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## The Foraging Mode of Thought

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## The Foraging Mode of Thought

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### INTRODUCTION

It is only very recently that a concentration of interest in what hunter-gatherers or foragers think, especially Bird-David's [1990] notion of the 'giving environment', has provided an effective cross-cultural analytical framework. Still, Bird-David's notion gives us only a partial understanding. Woodburn's phrase 'immediate return' [e.g., 1980; 1982] gives us another important one, but I believe that Woodburn's restriction of the term to cover only certain kinds of society reduces the impact of his concept for the understanding of similarities between the way foragers in foraging societies and foragers in mainly non-foraging societies think.

In addition, part-time foragers have aspects of a foraging mode of thought as well. Thus the idea is of wider applicability than is usually understood by those who describe 'pure' foraging (or hunting-and-gathering) societies, though it retains the emphasis on foraging as a way of life and not just means of subsistence.

In a recent paper exploring potential conflicts between hunter-gatherers and bureaucrats [BARNARD 1998; cf. BARNARD 1993; 2002], I drew a distinction between the foraging mode of thought and that which I call the accumulation mode of thought. I shall draw on that earlier paper here, and on the idea of bureaucrats as archetypal exponents of the accumulation mode. This paper focuses on five general topics: (a) economy, (b) politics, (c) kinship, (d) land, and (e) identity (by ethnicity and by former lifestyle).<sup>1)</sup> Of course other possibilities exist, notably those which entail the potential of relative equality (presumed in the foraging mode of thought) versus relative inequality (characteristic of the accumulation mode of thought): gender, age, ritual practice, etc. My central examples are drawn from N/oakhoe, Basarwa, Bushman or San populations of Botswana and Namibia; and I propose these collectively as a case study to illustrate my general points.<sup>2)</sup>

### DEFINITIONS AND GOALS

It is worth emphasising at this point that my approach in this paper is largely speculative. My goal is to elucidate the key attributes of what I see as a mode of thought inherent in both 'foraging societies' and (thought to a lesser extent) among those on the fringes of societies who still pursue a way of life in other ways reminiscent of those who forage for a living. It is true that concern in Western and Japanese anthropology has been mainly with the effects of hunting and gathering as intentional human activities (see, e.g.,

Ingold [1988]). This is in fact the case on both sides of the 'Kalahari Debate' (see Barnard [1992a]). However, what I want to explore here is the perception of a way of life of hunting and gathering, or of foraging in a wider sense. The foraging mode of thought transcends the boundary between foragers per se and members of other kinds of society. It includes part-time hunter-gatherers who live on the outskirts of Tswana society, and in some respects (notably with regard to economics and politics) rural Gypsies and even urban beggars in industrialised Europe. It is not the specific activity which is important, but the way of life epitomised by the range of subsistence activities and attitudes towards them.

Therefore, my definition of 'foragers' is necessarily a wide one and even a loose one. I include not only 'pure' hunter-gatherers, but also people who procure their subsistence by petty-theft, foraging in dustbins, and taking short-term employment with the intention of leaving it once the first payment is made. My specific concern, though, is with those who still hunt and gather or who identify with a hunting-and-gathering lifestyle practised by their immediate antecedents.

When I refer to 'hunter-gatherers', I mean people who see themselves as hunters or gatherers. 'Foragers' is yet a wider category. When I distinguish 'foraging' from 'non-foraging peoples', it is the former category which includes recent former foragers. These are populations whose older representatives remember the foraging lifestyle, or populations which retain values associated with foraging culture. My findings in the Kalahari and my premise more widely is that foraging populations are more resilient than has previously been acknowledged. Mode of thought is more resilient than mode of production generally, and the two are interdependent: old divisions between base and superstructure are broken down by this interplay. To some extent this remains a general hypothesis to be tested, but I hope that both the evidence presented here and, more importantly, the framework used, will provide a basis for the re-assessment of the forager/non-forager divide.

This important self/other divide, as we shall see, is not only one within anthropology or within specific societies, but a widespread one among indigenous peoples and among those who see themselves in opposition to indigenous peoples. Thus the foraging mode of thought is both an insiders' and outsiders' view, in the sense that it designates both how these people perceive their own way of living and how we characterise them too. More than that, the foraging mode of thought also represents a charter for action or inaction (on the part of foragers), and indeed for reaction (on the part of others). In Bourdieu's sense [e.g., 1977; 1990], it forms a habitus of embodied dispositions, which defines both the range of appropriate social actions within foraging societies and the form and character of transactions between foragers and others.

## **ACCUMULATION, CONSUMPTION, AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

In earlier papers, I have suggested that we should direct our attention away from production, in the narrow sense, and towards a wider understanding of social and environmental relations. More specifically, we need to develop an approach which takes account of the continuity of foraging culture, even after new modes of subsistence are taken up. Even economic relations can be resilient, especially when they encode social as well as

material functions.

