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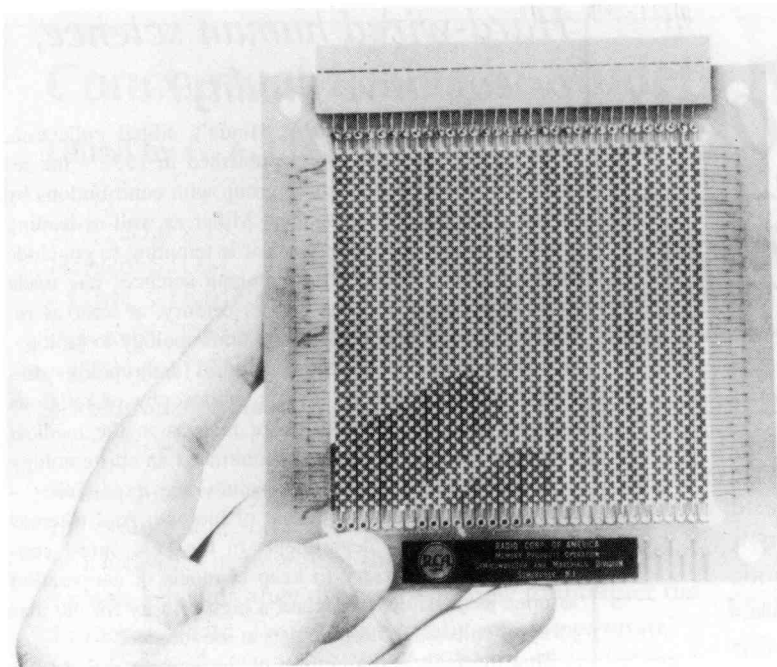
## Hard-wired human science, or cognitive fluidity?

Looking back at Robert A. Hinde's edited collection, *Non-Verbal Communication*, published in 1972 – the result of a Royal Society study group with contributions by Leach, Gombrich and Jonathan Miller as well as leading ethologists and psychologists – it is tempting to conclude that interdisciplinarity in the human sciences has made little headway in the last quarter-century, at least as regards the relationship of cultural anthropology to biology. Whereas during this period cultural anthropology has earned many friends in history, philosophy or religious studies, also for rather different reasons in the medical world, it has for the most part embraced an epistemology – one focused on meanings, values and experiences – which differs sharply from that of biology. And whereas some anthropology departments in the U.K., most conspicuously Durham, try to keep channels of cooperation as open as possible, this is not a high priority for the majority of cultural anthropologists at the moment.

That the fault is not entirely theirs is exemplified by a state-of-the-art edited collection, *Characterizing Human Psychological Adaptations*, published last year<sup>1</sup> for the highly respected Ciba Foundation – which has since changed its name to the Novartis Foundation – as the proceedings of a symposium held in London in October 1996. Contributors include the celebrities Leda Cosmides, Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker, and the chair was Martin Daly of the psychology department of McMaster University, Canada.

Once upon a time the Ciba Foundation published human science symposia of genuine catholicity – *Caste and Race*, published in 1967, remained on reading lists for many years – but the current policy seems to be to invite only participants who share a common approach, in the interests of academic peace. (Another example is the 1996 symposium on 'Genetics of criminal and anti-social behaviour', to which the only cultural anthropologist invited – though he did not in fact show up – was Napoleon Chagnon, who is far more sympathetic to genetic explanations than most of his colleagues.) The only cultural anthropologist invited to 'Characterizing Human Psychological Adaptations' was, admittedly, a particularly brilliant one, Dan Sperber, and several of his interventions in the discussions are published in the proceedings. However, these are all couched in the idiom of psychology, with two exceptions. First, he claims it is more likely that matrilineal inheritance systems promote a relaxed attitude to paternity doubts than that (as is argued by the speaker) 'the preference for matrilineal inheritance would emerge in societies where doubts about paternity are greater'. Second, Sperber draws briefly on his own fieldwork in Mauritania and Ethiopia to point out the cross-cultural variability of beliefs regarding the duration of pregnancy. These are sound enough points, but half a page in a 300 page book does not redress the balance. (Can it be that Sperber is conducting participant observation of evolutionary psychologists, and wishes to disturb the object of his study as little as possible?) It is true however that the chair, Martin Daly, does not seem to be against cultural anthropology in the way that he is against Freudian theory, which he considers to be now lingering on only in 'pop psychology and literary criticism'.

A critique of evolutionary psychology such as the archaeologist Steven Mithen's<sup>2</sup> – deploring over-emphasis on 'hard-wired' domain-specific intelligence as opposed to the 'cognitive fluidity' celebrated by cultural anthropologists – is not cited. Furthermore the book raises serious



Ferrite cores for a computer store, c. 1970, Radio Corporation of America.

