

NASCENT WORLDS



CULTURAL DISCOVERY

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A blue cup with white speckles is in the top left corner. Below it, an open map with a compass rose is visible. The map shows various regions in different colors (pink, green, yellow) and has a grid of latitude and longitude lines. A black object, possibly a pen or a small container, is resting on the map.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

choose your own adventure

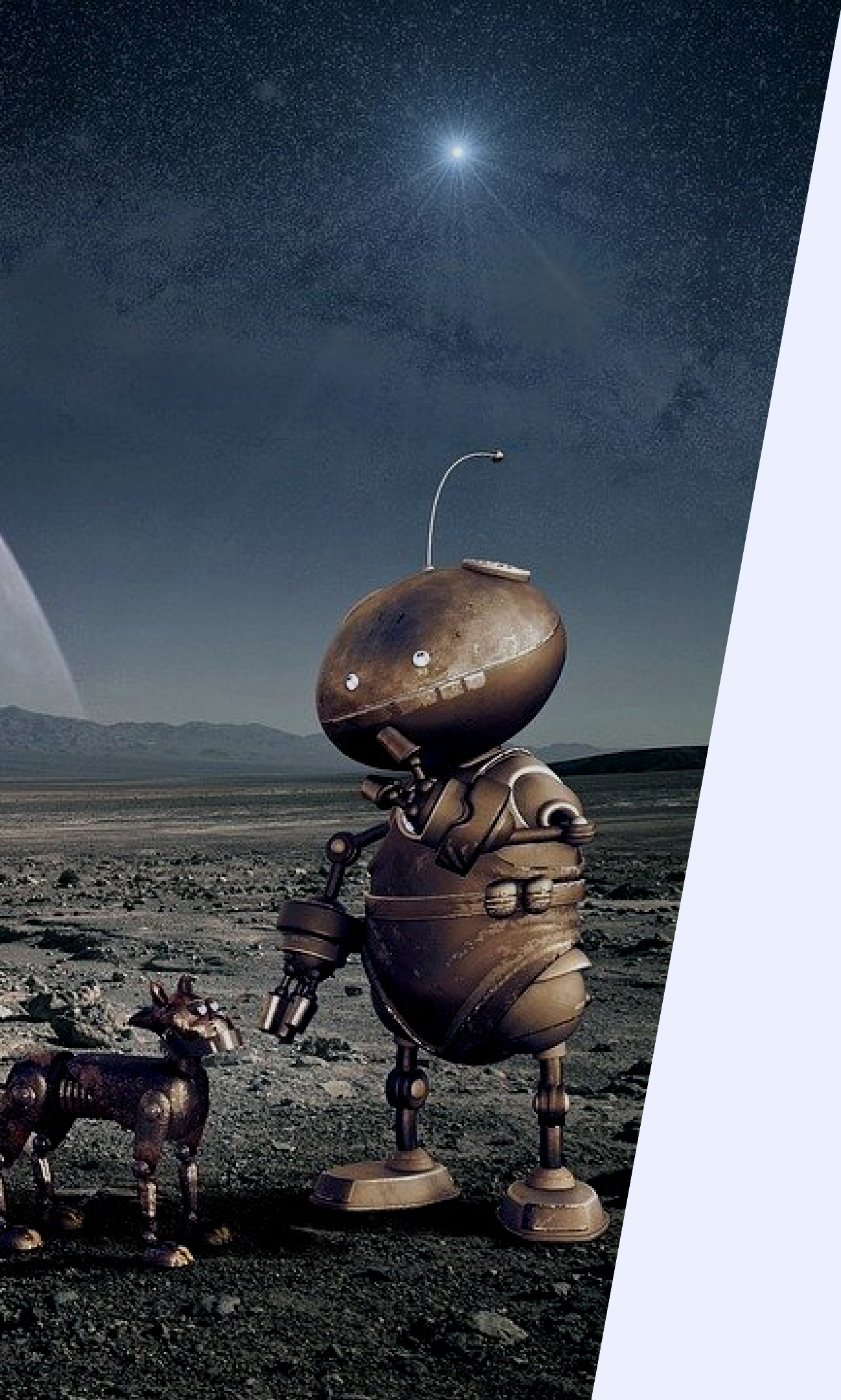
The idea behind **Nascent Worlds** is for students of anthropology to imagine themselves as ethnographers encountering an entirely distant culture for the first time. What would they discover at this moment of first contact? Over time, by exploring the different areas of life in that society, the alien anthropologist must file a report with an intergalactic board of ethnographers. Who are these beings, and what has been learned about their culture?

