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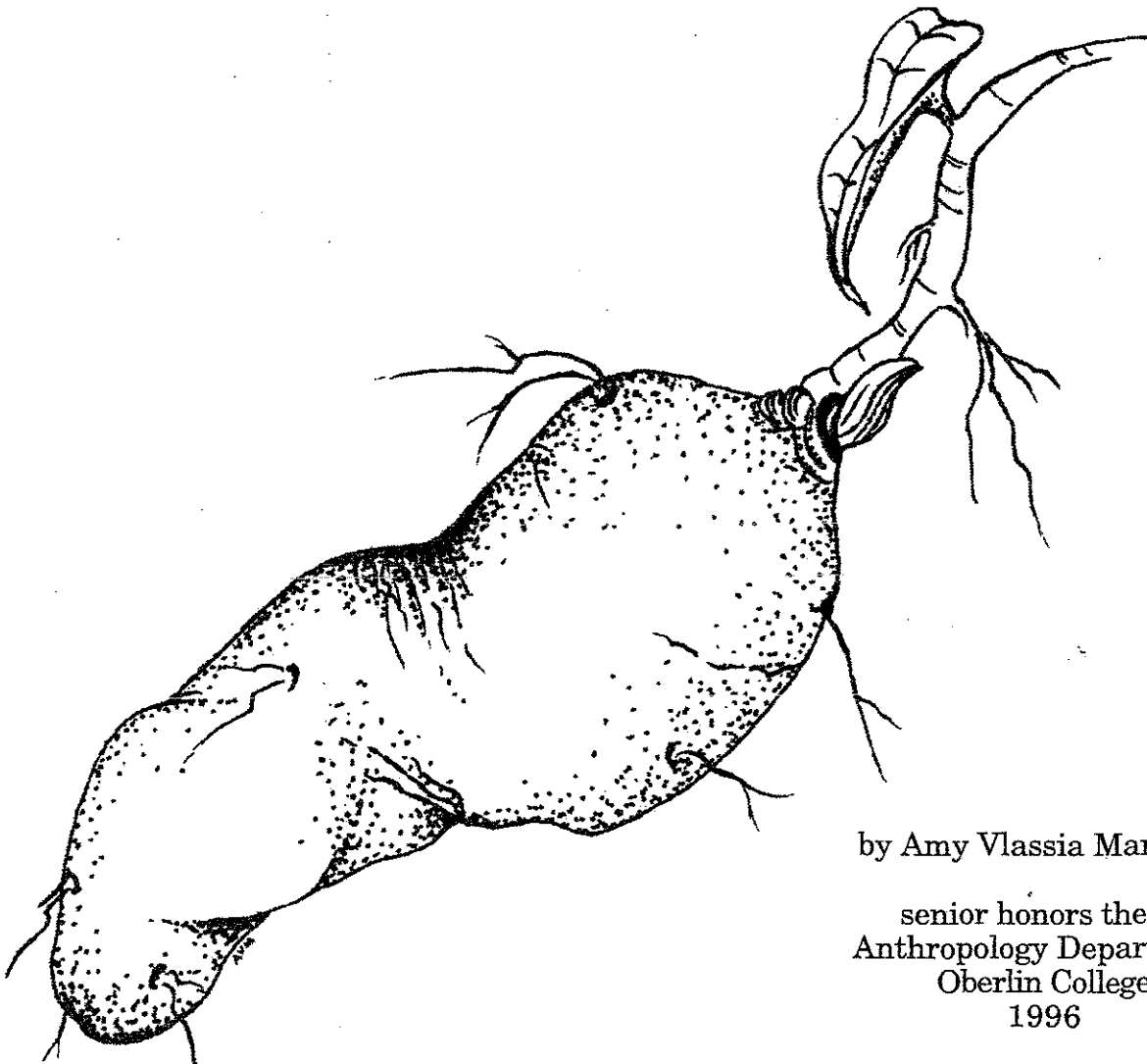
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MEAT AND POTATOES:

RECIPES FOR A RANGE OF EGALITARIANISM IN THREE HUNTER-GATHERER SOCIETIES



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senior honors thesis
Anthropology Department
Oberlin College
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*"The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them
their meat in due season."*

- Psalm 145:15

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INTRODUCTION

The Quest for Categories

Throughout most of human history our ancestors lived by hunting and gathering. Only within the last ten to fifteen thousand years have alternative forms of social organization developed, duly labeled by anthropologists and archaeologists: agricultural, pastoral, and complex state societies, lineal tribes, and a host of other terms which pass in and out of favor in our ongoing (and inescapably human) attempts to categorize our own kind.

Classification lies at the heart of science, and anthropology is certainly no exception. However, categorization of any degree (which requires generalization) runs the risk of obscuring important differences between cultural groups. The trick for anthropologists is to strike a balance between grouping to the point of over-generalization, and dealing with cultures on such an individual basis that cross-cultural regularities are not recognized. When we look at the history of anthropological theory, it is clear that this approach is a relatively recent one - and one we continue to struggle with.

Wilmsen (1989) and Kelly (1995) have written what I believe are excellent reviews of how the category we now refer to as hunter-gatherers (or foragers) has fared in changing historical and cultural typologies. Growing out of the European Enlightenment and its fashionable idea of progress, Morgan's model of unilinear cultural evolution clearly represents the dominant intellectual paradigm of the nineteenth century. The evolution he described from savagery to barbarism to civilization was direct, all-encompassing, and hierarchical. Morgan emphasized technology

and other material factors as the driving forces of cultural evolution; little leeway was given to other influences that might shape culture. Instead, Culture was considered a monolithic set of stages through which some groups naturally progressed more speedily than others. In this way, Morgan saw contemporary groups which fit the category of "savages" as no different from those stone and bone-using peoples of the Pleistocene.

Morgan's particular expression of this idea was appealing, profoundly influencing many of his contemporaries. Marx, for example, used this model as a basis for his own theories of social evolution and progress. In tracing the struggle between classes for control over means of production, he equated savagery with the primitive communist state. Marx believed that only after the progression of several other stages, including capitalism, would the social ideal of true communism re-emerge. Among other problems, the type of deductive reasoning used to place cultures into discrete categories such as these too easily led researchers to exclude or distort actual ethnographic data so they would conform to a pre-fabricated mold, leaving no room for deviations.

I find it interesting that while social theorists continued to work within the frame of general evolution, these very same ideas were quickly breaking down in the nearby natural sciences. The publication of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* in 1859 introduced the theory of natural selection, based on biological adaptation to specific environments by way of random processes. Darwin's evolutionary model was similar to that of his contemporary, Morgan, in that it established a scientific explanation for questions long answered by theologians. However, Darwin's biological framework allowed for many possible evolutionary paths, as species strove toward optimal states of adjustment which were relative to their particular ecological circumstances. Morgan's cultural stages, on the other hand, were pre-determined and absolute. Darwin's notion of

adaptation quickly became popular among both scientists and lay-people, but was generally ignored by anthropologists, even into the early twentieth century.

Boas, critical of etic categorization entirely, retaliated against the lingering popularity of general evolutionism with his historical particularist method of studying culture. He considered every group unique, and understandable only by reconstructing its long and individual history. Because of this deeply rooted uniqueness, cultures could not be ranked, some considered "higher" or more advanced than others. Boas also peered vertically into individual cultures with this notion in mind, assigning equal weight to all cultural characteristics in contributing to a group's overall configuration: kinship structure, art, religion, economy, etc. Boas dismissed the general evolutionary models of Morgan, Tylor, and others as ethnocentric - a clear step up for the status of hunters and gatherers.

Within this scheme, however, comparison between groups was not considered viable. Even as many so-called defining features of hunters and gatherers are fading in the light of more detailed ethnography, as well as through the reality of increased interactions with non-foraging groups, it is clear in my mind that *something* sets hunters and gathers apart from other sorts of groups. The investigation of those common components requires cross-cultural comparison, which in turn will make possible generalization. Boas' ethnography was admirable, but his results were in some ways as limiting as the evolutionary models he was so vehemently opposed to.

I find the work of Julian Steward admirable because he was interested in the *processes* which ultimately give rise to cross-cultural regularities, mediating between Boasian radical relativism and models of general evolution which could not account for variation between groups.

He believed that the form and structure of a community was strongly tied to the interplay of the people with their natural environment; the problem, as he saw it, was "to ascertain whether the adjustments of human societies to their environments require particular modes of behaviour or whether they permit latitude for a certain range of possible behaviour patterns" (Steward 1955:36). In this way, people were not merely pawns swept up in an immutable chain of events beyond their control. He believed that similar ecological variables tended to give rise to similar structures, but that the process was far from deterministic. At the same time, he argued that the converse of this trend was not necessarily true: similar configurations did not imply a similar history of change. In other words, by delving into the problem of culture change on the level of individual cultures, he revealed that the ends, sometimes ensconced within a shell of external similarities, did not always reveal the means.

In addition, Steward led the way in modern anthropology as one who truly practiced the scientific method in both his ethnographic and earlier archaeological work. Scientific investigation requires empirical data that the researcher uses to formulate falsifiable theories. Steward proceeded in his method of cultural ecology with a set of problems in hand to be studied empirically. His hypothesis-testing resulted in middle range theories based on ethnographic data, thereby going beyond the descriptive ethnography of Boas, without adopting overly general evolutionary models which relied on single causation.

In *The Foraging Spectrum* Robert Kelly stresses that our search for how to most accurately represent hunter-gatherers as a single category is ongoing; still, no single name or label can ever account for the entire range of variability between groups. While I believe the work of anthropologists like Boas and Steward has helped to revise some long-standing typologies, Kelly feels that we have nevertheless continued with

this same classificatory approach in attempting to distinguish foragers as a group. In his view, we must now move toward theories which attempt to *explain* variability, rather than merely gloss over it (1995:34). Although clearly Kelly is not the first to articulate this, I agree that we must not overlook internal differences because of the possibility that they will blur what have been erected as clear (and somewhat arbitrary, I believe) boundaries between those groups primarily foraging for a living and those that do not.

Hunter-Gatherers as Human Artifacts

One weakness of general models of human evolution is that they are not truly diachronic. While they depict change, it is in the form of evolution between contemporaneous stages rather than within individual groups through time. The ensuing effects on the representation of hunter-gatherer groups have been profound; the names have changed, but their perceived status as the last remaining links to our Pleistocene past is dissolving with much more difficulty. In much the same way that Morgan attempted to delineate the nature of Cultural evolution, anthropologists until recently believed they had discovered in modern hunter-gatherers the essence of Humanity, unencumbered by the trappings of modern society. Even the ground-breaking work of Lee, DeVore, and others of the Harvard Kalahari project in the 1960s proceeded on the basis of this now controversial assumption - what better peoples to study in search of the natural "human condition" (Lee and DeVore 1968:ix)? On the !Kung, Wilmsen writes, "Paradoxically, these peoples, who are universally considered to be the longest-term living residents of the Kalahari, are permitted antiquity while denied history" (1989:10). In this way, researchers placed much more emphasis on the categorical similarities *between* groups than on their differences, derived from a range of

historical processes. .