1. John Wiley, £55.
2. 'Understanding mind and culture: evolutionary psychology or social anthropology?' A.T., December 1995. This followed a British Academy/Royal Society conference in April 1995 on 'The evolution of social behaviour in primates and man', attended by both Cosmides and Mithen. Mithen's book *The Prehistory of the Mind: A Search for the Cognitive Foundations of Art, Science and Religion* was published by Thames and Hudson in 1996.
3. See his essay 'The Evolution of Society' in the recently published *Evolution: Society, Science and the Universe* (ed. A.C. Fabian, CUP, £16.95).

problems both at the level of quality of data and at a more philosophical level.

To take an example of poor data (Mithen has given others from earlier publications in this discipline), one contributor, Randy Thornhill, tells us as a fact, citing his own five-page article in *Trends Ecol Evol*, that greater lifetime mate number and 'sexual advertisement' are found 'in women who are reared and live in social environments of reduced paternal investment'. This 'adaptation' is presented as analogous to the callusing of the skin from friction, or the formation of antibodies against a parasite. At no conference in cultural anthropology would a speaker get away with such a statement without being asked, at the very least, for more context and particularization.

As regards philosophy, it is true that some of the contributors worry a little that the principle of 'reverse engineering' – inferring specific Darwinian environments and selection pressures from the analysis of observable adaptations – could be a circular form of argument. But a more searching approach is needed. Daly takes as an epigraph for the book a dictum by a 1960s pioneer of these studies, George Williams, 'Is it not reasonable to anticipate that our understanding of the

human mind would be aided greatly by knowing the purpose for which it was designed?', and Daly adds: 'The workings of the psyche are obviously organized to achieve various ends' [emphases added]. Scientists should surely try to avoid the imprecision of the floating passive voice, which is well described by Arabic grammarians as *al-majhul*, 'the unknown'. We are all indeed trapped by the constraints of language, as Darwin was when he originally advanced the concepts of 'natural selection' and 'fitness'. But a measure of humility is called for and when Daly attacks 'the same old hostility, ignorance and foolishness' of those who do not yet appreciate evolutionary psychology (but without citing critics), it is clear that he is a missionary as well as a researcher, and that his cause risks becoming what Stephen Jay Gould has called 'ultra-Darwinism'. Or as the anthropologist Tim Ingold – who, like Mithen, has made efforts to integrate the arguments of evolutionary psychology with his own discipline – has written, 'Despite the claims of evolutionary theorists to have dispensed with the archaic subject/object and mind/body dualisms of Western thought, they are still there, albeit displaced onto the opposition between the scientists, to whose sovereign imagination is revealed the design of nature, and the hunter-gatherer whose behaviour is interpreted as the output of innate dispositions installed by natural selection, and of which he or she has no conscious awareness'<sup>3</sup>.

Many suggestions made by contributors to this volume – about cheater detection, different animals' awareness of numbers, monogamy, or risk assessment – are of great interest. Foundations such as Novartis should be on the lookout for the equivalents to Robert Hinde, an outstandingly successful interdisciplinarian, among the middle generation of practising scientists, who could find a way of orchestrating these neo-Darwinian approaches with the more seasoned tools of philosophy and cultural anthropology. They should be able to afford the risk of inviting to the party not only those cultural anthropologists who broadly accept the neo-Darwinian paradigm, but also those of Tim Ingold's persuasion, which is that neo-Darwinism with its insistence on genetic traits does not do justice to the all-pervasiveness of sociality. Researchers who refrain from examining their own preconceptions fall short in this essential aspect of scientific method. □

Jonathan Benthall

## The Domestic Mode of Production in post-Soviet Siberia?

CAROLINE HUMPHREY

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This article arises from an invitation from Stephen Gudeman and Richard Wilk to take part in a session of the American Anthropological Association's 1997 annual meeting devoted to Marshall Sahlins' classic text, 'Stone Age Economics' (1972), with a response by Sahlins himself. I chose to show how his concept of the Domestic Mode of Production (DMP) stimulated me to

look at aspects of rural life in contemporary Russia in a way that I would not otherwise have done.

The idea of the DMP is that in many kinship-based societies both production and consumption are restricted to the requirements of the household sphere. For Sahlins, domestic group autonomy comes to be challenged by inter-household ties such as kinship or political relations which stimulate the production of a



Haymaking team on a Buryat collective farm. This and the other photographs illustrating this article were taken by the author in summer 1996.

<sup>1</sup> Chayanov's work (1966) of course inspired Sahlins and, as it concerns Russian peasant households, relates more closely to my materials than to the tribal economies Sahlins adapted the model to. Disapproved of in Soviet times, Chayanov has more recently been taken up by certain Russian academics, but his work has had little impact on policy-makers.

