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On the Problem of Egalitarianism

The Kalahari San in Transition*

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The immense problems facing contemporary foraging groups in their attempts to cope with encompassing worlds have been attributed to the egalitarian character of their socio-cultural systems (e.g. Lee 1979, 1982; Woodburn 1982; Yellen 1984; cf. Bernard 1983). Woodburn has argued, for instance, that hunting-gathering societies are "profoundly conservative", embodying "a set of distinctive egalitarian practices which disengage people from property, inhibit not only political change but any form of intensification of the economy." (1982: 447) He explicitly rejects environmental and technological factors as critical, stressing that the "overwhelming difficulties lie in the egalitarian leveling mechanisms." (loc.cit.) Thus, "the equality that is present is not neutral, the mere absence of inequality or hierarchy, but is asserted." (Woodburn op. cit.: 431, emphasis original)

Cashdan has argued, however, that in the case of the //Gana of Central Kalahari, inequality is "the inevitable result of the lifting of the constraints that produce strict egalitarianism among other Kalahari hunter-gatherers." (1980: 119-20, emphasis original) Woodburn rejects this interpretation, claiming that "egalitarian values (are) deeply built into hunting gathering systems" (op. cit.: 449, emphasis added). Contrary to Cashdan, most students of San culture agree with this general claim. For instance, Lee portrays the !Kung as 'fiercely egalitarian' (1979: 24) with an 'ideology of equality' (1982: 53), which constitutes the major factor responsible for their prevailing problems of coping with a changing politico-administrative, economic and ecological environment. Similarly, Katz argues that "their egalitarianism makes them reluctant to acknowledge fixed hierarchies and loath to create them" (1982: 240), and Yellen stresses that "egalitarian beliefs prevent the emergence of a Basarwa chief or headman." (1985: 22) Moreover, Lee claims that the miseries of 'encapsulated San', which he has observed, are attributable to an egalitarianism that prevents them from storing wealth and establishing an authority figure (op. cit., 1979).

The prevalence of suffering among the San and their tremendous difficulties in coping with a rapidly changing world have been well documented. Yet this does not mean that they have been the entirely passive victims of external forces. Several historical and contemporary records show that the San do occasionally create authority figures and in many instances they practice storing economies. At times they have even mobilized themselves as mounted raiding bands in response to intruders. Thus, in contrast to the prevailing view that San egalitarianism is pervasive and renders them utterly passive in the face of external challenges, I shall argue that *their fidelity to egalitarian principles is context bound*. Other San cultural propositions may prevail in certain contexts and facilitate creative and active responses, both economic and political, to external pressures. One pertinent task is thus to identify and examine the conditions under which the San engage in the re-construction of their social order in a way that facilitates their resistance to external forces and ameliorates the destructive effects of land encroachment.

Phrasing the problem this way means that I reject the common assumption that foraging cultures constitute packages integrated around a compelling idea of equality. Rather, I follow Spiro who sees culture as a *set* of propositions (1984: 323). These propositions have to be identified and related to their socio-cultural context. In this pursuit, the analytical approach to the study of integration in culture, as developed by Professor Barth, seems to be extremely helpful. Accordingly, I shall consider consistency between the different values that coexist in a culture as on-going processes of social valuations by which values are confronted and ranked (Barth 1981: 48 ff.). The fruitfulness of using such a processual approach in order to avoid the reification of foraging cultures, has been demonstrated by Henriksen (1973). He explains how in Naskapi culture the fundamentally competing valuations of autonomy and 'having' versus dependency and sharing manifest themselves in some critical social dilemmas, the resolution of which varies significantly as the Naskapi move from one social context to another. The present paper pursues this perspective, explaining why socio-economic inequality and authority figures are easier to tolerate, and even support, in certain social contexts, by carefully comparing the wide range of contexts in which the San are currently found.

Yet I do not of course entirely reject the notion of 'egalitarianism' or the pertinence of 'equality' among San foragers. Rather, the point is that in order to treat 'egalitarianism' as a *variable* in the analysis, this notion needs to be deconstructed. Patently, in most San studies the notion of 'egalitarianism' appears as a broad concept which, for instance, confuses distributive equality and ideas of equality. It is therefore impossible to see if manifestations of equality stem from virtues of equality or are the aggregate result of the pragmatics of action, determined by quite different kinds of valuations. Thus, while most studies *assume*, on the one hand, an

almost unilateral relationship between the level of values and ideas and, on the other, the level of behaviour and social organization, the present paper considers this relationship as a major issue, calling for careful investigation.

Encapsulation, Subordination and Encroachment

The San number between 40000 and 60000 people, who live widely distributed over most of Botswana, Eastern Namibia and in northern parts of South Africa. Some few groups are found in hunting-gathering bands. Most of them are now living in conjunction with ranchers and other pastoralists, or as squatters in the vicinity of various villages.

In the course of the past few centuries, the San hunter-gatherers and Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists have interacted in ways which have involved an increasing dependency and subordination of the San. At an early stage, probably stretching considerably into the nineteenth century, the relationship between the foraging San and the blacks was essentially one of non-dominance in that it mainly involved voluntary exchange: The San brought ivory, fur and ostrich feathers for which they received various manufactured goods.

This trade contributed to the raising of very large chiefly herds. Chiefly cattle, in combination with the influx of a large number of people from the East in the wake of the politico-military upheavals on the sub-continent, constituted the main preconditions for the rise of the Western Tswana chiefdoms (Gulbrandsen 1987). While this process entailed an integration of the majority of the population as full citizens of these chiefdoms, all San groups (together with some other demoted ethnic groups like some of the Bakgalagadi) have been recognized as secondary human beings only and kept outside the confines of this order (Schapera 1952). The extreme inferiority of the San is illuminated by the fact that they are also subordinate to the inferior groups of Bakgalagadi (Kuper 1970, Silberbauer and Kuper 1966).

The social character of this relationship has changed significantly over the past two centuries. At an early stage, serfdom was occasionally established by the capture of San children. Although such practices were probably brought to an end during the colonial era, San subordination to black communities has accelerated in other ways during the present century – and especially during the most recent years. Most critically, by the rapid expansion of the pastoral frontier, most San territories have been appropriated. By the extensive drilling of boreholes for watering livestock, the water-table has declined and the conditions for a mobile adaptation have deteriorated concomitantly.

These encroachments are worth noting. For while the San have appar-

ently been subject to more humane treatment, at least in terms of formal citizen rights and to some extent the support of public services (Gulbrandsen et al. 1986), the Botswana government has given no recognition to San territories, leaving them open for extensive ranching programmes (op. cit., Hitchcock 1980). At the same time, the San are not represented in any political or public administrative body.

The severe impact of these developments upon the San are perhaps best expressed by the fact that only about five percent of the San population is left with a hunting-gathering habitat intact. A large number of San are living on or in conjunction with cattleposts and ranches, which have either occupied or seriously affected their traditional area. An increasing number depend upon relatives who are employed as herders. The aggregation of what the pastoralists and ranchers now call a 'surplus population' is most apparent at the freehold ranches of Ghanzi (Childers 1976, Gulbrandsen et al. 1986; cf. Guenther 1979, Russel 1976, Wily 1982). Indeed, on these ranches the misery of the San life situation is very apparent, with high child death rates, tuberculosis frequencies and general malnutrition, among the worst in Africa.¹ While periods of drought - especially under the present conditions where the 'traditional,' regionally organized, security networks have been curtailed by the ever expanding pastoral frontier - are pushing many San out of a foraging adaptation (Hitchcock 1986, cf. Vierich 1982), it is quite telling that the nutrition situation among those very few who manage to continue as hunter-gatherers is exceptionally good compared to *national* standards (Gulbrandsen et al. 1986: app. 9-4; cf. Marshall and Ritchie 1984: 54ff., Marshall et al. 1985, Hitchcock 1982: 246). The ever increasing number of such a 'surplus population' is reflected in the rise of squatters in the vicinity of provincial villages. These squatters are the most ugly entailment of Botswana's extremely prosperous beef industry, involving an exceptionally high rate of criminal cases and an extensive use of alcohol.

