

Regional comparison in Khoisan ethnography: Theory, method and practice

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Abstract. This purpose of this article is to explain the approach known as "regional structural comparison" or for short, "regional comparison". I shall begin with a theoretical discussion of the notion of comparison and the historical basis for regional comparative studies, then illustrate my method with reference to the ethnography of the Khoisan peoples of southern Africa (Bushmen and Khoekhoe, including Nama and Damara). My own work has concentrated on kinship and on settlement patterns. Both these concentrations are especially amenable to regional comparison, and they will serve as my primary examples here. Subsistence, exchange, politics, gender, ritual and belief are all relevant spheres for analysis within this methodological framework too, and at the end of this paper some aspects of these will also be touched upon briefly.

Zusammenfassung. Zweck dieses Aufsatzes ist es, den Ansatz zu erklären, der als „regionaler struktureller Vergleich“ bekannt ist. Der Regionalvergleich ist eine Methode der Analyse von Kultur und - spezieller - Sozialstruktur. Wichtigste Grundlage dieses Ansatzes ist die Erkenntnis, daß die Kulturelemente einer Gesellschaft am besten in einem Vergleichsrahmen erklärt werden können, der die Verhältnisse verwandter Völker in Betracht zieht. Durch diese Methode werden Umwelteinflüsse und andere äußere Zwänge besser verständlich ebenso wie die Variation, die innerhalb eines Kulturreals vorkommt.

Ich beginne mit einer theoretischen Diskussion des Vergleichsbegriffs und der historischen Basis für regional vergleichende Studien und erläutere danach meine Methode anhand der Ethnographie der Khoisan-Völker Südafrikas (Buschleute und Khoekhoe, die Nama und Damara eingeschlossen). Spezielle Aufmerksamkeit wird den Siedlungsmustern und der Verwandtschaft gewidmet, Aspekten der Kultur, für die diese Art der Analyse besonders geeignet ist. Lebensunterhalt, Tausch, Politik, Gender, Ritual und Glaubensvorstellungen sind aber auch für eine Analyse in diesem methodischen Rahmen geeignete Bereiche. Am Ende des Aufsatzes werden deshalb einige dieser Aspekte kurz berührt.

I have been involved in field studies and comparative analysis of Khoisan society for the last twenty years. In this time, regional comparison has proven to be a concept of both theoretical and methodological importance, and indeed one which can have significant practical applications as well. Intracultural, as well as cross-cultural, understanding can be enhanced by an appreciation of a wider cultural context: a socio-cultural system within a system of socio-cultural systems. The idea is that analysis of any given phenomenon should be made within a comparative perspective which narrows the range of variables by limiting the geographical scope of comparison. Causes and

effects, social stasis and social change, outside influence and internal dynamics, are all things which can be better seen through such a limited comparative framework than when analysed in isolation from comparable occurrences among related and nearby population groups.

Comparison as a theoretical concept

All anthropologists, or ethnologists, compare. The problem is that few regard that comparison as an activity worthy of comment. Comparison which is designed primarily to illustrate points, to show differences or similarities between societies chosen randomly, is not likely to be considered as "theoretical". At the other end of the scale, comparisons designed to cover all possibilities world-wide, or to account for all instances of some cross-cultural fact wherever it is found, *are* perceived as theoretical, but they usually tell us little about our own, more specific ethnography. Regional comparison, which is a form of controlled comparison, lies in between.

Broadly following Sarana (1975), it is useful to distinguish some three distinct types of comparison in anthropology. These may be called *illustrative comparison*, *global comparison*, and *controlled comparison*. *Illustrative comparison* entails choosing examples to make some point about cultural difference or similarity, to draw the reader's attention to a feature of a particular society by comparing or contrasting it to that of another society. This form of comparison is the basis of much undergraduate teaching in anthropology. We might choose the Nuer as an example of a patrilineal society, and compare Nuer to Trobrianders, as an example of a matrilineal society. We might choose an element of one society which is unfamiliar to those whom we are addressing, say gift-giving in Nharo Bushman society, and compare it to a similar practice in a more familiar case, say gift-giving in German society. Such comparisons may show similarities, e.g., the practice of gift-giving itself, but often the illustrations are designed to show differences which reveal aspects of the nature of the less-familiar society. Nharo give gifts in relation to need and in response to requests; Germans give gifts in relation to specific events, e.g., birthdays, weddings, Christmas. Nharo give only non-consumables in formalized gift-giving (*//aŋ*); Germans, at their gift-giving events, may give either non-consumables or consumables. Nharo gifts are never reciprocated immediately; German gifts may be, e.g., at Christmas. Nharo gift-giving overlies a system of rights to use resources which are not given in exchange, such as rights to water; German gift-giving does not. With these kinds of comparison, we may thus make statements about, in this case, Nharo society, which are meaningful to German students or indeed anyone else who is familiar with German culture. Professional anthropologists use illustrative comparison similarly when they compare their own unfamiliar data to familiar data within the anthropological corpus, e.g., to Trobriand or Nuer data.

