On the Social Anthropology of Hunter-Gatherers

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Testart's (CA 29:1–13) article is an interesting view of the issues in the social anthropology of hunter-gatherers, and it also provides the researcher with inspiration for the investigation of prehistoric reality.

If each population is a socioeconomic system, then its characteristics emerge from the interaction between the biological and cultural requirements for the maintenance and reproduction of human groups. Every population has five important features: the exploitive ability of the local group, the capacity of the environment, the size of the group, the social structure of the group, and the ideological subsystem. The research that has been conducted so far indicates that these factors have interacted on various levels in the course of the development of ancient populations. For the earliest populations the relations between group size, capacity of the environment, and exploitive ability seem to have been most important in determining the direction and efficiency of the economy (Piontek and Weber 1985). In this context, the character of Testart's societies of hunter-gatherers whose economy is based on food storage is a function of these factors. In answer to Testart's question concerning the relations between economy and the social structure, I tend to see technological and economic organization as causing the emergence of both social forms and inequalities. However, processes going in the opposite direction must also have existed. I agree with Testart that the emergence of food-storing hunter-gatherer societies was a critical point—a point at which an essentially new structure simulating the productive economy began to develop.

It is also worth noting that the sedentary way of life of a hunter-gatherer society is not necessarily a consequence of the economic structure Testart proposes. It could be a response to a lack of fauna or the specific

habits of the animals inhabiting restricted areas (Kozłowski 1972).

In the context of Testart's observations the issue of Neolithization, although not the focus of his interest, attracts attention. The existence of the features traditionally regarded as Neolithic, such as sedentariness, social inequality, and considerable density of population, in nonagricultural societies that practise intensive food storage does not explain the spread of the productive economy in a broader area such as Central Europe. Such an economic structure, Testart stresses, could have emerged only in specific conditions and only in societies that practised gathering, in contrast to the Central European hunting-and-gathering societies of the forest sphere, where hunting was predominant. Testart's concept does not answer such important questions as What would define the Neolithic in Europe, inegalitarian social structure or cultivation of cereals? Was sedentariness the result of an economy based on the storage of wild food supplies or of an agricultural economy? Assuming that the emergence of storing hunter-gatherers could have happened only under specific environmental conditions (not found in Europe), how are we to understand Neolithization in Europe? Here it is necessary to use some other model such as that of Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza (1973).

Testart's concepts are weak because he bases his hypothesis almost exclusively on observation of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies. It would have been stronger if he had demonstrated the presence in Europe of prehistoric hunter-gatherers whose economy was based on food storage. Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the observations of such multiseason sedentary Paleolithic settlements as Pavlov, Awdiejewo, and Kostienki, where the economy was based on highly specialized hunting.

The existence of inegalitarian hunting-and-gathering societies that practise food storage neither constitutes evidence of their existence in prehistoric times nor allows a detailed estimate of their importance in the general process of change. The food storage and inegalitarian social structure of early farmers do not prove that hunting-and-gathering societies with a storage economy existed before them. In any case, is it possible reliably to distinguish egalitarian and inegalitarian prehistoric societies? What would be the criterion for such a distinction?

Testart's proposal of a new definition of hunter-gatherers does, however, seem reasonable. A new definition would combine terms defining economic activity with social forms. It is necessary to question, redefine, and verify issues and terms that have lost their explanatory power.

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It is very important that Testart has directed our attention to the existence of groups of hunter-gatherers characterized by sedentariness and socioeconomic inequalities and pointed out that, since this category of hunter-gatherers has the same economic structure as cultivators of cereal, the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture is not revolution but social evolution. Some questions do, however, arise from this discussion.

Testart says that the storage economy could come into being only among those who were principally gatherers and/or fishers, but a storage economy as he defines it evidently exists among hunters of large mammals such as the Eskimos of North Alaska (Tareumiut and Nunamiut), the Caribou Eskimos, and Plains Indians such as the Blackfoot. It is especially noteworthy that the Tareumiut, for instance, stored the meat, blubber, and skins of the whale in underground caches for more than a year (Larsen and Rainey 1948:29). Most families of the Lower Thompson, semisedentary storers of British Columbia, kept the surplus of each season's catch of salmon for two or three years (Teit 1900:234).

Testart regards sedentariness as one of the two major characteristics of storing hunter-gatherers, but ethnographic data do not indicate any close correlation between sedentariness and storing as he defines it. The Shoshoni (pine-nut collectors) were nomadic storers, and there are many examples of seminomadic storers such as the Blackfoot, Nunamiut, and Tareumiut.

