Towards a Broader View of Hunter-Gatherer Sharing

Edited by Noa Lavi & David E. Friesem
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With contributions by
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This monograph is a result of a conference we organized at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research at the University of Cambridge on ‘Sharing among hunter-gatherers’, which aimed to promote a wider notion of sharing. We are especially indebted to Nurit Bird-David and Peter Gardner for being our source of inspiration for the theme of this conference and for their endless support and encouragement along the road. We also thank Jerome Lewis who was extremely supportive and helpful in making the conference both attractive and successful.

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Noa Lavi & David E. Friesem,
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In a lecture about how children learn kinship terms in different societies, a linguist presented a short video showing an interaction between a two-year-old aboriginal child and his aunt while she was grilling a fish. The lecturer pointed out the kinship terms used by the aunt when referring to the child and how she encouraged the child to use a specific kinship term when referring to her. Following the lecture, in an informal discussion, a colleague of ours, a biological anthropologist, asked us whether we noticed how the video is showing from whom children learn basic social notions, emphasising the role of close kin in cultural transmission. As a social anthropologist (Lavi), I actually found this video to show a wonderful example of how children learn how to properly (indirectly) demand their share of food while respecting others’ personal autonomy. I pointed out that following the child’s request for the grilled fish, his aunt instructed him to ‘not say you want a fish, say you do not have a fish’. Once the child re-phrased his words, he was immediately given a part of the fish. However, as an archaeologist (Friesem) I was actually focusing on the materials used for grilling and cutting the fish and the residues left on the ground as markers for this activity.

The story above demonstrates how the same social interaction can be examined from different perspectives. It also suggests that disciplines often direct their members towards specific questions and specific perspectives. For this reason, multi-disciplinary approaches are encouraged within academia, allowing one to regard one’s object of study from many different perspectives. An effective way to do so, we feel, is simply be engaged in conversation with people from different disciplines who can view one’s data through a different prism and might suggest new and refreshing ways of thinking about it.

This book re-opens the discussion about the practice of sharing among foragers and other small-scale societies, rethinking this practice’s social importance, its place in constructing everyday life and social ethics and the conditions it requires. It offers a look at this central social notion in its broadest sense, regarding not only sharing of food (as was common in previous studies of the topic) but all kinds of sharing that comprise the everyday experience of foraging societies. As its title suggests, this book is about promoting a broader view of sharing by bringing together social and biological anthropologists and archaeologists who study past and present hunter-gatherers across the world. This cross-disciplinary integration yielded innovative and thrilling new theories, ideas and thoughts that help to shed light on this unique social trait and refine our understanding of the life of hunting and gathering communities in the past and present.

Why hunter-gatherers? Why sharing?

Hunting and gathering, or foraging, societies have been at the focus of anthropological and archaeological research since the early days of these disciplines. As suggested by the very name attributed to them, different communities were initially grouped together under this category primarily following economic aspects. Preceding the emergence of agriculture, around 11,000 years ago, all humans were considered to be hunting and gathering for subsistence. Hunting and gathering as the main subsistence economy is still practiced among a few communities around the world inhabiting diverse environments including deserts, rainforests and Arctic regions. And yet, this category
has long been debated by both anthropologists and archaeologists (e.g. Barnard 1983; Bird-David 1990; Ingold 2000; Schrire 1984; Schweitzer et al. 2000). The first question that comes to mind is how valid the category of hunter-gatherers is. Can we really use it to group together different societies living in diverse environments and under diverse social circumstances? Can we link between the present and the deep past, using contemporary hunter-gatherers as an analogy to understand the lives of those who lived a thousand and a million years ago? Last, how relevant is this narrow economic category in regard to such people today, considering that many, if not all, of those previously described as hunter-gatherers engage now in market economy, wage labour, agriculture or animal husbandry and gradually become active participants in nation state politics? While these questions are under constant examination and discussion, it has often been argued that there are unique similarities between these groups which override their differences, especially in comparison with their surrounding neighbours (e.g. Bird-David 1990). Moreover, many ethnographers highlight similarities in social notions, ethics and practices that are not only more central to people’s lives than any specific economic engagement, but are also often maintained even in cases where actual hunting and gathering subsided. Scholars working across the globe had emphasized the communities’ small scale, their high mobility, personal autonomy, egalitarianism and the practice of sharing as part of what they termed foragers’ ‘ethical framework’ (Endicott 2011), ontology (Bird-David 2008), or ‘foundational schemas’ (Hewlett et al. 2011).

