

LEADERS AND LOGICS, PERSONS AND POLITIES

Harvey Whitehouse

Trinity Hall, Cambridge

Introduction

Nearly thirty years ago, Sahlins observed that the history of anthropological research in the Pacific was virtually coterminous with "the history of ethnological theory in the earlier twentieth century" (1963: 286). In reciting the list of revered names (Sahlins himself mentioned Rivers, Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, Firth, and Mead) one is compelled to ask why the Pacific has attracted so much top-level attention. For Sahlins, the answer lay partly in the region's ethnic diversity: "where culture so experiments, anthropology finds its laboratories—makes its comparisons" (ibid: 285).

At that time, Sahlins' laboratory was rather on the large side, encompassing the whole of Melanesia and Polynesia. The western end of this laboratory housed the most under-developed specimens of Melanesian political evolution while, at the eastern end, flourished the most highly evolved Polynesian polities. Between these two extremes, Sahlins' specimens were distributed along a rough continuum, which he referred to as "an upward west to east slope in political development" (ibid: 286). The variables on Sahlins' continuum were potentially many and varied. For example, from east to west there was a marked increase in the size of political units (ibid: 287), accompanied by a shift from segmentary to hierarchical structure (ibid). But what really interested Sahlins, above all, were the two kinds of leadership which existed at the extremes of his continuum-laboratory.

Sahlins began by emphasizing the "personality"-types associated with leadership (ibid). This led him to describe the Melanesian type of leader, or so-called "big man", as "thoroughly bourgeois", a "free enterprising", self-made man (ibid: 289). By contrast, he caricatured the Polynesian

chief to the east as a regal figure, the incumbent of ascribed rather than achieved authority. (One is not, of course, to be sidetracked by the paradoxical nature of this argument which holds that the feudal-type leader belongs to a higher social evolutionary stage than the capitalist-style leader!) The main point, for Sahlins, was that these two types of leader-personalities "not only reflect different varieties and levels of political evolution, they display in different degrees the capacity to generate and to sustain political progress" (ibid: 300). The chief could sustain more, the big man less, but both soon bumped their heads on their respective evolutionary ceilings.

The big man's evolutionary ceiling was set by the extent to which he could exploit a faction of loyal supporters. The more goods he gave away in pursuit of renown, the more the big man ran the risk of alienating his supporters. His faction was relatively easy to alienate because its allegiance was not based on any ascribed characteristics of the big man. In other words, he not only had to achieve a following in the first place, he had to go on achieving it through ongoing acts of calculated generosity. Thus, the extent to which Melanesian leaders could extract surpluses from the population was set at a lower level than in Polynesia, where chiefs were not so limited by the obligation to reciprocate the goods supplied by their underlings (ibid: 296). Sahlins acknowledged that this was not simply a matter of different leadership types but of a different distribution of the means of coercion: "a Tahitian or Hawaiian high chief . . . controlled a ready physical force, an armed body of executioners" (ibid: 297). Now, according to Sahlins, just as in the case of the big man polities, exploitation in the chiefdom had its limits. The dynamics of the chiefly economy (which sounded uncannily like its "laws of motion") were to be seen in the increasing appropriation of wealth by the ruling apparatus. The polarization of leaders and their people was described as an "overload" on their relations, resulting in rebellion.

The ideas which Sahlins put forward in 1963 are still very much alive, preoccupying the theoreticians of the 'eighties and 'nineties. This paper is concerned in part with the impact of Sahlins' political models on a new collection of essays under the title *Big Men and Great Men* (1991) edited by Godelier and M. Strathern. The volume is explicitly concerned with Godelier's thesis in *The Making of Great Men* (1986) which was in turn stimulated by Sahlins' big-man/chief comparison (cf M. Strathern 1991: xiii). Godelier's recent theories of leadership types and the "logics" of society to which they correspond also contain rather more distant echoes of the great nineteenth century theoreticians, such as Marx and Durkheim. In itself, all this is unremarkable; however, I hope to show that the influence of well-known theoretical traditions on Godelier's thought may be regarded as largely negative. As I see it, the most

important contribution of Godelier's recent work has been to highlight links between the social institutions of the Baruya in such a way as to invite comparison with other Melanesian societies. Godelier shows that models of big-men systems are quite inadequate for the analysis of highlands institutions in general, let alone for those of Melanesia as a whole. In a sense, then, Godelier advances some way beyond Sahlins in the analysis of Melanesian political systems. However, insofar as Godelier sets up a model of his own, the great-men society, which sits alongside the big-men society, and insofar as he allows himself to be guided by theoretical ideas which are remote from his ethnographic base, he seems to take a few steps back again for fear of losing touch with his anthropological family. To begin with, I will summarize, as briefly as possible, Godelier's concept of "two alternative logics of society" (the subtitle of Chapter 8 in his first publication [1986] and a guiding principle in his later [1991] rendering of the thesis).

A Summary of Godelier's Two Logics

According to Godelier, the big-men polity described by Sahlins has never been typical of Melanesia but, in fact, "is probably the exception in this part of the world" (Godelier 1986: 188). Sahlins' image of the big man was of a leader who "acquired power through his own merit . . . his ability to amass wealth and redistribute it with astutely calculated generosity" (ibid: 163). According to Godelier, such a figure belongs within a peculiar institutional system, in which: (1) the principle of competitive exchange takes precedence over the principle of war, and hence the big man takes precedence over the warrior (ibid: 185); (2) in which social inequalities derive from the system of exchange rather than from the machinery of initiation (ibid): (3) in which the nature and/or quantities of the things exchanged are not equivalent (ibid: 187).

