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## Equality as a human categorical imperative

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**Abstract.** The author assumes that aspiration for equality represents one of the most ancient achievements of human cultures. A pursuit of justice and desire to eradicate root causes of conflicts must have stimulated an empirical search for various means of restraining dominant individuals or groups as well as elaboration of various modes of behavior intended to eliminate competition and put all individuals or groups concerned in equal positions. Those strategies have been familiar to members of quite different societies, including modern urban ones, but they have been mostly used temporally and only in specific social settings. However, in some hunter-gatherer societies studied ethnographically, people always tended to consciously follow such strategies. At the same time, a number of hunter-gatherer cultures described in ethnographies were able to build up effective mechanisms of social differentiation. Egalitarian or non-egalitarian relations of hunters and gatherers studied ethnographically cannot be extrapolated to the past ages of Europe or any other part of the world, but it should be admitted that Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic hunters were able to develop both egalitarian and non-egalitarian social systems. The author argues that achievement of social equality may have been possible only as an outcome of persistent long-term efforts of many generations of determined people. She also suggests that, in order to under-

**Артёмова О. Ю. Равенство как категорический императив.** Автор предполагает, что стремление к равенству является одним из древнейших достижений человечества. Представления о справедливости и желание элиминировать коренные причины конфликтов должны были стимулировать эмпирические поиски всевозможных способов сдерживания индивидуальных или групповых проявлений доминирования, а также породить стратегии поведения, направленные на нивелирование соперничества и соревнования, на выравнивание индивидуальных и групповых статусов. Такие стратегии известны представителям самых разных культур, включая современные городские. Но, как правило, они применялись и применяются только временно и только в определённых социальных контекстах. Однако в некоторых охотничье-собираТЕЛЬСКИХ обществах, изучавшихся этнографически, люди стремились следовать подобным стратегиям всегда. В то же время этнографии известны общества с присваивающей экономикой, которые развили эффективные системы социальной дифференциации. Эгалитарные и неэгалитарные социальные системы охотников и собирателей, описанные этнографами, не могут быть прямолинейно спроецированы в древнейшие времена, но следует предположить, что верхнепалеолитические и мезолитические

stand how people came to complexity, productive economies, states, and civilizations, academic researchers would need to assume that the start must have been a non-egalitarian one, and that the initial forms of inequality must have been principally dissimilar from those which were observed ethnographically among the later non-egalitarian hunter-gatherers including the so-called 'complex' ones. The paper is intended to stimulate awareness of our preconceptions about human social evolution and to challenge the orthodoxy of an essentially egalitarian start of human history.

**Keywords:** hunter-gatherer societies, equality, inequality, egalitarianism, ethnography, archeology, social evolution, egalitarian and non-egalitarian social systems.

охотники также могли создавать эгалитарные и неэгалитарные формы социальных отношений. Автор настаивает на том, что максимальная приближенность к идеалам социального равенства возможна только как результат целенаправленных и многопоколенных усилий людей. Автор также считает, что для понимания того, как древние общества пришли к культурной сложности, производящему хозяйству, государствам и цивилизациям, исследователям следует предположить, что у истоков подобных процессов были неэгалитарные социальные отношения, причем такие их формы, которые принципиально отличались от форм социального неравенства охотников и собирателей, изучавшихся этнографически, включая специализированные иерархически организованные их системы. В статье ставятся под сомнение некоторые устоявшиеся представления о ранних этапах социальной эволюции, в частности — об эгалитарном старте истории человечества.

**Ключевые слова:** общества охотников и собирателей, равенство, неравенство, эгалитаризм, этнография, археология, социальная эволюция, эгалитарные и неэгалитарные социальные системы.

There was no fear, no terror,  
Man had no rival.

*Enmerkar and the Lord of Arratta*<sup>1</sup>

He had debts remitted and made all hands clear... for seven days  
the slave woman was allowed to become equal to her mistress  
and the slave was allowed to walk side by side with his master...  
He silenced the evil-speaking tongue and locked up evil.

*The building of Ningirsu's temple* (Gudea, cylinders A & B)<sup>2</sup>

## What does 'egalitarianism', or 'equality', mean?

Perhaps, it would be good to begin this paper by reiterating Marina Butovskaya's statement (this volume) that 'no multi-male/multi-female egalitarian primate societies exist, except our own species', and Bill Finlayson's suggestion that it is 'important to define what is meant by egalitarianism' (likewise, this volume).

<sup>1</sup> A Sumerian epic poem reflecting perceptions of the Golden Age (Kramer 1963: 262).

<sup>2</sup> Gudea cylinders are a pair of terracotta cylinders dating to ca. 2125 BC, on which a Sumerian myth called "The Building of Ningursu's Temple" is written in cuneiform (The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature).

Elsewhere (e. g. Artemova 2016: 14), I have argued that the term *egalitarian society* should be only used in its direct sense — that is, referring to a society in which all the people have equal access to all material and spiritual values of their culture and where — contrary to Orwell's famous aphorisms — one cannot be more equal than another. We cannot speak of more or less egalitarian societies or social systems, for egalitarianism has no degrees of comparison; it is inequality that has those.

However, we have to agree with Bill Finlayson when he writes that 'there has never been a society that entirely lacked inequality or dominance'. Even within the societies that ethnologists conventionally call 'egalitarian' (such as those of the Hadza, Zu/'hoansi, G/wi, G//ana, Nharo, Batek, and many others), there did exist slightly expressed differences in social prestige and access to at least some material and spiritual values (i. e. between more or less influential individuals, between men and women, or between elders and youngsters) (e. g. Blurten Jones, Hawkes, O'Connell 2006: 177, *passim*; Gunter 1986: 204–205; Marshall 1976: 176–177; Woodburn 1979: 253–254, 256).

Why then do word combinations such as 'extremely egalitarian', 'more egalitarian', 'maximum egalitarianism' (Townsend 2018), or 'robustly egalitarian' (Wengrow, Graeber 2018:12) seem to be counterintuitive and generate almost unconscious rejection? Is it because equality, or egalitarianism, is more an idea created by the human mind than a form of human social organization that has ever existed, a 'perfectly pure and abstract thing similar to algebraic sign' (Mozhegov 2013) and also a moral hope, an aspiration for a state of affairs that is highly desirable but that has never actually been experienced?

If so, then it becomes understandable why, in the mythologies of many peoples, a picture of a Golden Age that involves the equality of all humans is taken into a Distant Past. Highly educated intellectuals, philosophers, and academic scholars are also humans; and possibly for the same reason (albeit partially), many of them, since the Age of Enlightenment (or even Antiquity) until our times, have been inclined to imagine an essentially egalitarian start of human history, or at least to assume egalitarian social relations as a universal evolutionary stage in the early history of Humanity — ranging from the 'Nobel Savage' through Marxist 'Primitive Communism' to the 'Egalitarian Syndrome' and 'inherent inequity aversion' of some modern sociobiologists and evolutionary anthropologists (e. g. Boehm 1999; Gavrillets 2012; Whiten, Erdal 2012). The notion of Primitive Communism — especially popular in the Soviet epoch among us, Russian ethnologists — is for sure akin to a mythological mode of thinking and anchored in the ideological aspiration for a future Communism on a global scale. If it was possible in the past, it will be possible in the future. The same, perhaps, could be attributed to the feminist way of reasoning according to a strange logic in which gender equality, or even matriarchy at the beginning of human history, might be seen as a recipe for the forthcoming equality of sexes, or even female dominance in the entire world.

