Hunter-Gatherers in Modern Settings

Politics and History in Band Societies. ELEANOR LEACOCK and RICHARD LEE, Eds. Cambridge University Press, New York, and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, 1982. xiv, 500 pp., illus. Cloth, $44.50; paper, $17.95.

Until relatively recently in human history, all *Homo sapiens* shared a nomadic life-style as hunter-gatherers. For a long time, however, the few peoples who continued to live in this fashion were regarded by Western scholars as evolutionary failures, a kind of flotsam eking out an impoverished existence in the more remote and marginal regions of the world. Since none of these peoples really excited the European imagination (the "noble savage" mystique was derived from other sources), anthropologists have been concerned to restore to respectability this oft-denigrated and widely misunderstood mode of adaptation. In recent decades, band societies have been the subject of some drastic anthropological rethinking, and as a result new models and metaphors have emerged that clarify the general picture. Thus, for example, the vivid and once generally accepted image of foragers as locked in a desperate daily struggle for survival has been supplanted by the notion of "the original affluent society," whose members enjoy an unsurpassed degree of leisure—which is indeed true of some hunter-gatherers some of the time. Likewise, the dominant image of man the hunter has been reworked because of women's major role in subsistence in most band societies, so that "woman the gatherer" more accurately reflects this crucial aspect of hunter-gatherer life.

Since the 1960's, important questions concerning territoriality, band composition and flexibility, male-female relationships, decision-making and authority, the influence of ecological variables on cultural structures, and the applicability of Marxian explanatory models, to name just a few, have been raised and debated at length by social scientists interested in band societies. A progressive refinement of understanding has stimulated intensive and more finely grained field research among hunter-gatherers on several continents. From these, a much clearer depiction of the variability and complexity of these so-called "simple" societies has been possible.

No better evidence of this considerable leap forward in our appreciation of hunter-gatherers exists than this volume, which stems from a 1978 conference on hunters and gatherers held in Paris. Although not all the 50 or so scholars attending had worked in band societies—and many who had were not present—a wide range of areal and topical interests was represented and an intensive interchange of ideas ensued. Three issues of major importance were addressed during the conference, and in accordance with this the volume is divided into three parts: on social organizational dynamics, with considerable emphasis on conflict-management and political processes; on relations between hunter-gatherers and farmers, a significant but often-neglected aspect of band society adaptation and persistence; and on contemporary struggles for survival, a vital issue that has increasingly concerned anthropologists. Eight essays explore both the extent of alien penetration of the worlds of hunter-gatherers and the strategies they adopt in their self-assertive struggles for their land and a measure of autonomy.

The 21 papers fit well into this tripartite mold, giving the book a thematic unity that is often promised but rarely delivered in volumes of collected papers. The editors provide a first-rate introduction, which combines general comments on the relationship of band society studies to anthropological theory with brief but informative comments on individual papers and areas of shared concern among the various authors. The editors are explicit in their commitment to a Marxist approach—"Anything less than a dialectical and historical-materialist view of society ends in distortion" (p. 6)—and to this end Leacock offers a comparative essay on relations of production in band societies. Her admonition to scholars to pay closer attention to historical factors and the impact of alien contact on "traditional" band economies is timely, but I found Lee's focus on internal contradictions in !Kung San society more stimulating as an application of Marxist perspectives to hunter-gatherers. However, I do not share Lee's satisfaction with the terminology of Marx and Engels in his depiction of the forager mode of production as one of "primitive communism" (p. 55). Since the state has not yet withered away in communist societies, the continuing strong identification of communism with state bureaucracies would seem to make "communalism" a more appropriate term in the case of stateless societies of the band type.

Few contributors adopt an explicitly Marxist approach in their papers, though most are mindful of historical processes and of the need to examine closely the nature of contradiction and inequality. In fact, a variety of perspectives is employed, and the volume benefits from this eclecticism. Briggs, for example, in her fascinating paper on the control of aggression among Canadian Inuit, employs a strongly psychological orientation. A similar topic is tackled by Turnbull, in his essay on Mbuti Pygmy conflict-management, in a way that is equally effective but very different from that of Briggs; Turnbull's richly textured piece is sociologically oriented. Several authors present findings that highlight the dominance of cultural factors over the seemingly irresistible force of ecological constraints on hunter-gatherer adaptations. Two well-argued papers that demonstrate ably the rewards of moving beyond ecological analysis are those of Wiessner on !Kung San exchange relationships and Blackburn on Okiek adaptations to their Kenyan environment and settled neighbors. Another example is Silberbauer's paper on consensus and decision-making among the G/wi of Botswana. Silberbauer offers an interesting summary of social scientific perspectives on power, but his data cry out for comparison with those on other hunter-gatherers, such as the Australian Aborigines and the !Kung San, with whom the G/wi share striking similarities in certain aspects of political process.

Taken as a whole, the seven papers in part 2 significantly add to our knowledge of the dynamics of forager-farmer relationships, and the strongest of them are particularly valuable for the insights they offer. Vierich shows how and why the Basarwa of the southern Kalahari Desert maintain an oscillatory adaptation that takes them in and out of predominantly foraging or farming-pastoralist modes. Many anthropologists in recent years have become increasingly convinced that this kind of switching was far more common among contiguous hunter-gatherer and farming peoples than was previously thought. Furthermore, as Vierich nicely shows, ecological factors offer only partial explanation for this oscillatory strategy. Hitchcock, who also worked with Basarwa, but further north, discusses the many variables that affect the shift from nomadic to sedentary ad-

aptation. Since so few scholars have paid close attention to this widespread and most significant transformation, Hitchcock's contribution is considerable. The paper by Morris in part 2 also deserves mention for his concise overview of some major theoretical issues pertaining to the study of band societies and because his is the only paper about hunter-gatherers in the Indian subcontinent.