<sup>2</sup> The view that sees Russia as 'Eurasia' emphasizes the Byzantine Orthodox religious tradition and the Mongol-Tatar idea of the state as an authoritarian, hierarchical organisation (Suptelo 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Urbanayeva writes about the 13th century Mongols: "The understanding of *ulus*, which originally meant 'people-domain' or appanage, i.e. specifically 'people', expresses the traditional mechanism by which the nomads established statehood. First, the *uluses* were gathered into a collectivity; secondly, however, not all collectivities were called *ulus*, but only those in which the 'people-domain' was organised as the dependency of higher power, i.e. which had the vassal system. Thus, the Taichiyut, looked at as a series of kin-related clans, was seen as an *irgen* (a tribe of lineages). But the very same Taichiyut, or even just part of them, when united for example under the protection of Targutai-Kirilukha, was an *ulus*, i.e. the 'people-domain' of a named khan. Subsequently, *ulus*

surplus and enable the passing of control to extra-domestic groups. Although the concept of modes of production has waned in anthropology since the passing of Structural Marxism, and in spite of criticisms that economic anthropologists have made of the DMP model over the last twenty-five years, the DMP remains part of our vocabulary as anthropologists. I use it here as a 'counter-model'.

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Contemporary Russia seems far indeed from the tribal terrains of the Domestic Mode of Production. However, it is in categories remarkably like Sahlins' that many Russians are trying to address the problems of the de-collectivization and privatization of agriculture. In the abstract, if a collective farm is disbanded, what is left are the hundreds of households who subsist on their so-called 'private plots'. The 'private plot' is a shorthand for a smallholding consisting usually of a house, a vegetable garden, a few livestock, pigs and chickens, and rights to a hay-meadow where fodder can be cut to sustain the animals over the long winters. Suddenly, this begins to look like familiar DMP territory, and reform-minded Russians are asking themselves questions like Sahlins' (1972: 130-1): how can production be intensified on these individual plots, and what kinds of leadership structure will curb the tendency to self-oriented anarchy?

For an anthropologist, Sahlins' immensely stimulating essay nevertheless provokes further thought on these matters, inspired to a great extent by his own later work on culture. It will be argued here that to see contemporary Russia in terms of the DMP would be to neglect a predominant indigenous understanding of the political economy, which I term 'hierarchical shareholding'. At root the DMP-like categories employed by Russian reformers are formed on the basis of theoretical

individualism – influenced in their case not so much by A. V. Chayanov as by Yeltsyn's Euro-American advisors and rational choice theory.<sup>1</sup> The indigenous idea to which attention is drawn here, on the other hand, is one in which farmers are social beings right from the start, from their innermost inclinations, from their understandings of the person to their concepts of the state. In many important contexts, they see themselves as part of a socio-political 'whole' (Sneath 1996). The idea is crucial to an explanation of why collective farms have been maintained in such wide areas of Russia, despite a string of presidential edicts to privatize from 1992 onwards. This paper will briefly analyse these ideas as they exist among Buryats in northeast Asiatic Russia, though in my opinion something similar is current also among other native people of Russian Asia and even – strengthened by Sovietism – among some of the Russians themselves.<sup>2</sup> This is an example of a 'DMP-like situation' which may help us re-think the DMP itself.

The section of Sahlins' analysis of the DMP I shall be concerned with is his discussion of how leaders and 'tribal powers encroach on the domestic system to undermine its autonomy, curb its anarchy, and unleash its productivity' (1972: 130). The political-negation of the centrifugal tendencies to which the DMP is naturally inclined is, according to Sahlins, negotiated by means of reciprocity. Where the political and kinship systems are not differentiated, leadership is a higher form of kinship and hence committed to generosity; yet this chiefly liberality must ignore the flow of goods the other way (upwards from the households) and it disguises what are actually relations of exchange, transaction, even exploitation (1972: 141), and ultimately contradiction (1972: 143). In this model, the households appear like little self-sufficient balls, linked by lines of 'reciprocity' of one kind or another, to separate and larger balls, the chiefs. Later in *Stone Age Economics*



came to mean the 'people-state' or the 'people forming a state-domain'. Thirdly, the 'collected' *ulus* was organised administratively, and had special civil servants who led its affairs and were rewarded by their 'share' (*khubi*) of the total wealth" (Urbanayeva 1995: 204).

<sup>4</sup> This direct mapping occurs when a section of a clan dominates a section of a collective. It is almost never the case that a single clan dominates a whole collective, which is a large entity of 300-700 families.

<sup>5</sup> In Siberian conditions and with the species kept by Buryats, only horses can live throughout the year with only hay as a winter supplement to grass grazing. Sheep, cattle and pigs all require other, more concentrated fodders.

<sup>6</sup> Buryats regard bread, noodles and dumplings as core parts of their diet, though they do not eat as many flour products as Russians (Tulokhonov and Manzanova, 1996: 146).

<sup>7</sup> In 1992-3 some 15% of households claimed they would like to separate off and set up as private farmers according to a social survey in Buryatia. By 1996 the proportion had shrunk to 3%. The many complex reasons for this are discussed in Manzanova (1997) and Humphrey (in press).

<sup>8</sup> Land spirit-masters are called in Mongolian *gazaryn ezed* (sing. *ezen*), a word which is applied also in daily life to the 'master of the household' (*geriin ezen*). Buryats often use the Russian term *khozyain* (master), again both for spirit masters of the land and for political masters such as Stalin.

