

FOOD COMMODITIZATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INEQUALITY AND THE PERSISTENCE OF
EXCHANGE: FOOD COMMODITIZATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By

Mary Elizabeth Vallance B.Sc., B.A.

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AUTHOR: Mary Elizabeth Vallance, B.Sc. (University of
Western Ontario)

B.A. (University of
Western Ontario)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. D. R. Counts

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ABSTRACT

Sahlins (1972) contends that, in the gift economy, food "...has too much social value--ultimately because it has too much use value--to have exchange value" (1972:218). This thesis critiques Sahlins' theory of primitive exchange and examines the effect of commoditization on the traditional mode of production.

The application of the analytical concepts, gift and commodity, are shown to be ill-suited to the Papua New Guinea context. Goods within this exotic setting have a dual nature which is not eroded by the growth of a commodity market. Commoditization has not the power to supplant the gift mode and, indeed, exchange activities have effloresced in Papua New Guinea despite the growth of a capitalist sector. The traditional mode is reproduced and control over subsistence remains in the hands of the indigenous rural population.

However, consumption expectations and the need to obtain cash have led to greater participation in cash cropping and wage labour and such participation creates new social stresses. Land has come under increasing pressure. Traditional systems of inheritance, authority and value have become riddled with ambiguity. A growing number of landless migrants have settled in the urban areas and, to varying degrees, have become dependent on the capitalist mode.

Through the consumption process, capitalism has penetrated the traditional mode. Inequalities have resulted with the faint outline of class distinctions beginning to appear and be reflected in consumption patterns and, potentially, nutritional status. It is asserted, however, that, despite growing inequality, commoditization and change, food is still used as a gift and is still good to think and good to give.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The traditional societies of Papua New Guinea (PNG) are characterized by elaborate exchange systems. In these systems food, in particular, is considered a potent integrator for as Sahlins states, food "has too much social value--ultimately because it has too much use value --to have exchange value" (1972:218). In our own society food is the basic commodity. Since few people (even farmers) engage in direct subsistence food production, the use-value of food demands that it be available for purchase. However, in a gift economy, where a surplus of subsistence goods is produced and producers of such goods are numerous, there is no need to purchase food. Within the 'moral' community food moves as a gift. Indeed Sahlins, in his version of exchange theory (1972), would have us believe that there is a moral imperative to make gifts of food. He states, "about the only sociable thing to do with food is to give it away" (1972:217). Not to give or to refuse to share is tantamount to a denial of another's humanity. To hoard food is anti-social. To sell food is immoral.

Sahlins tells us that,

Food dealings are a delicate barometer, a ritual statement as it were of social relations, and food is thus employed as a starting, a sustaining or a destroying mechanism of sociability (1972:215).

This thesis takes as its problem the following: if "food has too much social value--ultimately because it has too much use value--to have exchange value" (Sahlins, op.cit.), what happens when commoditization of food occurs in the process of economic development?

This introduction will briefly present the conceptual problems inherent in the version of exchange theory developed by Sahlins. The assumption of economic spheres distinct from social spheres and the opposing of gift and market economies create conceptual muddles in the models of other anthropologists as well, and yield perceptual problems when applied to the PNG context as is illustrated by Gregory's Gifts and Commodities (1982). His concepts of gift and commodity make inevitable his discovery of cultural ambiguity where I contend there is only cultural reproduction.

Marcel Mauss in The Gift, argues against the notion of a 'natural economy'. No economy functions solely to maintain subsistence, "it is something other than utility which makes goods circulate" (Mauss 1967:70). Even in the most primitive societies surpluses are produced.

The notion of value exists in these societies. Very great surpluses, even by European standards, are amassed; they are expended often at pure loss with tremendous extravagance and without a trace of mercenariness; among things exchanged are tokens of wealth, a kind of money. All this very rich economy is nevertheless imbued with religious elements; money still has its magical power and is linked to clan and individual. Diverse economic activities --for example, the market--are impregnated with ritual and myth, they retain a ceremonial character, obligatory and efficacious; they have their own ritual and etiquette (Mauss 1967:69).

Surpluses are produced and enter into a system of exchanges. Mauss notes that, although in our own society clear lines are drawn between people and things, this is not true in 'primitive' society. In such societies goods are closely associated with their producers. They are, to some degree, inalienable and personal and, whether given, stolen or mislaid, are never completely separable from their human source.

The obligation attached to a gift itself is not inert. Even when abandoned by the giver, it still forms a part of him. Through it he has a hold over the recipient, just as he had, while its owner, a hold over anyone who stole it. For the taonga is animated with the hau of its forest, its soil, its homeland, and the hau pursues him who holds it (Mauss 1967:9).

All personal possessions "have a hau, a spiritual power" (Mauss 1967:9). When given as gifts the 'spirit'

travels with the objects, but "the hau wants to return to the place of its birth, to its sanctuary of forest and clan and to its owner" (Mauss 1967:9). The hau, "itself a kind of individual--constrains a series of users to return some kind of taonga of their own" (1967:9).

It follows clearly from what we have seen that in this system of ideas one gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence. To keep this thing is dangerous, not only because it is illicit to do so, but also because it comes morally, physically and spiritually from a person. Whatever it is, food, possessions, women, children or ritual, it retains a magical and religious hold over the recipient. The thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place (1967:10).

Because of this bond between people and things the transaction of goods is a social event. The material world is embedded in the social world--there is no separate economic sphere. Such a separation becomes real only in the modern capitalist economy. "It is only our Western societies that quite recently turned man into an economic animal" (Mauss 1967:74). Prior to this he was only a social animal.

The initiation of gift exchange is the necessary step in creating peace and debt. Gifts are reciprocated to discharge debt, to maintain status and ensure the bonds

through which wealth may travel. While earlier theorists believed humans entered into these 'contracts' voluntarily, disinterestedly, and spontaneously, Mauss notes that,

The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest (Mauss 1967:1).

There is an obligation to give and an obligation to receive. To refuse to participate is tantamount to a denial of a relationship and a declaration of war.

This theory assumes a fundamental tension in human relations--a tension which if not vented through controlled competition or somehow neutralized through acts of reciprocity, would produce a Hobbesian war of 'all against all'. The exchange of objects as 'gifts' is thought to integrate humanity through bonds of obligation. An interdependence is created as the fulfillment of obligations becomes essential in the pursuit of prestige. Through the exchange of material objects bonds are manufactured and maintained. Through the exchange of human objects, women and children, alliances are forged. Social life exists as a series of exchanges. One is not a function of the other.

The gift, an unalienated object without exchange

value, is thought to be the potent effector of social ties. It gains its power through the relations of its production. Because it embodies the personal labour of the giver, it stands in unambiguous opposition to a commodity and unites rather than divides transactors. This integration of material and moral life is characteristic of a 'gift economy'. There is no economic sector as distinct from the social sector. Such a separation occurs only in the capitalist economy and is lamented by Mauss as it legitimizes immoral conduct in the market place and excuses capitalists for having put profit above obligation to workers. Instead of a united society working toward its own best interests, oppositions are created as social classes struggle for power. The answer to this conflict is, as Mauss wrote, to "come out of ourselves and regard the duty of giving as a liberty, for in it there lies no risk" (1967:69).

Sahlins in Stone Age Economics builds upon and eventually transforms the ideas Mauss developed in The Gift. The concept 'hau' was declared 'mystic cement'. With Sahlins, the rule making reciprocation obligatory in the gift economy is seen as based on the immorality of profiting from the work of others. The profit generated by a product of unalienated labour belongs to the source of that labour. In Sahlins' version, exchange theory becomes secularized. But the basic premise of

The Gift is accepted as he writes,

The primitive order is generalized. A clear differentiation of spheres into social and economic does not there appear (1972:182).

Sahlins found "that every exchange, as it embodies some coefficient of sociability, cannot be understood in its material terms apart from its social terms" (1972:182). "A material transaction is usually a momentary episode in a continuous social relation" (1972:185).

Despite this recognition of the inseparability of moral and material life in the 'gift economy', Sahlins goes on to construct a model that assumes the distinction. He employs oppositions such as trade versus prestation to create a model of the 'gift economy' that is distorted from reality and made in the image of our own capitalist system.

The assertion that gift economies have an economic sector beyond the boundaries of the moral community in which morality is suspended is found in the writings of Marx and is clear in Stone Age Economics. Other anthropologists have accepted this assumption and hence have categorized goods in traditional societies as commodities or gifts (Gregory 1982; Godelier 1977; Epstein 1968). These conceptual problems are to be found in the analysis of economic change in PNG and lead to perceptual problems.

In Gifts and Commodities, Gregory finds "the essence of the PNG economy today is ambiguity" (1982: 115). However the conceptual problems discussed earlier (i.e., assumption of an economic sphere as separate from the social sphere, the assumption that commodities and gifts are concepts relevant to the PNG context) create perceptual problems. By opposing economy and society, gift and commodity, social change and commoditization must inevitably be seen as processes that threaten the integrity of a moral community. The moral and material become contradictory. As commoditization increases, anti-social economic transactions threaten to disintegrate a 'gift economy'. Moral confusion results--bonds of obligation are not maintained--things fall apart. But I contend that it is Gregory's method which manufactures the ambiguity he attributes to the PNG economy.

Exchange theory as developed by Sahlins and applied by Gregory contains several ethnocentric assumptions that confuse rather than illuminate the PNG situation. Indeed, if we avoid making these assumptions, the introduction of cash, cash-cropping, and commodities into PNG becomes a process of change amidst cultural reproduction rather than cultural confusion. Gregory argues that the traditional gift economies of PNG not only remain strong but have actually effloresced in the face of commoditization. His explanation of this

efflorescence, however, is inadequate because he dichotomizes gifts and commodities, generates ambiguity from the role of land in traditional and modern PNG and grounds apparent continuity in the confusion of categories.

Although I agree with Gregory that the traditional gift economy remains strong in PNG, my explanation is different. I assert that continued gift-giving is a result of several factors:

1. An indigenous morality which is not divorced from social context.

No separate economic sphere is required so that a set of moral 'ideals' can be maintained. When morality is context-bound, immorality is difficult to judge and erosion of standards becomes improbable. If the opposition between an economic sphere and a social sphere is assumed, the apparent dual economy consisting of a modern and traditional sector would require moral and mental gymnastics on the part of indigenous people. By assuming that morality in PNG consists of ideals that make gift giving moral and trade immoral, analysis becomes a report on the discrepancy between the 'ideal' and the 'real'. The ambiguity 'discovered' is explained as a reflection of moral decay and cultural disintegration.

2. A continuation of traditional tenure systems.

As Gregory noted, very little of the land in PNG has been alienated. Most land remains in the control of traditional corporate groups and no large landless proletariat has emerged. Access to land requires participation in exchange systems and acceptance of traditional obligations and responsibilities.

3. A lack of integration of indigenous production into the larger international commodity market economy.

The people of PNG produce only enough 'cash crops' to satisfy immediate cash needs. Their production is oriented toward consumption. They work to gain cash to pay for educations, taxes and goods. They participate in the capitalist market yet without having developed a 'capitalist mode of production'.

Subsistence farming has not been abandoned and only those persons separated from their villages and kin are dependent on food commodities. In most areas of PNG, the security offered by a traditional economy based on reciprocity and sharing has not been traded for the promises and risks offered by a modern market system.

4. An incorporation of introduced cash and commodities into traditional exchange systems.

Commitment to cultural categories and systems of meaning causes reproduction of traditional structures.

In PNG, there is no strong commitment to commodity production and only a limited commitment to commodity consumption. The process of commodity consumption is especially interesting for it nicely illustrates the lack of opposition between the concepts of gift and commodity in PNG. For example, if a commodity is purchased from a local trade store there is no conceptual difficulty in using it as a gift. It is not the direct embodiment of relations of production which makes a gift an important catalyst in the creation of social bonds.¹ It is the

1. Rodman (personal communication), in reference to buying and giving of tinned fish in the New Hebrides, notes that indirectly the tinned fish embodies relations of production transformed into the cash that buys it.

intention in its giving--intention being directly related to the social context of the transaction. In PNG objects can be used as gifts or as if they were commodities. This 'dual nature' of goods existed traditionally and is not an ambiguity resulting from cultural change.

Today in PNG new commodities are purchased and then incorporated into traditional systems of exchange. Cash, tinned meat, rice and beer are items now well integrated into traditional exchange ceremonies. Crops and foodstuffs can function as commodities without harm to the gift economy. Indeed, in many areas, participation in a market system is traditional, "for the market is a human phenomenon which we believe to be familiar to every known society. Markets are found before the development of merchants, and before their most important innovation, currency as we know it. They functioned before they took the modern forms...of contract and sale and capital" (Mauss 1967:2).

In traditional PNG there was no necessary distinction made between trade and prestation; commodity and gift, for there was no necessary opposition between the economic and the social sphere. This does not appear to have changed yet. It is still the 'thought that counts'. Of course, this is also true even in our own society where certain commodities are purchased for the express purpose of making of them a gift. Diamonds, chocolates, flowers,

etc. are commodities marketed to be gifts--symbols to express affection or establish a social relationship. They are purchased to be given. Removal of price tags, wrapping in ribbon and foil, the secreting of the dinner tab, the denial of price makes something purchased into a gift with social value beyond its exchange value.

Commoditization is not an irreversible process. It causes no irreparable transformation of goods. However, although there is movement between gifts and commodities in our capitalist economy the boundary between the two concepts has reality for us. The economic sector is kept separate from the social sector. In extending hospitality and giving gifts we behave according to rules "which explicitly demonstrate that neither commerce nor force are being applied to a free relation" (Douglas 1982:58).

It is understandable that exchange systems remain strong in rural PNG. I will argue that nothing has fundamentally altered traditional social relations; that land and labour remain largely unalienated; that there is no large dispossessed proletariat dependent on cash and commodities for their existence; that most wage labourers are temporary migrants to urban areas who eventually return to rural areas, re-enter exchange relations and return to subsistence activities.

