

ORDER AGAINST HARMONY

ARE HUMANS ALWAYS SOCIAL?

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It is our purpose to study the sentiments and motives which draw people to each other, keep them together, and induce them to joint action. We wish especially to investigate the products of human thought which, resulting therefrom, make possible and sustain a common existence. (Tönnies 1955, 3)

(...) [N]either of these contrasting poles [serenity and turbulence] can be chosen to the exclusion of the other, because the poles are mutually dependant. This profound and general truth is simultaneously asserted for the fields of sex, social organization, and death. (Bateson 2000 [1972], 152)

Introductory remarks

I started doing fieldwork among a tribal group in the southern Philippines in 1970. I investigated this people, on and off, for the next 37 years. This is an indigenous cultural community (as the official label goes in this country) named 'Palawan'. They are agriculturists who live in scattered small settlements. Their peacefulness and egalitarianism was immediately obvious and not something new: other anthropologists had encountered a similar situation in this part of the world and elsewhere. There was no problem with that, and a number of books and studies were to be published on non-violent, peaceful, and egalitarian societies by a host of anthropologists during the eighties and nineties (see Howell and Willis 1989; Boehm 1993; Silverberg and Gray 1992; Sponsel and Gregor 1994; Kemp and Fry 2004). But there was a less conspicuous aspect of the situation that bothered me somehow. No matter how hard I looked there was no 'group' or 'social unit' to speak of, outside the domestic family. The only entity that could be called a 'group' was the local group or settlement. This was the usual situation, actually, and many other similar cultures in the Philippines, Borneo and the Malay Peninsula display a local group, hamlet, village, settlement, neighborhood, seen as the basic locus of social interaction defined on a face-to-face basis (see for instance Jocano 1968: 35–37; Eder 1987: 28–31; Gibson 1986: 71–76; Schlegel 1970: 10–11; Nimmo 2001: 135–7 on the moorages of sea nomads; Dentan 1968: 79–80 on the "band"). I have rather stubbornly pursued the study of this 'local group' over many years (Macdonald 1977: 175–179, 2007: 23–25) and I have shown that it had some kind of weak corporate reality. I am now of the opinion that its corporate reality is indeed so weak as to be nonexistent. So here we are, with supposed societies which have no groups. What kind of 'society' is that? If a social organization is that which can be analyzed into separate collective units that interact with each other (see below), then this hardly looks like a social organization. Put another way, as Gell remarked of the Chewong: "In the absence of almost all the features of social organization" it is hard to use an "orthodox approach", and to make sense at all of their way of organizing themselves (Gell 1985: 366). I shall say more on that later.

Another and more telling aspect of interpersonal relations among the Palawan people became an object of puzzlement and thinking: their incredible propensity to joke, jest,

tease, laugh and, in other words, bond through merriment, gaiety and humor. Actually if you really want to know the difference between a Palawan and an outsider (Christian lowlander or Westerner) it will be explained that: 1. A Palawan person is poor; 2. A Palawan person knows how to make jokes. The rest of the world is rich and serious.

One aspect of their humor is its heavy sexual content, so lewd indeed that literal translations need some softening and disguise, lest these people be exposed as depraved and immoral in the eyes of a Western audience. But let me tell you this. In many cultures, mine in particular, sexual innuendos or explicit references to genital parts and sexual practices are used to insult and to offend. This is *never* the case in Palawan discourse. Far from being offensive, sexual matters seem to be innocent and amusing facts, tools to smooth interpersonal relations. This gave me cause for reflection.

Through some minor twist in my academic career I came to participate in an International Conference of Inuit Studies in Paris and this gave me an occasion to meet colleagues—inuitologists and Inuits as well—with whom I discussed this. Inuit people, as I was to discover, make fun of a lot of things, they laugh uninhibitedly while practicing all sorts of clownery, good-humored taunts and hilarious buffoonery. I could thus discuss this topic with some serious specialists in laughing-matter. I came out of these meetings realizing that interpersonal relations among the Inuit—an Arctic people of hunters and fishermen—and among the Palawan—tropical agriculturalists and forest people—had something essentially similar that was not completely understood by us Western anthropologists, something that was downright excluded from any academic discussion. I came to understand laughing and joking as a basic mode of relatedness, not as superficial decoration of social intercourse. As you can see, I was already lured into disreputable borderline grounds where sociology fades into psychology.¹

The research I conducted on suicide amongst the Palawan people and a comparative attempt at theorizing this phenomenon, led me also into some basic and unorthodox views on human behavior. I became convinced that explicit values and institutions are sometimes of little help in explaining what makes people do what they do. One should probe behind cultural artifacts and pay attention to the emotional life and narrative identity of those one wishes to understand. Most of all, one should acknowledge the value of personal autonomy.

What is a social organization?

My overall thesis is quite simple. Humans are not necessarily social beings. They are not solitary animals either. They want personal autonomy and cannot live alone. They are fierce individualists who cannot dispense with the company of others. In absolute isolation, humans disintegrate. They need the presence of others, which is highly stressful to them. Humans need to interact but not to always form societies. Such is, I guess, the basic paradox of the human condition.