<sup>9</sup> Whether to allow the buying and selling of land is still a matter of agonised debate at the highest levels - it is being called a 'hellish mechanism' in the State Duma. The Russian President has withdrawn advocacy of land sales and now is struggling to persuade people of the usefulness of land mortgaging, the point being to enable farmers (collective or otherwise) to obtain credit without going through the corrupt state bureaucracy, *Argumenty i Fakty*, 15th October 1997, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Some collectives have not even gone this far, but operate entirely as in the late Soviet period, i.e. by work orders to members who earn wages.

<sup>11</sup> Zizek (1997: 29-300) writes, 'Each hegemonic universality has to incorporate at least two particular contents, the authentic popular content as well as its distortion by the relations of domination and exploitation. [...] However, in order to be able to achieve this distortion of authentic longing, it has first

Sahlins introduces the idea of 'pooling' or redistribution, only to dissolve it too into 'an organization of reciprocities, a system of reciprocities' (1972: 188).

But what if the domestic groups and chiefs were not imagined as separate but as one whole 'society'? The tribal leaders then do not 'encroach', as Sahlins put it, but are no less integrated than anyone else. If we accept Maurice Bloch's argument (1989) that 'society' is a model, distinct from the messier arrangements of practical life and sustained by ritualized enactments, then it can be seen that such a model could base itself on kinship or on some other social form. In Inner Asia, kinship is not the only idiom in which 'society' is imagined, for there is also a concept of the ruled domain which sometimes coincides with patrilineal structures and sometimes exists without them.<sup>3</sup> In my view, hierarchical shareholding is a cultural principle which can obtain in either case, but I shall focus here on the Buryat example where political leadership and kinship seniority tend to coincide, as in the cases discussed by Sahlins. We are dealing here with very 'ancient' ideas, which nevertheless have been transmitted and reenacted periodically over centuries - and have legitimacy today partly because of the ancientness people attribute to them.

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Buryat culture, as distinct from the Mongolian, imagines the family only as a temporally-specific part of the wider patrikin which includes the leaders as well as the ancestors of the past and those descendants yet unborn. The household is due a share in the whole, as represented ritually in meat-division at sacrifices, just as lineage divisions also receive a share at a higher level. This way of seeing oneself, defined genealogically within groups which are at once political and kinship-structured, is analogous to, and sometimes even directly mapped onto, the positioning of oneself in collectives on the basis of notional shares of collective resources.<sup>4</sup> The collective here appears as a stage in a series of nested hierarchies, from the household, through production-teams, brigades, collectives, the sub-district, the district and the republic itself. Such a vision of society has been encouraged recently by the practice of publishing the budgets of districts, etc. with the distribution of resources among their parts, and by the allocation of land-shares among individuals at district level. No matter that the budgeted sums seem to disappear almost without trace and the land-shares to be entirely notional for the great majority of people: these public pronouncements reinforce indigenous ideas of belonging to a whole within which there is a process of allocation.

Of course, actual allocations (pensions, loans, subsidies, handouts by enterprise managers, distributions at sacrifices, etc.) are not the only economic activities present, as mentioned again at the end of this article. But they have had a relative invisibility in the literature and require more attention if we are to understand life in large parts of Russia today.

In brief, this material suggests five ways in which the DMP model can be re-thought:

1. The 'natural' tendency of domestic groups to autonomous subsistence is placed in doubt by cultures in which there is a 'social' tendency for households to see themselves as economically and spiritually incomplete.

2. The centrifugality and anarchy of domestic groups founded on separate rights to resources is encompassed by higher communal rights, in this case manifest in ritual and ideas of ancestral master-spirits of the land.

3. Strong and successful leadership does organize communal activities that increase production; however, this is not a consequence of reciprocity but of command, duty, obligation and example.

4. Shareholding transcends the domestic group. Unlike the notion of 'pooling' (Sahlins 1972: 94, 188), it is a highly articulated form of redistribution which registers differentiation and hierarchy as well as belonging.

5. Relations are personalized and political, more than law-governed or economically motivated, and this creates a register of culturally specific enactments of appeasement, anger and fate which are not reducible to reciprocity.

In the Buryat situation, far from the domestic groups being economically autonomous, there is resistance to the idea of independence. The economy is set up in such a way that the 'private plots' can hardly be self-reproducing: the livestock require cultivated fodder<sup>5</sup> and the people need flour<sup>6</sup>, and both fodder and food grains are produced on huge, distant fields with large tractors, drilling machines, combine harvesters, etc. In other words, these essentials are produced collectively, and there is very little inclination on the part of householders to take over this work and do it themselves on a mini-scale.