Global comparison, in its literal sense, involves comparing every society on earth, or in many cases every society of a certain type, e.g., all hunter-gatherers. True global

comparison in this sense is almost impossible. More usually therefore, "global comparison" is actually *global-sample comparison* which is itself a form of *statistical cross-cultural comparison*. A sample of the world's societies is chosen, either at random or according to some other statistically-appropriate means, and the entire sample forms the basis of a complex set of comparisons. Typical of this kind of comparison is the work of George Peter Murdock and his followers (e.g., Murdock 1949; Ember and Ember 1983). Specialists in global comparison note the statistical correlations which can be drawn between incidences of cultural features, or – in ecological anthropology – between environmental and cultural features, and they deduce causes and effects from among these various features. They believe that the relative instances of cultural features are indicative of necessary culture complexes, or possibly of evolutionary trajectories which occur independently of local historical circumstances. Global comparison is certainly useful at a high level of abstraction, but its obvious emphasis on the simplification of cultural features for heuristic purposes renders it relatively impotent for the understanding of cultural particularity.

Controlled comparison involves an attempt to limit the range of variables, as in the physical and natural sciences, by narrowing comparisons to similar cases, i.e., cases where the significance of those variables can be empirically tested. For example, we could compare a number of different desert-dwelling hunter-gatherers to see the effects of rainfall on settlement. Or we could do the same, but within a particular region of the world, say Australia only, or the Kalahari desert of southern Africa only. Usually controlled comparison is in fact *regional*, and usually it is based on a search for controls which are *structural*. They may also be environmental, and this approach is in fact especially useful where environmental factors come into play. How many possibilities of settlement might there be, given the seasons of the Kalahari? Which of these types are found where? And why? Beyond environmental factors, studies in controlled comparison may be based on any number of social facts which distinguish linguistically or culturally-related societies, perhaps even on some evolutionist scale, e.g., egalitarian to hierarchical, or simple to complex in economic structure. Adam Kuper's work on the politics of marriage among Southern Bantu-speakers (e.g., Kuper 1982) is a good example of this controlled, regional-structural, comparison. By concentrating on a small range of societies in this specific linguistic and geographical area, Kuper is able to relate structural features in one society to those in another, and very often to account for the differences in ways which indigenous people would readily understand, though they may not previously have been challenged to do so. My own work on Khoisan hunter-gatherers and herders (e.g., Barnard 1992a) has broadly followed this model.

In reality, these three forms of comparison are not always as clearly distinguishable as we might hope. Statistical cross-cultural comparison is not always global. For example, some of the Embers' work is based on comparisons within a range of specific kinds of society (hunter-gatherers only, or societies favouring the nuclear family), and sometimes this leads to a geographical bias in favour of certain areas of the world. Also, they claim

generally to favour theories of the "middle range" (Ember and Ember 1983: xvii-xviii). This adds an element of control comparable, in some of their work, to that of regional comparison proper. To take quite a different example, the ethnographic treatment in Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques* (e.g., 1964) is largely confined to the Americas, especially South America. Thus, although Lévi-Strauss asserts he is looking for cultural universals, his texts can be taken as showing simply cultural relationships within a particular region. Although not "controlled", his regional structural methods are in fact more like those of Kuper than like those of the Embers. This does not mean that his insights are either inferior or superior to those practising different methodologies, but it does mean that they might be qualitatively different from those whose methods are more tightly controlled or explicitly illustrative.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine which form of comparison is intended, or what the level of control in comparison is. For example, in his famous paper "The mother's brother in South Africa", Radcliffe-Brown (1952 [1924]: 15-31) chose to comment on just three patrilineal societies: BaThonga (Tsonga), Nama, and Tongan. Our question is: was he asserting something about patrilineal society in a controlled way, or was he merely illustrating the similarities between mother's brother / sister's son relationships in societies which are geographically distant? To take another well-known case, in *The Golden Bough*, Frazer (1911-15 [1890]) chose a global sample to illustrate cross-cultural similarities. But was he asserting universals of the kind Lévi-Strauss later did, or was he just doing illustrative comparison on a grand scale? These ambiguities highlight the difficulty of defining precisely the methodological orientation even of very well-known, past authors, but they also highlight the necessity of greater precision for contemporary anthropologists in the quest for comparability between both diverse data and diverse orientations. An awareness of the possibilities for comparative statements on the basis of one's own ethnography is an important step towards a universal ethnographic understanding. My view is that controlled, and especially regional, approaches generally provide greater understandings than other approaches; but any approach which takes into account its own advantages and limitations according to level of analysis has the potential to be fruitful.

A short history of regional comparison

The term "intensive regional comparison" first appeared in 1953, and "controlled comparison", in 1954 (respectively Schapera 1953; Eggan 1954). Yet there are good grounds for tracing the notion, in its widest sense, back much earlier. An intriguing feature of the history of regional comparison is that the idea emerged, somewhat independently and with different connotations, in several anthropological traditions – most strongly in the 1920s.

In the German-speaking (German-Austrian) tradition, regional studies formed part of the theoretical arsenal of the diffusionist school which included Ratzel, Frobenius, Graebner and Schmidt (e.g., Graebner 1911). Although they differed in methodology, all in this school agreed on the importance of understanding cultural variability through a search for historical relations between societies within regions, and most such scholars sought to understand in some historical way the connections between regions as well.

Much of the concern with defining regions was also part of the American tradition which emerged from the German-Austrian one. Wissler (e.g., 1917) especially sought to define *culture areas*, along with culture complexes and the culture traits which make up those complexes of interrelated features. Ecological anthropology subsequently came into being, as culture areas came to be equated more and more with environmental zones. Much of Julian Steward's work (e.g., 1955: 151-209) is based on a ecologically-defined sets of culture traits which themselves define both culture complexes and cultural-environmental areas.

