

Making a living: foraging

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- **Subsistence**
 - "How people get their groceries"
 - fundamental to understanding everything else about a culture
 - subsistence is inextricably linked to everything else (remember "culture is integrated")
 - as a result, anthropologists can rarely, if ever, discuss subsistence without bringing in other aspects of culture
 - such as gender roles and relations
 - marriage rules
 - ideals and practices about status and wealth
 - systems of trade or other kinds of exchange, etc.
 - the three readings all illustrate this
- Anthropologists describe subsistence strategies for various reasons
 - as context or background to explain how a particular group lives, as part of an ethnography, so that other aspects of the culture will make sense
 - as in the reading by Lee 1984 (The Dobe !Kung) for today, and Pospisil (on the Kapauku Papuans of Papua New Guinea), Chapter 4 of Fratkin (on the Ariaal of Kenya) for next time
 - to explain the logic behind general types of subsistence systems and what factors affect them
 - as in Lee 1994 (Scarce Resources) for today, or the introductory section of the reading by Fratkin (Ariaal) for next time
 - to evaluate theories or generalizations about cultures, cultural evolution, and so on
 - as in Lee 1994 (Scarce Resources)
- General types of subsistence strategies
 - **Foraging = Hunting and gathering**
 - living off the land without intentionally altering it
 - **Agriculture = farming**
 - Activities to artificially increase plant food yields (sowing seeds, clearing forest, weeding, diverting water, fertilizing, etc.)
 - **Pastoralism**
 - depending primarily on herds of domesticated animals
 - pastoralists travel with their herds to pasture areas, rather than bringing food to them
 - **Agropastoralism**
 - depending on a mix of agriculture and pastoralism
 - typically with one or more fixed settlements
 - often plus pastures to which the animals are sent with some group members seasonally
- our subsistence base is really none of the above
 - **Wage labor system**
 - people work for pay, rather than producing their own subsistence goods
 - then exchange that income for subsistence goods produced by others for exchange

- These types oversimplify reality
 - real people mix and vary these strategies
 - most real societies don't fit perfectly into these clear, well-defined types
 - but these types do give us a shorthand for the general ways people live
- Each subsistence system affects the rest of the culture
 - and tends to be loosely associated with certain kinds of social organization
- Foraging is the way that people lived for the vast majority of the time that humans have existed
 - we have been foragers since the first members of our genus *Homo*
 - roughly two million years ago
 - farming only appeared about 11,000 years ago
 - 99.5% of our time on Earth, we have been foragers
 - Yet very few foragers remain today
- Example of a foraging society: The !Kung, in extracts from two books by Richard Lee
 - Two readings on the same group, with two different purposes
 - Lee 1984 extracts from “The Dobe !Kung”
 - background for an ethnography
 - describing the subsistence strategy provide context for the rest of the ethnography
 - gives you a sense of what the group is like
 - and what Lee's experience with them as an anthropologist was like
 - Lee 1994 “The Hunters: Scarce Resources in the Kalahari”
 - directed at making some specific theoretical points, supported by ethnographic evidence
 - Intro to the !Kung
 - They live in the Kalahari desert of Botswana, Namibia, Angola, South Africa
 - The group of !Kung that Lee studied live in Botswana, and call themselves the Ju/'hoansi
 - They often serve as an example, to help us visualize what a foraging lifestyle is like
 - !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
 - studied by Richard Lee and others
 - and filmed by John Marshall, starting in the 1950s
 - Many !Kung names and words are written with odd punctuation marks and other symbols that represent various different clicks.
 - If you don't speak the !Kung language, it is customary to just ignore these sounds.
 - We are reading about the recent past here. Since Lee's fieldwork, virtually all of the !Kung have been settled in permanent camps
 - These are modern people, not fossils
 - 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.

- What is distinctive about the foraging lifestyle?
 - 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
 - compare to maritime foragers like Inuit (Eskimos), who eat almost exclusively meat for much of the year
 - 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
- yet 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
- "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
- also called a “band” society, in reference to the size and the nature of the groups in which people live
- but some foragers in particularly good environments may not fit these generalizations
 - ex: northwest coast of North America: rich salmon runs allowed for sedentary, complex societies based on foraging
 - ex: Central California: reliable, productive acorns allowed for semi-sedentary foragers
- Answering some questions about the !Kung that people have asked in previous semesters
 - 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
 - only 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
 - weapons: poison-tipped arrows, can be deadly
 - 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!
 - drugs and alcohol
 - !Kung occasionally plant marijuana and tobacco
 - Alcohol problems where sugar (to brew) or liquor available
- Lee’s 1994 argument about the economic viability of foraging:
 - Main conclusions:
 - contrary to earlier belief, foragers do not depend primarily on hunting
 - contrary to earlier belief, foragers are not necessarily just barely surviving
 - background
 - 14 camps, each at a waterhole
 - each surrounded by an exploitable hinterland

- minimal storage of food
- lots of sharing within camps
- plant foods are 60-80% of total diet by weight
- women provide 2-3 times more weight of food than do men
 - virtually all of it is plant food
- men gather for themselves while in the bush, but don't bring home nearly as much food
 - what the men do provide sometimes is meat
 - which is relatively scarce and highly prized
- food is available year-round
 - it just requires more walking in the drier parts of the year
 - they never use up all the available mongongo nuts
 - plentiful, reliable, nutritious
 - 50% of the plant food consumed
 - more dependable than agriculture
 - nor do they use up many of the other plant foods
- the relative richness of food is shown by how selective the !Kung can afford to be about what they choose to eat
 - of all the plants they know to be edible, they eat primarily just 25% of the species
 - they can afford to neglect the rest
 - of all the animals they know to be edible, they regularly hunt only 31% of the species (17/54)
- subsistence can't be too precarious, because they tend to live to an old age
 - 46 out of 466 (10%) of Dobe !Kung were over 60 years old
 - compare to 16% for US society today
- another indication that subsistence can't be too difficult: young people don't regularly provide food until they marry, around age 20 for boys
 - nor do old people over 60
 - so only 40% of the people are providing the food for the whole group
- time allocation study
 - they average only 12-19 hours/week getting food
 - in a more detailed publication, Lee included "chores" like getting water, gathering firewood, making tools, cooking, etc.
 - still only 42.3 hours/week of work, total
 - compare to US, where we work at least 40 hours/week to earn money, then add another 40+ in commuting, buying food, cooking, cleaning, etc.
- diet study
 - they typically eat a bit above what the US recommended daily allowance would be for people of their size and activity level
 - that is, they get enough food
- and all this data was collected in the third year of a famine!
- Lee's conclusion: foraging isn't such a bad subsistence strategy
 - so the fact that humans were foragers for most of our history is not surprising
 - instead, the question is, why did they change? Why adopt agriculture, herding, etc.?

- Recent history update:
 - many of the !Kung in Botswana were forcibly evicted from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve
 - and prohibited from hunting in it
 - in December 2006, the !Kung won a long-running legal case that found that the Botswana government was wrong to do this
 - but did not find that the government owed them any services, like drilling wells for them
 - several hundred to 1000 !Kung have indicated that they plan to move out of the settlements in Botswana and back into the Kalahari preserve to return to their foraging lifestyle
 - it remains to be seen if they really do, and how well they fare