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## Ethnographic analogy and the reconstruction of early Khoekhoe society

Alan Barnard

School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh, Chrystal Macmillan Building, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, Scotland; A.Barnard@ed.ac.uk

### ABSTRACT

Recent thinking sees the earliest Khoekhoe as a kind of San *with* livestock. Eighteenth-century travellers sometimes seem to have seen San as a kind of Khoekhoe *without* livestock. Classic ethnographic sources saw Khoekhoe and San as related peoples, one with livestock and one without. Some in recent years have suggested that Khoekhoe and San are unstable ethnicities, shifting back and forth with the acquisition and loss of livestock. Is there a correct view? This paper attempts to answer that question.

One theme of the paper is the idea that the acquisition of livestock by twentieth-century Khome-speaking hunter-gatherers might serve as an analogy for deciphering similar processes among early Khoekhoe. The shifting lifestyles from hunter to herder and back again in the Cape are now well documented in the historical and archaeological records. Similar processes have been observed by ethnographers in the Kalahari since the 1970s. Another theme is the more theoretical concern of Khoekhoe and San social structure and social ideology. Hunter-gatherers and pastoralists do see things like accumulation and sharing differently, but comparative ethnography shows us that specific exchange practices like *hxaro* are not as unambiguously 'hunter-gatherer' as we might think, nor customs such as bridewealth payment as unambiguously 'pastoralist'. Comparative examination of Khoisan ethnography, coupled with the use of recent theoretical insights, can help us to build a picture of early Khoekhoe society and ideological shifts that must have accompanied the adoption of herding by the inhabitants of the Cape in past centuries.

KEY WORDS: ethnographic analogy, kinship, exchange, Khoekhoe, San

*Yet there is little to distinguish a landless and cattleless Khoi from a Bushman, or a Bushman who has acquired cattle from a Khoi.*

Shula Marks (1972: 57)

In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars were fairly clear that they knew the prehistory of pastoralism in southern Africa. A migration of Khoekhoe herders brought sheep and later cattle to the Cape, into lands previously occupied by Southern San. However, since then Karim Sadr's work (e.g. Sadr 1998) has suggested that livestock and pottery first arrived at the Cape through diffusion rather than migration. He proposes that theories of Khoekhoe migrations from Botswana have little support from the archaeological record. Indeed, the situation seems yet more complex. Peter Mitchell (2002: 227–37) sees the newer evidence as support for Stow's westerly route for livestock and pottery from East Africa; and like Gronenborn (2004), he finds parallels between the European Neolithic and the early ceramic-using peoples of southern Africa. Mitchell comments on revisionist arguments concerning the acquisition of horses in the nineteenth century Eastern Cape and goats in 1960s Dobe. In yet another twist, Mitchell (2002: 235), citing Andrew Smith's (1990) paper on Khoekhoe and San ethnicity, recognizes the ideological difficulties involved in the transition of an egalitarian hunter-gatherer population to an accumulation-based sheep-herding lifestyle; but he notes that the evidence of ethnographic observation—that people have made such a transition—is plain. At a more theoretical level, others such as Ingold (1986: 168–70) have questioned the simplicity implied in models of this kind.

In this paper I shall touch on several of these points, but I shall do so largely indirectly: not through a purposeful treatment of recent evidence on sheep or ceramics, but with such discoveries in the background. My goal is to offer observations on the boundary between hunters and herders, as seen in social anthropological terms; and for reasons of clarity and simplicity I shall concentrate on just a few aspects of economic life and kinship. Aside from rare cases, such as attempts in 1960s North America to identify matrilineal and patrilineal pottery, kinship does not figure very much in archaeology. But, as we shall see, it is relatively easy to reconstruct, and I believe it is important for archaeologists and historians to understand its basics, because so much in society, especially for hunter-gatherers and herders, is dependent upon it.

My paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I want to hint at some of the larger issues confronting us, and reflect on these in light of topics ever so slightly beyond our narrower remit. Why should we want to know whether Khoekhoe moved with their sheep and pottery into the lands of the San, or whether San picked up sheep and pottery and became Khoekhoe, unless we *also* want to know what kind of society Khoekhoe had? The second part of my paper concerns some aspects of subsistence, settlement and economics. I want to make generalizations about hunters and about herders, and at the same time I want to call into question some commonly held beliefs, like the notion that *hxaro* is a typical hunter-gatherer thing or that bridewealth is just for herders. In the last part, I shall look briefly at Khoekhoe kinship ideology, where the most interesting revelations are to be found.

#### REFLECTIONS ON LARGE ISSUES

Social anthropology has no disciplinary expertise on the Western Cape or Eastern Cape Khoekhoe as such, because our methods are ethnographic and require fieldwork and writing on ethnic configurations linked to living individuals. Obviously there are no living representatives of any early Khoekhoe ethnic entity. However, what does exist is source material that can be analysed to provide a reconstruction of something approaching 'an ethnography'. What I shall try to do is provide a more speculative than usual ethnography, based on early source material and on comparison to modern Khoisan ethnography, including my own work with Naro (Nharo) and other Khoisan peoples. It is my contention that Naro, G |wi, G ||ana and other Khoe-speaking traditional hunter-gatherers have a special relevance, given their own recent and continuing transitions from hunting and gathering to herding. I am in agreement with Smith that such a transition is difficult, although I approach the transition a little differently: the question I raise is not so much how difficult it may have been, but how diverse groups of people may have interacted in transition periods, given their probable diversity in mode of thought as well as in mode of production.

