

# African hunter-gatherer social organization: is it best understood as a product of encapsulation?

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## Introduction

In a paper published in 1980, 'Hunters and gatherers today and reconstruction of the past', I made some preliminary comments<sup>1</sup> about the relevance of the political and economic relationships with neighboring pastoral and agricultural societies for understanding hunter-gatherer social and economic organization and, in particular, for understanding why some hunter-gatherers have what I call 'immediate-return' organization while others have what I call 'delayed-return' organization. Stimulated by recent work (for example, Leacock and Lee 1982; Schrire 1984), my aim in the present chapter is to develop those preliminary comments.<sup>1</sup> As always, I regard the argument I am putting forward as tentative and I warmly welcome discussion and evidence, both in support of what I have to say and opposed to it, that will help me to improve or to discard aspects of the case presented here.

My distinction between immediate-return systems and delayed-return systems had been developed in a series of papers (Woodburn 1978; 1979; 1980; 1982a; 1982b). There are some changes, improvements I hope, in the formulation between the earlier and later papers in this series, and there will be other changes in future papers. But I am not concerned in the present chapter with further elaboration of the distinction, though I cannot escape summarizing it here, for my argument is unintelligible if the distinction is not understood. Here, then are the characteristics of immediate-return and delayed-return systems:

An *immediate-return system* is one in which activities oriented to the present (rather than to the past or the future) are stressed in which people deploy their labour to obtain food and other resources which will be used on the day they are obtained or casually over the days that follow; in which people use simple, portable, utilitarian, easily acquired, replaceable tools and weapons made with real skill but not involving a great deal of labour; in which people do *not* hold valued assets which are held and managed in a way which resembles and has similar social implications to delayed yields on labor; in which people are systematically disengaged from assets, from the potential in creating dependence.

A *delayed-return system* is one in which, in contrast, activities are oriented to the past and the future as well as to the present in which people hold rights over valued assets of some sort, which either represent a yield, a return for labour applied over time or, if not, are held and managed in a way which resembles and has similar social implications to delayed yields on labor. In delayed-return hunting and gathering systems those assets are of four main types, which may occur separately but are more commonly found in combination with one another and are mutually reinforcing.

- (1) Valuable technical facilities used in production: boats, nets, artificial weirs, stockades, pit-traps, beehives and other such artifacts which are a product of considerable labor and from which a good yield is obtained gradually over a period of months or years.
- (2) Processed and stored good or materials usually in fixed dwellings.
- (3) Wild products which have themselves been improved or increased by human labor: wild herds which are culled selectively, wild food-producing plants which have been tended and so on.
- (4) Assets in the form of rights held by men over their female kin who are

then bestowed in marriage on other men.<sup>2</sup>

Some hunter-gatherers have immediate-return systems and some have delayed return-systems. All other societies (with a very small number of possible exceptions) have delayed-return systems.

I have argued that both immediate- and delayed-return systems are likely to have existed even in the pre-neolithic period, though their relative frequency would probably have been quite different from today. I have also argued that in history there have been changes in both directions – from delayed-return systems to systems of immediate-return and vice versa – and have suggested in a preliminary way a range of factors that are likely, singly or in combination, to have promoted one type of system or the other or to have generated shifts from one to the other (Woodburn 1978; 1980). Contact with other societies is one such factor. I have claimed that

the contact situation and the political and economic relationships with non-hunting outsiders are relevant. Turnbull (1965a) and Gardner (1966; 1969; 1972) both discuss societies with systems of immediate return, and attribute the systems directly to the relationships with outsiders. Turnbull, in his discussion of the Mbuti Pygmies, argues that their mobility and flexibility are a means by which they seek to avoid political domination by their agricultural neighbours. Gardner sees the situation more starkly and argues that the immediate-return system of the Paliyan groups which he studied is pathological and the result of breakdown caused by the dominance and exploitation of their predatory peasant neighbours. Both authors are, I think, wrong in treating immediate-return as an unusual system which requires special explanation. As the examples I have listed earlier in this paper illustrate, the system is widespread and not all the societies in question suffer from exploitation by neighbors. At the same time I think the idea should be treated seriously and we should consider whether pressure from outsiders is one of the factors which tends, in combination with other factors, to push societies towards immediate-return systems. I think it is plausible to suggest that it is and that in a world consisting exclusively of hunters and gatherers, a higher proportion might have had delayed-return systems (Woodburn 1980: 112).

Taking these preliminary comments as my point of departure, my concern now is to consider more carefully how the *social organization* of hunter-gatherer societies may have been affected by pressure from outsiders.

I have argued that delayed-return systems depend for their operation on sets of ordered, differentiated, jurally-defined relationships through which crucial goods and services are transmitted. There are binding commitments and dependences between people. For people to build up, secure, protect, manage and transmit the delayed yields on labour, or the other assets which are held in delayed-return systems, load-bearing relationships are necessary. Social organization is *not*, however, merely an epiphenomenon of technology, the work process and the rules governing the control of assets. All I am saying, as I have indeed said before (Woodburn 1980: 111; 1982a: 434), is this: in a delayed-return system there must be organization having the very general characteristics outlined. The *particular* form the organization will take cannot be predicted, nor can one say that the organization exists in order to control and apportion these assets because, once in existence, the organization will be used in a variety of ways, which will include the control and apportionment of assets but which are not otherwise determined. In small-scale, delayed-return pastoral, agricultural and hunter-gatherer societies the binding commitments and dependencies are most often those of kinship groups; marriages in which women are bestowed by men on other men; marriage alliances between groups. We may also or alternatively find other sorts of formal contractual bonds to which people are committed. In contrast, the social organization of societies with immediate-return systems has the following basic characteristics: social groupings are flexible and constantly changing in composition;

individuals have a choice of whom they associate with in residence, in the food quest, in trade and exchange and in ritual contexts; people are not dependent on *specific* other people for access to basic requirements; relationships between people, whether relationships of kinship or other relationships, stress sharing and mutuality but do not involve long-term binding commitments of the sort that characterize delayed-return systems; distinctions – other than those between the sexes – of wealth, power, and status are systematically eliminated.

This chapter is intended to contribute to discussion of whether immediate-return systems and the forms of social organization associated with them are to be treated, as least in part, as a product of pressure from outsiders. Of course, members of all hunter-gatherer societies (and indeed of all human societies) have been subjected to pressure of one sort or another from outsiders. Such pressures may include:

- attempts to kill or injure them or to coerce them using violence;
- attempts to classify them as inferiors and to treat them as such;
- attempts to seize or entice them (especially their women and children) to work as slaves, servants, or clients;
- -attempts to dispossess them for their land or the natural resources of their land;
- attempts to seize their artifacts or the wild resources they have harvested;
- attempts to divert them from working to meet their own needs into working to obtain furs, ivory, honey, meat or other goods required by outsiders;
- attempts to dominate them politically, to define them as subject to the political authorities of some wider entity with powers to control their hunting, to sedentarize them or to otherwise organize their lives;
- attempts to proselytize them and to incorporate them, often in subsidiary roles, into outsider religious and ritual systems.

Pressures of these and other sorts are not new and indeed some of them will have been applied even in the pre-agricultural period. But with the expansion of agriculture and pastoralism over the world during the past few thousand years, and the expansion of long-distance trade over the past few hundred years, such pressures have, in general, multiplied and become much more intense. The problem, then, is to discern, what effects different types and different intensities of pressure have on hunter-gatherer social organization.

Let us start with a correlation; hunter-gatherer immediate-return systems appear to be commonly associated with encapsulation by small-scale agricultural and pastoral neighbours while hunter-gatherers with delayed-return systems are apparently not often thus encapsulated or were not thus encapsulated when they first entered the historical record. Groups such as the !kung bushmen of Botswana and Namibia (Marshall 1976; Lee 1979), the Mbuti of Zaire (Turnbull 1965a; 1965b; 1983), the Hadza of Tanzania (Woodburn 1968a; 1968b; 1972; 1982a), the Malapantaram (Hill Pandaram) of South India (Morris 1977; 1982a), the Naiken of South India (Garden 1966; 1969; 1972) and the Batek Negritos of Malaysia (K. Endicott 1979; 1983; 1984; K.L. Endicott 1981) can all be said to be thus encapsulated and to have immediate-return organization. The many different Inuit (Eskimo) groups, the peoples of the northwest coast of North America, the Australian Aborigines in general, all (or almost all) appear to have had delayed-return organization by my definition at the time of the first descriptions of their social organization and were not thus encapsulated. An important instance of a society to which the correlation does not apply is that of the Okiek or Highland Dorobo of Kenya (Blackburn 1970; 1971; 1974; 1982; Kratz 1981). They were encapsulated and yet had delayed-return organization; their case will be among those examined later in this chapter.

A correlation of this sort can be no more than suggestive. To be more than this it would have to be properly checked against a wide range of instances. And if it were then found to be statistically significant, we would still have to show that the key factor is indeed encapsulation/non-

encapsulation. There are several other possible factors: one is that all seven of the immediate-return instances I have cited are either in the tropics, and, unlike hunter-gatherers in more extreme latitudes, not subject to a really harsh season each year during which food is particularly difficult to obtain and good shelter and warm clothing are highly desirable. It is highly conceivable that this is a more relevant factor for the generation and maintenance of these systems, with harsh seasonality tending to stimulate the development of and the endurance of delayed-return systems. Another problem should be mentioned at this stage. It should not be assumed that the pressures from outsiders on encapsulated groups are, or have historically been, necessarily more intense than pressures from outsiders on groups that are not encapsulated.