San Creative Resistance to Encapsulation

Unlike some other fourth world peoples, the San have to a very limited extent, responded collectively and politically to the destructive impact of external forces. Furthermore, they have no support-movements, they are not at all organized beyond the level of the band or settlement groups, and they have no connection to international fourth world organizations.² The fact that the San often meet the encompassing political and economic forces with apathy and that they have great problems in establishing a new economic platform when the conditions for hunting and gathering deteriorate, is related to the character of their 'traditional' culture and social organization, commonly referred to as 'ideology of equality' and 'egali-

tarianism' (e.g. Lee 1982, Yellen 1985). Most accounts indicate that there is a certain notion of leadership among the foraging San, but its very informal character is always emphasized; decisions beyond the family level are based entirely upon silent consensus rather than on a leader's express decision (e.g. Lee 1979: Ch. 13, Marshall 1976, Silberbauer 1981, 1982). The foraging San favour a leader who is "modest in demeanor, generous in faults and egalitarian" (Lee 1982: 51). Such idealized traits, Lee says, are denied by the "political arena of District Councils, Land Boards and nationalist politics (which) required someone who is male, aggressive, articulate, and wise in the ways of the wider world." (1982: 51; cf. op. cit.: 47, Hitchcock and Holm 1985)

This claim of a unilateral relationship between behavior and ideas is, however, far from unproblematic. For instance, although there are certainly differences in interactional style between, on the one hand, the Tswana and other blacks and, on the other, the foraging San, it is questionable if San political ineffectiveness can be explained satisfactorily in these terms. Apart from the dangerous proximity of Lee's explanation to psychological reductionism, rhetorical skills are well-developed and *tacitly* esteemed among the San, while aggressiveness is equally despised within Tswana political culture (e.g. Comaroff 1975).

Most importantly, this inference ignores numerous historical records as well as contemporary observations of San communities which have already formed or are in the process of forming a headmanship. For instance, among the north-western San, living in Southern Angola, there were bands of considerable size, each band having a recognized chief, the office of which was hereditary in the male line (Schapera 1930:150; cf. Kaufman 1910, Bleek 1928, Fourie 1928, Lchzelter 1928-29). Moreover, in

troubled times, during the last two centuries, a number of the Bushman groups of the Cape and Natal were organized politically in large groups (up to 1000 strong), with centralized political power, mounted on horseback and armed with rifles (both stolen) and espousing militaristic institutions and values (Szalay 1983: 170-79, 194-96). (Guenther 1985: 3)

While Lee only refers briefly to such instances, almost as if they were novel deviances from an ancient San culture, these accounts give reason to question the notion that an egalitarian ideology acts as a basic constraint upon establishment of the headmanship.

The pertinence of this question is supported by observations which I have made recently in Central and Western Botswana where some San communities were in the process of adapting to a sedentary setting, establishing themselves as agro-pastoral farmers, within the framework of a separate land base. These communities included from about seventy to several hundred San. They had chosen their headmen who had estab-

lished courts where cases were tried and where communal affairs were discussed and decided upon under the presidency of the headmen.³ Some of these communities were established by governmental extension workers, but not all of them. Moreover, in the wake of this governmental initiative, other groups on the freehold ranches took initiative to obtain their territorial footing beyond the confines of the ranches. The San explained that they found it useful, and that they had also copied Bakgalagadi and Tswana customs and law when this was considered helpful.

In fact, it was not difficult to identify issues and problems, the solution of which these institutions certainly facilitated. One of their main current problems is to have the headmanship officially recognized and their court integrated in Botswana's customary court system. Considerable complaints were levelled against the Government's apparent reluctance to meet their request. Furthermore, in the eastern part of Central District, there are various large San communities which show sufficient strength to pursue tough disputes with Tswana communities on significant land issues.⁴ Kent (n.d.) reports on the formation of political leadership among San groups in Western Kweneng. Generally, the overall changing economy, has "prompted a need for individuals who could make decisions. . . . Social role specialization was the result." (Hitchcock 1987: 239)⁵

This does not mean that there are no ambiguities or conflicts surrounding San leadership. Moreover, such difficulties might arise from the leaders' problem of, on the one hand, acting efficiently in external affairs, and, on the other hand, satisfying commitments embodied in his internal relationships (cf. Hitchcock and Holm 1985, Lee 1982). In view of the fact that the position of the leader constitutes the extremely difficult point of articulation between internal interests and external forces, we have all the more reason to expect such problems. Nonetheless, the main point here is that decision-making agencies have, in principle, been *formed* by various San communities. This means that, in many instances, it would be inadequate to conceptualize conflicts and tensions surrounding leadership as entirely a matter of imposed 'external leaders' versus traditional 'internal leaders' (Lee 1982: 50), although such an opposition may well be exploited rhetorically in conflicts and disputes surrounding a leader.

The notion of 'egalitarianism' or ideology of equality (Lee 1982: 53) as an obstacle towards social and economic change has its second principal reference to sharing and the absence of accumulation: the "IKung are fiercely egalitarian people, and they have evolved a series of important cultural practices to maintain this equality . . ." (Lee 1979: 244; cf. 1982: 53, 1979: 412 ff.).

However, in several cases, San are reportedly accumulating livestock; "the majority having been acquired through purchase, exchange, or as payment for services rendered." (Hitchcock 1987: 29) In some of the

Ghanzi settlement communities livestock schemes have been implemented (Gulbrandsen et al. 1986). These are based upon the principle that people borrow breeding cows from a pool to which they are returned. After only a few years, several families have been able to establish their own small herds, and to satisfy the terms of the scheme by returning the borrowed cattle. A similar situation has been reported by Marshall and Ritchie (1984) in San communities in Eastern Namibia. The fact that very few families have been able to raise a *viable* herd does not reduce the significance of this point.⁶ The critical constraints upon saving is seemingly not found in the San socio-cultural field, but in the wider socio-economic, political and ecological environment encapsulating San societies (cf. Hitchcock op.cit.).

Explicitly rejecting the common anthropological assumption that the present foraging San were uncontacted, static foragers, recent archaeological findings suggests that:

population groups in Botswana have been more opportunistic and open to changes in subsistence strategies and, likely, social systems than the standard anthropological categories of hunter-gatherer or herder-farmer would suggest. Some hunters and gatherers in the Kalahari apparently vacillated between *foraging and food production in the past*. (Denbow 1984: 179 emphasis added; cf. Hitchcock 1987: 221ff.; Denbow 1983, 1984, 1986; Denbow and Wilmsen 1983, Wilmsen 1978, 1982; Schrire 1980; Hitchcock 1978, 1982; Yellen 1984, 1985; Gordon 1984, Wilmsen 1989)

Thus, it seems that the San culture has been exposed to fundamental adaptive shifts at different historic and pre-historic stages. The most well-documented instance of contemporary food-producing San are those of the Nata river, among whom one is the Bateti (cf. Cashdan 1979, 1985, 1986). This group has headmen with real power, who cultivate gardens and who are wealthy cattle owners. Their apparent prominence has been based upon their control of the fertile flood plain. They have managed to retain this control even after the influx of the centralized agro-pastoralists of Kalanga in the area. From the same region, Hitchcock generally reports that "with increased sedentism there is a concomitant increase in territorial identification and demarcation . . . The rights to agricultural fields are passed down through the male line . . ." (1982: 251). Moreover, "trends towards increasing social complexity . . . (imply) that leadership roles have also begun to emerge among settled Basarwa" (op. cit.: 252-3). It is, indeed, of great significance to the present issue that while the activities of hunting and meat-sharing are forcefully subordinated egalitarian principles in a foraging context (Lee 1979: 244 ff.), "(a)long the Nata a specialized hunt leader, known as *dzimba*, emerged" (Hitchcock loc.cit.).