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Now collective farms in Buryatia are virtually all bankrupt, which does not stop them operating. One result is that public work and dividends for shares are not paid in money, but precisely in those items that the members have decided not to, or cannot, produce for themselves (flour, fodder, also firewood, vodka, tea, sugar and occasional allotments of clothing). The domestic group is thus economically incomplete. It is suggested here, however, that this is not just a 'fall-out' of the socialist economy, but is a reflection of an indigenous view of how things are or should be. In a wider perspective, people see themselves as part of, and hence dependent on, 'nature' (*baidal*, the ways things are 'out there'), which includes the weather, the state of the grasses, the fertility of people and livestock, the presence or absence of disease, wolves, hailstorms, etc. Since the domestic group depends so greatly on natural processes and enacts regular communal rituals to call down the blessings of the spirit-masters<sup>8</sup> of the land, waters and skies, the idea of domestic 'autonomy' is in any case an impossibility. The designation of some part of narrowly human economic activity to the collectivity is thus in a sense neither here nor there - things could be organized this way (in Buryatia they are, but in Mongolia today, on the whole, they are not) - in any case the domestic group is located within and sustained in its efforts by a providing, or alternatively 'punishing', world governed by masters both spiritual and temporal. The anthropological issue then is whether this provision is to be seen as obtained through 'reciprocity' or by means of another idiom. The interesting thing about the Buryats is the remarkable extent to which they support the shareholding idea: in other words, they give accord to the principle of the lot rather than that of the bargain.

The irony of agriculture in provincial Russia is that the very idea which was supposed to introduce privatization and capitalism, 'shares', which could be bought and sold in the open market, has been turned on its head (or rather, outside in) to reproduce and actualize the indigenous notion of shareholding. What has happened is that local authorities have forbidden the free sale of shares.<sup>9</sup> The villagers strongly support this prohibition, since otherwise they say 'foreigners' might get

to incorporate it...Etienne Balibar was fully justified in reversing Marx's classic formula: the ruling ideas are precisely *not* directly the ideas of those who rule.'

<sup>12</sup> In Buryat regions pre-revolutionary local communities were clan-based tax-paying units which allocated hay-land and carried out certain collective works (irrigation, fencing, common moves to summer / winter pastures).

<sup>13</sup> A Buryat philosopher has written that the worship of the ancestors is the essential act in which the individual gets his 'face', his place in the social categorisation of the world. In this context, one's *khubi* (share, destiny) is both inevitable and relative (to others), and it is immediate (specific in time). At another time, as one's place in the shifting web of relations has changed, the share will be different (Morokhoyeva 1992: 97).

<sup>14</sup> In some West Buryat areas the meat is chopped up so as to eliminate the symbolic differences between the parts of the animal in the shares (Sanzheyev 1980: 115). This is not done elsewhere and the symbolic significance of different parts of the carcass is used to mark social status.

<sup>15</sup> Among Western Buryats earlier this century the meat trays were set out before a row of birch branches in a line, one branch for each family, using the common Mongolian denotation of seniority from west (senior) to east (junior) (Sanzheyev 1980: 107).

<sup>16</sup> Mongolia has privatized more thoroughly than Russia and today (1997) few livestock are state/collective-owned.

<sup>17</sup> Buryat writers contrast this with their understanding of the type of power exercised by the *khagan* (e.g. Chinggis Khan), which was essentially

organisational rather than repressive. It was the moral fault of deception that was punished severely.

Disobeying orders was a lesser matter punishable by fines, etc. Imprisonment was hardly used at all by the Mongol state, for the political culture valued a kind of organised freedom (Urbanayeva 1994: 228). Nevertheless, other Buryats write of the likeness between the Soviet state, especially under Stalin and 'eastern despotism'. 'Therefore, the harsh unitary right (*yedionachaliye*) of the ruler did not traumatise the ordinary Buryat in the way that it would have traumatised, for example, the Englishman spoilt by democracy', (Morokhoyeva 1994: 172).

<sup>18</sup> These should be paid for at reduced rates, well below market prices, but in fact the people usually cannot pay for them and



hold of 'our ancestral lands'. Americans are often agitatedly imagined in the strange role of the grabbers of shares in bankrupt collectives, but the actual practice is that neighbours from the next village are debarred. The result is 'insiders' collectives' (Konstantinov 1997), in which kinship and indigenous notions of land-ownership and sharing have more or less full sway.

At present shareholding works as follows: the totality of land and other assets is theoretically divided up and allotted to the population on the basis of length and quality of work contributed by 1991.<sup>10</sup> Most people have never even seen the documents entitling them to shares. All the land and assets are given 'back' into the collective (in fact, they were never removed from it). Benefits ('dividends') such as fodder are then given to the populace in proportion to the size of their shares, while workers in the collective are paid by a variety of methods (for further details on this situation, see Humphrey, in press).

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Sahlins' formula of the natural autonomy of subsistence-oriented households would look good on the desks of reformist planners, who are waiting for the collectives to collapse and disappear. Indeed I have met young administrators, graduates of Management Training Centres, who would love this natural propensity to reveal itself. They encourage people to 'take out' their shares in real land, livestock, etc. and set up independent farms. But the villagers say (misunderstanding their own history, which was never so impoverished): what mad person would want to 'go back' to the far past of bare subsistence, and who would want all the trouble of independence, when we are all 'our people' anyway?

