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Egalitarian Tensions of Ju/'hoansi in a Capitalist Economy:
Foraging Ideology and Adaptations to Cash Income

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Abstract

This paper examines the adaptation of the Namibian Ju/'hoansi to the introduction of a global cash economy in the remote area service center of Tsumkwe. Ethnographic observations look at the transition from egalitarian forager lifeways to a cash-based wage labor economy. Specifically, the paper argues that some members of Ju/'hoansi society are slowly abandoning the traditional egalitarian sharing norms. The wage labor economy means that certain individuals have exclusive access to cash-based economic resources, while others have no access. The paper argues that this is the basis for long-term binding dependencies that create the foundations for an emerging non-egalitarian social structure. The beginnings of social stratification have appeared as a response to a fundamental change in economic production and change in structure of resources in the environment.

Introduction

The search for the origin of social inequality is as old as social science. It is quite remarkable that more understanding has not been reached concerning this problem. Wiessner (2002), in a recent review, has made a marvelous summary of much of this research, and this will serve as a foundation for my initial discussion. Wiessner (2002) and Arnold (1993) divide the approaches to this discussion into two basic categories: "adaptationist" and individual agency-based. The ecological perspective is one such approach commonly brought into this discussion. Arnold (1993) and Wiessner (2002) place this approach under the "adaptationist" category, which emphasizes the institutionalized inequality as an adaptation to environmental circumstances that affect a society as a whole (Carneiro 1970; Cohen 1985; Fried 1967; Halstead and O'Shea 1958; Isbell 1978; Johnson and Earle 1987; Keeley 1988; Rathje 1972; Sahlins 1958; Service 1958; Webster 1975; Wittfogel 1957; Wright and Johnson 1975). These hypotheses generally view some sort of stress, such as

population pressure, environmental degradation, breakdown of exchange networks, or warfare as the cause of social complexity. Others place the emphasis on the need to redistribute centrally collected resources. Separate environmental determinist models use resource abundance to explain the origin of inequality (Hayden 1995, 1997; Price and Brown 1985; Price and Feinman 1995). Testart (1982) views food storage as a necessary precondition. A competing perspective sees resource distribution in the environment as causing social inequality. This paper in part takes an adaptationist perspective and looks to make sense of these perspectives in examining the emerging social inequality among the Ju/'hoansi of Northeastern Namibia.

The other main perspective on the origin of social inequality has been deemed by Arnold (1993) and Wiessner (2002) the "agency" approach. This perspective criticizes the adaptationist view on the grounds that environmental determinism is not adequate in explaining cultural change at the individual level. In addition, they argue that functionalism does not make sense; social inequality does not benefit most segments of a society (Earle 1977; Peebles and Kus 1977). This perspective views individual "aggrandizers" as attempting to garner political and economic power, while individuals manipulate their social environment in order to secure advantage for themselves (Arnold 1993; Boone 1992; Earle 1997; Hayden 1997). I consider much of this criticism misdirected. Binford (2001) observes that ecological adaptation is entirely an issue of individual agency. Individual action is dependent upon situational circumstances; agency is the primary ecological concern. Still, the dynamics of agency on the individual level are an extremely important consideration in examining the origin of social inequality. This is another primary concern of this paper. By looking at response to large-scale resource structure change at the individual level, I combine the two perspectives.

This paper examines how the processes of globalization and the introduction of Western capitalism have brought about or at least accelerated the process of institutionalizing of inequality among the Ju/'hoansi. Within the adaptationist perspective, I ask, how has globalization changed the landscape in which the Ju/'hoansi live? I argue that globalization has changed the structure of resources in the environment, and that this fundamental change in resource structure has brought new patterns in social and political organization. On the agency level, certain individuals have begun to

gain differential access to the means of production. Certain advantaged individuals with better economic options have started to manipulate their social environment to their advantage. This is manifested in economic status differences and recently new forms of political power. In short, the economic changes brought about by the process of globalization have catalyzed the transition of the Ju/'hoansi from egalitarianism to non-egalitarianism.

Since the Ju/'hoansi have served as the paradigm (perhaps "type-specimen") of an egalitarian society and they have served as the basis for so much foundational ecological research, it is appropriate that this investigation focus on the Ju/'hoansi, though I hope to break with some of these traditions in the course of my argument.