Ethnographers have long since singled out the practice of sharing as having a significant role in the lives of hunting and gathering communities around the world (among many others, see Bird-David 1990, 1999, 2005; Fortier 2001; Gomes 2011 in Asia; Bodenhorn 1990, 2000; Collings et al. 1998; Wenzel 1995, 2000 in the Arctic; Hawkes et al. 2001; Kitanishi 2000, 2006; Lewis 2005; Widlok 2004, 2013, 2017; Woodburn 1998 in Africa; Musharbash & Barber 2011; Peterson 1993 in Australia; Kaplan 1984 in the Americas). As such, it attracted the attention of many scholars who stroved to understand its mechanism, reasons, implications and history. From an evolutionary perspective, hunter-gatherer sharing was often considered enigmatic as it was not clear why should an individual provide hunted or collected resources obtained through great effort to someone who has not helped to pay the cost and is not an immediate kin (Bliege Bird & Bird 1997). As a result, different models were suggested to explain this practice in terms of cost-benefit theories and risk reduction (e.g. Bliege Bird & Bird 1997; Blurton Jones 1987; Kaplan & Hill 1985; Hawkes 1991; Wood & Marlow 2013 to mention but a few). It has been suggested that due to the unpredictable availability of resources (e.g. hunted animals) and lack of storage, sharing provides a rational strategy, a sort of risk management bonding together the members of the group in a form of exchange and reciprocal relationships. Kaplan & Hill (1985) have shown that where large animals are shared, such sharing does indeed increase the nutritional well-being of the group as a whole, although not equally between all members. Blurton Jones (1984, 1987) offered a model he termed ‘tolerated theft’ to explain how the cost of not sharing resources among foragers is too high to pay due to the unpredictable nature of resources that often arrive in large quantities and are divided into smaller units. The use of the term theft in this model, however, was criticized as potentially misleading (as agreed by Blurton Jones himself, see Hawkes et al. 2014) because food is not perceived as private property among hunter-gatherer groups (Marlow 2010). In order to explain why foragers seem to prefer and invest significant effort in collecting large-sized resources under pressure to share, as opposed to obtaining smaller resources that could have been directed exclusively to their own families, Hawkes (1991) offered the ‘show-off hypothesis’, arguing that social reputation plays a significant role in the choices of resource acquisition and sharing behaviour (e.g. Hawkes 1991, 1993a; Hawkes & Bliege Bird 2002). Furthermore, it has been argued that competition, not necessarily over resources but for status gained through sharing, acts as an important spur to the economic productivity among humans (Hawkes et al. 2014). From an economic perspective, for many decades sharing has been understood through a market-derived theory of value, as a generalized form of reciprocity or as exchange (e.g. Sahlins 1972). In this sense, too, sharing has the potential to produce both prestige (of those who hunt and share more) and obligations (to share with those who shared with you).

In recent decades, the view of sharing as a generalized form of reciprocity has been debated by numerous social anthropologists who argued that sharing among foragers is not reciprocal and should not be taken as a form of exchange (e.g. Bird-David 2005; Peterson 1993; Widlok 2004, 2013, 2017; Woodburn 1998). Hunter-gatherers, it was argued, occasionally do store food, or have the ability to do so. Sharing does not always involve extraordinary quantities of meat that would otherwise be thrown away, and many foragers share ordinary food and items (Bird-David 1990, 1991; Widlok 2013, 12, 2017, 75; Woodburn 1998, 48). Additionally, in many groups, scholars showed that the hunter has very limited control over the dis-
tribution of meat. Meat is usually given to everyone present at the moment, regardless of their capacity for future giving. Meat cannot be directed by the hunter to past or potential future donors and likewise does not bind the recipient to reciprocate and thus does not allow future claims (Woodburn 1998). On the other hand, it was also argued that sharing should not be considered an act of generosity as it often follows demands by people who see themselves as entitled to receive a share (Peterson 1993). Such analysis of sharing emphasizes donor obligation and recipient entitlement without implying any obliging long term engagements, because the obligatory nature of the donation disconnects it from the right to receive (Peterson 1993; Widlok 2004, 63; Woodburn 1998, 49–50). In this regard, sharing can be read as a levelling mechanism meant to reduce material inequality (e.g. Woodburn 1980, 1982, 1998).

Various mechanisms and methods were reported among different groups showing how the hunter is systematically decoupled from the meat and the giver from the receiver. These include depreciating the share and the provider (e.g. Turnbull 1966, 183; Woodburn 1982, 440–1 about African Mbuti and Hadza respectively), not involving the hunter in the act of butchering (e.g. Woodburn 1998, 51, about the Hadza), regarding as giver others than the hunter (e.g. his wife; see Bodenhorn 2000 about Alaskan Inupiak; the owner of the dart, see Endicott 1988, 115–16, about Malaysian Batek), or attributing a dominant role in the division of shares to children (e.g. Bird-David 2017, 145, about South Indian Nayaka). Among some foraging societies, food is further detached from the person who hunted or gathered it as it is perceived as given to all the people by the environment or an environment-related being, such as the master of animals or the hunted animal itself (e.g. Bird-David 1990; Bodenhorn 2000b; Ingold 1996; Jackson 1995; Naveh 2007; Tanner 1979).