One uncomfortable fact for reformers is that collective farms did not come from Mars and were not solely state instruments to expropriate surplus from the peasants. The fact that Russians created collective farms in their own land reminds us that, for them to work, ruling ideas must incorporate (even if they horribly distort them) a number of features in which the subject people will be able to recognize their authentic longings.<sup>11</sup> Collective farms were born amid fierce resistance and

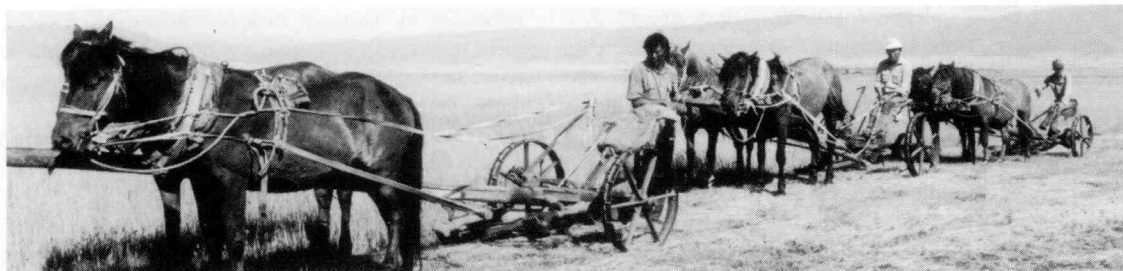
suffering in the 1930s. But it is arguable that what was resisted was their absolute egalitarianism and the cruelty with which it was imposed, not their collectivism. What was hated was the way they annihilated everything that families and groups had built up over generations, and instead created the undifferentiated *kolkhozniki*, who each were constituted as 'the same', even ironing out gender differences. Collectives rather soon ended most of their pretensions to egalitarianism. Thereafter they were lived in and their rankings became the operative hierarchy of rural life. Still now, a curtain is drawn over memories of repression, at least among people like the Buryats who had never known private property in land and prefer to see themselves as beneficiaries of the education, medicine and technologies of the Soviet state. The collectives came to be like a fact of social nature, and this is because they corresponded in many ways to indigenous and deeply felt concepts of the social unity. That is, they constituted a manifested version of such a unity which, over the generations, took over from memories of earlier versions.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, people bent the rules and thieved from collectives, and the dense entanglements of relations of survival were an essential aspect of life within them (Humphrey, 1983). Equivalent facts were noted by Sahlins in his discussion of popular relations with the chiefly domain. His observation that the economically failing domain (read collective) is also the one in which dues (labour) are not paid in and stealing becomes almost barefaced – the process he called 'negative reciprocity' (1972: 143) – is also pertinent to the current Russian situation. Conversely, the wealth created by successful organization of communal activities allows the chief (read Chair) to be generous to the people (1972: 140). However, what I would like to query about this is the idea that *reciprocity*, positive or negative, even redistribution seen as the 'organization of reciprocities' (1972: 188), is the right way to analyse these internal relations.

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Let me first step back to explain the fundamentals of the indigenous ideas of 'hierarchical shareholding' which have reappeared in the collective farms. The





remain in debt to the collective.

<sup>19</sup> Anger is not a tight-lipped polite kind of anger, but a deeply insulting, annihilating fury which is frightening to behold (which one does very rarely, as it is hidden from foreigners).

<sup>20</sup> Jagchid and Heyer (1979: 306-8) describe the Mongols' tributary relations with the Chinese emperor in terms of power-swayed trade, but Sahlins (1994) and Hevia (1994) provides a more culturally nuanced account of the way in which such rituals of tribute and obeisance defined the status of the subjects within the empire.

<sup>21</sup> 'Power resides in the office, in an organized acquiescence to chiefly privileges and organized means of upholding them. Included is a specific control over the goods and services of the underlying population. The people owe in advance their labor and their products. And with these funds of power, ...' (1972: 139).

<sup>22</sup> It is virtually obligatory for heads of sectors and Chairs of collectives to have higher degrees in agricultural sciences.

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share (Mongolian *xubi*, Buryat *khubi*) has the connotations of portion, lot and destiny. It appears in the distribution of the product of the whole (Sneath 1996) to members by virtue of their social position, represented by 'shares', in the whole. Today shares (*khubi*) are most evident in distribution of sacred, fortune-imbued meat at sacrifices to the ancestral spirit-owners of the land, a ritual which has become enormously popular in Buryatia in the 1990s (Humphrey, in press). In this context shares are used both to indicate the kinship equivalence of the 'men of a clan' and to mark distinction/hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> The totality of the meat contributed is divided into the same number of shares as the number of male household-heads in the 'society'. However, although in some Buryat communities the shares received are 'equal',<sup>14</sup> so that each family receives the good fortune bestowed by the ancestor, even in these cases the order in which the trays of meat are laid out spatially establishes a clear hierarchy of genealogical seniority.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the 'share' implies not only what is received but also what is put in, and here, though each family gets one ritual share and eats their fill, the richer people contribute many shares, the middling ones fewer, and the really poor none. In this way, the notion of *khubi* allows a general redistribution of meat while also encoding a scale of seniority.

