

## **Society without civilization: The foraging way of life**

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- Announce again: How to get to class web page; class ID and password
- In order to help us figure out what we mean by “civilization”, we will first look at some people who do *not* live in a civilization: foragers, or hunter-gatherers. (recap of comments from last class)
  - **Foragers:** People who live off the land without intentionally modifying it.
    - They gather wild plant foods and hunt
    - They typically live in small groups
    - They typically move around the countryside, following the seasonal food resources
    - This is the way that people lived for the vast majority of the time that humans have existed
  - There are very few foragers left in the world today
    - One such group is the !Kung, or Ju/'hoansi (although even they have been forced to live in fixed settlements in recent decades)
    - They will serve as an example, to help us visualize what a foraging lifestyle is like
  - Last time we saw a bit of a video about them.
  - Your first reading assignments were about this same culture, but written by a different anthropologist who worked with a different group in a slightly different area.
  - You will notice that the reading, by Richard Lee, sometimes contradicts the film
    - Is one of these sources wrong, or is there some other reason why they might disagree?
- Think about the video...
  - How is their lifestyle different from what we might call “civilization”?
  - Subsistence:
    - how do they get their food?
    - who does the work?
    - how is the work divided up?
  - Social organization:
    - how big is the group they live in?
    - how is the group organized?
    - do they have a leader?
      - to the extent that they do, how much power does he have?
      - how did he get his position as leader?
  - What sort of belongings do they have?
    - are there differences in wealth between them?
    - who owns the land, water, etc.?
    - what good does this “ownership” do them?
  - What do you think of this lifestyle?
  - Remember, at one time all humans lived more or less like this
    - this lifestyle is broadly similar to the original state of human society
    - we will spend most of this class trying to figure out what happened to change the way people live from variants of this to “civilization”

- Consider the society of the !Kung, from the film and the reading
  - First, let's get a few concepts and terms under control
    - we will look at them more carefully later.
    - **Subsistence:** "How people get their groceries"
    - **Foraging**, also known as **hunting and gathering:** Living off the land without intentionally altering it
    - **Kinship system:** One's system of rules for identifying, naming, and interacting appropriately with relatives
    - **Division of labor:** Who does what; the rules and patterns by which different tasks are done by people of different ages, sexes, specialties, etc.
- Intro to the !Kung, the people in the film
  - !Kung = San = Bushmen: Terms for the general ethnic and language group of the people in the film
  - Ju/'hoansi (pronounced "jhu-wahnsi") and variants spelled slightly differently: a subgroup of the !Kung that speaks one of the three major language variants, filmed by Marshall and studied by Lee
  - Many !Kung names and words are written with odd punctuation marks and other symbols. These represent various different clicks. For those of us who don't speak the !Kung language, it is customary to just ignore these sounds.
  - They live in the Kalahari desert of Botswana, Namibia, Angola, South Africa
  - Lee 1984 (The Dobe !Kung) describes a group living in modern Botswana
  - The film was shot with a different group living in Namibia, but the culture is similar
  - We are seeing and reading about the recent past here. Since the film was made, virtually all of the !Kung have been settled in permanent camps
    - many were forced to leave a large Kalahari game preserve
    - in 2006, they won a court case that should allow many !Kung to return to the preserve
    - several hundred !Kung have indicated that they plan to move out of the settlements and return to a foraging lifestyle
      - it remains to be seen if they really do, and how well they fare
      - and the Botswana government has been preventing some from moving back
  - These are modern people, not fossils, even at the time of the video and Lee's ethnographic work
    - They know about the industrialized world, but it is remote
    - They know farmers and pastoral people who live around them, trade with them, intermarry, etc.
    - In fact, as a separate group, they may be a modern creation, originally just the members of a society that included some herders and some foragers, with people shifting from one lifestyle to another as their fortunes and desires led. The !Kung with herds became recognized as a distinct group (Khoi), treated differently by colonial governments.
  - But they can serve as an example of how people can live as foragers
    - this is presumably roughly how all people *did* live before the spread of agriculture and, later, "civilization".
- What is distinctive about the foraging lifestyle, especially in contrast to what we are used to?
  - Subsistence by foraging