### **Encapsulated African hunter-gatherers and what their farmer neighbours think of them**

But let us look more closely at African hunter-gatherers, and especially at a few East African instances, to see whether or not encapsulation is a plausible candidate as a generator or part-generator of immediate return.

In most sub-Saharan African countries there are, or were until recently, small groups (or subgroups) of people who either obtained their food largely by hunting and gathering or regarded themselves as descendants of people who had until recently obtained their food in this way. Such groups exist (or existed) in Mauritania, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Zaire, Ruanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa and probably also in several of the other sub-Saharan African countries I have not mentioned. The majority of these groups are separated from each other by the much more numerous, and vastly more populous, groups of agricultural and pastoral peoples who are, and have long been, not just numerically, but also politically, dominant.

They include: the many different equatorial forest groups who are referred to in the literature as Pygmies (or if they are on average more than 150 centimeters high as Pygmoids!) and whom their neighbours call by such names as Mbuti, Mbute, Aka, Twa, Tuwa, Tswa or Chwa; the savannah groups rather further south, many of whom again are called by some variant of the term Twa; the many groups in Kenya and Tanzania whose neighbours call them by the Maasai term Ndorobo or Dorobo; the many groups in Botswana, Namibia and Angola who in the literature are usually called Bushmen or San; and again many other groups like the Hadza of Tanzania or the Kwegu of Ethiopia to whom no generalized term is usually applied.

Virtually all African hunter-gatherer groups are partly or totally surrounded by, and have rather frequent contacts with, the neighbouring pastoral and/or agricultural groups who divide them off from other hunter-gatherers (of whom they may have heard or of whom they may be totally unaware). I use 'encapsulation' to refer to this whole or partial enclosure or enclavement. The units thus encapsulated are very variable in size and their contacts with their neighbours are very variable in frequency: they range from one or two households separated from other similar groups by intervening farmers with whom they have daily contacts up to 'tribes' of a thousand or more people who may have an area of a thousand or more square miles more or less to themselves and who have only intermittent contacts with their farmer neighbours. In these latter cases, which are now extremely rare, even non-existent, but of which there were several in Africa only a few years ago, the term 'encapsulation' with its overtones of circumscription may seem inappropriate to us and would perhaps seem strange to the people involved if its meaning were to be explained to them. It might conflict with their sense of open horizons and freedom from constraint. The reality is that farmer neighbours are in most directions unlikely to be more than a long day's walk away and contact with them, for all its variation, is likely to be significant and to be seen by the people themselves as important.

The type and intensity of the pressures applied by the encapsulating groups were in some respects similar throughout Africa and in other respects rather variable. Reading through the literature, I have been particularly struck by a similarity. The encapsulating groups did not merely assert their political dominance over the hunter-gatherers and ex-hunter-gatherers they encapsulated; they also treated them as inferiors, as people apart, stigmatized them and discriminated against them.<sup>3</sup> But at the same time they regarded them as possessing certain powers often linked with the notion that they were the original inhabitants of the country. The stereotypes that are held by the encapsulating groups are politically potent and colour the whole range of interactions between them and the hunter-gatherers they encapsulate.

These points are best discussed by referring to specific instances and I shall look in turn at three different East African cases: the Hadza of northern Tanzania, the Okiek (Highland Dorobo) of central Kenya and the Mbuti of Zaire.

The Eastern Hadza live in an area of around 1000 square miles of bush to the east of Lake Eyasi in northern Tanzania. These days a proportion of them live in government settlements but the number of residents in the settlements varies depending mainly on the availability of food and other goods which the government provides at any particular time. Most of the remainder live by hunting and gathering in nomadic bush camps although a few have taken up residence in the settlements of neighbouring farmers.

What is unusual about the Hadza situation is the variety of different neighbours they can contact if they choose. To the south are the Isanzu, sedentary Bantu-speaking agriculturalists. To the east and north-east are the Iraqw or Mbulu, sedentary Cushitic-speaking mixed farmers.<sup>4</sup> Within Hadza country and to the east and south-east are the Barabaig, who are nomadic pastoralists. Also within Hadza country are two substantial tribally mixed villages, Yaida and Mangola, which contain members of these three and many other groups. Interestingly the views all these various groups hold about the Hadza are rather similar; the same stereotypes constantly recur.

The view that is most often put even when Hadza are present is that the Hadza are not a 'real' ethnic group but are an aggregation of people who, recently or in the past, fled from neighbouring societies into the bush for a variety of reasons — to avoid famine, to avoid punishment for some crime or because they had been ostracized, to avoid paying the head tax levied by the colonial authorities on all groups in the area apart from the Hadza. Nowadays the idea that they are victims of colonialism, people who were forced out into the bush by the colonial authorities, has some currency.

Their click language is, I was once told by a neighbouring tribesman, not a real language but a cacophonous creole bastardized from neighbouring languages and using animal-like sounds. Loan words in Hadza, heard in Hadza conversations, were triumphantly produced as evidence that Hadza is not a language in its own right.

The Hadza are, or were, also sometimes treated as being themselves almost animal-like, partly perhaps because they live in the bush, an unacceptable place associated with animals. The daughter of one of my elderly Hadza friends had married an Iraqw farmer. This farmer, annoyed about something, came with farmer friends and gave his Hadza father-in-law a serious beating. I persuaded the Hadza to seek damages for his injuries in an Iraqw tribal court (this was in 1958 or 1959). At the court one of the Iraqw court elders said, to my astonishment, that Hadza were like baboons but if you married one you had to treat your wife's father properly. Some other Iraqw elders seemed very doubtful about whether a Hadza had any right, even in these circumstances, to claim against an Iraqw. Damages were, in the end, awarded but I know of no other case in which a Hadza managed to secure damages in an Iraqw court.

The fact that some of the foods the Hadza eat are regarded as disgusting and unacceptable as food to some or all of the neighbouring farmers is sometimes mentioned. Hyrax, baboon, vulture (eaten by some Hadza) and tortoise (eaten by Hadza women) fall into this category. More emphasis is placed on the claim that Hadza eat meat raw and that they are impolite and greedy in the way that they eat. In these and other respects they are seen as violating acceptable behaviour.

They are much criticized for their begging and their supposedly child-like lack of attention to wealth and property. They are seen as poverty-stricken and their poverty is often said to be their own fault. However, nowadays they are sometimes treated by government officials as victims rather than as improvident poor and as appropriate recipients for government development aid. Another theme that constantly recurs is the notion that the Hadza are mysterious, that they have special knowledge of secret medicines (especially anti-snakebite medicine) and that they have extraordinary supernatural powers (in particular the power of making themselves invisible). The Hadza are relatively few in number and only rarely venture outside their own country so that many people living within a few miles of them have never actually seen them. There is much speculative talk about them. Like many other ethnic stereotypes, this composite one that I have outlined is almost wholly false. The Hadza have a rather clear and distinctive ethnic identity and speak a language which is unrelated to neighbouring languages and is in no sense a creole. The five hundred detailed genealogies that I have compiled and the genetic studies carried out by a physical anthropologist, Nigel Barnicot, with whom I worked in the 1960s, demonstrate conclusively that immigration during the past hundred years — and probably for much longer than that has occurred on a very small scale except during a period of a few years early this century when harsh actions by the German colonial authorities and a series of famines did briefly cause a number of Isanzu farmers to come to live in the bush by hunting and gathering. Most are said to have lived apart from the Hadza and soon returned to Isanzu. Some lived with the Hadza and a number of these, almost all men, married Hadza spouses. Many young Hadza today have one of these immigrants among their ancestors. Erich Obst, who in 1911, was the first European to make contact with the Hadza, met several of these immigrants (Obst 1912) and I met one or two survivors when I started my research in 1957. The number of more recent immigrants is very small indeed. Usually they only stay if they are of part-Hadza ancestry, for example the children of women who have married out. There is nothing to suggest that the proportion of immigrants is any higher than it usually is in Africa between adjacent farming communities. Even the hungry are reluctant to live for longer than is necessary with a mysterious and stigmatized group.

Though there are foods which the Hadza eat which their neighbours reject, there are also foods — notably milk — eaten by neighbours which the Hadza traditionally rejected. The Hadza may eat liver raw as some of their neighbours do — but they do not, in general, eat other meat raw. The claim that their food use is disgusting is just as ethnocentric as such claims usually are.

The Hadza are not impoverished. They obtain their food with relative ease and famine is unknown. Surveys in which I participated in the 1960s demonstrated that malnutrition almost never occurs. They are poor only in the sense that they do not accumulate property — domestic animals, stores of food, stores of artefacts — of the sort that their neighbours do.

They trade on their reputation as mysterious people in their dealings with outsiders, and especially in their sales of herbal medicines. But, for the most part, they do not place much faith themselves in the medicines which they sell. They certainly do not believe that other Hadza can make themselves invisible!