Although sharing is not the sole mode of resource transfer among foragers (e.g. Wiessner 1982 about *lxaro* exchange among the !Kung; Bird 1983, 78–9, about instantaneous payment for services by fellow Nayaka; Bodenhorn 2000, 31–2, about different ways of distribution of different kinds of prey among the Inupiaq; Woodburn 1998, regarding hunters’ entitlement to at least some of the meat among the Hadza), it is considered a dominant practice as it is closely linked to people’s sense of personhood and relatedness, deriving from and reinforcing social relations (e.g. Bird-David 1999, 2006; Endicott 1988; Gomes 2011; Kwok 2011; Myers 1986; Peterson 1993; Widlok 2017). Myers described sharing as one of the main social actions people are required to constantly perform in order to reaffirm kinship ties (Myers 1986, 104). Bird-David argued that by sharing, persons are ‘made’ relatives, and this in turn invites further sharing, which is required for the maintenance and generation of relatedness (Bird-David 1999, 73). Furthermore, it has been argued that the focus in sharing is not on dispersing property but on uniting people, expanding group boundaries and forming relatedness and a shared identity, a sort of extended self (Widlok 2013, 25; 2017, 20–4). Sharing not only shapes relations and affects the material culture, it also acts as a major factor in decision making, use of space and the formation of the dwelling environments (Bird-David 2009; Lavi & Bird-David 2014; Myers 1986; Friesem & Lavi 2017).

The notion of sharing, coupled with that of non-sharing, is therefore ever present in the everyday lives of foragers. This argument is strengthened by many contemporary cases that demonstrate the persistence of sharing long after actual hunting and gathering has been abandoned or relegated to a marginal economic activity due to recent changes in the environments and lifeways of those traditionally called hunter-gatherers (e.g. Bird 1983; Bodenhorn 2000; Collings et al. 1998; Gomes 2011; Hart 1978; Kitaniishi 2006; Musharbash & Barber 2011; Naveh 2007; Peterson 2013; Smith et al. 2010; Wenzel 2000; Widlok 2013).

Encouraged by the ethnographic observations on the role of sharing in the lives of contemporary hunter-gatherers, some archaeologists have tried to find evidence for sharing among prehistoric and early agrarian societies. However, being limited to the analysis of materials which are preserved in the archaeological record, only a few studies have discussed this issue directly (e.g. Bogaard et al. 2009; Enloe 2003; Parmalee & Klippel 1983; Speth 1990; Stiner et al. 2009). The main reason lies in the difficulty identifying in the archaeological record the social and ecological perceptions and behaviours that are associated with sharing and distinguishing them from other modes of food distribution (see more in Chapter 9 by Kelly et al.). It is therefore not surprising that most of the archaeological discussion about sharing relies on ethnoarchaeological studies (e.g. Kelly 1995; Yellen 1977, Binford 1984, to mention but a few) which aim to link between contemporary hunter-gatherers’ practices and the formation of specific patterns of material distribution that can later be used as a reference framework to interpret the archaeological record.

Among the few studies that argued for an evidence of hunter-gatherer sharing in the archaeological record is the work of Isaac (1978a, 1978b) that interpreted the distribution of stone tools and animal bones dated to about two million years ago in East Africa to evince meat sharing among early hominins.
Introduction

Bunn & Kroll (1986) used the frequencies of animal bones and cut marks found in Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, dating to 1.75 million years ago, to argue for systematic butchery of substantial quantities of meat and marrow resulting in sharing on a significant scale. However, both of the above studies from East Africa were criticized for presenting patterns that could have resulted from carnivore or scavenger activity and not necessarily from human behaviour (see comments in Bunn & Kroll 1986). Parmalee & Klippel (1983) examined the spatial distribution of carcasses in the Rhoads site in Illinois as an indication of economic interaction within a campsite, concluding that the distribution of deer carcasses was a result of sharing practices between individuals or families. Enloe (2003) analysed the spatial distribution of individual reindeer carcasses from the late Upper Palaeolithic site of Pincevent in France. He argued for clear evidence of food sharing by using carcass refitting which demonstrated that bones from the same carcass were transported to different households located at the same archaeological level. Stiner et al. (2009)reported a high abundance of randomly orientated cut marks on large game bones from Qesem Cave, a late Lower Palaeolithic site in Israel. They argue that meat distribution 400-200 thousand years ago may have been highly individualized, with little or no formal apportioning of meat. By comparing these patterns with bones from Middle and Upper Palaeolithic sites that present systematic cut marks, Stiner et al. (2009) suggest that important differences in the practical and social mechanics of meat-sharing appear between the late Lower Palaeolithic and later periods.