So then, what is the accepted definition of a social organization (a society)? There are many definitions of course; let me use one that is given by the *Dictionary of Ethnology and Anthropology* edited by a French team (Bonte and Izard 1991) The entry “social organization” (Lenclud 1991: 527–8) starts with the property of “internal division” of society into “social units” that are enduring and have an institutional existence. The study of social organization

is furthermore defined as one that deals with the relations between such units. Examples of such units are families, domestic groups, kin groups like lineages and clans, et cetera. One should, it says, pay attention to the “membership principle” (‘principe d’appartenance et de recrutement’ in French) in the guise of consanguineal ties, age, rank, professional activity and so on. If those conditions are not met, then we do not have a “society”, but just a “collection of individuals” (Lenclud 1991: 527). All this is established and accepted truth. But what is implied and which I strongly question is the fact that *all* human beings live in ‘societies’ so defined (with permanent and preferably discrete social units to which one must belong according to a criterion such as birth, rank, residence, or whatever). The Palawan situation points to a state of affairs where no social units whatsoever ever come into existence, except the domestic family (usually man, wife, and children) the existence of which does not last longer, by definition, than the life of its senior members.² An identical situation can be observed elsewhere in the Philippines and the Malay Peninsula among such people as the Buid of Mindoro (Gibson 1986) the Semai (Dentan 1968), the Temiar (Benjamin 1993, 2002) and many others. Likewise, Inuit social organization seems to dispense with any established permanent groupings. Instead it is characterized by overlapping aggregates in the form of series of ego-centered circles not resulting in corporate structures (Hippler 1974: 260; Kublu and Oosten 1999: 75–76). The same situation can be observed with bands of foragers in a constant state of fission/fusion (Wilson 1975: 10). The point here is that many cultures the world over, whether nomadic hunters-gatherers, or sedentary agriculturists, whether forest people or Arctic dwellers, do not institutionalize clear-cut and durable groups outside the domestic family.

The concept of group is so basic as to have become subliminal. One does not spend time paying epistemological attention to it.³ Discussions on the State, hierarchy, dominance, bonding, cooperation, status, role and so forth fill libraries. Networks and many kinds of aggregates are discussed at length in the anthropological literature. The concept of group has, to my knowledge, been seriously discussed and defined by British functionalists only, under the caption of “corporate” entities with three defining criteria: property, perpetuity and a chief or representative (Radcliffe-Brown 1953: 51). Anthropological literature does not stray very far away from this concept, so defined, although it is widely recognized that problems arise when things are not so clear-cut. For instance, one makes a distinction between ‘group’ and ‘category’ when discussing the ‘kindred’ (see Freeman 1960). The importance of the corporate group concept remains, however, paramount in the way we conceptualize human organizations.

The mental and cultural counterpart of the ‘corporate group’ idea is clearly its identity in the form of a symbol, or some kind of emblematic activity or thing (one could think of so many from a flag to a ritual, from an anthem to a myth, from a muddled idea of ‘way of life’ to a territorial boundary, from a religion to a style in dressing). We should have then an identity, that is, a mental representation in the minds of its members.⁴ This happens of course, and we all have a definite representation of what our nation is (with its name, boundaries, official language, and so on). Actually we tend to have clear group identities, or at least we think it is important to hold such an awareness. I submit that quite a number of people prove to be totally indifferent to it. Taking, for instance, the much debated question of ‘ethnic identity’ (which obviously refers to a group): some tribal groups have it, like the New Guinea people Maurice Godelier is discussing in his latest book (Godelier

2007: 95–6), some do not. In France today the question of ‘national identity’ is a much debated and politically important issue. Probably a majority of humans outside the historically modern nations had no idea that they were forming groups of any sort, ethnic or otherwise.⁵ The need for a national or ethnic identity is a creation of what I call the social order. Some proof of that is that so-called ‘ethnic names’ (ethnonyms) are quite frequently either exonyms (like Eskimo) with no meaning to the people themselves, or endonyms (like Inuit) meaning ‘humans’ or ‘persons’, or just ‘us’.

Society as a machine or as an organism: simple vs. complex

I would like to look at another aspect of this ‘group’ concept and its corollary in terms of how we conceive of society. Remembering the famous distinction made by Durkheim between two kinds of solidarity, ‘mechanical’ and ‘organic’ (Durkheim 1967 [1897]) social anthropologists seem to think of this as this being a real alternative: on the one hand the night crawler, on the other the more evolved organism, say, well... Man himself. I am of the opinion that the ‘organic’ and the ‘mechanical’ are metaphors that amount to the exact same thing as far as their meaning in the social sciences is concerned. They both suppose moving parts (cogs and wheels, organs and limbs) with different and clearly defined functions. In other words you need ‘groups’ (corporations and professional groups for Durkheim’s [1967 {1897}] *Division du Travail Social*) with enduring and distinctive qualities and functions. Whether organicist or mechanistic, this vision of society is rather simple-minded, ethnocentric and irrelevant for a number of cultures. It amounts to viewing the social ‘machine’ or ‘body’ as made up of ‘body parts’ (that is, ‘groups’) interacting this way and that way, having different functions. If you have no ‘groups’, particularly of the corporate kind, what are the parts or the elements with which is built the whole machine or organism?

One is usually led to believe that modern societies are ‘complex’ whereas those dubbed ‘primitive’, or ‘archaic’, are ‘simple’. I offer the view that this is untrue. Complexity is also on the side of ‘simple societies’. We could say that there are two kinds of complexity. How is that? In his writings the French sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin called our attention to the concept of ‘complexity’ and ‘self-organization’ (Morin 1977: 145, 2005: 23, 45–49). This entails looking at natural systems, especially living organisms as ‘open’ systems, never closed upon themselves, never separated from their environment, and functioning on the basis of a random distribution of elements in a state of unbalanced equilibrium. Complexity is thus more like life itself, not at all like a machine. So when we think of the metaphor of society as a body we still think in mechanistic terms. Morin (2005: 43–4) uses a very apt illustration of this. Quoting von Neumann he reminds us of the fact that in a machine the parts are more reliable than the whole, while in a living organism the reverse is true. An engine is made of well-manufactured and solid parts, in themselves more durable than the engine. Our body is made of millions of cells and molecules that are constantly degraded and replaced by new ones. But we still go on living. The whole in this case is much more durable than its constitutive elements. Why not use this concept of complex, self-organizing, open systems and apply it to human organization?