Why then are these false stereotypes held? They express, first, the power situation. The Hadza are manifestly politically weak in relation to their neighbours. They have neither the numbers nor the organization to be able to assert themselves politically. Their relative political impotence labels them as inferiors. At the same time nomadic hunting and gathering as a way of life does offer so many patterned contrasts to the cherished values of successful farmers that it is readily represented as alien and unintelligible: for farmers it simply cannot be a 'real' coherent way of life at all and must be a bastardized form.

Now who would live an inferior, bastardized way of life? Two categories of people offer themselves in the amazing world of ethnic stereotype construction. Either people who are themselves perceived as intrinsically inferior, or else outcasts from other groups who have no choice in the matter. Some of the neighbours of the Hadza undoubtedly do think of them as

intrinsically inferior but the preferred explanation of these neighbours is perhaps the more generous one — that they are outcasts or outlaws who are living as they do because other choices have been denied them and who are at least potentially capable of redeeming themselves and living as these farmers believe human beings ought to live. On the other hand, this latter stereotype is ungenerous in denying them priority as the first inhabitants of the area. Neighbours, even those who have dealings with the Hadza, are quite extraordinarily ignorant about them and this is certainly in part related to the barriers to communication that are imposed by the social distance they create between themselves and the Hadza. Outsiders, sometimes even long-standing immigrants into Hadza society, do not learn to speak or to understand Hadza. They expect the Hadza to learn their languages. Nor do they usually take much trouble to find out about Hadza custom — that would be treating the Hadza too seriously. It is wholly consistent that in this vacuum they attribute mysterious, unintelligible supernatural powers to the Hadza.

What, then, are the Hadza's stereotypes of their neighbours? Mainly because they learn to speak their neighbours' languages, they have far more genuine knowledge of their neighbours, than their neighbours do of the Hadza. Stereotypes exist, of course, but not on quite the same scale. For present purposes the stereotype that matters is the strong belief that their neighbours, and especially the Isanzu, are extremely dangerous witches who use their supposed powers to kill Hadza by witchcraft if they can, and especially any Hadza who settle near them.

And Hadza who do settle near the Isanzu and survive are often believed by other Hadza to have survived because they have acquired witchcraft from the Isanzu and become witches themselves. Such settled Hadza are then themselves likely to be treated, at least in some contexts, as dangerous outsiders.

Recent accounts of the Okiek, hunters and gatherers of the Mau forests of Kenya, show that they too are stigmatized as fundamentally inferior by many of their neighbours. They too are regarded as monkey-like and there is even a widespread belief that they have tails.

They too are falsely accused of eating their meat raw (Blackburn 1970; 1971; 1974; 1982; Kratz 1981: 358). Their immediate neighbours include the pastoral Maasai. In a version of the Maasai origin myth cited by Blackburn (1982: 297), an Okiot man annoyed God by his profligate behaviour and as a result no more cattle were lowered from heaven.

This denied Maasai more cattle. At the same time God condemned the Okiek to live from then onwards only from wild rather than domestic animals. Both the Okiek way of life and the Maasai shortage of cattle are thus represented as imposed by God as a punishment for Okiek misbehaviour. Even today the Maasai regard the Okiek as rofligate and gluttonous because they often obtain cattle for slaughter and immediate consumption rather than to build up a herd. Their relative lack of cattle indicates, the Maasai believe, their poverty and their improvidence, their lack of ability to develop and care for possessions. Their consumption of game meat and of the meat of cattle that die of disease further condemns them. At the same time they are said to have no sense of respect or of honour and to lose their tempers and become violent among themselves in a shameful way. Like the Hadza in relation to their neighbours, the Okiek lack political power in their relations with the Maasai. Their perceived impotence is again translated into inferiority and in this case the inferiority is made additionally humiliating by being represented as a consequence of their own failings, their ancestral and present-day profligacy.

Blackburn labels as a gross misconception the notion put forward by unspecified outsiders that the Okiek are merely a conglomeration of criminals and runaways from other tribes (1971: 144), a similar stereotype to the one applied to the Hadza which I have discussed and sought to explain above. No doubt some similar explanation would be appropriate here.

The Maasai are not well informed about the Okiek. Blackburn tells us that Okiek life is a mystery to them and that they feel there is something mysterious and unknowable about the Okiek (ibid.: 141). Again there are obvious parallels with the stereotypes applied to the Hadza and similar explanations may be relevant.

These two East African instances should serve as a cautionary tale to suggest that we should be extremely careful before we believe outsiders' views about stigmatized groups. Much recent writing has, I believe, fallen into the trap of doing just that, with the result that misunderstandings have arisen about who East African encapsulated hunters and gatherers really are. What we need, of course, is more field research among the hunters and gatherers themselves to clarify the situation. It will in due course become clearer how typical these two instances are.

In the published literature on East African hunter-gatherers the term 'Dorobo' constantly appears. The term is used by the pastoral Maasai, and by writers who obtained their information from the Maasai and other people in the same area, for the very wide range of different hunters with whom they had contacts. It covers both those Maasai who have temporarily lost their cattle and who are forced to live by hunting until they can accumulate more, and hunting and gathering groups like the Okiek (and even occasionally the Hadza, though the Maasai today have scarcely any contact with them) who have distinctive cultures and languages, who have long occupied particular areas and who have apparently accepted relatively few in-marrying or other immigrants whether these immigrants are impoverished pastoralists or not. There has been a spate of recent articles suggesting that the Dorobo in general are best treated as impoverished pastoralists living only temporarily as hunter-gatherers until they can acquire stock (for example van Zwanenberg 1976). While undoubtedly there are some Dorobo of this sort (see, for example, P. Spencer 1973), we must beware of generalizing from these instances and taking the highly prejudiced ethnic stereotypes of the Maasai and other peoples at their face value when they deny cultural integrity to societies they despise and fail to understand. My own guess is that, in spite of their political weakness, indeed perhaps partly because of it and the stigmatization associated with it, most East African hunter-gatherer groups display at least as much stability and continuity of ethnic self-identification as do East African agricultural and pastoral societies. As Kratz (1981) points out, clear ethnic self-identification is for the Okiek combined with an ability to pass comfortably between cultures, to speak in the languages and interact in the cultures of their neighbours as well as in their own. The Hadza, too, have this skill and I would expect it to be widespread among low-status groups. This may be confusing for higher-status groups (and sometimes for anthropologists) but it must not be taken as an indication that such hunter-gatherers do not have a culture of their own.

The Mbuti, too, are stigmatized by their villager neighbours, as both Turnbull's material and some interesting new material presented by Waehle at a conference I attended in Cologne in January 1985, reveal.<sup>5</sup>

We are told that the Mbuti are labeled by villagers as savages, even sub-human (as being like chimpanzees or forest hogs), as associated with the uncivilised forest, as unreliable and as ignorant (Whle 1986). Here the emphasis appears to be on intrinsic inferiority rather than inferiority as outcasts — which is, I suppose, what one might expect given the striking physical differences between Mbuti and villager which the villagers stereotype can hardly ignore. Yet at the same time their forest skills are recognized and they are said to have originally taught villagers how to live in the forest. Turnbull (1965b: 162) tells us that the Mbuti are recognized as the original inhabitants of the forest and are 'to a certain extent, feared and respected as such by the villager'.

Maquet (1961: 10) tells us that the Twa of Ruanda are said, half jokingly, by most other Ruanda, to be more akin to monkeys than to human beings. The socially emphasized physical stereotype for a Twa is, he tells us, one that 'stressed all the features which could be interpreted as ape-like' — bulging forehead, flat face and nose, and so on (ibid.: 146). Only the Twa eat game meat, which is another reason why they are despised by the rest of the population (ibid.: 14). Twa are

regarded as naturally gluttonous and lacking in restraint, but as loyal to their masters and courageous in hunting.

One could go on and on. Rather similar stereotypes are, or were in the past, applied by agricultural and pastoralist neighbours to San in southern Africa and, I think, more generally to hunter-gatherers all over sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Political relations between encapsulated hunter-gatherers and their farmer neighbours**

The political context in which these stereotypes flourish is one in which numbers of people in hunter-gatherer groups are usually (but not always) so small that in spite of their formidable weapons they can be treated as politically impotent, as conquered or conquerable. Typically we find that they are, or were, treated as not having an entitlement to equal legal status with other people and as being either excluded as marriage partners or, at best, as only being acceptable when the husband is the farmer and the wife the hunter-gatherer. Hunter-gatherer women are often taken only as concubines or secondary wives or as the first wives of particularly low-status farmers.

As everywhere else in the world, the combination of stereotyped inferiority and of political impotence is potentially very dangerous, even lethal, for those so characterized, especially in times of political turmoil. The power exerted by the dominant groups has differed from time to time but has always been a potential. Schapera (1956: 128-9) described what happened when the Western Tswana tribes — pastoralists and agriculturalists — entered Bechuanaland from the Transvaal in the first half of the eighteenth century:

They found the country occupied by many small and scattered groups of Bushmen [hunter-gatherers], Kgalagadi, Tswapong, Yeei, and other peoples [mostly farmers], whom in some instances they fought and conquered, but who as a rule submitted to them without resistance. . . . The inhabitants of each district became the serfs (*malata*) of the local overseer. He made them herd his cattle and cultivate his fields, and usually also brought some of them into the capital to do the menial work in his home. In addition, he could appropriate whatever property they acquired. This referred especially to such hunting spoils as ivory, ostrich feathers, and the skins of wild animals, all of which he claimed for himself, leaving them only the meat. . . . Serfs remained permanently attached to the family of their master, and after his death were inherited by his children. They were apparently seldom, if ever, bought or sold, though their master could give or lend them to other men, and they often formed part of a daughter's dowry; but they themselves were not free to seek work with anybody else or to move away from their district. If oppressed, as they often were, they had no access to the tribal courts, and should they run away they might be followed up and brought back by force. They lacked many other civic rights, including participation in political assemblies, and were not admitted into membership of age-regiments, nor were they allowed to possess live-stock of their own . . . some, especially the Bushmen, are still considered inferior to other members of the tribe, who deem it degrading, for instance, to intermarry with them.

