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On the social relations of the hunter-gatherer band

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Do hunters and gatherers live in societies? If so, do these societies possess any common characteristics? In the history of anthropology, answers to these questions have turned upon the nature of a peculiar collectivity known as the *band.* In this chapter I review anthropological thinking about bands and band-living in two stages.

First, I show how alternative characterizations of the band mirrored three different senses of society current in the discourse of Western modernity. Each of these characterizations has purported to provide the corresponding notion of society with a natural, essential, or "primitive" foundation. Second, by focusing on the themes of immediacy, personal autonomy, and sharing, I shall argue that the forms of hunter-gatherer life cannot be understood as instances of any essential type of society. The distinctiveness of hunter-gatherer sociality lies in its subversion of the very foundations upon which the concept of society, taken in any of its modern senses, has been built. Hunter-gatherers show us how it is possible to live socially, (that is, to conduct one's life within an unfolding matrix of relationships with others, human and non- human) without having to "live in societies" at all.

Society in the state of nature

Hunter-gatherers occupy a special place in the structure of modern thought so special, that had they not existed they would certainly have had to have been invented (which, to a large extent, they *have* been; see Kuper 1988). From the eighteenth century to the present, the problem facing modern thinkers has been to reconcile the thesis that the human is but one species of many (differing from the others by degree rather than kind), with the conviction that, alone among animals, human beings have progressively raised themselves above the purely natural level of existence, and, in so doing, built themselves a history of civilization. The solution has been to distinguish two axes of development and change: the biological and the cultural. Along the first axis are placed those changes that, ever since Darwin, have allegedly linked our ape-like ancestors, through various hominid grades, to human beings of an anatomically "modern" form. Along the second axis are placed those changes that led from the earliest fully human ways of life to modern science, technology, and civilization, apparently without entailing any significant further change in the biological form of the species.

The intersection of these two axes constitutes a point of origin, from which history rises upon the baseline of an evolved human nature. It was to characterize the condition of humanity at the junction of evolutionary and historical change, that modern thought posited "the hunter-gatherer." History, by the same token, came to be viewed as a process where human beings, through their intellect and their labor, gradually assumed control both over the nature around them (conveyed by the notion of domestication) and of their own inner nature (conveyed by the notion of civilization). Just as the hunter-gatherer , was positioned at the fulcrum between evolution and history, so the band was located on the fulcrum between nature and society. For an anthropology bent on discovering the "elementary" foundations of human sociality, stripped to its barest essentials, there seemed to be no better way than through the ethnographic study of the modes of association of contemporary hunters and gatherers. "The conditions of life contingent on hunting and gathering:' as Peter Wilson has put it, "indicate a minimal sociology, suggesting what is absolutely necessary and sufficient for the survival and well-being of a human society" (1988:23).

The notion of society, however, has no fixed, unitary meaning; it has been pulled this way and that within a discourse in which it has been variously contrasted to such terms as individual, community, and state. To cut a long story short, the recent history of ideas has bequeathed to us three different and apparently quite contradictory notions of what a society *is*. All three are situated within a long and continuing controversy among Western philosophers, statesmen, and reformers about the proper exercise of human rights and responsibilities. In one sense, also the oldest, society stands for the positive qualities of warmth, intimacy, familiarity, and trust in interpersonal relations which are also summed up in the concept of community. But while in certain contexts particularly those of emergent nationalism -society and community have come to mean much the same thing, namely a group of people bound by shared history, language, and sentiment, in others, society stands *opposed* to community, connoting the mode of association of rational beings bound by contracts of mutual self-interest, as epitomized by the market, rather than by particularistic relations like those of kinship, friendship or companionship. In yet other contexts, transactions based on self-interest are conceived as the very antithesis of the social. Here, society connotes a domain of external regulation -identified either with the state or, in polities lacking centralized administration, with comparable regulative institutions -which

curbs the spontaneous expression of private interests on behalf of public ideals of collective justice and harmony.

To each of these three senses of "society" there corresponds a particular discourse on the hunter-gatherer band. In each case, the burden of this discourse is to establish the "naturalness" of society in the sense implied by it. In the following sections I shall consider the significance of the band, as, first, an elementary form of community; second, an outcome of strategic interaction; and third, an egalitarian social structure.

Communism, familism, and reciprocity

Taken in the first sense, the essence of band society is said to lie in the intimacy, conviviality, and familiarity
inherent in what anthropological literature has conventionally called "face-to-face relationships:' Lewis Henry Morgan, describing the domestic arrangements of certain native North American peoples (whose mode of subsistence, in fact, combined hunting and gathering with cultivation), had spoken of a "communism in living" (1881:63-78). By this he meant the pooling of effort and sharing of produce that were the natural concomitants of living under one roof. Morgan's idea inspired Marx and Engels to characterize the original state of human society as one of "primitive communism." Many subsequent commentators have followed this lead (see Lee 1988 for a review). Yet the notion of communism, removed from the context of domesticity and harnessed to support a project of social engineering for large-scale, industrialized states with populations of millions, eventually came to mean something quite different from what Morgan had intended: namely, a principle of redistribution that would override all ties of a personal or familial nature, and cancel out their effects.