The idea of shares (*khubi*) has been reproduced through the centuries in many different contexts: in the allocation of appanages (*xubi*) by Chingghis Khan to his sons and wives; later in the division of lay offerings among lamas in Mongolian and Buryat Buddhist monasteries; in the allocation of hay-meadows among Buryat households in the early 20th century; in the cutting up of the carcass of a hunted animal, and today even in the simple shares of meat at a family meal. In these examples, which are no longer concerned with the ritual equivalence of the male clan members as in the ancestral sacrifice, the shares are allocated only on the basis of differential status. The clearest case is the family meal, in which each person receives their portion (*khubi*). 'Pooling' (1972: 94) does not describe this well. The people are as differentiated from one another as the neck, ribs, haunches are symbolically distinct.

The *khubi* implies a part of the whole that is pertinent to the self (in Buddhist contexts a *xubitai xün* is someone with good karma from a previous life; in the context of privatization in Mongolia *xubiin mal* are 'private' livestock). In a public, more overtly political context, there is a similarly relational term, *alba*, which denotes imperial state duty and feudal obligations. Even today in Mongolia livestock kept by a herder but belonging to a collective are called *alban mal* (Sneath 1996).<sup>16</sup> The significant fact is that personal shares and state dues are closely related ideas for the Buryats and both are somehow given and fated. This can be seen in their characterization of smallpox. In the late 19th century, someone who fell ill with this disease was said to have 'got their share' (*khubiya aba*) or to 'be lying down in obligation' (*albanda khebte*), because the Eastern Skies were thought to send smallpox to each family

as their share/duty. The Buryat writer Khangalov (1958: I, 457) adds bleakly that the Skies send smallpox so that people should die in the numbers prescribed [i.e. for the world to go on as it should do]. The fatedness implied in shares appears in how Mongolian people talk about it today: to 'take' one's share implies a presumptuous grasping; a more appropriate expression is to 'find' one's share (*khubi olo*). If inexplicable misfortunes occur, the cow has died, the son is ill, this is often attributed to inadvertent angering of the land-spirit, which is reversible by performing one's duty, i.e. making an offering. The contemporary Buryat shamanic ritual of a household to appease an evidently angry spirit is called *alban* – 'duty' (Zhukovskaya 1997).

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It is true that Buryats today use Russian terms (*pai*, *dolya*) when talking about the collectives, land-shares, and so forth, but it seems to me that the older ideas often influence the way they actually go about things. These have been reinforced and set in new idioms by Soviet political culture. The main input of Soviet culture, apart from the massive repressive power of the state,<sup>17</sup> has been the introduction of the hierarchy of labour in place of genealogy as the legitimating principle of social differentiation. Not only is it on this basis that shares (*pai*) are allocated, but the practice of hand-outs works this way too: above a minimum for survival (hay-lots, firewood, fodder, etc. which all members receive<sup>18</sup>) the bestowals of sugar, vodka, clothing and so forth are distributed broadly in terms of labour status. Veterans, stalwarts and worthies get more, while layabouts get much less. This might look like reciprocity – 'You work and I'll make sure to distribute some vodka' – but reciprocity does not explain the underlying motivations which commonly operate, nor the totality of transfers that take place.

The leaders feel a broad responsibility for all 'their' people including those who cannot work, the sick, the alcoholics, etc., and the people expect this to be honoured (I have seen the constant stream of petitioners in the Chairman's office; a share is a right). The householders for their part do not think of themselves as working in order to reciprocate so much as *obliged to obey*, so they work quite largely to try to make sure the official is not angered.<sup>19</sup> It is thought that a leader not only has a right but also has a duty to give orders, and if they are wrong-headed nothing will be done because that is just how things are. Anger also falls upon one's head and is not really predictable. The householder has the obligation to *otchityvat'sya*, an almost untranslatable expression, which means to account to the leader for what he/she has been doing in relation to these orders. The very existence of this expression indicates of course that orders might not be carried out. But what we have here is a variety of relations (rhetorical demonstration of power, 'paternal care', rage, etc., on the one hand, and evasiveness, demonstrative obedience, 'gratitude', etc. on the other) which are a quite different reg-

ister from the *quid pro quo* of reciprocity, however that notion is expanded.

I am not trying to argue here that the workers and householders are not self-interested, rather that in this mode of relations the self-interest appears in 'political' as much as in economic forms: it appears in unwillingness, disobligingness, neglect, or simply not fulfilling the duty (Scott 1990). It is arguable also that even apparently economic forms, like the 'contracts' which many collectives have introduced instead of orders, in fact operate politically. As there is no legal system to enforce contracts, it is left to the vagaries of exigency and obligation on either side as to whether the conditions are fulfilled (Humphrey and Sneath 1998, in press).