These three institutional features which Godelier associates with the occurrence of big men are said to be mutually reinforcing in various ways. For example, if non-equivalent exchange is practised (3), then this tends to undermine warfare (1) in at least three ways. Firstly, if it is possible to exchange wealth for human life in the form of compensation for warriors killed in battle, then this sort of qualitatively non-equivalent exchange helps to keep the peace between groups. Secondly, if it is possible to exchange wealth for human life in the form of bridewealth payments, then this promotes (or facilitates) exogamy and alliance. Thirdly, and perhaps above all, unequal (specifically competitive) exchanges of wealth "partially obviate the need for warfare and the

warrior . . . As the peaceful extension of war, they tend to weaken and undermine its role in intertribal relations" (ibid: 170).

Another example of how the features of the big-men complex identified by Godelier may be seen as mutually reinforcing is the link between bridewealth (3) and the precedence of exchange over initiation (2). The principle of bridewealth promotes the emergence of the entrepreneur, a figure who accumulates and redistributes wealth to secure brides for himself and for his faction (ibid: 177). Such a figure tends to overshadow the ritual specialist, such as the masters of initiations (ibid). But the link between bridewealth and the precedence of exchange over initiation is even more forcefully expressed in Godelier's most recent work, as where he writes: "I assume that, when kinship relations are found to depend primarily on the exchange of women for wealth, there should be a development of some system of social integration and forms of male power centred on a sprawling system of competitive exchanges which tie local societies into one regional, intertribal network . . . In this social logic, there is no longer a place or a need for the big male initiations, as men and women are both controlled by their (unequal) access to wealth" (Godelier 1991: 278).

However, as I have pointed out, Godelier does not regard this particular social logic (the organic complex of the big man) as widespread. It is a system which Godelier contrasts starkly with the social logic of societies led by "great men" who are not big men. What distinguishes the great man figure is the possession of greater prestige, influence or power than his fellows. As such, the entrepreneurial big man described by Sahlins is undoubtedly also a great man (Godelier 1986: 166). but many of the kinds of great men that one finds in Melanesia are neither self-made men nor accumulators and distributors of wealth. For example, among the Baruya, there are shamans, hunters and warriors whose indisputable greatness has little or nothing to do with the control of wealth. Likewise, there are great men, such as the masters of the shamanistic initiations, whose status is to a large extent ascribed (inherited) rather than achieved. In general, presumably for reasons of economy, Godelier refers to great men who are not big men simply as "great men" (as if the big-men category is opposed to the great-men category rather than a subset of it). This procedure may in fact sit more comfortably with indigenous conceptions: the Telefolmin, for example, who take a very dim view of ceremonial exchange in general, assert that Hagen "big men are *not* great men" (Jorgensen 1991: 263, his emphasis). Meanwhile, M. Strathern's contribution to the volume suggests that big men and great men represent analytically incompatible principles of leadership because they embody different kinds of social relations: "one [the big man] is a figure who holds within his own will a precariously demonstrated ca-

capacity for unification in the face of external relations, while the other [the great man] is one conduit among many who hold between them the powers necessary to accomplish equally hazardous internal divisions" (M. Strathern 1991: 214).

At any rate, regardless of whether big men and great men are alternative categories of leader, Godelier regards the *social logic* of the great-men society as a mirror image of the *logic* of the big-men society. The main ingredients of the great-men organic complex are great men (of course), warfare, large scale initiation, and exchange which is qualitatively equivalent (only life is equivalent to life, as in sister exchange) and balanced (non-competitive). The elements of the great-men system are seen as mutually reinforcing. Consider, for example, the way in which Godelier ties the principle of warfare into his organic great-men complex. Godelier argues that sister exchange conforms to the "logic" of equivalence, such that only a woman is worth a woman. Its corollary, in this conceptual sense, is the idea that only a warrior is worth a warrior. People who think in this way are perpetually at war because an act of violence must always be repaid with an act of violence (an eye for an eye . . .). The establishment of peace between warring groups depends upon a violation of this "logic". For example through the introduction of wealth-for-life compensation. On the other hand, of course, the "logic" of equivalence and endless warfare also implies the continued precedence of warriors, which is to say great men who are not big men (ie because their greatness does not derive from the control of wealth). This is enough, then, to introduce the "two alternative logics of society" (Godelier 1986: 162), to show that they can be associated theoretically with organic systems of institutions, over which either big men or great men preside.

In addition to characterizing the two logics or systems of society, Godelier wants to address the question of how one system is transformed into another. He takes it as his starting point that the big-men system is derived from the great-men system, in an evolutionary model (1991:276). In the following section, I shall try to demonstrate that Godelier is attracted to some kind of Marxian theory of the transformation from great-men to big-men societies. There is some reason to suppose that he would like to conceive of the principles of sister-exchange and bridewealth, not merely as alternative logics but as alternative modes of (re-)production which determine the different political systems of the great men and big men respectively. If so, Godelier finds that his Marxian intuitions run into difficulties. He is bound to acknowledge that his would-be alternative modes of (re-)production are not practical alternatives. On the contrary, the empirical coincidence of many of the elements in his alternative systems renders any kind of "economic determinism" untenable. It also raises doubts about Godelier's models of

alternative organic systems. His solution seems to be the argument that alternative *logics* may co-exist, in a delicate balance (the big-men system forever threatening to achieve dominance over the great-men system). But I shall argue in the course of this article, that there is no convincing reason to think of the co-existence of sister exchange and bridewealth (for example) as indicative of the co-existence of alternative logics, let alone alternative modes of production. Nor do Godelier's models characterize alternative ideologies or indigenous political theories. My starting point is an assessment of the Marxian influence in Godelier's theory of "alternative logics". Mindful of many pitfalls, Godelier does not make his materialist inclinations explicit, but they may be read between the lines and marked in the margins.