However, against all the odds, we must admit that an aspiration for equality — even if it is not or was not explicitly articulated verbally — represents one of the most ancient achievements of human cultures. It appears very early in written sources coming from different parts of the world, and it had probably emerged long before literacy was created and spread. Egalitarianism seems to be, first of all, a product of a very complicated interweaving of emotional, social-psychological, intellectual, and ideological phenomena which, we can assume, must have arisen, not once but many times in different societies and different parts of the Oikumena, in social contexts of more or

less pronounced inequity. This is in line with the evidence of contemporary primatology and human ethology, supporting the assumption that inequality is inherent in human nature (e. g. Butovskaya, this volume).

The conscious or unconscious pursuit of justice and the informed desire to eradicate root causes of conflicts must have stimulated an empirical search (both in the way of method and process of trial and error) for various means of restraining despotic leaders and other dominant individuals or groups (e. g. 'reverse dominance hierarchy'; see: Boehm 1993; 1999) as well as various modes of behavior and various rules of communication intended to eliminate competition and put all the individuals or groups concerned in equal positions.

It appears that in all stratified societies or, more broadly, in societies with institutionalized inequality — during some periods and in some circumstances, or in some temporally created associations, or in some special social milieu — people have used modes of behavior and rules of communication of the kind that help to level out statuses and opportunities (e. g. Tutorsky, this volume). We all know and have experienced how various tools of social leveling work. David Wengrow and David Graeber, in the article entitled *Farewell to the 'Childhood of Man'* (conveying the sense that we should not imagine our distant prehistorical human ancestors as less mature — intellectually or emotionally — than ourselves), argue that those tools may have been invented, elaborated, and consciously used very early in the evolution of humanity (2015; 2018). It appears that they are right.

If we attempt to define and summarize the essence or scope of such leveling rules and behavioral strategies, we will see that they are mostly easy to understand and approve, but difficult to fulfill or follow. Perhaps, it is not by accident that their verbalization would often involve negative requirement — *not to do something* (as if people prescribed for themselves not doing things that they used to do or want to do). For example: do not provoke envy, irritation, hurt feelings, anger, and so forth. Do not possess the things that others do not possess. If you are blessed with some qualities that are perceived in your social milieu as talents or beauty or unusual energy, or if you have gained some unique skills or knowledge, you should not openly demonstrate that, or show any pride in that. It is also not allowed to publicly admire someone's success or advantages, to impose secrecy on any socially important information, to organize closed corporations with restricted membership, etc. Those, and similar strategies and rules, have been familiar to members of quite different societies, including modern urban ones, but they have been mostly used in specific temporal and social settings. However, as we know, many ethnographies tell us about hunter-gatherer societies in which people always tended or at least tried to consciously and scrupulously follow such rules and strategies<sup>3</sup>. As a result, they managed to come very close to the ideals of egalitarianism.

### Egalitarian societies

Peter Gardner wrote about the Paliyar of Southern Tamil Nadu: 'Readers who have browsed in the social philosophy of earlier centuries may, at this point, remember Lao Tzu's 'primal virtue', William Godwin's prescription for 'political justice' or Herbert

<sup>3</sup> Out of here comes the allusion to Kant's categorical imperative used in the title of this paper: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law' ("Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals" [1785]).

Spencer's 'first principle'. Each of these thinkers advanced as his central idea, the notion that people should live virtuously, avoid disrespect, coercion, or domination in social relations. Can one really live that way? Actually, Paliyans showed the author that one can' (2006: 33); and James Woodburn wrote that with the Hadza of Northern Tanzania: 'Equality is what matters and the threat of inequality is of more concern than the threat of hunger' (1998: 50).

Ethnographies as well as theoretical publications discussing the so-called leveling strategies of some foraging peoples are very popular among social anthropologists and archaeologists, and they are numerous. It is impossible to list them all, but here are some: Biesele 1999: 208; Boehm 1993; 1999; 2012; Cashdan 1980; Gardner 1966; 2012; Endicott 1981; 1988; Lee 1979: 245–248; Marshall 1976: 194–195; Silberbauer 1982; Tanaka, Sugawara 1999: 198; Turnbull 1965; Wiessner 1996; 2002; Woodburn 1979; 1980; 1982; 1998. For all the cultural diversity of various types of forager's equality — which has been stressed in scholarly literature more than once (e. g. Wiessner 2002: 233 and passim; Widlok 2019: 26–27, 29) — we can definitely emphasize very important features that all such cultures have in common: their egalitarianism is grounded in 'a political ideology, backed by sanctions positive and negative' (Woodburn 1998: 50), in strong and elaborated moral values that shape people's behavior in day-to-day interactions, in regularly and persistently trained behavioral patterns and skills, and 'habits and habitualization' subtly developed over time (Gardner 2012: 93; Widlok 2019: 29, 31, 36). 'To emphasize the active nature of maintaining' egalitarian social systems, Woodburn 'labeled them *assertively egalitarian*' (1982). Such groups actively fashion their worlds in similar ways that ensure that normal differences between people are not culturally converted into differences in status, authority, or rank' (Lewis 2019: 101).

For the most part, these peoples, having for hundreds of years contact with horticulturists, agriculturalists, or herders, have persistently preserved and protected their egalitarian values, habits, and customs, regarding them as 'more proper', 'more reasonable', or 'more moral' (e. g. Gardner 1985: 411–432; Silberbauer 2006: 64), or even 'more human', than the customs and behavioral patterns of their neighbors, and clearly defining their preferences in conversations with anthropologists as well as in judgments and sayings common in their midst. Thus, Jerome Lewis evidences that the Mbendjole (one of the Ba Yaka groups in the western part of Central Africa) 'consider the status and property-obsessed Bilo village people in their region to be reborn as 'gorillas' because, like gorillas, they do not share on demand, they fight for status, power and authority between themselves, and make aggressive efforts to claim parts of the forest, in this case their fields, as their own exclusive property. In normal speech Bilo are simply referred to as 'gorillas' (*ebobo*) because of this. Europeans are called 'red river hogs' (*bangwia*) due to their extraordinary accumulation of wealth (fat) despite sharing the same forest as everyone else' (Lewis 2019: 100).

It is revealing that typical egalitarian values and guidelines that are frequently described in ethnographies vividly manifest themselves in how people belonging to foragers' cultures deal with the things that come to them from the outside. Here is but one example from Gardner's article on the Paliyar. In the early 1960s, he witnessed people in one of their groups playing a game locally popular among Tamils: 'competition in games is ruled out. Though the Paliyans have borrowed the game of prisoner's base from their neighbors, complete with the verbalized 'rules', the real rules, which are taken for granted and actually followed, are quite different. By the Paliyans' actual rules, both the elements of cooperation and competition are ruled out; the game be-

comes, in effect, a ballet with as many prima donnas as participants. No one catches anyone else and, in fact, no player expresses much interest in another's performance' (1966: 394).