Testart considers the appearance of inequalities in large part tied to storing, which constitutes the material basis for their development, but it appears to me that there is no close correlation between the two phenomena. Even sedentary storers, for example, the Northern Paiute of the Owens Valley (pine-nut collectors) and the Sanpoil of the Plateau (salmon fishers), may not show such marked socioeconomic inequalities as are seen among the Northwest Coast Indians. On the other hand, a stratified or ranked society of the Northwest Coast type can be found even among "central-based wanderers" (VanStone 1974:41) or less sedentary storers such as the Ingalik of the lower Yukon (Snow 1981:608).

Testart says that "correlations become evident between economic structure and storage, sedentariness and socio-economic inequality" and that these correlations "allow us to envisage the category of storing hunter-gatherers as an autonomous and properly constructed one . . . quite distinct from the other category of hunter-gatherers" (p. 5). For the reasons just mentioned, it does not appear to me that storing is an appropriate criterion for distinguishing the sedentary, inegalitarian hunter-gatherers represented by the Northwest Coast Indians from other hunter-gatherers.

It is not only on the Northwest Coast that we find hunter-gatherer societies with social ranking or stratification. Such societies are also widely found in other areas surrounding the northern Pacific. One of the most significant features of these societies is occupational differentiation among males—differentiation of nonhunters from (big-game) hunters. In the northern Pacific maritime areas from the Northwest Coast to the Far East that are associated with the successive runs of Pacific

salmon, the nonhunters were fishermen (Watanabe 1983), while in California they were fishermen and/or small-game hunters.

These specialized big-game hunters often underwent specific training under the sponsorship of the father (Ainu), grandfather (Tipai), maternal uncle (Tlingit), etc., or a secret society (Nomlaki). The system of producing aristocrats that is ethnographically well known from the Yurok appears also to have been a system of producing specialized hunters. Hunters were clearly distinguished from nonhunters in their societies on the basis of such criteria as the nature of their guardian spirits, ceremonial privileges, and/or esoteric knowledge. These hunters were necessarily richer than nonhunters and higher in social status. On account of their wealth and prestige, they were respected or looked upon with awe by other members of their societies. These ethnographic facts suggest that occupational differentiation among males between hunters and nonhunters may have been the primary factor relevant to the ranking or social stratification that characterizes societies of northern Pacific maritime hunter-gatherers (Watanabe 1983).

It appears to me that ranked or stratified hunter-gatherer societies can be classified into two major categories on the basis of the presence (e.g., Nootka and Tlingit) or absence (e.g., Ainu, Ingalik, Thompson, Alsea, Tipai, and Nomlaki) of a true nobility—chiefs who do not perform menial tasks. Variation in the nature and degree of development of social stratification appears to be correlated with variation in the nature and degree of differentiation of nonhunters among the males of a given society. Especially noteworthy is such division of labor by class as is practiced by the Nootka: only the lower-class and the slaves went fishing, while the chiefs and their relatives concentrated on hunting (Gunther 1927:214).

Modern hunter-gatherer societies can and must be reclassified into two categories, those that permit males to be nonhunters and those that do not. Socioeconomic inequality is associated with the former. It appears more appropriate to regard the phenomenon as a result of occupational differentiation among males than as a result of storage. This new system of sociological classification of modern hunter-gatherers will be fully discussed in a paper I am now preparing. In my opinion, the origin of agriculture can be seen as the emergence among hunters of cultivators as a sort of nonhunters similar to the differentiation of fishermen and/or small-game hunters in native North American societies (Watanabe 1986, 1988).

Reply

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In response to Marciniak's concerns I will say that I have repeatedly mentioned the possibility of storing hunter-gatherers in prehistory—for the Natufian in the Near East, the Jōmon in Japan, the Woodland in North America, and certain coastal or riverine sites in Central Europe, among which Lepenski Vir seems one of the most likely, and in the far north (Testart 1982:19–21, 114–17, 124–26, 133–37, 175ff.). But archaeological data are always difficult to interpret, and these are only probable cases. As far as the earliest sites of the loess region of Europe, such as Kostienki, are concerned, it seems to me wisest to reserve judgment (pp. 137–39).