Marx in the Margins

There have already been a number of scholarly attempts to account for the pattern of political and economic variation in the New Guinea highlands with reference to Marxian categories and theories. For example, Feil's (1985, 1987) investigations have focused on the covariation of ecological and socioeconomic variables on an East-West continuum, suggesting that differences in levels of political development roughly correspond to geographical variation in productive forces. This was not a deterministic argument, but asserted merely that climatic conditions imposed different "threshold levels" on production intensity in eastern and western highland societies (especially prior to the arrival of sweet potato). Meanwhile, Modjeska (1982) attempted to explain variable commitment to exchange in the highlands in terms of population densities and demographic expansion. His characterization of self-amplifying "use-value" and "exchange-value" cycles was similarly inspired by Marxian perspectives (as this terminology suggests) and proposed a more deterministic model of political development in which social "causations" and "causalities" were frequently postulated. Godelier's approach to political and economic variation in the region is therefore set against a background of materialist explanations above and beyond the early formulations of Sahlins.

It may seem that the obvious place to start in an exploration of the Marxian influence on Godelier's recent work, would be his suggestion that the "two logics could be considered to be two stages of an evolution" (1991: 276). But, of course, Marx was just one of many theoreticians to fall under the spell of evolutionism and thus Godelier's progressivist hypothesis has little about it that is demonstrably Marxian. I want instead to draw attention to the general direction in which Godelier

apparently wants to go in seeking the *mechanisms* of a transformation from great-men to big-men societies. This will reveal that Godelier is drawn to some kind of infra-/superstructure distinction which he subsequently (and without acknowledgement) seems to abandon. He does not abandon the evolutionary perspective, however, nor does he make clear the reasons for his continued attachment to it in the absence of a satisfactory theory of the mechanisms which produce it, assuming that Modjeska (1991) cannot be said to have uncovered the process (Godelier 1991: 276), and in spite of the evidence against evolution (Liep 1991; Jolly 1991: 77).

There is good reason to suppose that Godelier does indeed gravitate towards the idea that "social formations" come in a hierarchy of functional levels, organized according to their relative dominance in the historical process. Sixteen years ago, Godelier undoubtedly subscribed to this view, as when he declared: "to discover the deep logic of the history of societies it is necessary to go beyond the structural analysis of 'forms' of social relations or of thought, and to try to detect the effects of various 'structures' on each other, and their hierarchical arrangement and articulation resting on the base of their particular modes of production" (Godelier 1975: 15). That Godelier still wants to do something along these lines seems to be evident in his attempt to look beyond the forms of bridewealth and sister exchange and to focus on their functions in relation to the political economies of New Guinea Highlands societies.

There is some indication (Godelier 1991: 227-8; 293-4) that the functions of these two forms of kinship relations correspond to two modes of production/reproduction: (i) a sort in which control over (re-)production must be exercised directly by means of initiation (ie in the sister exchange complex); (ii) a sort in which control over (re-)production must be exercised indirectly, through the circulation of wealth (ie in the bridewealth complex). In either case, Godelier declares that it is necessary to attribute "a leading role to the nature of kinship relations" (ibid: 277). As I have pointed out, Godelier associates the "alternative logics" of bridewealth and sister exchange with two organic systems. But he wants to say more than that the elements of these respective systems are mutually reinforcing. In asserting that kinship relations play a "leading role", he seems to be relating them to the same sort of hierarchy of functions which informed Marx's distinction between infrastructure and superstructure (Godelier 1975: 15). Thus, Godelier seems to incline towards the view that bridewealth and sister exchange function at the level of infrastructure and constitute a "starting point" (1991: 277) in the sense that, having established the existence of one or the other, numerous other elements of the structural formation follow (being "determined" by the kinship relations).

The proposition that relations of (re-)production (kinship relations) determine other institutional functions certainly seems to be apparent in Godelier's most recent work. A particularly good example of this determinism, based on the idea of a hierarchy of functions, is Godelier's argument that sister exchange necessitates certain of the functions of initiation whilst ruling out certain other institutional functions. He writes: "I assume that in societies where the principle of the direct exchange of women dominates the production of kinship relations, one *must also* encounter systems of male (and sometimes female) initiation calling upon powers that are inherited or ascribed . . . rather than merited or achieved" (1991: 277, my emphasis). The reasoning behind the first assumption, that initiation is a necessary condition for (or "determined" by?) direct sister exchange, is not clearly stated for another seventeen pages, when at last it is explained that "the direct exchange of women between men . . . requires the construction of a collective male force to stand behind the individual (his sisters or daughters). This collective force is what is created by male initiation" (ibid: 294).

Now, the argument that a sister exchange mode of (re-)production requires (determines?) large-scale initiation may be criticized, in the first place, on theoretical grounds. I am inclined to ask: how many men does it take to compell a woman to marry a particular man? If it is indeed necessary for all men (potentially) to gang up against the individual woman, then is initiation the only possible means of achieving male solidarity in this rather specialized context? A Marxian interpretation could, incidentally, argue along directly opposed lines, by maintaining that the high levels of appropriation of female labour in ceremonial exchange systems (Modjeska 1982, Jorgensen 1991) would require (determine) considerable superstructural reinforcement, whereas the less "exploitative" production relations of great-men societies ought to make the "policing" or political domination of women a less pressing concern. It is of some interest that Telefolmin men roundly condemn the exploitation of women in big-men societies, and lack the institutional and moral framework to engage in such exploitation themselves (Jorgensen 1991). Thus, for the purposes of maintaining materially exploitative gender relations, it ought (logically) to be the societies founded around bridewealth rather than sister exchange that attempt most ardently to secure the economic interest of men, as a "class", by political means.