In the British tradition, we see the notions of both control and structure emerging through the work of Radcliffe-Brown. His studies of the Australian Aborigines (e.g., 1930-31) advanced the quest for comparison through close scrutiny of structural relations between different Australian kinship systems. Unlike German and American interests, Radcliffe-Brown's concerns were, of course, less with culture history and more with social structure. He defined features of Australian systems according to the number and type of social units (moieties, sections, subsections, etc.) in different parts of Australia, and he even showed what happens when Aborigines from different areas meet and have to work out the classification of individuals from outside their respective societies in terms of comparable structural elements each within their own. Regional structural comparison is thus far from a merely theoretical interest here, as it helps Aborigines to maintain their own kinship structures and systems of world order when dealing with those whose systems are different.

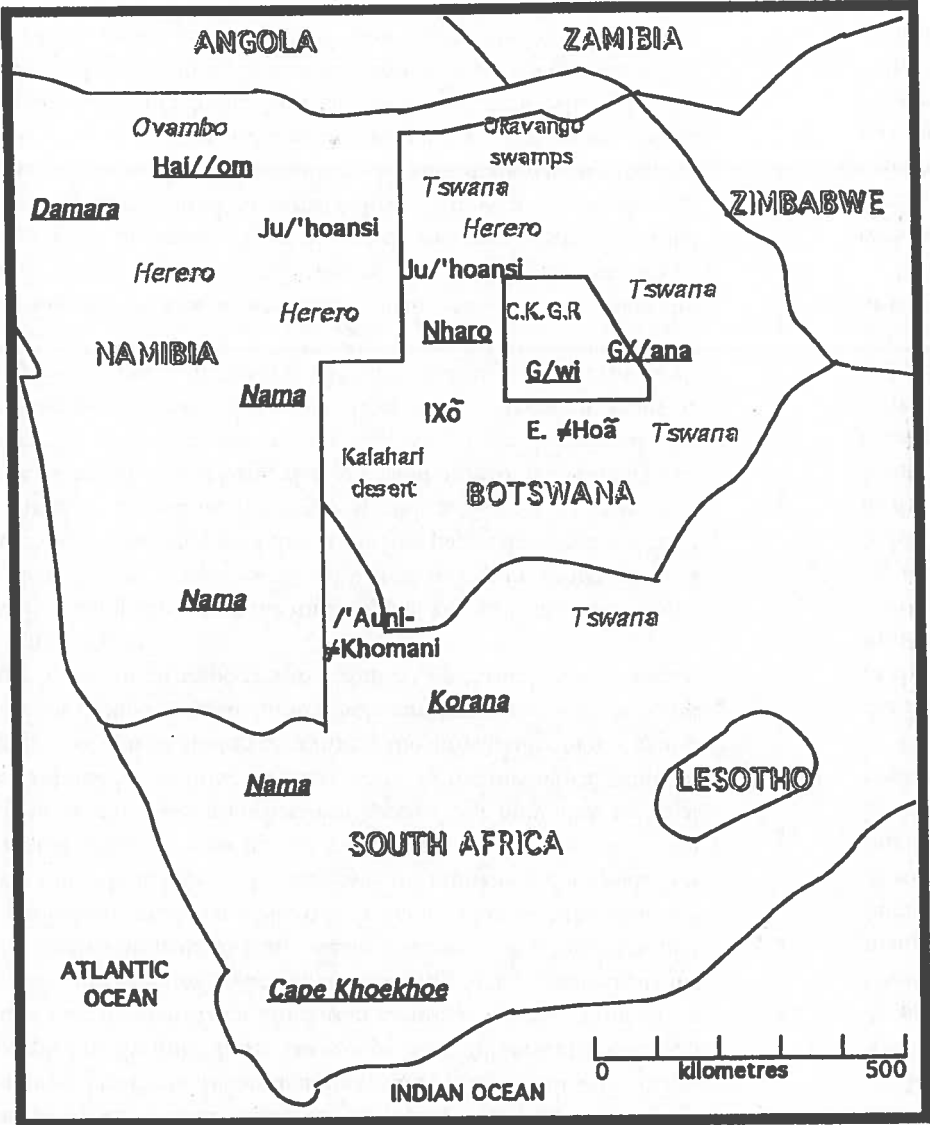
At much the same time, what later came to be called "Dutch structuralism" evolved from studies of language, culture and society in the Dutch East Indies. Dutch structuralism differs from structuralism as we usually think of it, i.e., French structuralism, in that the former postulates only structures which are unique to culture areas or regions, and not to all humankind. Such culture areas are known within Dutch anthropology as "fields of ethnological (or anthropological) study" (*ethnologisch studievelden*). Each is defined by a set of common features known as its "structural core" (*structurele kern*). These might include, e.g., patrilineal descent, the circulating connubium and hypogamy in the case of the Malay Archipelago — the classic example of a field of ethnological study (e.g., de Josselin de Jong 1977 [1935]). Each distinct culture within such a "field" will have differences, but such differences can be accounted for with the larger structural pattern. The motto of Dutch structuralism, like that of the Indonesian nation state which grew from the same cultural source, might well be taken as "Unity in Diversity".

