Forager Food Sharing Economy : Transfers and Exchanges

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INTRODUCTION

Sharing as a principle of allocation became important in anthropological discourse following the publications of Elman Service in the early 1960s [1962, 1963, 1966]. It focused on food sharing, and particularly on the allocation of meat from kills of large animals. The view at the time was that foragers were mostly hunting for a living, and doing a little bit of gathering.

There were (and still are) a number of famous (if not well known) contemporary hunting societies, primarily in Australia, the Arctic, the central African forests, and the Kalahari. Although foraging societies did not have a large number of people, foraging society and culture was and is of interest for several reasons. Here was a social and cultural form that was interesting in its own right. The apparent simplicity was an effective counter foil to a view of humans that assumed the existence of the state. For the vast majority of human existence, humans had been only hunting and gathering. Many have attempted to cast some light on our paleolithic ancestors by using insights from contemporary foragers.

With the revival of evolutionary research in anthropology in general which occurred in the late 1950s there was a renewed interest in how human society and culture had evolved from primate patterns. Interest in the forager way of life acquired a new lease on life for anthropologists. Service claimed that sharing of food was a major shift from the biograms[2)] of other social animals [1962]. There was implicitly, I believe, another contrast, with humans who lived in states, where sharing of food was much more constrained and contested. So the foragers seemed to be different from our non-human ancestors in that they shared food, and they seemed to be different from ourselves in that they shared food. Sharing of food came to be seen as a key component of the hunter-gatherer way of life, and furthermore was important for thinking about evolution.

As an economic anthropologist who has long worked on agriculture, and especially on irrigation, my empirical and comparative research has been confined to people who live and work in states. I have no first-hand experience with foraging populations. This paper looks at "sharing" in the literature on foraging societies from the point of view of an economic anthropologist, paying particular

attention to concepts for studying allocation.

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Because much of economic anthropology has dealt with horticulturalists and agriculturalists rather than foragers, it may be worthwhile to present a (very) brief overview of the subject matter of the sub-field.

First, what is economic? The difference between the formalists and the substantivists is relevant here. The formalists claim to define economic in terms of "economizing". The substantivists claim to define economic in terms of production and allocation of goods and services that sustain life. In fact the two kinds of claimants do not do very different things, but the theoretical differences are quite clear. I prefer the definition of economic that sees labor (and usually raw materials) combined to form something anthropogenic. All human goods therefore have economic content.

The economy is present in all human societies. Production is omnipresent, and for humans always involves technology, materials, and the transformation of materials by humans using that technology (often called labor). Considerations of production, and of productivity, are often important.

Once something has been produced, it is very often shifted to another organism, often a human (and sometimes sequentially to a very large number of other humans, each of whom may transform the object along the way.) Humans not only produce far more goods than any other species, we also allocate it in far more intricate patterns, and to far more numbers of organisms, than any other species. Much of allocation takes place in what can reasonably be called economic exchange. But some allocation is not part of economic exchanges (which I have called economic transfers [HUNT 1998b]).

All exchanges and transfers contain something of value to the participants. Value is a major underexamined concept in economic anthropology. Where prices exist (which require some sort of money, and preferably a general purpose money of great range), value can be said to be closely linked to the prices. But many exchanges and transfers do not involve money. How the individuals involved assign value to the transactions is highly uncertain.

Economic anthropology must also consider several other phenomena. All production and allocation take place in a social context, and the social units involved should be specified. Individuals are often involved, as are various kinds of dyadic relationships, and sometimes groups are involved as well. The division of labor in the society is a very important part of the social organization of the economy. There are always questions of property. Property is composed of social relationships between jural units, which specify the rights and duties of each party over some "object" of property. Production often (but not always) creates property rights. Allocation usually assumes the legitimacy of transactions, and these depend upon the prior existence of property rights. Property, although much

ignored in anthropology, is a universal of human societies, and deeply implicated in the economy (see Hann [1998], Hunt and Gilman [1998], Hunt [1998a]).

FORAGER ECONOMY—A GENERAL VIEW

Foragers live in societies that are said to be egalitarian, and this refers to two structural phenomena: wealth distribution and political organization. Foragers are usually seen as having an equal, or very nearly equal, distribution of wealth, assets, property, and food. Food sharing is very much a part of this picture. Foragers are usually seen as having no formal roles of leadership, no chiefs, and there is no coercion of action by any such role.[3)]

Contemporary foragers are defined by production technology. Only undomesticated plants and animals are harvested.[4)] Correlated with this (but not perfectly) there is usually little or no storage of food, the energy sources rarely include machines or fossil fuel, and the principal domesticated animal is the dog. All have the use of fire, and all have cutting, digging, and carrying tools.[5)] Pottery and metal when present are traded in from non-foragers, not manufactured locally. Stone wares, baskets, skin containers are produced locally (if not always with local materials). Transaction networks are very widely found, and objects can travel great distances.

Foraging involves harvesting the products of primary biological production, and the primary production is rarely concentrated enough to permit permanent settlement. Moving to get water, plants, or animal foods is therefore frequent, and two correlates are small size of "communities" (less than 100, often less than 50, persons), and small inventories of objects.