Underlying Godelier's argument for a link between sister exchange and initiation is another line of reasoning. Godelier seems to be saying that sister exchange does not supply in itself a means of integrating the groups which make up society, unlike the principle of bridewealth which does. Thus, if initiation were not necessary as a means of enforcing sister exchange, it would be necessary anyway as the "institution by which

society represents itself as a whole" (ibid: 277). At this stage, it seems as if Godelier is torn between his Durkheimian and Marxian instincts. On the one hand, society as a whole is represented by initiation, and on the other hand initiation represents only the male society, being the instrument of men's domination of women. I am prepared to accept that the idealist and materialist perspectives need not be as incompatible as some writers seem to suggest (see Morris 1987: 122). However, as far as Godelier's argument is concerned, my main criticism would be that the (presumably Marxian) suggestion that a sister-exchange mode of (re-) production determines the superstructural machinery of large-scale initiation, is without adequate foundation. By contrast, the Durkheimian hypothesis could be more rigorously developed. I wonder, for example, whether it might be fruitful to explore the possible parallel between Durkheim's thesis that (crudely) social evolution embodies a transformation from "group equals god" to "individual equals god," and the corporateness of initiation systems which might be said to evolve into entrepreneurial cults of the self.

The generally implicit role of historical materialism in Godelier's thesis is also brought into question by the ethnographic data. On the one hand, the practice of sister exchange is not everywhere associated with (for example) large-scale initiation (Juillerat 1991: 130-1). On the other hand, sister exchange does not seem to rule out any particular institutional arrangements, even bridewealth. Godelier does not hesitate to acknowledge the second point. Indeed, he observes that the Baruya operate the principles of sister exchange *and* bridewealth (Godelier 1991: 281), as do the Duna (ibid: 289) and numerous other societies. Furthermore, many of the institutions which Godelier argues are associated with the principles of bridewealth and sister exchange respectively, empirically occur in conjunction with both sorts of "kinship relations" (ibid: 279). However, none of this leads Godelier to question his assumption of the "centrality" of kinship relations. Rather he concludes that the two logics (or what I suspect he would have preferred to think of as modes of (re-) production), may be present simultaneously in a single society. Hence: "The transformation of great-men societies into big-men societies cannot be a problem of one principle turning into another, but of a change in the relation of dominance between the two" (ibid: 284).

Once Godelier reformulates his thesis in these terms, he is forced to give up altogether on structural Marxism (assuming that this *is* where he had originally been heading). In conceding that sister exchange can co-exist with almost any political principles (including bridewealth), it becomes obvious that "kinship relations" do not even determine other institutions in the sense of setting "outer limits on the variation and development" (Friedman 1975: 164) of society's institutions. Thus, the

idea of a "hierarchy of functions and structural causalities" (Godelier 1975: 15), which Godelier appears to be moving towards in his theories of great-men and big-men societies, is eventually ruled out of court. However, it is not clear that Godelier acknowledges this ruling, since at no point does he withdraw his attribution of "a leading role to the nature of kinship relations" (ibid: 277).

The direction in which Godelier's thesis seems to develop is strikingly reminiscent of Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1964). Like Godelier's big-men and great-men polities. Leach's Shan and *gumlao* systems are the polar types of a continuum: "The majority of actual Kachin communities are neither *gumlao* nor Shan in type, they are organized according to a system . . . which is, in effect, a kind of compromise between *gumlao* and Shan ideals" (Leach 1964: 9). In a similar vein, Godelier ends up by suggesting that most New Guinea Highlands societies constitute a compromise between big-men and great-men systems or logics. However, whereas the Kachin are able to distinguish between the logics of Shan, *gumsa* and *gumlao* political ideologies, the distinction between big-men and great-men systems does not correspond to any indigenous body of political theory. Thus, if big-men and great-men systems *neither* constitute alternative modes of (re-)production *nor* alternative ideologies, then in what sense are they alternative logics?

Two Logics, One Logic, No Logic?

To say that sister exchange requires systems of initiation, or that exogamy promotes alliance, may well be logical. But it would be rather eccentric to describe systems of such links between institutions as "logics". These systems are, one could argue, composed of *functional* relations. For example, a function of initiation might be to enforce sister exchange while a function of exogamy might be to maintain the autonomy of political units. But whether one agrees or disagrees with such arguments on particular empirical and theoretical grounds, they do not rest solely on the attribution of an intellectual unity to systems of institutions. However, there is a sense in which Godelier's argument is cast in exactly that kind of intellectualist frame. He seems to be suggesting, in a number of contexts, that there are two intellectual or logical systems, in other words "ways of thinking", that in themselves unite many of the features of big-men and great-men systems respectively. This is an argument which must be considered in isolation. It rests on the hypothesis that sister exchange, warfare and non-competitive exchange form a unity because they form part of a particular logic or way of thinking,

which is the logic of *equivalence*. Conversely, it is suggested that bride-wealth, compensation and competitive exchange are unified by the logic of *non-equivalence*.

Unlike the notion of alternative modes of (re-)production, which in any case Godelier never explicitly espouses, the idea of alternative logics cannot be criticized on the empirical grounds that sister exchange and bridewealth principles co-exist within particular societies. Godelier could merely take this as an indication that both logics can pervade a single social system, like that of the Baruya (ibid: 284). Thus, although Godelier associates equivalent exchange with great men and non-equivalent exchange with big men, his position is not threatened by the observation that "exchanges involving substitutes for life principles—even substitutes for human beings—are practised in many societies without big men" (Lemonnier 1991: 15). A much more serious challenge to Godelier's idea of alternative logics is presented by the observation that the institutional principles supposedly characterized by "equivalence" are in fact permeated by "non-equivalence", and that the flows of wealth which Godelier associates with "non-equivalent" exchange may in fact be "equivalent" in important respects.

