

# GAME SHARING SYSTEMS AND KINSHIP SYSTEMS AMONG HUNTER-GATHERERS\*

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This article argues that there are two major kinds of game sharing among nomadic hunter-gatherers. In one, sharing is initiated by the hunter himself who shares out the game. In the other, the process is initiated by persons other than the hunter: after the hunt the hunter is dispossessed of the game which is taken over by someone else who then shares it out. This latter form is found in Australia. From this distinction an hypothesis is proposed to explain the difference between kinship systems among Australian Aborigines and those of other hunter-gatherers.

For some time we have known that hunter-gatherers share their game. Most recent accounts have tended to insist on the fact of sharing and on its extent, showing that game is shared by a number of people apart from the hunter, the producer.<sup>1</sup> Sharing is thus seen from the perspective of consumption, in other words in terms of its ultimate destination. This article will, however, concentrate on the way in which this ultimate destination is reached. I wish to show first, that there are two major kinds of game sharing. In one, system A, sharing is initiated by the producer: the hunter himself shares out the game. In the other, system B, the process is initiated by persons other than the producer: after the hunt the hunter is dispossessed of the game, which is taken over by someone else who then shares it out. These two systems are shown in fig. 1.

Secondly, I wish to show that the two different systems are found in societies structured in very different ways. In other words, since the relations between the producer and the non-producer are different in the two systems, so the social structures—above all the kinship systems—are completely different.

## *System A*

In one way this system appears to be the simplest, but it is in fact the most complex. I am not, in stating this, trying to propose a paradox. There is less risk of misunderstanding in situations that are very evidently complex. Apparent simplicity often involves ignoring hidden motives and structures. We are unable to see difficulties and thus do not ask questions. For this reason I wish to concentrate on the first system and show the economic categories that are at work, although I would maintain that it cannot be entirely understood without reference to system B.

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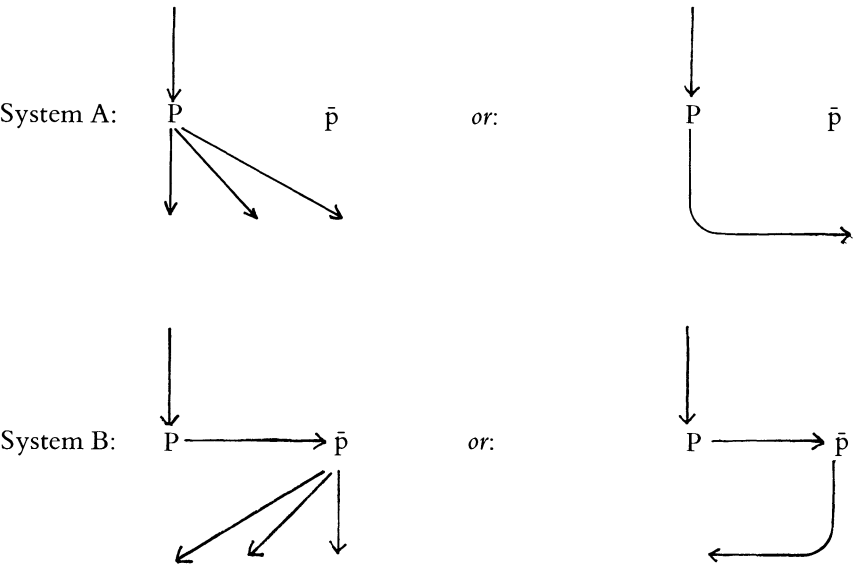


FIGURE 1. The two systems of game sharing.  $P$  stands for the producer(s),  $\bar{p}$  for the others. The arrow above  $P$  represents the process of production; the arrows below show the movements of the parts in the distribution process.

The concept of communal appropriation has too often been used with reference to hunter-gatherers who share their food. The model of the noble savage and the idea of primitive communism have been too frequently projected onto inadequate evidence and insufficient analysis. Often all that is stated is that everyone has the right to a part. But detailed analysis reveals a very different process. It is solely as a result of the lack of studies of this phenomenon that it has been possible to state: 'everyone'. . . . Such precise documentation as we do have, however, reveals something very different.

As a preliminary example we can look at the Shoshone of Nevada. Harris (1940: 47) says that 'an animal belongs to the man who hit it'. But to this is immediately added the fact that this property was entirely a matter of prestige, for the animal was in fact widely distributed. It seems that anthropologists faced by a system of sharing always vacillate between the idea of the hunter as the owner of the game that he has hit, and the opposite idea that he is not its owner—or at least that this ownership is of a pure form (a question of prestige)—since in the end he gives it away to others. But one can only give what one has, and we are forced to the conclusion that the hunter is the owner of the result of his own labour. It is because the produce is his that he can give it away. The gift of this product or rather of part of this product is thus one of the possible uses of his property. Through using his property in this way, the owner/donor denies its use value; for the donor, the gift is a form of consumption, as is the fact of eating or destroying it. It is, in a double sense, a productive form of consumption, first of all because, although the use value of the product that is given away is destroyed for the donor, it remains for the receiver; for the latter the gift creates use value. Secondly, through giving, the donor receives

something: either the hope of getting in return a gift, or prestige, or the strengthening of a tie with the receiver. The fact that the hunter gives away his game does not imply that he was not its owner at the outset; all that it implies is that he was only a temporary owner. We have thus to conclude that when the hunter gives away his game, when it is he who is in control of the distribution process, what is appropriated is above all the result of his labour.