N/oakhoe and most other hunter-gatherers have immediate-return economies. They take their food from the wild and generally use it immediately, without storing it and without either the necessity of storage or the need to plan for the future. Of course, they do accumulate and store (e.g., mangetti or mongongo nuts in the case of the Ju/'hoansi or Central !Kung), but the point is that they value sharing over accumulation. They value sharing not just in the sense of a belief that those who share are 'good people', but in the sense that failing to share is an act of bad faith. It is literally anti-social, as society itself is constructed on the ideal of widespread sharing (see Fig. 1). Those who do not share are ridiculed for not doing so (see, e.g., Lee [1993: 183-188]). Furthermore, the ideology of sharing persists among part-time and former foragers. Sociality depends on sharing, and is offended by accumulation. Such an attitude to labour and to saving is entirely contradictory to that of members of other societies.

Evidence for this includes the very fact that people conceal accumulation, while nevertheless acknowledging its existence. For example, one may have two tobacco pouches—a full one, which is hidden, and a relatively empty one, to show people and to share from. I should also emphasise that although many non-foragers (including most 'traditional Africans') share more widely to individuals than do people in longstanding capitalist cultures, sharing among foragers is of quite a different magnitude. Foragers frequently share with everyone (e.g., all those involved in a hunt), not just with their near kin or their chosen charity.<sup>3)</sup>

Of course, sharing is only the most extreme form of redistribution in foraging societies. There are also, for example, practices of gambling, as among the Hadza [WOODBURN 1968: 53-54], long-term lending and borrowing of possessions, as among the Kua of Kutse [KENT 1993: 496-497], and delayed exchange of non-consumable, movable property, as among the Ju/'hoansi and Nharo [WIESSNER 1982: 66-83]. Take the last instance, what is called *hxaro*

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>non-foraging peoples</b>   |  |
| <i>(coming from a community in which goods are not widely shared)</i> |  |
| accumulation  | social (= saving for self and dependants)    |
| immediate consumption   | anti-social (= not saving)                   |
| <b>foraging peoples</b>   |  |
| <i>(coming from a community in which goods are widely shared)</i>     |  |
| accumulation  | anti-social (= not sharing)                  |
| immediate consumption   | social (= sharing with family and community) |

**Fig. 1.** Accumulation and consumption

among Ju/'hoansi or //aĩ (the verbal stem) among Nharo (Naro) (see, e.g., Wiessner [1982: 66-83]). *Hxaro* or //aĩ. is a sphere in which non-consumable, movable property is exchanged for similar property, but always with a delay of a day, a month, or a year. The duration of the delay does not matter, but the fact of it does. This sphere of delayed but balanced reciprocity actually overlies another, related sphere—that of generalised rights of access to resources, including water, firewood, and rights to hunt in one's exchange partner's territory. These combined spheres of exchange thus equalise access both to movable property and to natural resources. They also entail social responsibilities as well as economic obligations. Thus gift-giving and forms of sharing, although not identical and even operating in different spheres of exchange, can be closely linked.

In the 1970s I found //aĩ relationships very common and very important among Nharo who were settled on white-owned farms and worked as seasonal labourers. The practice of //aĩ enabled the foragers, the unemployed, and the under-employed to reap benefits from the employment of other Nharo. But employment in Nharo areas was often temporary, and certainly a minority pursuit; and accumulation was no more valued where employment existed than where it did not. *Hxaro* among Ju/'hoansi has been linked to the right to utilise non-*hxaro* resources, including access to water, firewood and game in one's *hxaro* partner's lands (see, e.g., Wiessner [1982: 67-68, 74-77]). Thus the existence of such a mechanism helps to equalise access not only to non-consumable property, but also to at least some of the produce of the land. It links the sphere of subsistence extraction to that of the transfer of material wealth—serving similar functions even to the potlatch of the Native Peoples of the Northwest Coast of North America [cf. PIDOCKE 1965]. Yet as with the Northwest Coast groups, we are nevertheless talking about linked spheres, not one sphere of exchange.

During the drought of the 1980s, Nharo were still engaged in //aĩ transactions in earnest, and today the pressures for redistribution must be even greater, as some Nharo have seemingly entered fully into the capitalist system (the artists of D'Kar who paint for the world market are good examples). Yet they remain in a community whose values still include sharing and whose suspicions are still aroused by visible accumulation beyond the means of the ordinary individual. In the past there were artists—whether they were musicians, trance performers, or for that matter, rock painters or engravers. But in the past too, artists were equal to others in material aspirations. While economic forces today are appreciably different, I would not write off the preservation of the ethos of sharing and its Nharo corollary, delayed balanced reciprocity, even there. The characteristic flexibility of foraging societies includes a flexibility inherent in these specific economic structures. They work for Khoisan peoples on both sides of the forager/herder divide, and they retain potential for the young even in the face of the rapidly changing material forces of today.

## **POLITICS: EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL**

Gregory Bateson [1973 (1942): 73-74] once drew attention to the possibility that the behaviour of leaders in relation to their subjects differed markedly between cultures. His examples were Germany and Russia. Elsewhere in the same article, he drew attention to marked contrasts between Americans and Englishmen, and between Balinese and Westerners

in general, in their cultural understandings of dominance and submission. Much in my present paper (not least the idea of the diagrammatic representation of such differences) is based on his approach. The representation of political difference as a whole is more problematic than that of sharing and accumulation. Fig. 2 is intended to illustrate a single but important difference in perceptions of leadership between most foraging and non-foraging peoples, that is, between leadership in the foraging mode of thought and leadership in the accumulation mode of thought.

