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Governance in the Raw: A Primer on Tribal Political Systems

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This paper will introduce the reader to some different types of pre-state or tribal governance systems a person is likely to find in portions of the planet where people are living at just above the subsistence level and there is limited or no state influence. While each culture may be unique, certain commonalities can be seen between tribal people living across the globe. The intended audience for this paper is the practitioner working with these people, be they military or civilian, who are trying to influence the group without necessarily trying to change it. To achieve this, a better understanding than might be provided by being told you are going to be dealing with a tribal society might be helpful.

- Who are the leaders of the group?
- What authority do they have?
- Who settles disputes?
- Who doles out patronage?
- Are they the same person?
- What affect might I have on the group if I deal with this person rather than that?

While this paper cannot answer all these questions, it might provide a starting place to help you focus your search for key players.

Why Bother?

Normally, when entering a new area, practitioners get some background briefing on the indigenous, tribal people in the area. Hopefully it will include history, traditions, culture, and who the leaders are. Isn't that enough? Doesn't know the traditions of the tribe sufficient? Maybe ... or maybe not. The Pashtuns are a single tribe, yet their level of political integration as well as their key political players will vary based on whether you are dealing with the *qalang* of the valleys or the *nang* of the hills.

A distinction between mountain and plain tribes is indispensable seeing that it is important to the Pashtun self-conception. To simplify, plain tribes (*qalang*) are integrated into a system of administrative and political control of the state. As a consequence, they pay taxes. ... Powerful Pashtun landlords dominate and manipulate patronage networks. Conversely, hill tribes (*nang*) are relatively free of any non-tribal control from outside. Even within tribal borders they are free of domination by others ... (Oberson 2002, pp 19-20, citations omitted)

Oberson sees this distinction primarily as a socioeconomic one, with the *qalang* living in an “agricultural feudal economy” and the *nang* living in a “pastoral tribal economy”. These descriptions actually define two aspects of the economy, the first being the primary source of food production/procurement (pastoral vs. agricultural) and the second being the political result of the level of economic production (tribal or subsistence economy vs. feudal or political/centralized economy). Each of these two aspects has significance. For example, pastoralists, people who herd animals, tend to be associated with a male dominated society that is prone to raiding others (Johnson and Earle 2000). This paper will endeavor to define those terms in a very basic way and to help practitioners recognize them as well as glean insights into what political system, if any, the group is likely to be using. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to provide a better understanding of how to work within a tribal society.

Caveats

I need to make four caveats. First, when I started my research on political systems in general and creating democratic systems in particular I came to the conclusion that very little research is conducted by “modern” political scientists on pre-Westphalian systems. The assumption being that political systems are evolutionary and that the study of anything prior to the modern state should be relegated to historians or anthropologists. I do not subscribe to that opinion. So while the majority of the terms and references used in this paper are from anthropologists, it is only because they are the only ones studying these non-state systems and I will alter them where doing so provides greater clarity in a modern context. Second, the fact that these cultural, economic, and political systems are primarily studied by anthropologists should not be contrived to mean that they are somehow prehistoric throwbacks. These systems exist currently all around the world largely in areas the Barnett described in “The Pentagon’s New Map” as potential hotspots for conflicts into the future (Barnett 2005). Therefore, when you read this paper do not think of these societies as relicts of the past but of current and future regions of interest. Third, while more information is provided on the Pashtun than any other tribe, this is not an Afghan-centric paper. Information on tribal people from all over the world is presented to try to establish patterns. Finally, these patterns must be take for what they are, indicators of what a practitioner *might* expect to find under a specific set of conditions, not a definitive answer to what a practitioner *will* find.

What is a Tribal Society?

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, the term tribe “usually denotes a social group bound together by kin and duty associated with a particular territory. Members of the tribe share the social cohesion associated with a family, together with the sense of political autonomy of a nation”(Scott and Marshall 2005, p. 699). However, the definition of a tribe is far from settled and may include additional qualifiers such as a subsistence level economy, a common language, common culture, and common ancestry (Fried 1967; Haas 1985). For example, the Pashtuns claim a common decent from *Qais bin Rashid* who was converted to Islam by the prophet Mohamed. Legend holds that *Qais* can trace his bloodline back to *Afghana*, a descendent of Saul, the first king of the Jews (Oberson 2002). I will not try to settle the question of what is or is not a tribe. I will instead use the dictionary definition with a particular interest in a tribe’s real or perceived political autonomy.

Categorizing Tribal Societies – Food Production or Procurement

Anthropologists have used many terms to categorize prehistoric societies. Societies have been classified as hunting, pastoral, or farming; or as savage, barbarian, or civilized (Lenski 2005; Nolan and Lenski 2005). More common to most people will be categorization based on the level of material technology; stone, bronze, iron. My preference is for the taxonomy used by Gerhart Lenki in “Ecological-Evolutionary Theory: Principals and Applications”. He identifies seven categories of society based on the characteristics of their environment and their level of technology. These seven are hunter/gatherers, fishing societies, herders, horticulturalists, agriculturalists, and industrial societies. The first five, hunter/gatherer, fishing societies, herders, horticulturalist and agriculturalist represent humans producing food directly from their environment. The distinctions are usually related to their environment and may be the only options available given the environmental conditions the society finds itself in. The last two categories, maritime and industrial, represent a society where the group is largely engaged in activities other than food production and instead procure their food through exchange for other goods or services. The distinction becomes important when you think about the corporate nature of the tribe. For the purposes of this paper I will expand the maritime category to include societies where trade in goods or services is the primary source of economic activity. I will also add an eighth society, the rentier society.

Hunter/gatherers are pretty much as the name describes – they hunt their food, gather their food growing wild, or consume a combination of the two. Sometimes referred to as foragers they tend to have a low population density may be nomadic, but beyond that little more can be safely generalized. An example of a hunter/gatherer society would be the !Kung of the Kalahari in Southern Africa¹. The “!” at the beginning of the name signifies a clicking sound that has no equivalent in English. The region the !Kung occupy is dry. Seasonal rainfalls vary and drought years are not infrequent. In the Dobe region, along the Namibia/Botswana border, there are only nine permanent water holes although seasonal water holes are more common during the rainy season. There are about a hundred species of edible plants in the Dobe region with the most important being the mongongo tree which produces seasonal fruits and nuts that can be found on the ground year round. Animals found in the region include kudu, wildebeest, and gemsbok. The !Kung’s diet is about 70% plants, fruits and nuts and 30% animal. The !Kung are nomadic, moving as food and water resources dictate. “The !Kung typically occupy a campsite for a period of weeks and then eat their way out of it. For instance, at a camp in the mongongo forest the members exhaust the nuts within a 1.5-km radius the first week of occupation, within a 3-km radius the second week, and within a 4.5 km radius the third week. The longer the group lives at camp, the farther it must travel each day to get food. The feature of daily subsistence characterizes both summer and winter camps. For example, at the Dobe winter camp in June 1964 the gatherers were making daily round trips of nine to fourteen km to reach the mongongo groves. By August the daily trips had increased to nineteen km” (Lee 1979, p. 175). Hunter/gatherers generally do not plant food or keep animals, or if they do these activities only augment their primary food sources. Generally, hunter/gatherers population is directly related to the availability of resources and is usually low with the rate for the Dobe !Kung at one person for every eight square miles.