The Ju/'hoansi and Globalization

The Ju/'hoansi are a member of the diverse group of peoples often referred to as Khoisan. The Ju/'hoansi are the largest of the central !Kung speaking peoples. They are situated on the Kalahari rim along the Northeastern border of Namibia with Botswana. I will now provide a very brief overview of some of the changes that have occurred to the Ju/'hoansi physical and social landscapes through the process of globalization throughout the twentieth century. My purpose is to show two aspects of the same phenomenon of globalization: how the Ju/'hoansi have been exploited through the introduction of the new global capitalist economic system, and more importantly for this paper, how the structure of resources in the environment has changed. In the next section, I will examine how the Ju/'hoansi have adapted to these changes, specifically with an eye to how the origins of non-egalitarian social structure may be among these adaptations.

Under the Odendaal Commission of the Apartheid government, Bushmanland was recognized in 1970 and parts of it later set aside as a homeland. In this process, one third of Bushmanland was turned into the Kaudom Game Reserve, one third set aside for Herero herders. The Ju/'hoansi population of the former Bushmanland stands currently around 1,500, with comparable numbers across the border in Botswana. The territorial changes to the former Bushmanland province functioned to circumscribe Ju/'hoansi mobility, forcing many to population centers and toward sedentism. I will discuss this in more detail below.

The most sweeping changes to the structure of the local economy came with the occupation

of the South African Defense Force (SADF) in 1978 (Uys 1993; Sharp and Douglas 1996). Though warfare had little direct effect on the Ju/'hoansi, the presence of the SADF had numerous consequences (Lee and Hurlich 1982; Marshall and Ritchie 1984). Many of the mobile hunter-gatherer groups were attracted to towns, such as Tsumkwe, by the prospect of landing one of the relatively well paying jobs offered by the SADF. The cash economy came to the Namibian Ju/'hoansi in the 1960's, with the establishment of the first store in Tsumkwe, and enlarged dramatically with the arrival of the South African Defense Force during the Namibian war for independence. Today, cash comes to the Ju/'hoansi through three means. First, many women and a few men are able to sell small quantities of craft items to charitable marketing operations or the occasional tourist. Second, and more significantly, there are a few jobs for Ju/'hoansi, with state agencies or NGO projects. Finally, many of the elderly Ju/'hoansi are eligible for the old-age pension paid out by the Namibian government.

Of these three means of attaining cash, wage labor has become the most significant, especially for my discussion. Cash jobs are available from only a few sources: government agencies, NGOs, and private businesses. The most prominent of the government agencies is the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, which is fond of hiring Ju/'hoansi. In addition, the police hire a few employees, although to my knowledge no Ju/'hoansi to this point in time. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs has several Ju/'hoansi employees, as well as the government water provider, and the local school. In addition, several NGOs, mostly public health or religion related, provide employment for a few Ju/'hoansi. Last, a prospecting mining company, a tourist lodge (also owning a general store), private water providers, and a store provide private employment to some Ju/'hoansi. I estimate that this diversity of wage labor offers no more than thirty jobs for Ju/'hoansi hirees at any one time (though the total number of jobs including employees of other ethnicities is much higher). Less than one in thirty Ju/'hoansi have real employment (Wiessner 1998). This is an extremely small number.

In addition, I feel it would be inappropriate to discuss the specifics of each jobs wages. However, Ju/'hoansi salaries range from \$300 Namibian per month (less than \$1 US per day) to \$3000 Namibian (less than \$10 US per day). In addition, I selected a quota sample of twenty

employed Ju/'hoansi for which I found the mean monthly salary to be \$980 Namibian (around \$3 US per day). While these seem extremely small values at first, they are far more than the average income for Ju/'hoansi peers!