- gathering
  - most of the food is plants (70% of calories for !Kung)
- hunting
  - occasional meat (30% of calories for !Kung)
  - these proportions have probably varied a lot for different groups, places, and times
- Small groups
  - one or a few families, typically 10-50 people
  - group membership changes over time: groups split, merge, individuals shift from group to group
  - groups can't be big, or food around the camp would get depleted too fast
- Very mobile
  - use up the preferred food in one place, then move to another
  - moves may be irregular or in a seasonal round
  - camps are typically set up in a few hours or days
- Few possessions
  - nothing you don't want to carry
  - many things can be made as you need them
  - so no hoarding, long-term storage, or accumulation of wealth
  - so there are few differences in wealth
    - everyone has roughly the same kinds and amount of stuff
  - no one "owns" the land or the water, although people do have recognized rights to certain territories that are associated with their families or bands
    - they can try to control access to it (although in practice access is almost always granted)
    - but they can't sell or trade it
      - their connection to it is inherent in their family identity: it is "inalienable"
- Little division of labor or specialization except by age and sex
  - women handle most child care, since men can't breast feed
  - men do most of the hunting, since women are usually burdened by children
  - little kids and old people gather but don't hunt
  - some limited specialization: skilled people may make and fix tools, or perform curing ceremonies
    - but only a small part of their time
    - reward is personal satisfaction, some respect or prestige, occasionally gifts, etc.
- but overall, with minor exceptions, everyone has basically the same roles, determined by sex and age
  - no careers, jobs, positions that strongly differentiate one person from another
  - every family includes people who do all the things that are necessary to survive
  - families are fairly independent, self-sufficient, and economically equivalent
  - but families do depend on each other to share things, especially meat
    - all families can get meat and other necessities
    - but a good kill is relatively rare and produces a lot of meat that will go bad quickly

- so sharing reduces the risk of not getting enough meat during a spell of bad luck, while not hurting the family of a hunter that temporarily has more than it can use
- Minimal social hierarchy (no powerful leaders)
  - no chiefs or other people with special power (according to Lee)
  - although some are more respected than others
  - and some have special skills (curing, making arrows, etc.)
  - i.e. no significant hierarchy of status or power
    - !Kung society is essentially egalitarian
  - Did you notice a claim to the contrary in the film? How might you explain that?
    - Lee comments on this discrepancy and clearly thinks Marshall was wrong...
- "Simple" social organization based on kinship
  - everyone is related to everyone else
    - so you deal with others according to your relationship with them
      - you know how to treat them, what their obligations are to you, and yours to them
    - social dynamics are like going on a trip with your extended family and a few friends
      - except that the !Kung have much more practice at getting along with each other
      - and they really depend on each other much more directly than we do
    - another analogy is to a small town, where everyone knows everyone else
      - everyone knows what everyone else is doing, and talks about it
      - almost nothing is private
  - interactions are on a personal level
    - foragers like the !Kung tend to be very aware of interpersonal matters like jealousy, pride, trustworthiness
      - take elaborate steps to prevent social problems
      - “insulting the meat”
    - thus little room for anyone to take advantage
  - conflicts can be defused by someone just leaving to hang out with another band, usually with a kin connection
    - as you might move in with your grandparents if you had problems with your parents
  - occasional violence, but only at a personal or family level (no warfare).
    - Very occasionally group violence by general consent
  - although the kinship system is extremely complex (much more complex than ours, extending much further out and with some wild variations), this is often called “simple” social organization.
    - Because some kind of kinship system exists in all societies
    - “Kinship-only”, then, is a minimal kind of organization, "simple" in the sense of there being just one system for categorizing people and relating to them
    - in more "complex" societies, additional layers of organization like classes, educational status, family prestige, inherited titles, etc. are added
    - complex, in the sense of having many parts, refers to society organized by kinship *plus* other, more or less independent systems... as we will see next time.
  - also called a “band” society, in reference to the size and the nature of the groups in which people live