¹ Much has been written on the !Kung. Lee, R., 1979, “The !Kung San”, Cambridge, Cambridge Press; Howell, N., 1979, “Demography of the Dobe !Kung”, New York: Academy Press; and Leacock, E. and Lee, R., 1982, “Politics and History in a Band Society”, Cambridge: Cambridge Press are just some examples.

Fishing societies can fair considerably better. Similar to hunter/gatherers, their primary source of food is taken directly from the wild. In fact, many anthropologists do not even bother to segregate the groups classifying them as hunter/gatherers. However, they have the advantage not being able to easily deplete their food source so they do not having to keep moving to find food. Because of this they can remain in one area, building villages and developing large and complex societies. Because of that and because of their ability to eventually transform their society into maritime groups I find it convenient to classify them separately. The Indian fisherman of the Pacific Northwest will serve as our example of a fishing society. Communities here concentrate on marine and estuary resources and include fish, marine mammals, ducks and geese, and shellfish as well as plants. Some inland game such as deer and caribou are also taken. Since the sea is not easily diminished fishing societies can stay in one area for longer periods of time building villages and elaborate social structures. Because of the greater resources available population densities can reach as high as one or two persons per square mile.

Herders, also sometimes referred to as pastoralists, herd domestic animals. They tend to be nomadic or seminomadic and are capable, through diffused networks of related kin, to grow to very large sizes. Herders tend to exist where environmental conditions preclude other lifestyles. Conditions may be arid or mountainous and provide little opportunity for sustained farming, there is insufficient wildlife to hunt, and fishing is obviously out of the question. Each of these three types are products of their environment. Where they are encountered attempts to change their primary form of food production should be thoroughly examined for long term sustainability before implementation. The Turkana of east Rift Valley of Kenya will serve as our example of a herding society. The Turkana's environment varies from thorn-brush grasslands to dwarf shrub rangeland (Johnson and Earle 2000). The Turkana are nomadic moving from the northern, mountainous edge of their range, which produces grass along watercourses in the dry season, to the open plains below, which provide better grazing during the rainy months. The Turkana's main foods are milk and meat from their herds of cattle, camels, sheep, goats, and donkeys. The Turkana gain the majority of their food from animal products but will trade with other local groups for grains and other products. The Turkana are capable of higher population densities of greater than 3 people per square mile.

It can be difficult to extrapolate universal social characteristics from a group's mode of food production but two other points about pastoralists are worth mentioning. First, they have a higher tendency than other groups to be patriarchal (Lenski 2005). They are more likely to require a bride price and more likely to require the new couple to live with husband's kin. This reinforces male domination. The patriarchal nature tends to reinforce kinship bonds before others. As a result, they are often seen as truly tribal in the sense that the tribe, or kinship group, takes precedence over other cultural ties. Second, herding societies tend to engage in raids more often than most other groups (Anderson 1978; Lenski 2005). These raids can be for a number of reasons including replenishing their herds (Johnson and Earle 2000). Engagement in raids, as well as defense against raids, is part of herder's day-to-day life. This can lead to a militaristic mentality. Pastoralist, such as Genghis Khan, have built and administered entire empires that have stretched from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean. But although tactical prowess may be a part of the herding lifestyle, taking and keeping territory is not. Pastoralists traditionally engage in raids, attacks at specific target to acquire a specific property or persons (slaves or wives) followed by abandoning the terrain once the object of the raid has been taken. Warfare, in the form of actually taking and holding land, tends to be more common in sedentary societies. These aspects of their social organization should be kept in mind when dealing with pastoralists.

Horticulturalists are gardeners. They create and care for relatively small plots of land using simple tools like a hoe. Horticulturalists practice “slash-and-burn” techniques where a plot of land is converted from its current state by cutting down everything and burning it, then planting the desired crops. The land will be planted until it no longer producing a sufficient harvest at which time a new plot is cleared and prepared for planting. This lifestyle will be more sedentary and leads to establishing semi-permanent villages. Our example of a horticulturist society is the indigenous population of the Trobriand Islands located about 120 miles north of New Guinea’s eastern tip. The Trobriands are a group of flat, coral islands with thin layer of soil over the coral. Cultivation is done by selecting a plot of land, clearing it, burning the cleared material, fencing it, and planting it. The plots are usually prepared new every year and allowed to go fallow for two years before reused. The staple crop is yams, which is planted twice a year on the plots. Population densities for the Trobriand islanders are quit high at about 100 persons per square mile.

Agrarian Societies are groups who cultivate the same plots of land year after year, the predominant form of farming today². I will not spend time explaining them. There is one point I would like to make at this time. Much like raiding was for the pastoralist, warfare, in the form organized ventures to take and hold land, is the province of the horticultural and agrarian societies.

The last two categories represent societies where food is procured rather than produced. The distinction is important first because having an economy that procures its food indicates a level of specialization above mere subsistence. This transition is particularly important to tribal societies because these communities tend to be economically interdependent.

Maritime societies are very rare and I could not think of a current application of one. A historical example would be the Minoans of Crete. These are societies built on trading across cultures, giving them the advantage of having contact with and learning from other societies. Applying the basic idea of trade as the major source of economic prosperity I will expand maritime societies into trading societies in general; societies where the central economic characteristic is its dependence on trade. A landlocked example of this would be Afghanistan during the period of the caravan, when control of trade routes through the Khyber pass yielded a significant source of economic power.

Then there is the industrial society. While there might be a tribal industrial society I cannot think of one so they will not get much mention here. The only point worth making in this forum is that an industrial society does interact with tribal societies.

The final category I will mention is the rentier society. Often defined as rentier state, the society’s primary source of economic wealth is the exploitation of a natural resource such as oil. I expand this standard definition to include control of an exceptionally lucrative cash crop such as opium. The control of this resource and the income it generates is the main economic source of power.