Man the Hunter, an outgrowth of the 1966 *Symposium on Man the Hunter* and edited by Lee and DeVore, was a major turning point in hunter-gatherer studies in this respect. It both set the precedent for overturning old view of hunter-gatherers, and offered new interpretations of their cultures. Many of these ideas were not in accord, and some have gained more popularity than others. More importantly though, the meeting and ensuing volume provided researchers the impetus to re-evaluate many assumptions about hunting and gathering groups and to focus on them with much greater ethnographic refinement than ever before. For instance, Estioko-Griffin and Griffin write, "Only since... *Man the Hunter* (1968) have we known that women gather and may be the steady no-nonsense providers of plant foods" (in Dahlberg 1981:142). Although it was revolutionary at the time, Estioko-Griffin and Griffin believe this concept, like many before the conference, has stagnated, blinding researchers to other possibilities. They continue, "The man-the-hunter/woman-the-gatherer dichotomy has become the latest 'law'. Instead of questioning the basic assumption, anthropology has sought to show that, in being gatherers, females were important in the evolution of culture and in shaping human situations" (in Dahlberg 1981:142).

An Approach to Looking at Variability

Returning to ethnography then, close examination reveals that variability exists even within some of the basic features which have defined hunter-gatherers as a cultural type. I find it especially salient that these groups are defined partially on the basis of their so-called egalitarian structure, especially within "simple" (versus "complex") foraging societies. As Susan Kent writes: "Egalitarianism is a continuum, not an absolute entity; societies are only more or less egalitarian

(1993b:480).” While these groups show overall similarities which stem from their foraging mode of food-acquisition, (Lee and DeVore 1968 suggest low population density, small group size, lack of territoriality, minimal amounts of food storage) neither this mode of production nor the extent of equality that exists within it can be viewed as uniform from culture to culture.

With these ideas in mind, I have chosen to focus this study on the food distribution patterns of four disparately located hunter-gatherer societies in an attempt to demonstrate that a) the ways in which both plant and animal food products are distributed are an indication of the *wide range of configurations* that groups, all blanketed under the term simple hunter-gatherers, exhibit in organization about and implementation of food procurement strategies, and b) the ideal of egalitarianism cannot be assumed of hunting and gathering societies, as degrees of equality differ between groups. Food distribution patterns provide a window into the extent of egalitarianism within a given group; the control and distribution of essential resources in turn shapes differential power and prestige.

The three groups to be discussed are the well-known !Kung of the Botswana Kalahari, the Tiwi, a group of aborigines who live on Melville and Bathurst Islands north of the Australian mainland, and the Nunamiut Inuit of northern Alaska. The selection of these groups was made more on the basis of availability of sources than on previous ideas I may have had about which groups would be particularly interesting with regard to the research questions. Many other groups have been written about extensively and would make fascinating additions to this study. Agta women of the Philippines, for instance, are active hunters, providing a substantial proportion of nutritional resources to their families (Estioko-Griffin and Griffin in Dahlberg 1981). This is likely to influence their

participation in decision-making about food and other resources, the amount of autonomy they maintain, and other factors which may figure into their collective position in Agta society.

The usual disclaimers about the sources themselves also apply here. First, the data span a considerable time range. Second, the literature on each group is also subject to the biases of particular research methods and interests, and of the researchers themselves. Third, some works are an ethnographer's observations of a group as it existed during the period of research (e.g.: the !Kung ethnographies, Baldwin Spencer's work with the Tiwi) while others are reconstructions of former lifeways, radically altered by social change (Robert Spencer 1959 and Gubser 1965 on the Nunamiut).

In addressing the problem of equality, the !Kung have remained classed as one of the most "staunchly egalitarian" groups (Lee in Kent 1993:480), while the Nunamiut and other Inuit groups, often cited for the subordinate position of women within them, have fallen on the other end of the spectrum (Friedl 1975:45). Other groups such as the Tiwi have lain more ambiguously between the two, depending on what aspects of the society are analyzed: roles in decision-making, the amount of control over food, knowledge, and other resources, etc. When delving into the question of equality, the advantage of looking at patterns of food distribution lies in their implications, which intersect with *all* facets of society - social, political, and ecological. In this way, a sort of Venn diagram is generated through an event in which various aspects of society overlap naturally, rather than creating a mosaic of features merely laid out side by side. From this vantage point, we can see that even within classless, "affluent societies" such as these (Sahlins 1972), possibilities for consistent inequalities exist, as affluence in the forms of power, authority, and nutrition is not always acquired uniformly by all members of a group.

This can result in cleavages along the lines of sex, age, and ability.

My purpose in discussing these inter- and intra-group differences is not an appeal to entirely dismantle hunter-gatherer studies as a reasonable and discrete area of research, even as all such groups are now undergoing rapid changes through interactions with non-foraging groups. Change and interaction must instead be incorporated into our understanding of these groups without restricting this examination to the recent past. The portrayal of hunter-gatherer groups as persisting in an isolated, halcyon world of egalitarianism is not only inaccurate, but may affect future anthropological work: "...we are not inclined to look for such inequalities because by definition they should not exist (Speth 1990)." In addition, our imperfect attempts at classification should not be seen as disheartening; I argue only that our approach to "simple" foraging societies must not in itself be simplistic. Instead, by refining our theories, and incorporating a wider range of variability, we not only gain a more complex (and thus probably more accurate) vision of what it means to live primarily by hunting and gathering but also attain a greater opportunity to understand future changes among hunters and gatherers.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DOBE !KUNG

What introductory-level anthropology student has not heard of the !Kung - the long-standing archetype of simple hunting and gathering societies? For this reason, the !Kung have supported a regular and prolonged influx of outside researchers in their communities. In particular, beginning in 1963 Richard Lee, Marjorie Shostak, John Yellen, and others from the Harvard Kalahari research project have used the Dobe !Kung as a testing ground for problems concerning hunter-gatherers in general, probing a myriad of topics including economics, health and nutrition, folklore, and archaeology. The ironic result is that the lives of these people, originally sought out because of their perceived isolation, have been noticeably altered by the presence of those whose intent it was to record them: a negative feedback loop which stands in the path of Lee's "race against time" (Lee 1984: ix) to preserve the details of "traditional" !Kung life before they are swept away by modernity.

Just as no man is an island, likewise neither are communities. We would perhaps like to believe that fragments of a pristine past of the !Kung lie somewhere among modern-day blue jeans and the tobacco gifts of anthropologists. But archaeological evidence in fact reveals a long history of their trade and interaction with non-foraging groups, in a network stretching over a large portion of the continent (Denbow and Wilmsen 1986).

The ideas to come are based largely on observations made by Lee and Shostak in the 1970s, so we must keep in mind that they do not speak for

the whole of !Kung life and behavior both in the synchronic and temporal scope of a culture. My purpose in this and the following discussions is not to "determine" the relative status of women versus men, the young versus the aged, or any other dichotomized deviances from an egalitarian template within hunter-gatherer societies from the sole vantage point of food distribution events; it is naive to believe that such an attempt is possible, as it would forego other facets of culture which could provide variables to the equality equation, if such a thing can even be constructed. Instead, I will explore some events, all circumscribed by the distribution of food, which suggest possibilities for imbalances in the scale of egalitarianism.

Food Sharing and Equality

The Dobe !Kung live in the Kalahari Desert of northwest Botswana, close to the Namibian border. In this area the year is divided approximately in half by the wet and dry seasons; when pools and springs fill up, many families may gather at these locations, but when the rain ceases and water becomes scarce, groups divide up again to settle at near-permanent water sources (Shostak 1981:11). The main food staples are mongongo nuts and meat, while a huge variety of other items supplement their diets during scarce periods of the year, or when a group is far along in "eating itself out" of an area before moving on (Lee 1984:54).

It would be handy to divide up methods of food procurement along sex lines: women as gatherers, and men as hunters, and then examine how the products of these tasks (vegetable foods and animal foods) are distributed among the household and the larger group. In reality, however, divisions of labor are much more fluid than this method would depict. While broad generalizations can be made for most foods (e.g. nearly all

animal products are procured by men, most vegetable foods are attained by women) honey, for instance, falls between the cracks, and seems to be collected by whomever is lucky enough to encounter it (Shostak 1981:81). According to Lee (1984:51), while men do nearly all of the hunting¹, both women and men gather; Shostak (1982:12) cites that women provide 60-80% of a family's food, while Lee's total (1984:51) is about 55%, with men contributing the other 45% through a combination of both vegetable foods and meat. In either case, Shostak argues that although vegetable foods are the staple of the !Kung diet, the prestige associated with meat (although not necessarily with *hunting*) is much higher (1981:85).

Shostak writes that "most gathered foods, except the mongongo nut, are described as 'things comparable to nothing' [by the !Kung], while meat is so highly valued that it is often used as a synonym for 'food'" (1981:243). The higher value placed on meat is also made clear in the celebration of a young hunter's first male and female kills. During the ritual the young man's face is tattooed with a mixture of soot and eland fat to make 'his heart burn hot toward meat' so he will hunt frequently (Howell 1986:170). After the ceremony the young man is considered eligible for marriage (Shostak 1981:84). In this way, a young man's introduction into society as an independent economic provider is recognized through his hunting skills. No such system seems to exist for women as providers of vegetable foods. Although Shostak doesn't indicate that the division of meat among the group differs in this situation from any other, the uniqueness of the occasion in its relation to men and meat points up the special emic importance of meat over other foods for the !Kung.

¹ Lee estimates that meat provides about 30% of the !Kung's diet (1984:51). His exact definition of "meat" is unclear here, however. In this case Lee probably groups other animal-derived foods such as fat and marrow under this category. For simplicity's sake, I will do the same except where I address these other products specifically.

In contrast, vegetable foods are collected primarily for the household, with little *formal* sharing between members of the larger group (Shostak 1981:12). Informally, on the other hand, reasonable requests for vegetable foods are tolerated, and even expected. Shostak's collaborator, Nisa, says that as a child she often harbored ill feelings against families or individuals for "stinging" food. She was especially upset when household members refused to offer her meat, but stinging of other types of food elicited similar results (Shostak 1981:88).

We can look at these patterns of sharing within the context of a society that Shostak describes as essentially egalitarian (1981:237-8). No official positions of authority exist, and no one is generally entitled to a larger share of food than his or her neighbor's. For example, Nisa tells the story of an early lesson in sharing: as a child out gathering with her mother she encountered a young wildebeest lying dead in the bush. "This wildebeest is *mine*", she said. "I'm going to hang it up by my hut so I can eat it *all*." To her chagrin, while she was away her mother took the animal and shared the meat with everyone (Shostak 1981:94). In this way, Nisa's rights to ownership of the animal gave way before her reluctance as a child to participate in the expected forms of sharing behavior. In many cases where strict divisions of labor exist between men and women, men assume a special status as providers of meat. In !Kung society, although tasks related to the hunt are relegated fairly discretely to men, possible tendencies toward inequality are seemingly circumvented by two systems: the practice of "insulting the meat" and the sharing of arrows used in the hunt.

The practice of "insulting the meat" is well-illustrated in Lee's appendix "Eating Christmas in the Kalahari" (Lee 1984). Hunters returning from a kill first remain silent about their efforts, and only after much prodding do they reveal their success, downplaying all the while the size

and condition of the animal (Lee 1984:49). Lee's purchase of an enormous black ox for the !Kung at Christmas brought nothing but complaints from the group about the pitiful bag of bones they would eat. When the reason for their complaints was finally revealed to Lee, he was told that, "when a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can't accept this" (Lee 1984:156). By downplaying his good luck in the hunt and the procurement of a fine animal, a hunter side-steps the prestige that may otherwise accompany such a kill.