My premise is that, at least internally (as opposed to in dealings with outsiders), foragers tend to have a political ethos in which leaders emerge for specific tasks. The position of leaders is not hereditary. Often it is transient, and it may exist only for some specific purpose, such as in the hunt. Leaders aid in group decision-making, but they do not hold power. Indeed, the act of seeking power is discouraged, and it would weaken their prestige if it became apparent. One may say that much the same is true of other societies, but foragers couple the position of self-seeking individuality with a low opinion of power itself. The notion of leadership as a public service, common in societies with an accumulation ideology, would be entirely alien in such an ideology. Even leaders who have power thrust upon them are sometimes reluctant to take on the role. Politics in foraging society is ideally politics by consensus [cf. SILBERBAUER 1982]. Leaders, though they may bear labels like *//aixaba*, *//aiha*, or *!xaa aa* ('big one' or 'great one', in Nharo, Ju/'hoan, and !Xõo respectively), typically do not like making the decisions for the rest of their communities.

Take the example of the Nyae Nyae Farmers Co-operative in Namibia, which has over a thousand members—all N/oakhoe. It was established, with mainly private funding from the United States, four years before Namibia's independence, and it continues to be the largest development effort for N/oakhoe. It has had difficulties, including well-publicised disputes among its expatriate staff. More importantly for our purposes here, cultural timidity about appearing to dominate others has made it difficult for indigenous leaders to put themselves

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>non-foraging peoples</b> |   |
| leadership                  | positive (associated with public service)                         |
| followership                | negative (possibly associated with lack of initiative)            |
| <b>foraging peoples</b>     |   |
| leadership                  | negative (associated with self interest)                          |
| followership                | positive (associated with deference to the will of the community) |

Fig. 2. Perception of leadership

into positions of power, either in their own community or with reference to outside agencies. For example, I once observed a group of Ju/'hoan leaders in Namibia debating whether or not to meet a government minister on a pre-arranged visit. In the end, they decided that it would be better for the expatriate development advisor to meet the minister, as he (and not the Ju/'hoan leaders) would know what to say. There are, of course, leaders, and there always have been. Yet leadership among N/oakhoe is a different thing from leadership among many other peoples, because the active achievement of leadership is discouraged; and the skills which are learned, and the knowledge which increases with age, confer respect from others, not authority over them.

One thing which is valued in the foraging societies of harsh environments is the knowledge that comes through age and through decades of individuals learning the skills to employ the knowledge of making a living from such an environment—an environment perceived as giving produce rather than extracting human labour. The foragers' ideal of respect between human beings is consistent with Bird-David's notion of a 'giving environment' [1990]. However, in dealings with outsiders, different rules may come into play. Younger leaders have evolved, perhaps less constrained by the traditional fears of leadership; and leaders with a foot in two cultures—like the late John Qace Hardbattle (who was part Nharo and part English)—have represented the interests of recent foragers very well. The future political strengths of foraging peoples is, at least in the short term, greatly dependent on the existence of such extraordinary individuals.

N/oakhoe society is, in a sense, self-regulatory. Because leadership is ascribed to those who deserve it and not sought by those who do not, the system works. Yet it only works in areas where N/oakhoe have political control themselves. The regulation of affairs between, say, central government and G/wi and G//ana populations in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve is done on the government's terms, not the terms of the G/wi and G//ana. Even the mechanisms for decision-making are defined by government, either when it consults indigenous leaders or when it conducts surveys. Neither method is traditional in N/oakhoe society. Since Botswana's independence (in 1966) and Namibia's (in 1990), the governments of those countries have been reluctant to allow traditional foragers any special privileges. The results of differential treatment for population groups in South Africa and in pre-independence Namibia have been too harmful, and the memory too strong, to bend in this direction—even for the benefit of a small, disadvantaged minority. Yet there are good grounds for such privileges. The use of land and the concepts of land ownership which N/oakhoe have, do not fit neatly into either traditional Batswana concepts of land ownership, for example, or the land allocation systems of existing government structures.<sup>4</sup>

## **SOCIETY AND KINSHIP**

What is 'society'? Western bureaucrats often seem to equate society with the state. Batswana bureaucrats probably do as well, and may also equate society with the tribe as a political entity, but not to ethnic minorities. Both state and tribe are culturally-constructed political entities. Such an equation in Western discourse has a long history. It dates back to seventeenth and eighteenth-century ideas on the 'social contract' (really an imaginary

political contract), which grew not from an understanding of stateless societies, but from speculation on the nature of society as Europeans understood it. Their speculation was based on an abstract, pre-modern European society in its formative stage.

More specifically, there has been a long debate in the West on whether the family or the 'social contract' formed the basis of early human society, with Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hume, for example, on the side of the 'social contract', and Maine, Morgan, and most anthropologists since, on the side of the family (see, e.g., Kuper [1988: 17-41]).<sup>9</sup> That debate is, in a sense, replicated in the ways in which the bureaucratic authorities of modern nation-states, on the one hand, and members of small-scale 'traditional' societies, on the other hand, see the boundaries of their respective social universes.