From all these diverse national traditions themselves, there eventually emerged a unity in the narrowing of comparative interests to regions of the world. Yet prior to the 1980s, regional comparison was rarely explicit. Nadel, Eggan, Goody, and many others practised it without necessarily realizing the potential of regional comparison as a major tool of anthropological understanding (for examples, see Barnard 1992a: 3-7). Only scholars in the Dutch-Indonesianist tradition saw its potential from the earliest days of their tradition. It is therefore ironic that when this tradition was in decline, a South African - British anthropologist working in Africa should renew and make explicit the aims of this form of comparative anthropology in his inaugural lecture at the University of Leiden (Kuper 1979). Kuper had been my own supervisor at University College London, and in the 1970s I developed my approach partly in response to his growing interest and partly independently, through the knowledge that members of different Bushmen groups understood the structural similarities and differences between their own kinship systems and those of other Bushman groups. In other words, they, like the Australian Aborigines as described by Radcliffe-Brown, understood their own place in a wider culture precisely through an indigenous form of *structural* – not statistical – cross-cultural comparison.

Khoisan settlement patterns and territoriality

My first paper on regional comparison was an analysis of settlement patterns among four Bushman groups. In that paper (Barnard 1979), I argued that the presence of surface water enabled groups to maintain a non-nucleated form of settlement without territorial defence, while a lack of surface water was a determinant of more nucleated, territorial settlement. Of the four groups, the !Xó (also known as Western ≠Hoā, etc.) generally had the least water and were most territorial (see map, Fig. 1). Their band clusters were delimited from each other by strips of "no-man's-land", and visiting across such boundaries was limited. In order of nucleation, then came G/wi (G/wikhoë) and Ju/'haonsi (central !Kung), and finally Nharo (Naro). The Nharo have always lived mainly on a limestone ridge which traps water underground, and in recent decades they have had access to numerous waterholes put down by the white farmers who occupy their traditional territory. This has created an arrangement whereby their own foraging areas do not need to be so carefully delimited.

In a subsequent paper (Barnard 1992b), I came to question this precise correlation – when new data emerged on the /'Auni-≠Khomani, a group with even less water than the !Xó but who seemed not as territorial as the !Xó. This led me to postulate a threshold of abundance, before which territoriality was unimportant but after which territoriality emerged as a determining factor. The /'Auni-≠Khomani were thus too lacking in water and other resources for territoriality to emerge. They had, it seemed, too little in their territories to require band members to defend them. In the meantime,



Non-Khoe-speaking Khoisan hunter-gatherers in roman:
Kho-speaking Khoisan hunter-gatherers in underlined roman:
Kho-speaking Khoisan herders in underlined italics:
Bantu-speaking groups in outline italics:

Ju' hoansi
G/wi
Nama
Tswana

Fig. 1. Locations of ethnic groups mentioned in the text

Elizabeth Cashdan (1983) had published on the same original four groups. She came to the same conclusion as I had, but interestingly, she pointed out that the relationship between resources and territoriality among Kalahari Bushmen was precisely the *opposite* as that which had been observed for herbivorous animals in the Kalahari. The animals defend territories which are abundant, rather than those with scarce resources. A formal explanation is that these animals do not reach a sufficient state of abundance to defend territories which are lacking in resources. In other words, we can envisage a scale of increasing resources and increasing territoriality, which is transformed at the threshold of abundance into a scale of increasing resources and decreasing territoriality. The former scale is occupied by the herbivorous animals and by the /'Auni-≠Khomani, while the latter is occupied by the other Bushman groups. This still leaves the question of whether such animals are different from humans in nature, or whether some other factor needs to be taken into account – such as the differing social mechanisms for protection of resources which humans and animals have access to. Without examples of any herbivorous animals on the latter scale, it is difficult to say that the idea of a threshold of abundance does hold true in the same way for humans and animals, but the real point here is that insights can be gained comparing comparisons – between human culture areas or, in this case, even between species, but only after regional comparison has been applied for an initial understanding of the theoretical problem under consideration. It is, of course, useless to compare the territoriality of one group of springbok to that of one group of human hunter-gatherers, but it *may be* meaningful to compare the range of territorial responses to resources by springbok to those of humans in the same environment.

In yet another analysis using data from the four original groups (Barnard 1986), I pointed out that settlement can be seen as related to seasonality in interesting and perhaps unpredictable ways. I had suggested this in my first paper, but I had not fully realized the implications at that time. Relatively speaking, !Xō are permanently dispersed; they come together in groups larger than the band only for the annual boys' initiation ceremony, not for environmental reasons. Likewise, in this loose sense, the Nharo can be said to be permanently aggregated. They only aggregate in band or smaller units, but they can aggregate in this way all year round. In contrast, the G/wi and Ju/'hoansi are seasonal in their patterns of aggregation and dispersal. The Ju-'hoansi aggregate during the dry season, when more than one band may share the same waterhole. The G/wi, however, traditionally aggregate as bands in the wet season, and disperse as families in the dry season. They used to do this precisely because they had no permanent sources of water at all in parts of their territory, and so in the dry season they were better off in small units exploiting the very marginal resources of their lands. Thus given two seasons (wet and dry) and two basic patterns of settlement (aggregation and dispersal), all four logical possibilities are realized. Nharo can be aggregated in both wet and dry seasons, !Xō do not aggregate for long at all, G/wi formerly aggregated only in the wet season, and Ju/'hoansi aggregated only in the dry

season. We may also note that units of aggregation differ in size and level. G/wi traditionally aggregated only at the band level – several families together, while the Ju/'hoansi aggregated in larger units – two or more bands together.

In the eastern part of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (C.K.G.R.), the G//ana (or G//anakhoe, close relatives of the G/wi) frequently spend the dry season outside their own territories and indeed outside the Reserve. They use water resources occupied by neighbouring herding populations (Cashdan 1984). This means that they do not have to disperse as family units like the G/wi. Their wet-season pattern is like that of the G/wi, while their dry-season pattern is like that of the Ju/'hoansi.