In conclusion, the progressive deterioration of San foraging adaptation has brought many San groups into a miserable situation characterized by

extreme political and material marginality. Nonetheless, the instances of active and creative responses to encapsulation and encroachment challenge the prevailing thesis of 'egalitarianism' as an imperative cultural premise which forcefully prevents the shift to storing economies and the development of authority figures.

The Context-Bound Importance of Equality and Sharing Practices

The rejection of the *imperative* character of 'egalitarianism', calls for an investigation of the conditions under which the San have subordinated these cultural premises to other values. In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of how such transformations may come about, it is necessary to consider more carefully what this broad notion of 'egalitarianism' actually should mean in a San foraging context and how this notion can be related to the social process. This examination will focus upon the hunting-gathering !Kung, about whom a wealth of valuable ethnographic accounts are available, and who form the group of reference for Lee's and others' notion of 'egalitarianism'. I shall pursue my issue, first with reference to 'sharing' and then to the question of 'leadership'.

The daily gathering activities are carried out in joint expeditions of women, however what is collected remains mainly within the individual family (Lee 1979, Marshall 1976) where it represents the essential source of subsistence (Lee *op. cit.*). In contrast, hunting is pursued by small groups of 2-3 men. Although meat is not essential for survival, "(t)he !Kung are quite conscious of the value of meat-sharing and they talk about it, especially about the mutual obligations it entails." (Marshall 1976: 302, emphasis added) Such mutual obligations are aspects of social relationships the character of which varies significantly.⁷ On the one hand, there is a system by which individuals and families establish relationships of reciprocity, reaching far beyond the confines of the band, by which

each family creates ties which distribute its risk over the population . . . In good years, it will have access to the abundant wild crops in other areas. The hxaro relationship involves a balanced, delayed exchange of gifts, whose continuous flow gives both partners information about the underlying status of the relationship - one of a bond of friendship accompanied by mutual reciprocity and access to resources . . . each partnership links a person to a broad network of hxaro paths (Wiessner 1982: 66; cf. Marshall 1976: 287ff, Silberbauer 1982).

This extensive pattern of high frequency exchanges, ensuring a wide distribution of goods, basically springs from the fact that, from the individual family's point of view, it is imperative to survival in such a marginal environment.

Within the band, on the other hand, there are no such benefits to be reaped, since the members are dependent upon the same resource base. While veld food is not shared within the band, meat is. So what sanctions are at work within this context, entailing an extremely high concern about fair distribution? This question seems pertinent in view of the fact that

(a)fter a run of successful hunts . . . the hunter may stop hunting in order to give other men the chance to take the limelight; . . . a too energetic hunter or gatherer might be appreciated up to a point, but then would begin to draw the envy and resentment of others. (Lee 1979: 249, emphasis original)

This points to a leveling mechanism which reflects an extreme sensitivity towards successful hunters who may attempt to achieve social esteem or exercise social domination. Thus, they are "cutting down to size the arrogant and boastful, and . . . helping those down on their luck to get back in the game." (Lee 1979: 244) This factor is apparently of considerable significance, because it sets constraints upon the total access to meat (for which they are, reportedly, hungry all the time). Generally, the sensitivity towards social domination is illuminated by the prevailing concern about performing hunting and meat distribution in ways which do not disturb social relationships, patently expressed in standardized ways of playing down their own success.⁸

Now, how can we make sense of this emphasis upon the social value of equality among band members? Although they are always hungry for meat, good hunters are never encouraged. On the contrary, good hunting skills are acknowledged socially to a very limited extent and such capacities are forcefully kept under the social surface. That is, while hunting skills are tacitly esteemed, the San explicitly feared that its social expression - social ranking of band members - produces envy and jealousy. This fear seems to be closely related to the fact that

(t)hey must belong; . . . (t)hey are also extremely dependent emotionally on the sense of belonging and on companionship. Separation and loneliness are unendurable to them. I believe their wanting to belong and be near is actually visible in the way families cluster together in an encampment and in the way they sit huddled together, often touching someone, shoulder against shoulder, ankle across ankle. Security and comfort to them lie in their belonging to their group free from the threat of rejection and hostility. (Marshall 1976: 287-8)

Access to hunting partners is probably not the most important condition for the extraordinary high value placed upon companionship, since hunting is mostly carried out in small teams of two or three men, and since access to meat from large animals is not critical for survival. What is critical to them is the precariousness of social relationships, involving a serious danger of being left more or less in a social vacuum: The San may just prefer not to relate to each other since "nothing prevents them from split-

ting apart, except that an extremely small group is not viable. People may be based in the same territory, but they do not have to live together." (Marshall 1976: 197-8) Basically, in a foraging band there are no other corporate interests keeping people together than precisely those involving the value of 'belonging'.

In this perspective, it is easy to understand that there are strong incentives for the careful and extensive distribution of meat *within* the band as well. Marshall reports that "the !Kung are fully aware of the enormous social value of the sharing custom" which "helps to keep stress over food at a low intensity" (1976: 295). Moreover, "(t)he !Kung are quite conscious of the value of sharing meat and they talk about it, especially about the benefit of mutual obligations it entails" and "(t)he custom of gift-giving . . . comes second only to meat sharing in helping the !Kung to avoid jealousy and ill will and to develop friendly relations" (op. cit.:302-3). These are the pragmatics underpinning the apparently egalitarian ethos of sharing, expressed, for instance, by the fact that "(t)he idea of eating alone and not sharing is shocking to the !Kung. It makes them shriek with an uneasy laughter: Lions could do that, they say, not men." (op. cit.: 295)

Now, from what does the reportedly extreme sensitivity towards the social display of particular abilities and social domination spring? This question seems pertinent since the entailing sanctions may even discourage hunting and, thus, reduce the supply of meat. Although the !Kung may visit friends and kin beyond the confines of the elementary band, and although several bands may occasionally aggregate at one particular water point, the everyday lived-in social universe rarely comprises more than 30-40 persons (among whom many are non-adult persons). All accounts place great emphasis upon the fact that there are almost no possibilities for front stage / backstage demarcation within such a band, meaning that people's feelings and intimate concerns have to be revealed at all times within the bounded context of total social relationships. In other words, people are at all times critically dependent upon these relationships as the essential source for the reproduction of their self and for retaining their self respect while, at the same time, exposing critical shortcomings and sensitive emotions. Indeed, these essential qualities constitute the main *raison d'être* for attachment to a band. It is these qualities of band social relationships which, I re-emphasize, constitute the basic force of band integration. It follows that in order to retain such precarious, yet highly valued, social relationships, there is tremendous sensitivity towards such threatening actions as the display of tacitly esteemed abilities like hunting skills, expressed confirmation of oratory capacities, or the exercise of social domination.

Admittedly, at this point we easily run the risk of reducing the cultural ideas and valuations labelled 'egalitarianism' to a reflection of particular

psycho-sociological requirements. I will strongly resist such an inference. On the contrary, the present analysis is not based upon the assumption that primacy should be given to either the cultural or the social level. Rather, I am concerned with the systemic interdependencies between these levels, in terms of context-conditioned on-going processes. Accordingly, I have tried to argue that the ideas and valuations underpinning the foraging !Kung's extreme sensitivity towards competition and domination, are *given particular prominence in a foraging band context*. And precisely this prominence finds its confirmation in an elaborate ethos of commensality. Moreover, the sharing of esteemed scarce goods, constituting an extremely important system of signs to express commensality and mutuality, is in full agreement with foraging adaptive conditions.