There is an extremely viable way for humans to relate to each other in randomly arranged,⁶ open aggregates, not defined as mutually closed and exclusive sets. The unity of the whole is not holistic (an organized set of individual parts complementing each other in perpetuity)

but belongs to the universe of open, complex, life-organizing, self-regulating systems. Such I believe are the Palawan local communities, the Inuit bands, the moorages of sea nomads, and possibly the Rom communities, as well as many others: Piaroa, San, Kung Bushmen, Temiar, Semai, Hanunoo, Buid, Chewong, Mbuti, Hazda, Inuit... My contention of course is that this form of collective life caters to something deeply human and probably very ancient in the make-up of *Homo sapiens* (see below). Social order, with its mechanical equilibrium and closed sets, runs contrary to it. I shall come to that later again. Here we start to understand the difference between two completely opposed realities: social order which is in a way simple, and anarchic harmony, which is complex.⁷

In sum then, non-social organizations, or what I like to call anarchic, egalitarian, and gregarious communities, function on the basis of open ego-centred networks (on the model offered by cognatic kinship systems), forever changing in composition, having no real focal identity, no clear boundaries, no chiefs or representatives, no property, especially in land, no corporateness whatsoever. Their members have no needs for “embeddedness in group structures” (Maryanski and Turner 1992: 163). Since we, Western social scientists, think in simplistic terms of boundaries, of closed sets, of mechanical/organic⁸ functionality, of finite systems, and of subjects driven by ‘social instincts’, we have difficulty grasping the very real complexity of this kind of communality which is absolutely not—as quoted above—a mere “collection of individuals”, but communities of eagerly and intensively interacting, culture-producing, humans.

Relations among autonomous agents

Yet again, the idea that a ‘collection of individuals’ is not a society could be investigated from another angle. Non-social, gregarious, anarchic communities might indeed be conceived of as collections of individuals intermingling in an array of overlapping aggregates and networks. The Hobbesian and popular idea that primitive man should fall into tightly-knit, permanently and fiercely bounded groups, like ‘tribes’ and ‘clans’, is dispelled by ethnographic facts and rests on naïve assumptions (Hirschfeld 2001: 112–3; Fried 1975), such as the inherently aggressive nature of human beings possessed by the urge of waging war against each other, or—even more naïve and ill-informed—appropriating territories.⁹ The constant realignment of individuals into labile aggregates that forever overlap, intersect and change in form and content is probably what a large section of humankind has known for the major part of its life on earth, and human sociality is thus enormously complex. How? Precisely because it requires management, monitoring, calculation, understanding, negotiation, and maintenance of individual affiliations and bonding into a forever changing landscape, at the centre of which lies the precious core of all human sociality: the domestic family. Collective life is thus an arrangement of individuals, that is, human organisms endowed with the most complex object in the universe: a central nervous system. Putting a number of such enormously complex objects (brains) together is an even more dauntingly complex task. That is why complexity is on the side of what looks to us as simple.

Actually we are all aware of this. We spend our entire lifetime negotiating personal alliances, friendships and enmities. We constantly bond and fall apart, unite and then separate, and unite again. And we know this to be a full-time job, at home, in the office, wherever. We scheme endlessly to belong to cliques, coteries and clubs, or exclude others as

the case may be. We obsess over getting ahead or a least not being left behind other individuals (colleagues, neighbours). We exhaust ourselves dealing with sex so as to conform to moral rules or other persons' affects—an impossible order of course. We are kept alert and interested in such dealings throughout our lives. Compared to that, the relationships to the State or to other institutions in our so-called 'complex societies' are actually quite simple. You pay or you do not pay your taxes. You obey or do not obey the law. You put one ballot in the box. You follow written, fixed rules. Of course all these activities and decisions involve complex reasoning, and they are the products of a long and complex history, but they probably do not entail the kind of highly developed inherited skills that are required to solve relational problems between individuals, because interpersonal affairs involve the total human person, both as a rational and emotional agent. Will you ever compare choosing a spouse or a friend to choosing a candidate for public office?

Hierarchy

I will examine briefly the question of dominance and/or hierarchy, a question that has been discussed by many authors, but one that needs to be re-examined anyhow within the purview of this presentation. Whether you call it dominance, hierarchy, inequality, this principle permeates as well as constitutes the foundation of the social order. Inequality is supposed to be ubiquitous in modern and primitive societies (Béteille 1977) and it has been construed as the true and only foundation of civilized life. Louis Dumont, for instance, influentially argued not only that holistic cultures must be based on some kind of hierarchical principle (Dumont 1977: 12), but also, quoting Parsons, he hailed the "universal rationality of hierarchy" (Dumont 1966: 33). Compared to the need of having a system of graded values, and therefore graded agents in a graded society, "the egalitarian ideal itself is artificial" (Dumont 1966: 34). The presence or absence of the State as the one central and paramount institution that supposedly separates the primitive from the civilized is the embodiment of the encompassing hierarchizing order of society.