No less impressive are the relations of people committed to equality with their gods and spirits, and with a 'transcendental reality' as a whole. Typically, those beings, as well as a 'sub-natural' world associated with them, are believed to be friendly or neutral with respect to humans. Thus, Walter Skeat and Charles Blagden wrote in the beginning of the last century about the nearly complete absence of 'demon-worship' among the Semang of the Malay Peninsula (1906: 174–175). Kirk Endicott evidenced the same about the Batek in his book on their religion (1979): 'The Batek do not generally believe, as the rural Malays do, that the environment is thickly populated with evil spirits (*Malay huntu*) which must be continuously avoided, combated, or propitiated. The absence of such a belief is one reason for paucity of ritual in Batek life.' However, Endicott noted that the Batek did fear the 'ghosts of the deceased', and that Skeat and Blagden were 'misleading' when they denied this for all the Negrito peoples of Malaya, although he strongly emphasized that 'superhuman beings' of the Batek were mostly 'considered to be thoroughly benevolent' (Endicott 1979: 23). That was because they saw their gods in the mirror of their culture.

It is remarkable that, according to Roy Grinker's testimony, the Lese, Bantu-speaking people of the Ituri Forest, believed that their Efe-Pygmy neighbors had powers to counteract sorcery or witchcraft, as well as to neutralize evil spirits. The Efe were seen by the Lese as protectors from demons, and often one of them would be invited to a Lese village when there was a need to identify a witch or determine a source of magical threat. Even more than that: some Lese individuals sought to establish quasi-kin relations with some Efe individuals in order to have a sort of live talismans — to put, so to say, a protection from malignant charms on a regular basis (Grinker 1994: 189–193).

### Phenomena closely interlinked

As mentioned earlier, cultures usually regarded as egalitarian were quite diverse in a variety of aspects, and some of them were closer, figuratively speaking, to the ideals of equality than others. Tentatively, we could delineate, using the data from relevant ethnographies, a sort of continuum between, say, the Zu/'hoansi of South Africa with their slight but still obvious differences in gender status and the Palyiar of South India whose traditional social life was described by Peter Gardner and Christian Norström (2003) as absolutely deprived of any disparity in people's positions within social structure, where even children and adults appeared to have equal statuses and equal rights to make up their own minds.

However variant, egalitarian values and behavioral stereotypes in such societies (at least in those known to me) did in some complex way correlate with, or were linked or even chained to, a number of rather specific phenomena of structural nature. These correlations, of course, have drawn anthropologists' attention on many an occasion. They were also discussed in detail, with appropriate references to source materials, in my own book published in Russian (Artemova 2009). Still, a brief mention of them seems to be needed with respect to the purpose of this paper. Apart from various rules and behavioral practices aimed at the elimination of conflicts, they are:

1. The norms regulating relations between sexes and governing marriages that are tolerant to individual preferences and needs. Polygyny or polyandry are allowed,



but not widely practiced and not regarded as prestigious forms of matrimony. Getting out of a marriage is easy. People can choose spouses at their discretion; at any rate, the wishes of the prospective parties are taken into account by the organizers of matrimonial alliances. A range of a person's acceptable partners is limited only by demographic factors and by the standard exclusion of the closest kin. This, in turn, correlates with the Eskimo or generational types of kinship nomenclatures which do not prescribe that a person must marry somebody from a predefined pool of partners and do not outline quite a wide circle of unacceptable partners, as for example the Iroquois kinship systems do.

2. Simple, not prolonged, initiation rites for the young (very similar for both sexes), or even the absence of such. Sometimes, the term 'initiation rites' is mistakenly, as it appears, applied to puberty rituals merely intended to celebrate the first signs of a girl's or boy's biological maturation (Tendryakova 1992a; 1992b).
3. The absence, or near absence, of secret religious cults and groups or events with restricted membership. Often, there is an absence of beliefs in sorcery; and if they are present, they do not represent a source of permanent fear.
4. The sanctions following various breaches of social norms that are of a predominantly moral kind. As a rule, no person or group has a formal right, acknowledged within a community, to control the behavior of others and punish them in the case of misconduct.
5. Lack of competition. It is deliberately ruled out.

There are some issues, though, that seem to be less clear and need separate treatment in different ethnographic cases. One is about leadership. As Gardner evidences, the Paliyar not only lack leaders, but no one among them holds a position of authority; furthermore, they usually ignore the fact that some people have better knowledge or skills than others. To demonstrate special abilities means to demonstrate a disrespect to the people around. 'Disrespect, then, is a breach of equality, and it hurts'. 'Any show of expertise stands to offend all who witness it. To have experts is to create the possibility of dependence' (Gardner 2000: 101; 2012: 90–91; 2019: 186). However, there are some indications pointing to the presence of formal or informal leaders among other Indian hunter-gatherers, the Birhor for instance (Sinha 1972), or some Bushmen and Pygmy peoples (*e. g.* Barnard 1992: 139–140; Ichikawa 1999: 212). Occasionally, these may be the 'headmen' introduced from the outside and functioning as mediators between their own folk and state administrations or neighboring farmers or herders; and occasionally, these may be the individuals who are not vested with any institutionalized authority but whom people voluntarily follow in the need of wise suggestions and decisive actions. Overall, nonetheless, Gardner's definition of 'a smoothly functioning anarchy in the original Greek sense' — 'lacking a head' but being far from 'anarchic in the more recent sense of being 'chaotic' (2012: 87) — seems still to apply to the social life of all the peoples under consideration.

Much has been written about 'individualistic' behavioral stereotypes and moral attitudes characteristic of interpersonal relations, or about the 'atomistic' internal structure of such societies (*e. g.* Rubel, Kupferer 1968; Gardner 1966; 2000; 2012; 2014; 2019; Maslow, Honigmann 1970; Norström 2003; Ivanov *et al.* 2011). Gardner in particular consistently uses the adjective 'individualistic' — almost synonymously with 'egalitarian' — though making reservations that this does not mean the lack of traditional forager's sharing or human 'warmth' in personal interactions (*e. g.* 2012: 87). In his 1966 and later articles, he opposed 'individualistic' societies (such as the Mbuty, Hadza, Zu/'hoansi *etc.*) to 'collectivist' ones (such as the Australian Aboriginal or many of

the American Indian ones). Such a dichotomy is perhaps inappropriate, not only because of the perpetual and intense sharing in so called individualistic societies, but because of the constant cooperation in hunting and gathering activities within them, because of the use of communal plots of land and natural resources by related groups of people, as well as the common ritual activities and many forms of mutual help practiced among the people included in wide networks of kin relations (e. g. Norström 2003: 227–231). However, the evidence of many other observers goes along with Gardner's in that egalitarian social values are chained to what could be called relatively diluted or flimsy social milieu, and relatively weak bonds between people in residential groups (compare this to the Australian Aboriginal data, for instance). This, in turn, is chained to a very high level of autonomy which is often perceived by Western scholars as a pattern of real personal freedom and spiritual comfort that one could only ever dream of (fig. 1).

How and why did it happen that such an attractive style of social life appeared on Earth? Great minds have sought to understand this. The limitations of a journal paper preclude discussing the various complicated explanations that have been published over many years. It can only be roughly outlined that those explanations have mostly appealed either to the inherent essence of human nature that some hunter-gatherers have preserved until our times, or to the various situational adaptive needs which forced peacefulness and harmony of social relations in the conditions of harsh environments, or hostile attitudes of surrounding alien ethnic groups (encapsulation), or to both simultaneously.

