

Andrew Strathern, ed., *Inequality in New Guinea Highlands Societies*.
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The societies of the New Guinea Highlands are noted for their "big-man" systems, in which self-made men rise to economic and political leadership, and for the marked difference in status between men and

women. The five essays in this book examine these forms of inequality and newer ones emergent with the penetration of capitalism into the Highlands.

In the first of his two essays, "Two Waves of African Models in the New Guinea Highlands," Andrew Strathern reviews the now-abandoned attempt to cast Highlands societies into the mold of African-descent group models, and considers the applicability of neo-Marxist models of inequality that have more recently been developed in African settings. In both cases Strathern finds the models inadequate to explain New Guinean realities.

In his lengthy essay, "Production and Inequality: Perspectives from Central New Guinea," Nicholas Modjeska relates inequality among men and between men and women to production and exchange, using material from the Duna and neighboring groups. His contention that big-man leadership and high-intensity production and exchange go together would seem to tie in with some of Maurice Godelier's findings in his essay, "Social Hierarchies among the Baruya." The Baruya, a small group on the eastern edge of the Highlands with a productive capacity much lower than the more populous Highlands groups, do not have the big-men so typical of the larger and wealthier Highlands groups. Instead, they have "great-men" who are fierce war leaders and accomplished shamans. Godelier correlates this contrast with exchange systems: the Baruya practice restricted exchange of women while the big-man-dominated societies practice generalized exchange of women and wealth.

These first three essays deal primarily with the "ethnographic present." The last two essays in this collection are explicitly historical or transformational.

In an exciting essay, "The Ipomoean Revolution Revisited: Society and the Sweet Potato in the Upper Wahgi Valley," archaeologist Jack Golson reanalyzes data from the 10,000-year-old Kuk agricultural site to ask when and how the intensive agriculture/pig raising systems presumably basic to big-manship originated. His effort, stimulated by the writings of Modjeska and other social anthropologists, results in an intriguing hypothesis: the intensive agricultural systems of Kuk, which began to take shape some 2,000 years ago and were probably based on taro before the sweet potato was introduced, were not forced on the Wahgi Valley people by environmental change as formerly thought but represent a socially inspired intensification of production that laid the foundation for the big-man systems that dominated the region at contact.

In the final essay, "Peasants or Tribesmen?" Andrew Strathern extends the inquiry about inequality into the present, asking how capitalism may be transforming traditional patterns. In addition to considering the issue of how much wealthy Highlands entrepreneurs are departing from traditional big-man models, and musing about how business could liberate women if only they could freely engage in new enterprises, Strathern observes that new forms of group inequality are emerging. Groups with fertile land and easy market access are forging ahead of less well-endowed and more remote groups, and syndicates of aggressive politician-businessmen are using their political connections and business acumen to gain a dominant position in the marketplace.

These essays may be tough going for readers who have not already immersed themselves in the considerable body of literature on Highlands societies that has developed over the last few decades. Nonetheless, the essays may be attractive to nonspecialists because they reflect considerable progress in understanding Highlands social systems, including how they may have originated and how they are evolving today. In fact, anthropologists working elsewhere may be growing a bit envious of those who work in an area where prehistory, ethnography, and current sociology provide such a rich and integrated field for study. Already there are signs that the intellectual balance of trade among anthropological regions is being reversed; where Highlands specialists once imported their explanatory models from Africa, they now find their ideas on practices such as big-man systems borrowed for use in other contexts.