Two questions follow from this:

1. How is the identity of the producer determined? In other words, who is seen as the owner? Although the reply is straightforward in the case of individual hunting, the point of the question is clear when several hunters participate in the hunt.
2. On what terms is sharing undertaken? How is it decided who should be included in the distribution system?

The replies to these questions clearly vary from culture to culture. But, in all the examples considered, one central fact remains the same: it is always the producer (however designated, according to the cultural terms of the particular society, at the end of the labour process) who is seen as the owner of the game and who therefore presides over its distribution.

The second example, the Eskimo of Ammassalik on the coast of Greenland, has been chosen because of the extremely detailed description of the sharing out of the game given by Robbe (1975). We can start by stating that in the case of individual hunting, appropriation occurs in the same way as among the Shoshone and poses no further problems. In the case of seal hunting, however: 'the animal belongs entirely to the person who captured it'. The seal is taken back to the village where the wife of the hunter cuts it up into sixteen pieces, which are redivided and distributed between the hunter, his wife, his children, his parents, his parents-in-law, his siblings, his wife's siblings, his first cousins and the village elders.

So, to whom does a collectively captured animal go? Robbe (1975) describes a case he observed of the distribution of a bear:

Virtually all the inhabitants of the village were there, standing around the animal in three roughly concentric circles: Harald and the five participants (those who had been members of the hunt), then the other men of the village who were going to take part in the cutting up of the bear, known as the *avisivertit* (from *avigsivoq*, 'he cuts up'), and finally the women and the children.

This reinforced the initial, general impression that everyone, not only the producers, took the game. But this apparent food communism does not stand up to analysis. Robbe's description and explanation show that the bear belongs to:

1. 'the first individual who saw it' (in this case Harald mentioned above). This 'owner' is called the *naniteq*; his rights are perfectly understood and respected since he is the first to cut open the bear once it has been skinned and to take his part—the biggest. He gets the skin, the head, the neck, the forequarters, the vertebral column and the insides;
2. the five participants in the hunt, the *ningertit*, those who in effect captured the bear. Each received either a foot or the rump;
3. the *avigsivertit*, those who did not participate in the hunt but got a part since

they were present for the cutting up of the animal. They divide the rest, the hind quarters, the stomach muscles and the flank.

This raises two issues. First does the fact that those who did not participate in the labour process (the *avigsivertit*) received a part contradict the principle of the appropriation by the producer? Each of them only got a very much smaller part than the *ningertit* or the *naniteq*. But, and this is the crucial point, the bits that they did get 'would have come to the *ningertit* if the animal had been cut up at the place of capture, when each of the participants would have got five sides'. None of the animal therefore, automatically and as of right, goes to the non-producers. The hunters could have cut up the animal in the hunting area (and other examples given by Robbe show that this in fact does happen). So, by bringing the whole animal back to the village, the producers had already made a choice, which was to give some of the animal to the non-producers, a gift that in no way undermines the principle of the appropriation of the game by the hunters.

Secondly, the *naniteq* is the first individual to see the bear or its tracks. 'This individual, male, female or child, does not need to be involved in the capture of the animal' (Robbe 1975). Even if he had not contributed to the death of the bear, the *naniteq* effectively participated in the labour process, since no bear would have been killed if it had not been seen. The *naniteq* therefore, along with the *ningertit*, is a participant in the hunt. The limits imposed on the group of hunters seem to us to be arbitrary and strange. The number of *ningertit* is limited to five: the first people to succeed in touching the animal. The pre-eminent position of the *naniteq* seems strange to us, and unfair to those who risked their lives in attacking the bear. This reaction is, however, partly unjustified, for in the totality of cynergetic activity, the location of the game is clearly as decisive and frequently more difficult than the killing. Nevertheless, overall, the division of the animal between the participants in the hunt still appears somewhat arbitrary: why are there five *ningertit*, no more, no less? Why are the first five individuals to touch the animal designated the *ningertit*, given that some of these might only have inflicted light wounds or only touched the animal once it was dead? Why does the person who only saw the animal by chance get the best part? All this seems arbitrary to us, since we assume that work should be remunerated in terms of its quantity and its qualifications. But this is to forget that the notion of abstract, comparable and quantifiable labour only appeared historically with generalised commodity exchange, and does not apply to hunter-gatherer societies. The system of sharing among the *naniteq* and the five *ningertit* thus represents an original solution to the problem of the division of the product of collective labour among the workers in a society in which the notion of abstract labour does not exist.

So this is the answer provided by the Eskimo of Ammassilik and their bear hunt to the first question that we posed. In terms of other game, or in other Eskimo areas, different answers are provided: the titular owner is, according to the situation, either the first to see the animal, or the first to have touched it or, again, the person who killed it. These are some of the ways of designating the producer-owner. They have two elements in common which are important for our argument:

1. The fact that the owner is chosen from among the participants of the hunt, that is, from among all those who were involved in the labour process;

2. That this choice was made on the basis of one phase in the labour process. It is therefore the labour process which dominates the entire system.<sup>2</sup>

At first sight, the system of the !Kung Bushmen seems to be entirely different. It is not the hunter who killed the animal or the first to have touched it, who appropriates it, but rather the owner of the first arrow that penetrated sufficiently deeply into the skin of the animal for the poison to take effect (Marshall 1976: 358). Since arrows are the objects of an important exchange system, known as the Hxaro (Wiessner 1982), the (male or female) owner of the arrow, and thus of the game, might not have contributed at all in the hunt which enabled him or her to acquire the game. Effectively this system is identical to those of the previously mentioned hunter-gatherers. For the person who uses the arrow has decided whether or not to use an arrow which belongs to him or one that was lent to him and which therefore belongs to someone else (Marshall 1976: 359). In the last analysis it is thus the person who kills the animal who makes the decision. Either, by using one of his own arrows, he decides to keep it or, by using one which has been lent to him, he transfers the rights of ownership to the owner of the arrow. It is precisely the same as giving away the game that he killed with one of his own arrows. That he is able to transfer the right to someone else, through his choice of arrow, reveals that it is he himself who is primarily the holder of this right, just as the gift demonstrates the ownership of the given object.