- Answering some questions about the !Kung that people have asked in previous semesters
  - health
    - despite the distended bellies of many people in the video, they are said by various investigators to have been in good health
    - although their body weight varied fairly widely by season, suggesting that they did suffer from food scarcity for part of each year
  - life expectancy
    - since people die at different rates at different ages, this is a harder concept to express that you might think
    - figures as of 1968, when Lee did the research in the reading
    - life expectancy at birth was 30 years
      - but this includes high mortality during childhood
      - 20% of babies die in their first year
      - 50% of children die before age 15
    - those who make it to age 15 survive, on average, to 55
    - about 10% of the population is over 60
      - compared to 16% in the US
    - this is actually fairly good life expectancy for societies without modern medicine, including our own just a century or two ago
  - rates of violence
    - Mostly between men, with mostly men killed (unlike many other places where women are the most common victims)
      - of three recorded women killed, two were innocent bystanders
    - Fights are mostly over women or previous deaths (feuds)
    - 22 homicides recorded in 35 years (1920-55) in the Dobe area
      - There were 466 Dobe region !Kung individuals in 1965
      - i.e. 135 homicides / 100,000 / year
      - US in 1990: 9.4 homicides / 100,000 / year
      - !Kung homicide rate was 14 times greater than that of the US!
- What should we think of this lifestyle?
  - Marshall Sahlins called foragers "the original affluent society"
    - argues that the !Kung and other foragers actually live very well
    - Lee showed that the !Kung have lots of free time
      - average 17 hours/week getting food (2.5 hr/day)
      - average 6 hours/week making and fixing tools (54 min/day)
      - average 19 hours/week "housework" (cooking, cleaning gear and camp, gathering wood and water) (2.7 hr/day)
      - total 42.3 hr/week = 6 hrs/day
      - leaves lots of time to sleep, talk, gamble, etc.
      - and this is in a very harsh environment
        - in the past, foragers also lived in better environments, where they presumably would have to work even less
    - Sahlins argues that your material standard of life depends on your expectations

- two ways to be satisfied:
  - have a lot
  - want little
- the !Kung met all their needs with less work than we do today, leaving them satisfied and with lots of leisure time to hang out, talk, dance, sleep, gamble, play with the kids...
- of course, they don't have the pleasures of literature, television, organized sports, nice clothes, cars, effective medicine, understanding physics, etc.
  - and now that they are familiar with some of those, it is less likely that they would be content to return to their old foraging lifestyle
- Consider how our own society and others like it differ from the !Kung
  - Subsistence
    - Agricultural production
    - *lots* of exchange of goods
    - Few or no people produce all that they need to survive
      - people exchange their labor or products for food and goods
      - often, but not always, using money as an intermediary
    - Extreme interdependence of people on each other for the food, other goods, and services they need to survive
    - Relatively little free time compared to foragers
  - Huge groups
    - Towns, cities, states, countries
    - Many or most people live in places with a very high density of people per acre
    - Very large numbers of people interact with each other
    - Lots of interaction with strangers and non-kin
  - Not very mobile
    - People tend to have long-term homes, permanently constructed
  - Lots of possessions, unevenly distributed
    - Even poor people accumulate lots of stuff
    - the minimum amount of stuff we consider necessary to live in an acceptable way is much greater
      - multiple sets of clothes and shoes, a bed, a telephone, a car, a refrigerator...
    - Huge differences in wealth between the poorest and the richest
    - Virtually all the land, water, and other resources are owned and controlled by individuals or groups (businesses, governments, etc.)
  - Very complex division of labor
    - by age and sex
    - but also by education, experience, interest, abilities, contacts...
    - thousands and thousands of different jobs and roles, all dependent upon countless others
  - Very pronounced and complex social hierarchy with powerful leaders
    - lots of variation in individual power
    - complex hierarchies of leadership and authority
    - in cross-cutting spheres of influence
      - police / government / businesses / religious institutions, etc.

