

39. Evolution of inequality (including warfare and violence)

15937 - Explaining variation in inequality: Western North American foraging societies

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Smith, Eric Alden (Univ. of Washington, Shaw Island, WA, USA)*

Indigenous levels of socio-political inequality among Native North American foraging societies varied greatly, from highly egalitarian (e.g., central Great Basin) to stratified (e.g., Northwest Coast). This diversity has been variously ascribed to ecological, demographic, institutional, and cultural-historical determinants. I use Jorgensen's (1980) compendium of trait lists for Western Native American societies, as well as controlled ethnographic comparisons, to evaluate some of these formulations. Ecological hypotheses tested focus on control of dense, predictable resources (including trade goods) as drivers of differential bargaining power. Demographic hypotheses consider population density and residential mobility, while institutional hypotheses focus on raiding/warfare and corporate kin-group structure. The argument that cultural history explains variation in inequality is tested using language as a proxy. Although interpretation of results is compromised by ambiguity or incompleteness in many codes, I conclude that ecological formulations explain more variation than other ones, and can in fact subsume some apparent alternative explanations. While population density and low mobility do covary with political hierarchy, a closer look at the differences between most Native California societies and those on the Northwest Coast suggest that this covariation is tangential to the control of dense, predictable resources in a patchy landscape where patch 'owners' grant others access in exchange for labor and allegiance.

15932 - Surplus and inequality: What's the connection?

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Domestication was long seen as key to the development of social complexity because it “allowed” people to produce a surplus, which in turn financed the state (e.g. V.G. Childe, *The Urban Revolution*, 1950). It is now well known that both surplus production or acquisition and social stratification can occur in complex hunter-gather societies in the recent and distant past, and in the absence of domestication of crops or animals. Yet the causal connection between surplus production and inequality continues to be debated. I discuss two current models. One is the “aggrandizer” model in which certain individuals are motivated to produce a surplus, which is then used to fund social competition that leads to ranking within communities. Another is what I call the “safety first” model, in which surplus production is obligatory for every household in a community, since average production over time must be adjusted to ensure survival through the very worst years. Ranking manages scarcity during infrequent downturns by maintaining differential control of surplus production during the more frequent good years. Using some simple graphical models, I attempt to show that the “safety first” approach provides a more general explanation for the development of ranking in small-scale societies.

16145 - Revisiting the Origins of Structural Inequalities: Two Core Issues

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Egalitarianism has been viewed as a maintained condition that, when social practices that sustain it attenuate, inequality emerges. This general view may help to explain some elements of interpersonal inequalities in foragers, but there are several issues pertaining to the emergence of more structural inequalities in complex hunter-gatherer-fisher groups that have yet to be fully addressed. Coast Salish groups of Northwestern North America illuminate some important aspects. First, formally structured inequalities can emerge in the context of a broader re-organization of the relationship between people and their landscape, as transforming a landscape into a built environment also involves the transformation of social relationships. Second, inequalities can be viewed as a consequence or trade-off of other processes and outcomes, such as the development of ownership systems, which re-shape access to resources. This paper illustrates these points using ethnographic and archaeological data from the Coast Salish region of North America. My purpose is not to generate a new “theory of inequality” but rather to see inequality in its historical context.

15969 - The origins of political inequality in a contemporary small-scale society

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *von Rueden, Christopher (University of Richmond, Richmond, USA)*

Among Tsimane forager-horticulturalists of Bolivia, intra-village political inequality varies with proximity to the market town of San Borja. Closer to the market town, there is greater skew across men in their informal influence during village meetings. Furthermore, influential men in near-town villages draw upon more coalition partners and arbitrate a greater fraction of intra-village disputes, compared to influential men in more remote villages. Politically influential men near the market town, but not influential men in remote villages, are in better health and produce more surviving offspring relative to their peers. I analyze several factors related to market proximity that may drive these village differences in inequality, including settlement size and density, change in traditional sharing networks, material capital availability, and conflict frequency. I conclude that the most proximate reason for variation in political inequality in the Tsimane context (and for many socio-political transitions over human history) is patron-client relationships and coordinative leadership.