This argument implies that the forceful disapproval of non-competitive and non-dominating actions does *not* mean that the foraging !Kung culture should be characterized as entirely 'egalitarian'. For instance, they constantly evaluate each other's hunting abilities, but without permitting these valuations to be expressed in terms of a stratification of *social* persons.

The cultural premises which stimulate high sensitivity towards competition and domination certainly have considerable bearing upon the question of leadership. In order to explain precisely why these premises are elaborated and given social predominance under the conditions of foraging adaptation, it is necessary to relate them to the socio-political process. While the question of leadership has predominantly been analyzed from the perspective of how egalitarianism is possible - i.e. how the San can avoid the formation of institutionalized leadership - I shall start this discussion from the opposite perspective by asking if the benefit which might be gained from formalizing leadership among foraging San would balance the costs of the giving up of autonomy. This approach will be helpful in order to specify the nature of the phenomenon which seemingly are an expression of egalitarianism, and, most importantly, show how these ideas constitute a system of evaluation and sanctioning which is inherently related to San foraging band organization. Marshall explains that:

Each group of the *kxai k"xausi* who compose the core of a band "own" exclusively the resources of plant food and water of their territory. By that I mean that the resources are not owned communally throughout the *Nyae Nyae* area. One band does not have the rightful access to another band's resources. Visitors and travelers from other bands must be invited or ask permission to partake of the resources. The plant foods are owned with strict definition and jealous concern. (op. cit.: 187)

Furthermore, "there is a man, a member of the *kxai k"xausi* group, who is called *k"xau n!a* or simply *k"xau*. In *k"xau n!asi*, *si* is the plural suffix, *n!a* means "old" or "big," *k"xau* means "owner." This person gives

focus to the ownership of the resources of plant foods and waterhole that his band lives on. He personifies that ownership and gives it a voice. He does not have stronger claim to the resources than the other *kxai k"xausi* or the incoming members of his band. He cannot withhold the resources from them nor do they feel that they receive the resources through his bounty. (op. cit.: 192)

The fact that veld food and water are resources which are "owned with . . . jealous concern," might involve conditions for a certain degree of incorporation on the band level, working in support of leadership. There are two main reasons why this is not the case. First, the principle of undifferentiated access to these resources within the band require no internal coordination. Second, there is no need to coordinate protection of these resources:

since the bands have not encroached upon or fought each other for the fertile areas in which the plant foods grow within the memory of the living people . . . Visiting being a common practice, it is better to visit than to fight. (Marshall 1976: 188)

Visiting is exercised in extensive (mainly kinship-based) networks, constituting a system through which the single family establishes *its own* security. Thus, the band constitutes a coalition of interests attached to demarcated natural resource loci, which individual families draw upon for a) satisfying recurrent subsistence needs and b) retaining a wider network of multiple bilateral arrangements which, from the individual family's point of view, constitute a regional socio-ecological matrix within which they can move when desired, or when compelled to do so for ecological and socio-political reasons.

In other words, the effective unit of operation within this environment is the individual family, whose adaptive field stretches far beyond the limits of the band. Thus:

separate bands, as whole units, do not engage together in any organized way in economic, ritualistic, or other activities. Whole bands may come together, but it is through the interaction of the individual members that they do so, usually through visiting. (Marshall 1976: 199-200)

Since the band does not constitute a unit of any significance with respect to the management of these highly critical networks, and since the individual family needs sufficient freedom to maneuver efficiently within this wider context (extensive visiting, display of generosity, etc.), subordination to a band leader would not only be superfluous, it would easily involve intolerable constraints.

In view of this point and the intricacies of complex band social relationships (cf. preceding paragraph on sharing), in combination with the fact that there is always a feeling of tacit attempts at domination, there is good reason to expect the foraging San's explicit rejection of any kind of

leadership which, in their mind, corresponds to that of the Black's headmanship (cf. Lee 1982: 48-9). This sensitivity towards domination is perhaps most clearly expressed by those persons whose actions come closest to any notion of leadership. That is, persons who exercise some personal influence by virtue of being excellent speakers or diplomatic mediators. Typically, "(n)one is arrogant, boastful, or aloof." (Lee 1982: 47) People who have tried to dominate others by a certain degree of aggressiveness have, in the worst instances, been killed - by community agreement (cf. Lee 1979: Ch. 13).

This analysis brings out that the notion of "the ideology of equality" (Lee 1982: 53) for explaining the absence of a headman and other authority figures (cf. loc. cit.), should, specifically, be referred to the positive valuation of autonomy - in addition to the sensitivity of competition and dominance as explained in the preceding paragraph. Thus, from an adaptive point of view, a foraging San headman would not only be redundant but probably involve significant constraints. However, what about headmanship as a conflict-resolving agency?

First, conflicts among band members rarely relate to property, the most important reason, of course, being that the value of those few possessions they do have is mainly established through the act of gift-giving and other forms of handing-over. Furthermore, "(d)isputes involving land resources are uncommon and rarely rise to violence." (Lee 1979: 370, cf. below) The most frequent controversies spring from more subtle tensions. The common method of handling such conflicts among the San is group-based: "In instances of wrongdoing or to avenge a wrong, group opinion is expressed in talking. Group opinion acts as a sanction and group disapproval as a punishment." (Marshall 1976: 193) Lee notes that such arguments are often "followed by a group split, as one of the principals leaves the camp for a cooling-off period." (Lee 1979: 372, cf. p. 367) The importance of this mode of conflict resolution, rather than that which might be established by a headman's authoritative judgement, is evident in view of the fact that band relationships are founded upon mutual trust and supportive, psycho-sociological intimacy.

Second, someone who is personally wronged by another may take his revenge. The fear attached to violence, and the fact that a good number of conflicts run out of control, helps to explain why "(m)y impression is that the Tswana court has proved very successful because the Bushmen have been relieved to have an outside agent take the heavy responsibility of resolving conflicts out of their hands." (Lee 1972: 361) An area is apparently here identified which aptly calls for a headman, preceding a court with some enforcement powers. The major constraint in this foraging context is that those conflicts, which are so serious that conflict-resolving measures of this kind are required, involve parties from different bands. In other words, a super-local headmanship would be necessary.

The conditions required to ensure sufficient politico-juridical integration in support of the operation of such a headmanship is obviously not present in a society where people, for adaptive reasons, have to be located in a very scattered manner, and where the conditions for supporting non-producers are very limited. This means that although a conflict-resolving agency would certainly have been highly beneficial, there is no resource base to support such an agency or the enforcement powers which would have to be attached to it.

In Western societies the connection between adherence to ideologies of equality and the distribution of goods and privileges is entirely ambiguous. As Bétéille (1986) argues in his criticism of Dumont's notion of 'homo aequalis' (Dumont 1977), these societies patently illuminate the ambiguous and often contradictory relationship between these levels, as they ideologically express profound adherence to 'egalitarianism' at the same time as they display some extreme features of distributive inequality. Correspondingly, we cannot take for granted that distributive equality among foraging San unambiguously rests upon ideas which encourage actors to sanction behavior which deviates from an egalitarian pattern. Accordingly, on the basis of the preceding analysis, I shall specify the various mechanism which ensure distributive equality.

Firstly, with respect to material scarcities, distributive equality springs from the operations of two types of relationships which work on the basis of completely different principles. External relationships are formed and operate on the basis of pragmatic rules, for the purpose of establishing ego-centered security networks. These operations are not indigenously evaluated with reference to the problem of greed or envy, and they are consequently not necessarily propelled by any idea of equality. Rather, the hxaro partners are concerned with the satisfaction of the principle of balanced reciprocity, the failure of which entails decline of a person's security network rather than accusation of greed.

Within the camp, however, material scarcities are shared according to the principle of generalized reciprocity. The operation of these relationships are supported by the valuation of generosity which is intimately connected to the value of social companionship and a relaxed, harmonious, non-competitive social milieu. It is essential to cultivate this milieu since it constitutes the social environment for the daily access to hunting-partners and for not being left in a social vacuum.