Sister exchange is held to be "equivalent" in the sense that the values given and received are similar in nature (ie only a woman is exchangeable for a woman). However, the element of hypogamy which accompanies sister exchange among the Baruya suggests that a woman is in some sense *not* equivalent to a woman: "a man who receives another's sister in marriage incurs a debt which nothing can expunge . . . the countergift does not cancel the first debt" (Godelier 1991: 280). This suggests that the original gift of a woman is somehow not equivalent to the counter-gift of a woman. In the case of bridewealth societies, the non-equivalence of the values exchanged (wealth for a woman) is materially self-evident. It is precisely this non-equivalence in the nature of the values exchanged which Godelier associates with asymmetries in affinal relations in bride-wealth societies, specifically the tendency towards hypergamy where the gift of wealth is generally more prestigious than any other sort of gift (ibid). However, this is not to say that the recipients of women derive superiority from the fact of giving away more bridewealth than the wives are "worth". In other words, there is no logical necessity for an increment in the values exchanged (wealth for a bride). *Similarly*, the superiority of wife-givers in sister exchange societies (if one accepts Godelier's generalization) does not derive from the poorer quality (eg laziness, promiscuity etc) of women given in return. Thus the sense in which the exchange of women for wealth, or women for women, may be regarded as "equivalent" or "non-equivalent", may correspond rather more closely than Godelier's approach would suggest.

Now, Godelier's theory also proposes a radical separation between the equivalence of revenge killing and the non-equivalence of compensation. It seems to me possible to argue, on the contrary, that revenge killing does not necessarily conform to a *logic* of equivalence. If the appropriate response to war-related deaths on one side is to take lives on the other, then why not (in principle) kill two or more enemies for every allied loss? The logic of equivalence (or, at least, quantitative equivalence) is not "built into" the principle of revenge killing. *By contrast*, the payment of compensation must not fall short of the accepted value of human life, otherwise it is not effective as compensation. In this respect, the drive for equivalence is perhaps more (rather than less) apparent in the principle of compensation. But, by the same token, one could not argue that compensation must necessarily be equivalent to human life in a quantitative sense. It is quite possible for the value of compensation to incorporate an increment and thus serve as a challenge to the enemy (Lemonnier 1991: 17).

However, the main thrust of Godelier's thesis is that revenge killing is a qualitatively equivalent (life for life) exchange, whereas compensation entails qualitatively non-equivalent (life for wealth) exchange. When the argument is couched in these terms, I find it hard to sustain an image of revenge killing as a form of exchange because the scenario of hostility and revenge does not incorporate any form of giving, only forms of taking. An exchange in which nobody gives anything is indeed an odd form of exchange and so it is hard to see how the qualitative equivalence of revenge killing belongs within the same frame of reference (exchange) as the qualitative non-equivalence of compensation. Nonetheless, this difficulty pales into insignificance when it is compared to the problem of appreciating how the principles of compensation and bridewealth might belong to the same "logic" as competitive exchange, whereas the principles of sister exchange and revenge killing could not.

In suggesting that bridewealth and compensation are manifestations of a peculiar "logic" or way of thinging, Godelier is drawing attention to the fact that both principles entail the substitution of wealth for life (or, more properly, wealth for social relations). It is only in this sense that bridewealth and compensation necessarily constitute forms of non-equivalent exchange. Competitive exchange, however, does not entail this kind of non-equivalence, as Lemonnier points out (1991: 16–18). Rather, it entails the substitution of like for like (wealth for wealth). The only context in which competitive exchange may be regarded as non-equivalent is where the recipient of a prestation attempts to return more than he originally received, the increment producing an imbalance. This sort of non-equivalence is inessential to the principles of bridewealth and of compensation. One might just as well argue that sister-exchange and revenge

killing belong to the same logic as competitive exchange insofar as they always consist of the substitution of like for like (woman for woman, death for death, wealth for wealth). One might even go as far as to say that they are also united by the logical potential for an increment (one woman for two women, two deaths for one death, more wealth for less wealth). On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the principle of non-equivalence (however that may be conceived) is lacking in certain aspects of competitive exchange, for example where there is no increment in the counter-prestation: "it is not the obligation to return more than received that makes the exchanges competitive. One of the partners may merely be challenged to do 'as well' " (Lemonnier 1991: 16).

This is enough, then, to show that the principles of equivalence and non-equivalence cannot serve to classify the institutions of the New Guinea highlands into two "logics". Following a similar line of reasoning, Lemonnier wonders whether warfare and great men on the one hand, and ceremonial exchange and big men on the other, represent not alternative logics but "two . . . forms of the same social reality, namely inter-group competition" (ibid: 9). In this view, great men and big men, warfare and ceremonial exchange, revenge killing and compensation, even sister exchange and bridewealth, are all encompassed by the unifying "logic" of competition.

Lemonnier's arguments are highly stimulating, but it is by no means easy to accept the view that the theme of competition unifies the institutions which are singled out as representing the great-men and big-men systems. For, just as it is possible to envisage warfare and compensation within a competitive frame, it is also possible to envisage both of these principles as non-competitive. It might seem that the solution is to return to the idea of "alternative logics" by a different route, to suggest that the alternatives are not "equivalence" versus "non-equivalence", but "competitive" versus "non-competitive" relations. However, neither distinction refers to a difference of "logics". It merely proposes a typology of institutional functions such that here one finds competitive compensation payments, and there one finds non-competitive compensation payments. Such a typology could be applied anywhere in the world, since an activity is either competitive in a particular respect or it is not. But this does little to illuminate "ways of thinging" in a particular region.