Tempting as it might be to try to reconstruct Cape Khoekhoe society strictly from the log of Vasco da Gama's diarist, the daybook of Jan van Riebeeck, Ten Rhyne's report, Grevenbroek's letter, or even Kolbe's account of the Cape of Good Hope, this is not practical. There is actually rather little about society in these accounts, as an anthropologist would understand it. Instead, I am going to make use of other Khoekhoe ethnography to suggest the kind of social organization that we would expect the early Khoekhoe at the Cape to have had. This I hope will be useful for those who do delve into the earlier sources. An interplay between sources is required, and I would reverse

the usual historiographic process: give prominence to the construction of a picture of social relations through comparative ethnography; then go to corroborate it, or pick holes in it, through examination of the early sources.

There have been at least three attempts to construct something resembling 'an ethnography' of the early Cape Khoekhoe from the accounts of explorers, settlers and travellers. The first was Dapper's *Kaffrarie*, part of his description of African regions published in 1668 (Dapper 1933). The second was Schapera's *Khoisan peoples*, or at least the sections on Cape Khoekhoe interwoven through the account (Schapera 1930). The third is the chapter on the Cape Khoekhoe and Korana (!Ora, !Gora) in my *Hunters and herders* (Barnard 1992). What is interesting, looking back on these is how much they have in common. For example, all three mention things like the excision of a testicle, the incidence of female twin infanticide, and dancing a full moon. We have to ask: are these the things that were really important to the Cape Khoekhoe, or even about the Cape Khoekhoe? Or were they just the things that interested those European writers who were on the scene in the seventeenth century? Are we forever condemned to represent the Cape Khoekhoe, of 1652 or so, with those particular ethnographic specifics?

I am going to suggest, on all counts, an answer in the negative. Of course we all add our own interpretations and choose some facts to emphasize over others. However, generalizing ethnography implies a search for ethnographic facts which are important for their relations with other facts, both in their place within systematic description of the workings of a particular society, and in their ability to provide the basis for ethnographic comparison. In this paper there is no music, dancing, decorative art, or 'moon worship'. The sorts of things that interested the early writers are very different from what interests social anthropologists today, and my aim is to approach the Khoekhoe of the Western Cape from the standpoint of some of the modern interests of my discipline.

#### SOME ASPECTS OF SUBSISTENCE AND EXCHANGE

Recent thinking sees the earliest Khoekhoe as a kind of San *with* livestock. Eighteenth-century travellers like Sparrman (1785) apparently saw San as a kind of Khoekhoe *without* livestock. Classic ethnographic sources like Schapera (1930) saw Khoekhoe and San as related peoples, one with livestock and one without. The first revisionists like Shula Marks (1972) seem to have seen Khoekhoe and San as unstable ethnicities, shifting back and forth with the acquisition and loss of livestock. Is there a correct view? I am not sure there is, in any essentialist way, but certainly our re-readings of both data and writings can help to clarify what we might mean and provide greater precision on the question of early Khoekhoe lifestyles, or for that matter contemporaneous San lifestyles.

The authors of *The Cape herders* (Boonzaier *et al.* 1996: 16–23) bring Andrew Smith's data on Kasteelberg and Witklip to bear on the perennial question of whether Khoekhoe and San were separate groups or part of a cyclical pattern in acquisition and loss of livestock. Witklip was essentially a site of hunter-gatherer people who sometimes ate sheep, while Kasteelberg was a Khoekhoe site. Significantly, the artefacts of each site were different, for example, large ostrich eggshell beads at Kasteelberg and small ones at Witklip. The argument is that this demonstrates culturally distinct Khoekhoe and San groups in pre-colonial times. Interestingly, the text suggests that the cyclical model,

from Khoekhoe to San to Khoekhoe again (e.g. Elphick 1985: 23–42), may apply at later periods of history, that is, after European contact. The case for separate groups of Khoekhoe and San is also implied in John Parkington's (1984: 160–1) reading of early accounts which speak of linguistic differences between Khoekhoe and San, and the borrowing of cattle between Khoekhoe groups, rather than Khoekhoe living as hunter-gatherers, in times of loss. It is as if no one wants to be accused of being San, as in Theophilus Hahn's (1881: 2) example, *Khoikhoi tamab, Sâb ke* (meaning 'He is no Khoekhoe, he is a San'; or in non-ethnic terms, 'He is no gentleman, he is a rascal').

I see no reason not to assume that, in a sense, *all* commentators are right. The Kalahari Debate was only ever a 'debate' because some people saw other people's findings as contradicting their own, rather than as representing different situations among different groups or at different historical periods. The kind of ethnographic diversity that has existed in recent decades in the Kalahari may also have existed here in the Western Cape before the arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch.

In a series of earlier papers, I examined the boundary between what I have called the foraging or hunter-gatherer mode of thought and the accumulation mode of thought. In the original paper, presented at the Eighth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies in 1998 (Barnard 2002), I isolated five aspects of society for consideration: (a) economy, (b) politics, (c) kinship, (d) land, and (e) identity. Let me just illustrate the point with one of these, economy, or more specifically in Table 1, accumulation versus immediate consumption.