From the representative studies mentioned above it is clear that despite the great attention given to this significant practice, the examination of sharing among foragers by both archaeologists and anthropologists has been almost entirely directed to the distribution of food, particularly large game. There are various possible explanations for this particular focus. First, hunting (especially that of large game), being an impressive act, thought of as requiring both skill and talent, attracted more scholarly attention than lower key daily actions such as fruit picking, tuber digging or sitting around the fire. Additionally, it might be easier to spot evidence of sharing of large game in archaeological records, for example by examining the spatial distribution of animal bones (e.g. Bogaard et al. 2009; Bunn & Kroll 1986; Isaac 1978a, 1978b; Parmalee & Klippel 1983), refitting animal carcasses (e.g. Enloe 2003) or analysing patterns of cut marks made on bones (e.g. Stiner et al. 2009). Nevertheless, there are few archaeological accounts which could be read as evidence of what we might interpret as sharing of knowledge or other immaterial aspects (see the overviews provided by Tosteving and Honoré in this volume), but those were usually not framed by their authors in terms of sharing. Within anthropology, there are also a few rarer accounts describing the sharing of other non-edible material objects (e.g. see Widlok 2017, 114, about tobacco; Bird-David 1990; Wenzel 2000 about work tools; Peterson 1993 about money). Yet there are almost no papers that go beyond the sharing of material objects (whether edible or not) while making use of the terminology, mechanics and social rationality of sharing. One particular exception can be found in Bird-David’s description of the Nayaka she worked with as sharing not only things, but also actions, spaces and their very selves with each other (Bird-David 1999; 2009; 2017). Despite this absence of data, there are some cases that suggest that different types of sharing are likely connected and inter-dependent. For instance, some accounts showed that reduction in opportunities of being together with relatives (which can be viewed as sharing of selves, actions, time, etc.) results in reduction of sharing and is reflected in the local relationships (e.g. Kwok 2011, 165–6; Lavi 2018, 132–48). It seems of great importance to refer to this gap in the data. Studying sharing beyond game meat and even beyond any material aspect may open a window to new ideas about the practice of sharing, its working and significance among the people practising it.

About the book

This edited monograph emerged from a conference titled ‘SHARING: The Archaeology & Anthropology of Hunter-Gatherers’, held at The McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research at the University of Cambridge in September 2016. The aim of the conference was to bring together archaeologists, social anthropologists and biological and evolutionary anthropologists studying hunting and gathering societies in the past and present, with a particular focus on sharing as a central cultural pillar. Assembled together, leading scholars from different fields who famously engaged with the topic of sharing discussed sharing in its broader sense to include sharing of space, actions, knowledge, selves and identities. This fruitful discussion yielded innovative ideas and theories regarding various aspects of sharing.

As a result of the conference, this edited monograph brings a collection of papers that re-open and re-examine this well-studied concept of sharing among hunting and gathering societies in the past and present. It presents novel theories and offers new frameworks that re-shape the ways we should think
about and understand this central practice, its social implications and people’s daily life. Broadening the concept of sharing brought about engagements with fascinating new aspects of this practice (e.g. sharing of selves, space and time to be equally perceived and valued by people as sharing of food) as well as new perspectives about its more intangible aspects such as relatedness, sociality, values, identities and social, self and environmental perceptions. Involving scholars from diverse fields, the book provides inter-disciplinary perspectives for the study of hunting and gathering societies from the early Palaeolithic to modern times and in a wide range of geographic areas and contexts. Each chapter brings a different angle to examine the practice of sharing and its meaning and impact on everyday behaviour, the formation and maintenance of social relations, decision making, social identities, perceptions of self and the environment, patterns of use of space and material culture. In addition, the book’s chapters re-open the questions of the social conditions and realities that such practice creates and allows, and what conditions it requires, alongside the fine-tuning of its working.

A cross-disciplinary discussion between archaeologists and social, biological and evolutionary anthropologists such as the one offered in this book is surprisingly rare. This is mostly due to the difficulty and reluctance in associating contemporary foragers with Palaeolithic ones and tying between mundane ethnographic observations and evolutionary models. Yet, as the following chapters will show, while caution is indeed required in engaging in such mutual discussions, they nonetheless yield fascinating new questions and perspectives. In each chapter, writers were encouraged to consider the possible contributions of their theories to other disciplines and vice versa. The emergent ideas can advance our thinking toward both past and present societies. Sharing serves as a good common ground for such a cross-cultural discussion. Being first and foremost a practice, sharing can be more easily observed and studied through field observations and/or material culture. Thus, the focus on sharing, as a practice and a foundational social schema, can therefore aid to unravel social aspects of foraging societies, which are otherwise intangible to mere material analysis, without implying a direct analogy between the present and past.

