

Trudie Husnjak

How the environment can be understood

For some, the movement from Hunter-gatherer to Horticulturist has been seen as progression, but there are some academics who would dispute this claim. It was described as "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race." (Diamond, 1987) and Hunter-gathers were said to be "The Original Affluent Society" (Sahlins, 1972). Sahlins work demonstrates that the life of an average Hunter-gather meant that seeking food lasted for only approximately 15 hours a week, in which time all their material wants were easily met, leaving remaining time to spend with their communities. This is a great deal different to the 40-hour working week that a person in an urban or industrialised nation must complete, just to achieve the same results. For the first time horticulture produced the have and the have nots. "With agriculture came the gross social and sexual inequality" (Diamond 1987) Sahlins (1972) therefore argues that "[T]o accept that hunters are affluent is therefore to recognise that the present human condition of man(sic) slaving to bridge the gap between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means is a tragedy of modern times". (Sahlins 1972) This essay will argue if Diamond and Sahlins are correct in their thinking by using the examples of the Kogi and Baka communities.

The Baka people, known in the Congo as Bayaka, are an indigenous group who inhabit the tropical forests of central Africa. Their way of life is changing forcibly as their territory is changing, conservation and industrial interests have made their nomadic existence exceedingly difficult to continue. The deforestation has now forced them to live on the edge of the forests. Being confined to a much smaller area, with extraordinarily little mobility has also caused other issues, such as disease and tensions in the community. The once abundant forest, which would not only provide their food but also their medicine is rapidly disappearing. The Baka work for the logging and mining companies and are paid in alcohol, which brings its own issues to the people. Life for the women has become much tougher with their roles changing to include heavier work. Many are dependent on the alcohol, and not only the men, but women (including pregnant ones) and children are drinking. This has caused huge social problems in their community and increased the tensions and in some cases has led to violence. Some hope for the younger generations of the Baka is education, but they must never lose contact with their culture.

However, this is not the case for Hunter-gathers who progressed onto becoming Horticulturists, for example The Kogi, who are a conscious indigenous community of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Martha in Northern Colombia, they have inhabited this area for four centuries, hidden from the world and are the last surviving high civilisation of pre-conquest America. They progressed from Hunter –gatherer but were able to isolate themselves away

from the rest of the outside world, so despite being partly settled they have not been affected as Diamond had predicted. They have a variety of eco-systems, which in turn produce a rich and varied selection of flora and fauna. They see themselves as keepers of the earth and have kept to their traditional ways of living, they call themselves The Elder brothers, and call us the younger brothers. "As the elder brother, they are obliged to ensure everything remains connected and balanced so that the creative force of the world can continue to produce. This is achieved through careful thought. Only after 'mediation' on the consequences can actions be taken. (Eriera, 1987) They have chosen to contact their younger brothers in a bid to stop further destruction to the Earth. They believe that the Earth can only be revitalized by using Kogi methods. "Everything we do is an event not only in the physical world but also in the spirit world. We live in a world shaped by spirit. Every tree, every stone, every river, has a spirit form, invisible.... this is the world of Aluna, the world of thought and spirit. Aluna embraces intelligence, soul, and fertility: it is the stuff of life, the essence of reality. The material world is underpinned, shaped, given life and given generative power in Aluna." (Eriera, 1992:63) The "rules" by which the community is governed has changed little and the women have continued to carry out the "mothering" role.

It could also be argued that it is not horticulture that is "The worst mistake in the History of the Human Race" (Diamond, 1987) but the choice to exploit the environment for Horticulture purposes. When looking at the Kogi community, they always work with the environment. They have not had any intervention from the outside world and taken on any forms of industrialisation. Alternatively, when we look at this argument in relation to the Baka, we find that their environment has been heavily exploited by outsiders to the total degradation of their culture and traditional ways of life.

In conclusion even though Diamond and Sahlins are correct with their thinking's in some cases, this essay has argued that it is not horticulture, but the large-scale exploitation of the environments for horticulture purposes that is "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race" (Diamond, 1987) As Diamond ended, "Hunter- gathers practiced the most successful and longest-lasting lifestyle in human history. In contrast, we're still struggling with the mess into which agriculture has tumbled us, and it's unclear whether we can solve it" (Diamond, 1987)

References

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