- those at the top have vast power over those at the bottom
  - your boss at work can make you change your hairstyle
  - the IRS scares you into paying your taxes
  - and if you don't, an IRS agent can take away your house
  - the President can send 18 year old soldiers to kill and die
- "Complex" social organization based on kinship plus many other, often overriding factors
  - it is "complex" social organization in that it is comprised of many parts:
    - a kinship system (in our case, drastically simplified), *plus*
    - economic classes
    - ethnic groups
    - status groups by education, birth, etc. partially apart from wealth
    - self-defined groups by political views, social preferences (marked by musical tastes, clothing styles, ways of speaking, etc.), and other criteria
    - all of which contribute to determining how people behave and interact with each other
  - most interactions are with non-kin
  - most interactions are impersonal, structured by jobs and other roles, rather than by kinship relations
  - complex systems for resolving conflicts (courts, etc.)
  - violence is often at the group level: wars
  - "state" society: an extreme form of complex society
    - we will look more closely at states later
    - but in general: large societies with a complex hierarchy of political power
- Can you think of anything else that differentiates our way of living from that of the !Kung?
- Can we call this difference "civilization"?
  - For the sake of talking about "our kind of society", we have to call it *something*
    - and we will be able to think about "our kind of society" more clearly if we specify what, exactly, about "our kind of society" we think is so distinctive
  - Civilization, like any other word, just means what we agree it means.
    - There is no "true" definition
    - It is just a category or a description for one kind of society that we are interested in.
    - "Civilization" as we will be using the term does not imply anything about how much we like a society, nor about how good, fair, peaceful, pleasant, sophisticated, or artistic it is.
      - Nor does saying that a society is NOT a civilization imply anything about how wise, humane, happy, sophisticated, etc. those people are
    - Instead, when we call a society a "civilization", we are simply classifying it as socially, politically, and economically complex, including a large number of people, usually with a relatively complex technology, and usually with a variety of other features.
      - which we will examine more carefully later
  - So now, let's think about how you would define "civilization"
    - We will hold off on defining "civilization" exactly until we have looked at some different societies and discussed some other concepts.
    - But you can start thinking about what the category of "civilization" entails

- Think of classical Greece, the Roman Empire, Egypt of the Pharaohs, Dynastic China... everyone agrees that these were “civilizations”
- And almost everyone would agree that the society of the !Kung is not a civilization
- many of the definitions of “civilization” (and “complex society”, which we can treat as roughly synonymous) involve the concepts of “city” and “state”. So we will also have to figure out what exactly we mean by those terms.
- Just keep these questions on your mental back burner. We will get to them in future classes.
- you may not agree with all the definitions; I’ll want some opinions in class!
- defining civilization is important, because throughout the class we will often have to decide when civilization arose in different places, in order to look for the processes that caused that transformation.
- Civilization's place in the human career
  - whatever we mean by civilization, of course...
  - For the vast majority of humans' existence on earth, people have lived as foragers, more or less like the !Kung
  - Look at the chart posted on the class web page: “Civilization’s Place in the Big Picture”
    - "BP" means "Before Present"
  - Analogy to this semester-long class
    - if the class covered the existence of our own species, from the first archaic *Homo sapiens* to the present, it would start at least 500,000 years ago
      - a semester-long class has 30 meetings of 75 minutes each, or 2,250 minutes; that is 222 years/minute
        - that is about one generation every 5 seconds for the whole semester...
      - we would study foragers all the way into the last class meeting, totaling 36 hours, or 98% of the course
      - we would not get to the first farmers (10,000 years ago) until 30 minutes into the last class meeting
      - and we would only get to the first sizable cities, states, and civilizations (about 5,500 years ago) until 50 minutes into the last class meeting
      - all of written history would fit into the last 25 minutes of the semester
  - so: farming and civilization are very recent aberrations for the human race.
    - we evolved biologically as foragers
    - that includes not only our bodies, but also our capacity for thought and planning
    - our propensities for social relations
    - and our emotions
  - So how did we get from foraging to civilization? Why change after such a long run of success?
  - Or, to look at it from a more personal angle:
    - Most people would say that we live in a “civilization”
    - look around you and think about
      - how dependent we are on countless thousands of other people we have never even met
      - the incredible complexity of our social and economic relations



- think about the way the !Kung live, and then consider:
  - how you and your parents probably work for some organization, which gives you a piece of paper every month, which you use to get housing and food
  - McDonald's hamburgers and Safeway supermarkets
  - the engineers, factory workers, managers, and salesmen who made it possible for you to buy a car in which you travel faster, farther, and more comfortably than the richest person on earth could do just 100 years ago
  - and the gigantic, complex web of people and things that make it possible to fill that car with precisely the right kind of refined petrochemicals in almost any town on earth
  - the city, state, and federal government
    - the huge number of people who we elect and others that they hire
    - that build the system that brings fresh water to every house
    - that hire police
    - that pay your grandparent's medical bills (maybe)
  - income taxes and the legal system that makes you pay them
  - the US air force; the FBI
- this is not natural!
- people have not always lived this way!
- How did we get into this mess?
- That is the main point of this class:
  - How did we get into this mess?
  - Or: why and how did "civilization" arise?
  - Or, as a !Kung man said when Richard Lee asked why they didn't take up farming: "Why should we farm when there are so many mongongo nuts?"
- I'll suggest a few possible answers for this first step when we look at the origins of agriculture...