The persistence of subsistence production in rural areas prevents complete dependence on the commodity

market. Some commodities have become desirable and are purchased but these excursions into the capitalist market have not disintegrated the gift economy. On the contrary, gift economies which do not distinguish between commodities and gifts have incorporated these modern goods into traditional exchanges. The result is an efflorescence of gift-giving activity because increased access to goods has an inflationary effect on exchange.

As commodities can become gifts so too can the traditional inalienable products of people become used as commodities. Even food may be sold to kin in the newly established marketplaces, but a context-bound morality remains uneroded. I argue that food commoditization will have little impact in rural areas which engage in subsistence activities and continue to participate in gift exchange. The one who is at risk with food commoditization is the urban dweller as he has no choice but to purchase food. His dependence on the commodity market makes him vulnerable. Often so large a portion of his earnings must be spent on purchasing food he cannot amass any savings. Without savings he cannot escape his urban situation for to return without money or gifts, or money for gifts, brings great shame and, with no wealth to use in gift exchange, traditional roads to prestige and access to land are closed (Strathern 1975).

In this thesis I critique the separation between

economic and social spheres created by Sahlins in his model for exchange in 'primitive' societies. Using Gifts and Commodities, a study of economic transformation in PNG by Gregory (1982) as illustration, I examine the conceptual and perceptual problems that result from the application of this model. The central focus of the thesis is on the process of food commoditization and its impact on traditional economies of PNG. The aim is to explain the inseparable nature of economy and society in PNG, why it continues, and how it limits the impact of 'economic development'. This approach presents culture as resilient, shaping and shaped by the changing realities of actors in the world. Culture doesn't fall apart.

CHAPTER II

THE REMAKING OF MAUSS AND THE CREATION OF CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

Economies of traditional societies of Papua New Guinea (PNG) have been termed 'subsistence economies'¹; however as Godelier points out:

it seems obvious that the concept of 'subsistence economy' or 'self-subsistence' used frequently to characterize primitive economies should be rejected since it masks the fact that these economies do not limit themselves to the production of subsistence goods, but produce a 'surplus' destined for the functioning of social structures (kinship, religion, etc.). It also masks the existence of many forms of exchange which accompany this functioning (1977:110).

The term 'gift economy' appears a more appropriate label for economies in which surplus goods enter a 'spectrum of reciprocities' which Sahlins (1972) has divided into three types: generalized, balanced and negative. The lines between each category have been drawn with a thick

1. Sol Tax, 'Primitive Peoples', and Lois Mednick, 'Memorandum on the Use of Primitive', Current Anthropology, Sept.-Nov. 1960, pp. 441-5; Francis L. Hsu, 'Rethinking the Concept "Primitive"', Current Anthropology, 5(3):169-78, June 1964.

brush.

Whereas 'pooling' or 'sharing' is "socially a within relation, the collective action of a group, reciprocity is a between relation, the action and reaction of two parties" (Sahlins 1972:141). Pooling de-emphasizes the individual in favour of the group. Reciprocity, on the other hand, creates duality. It involves two distinct wills related but separate--at times opposed. The three types of reciprocity express degrees of sociability and correspond to degrees of relatedness.

In reference to The Gift, Sahlins writes,

it remains a source of an unending ponderation for the anthropologist du metier, compelled as if by the hau of the thing to come back to it ...perhaps to enter into a dialogue which seems to impute some meaning of the reader's but in fact only renders the due of the original (1972:149).

The 'hau', which Mauss defines as the spirit of the gift that makes reciprocity essential, is for Sahlins 'mystic cement'. Indeed Sahlins reasons that the rule making necessary a return gift is the immorality of profiting from another person's property. However, once Sahlins secularizes primitive exchange, he accepts the basic premise of The Gift which is that "the primitive order is generalized. A clear differentiation of spheres into social and economic does not there appear" (1972:182).

Instead he asserts that reciprocity occurs over a continuum of social distance and generalizes three forms of reciprocity corresponding to degrees of intimacy (Figure 1).

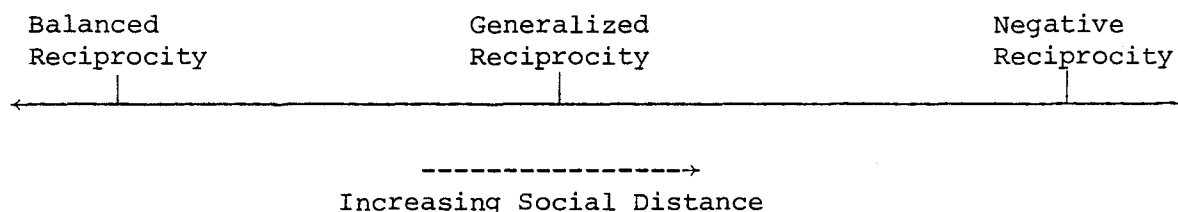


Figure 1. Forms of Reciprocity in Relation to Social Distance.

Negative reciprocity is the most impersonal, most economic exchange in which the "participants confront each other as opposed interests, each looking to maximize utility at the other's expense" (Sahlins 1972:148). Such 'trade' or 'barter' is "explicitly concerned with the acquisition and distribution of goods. As informants explain, the focus of such transactions is on material objects and may occur between people standing in any relationship" (Healey 1984:43). The relationship is, indeed, irrelevant.

Sahlins finds such asocial acts to be infrequent within the 'moral' community. Usually surplus goods move through the group as gifts in transactions "explicitly

concerned with the establishment, continuation, or discharge of social relations, rights and obligations" (Healey 1984:44). Within the 'gift economy', each exchange event "is usually a momentary episode in a continuous social relation" (Sahlins 1972:185). As Foster points out in his model for exchange in the Mexican peasant community of Tzintzuntzan, within long-term social relationships,

there are short term exchanges, often noncomplementary, in which a particular act elicits a particular return....A functional requirement of the system is that an exactly even balance between two partners never be struck. This would jeopardize the whole relationship, since if all credits and debits somehow could be balanced off at a point in time, the contract would cease to exist. At the very least a new contract would have to be gotten under way, and this would involve uncertainty and possibly distress if one partner seemed reluctant to continue. The dyadic contract is effective precisely because partners are never quite sure of their relative positions at a given moment. As long as they know that goods and services are flowing both ways in roughly equal amounts over time, they know their relationship is solidly based (1961:1185).

Healey divides gift-giving activities into two broad classes which correspond to what Sahlins refers to as 'generalized' and 'balanced' exchange. 'Major presentations' consist of "several named categories of specific events in the life cycle of individuals or the fortunes of collectivities. Such transactions usually involve set

codes of goods" (Healey 1984:44). 'Minor prestations' are unnamed, unceremonialized transactions which create debt and an expectation of reciprocity, however, they occur usually between individuals rather than groups as expressions of "solidarity, reconciliation, or intimacy" (Healey 1984:44).

Unlike negative reciprocity, major and minor prestations, "occur only between particular categories of people in certain circumstances" (Healey 1984:40). There is a social order within the moral community. People are categorized according to relatedness and obligation. A moral order also exists for goods which move within the community.

Within each category, an article may easily be exchanged for another, but it is difficult, well nigh impossible and unthinkable, to exchange an article for an inferior category for one from a superior category. For example, among the Siane, all goods except land, were divided into three heterogeneous categories: subsistence goods (agricultural, artisan and gathered products), luxury goods (tobacco, salt, palm oil, screw-pine nuts), and precious goods (shells, birds of paradise feathers, ceremonial axes, pigs), which circulate at times of marriage (kinship relations with neighbouring groups) initiation and religious ceremonies. There was, therefore no generalized exchange of goods and services as in a market economy, only limited and separate exchange (Godelier 1977:108).

These 'spheres of exchange', common throughout

traditional Papua New Guinea, are constructs based upon socially acceptable relationships regarding things and people. They reflect a system of values and "since the values put on things depend specifically on barriers to their interchange", 'spheres of exchange' is a "theory of value in non-exchange, or of non-exchange value" (Sahlins 1972:277). Rodman notes that,

Although the factors that create barriers between spheres remain to be fully defined in economic anthropology, there is general agreement that these barriers allow discrepancies of evaluation to exist regarding goods in different spheres (Barth 1967:149). Boundaries between spheres are regarded as barriers that inhibit comparison of the media of exchange in separate transactional circuits (1976:112).

Objects bounded into spheres of exchange can be seen as coupons used for status acquisition (Douglas 1982). Access to spheres is restricted according to a person's sex and circumstances and when, despite barriers, goods from separate spheres become equated² it is like comparing tickets to different events.

Even if the two tickets cannot be exchanged for each other and the two events yield different statuses, purchasers can and will compare the price of tickets (1976:113).

2. This is illustrated by the exchange of mats and pigs in the dure, the ritual slaughter of pigs by an unmarried female, performed on the island of Aoba in the northern New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) (Rodman 1976).

Spheres of exchange are not based on the relative value of goods so much as on the social categories of people. Rodman observed this moral patterning of the material:

Many social relationships in Longana are expressed in flows of goods and in discontinuities of exchange. Consequently, rules restricting mats and pigs to separate spheres also govern interaction between individuals (1976:119).

Participation in exchange events requires the correct matching of goods to people. Successful exchanges in each sphere bring a different status and a different degree of prestige.

Rules of exchange are based upon conceptions of what is moral. Although more will be said about morality in PNG, for now, it is important to note that goods within a particular 'sphere of exchange' are substitutable in various amounts for each other. They are 'of the same order' and if an exchange is initiated with one object of a particular category reciprocity will usually bring a return gift of the same order. There is no exchange value for goods. There is no clear separation between the material and the moral, however this inalienability does not appear always to apply to land and labour.

A very few Melanesian societies are reported in which land is so abundant

and populations so small that gardening land is simply not owned: the Hewa of New Guinea (Steadman, 1971) and the Seng Seng of New Britain (Chowning, 1971b). But in the vast majority, gardening land is not only subject to ownership, it is considered the most valuable possession (Chowning 1977:38).

The details of the systems of land tenure differ greatly from society to society. Some permit permanent alienation and individual ownership; others do not. It is not uncommon to find distinctions made between gardening land, village land or house sites, and bush land, with different systems of rights applied to each, not to mention the rights of sacred places, grave sites, paths, water supplies, sago swamps, and fishing areas (Chowning 1977:38).

Chowning also notes that people providing specialized services were often paid (1977:52). But, although in some instances there would appear to be an exchange-value for labour and land, there existed no indigenous commodity concept. Control over land was often vested in a corporate group. Labour was most often repaid by labour or gifts and workers were usually provided with food. No permanent exchange value attached itself to work or land. Neither was food a commodity. Since subsistence goods occupied a separate sphere, there could be no substitutions for traditional essential foodstuffs-- nothing was 'of the same order'. Food could not be traded lightly, for such a gift "has too much social value-- ultimately because it has too much use value--to have exchange value" (Sahlins 1972:128). Its consumption

yielded life and energy, and its production required this same life and energy. "Food is generally conceived of as having sentience and other human qualities for people invest their lives in food, and it in turn gives them life" (Jones 1982). It is the possession of the producer--an extension of his life, like a child.

The food gift is personal and intimate--potentially intimidating. It can be the sensual bond between friend or family or a forced intimacy, obligation and shame between enemies. Whatever the intent, food is a powerful integrator.

The giving and sharing of food does not merely express a social relationship, it validates and develops it. Kinship connections may be viewed as avenues of potential personal relations--always open perhaps, but not necessarily actualized. It is through giving and sharing food that the relationship becomes real (Schieffelin 1976:50).

Through gifts of food an individual can forge bonds and create for himself a social world. By accepting food gifts an individual accepts a position within a social network. Food facilitates the transformation of strangers into humans and humans into social persons. Participation within the 'subsistence' sphere of exchange allows one to obtain the fundamental status needed for entry into any other sphere of exchange. The process is illustrated by Schieffelin in his account of an eating experience:

He broke off a piece and handed me a chalky looking substance covered with grayish, rubbery skin. There was a pause while the people of the longhouse watched to see what I would do. Reluctantly, I took a bite. The flavor was strongly reminiscent of plaster of paris. 'Nafa?' ('Good?') asked one of my hosts hopefully, using one of the few Kaluli words I knew at the time. 'Nafa', I answered when I could get some saliva back in my mouth. 'Ah', said my host, looking around at the others. They relaxed. Having eaten sago, I was established as a fellow creature (Schieffelin 1976:47).

Food consumption both physically sustains and symbolically defines the person. Participation in food-gifting secures the person in a social world.

A day or so after a child is born, his parents and a few relatives take him on an expedition to a forest camp where they spend a few days catching crayfish and sago grubs to feed him. The common concern is to make the child strong and to please him and make him feel welcome so that he will not go back to where he came from and die. It provides others beside the mother, who feeds the baby at her breast, with the opportunity to relate to him by giving him food (Schieffelin 1976:48).

From the above discussion of exchange theory and the importance of food gifts can be drawn a series of oppositional key concepts. Negative reciprocity is opposite in intent and result from both major and minor prestations. Prestations occur within the moral community whereas trade occurs beyond the moral community. The gift is a concept opposed to the concept commodity hence the gift economy

contrasts sharply with the market economy. But there are 'muddles in the model', conceptual problems that Sahlins manufactures in his remaking of Mauss. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to the problems inherent to Sahlins' version of exchange theory.