Another approach to the broad cultural contrasts between societies which practise ceremonial exchange and those which do not, is suggested by Jorgensen in the penultimate chapter of the *Big Men and Great Men* volume. Jorgensen argues that Godelier's "logic of equivalence" may be viewed in terms of the "irreducibility of differences" (1991: 269, his emphasis) between categories of things and people, such that only values from like categories may be compared or exchanged. By contrast, systems

based around ceremonial exchange tend to break down the categorial differences between values and to compare them in terms of a common gauge or scale. Jorgensen relates these tendencies to two systems of gender relations, a sort which effects a radical disjunction between the sexes thereby "(foreclosing) the possibility of regarding men's and women's actions as commensurable" (ibid: 270), and a sort "facilitated by a system of circulation which binds the sexes together while placing them unequally within it" (ibid: 269). The theme of disjunction or incommensurability seems to pervade societies which lack ceremonial exchange and in which "pollution rules abound, secrets must be kept, crucial actions are carried out in the deep bush or in the darkened confines of men's houses" (ibid). Likewise, the conceptual integration of values in big-men societies seems to be expressed in the all-pervading metaphors of connectedness: "roads, lines and ropes, ways of tying things into one grand network synthesizing people, activities and aims" (ibid). According to this interpretation, the link between (for example) sister exchange and male initiation is not of the sort envisaged by Godelier (see above, pp 11-12) but is to be seen in the fact that both of these institutional forms are expressions of an underlying political principle which isolates people and things (eg brides, male novices) into categories which cannot be compared or otherwise brought into conjunction conceptually. Although Jorgensen may not wish to put it like this, his argument makes it possible to envisage sister exchange, pay-back killing, male initiation, and so on, *not* as part of a "logic of equivalence" (either quantitatively or qualitatively) but as a principle of categorial isolation or atomism specifying the range of comparisons and conjunctions which are not permissible. Meanwhile, this state of affairs may be usefully contrasted with the cultural orientation of societies practising ceremonial exchange, which tend to pursue the conceptual integration of values.

Mutually Exclusive Principles of Political Integration

Apparently losing faith in his original conception of "alternative logics", Godelier finally settles on the idea that the main difference between great-men and big-men societies is to be seen in two mutually exclusive principles of political integration, which can be distinguished empirically. According to Godelier, in societies where big men are preeminent (so-called "genuine" big-men polities) competitive exchange rules out the principles of sister exchange and large-scale initiation (Godelier 1991: 297). The crucial question is whether the idea of mutually exclusive principles of political integration, rescues the distinction between big-

men and great-men societies by locating it on an empirical base. In my view, the rescue attempt is unsuccessful, for the following reasons.

Godelier's final position is that, once you have large-scale competitive exchange you must also have bridewealth and compensation, and big men (manipulators of wealth) are bound to take precedence over great men (such as warriors). Meanwhile, initiation and sister exchange are ruled out. However, there are so few examples of "genuine" big-men societies (Godelier mentions only Hagen and Enga) that the evidence for his argument is very limited. Although competitive exchange in Hagen is associated with the preeminence of big men, this does not mean it *has* to be that way (I wonder whether, in the absence of modern state structures, Hagen big men would live in the shadow of warriors and other "great men"). If there were more "genuine" big men societies, it might be a good deal harder to demonstrate a positive connection between bridewealth, compensation, and so on, and the necessary exclusion of sister exchange, initiation and warfare. Lemonnier, who seems to class more societies in the big-men category than does Godelier, draws attention to "the continued existence, in big-men societies, of initiation rituals" (1991: 12).

A related problem with Godelier's eventual conclusion is that even if one accepts the idea of a big-men principle of political integration (that is, as an organic system which excludes many institutional forms which occur in highlands societies without big men) then it is still hard to see how this system contrasts with some *other* "logic" or organic system. In other words, the highlands societies which are excluded from the big-men category, and which also constitute the vast majority of societies, do not seem to possess a "logic" of their own, or a *principle* of political integration. Rather, they constitute a diversity of societies, embodying endless combinations of institutions which are not bound together by a single, unifying logic or principle. All one can say about them, following Godelier, is that they are not governed by the principle of competitive exchange.

Persons Versus Politics?

I have drawn attention at various points to the fact that Godelier's distinction between big men and great men is in many respects a direct response to Sahlins' early characterization of the Melanesian political "type" in terms of simply the big-men model. Godelier counters this characterization with the observation that "war . . . ritual, magic, and sacred lore" (1986: 166) provide a basis for leadership by great men, who

are not big men. Indeed, the big man turns out to be more of an exception than a rule. As Lemonnier (1991: 7) points out, this then produces three types of leader who exercise three different sorts of power: (1) great men whose powers may be largely ascribed or achieved but are not based upon the control of wealth; (2) big men whose powers are largely achieved and derive from the manipulation of wealth; (3) chiefs whose powers are largely ascribed and coincide with privileged control of wealth. Sahlins was primarily concerned with the relations between leadership types (2) and (3), Godelier with (1) and (2). However, the fact that both scholars seem to set up the "problem" in terms of types of men (big, great, chiefly) arguably handicaps their attempts to analyze the evolutionary trajectories of political *systems*.