These and other similar styles of reasoning seem to be somewhat odd, or at least reductionist, as if history as a whole, and numerous ethnographies in particular, were not punctuated by the evidence as to how powerfully human cultures are able to







*Fig. 1. Hadza, Tanzania, vicinity of Lake Eyasi and the Gofari village (photos by Michail Drambian, 2006): a — hunter by the name of Nerero talks about a successful morning hunt. The carcasses of dik-diks hanging from the tree; b — father and daughter; c — old man lighting his selfmade pipe. His headwear is absolutely unique; d — old woman and a young man. A fragment of antelope's hollow horn containing a remedy against snake or spider venom tied to his arm; e — grandmother and granddaughter*

*Рис. 1. Хадза, Танзания, окрестности озера Эяси и деревни Гофари (фото М. Драмбяна, 2006): a — охотник по имени Нереро рассказывает об успешной охоте. На ветвях дерева висят тушки антилоп дикдики; b — отец и дочь; c — старик раскуривает свою самодельную трубку. Его головной убор абсолютно уникален; d — пожилая женщина и молодой мужчина, к руке которого привязан фрагмент полого рога антилопы со снадобьем от укусов ядовитых змей или пауков; e — бабушка и внучка*

transform human nature; or as if human societies were organisms reacting predominantly to external stimuli rather than associations of intellectually and emotionally mature people capable of making choices and cooperating in pursuit of what seems to be good for them and their offspring.

### **The ratio of egalitarian to non-egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies**

In the quite challenging and even provocative article entitled '*How to Change the Course of Human History (at Least, the Part That's Already Happened)*', while aiming to overturn the contemporary academic understanding of social evolution on the global scale, Wengrow and Graeber (2018) reject a common opinion that truly egalitarian social relations could only be created in small-scale societies. On the contrary, Wengrow and Graeber assert that 'egalitarian cities, even regional confederacies, are historically quite commonplace', and that 'the first cities were often robustly egalitarian'. They refer to the 'more established heartlands of urbanisation' — Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley — where 'cities with sophisticated civic infrastructures flourished for over half a millennium with no trace of royal burials or monuments, no standing armies or other means of large-scale coercion, nor any hint of direct bureaucratic control over most citizen's lives' (2018: 12).

These statements seem to be controversial. According to such logic, any ruin of a soldiers' barrack could represent a pattern of egalitarian relations among its former inhabitants, although we know that systems of military subordination usually constitute a quintessence of inequality.

Not all forms of social inequality, not even those related to the difference in economic positions of people, leave an archaeological footprint. Thus, some groups of Siberian mobile hunter-gatherer peoples (for instance, the Nganasans, Evens, Evenks, Nivkhs) demonstrated obvious signs of inequality in wealth among their members (e. g. Bakhrushin 1925: 90; Popov 1984: chapter 1; Lindenau 1983: 68, 72; Tugolukov 1970: 230–231; Schternberg 1905: 116, 119, 122). These peoples also had elaborated ideas about richness and poverty which were reflected in their languages. But, most likely, those forms of inequality are beyond the reach of archeology.

As Kenneth Ames wrote, archeologists generally take the absence of evidence of permanent inequality for the evidence of egalitarianism. Thus, archeology of egalitarianism is based on negative evidence (2010b: 35; see also Ames 2010a) where egalitarianism turns out to be the 'assumed default human social state' (see Finlayson, this volume). However, ethnographies and histories show quite diverse forms of social inequality; some of those may have foundations in the realm of material production, some outside it. For example, the data from a number of hunter-gatherers, Indigenous Australians in particular, show how social inequality may have been — to a very considerable extent — rooted in spheres of activity pertaining to ideology. Such forms of inequality could, and very often did, exist without any material paraphernalia that would leave archaeological evidence, although the signs of elaborate ritual practices and complicated religious ideas, which are represented at some Upper Paleolithic sites, might be the indirect indication of similar forms of inequality.

Lastly, I can find no example of a society with a high demographic profile that really succeeded in achieving an egalitarian social organization, even if it had developed a coherent program for radical social transformation and made a great effort to

implement it (as happened, for instance, in Russia after the Revolution of 1917). It can be assumed that 'face to face relations' intrinsic to small-scale societies are key to a faithful implementation of norms and values of egalitarianism.

It once seemed to me that egalitarian societies had probably never been numerous at any given time in human history or prehistory (e. g. Artemova 2016). But I started to doubt this, having read Lewis' 2019 paper and having reread Gardner's 2014 paper. Gardner wrote: 'Many colleagues were astonished when Hitchcock and Biesele cited an as-yet unpublished report by D. Venkatesan that 1.3 million present and recent hunter-gatherers live in mainland India — fully 25% of the world total... That would mean that India is home to five times as many hunter-gatherers as North America and the circumpolar region combined, over four times as many as Australia, and approximately three times as many as Africa' (Gardner 2014: 243).

All Indian hunters and gatherers described in ethnographies seem to be egalitarian, while American and Australian ones mostly non-egalitarian (at least in the sense that is invested in both terms here).

According to Lewis, 'The greatest number of contemporary and former hunter-gatherers in the world live in the forests of the Congo Basin and estimates of their overall numbers range from 220,000 (Bahuchet 2014: 8) to a possible 900,000 (Oliveiro *et al.* 2016; Lewis 2019: 99). We can add here the Bushmen of South Africa, as well as hunters and gatherers of the Southeast Asia described as egalitarian in relevant literature, and thus assume that the egalitarian hunter-gatherers studied ethnographically were more numerous than non-egalitarian ones. However, I am not sure that this kind of calculation — quite rough indeed — might have crucial importance in reconciling egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies in their ratio to the non-egalitarian ones at any time. Maybe, it would be more heuristic to count 'cultures' or 'societies' as such, but not people. However, we cannot do this because both 'cultures' and 'societies' are conventional academic notions rather than discrete countable units. So, it is probably better not to 'give the palm of primacy to anyone'.

### On some forms of social inequality

Elsewhere (e. g. Artemova 2009; 2016; 2019), I attempted to present a concentrated discussion of what I consider to be one of the most widespread types of social inequity. One crucial aspect of the latter is related to the phenomenon I chose to call *the monopolisation of special knowledge and occupations* (mostly dealing with ideology) by certain social groups. I argued that that phenomenon *per se* was a powerful force that shaped social inequality in many societies with quite different modes of subsistence and social-political systems. Supporting evidence with appropriate references was drawn from ethnographic records of pre-colonial Indigenous Australian Aboriginal and, to a considerably lesser extent, Fuegian hunter-gatherers. Both cultures, in economic terms, conformed to Woodburn's model of immediate-return systems and thus demonstrated that a society which had powerful mechanisms preventing accumulation of wealth by individuals or groups was able, nevertheless, to also build up effective mechanisms of social differentiation. I reasoned that in both cases the 'monopolization of information as a source of social inequality' functioned in its pure, so to speak, form; that is to say, not only did no economic reasons for the development of inequality exist in the traditional context, but there even were not any materialistic or mercenary issues 'confusing the picture'.