As Elman Service (1966) pointed out, the communism of hunter-gatherer societies, if we can call it that, is embedded in relations of immediate kinship. Essentially "familistic:' it has its counterpart even in modern states with industrial capitalist economies, as seen in the sociality and redistributive practices of family and close friends. For Service, family and society in band societies are effectively coterminous, whereas in states, "society" is identified, if anything, with the framework of public institutions that partition and envelop the innumerable little domains of "private" family life. *As,* in the course of social evolution, societies increase their scale and level of integration, so families grow smaller, and family relations become increasingly removed from social relations. "If we compare comparables:' Service observes, ('we find the primitive band of thirty to sixty persons larger, to be sure, than the family in urban America, but it is still a family and it is still a very small-scaled society, as *societies* go" (1966:24 [original emphasis]).

That Service's concept of familism failed to take root in anthropological discussions of band society was due in part to an attractive alternative formulation offered by Marshall Sahlins. Sahlins viewed the sharing of effort and resources in the hunter-gatherer band as a prototypical instance of what he called *generalized reciprocity* (Sahlins 1972:193-4, 231ff.): a kind of give and take characterized by diffuse obligations to help others who may be in need, regardless of the specific balance of account, of how much has been given or received, by whom, in the past. Sahlins contrasted this with *balanced reciprocity,* in which every gift anticipates an equivalent return, and *negative reciprocity,* characterized by persistent and underhand attempts to get

something for nothing. Sahlins' aim, in setting up this continuum of reciprocities from generalized to negative, with balanced at the midpoint, was to establish a systematic correlation between the quality of reciprocity obtaining in a given relationship and the social distance between the parties. This distance was reckoned in terms of a model of society envisioned from the vantage point of a particular individual as a series of ever-widening social sectors in which he or she is perceived to belong: household, lineage, village, tribe, etc. (1972:199, see also Sahlins 1968:16,85).

Although at first glance, Service's *familism* and Sahlins' *generalized reciprocity* seem much the same (both echoing Morgan's ('communism in living"), there is, in fact, an important difference. While Sahlins draws his examples freely from societies of hunter-gatherers, agriculturalists, and pastoralists, his general theory of reciprocity appeals to a segmentary or "tribal" model of society, attributed in the main to agricultural and pastoral peoples. According to this model, the elementary units of society are autonomous and discrete households, each centered on the relations between husband and wife, and between parents and children. As a relatively self-sufficient unit of production and consumption, every household enjoys immediate access to its own means of subsistence. Thus, the agricultural household has its cultivated fields, and the pastoral household its flocks and herds, islands of "domesticated" resources over whose yield it has the prior claim. Acts of reciprocity are then conceived to inhere in distributive relations *between* these household units, in more or less inclusive sectors of the wider society.

On the other hand, for Service the essence of the hunter-gatherer band lies in the extension of familial relations which, in other societies, are internal to the house- hold, across the entire community. Such a society is not internally differentiated by boundaries of segmentary exclusion into relatively close and relatively distant sectors, nor is access to the resource base divided between its constituent units. The band is conceived as one big household, whose members enjoy unrestricted use of the resources of its country and who labor in common to draw a subsistence from them. Thus, *contra* Sahlins, sharing in a hunter-gatherer band is not generalized reciprocity at all. For far from overriding the limits of domestic self-sufficiency, it is underwritten by a principle of collective access. On these grounds, Price (1975) has argued that sharing and reciprocity should be clearly distinguished: the former is the "dominant mode of economic allocation" in band societies, whereas the latter is the dominant mode in tribal societies. The band, in short, is no mere collection of domestic units, each of which places its own interests before those of the collectivity; rather, it is an "intimate social group. ..small in scale and personal in quality" (Price 1975:4). The internal cleavages of the band (most apparent in times of crisis, whether caused by food shortages or interpersonal conflict) are not, then, between families, but between men and women, and between generations (Ingold 1986:231).

Behind these debates lurks the issue of the status of the nuclear family as a fundamental building block of human society. One view, going back to Engels (Sacks 1974), holds that the minimal domestic unit in the original band society, comprising a couple and their children, had not precipitated out, as a separate proprietorial interest, from the larger, band-wide household; thus, rather than being primarily husbands and wives, parents and children, people were brothers and sisters, of both older and younger generations. It was supposed that within this band-household, men and women played complementary roles: men sharing the hunting; women

collectively bringing in the gathered produce, preparing the food, and carrying out other aspects of housework.

The alternative argument maintains that the nuclear family, integrated by a division of labor between husband and wife, is the basic unit of production and consumption in every human society, and that the band is an aggregate of such units bound together by ties of reciprocity. "There can," claims Fried, "be no disputing the significance of the nuclear family as the main component of the band" (1967:67). This is the assumption behind Sahlins' (1972) assertion that every primitive economy, hunting and gathering included, is underwritten by what he calls a "domestic mode of production:' There is, however, a third alternative, which is to suggest that the band is neither a single unit of householding, nor an aggregate of such units, but is rather formed of two relatively autonomous domains of production and consumption, respectively male and female. What we might recognize as "families" are then constituted at the multiple points of contact between these domains, through relations of exchange involving food and sex. In many societies, for example, a husband's first obligation is to provide meat for his wife's mother, who will share it with her daughter. The latter, in turn, will provide her husband both with a share of gathered produce and with sexual favors. As for children, they share in what their mothers have collected, and take meat from anyone who has it (Hamilton 1980).

Cooperation and residential Organization

The studies reviewed above all trace the essence of human sociality to the familiarity and mutual concern generated through prolonged living at close quarters. For other writers, however, band organization is the result of strategic decisions made by individuals or families in the interests of survival and reproduction under particular environmental conditions. These writers consider social organization to be a component of ecological adaptation, on the assumption that people will associate, and engage in various forms of cooperation and sharing, if, by doing so, they enhance the security of their food supply.