ASSIGNMENT

Imagine that you have encountered a distant culture for the first time and are invited to live among them as an ethnographer. **Write a “culture summary” or overview of the society.** Where are they from? What do they look like? How do they live?

Name and describe the culture and its facets, including the “rules” governing society and relationships between its members, along with an origin story, mythology, or explanatory secular cosmology. A sample of cultural traits to include in the summary can be found below.





GUIDELINES

Your society does not have to outwardly appear humanoid or reside in hospitable environments as they exist on planet Earth. Perhaps they are invertebrates, merfolk, or silicone-based lifeforms. However, they must have a set of **cultural traits** and a **history** that can be detailed through (imagined) **participant-observation**.

The social and cultural features “observed” by intrepid student ethnographers must make internal sense. That is, the practices, dwellings, cosmologies, laws, norms, symbols, and rituals should all align within the established **logic** of the invented society. For instance, when it comes to describing how merfolk (sea-dwellers) came to exist, you might describe the pervasive power and importance that water holds in such a society.

UNIVERSALS

Refer to Murdock's proposed list of **human universals** - such as love, marriage, food taboos, religion, or music - for ideas about cultural traits. Think about how some of these themes might connect thought and behavior.

Universals of Culture by George P. Murdock

American Anthropologist, 1945 compendium

From: Consilience, E.O. Wilson, 1998. p.147

- age-grading
- athletic sports
- bodily adornment
- calendar
- cleanliness
- training
- community organization
- cooking
- cooperative labor
- cosmology
- courtship
- dancing
- decorative art
- divination
- division of labor
- dream interpretation
- education
- eschatology
- ethics
- ethnobotany
- etiquette
- faith healing
- family feasting
- fire making
- folklore
- food taboos
- funeral rites
- games
- gestures
- gift giving
- government
- greetings
- hair styles
- hospitality
- housing
- hygiene
- incest taboos
- inheritance rules
- joking
- kin groups
- kinship nomenclature
- language
- law
- luck superstitions
- magic
- marriage
- mealtimes
- medicine
- obstetrics
- penal sanctions
- personal names
- population policy
- postnatal care
- pregnancy usages
- property rights
- propitiation of supernatural beings
- puberty customs
- religious ritual
- residence rules
- sexual restrictions
- soul concepts
- status differentiation
- surgery
- tool making
- trade
- visiting
- weaving
- weather control

(Source: <http://www.unc.edu>)



CHANGING WORLDS

Societies are continually changing. Your cultural stories should address the **past** as well as the **present** and the **future** trajectories of the society.

For instance, you might wish to describe prehistoric artifacts uncovered by your team's archaeologist. What significance do they have?

With regard to the future: how will the culture respond to a global catastrophe that may threaten the ecosystem if action is not taken? Will new scientific discoveries or technological advancements threaten to efface long-held traditions?

CULTURAL CHANGE

TIMELINE



PAST

Incorporate archaeological evidence including artifacts or material culture along with the foundations of a belief system or origin story. Are there any sacred relics that are meaningful? What do they tell us about the history and prehistory of the society?



PRESENT

How does this culture live today? How do they dress? What are their homes and families like? What foods do they produce and enjoy eating? What jobs do they do? What do they believe, what are their motivations, and how do they interact with each other?



FUTURE

Based on the past and present, address cultural change and diffusion over time, or envision a future cataclysmic event. What do you think will happen to this culture? Can you find comparisons with current or past human societies that have changed?



CULTURE SUMMARIES

eHRAF World Cultures contains a wealth of ethnographic data on hundreds of societies around the world.

Culture Summaries in eHRAF describe various aspects of each society, including where a people is from, the environmental conditions, historical background, and how they live: their political and economic systems, kinship and descent, belief systems, etc. The basic outline and headings are the same for each summary so that they can be easily compared.