However, Nicolas Peterson (see this volume), referring particularly to my 2016 publication, has showed that among Australian Aborigines of the pre-colonial time, the situation was more complicated and that 'underlying economic interests' were 'at work in the system', although 'the role of religious knowledge was central'. Being grateful for and wholly in agreement with the elaboration and revision he has suggested, I will briefly reiterate below some general points related to the religious knowledge and ritual activities of the Indigenous Australians (as this seems to be important in the context of the present paper), and will try to provide some additional considerations about the economic aspects of Aboriginal inequality.

Australian Aboriginal societies can only be described as hierarchal. Nicolas Peterson supports this. Evidently, this system was more developed in certain northern and southeastern parts of the continent where population density was relatively high, and less developed in arid central regions having very low population densities. A significant element of this system was the initiation rite whereby special secret/sacred knowledge was imparted to individuals and groups. Initiation rites divided people into several status categories. Only men that had passed at least the primary stages of initiation rites and had absorbed some esoteric knowledge related to religious cults gained authority over women and adolescents. The 'elders' were men who had passed all stages of an initiation and were widely knowledgeable in religious life. However, particular aspects of religious knowledge were reserved for particular types of religious leaders. 'Professional' magicians, sorcerers, and 'native doctors' also acquired special esoteric information. These status differences were sometimes *marked symbolically*. The higher ranks were allowed to bear special *names* or a sort of title, and to wear special decorations, ornaments, *etc.* Religious knowledge too was multi-layered, some layers were accessible to everybody, while many were reserved for those belonging to specific status categories. The secrecy of esoteric knowledge was guarded by numerous elaborate taboos and prescriptions, a violation of which incurred punishment. Mechanisms of status differentiation mentioned above affected most of gender relationships.

It is very important that this system appears to be in some complex way linked or chained to several other phenomena of structural and regular nature:

1. Norms that regulated relations between sexes and governed marriages were not tolerant at all to individual preferences; this especially concerned women and young men, for their opportunities to choose spouses at their own discretion were heavily constrained by a number of circumstances and rules<sup>4</sup>. Polygyny was widespread among the senior men and was regarded as prestigious and desirable by all men. Polyandry appears to have been unknown. Getting out of a marriage was not difficult for men but very difficult for women. A range of any individual's — regardless of sex, age, or personal status — acceptable partners was considerably limited by numerous restrictions which were in many cases linked to several types of the Iroquois kinship systems with prescriptions as to whom a person has the right to marry and delimitations marking wide circles of people unacceptable as marriage partners. Peterson has vividly highlighted all of this in his paper in this volume.
2. Sanctions in cases of misconduct (especially if connected with sacral and marriage rules) were quite severe and often involved violence, occasionally even death carried out by people with acknowledged authority to do that.

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<sup>4</sup> Middle aged women, and certainly those past child bearing age, had more say in their later remarriage. Because of the age difference between spouses a woman was likely to have 2-4 husbands in a lifetime (e.g. Rose 1960).

3. Revenge for any damage or harm done to a person or a group constituted the main substance of the traditional Aboriginal categorical imperative; and elaborate rules existed regulating how, and in what circumstances, people would retaliate, as well as whose aid could or should be used therein. The higher the status of the injured party, the weightier the payback (for the same kind of harm, that is; see Hiatt 1965; McKnight 2005; Strehlow 1970; Warner 1958).
4. High level of institutionalised aggression and quite elaborated, “culturally shaped” conflict and fighting.
5. Very elaborated, time-and-energy-consuming ritual activities on the part of men, especially elders.
6. Very versatile, sophisticated, devious beliefs in sorcery and sorcerers; horrible, bone-chilling black-magic folklore — oral traditions of various genres, which in painstaking detail described countless means of magically making harm to a human being or killing someone (fig. 2).
7. The phenomenon that could be conventionally called thickness or solidity of social milieu. This applies with particular poignancy to men tightly knit by joint ritual and fighting activity (so called male bonding; see Tiger 2004).
8. Social environments and cultures that appreciated and encouraged personal achievements in various spheres of activities.

Against a backdrop of all these peculiarities (and many others which are impossible to even list here), the social life in Aboriginal associations was far from being ‘a smoothly functioning anarchy’, though; as Peterson has convincingly showed in his review of relevant discussions among anthropologists, there were no acknowledged rulers or governing institutions in pre-colonial Australia. All decisions were made and executed by people who were particularly affected or interested in something and by their closest kin or collaborators (in ritual activity), according to complicated and versatile rules which not infrequently contradicted each other and individual ideas about what would be fair in this or that case. Formal leaders, perhaps, were exclusively the executors of religious activities, but observers’ testimonies abound with indications that some of the religious leaders had an ability to influence to a considerable extent the daily life of people around them. The same applies to medicine men and outstanding warriors.

Although my arguments related to the egalitarian societies draw exclusively on published ethnographies, I had a chance to spend some time among the Indigenous Australians in a number of their communities (mostly in Aurukun, Cape York Peninsula, which is inhabited predominantly by Wik-Munkan-speaking people, during several field trips in 2005–15), in which certain features of their traditional culture are still well-preserved (fig. 3–7). A few personal observations are due in this regard.

There is a regular formal leadership there, which emerged in the post-colonial context, and there are very influential people with no formal authority or titles, whom other people willingly and spontaneously follow either out of great respect (for their remarkable intelligence or strong will) or, not quite willingly, out of great fear (in view of suspected sorcery skills or well-known fighting abilities). This informal leadership seems to be a traditionally rooted one, though, with an important new aspect — a number of such leaders are actually women. They are indeed very influential in the Aboriginal social network.

It is common among the anthropologists writing about the Australian Aborigines to stress personal autonomy or individual freedom as a value heavily favored in their traditional cultures (e. g. Peterson, this volume). The same has been pointed out by