The qualifications for employment are a fairly predictable consequence of globalization. The ability to speak English represents the highest form of qualification for employment. All employers would prefer an employee who spoke English, though the reasons for this preference are more symbolic than functional (perhaps in terms of inclusion in the growing Namibian international tourist trade?). Afrikaans is a minimal qualification for employment. However, Afrikaans was the language of the SADF military presence in the former Bushmanland, and is spoken reasonably broadly in the Ju/'hoansi population. My estimates show that less than 5% of Ju/'hoansi speak English and around half of the population speaks Afrikaans, although these numbers are difficult to estimate for reasons I will discuss later. I also count that about half of the Ju/'hoansi employees in Tsumkwe speak English, comprising a very high proportion of the English-speaking population in Tsumkwe. In addition, a jumble of other less visible variables (experience, personality, etc.) naturally play a role. To make a long story short, this situation leads to a few "employable" Ju/'hoansi repeatedly being hired for wage labor, while the vast majority of the population will never realize employment. The result presents one of the key tensions of this paper.

The structure of resources is also significantly changed by the availability of old-age pension from the Namibian government. The Namibian government pays out \$160 Namibian per month to persons over 65 years in age. This pension is paid out in rural villages as well as in Tsumkwe, and an oral tradition details the practice of shop owners following the pension dispensers to the rural villages. The details of the numbers of Ju/'hoansi that receive this pension are less clear to me. Speaking in terms of pure demographics, around 75 Ju/'hoansi are eligible for this pension. However, the exact number who receive it and their specific locations are difficult to identify, and I am currently working to tie up this loose end. This is an important source of cash for the Ju/'hoansi, and accounts for more total income than does wage labor. It is important, however, that all Ju/'hoansi have the potential to become eligible for this income.

The new patterns of resources within the global capitalist economy have led to some stark

changes in Ju/'hoansi settlement strategies. When the SADF pulled out in 1988, many Ju/'hoansi left their places in the towns and returned to the bush. However, most ceased to be truly mobile groups, becoming mostly sedentary, settling around artificial boreholes that provided permanent access to water. Many remained settled around Tsumkwe. In many ways, hunting and gathering as a mode of production declined significantly, given the over-exploitation of resources around the permanent camps. Thus, the Ju/'hoansi stopped being true foragers and became what Lewis Binford (1980) calls "collectors" or Taylor (1964) calls "tethered foragers".

Here, I think Binford's terminology, echoed by Kelly (1983), is relevant. Binford introduces the concepts of "logistical" and "residential" mobility. I will dispense with definitions and summaries here for the sake of brevity. However, I chose to focus my discussion of the change in Ju/'hoansi settlement patterns with this frame of reference. The Ju/'hoansi served as the paradigmatic case of the residential mobility for Binford. This data was mostly collected before the drastic changes to the local economy outlined above. These changes have caused a polar reversal to a logistical mobility strategy. Now, the Ju/'hoansi are tethered to boreholes and make logistical trips to the stores or to areas distant from the permanent village that have not been over-exploited. In addition, a large segment of the population lives semi-permanently in Tsumkwe, many in Apartheid-era government housing. The residential mobility pattern defined by Binford and observed by various researchers (Lee 1972, though not in that terminology) has completely given way to sedentism with logistical collecting.

Schalk (1977) identifies clumped resources as the ecological basis for logistical mobility. I think that this would be a fair summary of the current structure of resources in the environment of the Ju/'hoansi. Food rations, cash, store goods and various luxury items (such as alcohol) are very clumped in space. In addition, the formerly expansive range of the Ju/'hoansi has been severely restricted, limiting mobility range. Finally, related to this circumscription and the influx of population, environmental resources have become severely strained. The result is a logistical mobility strategy. I think this change in settlement structures has important implications for culture change, and it is a factor identified from the beginning of hunter-gatherer research (Turnbull 1968). Turnbull identifies mobility as a key factor in the maintenance of egalitarianism, and I suggest that

the changes in mobility among the Ju/'hoansi have played a role in the emergence of social complexity.

The introduction of a global capitalist economy has had a myriad effect on the social structure of the Ju/'hoansi. I have barely done justice to the complexity of the changes that I mentioned. I contend, however, that the new structure of resources in the environment can be described and that the culture change that has occurred can be understood in this context. In this way, ecological theory concerning the Ju/'hoansi is not at odds with research trends concerning globalization. I wish to focus this paper on how the change in environmental resource structure that I have just glossed over has brought about some of the culture changes that I have observed; specifically, the causes of the origins of social complexity among the Ju/'hoansi. The next section examines this question in more detail.