Apart from the contribution to the academic audience and advancing our knowledge of the human past, this new discussion on sharing is highly relevant to the understanding of the contemporary realities of modern foragers. In today’s context, some of these communities are seen by their neighbours, developers and state agents as poor, lazy, irresponsible or lacking motivation to work to assume what non-foragers often call ‘well-being’. Some of the perspectives presented in this book may offer an alternative view, even contradicting that above, for the meanings, reasons and implications of common daily practices among foragers.

### Innovative perspectives of sharing: chapters outline

The first grand contribution of this book lies in a new in-depth discussion about the centrality of **intimacy, presence and shared-living** (Part I) in the practicing of sharing. Looking at those aspects reframes sharing not so much as a strict social rule or an official norm but more as a derivate of a specific way of life which allows it. In the opening chapter of this part Bird-David (Chapter 1) urges scholars of hunter-gatherer communities to address the importance of intimate living to the working of sharing by re-introducing the aspect of scale into the analysis of those called ‘small-scale/indigenous societies’. By examining five well-known studies of foragers’ sharing (Marshall 1962; Woodburn 1980; Bird-David 1990; Peterson 1993; Widlok 2013; 2017), she shows that the consideration of the scalar and kinship frameworks of hunter-gatherer sharing has been neglected in previous ethnographic writing. Bird-David argues for the necessity of training attention to scale and scaling (as a practice). Foragers’ tiny communities, she shows, are hyper-relational and hyper-perspectival. All members are interconnected kin; each is uniquely and multiply related to each of the others. She demonstrates how the small size of the group plays a central role in their concepts of community. Living closely together, sharing space, resources and living (in a sense even sharing themselves) is crucial in how these foragers understand and form relatives. Consequently, the smallness of the group and its kinship are critical to our understanding of all aspects of the forager world, and in particular for the context that allows sharing.

The second chapter by Widlok (Chapter 2) offers a new theoretical model of sharing which has a temporal, processual dimension, while not relying on the assumptions of behavioural ecology. He highlights the central place of **presence** in the practice of sharing. The pressure to share, he argues, is ‘felt’ through presence, co-residence and participation in each other’s lives. Re-thinking the terms through which we understand hunter-gatherers’ sharing, Widlok’s account suggests seeing it not in terms of moral **obligation** (as it is often viewed) but in terms of **opportunities**. Co-presence provides opportunities to request (from others), to respond (to others) and to let go (for others); without
them the practice of sharing does not take place. The temporality of sharing is due to the fact that sharing comes to an end when requests come to an end and when shared presence comes to an end (ranging from mere physical separation to its ultimate expression, death). One implication of this temporal aspect is explaining why sharing decreases when people are culturally less exposed to their own finiteness and to that of others, for instance as a result of ideologies that deflect and bracket out this finiteness.

In line with the theoretical considerations offered by the two opening chapters, Hewlett, Hudson, Boyette & Fouts (Chapter 3) engage with the centrality of close presence and shared lives from a different angle, offering an innovative approach by looking at sharing of space and its implications for the practice of sharing in general. Comparing the Aka hunter-gatherers to their Ngandu farming neighbours in Central African Republic, Hewlett et al. regard the sharing of space in four domains: settlements, houses, beds, and interpersonal interactions (touching). They show how the Aka’s spatial patterns are dictated by their desire to stay physically close to others. The intimate shared space during the day and night, the high frequency of touching, along with the sensitive care, provide a multi-modal (biological, psychological, cultural) environment in which to learn trust, empathy, and cultural models. These in turn help to contribute to other features of forager life, such as extensive sharing of food, childcare, and knowledge.

Spikins (Chapter 4) examines the significance of sharing and its evolutionary implications as part of intimate social and emotional relationships in the distant human past. She offers an explanation to understand the widespread care for illness, injury and impairment throughout the Palaeolithic, which at first does not seem to fit with a rational evolutionary sense due to its high cost and low pay. Spikins argues that the intimate life people shared led to complex evolved cognitive-emotional capacities in which people are inclined to give without necessarily receiving a direct return. Furthermore, the compassion and generosity involved in sharing an intimate life and care for others is suggested by Spikins to result in inclusion, support and appreciation of various skills and talents, which may also bring disadvantages and vulnerabilities (e.g. autism). Overall, the social, emotional and inclusive relationships people developed in their intimate communities may well explain the formation of human diversity as we recognize it today and its deep roots in human prehistory.