[Schapera then quotes the following passage from Mackenzie 1871: 132f.] 'The contest for the possession of certain villages of Bakalahari [Kgalagadi] or Bushmen, is a fruitful source of strife in Bechuana towns. The vassals with all their belongings are the subject of litigation and endless jealousies . . . . When rival chiefs fight for supremacy in the same tribe, the condition of the harmless vassals is wretched in the extreme. They are then scattered and peeled, driven hither and thither, and mercilessly killed, as the jealousy, caprice, or revenge of their masters may dictate. It is quite fair in such a struggle to kill all the vassals, as it would be to lift the cattle, of him who cannot be displaced from his chieftainship. And so with the varying fortunes of a "civil war", the vassals might be attacked by both parties in turn. Again, when one Bechuana tribe attacks another, the Bushmen and Bakalahari belonging to both are placed in the same category with cattle and sheep — they are to be "lifted" or killed as opportunity offers. In such cases, therefore,

all Bakalahari and Bushmen flee into wastes and inaccessible forests, and hide themselves until the commotion is past.'

Schapera goes on to say that the Tswana discriminated against defeated peoples according to a scale of ethnic and cultural differences between themselves and the conquered. There was seldom any marked discrimination against conquered or immigrant peoples of the same stock as themselves. 'It is only if subject peoples differ obviously in language, culture or race from their new rulers that they tend to be exploited and this applies even if they were not conquered but came as immigrants (1956: .132).

Where, as in this instance, there is traditional state organization, seizure of whole communities and their land often occurs, and domination over and stigmatization of people defined as alien — of whom hunter-gatherers are almost the prototype — can be particularly severe. In Ruanda and Burundi, the Twa suffered many civil disabilities: in Burundi, even now when most Twa hunting lands have been cleared for farming by non-Twa farmers, they are apparently in practice not entitled to hold agricultural land. They are said not to be able to set foot in the houses of other people and commensality is said to be out of the question. In the past they did have special privileges and duties at the king's court. Schebesta (1936: 190) tells us that they had the sole right of acting as bearers of the king's sedan chair, that they served as constables at the court and as executioners (ibid.: 200). These privileges were seen as linked with the legend that in remote times the Batwa had helped the ancestors of the king to conquer the country and had stood by them in time of peril (ibid.: 191). Similarly, we find an apparent combination of discrimination and privilege in Kafa, one of the southern Ethiopian kingdoms where the Manjo, who were hunters living mainly by hunting monkeys taken in traps but who were said to eat any animal, had the privilege of guarding the royal enclosures and gates of the country (under Kafa commanders) and of fetching wood and water for the king. It was also their obligation to bury Kafa dead (Huntinglord 1955: 136). No doubt their privileges can be explained in much the same way as the common use of slaves in other kingdoms with similar roles: belonging to an alien and politically impotent group, they were not competitors for political offices. Since their privileges depended on the king alone, their loyalty would be particularly great. But unlike slaves, their identification as first inhabitants of the country and their willingness to serve the king in this capacity helped to legitimize his right to rule.

Hunters and gatherers in the neighbourhood of traditionally acephalous societies or of petty chiefdoms are obviously unable to benefit from association with royalty but are perhaps less liable to be seized en masse with their lands. They are, however, very likely to be raided, and this was especially so in the struggle for ivory and slaves which spread all over Africa and which in East Africa became particularly acute in the nineteenth century. The Mbuti and the Hadza both suffered at this time. Erich Obst, the German geographer who contacted the Eastern Hadza in 1911, recorded what he then discovered of their history:

They told me that as far back as can be remembered they had had to wage constant bloody feuds with their neighbours, especially with the Waisansu [Isanzu] and the Wamburu [Mbulu, Iraqw]. Their strength was already shattered by this when the Massai [Maasai] broke in from the north east. . . . Under their leaders, Boiyoge and Wassaraguai, they made repeated attempts to defend themselves against the tiresome intruders, but finally had to yield their superior power. . . . [They] chose as a place of refuge the rocky heights between the Hohenlohe [Yaida and Wembare [Eyasi] valleys and now carried on a pitiful existence here in hordes of from one to three families. . . . Even after the flight from the Massai the Wakindiga [Hadza] were not fated to enjoy peace and quiet. So long as there were still herds of elephants in the Wembare and Hohenlohe valleys the coming and going of the foreign peoples continued. And while the Wassukuma [Sukuma] came only in small troupes, on account of the greater distance from their home, traded with the Wakindiga and obtained permission to hunt by handing over old iron hoes, knives, beads and by leaving meat to the Wakindiga, the Waissansu, on the other hand always came prepared for war,

feuded incessantly with the Wakindiga and seized women and children whenever they could lay hands on them. Only after the last decades, in which the elephants became rarer and rarer did the fights with the Waissansu cease. Silent trading<sup>6</sup> led to an exchange of natural and cultural riches of the two peoples and to . . . peaceful invasion by the Waissansu<sup>7</sup> (Obst 1912: 17-18; I have inserted uninflected current spellings and names in square brackets).

In their accounts of the dramatic past, Hadza are, like most of us, inclined to exaggerate and I have certain doubts about whether the scale of raiding was necessarily as continuously severe as this report suggests. Raids spread over much space and time may have been coalesced. The high rocky area to which the Hadza are reported to have fled is a central part of their country, rich in wild foods, and is likely to have been so even then. Obst visited their country in the dry season and may not have been aware that camps of from one to three families are entirely normal in the wet season and even in the dry season would not imply social collapse. Their country is large enough, and offers enough good cover, for concealment to be practicable over long periods from all apart from other Hadza. If trapped, Hadza proficiency with their formidable bows and poisoned arrows (Woodburn 1970) — much better weapons than the bows and arrows and spears of their neighbours, in most contexts better even against people than the muzzle loading rifles which may have been used by some outsiders to kill elephants means that they will have been able to kill as well as be killed. All the same, the evidence that I gathered in the late 1950s clearly supports the view that the Hadza were indeed under considerable military pressure from neighbours in the nineteenth century though there is no way of knowing how long this pressure lasted.

Their country was (and even today is) a frontier zone between a number of culturally and linguistically distinct peoples who have never in the known history of the past hundred years lived entirely at peace with one another. As I have described earlier (Woodburn 1979: 249), Hadza men always travelled armed with their powerful bows and arrows and outsider tribesmen hardly ever ventured into Hadza country unless they were armed with bow, spear or firearm. Occasional murders occurred, both of Hadza and of others, most commonly carried out by marauding groups of pastoral Barabaig, and these were generally not reported to the government authorities. The availability of game animals attracted outsider hunters of all types, some with legal rights to hunt and others without, some threatening to the Hadza and others not. The essential point is that the consequences of encounters with outsiders were unpredictable and potentially dangerous as they commonly are in frontier situations elsewhere where armed individuals and groups from quite different cultural backgrounds, and some times with no language in common, encounter each other from time to time.

Central Kenya, the area in which the Okiek live, has a long history of warfare and raiding. Blackburn tells how the Okiek survived the waves of pastoral invasions which decimated, scattered or assimilated other peoples in the area. The Okiek survived because they lived in the highland forests, areas of no interest for grazing and ideal as places in which to hide; because they kept no cattle or other stock to attract raids; and because they were useful as providers of valued honey. Nowadays, Maasai warriors sometimes act aggressively towards Okiek individuals or small groups whom they happen to meet when travelling. The Okiek, aware of their numerical weakness, tend not to retaliate for fear of attracting retribution (Blackburn 1982: 293-6).

From Waehle's account (1986) it is clear that the Ituri forest was also wracked with warfare in the nineteenth century. Villages were surrounded by palisades and a woman fetching water would need two armed men to accompany her. Slave and ivory raiders were feared. Different groups of villagers were at war with each other and Efe Mbuti acted as guerrillas for their villagers. Strangers risked being shot at or killed. The Mbuti are depicted as having been (particularly the Mangbetu) is mentioned. Silent trade between the Mbuti and the Mangbetu may be explained by such fear and general suspicion. Stories also tell of strained relations between the Mbuti and villagers, and that villagers used commonly to beat their Mbuti. Turnbull, who mainly Worked

further south in the Ituri, tells of the years of warfare that accompanied the arrival of Arabs in search of ivory and slaves and the expeditions of Stanley through the area. But he says: 'Stanley's brutal expeditions had little impact on the Mbuti, except perhaps to warn them, as it warned others, what they might expect from other Europeans. Even slavery only touched them in so far as they were encouraged to kill elephants in order to provide the Arabs with ivory' (Turnbull 1983: 22). He also mentions the introduction of a new technique for elephant hunting -- heel-slashing -- which was introduced at this time, presumably stimulated by the demand for ivory.