Culture Change and the Origins of Social Inequality

In a previous study, I examined a frame in the process of culture change among the Ju/'hoansi (McCall 2000). To briefly summarize my research, I was interested in how Ju/'hoansi social customs and norms concerning sharing were adapting to the global capitalist economy. I focused my examination on spending practices in the two stores in Tsumkwe. In particular, I was interested in the tensions between the traditional egalitarian social structure of the Ju/'hoansi and the new global capitalist system that emphasizes material accumulation and competition with one's peers. What I found was a rare moment of intense culture change. I found that the Ju/'hoansi in Tsumkwe still very strictly followed the egalitarian norms of the society concerning sharing. Individuals were not allowed to overtly accumulate cash, but instead were pestered until the cash was gone. Instead, I found individuals who were creatively finding ways to deal with cash accumulation among intensely egalitarian peers. In the proceeding years, these pathways to accumulation have diversified, and are blossoming into a naissant social complexity.

In many ways, even the urban Ju/'hoansi of Tsumkwe still fit the characteristics of an

egalitarian society as laid out by Woodburn (1982). In my interviews with the quota sample of twenty employed Ju/'hoansi, I became aware of the extensive kinship networks that still pervade the Ju/'hoansi living in Tsumkwe. The sample reported a mean value of 48 kin relations living in Tsumkwe alone! Furthermore, I think this number may be an underestimate, as a few respondents gave very low values for this question. Given the complexity of these kinship networks, I think it is wrong to oversimplify the dynamics of social relations in Tsumkwe. It is also clear that much of the egalitarian social structure of the Ju/'hoansi, especially as defined by Woodburn, is still strongly present. However, I think it is important to examine how Ju/'hoansi social relationships in Tsumkwe are changing as a result of the emerging global capitalist economy. In fact, I believe that this is the key to understanding the emergence of social complexity as an ongoing process in Tsumkwe currently. Woodburn identifies four characteristics of egalitarian social structure:

1. Social groupings are flexible and constantly changing in composition.
2. Individuals have a choice of whom they associate with in residence, in the food quest, in trade and exchange, in ritual contexts.
3. People are not dependent on specific other people for access to basic requirements.
4. Relationships between people, whether relationships of kinship or other relationships, stress sharing and mutuality but do not involve long-term binding commitments and dependencies of the sort that are so familiar in delayed-return societies. (1982: 434, emphasis in the original)

The Ju/'hoansi fit each of these characteristics well, and they serve as a paradigm for Woodburn's discussion of egalitarian societies. However, I have attempted to document change in each of the four characteristics listed above. I believe that the introduction of the global capitalist economy has fundamentally altered the structure of resources in the Ju/'hoansi environment, changing the ways in which these characteristics are manifested. I will quickly address how each characteristic has become differently manifested.

In the past, the Ju/'hoansi had a very flexible group membership. In his classic study, Turnbull (1968) emphasized the importance of residential flexibility in the maintenance of egalitarian social structure, and identifies the Ju/'hoansi as a prime example. The Ju/'hoansi solved the problems of accumulating dependencies and tensions by changing residences. In Tsumkwe today,

there is a quickly increasing trend toward permanent sedentism. There is still a constant flow of people between the villages and Tsumkwe. However, with the increase in number of permanent structures, the Ju/'hoansi residents of Tsumkwe are becoming much less mobile. This is especially true of the Ju/'hoansi with employment, who have accumulated immovable property, as well as job commitments that are unavoidable. The urban Ju/'hoansi of Tsumkwe are quickly becoming permanently sedentary in the urban center. In this sense, Woodburn's first characteristic is less satisfied. The notion that a Ju/'hoansi person could simply walk out on accumulating social dependencies is now extremely doubtful in all circumstances.

The second characteristic is more ambiguous in many respects than the first. Among the Tsumkwe Ju/'hoansi, there is certainly less choice in who one associates with than there has been in the past. The introduction of the cash economy means that defining the "foodquest" is not as straightforward as it once was. Since only a few Ju/'hoansi have access to cash labor, many are dependent upon certain people for their income. This means that many urban Ju/'hoansi no longer have choice in whom they associate with. This issue also relates closely with Woodburn's (1982) third characteristic. Because of the differential access to cash labor, individuals have become obviously and grossly dependent on specific other individuals for their income. This means that increasingly, the urban Ju/'hoansi do not have a choice in whom they live with and are largely dependent on certain individuals for their income. I believe that this is the key issue in the origin of social complexity among the Ju/'hoansi. It is precisely the fact that certain individuals have become dependent on other individuals for their income that has created economic and political inequality. I will return to this notion in my conclusion.

