

# An essay on foraging societies



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Foraging society forms the oldest and the more basic political system of people- the band societies. For more than 1 million years, these people from hunter-gathering societies sustain their living doing this. The contemporary hunter/ gatherers form a small group or population of people with little density and nomadic type of living.

Foragers remain egalitarian because they live in close kinship relations with others. They were tied with relations and they formed groups of unity. That is the reason why they exchange commodities or services among each other. The wealth circulated among themselves. This created an egalitarian group, where there were no great differences between people.

An example of a foraging society, residing in the Kalahari Desert, is the society of King San or the Bushmen. They gather fruits, berries, melons, and nuts. It is estimated that women gather the food and the overall time spend on gathering is 2 or 3 days out of one week. Men from the tribe spend their spare time in performing rituals, resting or entertaining. They reside in Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa.

An example of a foraging society in the tropical rain forests is the Mbuti Pygmies. In the gathering process everyone of the group is involved, even children- male pick up elephants, wild pigs and other animals, while females gather the vegetation.

The third group of foragers dwells in the arctic regions where vegetation was scarce. Eskimos, the local people, hunt sea mammals (whales, seals) and value a lot the undigested vegetation. For that reason, female did not

specialize in gathering food. In the summer both males and females gathered larvae and maggots.

Fissioning among foraging people occurs, when under certain conditions (like overpopulation) there is a need of migration of some people, and their fragmentation into smaller groups of people. Sometimes the subsistence food can become scarce, and not enough for the entire population.

Infanticide occurs when a mother deliberately kills a newly born child. The reason is that sometimes, woman cannot afford to meet the needs of the baby, or because the baby has some deformed physical features.

The fertility rate among foraging people is very low. There may be several reasons for this. Females from the San people are for example very slim and they do not weight more than 80 pounds. This can postpone the menstruation. Their puberty comes later, the average age is 16 years-old, compared to the average age in the US- 12years-old.

Most of the foraging groups do not differ in their economic state. They share the same economic system based on reciprocity, the exchange and sharing of goods, food, and services. It is called a Reciprocal Economic system. Most commonly, families exchange their food with other families from the group. It is defined that there are three types of reciprocity.

The first one is called Generalized Reciprocity, which is based on the assumptions that there is no return in the exchange. In other words, people do not expect to have a return for they favor, or exchange of goods or services. For example, it is even insulting among some foraging group to say

thank you, after they have given you food. We also have in our societies Generalized Reciprocity- when your parents buy you clothes or give you pocket money, they do not expect you to return anything to them back.

This system creates more mutual trust and bounds better kin and relations. It also strengthens the egalitarian status of people.

The second type of Reciprocity is the Balanced Reciprocity. It involves an exchange with immediate return. This system is more like bargain and trade. It is used by groups of people who in a far distance between them. In modern foraging groups this reciprocity is not very common, because most of them exchange values and goods among kin groups only.

The third type is the Negative Reciprocity, which involves no reciprocity of all. It is an attempt to get an exchange or a deal without returning anything.

According to Lee and DeVore's work, foraging people like the San are affluent in terms of their allocated time spent on finding subsistence. They estimated that foraging people easily find food enough for a couple of days, and that foraging people have adequate and well balanced diet. They called them Leisure and Affluent people. They found that the average death rate is not high and the average age of people from those societies is the same as people from more developed industrialized societies. According to another anthropologist Sahlins, foraging people did not accumulate goods and food, because of their nomadic living, and that makes them not so materially obsessed.

However, recent studies challenged the hypothesis mentioned above. They found that these facts do not apply to every forage group. For example in the rain forests people could not easily find some certain type of food immediately and spend more than 30 , 40 hours a week, searching for it. Furthermore, it is estimated that other activities, such as making weapons or preparing the food also involves much time. Those recent studies do not challenge entirely the previous hypothesis, but expand the relativity that comes from the geographic locations of people.

The social organization of foraging people is based on kinship, marriage, family, gender and age.

1. The family can be Nuclear, which includes parents and their immediate offspring. Band includes several Nuclear Families. A band can include from 20 to 100 individuals, depending on the environment capacity of subsistence of those people.
2. Cross cousin marriage appears when a male is married to the father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter.
3. Patrilocal residence- when the married couple resides with the male's father.
4. Restricted marital exchange is the combination of patrilocal residence and cross cousin marriage, where two groups exchange the females to tight the kinship alliances.
5. Brideservice is when male resides in a female's band for a period of time.
6. Matrilocal residence- the husband lives with the bride's family.

7. Inuit tradition is the wife exchange where male individuals have sexual intercourse with each other's wives.
8. Egalitarian status of men is more common than the equal status of females in foraging group, compared to people from other societies.
9. Patriarchal- when male dominates in political and social aspects.

Gender and Age are important factors in evaluating the labor division. They vary between societies to societies and determine the social stratification and hierarchy.

The warfare and violence in modern foraging societies differ from the past foraging societies. There are now lower at rate. Most of the problems that individual resolves are connected to relations between adultery.