Part 3, Contemporary Political Struggles, begins with a superb essay by Renato Rosaldo, intriguingly titled "Utter savages of scientific value." He analyzes reactions to the recent "discovery" of the Tasaday hunter-gatherers of Mindanao, which he sees as dramatizing the continuing weight of a colonial legacy—an ideological inheritance that accords greater value to such peoples merely as objects of "scientific" scrutiny than to their proven accomplishments as self-reliant foragers and their hidden skills as political actors. Rosaldo offers sobering examples from the early days of U.S. colonial administration of Philippine tribal peoples to highlight the uses and distortions of anthropological lore. He asserts, "Had Negritos not existed perhaps they would have been invented to define that marginal point [which is] beyond administration but perhaps invaluable for human knowledge" (p. 321). Rosaldo's paper effectively sets the scene for the remaining essays, since all in some way document the negativism with which nation-states have approached their hunter-gatherer minorities. Lee and Hurlich outline the tragic dimensions of the South African government's cynical exploitation of Bushmen in pursuit of its vital interests in Namibia. Those who have seen John Marshall's moving documentary "N!ai: the story of a !Kung woman" will be sadly reminded of it by this hard-hitting paper. Two excellent papers, by Asch on the Dene and by Feit on the James Bay Cree, draw on their authors' work among Canadian Indians to address the vitally important question—what forms of political response are possible, and usable, by band peoples living within powerful nation-states? Both authors show convincingly how local-level responses to outside pressures have been potent factors in determining the subsequent form that relations between minorities and national governments have taken. In these papers, too, thoughtful treatment is given to the role of anthropologists as agents in the struggles of the people with whom they work.

Recent economic and political developments among Australian Aborigines are the subject of the final three essays. Coombs, Dexter, and Hiatt describe the genesis and development of the outstation movement; Peterson summarizes the aftermath of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act of 1976 and the status of the land rights movement throughout the continent; and Vachon examines the rise of land rights among the Pitjantjara Aborigines. A paper by Hamilton earlier in the book provides a well-argued Marxian perspective on territorial organization on the eastern side of Australia's Western Desert and highlights the dominance of religious concerns in the structuring and operation of Aboriginal societies.

To conclude, this volume offers a solid and comprehensive summary of the state of the art in hunter-gatherer studies. My sole general criticism is that many authors seem not to have capitalized sufficiently on the insights gained from the Paris conference by incorporating more comparative material into their revised versions; some widely shared characteristics of fundamental importance remain unassailably part of our understanding of hunter-gatherer societies. More conferences about band societies are planned, and it is to be hoped that subsequent volumes are as successful as this one in achieving thematic coherence in the face of such geographical and topical variation. This book is no doubt already assured of a wide audience among anthropologists, but it warrants also the attention of other students of the human condition because, as the editors promise at the outset, it deals with a set of questions that are vital to our understanding of ourselves as human beings.

ROBERT TONKINSON
Department of Anthropology and Prehistory, Australian National University, Canberra

Public Opinion

Political Attitudes in America. Formation and Change. PAUL R. ABRAMSON. Freeman, San Francisco, 1983. xxvi, 354 pp., illus. Paper, $14.95.

In *Political Attitudes in America*, Paul Abramson attempts to pull together various lines of research he has been working on for the past several years. In this book he focuses primarily upon three related classes of political attitudes: (i) party identification, which refers to individuals' long-term levels of support for either the Democratic or the Republican party; (ii) political efficacy, which refers both to perceptions of how responsive those in power generally are to public demands and to individuals' perceptions of how effective they themselves would be in eliciting a satisfactory response from government officials; and (iii) political trust, which refers to perceptions of how honest, thrifty, and public-spirited government officials are.

Abramson's investigation of these various sets of attitudes proceeds in a methodical fashion. In each instance he begins by examining the process of attitude *formation*, analyzing data from a vast number of childhood socialization studies (survey interviews with schoolchildren) or, whenever possible, data from the famous Jennings-Niemi surveys of a national sample of high school students and their parents conducted at the time of students' graduation (1965) and several years later (1973). His primary concern here is to determine the degree to which children acquire various political attitudes from their parents and to assess how strongly individuals hold such attitudes at the time of their entrance into the electorate. Abramson then turns to the examination of attitude *change* among adult voters over the course of their lifetimes. The major empirical questions he attempts to answer here are the standard fare of cohort analysis: Do people tend to retain political attitudes they acquired during the formative years of their life? (For example, is the generation that grew up during the '60's still cynical and distrustful of political authority?) Or do attitudes change noticeably and predictably as people grow older? (For example, do people become more intense, partisan supporters of a political party as they grow older?) Or is it the case that certain important political events (such as Vietnam, Watergate, or the Civil Rights movement) fundamentally alter the political attitudes of Americans both young and old? As before, Abramson brings to bear on these questions a vast quantity of data from literally dozens of public opinion studies.

This book, like most of Abramson's previous work, exhibits a commendable sensitivity to a number of empirical issues. First of all, Abramson is continually concerned about the net, aggregate effects of changing patterns of political attitudes; he pays special attention to the dynamics of generational replacement, for example, the dying out of old, relatively Republican voters in the '30's and '40's and the entrance of young, relatively Democratic voters into the electorate. Second and most important, he is always careful to report the results of separate analyses (wherever this is possible) for