Another paper from this series was for a 2005 conference called 'Going over: the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition in north-west Europe'. I compared the Kalahari Later Stone Age/Iron Age boundary to the European Mesolithic/Neolithic divide (Barnard 2007). I suggested that, in either case, a hunter to herder transition would imply a number of constraints and changes in attitude and activity, as a direct result of the acquisition of livestock. Such changes assume a permanent or at least long-term shift in subsistence, and certainly not a seasonal one. This is because of the very considerable ideological difference between the two lifestyles, even in people's attitudes towards and beliefs concerning animals (cf. Ingold 2000: 69–75). Unlike James Woodburn (e.g. 1982), I do not see this immediate-return/delayed-return divide, or Mesolithic/Neolithic transition, in terms of clear boundary. The acquisition of one animal, or temporary work looking after someone else's herd, does not necessarily create an ideological gulf, but rather merely creates the potential or increases the tendency to think differently about the accumulation of resources.

TABLE 1  
Comparing modes of thought.

<b>Hunting-and-gathering mode of thought</b>	
Accumulation	Anti-social (equated with not sharing)
Immediate consumption	Social (equated with sharing with family and community)
<b>Herding mode of thought</b>	
Accumulation	Social (equated with saving for self and dependents)
Immediate consumption	Anti-social (equated with not saving)

In fact, a hunter-gatherer ideology, or what I have variously called the ‘foraging’ or ‘Mesolithic mode of thought’, can be extremely resilient. That is why San continue to maintain what Sahlins (1974: 1–39) rather optimistically called the ‘original affluent society’—where people work as little as they can to achieve the (minimal) level of wealth they require (see also Solway 2006). When a worker gets paid; he may choose to spend his pay rather than save it, and to give up work rather than continue. What to white and black farmers in the Kalahari makes for bad workers, for San makes for good members of their society. The ideological value of work in such a society, which favours immediate consumption, may be the inverse of that in a society where accumulation is the norm—including small-scale herding societies and advanced capitalist societies alike. In a hunting-and-gathering ideology, accumulation is regarded as anti-social and immediate consumption social, because the latter is equated with sharing.

I mentioned in passing the seasonal acquisition of livestock. This may seem an odd idea, but like seasonal cultivation it is a possibility realized among at least one group of Khoekhoegowab-speakers today—a group of Hai||om in northern Namibia. Thomas Widlok (1999: 164–70; see also Barnard & Widlok 1996: 95–8) describes this group, living ‘purely’ by hunting and gathering for at least part of the winter dry season, with a second slightly less ‘pure’ hunter-gatherer lifestyle and location for the rest of the dry season, and a lifestyle of cultivating and herding in the summer wet season. This has the unusual effect of creating what, to exaggerate slightly, might be considered a Later Stone Age social organization in the winter and an Iron Age social organization in the summer. I had the good fortune to visit the community with Widlok in the winter of 1991, and also to see their temporarily abandoned Ovambo-style dwellings several kilometres away.

Clearly, such seasonal variation puts a different spin on notions of transhumance in classic Western Cape terms. I mention the example of seasonal hunter-gatherers from northern Namibia not because there is any direct evidence of such a pattern of seasonality in the archaeological or historical records, but because it represents an extreme case—a possibility that should be considered *as a possibility* different from the more usual assumption of acquisition and loss of livestock in a more random way.

On the other hand, the transition to pastoralism is complex. Table 2 is also based on a diagram from my Mesolithic/Neolithic paper, only I have added here the phrase ‘impact on individuals’. It seems to me that some eight key differences exist, for individuals, between an essentially hunting and gathering lifestyle and a hunting gathering and

TABLE 2  
Comparing impact on individuals.

	<b>Hunting and gathering</b>	<b>Herding, hunting and gathering</b>
<b>1</b>	knowledge of environment	knowledge of herding skills
<b>2</b>	search for food	search for grazing
<b>3</b>	chance of finding meat	guaranteed supply of meat
<b>4</b>	sharing meat	sharing and trading meat
<b>5</b>	lots of free time	longer working hours
<b>6</b>	few possessions	chance to acquire more
<b>7</b>	fewer worries about water	more worries about water
<b>8</b>	taking each day as it comes	planning for the future (long term)

TABLE 3  
Comparing impact on society.

	<b>Hunting and gathering</b>	<b>Herding, hunting and gathering</b>
<b>1</b>	no property to inherit	inheritable property and rules of inheritance
<b>2</b>	bilateral kinship and group structure	lineages and clans
<b>3</b>	band organization	clan-based settlement
<b>4</b>	seasonal aggregation and dispersal	transhumance or clan migration
<b>5</b>	egalitarianism	social hierarchy
<b>6</b>	politics by consensus	politics through chiefs and councils
<b>7</b>	raiding in small groups	potential for large-scale raiding

herding lifestyle. I stress here that I am talking about a lifestyle, not the accidental, temporary or short-term acquisition of livestock, and not seasonal labour in looking after someone else's animals. I shall not dwell on the details here. My point is that the transition is not something to be undertaken lightly by the hunter-gatherer and therefore not to be taken lightly by analysts like us.