This, therefore, does not invalidate the fact that the game belongs to the person who kills it. In terms of the first kind of distribution which results from this, the hunter disposes of his own game. Through his choice of arrow he decides either to keep it for himself, or to give it away: this is the second level of distribution. This distribution determines the person who is seen by everyone to be the owner of the game, and thus the one who will distribute it between the members of the camp. This distribution, which Marshall calls the first, is our third level of distribution, and it redivides the animal between the hunters and the giver of the arrow, if its owner is not the person who made it. This distribution, the first which can be called sharing, involves the sharing of the animal between all the producers: those who participated directly in the hunt as well as the person who participated indirectly through contributing to the making of the arrow, one of the means of production used. It should be emphasised that the result of this distribution would seem to annul that of the second: for at the end of the second, the rights of the hunter might be transferred to the owner of the arrow, in other words to someone who had not participated in the hunt, but in the third distribution the product again returns to the hunters. Thus the producers get the animal, while the owner only gets the prestige of having presided over the distribution. The game is again distributed (Marshall's second distribution and our fourth) by those who received a part, in other words, by the producers, to their kin: it is only at this level that those who did not contribute to the hunt in any way are included. The kin in their turn redistribute. To summarise, here as elsewhere, in the last analysis, the direction

of the successive forms of distribution is determined by one of the stages in the labour process.

The system of the Aka Pygmies, as described by Bahuchet (1984), seems to be very close to the !Kung system, since here the hunter can use a spear that does not belong to him; in this (fairly rare) case the owner of the spear rather than the hunter gets the game. Otherwise the owner of the game is the person who hits the animal first; it is the weapon itself which is seen as responsible for the death, and the owner is thus the owner of the weapon. It is he who cuts up the animal and distributes the pieces among those who were members of the hunt; lastly, each of the hunters redistributes among his own family group. As in the !Kung case, the system of sharing sets up a clear distinction between the producers, who receive first, and the kin who receive second. Finally, these two systems share a cultural similarity in terms of the central role of the instrument of production (the arrow or the spear) and in the way in which the owner is designated, while in the Eskimo world it is always the action of the hunter that is important.

In all these cases, at the end of the labour process the product belongs to the producer as designated by a specific formal and arbitrary form of attribution. The producer disposes of the product and finally distributes the parts. In such societies sharing is only a secondary phenomenon in comparison with the social relations which determine that the product returns to the producer. The insistence on the facts of sharing should not hide the crucial fact that it is the producer (on occasion the collective) that appropriates the product and not the community.

### *System B*

System B is entirely different. Two initial observations can serve as an introduction. One comes from an early text by Dawson (1881: 22) who noted that among the Australian Aborigines of Victoria: 'when a hunter brings game to the camp, he gives up all claim to it, and must stand aside and allow the best portion to be given away, and content himself with the worst'. A second observation comes from Mountford (1965: 17) referring to the Pitjandjara of central Australia, according to whom: 'When an Aborigine came into the camp with a kangaroo he had speared, and probably carried several miles, he threw the carcass down at the feet of another Aborigine, seated himself in the shade of a tree, and apparently took no further interest in the matter.'

Australia is immediately distinguishable from the societies examined above in two respects: 1. the hunter gets the worst parts; so, in terms of its results, distribution is unfavourable to the hunter; 2. the hunter does not preside over the distribution—he has no control over his product. The question then arises as to who it is that presides over the distribution and how he is chosen. The particular forms of this choice vary from one region to another. It is always, however, someone other than the hunter, someone who is chosen from outside those who participated in the hunt, from outside the group of producers, and someone who is chosen independently from the procedures of the hunt.

Among the Wotjobaluk and other south-eastern tribes, it is the old men and

the elders who share food among everyone (Howitt 1904: 764, 767). Among the Aborigines of Groote Eylandt, in the north, the old men receive more than the young, and in each local group a specified man, always the same one, a kind of permanent official, presides over the distribution (Tindale 1925: 82–3). In all these cases the hunter stands apart during the distribution, and the product is entirely removed from him since the distribution is organised by those who are socially defined as independent both of the producer (in his person and his actions) and of the concrete labour process.