² Lenski’s taxonomy separated horticulturalists and agrarian’s by the type of tool they used to farm. Horticulturalists used a planting stick or hoe while agrarians used a plow. From an anthropological perspective, the invention and widespread use of the plow is clearly an important event that resulted in massive population growth where rainfall and soil conditions permitted large scale cultivation. However, this distinction is less relevant when discussing current cultural systems living on marginal land. Because of this I have deviated from the original characterizations of what makes up an horticulturalist and an agrarian society
Lenski, G. E. (2005). Ecological-Evolutionary Theory: Principles and Applications. Boulder, Colo., Paradigm Publishers.

Categorizing Tribal Societies: Economic Level and Governance: The Relationship According to Classical Anthology

The next section will introduce some concepts from anthropology that will be used to help practitioners understand the environment they are working in. Before I begin I would like to provide a better understanding of why we are using anthropological terms and the problems with using those terms. Specifically, there are two problems you run into when trying to find relevant, unbiased information on tribal governance archetypes. First, most of the data is not designed for use by modern practitioners and second, while much of the theoretical work describes the same activities and processes, they are not currently universally applied terms associated with many of them. The first problem introduces why we are working with anthropological terms in the first place. One of the methods Anthropologists use is to look at “primitive” societies today and try to determine what our (us more civilized people) ancestors would have lived like 10,000 years ago. The idea being that human’s have not evolved genetically that much in the since then and, under similar circumstances, it is reasonable to believe that our ancestors would have acted pretty much the same if we correct for unique environmental differences. As a result, when you go looking for information on tribal political systems, most of what you find is written by anthropologists. Therefore, my introduction into the relationship between economic production and governance will start with some anthropological ideas.

The second problem, one of consistent terms, will get a short example. In the next section I will introduce the “big-man” as a form of governance system. For now all you need to know is that a big-man is a person who, through personal charisma, economic good fortune, favors, and patronage, builds a following. This following is loyal to him as long as he continues to provide for them and he maintains his power in a similar fashion. He has no “right” to political power, he was not elected and he did not become a big-man through right of birth, he did so through his own tenacity. The term is relatively new, less than a hundred years old. In writings from the eighteenth and nineteenth century explorers who encountered natives the big-man identified as a “chief”, because that is an idea translatable to modern westerners. Captain James Cook describes meeting the native of Vanatu in 1774 and searching for their chief. “They seem to have chiefs among them; at least some are pointed out to us by that title; but, as I before observed, they appeared to have very little authority over the rest of the people” (Lindstrom 1981, p. 901). “Chief” remained the term used until between the 1930s -1950s when it became clear that the word did not accurately convey the meaning the author, or the original language, intended to convey. A number of labels were contrived for the new term including headman, centerman, strongman, manager, magnate, director, executive, and big-man (Lindstrom 1981). Although the term gained predominance after Marshall Sahlins wrote “Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief” in 1963, by 1979 some anthropologists had abandoned the term in favor of other language(Lindstrom 1981). So while the terms I introduce here are the most accurate I can find, they may not be universally accepted or used by many anthropologists.

Economic Anthropologists’ Levels of Economic Status

When discussing economic status I am defining the total production capacity or output of a political unit above the nuclear family over no less than a year. For example, in a band there may be four or five husband and wife (or wives) living together. Several of these bands may live together to form a village of a hundred or so people. The village is a political unit that has its own production capacity when discussing total production. The village may be part of a larger

group of villages also associated by kinship. We can also examine that level of economic production to determine its level of economic production where the political level we are interested in is the kinship group. The economic status must always be tied to the political unit being discussed to be accurate. When discussing production capacity I am looking at the total group output of food, products, and capital improvements. For example, a family may produce food through gardening, make their clothes, and build their own shelter. These would be food and products. A village may collectively clear fields for farming and add irrigation systems to increase yield. These would be capital improvements. It is a qualitative determination based on observations of the group not a quantitative one.

There are two level we are primarily concerned with and two intermediate steps between the levels. The first level is the subsistence economy which is a level that is just high enough to allow people to survive. The second level is the political economy which involves a significant amount of excess capacity. The two intermediate steps are first, the introduction of craftsmen who are not involved in food production, and second, the creation of a prestige economy of goods that serve no functional purpose other than to set the owner apart from the rest of the group.

Subsistence Economy

A subsistence economy is one where the group is producing enough food, clothing, tools, and shelter for its own wants and needs but little else. Often, it may no even be producing enough for itself. This does not mean the group is living in abject poverty, working every waking moment just to survive. Marshall Sahlins, in his book, “Stone Age Economics”, described groups living at this level as “The Original Affluent Society”(Sahlins 1972, p. 1). They produce enough to get by and then rest, having far more leisure time than people in modern societies. Reporting on hunter/gatherers, Richard Lee wrote

A woman gathers on one day enough food to feed her family for three days, and spends the rest of her time resting in camp, doing embroidery, visiting other camps, or entertaining visitors from other camps. For each day at home, kitchen routines, such as cooking, nut cracking, collecting firewood, and fetching water, occupy one to three hours of her time. This rhythm of steady work and steady leisure is maintained throughout the year. The hunters tend to work more frequently than the women, but their schedule is uneven. It is not unusual for a man to hunt avidly for a week and then do no hunting at all for two or three weeks. Since the hunt is an unpredictable business and subject to magical control, hunters sometimes experience a run of bad luck and stop hunting for a month or longer. During these periods, visiting, entertaining, and especially dancing are the primary activities of men. (Lee, DeVore et al. 1969, p. 37)

Clearly they are not working every moment to survive. Often people living at a subsistence level are doing so because that is the limit of the environment’s carrying capacity – the ability of the environment to provide necessities for the population. Another important factor when considering a subsistence economy is that the unit of production is the family, what Sahlins referred to as the Domestic Mode of Production (Sahlins 1972). What that means is that the entire family is involved in producing all the needs of the family including food, clothing, tools, and other items. One family does not produce food while another producing clothing and so

forth. Different members of the family may produce different things, but every family is economically self sufficient although it may need assistance from other members of the village to survive during lean times. Subsistence economies are generally associated with the band, family forager, or tribe depending on who the author is.

Political Economy

The second economic level is the political economy and it represents a significant jump in total output. At this point the families, as a Domestic Unit of Production, can no longer stand alone. In this economy the exchange of goods and services are required. It represents more than a simple economic upturn. It also represents a more complex social structure and dependency on others for security and trade (Johnson and Earle 2000, p. 26). The dynamics of the political economy are geared toward using the surplus production capacity to support social, political, and religious programs. This is done through taxation and redistribution by some political entity. The political economy is generally associated with the chiefdom (Fried 1967; Earle 1997; Johnson and Earle 2000; Earle 2002).