Foraging societies and some other small-scale societies differ from all others in one crucial respect: the range of kinship classification. Foragers have what I have called 'universal' systems of kin classification [BARNARD 1978]. This means that they do not distinguish between kin and non-kin; everyone with whom an individual associates, at least on a regular basis, is classified as some kind of 'kinsman'. Thus universal systems of kin classification are those in which the range of kin category extension is virtually total. The mechanism of classification may be through moieties, sections or subsections, as in Aboriginal Australia, through namesake-equivalence, as among Ju/'hoansi and Nharo, or even through real genealogical ties, as among most other N/oakhoe groups and hunter-gatherers elsewhere in the world.

Among Ju/'hoansi and Nharo, personal names cycle through the generations from grandparent to grandchild, and anyone with the same name is believed to be descended from the same namesake-ancestor. A person with the same name is, by definition, a 'grandrelative' (see, e.g., Marshall [1976 (1957): 223-242]). Non-N/oakhoe who stay for some length of time are given names too in order to fit them into the system. This is not even a matter of 'fictive' kinship, as the categories define real social relationships, including the incest taboo, how close one may sit next to another, whether to show formality or informality, etc. Furthermore, the rules of behaviour are the same in kind, if not always in degree, between distant and close, name-related and presumed biological kin. The mechanism of classification will be different in societies which lack namesake-equivalence rules (e.g., G/wi and G//ana), but the principle is the same. One traces kinship universally throughout society by genealogical links, and when these fail, then by links of friendship which are regarded as equivalent to sibling or grandrelative relationships.

Among peoples such as these, it is not that easy to distinguish kinship from society itself (Fig. 3). Those who live in acephalous clan-based societies, tribal chiefdoms, and agrarian or industrialised states, all see things differently. They are unlikely to understand the necessity for foragers to define relationship to every other person, and therefore their association with foragers can be difficult. From the foragers' point of view, outsiders may be perceived as not really having true 'Society' or sociality at all. It should go without saying that notions of kin-based communities appropriate for thinking about peoples with non-universal systems are inappropriate for thinking about peoples with universal systems. Sahlins [1965: 149-158] drew attention to the relation between forms of reciprocity and kinship distance, with generalised reciprocity occurring within the household, balanced

reciprocity at greater distance, and negative reciprocity beyond the boundaries of sociality. Arguably, generalised reciprocity is the norm in foraging societies because all members of society are classed as kin (though not, of course, as close kin). Indeed, forest, land, animals, etc., may also be classed as 'kin', thus inhibiting, for foragers, that negative reciprocity which is inherent in an accumulation mode of thought [cf. BIRD-DAVID 1990; 1992].

Most hunter-gatherers and a handful of small-scale cultivating societies have universal systems. If we take this as the typical model for foraging peoples, and that of non-universal systems as the typical model for peoples with an ideology based on accumulation, the distinction is clear. One difficulty for foraging peoples in modern society is that they will not necessarily, or even generally, want to define their social position in terms of the alien notion of a wider political entity. Nor should they be expected to, any more than we might expect any subjugated people to regard themselves as part of a society under whose domination they live. Such an irony is inherent in the revisionist overemphasis on the larger society, or societies, at the expense of the ones at the bottom of the social scale [e.g., WILMSEN 1989a]. I would argue that we should turn on its head the Marxist anthropological notion of 'centre' and 'periphery'. As a Nharo once told a Tswana researcher: 'If by "*tengnyanateng*" (remote or peripheral) it is meant that we are far away from Gaborone, Gaborone is also far away from us' (quoted in Mogwe [1992: facing first page]). As if to make the point crystal clear the Nharo added: 'Gaborone (the capital city) is also "*tengnyanateng*"'.<sup>6)</sup>

Universal kinship very often remains important even after permanent settlement, and it ties in clearly with the idea that one has 'kinship' with people across vast areas, and not merely within one's own locality. It is important to remember here that while the band is perhaps the most visible unit of social organisation, it is certainly not the only one. There is always a territorial unit larger than the band: certainly the ethnic or language group, and often a cluster of related bands. In such cases, among !Xõo and Nharo, for example, the

| <b>non-foraging peoples</b> |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| kin classification          | non-universal (distinction between kin and non-kin)  |
| society                     | equated with tribe or nation-state<br>(beyond the range of kin classification)                               |
| <b>foraging peoples</b>     |  |
| kin classification          | universal<br>(no distinction between kin and non-kin:<br>within social network everyone classified as 'kin') |
| society                     | equated with kinship (defined by kin classification)   |

**Fig. 3.** Kinship and society

band cluster marks the normal range of social interaction. The constant visiting between members of different bands and the frequent changes of band membership mean that N/oakhoe maintain extensive social networks irrespective of residence. They also retain rights of residence through parentage, often in several bands (see, e.g., Lee [1979: 39-86]). Of course, sedentisation (or sedentarisation) has effects on band organisation. However, while government officials, and indeed anthropologists, may perceive N/oakhoe variously as nomadic or sedentarised, these are not necessarily categories N/oakhoe themselves see as that important. Susan Kent's work [e.g., 1993; 1995], in particular, highlights the degree to which 'sedentarised' N/oakhoe retain other aspects of traditional economic and social relations.