Now 'order' is a very precise concept, mathematically defined as a transitive relationship between elements of a set. If $A > B$, and $B > C$, then $A > C$. If you apply the formula to social groups you obtain things like a chain of command in an army, or a bureaucracy. The mathematical definition of inequality is the backbone of social order and can be put to many uses. You may thus define the relation as 'contains', then if $A \subset B$, and $B \subset C$, then $A \subset C$. This could serve as an administrative mapping of territorial units (municipality, province, region, state). Descent groups can be used to such double effect; their paradigmatic hierarchy serves to recruit warriors in sets of ascending or descending magnitude, fix positions of subordination in a graded scale, and map territories as well (Sahlins 1961). This kind of segmentary/hierarchical thinking has been used by pastoralists like the Nuer and by developed civilizations like the Indian caste system.

There is something almost primal in hierarchizing things: a simple binary opposition—right and left, up and down, male and female, moon and sun—is usually conceptualized as containing a superior and an inferior term. Anthropologists have demonstrated that at length (Hertz 1909). Hierarchy in this sense is a highly valuable tool to simplify and organize relations, create groups, and establish order in a broader sense. It is both a sociological reality and a basic mental tool. The human world is a natural world and probably

a mathematically ordered world. We might have confused hierarchy (associated with the idea of power) with asymmetry (associated with the idea of difference).

Let us admit first that communities with no chiefs, anarchic in the literal and etymological sense of the word, do exist. They have definitely been observed and described by a host of ethnographers. The paradox is that they do acknowledge, significantly, a certain measure of asymmetry, usually one between elder and younger members of the community, parents and children. Sometimes between male and female, but less so. The point is that non-hierarchical communities recognize dyadic asymmetrical relations, but tend not to develop single asymmetrical pairs into transitive chains of relations. Let me give you an example. Amongst the Palawan there is clearly a relation of asymmetry between elder and younger members of a cognatic set (let's say an uncle and a nephew) and between in-laws (let's say BW and WB). Now this asymmetrical relation is limited to immediate affines or close kin. If A is uncle (therefore senior and as such somewhat "superior") to B, and B uncle to C, A is *not* necessarily uncle to C. Ego must be somewhat subservient to his wife's elder brother, but not to her cousin. I have argued that the deepest substratum of the Palawan ordering of statuses and roles is hierarchical or asymmetrical in nature, but does not result in an unequal social order (Macdonald 1977: 252–3, 2007: 72). It is a huge paradox, illustrative of a complex order of reality, that an underlying asymmetry results in a radically egalitarian kind of system. Since I am dealing with age and seniority, an important remark must be made. Careful comparison will show that non-hierarchical, gregarious, anarchic, egalitarian communities do usually display symmetrical gender relations compatible with a non male-dominated, division of roles.¹⁰ Why then would the age/generation principle be preferred to the gender-based principle? One reason to my mind is that a modicum of hierarchy based on age is by definition temporary, as far as the members of the ages-sets are concerned. If you are born a man or a woman, you usually remain man or woman until your death. Whereas you do not, alas, remain young, and after being in a subservient position as a junior person, you will eventually be upgraded to a senior status. So do anarchic and non-social communities operate, creating equality by using and at the same time subverting hierarchy.¹¹

Let us for the time being keep in mind that hierarchy and dominance are seen as functions of closed groups.¹²

Sharing versus giving

One of the prime concepts of twentieth century anthropology has been, I guess, exchange and/or reciprocity. This notion, starting with the seminal essay by Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le Don* (1925), has spurred fruitful anthropological theorizing into many different fields: economics, communication, kinship, social dynamics, and so forth. Exchange has thus become the "primitive social contract", the "condition on which are based the production and reproduction of social relations" (Godelier 1996: 69), and it remains one of the three major concepts around which we organize our anthropological thinking, together with group formation (the basic units of social organization) and dominance or hierarchy. Here again my thesis will be that a number of communities do not fit into an 'exchange theory' of society.

Let us be reminded that the core of Mauss' theory on the gift consisted in three successive and tightly linked 'obligations': one must give, one must receive, one must give back. Behind a single act (giving) there was a whole chain of relationships between social actors. Actually there are no free gifts and what goes round comes round. Mauss' essay was the object of many comments and revisions among which are those of Lévi-Strauss (1950), Sahlins (1965), and more recently Godelier (1996). Mauss indeed focussed on competitive exchange and his theory of the gift might have been more a theory of the *potlatch* than a theory of giving or sharing. Subsequently Sahlins proposed a spectrum of reciprocities, with the "generalized" (the idea of pure or generous gift) at one end, the "negative" (akin to the idea of swindle) at the other end, and the "balanced" (direct, simple exchange of like for like) in the middle (Sahlins 1965: 147–9). Realizing that the picture was not complete, Godelier following Weiner (1992) more recently proposed distinguishing between transferable and non-transferable goods, between material and non-material exchange, thus explaining the paradox of why certain objects are kept while circulating. Godelier was resting his argument on the *kula*, Mauss on the *potlatch*, Sahlins on the market and on non-ceremonial goods. The major fault of these theories on giving, exchanging and reciprocity is that they lack one basic dimension about how people in a number of cultures distribute material objects among themselves, and particularly food. And that one major dimension is *sharing*. Sharing has been shown by some authors like Gibson (1985, 1986: 44–48) to be of an independent order, a pattern entirely distinct from reciprocity, entailing a relation between persons that is in no way coterminous with giving and exchanging. This is actually so obvious that one wonders why anthropologists could have been so blind as not to recognize this before, and give it the theoretical status it deserves.