A political economy means centralized ownership of the means of production, usually by a chief, that allows them the ability to siphon off excess to fund political projects. Land is the best example of this. In subsistence economies land is either owned collectively by the group or by families within the group. Not so in a political economy. In Hawaii, during the Great Mahele, when the land-tenure system was transformed to private ownership the workings of the old system were made part of the record.

This system of land tenure was not codified in law; it was highly flexible, manipulated by chiefs to generate surplus used in political maneuvering. Ultimate 'ownership' rested with the paramount chief, based on his political office. Although this office was, in principle, inherited partilineally by the first son of the first son (and thus by the highest-ranked individual in the society), in fact it was most commonly seized during wars of succession and conquest. The paramount then delegated to his closest supporters the rights in a community. The title of community chief was a political compensation for support and could be rescinded at will by the paramount. The community chief then appointed a konohiko, often to compensate a lower-ranking chief who had been a warrior supporting the paramount. The konohiki allocated the land to commoners, and the staples mobilized as rent from the commoners were the currency of the chiefdom(Earle 1997, p. 79).

This centralized ownership of the means of production provided the "currency" of the chiefdom providing them the ability to fund everything from specialized craftsman to large scale capital improvements on land. The basics of this system, although based on private ownership of property and enshrined in laws, are the basic foundations of the property taxation systems used in many modern states.

Intermediate Steps – Specialization

It should be clear that there is a wide gap between having enough to survive on your own and being part of an economically interconnected society where there is enough excess capacity to maintain a chief (Johnson and Earle 2000). A step along this path is specialization, which is

the ability to have individuals or families specialize specific goods or services. They are allowed this ability because the rest of the group is producing enough excess to allow a select few to only work in that specialty. For example, if a person or family becomes known for their pottery they may be able to only make pottery if the rest of the group can produce enough excess food to barter with them for pottery.

Intermediate Steps – Prestige Economy

Specialization will begin with utility items like clothing and tools but in more economically advanced groups it will extend to items that serve no practical purpose. These items are the valuables of primitive societies (Earle 2002)³. Ownership and display of these items identify the owner's status as someone of wealth or importance. This represents the second step, the establishment of a prestige economy: an economy built on items with no other purpose than to display one's status. Often ownership and trade in these items will be restricted to people of status such as tribal elders or chiefs. Such items might include seals or other family symbols, axes, necklaces, or specialized clothing such as feathered robes (Earle 2002).

Anthropologists' Archetypes of Governance – Some Definitions

Before going too far into this I want to be clear what I am referring to when it comes to the concept of governance. I am not talking about government as an institution. No such institution exists in pre-chieftain societies. However, certain functions normally associated with governments are performed by key people in the pre-chieftain systems. It will be two select functions I will examine: the redistribution of products and services for the public good and decision making regarding common concerns. The redistribution of products and services for the public good is institutionalized in modern governments through taxation and government spending. In the American system, what items are taxed and how that money is spent is decided by the legislative branch and administered by the executive branch. Decision in pre-chieftain societies often involves decisions about when to move camp or where to hunt. In modern societies the decisions are usually made by the legislative branch unless they involve a dispute in which case they end up in the courts. In pre-chieftain systems these functions may not exist (as in the case of redistribution in a subsistence level group) or may not be the prerogative of a specific person or group.

The second group of terms I need to explore will help delineate what level of ability the party either redistributing property or deciding disputes actually has. These three terms are influence, authority, and power. Influence is simply the ability of a leader to sway the opinions of those around you. It is the ability to get things done. It usually entails a level of loyalty from the people you are influencing but does not indicate any level of recognized authority and no power to enforce your will. While the general society may recognize your ability to get things done you are not looked at by all members of the group as being the person to go to. For example, a certain elder may be sought out to help resolve a dispute but he may not be the only person who could perform that task or may not be recognized by all the parties as having that ability. With authority you have a socially recognized ability to perform the task but not an exclusive lock on that ability. Authority also lacks the ability to enforce any decisions beyond the acquiescence of the parties. Power, on the other hand, entails both the authority to take action

³ Another important step is the creation of money. However, it is of limited importance in the modern world since most societies will use the money of their local government.

and the ability to enforce that decision. It will almost always involve a exclusive lock on the authority to perform the specific task.

Anthropologists' Archetypes of Governance – Egalitarian Societies

“Egalitarian” is usually the term associated with early governance system, or more correctly, a non-governance system. In “The Evolution of Political Society” Morton H. Fried defines egalitarian systems.

An egalitarian society does not have any means of fixing or limiting the number of person capable of exerting power. As many persons can wield power – whether through personal strength, influence, authority, or whatever means -- can do so, and there is no necessity to draw them together to establish order of dominance or paramountcy. Let there be no mistake. An egalitarian society as here defined has some members who are less assertive, less successful than others. By and large, however, the differences among members, apart from sex and age, tend to be ephemeral. Strength, sensory acuity, excellent performance – these strong points constitute an ideal in all simple societies; accidents, bad luck, illness – such things can put the mighty out of commission, making them temporarily dependant or ruining them altogether. Furthermore most egalitarian societies have a powerful leveling mechanism that prevents the appearance of overly wide gaps in ability among members.(Fried 1967, pp. 33-34)

Fried’s work is seminal in political anthropology and this term became ubiquitous. It is generally used to define any society that did not have at least a simple chiefdom. However more recently it has become clear that, below chiefdom, there is another party who at least attempts to wield authority and is not subject to leveling mechanisms. This proto-chief is the big-man and will be discussed below. Even where no big-man exists, there are members of the group who are revered and respected. Often these are the oldest male (and sometimes female) members of a particular family group. They receive more visits from other members of the group (Johnson and Earle 2000) or they are looked to for advise (Allen 1984). These Elders may not have any actual authority or power, but they are looked to when a decision needs to be made. However, elders may not be the only ones looked to. Lee provides an example from the !Kung.