Elsewhere in Australia, other forms of sharing occur in which the product goes, in whole or in part, to the parents-in-law of the hunter. This kind of sharing, which is often mentioned, is seldom adequately described. In some cases it seems that only the father-in-law acts, as the elders do among the Wotjobaluk, as the distributor and general representative of all those who did not participate in the hunt: among the Kurnai the hunter returns to him, undivided, the wombat he has trapped (Fison & Howitt 1880: 262). In other cases the father-in-law appropriates the product himself and, in his capacity as father-in-law, takes his son-in-law's game. Gould's (1967: 53–7) description of the sharing of game among the Ngatatjara describes such a situation: when an animal, the size of a kangaroo, is killed far from the camp, it is cooked on the spot. It is first gutted, and the man who killed it then takes the heart and the liver which he eats then and there, 'but, of course, this is nothing more than a token share amounting to very little meat'. Once the animal is cooked it is divided among those who are present in the hunting party. It is not the person who effectively killed the animal who presides over the division, nor is it he who receives first. First it is his affines, his father-in-law and brothers-in-law, who take for themselves, and take the best parts. After this his brothers choose. Finally, the hunter whose spear hit the animal takes the rest—which can, in fact, mean nothing at all if the hunting party was large. After the division everyone returns to the camp and redivides the meat they received the first time around, with other classes of relatives.

Gould's description shows that among the Ngatatjara, sharing is undertaken according to the opposite principle to that which determines sharing among the Eskimo or the !Kung. Among the latter, it is the person who is considered as the hunter who decides the distribution: others only get what he wants to give them. Among the Ngatatjara, it is the affines, then the consanguineal kin, who take first, the hunter only getting what remains. Among the Eskimo and the !Kung, the total of the successive sharing stages describes a movement that issues from the hunter as the final decision core. Among the Ngatatjara, the movement starts from the point that is most remote from the effective hunter and comes progressively closer to him, having passed via his closest kin, his brothers.

The Ngatatjara form of sharing is different from that among the Wotjobaluk or on Groote Eylandt. Among the latter, the elders or the distributor represent a fixed independent pivot for a concrete labour process around which appropriation is organised. Ngatatjara appropriation is first and foremost by the parents-in-law of the hunter and is thus in relation to the hunter. But this is a purely formal difference. The elders and the distributor are indeed defined

independently of the hunter, but they are only there insofar as they are representatives of all those who did not participate in the hunt. They thus represent a group which is defined in relation to the hunter and in opposition to him. In all these cases it is those who are the non-producers in terms of the concrete labour process with which they are concerned, who appropriate the end product.

This principle is the same in the two kinds of division which we have examined, which are versions of the same system of sharing. The differences are of two kinds. First of all, appropriation by the non-producers is, in one case (the Wotjobaluk or Groote Eylandt) undertaken indirectly through the mediation of an appointed person, while in the other (the Ngatatjara) it is undertaken directly with no intermediaries. This demonstrates that the existence of this appointed distributor is not essential to the Australian system, and little importance need be attached to it. The second difference concerns the identity of those who have a privileged position within the appropriation system: the elders in one case and the parents-in-law in the other. The same principle underlies them both, in that the labourer does not appropriate the product of his labour. This denial is all the more powerful since the product is first, or indeed exclusively, appropriated by those who are furthest from the labourer. Among the Ngatatjara, those who appropriate first are the most remote kin, the parents-in-law, and the last are the closest, the blood relations. Among the Wotjobaluk and in Groote Eylandt, insofar as the distributor gives first and most to the old men, it is these old men who have priority in the appropriation process, in other words the least productive, those most remote from the production process. The two variants of the system demonstrate two ways of affirming in a concrete and vivid way that the product is not appropriated by the worker.

This system immediately sets up, as its basic condition, an opposition between producer and non-producer. This is not an absolute opposition, but one that is relative to the specific instance of the labour process in relation to which the problem of the appropriation of the product is posed. In another labour process the workers may not be the same and the division between the producers and non-producers may be different. In Australian Aboriginal societies, as in other nomadic hunter-gatherer societies where men work, there is no absolute opposition between a group of producers and another of non-producers. Elderly men certainly do not work, but they had worked when they were young and the adults who feed them now are those whom they fed in the past. The non-producer of today is yesterday's or tomorrow's producer, and vice versa. From a global perspective, through the particular labour processes and through the succession of generations, the opposition of producers to non-producers disappears. Thus, in these systems of sharing the non-appropriation by the immediate producer in the context of each particular process resolves at a global level into an appropriation by the community as a whole.

#### *Systems of sharing and kinship systems*

Each of these systems sets up an opposition between producers and non-producers, but in very different ways. System A, which poses the principle of



the appropriation by the producer, throws the producer into an individual relation with his own product, therefore into a relation with himself. The other—i.e. the non-producer—only exists in the beginning as an absent and excluded term, the person who has no product, who is not an owner. It is only in the second phase, that of distribution, that the other enters, as the potential end of the distribution process: he only comes in at the end, and then has a subordinate role. The distribution process is a totality of movements which all start from the same individual, the hunter-producer, the owner and distributor: parts are taken from him and feed the whole social fabric, with diminishing force the further they are from the point of origin. It is in this context that kinship relations must be located: closest kin receive most, furthest least. They can be put in the same group as geographical proximity: those who were in the camp during the division receive a part, whereas those absent get nothing. Such relations of kinship or proximity are always defined in terms similar to closeness and distance, in relation to this same individual, the producer-owner and distributor, the ego in the kinship system. This is the point of reference in relation to which all terms are located, the origin of all movements and the centre of the system.