Societies based on foraging usually have a very low division of labor, often confined to age and gender alone. There is usually no stratification, and no formal political office. There is usually little or no differentiation according to what we could call wealth or income, and sharing has a major role to play to promote and preserve this economic distribution.[6)]

Foragers usually "share" food, especially food derived from animals too large for the hunter, or his household, to consume before the meat spoils.[7)] This sharing is economic allocation, and it is done in such a way that many people have access to a share of the product. Sharing is a strong rule, and foragers may discuss for hours how to achieve appropriate shares. This sharing of meat is combined with the allocation of other goods to produce a lack of concentration (or accumulation) of any other material good, or of any political influence.

In this section I have frequently used "usually". That is because I have been describing correlations of foraging with other social phenomena, and the correlations, while often strong, are not perfect. There are exceptions to every correlation. The San have iron, and may have had it for 1500 years. Most of the Inuit have been hunting with guns for 100 years or more. The Pygmy have been associated with agricultural peoples, and trading meat for agricultural products, for

many decades. In the paleolithic, of course, there was no metal, little pottery, and no agricultural products. Ever since the neolithic revolution some societies that mainly forage have had the option of trade with agriculturalists, and have with some frequency been involved in such trade. Even if the society itself has no face-to-face contact with agriculturalists, the transaction system can import their goods.

It should be noted that foraging has rarely been completely eliminated from the production portfolio of human societies. Most of the fish we eat is non-domesticated. Some of us eat "game", which is undomesticated. Some of us eat "wild" mushrooms, again an undomesticated species. The truffle is an intensely sought wild food for parts of the Mediterranean world. Some foraging occurs in every known human society. But however expensive the product, it is a trivial amount in an industrial economy. Foraging as a technology is universal among human societies. To have a society based largely or entirely on foraging as the production strategy is quite different, and at this point in human history rather rare. The argument developed in this paper concentrates on whole societies where foraging dominates the production system.

The widespread sharing of food became a prominent part of evolutionary thinking with the publications of Elman Service in the early 1960s (although he is rarely referred to in later discussions.) Progress has been made in showing that other primates do some food sharing but it is clear that Homo sapiens does it much more than any other mammal (see Kelly [1995]).

A major concern for many who focus on the life-ways of contemporary foragers is the fact of an egalitarian society.[8] Most contemporary foragers work very hard, and successfully, to reduce or eliminate differences of power, prestige, and wealth between persons.[9] They are determinedly egalitarian. This is a major contrast with more complex human societies and with the societies of many other primates. An egalitarian social system is a stark contrast.

There are probably several motivations for this anthropological interest in egalitarian systems. It is interesting because it is so different, and so hard to explain in the terms that a state uses. These egalitarian foragers are a positive model for what human life can be like for those weary of the moral and material struggle with stratification. The foraging adaptation also contains an evolutionary puzzle, the egalitarian structure.[10]

Food-sharing is a central part, although by no means the only part, of the egalitarian system. It is, in both human and evolutionary terms, rare. It is not easy to describe or explain. An understanding of the economics of food sharing is central to an understanding of an egalitarian society.

CONCEPTS FOR ALLOCATION

When first proposed, sharing was the offering of shares of meat from large animals to other people in the society. It was thought of in terms of a generous gift.

Some of the major terms that have been applied to the "sharing" event are: sharing, generalized reciprocity, reciprocity, gift, demand-sharing, dunning, and tolerated theft. These terms are applied by various authors to these sharing events. As we will see below, the use of these terms is rarely in conformity with the rest of the literature in economic anthropology, and is rarely precise.

In economic anthropology we have a number of concepts for the allocation domain including distribution, allocation, and circulation. All refer to some sort of shift or movement of things/goods from one person to another.

Exchange has been the main concept for discussing allocation. There can be no doubt that economic exchange is widespread in human societies, and that various concepts of exchange have given us considerable grip on understanding allocation.

For exchange there are three main bodies of concepts that we often see referred to: reciprocity-redistribution-market, gift-commodity, and generalized-negative-balanced reciprocity.

Reciprocity-redistribution-market is associated originally with Karl Polanyi, and refers to three different principles of organizing exchanges [1957]. For Polanyi an economy can be said to be dominated by, or integrated by, exchanges with the characteristics of one of these principles. Bohannan, six years later, shifted the terms to include kinds or examples of exchanges, in addition to the form of integration of the economy, a use which I follow in this paper. To summarize the Polanyi- Bohannan principles I will quote Bohannan's description in 1963:

"Reciprocity involves exchange of goods between people who are bound in non-market, non-hierarchical relationships with one another. The exchange does not create the relationship, but rather is part of the behavior that gives it content." [1963: 232]

"Redistribution is defined by Polanyi as a systematic movement of goods toward an administrative center and their reallotment by the authorities at the center." [1963: 231]

"Market exchange is the exchange of goods at prices determined by the law of supply and demand. Its essence is free and casual contract." [1963: 231]

Gift-Commodity has largely replaced the Polanyi formulation in recent decades. Here I will take the summary description from Gregory's oft-cited 1982 book.