Likewise, the practice of sharing arrows displaces ownership of the animal and the rights to its distribution. Arrows are acquired through *hxaro* trade, and both women and men may own them. The rule is "the owner of the arrow is the owner of the meat"; if the owner is at hand, he or she has the privilege (and likewise the burden) of dividing the meat among the group so that everyone receives a fair share. If the owner lives elsewhere or is absent, part of the meat is dried and saved for him or her (Lee 1984:50).

Lastly, Lee mentions that divining and hunting magic may be used to aid unsuccessful hunters (1984:50). Thus, it would seem that differences in natural hunting ability are smoothed out, and by downplaying the value of their animal and displacing its ownership, hunters doubly remove themselves from the personal prestige which may otherwise be associated with providing meat for the group.

Loopholes and Cheating the System

Because these are the stated norms of !Kung society, we would expect things to most often work in this way. Robert Kelly points out a loophole in the system, however, demonstrating the discrepancies which always exist between what is said and what is actually done. When a man

goes out to hunt, many of the arrows he brings with him belong to his *hxaro* trade partners, and are recognizable by their individual markings. By choosing which arrows he wants to use, the hunter determines who will own the meat if he is successful (1995:164). The !Kung feel very strongly about equality in sharing and the exercise of personal authority, and so I doubt that hunters would abuse the system for the benefit of themselves or others, simply for the sake of "getting ahead". Rather, it may be manipulated in order to provide for those at a disadvantage, for example: women with large families or many others to support, older people struggling for their subsistence, or other hunters who are down on their luck.

Although this loophole may be used to further even out the distribution of food resources, it demonstrates that a system which can be manipulated, for good or ill, is not random. In the broader perspective, the very existence of a system of rule-governed distribution points up the fact that egalitarianism is not a natural phenomenon of the human state laid bare: it is *constructed* via leveling mechanisms, and must either be worked at or falter. While hunters and gatherers especially in the 1960s and 1970s have been cast as naturally blissful, generous peoples, the pattern of sharing that we see among the !Kung is just one of many possible mechanisms used for maintaining a set of social and economic relationships which serve both the individual and the larger group.

Because these interests are at odds with each other, the question then becomes: *to hoard or to share?* An individual must evaluate whether to keep resources for oneself, providing for one's immediate needs, or by sharing, to invest these items in the hands of others as a form of "social storage" for later claim in times of resource stress. This dialectical relationship often seems to weigh more heavily on one end or the other, depending on the group. We then may ask: Do certain individuals

consistently succeed at the expense of others? Or is there a greater tendency to put the interests of the community ahead of oneself through sharing and humility in personal achievements, as seems to be the case among the Dobe !Kung? And lastly: Is this latter behavior an indicator of true egalitarianism?

So far in discussing the !Kung, it is clear that formal systems are adhered to in order to provide group members equal access to food resources. The informal sharing of vegetable foods also seems to serve these needs. A key factor in these features I believe, is their occurrence in *public settings*, where what is perceived as unfair behavior can easily be observed and reproved by onlookers. In more private arenas, however, I believe some of this pressure to provide for others is relieved, and individuals make more choices according to their own self interests. Kelly for instance, observes that !Kung hunters often consume marrow and other fatty parts of a kill before returning to camp (1995:166). In this way, other members of the community are placed at a nutritional disadvantage, especially in lean seasons when protein from mongongo nuts and other sources are scarcer than usual (Wilmsen and Durham:1988 in Speth 1990:165).

This is not to say that only men may act in their own self-interest in more private settings. Women also snack on foods as they gather them, and these items may in fact represent a large portion of their daily average intake of vegetable foods (Howell 1986:170). While both women and men may "cheat" though (by consuming food before it can be shared by the entire community), the results do not equal out because of the specific divisions of labor of the !Kung. To begin, it is important to emphasize that a strict men/women and meat/plants dichotomy does not exist in Dobe !Kung society. Shostak writes that men's knowledge of plants is comparable to that of women's, and men may gather whenever they wish

(1981:244). According to Lee, men spend about one-fifth of their working days gathering, and contribute around 22 percent of all gathered foods. This is in addition to the 30 percent of the !Kung diet that consists of meat, which men are primarily responsible for providing (1984:51).

On the other hand, while women primarily gather plants, we learn from Shostak that they sometimes contribute animal protein in the form of eggs, snakes, reptiles, insects, and young animals (1981:244). Nisa herself tells of two experiences as a child, when she found young animals in the bush which were brought back to the village for food. The first was the wildebeest killed by lions and divided among the community, despite her protests (1981:94). Another time, also while gathering with her mother, she found a newborn steenbok lying in the bush. When the animal tried to escape she pursued it, killing it by bashing the animal on the ground (1981:94). Both of these incidents occurred, according to Shostak's reckoning, when Nisa was between the ages of five and eight (1981:376).

It is clear then, that both women and men have access both to plant and animal protein. Women, in fact, would seem to have greater control over the products of their labors, because these items are not subject to the same formal rules of distribution which pertain to hunted meat. This kind of autonomy has been suggested as a mark of egalitarianism (Friedl 1975:8). The key to recognizing the inequity of the situation lies in the fact that women do not hunt, and the problem this poses in terms of the one resource that only hunted animals provide: fat.

Speth in particular has written about unequal distribution of nutritional resources, and especially fat, among hunters and gatherers (Speth 1989;1990). Fat is critical to these groups for several reasons. It is filling and easier to metabolize than protein, and as a concentrated source of energy, it contains fat-soluble vitamins and essential fatty acids (Speth 1990:152). As would be expected, these nutrients are not

distributed equally over the body of an animal, as some parts are more nutrient-rich than others. In addition, animals regularly experience depletions in body fat with seasonal resource stress. Fat stores are then lost from the body in a predictable sequence, beginning with the back and ending with the limbs and mandible (1990:152). As a result of these features, even if portions of a kill are divided approximately equally by mass, it is unlikely that each person will receive parts of equal nutritive value (Speth 1990:160). Speth suggests that in order to evaluate the equity in sharing animal resources, we must determine " (1) who gets each part of the carcass; (2) the fat content of each part; and (3) the physiological condition of the people who receive fat-rich parts and those who get lean parts " (1990:160).

While the eggs, snakes, etc. which women procure provide protein and some fat, Shostak (1981:244) implies that these are brought back to camp, rather than gathered primarily for snacking (although some snacking is likely). In addition, animals they may attain in the bush without hunting weapons are capturable probably because they are either small, immature, or ill, (as Nisa's stories illustrate), causing the animal to have only meager fat reserves. This situation, coupled with hunter's tendencies to snack on these same valuable resources, marrow and body fat, leads to a consistent gap in the diet of !Kung women and others excluded from the hunt, with possible long-term repercussions.

Although no one has approached this problem of particular nutritional deficits directly, several researchers have determined that the !Kung experience much greater periods of nutritional stress than had once been assumed (Howell 1986; Wiessner 1981 cited in Speth 1990:164). While Lee makes no mention of whether snacking in the field is a routine practice or occurs most often seasonally, it is likely that men cheat more often when times are tough, perhaps to sustain themselves for longer and

more arduous hunting expeditions. Evidence for malnutrition among group members is difficult to straighten out. Trustwell and Hansen, physicians who did work among the !Kung, report that the !Kung children they studied with stunted growth showed no signs of malnutrition, and were in very good physical condition (cited in Howell 1986:166). However, in a later article, Hausman and Wilmsen present evidence of such malnutrition in San girls in addition to their stunted growth (cited in Speth 1990:165). Howell writes that the physical condition of the !Kung was strongly linked to seasonal variations in their diet, at the time they were studied by Trustwell, Hansen, and Jenkins (1986:167), as would be expected. In addition, during her fieldwork she observed that although dietary shortage alone is rarely a cause of death, it often contributes to other problems such as disease which in turn lead to an early death, especially among old people (1986:171).

My feeling is that malnourishment is a seasonal phenomenon which most likely affects all members of a community, but to different degrees. Although more work obviously needs to be done in evaluating the comparative nutritional status of members of !Kung communities, I argue that the "losers " in this respect are those who have least access to animals immediately after the kill: women, children, and the elderly. Perhaps it is no coincidence then that young hunters' faces are tattooed with fat (rather than other symbols of meat such as blood or flesh). While fat is used to represent a man's desire for meat (Howell 1986:170) it also sets him apart from the non-hunters in the community, both during the ritual and in its continued consumption through the duration of his role as a hunter.

The imbalance that this creates in !Kung society is admittedly much

more subtle than among other hunting groups. In fact, other aspects of !Kung behavior could very well indicate that the high degree of egalitarianism they are renowned for may not be far from the truth. As in any society though, the truth lies under the everyday layer of experience; what an anthropologist hears and witnesses may not tell the whole story, as deviations from stated norms occasionally occur. It is important to track both the systems used to keep imbalances in check and the ways these systems are manipulated in order to scrape away at this layer and touch at the core. What it reveals, I believe, is not that the !Kung are people with an overwhelming propensity to cheat and subordinate - only that a system is only as strong as the restraints on individuals who maintain it, and that everyone struggles in fulfilling the aims of society when they are at tension with other, perhaps more immediately appealing self-interested goals.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TIWI

Background

The Tiwi are a group of Australian aborigines who are somewhat atypical of other Australian foraging peoples. They are spread across two islands, Melville and Bathurst, which are north of the mainland, about forty miles from Darwin. Unlike much of the continent, the three thousand square miles or so which make up the islands are rich in wildlife and vegetation. Criss-crossed with streams and rivers, they harbor ecological settings which range from heavy forest, which covers most of the land, to marsh and swamp, and long beaches. Edible plants and trees abound, as do marsupials, reptiles, birds, and sea animals, from oysters and cockles to rock cod and shark (Goodale 1971:4,5). In short, a diverse ecology produces abundant and reliable food, easy to attain, without extensive skill or effort (Goodale 1971:223).

There is some disagreement on the extent of the Tiwi's isolation historically. In an early article, Hart (1930:168) writes that they were "tamed" through long contact with whites, although attempts at permanent white settlements on the islands failed several times (due to the Tiwi's much-rumored ferocity). Mountford, on the other hand, (1956:417) takes the view that these "Stone Age Survivals" have lived in relative isolation due to the difficult passage to the mainland through Clarence Strait. In his view the group's lack of agriculture, permanent homes, pottery, and until fairly recently, metal implements, can be explained only by their anachronistic survival into a world fifty thousand years ahead of them

(Mountford 1956:417).. Most recently, Goodale writes that although records are scarce, Melville Island's location on a main sea route from Indonesia to the South Pacific makes early contact with seafarers likely, and in fact Malaysians, French, British, Australians, and Japanese came to the islands to trade in the nineteenth century (1971:6-11). In 1910 or 1911 Father Gsell established the Sacred Heart Mission Station on Bathurst Island (Hart 1930:167); Catholic missions have been a strong force of change in religion, education, and amount of sedentism on both islands since that time (Goodale 1971:12). The Tiwi have continuously resisted domination by these outsider groups though. An important victory, the passing of the Northern Territories Land Rights Bill in 1976 granted the Tiwi full ownership once again of all of their tribal lands - the whole of both islands (Goodale 1991:327).