Secondly, as regards non-material scarcities, such as social rank and political authority, the extremely important and highly vulnerable value of social companionship seems to be equally difficult to cultivate in combination with any form of social ranking and political leadership. However, this is not the only factor which militates against the appearance of authority figures. On the pragmatic level, I have argued, the value of op-

rational flexibility in a wider regional social network would make attachment to a band authority figure redundant and constraining.

Distributive equality can be seen as a combined effect of both pragmatic-adaptive strategies within the family-centered networks of extra-band relationships and the critical problem of cultivating band social relationships. Since I have mainly related the pragmatic-adaptive strategies to relationships beyond the confines of the band, and the exercise of 'leveling mechanisms' to internal relationships, I do not suggest any relationship here between these strategic and valuational levels. Yet I do claim that the valuational basis for the exercise of 'leveling mechanisms' can be seen as a cultural resolution of prevailing adaptive dilemmas pertinent to foraging bands. In line with the perspective that systematization and consistency between different values that coexist in a culture is a matter of ongoing social processes through which values are confronted and ranked (Barth 1966), I argue that the emphasis placed upon generosity, autonomy and non-dominance serves to under communicate other valuational tendencies, viz. ambitions of domination, the admiration of hunting skills and oratory performance, the inclination to 'keep' etc. The critical importance of non-competition, non-domination etc. gain social momentum and cultural elaboration by virtue of the force with which such tacit valuations *need to be condemned* in a foraging context.⁹

The distinction between distributive equality and ideas of egalitarianism has been helpful to restrict the relevance of 'egalitarianism' to principles of reciprocity and non-dominance within bands. By identifying the motivating forces (springing from the precariousness of band social relations and a strong desire for autonomy) we have been able to establish the severe threat represented by such actions as 'keeping' and the display of domination and esteemed abilities. And it is to this specific, socially determined, set of oppositions that the prevailing notion about 'egalitarianism' should be referred.

This point has implications for using the notion of 'egalitarianism' in cross-cultural comparison. Its immediate bearing upon the present analysis may be stated as follows: It is true that the San, during everyday conversations, constantly take a great interest in topics related to social dominance and sharing. Yet, these expressions do not necessarily reflect what I claim to be the motivating forces, which have, analytically, to be kept separate from people's reasoning about and reflections upon their actions and more or less institutionalized practices. Thus, there is no reason to claim that egalitarian values (are) deeply built into hunting-gathering systems' (Woodburn op. cit.) more than valuations which potentially entail inequality.

However, if valuations which potentially may entail a certain degree of inequality are to such an extent despised and abandoned, how can they be reproduced? A distinction is to be made between, on the one hand, the

importance of the *activity* of hunting and hunting skills, and, on the other hand, the express giving of social esteem to persons who are particularly successful hunters. The reproduction of the valuation of hunting skills is conditioned by the fact that meat is always in short supply, dependent upon the demanding activity of hunting, where there are far more failures than successes.

Although this analysis is entirely based upon accounts of the !Kung, the essential empirical interdependencies which I have tried to establish certainly do not rest upon conditions particular to the !Kung, but seem equally pertinent to other foraging San. The context bound nature of valuation of relations of dominance and sharing among foragers is also perfectly illuminated by such a different group as the caribou-hunting Naskapi Indians of Labrador. Henriksen, reports for instance, that whereas "sharing . . . is fundamental to the social system," (1973: x) and forcefully emphasized during hunting in the interior, on the coast it is "possible to maximize the value of having" (p.xi).

I have brought out that San culture embodies values with the potential of creating social inequality. I have specified the exceptional socio-cultural processes pertinent to the San foraging adaptation by which such valuations are kept forcefully below the social surface. It is highly problematic to comprehend the interface between cultural premises and social action, as long as 'egalitarianism' is considered as an integrated package of compelling virtues and distributive equality is seen entirely as manifestation of the virtues of sharing and non-dominance.

Acceptance of Leadership and Storing

The connection between, on the one hand, distributive equality and the powerful emphasis put upon non-dominance and generous sharing, and, on the other hand, the adaptive context, establishes a baseline for specifying why the acceptance of storing, accumulation of productive resources (e.g., livestock) and a certain degree of authority assigned to a headman are, as I have already explained, found in some sedentary settlements of San agro-pastoralists. In sedentary adaptation it is not critical to cultivate extensive networks of partners in order to ensure access to essential resources in a larger region. Moreover, the premises for a pattern of generous, generalized reciprocity, found in foraging bands, are not readily apparent in the large, sedentary settlement: The stationary character of adaptation and the scale of the co-residential group always ensure an immediate social environment. While few corporate interests are attached to the foraging band, members of the sedentary agro-pastoral community increasingly experience that they have to jointly defend their collective in-

terests related to land, their access to various governmental resources and their jurisdictional integrity.

As the vast majority of families are basically dependent upon cultivation, incentives to store and accumulate productive resources work *uniformly* within the community. This is, however, not to say that there may be no constraints upon accumulation of, for instance, livestock beyond a certain level. Indeed, social disapproval – often motivated by envy and jealousy – of economic inequality are even found in societies where a hierarchical ideology is strongly expressed. Within the settlements the conditions for fearing envy and jealousy are not equally strong as in the small foraging bands because the threat of conflicts and tensions are not equally critical. Pertinently, some differentiation of social relationships with respect to degrees of intimacy and commensality in a co-residential group of a hundred people and more makes it easier to retain self respect while at the same time accepting that some of these relationships manifest some degree of domination and other forms of inequalities. The fact that people living in such communities actively attempt to differentiate their network of social relationships is manifested by the fact that they start constructing physically enclosed family compounds with considerable spatial separation (cf. Brooks et al. 1984).

This differentiation of social relationships also helps to explain why it seems to be easier to accept an authority figure and other forms of social domination in a settlement context. However, the propelling condition for the formalization of leadership follows from another comparison: While I have argued that headmanship under the conditions of foraging adaptation would not only have been redundant, but involve considerable unbalanced social costs as well, it is equally true that a sedentary settlement calls for an institution of this kind. Most importantly, whereas the foraging society includes no well defined group from which the authority of a headman can spring, the settlement includes a much more coherent and larger group which experiences a joint interest in defending their territorial and jurisdictional integrity vis-a-vis non-San agencies and competitive interests. Thus, establishment of a customary court, for instance, has been important to them: Having their own court, they can to a certain extent escape the Bakgalagadi headmen's jurisdiction.

In conclusion, the establishment of an authority figure can be related to two principal changes in adaptive conditions: (a) Scale of settlement, diversification of social relationship and higher degree of stability is likely to make it easier to accept relationships of unequal authority; (b) The formation of large, agro-pastoral settlements involves a fundamental shift in socio-political circumstances.

If it holds true that the social importance of non-dominance and extensive, instant sharing is pertinent to a foraging context, how can it be that

some accumulation and formation of leadership roles represent the exceptions rather than the general trend? How does this thesis fit with the ever more apparent misery of the rapidly increasing sedentary San? I shall pursue this issue by exploring a wider range of San group adaptations in an attempt to identify the most significant factors responsible for the socio-economic and political marginalization of the San, and consequently identify further the principal factors working in support of shifts to a storing economy and establishment of leadership.