"Things, land and labour assume the gift form in clan-based societies." [Gregory 1982: 100]. "Gift exchange is an exchange of inalienable objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal dependence that establishes a qualitative relationship between the transactors." [Gregory 1982: 101]

"Things and land assume the commodity form in class-based societies. Classes are formed when the producer loses control of his means of production. ...Commodity exchange is an exchange of alienable objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal independence that establishes a quantitative relationship between the objects exchanged." [Gregory 1982: 100]

Generalized, negative and balanced reciprocity are the creation of Marshall Sahlins. Balanced reciprocity refers to direct and equivalent exchange without delay [SAHLINS 1972: 194–195]. The other two, generalized and negative, occupy poles of a continuum. At one end is generalized reciprocity, which Sahlins equates with Malinowski's "pure gift". Such terms as altruism, sharing, and hospitality are used [SAHLINS 1972: 193–194]. At the other pole is negative reciprocity, which is the intention to get something for nothing. Here Sahlins attaches such words as haggling, gambling, and theft [SAHLINS 1972: 195–196]. Sahlins puts social dimensions of the participants, particularly kinship distance, in the center of his subsequent discussion.

Within the domain of allocation we should have another look at exchange. We are discussing a classification of concepts. As Adams and Adams [1991] have clearly stated a good classification is clear about the domain, and has classes that are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the terms used for the classes should be unambiguous [HUNT n.d.].

My long-term goal is to (eventually) produce a classification of the domain of allocation which is exhaustive, where the partitions are mutually exclusive, and where there is no ambiguity in the terms used. It should be desirable to describe any and every transaction in terms of this classification. Furthermore it should apply without significant distortion to any culture we find (conceptual equivalence is one of the goals).

All of this work is conceptual. The domain, and its partitions, are concepts. Part of our work is empirical, of course, and the concepts to be effective must have operational considerations in their definitions. And part of our work is theoretical, which consists of the (empirical) regularities to be found between concepts. But a part of our work is purely conceptual. This work will involve definitions. What these definitions represent is valid and reliable concepts for acquiring and organizing empirical data.

If the goal is testable theory, then correlations of empirically measured variables are a necessary part of the picture. Those correlations are diluted, sometimes to the point of meaninglessness, by conceptual categories which are ambiguously named and/or overlapping in content. They are weak correlations to the extent that the categories are not exhaustive. This issue concerns the foundations of the discipline, and not mere semantics.

Let us turn to the classifications of economic exchange presented above, and raise some questions. Within the domain of exchange, are the classifications exhaustive? Are they mutually exclusive? Are they named without ambiguity? Each of the three major sets of terms to discuss exchange have problems.

The Polanyi-Bohannan classification has the virtue that redistribution is part of the system (it is missing in the gift- commodity system), and this kind of exchange is important in chiefdoms and particularly in states. What is hard to accommodate in the Polanyi classification is exchanges between unequals which are not part of redistribution. Patron-client networks are hierarchical, and often not part of

administrative organization. The pooling analysis of the domestic group, advanced so usefully by Sahlins, is an important addition to the system, one which Polanyi suggested but did not flesh out.

Gift is an ambiguous term in social science. It is very often used to refer to exchanges, presumably of the reciprocity type. It is also used to refer to offerings of "pure gifts", which are not part of economic exchanges. I have proposed that transfer be used for a transaction in which an object X is shifted from one social unit to another. When it is not matched by a counter transfer we have only one of the meanings of gift and we do not have an exchange [HUNT 1998b]. Other uses of "gift" do involve exchanges.

Much discussion of gifts and of commodities uses the distinction between use-value and exchange-value. This distinction is central to Aristotle's discussion of exchange in his Politics [1962, Book I]. The distinction shows up in Marx (in the well-known formula $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$), and is prominent in Sahlins' discussion of reciprocity.

The distinction is of far less utility in our discussions than is apparent at first reading. First, all human groups exchange things, so exchange value of those things has to be present everywhere, not just in market exchanges. Second, one use of the term exchange refers only to transactions which involve money. Exchange value in this case would only refer to transactions that are priced. But there are some human groups that do not have money, and in every society there are a number of exchanges that do not involve money. In the more generalized sense of exchange 'exchange value' is a human universal.

In the Kula system east of New Guinea there are precious objects which are manufactured, and exchanged. They cannot be eaten, consumed, or used to make something else. I suggest that the utility of these objects is their exchange. They are made purposely for exchange, and they are exchanged. Any other uses are trivial.

I conclude from the above that exchange value is omnipresent, that in some cases the only use of an object is exchange, and that the moral distinction between use-value and exchange-value is at best a distraction. The distinction is of very limited use in an economic anthropology.

The gift-commodity dichotomy as summarized by Gregory defined commodities as alienable, the transactors are in a state of mutual independence, and the exchange establishes relationships between objects. Gifts are the inversion, in that they are inalienable, there is a state of mutual dependence between transactors, and the exchange establishes relationships between the parties, not between the objects.