### **DIFFERING CONCEPTIONS OF LAND**

Of all issues for foraging peoples, land is the most politically charged. It is also probably the most important for the continuity of foraging cultures beyond the foraging mode of subsistence. With respect to land though, it is imperative to distinguish between foraging peoples or societies (including recent former foragers) and individuals or groups who have characteristics of foragers in the sense of being anti-accumulation. Attitudes to land are embedded in local knowledge and longstanding relations between peoples and their respective environments.

Land and landscape acquire meanings according to upbringing, but more specifically they acquire meanings according to how land is used in different cultures, and how land is understood in relation to boundaries between neighbours, centres of social activity, and centres of ritual activity. The problem is both subtle and highly complex, as, for example, archaeologist Christopher Tilley [1994: 7-67] has shown in his review of theoretical and ethnographic literature. This is not the place for an extended discussion of subtleties and complexity, though. Rather, I will suggest simply that accumulators and foragers (the latter including recent former foragers but in this case not necessarily other peoples on the edges of non-foraging societies) may understand relations between land and people in reverse (Fig. 4).

Let me elaborate. Non-foraging peoples in the modern world will tend to see land more in terms of sovereignty: e.g., with regard to the nation-state's authority to decide what does and what does not constitute legal 'ownership'. They see semi-sacred rights of freedom, etc., as vested in the people independently of the land they occupy. Foragers and recent former foragers, however, see their lands as associated with inalienable rights and the primordial possession of land by kin groups. They see people as innately free and the state as the usurper, not the guarantor, of freedom and mutual aid (see also Barnard [1993; 2002]).

Non-foraging peoples accumulate land by conquest or purchase, whereas for most foraging peoples this is not possible because relations between people and land are different. In fact, a great deal is bound up in a cluster of relations between people and land. It is useful to think of these in terms of (a) ritual association, (b) economic association, (c) notions of ownership and knowledge, and (d) perceptions of power and rights.

### Ritual Association

Of the world's foraging peoples, Australian Aborigines have the closest ritual associations with their land. For them, the land was crossed by spiritual beings in the Dreamtime, at the beginning of the world, and this creative activity continues in significance today as spiritual associations are renewed by the present generation [e.g., MADDOCK 1973: 21-44; cf. 1983]. For African hunter-gatherers, the association between land and the spirit world is not quite as obvious, but it is certainly there [cf. SILBERBAUER 1994].

Nharo, for example, say that in the beginning *!Nadiba*, 'God the Sky', gave the Nharo lands to the *Kajem G//odzi*, the 'Oldest Progenitors', and that therefore Nharo rights to land are sacrosanct. Such land is heritable but not disposable. Its heritability continues through Nharo descent from the beginning to the end of time. Nharo are perfectly aware that in the law of Botswana the land is 'owned' by others, and they recognise the jurisdiction of Botswana law in aspects of land in which it should have jurisdiction, i.e., those regarding its use as pasturage. They do not, however, recognise this as a sufficient condition for the exclusion of traditional Nharo rights either to use the land in their own subsistence pursuits (including grazing their animals, as some Nharo have livestock too), or to reserve their own use of the land against potential claims by other N/oakhoe. That was certainly the situation prior to the drought of the 1980s, though in some Nharo areas concepts of 'ownership' (all expressed with the verb *kao*) may now be changing [cf. GUENTHER 1986: 169-192].

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>non-foraging peoples</b> |   |
| land                        | sovereign (associated with alienable wealth and with political authority)     |
| people                      | sacrosanct (people as citizens, the state as a sacred trust)                  |
| <b>foraging peoples</b>     |   |
| land                        | sacrosanct (associated with inalienable rights and primordial possession)     |
| people                      | sovereign (people as free individuals, the state as a constraining authority) |

Fig. 4. Perceptions of land

### **Economic Association**

Government officials almost invariably see land in terms of its economic potential, but economic potential can be measured in various ways. Here it is useful to distinguish, as Marxists did, the use value from the exchange value of land. But beyond that, it is essential to divide use value according to purpose. The maximal use value of land depends on the means used to exploit it. Therefore perceptions of use value are contingent on the potential means of exploitation. Some uses, or means of exploitation, will be acceptable to government authorities (perhaps those requiring investment and yielding the most profit). Different means of exploitation will be acceptable to foragers (perhaps only those which do not disrupt traditional boundaries between bands, band clusters, and ethnic groups). More research is needed here before definitive generalisations can be made, but there is plenty of circumstantial evidence for misunderstandings resulting from misperceptions between N/oakhoe and outsiders (see, e.g., Saugestad [1998: 119-136]).