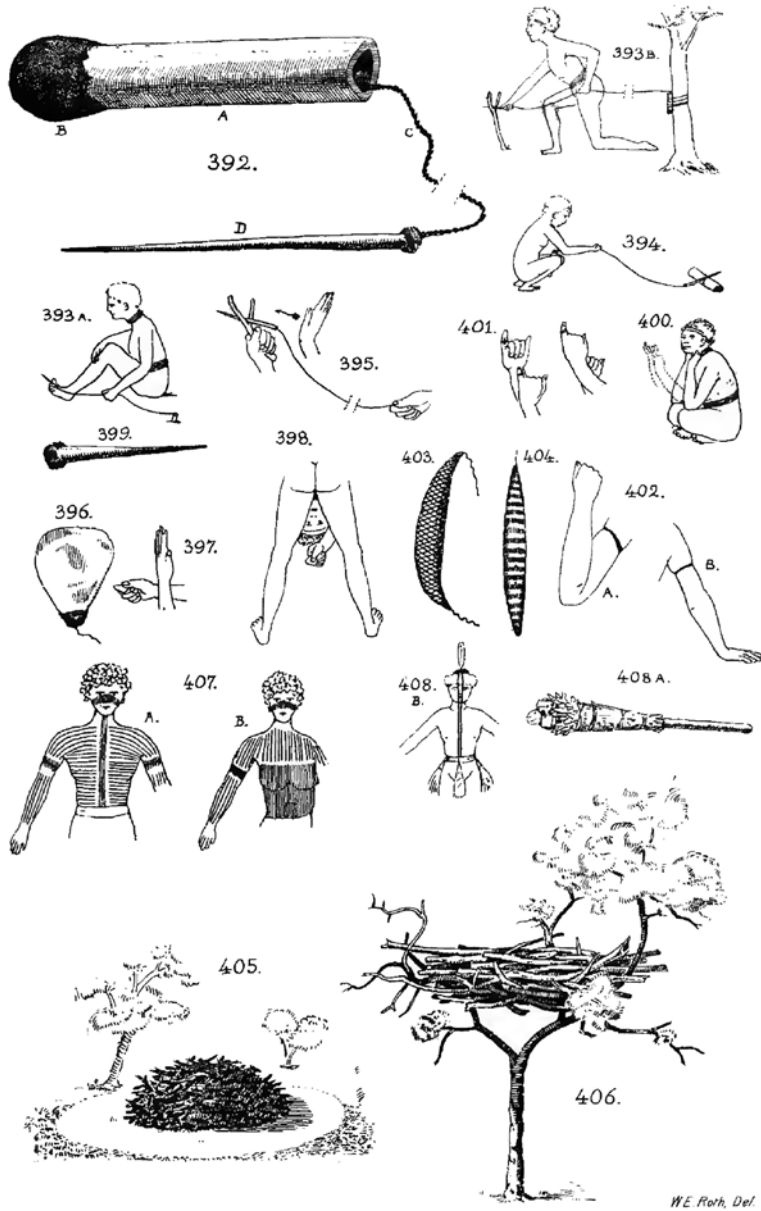


Fig. 2. Various Australian Aboriginal devices and techniques for inflicting sickness, disease and accident. Exhaustive explanations given by Walter Roth are not quoted here as it could be unsafe for the author of the present paper. No. 407 shows types of mourning body-painting, No. 405 and 406 show kinds of burials, North-West-Central Queensland (after Roth 1897, plate xxiii)

Рис. 2. Различные приспособления и техники, используемые аборигенами Австралии для причинения вреда и насылания болезней. Подробные объяснения, приводимые Уолтером Ротом, здесь не воспроизводятся, так как это может быть небезопасно для автора настоящей статьи. № 407 — типы траурной раскраски, № 405 и 406 — виды погребений, северо-запад Центрального Квинсленда (по: Roth 1897, plate xxiii)



*Fig. 3. Children of Aurukun, Cape York, Australia, 2009 (photo by Vladimir Klyaus)*  
*Рис. 3. Дети Аурукуна. Австралия, Кейп-Йорк, 2009 (фото Владимира Кляуса)*

some experts who conducted field studies among the Wik people (personal communication with David Martin and John von Sturmer, among others). Now, this appears to be ambiguous. Perhaps, an Aboriginal person is not obliged to tell a spouse (or mother, father, aunt, *etc.*) why the last night was not spent among the family or what amount of money was squandered in gambling, or where she or he is going right now, or when they should be expected back, and so on. Possibly, this might be perceived as 'real freedom' by a representative of a European (for example, Russian) culture who is considerably constrained in movements and actions at work and at home. But how can one reconcile the ideals of personal autonomy with the perennial fears of 'supernatural' intrusion and the unending secrets that are obligatory for some to keep and potentially malignant for others? or else with the duty to retaliate for injures and participate in armed avenging campaigns launched by various relatives, which still happen quite frequently, as well as with the constant 'pressure of sharing' which, likewise, is still the case in many Aboriginal communities (Peterson's expression, 2013; see also Peterson 1993)? Interestingly, while Peterson wrote about the 'pressure of sharing' among the Indigenous Australians, Lewis wrote about the



*Fig. 4. Nice catch. Milingimbi Island, Australia, 2010 (photo by the author)*  
*Рис. 4. Хороший улов. Милингимби, Австралия, 2010 (фото автора)*





*Fig. 5. Johannes (Hannes) Poonkamelya with a Pikkuw (crocodile) carving. Aurukun, 2015 (photo by Vladimir Klyaus)*

*Рис. 5. Йоханнес (Ханнес) Пункамелиа, изготавливающий деревянную скульптуру крокодила (Пиккувы). Аурукун, 2015 (фото Владимира Кляуса)*



*Fig. 6. The memorial ceremony at Aurukun, 2005 (photo by Charles Warker)*

*Рис. 6. Мемориальная церемония в Аурукуне, 2005 (фото Чарльза Уоркера)*



*Fig. 7. Rosina Pootchemunka with the fruits collected in the forest near Aurukun, 2015 (photo by Vladimir Klyaus)*

*Рис. 7. Розина Путчеманка с фруктами, собранными в лесу близ Аурукунa, 2015 (фото Владимира Кляуса)*

‘pleasure of sharing’ among the Ba Yaka people (2019). Perhaps it was no accident. Different hunter-gatherer societies must have developed different styles of sharing (e. g. Widlok 2019).

### **‘Enough is as good as a feast’**

Peterson clearly outlined the significance of polygynous marriages with respect to the Aboriginal type of inequality as well as economic aspects of polygyny and status differences among men of different ages. That was a quite complicated but, in a sense, balanced system, with many components mutually interlinked and intricately adjusted to each other. This complexity obscures, it seems, a relationship between ‘causes’ and ‘effects’. At least, it brings to mind the metaphor of the chicken and the egg — that is, the question whether it was the economic factors that caused the monopolization of sacred knowledge by senior men or it was the monopolization of knowledge — providing high status and prestige due to dealing with or through



a powerful mystery — that helped senior men to acquire several wives as well as gain control over younger men and women and some other benefits of the material kind. Perhaps, though, I had better avoid going into deeper detail here, for I am very well aware of the extent that Peterson's experience in Aboriginal studies is richer than my own.

Another point has to do with the absence of inherited individual privileges in pre-colonial Aboriginal life. One more consideration may probably be added to the very sophisticated interplay of age differences between husbands and wives, sons and fathers, as highlighted by Peterson: the impression is, if we are to rely on numerous ethnographic surveys, that for all their authority Aboriginal men of 'high degree' possessed nothing (belonging exclusively to them as individuals) that they could transfer to inheritors personally<sup>5</sup>; indeed if they had, they would have been able to transfer their personal assets connected with the sacred to their nephews, sisters' sons, and we would have had a matrilineal succession among them. But it appears, however, that the sacred knowledge obtained by a man during his life course must have been a collective or corporate asset of associations or networks which included quite a number of people.

Yet another point is that, normally, Aboriginal men (as well as women) did not acquire any material stuff during their lifetime, apart from small amounts of items needed in their daily routine (often, those were destroyed after the owner's death, in the mystical fear of ghosts of the dead), and the society as a whole not only lacked any 'mechanisms for the accumulation of wealth by individuals or families', but it also lacked the aspiration for wealth or material comfort or pursuit of economic prosperity as a cultural value. At least, it looks so, judging from multiple ethnographies, and my personal observations support this. Furthermore, it seems that Aboriginal cultures did not even develop any ideological concepts of richness and poverty. For example, the dictionary of Wik-Munkan language contains nothing resembling words with these meanings (Kilham *et al.* 1986). Some hunter-gatherer cultures (Siberian ones, for instance), on the other hand, did develop both ideas about richness and poverty, and the relevant lexicon.