Although the Tiwi once again may hunt and gather freely on their lands, my sources are inconsistent regarding the organization of labor before the influence of white settlers. One source is particularly problematic. Hart and Pilling took an unusual step in co-authoring *The Tiwi of North Australia* (1960) in that the two worked with the Tiwi at quite different times (Hart during 1928 and 1929 and Pilling in 1953 and 1954), and *had never met or communicated until collaborating on this book*. (Hart authored the chapters on Marriage, Life in the Bush, and The Collective Life which I will draw on in my discussion.) Although they justify this approach by the apparent similarity between their independent accounts, the researchers' descriptions differ in important ways from those of Jane Goodale, who also worked with the Tiwi in 1954, and later, briefly, in 1962, and Baldwin Spencer in 1912. Negotiating between these differences is difficult, but crucial. All accounts describe the household as the primary economic unit, and thus, the household makeup and everyday patterns of food distribution will be the first topic

described. In addition, the *kulama* yam ceremony, a public initiation and celebratory event, provides what I believe are some valuable clues to the nature of social relationships among the Tiwi and their implications for egalitarianism in the group. From the tangled accounts emerges a picture of the *kulama* yam as symbolic mediator not only between men's and women's tasks but also the Tiwi's very view of men and women themselves.

Gathering Resources: Women and Food

Hart and Pilling describe at length the particular type of polygamous marriage in which they claim most men participated. It would have negated any possibility of a woman, regardless of age, remaining unmarried. According to the authors, fathers promised their female babies (or even unborn children) to older men. The latter had either proven themselves experienced hunters or seemed desirable as allies (1960:14-15). Once a man secured one wife, he often gained a sort of "nuptial momentum". As his desirability as a son-in-law grew in the eyes of other fathers, they began to promise their daughters to him as well (1960:16). Often a young man in his 20s or 30s would start his "wife collection" with a widow or mother of a friend who, although old, was experienced at finding large quantities of food in the bush (1960:34).

Each morning a man's wives ventured into the bush to find enough vegetable foods for the household. Younger wives, who were less experienced in locating resources, were placed under the supervision and instruction of the older women. Young children also accompanied the group, aiding their mothers or grandmothers. Finally, fish and game were provided by young men in the family and were distributed communally within the household just as the vegetable foods (Hart and Pilling 1960:33-34).

According to the authors, small households were at an economic disadvantage in this way, and were sometimes forced to beg from nearby large family groups (1960:35). Given the ecological bounty of the islands, however, I find this claim highly unlikely. Hart and Pilling quote one man: "If I had only one or two wives I would starve, but with my present ten or twelve wives I can send them out in all directions in the morning and at least two or three of them are likely to bring something back with them at the end of the day, and then we can all eat" (1960:34). Behind this strategy lay the idea that by the time a man was too old to hunt for himself, he would have accrued a large enough family of wives and children, as well as important kinship ties to their male relatives, that the entire household would be adequately provided for.

Although the food quest may have been the most tangible and obvious manifestation of this form of domestic organization, I doubt that it was its true cause. The fear of starvation expressed by the informant was probably an exaggeration - a fear played out only in the case of his own extreme laziness, or on the part of his wives. Instead, I suspect that the power play of wife accumulation was the primary motivating factor in this family array, as a man competed to gain prestige and influence in his community by widening his circle of kin through his many wives. In the system described by Hart and Pilling, a man, his many wives and their children formed an autonomous economic unit in which all of the items collected during the day were shared. Although the underlying reasons for this system are not explained to my satisfaction, we see that men are cast in the potent role of both donors and recipients of the Tiwi's most valued economic asset - women.

Goodale's fieldwork (undertaken over twenty years later than Hart's) leads to quite a different picture of Tiwi subsistence and domestic

organization. According to Goodale (1971:13), Melville and Bathurst Islands are divided into large territories or "countries", each composed of several subcountries. Both men and women have rights to land ownership in these areas, inherited through one's father. Groups are divided within countries into exogamous clans, or "sibs", which claim a common ancestry (1971:18), and into camps, a further territorial division (1971:14). In addition, a few men are considered bosses, or "big men" of a country; while this position probably held more authority in the past, contemporary bosses could only grant permission to burn the grass in an area, clearing it for hunting (1971:176). At the time of Goodale's first stay, nearly all Tiwi lived in the Snake Bay Settlement, Darwin, on the mainland coast, or in or around the Bathurst Island Mission (1971:13). The shift from polygamy to monogamy in the Snake Bay Settlement, where Goodale conducted her research, is complete: "The mission and settlement administrations have supplemented 'old-age security', a function provided by multiple wives in the past. Tiwi men have new means of gaining prestige, which they are accepting enthusiastically" (Goodale 1971:126). Thus, she acknowledges an earlier period during which polygamy was practiced (as the exception, rather than the rule) in some areas (1982:201-202), but found it on the wane, discouraged by the Catholic mission (1971:55). Instead, while marriage by bestowal was still common, Goodale encountered households consisting of a husband, wife and children who all actively participated in the food quest (Goodale 1971:151).

Other indications of the balance of power between men and women differ in Goodale's account, perhaps due to changes with time, perhaps due to her own biases or those of Hart and Pilling. For instance, mothers-in-law, rather than fathers-in-law, actually instigated most promised marriages in her experience, choosing the future husband and locking him

into a period of bride service as well as continued obligations to provide for his wife's family (Goodale 1971:56).

Because the basic economic unit of the household is much smaller than that described by Hart and Pilling, we would expect good-sized animals to be divided first at the community level in order to avoid waste, if food storage is not possible or practiced. Goodale indeed found that the distribution of non-vegetable foods begins at this level, continuing with several smaller rounds. The first division is somewhat similar to the !Kung practice resulting from sharing arrows, in which ownership of a kill is (ostensibly, at least) randomly determined. The Tiwi hunter responsible for the kill is considered the owner, or "boss" of the animal, and thereby entitled to the forequarters and brisket (see also Mountford 1956:418). The hunter is not, however, allowed to cook the animal - this honor goes to the first person who calls out, "That's my tail!" - the portion allotted to the cook. If the animal is large, it may be further divided in this way: the next person to call out gets the head, the fourth person a leg, and so forth, according to strict rules. Anyone who calls and receives a portion of meat is responsible for helping out in cooking (Goodale 1971:171).

In key departure from the !Kung, Tiwi women participate equally with men in this event because they too are hunters, although responsible for different types of animals (discussed more fully later). Animals are subject to the immutable rules of disbursal regardless of size ; even snakes are divided into the appropriate physiological parts and parceled out accordingly (Goodale 1971:171).

Crocodiles and turtles, however, are hunted solely by men from boats, and result in predetermined divisions according to a man's placement in the vessel. The spearman in the bow, the paddler and captain, and the bailer in the center all know ahead of time what they will

receive: head, all four legs, and body, respectively (Goodale 1971:171). Unfortunately, Goodale does not describe how these positions are chosen, nor if they are long-term or change from hunt to hunt. We can, however assume that some meat packages have a higher nutritional quality than others, as well as the possibility of higher prestige associated with them. If boat positions are long-term (or even seasonal) certain men will consistently receive lower or higher valued parts than others. As mentioned above, the position of big man still exists among the Tiwi, despite the absence of polygamy. Without the bargaining chip of women, how is this position attained? Although unanswered by Goodale, perhaps the potential inequalities resulting from boat hunting are a starting place, as those with the best parts win the greatest authority in the minds of the community.

Secondary divisions in both of these situations are identical, however. One is first obligated to provide for his or her immediate family, followed by mother-in-law, and other kin. Truly large kills, however, are distributed equitably throughout the entire group, regardless of age or kinship relations (Goodale 1971:172). Paraphrasing Tiwi informants, Goodale writes, "You work for old people not the young ones who can work for themselves" (1971:172).

The Kulama Yam Ceremony

The Ethnographies

Ernestine Friedl argues (1975) that the relationships between men and women in everyday circumstances are influenced by their unusual juxtapositions during extraordinary events: public rituals, feasts, etc. During these activities, participants assume roles and relationships which are different from their mundane ones and which "leak" into routine life, especially in regard to the control and distribution of valued resources. I

question the directionality of these inequalities, as extraordinary events perhaps bring to the surface or exaggerate relationships as they exist in mundane settings.

Nevertheless, among the Tiwi, the *kulama* yam ceremony is unequivocally such an event, drawing on the entire community in celebrating the initiation of young men and women into the group via their association with the yams, an unusual food item whose use is highly symbolic. By looking at the group's use of the *kulama* yam in this context, I believe we gain significant insight into the Tiwi's view of men's and women's roles as they weave together to produce an integrated community.

Once again, working between the various ethnographic accounts of the celebration requires caution. Hart and Pilling give only a brief discussion of the annual event, and do not explain the source of their information - their own, direct observations, or on information collected from Tiwi informants. In any case, they claim the involvement of only male initiates and their older male mentors, who are usually related by marriage to the initiate's sisters (1960:94). "Very senior men did not bother as a rule with initiation sponsorship because it took too much of their valuable time" (1960:94). I find this claim highly dubious. As the oldest community members, and those most knowledgeable in ritual matters, what is the likelihood that seniors, and senior men in particular, would find little impetus to aid in a ceremony which marked the emergence of other males as full adults and their successful learning of "all the things -- chiefly ritual matters -- that grown men should know" (Hart and Pilling 1960:94)?

The initiation period is long -- about ten years -- and is marked by several stages, each requiring different activities at the festival, as well as changes in dress, decoration, and periods of seclusion in the bush.

When a boy is about fourteen his father arranges the boy's sudden "attack" by the appropriate male relatives, and he is dragged away to carry out the rest of his initiation period with them, learning ritualistic knowledge and avoiding most group members -- especially women. When the *kulama* are ripe, they write, the initiates participate in the ceremony which signals their advancement to the next stage, and culminates, in the final stage, in plucking out the young men's pubic hairs (1960:94). This is basically all the authors tell us. We are left to wonder, what ritual knowledge do the initiates learn from their mentors, and when is it used? Why does the initiation ceremony occur when *kulama* yams were in season? What is the role of the community, if any, during the *kulama* ceremony?

In a 1912 study of the Tiwi, Spencer gives a very different account of the event. He writes, "a very striking feature of...all events...is that the members of the tribe - men, women and children - take part in them. This is quite opposed, and stands in strong contrast, to the customs of most mainland tribes, amongst whom women and children, except to a very limited extent, are rigidly excluded from all active participation in them..." (1915:91). Spencer goes on to describe young girls' as well as boys' participation *as initiates* in the event he observed (1915:93), a clear departure from the Hart and Pilling description.

How then do we explain that Spencer, over 15 years earlier, recorded the participation of female initiates, while Hart and Pilling claim the involvement of only boys and men? The confusion I believe, is partly a misunderstanding about the relationship between the yam ceremony and the initiation proceedings; the former apparently takes place regardless of whether there are initiates in the group, while initiation can only take place during an annual *kulama* event. Goodale, for instance, observed a yam ceremony that did not involve any initiates at all.

I suspect Hart's and Pilling's remarks are the result of one of three

possible situations. First, they (or just Hart, who wrote the description) witnessed the ceremony at a time when the only eligible candidates for participation were male - that is, no females of the right age, stage, etc. were present in the group. Even so, information gathered from Tiwi informants most likely would have rounded out the scenario, alluding to some female participation in the past. Second, it is also possible that females were in fact involved in the rite, but due to the authors' own expectations and biases, their role was downplayed to the point of omission. (As merely tools used from birth for the inflation of men's economic and social status, what importance could women's formal introduction into society hold?). Third, the authors may never have witnessed the event at all, relying instead on data gathered from male informants. If this is so, we have no way of evaluating the bias of information reaching the authors, even before their own further "filtering" and reformulation.