The *locus classicus* for this view is the early work of Julian Steward. In an article dating from 1936 on "The economic and social basis of primitive bands:' Steward distinguished between two types of band organization: "patrilineal" and "composite" (Steward 1955:122-50). The patrilineal band is a relatively small group (about fifty persons), comprising a nucleus of agnatically related men with their in-marrying wives and children. Steward reasoned such a group would be well adapted to hunting relatively sedentary, dispersed fauna within restricted territories, using a technology of individually wielded weapons (bows, spears, clubs) calling for only limited cooperation. The composite band is larger, numbering some hundreds of persons, and consists of "many unrelated nuclear or biological families" affiliated on the basis of "constant association and co-operation rather than actual or alleged kinship" (1955:143). Since the families of the band are not already bound by relations of kinship, they may freely intermarry. This kind of band, according to Steward, arises as an adaptive response to the exploitation of large herds of nomadic, migratory fauna, by means of techniques (such as game drives) involving large-scale cooperation.

Steward's typology has been much criticized. One prominent critic was Service (1962). He was convinced that the original human society, regardless of local environmental conditions,

took the form of groups of related men (exogamous "patrilocal bands") establishing the basis for peaceful coexistence through the exchange of women in marriage. Following Levi-Strauss (1949), Service reckoned that the establishment of intergroup alliance was the critical feature distinguishing human marriage from the mating systems of non-human primates, thereby laying the foundation for human society. Service thus explained the patrilocal band on structural rather than ecological grounds. Although Service's patrilocal band did not differ in composition from Steward's patrilineal band, Service chose the term "patrilocal" to emphasize the significance of place rather than genealogical descent in the recruitment of band members. Both Steward and Service agreed that *men* stayed together while *women* moved on marriage to join their husbands' groups; yet they disputed the reasons for this: Steward (1955:135) emphasized the importance of local knowledge for success in hunting, which would place a premium on male hunters emaining in the country where they grew up; Service pointed out (correctly) that, in many societies, women's gathering is a more significant source of subsistence than men's hunting, and that hunters' knowledge of the terrain generally extends far beyond the locality of their particular band. The real reason why male agnates stay together? Service surmised, is because, having grown up together, they know and trust one another. Such knowledge and trust, he suggested, is essential not only for cooperative hunting but also in the event of potentially hostile encounters with other bands (1962:33-5).

The major disagreement between Steward and Service, however, concerned the nature of the composite band. Having posited the patrilocal band as the universal, original form of human society, Service saw the composite band as an aberration of history, namely "a product of the near-destruction of aboriginal bands after their contact with civilization" (1962:97) .The remnants of the original patrilocal bands which had been broken up and scattered, their populations decimated by genocide and disease, were supposed to have coalesced to form the composite bands recorded by ethnographers. Though the destructive impact of the West's initial encounter with indigenous hunter-gatherers is undeniable, there is little evidence to support Service's interpretation, largely because the model of the composite band that both he and Steward worked with is an ethnographic fiction.

The organization of those peoples reputed to live in composite bands differs from the model in three respects. First, the constituent families are not unrelated: the affiliation of any family with the band depends on at least one kinship link of the first degree, through one or the other spouse, to an already established member. The resulting genealogical structure typically consists of a senior sibling group, with in-marrying spouses and children, together with a selection of the siblings of these spouses and *their* spouses and children. Second, band membership is not permanent but fluctuates as people freely shift their affiliations from one group to another in response to environmental conditions and the rise and fall of personal reputations. Third, the large aggregates of people that attract Steward's attention are only seasonal, the high point of an annual cycle of concentration and dispersal. For most of every year, people live in sma1J, local bands (Helm 1965). Though similar in scale to Steward's patrilineal bands, local bands recruit bilaterally, not patrilineally. Kinship is cognatic, and residence ambilocal (a woman may move to her husband's place on marriage, or vice versa, or the family may switch between these alternatives on any number of different occasions).

Somewhat paradoxically, recent research in cultural ecology has identified the band with a form of organization that, for Steward, represented the exception rather than the rule. This is what he called the "family level of social integration." Societies at this level appeared to lack any enduring social, corporate aggregates beyond the nuclear family. Individual families would come together and split apart, in an annual cycle of aggregation and dispersal, in different ombinations and under different leadership from one year to the next.

Steward had always insisted, following Murdock (1949), that for any social aggregate to count as a band, it must have "first, a fairly wide-ranging nomadism. ..and second, permanent membership" (1969:187). Since the multi-family associations found in societies at the family level of integration lacked permanent membership, they did not count, in Steward's terms, as bands at all. Ethnographic research has shown, however, that such flux in the composition of co-residential groups, far from being exceptional, is a widespread and striking feature of hunter-gatherer social arrangements (TurnbulI1968). It also emphasizes the importance of distinguishing analytically between residential flux and the physical impermanence of settlement: between changing company and changing places (Ingold 1986: 176-7). The concept of nomadism, strictly speaking, refers specifically to the latter. In this strict sense, the nomadism of most hunter- c gatherers is of a fairly restricted kind, very often tied to . ~'c sites that are more or less continually occupied, even ~" though the list of inhabitants of each may change almost : from day to day.