It is therefore easy to see that such a system of division easily accommodates an Eskimo-type kinship terminology. There is an isomorphism between one and the other; each is ego-centred, with a similar definition of all the terms with regard to proximity and distance in relation to ego. According to the ego-based kinship system, kin are organised in concentric circles; first the closest (father, mother, siblings, children), then first degree kin (uncles and aunts, cousins, etc. in a terminology which conflates the two collateral lines), then the kin of second degree, etc. It is recognised that this kind of kinship system is, in effect, found among hunter-gatherers who have a system A form of sharing: propounderant in the Eskimo world and among the !Kung Bushmen.<sup>3</sup>

To conclude this discussion of system A, we can state that kinship in such systems:

1. in terms of role and function, is not concerned with the principle of the appropriation of the product by the producer;
2. in terms of form, is organised within an ego-centred system which conforms with its function of supporting distribution.

In system B, kinship is entirely different. Because this system affirms the non-appropriation of the product by the producer, it has, somehow, to specify who is to appropriate the product: the question of the definition of the other is at the centre of these concerns. The other is usually defined in kinship terms. The game goes to the father-in-law of the hunter, according to a whole range of sources (Fison & Howitt 1880: 262; Howitt 1904: 756 sqq.; Spencer & Gillen 1904: 609–11; J. Falkenberg 1981: 46; etc.). It would be wrong to see the father-in-law always as an individual person, defined in relation to the hunter by a purely inter-personal relationship. For Australian kinship systems, function can only be discussed in relation to form. These systems define, not the relations between persons, but the relations between categories of persons. Here, we must remember that these are classificatory kinship systems, and thus systems in which the significant elements are the 'classes' of kin, a word which I shall use in

the sense in which Australian ethnography talks of matrimonial 'classes'. It is only in relation to these classes that the principle of non-appropriation by the producer, which is in fact the non-appropriation by the whole class to which the producer belongs, can be specified.

A few examples illustrate this phenomenon. Throughout Australia, brothers are equivalent: two brothers are always classed in the same kinship class. As a result the brother of the hunter belongs to the class excluded from appropriation. For example, in south-west Victoria, the hunter is said to receive nothing, and his brothers are treated in the same way (Howitt 1904: 765). Among the Ngatatjara, the parents-in-law take first and the brothers last. The members of the society are often grouped into lineages and clans in such a way that (in terms of this clan or lineage organisation) all those from the same lineage or clan are the same because they belong to the same overall kinship class. Thus, among the Maljangaba of New South Wales, the tribe is divided into matrilineal moieties and a man gets very little meat from his maternal kin because they belong to the same kinship group as he does. He receives much more game from his father, since he is not maternal kin (Beckett 1967: 459). In north-east Arnhem land, society is organised into patrilineal clans and when an animal is killed by a spear dedicated to a specific clan, it is not the clan members who take priority in the division of the meat, but the men whose mothers came from this clan, thus those who belong to another clan and even another moiety (Thompson 1949: 269). Finally, we saw that it was often the old men who appropriate the game, and even though the texts have little to say on this point (perhaps because the custom has died out) this can be seen as occurring, not so much because they are old as because they are in a kinship relation to the hunters, one which opposes generations.

System B thus presupposes these classes of kin, these matrimonial classes, moieties, unilineal clans, generational levels. It also presupposes an objective delimitation of society, a division which exists before and independent of ego. Kinship terms are always seen in relation to a specific ego, they refer to the subjective and specific point of view of a determinate ego; but here we are confronted by a fixed, objective totality which exists independently of the subject.

Society as a whole is divided up in this way and organised into classes, each of which is only one part of the same totality. Such kinship systems divide society in such a way that nothing remains outside the system. The classification is exhaustive. Such classes only have complementary definitions. Thus the non-appropriation by the producer always means the appropriation by the class which stands in a complementary relation to it in society: blood relations and affinal relations, exogamous moieties, alternate generations; this is so even when these bi-partitions are cut across by others, organised on different oppositional criteria. The self and the other are defined in various different ways. But the principle which underlies system B shows that appropriation belongs to the other, and thus is to be understood as the complementary part within the same overall system of reference. The father-in-law mentioned by the sources is important as a specific and clearly understood sign of this category of the other, for he represents the other moiety, the other generation.

System B presupposes a certain organisation of society which defines what could be called the objective place of 'alterity' or otherness. This is the only definition which makes any sense of the non-appropriation by the producer which allows the other to appropriate. As a result, in system B the overall structure and the fundamental organisation of society as a whole is set in motion because the product, taken from the immediate producer, has to go to the other end of society. In so doing it has to go through each of the major categories into which society is divided. System A on the other hand only affects a localised part of society, which is centred on ego as producer and is organised in reference to him.

Kinship relations thus have a totally different role to play in these societies. In Australia (the only region in which system B is found) kinship relations are essential to, and located prior to, the principle of appropriation. We can thus determine the person to whom the product goes. In this sense, it seems to me, we can account for the primacy of kinship relations in Australia. We can also see why Australian kinship systems, so far as they are known, are of the Iroquois classificatory type which conflates brothers and parallel cousins and distinguishes parallel and cross cousins etc., with all the subtlety of a society organised into clans, moieties, sections, etc., all forms, however diverse, which define a society structured into classes.

### *Conclusion*

I want, in conclusion, to make three points.

1. *On the prohibition on consuming one's own game.* The prohibition which prevents the hunter from consuming his own game is widespread; numerous examples can be found both among hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists, in Siberia, south and north America and in New Guinea.<sup>4</sup> It is important to understand that system B, as it is described in relation to Australia, cannot be reduced to this simple prohibition, nor can it be deduced from it.