To take another example, the Hai//om of northern Namibia can, in some areas, have an even more bizarrely-diverse opposition (Barnard and Widlok 1996: 95-98). To put it bluntly, they can live like Bushmen in the dry season, and like neighbouring Ovambo in the wet season. More specifically, they group as small bands living in mangetti groves, away from water supplies, in the dry season. Their lands have sufficient permanent water resources such that they do not need to travel more than a kilometre or so to fetch water, but they spend this season effectively aggregated with each other but dispersed from their Ovambo neighbours, who remain by the wells and boreholes. In the wet season, these Hai//om move to the permanent water sources and engage in farming, either working for Ovambo or growing subsistence crops in their own right.

Of course, herders are as dependent on resources, especially water in dry regions, as their foraging cousins. The Nama and Damara, unlike the Ovambo, are closely related to the Hai//om, both culturally and linguistically, and they share this relationship to some extent with other Bushman groups of Botswana. Most Nama live in the dry southern areas of Namibia, while the Damara inhabit even drier parts of northern Namibia. Nama settlement was traditionally based on the circular encampment, not unlike a Bushman camp in form but hierarchically arranged with the hut of the chief in the west and occasionally a defensive wall around the outside. At times an entire Nama tribe would camp in one great circle, and each clan of the tribe had its own kraal within the tribal territory. More usually, the camp was made up of some five to thirty huts. Livestock would, in theory, spend the night in front of their owners' huts or in the centre of the encampment. We know a good deal about such camp layouts, but little about territoriality or seasonal movement prior to the Herero-German War of 1904-1905, which decimated the Nama tribes (see, e.g., Barnard 1992a: 183-184).

Damara settlement resembled that of the Nama, but also had elements in common with neighbouring non-Khoisan peoples such as the Herero and the Ovambo. The Damara, like the Hai//om who have also borrowed such ideas from their agro-pastoralist neighbours, regard the east as the prestigious place. According to early ethnographic accounts they lacked a clear concept of territorial ownership but occupied poor regions to which they were driven, or which they were given by German authorities after the 1904 War. Thus they seem, in relation to Nama, to have poor resources and lack territorial defence, like the /'Auni-≠Khomani in the model described above. After the

war they were divided into some eleven large, locality-incorporative units. Unlike the Nama, they lacked patrilineal descent. Their group structure was like that of Bushman groups, if not looser. Little is known beyond that of traditional social organization, and indeed some historians and anthropologists have recently come to question the usefulness of the idea of a distinct Damara lifestyle at all (see, e.g., Fuller 1993; cf. Barnard 1992a: 197-210).

However, vestiges of traditional Nama and Damara settlement clearly remain, and in spite of vast differences in size of settlement the form of such camps, now often towns in the case of Nama, offers as touchstone to traditional hierarchical arrangements and spatial relations which have kept traditional leadership alive in spite of tribal decimation and decades of apartheid. Yet notions of land use have long since been altered, and in might be said that, while for Bushmen settlement is seasonal and defined in terms of territorial use, for Nama, Damara, and to some extent also Hai//om, it is best defined at the micro-level, i.e., in terms of the spatial arrangements of the settlement itself (cf. Barnard and Barnard 1993).

The very transition from foraging to pastoralism involves a number of changes in individual and social attitudes, and it necessitates changes in social structure. Among changes in attitude are recognition of the propensity for selling – as opposed to sharing – meat, the acceptance of longer working hours in exchange for a guaranteed supply of meat, and the development of an ethos of planning for the future of the herd. Among changes in social structure are an increase in social hierarchy as a result of new disparities in wealth, the development of larger social units, often based on a more formal recognition of ties of descent, and consequent changes in political organization away from consensus towards ascribed leadership. There are also changes in people's relation to the land, as the transhumance of foragers gives way to either permanent migration or permanent settlement at major sources of water. All these changes can be understood through comparison within a region, such as Khoisan southern Africa, more readily than in an abstract way. The environmental pressures which are placed on hunter-gatherers operate on herders too, and the methods applied to the study of hunter-gatherer settlement can apply equally to the study of the settlement patterns of Khoisan herding groups. Ultimately, the intensive comparative study of herding and hunting-and-gathering Khoisan settlement should be enlightening for attempts to understand both the transition, still underway, from hunting to herding, and the ways in which people cope with external pressures such as war and drought.

Khoisan kinship terminology and group structure

My earliest work on Khoe kinship terminology resulted from encounters with members of diverse Bushman groups in western Botswana in the mid-1970s. My informants were aware of both lexical and structural differences between their own, respective

terminologies and those of their neighbours. They explained these differences to me as a way in which to clarify my understandings of their own systems. Unlike my settlement pattern comparisons, most of the fieldwork on kinship terminology was done by me. This is feasible for kinship terminology, but plainly not for settlement patterns or for many aspects of kinship besides terminology. I was able to put together what others had written on descent ideology, group composition, and kinship behaviour with what I learned of the terminologies. Doing the collection of kinship terms myself meant both that I gained an intuitive sense of the terminology structures and that I could ensure accuracy and comparability beyond that possible when a great number of ethnographers – including perhaps some ethnographers who are disinterested in kinship – are left to record the data.