Following this line of thinking, we arrive at a view of the band as a loose and unbounded association of individuals or families, each related to one or more others through immediate kinship, occupying a particular locale and its environs. It is the outcome of a series of choices about where to go, and with whom to affiliate, in order to make the best of environmental resources which *are* never quite the same, in abundance or distribution, from one season or year to the next. Recent proponents this view (e.g., Winterhalder and Smith 1992) set out to analyze the incidence of sharing and cooperation in co-resident groups explicitly in terms of the costs and benefits of participants. Hunters and gatherers, It is assumed, seek "to maximize the net rate of energy gain," ~'ic'much as entrepreneurs in a modern market-oriented society seek to maximize financial profit (Bettinger 1991:84). However, whereas entrepreneurs calculate their own strategies, it is supposed that hunters and gatherers, like non-human foragers, are programmed to execute strategies worked out for them *a priori,* through a quasi-Darwinian process of variation under selection, operating not on genes, but on the elements of a cultural tradition that is "passed along" in parallel with genetic inheritance, from one generation to the next. Their adaptive strategies and resulting patterns of association are thus attributed to natural selection, not to rational choice. Here we have one more example, from contemporary theory, of the "naturalization" of band society.

The evolution of egalitarian society

Much of the confusion in anthropological discussions of band organization arises from confounding two quite distinct theoretical concerns: the first (reviewed in the previous section}with principles of local group organization; the second, with social evolution. If one takes "band" to refer to a local group of a particular kind, then there is no *a priori* reason why such groups should be exclusive to hunters and gatherers. One could just as well find "bands"

among nomadic pastoralists or swidden cultivators, in cases where the principles of organization are found to be precisely the same (as they often are). In the context of a concert} with social evolution, however, the band is conceived as the first in a series of social forms, of increasing scale, integration, and complexity, running through tribes and chiefdoms to states. This series is generally held to correspond, albeit imprecisely, to a parallel series of transitions in modes of subsistence, of which the most critical is that from hunting and gathering to agriculture and pastoralism. Accordingly, the band is taken to be the social form corresponding to hunting and gathering, and the tribe the social form corresponding to agriculture and pastoralism.
Because of the way in which narratives of social evolution are generally constructed, as the step-by-step development of the whole panoply of institutions associated with complex, state-level societies, the earliest stages in the sequence tend to be characterized negatively, in terms of the *absence* of institutional forms that have yet to emerge. This is certainly the case with the band, which, as Eleanor Leacock has observed (1969:3) , is more easily described by what it lacks: specialization of labor beyond that based on sex, class divisions, a formal priesthood, hierarchical political organization, and -most critically - private ownership of basic sources of livelihood. For those who would identify the concept of society with the third of the senses adduced above, as a framework of regulative institutions, the problem is whether the band - characterized by the apparent lack of such institutions - can be regarded as a society at all. Can there be societies with no, or hardly any, structure (Bloch 1977)?

This question can be framed in both political and economic terms, and I begin with the former. One of the key debates of Western political philosophy has surrounded the possibility of a truly egalitarian society. It has been argued, for example by Ralph Dahrendorf (1968), that society cannot be without rules for regulating conduct; that such rules would be meaningless without sanctions to back them up; and that the existence of sanctions requires that there be persons in positions to impose them, to exercise power over those who are sanctioned. In any society, therefore, "there has to be inequality of rank among men" (1968:172). The notion of an original band society from which all distinctions of rank are absent, Dahrendorf claims, is a figment of the imagination. Yet this notion has long been central to anthropological classifications of social forms, whether or not conceived in an evolutionary mould. In their celebrated comparative survey of *African political systems,* Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard distinguished between societies with centralized authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions (primitive states) and societies without (stateless societies), but added a third type: "very small societies.... in which even the largest political unit embraces a group of people all of whom are united to one another by ties of kinship, so that political relations are coterminous with kinship relations and the political structure and kinship organization are completely fused" (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940:6-7). Evidently, in the delineation of this third type, they had the hunter-gatherer band in mind.

Morton Fried (1967) draws on hunter-gatherer ethnography to exemplify what he calls "simple egalitarian societies," as opposed to "rank societies;' "stratified societies;' and "pristine states;' and identifies the band as the principal form of associating in these societies. An egalitarian society, according to Fried, is one that contains as many valued statuses as there are people to fill them, so that power can be exercised by any or all with the capability to do so (1967:33).

More recently, James Woodburn (1982) has drawn attention to the ways that certain hunter-gatherer societies, namely those who produce for "immediate return" (see below), "systematically eliminate distinctions of wealth, power and status:' Far from depicting the egalitarianism of these societies negatively, as the absence of hierarchy, Woodburn argues that their equality is positively *asserted* in the conduct of everyday life (1982:431). To eliminate distinctions of power, however, is not the same as eliminating power itself. Despite their egalitarianism, hunter-gatherers generally attribute great importance to power and its effects. For them, power is not power *over,* nor are its effects coercive in nature. Rather, power takes the form of the physical strength, skill, or wisdom that draws people into relations clustered around individuals renowned for one or more of these qualities. Ethnographers have often resorted to the notion of prestige to describe the appeal of such individuals. In one sense, this notion is highly misleading, for it suggests a competitiveness and ostentation which are wholly foreign to the tenor of hunter-gatherer life. It does, however, serve to bring out the point that power works by attraction rather than coercion. Bands do have leaders, but the relationship between leader and follower is based not on domination but on trust. I return to this distinction below.