Use these as the building blocks for creating your own summary for this assignment.

eHRAF Instructions

FIND SUMMARIES

In the database, click on the **Browse Cultures** tab to explore cultures by region, country, or map. Or, enter a name into the index box. Click on the culture to access the Profile and read the **Culture Summary**.

SEARCH

You may also wish to search the database to find more specific comparative examples using subjects and keywords of your choice.

The screenshot shows the eHRAF World Cultures website interface. At the top, the navigation bar includes 'BASIC Search', 'ADVANCED Search', 'Browse CULTURES' (highlighted with a blue circle), 'Browse SUBJECTS', and 'Browse DOCUMENTS'. Below this, there are buttons for 'A-Z Index', 'by Region', 'by Country', and 'by Map'. The 'Browse Cultures by A-Z' section is visible, showing a 'Filter Index' box with 'tiv' entered and a row of alphabet buttons (A-Z). The 'Browse' section displays a large 'T' button. The 'Tiv' culture profile is shown, including the title 'Tiv', the author 'Paul Bohannon and Ian Skoggard', and a 'Cite' button. The profile content is organized into sections: 'ETHNONYMS' (Munchi, Munshi, Tivi.), 'ORIENTATION', and 'IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION' (The Tiv (sing., Or-Tiv) are a group of about a million people who live on both sides of the Benue River, 220 kilometers from its confluence with the Niger in Nigeria). A blue arrow points from the 'Cite' button to the 'ETHNONYMS' section.

eHRAF WORLD CULTURES

BASIC Search ADVANCED Search Browse CULTURES Browse SUBJECTS Browse DOCUMENTS

A-Z Index by Region by Country by Map

Browse Cultures by A-Z

Browse Cultures A-Z Index

Filter Index tiv

Browse A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

T

Tiv
USE: Tiv (FF57)
View Profile: Culture Summary ▾ | Collection Description ▸ | Collection Documents ▸

Tiv
Paul Bohannon and Ian Skoggard

ETHNONYMS
Munchi, Munshi, Tivi.

ORIENTATION

IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION
The Tiv (sing., Or-Tiv) are a group of about a million people who live on both sides of the Benue River, 220 kilometers from its confluence with the Niger in Nigeria.

Cite

Identification Location



SUGGESTED TOPICS

The following are **suggested topics** that you may wish to cover in the description of your culture. You may go above and beyond these topics when completing your culture summary, including expanding your timeline.



Identity

- How do they dress and/or decorate their bodies?
- What are beauty standards and self-expression like?
- Are there gender identities?
- What other determinants of identity are there?



Consumption & Subsistence

- What do they eat?
- How is food acquired or produced?
- Are there any special ceremonial meals?
- What are some food-related practices?
- Is there illness or disease?



Communication

- How do they communicate?
- Is there written language?
- How do they categorize and classify the world around them?
- What colors or objects are symbolic?
- Are there creative arts (dance, music, graphics)?



Homes & Families

- Where do they live?
- Is there co-habitation?
- What are homes and dwellings like?
- What gender roles and familial relationships exist?
- What are the patterns of descent and inheritance?



Beliefs

- Is there a religion or are there secular myths or legends?
- What is believed about origins?
- What things are taboo and why?
- What rites and rituals (religious or secular) are observed?
- Are there sacred items or totems?



Economics

- What kinds of jobs do they do?
- Is there a form of currency?
- Are there markets?
- Do they give and receive gifts?
- What other types of exchange are there?
- How is wealth understood?



Morality & Law

- How are “right” and “wrong” determined?
- How are interpersonal conflicts mediated?
- Are there laws and punishments?
- What moral values are there and how are they codified?



Politics

- Are there leaders?
- How are they chosen?
- How are decisions made?
- Who holds power in the society?
- Are collectivism or individualism valued?



ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES

The following paragraph snippets from eHRAF Culture Summaries are provided to illustrate the depth and breadth of **ethnographic description** that you should apply to the summary of your "newly discovered" culture.