Sillander (Chapter 5) joins the authors of previous chapters in arguing that sharing is socially conditioned through aspirations for closeness. Studying Southeast Asian shifting cultivators and horticultural societies which lead a social life featuring abundant sharing, he suggests that a rigid economic explanation is insufficient to explain sharing. He focuses on several qualities of sociality: open aggregation, relatedness and inclusive classificatory kinship. Sillander argues that a performative social order involving social inde terminacy and small-scale societal demographic conditions compels sharing as a means for accessing social and material resources. Close social relations based on intimate practical association give rise to positive moral valuation of relatedness and sharing. Sillander revisits kinship as a central socially constituted force in hunter-gatherer and like societies, instrumental in legitimating demands in immediate sharing contexts and providing the underlying rationale for long-term personal sharing dispositions.

In the closing chapter for this part (Friesem & Lavi, Chapter 6), we attempt to frame hunter-gatherer sharing as echoed by previous chapters in this part of the monograph – to include the intimacy of living-together, shared social identity and co-presence – into a methodological approach towards the archaeological record. By drawing on our ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological work among the Nayaka, a South Indian forest-dweller society, we show how the practice of sharing selves, space, actions and things is expressed by people’s use of space in terms of site structure, the formation of activity areas and finally the deposition of activity residues. We discuss how sharing behaviour may result in specific patterns of material deposition and present a brief example for the application of this interpretative framework on archaeological case studies from the Ancient Near East and how it can help to study past social behaviour.

The second part of the book revolves around the role of sharing in the creation of senses of connectedness and joy and in turn, a particular sense of community, that extends beyond the horizons of the local group (Part II). Bridging between the first and second parts of the book, Lewis (Chapter 7) urges ethnographers to consider the value individuals place on positive emotional relationships and experiences as a central power behind the resilience of systems of sharing, particularly the sharing of rare and non-local items. Surveying three different systems for sharing non-local products across three African groups (the massana ritual performances among the BaYaka, San xaro gift-giving, and Hadza gambling), he shows that despite structural differences, the motor that drives all three systems is the desire for joy, companionship and intimacy. These motivations, referred to by Lewis as pleasure-seeking, work to move valued items over
hundreds of kilometres and distribute them surprisingly evenly across groups. They also establish a sense of connection and cultural community beyond the immediate camp—constituting an extended sense of ‘us’, of a society. The extended community and members, who would otherwise be unknowable, are made present through those systems which bring their products to communities throughout the cultural area.

Like Lewis, Honoré (Chapter 8) turns to examine ritual (dance) performance, this time from an archaeological point of view augmented by her own discussion of the notion of group identity and contact. Examining rock art from the Libyan Desert massifs dating to 9000-7000 years ago, Honoré offers an intriguing case study of the immaterial aspects of sharing in archaeology. She argues that sharing of dance performances has been a more cohesive form of sharing than subsistence-related shares amongst the Late Stone Age hunter-gatherer groups in North-Eastern Africa. The images presented in the chapter show that while people were depicted similarly when illustrating the performance of ritual dances, they were individualized in other group activities like hunting. Honoré suggests that the social importance of painting such performances and shared moments lies in the formation of social memories and identities, whose definition could differ depending on the activity performed. Group identity was therefore formed by sharing the image of the group performing the dance no less than in sharing the performance of the dance itself. Thus, rock art was used as a means of sharing a certain idea of the group not only within the group but ultimately also beyond, with any onlooker.

In an exceptional integration between ethnography and archaeology, Osborn & Hitchcock (Chapter 9) explore the relations between body adornment, information sharing, and environmental uncertainty. They combine ethnographic data from the Ju’hoan people in the Kalahari Desert of Southern Africa regarding their xaro system and an exceptional archaeological record of beads from the American Great Plains dating back to AD 1280–1300. They show how beads as body adornment can be used for signalling social identity that would facilitate social interaction and sharing of information between foragers, cultivators and pastoralists. Osborn and Hitchcock suggest that environmental conditions, and in particular mega-droughts, resulted in groups shifting from local, kin-based societies that relied upon social recognition for sharing information to regionally extensive populations that made use of quality signals to enhance inter-group social interaction. They conclude that gift-giving and receiving and information sharing was especially important during periods of environmental stress, and that social and material exchanges and signalling represented key means of coping with uncertainty.

The chapter by Kelly, Pelton & Robinson (Chapter 10) follows the previous chapters by offering an important discussion on the differences in the observational scales of archaeology and ethnography. They suggest that archaeology’s coarse-grained observational scale is not a weakness but a strength in understanding the conditions and primary factors under which hunter-gatherers share food, land, and information within a broad chronological perspective. Their argument is then demonstrated by an overview of Wyoming’s prehistory, through its 11,000 years, using a large database of radiocarbon dates, settlement patterns and provenance of obsidian tools and the distance they travelled. Kelly et al. present a synthesis for the transition in hunter-gatherers’ sharing of food, land and information, not only within the group but mostly between groups, as means to cope with changes in the availability of foods, changes that were jointly linked to both climate and human population density and brought significant transitions in the social interactions and sharing between groups.