For an exchange to happen, you will probably agree that something must be given to begin with. In order for something to be given, that something must be 'owned' in some way by the giver. I do not see how anything can be 'given' if that thing is not somehow in the possession or control of the giver. I suppose we would agree on that. Now it just so happens that certain objects—particularly one of the most important categories of all, food—are oftentimes, in communities such as the Inuit, San or Buid, just *shared*. Sharing is this: an Inuit hunter catches let us say, a bearded seal, or a San Bushman gathers *tsi* nuts, or a Palawan gets a wild boar in his pig-trap. The seal, the boar, the nuts are brought back to the village or camp and everyone is given a share (according to some specific rules: Robbe 1994: 272–5; Marshall Thomas 1989 [1958]: 211–2; Macdonald 2007: 77). The hunter, trapper, and gatherer who have harpooned the seal, trapped the wild boar, or gathered the nuts, do not own the seal, the boar, or the nuts. They own maybe part of it, which they keep. But the rest they do not give away, because rules state that it does not belong to them. It is not up to them to decide what shares and how many are going to be distributed in the community, and to whom. The Inuit hunter owns a certain portion of the seal—which by the way he keeps before actually sharing it; other hunters, who have touched the animal while it was still in the water, own the rest which is to be divided according to precise rules and preordained cuts (Robbe 1994: 273; Freuchen 1961: 153). The *tsi* nuts gatherer puts his nuts in a net, the owner of which has a primary right over the nuts (Marshall Thomas 1989 [1958]: 211). The successful Palawan hunter has to give at least half of the whole boar to his father-in-law who decides what is to be given to whom (usually on a strictly egalitarian basis: everyone in the group gets something). There is no exchange because the hunter, the trapper,

the gatherer do *not* own what has been caught or collected, at least do not own it completely.¹³ What goes to whom is either decided by someone else, or has been already partitioned by pre-existing rules. Nobody gives anything to anybody. There is no exchange of any sort at least between humans: what is *shared* is not *given*. If there is a gift, it is one bestowed by nature, by unseen forces of the universe. Inuit say the seal has given himself to man. The only giver is the seal or the spirit of the seals. The Palawan say the Master of the pigs has given them one of his children (Macdonald 2007: 121)

Anthropologists tend to think that reciprocity can be a foundation for social order, a true pristine 'social contract' in itself, as I said before. Indeed, behind the gift there is truly a moral basis for society, whether the gift is generous or whether it is interested. If it is generous one tends to associate giving, in the 'generalized' sense of Sahlins, with a primitive sphere of domesticity, intimacy and nurturing. If it is 'negative', one tends to see its presence in the wider sphere of hard, selfish, but realistic, dog-eat-dog relations. The patron-client model, so frequently used by sociologists and anthropologists to explain rural societies in different parts of the world, is just that: a giving that entails a debt, and a debt that entails dependence. Some people are so aware of that, that they absolutely reject the spirit of reciprocity and base their communal life on its opposite: sharing. Inuit people don't say "thank you", because to say thanks acknowledges a debt, and acknowledging a debt is the first step to slavery. "With gifts one makes slaves like one makes dogs by lashing them with a whip" (Testart 1999:11, quoting Freuchen).¹⁴

Astoundingly, we are now brought back to a dimension of collective life which I have mentioned above: the autonomy of the agent. Reciprocity (the 'obligation' to give and to receive) jeopardizes autonomy. Non-social, anarchic, and gregarious communities reject reciprocity as the moral basis of their mutual dealings, they are reluctant to give and to create a debt, save to the powers of nature. Obviously Inuits, San, Semai, Palawan, Buid and all the others borrow and lend, give and take, they barter, swap, buy, and sell. There are free gifts, some haggle, others might take away things and 'forget' to return them. All sorts of transactions and reciprocal activities take place. There is no such thing as 'primitive communism' and Palawan or Inuit people definitely have a sense of ownership, albeit one that is not exactly like ours. The point is, in some groups the social contract is not based on the 'spirit of the gift' but on the law of sharing. And this is because people like their freedom to remain intact.

Let us make a brief pause here and gather some loose threads. So far I have tried to discuss three propositions: 1) that the common definition of social organization rested on an idea of a division of the social body into closed, self-contained, corporate-like groups; 2) that it was difficult to think of a social order of any kind without using some measure of dominance or hierarchy; 3) that exchange and reciprocity was of paramount significance in understanding human affairs but particularly those of technologically simple and culturally conservative societies. Against these accepted truths I have made three objections: 1) that a number of human communities had no groups except the domestic family, and actually had no need nor desire of creating self-contained, exclusive, corporate groups in perpetuity;¹⁵ 2) that a good number of living communities had been closely observed by professional anthropologists, not showing the slightest tendency toward any hierarchical organization, and having no manner of chiefs; 3) that exchange and reciprocity as the *only* or *main* method for distributing goods and creating basic bonds of sociality was a seriously mistaken

idea that did not account for another equally fundamental and pervasive principle, that of sharing. Along the way I mentioned the concept of complexity, which, paradoxically, sits better with supposed simple, stateless, 'primitive societies', than with modern State societies. Another recurring theme was personal autonomy. I ought to tackle two other hurdles in the classic anthropological jumping contest: violence and the State. I will not have time do it here. Instead I would like to consider some propositions in evolutionary theory that may lend some strength to my general argument.