The kinship systems of Bushman groups have two important features in common, but there are also a great number of differences. The two important features in common are the presence of a clear, categorical distinction between “joking partners” and “avoidance partners”, and the extension of these categories universally throughout society. Joking partners are those with whom an individual can joke, tease, sit close to, and in certain cases, engage in sexual play or in intercourse with. Avoidance partners are those with whom these activities would be disapproved of or strictly forbidden. In several Bushman languages the word to “avoidance partner” is the same as that for “feared” or “to be afraid of”, while that for “joking partner” is the same as that for “not feared”. Those to “joke” with include, typically, grandparents and grandchildren, same-sex siblings, certain classes of cousins, and sometimes certain classes of uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. Those to the “feared” include especially parents-in-law, but also, reciprocally, children-in-law, and also parents, children, opposite-sex siblings, and certain classes of cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. Only joking partners are marriageable, and generally, one’s spouse’s joking partners are treated as “joking” and one’s spouse’s avoidance partners are treated as “avoidance”.

The differences between Bushman kinship systems can largely be accounted for by language. I mean this not just in the sense that the words for different genealogical relationships are different in the different languages, but also in the sense that the structure of the terminologies differs too (Barnard 1981). I shall take as examples the four groups whose settlement patterns were considered first above: Ju’hoansi, !Xó, G/wi and Nharo, along with one non-Bushman Khoisan group, Nama. Here it is important to note that membership in a language group does not necessarily coincide with mode of livelihood. The G/wi and Nharo, along with the Nama, are Khoe-speaking peoples. The Khoe-speakers form a large subgroup of Khoisan and include all the traditional herders (Nama and Damara in Namibia, and formerly the Cape Khoekhoe and Korana in South Africa), as well as most Bushman groups of the central and eastern Kalahari and the Okavango swamps of Botswana. What is interesting here is that all these groups, whether traditional herders or traditional hunter-gatherers,

have similar terminology structures – but with differences reflecting both aspects of group structure and culture contact (Barnard 1980; 1988a).

The Ju/'hoansi distinguish siblings from cousins and make no distinction between parallel and cross-cousins, except when the "name relationship" interferes with this classification. Normally, all cousins are considered joking relatives, and uncles and aunts are considered avoidance relatives. Categories are defined by alternating generations: the words for grandparents are the same as those for cousins and for grandchildren. The words for uncle and aunt are, respectively, the same as those for nephew and niece. Ju/'hoansi children are each named after a grandparent, or after those names are exhausted, after an uncle or aunt. If a child has his or her grandparent's name, there is no problem; but if the child is named after an uncle or aunt, then both the terms and the joking/avoidance categorization of grandparents, and uncles and aunts, is reversed on that given side of the family. One's true grandparents become "uncles and aunts", one's namesake-uncle or aunt becomes one's "grandparent", and that person's brothers and sisters (one's true uncles and aunts) become one's own "brothers" and "sisters". Likewise, one's cousins – who are normally equated with grandparents – become "uncles/nephews and aunts/nieces". Thus, for example, a third-born son named after one of his father's brothers will be equated with that father's brother and will classify his relatives differently from the way his own brothers and sisters (named after grandparents) do.

The !Xõ have an entirely different system. Like the Ju/'hoansi, they do alternate generations, but unlike the Ju/'hoansi (and like most other Khoisan groups) they distinguish parallel from cross-cousins and classify parallel cousins as "siblings". What is unique about the !Xõ is that they classify cross-cousins by a term which means "step-, extended or classificatory *child*". Thus, usually, cross-cousins are avoidance partners and are not marriageable. In fact, this oddity makes perfect sense in light of a more general principle of Khoisan kinship, namely that a joking partner's avoidance partner – in this case cross-uncle or cross-aunt's child – is an avoidance partner. The peculiarity is that the !Xõ are the only group whose terminology structure applies this underlying principle to such close relatives (see Barnard 1992a: 74-75).

The G/wi, and also the G//ana and numerous eastern Kalahari and Okavango Khoe-speaking peoples, all distinguish parallel from cross-cousins and marry those of the latter category. They also distinguish terminologically between junior and senior members of the joking category I call "grandrelative", and they equate same-generation "grandrelatives" (cross-cousins) with juniors (grandchildren, and also cross-nephews and cross-nieces) rather than with seniors (grandparents, cross-uncles and cross-aunts). Their terminology structure is simple in form and emphasizes the importance of the joking and avoidance distinction (see, e.g., Barnard 1992a: 109-111). Grandparents, cross-uncles and cross-aunts, cross-cousins, and all their reciprocals are "grandrelatives" and joking partners. Parents, parents' same-sex siblings (parallel uncles and aunts), their reciprocals and their spouses, are avoidance partners. Same-sex siblings and par-

allel cousins are joking, while opposite-sex siblings and parallel cousins are avoidance (parallel cousins are classified as "siblings"). One's spouse's joking partners are joking, and one's spouse's avoidance partners are avoidance.