Alfred Gell objected to this set of inversions, observing with respect to gifts that they are alienable, for the recipient gains access, and the power to donate, whereas the donor loses both. Further, he observed, commodity exchange partners can be mutually indebted, and in a relationship of mutual dependency over time [GELL 1992: 144–145].[11] In addition the gift-commodity domain can not cope with

redistribution. I conclude from this that the dichotomy of gift-commodity is not well formed for our purposes.

Sahlins' concepts of negative and generalized reciprocity are at least as unproductive as use-value and exchange value, and as gift-commodity. Sahlins' use of "reciprocity" and "redistribution" introduced unproductive ambiguities. They had already been given fairly specific meanings in the Polanyi- Bohannan framework, and were widely used in textbooks and in some monographs. Sahlins then used reciprocity in at least two senses, one of which referred to exchange in general. Redistribution was used by Sahlins to refer to the movement of goods from those who had them to those who did not in the context of the domestic unit, which was not the way the term was used in the Polanyi classification. The major virtue of Sahlins' discussion was singling out the domestic unit, with its principle of pooling.

A closer look at negative and generalized reciprocity, however, prompts one to ask why these are called exchange at all. If theft is the pure pole of negative reciprocity, and the "pure gift" is the pure pole of generalized reciprocity, neither of these events is an exchange. Surely an exchange involves the movement of goods in two directions. In the Sahlins cases, goods move in only one direction. I conclude that as categories of exchange, negative and generalized reciprocity fail. However important the events (and the events are very important), calling them exchange is misleading at best.

In sum, the concepts outlined above are not exhaustive of the domain, are not mutually exclusive, and are not always unambiguously named. In particular, those transactions which I have called transfers are largely omitted from the conceptual categories.

ECONOMIC TRANSFERS

It is my argument in the rest of this paper that allocation involves what I propose we call economic transfers, and that some important transfers take place without an exchange. I want to focus attention on the difference between exchange and transfer.[12)]

By economic transfer I mean the shift of something with economic content (X) from one social unit (A) to another social unit (B). The object can be tangible, or it can be a service. The shift can refer to changes in possession, and also to shifts in ownership The social units can be any locally recognized social isolate [APPELL 1984], and can be roles, individuals, corporate groups, corporations, or polities.[13)]

The X being transferred has economic content.[14)] It contains the efforts of production (natural material, and/or skill, and/or experience).

Economic exchanges are linked transfers such that the transfer of X from A to B is matched by a transfer of Y from B to A. The identification of the linkage of the two transfers as an exchange almost certainly has to be done by the local folk culture. That two transfers have taken place may be observable by an outsider.

Their being linked together to form an exchange requires local knowledge. The temporal dimension must be specified, for long periods of time may elapse before an exchange is completed. Which transfers form part of which exchanges can only be identified by the folk. The exchange may involve multiple transfers.

FOOD SHARING AMONG FORAGERS

The original interest in sharing among foragers was in the sharing of food, and particularly of meat. The general picture is the following: a person, or small team of persons, leaves camp and looks for game. When a large animal is killed, it will be butchered and taken back to camp. Back in the camp, the meat is "shared" with others in the camp. Whenever a large animal is killed, everybody in camp gets meat to eat. The luck of the hunt shifts from one person to another, and so the provider of meat for the camp shifts from one person to another. This system is different from that of other primates, and it is also different from the allocation system in societies reliant on domesticated species (and especially different from allocation in states.)

The literature on "sharing" is remarkable for how few detailed cases of sharing there are (see Peterson [1993]). Given this state of the literature, reanalysis of the empirical materials is next to impossible. Given the very small empirical basis, most of what I have to say in the following sections will take the form of reasonable questions to ask of meat sharing in foraging societies.[15)]

Sharing Unit

There are at least five different social units involved in provisioning humans: the individual, the production team, the household, the camp, and a multitude of dyadic relationships. Self provisioning by individual humans is universal. It is not surprising, and perhaps not even interesting, that hunting teams would share the results of the work. This is common among social carnivores (particularly wolves, leopards, lions, among others).

The household as a locus for sharing seems to have been ignored in the food sharing literature. Most of our interest in "exchange" has been focused on transactions which are not part of households, but occur between persons in an extra-household environment.

A vast amount of *Homo sapiens* food sharing occurs in households. Most of the food acquisition from nature is done by adults, and much of it is brought back to the household. We *Homo sapiens* process much of what we eat, and for foragers much of that processing occurs in the territory of the household, and by members of the household. Washing, cutting, peeling, grinding, mashing, heating, and serving usually are part of household routine. There are members of households, and the household is likely to be a corporate group. The household members usually have rights to consume this processed food (and unprocessed food as well). In consequence there is a great deal of food sharing (from the

comparative ethological point of view) that occurs in forager households.

Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics* pays a substantial amount of attention to this phenomenon, calling it pooling [1972]. In the Polanyi tradition it is sometimes called householding. Households have a marked division of competence, and of labor. There may well be helpless infants, sick people, untrained people, and weak people. There may well be people of many different ages. There are normally two genders present. There is usually a set of rules, backed by morality, for allocation of consumption items within the household. The household is the site of many exchanges, and of many transfers. The household as an arena for allocation needs much more attention than it has received, and not only among foragers.

Pooling in the household unit may involve exchanges, and in some cases it may be conceptualized as parents transferring to children when the children are small, and the counter-transfer, to complete the exchange, is from the children (when they are adults) to the parents (when the parents are dependent).

But these transfers are not everywhere exchanges. They may be transfers between family members based on the morality of the natal household. Establishing which are transfers only, and which transfers are linked into exchanges, requires ethnographic evidence.

Among foragers the camp has received most of the attention given to sharing of food. The usual conclusion is that when a large game animal is killed, the meat is shared so that everybody in the camp gets what Lee calls an "equitable" portion [1993]. The camp is usually small, and it is not clear to me how often there is camp membership, differentiating members from non-members. Although the population of a camp is very fluid (with some persons leaving, and others arriving, perhaps on a daily basis), the general picture drawn is that everyone in the camp receives a portion when sharing occurs (see Marshall [1976, ch. 9]). If this is so, then there must be some set of rules for how and why it happens. Nothing I have read to date has elucidated these rules. It is plausible that they are like household rules, and possible that they are an extension of household rules.

There is as yet no empirical reason to call meat sharing in a camp exchange. These are clearly transfers, from hunters to others. Whether they combine to form exchanges is not clear. Given that some hunters bring in a great deal of game, and other hunters bring in far less, or perhaps never bring in a large kill, and given that women never bring in a large kill, it is difficult to see how all of these meat transfers can be linked into economic exchanges. They might be linked into exchanges of meat and other economic goods. This can only be determined by targeted ethnographic investigation.

The social unit of pathways of partnerships composed of linked dyadic relationships is one that has not received any analytic attention. Every student of small foraging societies has remarked on the importance of sociality. It appears to me to be the case that this sociality usually, and perhaps always, contains, and is perhaps constructed of, pathways of these dyadic partnerships. Every adult ego has a number of such partnerships with particular people. They may be inherited

or achieved, and they must be continually reinforced if they are to endure through time. Most of these are achieved between adults. These relationships may include members of the nuclear family, as among the !Kung (see Lee [1979, 1993]). They may include persons who are not close kinsmen at all. Some of these relationships occur between persons who are in two different camps.

Visiting between camps is often noted for foragers, and it always results in the sharing of food. It is not clear to me whether such visits require that a partnership already exist between the visitor and someone already in the camp. If there were membership in the camps, then visitors might have to have a partnership with a member in order to visit, or to visit for any length of time.

The sharing of raw meat in camps seems to proceed along a pathway of these linked dyadic partnerships, starting at some role (not always the hunter), and proceeding according to a set of rules, involving household membership, and along a chain or pathway of partners. Is it possible that sharing within a camp is epiphenomenal to sharing along these dyadic relationships, with the proviso that any partner who is in the camp is on the receiving end of a sharing allocation? Physical presence in the camp is clearly an important part of the sharing eligibility rules. Another question is the transitivity of meat sharing in the partnership. Will meat be expected to move in both directions, depending on the starting point of the meat?

The transfers between these partners may well be a kind of economic exchange. If meat sharing in the camp is epiphenomenal to the dyadic pairs, then the meat sharing in the camp will be part of exchange, and single transfers will not be the best description. If, on the other hand, there are both dyadic pathways, and there are rules that everybody in camp gets a share, then both exchange and single transfer are relevant.

What Items Are "Shared"?

It is clear that large animals are shared very often. In the raw state, portions of the carcass may well be consumed by the hunting party at the kill site, but most of the carcass is distributed to those who did not participate in the hunt.

Cooked portions of the animal are also "shared", but my sense is that among foragers they have to be eaten at the cooking site, often a household. Such consumers come for a meal, and the rules for sharing raw meat are possibly different from the rules for cooked meat. The rules for requesting "guest" status for a meal need to be elucidated. May anyone do so? May any member of the camp do so? Are dyadic partners always entitled to do so? And what of strangers? Are these reciprocal privileges, and if so, what is the time frame? Untangling whether these are one-way transfers, or exchanges, depends upon empirical investigation.

The sharing of vegetable foods is much less clear. !Kung can visit a household processing Mongongo nuts and will be offered a share of the prepared nuts. A household will offer some unprocessed Mongongo nuts to others [Lee 1993].

Who Initiates The "Sharing"?

Sharing can only occur when, of two parties, one has something and the other does not. Service and others have claimed that generosity is central to sharing. Generosity implies that the party with possession initiates the sharing, and is in control of how much is shifted to the other party.

Subsequent empirical work has brought to our attention "demand sharing" [PETERSON 1993] wherein the initiative for sharing, and determining the item to be shared, originates with the party that does not have possession. Consequently generosity is no longer necessary for sharing to occur. The party that possesses perhaps has very little choice about how much to share, or with whom.

Who Controls The Sharing?