In examining Woodburn's (1982) last characteristic, certain ethnographic observations begin to make a great deal of sense. In my earlier study (McCall 2000), I observed importance of demand sharing in a few important social situations. I noted the importance of this in maintaining equality among peers, as the Ju/'hoansi with greater economic access to cash were prevented from accumulating through such tactics. Social interaction around cash emphasized sharing and egalitarianism. In addition, the interactions attempted to head off any movement toward building dependency. This has been one of the problems for employed Ju/'hoansi: why work when it was so

difficult to retain the reward for working? I have observed the quickly increasing willingness on the part of employed Ju/'hoansi to accumulate material property in the face of social pressure. I felt that this was a critical issue in examining the process of culture change among the urban Ju/'hoansi.

To address this issue, I surveyed a quota sample of twenty employed Ju/'hoansi (fifteen male and five female) from Tsumkwe concerning their property. I had noticed employed Ju/'hoansi frequently wearing ostentatious Western clothing, often very new. In contrast, unemployed Ju/'hoansi wore older discarded clothing or traditional dress. On this basis, in one question, I asked the employed Ju/'hoansi about their favorite item of clothing. All twenty listed colorful Western clothing. Blue jeans were very popular, as well as tee-shirts and skirts. Furthermore, I frequently observed employed Ju/'hoansi wearing long sleeve shirts and long pants on the hottest days. It became clear that the clothing served more as a marker of status than as a functional item. The employed Ju/'hoansi are now completely willing to set themselves apart with their appearance, as is clear from their responses to my survey. I also asked about their favorite piece of property. This elicited a diverse set of items! One man surprisingly owned a horse and another livestock. A few mentioned functional items (four mentioned beds, two blankets, one a refrigerator, one a stove, one pots and pans, one a briefcase, one shoes). However, the majority were at most semi-functional items (eight mentioned cassette players, two mentioned watches, one a television, and several other such entertainment items). In attempting to generalize from these items, it is perhaps circular and redundant to observe that all act as obvious markers of status. However, all clearly contradict the egalitarian norms against material accumulation that have dominated Ju/'hoansi social structure.

Simply put, the employed Ju/'hoansi that I interviewed had no qualms about accumulating property, and in combining the interviews with my observation, these material properties act as significant markers of the emerging elite class. I think that this is a critical observation, and one that I would have been more hesitant in making when I began my fieldwork in 1998. Furthermore, the growing importance of livestock can be related to this phenomenon. As my survey of employed Ju/'hoansi showed, livestock is becoming an increasingly important commodity. This is surely

more for symbolic value rather than economic in almost every case. Tsumkwe is not an economical place to own livestock because of the harsh natural conditions. In addition, Ju/'hoansi in Tsumkwe do not own more than a cow or two per person. The actual economic production is essentially nothing. In fact, it is a rather costly endeavor for the Ju/'hoansi who own cattle. The value of owning cattle is symbolic. It is a marker of status, and a symbol borrowed from the Ju/'hoansi's Bantu neighbors. Owning livestock is an extreme status marker.

Another increasing marker of status is the installation of telephones. Several of the employed Ju/'hoansi are beginning to own phones. This is equally useless, as no more than three Ju/'hoansi have phones, and there would be, of course, no one to call! Owning a phone, despite the obvious lack of utility of the object for the time being (although it will surely become a useful object as more Ju/'hoansi begin to own phones), is a real marker of status difference. The growing importance of these status markers among the Tsumkwe Ju/'hoansi bespeaks the emergence of very real and tangible social stratification.