Turning from polity to economy, the question of whether there is a distinctive social form of the band hinges on whether it is possible to specify a set of *positive* rules or principles that govern the activities of production and distribution among hunters and gatherers. In the terms of Marxian theory, if hunting and gathering is not just an assemblage of subsistence techniques -if it is a mode of production -then it must entail certain rules for the division of labor, access to productive means, and distribution of produce which together make up the social relations (as opposed to the technical forces) of hunter-gatherer production (Godelier 1978). Leacock and Lee (1982:7-9) have isolated six "core features" of these relations: (i) collective ownership of the means of production by a band, "horde," or camp; (ii) reciprocal rights to the resources of other bands through the formality of asking "permission;' which cannot be withheld; (iii) lack of concern with the accumulation of personal wealth, with storage only as a technique for tiding over seasonal shortfalls; (iv) "total sharing" of produce within the co-residential group, encompassing both hosts and visitors; (v) access of all to the "forces of production;' including skills (which may however be gender-specific), and (vi) individual "ownership" of tools, which are nevertheless freely lent and borrowed. These features, Leacock and Lee argue, underwrite the quality of what they call "band-living."

Within this Marxian framework, however, the patterns of cooperation and residential affiliation described by Steward and his followers would not fall within the category of social relations of production. Arising as they do from specific technical and environmental conditions, they are aspects of the organization of work, and as such belong with the forces rather than the relations of production. We might find that the residential composition of the camp among nomadic pastoralists is indistinguishable from that of the local band among hunter-gatherers (Ingold 1980:265), but the social relations of production in the two cases would be quite different, since pastoralism is characterized by a principle of divided access to the means of production (living animals), a strong concern with the accumulation of wealth, and limited sharing of produce.

In most so-called "tribal" societies, of course, the division of labor, access to means of production, and the distribution of produce are specified in terms of relations of kinship: thus in

these societies, relations of production *are* kinship relations. Claude Meillassoux (1981) has criticized the tendency in anthropology to assume that kinship-based models of social structure, developed in the analysis of agricultural and pastoral societies, are equally applicable to the analysis of hunter-gatherer bands. Kinship places people from birth in determinate relations with fixed, lifelong obligations, whereas "in the band an individual's position depends on voluntary, Unstable and reversible relationships in which he is involved for the limited period during which he actively participates fully in common activities" (1981: 18) .Such relations, Meillassoux argues, should be regarded as of "adhesion" rather than kinship. In the next section I shall consider the appropriateness of the notion of adhesion and whether (or in what sense) the relations entailed in 'band-living" are kinship relations.

The social relations of immediacy

Let us return to my original question: do hunters and gatherers live in societies? To answer it, I shall consider the significance of three terms which appear together in the ethnography with such regularity and consistency as to suggest a distinctive form of sociality. These are *immediacy, autonomy,* and *sharing.*

The "immediate" quality of hunter-gatherer social relations may be understood in two ways: in terms either of their lack of temporal depth, or of the direct, unmediated involvement of self and other. To begin with the temporal aspect, immediacy implies that social relations are of minimal duration, lived, as it were, for the here and now rather than establishing promises for the future through the fulfillment of obligations carried over from the past. One observer after another has reported a "lack of foresight" among hunters and gatherers, particularly in relation to the husbandry of food. They are inclined to share out whatever is to hand, eating prodigiously in times of plenty only to go hungry in lean periods, instead of rationing supplies to make them last. In this, as Sahlins notes (1972:30), it seems that they are "oriented forever in the present." According to Meillassoux (1973), immediacy is a definitive property of hunting and gathering as productive enterprises: yield follows directly from labor invested, whereas much of the work of farmers and herdsmen (in preparing or planting fields, or pasturing livestock) is done with the expectation of future yield. There may, however, be significant time-lags between the construction of equipment or facilities (particularly for hunting and trapping) and their use, a point which led Meillassoux (1981:14-15) to qualify his original distinction. Labor returns in an economy of hunting and gathering, he now suggests, are not necessarily immediate, but they are nevertheless *instantaneous.* By this he means that nothing holds band members together save their involvement in the current round of activity, beginning when they team up to search for food, and ending with the sharing out, and consumption, of the resulting produce. The band is thus "defined in terms of its *present membership"* rather than in terms of relations of filiation or descent linking past and future generations (Meillassoux 1981:17, original emphasis).

The distinction between systems of production ill which the returns on labor are immediate, and those in which they are delayed, has been further refined by Woodburn (1982). Like Meillassoux, Woodburn admits that many hunter-gatherer systems (and of course all agricultural and pastoral systems) are of the delayed- return type. The time-lags may be of three kinds: between the manufacture and use of facilities, between harvesting and consumption

(where food is stored for any length of time), or -in the cases of farming and herding -between the investment of labor in establishing the conditions for the growth and reproduction of plants and animals, and their eventual harvesting. Woodburn predicts that wherever such time-lags are found, people will be tied to one another for the duration, by "binding commitments and dependencies:' Only in systems of the immediate-return type do we find a form of sociality - more or less corresponding to what Meillassoux has in mind with his notion of instantaneity - characterized by flexible social groupings, residential flux, absence of formal commitments between persons in specific, jurally defined positions, and a stress on generalized mutuality and sharing (Woodburn 1982:433-4), My own view (lngold *1986:213-J* 7) is that this form of sociality is not incompatible with time-lags of the first two kinds, and therefore that it exists more generally among hunters and gatherers than Woodburn allows. Only the third kind of time-lag- in which the initial investment of labor entails a movement of *appropriation* -establishes dependencies of the sort that Woodburn associates with delayed-return systems.
The question remains, however, as to whether the absence of long-term, binding commitments implies that social relationships are immediate (or even instantaneous) in the temporal sense, within the fully enveloped concerns of the present. The answer depends on our understanding of what it means "to relate. In characterizing the constitutive relationships of the band as adhesive, Meillassoux implies that each person is like an atom, individual and discrete, unchanging through time. In their pragmatic associations, atomic individuals are assumed to "adhere" to one another, now in one combination, now in another, through an external contact that leaves their inner being unaffected. Recently, however, Bird-David (1994) has suggested a quite different image. The person in a hunter-gatherer band, she writes, is like a drop of oil floating on the surface of a pool of water. When these drops come together, they coalesce into a larger drop. But drops can also split up into smaller ones that may then coalesce with others. Likewise persons, "throughout their lives. perpetually coalesce with, and depart from, each other" (1994:597). The distinction between adhesion and coalescence, as principles of relationship, effectively corresponds to that (following Schutz and Luckmann 1973) between anonymity and immediacy, that is between "they relationships" in which the parties, as experiencing subjects, remain closed to one another, and "we relationships" in which each enters into the experience of the other and makes that experience his or her own as well. The forms of human sociality, Bird-David argues, can be ranged along a continuum from immediacy to anonymity: the band may, then, be characterized as "a social environment which specifically elaborates about the range of immediacy" (1994:599).