In egalitarian societies such as the !Kung’s, group activities unfold, plans are made, and decisions are arrived at – all apparently without a clear focus of authority or influence. Closer examination, however, reveals that patterns of leadership do exist. When a water hole is mentioned, a group living there is often referred to by the !Kung by a single man or woman’s name ... These individuals are often older people who have lived there the longest or who have married into the owner group, who have some personal qualities worthy of note as a speaker, an arguer, a ritual specialist, or a hunter. In group discussions these people may speak out more than others, may be deferred to by others, and one gets the feeling that their opinions hold a bit more weight than the opinion of other discussants. Whatever their skills, !Kung leaders have no formal authority. They can only persuade, but never enforce their will on others. (Lee 1979, pp 343-44)

As the kin group starts to gain economic ground ownership over the means of producing food, be it particular hunting or fishing areas, herds of animals, or farm land, the group takes on a “corporate” identity. “The corporateness of decent groups arise from increased competition over resources and the consequent need for strength in numbers to regulate and defend access” (Johnson and Earle 2000, p. 131).⁴ This family corporateness creates positions of power in the eldest member of a kin group. As the “owner” of the family assets they decide which family members get to farm on which plot or have this many animals in their herd. This ability tends to reinforce the elder’s image of authority among the group but this is usually the extent of what a kin group is capable of in a pre-chieftdom society.

Anthropologists’ Archetypes of Governance – Big-Men

As discussed above big-men are a rather recent addition to the anthropologist’s lexicon. Sahlins tends to be associated with the idea the big-man and described him generically. “Big-men do not come to office; they do not succeed to, nor are they installed in, existing positions of leadership over political groups. The attainment of big-man status is rather the outcome of a series of acts which elevate a person above the common herd and attract about him coterie of loyal, lesser men. It is not accurate to speak of ‘big-man’ as a political title, for it is but an acknowledged standing in interpersonal relations – a ‘prince among men’ so to speak as opposed to ‘The Prince of Danes’. In particular Melanesian tribes the phrase might ‘man of importance’ or ‘man of renown’, ‘generous rich-man’, or ‘center-man’ as well as ‘big-man’” (Sahlins 1963, p. 289) A big-man comes to power through the demonstration of the possessions and skills that demand respect. “Typically decisive is the deployment of one’s skills and efforts in a certain direction: towards amassing goods, most often pigs, shell monies and vegetable foods, and distributing them in ways that build a name for cavalier generosity, if not for compassion... Tribal rank and renown are developed by great public giveaways, sponsored by the rising big-man, often on behalf of his faction as well as himself” (Sahlins 1963, p. 291). This type of political showmanship requires consistent validation. “A personal loyalty has to be made and continually reinforced; if there is discontent it may well be severed. Merely to create a faction takes time and effort, and to hold it, still more effort. The potential rupture of personal links in the factional chain is at the heart of two (shortcomings of the min-man systems). First, a comparative instability. Shifting dispositions and magnetisms of ambitious men in a region may induce fluctuations in factions, perhaps some overlapping of them ... Second ... (t)he possibility of their desertion, it is clear, inhibits the leader’s ability to forceably (sic) push up his own followers’ output, thereby placing constraints on higher political organizations...” (Sahlins 1963, p.292). This demonstrates the limits of the big-man. His need to continually reinforce the loyalty of his followers and their ability to move on to a better deal inhibits their ability to enforce their will.

Traditionally, the big-man had been only associated with Melanesian tribes. However, when you look at the characteristics; personal charisma, influence through patronage, and the constant need to buy loyalty, no obligation of the groupies to head their leader or to not look for a better deal somewhere else, and no social stigma on the part of the followers for finding a better deal elsewhere – the type can be recognized in other societies under similar economic

⁴ An alternative strategy is the “network” strategy that involves a number of mutual agreements with other groups to provide for mutual protection and support. Earle, T. K. (2002). *Bronze Age economics : the beginnings of political economies*. Boulder, Colo., Westview Press.

conditions, the realm in between subsistence economy and a political economy. “The concept of big man leadership has been applied outside Melanesia, when achievement rather than ascribed leader status is under discussion” (Brown 1990). For example, the Tareumiut, Eskimos who live on the northern coast of Alaska have a village economy based on cooperative whaling.

Although kinsmen prefer to work on the same boat, nonkinsmen must often work together as boat crews, and several boats from one village may cooperate in taking a whale. Whale hunters form voluntary associations under the leadership of an *umealiq* (‘boat owner’; pl., *umealit*), who organize the labor necessary to acquire and maintain large whaling boats. The *umealiq* must be a knowledgeable and successful whaler to acquire and hold a following, and he must be able to integrate the diverse personalities of specialists (helmsmen, harpooners) into a smoothly functioning unit. Followers must trust their *umealiq* and fellow crew members, because a capsized boat in Arctic waters rarely survive (in fact, few Eskimos know how to swim). The *umealiq* ensures that the whale is properly butchered and distributed.

An *umealiq* must provide for the security of his followers even in a bad season. All families have Ice cellars for storage, but an *umealiq* has a larger cellar, corresponding to his greater responsibility. This cellar serves as a sort of social security fund from which his followers may draw supplies. In the early spring, before the whale hunt, he cleans out his cellar and feasts his followers with the remnants of last year’s catch. In addition he is expected to provide clothing and other items to his followers in exchange for their loyalty (Johnson and Earle 2000, p 177).

Note the similarities: leadership through reputation and personal acquisition, knowledgeable and successful, protects and shares with his followers, throws feasts, and is expected to provide for his following if they may leave him. Nothing about right of birth, being selected by vote or consensus of the villagers, or having any real authority to enforce his desires other than the good will and loyalty he creates in his followers.

Perhaps more importantly is this description of a Pashto *Khān*.

Khān is a Turkic word meaning in those languages ‘lord’ or ‘chief’ of a tribe or local component of a tribe. In the more emphatically egalitarian and non-stratified tribes of Ghilzai Pakhtun between Kabul and Kandahar in Afghanistan (who are not Turkish), the term denotes big men who are economically and politically prominent in their communities. A Ghilzai *khān* does not occupy a formal office but rather achieves an informal status by standing out from other men. Although a khanship tends to survive its incumbent because it is useful to all concerned and a prize avidly sought, each claimant to such status must prove himself constantly, and successions are by no means assured through any right. *Khāns* are more appropriately seen in the acknowledgement of a particular following. The Ghilzai Pakhtun reserve the designation for exceptional men and say that *khāns*, properly so called, are truly

singular individuals who 'feed the people' and 'tie the knot of the tribe,' which most accurately indicate the basis and thrust of khanship.