Sahlins took the notion of 'gift economy' developed by Mauss. He paid lip service to the idea of a socially embedded economy and then created a model of 'primitive' exchange which asserts a separate economic sphere for trade, placing it beyond the moral community. In our own society we attempt to maintain a distinction between the economic and social aspects of life and we accept the suspension of morality in the name of profit. Sahlins clearly creates the gift economy in our image. In opposing gift exchange to trade he blocks out much of the light Mauss shed on the subject of reciprocity. Mauss noted that gift-giving need not occur through a sense of generosity. Gift-giving need not be spontaneous or disinterested. It was not the opposite of trade. Gift-giving could be interested or disinterested depending on the social context. Sahlins, however, saw in the primitive economy only a negation of our own. That is where the trouble starts. (Figure 2)

Within a market system there are obscured but perceptible 'spheres of exchange'. There are recognizable luxury items and valuables that, although commodities,

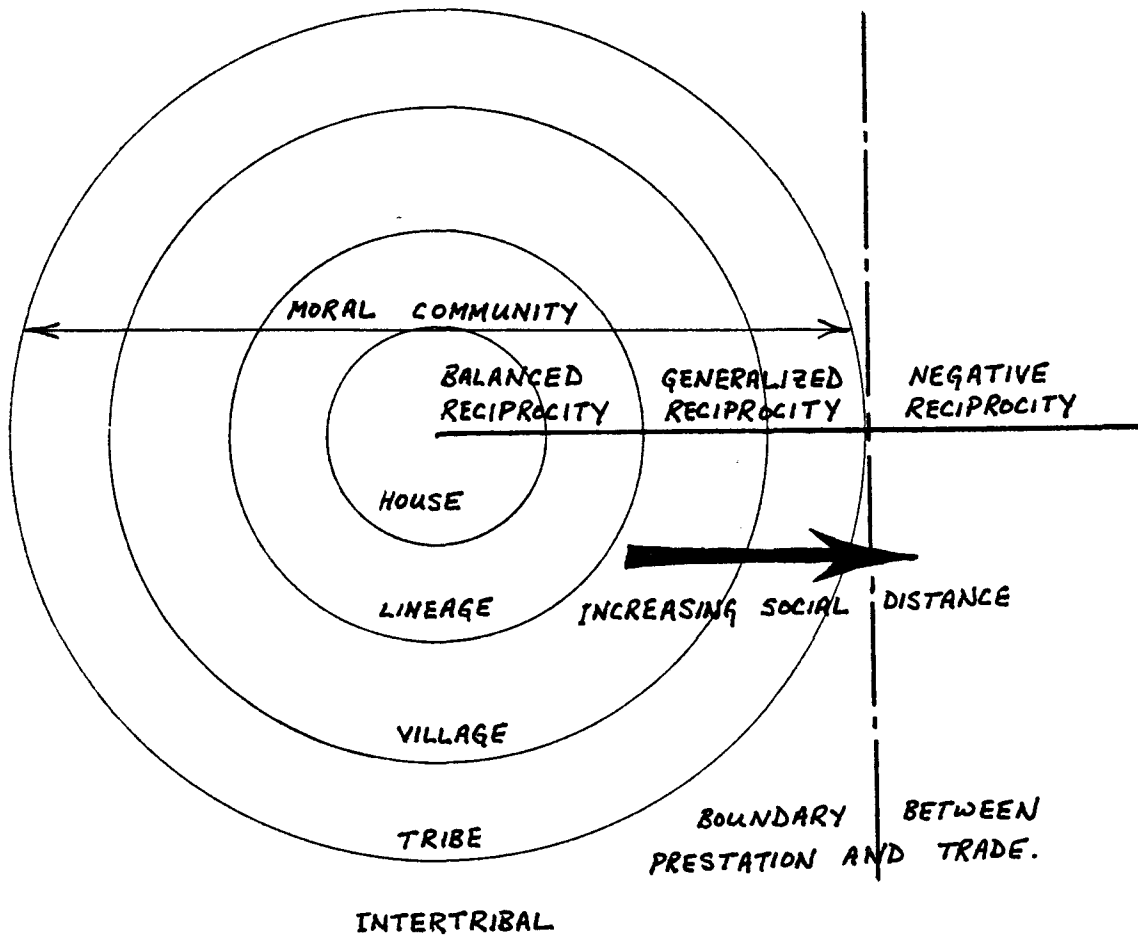


Figure 2. Note the similarity to Marx (1954) in that commodity exchange is thought to occur at the periphery of the moral community.

are purchased to be given as gifts, e.g., diamonds and pearls. Such objects are important in the establishment and expression of status. The spheres are bound, however, and mediated through a medium of exchange-money. A 'generalized' system of currency is characteristic of the market economy. However, money is not a unique invention of the complex modern market system. Comparable exchange media are indigenous to areas of PNG. The Tolai, Kapauku and various groups in the Solomons have valuables that function like 'true money' (Chowning 1977). But even in these societies, the exchange values established for goods did not erode traditional 'spheres of exchange'. Such currency did not separate an object from its producer or the economy from the moral sphere. Equivalences established between objects did not erode the barrier between them or change the status to which their exchange provided access. Some gift economies had well established currency systems allowing many goods to be substitutable for one another according to a reasonably stable series of exchange values (see Strathern 1971; Counts & Counts 1977).

Some pre-contact societies had already developed to a fine art the use of shell as money. Pospisil, who studied the Kapauku Papuans, established beyond doubt that in their economy cowries and two types of shell necklace functioned as the common medium of exchange and the common measure, as well as store, of value (1963). As in modern monetary systems the Kapauku cowrie

shell money came in various denominations, which had fixed conversion rates. For this money the Kapauku could buy not only food, domestic animals, growing crops, land and artifacts, but could also use it as payment for labour in his garden, for various services (such as surgery and magical cures), breeding of pigs, the lease of land, and for damages and fines that originated from criminal as well as civil misdemeanors, similarly tambu was one of the main supports of the Tolai economy prior to European contact (Chowning 1977:20).

Between and even within communities of traditional PNG goods were bought and sold. The label 'gift economy' is, perhaps, a misnomer for it tends to mask this active engagement in trade or 'negative reciprocity'. It also suggests the existence of a clear opposition to 'market economy' which is more than a bit hazy in reality.

Note that even in our own market-integrated economy, non-market transactions also occur, but are infrequent and usually petty in amount: we purchase gifts but then give them as presents at birthdays, Christmas and weddings....So too are traditional tribal and peasant economies mixed with regard to the modes of transaction used. However, in these economies non-market modes are frequently the important ones used to transact labor, land and produce (Dalton 1971:13).

Even the notion of trade as being opposite to the social activity of gift-giving is debatable. Healey (1984), in discussing Maring trade, emphasizes that generosity and demonstrations of trust were

central to the organization of trade and its meaning to participants as a category of social activity. A primary objective and consequence of trade as practiced by the Maring is the activation or construction of an expanded social universe--rather than the movement of goods as such. Trade is, then a cultural form capable of making statements about social relations beyond the pragmatics of satisfying material wants in the context of ecological diversity (Healey 1984:58).

Perhaps the term 'gift' should be abandoned for it carries a load of meaning which distorts our perception of primitive exchange. Foster (1961) notes,

The function and meaning of the goods and services which exchange in Tzintzuntzan cannot be understood if they are thought of as gifts. Disinterested gift-giving is foreign to the minds of Tzintzuntzenos and difficult for them to understand. Any favor, whatever its form, is part of a quid pro quo pattern, the terms of which are recognized and accepted by the participants. The favor or act simultaneously repays a past debt, incurs a future obligation, and reaffirms the continuing validity of the contact binding the partners....Informal or implicit contracts can be validated and maintained only by means of recognized reciprocal obligations, manifest by the continuing exchange of goods and services. The nature of these obligations will depend on the relative statuses of any two partners. When they are functionally equal--when the contract is symmetrical--the obligations and expectations must be complementary; otherwise there would be no purpose to the relationship. When the partners are functionally unequal--when the contract is asymmetrical--the obligations and expectations must be non-complementary; otherwise there would be no purpose to this relationship. In neither instance can the goods and services which represent obligations and expectations be thought of as gifts (Foster 1961:1190).

What we term a 'gift' in this economy is obligatory and interested. Despite the stress the literature places on the role of food as gift, generously and freely given, the self-interest in these transactions varied with the social context.

For instance Leahy, who was the first to explore parts of the interior of the New Guinea Highlands in 1933, wrote that 'with the large native population and extensive cultivated areas we had seen from the plane, we had no misgivings about the food supply, and instead of carrying food we took shell money with which to pay for it' (1937:152). He was thus confident, even before he set out on his expedition, that the indigenous population on first contact would be prepared to sell food for shell money and he was in fact proved right (Epstein 1968:20).

But primitive capitalism can sometimes be only in the eye of the beholder. As Salisbury notes,

When travelling Europeans wished to eat pork they 'bought pigs', as early reports phrased it. As natives saw it, pigs were killed in honour of the visitors, who later made prestations of valuables in return (1962:115).

I argue that in the traditional economies of PNG there was no economic sphere beyond a moral community. There were no commodities. There were only goods given under various degrees of obligation and self-interest.

Sahlins, in Stone Age Economics, states that the "immorality of food-wealth conversions has a sectorial

dimension: at a certain socially peripheral point the circuits merge and thus dissolve" (1972:219). Making concrete this 'periphery', giving it a location in physical reality, Marx writes,

The exchange of commodities, therefore, first begins on the boundaries of such communities at their points of contact with other similar communities, or with members of the latter. So soon, however, as products once become commodities in the external relations of a community, they also, by reaction, become so in its internal intercourse. The proportions in which they are exchangeable are at first quite a matter of chance. What makes them exchangeable is the mutual desire of their owners to alienate them. Meantime the need for foreign objects of utility gradually establishes itself. The constant repetition of exchange makes it a normal social act (Marx 1954:66).

But these are not commodities that are being exchanged; they are the same objects, the gifts, simply being exchanged in a different social context. Commodities are not the negation of gifts. Indeed, gifts in traditional PNG had the ability to function much like commodities and reciprocity, at times, could resemble shrewd trade.

Much has been written about Melanesian emphasis on reciprocity, and it is sometimes asserted (Lawrence, 1964:10) that men try only to achieve equivalence and not to make profits. This may be true in some societies, but in many, Big Men achieve their positions by avoiding strict reciprocity, especially with respect to those outside the kin group; when they deal with strangers and foreigners, sharp practice is very common. It is, however, usually considered

improper to allow the desire for wealth to overcome the demands of kinship... (Chowning 1977:50).

By manipulating the 'context' of a transaction the exchange can be more 'economic'--an object can function more like a gift freely given or a commodity requiring payment.

For example, Godelier who has carried out many years of fieldwork among the Baruya of PNG, makes the simple--but profound--point that a single object may exchange as a gift within a tribal community and as a commodity outside it (1973:128). In other words, he has shown how a single natural object (salt in the case of the Baruya) can assume different social forms depending upon the social context (Gregory 1982:23).

Godelier discusses this 'dual nature' of goods in the specific case of precious objects noting that the function of an object could change with the context. The context might, however, not always be clear, as Salisbury reveals in his observations of salt and the Siane.

Salt is not produced in Siane and I saw no expeditions to obtain any. Informants described the way a few 'big men' of a clan wishing to obtain salt have 'friend' relationships with 'big men' in distant salt-producing villages. They collect parties of about ten men, and carrying several pigs strapped to poles, walk to the producers' village, where the pigs are killed and there is great festivity and much entertaining. The guests do no work (the site of the spring is a closely guarded secret), but on their departure are presented with cakes of salt....Return visits by salt producers were reported to occur

occasionally, but were never as frequent as the visits of salt consumers....

Several things appear to the observer to indicate that a simple buying and selling relationship exists here. There appears to be a relatively fixed equivalence of one salt cake given for each pig killed; only widely separated clans are involved, and they only relate to one another when a transaction takes place; the return visits of salt producers are rare. Yet Siane informants insist on the permanence of the relationships, the festivity of the visitors being entertained by killing pigs...and the generosity of the hosts in giving salt to their friends. In native theory the exchange fits the normal pattern of 'exchanges between friends' (1962:87).

Context determines the self-interest in the gift exchange; this can be a physical place such as a market stall or a simple matter of intentionality on the part of the giver. Counts and Counts note, speaking of the introduction of a market in West New Britain,

By October 1975...the significant criterion had shifted from the place where food was sold to the purpose for which it had been collected. One man in Kandoka who spent the night hunting a wild pig to sell actually took only one quarter of the animal to market. The rest he sold at home to his father-in-law, his brother's daughter, and his wife. At about the same time a Kandoka woman carried a large bag of areca nuts to sell at Iboki plantation. Among those who offered to buy was her older brother, a foreman. Although she tried to give him a portion of the nuts he insisted on paying for them at the going rate, arguing that they had been brought there for sale and that if she wished she could come some other time and bring him a gift (1977:35).

Such behavior need not necessarily reflect a weakening of moral strictures. Indeed, the dual nature of objects and the role of intention in the determination of social context is not a new development in PNG. Firth in Social Change in Tikopia, notes,

The line between what we would regard as a gift and the Tikopia describe as a soumori, and what we regard as a purchase and which the Tikopia speak of as a tauvi, was not clearly drawn. Both might involve reciprocity (fakapenu), distinguishing between them, reference was rather a vague sympathetic initiative in the first case the giver of soumori does so in theory from arofa, affection; the proposer of tauvi does so because he wants the object. Hence, to the Tokopia the social context is different though the final result may be the same. To us, at least in theory, the difference in the final result is an indication of the social context (Firth 1959:138).

Salisbury, too, noted the subtle distinction between social contexts within the Rabaul market. When Tolai sellers have just arrived and have not yet sold any of their stock,

A seller sitting down and approached by one bringing an article of merchandise would accept it without question, as a gift, and would then bring out a return gift from her personal basket rather than her display stock (1970:181).

The dual nature of objects appears characteristic of

traditional PNG societies.