The deprivation of many San communities reflects the progressive processes of socio-political and ecological encapsulation from which they can no longer escape. This means that most San groups no longer have a hinter-land to which they can withdraw, at the same time as they have the most difficult point of departure of all citizens of Botswana for establishing themselves as agro-pastoralists. Thus, one set of critical constraints springs from the dwindling natural resource base, the lack of initial productive resources for agro-pastoralism and localization outside the reaches of governmental development programmes (Hitchcock 1980, 1986; cf. Gulbrandsen et al. 1986). Furthermore, accumulation is obviously difficult among those groups who are partially dependent upon hunting and gathering, and therefore have to be somewhat mobile. This constraint is increasingly significant as the environment within which they are now confined for hunting-gathering expeditions becomes increasingly dry,¹⁰ making it very hard to combine hunting-gathering activities with the accumulation of livestock. It is most likely that such a combination was easier in earlier times when hunting-gathering activities were not restricted to areas with extremely limited surface water.

Another important constraint upon forming an agro-pastoral subsistence base is that the San – even less than the large number of poor agro-pastoralists in Botswana (Gulbrandsen 1990) – have no way of obtaining livestock since the termination of fur and ivory trade. Moreover, those working on cattleposts rarely receive more than milk, some food, and a few pieces of cloth. Those few who get a heifer from their master or who manage to buy one with earnings saved from labour migration, often find that relatives and others consume it.

These constraints, springing from the overall socio-economic and ecological marginalization of most of the San, are of critical importance. In addition, we must take into account the constraints which allegedly are rooted in the cultural premises of 'egalitarianism'. Patently, Lee provides, for instance, illuminating cases, recorded in the sixties, of individual !Kung who make an attempt to raise grain, only to experience that kin and others turn up at harvest and as the most natural thing quickly finish up the crop. He reports similar experiences among people who have some livestock. (cf. e.g. 1979: 412 ff.)

These attempts to store and accumulate are, however, made under con-

ditions which differ fundamentally from those found in the settlements. Lee exemplifies here the typical situation along the pastoral frontier where, relatively speaking, a few individuals and nuclear families are employed by a herd-owner to which an ever increasing number of kinfolk and others attach themselves, – not only to get access to water during the dry season, but also for milk and food. These individuals still find themselves in groups of marginalized hunter-gatherers where the principles of reciprocity constitute a major basis for coping with risk, and which are extremely vulnerable to devolution and scattering.

Hence, the disapproval of storing along the pastoral frontier is an expression of extreme economical-ecological marginality. One contributing factor is the partial pursuit of foraging activities which means that only a few have shifted to a basic dependency upon food-production. The significance of this point may be emphasized by invoking reports on the most recent developments among the !Kung: In contrast to Lee's observations in the sixties, it has more recently been reported that a "person can own several cows . . . if milk is shared, and own donkeys if they are lent to others" (Wiessner 1982: 82) and some

are now regularly and successfully planting crops and do not meet with social disapproval if they do not share their harvest widely, as long as they retain reciprocal obligations in other ways. Thus, more items have moved into the realm of private property and storage exists side by side with *hxaro* as a means to reduce risk. (loc. cit. emphasis added; cf. Brooks et al. 297, 306)

I have argued that an authority figure is likely to develop where (a) the size of the community is significantly larger than that of a band, (b) the people are bound to the site, and (c) the members of the community share some critical problems vis-a-vis external groups. Certainly, external relations have become extremely dangerous and destructive to the San, hence the conditions for incorporation seem to be fully satisfied. Nevertheless, few groups have established a court with a formal leader. Moreover, no San is a member of the formal political bodies at any level in the country. On the other hand, many groups depend upon a foreign headman to settle disputes. Reportedly, the !Kung "with no compulsion take a wide range of disputes . . . for arbitration." (Yellen 1984: 58; cf. Lee 1972, 1979) Furthermore, Yellen claims that without the external judicial assistance "strain would develop to a point where group cohesion would be significantly undermined." (loc. cit.) Yet, rather than concluding that "egalitarian beliefs prevent the emergence of a Basarwa chief or headman" (Yellen 1985: 22), it can be argued, in line with points (a) and (b) above, that such a transient situation differs from that of an agro-pastoral settlement in several significant respects, viz. scale of community¹¹ and material ties to the locality.¹² Most importantly, the large settled groups which I have observed in the Ghanzi District, find themselves in a situation where

they have to defend their interests in land, water and other collective estates vis-a-vis surrounding communities, and to try to take the advantage of adequate articulation with governmental and other external agencies. In other words, these groups of San have a common estate, the management of which calls for coordination of a much larger group than that of a foraging group and, consequently, a need for formalizing the rules governing a decision-making agency.¹³ Thus, under these conditions, informants in various San settlements in the Ghanzi District explicitly stressed the importance of escaping domination from outsiders, for example by establishing their own court under the conduct of a headman.

Their concern about achieving the same institutional and material benefits as in the surrounding black communities, and arranging and managing them in their own way, indicates processes which may be conceptualized in terms of 'dichotomization' and 'complementarization' (Eidheim 1968). That is, there seem to be attempts to raise a deprived status in a wider context of very pronounced ethnic stratification (cf. Guenther 1976, Tloug 1977, Lee 1982, Silberbauer and Kuper 1966), without abandoning their San identity.

On the basis of this review, I shall pursue the issue of context-bound valuations by taking a closer look at the relationships between storing, on the one hand, and (a) unequal authority relations, and (b) accumulation, with reference to 'egalitarian' virtues, on the other.

Now, how can it be, as the case of !Kung at Tsumkwe suggests, that while change to a storing economy may come about quite swiftly, San community leadership and a court of any significance are not established simultaneously – but only gradually and hesitantly? Probably the answer is that a common interest in the principle of storing does not necessarily mean that the community finds itself required to subordinate themselves to an authority figure. Available evidence suggests that an exaggeration of tensions and conflicts among inhabitants of a small settlement community is not a sufficient condition for the establishment of leadership as long as (a) spatial separation and gift-giving may still work as conflict resolving mechanisms (cf. Wiessner op. cit., see below), and (b) disputes and assault cases are brought to an external court. Some accounts suggest that foraging San found some relief in their access to Herero headmen for handling serious assault cases (Lee 1972), and that this subordination to a foreign group in order to sanction destructive actions is still accepted (Yellen loc.cit.).

This behaviour is not necessarily contradictory to the desire for establishing an independent court and leadership so strongly expressed in the large settlements. Rather, it emphasizes the significance of the essential conditions for establishment of leadership: the strongly felt need of the corporate community interests to establish an independent socio-political platform and politico-jural integrity.¹⁴ Moreover, the exercise of authority

vis-a-vis people whose identity relations and self image have been formed in social contexts where any kind of dominance has been forcefully condemned is facilitated by the scale of the community.

Regarding the relationship between the principle of storing and the question of accumulation, there has reportedly been "an increasing of differential wealth" (Brooks et al. 1984: 306; cf. Marshall and Ritchie 1984: 57), which is also expressed in gender relations (op. cit.: 307, cf. Draper 1975). Certainly, such a trend confirms not only that accumulation is accepted in principle, but also that a certain degree of socio-economic differentiation may evolve. My own observations, as well as those reported by others, clearly indicate that the actual socio-economic differences are, by almost every standard, very modest. Hence, it needs to be asked if this high degree of distributive equality among foraging San indicates that the value of 'egalitarianism' has, nevertheless, survived the shift to a food-producing situation.