This prohibition, first, is limited in its effects. Although it affects a specific circulation of the product it is not the organising principle of society, its underlying structure. The best examples of this come from southern California and Siberia, from the Lamut and the Yukaghir.<sup>5</sup> In these cases the hunters exchange the kill among themselves. Exchange is thus strictly limited to one's hunting companions and does not affect the structure of society, for there is no appropriation by those outside the group that participated in production. In the Australian case, on the other hand, the process through which the game is taken from the hunter cuts across society as a whole. It can therefore be said that the difference between the simple prohibition on the hunter's consuming his game and the Australian system, corresponds to the difference between the incest taboo and exogamy.

In other respects, this prohibition can be explained simply in terms of a set of beliefs, such as those surrounding the souls of animals, the masters of the game, the contact between the hunter and the game, etc. These representations restrict

the hunter and limit his privileges, either because of the relation which he is supposed to have contracted with the master of the game or some clan animal, or because of the respect he owes to the souls of animals. As a result he has to treat the skin of the animal with respect, abstain from certain degrading activities, not eat its meat, or, on the other hand, try and trick the animal by abusively attributing its murder to someone else. The prohibition can thus probably be understood as the effect of a specific ideological belief. Such beliefs are common throughout south and north America and in Siberia, while, insofar as I can verify, they are totally missing from Australia.

Material provided by Bahuchet is particularly interesting in this respect. The Aka hunter does not consume his game. This prohibition only applies, however, when blood has run: if the game was knocked out, as in the case of small captured game, or if it was caught in a net, the hunter can eat it. This clearly applies to the hunter who 'acquires' the game, the person who is seen as its owner. This is usually the person who strikes first. But when the weapon that is used belongs to a third person, it is this person who is the owner, and the prohibition against the consumption of the game refers to this third person and not he who, in fact, struck the blow. Two comments follow from this.

First, the existence of system B cannot be tied to the prohibition against the hunter consuming his game, since the Aka provide an example of a system A group which *also* operates an explicit prohibition against the hunter (or rather the owner of the weapon which made the first strike and which drew blood) consuming his game. This kind of prohibition has nothing to do with the A or B form of sharing, and can co-exist with either. The most common reason is that the prohibition involves eating, whereas the system of sharing is located prior to this, at a far more fundamental, economic level: the distribution resulting from the social process of production. The consumption of food is thus only one of the uses of the product (apart from that which involves giving, for example, and which represents another form of the consumption of the product which, for the possessor, has nothing to do with food). The prohibition against the consumption of food is thus only concerned with one possible use of the product, but it does not call into question the principles of appropriation.

Second, this example illustrates perfectly the fact that the prohibition has an ideological basis, in this instance arising from a set of beliefs about blood. The co-existence of this prohibition and system B has to be situated in two distinct domains—ideological and economic. It is clearly not that the two cannot co-exist, but rather that ideological motives reinforce them and underline something that has already been given within an economic structure based on the non-appropriation of the game by the hunter. In this case the ideological motive, if it does exist, is not essential; it is an addition. It is probably for this reason that it does not occur in Australian ethnography, either because it does not exist or because it is so insignificant that it has escaped observation. In system A on the other hand, it occupies a primary position as the one thing that prevents the hunter from consuming his game.

Third, the way in which the 'acquirer' is designated and the prohibition to which he is subject in terms of the consumption of the part that comes to him, each have a different logic. The prohibition on consumption has ideological

motives whereas considerations of efficiency determine the mode of designating the 'acquirer'. It is the weapon which kills (the net, the spear, etc.) that is important. Here we are in the realm of the technical, of material production. This is entirely in accord with system A, in which as we have seen, everything originates from the technical process of production. This allows us to repeat, in a somewhat modified form, that the systems of sharing and of prohibitions are distinct phenomena, not only through their effects and their areas of application, but in terms of their own logic.

2. *On Australia.* I have shown, I think, that system B was an essential part of Australian social structures. I want now to propose another idea, and to discover the principle that operates in the sharing system that is found in other Australian institutions.

The analogy with exogamy is very clear. The hunter cannot himself consume his own game (as food), in the same way that he cannot (sexually) consume women from his own group. System B and exogamy presuppose the same kind of social structure, based on divisions into classes between which women and game circulate. Those who are opposite, those from the other moiety, always appropriate.

In the same way the young are initiated by the other moiety. This also generally holds for funerals, which are the responsibility of the other moiety. We could also show, although it would take too long, that Australian totemism is organised according to the same principles. In the ceremonies dedicated to the increase of game, each clan is responsible for its totem, but it is others who benefit.

All these institutions therefore reveal that the same organising principles underlie the Australian system in its entirety. The idea is that there is an essential disjuncture with the closest and a union with the furthest. Although this has for some time been recognised for exogamy and matrimonial systems, and in part for specific totemic phenomena, it has still to be identified within the economic sphere, and this is what I have been attempting to do in terms of the sharing of game.

3. *On Marxist concepts.* For twenty years there has been considerable discussion of the social relations of production, but no general and adequate definition has been given – particularly in so far as the term has been applied to societies without classes and exploitation, so often the concern of anthropology (see Testart 1985: 17–53). I propose the following definition: the social relations of production are those which link the producer and the non-producer, and determine the way in which the product is divided between them. This is only a generalisation of Marx's demonstration, in *Capital*, of how the totality of economic structures (the mode of production) of capitalism could be understood in terms of its central fact: the extraction of surplus value, the specific form that surplus labour takes in the capitalist mode of production. Capitalist social relations can therefore be defined as the relations between the immediate producers (the proletariat) and the non-producers (the capitalists) which determine the division of the product between them, between that part which

corresponds to necessary labour (which goes to the proletariat) and the surplus product (which goes to the capitalists).

