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A conspicuous development in Papua New Guinea Highlands studies during the seventies and eighties has been the shift in focus from segmentary group structure to exchange systems. This has not been an isolated development, of course, but rather the local manifestation of a general disillusionment with structural functionalism--here in the form of "African models" (Barnes 1962) that had posited corporate groups variously aligned and opposed within the usual multileveled hierarchy of lineage segments (e.g., Meggitt 1965).

As a part of this same general movement, there has been a tendency for some investigators to shift emphasis from "groups" to "individuals"

as the real stuff of human social life--most notably in detailed studies of exchange in two areas close to or overlapping with that studied by Lederman. These are, respectively, works by Feil on the Tombema Enga (Feil 1984 and others cited therein) and Sillitoe on the Wola (Sillitoe 1979).

In a forthcoming book on exchange in the Nebilyer Valley--within fifty miles of all these field areas--Francesca Merlan and I argue that this reaction is misguided (Merlan and Rumsey n.d.): to attempt to overthrow the notion of "corporate group" with that of "maximizing individual" as *explicans* is to reproduce a theoretical antinomy that must itself be transcended if we are to advance the analysis of the social practices in question. A fundamental problem with both the "corporatist" and "individualist" positions is that they posit social actors or agents as *preconstituted* entities: analytical primitives in terms of which social action is everywhere to be described and, ultimately, explained. A more useful perspective is one that allows for the possibility that the relevant actors themselves may be at least in part constituted by the very actions in which they are engaged (as in, e.g., Wagner 1967, where social "units" are "defined" by exchange transactions). Such a perspective requires us to give serious attention to the empirical question of what the historically given forms are that exchange transactions may take in this or that social formation.

*What Gifts Engender* is a masterful investigation along just those lines. What Lederman shows is that exchange transactions in Mendi do implicate what we can gloss as an "intergroup" dimension, but that the overarching dialectic of Mendi social life is not between "group" and "individual" but rather between two different, partly opposed kinds of social relationships, namely, *twem*, "network" relations among (mainly affinal and matrilineal) exchange partners, and *sem*, "intergroup" relations, in which clan "brothers" in principle transact in "unity" vis-à-vis other such units.

"Network" and "intergroup," "autonomy" and "unity" are, of course, also exogenous, Western analytical oppositions (well-worn ones at that) and cannot as such do full justice to the specific qualities of Mendi social life. But neither does my summary gloss do full justice to Lederman's finely nuanced ethnography, which shows that

"autonomy" in Mendi is socially constrained by obligations to a personal network of exchange partners and in some measure against obligations to clansmen. It is not an abstract individualism. *Sem* unity is likewise explicable only in relation to the

*twem* relationships of *sem* members. . . . Mendi assertions concerning autonomy or unity can be appreciated only when one understands the answers to the questions, "Autonomy from what?" and "Unity as opposed to what?" (P. 267, n. 15; cf. Strathern 1979)

Not the least of this book's virtues is that it affords a new basis for comparison of the Mendi political economy with those elsewhere in the Highlands, and further afield. Since Ryan (1961), it has been known that the most elaborate form of ceremonial exchange in Mendi is the *mok ink*, which comprises a five- to ten-year cycle of transactions culminating in a large-scale pig kill staged in concert by one or more *sem onda* (tribe, clan, clan cluster). Scholars trying to locate Southern Highlands Province exchange systems within a wider regional perspective (e.g., Strathern 1969; Feil 1987) have generally found in *mok ink* the closest parallel to the *moka* system of the Hagen/Nebilyer/Tambul area of the Western Highlands Province. In this they were no doubt influenced at least in part by the resemblance between the terms *mok ink* and *moka*, and also by the relative centrality of the two systems within the social lives of the respective areas. But in light of Lederman's work, we can now see that the parallel is largely inappropriate, for the following reasons.

First, the resemblance of the terms is a specious one. The *mok ink* means "pig," whereas in the Melpa language *moka* refers to exchange irrespective of the medium; pig exchange is called *kng moka*, *kng* being the Melpa word for "pig" (cf. p. 266, n. 5). If there is a cognate term to be found in Mendi for the Melpa word *moka*, it is more likely *maiike*, which "appears in the names of ceremonial prestations associated with death compensation" (p. 260, n. 12). This parallel is drawn by Mendi people themselves, who "refer to . . . the *mokadl* of Tambul [= Melpa *moka*] . . . as *sunda maiike*, 'sunda' being a general reference to cultural areas to the north of Kandep" (p. 266, n. 5).

Second, aside from questions of etymology (and ultimately of greater weight), the latter, indigenously recognized parallel is, for several reasons, more perspicuous in social-structural terms than the one between *mok ink* and *moka*. Although *mok ink* prestations are made by *sem onda*, unlike *moka* ones they do not--even in principle--involve *sem* as recipients. Rather, each comprises multiple, coordinated *twem* payments that are all made by people of the same *sem*, but in what Andrew Strathern has called a "radial" pattern, that is, to individual recipients in many different *sem*. Thus, contra Ryan (1961:205), *mok ink* is not an

“inter-clan” affair at all. In this respect it differs greatly from Melpa *moka* (Strathern 1971) and Nebilyer *makayl* (Merlan 1988; Merlan and Rumsey n.d.), the prototypical forms of which involve segmentary units as donors and as recipients. In the latter respect, the closest Mendi analogue to the Hagen *moka* is their *mai ke* “death compensation” payments, which involve *sem* as donors and as recipients (pp. 162-164). Not only is *mai ke* a “possible cognate for *moka*” (p. 260, n. 12), the Mendi names for the two kinds of *mai ke--ol ombul* and *ol tenga--* are directly analogous to the names of the initial and main payments in a Hagen/Nebilyer *moka* sequence: *wue ombikl/yi obil* (man’s bone) and *wue peng/yi pengi* (man’s head; the images are of paying for the bones and head of the man or men who have been killed).