This, of course, is to conceptualize immediacy in the second of the two senses adduced above, namely as the direct, intersubjective involvement of self and other. *As such, it depends upon the deep mutual knowledge that people can only gain through spending time together: on the intertwining or even merging of their respective life histories. Unlike relations of adhesion, which are frozen* in the present instant, the coalescence and splitting apart of persons, according to this "oil-in-water" sociology, has to be understood as a *process* in real time. The sociality of the band, therefore, cannot be immediate in the temporal sense.

How, then, are we to contrast immediate relationships with those based on binding commitments, if not in terms of their respective duration? The conventional notion that relationships among hunter-gatherers are conducted “face-to-face” is too crude to be of analytic value, combining as it does the connotations of mutualism and role-play. Everything depends on

the connection between person and face, which remains unspecified. Price's (1975) notion of "intimacy" is more promising, although Bird- David rejects its implications of exclusivity, which she finds out of place in the virtually boundary-less context of the hunter-gatherer band (1994:591).

Gibson (1985) suggests that relations based on the experience of living and doing things together, on "shared activity in itself," can best be described as ones of *companionship.* He opposes companionship to kinship: "a relationship based on kinship is involuntary, non-terminable and implies the dependency of one of the parties on the other. By contrast, a relationship based on companionship is voluntary, freely terminable and involves the preservation of the pers9nal autonomy of both parties" (1985:392). The idea that shared activity (residing together in a place and cooperating in everyday tasks) constitutes people as related resonates throughout hunter-gatherer ethnographies (e.g., Myers 1986:92, Bird-David 1994:594). These sources are equally insistent, however, that the resulting relationships are predominantly of kinship. In light of this, Gibson's opposition between companionship and kinship seems over-drawn. More accurately, kinship relations in the band context are of a different order from those to which we are accustomed from studies of "tribal" societies (Bird- David 1994:593). They are constituted more by the sharing of food, residence, company, and memory, than by specific commitments and obligations incumbent on the occupants of positions within a formally instituted structure of social rules and regulations.

Autonomy trust, and sharing

In our comparison of relations of adhesion and coalescence, we have already foreshadowed the particular kind of autonomy that, judging by the ethnography, is a general feature of hunter-gatherer social life. The basic principle is that a person's personal autonomy should never be reduced or compromised by his or her relationships with others. Or, more positively, it is through their relationships that persons are constituted as autonomous agents. That this might appear strange to the Western reader owes somethil1g to hidden assumptions about the nature of personhood. To expose these assumptions, we may consider another fundamental value which ethnography consistently attributes to hunters and gatherers. This is the value of individualism. This same value is frequently adduced as one of the diagnostic features of a specifically "Western" sensibility, where it is linked to political ideals of liberty and equality. How, then, does the individualism of hunters and gatherers differ from that of the modern West?

The Western individual is a self-contained, rational subject, locked within the privacy of a body, standing against the rest of society consisting of an aggregate of other such individuals, and competing with them in the public arena for the rewards of success. Relationships in this arena are characterized by their anonymity- that is, by the absence of direct, intersubjective involvement. They are brittle, contingent, and transient affairs. By the same token, the autonomy of the individual is given from the start, prior to his or her entry into any social relation- ships at all. For hunters and gatherers, by contrast, the dichotomy between private and public domains, respectively of self and society, has no meaning. Every individual comes into being as a center of agency and awareness within an unbounded social environment which provides sustenance, care, company, and support. The people around him, the places he knows, the things he makes and uses, all are drawn into a person's subjective identity (Ingold 1986:239). Selves, in other words,

are "grown" within a field of nurture; as their capacities for action and perception develop, so they expand to incorporate the very relationships that nourish them. Personal autonomy arises as the enfoldment of these relationships, and unfolds in purposive action. A person acts *with* others, not against them; the intentionality driving that action both originates from, and seeks fulfillment through, the community of nurture to which they all belong.

Evidently these are *just* two ways of managing what Myers (1988:55) calls "the dialectic of autonomy. ..and relatedness". In the first, epitomized by the modern Western ideal of civil society, relationships are strictly confined to external contacts in the public domain, and do not violate the integrity of the private, subjective self. In the second, exemplified by the hunter-gatherer band, selves expand to fill the entire field of relationships that constitute them.