### **Notions of Ownership and Knowledge**

For foragers, land is a matter of knowledge as well as ownership. Knowledge is collective, not just individual, and rights to resources are vested in descendants of the original ancestors. Traditional ownership concepts are collective when it comes to land, because the knowledge of the land and its natural produce is held collectively, and because the produce, before it is obtained, is owned collectively. Therefore they differ profoundly from other concepts of ownership, of movable items and even of food, which are owned individually in much the same way as in capitalist societies. To put it simply, foragers maintain a sharp distinction between movable (or individual) and immovable (or collective) property; outsiders generally do not. It is worth noting that linguistic categories are not necessarily a help here. Nharo, for example, use one word, *kao*, for all kinds of 'ownership', but this does not mean that ownership is a monolithic concept. 'They own this territory', 'He owns this bow', and for that matter, 'She owns her granddaughter', express qualitatively different relations.<sup>7</sup> The evidence for the distinction, rather, must be on the basis of observable actions and jural statements rather than simply the use of a word like *kao*.

The concept of 'ownership' is complex, and I believe that the Ju/'hoa words *kxae* (to own) and *kxao* (owner) entail similar ambiguities to those in Nharo. Wilmsen [1989b: 53] offers an appropriate note of caution when he says that it is not really land itself which is owned or inherited: 'What actually is inherited is a set of status positions binding an individual to a network of obligations owed between persons with respect to land'. Indeed, Wilmsen's statement, contrary to the general understanding among revisionists that anthropologists tend to exaggerate differences between foragers and others, seems to confirm my view that foragers do relate to their lands differently than do most other peoples. How far increased sedentisation will affect these relations is still not clear, though there is evidence from other parts of the Kalahari that that process does not necessarily cause a drastic change in the foraging ethos or a breakdown of the social order [cf. OSAKI 1990; SUGAWARA 1991; KENT 1993].

### Perceptions of Power and Rights

Finally here, consider the relation between human and civil rights, which is contingent on notions of the relation between a people and their land. For those in government, the human may be equated with the civil, as they usually see the state as the protector of the rights of all the citizens. Hunter-gatherers and recent hunter-gatherers do not generally see the state in this way. The history of relations between state entities and small-scale, sub-state societies around the world is a history of subjugation and intervention beyond what in sub-state society is regarded as morally justified [cf. CLASTRES 1977 (1974); 1994 (1980)]. This has nothing necessarily to do with colonialism, for in the eyes of hunter-gatherers and other very small-scale societies, colonial authority and nation-state authority come to the same thing. They are both perceived as external to the people. Indeed, Michael Asch [1989 *passim*] once argued, with reference to indigenous Canadian minorities, that the relation between indigenous peoples and nation-states is analogous to that between colonial subjects and colonial powers.

### ETHNIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Writing on European nationalism in the nineteenth century, political scientist Derek Heater [1990: 59] has commented that there were six ways in which, as he puts it, ‘the anomaly of minorities in a nationalist age’ could be handled: toleration, conversion, discrimination, persecution, expulsion, or annihilation. All of these have occurred with reference to foraging populations, and all except perhaps annihilation occur today.

Let us look at the situation in Botswana as a case in point. Since independence, toleration and conversion have alternately been practised in various branches of government, while discrimination has been common in the country at large. Today, persecution and (internal) expulsion are at least what the world sees when mention is made of Botswana’s dealings with N/oakhoe. I am here thinking specifically of the G/wi, G//ana and others from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). It is a peculiar irony that this reserve, established in the last few years of colonial rule for the protection of N/oakhoe, should over the last decade have been the subject of so much effort to exclude them. In terms of land, toleration has increasingly given way to attempts at cultural conversion in what, to N/oakhoe, is the most blatant possible way—removal and re-establishment in land which is not their own. There is, of course, nothing unique about Botswana here; this is a common way of treating minorities, especially poor minorities perceived as otherwise non-threatening to the majority and the state. It is never, of course, practised against a powerful branch of the majority. The discovery of diamonds in Central District did not, of course, lead to the removal of the numerically and politically dominant Bamangwato!

Of course, in the minds of those in power, there is no ethnic discrimination. That is, there is no *de jure* discrimination, but there is *de facto* discrimination—because the inhabitants of the CKGR happen to be overwhelmingly poor N/oakhoe, along with some poor Bakgalagari (another disadvantaged minority). By classifying populations as ‘Remote Area Dwellers’, for over twenty years the government has both denied those classified that

way their several and distinct identities (G/wi, Nharo, etc.) and prevented them from forming effective political opposition. I do not believe, though, that this was the government's original intention. The intentions of those who drafted government policy were to emphasise poverty in such areas and alleviate it, and more particularly to find common purpose among 'remote' groups and provide aid in the most efficient way for all concerned.

However, the idea of Remote Area Dwellers is neither academically nor politically neutral [cf. HITCHCOCK 1998]. In academic terms, it accords with the revisionist theory in African historiography and anthropology generally and in Khoisan studies especially. Yet this perspective, in granting the N/oakhoe a more prominent part in history, denies them cultural uniqueness and makes more difficult their quest for identity. Statements that 'RADS' or 'Basarwa' (the Setswana and official English term for N/oakhoe) represent an underclass more than they represent an ethnic group are both historically unfounded and ethnographically misinformed [cf. BARNARD 1992b: 237-241, 297-298]. Of more relevance here, though, is that such views are politically counter-productive.