Anthropologists have attributed the apparent success of the traditional gift-giving economy in functioning alongside a market-oriented economy to an ability on the part of indigenous peoples of PNG to 'compartmentalize'. This psychological forte allows these people to deal with the ambiguity of two apparently opposed economic systems functioning simultaneously. I contend, however, that the reason for the persistence of the traditional sector is not moral flexibility or the ability to perform mental gymnastics. It is not so mystical. It is simply that the capitalist system as integrated into the traditional societies of PNG creates no conceptual conflict. Traditionally, transactions involved different degrees of self-interest and shifts were made between commerce and prestation depending upon the social context. Participation in the capitalist system has required no erosion of morality, but only a logical extension of the traditional capacities of the 'gift' and traditional conceptions of morality, a morality which differs fundamentally from our own.

Exchange theory provides us with useful typologies; however, the difficulty in applying them results not only from their high level of abstraction, but also from implicit ethnocentric assumptions embodied in them regarding the concepts of person, morality and the nature of social integration.

K.E. Read, in an article on comparative ethics, placed the ethical categories of western European culture (from which has sprung the idea of a science of man) next to those held by the Gahuku-Gama, a people of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea. Read recognized that, for these PNG people, moral judgements, such as those made in exchange, manifest a specific ethical orientation, a particular ontological conception of man and of human relationships.

Primitive ethics have received relatively little attention from anthropologists.

It is also a disappointment to discover that where there has been an attempt to deal with the matter systematically, ethics are generally confused or equated with religion, the investigator apparently considering that once he has described the religious beliefs and sanctions of a people he has disposed of their morality (Read 1955:235).

Read discusses two states of society postulated by Marret in relation to ethics. The first is the level of primitive culture and was characterized by the fact that custom forms the bonds of society. The other state,

is characterized by the rational selection of preferred ends and by the existence of ideals. The primitive (synomic) stage of society is thus regarded as a region of habit resulting from a subconscious selection of ethical standards. The higher, syntelic stage of society is a region of reflexion in which ethical standards are selected consciously by a rational intelligence (Read 1955:239).

Read refutes the separations drawn by Marret by revealing the Gahuka-Gama as actors who evaluate situations and respond rationally and morally in accordance to conceptions of right and wrong. They are not passive adherents to tradition who make no choice, performing with steadfast conformity to custom. Their morality, however, is different from the traditional ethics of Western Europe and it is through comparison that Read makes the contrast dramatic.

The morality characteristic of Western European culture and fundamental to the discipline of anthropology claims each human is a person, a unique but relational centre of rationality and free will. This is a Judeo-Christian perspective which asserts each human being is a creation of God and possesses a soul. All humans, therefore, have equal potential and an intrinsic ethical value. Hence each human deserves consideration and must act properly towards all other humans with whom he or she shares a fundamental relatedness. The moral code is composed of 'universals'. Thou shalt not steal, or kill or commit adultery, whatever the circumstances. The rules are universal in intended application, divorced from social context.

Ideally, in our moral relationships, we

operate, as it were, from a fixed perspective of the person and his moral claim regardless of social ties or status to a certain minimum consideration (Read 1955:260).

The Gahuku-Gama do not have such an 'ideal'.

Within their community, rules regarding

what is right or wrong, good or bad, are not intended to apply to all men; they are stated from the position of a particular collectivity outside of which the moral norm ceases to have any meaning. Thus the manner in which people behave who are outside the tribal system of intergroup and inter-personal relationships is virtually a matter of indifference. More than this, the individual does not regard himself as bound to them by any moral obligation: it is justifiable to kill them, to steal from them and to seduce their women (Read 1955:256).

Many of the traditional cultures of PNG shared similar economic systems, religious attitudes, political motivations and social organizations. If we assume that underlying these structures is a similar ethical outlook we can begin to understand the response these societies have made to the introduction of commoditization. If the individual is not bound to all humans in the same degree or defines 'human' more narrowly and does not accord to all the same intrinsic value, he is obligated to behave morally only in a social context that involves him with persons with whom he chooses to recognize a relationship or a common humanity. Only in such a context is reciprocity a requirement. Only when a bond of friendship or kinship is at issue is moral behavior imperative.

Even when these intimate relationships are involved,

individuals do not passively accept what is merely a fluke of blood or marriage. Even close relations can be selectively activated or left unemphasized depending upon circumstances. Each individual engineers the social world in which he must behave morally, but

As a moral agent his responsibilities vary considerably according to the positioning of inter-personal and inter-group relationships. Any particular moral norm may therefore have a more or less relevance or requiredness according to the individuals involved in a specific situation (Read 1955:257).

For all people are not equal. Each is unique in substance. Each is secured in the world through a continuity of substance, through production, biological reproduction and exchange. His action is intertwined with his being. Only with capitalism is the 'self' a concept distinct from action.

Ideological separation of the person's performance from the person's substance structures the possibility that actors in the marketplace can be regarded as occupying equivalent positions. The acknowledgement of substance is a prior condition for entry into the marketplace in the sense that the individual is a substance. But that substance does not determine the specifics of performance in particular contexts (Barnett and Silverman 1979:51).

Within our own culture the status of humanity is broadly applied hence we are all complete and capable of

Although only an illusion in our own society, the notion of universal obligation has become an implicit assumption in exchange theory but inadequate in explaining a social world where rules of behavior are based on context. The results of attempted application yields explanations in which real social action is seen against a nonexistent 'ideal'. PNG societies become societies of ambiguity, battles of society against culture, examples of morality in decay and ripe settings for anomie and social disintegration. However, if we accept that morality in PNG is context-bound, the 'dual nature' of goods as commodities and the persistence of a traditional gift-giving economy become sensible. Participation in the modern market economy cannot be presumed to erode morality. People behave in the market place according to the morality demanded by the context. No confusion, no new ambiguity results. No great mental or moral gymnastics are required. Psychological compartmentalization is not required in order to function in two very different systems demanding two seemingly opposed ethical stances. The systems are not so opposed and the traditional context-bound morality can adapt to change nicely.

The very assumption that cultural change can lead to anomie and moral decay as the ideals of a society become questioned and deviated from is itself drawn from an ethnocentric view of social integration. Bateson in Naven

noted that, while change threatened the social integration of Iatmul, the type of disintegration threatened was of a different nature than that feared in our own societies.

In our case, the threat is one of increased muddle and confusion in our cultural norms, a rot which might spread through the community, producing first a lack of orientation among individuals and finally the collapse of the society (1958:106).

But to Iatmul, like to PNG societies,

there can be no great threat of general confusion resulting from a blurring of cultural norms, since the chronic state of the culture is one in which the norms are weakly defined. Neither can there be conflict between an organizing centre in the purely peripheral system of the Iatmul. Rather the threat is one of fission of the community (Ibid. 106).

The social integration of the Iatmul like that of other PNG communities is not based on the common recognition of a set of ideals. Although their societies may fission, it is unlikely that their cultures will crumble when exposed to commodities, cash and the modern market economy.

In summary, this chapter has examined the concepts of gift and commodity, 'gift' economy and market economy, prestation and commerce, in order to point out conceptual

problems in exchange theory as developed by Sahlins.

Between and within the 'gift' economies of traditional PNG there was an active engagement in negative reciprocity and the goods within these societies had a dual nature functioning at one moment like gifts and at another like commodities. Even food was used in trade which raises doubts about the 'moral imperative' Sahlins suggests for the transfer of food as a gift freely given. 'Gift-giving' was only required within the moral community, however, the context in which moral behavior was imperative was less clearly defined. Indeed, this context was ultimately simply the intention of the giver and hence social relations of production do not determine whether a good is a gift or commodity.

The subtlety in defining contexts as appropriate for reciprocity rather than for trade, appears to be a traditional characteristic of PNG societies and not a reflection of weakening moral strictures. What appears to be moral flexibility and mental compartmentalization is actually a logical extension of an indigenous morality which is undivorced from social context and not composed of a series of rules that apply universally.

The dual nature of goods and the context-bound morality are two traditional factors in the success of the gift economy in the face of the expanding modern market sector. In Chapter III I will illustrate the

perceptual problems that result from an application of inappropriate concepts to the PNG context by focusing on Gregory's Gifts and Commodities.

CHAPTER III

AMBIGUITY: FROM CONCEPTS TO CONSUMPTION

The conceptual problems inherent in the version of exchange theory developed by Sahlins are exacerbated when applied to the PNG situation. In assuming the existence of a distinct economic sphere in PNG, the categories of gift and commodity are also assumed relevant. Although concepts such as gift economy, market economy, gift and commodity can be analytically potent, such tidy categories are often confused with reality--a case of misplaced concreteness. Uncritical application of such categories to the analysis of 'economic development' in PNG renders a distorted view of reality. In other words, attempts to force PNG cultures into an order which is fashioned from our own ethnocentric view of 'how the world works' are likely to fail. Gregory's Gifts and Commodities (1982) illustrates this failure. This chapter presents, critiques and then employs ideas within Gifts and Commodities in order to illuminate the current PNG situation. The concept 'mode of production' is defined and applied in order to clarify the articulation between the imposed capitalist

system and the traditional gift economy. Points of capitalist penetration will be discussed and the source of ambiguities will be identified.

Gifts and Commodities has been considered a valuable framework of analysis for anthropologists (Schwimmer 1984). The stated aim of the book was to critique neoclassical economic theory, a perceived necessity considering

its pervasive political importance: it is often used to provide theoretical justification for development policies of a highly dubious nature (Gregory 1982:x).

Meillassoux (1972) asserts that this 'liberal economics' developed as an attempt "by the rising bourgeoisie to demonstrate that economics is ruled by 'natural' and 'universal laws'" (1972:189). He argues that, like capitalist doctrine, liberal economics gives the bourgeoisie apparent scientific ground for its political domination (1972:189). Gregory contends that neoclassical theory distorts the reality of non-European economies and prescriptions derived through its application are inappropriate. He explains that:

The principal problem of economics is the analysis of consumer behavior under conditions of unlimited resources. This problem assumes that an individual maximizes utility, subject to certain constraints (1982:7).

But, as Meillassoux argues, the neoclassical economists

failed to note as Mauss pointed out that "homo economicus" is a product of history. He is an ideal picture of the bourgeois entrepreneur and, as such, embodies certain sociological assumptions, one of them being that he is dealing with objects rather than with peopleand another being that he is free from all sorts of pre-established social dependency, a situation which was the result of the bourgeois industrial revolution (1972:190).

Homo economicus was a creature of unlimited wants maximizing profits by exercising choice in a market setting. By focusing on choice the problem of economic activity shifts

to the level of psychology: the principle of explanation of the economic phenomenon is to be found in the behavior of individuals and boils down to a problem of consumer attitudes (1972:190).

The same basic economic rules, claimed to be known intuitively, were assumed to apply to all cultural settings (Gregory 1982:26). But when it was observed that in some non-European societies, particularly PNG, profit maximization appeared not to be the motivation in exchange transactions, a 'Theory of Distortions' had to be erected to account for apparent irrationality. Attempts were made to make behavior fit the model.

Economists employ the analytical category of 'goods', a universal, subjectivist concept, which allows

the neoclassical framework no objective empirical basis for distinguishing between different economic systems. Hence, when such analyses are performed upon a traditional gift economy, the result is indistinguishable mush. Gift economies "are most often bundled under the label of 'primitive' or 'traditional' economies and dealt with indiscriminately" (Meillassoux 1972:190). Frequently they are transformed into a version of primitive capitalism or primitive communism (see, e.g., Kapauku Papuan economy) (Gregory 1982:107). The significance of the gift is lost in the vastness of the category 'goods'.

Gregory also criticizes the neoclassical focus on consumption and the treatment of production, exchange, distribution and consumption as independent and autonomous activities. He argues that production and consumption have a particular kind of circular relation, a point he develops later in his book. A more general criticism, aimed at both economists and anthropologists, is made regarding the analysis of cultural data within an evolutionary framework. Frequently, developing societies are analyzed as if they were evolving in isolation toward an economic system such as our own when in fact, Gregory asserts, these societies are subordinated to a European capitalist system. This indirect or direct colonial context must be addressed in an analysis of developing economies.

Neoclassical economic theory, Gregory concludes,

is not only incapable of containing analytically the reality of a gift economy, but its models for economic change, developed within an evolutionary framework, cannot account for the current state of economic affairs in PNG. For, as he points out,

the problem to be explained in PNG is not the story of the demise of the 'traditional' sector and the rise of the 'modern' sector but rather the simultaneous rise of both commodity production and gift production. The gift economy of PNG has not been destroyed by colonisation but has effloresced. The labour-time devoted to the production and exchange of things as gifts has risen rather than fallen, a change that has occurred simultaneously with the introduction of cash crops and wage-labour (1982:115).

Gregory claims the political economy approach¹ is more workable in analyzing development through imposed capitalism in traditional societies. Theorists under this theoretical flag

are all concerned to lay bare the principles governing the reproduction of the surplus product in different economic systems (1982:6).

Originally, political economy theorists sought to explain surplus in European capitalist economies identifying particular laws of motion within these systems. The

1. This is the substantivist side of the formalist/substantivist debate.

basic analytical concept employed was 'commodity'. A commodity, Gregory explains, is "a socially desirable thing with a use-value and an exchange value" (1982:iv). Use-value is intrinsic or discovered by society at different stages in his historical evolution (1982:10). Exchange value, on the other hand, is extrinsic and "refers to the quantitative proportion in which use values of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort" (1982:10).

Unlike a gift, the commodity is alienated from its producer. It carries with it nothing personal. It requires precise repayment without delay and can travel between any persons--complete strangers--it makes no difference. The commodity is the creature of a market economy and has an exchange value which relates it to many other commodities. For it, many substitutions are possible and the commodities' 'value' is subject to measurement by a common standard.

Exchange value, the defining characteristic of a commodity, is a quantitative measure of, among other things, the labour expended in the commodity's production in relation to the amounts invested in other commodities. This 'relational value' is based on a generalized concept of labour--an abstracted labour in which the source of energy in production no longer matters. It is only the amount which is important.