Even today, having lost many of their ancient skills and customs as well as some of the most important rites, such as initiation of youths or totemic increase rituals, the Wik people have retained to a great extent their traditional attitudes towards material possessions. They have further transferred these attitudes to money. They are not particularly interested in it. They are not interested in clothing or decorations (not only men but women too); they are not used to dress up and flaunt, and mirrors have not become mandatory objects of utility among them. It is rare to encounter an Aboriginal man or woman with a big burden in a street of a settlement. Mostly, people walk literally empty-handed, moving leisurely, slightly waving their arms. When going to visit relatives who live in a town 600 km away, he or she would board a plane also empty-handed or, maybe, just carrying a small purse.

People in Aurukun and other settlements visited by the author usually do not think ahead about what they will have for breakfast or dinner but procure food (from a shop if they have money, or from their relatives or anyone else if not) when they feel hunger. They do not show much interest in food and do not discuss its gustatory qualities.

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<sup>5</sup> In central Australia, according to Peterson, men did accumulate sacred boards which they often kept in caves or crevices, sometimes near an important sacred site. No censuses appear to have been made of any man's collection of boards but his impression from working with Warlpiri men in the 1970s is that ten would have been the maximum that any individual had. Most would have had fewer (Peterson, personal communication).

Nowadays, many of them use the Internet and post photos or small videos on Facebook: these are not pictures of meatballs or cakes, but rather pictures of ceremonial dances or street fights or hand-to-hand combats which in the last years became popular among young girls (for unclear reasons).

A typical Aboriginal house is almost empty, although there could be a television set and good musical equipment, sometimes a computer. Many people, especially young ones, have electronic notebooks and mobile phones or smartphones, although their carrier account balances tend to be perennially exhausted.

When people obtain some money — as welfare payments, personal earnings or gambling winnings — they mostly buy things that promise fun and exciting hang-outs, but usually they do not take much care even about quite expensive items, things constantly change hands, get broken down quickly and thrown away. They also treat money in a similar way. Sometimes, thousands of dollars (for example, compensations that the Australian Government pays to those who had experienced hard childhood in the missionary times) are spent in a matter of days. But it would be imprudent to think that the Wik people did not learn — during more than a hundred years of post-colonial life — how to handle or count money; it is rather that they do not attach much value or much attention to it. When strong motivations for saving money or obtaining it in considerable amounts arise, the Wik people often manage quite well. The most telling example of this in Aurukun is the death of a relative, which motivates people to save large sums of money and start storing food and various things in huge amounts. Funerals, complicated mourning rites and mourning feasts, which are attended by numerous people, are carried out assiduously and this entails substantial material investments on the part of families of the deceased. A relatively new trend is the installation of expensive natural stone monuments or tombs ornamented with totemic symbols; such monuments do require considerable financial means.

It would seem that people living in the Aboriginal communities cannot get out of what Anglo-Australians call poverty, not only because of their objective circumstances, but also because of the lack of motivation — in individuals and families — for achieving what the whites, again, call wealth or well-being. However, not even the 'objective scarcity of resources (finances, fuel, equipment and so forth)' (Martin, Martin 2016: 213) is perceived as poverty by these people. At any rate, I personally have never heard any of my Aboriginal interlocutors call themselves poor (despite the fact that many of them speak English quite well).

As Marshall Sahlins wrote many years ago, 'Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status' (1972). 'In a society that highly appreciates material wealth and prosperity', — we could add to that. Because the Aboriginal traditional societies did not. This is why I am still inclined to speak of economic equality as the typical feature of traditional social relations in them and as their 'glorious cultural heritage'<sup>6</sup> (cf. Testart 1988: 13).

Peterson has emphasized that the status disparity in Aboriginal societies was not hereditary and that this determined certain 'aspects of egalitarianism' in pre-colonial life. These aspects of egalitarianism appear to be a sort of 'involuntary eventuality' of inequality between people of opposite sexes and different ages as well as of complicated rules regulating marriages, rather than a result of people's deliberate

<sup>6</sup> It cannot be ruled out that the Aborigines might lose this heritage in the near future, though; at least, in 2015, I detected some signs of such a possibility, which had not been the case in 2005 (cf. Peterson 2016).

and conscious efforts. Maybe, the aspects of egalitarianism that we call here 'economic equality' were some kind of involuntary eventuality of demand sharing which created mechanisms that considerably reduced or even nullified the motivation of individuals, families, and groups for accumulating wealth, as well as mechanisms that constantly reduced or lowered (in social and psychological contexts) the costs of material assets or material objects. However, these aspects of egalitarianism could be also an involuntary eventuality of conscious human moderation. 'Enough is as good as a feast', an English proverb says; 'He will always be a slave who does not know how to live upon a little' (Horace). Perhaps, the Indigenous Australians did not strive to achieve equality as, for example, the Paliyar did; but they strived to achieve freedom of swag. A very important aspect of freedom, indeed.

### **In the name of 'want for more'**

It was not before I spent some time among the Indigenous Australians in their own communities that I started thinking about the origins of farming — namely of the kind of farming that led the humanity to civilization, urban life, as well as to very elaborate and diverse forms of social inequality. Being among the Wik people, looking at their everyday social interactions and individual behavior, speaking with them about their life, I could not help feeling and thinking that their social values and aspirations, as well as very persistent behavior stereotypes and habits were absolutely contrary to those that a successful productive economy would need. It was precisely because of these phenomena, briefly outlined above, that Roger Cribb (an archaeologist who had introduced me to the Wik people) spoke about the contemporary Wik as 'absolutely tribal people', despite the fact that they had nearly abandoned hunting and gathering and turned to sedentary life in modern houses, with cars, *etc.*

The social-psychological and ideological characteristics typical of the Wik cultural traditions (often associated with the concepts of 'moral economy' and 'demand sharing' in hunter-gatherer studies; *e. g.* Peterson 2005; Peterson, Taylor 2003; Woodburn 1998; Widlok *et al.* 2017) should, it appears, have prevented any possibility for a cardinal breakthrough in economic activities, not only in a transition to the agricultural mode of subsistence and corresponding lifestyles, but also to the so-called intensification<sup>7</sup> of hunter-gatherer economy, a representative example of which is frequently seen by scholars in the Indian societies of the Northwest Coast of Northern America.

If the ancestors of the people who were the first in the world to take the path of intensive productive economy indeed had, originally, all those norms of social relations and behavior that are related to the notion of moral economy and specific foragers' forms of sharing, what needed to have happened to these ancient people in order for them to break these norms and stereotypes? Or had there been, for a long time before the Neolithic, quite different social relations and values? The latter assumption seems to be more likely.

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<sup>7</sup> There are archaeological data that allow some scholars to assume that in separate areas of South-East Australia the processes of 'intensification of economic activity' must have taken place during certain periods of the Aboriginal history (*e.g.* Lourandos 1997). As Smith (1999: 327) wrote, 'It seems, Australian hunter-gatherer societies moved toward a different social and economic mode in some parts of the continent in the postglacial period but it was not a unilinear process nor was it continuous or uniform across the continent'. Nothing of the kind, as far as I know, was observed among the traditionally oriented Aborigines.

Nobody has proved that hunter-gatherers who have been studied ethnographically, including the so-called 'complex' ones, were moving (very slowly, with great delay) in the same directions as the ancient Southwest Asian, East Asian, or Mesoamerican 'complex' hunter-gatherers and early farmers. On the contrary, more and more evidence tempts us to assume that the former, or, rather, the ancestors of the former, were following their own evolutionary paths, very diverse and complicated indeed, and that their contemporary cultures are derivatives of alternative ways and directions of historical development (with regard to productive economy, state, and civilization). So, we have to agree with the statement that there are perhaps no ethnographical analogies to Natufian (Finlayson *et al.* 2011).