In 'feeding people' *khāns* develop leadership through patronage. In effect, they convert their own surplus, mostly agricultural wealth, into social relations through hospitality, providing employment and other less clear cut patronage of their fellows. The institution of the *mulgurey* or 'companion' is a good example of the kinds of relationships that *khāns* generate and focus on themselves in this capacity, for it falls between and partakes of the more specific relations with guests and employees. A 'companion' is a man, often but not always a kinsman, who in return for 'accompanying' a *khān* and providing him with the retinue that testifies to his importance, is 'helped' by his benefactor. This 'help' in the form of gifts, favors, or even a regular stipend to a companion provides the margin between what he can make on his own holding in the tribe and what his lifestyle as an independent tribesman 'costs.' Companions are thus not mere employees; employees are worth little to a benefactor in prestige that is singularly khanly, for an unambiguous servitude confers no political return on a relation-ship. Instead, companions are tribesmen who, as kinsmen and proprietors, are 'equal' to any other but just miss having the wherewithal to actualize this equality in a politically meaningful way. Through his patronage, a *khān* takes up the slack by 'feeding' such persons in a literal as well as figurative sense (vividly manifest in their eating with him) and helps them in myriad subtle but important ways that bind companions to him 'volitionally'. The relationship is less narrow than with guests, less encompassing than with employees, and less unilateral than with either but also less truly volitional than allegiance freely offered or patronage unconditionally extended. The *khān-mulgurey* relationship is a formalized and special case of the patronage *cum* leadership that is consonant, if uncomfortably so, with the egalitarian emphasis of Pakhtun society where relations are bound by reciprocal and, ideally, equivalent prestations. In such a context, *khāns* emerge as social creditors rather than as "lords."

"Tying the knot of the tribe" represents turning such social credit to collective use. In a very real sense, *khāns* are self financed public servants, expending their personal wealth for the aggregate if not for the collective good of communities which, if they are to compose a khanship, are made up of kinsmen, specifically agnatic kinsmen. In this knot tying capacity, a *khān* does not order or decide, strictly speaking, any more than he could tax his people. Rather, he operates by influence, sounding public opinion, articulating group interests, and persuading on the basis of personal abilities to do so effectively and convincingly. This transcends mere economics, however subtle; for the knowledge and ability to get things done for which khans are respected is turned to the service of what, in the Pakhtun view, is a 'natural community' of coresident kinsmen. (Anderson 1978, pp. 168-70)

Notice again the similarities; no actual office, no actual authority, comes to the position through personal actions, shares his wealth for the benefit of the group, followers association is

volitional. The big man is a proto-chief. Amassing political and personal capital, he uses it to build prestige amongst his followers and eventually the entire society. He is limited only by his ability to enforce his will, a problem solved when we move to the next political system.

Anthropologists' Archetypes of Governance – Chief

Chiefdoms are probably the governance system most westerners are the most comfortable with. It has a central authority with power to enforce decisions.

A chiefdom is a regional polity with institutional governance and some social stratification organizing a population of a few thousand to tens of thousands of people. Chiefdoms are intermediate-level polities, bridging the evolutionary gap between small, village-based polities and large, bureaucratic states. Although chiefdoms are highly variable, characteristically the organization at this scale requires political hierarchy or an overlapping series of hierarchies for coordination and decision making; the advantage gained by a few with such a hierarchy result in a measure of social stratification. Archeologists use the presence and distribution of monumental construction and prestige goods to document the evolution of chiefly societies. (Earle 1997, p. 14 (citations omitted))

Chiefs are supported by political economies (Earle 2002). A chief is the person who occupies the position of chief – he does not need to possess any special attribute or gather a following, his position represents all those things. “The pivotal paramount chief as well as the chieftains controlling parts of a chiefdom were true office holders and title holders. They were not, like Melanesian big-men, fishers of men: they held positions of authority over permanent groups. The honorifics of Polynesian chiefs likewise did not refer to a standing in interpersonal relations, but to their leadership of political divisions – here ‘The Prince of Danes’ *not* ‘the prince among men’” (Sahlins 1963: p. 294 (emphasis in original)). They held the authority *and* the power to enforce their will.

Categorizing Tribal Societies: Economic Level and Governance: The Relationship According to a Non-Anthologist

The relationships established in the previous section are sound. Where human live in small populations in areas that barely provide for their needs AND they are not thoroughly integrated into a larger political system, like a state, then they will likely have an egalitarian political system. Where they live with sufficient excess to allow for a political economy administered locally without the direct interference of a state, you are likely to have a chiefdom. In the netherworld that exists between the two “pure” economic systems you may find elders or big-men wielding very levels of authority but with no real power. This section will try to refine the anthropological terms and place them back in a modern setting to help the practitioner working in these societies understand who they are dealing and help clarify the world they are dealing in.

It is important to realize that in almost every place you go there will be a government who claims to exercise authority over the land and, more important, the people you may be dealing with. For various reasons the people you are dealing with may not share that view. How

far the people have been integrated into the current government will have a significant impact on how much the people still rely on these more traditional systems. Always keep this in mind.

There are a number of ways to classify the people and systems we will be discussing. For convenience I will simply refer to them as non-state systems.

Non-State Economic Systems

Determining which non-state economic system you are dealing with will require you to determine the production capacity of your target group. Production capacity is also not an exact number. It is more of a generalized description based on observation. It categorizes the total output (plus external input) of a political group in relation to the survival requirements of the group. When referring to capacity, because of seasonal spikes in food production, a year should be the minimum time looked at. In formula form it would look like this: for any given year $F+G+CI+EI/R = C$ where F is food production, G is production of other goods, CI is capital improvements, EI is external inputs like (like subsidies from the State or support from NGOs), and R is the bare sustenance needs of the group. If using this formula helps you remember the concept then feel free to use it. However, what we are looking for is not easily reduced to a number. Production capacity is more a qualitative rating than a quantitative ratio.

The single most important factor in determining the realm of possible governance systems is the economic capacity of the group. The association I cannot overemphasize this point. It is true even of modern societies. I will identify three levels of economic capacity and several intermediate steps that will help in determining what effect additional economic capacity can have on the governance system. While the terms used here will be similar to the ones introduced in the previous section they are adjusted to help define the political environment. The two basic levels are subsistence and centralized (political). In between subsistence and centralized are two intermediate steps; specialization and prestige.

Subsistence

The lowest level is the subsistence level of economic production. The name aptly describes the level – it is a point of economic production equals what is required for survival of the group. This does not mean that everyone in the group is living in tattered rags barely surviving. What it means is that the group is producing enough to survive and may even be doing so quite comfortably. Sahlins considered many groups at the level the original “affluent society” (Sahlins 1972). It may not be obvious that the group is living at this level.