ORIGINS



The Hopi universe consists of earth, metaphorically spoken of as "our mother," the upper world, and the under world from which the Hopi came and to which their spirits go after death. Although the concept of original creation is unclear, there are various accounts of the Emergence into this present world from three preceding ones, the place of emergence ... being located in the Grand Canyon. Each of the preceding worlds came to an end because of some evil done by witches, and the present world will someday come to an end also. In order to forestall this and to keep the world in harmony, ceremonies are performed by ceremonial societies and by kiva members. The universe is balanced between a feminine principle, the earth, and a masculine one, manifested in the fructifying but dangerous powers of sun, rain, and lightning ([Schlegel 2000](#)).

HOPÍ (NT09)

ART



Visual arts are not heavily represented in Kapauku culture, apart from the decorative net-bags made by the men, and the arm-bands and necklaces worn as bodily adornment. Dances, as part of the pig feast, are frequent. There are two principal dances, the WAITA TAI and the TUUPE. The UGAA, which is a song that begins with barking cheers, is followed by an individual's extempore solo composition, in the lyrics of which may be couched gossip, local complaints, or a proposal of marriage ([Gratton 1998](#)).

KAPAUKU (OJ29)



DIVISION OF LABOR



Men do woodwork and go sea fishing in canoes. Women do domestic work, but both sexes tend the earth oven for cooking. Both men and women fish the reef, men with spear and seine net, women with hand net. In agriculture, men do the heavy work of breaking up the soil, both men and women plant, but women do most of the weeding. Specialization was recognized particularly among men, e.g. in canoe building. Men alone could be priests in the traditional religion ([Firth 1995](#)).

TIKOPIA (OT11)

RELIGION



Religious beliefs and behavior pervade every part of Iban life. In their interpretations of their world, nature, and society, they refer to remote creator gods who brought the elements and structured order into existence [...] The religion involves an all-embracing causality, born of the Iban conviction that "nothing happens without cause." The pervasiveness of their religion has sensitized them to every part of their world, and created an elaborate otherworld (sebayan), in which everything is vested with the potential for sensate thought and action. In Iban beliefs and narratives trees talk, crotons walk, macaques become incubi, jars moan for lack of attention, and the sex of the human fetus is determined by a cricket, the metamorphized form of a god (Sutlive 19.9.5).

IBAN (OC06)



DWELLINGS



The Mbuti live in territorially defined nomadic bands, which number from twenty to as many as a hundred individuals, who wander over recognized hunting territories owned collectively by the group. Camp sites are temporary in nature and consist of a circle of huts arranged around an open space. The huts, which are built by women, are hemispherical in shape and consist of a framework of flexible poles set in the ground in a circle or ellipse, bent together and fastened at the top, then covered with leaves. In many cases the dwellings are nothing more than windbreaks covered with leaves or bark ([Beierle 1995](#)) .

MBUTI (FO04)

CONFLICT MEDIATION



Day-to-day behavior is largely governed by the universal belief that most misfortunes are caused by witchcraft and that a witch will only attack those against whom he has a grudge. In precolonial days, serious accusations (e.g., of adultery or of murder by witchcraft) were brought to a ruler's court and resolved by oracle consultations in the ruler's presence. For adultery with a nonroyal wife, fines were exacted; witchcraft resulting in death was generally settled by magical vengeance. The adulterous lover of a royal wife, or a persistently murderous witch, might be put to death. Nowadays serious accusations (e.g., of witchcraft in connection with deaths by drowning or other accidents) can be handled by consulting a Nagidi prophetess and may, if her verdict is confirmed by local-government courts, result in prison sentences (Gillies 1999).