Throughout Africa (and in much of the rest of the world) it seems to be the case that hunter-gatherers as a stigmatized minority are vulnerable to persecution, insecure in their holding of land and unable to prevent encroachment by their farmer neighbours, and, even when closely involved with their neighbours, unable by themselves to mobilize legal procedures to secure justice in their dealings with them. In this situation two alternative means of handling relationships between the hunter-gatherers and the farmer neighbours may arise (as well as intermediate forms). The hunter-gatherers may, voluntarily or involuntarily, enter into a form of alliance, based on individual patron-client ties, with their neighbours. If they do, the best that they can hope for politically is that the relationship will become a paternalistic one with the patron requiring some deference but accepting some fatherly responsibility for his client — to protect him and his assets, to represent him in legal contexts and more generally in his dealings with other outsiders. But this does reciprocally imply, if the relationship is to persist, an acceptance by the hunter-gatherer of domination, or at least of some control. There is an implication from the patron's point of view though not necessarily from the client's that the client's role is essentially a demeaning and servile one.

If, on the other hand, the hunter-gatherers avoid alliances (as the Hadza normally do) and seek to channel their dealings with outsiders largely through ephemeral relationships, then they do not have to do more than to play at deference and certainly do not have to accept the possibility of control over themselves and their labour. But without protectors in the outsider community they are very vulnerable if, for any reason, they lose their land or other assets and, in particular, if they lose their means of subsistence and are no longer able to provide for themselves. They are also very vulnerable to violence and to more general persecution. From all this I think we can see that in sub-Saharan Africa there appears to be a widespread kind of ready-made discriminatory slot into which farmers seek to fit any hunter-gatherers who happen to be in the locality. But so long as they retain sufficient bush or forest in which to hunt and gather and, when necessary, in which to conceal themselves, hunter-gatherers commonly do not themselves accept subordinate status, and indeed often can be seen to succeed in partially negating the discrimination practised against them. Where they are in real difficulty is where they have lost their land, or the populations of wild plants and animals have become depleted, or where for some other reason they have become unable or unwilling to continue to live by nomadic hunting and gathering and have become sedentarized in situations in which they are controllable and exploitable (see de Carolis 1977; Waehle 1986).<sup>8</sup> In such situations discrimination actually appears to increase.<sup>9</sup> For groups with an immediate-return system, it is particularly difficult to develop effective agriculture (Lee 1979: 409-14; Woodburn 1982a: 447) and their low status and relative propertylessness in the eyes of their neighbours mark them out, once they have become controlled, as suitable for menial labour and also prostitution in those cases in which their status is not so low that sexual contact is seen as polluting.

I have suggested that the stigmatization of hunter-gatherer groups is related in part to their political impotence and the ease with which they can be classed as alien. If this is correct, such stigmatization will not have existed to the extent that it does today during the period of pioneer agricultural and pastoral expansion into areas previously occupied by hunter-gatherers. Language history may give us some clue to this: the Hadza language is today despised by speakers of neighbouring languages, and borrowings of Hadza vocabulary in the languages of their neighbours are virtually non-existent. Of course, linguistic history is full of cases of

borrowings from groups that were in some way low status. But I would have thought that such borrowings would occur only if the gap in status is not too great, if the numbers of people in the low-status group are relatively high and if they have closer day-to-day associations with higher-status groups than the Hadza have had in their recent history. If the extensive Khoisan phonological and vocabulary borrowings in Southern Bantu languages came, in whole or in part, from languages which at the time of the borrowings were spoken by hunter-gatherers, and if Southern Bantu languages were then spoken by pastoral or agricultural peoples, this suggests to me that the then relationship between hunter-gatherers and farmers might have been very different from the instances that we know in Africa today. Perhaps one could speculate wildly and suggest the possibility that pioneer farmers bringing with them a variety of new technologies, some of which had important military implications, may have themselves been kept under control and excluded from political power by then dominant hunter-gatherers applying the type of discrimination that is today applied in the reverse direction. There is a possible analogy in the severe discrimination that is applied in so many parts of Africa by agricultural and pastoral peoples to blacksmiths who possess a crucial technology and yet are ostracized and excluded from all political power by members of many of the societies among whom they live.

### **Economic relations between encapsulated African hunter-gatherers and their farmer neighbours**

I want now to examine some of the transactions of goods and services that take place between farmers and hunter-gatherers, at the relationships within which these transactions occur and at the yields for each party. Obviously we need to know whether the goods or labour transacted are substantial or relatively minor in comparison with goods and services transacted within each group. We also need to know whether they are indispensable to one or both parties. And are the transactions balanced in some way, with the parties able freely to negotiate yields, or are they controlled either ideologically, so that the goods and labour of the hunter-gatherers are devalued, or politically, so that the goods and labour provided by the hunter-gatherers are coerced rather than voluntarily delivered in exchange for things of equal value? It would seem likely that the stigmatization of hunter-gatherers would affect (and be affected by) the nature of exchanges with their farmer neighbours, and that these exchanges would be quantitatively and qualitatively different from the trading and bartering that typically occurs between members of adjacent farming societies, especially those occupying different ecological zones. We need to know whether a consistent pattern emerges which has implications for the system of social relationships and social groupings within the hunter-gatherer society.

Two aspects need particular attention. First, is a significant amount of people's time and energy devoted to production for exchange rather than production for use and, if so, does production for exchange operate within a framework of social relationships and social groups that is significantly different from the framework appropriate for production for use? Second, does the distribution of goods and services received from farmers affect the hunter-gatherers' social relationships and social groupings?

It is now time to look at some more Hadza data. The Hadza obtain tobacco, hemp, metal for arrowheads, knives, axes, gourds, beads, pieces of cloth, old clothing, cooking pots, some flour and various other goods from their neighbours. This long list might suggest that they are heavily dependent on their neighbours and that they organize productive activities so as to supply their neighbours with goods in exchange. It might even suggest that the neighbours are able to bind the Hadza to them by Hadza demand for these goods and that they are able to direct Hadza labour for profit. Nothing could be further from the truth. Apart from the occasional person who works as a herd boy or lends a hand with the harvest for some neighbouring farmer in return for food and for a few presents from time to time, the Hadza do not normally work for their neighbours nor are they normally commissioned to hunt meat or gather honey and other bush products for them. Hadza take trouble to avoid commitments to outsiders or to other Hadza.

How then do they obtain their wants? The methods they use depend heavily on the very large number of neighbours and the very small number of Hadza. Most of the objects they seek are of relatively little value. A handful of tobacco or a piece of broken hoe to make arrowheads can easily be obtained by begging. Some of the other items — particularly cloth or an axe — may be more difficult to come by. What the Hadza do is to seek out such objects opportunistically, searching for them among their numerous neighbours much as they search for game or honey in the bush. They trade on their exoticism much as Gypsies do in begging for scrap iron or selling lace in Europe, though they spend far less time in dealings with outsiders than Gypsies do. They may make extravagant offers of reciprocal gifts of meat and honey which are rarely delivered. They at times make such a nuisance of themselves that the neighbour in the end gives way and hands over whatever it is that is being sought without recompense. The Hadza, recognizing that they are stigmatized and realizing that nothing that they do is likely to gain them much respect, are not much interested in maintaining face and respectability. Items received are treated casually and are usually not husbanded or stored. The Hadza spend some time begging from each other for trade goods as well as begging from outsiders.

Some bush products are bartered or sold to outsiders — honey, zebra tails (used for making ornaments), zebra fat (used as a medicine), hartebeest and wildebeest hides, herbal medicines and a small amount of game meat. They make no craft goods for trade nor do they devote significant amounts of labour to processing the goods they trade. Most meat obtained is consumed by Hadza rather than traded. Honey is more valuable as a trade good than meat but even in this case probably more is eaten than is traded. It is particularly important as a food for small children. Usually honey is sold for cash or bartered directly for cloth but no great trouble is taken to get a good price. Hadza often boast about how much money they are going to get and then settle for a mere fraction of the sum they have specified.

The 'unseemly' way that the Hadza beg, break their promises and usually barter their goods for an immediate yield rather than giving them as gifts, confirms their low status in the eyes of their neighbours but it avoids the claims, debts, binding commitments and orientation to the future (rather than the present) which the Hadza find unacceptable both in their dealings with other Hadza and with neighbouring farmers. I think it is misleading to describe the relationship with neighbours as one of interdependence or dependence. The Hadza do depend on obtaining certain goods from neighbours from time to time though not with any great regularity but neither individuals nor groups enter into specific relationships on which they depend.