Nevertheless, ethnographic data may be very important for the elaboration of archaeological theory, but only provided that at least partly these data would be used in a style that could be called *contradictio in contrarium*. This means that if modern hunter-gatherers had some peculiarities in their social relations — peculiarities that encouraged their 'non-Natufian' or 'anti-Natufian' ways of evolution and, roughly speaking, encouraged them to stay foragers almost until nowadays — then these peculiarities could also encourage archaeologists to search for evidence of specific reverse peculiarities of social relations that might lead to the Natufian way of evolution.

For example, we could refer to the so-called complex hunter-gatherers of the Northwest of Northern America, such as the Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw). Ethnographies, including those of Franz Boas (1966), tend to describe people (mostly, the elite) for whom the acquisition and accumulation of material wealth served predominantly, or even exclusively, as a sort of driving force for scaling up and strengthening their status, prestige, or political power and prevailing in their struggle against rivals. Russian scholars call this type of activity *the economy of prestige* or *prestigious economy* (I have not encountered these terms in English scholarly literature). For quite a long time, it has been widely assumed that the economy of prestige was, figuratively speaking, a universal rung of the evolutionary ladder and that it led to a really intensive productive economy (e. g. Hayden 2014). But this seems doubtful when we examine the numerous and extremely impressive facts that show just how low the real costs (in the social-psychological or ideological sense) of material values were *per se* in societies such as the Kwakiutl. A successful productive economy requires an ideology with quite different attitudes to material wealth and material comfort. *These should be highly appreciated for their own sake.*

Prestigious economies of the Indian Northwest of America, then, could be rather a 'brake' or 'obstacle' (of course, only in respect to productive economy, state, and civilization), than a 'growth promoter'. The requirements of competing elites and the needs of the bulk of the population were mostly perfectly satisfied by the exploitation of favorable environments; besides, those people knew how to grow plants and did practice cultivation to some extent (e. g. Hayden 1998).

Yet another consideration concerns one of the interpretation principles or approaches often used by archaeologists in search of the causes that could have enabled, or factors that could have stimulated, various technological breakthroughs or other globally fateful events in human prehistory. One might call it the principle of 'aversion', or even that of 'destitution' or 'desperation' (or we can just say that the 'necessity is mother of invention', as Villeneuve and Hayden have put it in the polemic context; see this volume). For instance, the 'out of Africa' hypothesis is explicated by appealing to the consequence of dramatic climate changes, extinction of plankton in the Red Sea, violation of food chain, and an eventual lack of resources for humans

(in the almost unpopulated continent!); while the emergence of ‘real first farmers’ in the Middle East is explained as a consequence of disadvantages and, again, lack of resources during the Younger Dryas (in a very narrow territory!) (e. g. Bar-Yosef 2011); and so forth.

Meanwhile, if we take a look at the written history of human technological advantages followed by their global consequences, we shall see that they were for the most part inspired by the pursuit of growth in the name of ‘want for more’, development, intensification, diversity, new possibilities, and so on. Therefore, I would rather suggest adhering to the ‘quest for more’ as a promising interpretative principle which, of course, does not rule out the possibility that “different localities, with different environmental characteristics and historical trajectories, are likely to have become Neolithic at different times and by following rather different routes” (Finlayson *et al.* 2011: 136, and also Finlayson, this volume).

Thus, from the social-anthropological or ethnographic point of view, the Natufians must have had social inequality of economic nature (*cf.* Finlayson, this volume), material surplus and the institutionalized disparity in the distribution thereof between individuals or families (*cf.* Villeneuve, Hayden, this volume), as well as an ideological appreciation of material wealth and a social-psychological attachment to SWAG, for which there evidently is some archaeological support in the form of various material stuff found in the ruins of their dwellings (e. g. Hardy-Smith, Edwards 2004).

## Conclusions

Several points and suppositions have been discussed and these are summarised below:

1. The aspiration for equality — even when it is not, or was not, explicitly articulated verbally — represents one of the most ancient achievements of human culture(s). A conscious or unconscious pursuit of justice and the informed desire to eradicate the root causes of conflict must have stimulated an empirical search (both in the way of method and process of trial and error) for various means to restrain despotic leaders and other dominant individuals or groups, as well as various modes of behavior and various rules of communication intended to eliminate competition and put all the individuals or groups concerned in equal positions. Those strategies and rules have been (and are) familiar to members of quite different societies, including modern urban ones, but they have been and are mostly used temporally and only in specific social settings. However, many ethnographies tell us about hunter-gatherer societies in which people tended, or at least consciously and scrupulously tried, to always follow such rules and strategies. As a result, they did manage to come very close to the ideals of egalitarianism.

2. At the same time, ethnographies describe a number of hunter-gatherer cultures which in economic terms conformed to Woodburn’s model of immediate-return systems and thus demonstrated that a society which had powerful mechanisms preventing accumulation of wealth by individuals or groups was able, nevertheless, to also build up effective mechanisms of social differentiation. They are considered here to be non-egalitarian ones.

3. We cannot extrapolate the forms of egalitarian or non-egalitarian relations of hunters and gatherers studied ethnographically to the past ages of Europe or any other part of the world, but we have to recognise that Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic hunters were able to develop both egalitarian and non-egalitarian social systems, and



we have to assume that they actually did develop different systems in various periods and in different areas on the earth.

4. All of those must have had their own diverse and unique sociocultural dimensions, which are hard for us even to imagine now; but maybe, in prehistory, there also existed a sort of chaining between cultural phenomena where certain combinations were typical of egalitarian societies, while others of non-egalitarian ones. I would like to hope that the ethnographic approach to exploring this issue will be of some use for archaeologists.

5. The achievement of social equality may have been possible only as an outcome of the persistent, long-term efforts of many generations of determined people. During the long history of egalitarian societies, those people had to choose many times between egalitarian ways of life and the inherent tendencies of human nature to produce formalized inequality, as well as between their own ways of life and the alien ones imposed upon them by neighboring societies. In making such choices, they constrained themselves to stay within small-scale associations and reject other ways of living, including those depending on attempts at accumulation of material wealth and comfort.

6. While consciously safeguarding their values and traditions, people in egalitarian societies probably had to limit themselves not only in material wealth and comfort, but also in what could be called intensity of social life, in cult or religious activity and intergroup communication in particular. Ethnographic observations provide evidence that in none of the egalitarian societies were these spheres of activity as elaborate as they were in the traditional societies of Australia and some Native American ones. This made life in non-egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies saturated and eventful, but at a considerable cost, although the sacrifices that the societies that moved to a productive economy had to pay were, as we know, incomparably crueler.

7. If we are interested in exploring how people came to complexity, productive economies, states, and civilizations, we need to assume that their start must have been a non-egalitarian one, and that the initial forms of inequality must have been considerably unlike those which were observed ethnographically among the later non-egalitarian hunter-gatherers, including the so-called 'complex' ones (such as the Indian societies of the Northwest Coast of Northern America). A successful productive economy requires an ideology with quite different attitudes to material wealth and material comfort.

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