Regarding contact not only beyond the local group but also beyond human partners, Barkai (Chapter 11) engages in a stimulating discussion offering a new perspective to interpret the origins of sharing and how it was affected by the relations between early humans and elephants. He suggests that meat sharing could have emerged already two million years ago due to the preference for hunting elephants and the enormous quantities and qualities of fat and meat provided by a single elephant. As opposed to other hunted game, the surplus of elephant meat could have initiated sharing as a means to resolve this dissonance. Supported by ethnographic studies regarding hunter-gatherer perception of personhood and co-living with non-human beings, Barkai offers a novel interpretation for the extensive use of inedible elephant parts as tools, pendants and figurines, suggesting they indicate human respect for the hunted elephant as part of sharing existence in-the-world with non-human beings. According to Barkai, the special relationships of humans with elephants may well have led to the subsequent assimilation and adoption of the practice of sharing in other realms of life.

The third part of the book turns to look at learning and sharing (and non-sharing) of knowledge (Part III). Boyette & Lew-Levy (Chapter 12) open this part by not only examining the way knowledge is shared and transmitted, but by looking at the social background of people’s learning to share. They present the underlying cultural models which motivate sharing among Aka foragers and Ngandu farmers in
their respective cultural contexts. They look at early life experiences as key in shaping motivations and imparting the foundational schema of sharing, which persists throughout childhood and into adulthood. Both Aka and Ngandu, they show, rank sharing highly among the things that are most important for a child to learn, and thus actively socialize children to sharing. Yet, sharing practices are tempered by different core cultural values in each of the two compared groups, which in turn shape distinct beliefs and practices surrounding sharing. Sharing norms are more highly conserved among the Ngandu, for whom social relationships are strictly governed by foundational schemas of hierarchy, communalism, and a material basis to social relationships. Conversely, while Aka motivate unconditional sharing, their foundational schema of respect for autonomy suggests more acceptance of variability in sharing patterns even when it comes to not sharing.

Gardner’s account (Chapter 13) on sharing of knowledge reflects similar ideas about the importance of autonomy in shaping the process of learning and knowledge acquisition. Gardner regards the topic of sharing from a new perspective by highlighting foragers’ limited sharing of knowledge, particularly in regard to descriptive knowledge. He argues that we overestimate the amount of knowledge to be acquired and transmitted, the centrality of oral tradition and the need for uniformity for a culture to function effectively. Focusing particularly on South Indian Paliyan and American Subarctic Dene, Gardner examines how learning takes place, how they handle cognitive diversity and how claims to knowledge are established. In both cases, he shows the primary shared value that one must respect all others and refrain from hampering their autonomy (including that of children) is of key importance in this regard. Wishing to avoid violating autonomy, people refrain from excessive talk and particularly from direct explanations and requests for explanations. Knowledge therefore derives mainly through observation and personal experience. While this results in considerable interpersonal variation in how people frame and express what they know, none is considered wrong or correct. As Gardner shows, these are social systems in which high cognitive diversity is acceptable, which deny the existence of experts, and avoid generalizations and attempts to establish uniformity.

Following the ethnographic perspectives about sharing of knowledge, Tostevin (Chapter 14) provides an archaeological overview on sharing of knowledge, focusing on flint-knapping and production of stone tools in prehistory. By looking at archaeological evidence, experiments and cultural transmission theory, he offers a processual discussion of what can and cannot be shared in relation to flint-knapping knowledge. According to Tostevin, as opposed to other types of skills and performances, the nature of flint-knapping, characterized by rapid blows to stone cores that produce flakes, is so fast in its execution that learning the bodily performance with anything akin to accuracy through observations alone is difficult and unlikely. He argues that flint-knapping knowledge can therefore only be shared as a performance that is followed by the observers practicing the motions, through abundant repetitions, in order to replicate that incommunicable knowledge within themselves. In line with the papers in Part I of the book, he suggests that sharing of space and time are therefore crucial to allow such sharing of knowledge. Tostevin concludes that the nature of sharing lithic technology knowledge among foragers may present greater variability in the archaeological record than from the sharing of other intangible bodies of knowledge, such as ideas and beliefs.

The last part of the book looks at the practice of sharing in contemporary contexts of ample social, economic and environmental changes (Part IV). It raises questions that are asked by many who study foragers today, when most if not all are practicing new and diverse modes of subsistence (e.g. farming, wage labour, etc.) and many skills, customs and rites are forsaken. In this context, where the very identity of these groups as hunter-gatherers is often questioned, an in-depth examination of the practice of sharing allows questions of foundational social notions, cultural resilience, change and continuity to be addresses.