16085 - Violence and Inequality among Foragers: The Bioarchaeological Evidence from California

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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This paper explores social inequality among sedentary, semi-sedentary, and seasonally mobile hunter-gatherers vis-a-vis bioarchaeological evidence for violence. Central California offers a perhaps unsurpassed opportunity to conduct comparative analyses among diverse prehistoric and protohistoric foraging populations over millennia. Inter-personal and inter-group violence is well-attested in the historic, ethnographic, and archaeological record of central California foraging societies who were organized into chiefdoms, tribelets, and bands. These populations pursued a wide array of economic resources with considerable variation in mobility, storage, technology, and labor intensification. Moreover, archaeological, linguistic, and ethnographic evidence indicate several episodes of migration and displacement occurred in the region over time, which permits the examination of violence both within and between different ethnic groups. Here we summarize spatial and temporal patterns in physical evidence from a database of 18,500 individual skeletons that represent people who lived in central California from 3050 B.C. to A.D. 1899, and statistically evaluate the effects of population density, sociopolitical complexity, and relative mobility on the frequency and type of violence. We also examine the relative involvement of males versus females as an additional variable in the human ecology of violence in indigenous California. We further discuss the implications of this robust dataset in regards to better understanding the origin of violence and warfare in human history.

16083 - Was there War before the Holocene?

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Proponents of a short chronology of warfare argue that the relatively peaceful lives of foragers were shattered by the development of more complex sociopolitical organization in the Holocene. Increasing sedentism, surplus resources, reliance on storage, and the development of social inequality are commonly put forth to explain evidence of violence and warfare in both the archaeological record of the Holocene and complex hunter-gatherer societies known from history and ethnography. Douglas Fry, a leading proponent of this view, utilizes contemporary and historically known hunter-gatherer societies to argue that prior to the Holocene humans lived exclusively in small, low density, mobile, hunter-gatherer bands--a social form that pre-empted warfare. According to Fry, the absence of evidence for war prior to the Holocene can be taken as evidence of the absence of war. He and other proponents of the short chronology of warfare stress that the transition to cultivation and sedentary communities transformed human social organization and complexity. To them, it was this transition that produced war. But the transition also transformed the chances of finding the archaeological signatures that Fry takes to be diagnostic of warfare. If, indeed, pre-Holocene communities comprised small, nomadic forager bands as Fry proposes, they would have been the least likely of all known sociopolitical formations to leave any traces that they warred with one another. We argue that the emergence of evidence for war could as easily reflect a simple increase in the archaeological visibility of war as humans move to large, sedentary, cultivating settlements and more complex technological and social forms. On the evidence currently available, we argue, it is prejudicial to jump to any definitive conclusion about whether warfare was present prior to the Holocene. How likely is it that unambiguous, pre-Holocene archaeological signatures of war would have survived to the present? To answer this question, we must consider both the material traces of warfare that might be expected to survive to the present and the likelihood that those traces would be unambiguously diagnostic of war. There are three principal reasons why we should expect war prior to the Holocene to have left few material traces in the present archaeological record: the likely forms of pre-Holocene societies and their combat practices; the limited distribution of these societies across the earth; and preservation issues.

15930 - The Magician of Namonte and the spirit medium of Pig-Bone-Place: Political magic and the fragility of power among Mikea foragers of Madagascar

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Anthropologists have argued that hunter-gatherer egalitarianism is the result of (a) a lack of heritable resources and an inability to monopolize the means of production, (b) high mobility coupled with low population density permitting easy avoidance of unequal situations, and (c) fiercely egalitarian social norms. By contrast, Mikea foragers of Madagascar (a) acquire and inherit livestock wealth, (b) have restricted mobility due to clan obligations and outside political forces, and (c) share the same norms of gerontocracy and patriarchy as their non-foraging neighbors. Yet Mikea still experience relative socio-economic equality, at least within Mikea society (but inequality relative to their farming and fishing neighbors). In this presentation I explore the reasons for social equity among Mikea by presenting two stories of extreme cases when charismatic individuals exerted power and influence over others. The first story comes from oral historical accounts of the greatest Mikea magician in recent history, Tsiasinda, who attracted a large number of followers to the village of Namonte during the French colonial period. Tsiasinda's magic was particularly effective at combatting French colonial abuses, yet Tsiasinda was also the official Chef du Village for Namonte and so a member of the colonial government. The second story is about a renowned spirit medium whose forceful personality and that of his possessing spirit allowed him to exert authority over the forest camp of Antaolandambo (pig-bone-place), where he lived in a fenced in compound and usurped others' resources and labor. In both stories, Mikea accepted autocrats because they protected people from outside threats. Mikea ultimately rejected both leaders when these benefits were eclipsed by the costs of being exploited. Consistent with anthropological wisdom, resource access, mobility, and norms were instrumental in evading control.