I am grateful to Watanabe for having long recognised the interest of my storage hypothesis, and therefore the discussion must begin with certain misunderstandings of detail arising from the fact that Watanabe does not read French and I do not read Japanese. Thus he confronts my idea that storers are primarily fishermen and gatherers with several cases of hunters. Now, the first case, that of the Tareumiut, I have classed unambiguously among storing hunter-gatherers and have explained why Arctic maritime hunters are an exception: the Tareumiut have subterranean caches *dug into the permafrost* that permit easy freezing *throughout the year*, whereas outside storage on platforms or on the ground, the general mode of preservation throughout the Arctic, is possible only in winter (Testart 1982:121–22). *Except in a cold environment*, the preservation of the flesh of game requires very much more work than the preservation of plants or fish, and consequently one does not find storage *on a large scale* (and "the storage economy as [I] define it") among hunters, especially not among Plains Indians like the Blackfoot (pp. 150–51, 154–62). I have even advanced the idea that among hunters of bison the highly elaborate techniques for preserving meat (I distinguish preservation *technique* from storage *economy*), especially the making of pemmican, have the effect of reinforcing their nomadism and locking them into an economic logic very different from that of storers (p. 161).

Watanabe calls into question certain "correlations" among sedentariness, storage, inequalities, etc., once again offering some counterexamples. Here methodological precision is indispensable. I have always recognised intermediate cases—the Indians of the Great Basin and the Plateau and the Athapaskans of the west (pp. 118–20) as well as the immense Eskimo domain—that call for study from the point of view of storage. The realisation of a storage economy depending as it does on contingent conditions and variables of the environment, there will necessarily be cases in which it is only partially realised. But these intermediate cases tell us little, for it is always with regard to the clearly distinguished case that one can best test correlations.

Finally, it seems to me that Watanabe throws into relief a very interesting phenomenon by showing that throughout the North Pacific we see the beginnings of a division of labour, "occupational differentiation among males." The fact is sufficiently unusual among hunter-gatherers to be worth underlining. It seems to me equally significant that the only hunter-gatherer societies in which one finds this nascent division of labour

are, to my knowledge, those cited by Watanabe, that is, precisely the societies that I categorise as storers (pp. 52–54, 100). The problem is knowing whether this division explains the stratification or vice versa, for if the specialised hunters of whom Watanabe speaks are, as he says, "*necessarily* [my emphasis] richer . . . and higher in social status," is not one adopting as explanation the very inequality one proposes to explain? I would tend to consider the differentiation of tasks and the stratification as two aspects of the same trend.

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A Conservative Generation of Students? Comments on "Anthropology's Other Press"

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As former editors of *Nexus: The Canadian Student Journal of Anthropology,* we read Hannerz's (CA 28:214–19) "Anthropology's Other Press" with real interest. Although we agreed with many of the things he said, we were surprised to find him suggesting that "as things stand at present, this is hardly the voice of a proscribed opposition in anthropology; there is little that is subterranean in these publications" (p. 214) and that, with few exceptions, the people (many of them students) who put out the little journals seem to be satisfied with "anthropology as it is" (p. 219). Is the current crop of anthropology students really so conservative? After thinking about this issue for some time, we have come to the conclusion that it is.

There are, we think, reasons for this that go beyond the one offered by Hannerz: that students are using the little journals as a professional training ground and therefore tend to emulate the "professional" stances adopted by the mainstream journals. Before exploring these reasons we need to define what we mean by "conservative." As Hannerz implies, the concept really has two sides. The first is political. "There was certainly a time when at least some of the student journals in anthropology were vehicles of intellectual rebellion and experimentation. An obvious example would be *Critical Anthropology,* coming out of the New School for Social Research in New York in the early 1970s" (p. 219). Why are students, for the most part, not publishing such journals now? One answer may be that the student body as a whole is much more politically conservative in the 1980s than it was in the 1960s and 1970s. These are the days of multiple degrees and no jobs, when after ten years of hard work the new Ph.D. in social sciences can look forward to a well-earned rest—on unemployment insurance. It makes sense that more and more students would adopt a conservative stance in the face of a depressed job market. Another, perhaps less obvious answer may be that radical academic journals have become more commonplace. With established alternatives such as *Critical Anthropology* and *Dialectical Anthropology* already in place, there seems little reason for radical students to put the time and effort into starting a new crop of radical journals (especially if, as seems to be true, there are relatively fewer radical students around).

The second side of "conservative" refers to the tendency to work within the mould of previous anthropologists. This need not have reference to any overt political position. We refer here to students' taking a conservative position in relation to their immediate surroundings. By this standard a student in a department with Marxist leanings is being "conservative" if s/he assumes a Marxist stance. The "radical" in this situation might be the student who steadfastly defends a functionalist position. It seldom happens today, though, that a department or other intellectual environment will be so dominated by one more or less coherent body of thought. More commonly, students work within heterogeneous environments where they will encounter a number of cliques and/or individuals holding specific theoretical positions. In this kind of situation we would consider someone conservative if s/he were to take a position recognisable as following an authoritative trend of thought. This is more in keeping with Hannerz's notion of "play": Is a