It was Marx who first noted that exchange value

was the historically specific property of the commodity and that the existence of commodities presupposed certain social conditions (Gregory 1982:12). This 'historical specificity' of the analytical category, commodity, allows the political economy framework to distinguish between different economies.

Political economy takes as its problem the reproduction of particular social systems through the distribution of surplus. Consciously and unconsciously, anthropologists have extended the principles of political economy in their analysis of exotic societies and their development of the central concept of 'gift'. By combining the ideas of anthropologists like Morgan, Mauss and Levi-Strauss with those generated by political economists, Gregory creates a synthetic framework for the analysis of economic transformation in PNG.

Gregory notes that gift-giving establishes personal relations between people. Commodity exchange, in contrast, establishes only objective relations. Incorporating ideas from Marx, he asserts:

commodity exchange is an exchange of alienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence (1982:12).

Alienation is defined by Gregory as "the transference of private property" (1982:12), a convenient definition which

allows him to generate a questionable opposition between a gift economy and a class-based system. Since, as Gregory claims, there existed no concept of private property ownership in the 'clan-based' society which is organized on the principle of common property, there could be no exchange of alienated objects. In these societies exchange takes the form of non-commodity exchange, the transfer of inalienable things, between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal dependence.

Whereas political economists attempt to clarify the relation between things, anthropologists have usually been more concerned with relations between people, in particular with kinship. Morgan distinguished descriptive from classificatory kinship systems and later anthropologists illuminated the connection between kinship systems and land tenure. Class-based societies, characterized by alienable rights over things, private property and a clear distinction between owners and objects, occur in association with separatism between producers and the instruments of production (i.e., land). The clan-based system, characterized by exchange of inalienable things and reciprocal dependence, occurs when unity exists between producers and the instruments of production (1982: 12). Classificatory kinship is associated with such a system.

In contradiction to the neoclassical economic assumption and in contrast to the commodity economy, the

motive of transactors in a gift economy is not to maximize profit, but instead, to acquire as many gift-debtors as he possibly can (1982:19). Gregory asserts that gift transactors desire the created personal relations rather than the things themselves (1982:19). In summary, Gregory writes:

The concepts, gifts and commodities, while different, are nevertheless complementary: the concept commodity, which presupposes reciprocal independence and alienability, is a mirror image of the concept gift, which presupposes reciprocal dependence and inalienability (1982:24).

It is with these analytical categories that he proceeds to develop his framework for analysis.²

Within his framework, the process of 'reproduction' is central. "The term...is used...to refer to the self-replacement of both things and people" (1982:29). A holistic concept, it includes the "production, consumption, distribution and exchange of things on the one hand, the production, consumption, distribution and exchange of people on the other" (1982:29).

Marx, focusing on European economic systems, firmly rooted reproduction in the methods of production.

2. While Gregory does briefly refer to the work of Godelier (p. 22) and the notion of 'dual nature', his understanding of the gift remains narrow--a simple negation of commodity.

He observed that in class-based societies the producers were separated from the means of production and that this separation made necessary, for a class of people, the exchange of labour for cash to obtain food. Reproduction in this setting takes the form of commodity reproduction and capitalists can ensure the reproduction of wage laborers as wage laborers through the minimal wages they pay (1982:30). Reproduction is, then, fueled through production.

While appreciating the Marxist model for the capitalist economy, Gregory critiques Marx for having an incomplete notion of methods of consumption and neglecting the importance of consumption in the process of physical and biological reproduction. Gregory also questions the legitimacy of the Marxist claim that the objectification process, production, which turns personal things (i.e., labour and products) into objects, always predominates in reproduction. He claims that particular reproduction processes are defined by the particular distribution of the means of production between social groups.

Within the clan-based society there is generally no concern over access to land; usually land is not a scarce resource. It is not necessary for a group of people to exchange their labor for access to the means of production. Social control in this system is realized through control over subsistence. Meillassoux explains,

control over subsistence is not control of the means of production but of the means of physiological reproduction, used to reproduce the life of the human producers (1972:196).

Such control is achieved

both biologically and structurally...through the control of women considered as the physiological agent of production of the producer (1972:196).

Access to women-gifts requires participation in exchange activities. Reproduction in this setting, therefore, takes the form of gift reproduction, a personification process in which objects are made into personal gifts.

Gregory, in his discussion of gift exchange, refers to Sahlins' model for primitive exchange. He asserts that the relationship between types of gift exchange and degrees of social distance is best illustrated by a series of concentric circles.

A measure of kinship distance, then is the radius of one of these circles. At the periphery, for example, individuals are almost complete strangers, while at the center they are very closely related. It is only at the periphery that exchange assumes the pure commodity form (1982:42).

Like Marx, Gregory sees commodity exchange occurring at the periphery of the traditional society. And, like Sahlins,

he has implicitly created an economic sector.

Reproduction of the clan organization requires that appropriate relations of production be maintained. Self-reproduction requires the consumption of food and biological reproduction.

While the consumption of food is obviously a necessary condition for self-replacement, it is the other role that food plays which provides the key to understanding gift reproduction. Food as nourishment is a universal condition for self-replacement and, therefore, of little help in understanding the special nature of gift reproduction (1982:77).

It is the role of food as symbol of marriage and sexual relations, the perceived relation between food and human substance which illuminates reproduction. Because of its highly charged symbolic nature, food is 'good to think'. Within traditional societies, food is subject "to various rules relating to its shared consumption. These rules, together with food taboos, serve to regulate the relations between groups of people" (1982:78). The bonds and boundaries formed reflect a concern for bringing things of different substance together while keeping things of same substance apart (see Gells 1979). Gregory concludes that

consumption in a gift economy, then is not simply the act of eating food. It is primarily concerned with the regulating of relations between people in the process of social and biological reproduction (1982:79).

The classification of kin is reflected in cultural proscriptions regarding the sharing and consuming of food. It is consumption, then, that governs the relations between people and, hence, directs the process of biological reproduction that allows for the persistence of clan organization. Having delineated the process of reproduction and self-reproduction in the gift economy, Gregory's explanation for why the gift economy persists becomes obvious. It is the continuation of traditional land tenure systems, the basis for the clan-based society, which accounts for the persistence of gift reproduction (see Figure 3).

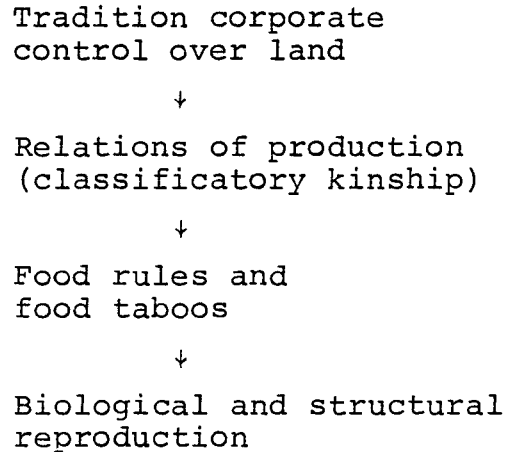


Figure 3.

What happens to this process within the development context of today? Gregory turns to the problem of explaining the simultaneous rise of both commodity production and gift production in PNG. He concludes that

the essence of the PNG economy today is ambiguity. A thing is now a gift, now a commodity, depending upon the social context of the transaction. A pig may be bought as a commodity today so that it can be used in a gift exchange tomorrow....The colonization of PNG has not produced a one-way transformation from 'traditional goods' to 'modern goods', but complicated a situation where things assume different forms at different times in different places (1982:115).

Gregory, in creating his analytical categories, defined gift in relation to commodity, a familiar process as it occurred in Sahlins' development of a model for primitive exchange. Perhaps in our capitalist ideology, gift is the mirror image of commodity. But the concept of gift in our culture, as Foster (1961) asserted, cannot be equated with the concept of gift as it relates to the PNG context. The gift in PNG is more than its label implies. It has a dual nature, potentially expressing many degrees of obligation and self-interest. The gift, traditionally, could be freely given or it could function much like a commodity. I contend that the 'new' ambiguity observed by Gregory is only an extension of the gift's traditional nature. The ethnographic category of gift and Gregory's

analytical concept, do not correspond.

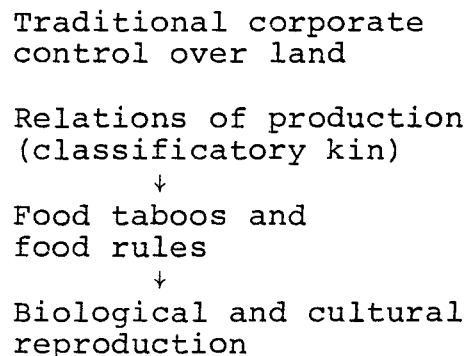
The gift, as illustrated in Chapter II, cannot be related to the commodity in any simple way. Certainly they are not opposites except, perhaps in our own culture. The conceptual problems discussed and critiqued in the previous chapter can be found in Gregory's book. He accepts Sahlins' concentric circles of kinship and assumes a moral boundary between economic and social spheres. The categories of commodity and gift are assumed relevant. But within traditional societies there often existed no distinct economic sphere--no conceptual opposition between commodities and gifts existed. There was no reason, therefore, for these societies to hold apart modern goods from traditional goods or find their integration conceptually problematic. However, when Gregory creates his analytical categories, gift and commodity are necessarily placed in opposition. In applying these concepts to the analysis of economic change in PNG, he finds the essence of the PNG economy today to be 'ambiguity'. But it is because gifts and commodities are conceived as opposites that their apparent co-existence become problematic. The persistence of the gift economy in the face of commoditization is contradictory only because, according to Gregory, they are mutually exclusive. Instead of reconsidering his categories, however, Gregory sets out to 'make sensible' the ambiguity his model forces him to assert.

Ambiguity in the PNG economy is explained by Gregory in relation to land.

The thesis advanced in this chapter is that while colonisation has fathered the rise of commodity production in PNG it has only succeeded in transforming labour and primary products into commodities, not land....The clan has maintained control over it and has by and large, prevented a land market from developing. Thus the material basis for the persistence of clan organization has not been destroyed (1982:116).

Gregory argues that because land, the material basis for gift reproduction, has remained under traditional control the basis for gift reproduction remains intact and hence such reproduction persists. However, persistence of gift exchange activities occurs even in those areas where land has become personal property and is no longer held in common (Rodman, personal communication) (see Figure 4). This would suggest that beyond the material basis for reproduction there is a strong ideological basis that allows for cultural reproduction even when the material conditions of economic life have been altered.

Figure 4.



The problem with Gregory's conclusion becomes apparent in studying Figure 4. For it is not corporate control which is important but, rather the production and control of surplus which is essential. If the means of production is transformed into personal property and/or labor is used to produce commodities, what then fuels the gift economy? Cash. We can improve the model in Figure 4 by incorporating Meillassoux's ideas. For as he observed, reproduction of the gift economy is accomplished through control over subsistence rather than control over the means of production. Access to land is therefore theoretically not essential (see Figure 5).³

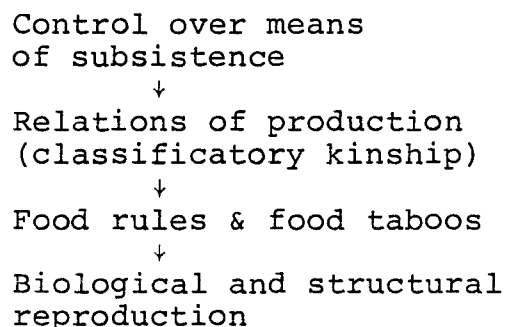


Figure 5.

We can conclude from this discussion that gift reproduction can still occur in the midst of an imposed commodity exchange system. Ambiguity arises from this situation, but I contend it does not appear at the level of 3. Of course, in reality it is.

gift versus commodity. Gregory asserts that the contradictory economic situation he identifies is inherently unstable (1982:117) and this issue should be further explored.

Gregory delineates two processes at work in PNG. A subjectification process turns objects and commodities into gifts. An objectification process transforms traditional gifts and non-commodities (land, labour, etc.) into commodities. He connects these processes to two distinct, coexisting modes of production.

The concept 'mode of production' comes from Marx and is clarified by O'Laughlin. She asserts that there are real structures or regularities in nature.

The structural regularities of the world are material, but they are also dialectical and therefore constantly evolving. Since all structures are dynamic processes--relations between being and becoming--they cannot be known positively through their phenomenal surface form (1975:343).

This underlying structure must be inferred through the observation of social/historical processes.

Through production for subsistence, man distinguishes himself from other natural creatures (1975:346).

In production people oppose themselves to nature by acting in the external world and changing it; but at the same time they are

dialectically one with nature, for in changing it they change themselves as well (1975:346).

History is, then, an interactive process between production, which is social action, and social structures which relate humans to each other and to nature. Marx generalized this dynamic to all societies, but he asserted that the quality of each particular social system was determined by its technical forces of production.

Hyden (1980) defines 'mode of production' as "an abstraction identifying the basic logic and structures of given formations" (1980:12). Each mode

has its own way of organizing reproduction of both material and social conditions, circulation of goods and services, and consumption. The concept refers to the economic organization of society in its widest sense (1980:12).

Each can be distinguished by the relation between people and the means of production. A mode of production is, then, as Wolf (1982) neatly summarizes:

a specific historically occurring set of social relations through which labour is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization, and knowledge (1982:75).

The capitalist mode developed in response to the

rise of alienated labour which resulted from the tie between producers and the means of production being severed (Wolf 1982:77). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in this mode it is production that determines distribution:

Those who detain the means of production can also detain the commodities produced. Those who produce the commodities must buy them back from the owners of the means of production (Wolf 1982:77).

Reproduction of the system is determined by production, for capitalists are dependent on the conversion of surplus production into capital to reproduce themselves as a class. Workers depend on wages they are paid for their productive labour. Low wages reproduce a working class.