There is nothing to suggest that Hadza enter or ever entered into patron—client relations with their neighbours though some individual Hadza do establish friendly ties with individual outsiders. The evidence strongly suggests that there is and was in the known past no significant pressure on them to exploit the area for the benefit of outsiders or, if there ever was such pressure, that they resisted it. The most striking aspect of this is the fact that Hadza do not hunt elephant which were until the 1970s abundant in their country<sup>10</sup> and which they eat with enthusiasm if one is found dead or is killed by someone else. Hadza hunt individually, and what they say is that they do not hunt elephant because their arrow poison is insufficiently strong to kill elephant. But it is strong enough to kill rhinoceros or buffalo and there can be little doubt that three or four arrows or one poisoned spear, if they were to use poisoned spears, would kill an elephant. My view is that there was no substantial obstacle of technology or skill to the development of elephant hunting. The demand for ivory has for at least the past 150 years, and probably much longer, always been strong in this and other parts of East Africa. It would be possible to argue that the Hadza do not and did not hunt elephant because such hunting has been illegal for bow-and-arrow hunters since the imposition of colonial rule or soon afterwards. But this is, I think, implausible. There were always Hadza willing to break colonial game laws and it is unlikely that the Hadza would have even heard of colonial game laws until after their first encounter with a European, Erich Obst, in 1911, a period well within the memory of many of my informants when I started my research. The true reason for the failure to trade in ivory is, I think, quite simply that the

Hadza were not sufficiently interested in developing their trade ties with their neighbours. To hunt elephant would have required a degree of coordination and of planning that would have been difficult in an immediate-return economy and the yield in meat for consumption and in ivory for trade was not a sufficient inducement. The Hadza seem to have been content with the role of acting as guides and trackers for occasional outsiders with firearms who have come to hunt elephant in Hadza country; their main reward has been the meat of any elephant killed.

There are innumerable other instances of trading possibilities which are not exploited. In recent years itinerant outsiders have often come to Hadza country to catch Fischer's lovebirds and other birds for the European market. The birds are taken by the simplest of techniques, the use of birdlime near water. Other outsiders have come to make charcoal for sale, again using techniques which are entirely straightforward. But Hadza do not seem interested in participating in such trade in their own right: all they do is occasionally act as casual helpers.

When I described this situation at a recent symposium, one critic suggested that the Hadza were in an even worse position than many other African hunter-gatherers: their neighbours would not even let them enter into stable relationships but forced them to go from place to place casually begging. My response to this is that all the indications are that the reluctance to enter into and to fulfill the commitments of stable relationships comes largely from the Hadza side and is entirely consistent with other aspects of their system. Stable relationships spell out domination and dependence to the Hadza and they avoid them. It seems to me thoroughly ethnocentric to presume that the Hadza should see stable relationships as desirable.

It is also important to be aware that the Hadza do not apparently covet the cattle of their neighbours. I know of no Hadza individual living in the bush, even in areas which are relatively free of tsetse, who has ever sought to acquire cattle. A few were given to Hadza in one of the government settlements but were not properly looked after. The Hadza usually reject milk and blood as foods and until the past few years the majority would not drink beer. They thus dissociate themselves from certain foods that are central for their pastoral and agricultural neighbours and, as with Jews and Gypsies in Europe in the past, their food usages limit the scale of commensality with potentially hostile outsiders and stress the sharing of food with members of their own group.

In the case of the Okiek, more goods are exchanged and more organization and time are devoted to obtaining goods which are to be traded. The Okiek trade large amounts of honey which is produced in beehives which they make and maintain. Hadza honey, in contrast, is all wild honey, obtained from the nests of wild bees in hollow trees and holes in the rocks, and the total harvest is very small in comparison.

Okiek honey is used by the Maasai as food and for making into wine which is necessary for ritual (just as it is among the Okiek). The honey is bartered directly with the Maasai, or is sold to shops which resell it to Maasai or others. Alternatively it may be given as a gift by an individual Okiot to an individual Maasai with whom he has established a freely negotiated formal relationship of friendship. The Maasai may then give occasional gifts of meat in exchange. Friends linked in this way give each other other forms of assistance as well. They are acknowledged to have a commitment to each other and are usually additionally linked as members of the same age-set and often also as members of the same clan.

Many other items are or were given by the Okiek in trade including buffalo hide shields, ivory and buffalo horn tobacco containers, giraffe and wildebeest tail-hair fly-whisks, lion manes, ostrich feathers for head-dresses, colobus monkey skins for leg bands, kudu horn for a trumpet, rhino horn and ivory for a chief's club, eland hide for leather thongs, eland meat for food (in extreme necessity), ivory, animal hides, bows and arrows, sword sheaths and decorative skin necklaces (these latter two are made and traded in considerable numbers). The most important item received in exchange by Okiek is domestic stock which is not normally kept — it would be liable to be stolen by other Maasai but is needed for ceremonies and is used as food for visitors.

Milk is also obtained and so are cow hides for making sword sheaths and sleeping mats (Blackburn 1982: 298-300).

The Okiek also perform various services for the Maasai. They circumcise Maasai boys (and are given a heifer in payment) and sometimes help in slaughtering and cooking oxen in the bush or in herding cattle. These services are less important than the exchange of goods. Blackburn comments that in the Mau area the Maasai are more dependent on the Okiek than the Okiek are on the Maasai. The Maasai need honey but the Okiek do not need any Maasai product to the same extent. There are, however, other Maasai areas where there are no Okiek and the Maasai meet their needs in other ways. Blackburn tells us that it is totally unsatisfactory to talk of Okiek servitude and Maasai overlordship though the Maasai might see the relationship in these terms (1982: 299-302). The political domination by the Maasai does not give them control over the goods and services of the Okiek, who appear to be free to dispose of their goods and services as they choose either to Maasai or to other outsiders who do not seek to dominate them. Indeed the relative equality of the exchanges appears to stand in contrast to the political domination of the Maasai.

Interestingly the economic links of the Okiek with the Maasai are closely connected, in the Okiek communities which Blackburn studied, with Okiek commitment to Maasai culture and Maasai values. The Okiek dress like Maasai and indeed most people other than Okiek and Maasai find it impossible to distinguish Okiek from Maasai as their appearance, ornamentation and dress are so similar. The Okiek age-set system is patterned on the Maasai one and domestic stock have to be obtained from the Maasai to carry out age-set and other ceremonies.

The Okiek now share Maasai views about the desirability of accumulating stock and are apparently beginning to build up herds of their own (Blackburn 1982: 294). Before we consider the Mbuti case let us examine very briefly some aspects of the social organization of the Hadza and the Okiek. There is a clear contrast in social organization between these two societies: the Hadza have an immediate-return system while the Okiek system is one of delayed return. The Hadza, both in their system of production and in the transactions which they carry out among themselves, seek to avoid investments, commitments and dependencies. This is directly matched in the transactions which they carry out with outsiders: unlike the Okiek they tend to avoid entering into formal friendship contracts with outsiders; they seek to beg the trade goods they want and to avoid any liability to reciprocation; they trade away their own goods casually on the spur of the moment without making any great effort to maximize the yield. They see many of the formalities and deferences associated with property transfers as ridiculous.

The Okiek, with their system of honey territories, of clans and lineages, of formal commitments between father and son and other pairs of kinsmen, have an organization which centres on the control and management of their honey assets but which can be and is used for other purposes. The elaborateness of the transactions between the Okiek and the Maasai — the range of items exchanged and the fact that some of them involve a substantial input of co-ordinated labour — all fit well with their delayed-return system. So also does the system of contractual friendship bonds in which the Okiek and the Maasai partners give gifts to each other of honey and of meat.

Earlier I discussed how stigmatized groups may respond to their vulnerability to domination and to persecution in one of two ways either by dealing with outsiders only through ephemeral relations and thereby retaining control of themselves and their own labour or; alternatively, by entering into a relation of clientship with some outsider patron, to whom they will have to defer, but who may offer paternalist protection against other outsiders. From what I have said it will be clear that the Hadza exercise the first option. The Okiek do neither; they seem to be less politically vulnerable and manage to establish ties of alliance which are reasonably balanced, in which they and their outsider exchange partners exchange goods with each other which are important for both and without the Okiek having to take on the status of client. The Mbuti, however, are involved as clients in relationships with agricultural villager patrons. In the Efe Mbuti area where Waehle worked, every Mbuti has a patron. But he can change from one patron

to another (Waehle 1986).

Basically the Mbuti provide meat, mushrooms, fish, honey, wild yams, nuts, building materials, plant fibres for mats, poisoned arrows and medicinal plants together with much agricultural labour. Villagers provide cultivated food, arrow-heads, knives, machetes, spears, cooking pots, tobacco, marijuana and salt — these last three items being particularly desired (ibid.). Both parties obviously value the transactions and derive real benefits from them. The labour provided by Mbuti clearly, however, puts them into a menial role vis-a-vis the villagers. Here much work and effort are devoted to production for exchange rather than production for use in the case of both Mbuti and villagers, but far more in the case of the Mbuti than the villagers. As the Mbuti are marked out as political inferiors, one would expect that this scale of exchange would provide leverage for economic exploitation and political domination.

But, in reality, such exploitation and domination do not seem to occur. Waehle explains that the Mbuti have considerable room for manoeuvre over whom they exchange with and whom they work for. They are not tied to their patron alone. They often exchange with and work for a wide range of other people including small-scale growers of cash crops who have recently moved into the area (ibid.). The patron-client relationship is manifestly viewed differently by patrons and by clients. The patrons talk of 'their' Mbuti; they see the relationship as essentially a committed one and Waehle comments that they never get rid of clients by asking them to leave (ibid.). The Mbuti, however, do not treat relationships with patrons as involving real commitment (ibid.): the labour and the forest products they provide are given spontaneously and casually rather than reliably or predictably. In the immediate pre-colonial period, Waehle tells us, the villagers had more authority; the fighting in the area meant that the Mbuti needed the security of an enduring relationship, were therefore unable easily to change patrons and were willing to accept rather greater authority (ibid.).