Personal autonomy and the force of social ties

Evolutionary theorizing is all the rage today in some quarters and I am not inclined to blindly follow any of its pronouncements, heeding Ingold's warnings on that (Ingold 1989). The unquestionable fact remains however that *Homo sapiens* (HS) is the result of evolution, that he is a zoological species sharing his direct ancestry and almost all of his DNA with apes such as *Pan*. Primatologists (like Rodman 1999 and others) and paleoanthropologists (like Sussmann and Chapman 2004, and others) have accumulated a wealth of data on primate behaviour and some serious clues about the beginning of Hominids' way of life. All this requires some attention on the part of the social anthropologist.

If HS and his direct ancestors have been shaped by evolution, then chances are that branches of the Hominid evolutionary tree diverge in some significant manner. The law of evolution indeed is that phylogenies are diverging and not converging. Another law is that, through adaptation and chance, a number of diverging organisms that branch out, disappear. Others remain. Those that remain retain certain features inherited from ancestors. Within HS evolutionary prehistory, chances are that several diverging forms of adaptation survived and still exist side by side. I hypothesize, therefore, that two branches on the hominid terminal ramification, not in the form of biological speciation but in the form of societal speciation (resulting from selection at the sociocultural level), are surviving from ancient adaptations of hominoids to specific conditions. One is the gregarious, anarchic, egalitarian, non-social type of collective life, which proved to be adaptive and successful over tens of thousands of years (more than 90% of HS life on earth). The other one is the socially structured type of collective life, extremely successful in a different sort of way, nowadays eradicating relentlessly all survivors of the other option. According to this perspective, both the 'social' and the 'gregarious' forms of collective life are present from very ancient times, when hominids started to create a new sociality. I believe these adaptive responses to the challenge of survival are much older than the Neolithic/Paleolithic forking of man's ways. It started when hominids adapted to a double environment: the natural environment with its physical properties, requiring biological and technological adaptation, and a newly emerging human environment with its demanding, complex, intraspecific relations of increasing importance requiring sociocultural, mental and emotional adaptation. Social order and gregarious harmony offer two satisfying responses: the first because it fights entropy by enhancing control in a mechanistic way, and eventually creates an enormously powerful machinery of domination (it creates order) and mastery of the environment, the second one because it enhances felicity and reduces anxiety among peers (it seeks harmony), while playing along with entropy. To borrow a phrase from linguists (Austin 1962), I shall term such requirements the "conditions of felicity" of hominid collective living. To meet

these conditions, one way or the other, is the business of HS. War or love, as it were, have been and still are two diverging paths followed by various sections of mankind, and two broad responses to the demands of collective living. This can be understood only if we fully recognize the emergence of personal autonomy. If evolutionary sociologists are correct (Maryanski 1994; Maryanski and Turner 1992) hominoid sociality, going back to the Last Common Ancestor of apes and humans, evidenced a “fluid organizational structure, consisting of a low level of sociality and a lack of intergenerational group continuity over time” (Maryanski 1994: 384). The reasons for that lie in several forces, one being the dispersal of females and another in the low level of bonding between males, characterized by high individual autonomy and high individualism creating fluid social networks (385).¹⁶ To quote again the same author: “A richness of weak ties over strong ties (...) provide humanoids with a degree of integration at the macro-population level in contrast to monkey populations where a richness of strong ties over weak ties is seen to provide integration at the micro-group level of organization” (386). In other words humanoids and their descendants were successful because they acquired great individual agency enabling them to produce large but loose aggregates. The benefits of that, for a far-roaming animal like Homo, are several. Ranging far and wide, being highly mobile, he needs to frequently associate and disassociate himself from his conspecifics. So here we are, HS is not essentially a ‘social’ animal. He is gregarious in the sense that he needs to interact and cooperate with his conspecifics, provided he maintains a great deal of personal autonomy.

The moral basis of gregarious anarchic collective living

From what was said above one could conclude that HS is nothing but a ‘friendly animal’. Actually I am inclined to believe that HS is a complex animal, mentally and emotionally, and that he is possessed with peaceability as well as with aggressiveness, a great capacity to bond and an equal capacity to hate and destroy his conspecifics, a profound longing to live in smooth harmony with his equals and a fierce desire to dominate and enslave them. I suppose both aspects are always present,¹⁷ but one is selected as a dominant device to regulate interpersonal behaviour in one or the other form of collective life we have examined. My guess again is that members of the social order are virtual anarchists (this is evidenced by many attempts at communal non-social living) and that an urge to dominate others is present in the most egalitarian and peaceful peoples. The name of the game is rather to negotiate conflicting drives in what I called a ‘maximization of the felicity conditions of collective existence’. There are, again, two ways to do it: one by maximizing personal autonomy and bonding between equally free agents, the other by ordering relations in a pecking order, creating groups and reducing personal autonomy.

Within the first option (gregarious and anarchic), certain moral rules must be followed. Paramount among these rules is humility and control over anger. An ethnographer quotes a saying from a native population of the Malay Peninsula, the Chewong, that goes: “To be angry is not to be human, but to be fearful is” (Howell 1989: 45). Among the Caribou Inuits the one thing that was not allowed was to give way to one’s anger (Mowat 1980: 166). The Buid of Mindoro (Gibson 1989) and the Semai of the Malay Peninsula (Dentan 2004) highly value tranquillity and a peaceful demeanour, while valuing aggression and self-assertiveness negatively. The Palawan hold exactly the same opinion. The way Palawan

people and many others describe themselves is always self-disparaging. An Indian group in Mexico, the Teenek, speak so ill of themselves that even anthropologists did not want to study them (de Vidas 2002). Gregarious and anarchic people constantly joke and tease each other, belittle themselves, using irony and ridicule, holding that the most hateful and despicable of all defects is arrogance. This is the way Palawan people describe Christian lowlanders for instance. Self-abasement together with an absolute commitment to nonaggression seem to be a constant factor, one that we have a hard time to conceive of, as it does not appear to be 'socially' acceptable. What would you think of people who claim to be cowards and approve of it, claim to prefer to run away than retaliate? Claim to be "poor", "incapable", "stupid", and "losers" as a positive option? How would a self-respecting Durkheimian creature consider joking as a foundation of sociality?