Elements of the capitalist system have been imposed on PNG. Mining companies and plantations require labourers. Taxes have been erected which necessitate PNG peoples to participate in the capitalist market for cash. But, as Gregory notes, capitalism has failed to break down the pre-capitalist barriers of the gift economy. Why does this gift economy persist?

Meillassoux notes that gift economies rely less on the control of the means of production (i.e., land) than of the biological and structural reproduction through control over subsistence and women. Such gift systems

"represent comprehensive, integrated, economic, social and demographic systems ensuring the vital needs of all the members--productive and non-productive--of the community" (1972:197). Meillassoux goes on to contend that the demise of the gift economy is the inevitable response to in-creeping capitalism.

A change towards a material productive end, the shift from production for self-sustenance and self-perpetuation to production for an external market, must necessarily bring a radical transformation, if not the social destruction of the communities (1972:197).

The natural course will bring a development of a class system. Meillassoux believes that changes in production will alter the integrity of the gift economy. But I contend that this is not the case. Rodman in her study of the Longanan people notes that in Vanuatu, as elsewhere in the world, unpredictable world prices and general economic instability make clear to the peasant the necessity of maintaining subsistence production. There was for Longanans little incentive for improving the productivity of their 'cash crop' plantations. There was a downward trend in cash crop prices, no grading for crop quality and limited cash requirements. Indeed, there existed disincentives to an increase in cash crop production efforts.

Not only can Longanan producers not influence the copra prices they receive, the amount they produce is negatively correlated with price variations above a minimum threshold. They cannot time the sale of their product to take advantage of higher prices or avoid lower ones in the short-run. Small copra-makers and, to a lesser extent, larger Longanan producers, orient their decisions to make a certain amount of copra at a certain time toward cash targets they want to meet (to pay school fees, for example) (Rodman 1981: 296).

In her thesis Rodman makes several key points regarding cash cropping in Longana. (1) Participation in the market economy is precarious and most rural people maintain themselves with subsistence crops. (2) Because of the persistence of traditional land tenure systems, a capitalist mode of production has not developed. Traditional social organization persists and with it traditional obligations. (3) While the Longanan people consume many commodities, the persistence of subsistence agriculture ensures that they do not become completely dependent on purchased food. The production of cash crops need not, therefore, mark the demise of the reproduction of the gift economy as Meillassoux has suggested.

Meillassoux argues that the gift economy persists because that is what capitalists want.

The agricultural self-sustaining communities, because of their comprehensiveness and their *raison d'etre*, are able to fulfill functions that capitalism prefers not to assume in the

under-developed countries: the function of social security. The cheap cost of labour in these countries comes from the super-exploitation, not only of the labour from the wage-earner himself but also of the labour of his kin-group (1972:197).

This super-exploitation, according to Meillassoux, accounts for the circularity of migration in PNG (1972:198). The workers return to their villages because they have no choice. The gift economy persists because rural PNG people have no other option. Meillassoux writes

economic investigation shows clearly that, once people are compelled to undertake wage-earning activities in order to pay taxes and gain some cash, if the capitalist system does not provide adequately for old-age pensions, sick-leave and unemployment compensations, they have to rely on another comprehensive socio-economic organization to fulfil these vital needs. Consequently, preservation of the relations with the village and the familial community is an absolute requirement for the wage earners, and so is the maintenance of the traditional mode of production as the only one capable of ensuring survival (1972:198).

He assumes that peasants are dependent and capitalists are unquestionably in control and that given a choice, the peasant would embrace the things of capitalism and relinquish his bonds to people. Meillassoux argues that the peasant remains bound because there is no choice.⁴

4. I do not wish to argue that capitalists do not subsidize the wage labour sector by exploiting the traditional economic system. I simply wish to point out that there is another perspective. Both perspectives are required to fully appreciate the complexity of the PNG situation.

Rutz (1978) has also been concerned with explaining the persistence of the gift economy. He, like Rodman, observes that in a rural village in Fiji, "with the exception of tree crops, market participation is periodic rather than continuous" (1978:779). Households in the village were monetized but not commercialized. Production was geared toward consumption.

Persistence of the gift economy, he argues, is due to its welfare function. Obtaining assistance at times of crisis, gaining access to Fijian doctors, receiving support in land disputes and social conflicts and assuring security in old age, "all these things can be secured through ceremonial expenditure and none of them without it" (1978:801). Hence, he argues,

it can be expected that ceremonial exchange will persist as a significant aspect of social relations...until incomes have risen sufficiently to meet these social costs and until the government can supply current demands for social services now met through ceremonial exchange (1978:802).

While, like Meillassoux, Rutz stresses that social security is the major function served by the gift economy in the context of development and is, therefore, a major factor in the persistence of gift exchange, he also submits that persistence is due to traditional corporate control over access to land. He suggests too that

ceremonial exchange enriches personal experience and that it may well be valued and continued for its own sake. Perhaps peasants persist in producing, exchanging and reproducing gifts because they 'want to' rather than they 'have to'.

Rutz, in suggesting that peasants may consciously choose to maintain the gift economy, makes an important break from Meillassoux. Hyden (1980) makes the break even more dramatically. His analysis of economic development and the persistence of traditional economies in Tanzania provides a perspective useful in the PNG context. In Tanzania, as in PNG, the peasantry has not yet been 'captured' by other social classes (1980:4). Land has not been alienated from traditional corporate control. As owners of their means of production, these Tanzanian peasants retain a degree of independence. The term 'peasant' is used in this thesis according to the definition presented in Hyden's Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry (1980).

What makes the peasants different from other social classes is their position as producers with direct access to land, production with the help of family members largely for their own consumption but at the same time integration into a larger social economy to which they are forced to make a contribution in one form or another, notably tax or rent (1980:11).

In PNG there are taxes to render. Education must be financed. Many new 'needs' have been established and their satisfaction usually requires cash. Churches require money offerings. 'Development' places demands on the gift economy which can only be met through petty commodity production or the periodic exchange of labour for cash. But, as Hyden notes,

a peasant community may be involved in commodity production--based on the capitalist criteria of exchange value--but this need not be its total culture. Even if it is affected by the wider capitalist world economy, the village community is not just a replica of the larger society and the global economy...social formations survive because the economic structures that give them life are still at work (1980:4).

The predominance of one mode over another cannot be assumed as it is by Meillassoux. Predominance can only be known empirically.

Hyden argues that within the traditional economy the cost of reproduction is high and that it leaves the peasant

with limited interest in adopting practices that may raise agricultural productivity. Agricultural modernization is a threat to the domestic orientation of the peasant household (1980:14).

The risk of change is high and the necessity to change may

not exist. As long as peasants persist in subsistence agriculture and do not solely produce cash crops they can remain independent, uncaptured. Although they are tied through production to a larger capitalist world economy, they maintain an 'exit option' (1980:32). Hyden argues that because peasants retain control over the means of production, they retain a certain amount of independence from the state through which capitalism is imposed. Although the state depends upon the surplus it extracts from peasant production surpluses, the peasants "do not require the state for their own reproduction" (1980:16). Hyden concludes:

Historically the peasant mode of production has generally been overpowered by more effective modes. New social classes have risen to power and captured the peasants for their own ends....Experience has shown, however, that this is a slow and difficult process as long as peasants have access to land in which they can practise their extensive agriculture. As long as peasants find the means to secure their own reproduction they will resist conquest by other social classes (1980:17).

Access to land and control of subsistence is what, then, Hyden points to as the factors accounting for the persistence of a traditional economy in the midst of capitalist development. The demise of the traditional economy could be accomplished through the alienation of land and the creation of a landless class dependent on subsistence

wages for its reproduction. Until this transformation occurs the traditional mode and the capitalist mode will coexist.

To summarize, in this chapter it is suggested that production in the gift economy is geared toward consumption and that reproduction of the system is achieved through control over subsistence and women. It is argued that changes in production do not necessarily transform the traditional mode of production (Rutz, 1978; Rodman, 1980). Indeed, Gregory (1982) argues that commodities purchased with money gained in cash cropping activities are incorporated into the gift economy resulting in an efflorescence of exchange activities. Even when the means of production is no longer held in common, the gift economy flourishes, fueled by cash gained through the production of commodities (Rodman, personal communication). Persistence of control over the means of subsistence is the fundamental factor in the continuation of the gift economy.

Production in rural PNG is geared toward consumption and as Hyden notes, "it is as a consumer rather than producer that the peasant approaches the market" (1980:14). I propose that it is through consumption activities that capitalism penetrates the barriers of the traditional gift economy and that it is through consumption that ambiguity in PNG societies is generated. Chapter IV will develop this idea.

CHAPTER IV

CONSUMERISM AND THE GROWTH OF INEQUALITY

But they have had a taste of the technology system. They have drunk water out of a tap, ridden in a P.M.V., used electric light, bought lolly-water and other things in a store, attended a second-rate picture theatre somewhere, probably bought a new set of clothes, drunk in a tavern, played billiards, listened to a string band, stood outside a big store and looked at all the unreachable cargo in the display counters, acquired a cigarette lighter...so, when they go back to the village, it is not the same as when they left it (Kokare 1972:30 as quoted by Connell and Curtain 1982).

Consumption is a performance in which public culture is generated, expressed and reinforced. It is also a vehicle for personal declarations of wealth and status. Consumption involves moral judgements and employs a meta language of goods for "making visible and stable the categories of culture" (Douglas and Isherwood 1978: 57). Douglas and Isherwood assert that the "main problem of social life is to pin down meanings so that they stay still for a little time" (1978:64). Through goods, cultural meanings are weighted with material expression.

Goods, then, are the visible part of culture.

They are arranged on vistas and hierarchies that can play to the full range of discrimination of which the human mind is capable. The vistas are not fixed...their structures are anchored to human social purposes (1978:66).

Cultures are always changing and in a world of goods and changing social purposes, consumption "is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape" (1978:57). Order is imposed upon the world and through consumption we form ourselves from this order. Through consumption we attempt to 'become' according to our conceptions of what is good, useful and important. As values are redefined, change will be reflected in consumption patterns.

As asserted in the previous chapter, it is as consumers that the people of PNG, of their own volition, approach the commodity market (Hyden 1980). It is through consumption, therefore, that capitalism can penetrate and have its solvent effect on traditional culture. But as Fitzpatrick in Law and State in Papua New Guinea (1980) contends, capitalist penetration has not yet been sufficient to transform traditional social formations.¹

Indeed, capitalism has

1. Fitzpatrick represents an older viewpoint than Hyden, one that is quite different in terms of agency. In Hyden's scenario the 'uncaptured' peasantry eludes capitalists who would incorporate it into the state if they could. In the other view, the traditional social formation is encapsulated within a larger system because the persistence of the traditional mode serves state goals.

made for the conservation of traditional modes of production largely because they served to subsidize capitalist production and to counter potentially disruptive class organization (1980:2).

Fitzpatrick argues that law and state attempt to assure the coexistence of the capitalist and traditional modes, however, the penetration of capitalism is generating ambiguity. And although penetration is being limited, it has still

encouraged and contributed to the consolidation of social and economic differentiation throughout the country (Connell 1982:512).

Despite efforts to contain development of a class system in PNG, it can be said that classes now exist if only in an embryonic state (Connell 1982; Fitzpatrick 1980). This chapter employs ethnographic examples to illuminate points of capitalist penetration and ambiguity in PNG cultures and to illustrate developing inequalities.

Papua New Guineans want goods, but this assertion should not lead us back to the abstract economic man of neoclassical economics. To understand why Papua New Guineans seek to participate in the commodity market "any attempt to differentiate purely economic factors from the purely social is deceptive" (Fitzpatrick 1980:20). Participation must be viewed within the cultural and historical context.

Merchant capital first entered PNG in the nineteenth century, when there was an influx of metropolitan trading companies and recruitment of labour for plantations outside and later within PNG. Since there existed in the gift economy no need for people to sell their labour as a commodity, colonizers had to create a compulsion (Gregory 1982:119). Brute force was employed. Taxes were imposed. Chiefs or headmen were used as agents and rewarded for their recruitment efforts.

With an influx of mining capital beginning in 1880 and formal colonization, first by Germany and later by Britain, the need for labour grew. Concern for the maintenance of traditional cultures, however, led to the adoption of more liberal labour policies with semi-free and free labour developing from 1951 to present day (Gregory 1982:119; cf. Connell 1982).

In the post Second World War period, increasingly, the desire to consume European goods fueled participation in the commodity market. The

young native now signed on for work, not solely because he was driven by such spurs as the tax, though these were important especially in the period of the creation of the labour force. Now he was caught up in a new web of social relations; he wished to acquire the white man's goods, to buy clothing, lamps, food and a hundred and one objects for himself and his kin (Worsley 1957:97).

A need for cash had been established and except in those areas where access to markets permitted the sale of cash crops, the exchange of labour for cash was unavoidable. Consumption aspirations developed as a result of experience in centers of European activities and education (Fitzpatrick 1980:20). And as Worsley notes:

Once such wants have been created, they shackle the native more effectively to the European order than any legal or political compulsion, and render the latter much less necessary (1957:247).

But consumption is a cultural activity and involves more than just a rational attempt to maximize profits as is well illustrated by the dramatic rise of cargo cults after World War II. In reference to cargo cult, Worsley writes:

Its significance is not hard to seek in social conditions where the natives were rapidly developing new wants for European goods which could only be obtained by working for Europeans, for there was, in general, little market for native produceAs far as the natives were concerned, the Whites received the goods by steamer from unknown parts; they did not manufacture them, and merely sent pieces of paper back. They did no apparent work themselves yet refused to share their fortune, forcing the natives to work long and hard for a return of a small proportion of the goods they themselves obtained with such ease and in such profusion. Who made these goods, how and where, were mysteries--it could hardly be the idle white men. It was the natives who did all the manual work. If the goods were made in some unknown land, they must, then, be made by the spirits of the dead (Worsley 1957:97).