In this light, Meillassoux's mistake, in characterizing band relations as adhesive was to have imported into the context of hunter-gatherer social life, a model of association of modern Western provenance. Yet, granted that the hunter-gatherer's autonomy is constituted by involvement with others, how can this be reconciled with the fact that such involvement entails considerable dependency? People who draw their livelihood from hunting and gathering *do* depend materially and otherwise upon one another. Does not dependency inevitably compromise autonomy? I would argue that it does not. Rather, the combination of autonomy and dependency calls into being relationships that are founded on the principle of *trust*.

To trust someone is to act with that person in mind, in the hope and expectation that they will do likewise, by responding in ways favorable to you. On no account, however, should you attempt to force a response by placing the other person under obligation or compulsion. To do so would represent a betrayal of the trust you have placed in them, and would be tantamount to a renunciation of the relationship. Trust is founded upon a . respect for the autonomy of the other on whO1T1 one depends (Ingold 1993:13). By recognizing that relation- ships are based on trust, we can make better sense of the dynamics of power and leadership in the hunter-gatherer band. Leaders depend upon followers to uphold their reputations. But followers join the band of a leading individual, such as a renowned hunter, because they trust him. Here, trust is conditional upon leaders respecting followers' autonomy. Should the former, at any stage, seek to dominate the latter, whether by threat or command, the latter, feeling their trust to have been betrayed, will take their loyalties elsewhere. A follower, as Henriksen (1973:42) observes, can always move to join another band if he feels that his autonomy is unduly curtailed. Thus, the good hunter should never make his superiority obvious, and should always refrain from telling others what to do -an injunction that tends to impede effective decision-making (Henriksen 1973:40-54). In the context of band-living, as we have seen, power works by attraction, not coercion, and the slightest tip in the balance from trust to domination will cause it to self-destruct.

Finally, we come to the phenomenon of sharing. This has been regarded, in the literature, either as an innate human disposition (with possible but disputed homologues in non-human primates), or as a rule or convention fundamental to society as an instituted order. Representative of the first view is Glynn Isaac's (1978) celebrated reconstruction of the adaptive complex of the earliest human hunter-gatherers, in which sharing was linked to bipedal locomotion, tool-making, language, the sexual division of labor, and daily return to a home- base. This is to treat sharing as an evolved behavioral trait, as much a part of human nature as walking on two feet.

The second view is exemplified by Morton Fried's (1967:106) declaration that sharing was "the paramount invention that led to human society," and by Peter Wilson's (1975:12) claim that, in hunter-gatherer societies, "sharing has the status of a rule;' carrying all the force of a moral obligation. Meyer Fortes (1983), for whom there could be no society without rules, regarded sharing among hunters and gatherers as an instance of "prescriptive altruism;' by which he meant acts of self-denial that are obligatory and rule-governed -quite unlike the allegedly altruistic, but in fact genetically programmed, behavior of certain non-human animals (1983:26).
My position differs from both alter Latives. While there is certainly more to sharing than the output of a behavioral program, sharing is not a rule-governed, obligatory act. The more that actions are is attributed to the determination of rules, the more the responsibility for those actions is removed from persons and attributed to the imaginary agency of society. In the limiting case, the complete prescriptive altruist- entirely beholden to society in everything he does -ceases to be accountable for his actions at all. He has no personal autonomy left. Yet, by sharing, persons surrender nothing of themselves to society. The scope of their autonomy, far from being diminished, is enlarged. We should not, of course, confine our understanding of sharing to exchange of food. In addition to material goods, people share tasks, dwelling spaces, company, stories, and memories. In a word, they share *"each other"* (Ingold 1986:117, original emphasis). Thus food-sharing is just one aspect of the total process by which persons are "grown" In a context of immediate sociality, through incorporating the substance, knowledge, and experience of others within a field of nurturance.

The practice of sharing makes it possible for people to depend on one another, in a general way, without losing autonomy. It is thus based on the same principle as the relation of trust. In sharing, as in trust, one avoids any form of pressure or coercion. One cannot reasonably press for more than what others manifestly have to offer (Bird-David 1992:30). Conversely, sharing rarely if ever takes the form of unsolicited giving. No one put under pressure to receive what they have not asked for. Sharing almost invariably takes place in response to requests, directed from those who lack something, toward those whom they perceive to be in possession of it. Myers (1988:57) describes this as "mutual taking;' while Peterson (1993) has elevated it to a general principle of "demand sharing." Since it conflicts with the Western ideal of generosity willingness to give without being asked, demand sharing has tended to be construed rather negatively, as evidence for a certain stinginess that persists beneath the surface of hunter-gatherer life. But as Peterson points out, if commitments to others are "construed not in terms of giving freely, but in terms of responding positively to their demands, the morality of demand sharing is as positive as that of generosity" (Peterson 1993:870).

Conclusion

Together, the principles of *immediacy, autonomy,* and *sharing* add up to a form of sociality utterly incompatible with the concept of society, whether by society is meant the interlocking interests of civil society;' the imagined community of the ethnic group or nation, or the regulative structures of the state. First, the hunter-gatherer's claim to personal autonomy is the very opposite of the individualism implicated in the Western discourse on civil society. While the latter posits the individual as a self-contained, rational agent, constituted independently and in advance of his or her entry into the arena of social interaction, the autonomy of the hunter-gatherer is *relational;* a person's capacity to act on his/her own initiative emerges through a

history of continuing involvement with others in contexts of joint, practical activity. Second, in a world where sociability is not confined by boundaries of exclusion, people do not define themselves as "us" rather than "them:' or as members of this group rather than that, nor do they have a word to describe themselves as a collectivity apart from the generic word for persons. This is why outsiders -explorers, traders, missionaries, anthropologists -seeking names to designate what they have perceived as societies of hunter- gatherers, have often ended up by borrowing exogenous labels applied as terms of abuse by neighboring peoples toward hunter-gatherers in their vicinity. Finally, the principle of *trust* that lies at the heart of hunter-gatherer sociality will not accommodate relations of domination of any kind. Yet, such relations are necessarily entailed in any system of regulative institutions which legitimate and empower certain persons, in the name of society, to control the actions of others. It is not enough to observe, in a now rather dated anthropological idiom, that hunter-gatherers live in "stateless societies:' as though their social lives were somehow lacking or unfinished, waiting to be completed by the evolutionary development of a state apparatus. Rather, the principle of their sociality, as Pierre Clastres (1974) has put It, is fundamentally *against* the state.