This becomes even more obvious when we consider not just changes for the individual, but changes in society. In Table 3, I have added another seven differences, some related to the ones for individuals and some ultimate results of the change for group structure, politics and social ideology. For example the transition to a full herding lifestyle entails a transition from egalitarianism to social hierarchy, from politics by consensus to politics through chiefs and councils, and possibly even from small-scale raiding to more organized, large-scale raiding for livestock. Inheritance and group structure are also significantly affected.

In general, a stock-keeping lifestyle is more labour intensive than a hunting and gathering one. However, it is not always true that specific herding activities take more time than hunting. To take an extreme case, Susan Kent (1992: 51) found that Kutse Kua spent about two hours per week caring for their goats, as compared to twenty hours in hunting. On the other hand, the description of "a [typical] day of goat raising" in the †Kade area by Ikeya (1993: 44–6) suggests a busy daily schedule for a number of herders working in cooperation, beginning with chasing the goats from the kraal and separating young and old between 6 and 9 a.m., and ending with the return of the goats and milking them between 5 and 7 p.m. My experience with N||oǀa||xai Naro suggests something in between.

An important ethnographic finding for the Kalahari which I think needs to be explored with evidence from the Cape, is the practice of lending livestock. I do not believe this is well attested for Khoekhoe, but it is very common among Khoe-speaking hunter-gatherer groups who in recent decades have taken on a herding lifestyle. Groups in the Central District of Botswana who have herded Bamangwato cattle for over a century gain by the practice known as *mafisa*; whereby the poor, often San or Basarwa, look after livestock for the better off, generally Bamangwato or other Tswana. Groups in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve give their livestock to others for environmental reasons—to avoid overgrazing, both in general and seasonally. Ikeya (1993: 48–50) reports G||wi and G||ana consigning goats to each other at distances of up to 140 km, with rights to milk and with occasional payment in the form of kids born to the flock. Some Hai||om in northern Namibia have an entirely different reason for consigning goats, in a practice

Widlok (1999: 113–19) describes as ‘inverse *mafisa*’. A poor Hai ||om may acquire his own livestock and leave them with well-off Ovambo, who in turn keep the products of the arrangement. Why does it occur? Plainly not for economic advantage on the part of the poor Hai ||om, but for social reasons: it is not good to be seen to have wealth, so one pays to deposit it elsewhere. In another example from Widlok (1999: 100–6), Hai ||om sell gathered mangetti nuts to Ovambo. The Ovambo make an alcoholic drink from the nuts, and then sell it to the Hai ||om at a profit. Again, Ovambo get wealthier and Hai ||om poorer, with the only gain for the latter seemingly being the retention of ‘original affluence’ in the form of more free time.

We know from twentieth and twenty-first century Africa that not all trade is *fair* trade. We know this from the seventeenth century too. There is no reason therefore to assume that trade means that things of equal value were being exchanged before that, or that the values of each trading partner were the same. Like Ovambo and Hai ||om, each side could be seeking something quite different, in subjective terms, from the arrangement, and in objective terms one side coming off better than the other. Let me throw in one more possibility implied by Naro cuisine. Very simply, hunted meat is always partly dried in the sun and then cooked directly in the fire, with no flavouring added. Herded meat is cooked in an iron pot, and if people have spices, they use them. This may seem trivial, but the two customary methods of cooking imply something deeper: an acceptance of two different *systems* of cooking, each associated with a different subsistence pursuit. This is the way I understand the actions of the Hai ||om who live as hunter-gatherers in the winter and like Ovambo in the summer. Much the same has long been suggested for Central African foragers, who even change kinship practices and religious notions according to the season, and exhibit enormous diversity from foraging to horticulture, from cognatic to patrilineal descent systems, and from animistic to totemistic beliefs (e.g. Hewlett 1996).

In short, consider the possibility of San and Khoekhoe as cultural traditions that one opts into or out of, seasonally, when one has livestock or loses it, or according to choice. This does not mean that San and Khoekhoe are the same, but on the contrary, that they are opposites—poles to which individuals and groups gravitate, and about whose existence they are acutely aware. The situation is analogous to classic ethnographic situations like those described by Fredrik Barth and his colleagues in *Ethnic groups and boundaries* (Barth 1969), most famously Barth’s own descriptions of the Swat Pathan in Pakistan, where ethnic groups are not distinct, bounded entities but fluid groups whose membership depends on struggles for power and shifting political allegiances. It is perhaps even more analogous to another classic case, the Kachin of highland Burma described by Edmund Leach (1954). Kachin groups change from hierarchical (*gumsa*) to egalitarian (*gumlao*) ideologies and back again, as powerful lineages are variously perceived as being closer to the ancestors (in *gumsa* structures) or not (in *gumlao* ones). In Leach’s account, the two Kachin structures are not two ethnographic entities, as he might have described them, but opposite ends of a single, oscillating social formation.

In the Khoisan case, it is easy to be complacent about hunter/herder differences. Consider, for example, the institution that Ju|’hoansi call *hxaro* or Naro call *//aĩ*, the giving of non-consumable, movable property with the expectation of an eventual return. This represents a system of balanced reciprocity which overlies a system of generalized



rights of access to resources. Whatever the reasons behind individual choices, *hxaro* or *//aĩ* serve to equalize access both to movable property and to the resources shared between exchange partners. Of course, this means that it also creates special access between *hxaro* partners, and therefore an edge over non-*hxaro* partners. *Hxaro* is sometimes described as if it were typical of hunter-gatherer ways or common among southern African hunter-gatherers. Yet this specific institution is found among relatively few San groups; other groups have different arrangements for reciprocity and mutual aid, such as long-term lending and borrowing of tools and other non-consumable objects between kin (e.g. Kent 1993: 496–7).