While the final scenario seems most likely (especially given the brevity of the account), serious questions arise in each case about the validity of their data. The event described by Hart and Pilling is secretive, including the clandestine teaching of ritual knowledge to initiates (while they avidly avoid all females). Nothing could be more different from the descriptions of Spencer (1914:91), Mountford (1956:436), and Goodale (1971:183), however. This is a truly public event, and knowledge is gained by the entire group by observing most of the steps the yams undergo for their detoxification. Hart's and Pilling's account is further weakened by the very strong similarities between Spencer's and Goodale's findings, despite the length of time between them.

Clearly other problems throughout the ethnography are also difficult to deal with given the researchers' thin description. The information supplied stands on shaky ground, due to internal inconsistencies and a lack

Yams of all sorts are associated with a series of beliefs by the Tiwi. All are thought to contain *tarni*, or sickness which is greatest during their development in the wet season. Fetuses are at a particular risk up until the following dry season when the yams have finished growing. As a result, pregnant women must avoid eating yams for most of the year, or the sickness will enter the womb and kill the baby. In addition, the taboo against eating yams during the wet season also extends to initiated men (Goodale 1971:144).

Their *tarni* seems to warrant special care in addition to restrictions on their consumption. Along with cycad nuts, which are highly poisonous before preparation, yams are carefully cultivated by women. When digging yams, a small amount must be left in the ground in order to continue the supply. When questioned by Goodale, the women explained: "We leave little bit where we find him, we know where he is alla time. By and by we want yam we find him¹ easy" (1971:173).

According to Goodale, the *kulama* is the only species of yam which is botanically toxic, however (1971:181). It is not an everyday food item, and after heavy processing during the *kulama* ceremony, is consumed by all participants at the event's end (Goodale 1971:181; Spencer 1914:109). Spencer writes, "The Island natives evidently regard the *kolamma* [sic], probably because it has to be specially treated before being safe to eat, as a superior kind of yam, endowed with properties such as ordinary yams do not possess" (1914:103). Spencer and Goodale's descriptions of the ceremony strongly support this idea.

Preparation for the ceremony begins with a breach in gender boundaries. Both Spencer (1914:93) and Goodale (1971:190) observe that the yams are gathered by certain men of the community, even though as

¹The women's use of the masculine pronoun in relation to yams exemplifies the gendered ordering of foods and their relation to the tasks of men and women - women dig "male" yams.

plants, they would normally be collected by women. (During Spencer's experience which included initiates, one young man and several young women accompanied these older men; 1914:93-94.) Before digging, the men Goodale watched "patted the ground, saying softly 'wake, wake.' '*Kulama* is a big boss² and would make them sick if they did not do this.'" The collectors also pretended to be women, although she does not specify how (Goodale 1971:190). Throughout this act, the *kulama* are treated with the same special care issued by women to other, mundane yams: carefully dug, they are transferred to baskets gently cradled in the palm of the hand, and the holes then filled with sand "so that the yam will come again" (Goodale 1971:191).

Both ethnographers note the parallels that the Tiwi draw between human hair and the fine roots which cover the *kulama*. Spencer reports that the roots are called by the same name as arm and leg hair (1914:93), and Goodale's informants liken them to a man's beard (1971:191). This male personification of the plant continues throughout other portions of the ceremony. Spencer and Goodale agree that the yams are soaked in the swamp, which the men then bathe in as well. Spencer observed the immersion of male initiates and the smearing of the soaking yams on their heads and chins. The purpose, he writes, is to stimulate the growth of hair on the faces of the initiates, given its correlation with the "hairs" of the yams (1914:99). (Whether this is information gained directly from informants or merely his own supposition is not clear.)

Spencer and Goodale part paths slightly in the next events which lead finally to the yams' consumption. Spencer notes that the adult males then carry the yams from the water to ceremonial ground, where both male and female initiates help in making a roasting fire (1914:100). Afterwards, while the group dances and sings, the single male initiate's

²This term is usually applied to males (Goodale 1971:221).

pubic hairs and those on his upper and lower lip are pulled out (1914:101). This last action is similarly described by Hart and Pilling (1960:94) - one of the few details they choose to include, probably because they consider it the most gruesome part of the ceremony and thus the detail most worthy of mention. Spencer's description continues as the adult men put the yams on the fire (1914:101). When they are cooked, the yams are removed and everyone but the male initiate helps to peel them. While this happens, the men sing, "yams, you are our fathers" (1914:102). The *kulama* are then sliced, and some are mashed and spread on the faces and heads of the initiates and their relatives, both male and female (1914:103). Finally, after another soaking, they are eaten by everyone (1914:109). During the entire ceremony we see that the contributions of both women (including the female initiates) and men are instrumental. The personification of the *kulama* throughout is entirely male, however.

Goodale's observations at the ceremonial ground differ in this last respect, as the yams and their environment appear to take on distinct *female* characteristics. First a roasting fire is made, and a crowd of men and children go to collect the yams from their watery bed, carrying them in a basket to the waiting crowd (1971:195). After arriving, part of the basket is woven into a ring called an *imbini*, which is placed on the ground surrounding the fire, with the yams in the center. The *kulama* are then covered over with bark and warm sand to make an oven, and the crowd chants "good-by *kulama*, good-by daughter" (1971:197). Interestingly, this is not the only female reference made at this point. The center of the ring, where the yams are nestled, is called the *tumaripa*, or navel, and the roasting fire in the middle is called "mother-in-law". Surrounding the yams, or "daughters" , is the oven, which is referred to as "mother" (1971:221); the connotations of pregnancy and birth are clear.

The final sequence of events is similar to those described by

Spencer, although the participants are mostly male. The *kulama* men peel and slice up the roots and rub some on their own bodies, then bring them to the swamp for the second soaking (1971:198-9). Goodale missed the final event, but according to her informants, the men bring the yams to the waiting crowd, who all partake (1971:203).

Despite the differences in implied gender of the yams, they are clearly personified throughout the ceremony. The overlap of roles and actions of the Tiwi themselves and those of the *kulama* reveals a powerful relationship between the two.

The Symbolism of the Kulama

We can examine this relationship on several levels. First, we can look at the role of the yams as purely food items. Within this framework, the ceremony becomes a learning event in which the process used to detoxify the *kulama* is passed down to generations of initiates. In Goodale's experience, the yams are little more than a famine food at most, however, in a land where famine is probably rare (1971:223). The intense processing necessary for their consumption, as well as their "extremely bitter taste and tissue-burning qualities" (according to Goodale and Mountford) amply explain to these researchers their lack of everyday use (Goodale 1971:182). Cycad nuts, also bitter and naturally toxic, are eaten when food supplies are low, although they are unappealing to the Tiwi palette (Goodale 1971:181). Although "cultivated" similarly to yams, they garner no special ceremony. Thus, the role of *kulama* yams as merely food items is probably secondary in their ceremonial importance. The event also brings the community together for a common cause, re-establishing bonds weakened with time or through other circumstances. Most importantly I believe, the *kulama* yams signify the underlying social structure of the community as organized in the minds of its constituents.

Goodale argues convincingly (1982) that the *kulama* ritual reinforces the symbolic role of the yams in resource management, both of food and people. The activities of men and women, and the ideology behind them, clearly supports this claim. The food quest does not cleave strictly along gender lines for hunting and gathering; instead, while women do most of the gathering, they also hunt many animals, including bandicoots, lizards, snakes, and opossum. Listing the primary foods and who attains them, Goodale makes a fascinating observation: all foods, both plants and animal, that women take are from the earth, while those taken by men, with the exception of the wallaby, derive exclusively from the sea or air (Goodale 1971:151-152). In addition, she notes that the Tiwi language is gendered, and these genders correspond to the separate realms suggested by the dichotomy in foraging practices -

ground, dirt, land, and beach, reef, and island are all masculine in gender, yet within them are those items considered exclusively appropriate for women to extract. Conversely, the sea, clear sky, wind, tidal sandbank, and mangrove swamp are feminine in gender, and are the regions where that which is hunted exclusively by males is to be found (Goodale 1982:203).

Although women's contributions make up the majority of the Tiwi's diet (Goodale 1971:169) Goodale sees these two contrasting sets of elements as complimentary rather than at tension (in which one may be deemed more important than the other, with or without regard for actual nutritional contribution).

This complementarity also applies to the Tiwi's beliefs about the making of a person. Tiwi children are said to originate as spirits who occupy tidal sandbanks. Identified in the dreams of men, a child's spirit is

sent into the womb of his wife, where it matures during pregnancy . Men are thus responsible for population maintenance, via the realms of women: tidal sandbanks and the womb (Goodale 1982:204). Women, on the other hand, carefully cultivate yams, planting them in the (masculine) ground to promote their propagation (Goodale 1982:203) (which in my mind mimics their role in childbirth and child-raising). Their job in maintaining this particular resource signifies their greater contribution to the food pool: " Thus we may say that while women do not actually procure or provide all the food consumed by the household or camp, they are responsible for the maintenance of all food resources in symbolic and culturally significant actions" (Goodale 1982:203).

In this way, women are responsible for food resources, and men for the resource of people themselves. The *kulama* yam neatly integrates the two in the linguistically and otherwise cognitively divided worlds of women and men. Their transformation from a toxic to an edible state at the ceremony's end mirrors the path taken by the initiates, as they are transformed into full and competent adult members of the community.

One difference between Spencer's and Goodale's accounts of the ceremony introduces an interesting possibility. While the yams Spencer observed took on only male connotations, those in the event Goodale attended took on were personified as both male and female. If the yams do in fact represent the community at large, the ethnographic observations may indicate actual changes in the Tiwi's perceptions of men and women. The additional female connotations of the yams perhaps correlate with an *increase* in women's status in Tiwi society. In this way, changes through time due to *white influences*: the near-disappearance of polygamy due to the Catholic mission, the role of mothers in choosing a husband for their daughters (in Goodale's observation), and increased food contributions by men, point to a greater move towards egalitarian principles , but are

CHAPTER THREE

THE NUNAMIUT

Background

The Nunamiut of Alaska (literally, "people of the land") were once an aggregation of groups linked by their inland location and dependence on caribou for nearly all aspects of life: meat and fat for food, antler and bone for tools and weapons, and skins for clothing, bedding, and trade with their coastal neighbors the Tareumiut, or "people of the sea" (Gubser 1965). Now only a single community living at Anaktuvuk Pass in the Brooks Range, their dependence on caribou remains strong, but a migratory band lifestyle has given way to a permanent village structure, as families or small groups of families set out on their own from time to time to hunt, fish, trap, or perform wage labor (Gubser 1965:61).

In the high latitude of northern Alaska, the growth of nearly all vegetable foods is precluded by the low angle of incidence of the sun's rays, the short warm season, and permafrost. As a result, nearly all of the Nunamiut diet before the introduction of imported foods consisted of animal products, largely caribou (Gubser 1965:xi). Except in rare circumstances, men are solely responsible for hunting, resulting in a unique dynamic in which women *contribute little to none* in food procurement, and are instead involved in all aspects of the processing of these foods (as well as producing clothing, kayak covers, and other items derived from animals) (Gubser 1965:115). In other words, women are nearly completely dependent on men

for food and raw materials for their labor (Friedl 1975:40). This represents a significant departure from other hunter-gatherer groups such as !Kung and Tiwi, in which women collect most of the food.

Friedl depicts Nunamiut women as near vassals to their husbands, as "a woman furnishes a man with her services as tanner, tailor, cook, and housekeeper in return for her and her children's subsistence" (1975:40). When we speak of egalitarianism in hunter-gatherer societies, this situation dares us to re-examine our evidence - is this situation, if indeed correct, a strong indication of women's subordination in Nunamiut society? Certainly from a Western feminist perspective such an interpretation is likely; similar experiences in the lives of women are and have been accompanied by their exclusion from positions of authority and opportunities to gain knowledge outside the home.

