The Roles of Men and Women in the Nomadic Hunter-Gatherer Society

(Case Study: Kung People of Southern Africa)

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Hunters and gatherers were predominately practiced with some of the communities in extensive Eurasia, African, and some parts of South American. The hunters and gatherers were the first and hence oldest socio-economic organization used by early man. This organization played a critical role in discovering fire; the discovery and use of tools, equipment’s and weapons was the main feature of the hunters and gatherers. The Intricate knowledge, especially flora and fauna, ensured the hunters and gatherers domesticated some plants and animals for simple food access. Hunting and gathering as a way of life are quickly becoming a thing of the past. Many communities that practiced this lifestyle embraced other social-economic stratification sues the advancement in technology. In some parts of African, Asia, and South America, very few communities still practice this kind of social-cultural organization. The numbers of these communities, as well as the general population, are quickly dwindling. This is primarily due to the reduced forest cover hence fewer areas to hunt and gather. The nomadic kind of lifestyle has also brewed conflict between these communities and their neighbor, especially on factors about boundaries.

The impact of globalization has adversely affected the modern hunting and gathering communities, for instant, KhoiKhoi and the San in Southern Africa. The nomadic sedimentary lifestyle has been impeded by the increase of population and hence lesser lands with indigenous trees and animals. The different people worldwide, with different cultures and religions, settled all around these hunters and gatherers, hence slowly diluting their seemingly obsolete lifestyle and culture. Moreover, the introduction of different religions in densely populated areas by the hunter and gatherers assimilated most of the communities and slowly but surely killed hunting and gathering.

The ecological pressure from the ever-increasing population has also impacted the reducing numbers of hunters and gatherers. For instance in South Africa, the KhoiSan and the Kung who thrived in the savanna woodlands and grasslands, hunting the antelopes, dik-diks and another herbivore in the ecological niche. The decline in the number of animals and the harsh climatic changes caused by global warming all play a crucial role in reducing available animals to hunt. In some cases, overhunting has led to government policies implemented to curb all hunting of specific species of plants and animals (Kirchengast, 2017). The above-listed factors have pressured the Kung and the entire KhoiSan community diminishing the growth and thriving of the community. The Kung have

One of the core factors that wove the society together is the law and order that revolved around hunting and gathering. Predominately, the female gender accompanied by young children were mainly gatherers. The men, who had developed the knowledge of using and making weapons, tools, and equipment, were chiefly in charge of hunting. The economic structure of the community also determined the social stratification hence influence the relationship between men and women. The community importance of every gender is emphasized by the responsibilities given to each. The women in the Kung community were tasked with collecting nutritional supplements that will supplement the catch that the men will get from the hunting spree (Lewis 2019). The women and the younger children also had the duty of looking for water of any kind of domestic use. The community was tightly bound with the strong communal spirit where all women worked together as the men did while hunting. During meals, the several families share the little that is available while they share the culture and customs through songs and dances with the younger generation.

The importance of marriage in the Kung society was evident in every aspect that preceded an entire union. As soon as the young girl comes of age, suitors from different families will start wooing her and her family. The man who marries any woman had to first show all need to marry as per the Kung. This primarily included hunting skills as hunting was the main way that men provided for their families. Moreover, the man had to prove without a shadow of a doubt that they can provide for the young girl's entire extended family. This was the main challenge to many young men of the Kung community since marriage, the responsibilities involved included adding several mouths to feed. This societal norm of the Kung was one of the main factors that ensured regardless of the scarcity of food, and every mouth will have enough to eat.

In accordance, an article by Boyette & Hewlett (2018) states that the family being the basic unit of the society, the Kung, had stringent family values that ensured each member adheres to some set of morals and ethics. The marriages in the Kung family were between a man and a woman. The period right before the marriage takes place, the couple undergoes vigorous training in the different aspects that ensure each individual in the relationship fully comprehends the responsibilities, duties, and roles in the family and the society as well. This ritual ensured that any disagreements within the family or even the societal members are handled in the most amicable and just way. The unwritten kinds of laws were inculcated to the younger general through teachings by the elders, folk songs, and other forms of oral literature. This was a crucial aspect that has sustained the Kung, Khoi Khoi, and the Khoi San as some of the few modern communities who are still hunters and gatherers.

The Kung community showed a lot of respect to the women, especially in the decision-making process of significant rituals of their life. For instance, the community allowed for a young girl just married can as for a divorce if she is mistreated in the new home. The Kung allowed women to air out their grievances to a court led by the council of elders and the entire society as spectators (Scanes, 2018). The decision, or rather the verdict, was left to the entire community to decide if the divorce process should proceed or not. The act of social justice ensured the social fabric of the Kung community remains rigid and inclusive of each member of the family. The community allowed a newly married young girl to spend the night in the parents’ home for as long as she is too fully comfortable to spend the night in the husband's place. This allowed the women the right to choice in most of the pertinent issues, especially since the society also supported both genders equally

One of the other significant roles played by the women in the Kung community and the extensive Khoi San communities is giving birth and nurturing the children. The entire process of conception, pregnancy, child delivery, and nurturing the toddlers was viewed in the Kung society as the women’s job. The men were only involved in very isolated situations, for instance, in case of stillbirths or adverse complications during delivery. The women's main role was to ensure the father provides all the basic requirements required to raise the children to functional members of society. This ensured that the children run from their parents' role at the family level and hence an easy transition to society.

As per the several resources highlighted above, it is crystal clear to see the significant impact women have played in the Kung community. Women have been an integral part of society and have ensured the Kung people's social, cultural, religious, and political organization's sustainability. The importance of women and, most importantly, empowering women within the Kung community set the trend for many other African communities. The sustainable existence and the resilience of the Kung, Khoi Khoi, and Khoi San are, as highlighted above, significantly dependent on the rigid social fabric let by inclusivity, justice, and equality to all. The societies that practice hunting and gathering for a long time have been regarded as primitive, and the social-cultural, economic, and religious organizations were overlooked by many. The extensive studies of the Kung community and the Khoi Khoi and Khoi San, their adjacent neighbor, have shown the significance of the role of women in the weaving of the social fabric. The robust social organization has played critical roles in long-run sustainability and built the overall resilience of the Kung community and other hunters and gatherers in the extensive Kalahari Desert in the Southern African region. The case study has fundamental lessons that other societies in all four corners of the globe should inculcate in their society for the long-run sustainability.

**References**

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