As discussed earlier, at the subsistence level the unit of economic production is the family. A family can produce everything it needs to survive. This becomes a relatively easy mark-on-the-wall to start from. There would be little or no specialization in the village; members of the family would make everything themselves. In a modern village people may acquire their clothing or specialized tools, including weapons, from outside the village but they are not produced inside the village and no one there survives off the clothing or tools they make. These modern objects are simply acquired through trade. Labor is generally not paid for in wages at subsistence level production but you may find laborers working in a subsistence economy but they will not be enough to support the entire family. The families will probably still keep a garden or a flock to provide for their needs. There is probably not a lot of currency being used in the village, although it is likely that every family will try to have some form of cash producing

crop or product to allow them to purchase modern goods. If very few families in the village (or larger political unit) can survive without producing their own food or being paid for their labor producing food by keeping a portion of it themselves (as in sharecropping) then the village is most likely at a subsistence level production capacity.

Subsistence Plus Specialization

It might be easier to think of subsistence as the default level. Start looking for the modifiers, or “pluses” to the subsistence level to see if you have a different economic production level. The first “plus” is specialization. How many families in the village survive off of doing something other than the dominant food producing trade? For example, in a herding culture how many families are living off something other than raising cattle or sheep? In a horticultural or agrarian society how many families do not have a plot of land they tend? In many cases you may find individuals who do things on the side, but at the subsistence level the unit of production is the family. How many people repair automobiles and ONLY make repair automobiles to survive? They are not simply supplementing their regular income with a side job. They are not doing pretty good as auto mechanics but still keep a garden to supplement their business. They are truly surviving strictly off of a business or craft item they produce. This is an indication of excess capacity. If the village is producing enough excess capacity or has it coming in from elsewhere on a regular basis so that select individuals can be fed off that excess without their family having to also engage in food production, then you have subsistence plus specialization. Next look to how many true trade people are there? When looking at specialization, only look for trade people. Do not include religious or political leaders and exclude land owners. Look for people who are producing a product used by the community or traded with another community.

Also examine the ownership rules for the main mode of food production. If you are dealing with pastoralists, who owns the sheep or cattle? Are they owned by individuals, families, a larger collection of families, or by the tribe. Similarly, where you are dealing with farmers, who own the land? Is it owned by individuals or families or by a larger land holder? Does that land holder live in the community? If the land or other means of production is held at the family level than it is more probably it is a subsistence level economy. The more the modes of production are concentrated in family groups and held by the elder member of that group (who is not a chief) the more likely you are still dealing with a subsistence economy. Where land and other assets are starting to be collected by someone other than the head of a family line then you might be seeing the start of a big-man system.

Subsistence Plus Prestige Items

Prestige items in a modern context will probably mimic prestige items you might recognize elsewhere, such as large homes, ornate clothing, or automobiles. They will be used to show status by the owner via the display of the items. In fact, the display may be much more important to the status of the owner (or manager) than the actual personal or productive use of any of the items. In any case, to be able to afford this level of conspicuous consumption there is either a substantial increase in production over a subsistence economy or money is being injected in from elsewhere.

Using prestige items as an indicator of economic level is somewhat dangerous. They could indicate that you are somewhere between a subsistence level and a centralized level economy. They are more helpful in identifying key players in the political system. Big men will

almost certainly possess such items and possibly flaunt them. Land owners may or some of their key employees may need them to monitor land, crops, and tenants. In any case, they can be used to identify people of prominence in the social structure.

Centralized or Political Economy Level

The key elements of a centralized or political economy are central ownership of key modes of production, positions of authority versus people of influence, and the ability to use coercive force to maintain that order. In best case scenarios the political economy is controlled by the state. Where that is the case then you probably have a de facto government working outside the states control.

This level of economy should be relatively easy to recognize. There will be a fair amount of excess capacity. There will be significant specialization in the workplace and prestige items present, possibly in large quantities. Much of the excess capacity is controlled by a political or quasi political entity. The excess is redistributed amongst the population in a manner that maintains the political structure and keeps the population at bay. Ownership of the modes of production may not be held in one persons name but the hierarchical system in place is used to ensure that the excess capacity siphoned off the land or the herd is used to benefit the political entity. At this level the economy has significant ties to the political system in place.

Non-State Governance Systems

As noted above, the reason you are trying to identify the type of system the indigenous population is using is because the state has either has not or cannot integrate the local population into it. Even where there is substantial state influence, understanding the natural non-state political systems may help you understand your environment. In particular, it can help you understand what key players actually can and cannot bring to the table.

We will look at the two governance activities, redistribution of funds and decision making and/or dispute resolution. Understanding how excess capacity is diverted for the public good is fundamental to identifying key players. Who makes these decisions? Is it one person or does it require a consensus. If it is by consensus, who specifically is required to concur with the decision? It is probably that your presence in the area will entail at least some excess capacity into the local economy most likely in the form of funding or other activities intended to influence the locals. Even in societies that do not normally have excess capacity, as in a subsistence level egalitarian group, certain people will be looked to when a decision or dispute needs to be settled. Depending on the effect you want these projects to have, knowing how the systems traditionally work will help you to know who you may want to include or exclude from the implementation process.

Knowing who traditionally decides disputes will help you know who to go to in regards to solving problems. For instance, if you inadvertently damage or destroy some property or you offend members of the group in some way, having the right people involved in settling the dispute may ad legitimacy to the process and prestige to the person who “settles” the dispute. It is important to remember that the person who traditionally settles disputes and the person who is involved in redistributing assets for the common good may not be the same person.

Non-State Governance – Egalitarian Systems

The egalitarian system in the modern world is pretty much as described in the previous section, and for anyone who is used to dealing with a hierarchical, bureaucratic government, this form of governance will be particularly frustrating. There is no single person to speak to, executive or formal body with any real power over the rest of the people. This is truly an acephalous society. Even so, examples show that there are certain hints that may help you in dealing with this group. They are: authority (if it exists at all) runs along family lines and most probably will be connected to property ownership where it exists; watching and listening is probably a good first step in determining who the key influencers might be; and when a decision is made it is by consensus of the group.

First off, there is no real power in egalitarian systems. One member of the group and cannot compel another member of the groups to act or not act. They cannot take property from one member of the group and redistribute it to another. However, there are two cases where a person may have a greater authority to act and will be given greater deference especially in cases where decisions need to be made. The first is where a direct family connection exists. Sometimes it may be as simple as finding the “oldest male of the house group” (Johnson and Earle 2000). In other cases it may be a family member of renown. Johnson and Earle provide an example from the Machiguenga of South America.