Those of us based in hierarchical social systems "naturally" ask who controls the sharing.[16] In the egalitarian societies there are no offices of chief, or boss, or headman, which exercise control over shared goods. Instead, foragers are reported to actively work to control the tendencies of successful hunters to try to control others, or the sharing.

There are many reports of arguments over the details of a sharing event. Apparently the disputes arise (at least in part) over value. Value is very poorly understood in economic analysis generally. Value must be present in every transfer and exchange, but we have virtually no idea of how the participants view the value question. A major task for the cultural analysis of economic matters will be to address the problem of value.

If there are disputes over the packets of meat to be shared, then there are local customs for valuing those packets. There is a strong tendency in our literature to measure those values with mass (kg.) or (usually imputed) calories. Yet there are accounts of anatomical divisions (the seal-partners of the Inuit [DAMAS 1972], where the front flipper, etc. are the definition of the packet).

Among egalitarian foragers there is no single office which decides the size of the packets, and who gets them. I suspect that each packet travels along a dyadic pathway. Each packet may be constructed for the number of people who are on that path, but that is an empirical question, to be answered only with field data. If that is the case, those who construct the packets are responsible for allocating value.

There is the possibility of public disagreement over the size of the packets, and such disagreement can escalate into disharmony. How is it decided that the relative value of the packets to be distributed has achieved parity? Can one stubborn person create effective disharmony, or will others pressure that person to desist? It would be productive to inquire into who participates in the public comments, whose voice is taken seriously, and the principles which are used in any given case to decide that the egalitarian condition has (or has not) been preserved.

Property And Control

Woodburn has raised the question of property in sharing of meat among foragers [1998]. It is appropriate to do so. Property is best analyzed as the distribution of rights and duties over social relationships with respect to some particular "object" [HUNT 1998a]. There is a general tendency to equate making with ownership (what might be called sweat equity). A hunter who kills an animal has "made" the meat, and so should be presumed to be the owner of it. In our state-based society, there is a folk illusion that "the" owner owns all the rights to that object. That is not true for most propertied objects in our society, and is decidedly not true of meat among foragers.

Woodburn's account is clear on the splitting of rights over the meat. First, there is variation in what act is said to have acquired the dead organism: first sight, first hit, killing hit, etc. Second, the subsequent rights to 1) butcher the carcass, and 2) allocate (including consuming) packets of the carcass may be assigned to a number of social units, and the "killer" may have no further role, even as consumer.

It seems reasonable to posit that any transfer of an object implies the transfer of some rights over that object, and further that the donor has those rights, and the rights to transfer them. Property is almost certainly involved. Given the recent emphasis on demand-sharing, it is tempting to re-analyze this phenomenon so that only some, and perhaps none, of the rights of transfer are held by those who have possession. This is different from what we find in states. What is needed ethnographically is a very careful sorting out of the rights, and the social units, and how the rights can be shifted from one unit to another.

DISCUSSION: EXCHANGE AND/OR TRANSFER?

There is a tendency in our society to assume that every allocation event is part of an exchange. Woodburn has claimed that many food sharing events are not exchanges [1998]. I have argued that there are many economic shifts that are not parts of exchanges [HUNT 1998b], and I have called them transfers. Since we have a proclivity to find exchanges, it would be useful to ask, in every case, whether there is evidence for exchanges, as opposed to transfers.

Some "sharing" events are clearly exchanges. The Central Eskimo seal-partners are clearly exchanging the same cut of seals. It is probable, I think, that value is accorded to the anatomical part, not to mass or calories. An interesting question would be how partners are chosen, and what might cause such a partnership to unravel. For example, if one man is a very good hunter, harvesting dozens of seals a year, and the other is a poor hunter, harvesting only a handful of seals in the same time period, what happens to the partnership? Would such a partnership be formed in the first place? The social units in this case are two hunters. They are in a dyadic relationship (I assume). How long does such a

partnership last? Are there clear markers for ending it?

But many "sharing" events are not clearly exchanges, and may not be exchanges. When a hunter produces a carcass in a !Kung camp, the meat is eventually distributed, so it is said, to every person present in the camp, and to some others (such as the owner of the arrow if that owner is absent from camp when the allocation takes place). There appears to be a collection of pathways of partners, composed of dyadic relationships, along which the meat moves. On a short-term basis, it would seem unlikely that these are exchanges. If a young man kills a large animal, and it gets distributed to an old woman in camp visiting someone, the likelihood of there ever being an economic counter transfer from the old woman to the young man would seem to be very low.

If meat flow is intransitive, at least for some participants, then there is no exchange of meat. Can there be an exchange of meat for something else, such as vegetable food? Again, bathed as we are in the background radiation of exchange, it is tempting to want to call all transfers part of exchanges.

It seems plausible to construct a scenario such that many instances of the sharing of meat are not exchanges. Rather, they are transfers from those who have to those who do not have. With a general rule for shifting certain kinds of valueds from those who have to those who do not, each such shift is a transfer, and none of them are exchanges. It is tempting to apply the household pooling analysis to these sharing events, and it may even be the case that some cultures also apply that construct.