Basically, distributive equality among food-producing San – which goes together with the prevailing poverty – reflects the marginality of San environment and productive resources. However, there are also particular levelling mechanisms in operation. Wiessner suggests that, under food-producing conditions, the !xaro system operates as a risk-reducing mechanism, resting on pragmatic, rather than ideological premises for sharing. She reports that "many !Kung are really torn between the desire to accumulate goods and the desire to remain within a secure system of mutual help" (op.cit.: 82), the pragmatics of which involve other valuations than those implied by the notion of 'egalitarianism'. Moreover, the significance of a connection between distributive equality and the pragmatics of scarcity value management is perfectly expressed among the Nata River San, who for a long time have been mainly dependent upon cultivation and stock raising. They have developed an extensive reciprocity network for grain, which entails a relatively high degree of distributive equality. Evidently, this system is developed for the purpose of coping with risk, as commonly is the case among agro-pastoralists (especially under marginal environments) and not primarily for satisfying some ideas of equality (Cashdan 1985, cf. 1980). The fact that completely new forms of reciprocity systems may evolve in sedentary, food producing contexts, confirms the pragmatic, rather than ideological, base for distributive equality. This point is illuminated by the !Kung of Tsumkwe. Those of them who have started working for wages in Namibia, hold their jobs for a shorter period, "supporting others with their income, but eventually quit work and take time to sit back and 'rest' and let others support them." (op. cit.: 79)

These points bring out that equalizing forms of reciprocity may well be combined with a food-producing, storing economy and wage labour. It is the imperativeness of the value of generosity within foraging bands, enforcing *instant* sharing of meat and some other highly esteemed goods,

which is incompatible with food production. Although storing and 'keeping' are despised and incompatible with the social viability of a foraging band, it does not follow that the idea of generosity is contradictory to a food-producing situation. In one situation where a shift to food production has taken place quite recently, the *!xaro* system "appears to be developing into one in which people exchange gifts to smooth over relations rather than to gain access to goods and resources . . ." (Wiessner 1982: 82-3). Thus, where sedentary groups have not yet managed to establish an authority figure to conduct arbitration, an extensive display of generosity may be employed as a method for coping with conflicts, and not necessarily for satisfying egalitarian virtues or for cultivating exchange partnerships.

The point that generosity is not necessarily contradictory related to a storing adaptation, suggests that while tensions between 'having' and 'giving' in the context of the band (cf. Lee 1982: 56) are forcefully resolved to the advantage of 'giving', it is not equally compelling to support 'having' in food-producing settlements (cf. Henriksen 1973: 85ff). Quite the contrary, as I have argued here, both economic and social viability of such settlements may be well supported by the exercise of such levelling mechanisms.

The employment of sharing practices in a transitional situation suggests that the San foraging culture embodies elements which may facilitate the transition to a storing economy and to relations of unequal authority. This point receives further support from an account of the formation of leadership among the Nharo of Ghanzi. Guenther reports that

(i) In Ghanzi the trance dancer is a powerful rallying symbol that represents the Bushman people and their culture . . . It becomes positive and assertive, offsetting the worthless and inferior self-image hitherto held by the majority of the farm bushmen . . . When (they) . . . debate who could be a suitable headman for the Ghanzi Bushmen, it is often the consensus that this should be one of the great dancers. The dancer is assigned the potential role of the charismatic political leader with far-ranging authority. (Guenther 1975: 165; cf. Katz 1982: 277 ff.)

The authority of the dancer in this new context springs from a significant increase in rituals and elaboration of esoteric knowledge "as disease, death, the supernatural and matters of eschatology and world view have become overwhelmingly confusing" (Guenther 1975: 163). Thus, under certain conditions formation of San leadership is facilitated not only by a readiness to re-evaluate the importance of non-dominance and autonomy, but also by the fact that some of those qualities, tacitly esteemed under foraging conditions, are drawn upon in the pursuit of establishing authority.¹⁵

Yet, one may then well ask: On the cultural level, does a shift from mobile foraging bands to stationary, food-producing settlements merely involve activation of certain cultural elements and de-activation of others? This is certainly not the case. Although foraging San culture seemingly embodies some element of significance for the establishment of an authority figure, the cultural competence needed to create a community government and to deal efficiently with their politico-administrative environment is limited compared to the blacks of the area. Thus, when they under large-scale sedentary settlement conditions try to meet their need for a court, they depend heavily upon ideas and normative rules developed among their neighbours. As already suggested, in such communities the San are quick to explain that they are ready to copy their neighbours to the extent that their ideas and practices appear useful. But precisely how foreign models are selected and translated into a San cultural scheme remains to be investigated. The point being made in this paper is that there do not seem to be any *imperative* ideas 'deeply embodied' in San culture (i.e. 'egalitarianism') which entirely prevent the creative work of enhancing their politico-administrative capacity.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the prevailing miseries of most San groups basically spring from forces of ecological encroachment and economic marginalization. Under marginal conditions the ideas of equality, pertinent to the foraging context, militate against socio-political incorporation, the creation of an authority figure and the accumulation of wealth. However, when the San are compelled to leave hunting and gathering as a principal subsistence activity, and especially when they aggregate in larger sedentary communities with a certain degree of territorial integrity, they start reconstructing their social relations and consequently reevaluate the relative importance of those ideals and practices critical under foraging conditions. Among these are ideals and practices summarized by the notion of 'egalitarianism'.

In order to reveal the context-bound significance of 'egalitarianism', this notion has been deconstructed since it confuses ideals of non-dominance and sharing with features of distributive equality. Distributive equality partly results from people's pragmatic operation of the *!xaro* and other trans-band exchange systems. The express valuations of such sharing practices (through extensive gift-giving, frequent visiting etc.) should be seen as context-bound reflections of their adaptive suitability. Moreover, these valuations should not be confused with those prevailing within the context of the band, where there is a notorious concern about how meat and other esteemed goods are shared among all its members,

and where any tendency of 'having' and 'keeping' is forcefully condemned.

These valuations are expressions of some critical dilemmas prevailing in the San lived-in social world, and they are spoken of in terms of such oppositions as greed versus generosity. The existential pertinence of these oppositions in a foraging context basically springs from the precariousness of band social relationships, constantly involving, for each and everyone, the danger of being relegated to a social vacuum. For the foraging San, the distribution of meat and gift-giving represent, besides 'talking', the most important means for continuously ensuring the quality of their social relations within the band. I argue that these concerns constitute the *motivating forces* underpinning the constant interest taken in the issue of within-band sharing. In this perspective, their extreme interest in this issue during everyday conversations expresses their collective reflections on the critical aspects of the foraging band life-situation in terms of particular cultural propositions.

This point invokes the problem of cultural reification represented by the notion of 'egalitarianism'. It is commonly suggested that the foragers' unanimous and forceful approval of equalizing practices reveals the most fundamental values and ideas in the San culture. I argue, on the contrary, that rather than consider such expressions as reflections of 'basic' cultural propositions, they should be seen as valuations people make with respect to critical problems recurrently springing from their lived-in social universe, *in terms of* a set of codes and values, selected from their cultural frames, pertinent to the interpretation of and communication on such problems.

Accordingly, I have argued that the extreme enforcement of 'levelling mechanisms' would have no meaning unless the values they serve are constantly threatened by some competing valuational tendencies. This means that, in the same way as egalitarian tendencies operate under the surface of the prototype of a hierarchical system - the Indian caste system (cf. Parry 1974) - tendencies of inequality are prevailing under the social surface of such a prototype egalitarian system as that of the foraging San. While both cultural tendencies are, in most societies, socially expressed and acknowledged (Béteille 1986), the forceful rejection of inequality in the foraging band springs from its extreme vulnerability to its inherent hierarchical tendencies.

Thus, the San culture embodies certain potentials for the formation of leadership. Yet I do not make the case for a wholesale rejection of 'egalitarianism' as an obstacle to the establishment of an authority figure and a sedentary storing economy. Rather, by the deconstruction of this notion and by relating its elements to the different lived-in social contexts, it has been possible to explain under which conditions specific elements hidden by this notion actually militate against such a fundamental shift. More-

over, this approach has been helpful to show that certain mechanisms which, under foraging conditions, work in favour of equality (sharing), may be employed by the San in their struggles to cope with conflicts and tensions during transitional phases.