(A) man was attempting to catch a stunned *segori*, a troutlike fish of excellent flavor whose roe are especially valued. It eluded him and disappeared into a pool. A minute later his seven-year-old nephew caught the fish, a look of pleasure lighting the boys face. But the uncle saw and said ‘Here, that’s my fish. I was chasing it!’ The boy refused to hand over his prize until his other uncle, a highly respected man, ordered him to do so.(Johnson and Earle 2000, p. 109)

This story reinforces two points. First, that the dispute was settled by a close relative. Second, that it was the unique respect given to the uncle that assisted in settling the matter. Knowing who the “highly respected” members of a group are can come in handy should a dispute need to be settled.

The second category of influential person is the property owner. Where an agrarian community exists there will usually be some rules for the transfer of land. In an egalitarian structure, whoever owns the land can make decisions regarding it. The same principal holds true for other property. The Turkana of Kenya, pastoralists, look to the owner of a herd to make decisions regarding how best to organize it so as to limit risk during harsh times. “Between July 1979 and February 1981, a period of intensifying drought, Angor (a herd owner with five grown brothers on whom he could rely) divided his livestock into six sub-herds, with separate satellite camps for the weak and the strong non-milking small stock, as well as for all the cattle and for the non-milking camels”(Johnson and Earle 2000, p. 198). Where property is involved, the owner is the best place to start. This a good reason for determining property rules and rights in the group you are dealing with.

Next, where you suspect you are dealing with an egalitarian system and you are trying to determine who the key influencers are, it might be wise to orchestrate or attend a meeting of as many of the group members as possible. At this meeting let the conversation be controlled by the

members of the group, and then watch who the speakers are. How often do they speak, how forcefully, and are they agreed with by the group. Even in egalitarian societies some people are respected greater than others. It was demonstrated by the example from the !Kung in the previous section. “In group discussions these people may speak out more than others, may be deferred to by others, and one gets the feeling that their opinions hold a bit more weight than the opinion of other discussants” (Lee 1979). By watching the groups interaction these “informal leaders” may come to the front. These will be the key influencers in the group.

Finally, decisions in egalitarian groups are made by consensus. Roy Rappaport describes a group of Tsembaga (who actually have a weak big-man system) discusses a meeting he attended.

(T)here was little attempt to reach a decision in any formal way. There was no one to frame the proposition in a form of anything like motions that could be put to a vote, for one thing, and besides, the idea of voting itself is unknown. It may be suggested that the formal decision making is actually avoided at meetings, for the framing of issues in terms that would allow a decision to be made could lead to confrontations between those holding opposing views. Such a confrontation would be difficult to resolve. Meetings are simply events at which there is much discussion about a particular subject going on at the same place and time among an assemblage that is larger than usual. These meetings are strange in appearance. Small knots of men – three or four or five in a group – stand or sit on the ground and talk among themselves. There may be many such groups within a restricted area. A few men move from group to group. Occasionally someone will address the entire assemblage in a loud voice. Some men drift away, others come by. Eventually everyone drifts away. No decision has been reached and no action initiated, but there is much talk. Concerning most action there is not meeting, but there is discussion in the men’s houses and on the paths to the gardens. A meeting crystallizes sentiment more quickly, but its purpose is limited to forming a consensus and not making a decision or instigating action per se. Its purpose is ‘to make the talk one’ (reach agreement) more quickly than is usually the case. (Rappaport 1984, p. 30)

This example is particularly helpful in making a point: egalitarian systems are not democratic. A democratic system a question would be discussed and put to a vote. Here, there is not voting. In a democracy a majority is required to get a decision settled. In an egalitarian system consensus must be reach. Members of the group not present at the meeting may not be bound by it (Johnson and Earle 2000, p 227). In fact, unlike a democracy, there is really no mechanism to enforce the consensus.

Non-State Governance – Big-Man Systems

Modern big-man systems are not considerably different than what was described above. Big-man is not a formal political position but a status attained by the individual. It is based on his personal activities. He is a true political animal who cultivates a public image through personal acts of generosity. He acts to build prestige and therefore will work within accepts cultural norms. He is most likely wealthy and successful. He will have a group of followers who are dedicated to him as long as he maintains his patronage with them. However, while they may profess loyalty he has not actual power over them. His followers are not subjects and are free to

leave him or seek alliance with another big-man at any time. I would simply like to emphasize a few points about the big-man system before moving on.

Because they require at least some economic excess capacity to build their prestige, you will normally find them in subsistence plus specialization economies. These economies have excess, and it is likely that the big-man is a part of, if not central, to the creation of this excess. Big-man systems are not truly systems of their own. They are an addition to what would normally be an egalitarian system. Big-men are self-taught leaders who understand how to convert economic capital into political capital. In many ways this is the key to their power. Therefore, where you are looking to influence the local population through local projects of infusion of capital they are likely to know how to do that. However, remember that they will be looking to increase their prestige at the same time.

Big-men and warlords are not the same thing. A big-man can be a warlord, but not every warlord is a big man. “Warlords secure their allegiance through a combination of the control of force and the strongman positions they held before the conflict broke out” (Oberson 2002, p. 7). Warlords have power that is backed by threat of force – a privatized form of violence. They are not interested in working within any political system. Big-men are not backed by a threat of force. They create a following through use of economic support or securing favors for their devotees. During times of conflict a big-man may rise to the occasion and assume a lead role defending his following. They may even use coercion to maintain discipline and control. But he will be willing to work within the confines of the cultural norms and deal with political leadership and are willing to transition out of that position once the conflict is resolved. A warlord will not generally be able to make that transition.

Finally, while big-men will have notoriety and influence, they are generally not sought out when resolving disputes. This capacity will generally be retained by the elders, religious leaders, and property holders in the community.

Non-State Governance – Chiefdoms

Chiefdoms are easy to recognize and work with. There will be single paramount leaders who occupy a position of authority in a hierarchical system. The position outlives the paramount. The chief controls the modes of production and hold sway over a centralized economy. They will have economic resources upon which to draw from and have instruments of power in place. They can truly enforce their will. They have centralized that power and both the capacity to redistribute assets for the common good and to settle disputes.

Conclusion

The intent of this paper is to provide some insights into non-state governance systems. It introduces the methods of food production and procurement as a means of recognizing the possibilities and limitations of each group. In particular, it helps identify what each group is likely to build their social structure around. It categorizes levels of economic productivity to allow the observer to understand how economics affect the social structure of the group. Finally it examines the types of governance systems as they relate to the economic capacity of the group. All of this with the purpose of helping the practitioner who comes in contact with these groups to better understand them and work with them.

It is important to the nature of these relationships and their limitations be understood but not be oversold. It is beyond the scope of this work to explain all the interrelations between economic capacity and governance. It is simply important to note that a relationship exists and that what we do can affect that relationship for better or for worse.

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