Once this is accepted it is very clear that the social relations of production of hunter-gatherers have to be located in terms of systems of sharing game. In system A, the product is divided in such a way that it returns *in toto* to the immediate producer. This defines the social relations of production in societies such as the Shoshone, the Eskimo or the !Kung. In system B, on the other hand, the product is divided in such a way that the producer is entirely deprived of the product in favour of others. This non-appropriation by the immediate producer in each specific process of production is resolved by the collective appropriation of all social production by the community as a whole. It is this that defines the social relations of production in Australian societies. There is, therefore, a profound difference between Australian and non-Australian hunter-gatherers, and entirely different modes of production are in operation.

This comment is only the corner-stone of a much larger theoretical construct, which, to account for the totality of economic activities, has also to include other elements: gathering, manufacture, the relation with the land, etc. I have attempted to undertake this elsewhere (Testart 1985).

#### NOTES

This article was first given in January 1985 at the Ethnoscience seminar at the Ethnobotanical and Ethnozoological Laboratory of the Natural National Museum and of the UA 882 of the CNRS. In its present form it benefited enormously from the remarks and the discussion which took place thanks to the participants of the seminar, and in particular from unpublished material provided by Pierre Robbe and Serge Bahuchet, when they themselves gave seminars at the same period (see Robbe 1984 and Bahuchet 1984). The article was also presented in its English version to the 4th International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (London School of Economics, 8–13 September 1986) and has benefited from remarks from many participants. The article elaborates, in a somewhat different form, the theses and data given in chapter 2 of *Communism primitif (1): économie et idéologie* (Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985).

<sup>1</sup> It is clearly necessary to explain once and for all the use of the term producer as applied to the hunter. Undoubtedly this use goes against a long tradition which is dominant in prehistoric archaeology, which uses the term 'predators' to describe hunter-gatherers and which restricts the term producer to agriculturalists. An opposition of this kind can perhaps be justified in terms of the descriptive ends that it proposes, but it is entirely incorrect in terms of economic analysis. Hunting is a production process in the same way, for example, that mineral extraction is, for it is an activity that requires the use of tools and produces an end product which was not there at the outset of the labour process. The difference between the hunter-gatherer and the agro-pastoralist can perhaps be defined at a very general level by saying that the second changes nature very profoundly, through creating fields, domestic species, etc. It can be more precisely defined in terms of the process of labour, by saying that the object of labour (what labour is applied to) is natural and given for the hunter-gatherer, whereas it is the result of previous labour for the agriculturalist or the pastoralist. The difference lies in the *nature* of the production but not between the presence or absence of production. (It should be clear that I am using here the marxian terminology which distinguishes in the process of labour the object, means and result of labour).

<sup>2</sup> Additional information provided by Robbe at the seminar mentioned above, reveals the existence of a very precise and complex juridical system. This information I put in my own terms, which will not be his. Whatever the animal and the kind of hunt that is implied, sharing is organised in relation to two major events: the transport from the hunting grounds to the camp and the cutting up of the animal. Those who, as hunters or producers, have rights over the animal, come from among those who were present at the hunt; transporting the animal ends this first phase of

attribution. The parts which are allocated there are purely theoretical and represent the rights gained over the animal which will only be finally defined when the animal is actually cut up. The cutting up takes place either where the hunt took place or at the camp outside or inside the house of the owner. According to the geographical location of the cutting up, the parts that are then acquired by each of those who have rights as hunters are different. Once the cutting up is over, the parts are definitely acquired; each person having one of the parts has exclusive and individual rights over it, which does not prevent him from redistributing it among the family group to which he belongs.

<sup>3</sup> There is not sufficient room here to allow a discussion of the Hawaiian kinship system, which frequently occurs among hunter-gatherers with a system A kind of sharing. For reasons, however, that it would take too long to discuss in detail here, I only consider nomadic hunter-gatherers while excluding '*stockeurs sédentaires*' (Testart 1982a; 1982b), as well as those, such as the Aka pygmies, whom I call 'enclaved', since they have a tendency to model their kinship system on those of their agricultural neighbours (Testart 1981). I am arguing for a gross statistical correlation between sharing and kinship systems. Of course there is no strict correspondence which would be valid for each people, since it is well known that there are other types of kinship systems among Bushmen, in the Eskimo domain or among Canadian hunters (for further detailed discussion on a statistical basis, see Testart 1985: 231–4).

<sup>4</sup> Jochelson 1910: 20; Levin & Vasil'yev 1964: 680; Clastres 1966: 21; 1972: 168–9; Kroeber 1925: 643, 684, 688; Oosterwald 1961: 65; Haberland & Seyfarth 1974: 244; Hauser-Schaublin 1977: 72.

<sup>5</sup> Kroeber, Levin and Vasil'yev, and Jochelson (see 4 above).