Many other traits characterize bands of hunter-gatherers, their volatile and emotional interactivity, their great sense of humour and their quick tempers, their constant oscillation between expansive laughter and bitter tears (Wilson 1975). Their 'gemeinshaftness' has been noted by many observers (Dentan 2004; Benjamin 2006) but the view that they live in harmony is probably a mean result, an average or ideal situation inferred from of a series of situations of conflict and resolution, rather than a stable condition of unchanging and serene equanimity. As I said, people *seek* harmony, they do not necessarily live in harmony all the time. They obtain it at times through a policy of extreme humility and strict control over aggressive impulses.

There are several aspects to this 'culture of timidity' that one should examine. One is the particular psychological or mental state with which it is associated, which Dentan (2004) calls "learned helplessness", a kind of surrender, a feeling providing the subject with serenity, or tranquillity, as Gibson says of the Buid. It is also akin to a mildly depressive state of withdrawal (Gibson 1989: 67). This should be probed further. Another one is, of course, the reason for such a non-violent, non-aggressive attitude which Dentan (2004) and Gibson (1990) see as a response to external violence. The fact is that such communities have been preyed upon and victimized by slave traders or by neighbouring tribal groups (the Inuits by North American Indians, the Semai by the Malays, the Palawan by the Maranao [Ilanun], and so on). But in my opinion, non-aggression and suppression of anger is not a response to an external environment but to the internal human environment in which these people spend their life. Non-aggression is just a function of non-hierarchical relations and, for that matter, the other main aspects of egalitarianism, the ethos of sharing or the respect for other persons' autonomy. All these features together form the conditions of felicity on which their collective life is based. In any case one must recognize their conscious commitment to a way of life that is distinct—they sustain "a radically alternative mode of relatedness" (Ingold 1990: 130)—and not something imposed upon them, or something that they would relinquish willingly. As Richard Lee wrote of hunters-gatherers "such societies have social and political resources of their own and are not just sitting ducks waiting to adopt the first hierarchical model that comes along" (Lee 1992: 40).

Some other important points

Time does not allow me to consider a number of other important questions raised by this approach. One that remains unsolved so far (in this presentation at least) and gives ground

to objection is again the question of aggression and violence. Violence is present in gregarious egalitarian and anarchic communities under various guises. This needs to be carefully examined and interpreted. In some cases violence erupts or is enacted without assuming any social function. One of the most striking examples I know of, is presented by the Ilongot, a people from the Philippines who are apparently anarchic and gregarious, but who practice a strange form of head-hunting fostering equality among peers rather than superiority over one's enemy.¹⁸

A number of corollaries and associated traits are worthy of serious investigations: what G. Benjamin (2006) calls "indigeny" and the unique and specific relation to place it entails, the "monophysite" conception of man and his environment, the notion of non-punitive justice (obviously tribunals are not welcome amongst primitive anarchists), the inherently non-religious ethics and frequent areligiosity of gregarious people (who recognize and deal intensively with unseen forces and spiritual entities but are not subservient to them in the fashion of Christian or Muslim obedience to a supreme deity), and many other aspects that must be considered.

Also, we would need to look at the limitations of both kinds of collective living. Clearly, although not restricted to foragers, the non-social and egalitarian way cannot survive under conditions of heavy demographic pressure. One thing is clear: gregarious communities are demographically small, need a lot of space and are easy prey to strong military orders. Their chances of survival depended during the last millennium on their capacity to find refuge in secluded areas (like high mountain valleys, ice banks, deep forests, deserts) in order to escape the murderous pursuit and utter devastation foisted upon them by social orders, whether tribal and stateless, or with a State apparatus. Social order is efficient and destructive at the same time. With its mechanistic order it has conquered the planet and laid it bare. With their obsessive pursuit of bonding among equals and preservation of personal autonomy, gregarious anarchic communities were doomed and are now all but extinct, taking with them a good part of what humanity is all about.¹⁹

Concluding remarks

I am not the first one, by a long way, to have dealt with the notion of 'ordered anarchy', 'stateless societies', "people without government" (Barclay 1982), or 'peaceful and non-violent people'. I am advocating an integrated picture of what I see as a complex mode of communality—for which I would like to avoid the word 'social' and its many compounds. Studies mostly focussed on one aspect or the other: the State (stateless societies), or violence (peaceful societies), or hierarchy and dominance (egalitarian societies). Look at the work of Clastres (1989), for instance. His exclusive focus on the notion of State renders his demonstrations naïve and ineffectual (Graeber 2004: 23). Selecting just peacefulness or non-violence as the main foundation of a stable collective life is equally insufficient. One must take into one's purview the entire sphere of collective living and integrate the economics of sharing, the 'conditions of felicity' of communality, the subtle and paradoxical enforcement of equality, the creation and maintenance of loose aggregates and networks, the principle of individual autonomy, the moral basis of the whole, as well as the unique kind of symbiotic relationship with nature sustained by these people, all of it in one cohesive model that mirrors the complexity of this way of life. Besides, one should remember that people are

not only moved negatively to just refuse something (the State, submission, lack of freedom) but are also moved positively by a desire to keep and defend something they value. So, some people prefer harmony to order.