*Hxaro*-like exchange networks are, in fact, found among herders as well as among hunter-gatherers; and marriage gifts which might reasonably be considered ‘bridewealth’ (a supposed paragon of herding society) are found among hunters. Nama may not have *hxaro* as such, but they do have *soregus*, sharing a drink, or in the past any close relationship between people, or an exchange relation between friends (see also Barnard 1992: 190–1, 246). In some areas the term may now imply more specifically an improper sexual relationship, but in the past it implied simply free giving of material goods. Nama also have a custom known as *aubagus*, the pooling of money to give to one who needs it. Both of these are distinguished from *māgus*, simply giving in exchange relationship.

Among Damara, non-relatives who exchange on a regular basis come to call each other by kinship terms. Thus the notion of the ‘family’ is at least metaphorically extended beyond ties of blood and marriage. Members of the family are expected to manage and look after the resources of the land they occupy; and labour is shared in the sense of herding each other’s cattle, sheep, and goats. Any herd will have within it sub-herds actually belonging to various relatives of the apparent ‘owner’. Grazing rights are traditionally communal but established through kin links, and the system of communal grazing reduces risk due to drought, stock raiding, and contagious disease (Fuller 1993: 222, 276). The Damara equivalent of *hxaro* goes by a different name and, unlike the Ju |’hoan form, includes consumable items. It is called *mā!khunigus* and involves the giving of things in delayed exchange. Like may not be exchanged for like, but the goods can be similar. This practice is distinguished from simply asking for something (with the verb *mā*, ‘give’, or *ou*, ‘feed’) without any expectation of a return (see Barnard 2004: 11–13).

Bridewealth customs among Khoisan hunter-gatherers include the gifts of what are called *kamane* (by Naro), or *kamasi* (by Ju |’hoan), or *gamasi* (by Hai |om), which often coexist with bride service. Whether such an institution originated as part of a herding lifestyle, we do not know. The notion of ‘helping’ (the verb *ui* or *hui*, found in Naro, Ju |’hoan and Khoekhoegowab alike) is distinguished among all these groups from ‘buying and selling’ (the verb *//’ama* or *//ama*, also found in all these languages). The joking relationship known as *//nurigāb* or *//nurigās*, including teasing and in past times cattle-snatching between sister’s son and mother’s brother, is found among both Nama and Damara, and was once found among Korana, where it was called *!’um- /’ab* (meaning ‘to go around – gift’) or, in the case of replacing bad things for good, *!na-!nab* (possibly related to Namibian Khoekhoegowab *!nao!nao*, ‘to stain’).

Family exchange is wider than such specific relationships may imply, and generalized reciprocity is widely extended. Naro *kamane* are peculiarly complex. I found these

stated as ideals by my informants in the 1970s. The troubling thing, in a way, is that they are what one would expect from herders rather than hunters.

#### KINSHIP AND MARITAL ALLIANCE

Kinship is the most esoteric of anthropology's specializations, but kinship structures can be resilient and indicative of very long term trends. I am going to reverse what we usually think of as the migration routes of the Khoekhoe. Stow and Theal, Elphick and Ehret all suggested routes south. I want us also to imagine the route north, that is the Korana as a remnant memory culture of the Cape Khoekhoe—not merely in the literal sense of Maingard (e.g. 1931) as migrating away from Dutch influence or the 1713 smallpox epidemic, but in the sense that they represent the best of all records of a kinship ideology with the potential to generate really quite extraordinary social patterns.

We know a bit about Khoekhoe trade. They traded copper and later iron. They traded dagga (*Cannabis*). They traded livestock, and presumably pottery. But what about people? I do not mean slaves; I mean husbands and wives. We know quite a bit about groups and something of clans and chiefs. But what about relations between groups in marriage? The usual understanding of relations between groups, such as that of Elphick (1985: 53), is a descent theory model. It is reminiscent of anthropological thinking which prevailed in Britain, South Africa and some other parts of the world from the 1920s until the 1960s. Yet in the 1920s, Hoernlé (1985)<sup>1</sup> and especially Engelbrecht (1936) were recording from their Nama and Korana informants something quite different—kinship models with more in common with the Dutch kinship theory of the day than Anglophone. This has interesting implications for imagining the relations between Khoekhoe groups centuries earlier—not because people literally remembered anything, but rather because their kinship ideology had quite different premises.

Let me outline a couple of basic principles of kinship terminology. It is possible for a terminology to make either lineal/collateral distinctions, parallel/cross distinctions, both kinds, or neither. These distinctions are shown in Figure 1. Peoples or languages which make lineal/collateral distinctions place the emphasis on genealogical distance. Those who make parallel/cross distinctions emphasize the same-sex sibling bond and usually marriage to the category of the cross-cousin.