We must keep in mind though, that the scenario Friedl describes is only one among many which involves the interactions of men and women around food acquisition, preparation, and distribution, all of which bear on the relative position of women in Nunamiut society. Two ethnographies prove particularly useful in exploring these interactions in several contexts: communal versus household food distribution, inter-group trade for food and other resources, the use of food in special events, and food taboos on pregnant and menstruating women.

Nicholas Gubser's 1960-61 ethnography of the Nunamiut is part reconstruction, part description resulting from his stay in Anaktuvuk. Both detailed and wide-ranging, his work provides nearly equal coverage of women's and men's activities, placing them in the concentric spheres of the individual, the family and household, and the band. Spencer's account from about the same time (1957) is similar in his use both of direct observation and

reconstruction, although with a larger scope, comparing the inland and coastal Inuit of Alaska. His concern with the two Inuit groups frequently leads to general descriptions of an entire group, rather than to further subdivisions such as sex and age, which have the greatest bearing here. Descriptions of the Nunamiut and Tareumiut are not always distinct, so I have avoided references which I feel are ambiguous.

Everyday Distribution Events - Then and Now

Gubser emphasizes the importance of the household as the primary social group, both in the past and at the time of his research. In the past, family households often fanned out across the land in summer and winter, subsisting independently by trapping and occasional hunting and fishing (Gubser 1965:97, 104). Hunting was a communal effort, as dispersed households reconvened for the spring and fall caribou migrations. Gubser's own observations point up the changes in hunting techniques, as the introduction of guns has led to hunting by individuals or occasionally, pairs of related men, and near year-round autonomy in each household's quest for food (Gubser 1965:172).

In preparation for communal hunts, men pooled their knowledge of successful hunting spots to choose a prime location, setting snares among piles of sod and moss in a large U-shaped fence. At the same time, women and other men set up "scarecrows" of stones, sod and moss at the edge of the caribou herd's anticipated path. Their path directed by the human-like forms, and excited by the hooting of women, men and children on both sides, the caribou usually ran straight into the corral, which was then closed off by the nearby "hooters". At this point, hunters popped out of hiding with bows and arrows and spears, shooting animals closest to the corral or trapped in the

snares. The frenzy ended when the arrows ran out, and the remaining animals were allowed to escape (Gubser 1965:173-4).

After the hunt everyone - women, men and children- joined in butchering the huge quantity of animals. A few hunters, specially chosen for their good judgment, took on the task of distributing the products: meat, fat, and skins (Gubser 1965:174). Unlike practices of the !Kung and Tiwi, Gubser notes that kills were apportioned directly to households (rather than to specific individuals). Each household's situation was considered separately, however, the final rationing contingent on several factors:

A large household with two or three mature sons who had contributed importantly to the success of the drive, and which maintained one or two large teams of dogs would receive more than a small household with one or two children and a few dogs. A household that had run completely out of food would receive a little more than a household that still had supplies (Gubser 1965:174-5).

Thus, even as all families appeared adequately provided for, a reward system operated in favor of those men with the keenest hunting skills. Because control of the meat was not based on *pre-established* rules of ownership or distribution, as we see among the !Kung and Tiwi, greater opportunity existed for certain men and their families to "get ahead" by claiming greater portions than those allotted to less superior hunters, or families without an able male to participate in the hunt.

In contrast, discontinuation of communal hunting led to a much greater reliance on one's own family members to provide food directly for the household (Gubser 1965:77). Gubser observed that hunters stay in nearby regions, but avoid each other's immediate territory. Occasionally, two kin

members such as a nephew and uncle will hunt together (Gubser 1965:101). The division of their kill, while ostensibly equal, is often influenced by individual need and generosity (Gubser 1965:79). If a kill is large, the hunter's wife and older children often go to the kill site and help to skin, butcher, and transport the meat (Gubser 1965:79).

At this point, the hunter's wife assumes sole authority over the animal: she might cook some of it, while other parts (meat and fat) may be distributed as gifts, first to her own parents, followed by other lineal relatives, her siblings, her husband's parents, and finally to other close relatives and friends (Gubser 1965:81). Gubser writes of his own experience:

Another time the man of the house and I were hunting 25 miles from the village. We had the good fortune to kill a fat bull moose. My companion made a special point of saving the fat around the lower esophagus for his mother-in-law who, he knew, loved that kind of fat for breakfast. As his wife did not accompany us on this hunt, the man's daughter and sister-in-law (an adopted daughter of his mother-in-law) assumed the responsibility for handling the gift as well as the rest of the meat (1965:82).

Nunamiut women's control over the distribution of resources is a powerful position, especially in times of nutritional stress when rationing could make or break a family, and the politics of food-sharing is likely to be most intense. The point is especially revealing in light of the !Kung and Tiwi diets; because vegetable foods (often collected by women) are scarce, meat is rendered the staple of the Nunamiut diet. Because hunting and trapping require a significant time investment, as well as highly specialized knowledge (Gubser 1965:110-111), those disgruntled about their food share did not have the option of going into the bush, for example, and gathering some items for

their immediate consumption. Women especially, cannot compensate for a day's shortage in their household by gathering more the next day. Instead, all food derives directly from hunters or from the distributive hand of other women. Thus, if a hunter is unable to provide adequately for his family, the household must rely entirely on gifts from female friends or relatives for supplements.

In day-to-day circumstances then, men evidently control the hunted animal (through its tracking and killing), while women assume authority over the animal as a viable resource, both within the household (as food and skins) and in its movement between households as gifts of meat and fat. Although perceived as a resource before its death, the animal's use as such is preceded by its withdrawal from the wild, and a transformation from a natural state to one of cultural usefulness, after its transport to camp. During transport then, control of the animal is shifted from the hunter to his wife. In eliciting the help of his wife and other family members in butchering and transporting substantial kills, a hunter thus surrenders partial control of the animal in this state, extending the period of his wife's access. In addition, larger kills require larger spheres of distribution outside the household, which increases the amount of decision-making on the part of a hunter's wife (how much to whom?) and widens the circle of families impacted by her choices.

Friedl writes, "the right to distribute and exchange valued goods and services to those not in a person's own domestic unit...confers power and prestige in all societies" (1975:8). If this is true, the larger the kill, the greater the prestige or authority available for the hunter's wife, and although hers is not an "official" position, I venture that the wife of a consistently successful

hunter is better off in this regard than that of a man less fortunate in his endeavors.

Given these circumstances, the advent of year-round individual hunting due to white influences may surprisingly, have led to *increased* opportunities for women to gain status and prestige over those afforded when fall and spring caribou hunting was performed in a communal setting. This is understandable in light of the community-wide distribution of hunted meat in !Kung society for instance, whose explicit purpose is to ration the kill as evenly as possible in the public's eye, while avoiding marking one individual's success over another's. Divisions at smaller scales rely more strongly on decisions made by one or a few individuals per household, and although subject to criticism, may allow greater leeway for personal choice in how much to share with whom.

Trade Partnerships

Women also participated in formal trading partnerships, which I believe afforded them some control over the seasonal movements of their family. Spencer's informants speak of partnerships which evolved between the coastal Tareumiut and inland Nunamiut after two people exchanged goods for a number of years at the same location (Spencer 1959:168). (It is not clear if some inland/coastal trade relationships persist despite sedentarization of the Nunamiut.) Spurred by the former's need for caribou skins for clothing, and the Nunamiut's reliance on seal and whale oil for food and fuel (Spencer 1959:169), bartering often drew Nunamiut to the coast where they remained for the summer in the village of a trading partners (Spencer 1959:168). While Spencer's description of the relationship speaks in terms of

men, he notes that women could also have partners, established through their own annual stops at trading stations (1959:168).

A man (or woman?) could maintain several partners at once, accumulating material wealth and status through his acquired goods (Spencer 1959:169). In addition, coastal trading partners were most often the guests at Messenger Feasts (Spencer 1959:170) – annual inter-community events which served to enhance the status of individuals and the host community through elaborate preparations of food, dancing, games, and the exchange of gifts in a potlatch-type attempt to outdo one's guests (Spencer 1959:210-217).

It is likely that women's participation in these trade relationships worked in their favor in important household decision-making before the Nunamiut's settlement at Anaktuvuk Pass. Regarding the Inuit, Friedl (1977:40) boldly states that "men's knowledge of the details of environmental conditions, gained from their hunting expeditions, gives them the information by which to make decisions concerning the necessary movements of the group. Women have neither the knowledge nor the experience to participate in these decisions." Several ethnographic observations cast doubt on this statement, however.

Gubser notes that not all decisions about seasonal mobility were based on economics, as loneliness, proximity to kin, and other social factors gave a good amount of sway to the feelings of women and even children in individual households (1965:90). However, the role of women in trading may have allowed them even more substantial influence, according to Spencer's account. He writes (1959:168) that relations between coastal and inland Inuit were often strained, as strangers to a group were subject to hostile attacks. Because trade partner relationships helped to mitigate the otherwise suspicious attitude the coastal and inland groups felt toward each

other, summer trips to the coast relied on the good relations between partners to establish a feeling of safety for the visiting Nunamiut (Spencer 1959:168). In a household in which both husband and wife maintained trade relationships, the safety resulting from trustworthy partnerships was likely to influence decisions as to which partner's village to stay in, in addition to what trading would prove most economically fruitful.

From Spencer's brief mention of women's participation in this system, we cannot determine that men's trading was more vigorous or economically important than women's -- advantages may have lain just as easily with one of a woman's partners as with one of her husband's. With this possibility then, a woman's independent actions in the form of her own trade relationships) could strongly influence the summer mobility patterns of her household.

In the rather vague ethnographic past presented by Spencer, we see that women probably contributed substantially to decision-making which affected their family's movements, and in a more recent era, assume control over inter--household dynamics centering on food through their primary role in distribution events. A look at some "extraordinary" events shows that such opportunities are not homogeneous throughout Nunamiut society, however, although the pursuit of personal prestige is a much greater driving factor for the Nunamiut than the !Kung or Tiwi. According to Gubser, "a person may offer hospitality as proof of his hunting prowess and largesse" (1965:92), and during winter months when households typically remain in sedentary clusters,

a desire for prestige does not allow some individuals to rest long. Driven by ambition to amass wealth and possibly a feeling of

guilt from, or a fear of, too much indolence, a few households decide to go it alone despite the ease of community living (Gubser 1965:93).

Unveiled attempts at gaining recognition and prestige also figure into less mundane food distribution events, which occur in the community *karigi*, or ceremonial house (Spencer 1959:210). Because these special events often reinforce standards for everyday behaviors and expectations (through their exaggeration or actual reversals of these norms), an examination of their content brings to the surface some aspects of gender dynamics perhaps less obvious than in day-to-day circumstances.

Extraordinary Events

The Messenger Feast is common among Alaskan Inuit groups along the coasts and as far east as Barter Island (on the north coast on the Bering Sea). According to Spencer, its primary purpose is to boost one's social status within the community (1959:210). In Spencer's description of the practice among the coastal Tareumiut, little mention is made of women's involvement, although because of the extensive preparations necessary for the event, nearly everyone's help in the community is apparently enlisted (1959:212). Only men dance and participate in the foot race, however, and most guests are *umealit*, or skin boat captains (a male position) in their own communities. A man unable to attend may send another man of similar status as a proxy to give and receive the requisite gifts, and barring this, a woman might also be sent (Spencer 1959:216). Unfortunately, Spencer makes no mention of the criteria used to choose a woman for this position -- her own status, that of her husband, her relation to the invited man, etc.