NOTES

¹ Psychology has been separated from sociology by Durkheim and his descendants. By doing so sociology and to a large extent social anthropology have become incapable of understanding not only what I will call “gregarious harmony” but even social order. As Herrernschmidt (1996:19) so aptly remarked on the sociology of caste: “Tout se passe comme si l’on refusait d’introduire la psychologie (sociale, et plus encore individuelle) et, avec elle, la conscience (de caste).”

² Freeman (1960, 67) describes the Iban *bilek*, however, as a “perennial corporation aggregate”. The family can thus acquire symbolic continuity.

³ For instance the dictionary I have mentioned above has two entries on special kinds of groups only (“descent groups” and “domestic groups”). The notion of group per se is not discussed.

⁴ See Hirschfeld 2001.

⁵ There are and were ethnic traits and features, but not necessarily an ethnic identity.

⁶ Statistical arrangements resulting from individual choices.

⁷ Complexity in modern, urban, industrialized, State societies refers to two different ideas: one, that those societies are huge and made of many groups, institutions, categories, functions, and so on. Complexity in this sense refers to the number of elements and distinct functions the social machinery is made of. The concept of “many-stranded social activities” defined by Gellner (1988) belongs to the same paradigm. Single-strandedness (in other words ‘specialization’) goes with increasing societal complexity. The more complex a society, the more specialized the tasks and the functions, so that one individual is incapable of grasping and mastering the whole range of societal functions. The second idea is that various arrangements—like the entire range of marriage preferences—are the statistical and unintentional result of individual choices.

⁸ Morin (2005: 39) aptly describes this view as “syncretic, historical, confused, romantic”.

⁹ Observations on actual, living communities such as the Temiar (Benjamin 2006: 7), or Palawan (Macdonald 2007: 48), show that to such people the very concept of landownership is totally alien.

¹⁰ Quite a number of tribal societies, in New Guinea and elsewhere, do present us with strong, violent even, male dominance and female subservience. They are clearly on the path of social order, with corollaries of corporateness, closure and warfare. The systems I am referring to in this presentation as “non-social, anarchic, and so on” are of a different kind.

¹¹ Societies that use age and age grades as a basis for a political order are not numerous. Those in the so called ‘Karimojong’ circle in East Africa are rather unique cases where this occurs. One very clear outcome of the age grade system is to rotate positions of power between sections of the population in more or less even cycles (Tornay 1995).

¹² Allegiance to the same master binds members at the bottom as well as at the top. There are other practical advantages of having chiefs, one being that cooperative work on a large scale can be more efficiently organized and monitored. A good deal of cooperation on a small scale (a dozen people or more) is quite possible without any supervisor or boss telling people what to do. When it comes to organizing hundreds and even thousands of people, anarchic cooperation finds its limits. Cooperation together with a rigid pecking order is a formidable device for putting together large working groups like, for instance, armies.

¹³ I must disagree on this with Testart who is misconstruing the reality in believing that the hunter “gives away” his catch and that, therefore, he owns it (Testart 1987: 288). In other words he infers ownership from what he thinks is the act of giving. He does not, like the great majority of anthropologists, realize that sharing is not a special instance of giving. The hunter may just be said to ‘bring over’ his catch, rather than ‘give’ it. So does the Palawan trapper who physically delivers or carries the boar to his father-in-law.

He does not give it away. Once the game has been so shared, then the shares are owned and can be given. Freuchen describes the apportionment (sharing) of a walrus on the principle of “first weapon”, “second weapon”, and so forth, and adds “(...) but ownership is ownership” and he who has received a larger portion will “have the pleasure” of giving it away (Freuchen 1976 [1935]: 96).

¹⁴ The full quote is this however: “You must not thank for your meat; it is your right to get parts. In this country, nobody wishes to be dependent upon others. Therefore *there is nobody who gives or gets gifts*, for thereby you become dependent. With gifts you make slaves just as with whips you make dogs!” (Freuchen 1961: 154, my emphasis). See note 12 above.

¹⁵ Thus dispensing with the need of developing the kind of ‘group identity’ that is apparently so much in demand in our modern nation-states.

¹⁶ Wrangham—quoted in Boehm 1993: 238—reached different conclusions in a previous reconstruction from humans and African apes. His are closed social networks and some dominance but no female alliances and hostility between groups (Wrangham 1987).

¹⁷ The argument has been put in similar terms by Fuentes (2004) discussing cooperation versus competition and proposing a “scenario of mixed cooperation and occasional competition” (Fuentes 2004: 715). Although my argument may appear as a definition of ‘human nature’, I would rather like to think in terms of ‘behavioral predispositions’ entailing a probabilistic dimension as well as an inherently dialectical foundation.

¹⁸ The ethnographers who studied them (M. Rosaldo 1980; M. Rosaldo 1980) had to account for it on the basis of symbolic values and animus (Rosaldo M. 1980: 176, 233). The main problem was that the victims did not fall clearly within the structural lines of feuding (with conflicting segments of a society retaliating against each other) although R. Rosaldo interpreted it in terms of revenge killing (R. Rosaldo 1980: 63, 276).

¹⁹ “Semai ethnic identity may not survive the onslaught of globalized seduction and coercion. *It may perish before scholars come to understand its complexity*” (Dentan 2004, my emphasis).

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