At the same time, it is reported of the !Kung that one must maintain dyadic relationships with appropriate transfers. How this relates to exchange vs. transfer is not clear. It is easy to imagine that these are exchanges, and that some judgement of value is being made. The frequency of the transfers is of importance and may be the core of value. Too infrequent an offer of something may bring doubt upon the strength of the dyad.

Each transfer might then be seen as part of some kind of an exchange relationship. We come to this matter with a tit-for-tat mentality. It is plausible that a dyad contains exchanges, but that no particular transfer is matched with a particular counter- transfer, as in the case of tit-for-tat. In general what is sent, and what is received, should balance, and should be done with the appropriate frequency. It is plausible, in other words, to imagine that these dyadic relationships, along which meat flows, are part of a kind of exchange relationship.

If this were the case, we need an unambiguous name for it. Gift, in my opinion, is too ambiguous, and too narrowly defined in the gift-commodity context, to be useful as an analytic concept. Sahlins' "generalized reciprocity" is not an exchange, and in addition confuses the meaning of reciprocity.

It seems more useful to think of this plausible case of multiple transfers between partners as reciprocity. There might be several kinds of reciprocity—one in which there are tit-for-tat exchanges, wherein the relationship is important, but each transfer has to be met with a particular counter-transfer, thereby ending the

exchange (but not the social relationship). The partners would continue to have these exchanges, until they decided to stop.

Another possible kind of reciprocity is one where there has to be a sense that in general transfers even out, but no particular transfer is matched with another particular transfer. Generalized reciprocity is an attractive name for this concept, but the name is already taken.

It is also plausible to imagine that the transfers flow along pathways, and that meat transfers are not part of any exchange relationships, but are single transfers instead. Only problem-oriented ethnographic research can resolve this question.

Tolerated theft and tit-for-tat reciprocity have been used to describe sharing. Tolerated theft and tit-for-tat reciprocity have been used by biologists, not by ethnographers, and are not anchored in the ethnography of human foragers. Tolerated theft was proposed by Blurton-Jones, a biologist, to try to find a selfish motive for apparent altruism [1984]. It is designed not for *Homo sapiens*, but for other animals. Tit-for-tat reciprocity is also from the biological literature, and seems to refer to ordinary reciprocal exchange.

Service wrote about the generosity of foragers, and many thereafter followed his lead. With the ethnography of Lee however we began to see that generosity may not be the best way to describe motivations. Demand-sharing as discussed by Peterson [1993] is now a prominent factor. Generosity implies that the possessor will gladly take the initiative to transfer some X to another. Demand-sharing states that the recipient will ask for the object, and the possessor has little choice about handing over the object.

There are two different problems being addressed here: the allocation of goods, and the motivation for doing it. There is no doubt that foragers have few objects, and that some classes of these objects (but not other classes) are frequently transferred from one person to another. Possession of some objects is temporary, and the possessor does not have much choice about how long an object can be kept. This allocation phenomenon is central to the egalitarian condition of these societies.

The motivation for participating in this system is a different matter. Generosity implies that everybody is happy to transfer the things they possess. From the reports of some ethnographers, not everybody is happy to be a donor and be dispossessed in every case. This raises the question of how a society motivates its members to participate in the standard behaviors, and what members of a society do about someone who is not motivated to participate. It is in the nature of a foraging band that there is considerable fluidity about where someone can be located. Visiting is frequent and easy. Silberbauer reports that his central !Kung bands had membership, and that would-be new members had to be accepted. He presents the case of a young man who was not sufficiently motivated towards harmony and generosity, and the senior members decided to make it clear that he was not welcome. Within a week he was gone [SILBERBAUER 1981: 174].

CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that the widespread and institutionalized sharing of meat exists among contemporary forager *Homo sapiens*. It is strongly linked to two aspects of the highly unusual egalitarianism among foragers, of wealth, and of power. There are very few detailed accounts of the phenomenon in the literature.

The purpose of this paper is to examine food sharing from an economic point of view. There is good reason to reject the use of the concepts of gift, and generalized reciprocity. I have suggested that it may well be productive to apply the idea of transfer to meat sharing. I have also suggested that more detailed reporting of the social organization and of property rights is a necessary part of the enterprise of economic analysis.

The natal household is an extremely important locus of sharing. Some of the extra-household sharing occurs in exchanges, which we can reasonably say are reciprocal. Some of the extra-household sharing occurs through what I have called transfers, where no exchange is so far demonstrated. Some of the sharing seems to occur in dyadic partnerships, which may occur within, and between, households. There are claims that the camp is also a unit for sharing of meat.

The next step would seem to be an ethnographic one.

Notes

1) I offer my thanks to Grete Hovelsrud-Broda and George Wenzel for their generosity in inviting me to participate in the symposium. It was an instructive and eye-opening experience. Brandeis University helped to defray part of the cost of attending GHAGS-8. I was the supervisor of Hovelsrud-Broda's dissertation, and without that exposure to forager ethnography I doubt that I would have taken on the task of writing this paper. I am the beneficiary of many useful discussions with Grete. I am grateful to Mark Seifert, and especially to Irene Winter, for discussions of the issues, and for comments on versions of this paper. George Wenzel and an anonymous referee have made suggestions which improved the paper. Nick Peterson offered many useful comments, not all of which could be incorporated due to limitations on space.