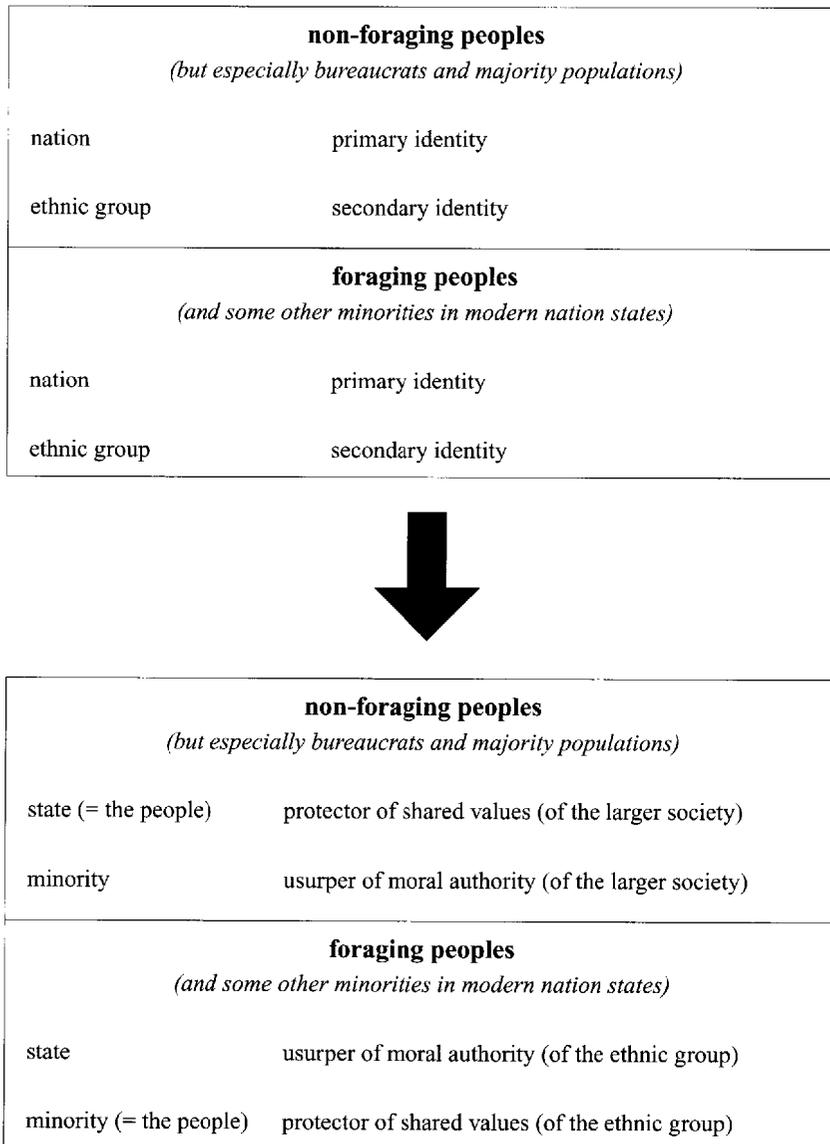
In the widest sense of the word 'politics', N/oakhoe want and require a political voice based on the fact that they are N/oakhoe or that they are members of specific N/oakhoe communities. I would agree that a broadly 'revisionist' approach is the correct one in cases like Rwanda and Burundi, where historical class rather than culture is the divisive force, but it is not the same in Botswana. The situation in Botswana is more comparable, in many ways, to that of European countries, with for example Gypsy populations, and even more so to countries with indigenous minorities like Norway, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, or Japan.

Botswana is one of the few African countries which is comparable to the archetypal European nation, with a numerical and culturally dominant majority and both economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged small minorities. In such cases, the crucial factor is whether one perceives one's primary identity as ethnic or national (Fig. 5). The net result of these differing perspectives of identity is a diametrically opposite understanding of the state, either as a protector of shared values (of the larger society) or as a usurper of such values (of the indigenous minorities). Unlike European minorities, though, former foragers do not have access even to the aspiration of national status themselves. This is the reason for these differing perspectives of identity. While the potential for physical conflict may not be of the same order as, for example, in the former Yugoslavia, nevertheless the trajectory suggested in Fig. 5 hints at a deep ideological conflict between foraging peoples and the nation states they inhabit. Perceptions of the state may be similar.

Studies of N/oakhoe identity are in their infancy, though an excellent start was made at the Cape Town conference on 'Khoisan Identities and Cultural Heritage' [BANK 1998]. Ironically, the flexibility inherent in economic aspects of N/oakhoe culture, coupled with their fierce egalitarianism and immediate return ethos, may well create a strengthening of N/oakhoe identity against the larger societies of which they are (in some eyes at least) a part or which encapsulate them. Foraging cultures have been adapting for millennia, and even where they have not withstood the pressures of neolithisation, they have retained their significant aspects: elements of ritual, belief, ties of sociality, ties to land, etc. N/oakhoe are catching up with Australian Aborigines, Native North Americans, Ainu, and other groups, as

they take greater part in the activities of the larger societies.

In a sense, ethnic identities are always framed in oppositional terms. Yet the processes of encapsulation and assimilation are not relevant opposites; the relevant opposites are the foraging mode of thought and the accumulation mode of thought. When foragers settle and come into greater contact with others, their values are strengthened, not weakened, and so too are their respective identities [cf. BARNARD 1988; 2002].