The economic social inequality that I have been describing is also increasingly supported by the accumulation of political power to protect it. Several of the Ju/'hoansi have begun to be involved with the ruling party of Namibia. In fact, one is now a parliament representative in the party. This is quite unexpected, as the ruling party has traditionally been very antagonistic toward the Ju/'hoansi because of the Ju/'hoansi association with the South African Defense Force during the war for independence, as well as a sort of simmering racism toward the Ju/'hoansi. Furthermore, on a general level, the Ju/'hoansi have historically been unwilling to participate in democratic power structures because of the obvious inconsistencies with egalitarian social structure and the need to build consensus in the decision-making process. While certainly not every employed Ju/'hoansi supports the ruling party, I find it interesting that so many employed Ju/'hoansi have turned to supporting the dominant party in Namibia. I think it makes a great deal of sense that the emerging Ju/'hoansi elites have begun supporting the party that protects their status quo. This is a social dynamic that deserves a great deal more study, and I think is increasingly the key to understanding this problem. However, for the time being, it is clear that many of the employed Ju/'hoansi have no qualms about accumulating political power on top of material wealth in the face

of the traditional egalitarian values that have been associated with political exclusion.

The heart of my ethnographic observation has rested on showing that the egalitarian norms that have been so paradigmatically associated with the Ju/'hoansi in the past are not monolithic, especially in the growing global urban landscape. There is a growing class of employed, urban, and increasingly Westernized Ju/'hoansi that has unequal access to economic resources, material accumulation, and political power. I have been trying to understand a moment of culture change among the Ju/'hoansi, and look at the causes and dynamics of this change. This is the nascent social stratification that I have been attempting to document. I will conclude this paper with a discussion of how the change in structure of resources in the environment associated with globalization has helped bring about this process.

Conclusion

I argue that the culture change that I have described among the Ju/'hoansi has its roots in the changes caused by globalization that I described in the previous section. The landscape of the Ju/'hoansi hunter-gatherer economy is intensely different than that of the modern cash-based economy. I believe that this dramatic change is responsible for the culture change that I have observed. Specifically, wage labor opportunities present a very clumped pattern of potential resources in which only specific individuals have access to the means of production. The restriction of access to the means of production to certain individuals has necessarily caused a network of permanent and defined dependencies between individuals with access to cash income and those without. These institutionalized dependencies are the germs of the growing social stratification among the Ju/'hoansi in Tsumkwe. It is precisely the fact that resources have become clumped with certain individuals having unequal access that has led to the emergence of an elite social group. Egalitarianism is the most direct mode of redistribution when resources are evenly spaced, every individual has equal access to these resources, and there is a collective ownership of the means of production. The global capitalist economy of Tsumkwe practically eliminates this, and provides a

template for material accumulation to an emerging Ju/'hoansi elite.

Much of the discussion around the causes of social complexity that I glossed over at the front of this paper focuses on the dynamics and scale of the switch from egalitarianism to social complexity. The agency-based approach has offered the critique of the adaptationist perspective that social complexity does not benefit all or even most members of a society. This is an important point for my discussion, however I think that it illustrates a needless distinction. Adaptation occurs on exactly this level and scale. The disintegration of the traditional Ju/'hoansi egalitarian norms in a few selected situations among certain individuals represents the complex interaction of essentially economic decisions on the individual level. These individuals, either consciously or unconsciously, weigh the perceived outcomes of adhering or contradicting the egalitarian norms that have defined ethnographic descriptions of Ju/'hoansi social interaction. The emerging urban Ju/'hoansi elite must navigate the tensions of increased economic and political power placed opposed to the social pressure and intimidation that follows contradicting an egalitarian social structure. Increasingly, this emerging elite is choosing to ignore the egalitarian norms in spite of the social consequences.

The set of outcomes to their choices, otherwise understood as the environment, determines their actions. In this way, both perspectives become one and the same, and I would argue were not philosophically contradictory to begin with. I feel that White's (1949) definition of culture as the extrasomatic means of adaptation is still the most useful of any yet conceived. Culture is any action that offers an effective way of managing the environment. To personify or reify culture makes it an unmanageable and useless concept. Culture does not cunningly adapt itself with a mind of its own in some Darwinian evolutionary scheme. Rather, individuals adapt to the situations they are placed into through their behavior. This is a useful way of understanding culture. It is this perspective that I claim makes the distinction between the adaptationist and agency perspectives difficult to maintain. Furthermore, understanding culture in this set of terms allows the ecological perspective to be used freely in examining problems, such as globalization, that have been traditionally beyond its scope.

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