Like most European languages, all Northern Khoisan ones (!Xū, Ju 'hoan and †Au ||ei) distinguish lineals from collaterals. Southern Khoisan languages of the Kalahari (!Xoõ and Eastern †Hoã) make parallel/cross distinctions; whereas those of the Cape either make both distinctions, in other words, they have very 'descriptive' terminologies, or they make neither distinction—for example, calling all cousins as if they were siblings. Bantu-speaking peoples, incidentally, make cross/parallel distinctions, but their terminologies are often unimportant as determinants of marriage. Tswana aristocrats, for example, actually favour marriage to patrilineal parallel cousins because, as they say, 'the [bridewealth] cattle return to the kraal'—livestock stays within the lineage (see Kuper 1982: 56).

In Aboriginal Australia, South America and Southeast Asia, the distinction between parallel and cross cousins, and consequent strict rules forbidding marriage to the former

<sup>1</sup> The 1985 volume is a collection of nine previously published essays by Hoernlé. Her essay 'The social organization of the Nama Hottentots of Southwest Africa' was originally published in 1925 in *American Anthropologist* 27: 1–24.

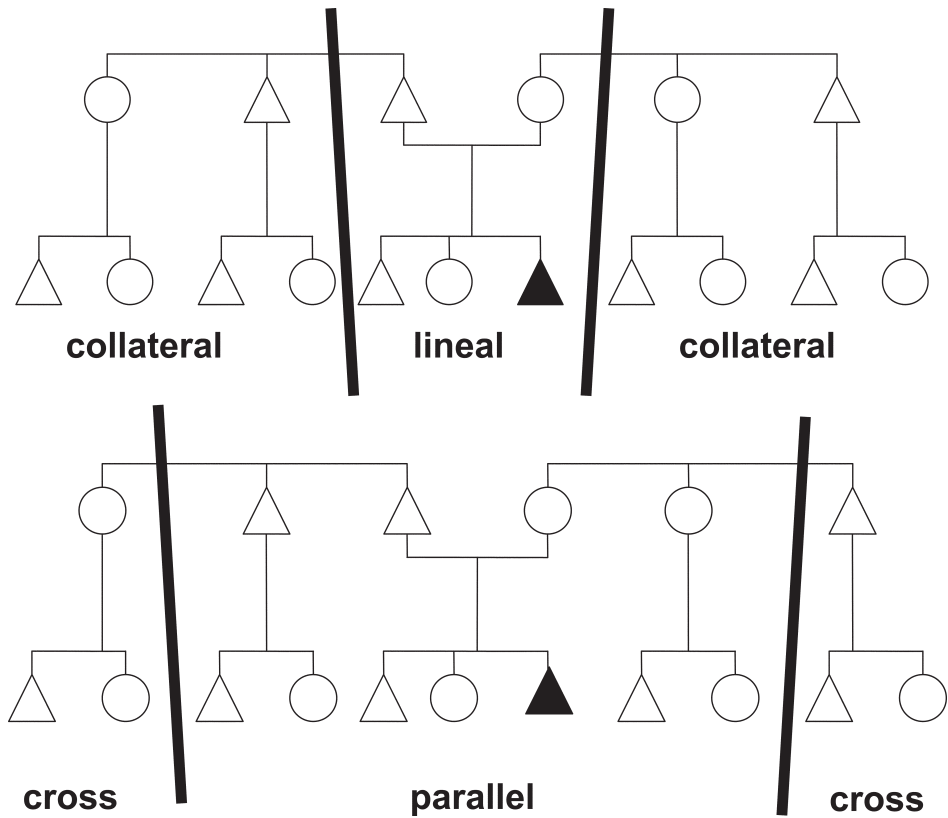


Fig. 1. Lineal/collateral and parallel/cross distinctions.

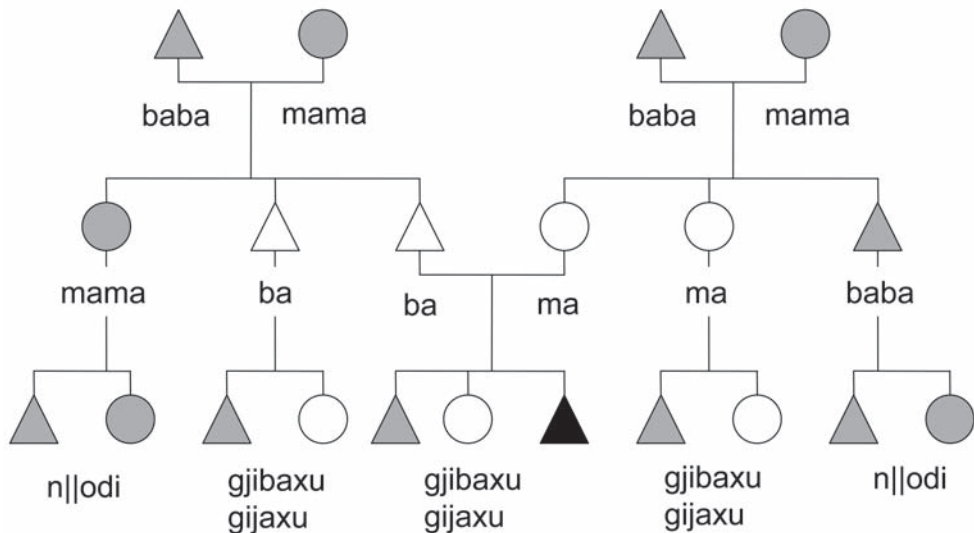
or other classes of kin, are significant determinants in social structure. Only one southern African language group is comparable in this regard: the Khoe-speaking peoples. What is more, not some, but *all* Khoe-speaking peoples have or once had clear-cut systems involving marital alliance. There are essentially two forms: a hunter-gatherer form (which I shall illustrate with G |wi terminology) and pastoralist form (which I shall illustrate with Korana). Khoe-speaking individuals might become |Xam, or |Xam individuals Khoe-speaking. However, there is absolutely no way in terms of their kinship structures that a |Xam sort of people as a whole could have become Khoekhoe, then become |Xam again. It is about as likely as a dinosaur evolving into a bird, then back into a dinosaur again. Rather, a people with a G |wi-like structure of terminology and marriage either retained such a structure if they became herders, or that structure was transformed into a hierarchical one—establishing relations of ‘great’ and ‘little’, as Khoekhoe say, not in terms of descent, but in terms of alliance.