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## APPENDIX—ON AUSTRALIAN DATA★

When this article was written, as well as the book from which it originates, I was not aware of the article by Altman (1982) which presented, on the subject of the sharing of game among the Gunwinggu (Arnhem Land), data which seem to be rather different from those which I have drawn on in this article (see also Altman & Peterson n.d.). Recent field research by B. Moizo (personal communication) in Kimberley seems to confirm the data published by Altman. These new data do not seem to me to be of such a kind as to put in question the older observations by Dawson, Tindale, Mountford, Gould (*op. cit.*). There are no grounds for supposing that either one group or the other has made a mistake. So we must admit the existence of a difference between the recent data from Arnhem Land and Kimberley and the older data coming from the rest of Australia. This presents a most interesting problem which should be examined with the greatest attention, bearing in mind that the methods of sharing out game in Australia have been very little studied, by comparison with other topics such as kinship. Hence this note must be considered as very provisional.

The first question to ask is whether these recent data correspond closely with traditional Aboriginal custom. Hunting today is done with rifles. Altman's article (1982) is concerned primarily with the buffalo, an animal species unknown in Australia before colonisation. It is true that Altman affirms that the sharing rules which he described for the buffalo are equally valid for kangaroos and other macropods. Nonetheless, we may ask whether the presence of a game animal such as the buffalo, so different from the traditional game and of such large dimensions, does not have the effect of considerably modifying traditional rules of sharing. When a buffalo is killed, hunters are confronted by a considerable mass of meat to distribute, quite out of proportion with that resulting

★ Translated by Jonathan Benthall



from slaughter of even the biggest of kangaroos. If one can imagine new rules of sharing being instituted for buffalo, cannot one imagine that rules relating to traditional game may have been equally modified to conform with the rules relating to buffalo? It is clear that the economic base of present-day Aboriginal communities (cash economy, social security payments etc.) is very different from that of pre-contact societies. Can we not imagine a radical change in social structure, and specially in relations between old and young? Altman (1982: 278) notes that 'It is protocol for a successful hunter to be humble and undemonstrative, although young single men often openly argue about their successes'. May we infer that *against protocol*, that is to say against the traditions which gave such a good share to the older ones during distribution, young men tend nowadays to assert their rights? The modification of relations of power and authority between young and old is evidently a central question for our understanding of systems for sharing of game in Australia.

The second question is to what extent these new data contradict the old. I do not think they are as contradictory as may appear. There are differences of detail between the two sets of data, explicable either by an historical evolution or as regional variations, but both sets of data testify to what seems to me the same general philosophy of sharing. In order to put the problem in a regional context, I shall consider the three references that I have noted for Arnhem Land.

The evidence of Tindale (1925: 82–3) for Groote Eylandt, the island to the east of Arnhem Land, is categoric: the same rule holds that within each group it is always the same man who distributes food (edible roots, cooked dugong and turtle flesh), whereas the one who brings in food remains apart during the distribution and very generally receives nothing. The later evidence of Thomson (1949: 25–26) for north-east Arnhem Land is more complex because it reports two different types of sharing. The first is definitely consistent with what I have called type A: 'As a rule, when a large quarry such as a kangaroo is killed, it is cooked and quartered on the spot, and then divided equally among those taking part in the hunt'; it is not until then that 'obligations defined by kinship' intervene. Here is the second rule: 'The flesh of any kangaroo or other game which is killed with a spear or other weapon which is *yarkomirri* (lit. 'having a name') that is, which has been dedicated to a sacred clan totem, is also sacred, and may be eaten only by members of the restricted group comprising the fully initiated members of the clan. On these occasions when the food or game is tabu, *the division of the quarry is in the hands of the old men* of the clan, or more particularly, the men who apply the term *ngandi* (mother) [. . .] to the clan concerned [. . .]. *The traditional rights of these men take precedence even over those of the hunters* who killed the quarry. The men who officiate in these divisions of food or game, as on most ceremonial occasions, are by kinship status necessarily members of the opposite moiety' (Thomson 26, emphasis mine). The clans and moieties are patrilineal. So those who preside and 'take precedence' are the old men, hence of the *other* generation, but more exactly those of the *other* moiety: which is precisely system B. The two systems coexist. It may be objected that in this case, system B is found only in a context of ritual. Nonetheless, it is found, although the first part of Thomson's description might have led one to expect the contrary; moreover, though the context is indeed one of ritual, this is linked to an economic activity.

Finally, is system B found as well among the present-day Gunwinggu of north central Arnhem Land, studied by Altman? Undoubtedly, Altman describes a different system from Tindale's, but I wonder whether it cannot be considered as a combination of the two systems reported by Thomson, or at least as the possible result of tension between these two systems. The hunter does have a right over his catch. But on the other hand, 'elders [are] particularly empowered to claim portions that they desire [. . .] A young man who is a successful hunter may find himself with next to no meat [. . .] elders may

try to override his claims' (Altman 1982: 278). Surely we find in these lines accents which recall older evidence according to which the hunter is kept in the background, usually to the advantage of the old men. In any case, the right of the old men is well established, and there is a definite tension between young and old. Again, 'if the hunter is a young unmarried man he may give the whole animal over to his father or other senior male relative to distribute after he has cooked it' (Altman and Peterson n.d.: 4). The Gunwinggu are matrilineal and hence the father belongs to the other moiety. This leads me to stress that the ordinary rules of sharing among the Gunwinggu allocate an essential share—and in a ritual context the whole of the catch—to hunters MMBDS and MBS (Altman 1982: 278), that is to say to affines, people from the other moiety. So these others, this principle of 'alterity' or otherness, whether of generation or moiety, come into play at the time of the first share-out. Is it necessary to recall that this is very different from the cases of the Ammassalik Eskimo or the !Kung?

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