In the extensive discussions which have surrounded the question of whether hunter-gatherer "societies" have distinctive features in common, few have stopped to consider the applicability of the concept of society itself. Taken in any of its modem senses, however, this concept is rooted in the discourse of domination. One might even say, with Levine and Levine (1975:177), that society *is* domination. The concept of society carves the world of human beings into mutually exclusive blocks in much the same way that the concept of territory carves up the country they inhabit into domains of political jurisdiction. If the latter implies a relation of control over the land, the former implies a relation of control over people. In this light, hunter-gatherers exist in "societies" for those seeking to exert control over them, but not for the hunter-gatherers themselves. Their world is not socially segmented; it is constituted by relations of incorporation rather than exclusion, by virtue of which others are "drawn in" instead of parcelled out" (Ingold 1990). As Peter Wilson observes, hunter-gatherer sociality is guided by focus rather than boundary: people "organize their social lives through focusing attention rather than referring it to a rigid structure" (1988:50):

In the conduct of their mutual relations, hunters and gatherers demonstrate the possibility of a perceptual orientation toward the social environment that is direct, rather than mediated by structures of control. Perhaps we could go further, to suggest that this perceptual orientation is not confined to relations among human beings. It also extends to non-human components of the environment: to animals and plants, even to features of the landscape that we might regard as inanimate. Hunters maintain relations of trust with their animal prey, as they do with human persons, assuming that animals present themselves with hunters in mind, allowing themselves to be taken so long as hunters treat them with respect and do nothing to curb their autonomy of action (Ingold 1993). The powerful hunter attracts animals as he attracts followers. For gatherers, the forest nurtures humans in the way adults do children -comprising together what Bird-David (1990) calls "the giving environment:' Generally, human relations with the non- human environment are modeled on the same principle of sharing that applies within the human community (Bird-David 1992). In short the rigid division that Western thought and science draws between the worlds of society and nature, of persons and things, does not exist for hunters and gatherers. For them there are not two worlds but one, embracing all the manifold beings that

dwell therein (Ingold 1996:128). Far from seeking control over nature, their aim is to maintain proper relationships with these beings (Ridington 1982:471). There are, of course, as many kinds of relationships as there are kinds of beings, but the differences are relative, not absolute. And if no absolute boundary separates relationships that are social from those that are not, then what need have we for a concept of the social at all?

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Facets of Hunter-Gatherer Life in Cross-Cultural perspective

Gender relations in hunter-gatherer societies i

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"For years many feminist anthropologists and hunter- gatherer specialists have been at odds in their interpretations of gender relations in foraging societies. This chapter presents overviews of gender relations in various hunter-gatherer societies, explores interpretative differences, and examines some common misconceptions about hunter-gatherer gender relations.

Anthropology traditionally neglected to study women; this led to theories that overly emphasized men. Durkheim (1961 [1915]:53) categorized Aboriginal men as sacred and women as relatively profane. Radcliffe- Brown (1930) concluded that the patrilineal, patrilocal "horde" was the basic unit of Aboriginal society. Service (1966) postulated that the patrilocal band, which kept male hunters together, was the natural form of social organization for hunter-gatherer societies. However, beginning with Phyllis Kaberry (1939), who showed that East Kimberley Aboriginal women had their own sacred ceremonies and ties to the Dreamtime, a few voices gradually spoke up for hunter-gatherer women (see Berndt 1965, Turnbul11965, Lee and Devore 1968, Goodale 1971, Briggs 1970).

Fueled by feminism in the 1970s, the anthropology of women focused new attention on hunter-gatherer women, especially "woman the gatherer" (see Dahlberg 1981, Reiter 1975). Underscoring that biology is not destiny, anthropologists dropped the term "sex roles" and adopted "gender" to refer more broadly to the ways societies define, elaborate and evaluate sexual dimorphism. How, they asked, is gender used as a tool for organizing social life? Ironically, however, some feminist anthropologists carried over anthropology's emphasis on males and developed gender theories that interfere with understanding gender complexities in hunter-gatherer societies. Rosaldo and Lamphere asserted that male dominance and sexual asymmetry are universals (1974:3). Friedl (1975,1995) argued that sexual asymmetry is unavoidable in hunter-gatherer societies because men hunt and distribute meat beyond the family. Collier and Rosaldo (1981) contended that women are merely objects of male manipulations in the marriage systems of simple societies, including hunter-gatherers. Various anthropologists who have done fieldwork with hunter-gatherers have described gender relations in at least some foraging societies as symmetrical, complementary, nonhierarchical, or egalitarian. Turnbull writes of the Mbuti: "A woman is in no way the social inferior of a man" (1965:271). Draper notes that "the !Kung society may be the least sexist of any we have