There are two excellent, although incomplete, ethnographic sources on pre-disruption Khoekhoe in more-or-less modern anthropological style: Engelbrecht (1936) on Korana and Hoernlé (1985: 39–56) on Nama. I say ‘pre-disruption’ rather than ‘pre-contact’, in reference to disruption of social life caused by frontier wars for the Korana and the

German-Herero War of 1904–05 for the Nama. Both Engelbrecht's and Hoernlé's accounts are derived to a great extent from interviews on 'memory culture'. This does not make them less accurate than other sorts of ethnography, but it does define them as representing an indigenous *ideal* rather than an *observed* state of social organization. It is like the difference between an imagined perfect Khoekhoe pot on the one hand, and few broken sherds on the other.

With that in mind, consider the pre-livestock, pre-hierarchical Khoe pattern. Figure 2 illustrates the G|wi terminology (see also Silberbauer 1981: 142–9). All Khoe-speaking hunter-gatherers have exactly the same structure, with some minor variations for western groups like Naro, who have borrowed Ju|'hoan naming customs and kinship terms. Virtually all Khoe-speaking peoples have a category labelled *n||odi* (as here) or *//nuri* or *//nuli*, which means cross-cousin, cross-nephew and cross-niece, grandchild, and marriageable person. For hunter-gatherer Khoe-speaking peoples, there is universal extension of terminology throughout society and an absolute distinction between joking partners (in grey in Figure 2) and avoidance partners. This means that there is no such thing as 'non-kin'. Only joking partners are marriageable, indeed only *n||odisi* are marriageable. Roughly half of opposite-sex members of society will be *n||odisi* and half will be called by other terms. All Khoe-speaking peoples, without exception, practice marriage to the category of cross-cousin (*n||odisa*).

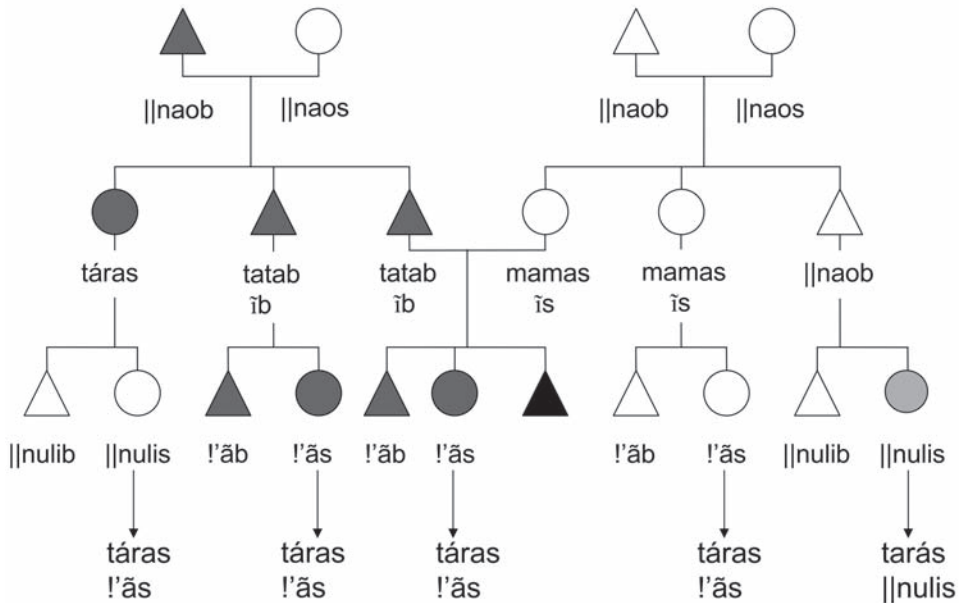
The patrilineal, hierarchical variant is illustrated in Figure 3, exemplified there with Korana (see also Engelbrecht 1936: 151–4). I have coloured ego's lineage in dark grey



suffixes: -ma (m), -sa (f)

## G|wi (|Guikhoe)

Fig. 2. The G|wi (G|uikhoe) relationship terminology.



## Korana (!Ora or !Gora)

Fig. 3. The Korana (!Ora or !Gora) relationship terminology.

and the one close kinswoman who in *all* Korana tribes would be a possible spouse in pale grey. Some Korana tribes classified father's sister's daughter as *||nuli* (as among the G!wi), whereas others would call her *!ás* (sister) or *táras* (classificatory father's sister)—both being a man's avoidance relatives, and of course, not marriageable. *Táras* here is not the same as *tarás*; it is the opposite—*táras* (great respected woman) versus *tarás* (wife).