Not only was there a strong desire to consume, there was also, according to Worsley, a perceived a priori right to goods. Much work and ritual was expended in attempts to attract cargo away from white men to deserving cult members.

It is clear that "enjoyment of physical consumption is only part of the service yielded by goods; the other part is the enjoyment of sharing names" (Douglas 1978:75). Papua New Guineans participate in the commodity market for similar reasons that they participate in traditional exchange relations: to ensure autonomy, acquire status, become the equal of other consumers by communicating in the same language of goods. Their desire to consume makes access to cash necessary. In some instances, cash can be obtained through cash cropping. As discussed in Chapter III, consumerism and the production of commodities has not necessitated a turn to the capitalist mode, however ambiguity has been generated.

The early colonial administration, in some areas of PNG, arbitrarily froze the boundaries between clans in order to stabilize what they perceived as territorial confusion. This concretizing of what had been traditionally fluctuating borders affected clans differently. Inequalities resulted and the administration created courts in which land disputes would be heard and settled. As Meggitt (1977) notes, in many cases, land claims were concocted and clan members would lie in order to gain access to land for themselves and relatives at the

expense of opposing clans. Warfare was waged in the litigation hearings. Winners would profit and losers would retaliate with new land claims. The courts were kept busy. However after 1960, litigation procedures became more rigid and settlements less disputable. Access to land was less easily accomplished through the court system. Meggitt connects this change with an increase in violence and warfare in areas of PNG.

Fitzpatrick notes that,

with the extension of cash cropping and later, cattle raising, there is a greater awareness of land as having a reified value and there is effective pressure for more clearly defined individual rights in land (1980:106).

A.L. Epstein (1969) observed a number of disputes over productive land. He notes that the disputes result from pressure on land increased by the extension of cash crops. Less land remains available for subsistence agriculture, less time is allowed for fallow, and, depending upon the land tenure system, inequalities in access to land are becoming more entrenched (Epstein 1969:196; 1962:85). Elders and big men have created monopolies over the use of land.

T.S. Epstein notes that the introduction of perennial cash crops caused much strain among the Rapitok cash croppers who wanted their sons, who had helped them

establish and maintain their gardens, to inherit from them. She writes,

At many native local government council meetings, I heard councillors suggest a change from their traditional system of land holding vested in the matrilineage to one of individual ownership, so as to enable a man to leave his perennial crops and other assets to his own son rather than to his brother or sister's son. Individual ownership of land would have the additional advantage of enabling the owner to mortgage or sell his land as he wished (1968:83).

The accumulation of capital created tensions over inheritance and was disruptive to social relations (Epstein 1968:107). In instances where businesses had been developed and equipment amassed

fathers would seek to favour sons in preference to the traditional rights of nephews by putting vehicles in a son's name under vehicle registration laws, by putting cocoa proceeds in bank accounts in sons' names and by buying land in their names (Fitzpatrick 1980:116).

Traditional culture was being penetrated and changed. Inequalities were becoming more apparent within villages as Epstein's (1968) work on the Tolai clearly illustrates. However, transformation of the traditional mode has been prevented for still "the great bulk of land, even if it is used in production for the market cannot be passed by will but remains subject to traditional inheritance laws"

(Fitzpatrick 1980:116). Although individual rights over land and production are becoming more distinct, group control persists with the support of much government policy (Fitzpatrick 1980:107). While a peasantry, as defined by Hyden (1980) (see Chapter III), has been established, the class has been contained. Although a rural bourgeoisie has been identified (Fitzpatrick 1980; Connell 1982), dependence of these entrepreneurs and big men on the traditional mode has been maintained.

In those areas of PNG in which cash cropping has not become a viable solution to the problem of access to cash due to ecological or technological constraints, periodic exchange of labour for cash became an economic strategy. Salisbury, in the early 1960s observed that when Siane labourers returned from working outside of their village they brought with them goods purchased and cash saved:

Pound notes (and a few ten shilling notes)... are usually kept locked away in valuables boxes....It must be repeated that it is only paper money that forms a valuable; coins, particularly shilling pieces, form luxuries. Most Siane natives do not treat the two as interchangeable (1962:126).

Upon their return these migrant workers were compelled to share their wealth and to reactivate social relations through gifts of luxuries. Cloth, coins,

tobacco and other luxury goods were given. Pound notes were retained for buying shells but Salisbury recounts how labourers, having exhausted their supply of luxuries would quietly request that their pound notes be changed into shillings. However, such an exchange between spheres was normally unthinkable for a native (1962:130).

From the Siane example we can see the development of several sorts of ambiguity. The first involves the solvent effect of money on spheres of exchange.

The consumption of European goods involved an initial translation of the new into the known categories of culture. In this ideological reproduction, culture is put into practice. Cash and commodities are made sensible using traditional categories. The Siane acted upon the new items of consumption by translating them into the accepted moral order. But

the relationships generated in practical action, although motivated by traditional self-conceptions of the actors, may in fact functionally revalue those conceptions (Sahlins 1981:35).

Money has the potential to erode the boundaries between spheres of exchange and the categories of people which they set apart. As the order of things becomes divorced from the relationships of people, the means of cultural reproduction are lost and a distinct economic sector can emerge.

Since the reproduction of cultural categories does not occur in stereotypical fashion (Sahlins 1981), change in culture is inevitable, but it is also unpredictable and unintentional.

For the labourers, then, although they clearly distinguish pound notes as valuables, and shillings as luxuries, there is no longer a certainty that valuables must be used in gima activities, and luxuries for entertaining. A new sort of economic choice has been introduced by the fact that money has both forms and can be subdivided into smaller units in a way a shell or headdress cannot (Salisbury 1962:130).

Obviously, those with access to cash can compete in exchange activities which provide status positions. Pigs can be purchased with cash and then used in traditional exchanges to gain prestige. Systems of authority and prestige are therefore areas of ambiguity and change (Epstein 1962:53).

Ogan notes that "European money systems have a high symbolic power, permitting a high degree of...abstraction" (1972:177). He continues:

For example, while Europeans use money as a medium of value of paying wages for labour, Nasioi use money payment of labour as a symbol of generosity and/or of customary social relationships (1972:177).

Through ideological reproduction, money has been given cultural meaning. It has been imbued with symbolic significance through an evaluative process based on particular encounters with money. The many complex and subtle functions of money may not be completely grasped and this

incomplete understanding of the European money system weakens the effectiveness of money in differentiating economic activities from other aspects of social life (1972:178).

The Siane translated money into traditional categories,

'help' although it may now mean a loan of cash, is still given to clan mates and forms the basis for recruiting work groups and distributing food, luxury and gima activities are conducted with the same partners and towards the same ends. What has changed are the resources available and the method of allocating them between the same competing ends as existed in 1933 (1962:138).

Money is integrated into different cultures in different ways depending on experience with the cash economy and the unique system of shared meanings with which the world is known (cf. Firth 1959:147). But while money is translated in different ways in different cultural settings, this translation does not eliminate the solvent effect money can have upon cultural categories. This solvency

leads to a second source of ambiguity in the area of value.

Firth wrote that the Tikopia worked to gain cash and to purchase goods not produced in their own villages. These purchased goods, then

can be distributed almost entirely through local processes of gift and other forms of transfer to kin and to chiefs...they do not need in their own community to make any set of monetary equivalents between Tikopia goods and western goods (1959:147).

Because traditional PNG cultures divided the world along different lines, they were able to incorporate cash and commodities without incurring conceptual conflict. It is, therefore understandable that gift exchange persists in the face of imposed capitalism. However, it has been noted (cf. Gregory 1982) that such exchanges have increased and an explanation has been sought. Salisbury noted that a striking

change in Siane in the period of indirect contact was the great florescence of ceremonial and warlike activity. The activities themselves were not new, but new commodities were adopted for use in them while the amount of time spent on them and the volume of goods handed over increased tremendously (1962:121).

The increase in goods was exacerbated by an increase in technology and an increase in leisure time. The result was inflation.

Dalton (1971), in his work on North American potlatch attempted to explain why gift giving activity grew when Kwakiutl culture encountered the European market economy. Before the incursion of the market system, potlatches were given infrequently by nobles in order to affirm rank. However, the nature of the potlatch changed radically when in 1840 the Kwakiutl population was decimated. Six hundred rank positions existed among the Kwakiutl and in 1880, with a population fewer than three thousand, almost everyone had a rank and could hold a potlatch. The other important change occurring at that time was the increased use of purchased items in prestations. As previously mentioned, the incorporation of cash-purchased commodities created ambiguity in the area of traditional prestige and power for

now the opportunity for upward conversions--the use of...goods bought with cash to acquire internal rank and prestige positions--became unlimited (Dalton 1971:14).

Almost everyone had a rank position and through earning cash could afford the potlatch. The potlatches became more lavish and more frequent (Dalton 1971).

Like the Kwakiutl, PNG gift-exchange systems, once penetrated by cash and commodities, effloresced. Access to cash led to the purchase and distribution of more goods. Commodities were incorporated into traditional

spheres of exchange. Supply increased and, therefore, value of goods within all spheres was lessened. Inflation resulted. A larger and larger number of coupons, in Douglas's (1978) sense, were required for admission to certain statuses. Among the Kapauku,

the most devastating inflation occurred with respect to brideprice. Whereas in 1954 an average amount asked for a bride would be 120 old cowries, 120 new cowries, 300 beads, 3 dedege (Nassarius shells) necklaces and 1 large pig;....In 1975 the average brideprice was astronomical for a young Kapauku: 300 old cowries, 600,000 rupees(!), 5 pigs, sometimes even a sewing machine (or a typewriter!), 10 or 20 pants or shirts, 2 blankets, 5 pots, 1 or 2 machetes and an equal number of axes, and neither glass beads nor dedege shell necklaces were acceptable (Pospisil 1978:119).

Salisbury noted a similar development among the Siane.

Where in the indigenous situation, brideprices had been of two or three broken pieces of gold-lip shell and a few neta, now brideprices increased steadily and even in western Siane had doubled by about 1940 (1962:116).

The purchased goods incorporated into exchange activities required less 'household' cooperation and the time required to obtain the money for their purchase was much less than that needed to produce shell money or raise pigs. A person was less dependent on his kin group for successful acquisition of status. With increased

independence from kin, reciprocity and generosity can decrease (cf. Jorgensen 1981).

Capitalism has brought to PNG improvements in technology and this has led to a decrease in the time required to ensure subsistence (cf. Salisbury 1962). More leisure time is available to be devoted to exchange activities. Technology has also decreased the time required to accumulate sufficient goods to make prestations (cf. Counts and Counts 1971). Less time is required to give and to reciprocate and the velocity and volume of exchange activities has mounted (Salisbury 1962; Gregory 1982).

The penetration of capitalism has led to inflation and problems in maintaining traditional control over the acquisition of status and the relationships between particular categories of people. In addition, the migration primarily of males from villages to areas of wage employment places stress on those who remain behind to continue subsistence activities. These general complications resulting from commodity consumption are accompanied by the more specific problems resulting from the consumption of particular commodities. Alcohol consumption in PNG provides a good example.

Schieffelin tells us that

in order to control the amount of alcohol available to the public, the government of

Papua New Guinea passed a law forbidding beer to be sold in any amount less than a carton--a relatively expensive item (1982:53).

It was expected that few Papua New Guineans would be able to afford the purchase price. However, the stratagem failed as people would pool their cash to purchase beer. More importantly, the cartons of beer

at once valuable (expensive) and consumable, make a perfect item of feasting prestation along traditional lines. Indeed, a carton of beer is presently called 'little pig' in some parts of the highlands (Schieffelin 1982:53).

Bottles of liquor and cartons of beer have been incorporated as gifts into formal prestations and to reciprocate various services rendered (Ibid., 1982:65). Feasts now included home-grown vegetables, store-bought foods, alcohol and pork (Ibid., 1982:65). The amount of alcohol exchanged during these ceremonial events can be very large. Schieffelin describes a marriage celebration in which the respective fathers exchanged fifteen cartons of beer and two bottles of sherry on six different occasions. Much alcohol is exchanged and much is consumed. This commodity has been enthusiastically incorporated into traditional culture and the traditional theme of sharing and reciprocity has been applied to its distribution and consumption.

Another theme in traditional society

--competition--also is expressed in alcohol use. Several Kapanarans are proud of their ability to consume large amounts of beer. One noted that whereas people from other villages become inebriated after consuming four or five bottles, Kapanarans can drink much more (Grossman 1982:68).

The integration and consumption of beer are processes which reaffirm traditional values. Evidence suggests that this commodity has actually helped preserve traditional gift exchange (Schieffelin 1982).

Zelenietz and Grant, in discussing the Kilenge, remind us that this

application of traditional behavior to new substances is not unexpected, nor is it a response unique to the Kilenge (1982:356).

The Huron and Iroquois Indians reacted to the introduction of alcohol by integrating it into their feasting activities.

'Eat-all' feasts soon had a 'drink-all' equivalent where the host distributed liquor instead of food. Guests were expected to consume all that was put in front of them as rapidly as possible. Disinclination to drink, like disinclination to eat, was regarded as a severe social insult to the host (1982:356).

Alcohol has been incorporated snugly into PNG cultures.

Its consumption, however, has created new social stresses. An increase in public drunkenness has resulted in more violence and more traffic fatalities. A resurgence of warfare has been reported as revenge is sought for the traffic deaths of people and pigs (Schieffelin 1982). Beer drinking has also been reported to have a negative impact on subsistence economy (Grossman 1982:71), even though the purchase and exchange of alcohol appears to reinforce traditional social relations.

The desire to consume European goods has created a labour force in PNG, and migration from rural areas to centers of employment has, for some cultural groups, become a rite of manhood (Fitzpatrick 1982:20). This migration, however, is primarily circular (cf. May 1977).