**Fig. 5.** Ethnic versus national identity

## CONCLUSIONS

The foraging mode of thought is not dead. What Nicolas Peterson has written about the Aboriginal peoples of Australia's Northern Territory applies also in the Kalahari and elsewhere.

The case for arguing that some Territory Aboriginal people are reasonably described as hunter-gatherers is based on the evidence that they are still reproducing sets of values and social relations that structure distribution and consumption, and to a lesser extent production, in distinctive ways that are much closer to the pre-colonial pattern than they are to the structure and workings of the mainstream economy. These differences include aspects of sharing, consumption, gender roles, attitudes to accumulation, egalitarianism and the continuing significance of kinship [PETERSON 1991: 82].

Foragers' values can be and are retained in spite of the loss of a strictly immediate return economy. Ikeya's recent studies [e.g., 1993; 1996a; 1996b], for example, have shown that neither goat raising, nor handicraft production, nor attempts to cultivate melons and other crops have resulted in a transformation of the system of distribution or the value of sharing among G//ana and G/wi of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Ikeya argues from detailed quantitative evidence that, in their eyes, wage labour is not a substitute for the maintenance of a flexible subsistence strategy; it is part of it [cf. TANAKA 1991; SUGAWARA 1998]. Furthermore, forager-farmers cannot become rich at the expense of their neighbours, because the mechanism of sharing, even in the case of cultivated melons, prevents it. The present threats to their lifestyle come entirely from outside forces, not from changes in their means of subsistence. The resilience of that community deserves both the anthropological scrutiny and the admiration of us all, but we need more studies like Ikeya's and more attempts at comparison before the future of the foraging mode of thought and the reasons for its endurance become clear.

Another area of future research may be in the relation between aspects of foraging society such those considered here: economy, politics, kinship, land, and identity. I have left open the question of causal or evolutionary trajectories which might link these, as my purpose here has been to concentrate simply on the oppositional elements in the distinction between foraging and accumulation modes of thought. Further comparative research and theoretical analysis, however, should yield additional insights into the complex relations between economy, politics, etc., as these are acted out by individuals operating within foraging and accumulating systems, and indeed by individuals operating between such systems.

Finally, let me add that the implicit suggestion in Kalahari revisionist thinking that there is no sharp divide between foragers and non-foragers is not an argument against my position [cf. BARNARD 2002]. Indeed, it strengthens it. There is such a thing as a foraging society, though it is not necessarily what anti-revisionists think it might be. Rather than culture contact, trade, and mixed subsistence strategies negating the notion of a foraging society, I see them as enabling a vision of foraging thought as transcendent of material forces—at least in the short term. If I am right, it should be the goal of those non-foragers who are in power over foragers and former foragers, both to respect foraging values and to work towards a

social order based on a merging of conflicting ideologies.

## NOTES

- 1) This paper was prepared for presentation at the Eighth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Osaka, 26-29 October 1998. I acknowledge the support of the British Academy and the University of Edinburgh for enabling me to participate in the conference. Earlier versions and related papers were presented at the University of Tromsø, the University of Gothenburg, and the University of Wales, Lampeter; and a shortened version was later presented at the National Academy of Sciences of Buenos Aires. I am grateful to all those whose comments have helped to clarify my intent and improve my argument.
- 2) In this paper I use the term N/oakhoe ('Red People', also spelled Ncoakwe) to refer to these groups. Although not yet well-known, it is rapidly becoming the preferred self-designation of indigenous foraging and former-foraging groups, especially in the parts of Botswana where I did my early fieldwork. In other parts of the Kalahari, the terms Khoe, Kua, and Ju/'hoan are sometimes used, though all of these latter terms carry some ambiguity of meaning. My fieldwork in southern Africa was supported by grants from the Economic and Social Research Council, the James A. Swan Fund, the National Science Foundation, the Nuffield Foundation, and the University of Edinburgh (Centre of African Studies Committee, Committee for African Studies, Department of Social Anthropology, Munro Lectureship Committee, Travel and Research Committee, and Tweedie Exploration Fellowship Committee).
- 3) After I presented a related paper to a largely African academic audience, several in that audience expressed the view that African culture as a whole (and not just N/oakhoe culture) possessed the sharing values I attributed to foraging culture, whereas, they argued, European culture did not.
- 4) 'Batswana' (singular, 'Motswana') refers in a modern political sense to the citizens of Botswana in general, but often in cultural terms (as here) it refers especially to the dominant Setswana-speaking majority.
- 5) This distinction is, of course, not absolute. Locke, in particular, argues a family origin in his 'Second Treatise of Government' [LOCKE 1690: chap. 7], while nevertheless also arguing that political entities derive their authority from a 'compact' and the consent of the governed [1690: chap. 8].
- 6) *Ha e le gore ka tengnyanateng gatwe re kgakala le Gaborone, Gaborone le ene o kgakala le rona. Gaborone le ene ke tengnyanateng.*
- 7) Respectively (in a word order emphasising the object possessed): *N/i n'usa ni ko kao; N/i tĩ mi ko kao; Xas di tsxõ-/oasa si ko kao*. Grandparents (not parents) are said to 'own' their grandchildren.

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