16037 - Push or Pull: The Role of Ritual in the Development of Inequality

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Perhaps the biggest bone of contention in current theorizing about the origins of inequality is whether egalitarian hunters and gatherers accepted claims to privilege on the part of some individuals by consensus to deal with community problems due to environmental stress or population pressure, or whether people were cajoled into participating in systems creating inequality by promises of lucre and a better life. The push versus pull scenarios contrast the most in terms of the resource conditions under which initial inequalities are expected to develop. Stress models are often predicated on the existence of severe downturns in food availability that forced residents to accept inferior socioeconomic and political roles in order to survive. Stress models can also accommodate non-resource stress conditions such as warfare, scalar stresses, and information congestion. The pull explanations are predicated on resource rich contexts or conditions under which significant surplus foods can become available, to enable aspiring aggrandizers to lure others into manipulative schemes that were purportedly to everyone's advantage.

Although ritual is widely accepted as being intimately entangled with the development of inequalities among hunter/gatherers, debates over the precise role of ritual continue to occur in most areas where inequality emerged from egalitarian foraging societies. In general, there remains limited understanding of how this plays out due to the higher level theoretical divergence in views surrounding the origins of inequality. Ritual is sometimes invoked to promote communitarian group solidarity, while in other cases ritual is used to support or justify political power derived from individual ambition. Definitions of key concepts like "inequality" and operational measures have been a recurring problem in many discussions. We make a critical distinction between initial inequality emerging from egalitarian forager types of societies versus elaborated or derivative inequality involving accepted norms of elite power, private property, contractual debts, and private control over resources. We use comparative ethnographies from the Northwest Coast and California to examine the role of ritual in the maintenance of inequalities. We then present the latest information that deals with this issue from the Keatley Creek site in Interior British Columbia, Canada, the largest prehistoric winter village site in the region.

16156 - Social inequality and ideology in the evolutionary prospect

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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The origin or emergence of social inequality has traditionally been one of the most debated issues in anthropology. The word "origin" itself implies the assumption that inequality did not exist during some period in early human evolution. Yet, since the beginning of studies in social evolution, certain scholars, such as Maine or Westermarck, have regarded inequality as inherent in "human nature." Contemporary sociobiology and human ethology aim to make this idea sound. Perhaps we should search not for the roots of social inequality, but for factors that might cause a specific form of social inequality and for mechanisms which might shape specific structural features of hierarchical systems. Likewise, we should inquire into what underlies the development of egalitarian social systems (Wiessner 1996, Trigger 2003, Ames 2010), for egalitarianism is a product of specific evolutionary processes to no lesser extent than is social inequality.

Different mechanisms that structure hierarchical systems could act in parallel in the same society or could be specific to particular cultures in particular periods, and could have foundations in or outside the sphere of material production. Monopolization of special knowledge and occupations (frequently connected to ideology) by certain social groups is a powerful force that can shape social inequality. Also, the spirit of competition and emulation in warfare, occultism, artistic performance and other spiritual endeavor might promote the development of institutionalized and excessive status inequality. Ethnographic data on hunter-gatherer societies (the indigenous Australian, certain North American, and, possibly, the Fuegians) illustrate this idea. A society, which in Woodburn's terms had "no mechanism for the accumulation" of wealth, could build effective mechanisms of social differentiation even if it did not follow a path towards the development of a productive economy or even towards the intensification of a hunter/gatherer economy. . (It is stated that a society which in Woodburn's terms, had "no mechanism for the accumulation" of wealth, was able to build up effective mechanisms of social differentiation. To create such mechanisms, it is unnecessary for a society to have followed a path towards the development of a productive economy or even towards the intensification of hunter/gatherer economy). The phenomena under consideration could exist without any paraphernalia available to archaeological fixation, although some data from European Upper Paleolithic sites (e.g. Sungir of the Russian Planes, Altamira of Franco-Cantabria) might be interpreted as the indirect evidence of similar forms of inequality. Also, the other archaeological record exists, "revealing small scale societies who seem to exhibit some degree of inequality but lack many of the other traits associated with complexity" (Ames 2010:16-19, Kelly et al 2013).