It is interesting then to think about the cast which the notion of duty throws over many transactions, even those of overtly bargaining kinds. People are trading with one another, doing bits of work on the side, making and selling handicrafts, thieving, using collective property to their own profit, exchanging gifts – in short, anything that will help them survive. A great deal of this has to be seen in terms of exchange, but it is also arguable that where kin networks are used the relations are conceived in terms of obligation and can sustain imbalances between households over an indefinite period (Sneath in Humphrey and Sneath 1998, in press). Inside the collectives, even when workers bargain directly with the management, 'reciprocity' as a dualistic relation (Sahlins 1972: 188) does not quite sum up what is going on.

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In the summer of 1996, I was present in a collective farm on the day seven hay-making teams were supposed to come out to mow. Not a single person appeared. The same was true the next day. The Chairman was in distraction: the grass was beginning to wilt. On the fourth day the teams presented an united offer: they would come out if each person was given ten boxes of cigarettes. The Chairman somehow obtained the cigarettes and hay-making started next day. There are several points that can be made about this. First, everyone knew that the haymaking would happen. Kin had come from the city specially to take part in it, and it was known that the collective hay was relied upon by other dependent households who could not mow themselves (the aged, ill, single mothers, etc.). Furthermore, the collective cattle, reliant on the collective hay, were the source of the butter and meat which were the only saleable items at that time of year, ensuring that the farm could continue to provide transport, fuel, etc. that everyone used, and which fed the school boarding house on which at least 70 families relied. Thus, the encompassing social element and systemic distribution to the whole was in fact the background *raison d'être* for what looked on the surface like a straightforward transaction. Furthermore, the collective haymaking fell due at exactly the same time that individual haymaking on household plots could best take place, yet people did not use the crucial few days to their own advantage. They just sat at home and waited. They were *not obeying*, rather than acting 'economically'. Finally, in a Mongolian context, cigarettes are not just ordinary payment but have honorific connotations. They are 'gifts' and consequently their presentation elevated the situation from a work-for-pay confrontation to one coloured by the ancient imperial light of duty and bestowal.<sup>20</sup>

The succession of ritualized and non-ritual times is highly relevant here. Non-ritual time is a kind of blank for 'society' in its collective form, and conversely at ritualized occasions the jointness and hierarchy are obligatory. For example, it is the height of impoliteness to take even a sip of drink by oneself rather than after a toast (when all drink together), and toasts are offered in order of status and always with some honorific words. Ritual occasions are extremely frequent, especially in the summer and autumn, when weddings, hospitable dinners for visitors, sacrifices, public holidays, and so forth happen almost every day. Now the allocations of goods by the collective always take place at such special festivities. The director of a farm *has to* get luxuries to distribute on International Women's Day, has to give a substantial gift at weddings, and must make a general hand-out of provisions for the New Year celebrations. One might imagine that the first thing bankrupt collectives would drop would be their own celebrations. However this is not the case: the Milkmaids' Ball, the Day of the Livestock Worker, and so forth, happen as before. It would be quite wrong to imagine that the Milkmaids demand a ball, or that the collective holds a ball to reward them. There is an intense life precisely 'in society', in other words when the asocial, incomplete existence of any group is elevated by ritual to the plane of incorporation and appropriate status.

To conclude, the DMP model envisages 'naturally' independent households which are encouraged into greater productivity by a collection of reciprocity ties with the leadership. The Buryat example, on the other hand, shows a case where, even when independent smallholdings are encouraged by the government to become private, and collective farms are weak, the households 'naturally' imagine themselves as hierarchically situated parts in a whole. The genealogical definition of 'society' enacted in sacrifices (in which, let us remember that leaders take part) is replaced in the collective farm scenario by a hierarchy of quality of labour. The DMP envisages the leader's power as a function of the services and goods owed to them by the domestic groups.<sup>21</sup> But the Buryat case, in either genealogical or labour scenarios, shows that another principle of power must be at work. As regards labour, domestic production with its manual methods is at the bottom of the scale and technological expertise is always found at the nodes of collective leadership.<sup>22</sup> Leadership in fact rests on mastery of the organization, rather than flows of goods as such. Mastery in the end, though it is a socially recognised idea (see note 7), seems to be a quality of individual personality (a quasi-magical, quasi-sacred power) and it transcends both genealogy and knowledge-expertise. The householders, who look as though they are engaged in reciprocity with leaders, are really, at a deeper level, receiving their lots in the domain of the fortune-channelling master.

The importance of such ideas is not that they sum up all of what is happening, but that they serve, especially in ritual, to 'make' the social ties which are a cause for the appearance of things.

This paper has attempted to show how the DMP could be reinterpreted were it to be seen in a cultural rather than an 'economic' light. But it is to Sahlins that we owe the brilliant insight of the formulation in the first place, and his other ideas found here and there in *Stone Age Economics*, not to speak of numerous later works, reveal his engagement with the very topics explored here. *Stone Age Economics* initiated terms of discussion in economic anthropology which are still at issue, and not only in academe. □