Quintal-Marineau & Wenzel (Chapter 15) examine contemporary mixed economy and mixed food systems that have become the reality of many Arctic Inuit communities, who combine country and store-bought foods, hunting and gathering and wage labour. In their paper, they challenge the traditional focus on men in the literature on Inuit subsistence practices. Studying how money has affected the normative sharing system, they show that contemporary economic transformations have in fact expanded the contribution of women within the traditional subsistence system. Money became an important resource in wild food acquisition due to the need to acquire expensive hunting equipment. Yet money is accessed today mainly by women who engage in permanent, full-time wage labour. Men continue to be the main providers of country foods, but the time required for hunting challenges their long-term engagement with wage employment. Sharing their income with active hunter-kinspersons, women become important money providers to men,
providing the critical support required for hunting. This works not only to maintain the cultural norms of subsistence but also makes women key actors in the mixed economy, with gender (and gender relations) becoming a visible dimension of contemporary Inuit sharing relations and subsistence.

Turning to the other side of the world, Artemova (Chapter 16) offers to re-think what seems like profound changes in the lives of Aboriginal Australians today, as well as the common question regarding why those communities do not get out of what the Anglo-Australian call poverty. She shows that although indigenous Australians seem to have abandoned many of their traditions, if we closely observe their actions and choices it is clear that they still retain the ideology and practice of sharing – the obligation to give what is requested, and the expectation that things will be procured with the help of others. Artemova highlights an important notion that often evades our attention, the tendency towards a mini-
mization of effort. Such a tendency means that people do not try to maximize utility or efficiency. Once the immediate needs are satisfied, any additional effort to obtain more is perceived as useless. This perspective provides an important alternative interpretation for many behaviours observed today, such as the lack of interest in accumulating wealth, permanent jobs and personal belonging, the popularity of gambling (in which people are ‘hunting for money’) and the continuity of sharing through which money is quickly spent and things change hands, get broken down rapidly and are thrown away. The objective scarcity of resources, she shows, is not perceived as poverty by the indigenous people themselves. This is the key to the continuation of their communal life and preserving personal integrity. The social risk of reducing sharing to achieve what white people call wealth or well-being cannot be overestimated.

The closing chapter by Tucker (Chapter 17) examines a case of contemporary low rates of food sharing among the Mikea foragers of Madagascar, addressing the argument that their lack of sharing testifies that they are not genuine hunter-gatherers. Opposing this view, Tucker argues that the very definition of what hunter-gatherers are is an invention of European thought. Mikea, he claims, should be considered hunter-gatherers since they perceive themselves as such, in distinction to their agro-pas-
toral neighbours. Mikea do have a sharing ethos, but there would seem to be conflicting norms of generosity and property. Tucker offers three alternative possible explanations. The first is that due to Mikea’s agro-pastoral ancestry, they treat food as clan prop-
erty; second, consistent with the tolerated scroung-
ing model, self-interested foragers are unlikely to share small and synchronously acquired foods; and third, social norms of generosity and property have changed due to market involvement and poverty. As Mikea have been increasingly drawn into the market economy, they may have shifted to thinking of foods and communal property as commodities and private property, changing from generalized to balanced reciprocity. While each explanation might not provide sufficient evidence, Tucker proposes that they should be considered simultaneously to offer a valid explanation for the question of Mikea sharing.

Concluding remarks

This edited monograph offers innovative perspectives into a broadened view of sharing among foragers that includes tangible and intangible forms, as a practice, a social notion and an experience which holds mean-
ings far beyond the mere distribution of meat and material goods. Integrating different contexts and perspectives, the authors in this book demonstrate how hunting and gathering people apply similar per-
ceptions, values and mechanics for sharing of space, actions, land, knowledge, time, self and identity, as previously highlighted by scholars mostly for meat sharing. Broadening the view of sharing therefore advances us to better understand its significance among the people who practice it. In addition, the exceptional integration between archaeologists and social, biological and evolutionary anthropologists offered by this edited volume expands the under-
standing of what is socially required for sharing, its development, what it allows in return and its implica-
tions not only for foraging societies, but for the social evolution of humanity as well. This cross-disciplinary volume raises an insightful discussion on the evolu-
tion and social complexity of non-agrarian societies in general and provides new tools and ideas to explore the complexity and diversity in the social world of past and contemporary foraging societies. Without implying that contemporary hunter-gatherers are a relic of prehistoric societies, the new concepts and understandings of sharing that emerge from this book provide a multi-layered framework which can be applied in contemporary ethno-graphic contexts, as well as in archaeological sites, aiding in unravelling intangible aspects of the hunter-gatherer world and lifeways and in testing similarities and differences between past and present. Last, a broader and more holistic view of contemporary foragers may aid in better understanding their perceptions and actions in a world of increasing modern interventions, attempts at assimilation and conflicts.
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