The Nharo lack the distinction between senior and junior "grandrelatives", and broadly favour fully-reciprocal terms, like those of the Ju/'hoansi. Indeed the Nharo have two nearly synonymous terms for "grandrelative", *tsxō* and *mama* (the differences are syntactical rather than semantic), and these seem to be derived ultimately from the Ju/'hoan language. The Nharo also have the system of personal naming used by the Ju/'hoansi, but it exists within a definitively Khoe kinship structure. Thus parents' opposite-sex siblings, like grandparents, are classified as "grandrelatives", and there can be no confusion of categories because of naming, as there can be among the Ju/'hoansi. The Nharo system is the Khoe system taken to simplicity, precisely because the naming system reduces the necessity to classify according to seniority, e.g., to distinguish parents from children, or grandparents from grandchildren. For example, a grandparent's namesake is classified as one's "grandparent" even if younger. Since the grandparent/grandchild relationship is reciprocal and can be represented in any Khoe language by a reciprocal term, in Nharo *tsxō-ku* (meaning "grandrelatives to each other"), the Nharo simply take this one step further and refer to each side of the relationship, egocentrically, as *tsxō*, or more accurately, *ti-tsxō-ba* ("my male grandrelative") or *ti-tsxō-sa* ("my female grandrelative") – though sometimes also with a diminutive suffix to indicate relative age.

Nama is very similar to G/wi. Indeed, a close comparison of the terminologies of the Khoe-speaking peoples reveals further that a number of terms cross-cut the ethnic and hunter/herder boundaries, as one would expect of closely-related peoples. For example, junior or equal "grandrelative" is *//nuri* in Nama and *n//odi* in G/wi (with appropriate number-gender suffixes). However, structurally there is one significant twist: the Nama terminology distinguishes between male and female first ascending-generation cross-relatives. Thus mother's brother is an extreme joking relative, while father's sister is an extreme avoidance relative; and their reciprocals are classified likewise. The reason for the difference is clearly to do with the traditional patrilineal clan organization of the Nama. Unlike the G/wi, who like all Bushman groups are essential cognatic in group structure, the Nama would in the past treat a father's sister with great respect because father's sisters held authority over their brothers, and by extension their brothers' children. The father's sister was like a "female father" in her descent group, although with the destruction of clan organization after the 1904 War, this role has changed to that of a "grandmother", or one might say, a "female mother's brother". The mother's brother relationship was the opposite of that of the father's sister. He was, and to some extent still is, a "grandrelative" *par excellence*. A boy may steal his mother's brother's cattle, or most anything else belonging to the mother's brother, and the latter can only replace these with poorer cattle or other goods belonging to the sister's son. In this way, the mother's brother looks after the interests of his young

change and indulgences him, or her, in a way that parents cannot. The parent/child relationship is among all Khoisan peoples a formal one, and in a sense contraposed to that of the mother's brother / sister's child.

One way to better understand the relation between the various systems is through notions of underlying categories, a method which I have already hinted at above. I explored this possibility in *Hunters and Herders* (Barnard 1992a: 265-281), where I defined just four reciprocal joking categories and four reciprocal avoidance categories for all Khoisan systems. No system needs them all; but three or four of these lower-level categories per higher-level category will suffice. Specific, egocentric kinship terms – say the term for “granddaughter” – are subsumed within the lower-level categories – such as “grandrelative”, mentioned above. This method is especially interesting in interpreting seemingly aberrant terminology structures, such as that of the Eastern ≠Hoā. The problems with that terminology are too complex to go into in detail here, but the main difficulty is that the same genealogical position may be referred to by more than one term, and further, that those terms may out the given relative in radically-different categories. Put simply, my analysis of Eastern ≠Hoā rests on the idea that the joking/avoidance distinction is submerged in favour of other features, and that alternative terms for the same genealogical position could reflect choices between *extended-descriptive* and *categorical* usages rather than between the classification of the position as belonging to one category or another (see Barnard 1987: 207-208; 1992a: 75-76, 276-280).

Another way to understand the relation between systems is historically. Through a combination of regional comparison and conjecture based on known linguistic relationships between the groups, it is possible to reconstruct the history – or prehistory – of Khoisan kinship with, I believe, a fair degree of accuracy. Again I have hinted at this above. I published a detailed paper on this idea in the journal *Africa* (Barnard 1988a), in which the Nharo system, along with those of two closely-related groups, can be seen as representing an historical simplification of the Khoe structure caused by contact with Ju/'hoan-speaking people to the north. The historical changes affecting Nama terminology are accounted for as a result of structural transformation resulting from the loss of clan organization. By comparing a large number of different but related groups in light of known historical-linguistic relationships, we can work out historical transformations of terminology and of the group structures which play on them. Thus, theoretically, it is possible to reconstruct a social history within a region such as Khoisan southern Africa. Such a history is based neither on evolutionist or diffusionist assumptions, but makes use of logical relations between structures. Obviously kinship terminologies, as one of the most structured forms of culture anywhere, afford a useful opportunity for such methods.

Regional comparison and other aspects of Khoisan society

Causal factors of regional variation are numerous, and variation in cultural sphere can be the cause of variation in another. Such causes can include environment, settlement, technology, means of subsistence, the presence of a cash economy, other aspects of modernization, the character of relations with outside groups, changes in the scale of social relations, aspects of kinship, and even aspects of language. Sometimes the exact causal factors are obscure, but careful comparison can reveal new spheres in which to look for causes, or at the very least, suggest correlations on the basis of linguistic or cultural relatedness. For example, marriage and childbirth gifts are especially prevalent among Khoe-speaking peoples, irrespective of whether they are traditional foragers or traditional herders, whereas non-Khoe-speaking Bushmen tend to have bride-service as a more significant element of the marital process (Barnard 1992a: *passim*). The exact cause of this is obscure, but the fact of it lends strength to the view that cultural features of gender relations, as well as some of those of kinship, are deep-rooted in the culture of linguistically-related Khoisan peoples and not prone to easy change as a result of change in the means of subsistence. This, then, is evidence against a simple, mode-of-production basis for the analysis of gender relations, and suggests that cross-cutting cultural factors may be equally important.