Oversimplifying matters, I think one can argue that both the Mbuti and the villagers get enough out of the relationship for it to be possible for the villagers to accept a measure of Mbuti immediate-return unpredictability and for the Mbuti to accept a measure of villager delayed-return formal authority.

There are, I believe, grounds for arguing that in these three instances, unlike the nineteenth-century Bushman cases described by Schapera (1956) and Mackenzie (1871) (see above), serious exploitation of the politically dominated and stigmatized group does not occur. There is no evidence in these three instances for politically coerced extraction of goods and labour or for ideological devaluation of goods and labour. In both the Okiek and the Mbuti cases, production for exchange does take up a significant proportion of people's time but the social context in which this production occurs is, for the most part, not significantly different from the context of production for use.

Turnbull argues that, for the Mbuti he studied, so-called dependence 'is voluntary and temporary, the forest world remaining an ever-present, ever-accessible sanctuary of independence' (1965a: 37-8). This gives an important additional clue to the way not just the Mbuti, but also the Hadza and the Okiek, manage to transact without being manifestly exploited. They cannot be controlled. In all three cases, they can and do retreat into the forest or bush and live there incommunicado for long periods without having to obtain new supplies of trade goods.

## **Conclusions**

Let us now return to the key issue. Are the interactions with neighbouring pastoralists and agriculturalists that I have described — the political domination, the discrimination, the violence, the range of economic transactions — likely to have affected the incidence of delayed-return and immediate-return systems among African hunter-gatherers?

I think there is a whole range of possible relevant factors but the historical evidence is far too fragmentary for us to be able to do more than speculate about their relative importance.

(1) Delayed-return hunter-gatherer systems are, in a sense, preadapted for the development of agriculture and pastoralism. They have the organization (the binding ties and the social groups) which should make the development of an economy based on agriculture or pastoralism easy when the techniques become available. Blackburn reports that the Okiek have in recent years taken up agriculture and the keeping of stock. I have myself seen, on a short visit with Corinne Kratz in 1985 to the area where she carried out field research, that their agriculture is now quite well developed.

People with immediate-return systems do not seem to have any difficulty with the technical aspects of agriculture and pastoralism but their ability to grow enough crops and keep enough animals to feed themselves effectively is seriously inhibited by their social organization and values — by their lack of binding ties needed for agricultural and pastoral cooperation, by their ownership rules and by their rules of sharing and other powerful levelling mechanisms (Lee 1979: 409-14; Woodburn 1982a: 447). This being so, people with immediate-return systems will tend to remain hunter-gatherers as long as they retain access to sufficient land and wild foods.<sup>11</sup> Hunter-gatherers with delayed-return systems will tend to become farmers. Political pressures may well have given additional impetus to the transformation of delayed-return hunter-gatherers into farmers. If this is correct, it may help us to understand why the incidence of immediate-return systems is relatively high.

(2) In a world of hunter-gatherers, the interaction of adjacent societies with each other, particularly in ritual and ceremonial exchange, might tend to reinforce the ideological basis for delayed return. This would be particularly significant for systems like those of the Australian Aborigines in which the delayed return element is based largely in men's ritual labour and the control of ritual assets and of assets in the form of rights held by men over women rather than in the mundane subsistence economy. Such systems might not easily survive long-term encapsulation and could become transformed into immediate-return systems. Sahlins has drawn attention to the fact that few hunter-gatherers apart from Australian Aborigines are now involved in elaborate ceremonial exchange cycles. Such systems may, he suggests, have disappeared elsewhere in the earliest stages of colonialism. I would add that they may have disappeared in some instances when hunter-gatherers became cut off from other similar societies and encapsulated by farmers. 'It is', Sahlins writes, 'as if the superstructure of these societies had been eroded, leaving only the bare subsistence rock, and since production itself is readily accomplished, the people have plenty of time to perch there and talk about it' (1974: 39). The argument here must not be exaggerated: the Hadza, !Kung and Mbuti all have quite an elaborate ritual life but they have immediate-return systems. But it seems possible that more elaborate ritual systems of the Australian type, on their own or in combination with ceremonial exchange, if they ever did exist in Africa, might not have survived long-term encapsulation. The effect of this would again be to reduce the proportion of delayed-return systems.

(3) Delayed-return systems could be threatened directly by loss of assets, or loss of control over assets, on which the delayed-return system is based. At the beginning of this chapter I specified four sorts of assets which singly or in combination underlie delayed-return systems:

- (a) *Valuable technical facilities used in production: boats, nets, artificial weirs, stockades, pit-traps, beehives and other such artefacts which are a product of considerable labour and from which a food yield is obtained gradually over a period of months or years.*

The Okiek, though militarily weak, have been successful over time in maintaining rights over their beehives but they have been helped by the difficulties of the forest terrain for outsiders. It does seem plausible to suggest that the military weakness of hunter-gatherers might have led to the occasional loss of technical facilities used in production in some other instances. The delayed-return system linked with the control and use of such facilities would only be threatened if the facilities could not be replaced.

We should also consider the possibility that contact with farmers might lead to the direct transfer from the farmers of skills that could be employed in the production of facilities, or alternatively contact with farmers — and, say, the possibilities of trade might stimulate hunter-gatherers to themselves develop facilities and the delayed-return organization that would allow such facilities to be used effectively.

The hunting nets used by some Mbuti are not substantial enough assets in terms of the amount of labour needed to produce them to provide the basis for a delayed-return system, but it is interesting that these (or rather the skills to make them) are said to be borrowings from local farmers. If the skills for making nets can be transferred, so too could other skills that might be used to produce more valuable assets. This would obviously be particularly likely to happen in patron-client relationships. On the other hand, the sharing and the leveling mechanisms that are a fundamental part of immediate-return systems would tend to inhibit such a development.

It might be argued that the use of large numbers of beehives in honey production by the Okiek — and the binding ties, the lineages and the land rights associated with such use — are a product of relationships between the Okiek and the Maasai. Leacock and Lee (1982: 15) seem to be making such a case. I think it is based on a misunderstanding. Okiek honey is not, as they believe, to be treated as 'a "commodity" produced for exchange rather than use'. Blackburn (1971) tells us that its use within Okiek society is of central importance. Kratz (1981: 361) tells us that most honey is eaten as food or brewed into honey wine for home consumption or ceremonies but that many Okiek sell or trade a third of their honey crop. Both in quantitative terms and (apparently) in Okiek evaluation, the internal use of honey overrides its importance in exchange with outsiders. In this situation it seems reasonable in principle to argue that the social organization linked with honey production is more a product of internal use than of external exchange, though it is of course a product of both. Comparative research on the social organization of the many different Okiek groups scattered over the highland forests of Kenya and who have very different economies would be valuable in relation to this issue. It is, I think, plausible to argue that both honey production and trade on the scale which Blackburn and Kratz report, from the honey-rich highland forests down to the arid plains below, could well have occurred even when the plains were occupied by hunter-gatherers rather than pastoralists. It would be very difficult to mount a convincing argument that Okiek delayed return is a historical development deriving from their encapsulation.

(b) *Processed and stored food or materials usually in fixed dwellings.*

Loss of such assets would usually be far less serious than loss of productive assets because they could be more readily replaced.

(c) *Wild products which have themselves been improved or increased by human labour: wild herds which are culled selectively, wild food producing plants which have been tended and so on.*

Loss of such assets could be serious. Obviously they would be lost if political pressure displaced people from the area over which they habitually hunted and gathered.

(d) *Assets in the form of rights held by men over their female kin who are then bestowed in marriage on other men.*

I have argued that the acquisition of such rights is particularly important for understanding the development of delayed-return systems ('The routes in the difficult transition from immediate to delayed return are likely to be many and varied but one broad highway among them lies, I think, in the intensification of control by men of rights over women who are to be given in marriage' [Woodburn 1980: 111]). Equally, I think there is a strong case for arguing that the loss of such rights is likely to be important in the transformation of delayed return into immediate return. Encapsulation can affect this process directly if the encapsulating farmers themselves take control — or a measure of control, through providing or helping to provide bridewealth — of the marriages of the women of the hunter-gatherer group. This is, or was, the case among the Batua of Zaire (Michael Schultz: personal communication).

(4) Another possibility is that delayed-return systems might be threatened not by the loss of control over the assets on which they are focused but instead by breakdown of the committed relationships and the group structure of the delayed-return organization.

Fragmentation caused by constant raiding or other political violence might over time have this effect. So might a system of exchange with outsiders in which vertical ties with outsiders displace horizontal ties with insiders. Yet another possibility is that a delayed-return system might be destroyed if the assets on which it is focused lose their value for the participants in the system. A system focused on the production of fish might be destroyed if people ceased for some reason to make much use of fish. Stigmatized hunters and gatherers run the risk that products that they value may be scorned by their politically dominant neighbours. Over time this may affect their patterns of production and consumption.