Gubser supplies more information about special seasonal community events which took place inside the *karigi*. When many households came

together in the spring and fall for the communal caribou hunts, celebrations in this temporary tent were common. Women cooked in their own homes (never in the *karigi*) in preparation for the communal meals which were served inside, interestingly, by young women and *men* of the group, who distributed equal portions to everyone (Gubser 1965:168).

Men played the drums and composed the songs which were performed publicly in the evening (Gubser 1965:169). Songs were judged, and fine composers gained prestige in the eyes of the community through the quality of their compositions (Gubser 1965:170). Women's exclusion in these special creative processes would have had several negative repercussions, the first in their obvious lack of opportunity to compete for prestige in a public setting, outside of the limited sphere of their family and in food transactions between households. Secondly, Gubser writes that newly composed songs most often commemorated special events (1965:170). In this way, pieces of Nunamiut history would have been preserved to be passed on during similar events in the future. Thus, although knowledge of oral history was not restricted, "he who controls the past controls the future", and as the composers of these songs, men alone would determine the content of the selective public history of their group, at least in this genre.

One special opportunity was apparently available equally to women and men during these celebrations: group dancing suspended many of the everyday norms about shyness and guarded behavior toward some kin and other community members (Gubser 1965:170). This freedom would have strengthened both kinship and non-kinship relations in a temporary, specially designated atmosphere, relieving the strict rules of conduct necessary to sustain peace in the sharing atmosphere of a small community in which resources were often scarce. In these respects, dancing served

positive functions for both women and men. In general, however, I believe these ceremonies did little to enhance the status of women or portray them in a special light which, might influence or emphasize their status in routine situations. Sexual inequality in the award of prestige was instead emphasized by special creative opportunities afforded to men which were not economically based, whereas women were constrained to perform for the most part routine tasks. While the participation by young people of both sexes in food distribution was an interesting departure from the usual stringent adherence to sexual divisions of labor, the practice not only increased males' opportunities for active participation in the event, but squelched, without compensation, the uniqueness of the women's contribution.

Food Taboos

Finally, pregnant and menstruating women faced powerful taboos, including those guarding consumption of certain foods. Marked by the onset of menarche, a girl's entry into adulthood was accompanied by a series of limitations: she was confined to the house, unable to look at the light for fear of harming her eyes; her urine (usually saved for use in curing hides; Spencer 1959:57) was kept separate from that of other household members, and consumption of raw or bloody meat was off-limits (Spencer 1959:243-44), although Spencer does not discuss the penalty for breaking these rules. Subsequent menses were similarly stigmatized, as menstrual blood was considered an extraordinarily powerful and destructive pollutant (Spencer 1959:244; Gubser 1965:208). Shamans in particular avoided contact with it for

fear of losing their power¹. In addition, sexual intercourse at this time was prohibited (Gubser 1965:208). After her first period, a young woman was considered eligible for marriage and in fact, was encouraged to find a husband as soon as possible or risk rape (Spencer 1959:244).

Taboos were also levied on pregnant women: when traveling with a group, they were expected to follow the others at a distance, and at times to sleep in a separate hut (Spencer 1959:57) and in addition, were forced to avoid contact both with shamans and other pregnant women (Spencer 1959:232). Gubser provides the tantalizing information that certain types of meat were off limits during pregnancy (1965:208), but does not indicate what sort.

According to Speth, dietary restrictions on women during specific points in their reproductive careers may have actually supplied nutritional benefits, however, as "supplimentation of maternal diets with protein in excess of about 20% of total calories...may lead to declines rather than gains in infant birth weight, and perhaps also to increases in perinatal morbidity and mortality as well as cognitive impairment" (1990:155-56). Perhaps a similar functional explanation exists for the taboos levied on menstruating women, although foods such as red meat are substantial sources of iron, which is depleted in menstruating women (Ammer 1983:39).

Men at no time suffered from this sort of periodic ostracism. A boy was thought to enter adulthood when his voice changed; this was recognized simply by giving him new sets of clothing and piercing his lip to hold a labret (Spencer 1959:241). Spencer writes, "It is clear that the shift from childhood to adolescence was not formalized. It involved merely the assumption of greater responsibility on the part of the boy and his being included gradually

¹This is particularly interesting in that both women and men could become shamans (Spencer 1959:257); I wonder if the taboo applied to both sexes.

in adult activities" (Spencer 1959:241). Thus, while both girl's and boy's formal comings of age were important markers of their increased economic responsibilities, only young women experienced a period of seclusion accompanied by other restrictive changes in their everyday routine.

Although some of these practices (seclusion, food taboos, etc.) may have existed for health reasons, real or perceived, clearly women suffered a socially no-win situation from the effects. Through their role in childbearing, women were routinely alienated from the rest of the community, perceived as unclean during the critical times when the status of new life could be ascertained (through pregnancy or menses). Stigmatization of pregnant and menstruating women in these ways is not uncommon. To the extent that such restrictions limit the participation of pregnant or menstruating women in public and private activities and diminish their access to goods and resources, these rules clearly symbolize female subordination.

It is important to point out, however, that a woman is excused from her routine household labors only during her first menses; all subsequent periods do not elicit changes which affect the maintenance of the household (Spencer 1959:244). Clearly, taboos are levied only so far as they do not interfere with the functioning of the woman's primary sphere of influence: the family. I believe the complementarity of men's and women's roles within the household, the basic unit of subsistence, issues a good deal of power to women there. Other arenas in which men and women interact, such as the community *karigi*, serve primarily social rather than economic functions, and it is here where women's status seems to suffer most. Thus, trends toward more insulated households (as we see in the shift to individual hunting), perhaps elevate the status of women due to their recognized economic indispensability within them.

CONCLUSION

Food as a Social Positioner

Food serves an important social function in hunter-gatherer societies as communities mobilize for its procurement, only to fall into factions of "winners" and "losers" through patterns of its disbursement. The degree to which these factions are formed is of course quite variable; clearly, different systems allow for different degrees of freedom for "getting ahead", whether it be over one's neighbor, a hunter with poorer eyesight, or one's own wife. This variability demonstrates the range of ways in which groups, all classed as hunter-gatherers, solve the basic problem of getting food (from procurement to consumption), and how differences in these methods bear on the relative amount of egalitarianism we see within these cultures. The distribution of food is intimately related to the distribution of power and authority, as rules for sharing, as well as their deviations demonstrate. Leveling mechanisms in this context represent attempts to even out innate and inevitable differences between individuals in hunting skill, aggressiveness, greed, etc. which form the basis for factions of inequality. Some relevant questions which have come to light are: Who takes charge of distribution events, and how is this decided? Are large kills distributed in full view of the public, wherein everyone ostensibly receives an equal share, or are families expected to fend for themselves, borrowing when necessary from those with greater stores? Are better hunters rewarded for their efforts, or are personal successes diminished for example, by formal obligations of humility? From the

ethnographic evidence presented here, I believe three factors most directly affect the accumulation of authority through everyday community food distribution events.

1. *RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN a HUNTER and OWNERSHIP of a KILL.* Among the !Kung, there is virtually no association between the two, as the kill belongs to the owner of the arrow used to bring it down. Tiwi hunters, however, are the owners, or "bosses" of their kills. The Nunamiut also claim full ownership of their animals as a result of individual hunting, although communal hunts of the past did not single out particular hunters as owners.

2. *INTENSITY of ASSOCIATION WITH a KILL,* or the extent of a hunter's control over the distribution of a kill, if he or she is in fact identified as its owner. !Kung hunters give away distribution rights along with ownership of their kill. Although Tiwi hunters are the bosses of their kills, thus procuring for themselves specific meat packages, further ownership of (pre-determined) parts is dependent on random processes, so intensity is not one hundred percent. Again, this association does not apply to "traditional" Nunamiut hunters involved in communal hunts, when distribution was arranged by a few men who hopefully had the best interests of the entire group in mind (and divided meat accordingly). Modern Nunamiut hunters have no control whatsoever over the divisioning of kills obtained individually; this task is instead in the hands of women.

3. *POTENTIAL FREQUENCY of DISTRIBUTION,* or how often, on average, individuals have the opportunity to distribute meat from kills. Because !Kung ownership is acquired randomly, distribution rights should be spread fairly evenly throughout the community. Because the Tiwi claim ownership over their own kills though, the frequency with which they

assume the authority of distribution (although sharing patterns are pre-determined) is related to their hunting success, so hunters who obtain more (either through superior talent or more time spent at the task) may be expected to assert command more often than those who bring in fewer kills. Communal Nunamiut hunters did not distribute meat (except for the designated few), while modern hunters again play no role in distribution. Women, on the other hand, fulfill this role all of the time.

Combining these factors, we see that !Kung hunters have, as we might expect, the fewest opportunities to assert authority, as they are not recognized as owners of kills and thus have no rights to their distribution. Positions of power are assumed more readily by the Tiwi, who own the products of their own kills, although the intensity of their association with them is fairly low, due to pre-established rules for divisioning. The frequency with which they might expect to distribute kills depends on hunting ability, but apparently little skill is required to procure animals on the islands they inhabit. This factor may be less significant here than in other areas then. The introduction of guns into Nunamiut society has profoundly affected patterns of ownership and distribution and the authority that rests within them. Although in the past better hunters and their families may have acquired a slight advantage in the distribution process, as their households may have acquired slightly better rewards, hunters possessed no designated control over the matter themselves. Control in modern Nunamiut apparently is completely sex-based; direct ownership by hunters is complete, while the distribution rights belong entirely to women.

According to these criteria, the !Kung fall at one end of a spectrum representing the relative *concentration* of authority available to any one individual; in this case, this authority is most dispersed throughout the

community. The opposite end of the spectrum, not exhibited by either of the remaining groups, would tend to concentrate authority in certain individuals by allowing a hunter ownership of a kill and exclusive rights to distribution. Following naturally, the frequency of an individual's role in this distribution would correlate with hunting skill, allowing for monopolization of these events by superior hunters.

Beyond the level of the individual, implications for differential access to power are dependent on the type of actors allowed to fulfill authoritative roles: can men and women alike, young and elderly participate in any or all of these aspects of distribution and ownership? Unequal access by these or any other discrete subgroups of a society obviously leads to unequal power dynamics between them.

Even as these events allow some individuals greater access to these positions of authority than others, public acts of food distribution in both mundane and *extraordinary* events (feasts, ceremonies, etc.) often serve as a sort of social glue, systematically uniting communities both functionally and structurally. Among the !Kung, I believe meat itself serves as the unifying agent. This is pointed up by the common use of the word "meat" to refer to both animals and vegetable foods (Shostak 1981:243). Why does (hunted) meat accrue such special significance if its percentage of overall consumption is much smaller than that of collected foods (Lee 1984:51)? Its relative rarity, nutritional benefits, and the variety in diet it provides are certainly factors, as well that people may simply think it tastes good. We may put these in the "input" box - reasons (or stated rationales) for pursuing meat - but the "output", or observed effects of the hunt and subsequent distribution, does more than accrue these benefits; distribution according to particular pre-determined rules emphasizes the highly egalitarian principles by which the !Kung claim

to operate (Shostak 1981:109) by downplaying the role of the individual (successful hunters) in favor of the community at large (recipients).