It will be recalled that, for Sahlins, the different evolutionary "ceilings" of chiefdoms and big-men polities resulted from a difference in the capacities of the two sorts of leaders to exploit their followers. In the crudest terms, Sahlins seemed to be saying that producers are *obliged* to supply a chief but have to be *persuaded* to supply a big man, and that is why a Polynesian chief can get away with greater exploitation than his Melanesian counterpart (the big man). But to what extent can the opportunities for exploitation in Polynesia be convincingly attributed to the nature of chiefly authority? This question has of course been extensively addressed in the substantial literature on Polynesian authority. In some parts of the region, "populist" strands of chieftainship (typified by the Samoan case) obviously run counter to images of unadulterated "ascription" (see, for example, Marcus 1989, Shore 1991). But even at the "kingly" end of the continuum, where succession is rigorously based upon genealogical criteria, subjects are continually *persuaded* of the chief's authority, often through his own (or his orators') efforts and achievements. It is not merely that the personal fortunes and competence of a Polynesian chief (indeed *any* leader) count for something, but that the institution of chieftainship is typically predicated on reciprocity between leader and people, which chiefs repudiate at their own risk. Thus chieftainship, like bigmanship, typically encompasses reciprocal relations between the leader and his kinsmen, affines, dependents, or "his people" more generally. If the opportunities for material appropriation are greater in the chiefdom than in the big-men polity, then the explanation for this does not lie primarily in the antonymical personalities or stereotypes of these two kinds of leaders.

Sahlins tended to exaggerate the elements of ascription and achievement in chieftainship and bigmanship respectively. In Polynesia, publicly expressed ideas about authority commonly deny elements of chiefly achievement, even while these may be alluded to in other contexts, such as comedy, private discourse and so on (see Shore 1991). By contrast, the

achievements of Melanesian big men are not excluded from public acknowledgement in this way. Douglas makes a similar point when she observes that "in regard to Polynesia especially, observers and analysts have often been unduly preoccupied with ideology . . . with the awe-inspiring presence of chiefs whose pedigrees linked them directly with divinity. Sahlins, for example, compared Polynesian ideology with Melanesian practice, and devalued Melanesians in consequence" (1979: 27). By the same token, Sahlins was unable to account adequately for the ongoing success of certain exploitative big men. He observed that "some centre-men appear more able than others to dam the tide of discontent that mounts within their factions, perhaps because of charismatic personalities" (1963: 293), however this appeal to "personality" overlooked the possible role of ideology in legitimating exploitation. Alternatively put, "charisma" is not so much a quality of the *person* as an attribution of observers informed by stereotypes of effective authority. In some cases, a big man's "charisma" may be no more "personal" or "achieved" than a chief's, insofar as this quality may in both cases be attributed to the leader in spite rather than because of his efforts.

The critical point to make is that, even granted that the ascription of authority is generally less pronounced in Melanesia than in Polynesian (and vice-versa with respect to the achievement of authority), the differences are not sufficiently pronounced to account for the different "evolutionary ceilings" of politico-economic development which Sahlins ultimately set out to explain. In other words, there may be a difference here between categories of social system but these differences cannot be metonymically represented (and certainly not explained) in terms of contrasting leadership types.

Sahlins' emphasis on types of leaders, and the types of men who assume positions of leadership, has clearly had a great impact on Godelier's work. It informs, for example, his discussion (1986) of ascription and achievement in the making of great men among the Baruya. And, like Sahlins, Godelier is willing to gloss whole political systems in terms of the types of leaders who preside over them. Even Godelier's final distinction between competitive exchange societies and non-competitive exchange societies is represented as the difference between "true" big-men and great-men polities. This, however, strikes me as highly artificial. In a true big-men polity, the big men are preminent, for they do not achieve renown in the shadow of warriors or ritual specialists (Godelier 1991: 297); in some great-men polities, big men may also be found but they are not the only, nor the most influential, sorts of leaders (ibid: 296). However, there seems to be nothing *intrinsic* to the role of true big men that distinguishes them from big men-like great men. Both achieve and maintain power through the manipulation of wealth.

Therefore, the characterization of political systems in terms of great-men versus big-men polities seems undesirable.

If Sahlins had never opened the debate in such terms, I wonder if Godelier would have been inclined to focus so heavily on types of leadership. This parallels my earlier query as to whether the special importance of "kinship relations" owes more to historical materialism than to highlands ethnography. Highlanders do not themselves acknowledge Godelier's distinction between "big men" and "great men", and its usefulness conceptually rests entirely on its capacity to illuminate some aspect(s) of social life which could not be understood without the distinction. However, the qualities of big men and great men seem to designate *aspects* of leadership rather than distinguishable *types* of leader and, by extension, types of political system. As I have tried to show, Godelier's eventual characterization of the difference between two types of highlands polity does not really correspond to a difference between two types of leader (see Tuzin 1991: 116). Thus, like Sahlins, Godelier finally seems to acknowledge that the system, and not the leader, is the interesting "thing". One can argue that Godelier was sidetracked by leaders (big or great) because of Sahlins. But Sahlins, as I have pointed out, was ambivalent about the matter: "Perhaps we have been too long accustomed to perceive rank and rule from the standpoint of the individuals involved, rather than from the perspective of the total society, as if the secret of the subordination of man to man lay in the personal satisfactions of power" (Sahlins 1963: 300).

Conclusion

The problem posed in *Big Men and Great Men*, confronted in a variety of ways by the fourteen contributors, runs the risk of becoming remote from the ethnography of the New Guinea Highlands. Godelier often seems to wrestle, not so much with sister exchange and bridewealth as with the ghost of Marx, not so much with big men and great men as with a rival scientist in a common laboratory, not so much with that which seems to be ideological as with that which ought to be (?) logical. Consider, for example, Godelier's concluding remarks which seem to address themselves specifically to the elusive "logic" of non-equivalence: "it is not possible to replace human beings, living or dead, by objects or living things without first *reifying social relations* . . . What can it be, then, that drives persons to invent themselves by becoming alien through thought and alien within society, trapped between representations which become fetishes and social relations which become things?" (1991: 304, his emphasis).