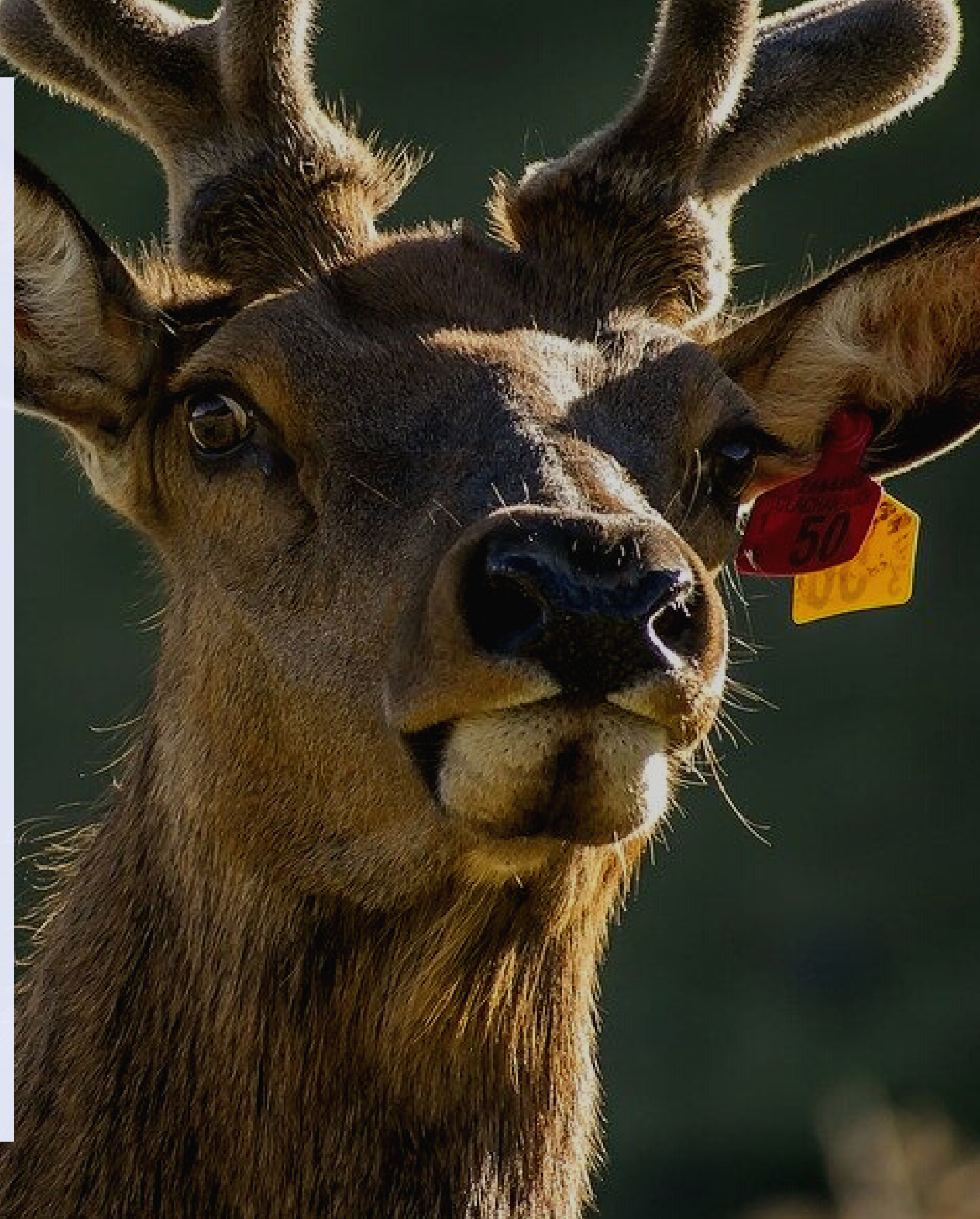
AZANDE (FO07)

SOCIAL CONTROL



Until the eighteenth century, social control was informal and relatively nonproblematic. In the absence of any hierarchical regulating mechanisms, some disturbances such as reindeer theft could escalate before returning to normal. With the court and religious systems of the encroaching dominant societies, Saami found alternatives in formal administration and litigation while maintaining informal controls through persuasion, gossip, sorcery, and relocation, forced or voluntary ([Anderson and Beach 1996](#)).

SAAMI (EP04)



The background of the entire slide is a photograph of a person's silhouette standing on a dark, rocky ridge, looking up at a vast night sky. The Milky Way galaxy is visible, stretching diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right, with a vibrant pink and purple nebula-like glow in the center. The sky is filled with numerous stars, and the overall color palette is dominated by deep blues, purples, and oranges from the galaxy's light.

THANK YOU FOR DISCOVERING

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An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

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