Among the Tiwi, I believe the *kulama* yam acts as a social unifier in the way that meat does in !Kung society; through its personification in the *kulama* ceremony, first as male and then female the yam integrates the cognitive and practical realms of men and women. This translates into an appreciation of the complementarity of men's and women's roles in everyday situations - one aspect, I believe, of a highly egalitarian social structure. The symbolic role of the yam is perhaps even more outstanding than that of meat in !Kung society in that nutritionally, the yam apparently serves little or no purpose. Both hunted meat in the Kalahari and *kulama* yams in Australia represent sources of uncertainty and danger, however, which may contribute to their social importance - meat in its unpredictability as a resource as well as danger of the hunt, and *kulama* yams in their initial toxicity and bearing of *tarni*, or sickness. Overcoming these states represents a victory that through distribution of these items, an entire community can share in.

Such a unifying agent is not as apparent to me among the Nunamiut, perhaps because of their high degree of household independence. In the past, the communal hunt drew households together from their seasonally disparate locations; no such event occurs nowadays, although the Messenger Feast was common in Gubser's and Spencer's time.

This brings us to the curious conclusion that food apparently exerts both centrifugal and centripetal forces on hunting and gathering communities. Can we then sort and weigh these forces in order to evaluate where they place groups on the scale of egalitarianism? As I warned earlier, the results of such attempts, aimed only at food-related events, are only part of the story whose full explanation requires an examination of *many* facets of

a culture. In addition, social status and equality are subjective categories, targets for many forms of interpreter bias (see Kelly 1995:298). Kelly (1995:301) recommends that we thus “replace the question of whether men have higher status than women, and the search for generalizations about gender equality among hunter-gatherers, with more open-ended questions about who has authority, who has power, and under what conditions is it exercised?”.

I believe this is a valid approach for hunting and gathering societies, in which positions of authority may only be awarded “unofficially” based on an individual's merits, and as quickly as influence is gained, so may it fade. At the situational level then, we see that men and women pass from scenario to scenario, each type of interaction providing different opportunities for one or the other to assume power; how else can we mediate, for instance, the great disparity between Nunamiut women's influence in the past on household mobility decisions, and their commodification through the practice of wife-exchange (Gubser 1965:67)? While practices such as this may not figure into a discussion of food distribution events, they speak powerfully about the issues at hand, and cannot be ignored.

The nutritional status of individuals is one *objective* indicator of relative egalitarianism within a community. Nutritional well-being may vary seasonally (Speth 1990) from year to year, or with age, as well as between group on individuals. Looking at how this inequality strikes various subsets of societies evidence indicates that women in particular are affected in relation to their relative amounts of fat consumption (Speth 1990). Snacking from kills by hunters in the field, observed by Kelly among the !Kung may deplete carcasses of marrow and fat before they even reach camp, barring non-hunters such as women, the young, and the elderly, from access to these

resources. Menstrual and pregnancy taboos also limit women's consumption of certain animal products, such as raw or bloody meat among "traditional" Nunamiut (Spencer 1959:243). Speth argues that these taboos may actually offer nutritional benefits to pregnant women, whose consumption of protein above a certain level could prove detrimental to their fetuses (1990:162). This must be weighed against potentially harmful effects, however, as many taboo foods are substantial sources of iron, which is depleted in pregnant and menstruating women (Ammer 1983:39).

An interesting possibility that arises from Speth's work is that nutritional status may sometimes be at odds with social status. While sets of menstrual and pregnancy taboos appear socially disadvantageous to women by temporarily barring them from full participation in society and stigmatizing their bodies, and in some cases menstrual blood, they may serve to protect women and fetuses from nutritional excesses.

Women's consumption of certain foods such as fat and protein, whether systematic or not, can be restricted at several stages: first by depletion of carcasses before they even reach camp, then through the portion of meat allotted to her household from community distribution events, and finally within the household. One difficulty, I believe, in evaluating the amount of differential access to specific nutrients stems from the fact that food is simply not always distributed at the same level as the inequalities we would like to examine. Instead, portions are allotted to individuals, who are then responsible for sharing them among family, kin, and friends, or in the case of the Nunamiut in the past, to households, without a single representative. The possibility of inequality crops up most often *within* the household unit (differences between men and women, young and elderly, etc.) , investigation of which requires a level of detective work that anthropologists may not

always have considered. Alternately, if patterns of distribution are at all influenced by hunting skill, a less skillful hunter's entire household may be at a disadvantage; similarly, hunters who consistently receive the same parts due to a particular position they hold (such as Tiwi boat hunters, if their positions are in fact constant) may obtain consistently more or less valuable meat packages for their families.

The systems which govern food distribution and the loopholes within them point up the possibility for both social and nutritional inequality within hunter-gatherer groups. Because modern hunter-gatherers have often served as analogues for prehistoric foragers, it is important to approach the archaeological record open to indications of this kind of variability. In the past, ethnographers failed to see aspects of present-day cultures which did not fit with models of the time, simply because they did not look for them. Archaeological hypothesis testing was thus based on this tautological reasoning, and researchers had no difficulty in discovering only what they considered "appropriate" data - stones and bones indicative of a primitive, hunting subsistence strategy. And because hunter-gatherer groups of the recent past relied primarily on similar such tools for food-acquisition, (all other cultural characteristics aside) a one-to-one association was posited between cultures separated by as much as thirty-five thousand years. Lubbock defended the basic procedure of cultural evolutionist study in terms that Morgan, Tylor, and others of the time would have readily endorsed: "the consideration of modern savages [is necessary because] if we wish clearly to understand the antiquities of Europe, we must compare them with the rude implements and weapons still, or until lately, used by the savage races in other parts of the world" (Lubbock cited in Wilmsen 1989:13). We are now in

the position to look beyond these limited approaches to exploring the past of hunter-gatherers.

Evidence of Sharing and Nutritional Status in the Archaeological Record

Susan Kent (1993a) has studied how a number of ethnographically observable behaviors impact the archaeological record in a sedentary Kalahari community. Her observations centered around five camps within the community, three of which participated in a sharing network, while the other two remained relatively isolated in terms of sharing. She collected faunal specimens and compared them between camps during a five year period of study; these were used to calculate MNIs (minimum number of individuals) for each camp, which could be compared with the EONI, or ethnographically observed number of individuals.

The results of the study show that while some hunters were more successful than others, differences in MNI counts between the three households which shared were not statistically significant (1993a:349). At the same time, the *taxonomic richness* was higher in sharing camps than isolated ones, probably because sharing families had access not only to the animals they personally attained, but those obtained by sharing partners as well (1993a:359). In camps which did not share, however, the accumulated EONI reflected the number of animals actually obtained at the camp (1993a:350), and taxonomic richness did not increase (1993a:353).

The picture is complicated by the presence of dogs, which tended to scatter bones around a camp (1993a:340), and people themselves as they scatter and pile bones while cleaning up (1993a:341). Other post-depositional events and processes obscure direct readings of the archaeological record. The

duration of site occupation, for example, may tend to increase taxonomic richness (Stiner cited in Kent 1993a:359). This was not a problem in Kent's study, as occupation time was known, and equal for the five camps she observed (1993a:359), but it can present quite a challenge for archaeologists, who rarely can estimate the duration of occupation with this degree of exactitude. This factor would have the least effect on sites with very fine-grained assemblages, produced by a camps congregated in response to spring or fall migrations of important game, for example. Some faunal indicators of seasonality I can think of are the presence or absence of certain kinds of seasonally available birds and fish, and the presence of fetal bones in assemblages, indicating spring kills.

Also problematic is the lack of control groups in the archaeological record, which we would use to compare sharing versus non-sharing behavior, such a Kent observed. What level of taxonomic richness in faunal remains at different camps could be expected from both types of behavior? Without this comparative information, inferences about the absolute level of sharing are very difficult to make. This also brings up the problem of establishing the contemporaneity of camps. If we know that separate camps composed a single community, significant differences in the number of animals represented or the taxonomic richness between camps could indicate a lack of sharing. Stratigraphy and in some cases, anatomical refitting could aid in establishing contemporaneity. The latter may also help to indicate the movement of parts between camps, possibly due to sharing.

Finally, Kent found a weak but significant correlation between hunter skill and number of cranial fragments at the hunter's camp (1993a:350), which Stiner (cited in Kent 1993a:350) suggests as evidence for elevated nutritional status of better hunters, due to the nutritional value of the brain. However,

this would not hold true among the Tiwi, for example, because the hunter does not claim the head for him/herself. This points up the importance of leveling mechanisms for spreading resources among the community.

Although we have seen how they may yet allow unequal access, their practice would impact the faunal record in important ways. The less control one individual has over a kill, the weaker the concentration of elements we find in select camps, which may represent particularly nutritionally valuable meat parts.

As I mentioned earlier, nutritional inequality can begin even before animals reach camp, as a result of hunter's snacking in the field. We can thus observe which parts were left at kill/butchering sites and which are absent, presumably brought to camp. (Not all "missing" parts are necessarily brought back to camps though -- some could be fed to dogs, or cached in separate locations in regions where storage is possible.) *If* we assume that transport decisions are based on economic considerations (utility of body parts, transportation time, etc.), discard could indicate one of two possibilities. The first is that meat (fat, marrow, etc.) on those bones was consumed in the field, and the bones then tossed aside. Ethnographic evidence of snacking (Kelly 1995:166; Binford 1978) shows that these parts are highly valued, especially for their fat and marrow content. The second possibility indicates the opposite: that discarded parts were considered *less* economically valuable, and were not worth transporting when weighed against other factors such as time and energy expenditures. These possibilities are not exclusive, nor is the economic value placed on meat packages constant. Both the nutritional content of parts themselves, and the need for them vary seasonally. Binford's *Nunamiut Ethnoarchaeology* (1978) explores some of these possibilities, and offers units of measurement with which to evaluate utility of meat parts.

The case of the Tiwi boat hunters (who receive pre-assigned parts according to their position) offers a good example of how archaeological evidence may help us to understand past dynamics of social and nutritional inequality. First, animals obtained from boats (crocodiles and turtles) are not regularly pursued, and are thus unusual when they appear in the faunal record. When they are found, however, many households may contain such remains because animals are shared. Because particular meat parts are first distributed to specific individuals, however, the camps of hunters who consistently fill the same boat positions may contain concentrations of some specific elements they were awarded: crania in one, limb bones in another, and axial skeleton elements in the third. Thus, we can infer that the more concentrated these elements are within a single camp, the less they were shared between camps. Conversely, a broad distribution of these elements among camps might indicate a high degree of sharing. Implications for nutritional inequalities between camps may also correlate with hoarding, or lack of sharing, if certain camps sometimes retained elements we can correlate with a high nutritional value.

Although attributes such as power and authority are not directly observable in the archaeological record, ethnographic evidence cited in this thesis suggests that levels of authority in hunting and gathering societies are associated, among other things, with the amount of control a single individual possesses over communal food distribution. If this holds true, possible indications of non-sharing behavior discussed above, such as low levels of taxonomic richness, and accumulation of certain skeletal elements (especially those with high utility) might also imply that some individuals gained more rights to distribution than others, paving the way for both social and nutritional inequalities between camps.

Relationships such as these make sense given what the ethnographies tell us. Further examination of these tentative relationships is necessary though, if we wish to reach beyond the "traditional" views of hunter-gatherers. Variability in both social and nutritional equality defies the simplistic categorization of these groups, and emphasizes the need for fresh ethnography and archaeology unencumbered by biased approaches of the past.

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