Among Ju/'hoansi in Botswana, there has been a gradual shift from bride service to bridewealth as the means of formalizing the relationship of marriage (Lee and Rosenberg 1993: 415-417). The process began when young men returned from the gold mines with cash which they could use to purchase livestock. They would offer the stock rather than their labour, thereby enabling them greater flexibility in residence. Restrictions on hunting, food distribution through the drought relief programme, and increasing sedentization have all made the acquisition of wealth in livestock more attractive than it was in the past. Accompanying all this has been a greater matrifocality in child-rearing, while at the same time a development towards a more patriarchal band structure, perhaps reflecting the greater incorporation of Botswana's Ju/'hoansi into the national culture of that country. Ju/'hoan children raised in a sedentary environment do more work, travel further from their homes, and interact more in same-sex, same-age groups than those of nomadic times. Adults spend less time with their children, and children's care-taking groups have been replaced by peer groups. With sedentization, gender differentiation increases. Women stay at home more, and men are more likely to stay away, often to look after their newly-acquired herds.

Regional comparison can help to enlighten views of relations between groups even beyond the given culturally-defined region. It can also serve as an adjunct to illustrative comparison, to add explanatory power in a case where illustration is confined to the region. Take the example of *mafisa* and "inverse *mafisa*", which does both. In Botswana, there is a custom known as the *mafisa*, whereby people with many cattle loan some to others to look after. The cattle owners are usually Tswana or Herero. The

people who receive the *mafisa* cattle are generally less well off, often having no cattle of their own. Members of a number of different Bushman groups fall into this category. They may milk the cattle under their care and eat the meat of any beast which dies naturally. Sometimes the owner of the herd may give them a calf in exchange for their labour. Thus, if they are fortunate, the poor can acquire stock from the rich, while the rich free themselves of having to look after all their animals themselves. However, Hai//om forager-herders of northern Namibia regularly leave their livestock with the neighbouring Ovambo. This "inverse *mafisa* system" (Widlok 1994: 185-188) enables the Hai//om to move around more freely. Also, since their livestock is, in a sense, "deposited" with the Ovambo, these Hai//om can avoid requests to slaughter their animals and distribute the meat to others in their community. With both *mafisa* and "inverse *mafisa*", the burdens of wealth are alleviated, and increased livestock ownership is made possible for both rich and poor. However, in the case of "inverse *mafisa*", rich Ovambo get richer at the expense of Hai//om, because the Ovambo can make use of the animals in their care, and because they regularly receive payment in the form of calves and kids born to these animals.

There are many other forms of sharing and reciprocity found among Khoisan peoples. These include vegetable sharing within the family; meat sharing according to strict rules, in terms of kinship and work effort in procuring the meat; cattle-snatching between those in specific kin relationships among herders; alcohol and tobacco sharing on an *ad hoc* basis; formalized, delayed, balanced reciprocity of non-consumable items – the system which is called *hxaro* among the Ju/'haonsi, but is also found much more widely, including among herders; generalized reciprocity of rights to resources (often defined as including *hxaro* partners); and long-term borrowing non-consumable items found in areas of the southern Kalahari where *hxaro* does not occur.

The situation is similar in other social spheres. In politics, the differences between hunters and herders are, in fact, more obvious than in economics – hunters tending to operate exclusively in consensus terms with self-seeking among "leaders" not tolerated, and herders tending towards traditional leadership with non-authoritarian chiefs and councils of elders (see Barnard 1992a: 237-250). In religion, the same rituals occur throughout at least Bushman areas, and beliefs about God and the spirit world – and even the terms for such entities – cross-cut both the hunter/herder divide and the Khoe/non-Khoe language boundary (see Barnard 1988b; Barnard 1992a: 251-264).

Conclusion

When I first thought about the problem of Kalahari Bushman settlement patterns, during my fieldwork in the 1970s, I was sceptical of environmental determinist logic – precisely because of the variation. However, on closer inspection, I realized that the patterns are all part of a larger pattern of patterns, in which season migrations can be

seen as related to the diverse availability of resources in each territory and in which an element of determinism became apparent. No amount of close scrutiny of just *one* group could ever verify an environmental determinist position, or test even less radical ecological hypotheses; only an approach in which the variables can be controlled for, such as in regional comparison, can do this. The same is true of archaeological data on environment and settlement, where a regional comparative approach might also prove useful. Likewise, in kinship, the comparative study of systematic relations has helped to unravel the complexities of all the systems and place them in a larger, even historical perspective. Changes in kinship relations happening now, as the range of social interaction expands in many parts of Khoisan southern Africa, can be best understood in light of the range of possibilities occurring among Khoisan peoples taken as an entirety.

Today in Khoisan studies, regional-comparative models compete against both traditional, isolated, non-comparative models, and the newer revisionist, integrationist ones. In my view, regional analysis provides not only the best means for the understanding of both specific cultures and the cultural milieu which they are a part of, but also the best prospect for comprehending the complex social problems which occur today across the region. Not only is a knowledge of specific traditional cultures important; it is equally important to see the range of possible variation among like cultures in order to make the right decisions in the provision of development aid. Settlement, kinship, gender relations, and dealings with outsiders are all arenas in which the actions of outside agencies can have either beneficial or detrimental effects. Thus the regional comparative study of such structures has both theoretical and practical significance.

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