Although urban labour no longer operates under the indenture system, traditional social formations remain accessible alternatives to the great majority of urban workers, circular migration remains the norm. Most workers have a low degree of 'urban commitment' and there is a great volume of exchange transactions between town and village (Fitzpatrick 1980:156).

Several factors encourage this circularity. The lack of married accommodations provided by the employer and the payment of what amounts to a single man's wages discourage permanent settlement in urban areas (Fitzpatrick 1980).²

2. Jorgensen (personal communication) recounts the social problems resulting from the return of migrants to their home villages after long periods of abnormal social relations in the all male work force at Bougainville.

The lack of social security beyond the kin group is a disincentive to urban living.

However, for some migrants, a short stay in the urban area becomes prolonged and, eventually, permanent.

Wage-labour frees one from the web of gift-debt but traps one in a wage-labour contract where all money earned must be spent on food and housing. As they say, "We just eat up our money! All our money goes on food and we are fed up!"....This makes it just that much longer to accumulate the money that they are expected to take back as gifts (Gregory 1982:147).

And as male absenteeism becomes long-term, a number of villages grow more and more dependent on the capitalist mode in the form of remitted wages (Fitzpatrick 1980:158). The growing dependence of these villages contributes to the increasing inequalities in PNG as do the rural/urban wage differentials (Connell 1982).

Eventually, wives join husbands and become completely dependent upon them. Whatever "status or power they had in the gift economy is lost" (Gregory 1982:147; cf. Connell and Curtain 1982:478). Urbanization has led to greater inequalities between the sexes while creating backwaters which are divorced from the political and intellectual development of the country. The rural regions experience a 'brain drain' as the people with skills and education migrate to urban areas and find secure employment with government agencies. An additional 'labour drain' of

rural areas results when unskilled men seek wage labour.

The unskilled migrants are in an unenviable position for their jobs will seldom provide much security.

If they become unemployed

they lack capital for travel, cannot distribute money and gifts in rural areas and must retain their precarious urban commitment. Thus unemployed men in Papua New Guinea are less likely to send home gifts or cash (Garnaut, Wright and Curtain 1977). The pattern of migration consequently has implications for the growth of an urban dispossessed group (Moravta 1979; Curtain 1980a). (Connell and Curtain 1982:472).

Ironically, it is that group of migrants who are secure in their urban context that can best afford to retain ties to traditional villages and hence maintain access to land through gift exchange.

A clear class system has not emerged in PNG.

Class terminology scarcely exists.

Only the Pidgin terms *pasindia*, from Papua New Guinea, and *lui*, from the Solomon Islands, with their connotations of 'urban-yet rootless-unemployed' fill this kind of gap (Connell and Curtain 1982:481).

But while capitalism in PNG has failed to sustain complete economic transformation, it has created ambiguity and the faint outlines of class distinctions. These disparate groupings can be summarized as follows:

1. Inter and intra rural inequalities:

These have resulted from consolidation of inequalities in access to land, labour and government services. A peasantry has been created through the imposition of state taxes and a rural bourgeoisie has emerged comprised of entrepreneurs and traditional big men. However class development has been contained due to the maintenance of the traditional mode.

2. Rural/urban inequalities:

These have resulted from the concentration of government assistance in urban areas and the high urban relative to rural wage which have stimulated outmigration from rural regions and made inevitable the underdevelopment of these areas.

3. Inter urban inequalities:

These result from the wages and security offered for different occupations. Those migrants who are unskilled retain integral operative links with the traditional mode. The skilled, formally educated migrants receiving more stable employment and higher wages are more committed to urban life. The unemployed, unskilled migrant joins the increasing number of dispossessed in PNG.

The inequalities increasingly apparent in PNG have resulted from the separation of production from consumption. It is consumerism that has caused "the self-sufficiency of the rural economy to be undermined by urban and international consumption patterns" (Connell and Curtain 1982:488). And it is consumerism that has led to the increasing ambiguity and inequality in PNG.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Mauss (1974) asserts that within traditional society, there exists no distinct economic sphere. Material provisioning of society is accomplished through a system of gift exchanges which create and reaffirm social relationships. Within the gift economy the material and moral are inextricably bound.

The gift, according to Mauss, is not always freely and spontaneously given. It can be quite obligatory or self-interested. Yet, whether a generous prestation or an ingredient of shrewd trade, the outcome of gift-giving is the creation of obligation and debt. It is this 'dual nature' of the gift in traditional societies that makes the gift more than its name implies (Foster 1961). Certainly, it cannot be considered the mirror image of a commodity.

Sahlins (1972), while paying homage to the work of Mauss, shows little intellectual loyalty. He creates a model for primitive exchange that ignores most of the insight within The Gift. Indeed, in his reworking of Mauss, a number of ethnocentric assumptions and thorny

conceptual problems are introduced into exchange theory. In Chapter II of this thesis, Sahlins' version of exchange theory was examined and critiqued. It was argued that the assumption that there exists in the gift economy an economic sector as distinct from a moral sector was explicit in his categories of exchange; as a result of this assumption, Sahlins introduced into the model for primitive exchange several conceptual oppositions characteristic of his own western culture. Most importantly, by opposing the social and economic in gift economies, the concept of 'gift' was recast in the much narrower mould characteristic of western society. The gift became confined to a social sector in which generosity and disinterestedness inspired its giving. Trade was then the negation of prestation. Social value and exchange value become contradictory.

C.A. Gregory, in Gifts and Commodities (1982), implicitly accepted the ideological oppositions found in Sahlins' Stone Age Economics (1972). By conceiving gift in narrow terms, he established commodity as its contradiction. Commoditization must then, logically, cause the decline and eventual disintegration of the gift economy. But, as Gregory observed, in PNG the rise of capitalism has been paralleled by a rise in gift exchange. Since the traditional mode and the capitalist mode are conceived as mutually exclusive, Gregory concludes the

essence of the PNG economy today is ambiguity. But this ambiguity to which he refers is only an aberration created by his analytical concepts. That objects in PNG should at one moment function as gifts freely given and the next as commodities, is within the traditional 'dual nature' of the gift. The ambiguity perceived by Gregory is not new and therefore not the result of increasing commoditization.

Gregory attributes the persistence of the gift economy in PNG to the non-emergence of land as a commodity. It is the continued corporate control of land that, Gregory contends, has allowed the traditional mode of production to continue. While Gregory's perception of the PNG context exhibits conceptual flaws, his identification of two distinct articulating modes of production in PNG is useful. I contend, however, that it is not the maintenance of traditional corporate control over land that accounts for the reproduction of the gift economy. Rodman (personal communication) notes that even when land has become personal property employed in cash cropping, gift exchange continues fueled by cash. Meillassoux (1972) argues that reproduction of the gift mode requires not control over land, but more specifically, control over the means of subsistence. He goes on to contend that this control continues in rural areas of PNG, not despite, but because of the capitalist sector which seeks to subsidize

itself at the expense of the gift economy.

While Meillassoux's argument is persuasive, it neglects the role of the indigenous population in maintaining the traditional mode. Rutz (1978) and Hyden (1980) would claim that continued participation in exchange activities occurs, not only because such activities enrich social experience, but because they provide for future social security. Participation in the commodity market is, on the most part, periodic, fueled by imposed taxes and the desire to satisfy newly acquired consumer tastes. Particularly for those in rural areas, commitment to the capitalist mode is limited and because control over subsistence is retained, an exit option exists. I contend that the traditional mode will persist in these areas as long as subsistence agriculture is maintained, however, persistence will not be free of ambiguity. As Chapter IV illustrates, tensions will persist over access to land, acquisition of status, value of goods and inheritance of capital. I predict the traditional mode will continue although the circles of interdependence and obligation will probably constrict and the inequalities due to differentials in access to land and government services will grow.

It is in the urban areas that control over subsistence is surrendered. And as migration becomes less circular and more permanent, the inequalities of a class system characteristic of the capitalist mode appear to

increase and become entrenched (Fitzpatrick 1980).

These class divisions are based on income levels reflecting occupation and ultimately education.

Income differentials are reflected in consumption patterns. Perhaps the most critical index of this is nutrition; a variety of evidence suggests that urban nutrition is often inferior to rural nutrition, following the replacement of traditional foodstuffs by imported foods (Parkinson 1977; cf. Thoan 1979). Imported foods have contributed both to a decline in urban nutritional standards and to the decline of the traditional agricultural system; an urban-based nutritional shift has had important implications throughout the Melanesian economies (Bathgate 1978; McGee 1975; Ward and Proctor 1980) (Connell and Curtain 1982).

An interesting extension of this thesis would be a study of consumption patterns and nutritional status in the rural and urban setting. The impact of inequality and the social and nutritional markers of class membership could be delineated. From this thesis it can be concluded that since class development is more apparent in the urban area, it is within this setting that income and consumption differentials will be most striking. In this setting a growing number of dispossessed appear and it is this group which form and biologically reproduce the wage labourers of the future.

Conditions that favour the emergence of an urban proletariat include improved urban wages, security of employment (or welfare/social security), urban home ownership or security of tenure, and the activities of unions in support of urban workers; they also include changes in the rural economy such as growing stratification, the individualization of land ownership, and the resultant emergence of landless villagers. Despite high wage levels in Melanesian towns, relative to many Third World urban centres, urban standards of living do not compare favourably with standards of living in rural areas, hence in the urban wage economy has not been marked (Connell and Curtain 1982:480).

But as urban wages increase, as consumption standards become increasingly set by urban practices, and as the service bias increasingly favours the urban setting, long-term commitment to the urban economy will become more marked. Only greater attention to rural development could offset the trend.¹

Permanent migration to the urban areas will have different costs depending on the migrant's skills and education. Hyden (1980) distinguishes between two urban segments. The unskilled migrants

1. Rural development is now being stressed in some provinces, i.e., West New Britain.

are often low-paid in occasional and unpermanent employment and often unemployed. They depend on the support of kin in the urban area and on urban agriculture. Their housing is low-cost, produced and located in ethnically based settlements (Fitzpatrick 1980:159).

The second segment

is, in the perspective of the capitalist mode, skilled and formally educated. It is largely committed to urban life and its links to the traditional mode tend to be incidental. Its members are comparatively highly paid and in permanent and stable employment (Fitzpatrick 1980:159).

If we accept the rough categorization of Papua New Guineans into three groups: rural dwelling, urban dwelling and skilled, and urban dwelling and unskilled, let's go back to the original question in this thesis and predict the impact of food commoditization on each group.

In the rural areas where the traditional mode persists, the commoditization of traditional foodstuffs has increased pressure on land, but production for subsistence and exchange continue, although food sharing may occur among a more narrowly defined group (cf. Jorgenson). Food is still employed as a gift and still retains its social value despite having a widely recognized exchange value. No conceptual boundary exists between gifts and commodities nor between tradi-

tional and modern goods. New European goods are imbued with the traditional 'dual nature' of indigenous goods. New foods are incorporated into the gift economy and are included in exchanges. The commoditization of food has had a minor impact on the traditional mode. The adoption of international and urban tastes, however, has separated consumption from production in rural areas and fueled participation in the commodity market.

For the newcomer in the urban area, dependence on commodity consumption can be offset by continued exchange with kin in rural areas. In this way some control over subsistence can be maintained and access to traditional foodstuffs can be assured. But as the stay in the urban area becomes long-term, such exchange diminishes and dependence on purchased foodstuffs heightens. When control over subsistence is surrendered and ties with the traditional mode lapse, dependence upon the capitalist mode is complete. In such a situation, the migrant must purchase food and is vulnerable to fluctuating food prices and changes in employment status. For the skilled, formally educated migrant with a relatively well-paying, secure job, such dependence is not problematic. This urban sector can better afford to purchase both European foodstuffs and traditional foods. Food commoditization has made this group dependent on urban wages for subsistence, but their vulnerability is lessened by their increased employment income and security. Although the

consumption patterns of this group may be markedly different from those of the rural sector, there is no reason to assume that this change will be negative.²

Among the unskilled urban sector the impact of commoditization is potentially most dramatic. This group is most dependent on the capitalist mode and most vulnerable due to low wages and minimal job security. This group is apt to have the most divergent consumption pattern from the rural sector for

urban gardening opportunities are few and even where locally produced food is available, prices are high (occasionally higher than imported processed and/or frozen commodities) (Connell and Curtain 1982:486).

Insecurity resulting from landlessness and dependence on remitted wages may, however, be offset by aspects of the traditional mode that are transplanted into urban areas. Fitzpatrick (1980) notes that among unskilled migrants there is a reliance on "ethnically-based" associations of mutual aid to provide some security for people against sickness and unemployment. Traditional type supports persist in these groups and food sharing continues. While commoditization of food erodes the security and threatens the well-being of the unskilled migrant, it has not stopped the giving. Exchange activities persist even in the urban environment, although

2. Some researchers suggest that an increased consumption of calories, particularly in the form of simple carbohydrates, occurs in the urban area and that this is related to an increased prevalence of obesity, diabetes and hypertension (Martin et al. 1980; Ward 1983; Zimmet et al. 1982).

participants may now be joined only by 'common language' (wantok) rather than 'common blood' (Counts, personal communication). Hence, even without control over land, even without control over subsistence, gift exchange can persist. Even where the traditional mode has no hold, aspects of the gift economy continue to be reproduced. Cultural reproduction occurs despite the absence of its material base.

It can be concluded that the transformation of the gift economy by the capitalist mode is not a given. Economic change is not accomplished through a law-like process. It cannot be predicted. Economic change can only be discovered empirically through the study of human action. It is people that accomplish change. Certainly, the power of the commodity to corrupt culture is over-rated.

This thesis began with the question of what happens when food in the gift economy receives an exchange value? It concludes that, while commoditization has increased participation in cash cropping and wage labour and contributed to the growing inequality in PNG, the gift economy remains strong. Where control over subsistence continues, food is still exchanged and shared. Where control appears lost and dependence on the capitalist mode is complete, food is still good to think and good to give.

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