This fact suggests an important point which exceeds the limits of this paper: I have stressed the importance of *not* taking for granted the assumption that the ideas and practices which have great social significance under the conditions of the foraging band remain equally essential to the San when they live in large sedentary communities. Nonetheless, any *comprehensive* study of the shift from foraging bands to sedentary communities should account carefully for ideas and practices which are retained in spite of such a dramatic shift. And I believe that the processual approach applied in this paper might prove equally useful for such an endeavour. For instance it reveals the following as a pertinent example of cultural reproduction under changing conditions: the activation of generosity, according to customary notions of sharing, in order to cope with tension in transitional contexts.

Finally, the question is whether or not the foregoing discussion of the notion of 'egalitarianism' has any bearing upon the study of foraging societies other than the San. A major intention of this paper has been to demonstrate the need for deconstructing this notion and for culturally establishing its elements with reference to the social context in which they are activated. This methodological point seems generally relevant to any analysis of 'egalitarianism'. In more substantial terms, this paper warns against conceiving the enforcements of 'levelling measures' as indications of egalitarian values which are, under all circumstances, more fundamental or genuine than those values which favour hierarchical tendencies.

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NOTES

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1 Information was provided by physicians in the Ghanzi district, 1985.
2 However, there are several other international forces which seriously affect their lives: The EEC has propelled commercialization of pastoralism by an exceptionally advantageous beef trade agreement (von Massow 1983, cf. Gulbrandsen 1990). International wildlife interests have responded forcefully to the consequent destruction of the natural environment by extensive international propaganda directed towards the Botswana Government as well as the EEC.

3 In Xade, West Hanahai, Tshibukwane, and Tsawe. During a field visit in December

- 1985, the settlement at Groote Laagte was about to be formed and the traditional doctor acted as an apparently non-controversial leader and spokesman vis-à-vis governmental agencies. (Gulbrandsen et al. 1986) Guenther reports that the formalization of leadership has already taken place on the Ghanzi farms (1976). According to information obtained in Ghanzi township in 1990 the San headman of West Hanahai is acting as a headman in the *kgotla* (customary court) of the Ghanzi township, when the Ghanzi headman, for one reason or another, is unable to chair court sessions.
- 4 For instance, the large San settlement of Lepokole is currently in a serious dispute over water-rights and territorial control with the people of Bobonong in northeastern Botswana.
 - 5 Among others he refers to "those along the Nata, (who) began to select their own leaders to represent them and assist in resolving disputes. In the latter case, some groups looked to the person who had been the territory "owner" or /!kaiha, while in other instances groups chose the local hunt leader, the dzimba, to represent them in judicial and political affairs." (loc.cit., emphasis mine)
 - 6 In fact, only a small number of all rural families in Botswana at large are in a position to subsist solely from their livestock. Most families also rely upon extra-farming income (Gulbrandsen 1990).
 - 7 Marshall explains that after the hunting partners and kinship obligations have been satisfied, the distribution of one's own portion has the quality of gift-giving. 'Kung society requires in such instances that "a person should give with reasonable generosity in proportion to what he has received and not keep more than an equitable amount for himself." (Marshall 1976: 299). Silberbauer notes that there are "few formal arrangements governing the distribution" (p. 233). It is "guided more by the needs of the recipient than by the magnitude or quality of obligation that the gift of meat is intended to meet. The quality of obligation is a function of the relationship between giver and recipient and is expressed in the frequency, rather than size of the gift."
 - 8 For example, upon returning from a successful hunting expedition, one of Lee's informants explains, that the hunter "must not come home and announce it like a braggart, I have killed a big one in the bush! He must first sit down in silence until I or someone else comes up to the fire and asks . . ." (1979: 244).
 - 9 Functionally speaking, San egalitarian virtues serve a similar purpose as in Western societies: to counteract tendencies toward inequality. The exceptional character of the foraging band, however, is that any tendency toward inequality is forcefully kept under the surface. No available records indicate that the San have any ideology of egalitarianism in the Western sense of this notion, which emphasizes equal rights and opportunities. First, their own reasoning about sharing seems to reflect a prime concern about mutual obligations and management of social relations, rather than the satisfaction of any over-arching idea about social equality. Second, with respect to leadership, the western notion of equal opportunities would have been redundant, because they reject entirely any idea of hierarchical relations.
 - 10 Due to the declining water-table, caused by the large cattle owners' drilling of boreholes.
 - 11 It has been documented convincingly that "reduced mobility did not lead to an increase in local group size among eastern Botswana Basarwa but rather resulted in a decrease." (Hitchcock 1982: 251) This pattern reflects the dispersed distribution of resources upon which sedentarization is based in this region: cattleposts / boreholes and arable lands. However, where sedentarization involves the establishment of agro-pastoral settlements supplemented by labour migration, these settlements may be much larger, as in the Ghanzi District (e.g. Gulbrandsen et al. 1986) and Tsumkwe (Marshall and Ritchie 1984, Yellen 1985).
 - 12 In fact, the transient character of many of these small settlements along the pastoral frontier is reflected in the fact that individuals (men in particular) may shift from cattle post employment to a foraging adaptation (e.g. Vierich 1982), and that there are more extensive shifts from sedentary to mobile adaptations according to periodic drought cycles (Hitchcock 1982: 235-6, 1978, 1985). This reflects the fact that a sedentary, food-

- producing adaptation is not at all more attractive in this environment, and that where such a shift takes place it is typically caused by permanent or temporary deterioration of a foraging adaptation (e.g. Hitchcock and Ebert 1984, Marshall and Ritchie 1984).
- 13 Correspondingly, Cashdan notes that "the clearest evidence for their (Bateti headmen's) power is that they had the ability to allocate (and deny) flood-plain land to newcomers. The information concerning this was corroborated by many informants of different ethnic groups." (1986: 308)
 - 14 Lee (1972) nicely portrays the formation of semipermanent settlements of some 150 !Kung in the Dobe area in conjunction with a Herero borehole. Lee suggests that they "had achieved a semipermanent public life situation . . . the presence of the Hereros as mediators, backed by the Batawana Tribal Authority . . . provides the (legal) umbrella that enables 150 Bushmen to live together in relative harmony for the greater part of the year." (1972: 348-9) This is a typical transitional situation found along the pastoral frontiers, characterized by lack of any corporate interests among the San, combined with high degree of dependency upon their masters. During my own visit to the area in 1990, Herero dominance was still very significant. Yet, many of the San settlements had by this time created their own authority figure.
 - 15 While a trance dancer is selected as a leader in some cases, in other cases "an articulate, well-liked individual who had been to the mines and to both government and tribal meetings" (Hitchcock 1982: 253), might be preferred.

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6

Negotiations Within Households

Dynamics Connected with Constituting and Splitting Up of Household Units in Rural Turkey

Arne Tesli

1

Introduction

Household structures are often looked upon as relatively fixed. And kinship-relationships are often discussed as constituting a framework for organizing household units and cooperation within these units.

Here I will discuss some prerequisites for cooperation or fission among members of households, and I will relate this to the measurement of the utility and drudgery of work in peasant households. More specifically, I examine the processes that lead to *cooperation and fission in households* in Sarkisla, Turkey. Much of my discussion will relate to Chayanov's work where he discusses peasant economy within a perspective confined strictly to household economy. His analysis has proved appropriate, relevant and valuable in a number of cases; it facilitates identification of the income situation of decision units in rural areas and insight into how these units allocate their labour resources. My analysis adopts this approach as its point of departure.

Chayanov's approach does, however, also have some clear limitations: it tends to treat households as relatively static units. They do not appear to have a dynamic of their own (*Eigendynamik*). And except for the influence of market prices, they are seen to be affected only by demographic developments - that is, the household's developmental cycle. Marshall Sahlins' discussion of Chayanov's rule is, in my opinion, hampered by the same kind of limitations.

During my fieldwork among Turkish peasants, I observed that the household units in their villages were influenced by a series of processes in addition to those generated by natural demographic changes. In order to analyze the kind of processes going on within these migrant households, I think it is useful to apply a transactional perspective, like the one