If the question is born of Durkheimian preoccupations, then the answer might be that the substitution of wealth for life is not a crucial moment in the reification of social relations, which in fact originates in the elementary forms of religion. This seems to be Godelier's view when he describes initiation as the means by which society represents and deifies itself as a sort of consciously discernible entity, rather than merely the unintended (and unrecognized?) consequence of many transactions. Alternatively, one could interpret Godelier's reference to reification to mean simply that the bridewealth principle substitutes women for things and therefore makes them things in themselves, whereas sister exchange does not. However, it seems to me that the objects transacted in sister exchange are not really human beings but *rights* in human beings. The right of sexual access, for example, is no more a "thing" because it is exchanged for wealth than if it were exchanged for equivalent rights. In other words, rights are by their very nature *not* "things". A similar conceptual error has been attributed to Malinowski, who wanted to reduce abstract entities (such as rights of land tenure) to more concretely discernible "things" (biology or biological needs) (Leach 1957). If the defence is that bridewealth merely treats rights *as if* they were things whereas sister exchange does not, then this is only true if it assumed that "things" which are the same in nature are not exchanged. But, in fact, these kinds of exchanges are an integral part of the daily circulation of things throughout Melanesia, and the direct exchange of rights in women (sister exchange) conforms to this model (treats rights as if they were things) in a way that bridewealth payments could not. The matter becomes even more complex if one accepts Wagner's argument (1991: chapter 9) that the objects of exchange are elements of "fractal persons", which do not correspond to the categories of Western sociological thought. In this view, categories such as "group" and "individual" lose their relevance in the conceptualization of leadership, exchange and other social processes, and thus marriage ceases to be about a transfer of rights in a *woman*, and is seen as relating to the transfer of detachable "parts" or aspects of social relations. These are issues which have of course been extensively explored by M. Strathern in a number of authoritative works, most notably *The Gender of the Gift* (1988).

Godelier's concluding question is also quite clearly a Marxian one, however it is important to know in the first place whether fetishism and alienation derive from wealth for life substitution, as Godelier seems to imply. Is the exchange of goods which is predicated on the exchange of sisters somehow less "fetishistic" than the exchange of women for wealth? Would a Marxian concept of alienation be more fruitfully applied to systems of competitive exchange than to systems of initiation? It is well known that Marx regarded as fetishistic the attribution of life to

things, as in the case of commodity fetishism where the origins of profit were attributed to the seeming "pregnancy" of money (functioning as capital) rather than to the extraction of surplus labour (Marx 1954: 76–87). But how is the wealth given in exchange for (rights in) women seen as having a life of its own? Where are the fetishes in such transactions? It seems to me that the most detailed documentation of fetishism in the *Big Men and Great Men* volume occurs in Gillison's paper (1991: chapter 10), which relates the fetishism of sacred flutes (among other "things"), their role in procreation, to elements of *equivalence* and *sister exchange*.

I am equally concerned by Godelier's related suggestion that bride-wealth engenders a form of alienation (1991: 304). His argument seems to be predicated on the assumption that wealth for life substitution reifies social relations, whereas sister exchange does not. Alienation is then portrayed as an aspect of reification: in seeing their social relations as things, people become "alien" to themselves. But if, as I have suggested, rights (rather than people) are seen as things then it is hard to sustain an image of people "alienating themselves by means of thought" (ibid). I can see no additional sense in which transfers of wealth at marriage render brides "strangers to themselves" (ibid). Are women who are delivered to their grooms in a sister exchange model somehow better acquainted with themselves? In Marx's writings, the idea of alienation presupposed a moral connection between producers and their surplus labour, and that was the basis for his argument that they could be alienated from it (separated from something which in some moral sense originally "belonged" to them). Such a perspective seems to me to apply more convincingly to certain strands of Melanesian religious thought than to marriage transactions. That is, one might wish to argue that when biological reproduction is thought to be subject to transcendental control, mediated by male ritual specialists, then women are alienated from their physiological "belongings", an occurrence which is more typical of societies practising sister exchange as of those dominated by the bride-wealth principle (Jorgensen 1991: 267). My point is not that this version of the alienation argument is necessarily desirable but merely that it makes sense to me, whereas I am unable to grasp or accept the logic behind Godelier's assertion that bride-wealth transforms people into things and makes them strangers to themselves whereas sister exchange does not.

Godelier's (1986, 1991) interpretations of the relations between social institutions in the New Guinea Highlands lead the reader in many directions and every new turning is a stimulating experience. However, the less productive lines of argument, the blind alleys so to speak, often seem to be responses more to existing debates and perspectives in anthropology than to the activities of New Guineans. The high walls at

every dead-end in Godelier's theorizing seem to be marked by the inscriptions of Sahlins and the messages of Marx. But where Godelier focuses attention on the ideological or even functional links between institutions in specific societies (especially, of course, the Baruya) one often finds the spent fireworks of inspiration and new paths for comparative analysis. This is where the overwhelming strength of the *Big Men and Great Men* volume really lies, in the rich diversity of ethnographic data from the length and breadth of Melanesia, comparing the relations of institutions (or even broader complexes or systems of institutions) with those described by Godelier. The typology of political systems or of leadership may fall by the wayside, the idea of alternative logics or (if it is really there) of modes of (re-)production may fade into the background, but what remains is a tightly interconnected comparative analysis of some of the social institutions of Melanesia, a book that will stimulate debate for many years to come.

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