2) Biogram is taken from Earl Count's work, and combines biological, social and cultural components of the organization and evolution of behavior [COUNT 1958, 1973]

3) Much ink has been devoted to the question of the existence of egalitarian societies. Many have argued that foraging societies contain individuals who are not the equal of some other individuals, often based on age and gender. Flanagan has argued that there are two different questions, one a question of differentiation of society members based on wealth or political office, and the other a question of differential evaluation of individuals [1989]. There seems to be no question that personal equality is very rare. But it also seems to this observer to be no question that forager societies lack stratification by wealth, lack systematic differentiation by wealth, and lack political offices, and officers who have the right to order other people around. It is this social structure sense of egalitarian that is widely found among contemporary foragers.

4) Nick Peterson has noted that foragers often manage wild plants and animals [Personal

Communication 1999].

5) There are notable discussions of production systems and productivity among foragers. Sahlins has claimed that foragers underproduce in their environment, working little and enjoying much leisure because their wants are easily met. It is the "original affluent society". The assertion is made that they could easily produce more. See Sahlins [1972], Lee [1979, 1993]. There are vigorous challenges to this view. See Altman [1984], Hawkes and O 'Connell [1981], Hawkes et. al. [1985], Kaplan [in press].
6) There have been efforts to describe simpler technologies with the concept of mode of production. Notable here is Sahlins' Domestic Mode of Production [1972], which seems not to have been used with studies of foragers. Richard Lee's ethnographic reports on the San do not use the concept. Other attempts include those by Southall [1987], and Testart [1987].
7) But see Woodburn [1998] for a different view on spoilage.
8) One major question has been to explore the motivation for such sharing on the part of the producers. Much of evolutionary biology since the 1970s has focused on the gene as the active agent, and has posited that the gene is selfish, and the motive is to replicate itself. In this context, food sharing is queried to see how the gene regulates the organism's sharing behavior. If the producer is sharing food with organisms that share the producer's genes, then it supposedly makes sense in selection terms. If, on the other hands, the producer is sharing with organisms with whom it does not share genes, then altruism is suspected, and a puzzle exists.

   Altruism is a major problem for a gene-centric account of evolution. If the active agent is the gene, and if the gene is being selected for its ability to reproduce itsself, altruism should not exist. Arguments have been constructed to cope with the problem of altruism. Food sharing is often dealt with in this context. See Blurton-Jones [1984], Hawkes [1993], Wilson [1998].
9) Speth has challenged the idea that egalitarian foragers achieve perfect equality [1990]. His conclusion depends upon a clear concept of value, and he does not use (because nobody has described) a forager folk notion of equality. Both Speth and Kelly [1995] have referred to the "sharing" of other items than food. Close inspection of trade partnerships, lending and borrowing, and transfers, as well as different kinds of reciprocal exchanges, in the context of the folk value system, are needed.
10) It is an evolutionary puzzle because it is in such stark contrast to non-human primates on one side, and to stratified human societies on the other. Why then are contemporary foraging societies so different? As far as I am aware, there has been no attempt to account for this hiatus with respect to structural power. More attention should be paid to this phenomenon in an evolutionary context.
11) Gell went on to define gifts as "...transactions in objects which occur in the contextual setting of social reproduction through marriage, affinity and alliance." [GELL 1992: 146]. This is a very narrow and Melanesia-centric definition of gift, and is unfortunate.
12) I have not yet done a systematic search for the use of the word transfer in economic anthropology. It is used in the sense I use it by Laurel Bossen [1988], and by Duran Bell [n.d.], both of them in context of transfers accompanying marriage. So far as I am aware, this is the first use of the term with the meaning I am proposing.
13) It may be the case that ownership requires that the social isolate also be a jural isolate. The role of property in this picture is not very clear. It may be the case that ownership but not possession is a matter of property, and that in the vast majority of cases ownership is salient. If that is the case, then the social units must be jural isolates. (see

Hunt [1998a]).

14) I have defined it this way to try to confine our discussion to something we might all agree is economic. There is a large literature on "exchange", proceeding from Lévi-Strauss [1949], Homans [1961], and Blau [1964]. There is a plausible case to be made for exchanging information, insults, intimacy, psychological support, etc.. I want to separate out the economic transfers from the (multiple) others.

15) I was the supervisor of Grete Hovelsrud's doctoral dissertation. Without that exposure to data and analysis I would have found it very much harder to write this paper, and very probably would not have attempted it. Grete has been most generous in sharing her materials with me.

16) CHAGS-8 was my first hunter-gatherer conference. I looked for and could find no officers, no secretariat, no newsletter, no administrarive center. There was no Table of Organization. The point is that I automatically looked. CHAGS-8 operated in many ways like an egalitarian band.

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