The historical data available to us, and indeed the historical data ever likely to be available, are insufficient to allow us to be able to tell how often in history these various processes have occurred. Nor can we tell why it is that the Mbuti and the Hadza and other specific groups now have immediate-return systems while the Okiek have a delayed-return system. But it does seem reasonable to maintain for sub-Saharan Africa my claim (Woodburn 1980: 112, and see above) that in a world consisting exclusively of hunters and gatherers, a higher proportion may have had delayed-return systems. Through history the number of hunter-gatherer groups in sub-Saharan Africa has been drastically reduced to a tiny fraction of their former number. The overwhelming majority of the hunter-gatherer groups of the past have adopted farming or have been assimilated in whole or in part by farming groups or have been exterminated. The various processes that I have discussed above are likely, singly or in combination, to have biased the rate of survival of immediate-return as compared with delayed-return systems; it is probable that a higher proportion of societies with immediate-return systems remain among surviving hunter-gatherer groups.

All this depends on two crucial propositions. The first is that African hunter-gatherers of today, or peoples who were until recently hunter-gatherers, are, for the most part, descendants of groups that have a long history of hunting and gathering. Their own claims, their own oral histories, strongly support such an assumption, and must be treated with more respect than the stigmatizing histories allocated to them by their farmer neighbours. Again, the fact that so many of them are genetically or linguistically distinctive and different from their farmer neighbours certainly renders implausible the suggestion that in general they are impoverished drop-outs forced by their poverty to hunt and gather. The data I have provided on their economic ties with their neighbours certainly do not favour the proposition that they are groups directed into hunting to provide the game meat or other bush requirements of neighbouring farmers, that their specialized hunting and gathering skills and way of life are a product of an intercultural division of labour. Only in the case of some forest groups is there evidence that substantial amounts of meat are transferred to farmer neighbours.

The second crucial proposition is that immediate-return systems have long existed and that they make sense in societies that are autonomous or near-autonomous. A counter-argument to this would be that autonomous hunter-gatherers have delayed-return systems, that encapsulation destroys most of them and that immediate-return systems are a historically recent product of such destruction. This argument is based on a serious misapprehension: immediate-return systems would not operate as they do if they were destroyed systems. They are not just former delayed-return systems without assets and without the committed relationships and social groups which are linked with such assets. All immediate-return systems have particularly demanding and elaborately sanctioned rules and values which are strongly focused on sharing, especially the sharing of the meat of large animals throughout the camp unit, and on morally valued egalitarian levelling mechanisms which actively restrict the development of property rights and of internal inequalities of wealth, rank and power (Woodburn 1982a). To treat such institutions as a product of breakdown simply does not make sense.

A more plausible alternative explanation for immediate-return systems might be that they are a combined product of breakdown of delayed-return systems and of opposition to outsiders, in other words destroyed systems of delayed return that have developed a new form of organization to oppose outsiders. Have their sharing and their egalitarian levelling mechanisms developed in opposition to domination by outsiders? Have we here a form of egalitarian oppositional solidarity of low-status groups, akin to the egalitarian solidarity manifest in some working-class or millenarian movements?<sup>12</sup> Is it egalitarian solidarity born of a fear that any hunter-gatherer with more power, wealth or status than another might be tempted to increase it and to exploit his fellows by allying himself with outsiders and that outsiders might be tempted to use such power holders to impose some form of control, some form of indirect rule?<sup>13</sup>

Such an approach has obvious attractions. Oppositional solidarity may well have played some part in the perpetuation of immediate-return systems at particular points in their history when they were under great pressure. But I am sceptical about the idea that it constitutes an adequate general theory for their emergence or for their perpetuation through time when pressures from outsiders are not so severe. If delayed return is fundamental why does it not re-emerge when pressures ease? From the known history of immediate-return systems, I see little indication of such re-emergence. And again, if immediate return is a form of oppositional solidarity, why has it apparently not emerged in its characteristic form in Canada and Australia in response to the discriminatory and, at times, ruthless pressures on hunter-gatherers from outsiders in those countries?

The fundamental reason why I am sceptical about the idea of oppositional solidarity as a general explanation for the emergence and persistence of immediate-return systems is that a simpler theory in which explanatory priority is given to people's day-to-day dealings with fellow-members of their own society makes better sense to me than one which makes the structure of such dealings dependent on the less frequent and, for the people concerned, less important dealings with outsiders. Much of my own and other people's work in recent years in societies with immediate-return systems has demonstrated that their systems are internally coherent and viable, that they make sense politically and economically for their members and allow them to live reasonably rewarding and satisfying lives. These highly flexible systems, which lack the social groupings and binding social relationships familiar to earlier generations of anthropologists, can offer, as I have repeatedly witnessed, reasonable security, good health and nutrition and a greater amount of leisure than is available in most societies (Woodburn 1980: 106). It seems strange to suggest that people would wait to invent such systems until outsiders imposed pressures on them. I would expect that where economic circumstances are appropriate such systems would be repeatedly invented and reinvented historically in autonomous and near-autonomous hunter-gatherer societies as well as in hunter-gatherer societies with extensive dealings with politically dominant outsiders.

The reason why a theory of oppositional solidarity is attractive to us lies, I think, partly in an ethnocentrism to which we, as anthropologists, are not immune. The farmer neighbours — all delayed-return property-holders of the Hadza, the Mbuti and the San feel uneasy about the apparent propertylessness of the hunter-gatherers and see it as bizarre, as an indication that something is wrong with their system and that it requires special explanation. We may imagine that we, as trained anthropologists, are effectively inoculated against such ethnocentrism but, of course, deep cultural prejudice is not easily shed. There is a widespread and dangerous tendency among us anthropologists, property-holders all, to deny to low-status groups with little property the relative autonomy and integrity that we are more willing to concede to high-status groups with their, to us, more familiar and intelligible hierarchies and wealth.

The ethnocentric temptation is to treat the apparent propertylessness of people like the Hadza as comparable to the propertylessness of low-class groups in our own society — as a product of impoverishment. Certainly this must be considered as a possibility, but the issue must be

judged on the evidence, and alternatives must be given adequate consideration. The valuable but much-misunderstood work of Sahlins on the so-called original affluent society (Sahlins 1974), and the work of the substantivists more generally, should surely have alerted us to the fact that it is not bizarre or even remarkable that people in some societies are not seeking to maximize their acquisition and control of property. Obst, writing more than seventy years ago, realized that the Hadza were not to be treated as impoverished: 'To be free from all the fettering luxury of sedentary peoples, to be able to wander around without having to take any homestead into consideration, that is the ideal of the Wakindiga [Hadza]' (Obst 1912: 5).

## **Notes:**

1. This chapter has benefited greatly from my most recent visit to Kenya and Tanzania in 1985 and I would like to thank Grace and John Bennett for their hospitality, John Sutton and the British Institute in Eastern Africa for the loan of equipment and other help and the LSE Staff Research Fund and the University of London Central Research Fund for travel funds. I would also like to thank the many people who have commented helpfully on the paper including Roderic Blackburn, Maurice Bloch, Corinne Kratz, Peter Loizos, David McKnight and Daniel Ndagala. Michael Schultz and Lisa Woodburn gave much valued help with word processing.
2. For some of the difficulties with this simple, indeed oversimplified, binary distinction between immediate-return and delayed-return systems, see Woodburn (1982a: 449, n. 3).
3. Modern African governments have tried, not always successfully, to counter such discrimination.
4. To the west, Lake Eyasi, uninhabited for most of the length of its shore, constitutes a natural barrier and the forested slopes of Ngorongoro mountain, also largely uninhabited at their base, form a barrier to the north.
5. I am most grateful to Espen Waehle for giving me permission to refer to this important material from an unpublished paper. A revised version of his paper is being published in the journal *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika* vol. 7, pt. 2, 1986. At the time of writing the journal has not yet reached libraries in England and I am therefore unable to adapt the page numbers to refer to the published version.
6. In a paper that is currently in preparation I discuss at some length the question of silent trading between hunter-gatherers and their agricultural neighbours.
7. The peaceful invasion by the Isanzu that Obst refers to here is the period of Isanzu immigration mentioned earlier in this chapter.
8. Helga Vierich gives a highly relevant illustration of this for the San or Basarwa of Botswana: 'On the whole, it seemed that the more dependent a family is on livestock and agricultural products, the less likely they are to actually own livestock or plant their own fields. It is a startling fact that among Basarwa of the remotest parts of the central Kalahari a greater proportion of families own livestock than do Basarwa who live on cattleposts, yet the latter are far more dependent on pastoralism for subsistence' (1982: 217).
9. There is an analogy here with the South Indian material. Discrimination appears to be much greater in relation to sedentarized ex-hunter-gatherers assimilated into the caste framework than it is to nomadic hunter-gatherers in the forest.
10. Apparently elephants became rare for a while at the end of the last century (Obst 1912: 17-18, quoted earlier).

11. In the modern world severe land loss is in some places making immediate-return hunting and gathering no longer viable as a means of meeting people's needs. As John Marshall and Claire Ritchie have so ably shown, some !Kung are now struggling to acquire cattle and to build kraals for them and in the process to 'overcome obstacles created by the culture of their hunting and gathering past, that are deep and real' (1984: 77). The transition from immediate return to delayed return is not easily accomplished.

12. Egalitarianism as a moral ideology in hierarchical systems is, of course, not confined to low-status groups. Members of high-status groups may display egalitarianism within their groups and such egalitarianism, far from being a reaction to or a rejection of hierarchy in the wider system, may well provide a means by which the wider hierarchical system is maintained.

13. That such fears are not implausible is, I think, confirmed by some dramatic incidents have described in which Hadza have made use of contacts with outsiders in their dealings With their fellow Hadza (Woodburn 1979: 261-4).