Neither Engelbrecht nor his informants could possibly have read Lévi-Strauss's work on elementary structures of kinship, which in 1949 mentions Nama as a system "faultlessly built up about the dichotomy of cousins" (Lévi-Strauss 1969 (1949): 102), or even the work of J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, who anticipated Lévi-Strauss's in his inaugural lecture at Leiden in 1935 (Josselin de Jong 1977).<sup>2</sup> Dutch linguists and ethnographers discovered the 'circulating connubium', or what would later be called generalized exchange, in southeast Asia around the 1920s. This involves lineages linked in one-way marital exchanges with other lineages. Such a system could be either transitive (with an absolute hierarchy) or intransitive (with a relative hierarchy), and the smaller the society the more likely intransitivity becomes. For Khoekhoe, I would expect that the stronger the ideology of pastoralism, the more likely would be a practice of

<sup>2</sup> J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong's lecture was published in 1935 as a pamphlet: *De Maleische Archipel als ethnologisch studieveld*. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleeraar aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden op 24 Mei 1935. Leiden, Ginsberg, 24 pp. It was republished, in English, in the 1977 volume edited by his nephew P.E. de Josselin de Jong.

generalized exchange. For demographic reasons, assuming men are on average older than their wives, actual, as opposed to classificatory, mother's brother's daughter marriage is always more common than actual father's sister's daughter marriage. (One's father, on average, will be older than one's mother; therefore, since there is no reason to assume that either sex of sibling will be older than the other, one's father's sister will be older than one's mother's brother, and one's father's sister's children older than one's mother's brother's children.) In terms of what sort of marriage is permitted, there is evidence of both bilateral and matrilineal cross-cousin marriage among twentieth-century Khoekhoe, and either form would be possible for Khoekhoe herders in pre-contact times.

The simplest possible case of generalized exchange, if represented in full, would have three groups. Each is inferior to one, in the case of the Khoekhoe by virtue of a man owing deference to the lineage from which his wife comes, but superior to the other, one to which it gives its female children in marriage. This hierarchical arrangement is known as hypogamy. Of course, in reality, such societies always have more than three lineages, and each lineage will stand in wife-giving/wife-taking relations to more than two others. Yet such an idealized three-part structure is the one suggested by de Josselin de Jong for representing this typical pre-Islamic Indonesian and Malaysian form of kinship system, while his predecessor Willem H. Rassers in the 1920s had seen it in terms of relations between two groups.

Let me quote, not Rassers, but !Hamarib Benjamin Kats, one of Engelbrecht's chief Korana informants, who talks about a similar, two-part, structure.

When people of a kraal marry they have children. Their female children used to be married by the men of another kraal and the people of [the latter] kraal were then the *little* of [the kraal from which the women came] which was now the *great* one (quoted in Engelbrecht 1936: 3).

In such a case, either in southeast Asia or in southern Africa, one identifies one's own group in hierarchical relation to the (lower-status) group who marries their daughters.

#### CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, if the first part of this paper served to blur the boundaries between hunters and herders, much in the second and third parts of the paper suggested a real difference: ideological and social as much as economic. The situation is complex, but to put it simply: it is not a matter of San versus Khoekhoe, but of San without livestock and San with livestock, and of Khoekhoe with livestock and Khoekhoe without livestock. I find it useful to think of Naro and G|wi as hunter-gatherers with goats, and it may be that San at the Cape, or indeed the very first Khoekhoe, were simply San with sheep. This characterization no doubt has implications for the debate on the concepts 'Neolithic' and 'Neolithization' for southern Africa (e.g. Sadr 2003; Smith 2005), although it does not in itself answer the question as to whether these terms are applicable. If anything, it muddies the water. Throughout this paper, I have sought to explain many complex phenomena by the use of simple models. Real societies only ever approximate idealized structures, and individuals only sometimes practise the rules that make up such structures. Ethnic groups are ever-changing in make-up, and history renders structures forever transient, as well as undeniably simplified.

Those Khoekhoe who acquired the full ideology associated with rearing livestock were, of course, not simply San with sheep. That ideology depends on a different use of

time, the acceptance of property as transmittable wealth, and different notions of social hierarchy. Whichever route livestock or ceramics took to the Cape, through the Kalahari or towards the west coast, the people who possessed these things at the Cape were, or became by the time of first contact with Western peoples, a recognizable, pastoralist society. Whether the people of the Cape acquired livestock or ceramics there, or brought these with them from farther north, at some point in space and time there was a transition from one ideology to another.

We cannot know for certain what kind of kinship system they had, or how closely their economic customs resembled more recent customs among Korana or Nama, Damara or Hai||om. Yet we can speculate that, whatever their precise customs, at the very least they fell more-or-less within the range of variation of known Khoisan and particularly Khoe-speaking peoples. In trying to reconstruct something of early Khoekhoe society, I would look to living and recent examples of Khoekhoe custom, and also to the hunter-gatherers to this day undergoing an as yet incomplete transition from hunter to herder. That transition is a difficult and complex one. It is not merely about having livestock, or pottery, but about the long-term adaptation of both ideology and social relations to material circumstances.

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