1 Subsistence & Economics

ANTH 380 Traditional Cultures

2 Subsistence & Economics

- Subsistence & economic sub-systems of the larger all-encompassing sociocultural systems are intertwined.
- Subsistence/adaptive strategies deal with how people acquire food and shelter.
- Economic systems constitute the organizational & institutional arrangements (*rules*) that accompany subsistence practices. Includes principles for:
 - •allocation of resources (especially land)
 - division of labor
 - facilitating exchanges.
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3 E Formalist-Substantivist Debate

- Dealt with applicability of western models from neoclassical economics to study of economic behavior in non-western/traditional cultures.
- *Formalists* asserted that principles & assumptions of mainstream economics *are* universally applicable
 - Makes assumption *scarcity* is universal.
 - People are forced to choose how to allocate scarce resources & to choose between alternative ends.
 - •Do I put that \$5 I just found in the bank or do I go to McD's?
 - Individuals make *rational choices based on full information* in order allocate scarce resources & in choosing between alternative ends.
 - Decisions will be made to *maximize utility* based on *self interest*.
 - Forms basis of market exchange
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4 Formalist-Substantivist Debate

- Substantivists disagreed;
 - Emphasized a more culturally relative view of economics.
 - •Scarcity is not necessarily universal.
 - •Should not abstractly develop predictive models of economic behavior.
 - Instead need to concentrate substantively & empirically on *how goods & services are actually produced, distributed, & consumed*.
 - Economics is an instituted process that is embedded within larger structures/institutions • Kinship & religion for example.
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5 Sormalist-Substantivist Debate

- Karl Polanyi
- Economist whose book *The Great Transformation* (1944) examined the rise of market economics in England.
- Gave rise to substantivistappraoch in economics.
- Identified 3 types of exchange principles:
 - Reciprocity
 - Redistribution

- Market exchange
- Polanyi distinguished between idea of markets as physical spaces for exchange of goods & market based economies.
- In traditional cultures reciprocity & redistribution were almost always paramount
- With intrusion of market economy & pulling of traditional cultures into larger economic systems, *land & labor become commodities*
 - •Can be bought & sold at prices set by laws of supply & demand.
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6 Adaptive Strategies

7 Foraging

8 Foragers

- Dependence on naturally occurring sources of food.
- Food collectors not food producers.
- 99% of hominid existence has been spent this way.
- Dangerous to assume too much about past foragers based on modern foragers.
- Modern foragers are found in areas of marginal agricultural potential.
- Modern foragers have evolved and continue to change.
- Interact with persons from other societies and have done so for long periods of time.
- The Kalahari debate revisionists vs. pristine forager model.
- •

9 Foragers

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10 Foragers

- General characteristics *tendencies not absolutes*.
- Foragers live on *low energy budgets*.
- Foragers live in *small groups* of related persons (camps > bands).
- Informal decision making (consensual)
- Egalitarian social relations.
- Size & composition of groups influenced by resource availability & social factors (tensions).
- Mobility is way of adapting to resource fluctuation
 - bring people to food rather than other way around.

11 Dobe Ju/'hoansi – Southern Africa

- Semi-arid savanna grassland.
- Wide variations both seasonal and diurnal temperature.
- Wide variation in rainfall combined with sandy soil makes agriculture precarious.
- Exploit wide range of resources
 - 500 species of plants and animals in the area.
 - Eat 100 species of plants and 50 animal species.

- 12 Dobe Ju/'hoansi Southern Africa
- 13 Dobe Ju/'hoansi Southern Africa
- 14 Ju/'hoansi of Southern Africa
- 15 Dobe Ju/'hoansi Southern Africa
 - Water is main limiting factor
 - influences settlement patterns.
 - Dry season (June September)
 - coalesce in large groups (20-40) around permanent waterholes; roots and tubers within day's walk of camp.
 - Rainy season (October May)
 - split up into smaller groups of 2-4 families; plentiful berries, fruits, melons, leafy greens.
 - *Mobility* is a key to adaptation.

16 Dobe Ju/'hoansi – Southern Africa

- 1/3 of time spent visiting; 1/3 spent entertaining.
- Visiting was part of adapting to resource fluctuation
 also allows people to share information.
- Flexibility in group membership
- broad notion of kinship.
- Hxaro general reciprocity.
- Trade with people, not things.

17 Dobe Ju/'hoansi – Southern Africa

- Vegetable foods gathered primarily by women
 - constitute bulk of diet by weight 60-80%.
 - Half of that comes from mongongo nut, rich in calories and protein.
- Relatively little time spent in food quest
 - lots of free time for rest, visiting, play.
- Relatively high dependency ratios
 - high percentage of "young" & "old" people.
- Massive changes since 1960s
 - Especially in diet & disease.
- 18 Dobe Ju/'hoansi Southern Africa

¹⁹ What is the role of *sharing* in foraging societies?

- Has always been regarded as economically important to survival of group & constituent individuals.
- Kent's study of Kalahari community of Kutse suggests another possibility.
- What is it?

²⁰ What is the role of *sharing* in foraging societies?

- In Kutse sharing is done to promote fosterage of *social networks* in order to maintain a strong ethos of *egalitarianism*.
- •Meat distribution is embedded in social relations.
- •Not just meat (large animals) is shared -everything

- Different consequences of sharing in egalitarian & non-egalitarian societies.
- In non-egalitarian societies, where differences in skill & material accumulation are encouraged, it is often linked to economic factors.
- In more egalitarian societies sharing is linked to equalizing inequalities & solidifying social networks.
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