16188 - Learning to live with inequality? -- Lessons from the Moken the (former) sea nomads of Thailand

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Arunotai, Narumon (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand)*

Hunting and gathering societies have a high level of egalitarianism, but nowadays outside influence brings about rapid change including sedentarization, aggregation, intermarriage, the adoption of new cultural values, etc. This results in “the evolution of inequality.” This paper explores the process of social differentiation in Moken society on the Surin Islands in Phang-nga Province, Thailand after they gradually became sedentary 2-3 decades ago and adopted “new” cultural values. How does social differentiation affect the community? Does it create and intensify conflict? How does the community adapt and does it develop new social mechanisms in dealing with this inequality? After exploring the change and transition, the paper will then extract lessons learned from the Moken society.

15906 - AGENT BASED SIMULATION OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION NORMS ON THE DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS IN HUNTER-FISHER-GATHERER SOCIETIES

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Agent-based computer simulations of population dynamics of hunter-fisher-gatherer societies are now possible with the development of software and computers capable of complex calculations. Previous studies have assumed simple and natural reproduction control in foraging societies resulting in a null growing-rate. But data from a half dozen existing foraging societies shows variability in growth rates, from negative to ones comparable to sedentary agricultural societies. However, there is the paradox of reduced population increase documented in the prehistory of these groups. This paradox and the fact that the modern demographic data were collected in an era of direct or indirect contact with the industrialized world, makes us wonder about the maintenance of these sustainability systems by these groups.

We seek to assess the weight that different social norms, particularly sexual discrimination norms and strategies have on hunter-fisher-gatherer population dynamics. Here we develop an agent based simulation model that allows the simulation of different life-courses of men and women in four hunter-fisher-gatherer societies, ethnographically documented, and to experiment with the medium- and long-term effect on demographics of these social norms that have a link with reproduction.

We present the system and the main results we have obtained so far.

15904 - THE ORIGINS OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY IN HUNTER-FISHER-GATHERER SOCIETIES.

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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A sexual division of labor exists in all ethnographically-known hunter-fisher-gatherer societies (HFG-S). And even in egalitarian societies there is often social dissymmetry between men and women, the former being the more favored. These societies also invested effort in social norms that regulate reproductive strategies.

A comprehensive explanation for HFG-S has to account for the need for those societies to regulate social reproduction. Where a vertical social inequality exists, production processes often attribute a different subjective value to producers. As a first step in the development of inequalities, the sexual division of labor and the underestimation of women constitute a strategy, one that allows social control over women. Thus it facilitates social control over the social segment which is most relevant for reproduction.

The reproductive capability of the modern human species suggests that there was a need to regulate strategies for reproduction and hence sustainability. We link this with the division of labor and consider that reproduction was the dominant variable, which required over time the major investment of social effort and ideological reinforcement. Thus our point is that the origin of male/female social inequality among ethnographically-known HFG-S has to be traced back to the first fully modern human societies.

The analysis of subsistence in prehistoric HFG-S has received enough attention by scholars, but reproduction has not. It has been considered instead a "natural" process. Our argument allows explaining the emergence of those social norms of reproduction. These norms are materialized in the archaeological record, in the existence of ceremonies designated to fix social norms and in ideological items that had been and can be related to the management of reproduction and to the reinforcement of the structure of social relationships.

Therefore we have been working toward an experimental ethnoarchaeology to develop the methodological instruments to advance knowledge of past relationships between men and women and to proceed beyond pure analogy. We will discuss some examples.