These data suggest that it is important for comparative studies of Highlands political economies to attend to the widely variable extent to which large-scale ceremonial exchange is integrated with patterns of warfare and military alliance (cf. Merlan 1988). An interesting implication we can draw from Lederman’s book is that that variability may in turn be related to differing forms and degrees of what used to be called “sexual antagonism.” For the Mendi area, Lederman argues that, contrary to one of the predominant tendencies of recent Highlands studies (see, e.g., Strathern 1982; Godelier 1982; Josephides 1985), at least by the late 1970s “gender hierarchy appeared not to be the central contradiction of Mendi social structure” but rather “an outgrowth of the symbolic means by which Mendi men mediate the more centrally problematic relationship between their *sem* and *twem* obligations” (p. 137).

The Mendi categories of *sem* and *twem* have recognizable analogues elsewhere in the Highlands, but the relationship between these modes of sociality, and the relative predominance of one or the other, may differ dramatically, as Lederman fully appreciates (p. 177). What seems to be far more constant across that wider region is the great extent to which wealth exchange in general is mobilized via links through women-as sisters, mothers, and affines, if not everywhere as actual exchange partners as in Mendi (Merlan 1988). Thus, for example, one can see that in both Hagen and Mendi, *twem*-like social links provide the main “roads” along which objects move, even when presented in the name of *sem*. But given the structural differences I have pointed to above between *moka* and *mok ink*, there are fundamental differences in the possible forms of articulation between *twem*- and *sem*-like modes of sociality: as “intergroup” transaction, *moka* places far greater limits on the range of possible “network” relationships any given participant can directly transact as (part of) his contribution to any “group” prestation. True, he

may "finance" his payment at least in part by drawing upon his network relations in a range of other (sub)clans. But the immediate recipient of the payment must be of the (sub)clan to which the obligation of his own (sub)clan is being discharged. No such restriction is placed upon the Mendi man who contributes to his *sem's mok ink*. He must make his payment in concert with others of his *sem*, but the recipient may be of any other *sem* whatsoever. Other things being equal, one would expect the "contradiction" between *sem* and *twem* obligations to be somewhat less pronounced in such a system than in the Hagen/Nebilyer one, and, accordingly, if Lederman's claim about the sources of "gender hierarchy" is correct, a relatively narrower range of contexts for it in Mendi. Such is indeed the picture that emerges from Lederman's ethnography.

From a comparative perspective, this suggests that it is simplistic to regard ceremonial exchange per se as the ultimate obfuscation of women's labor power (as in, e.g., Lindenbaum 1987; Josephides 1985) and that its outcome in this respect may be quite variable according to the extent to which *sem*-like social entities are, in principle, involved as both donors and recipients--a matter itself closely related to the extent to which ceremonial exchange relations are encompassed by or integral with those of military alliance and hostility.

As useful as *What Gifts Engender* is for new comparative work along these lines, Lederman makes an even more important contribution by the way she helps us to understand social formations (in the New Guinea Highlands and elsewhere) as dialectical systems. To cite just one of the ethnographic examples developed at length (see also Lederman 1980), Lederman describes the "politics of a pig festival" (the subtitle of chap. 6), in the course of which a disagreement arises among men of one of the would-be donor *sem* about whether they should join in the staging of a forthcoming parade as one phase of the jointly sponsored festival--a decision of real economic consequence, as the parade would cost thousands of dollars to stage. A leading big-man of that *sem*, Olanda, orated forcefully against its participation at that stage of the *mok ink*, and he appeared to carry the day. But when the day of the parade came, many members of his *sem* did participate and make prestations along with men of the other *sem*, each to his own *twem* partner(s). From this some might readily conclude that Olanda's oration had had no real effect, the apparent unity of the *sem* being an illusion behind which individuals really act according to their own private interests. But Lederman's close coverage of later events shows that matters are not so simple. Olanda's speech had not prevented some of his clansmen from participating in the parade, but it did have an important effect upon

how their actions could be construed: largely because of it, those who participated were not considered by their clansmen to have been doing it as a part of any overall transaction by the clan--they were making *twem* payments only. Thus shaping an aspect of the meaning of their actions, Olanda's speech had been of very real material consequence, assuring that, when his clan did later stage a prestation *qua sem*, those same men had to contribute again, placing a double burden on their household resources.

No one who has taken the point of such examples should ever again ask questions of the form, Is exchange *really* conducted by groups or by individuals? and Is clan solidarity an actual feature of Highlands social relations, or just a rhetorical premise? Nor will it suffice merely to say, The answer really lies somewhere in between. Differing modes of sociality--in this case *twem* and *sem*--can coexist as historical products in such a way as to provide grounds, within a single social formation, for active struggle over the meaning of given transactions. And "meaning," here as elsewhere, is not to be taken as a merely subjective construal of some more basic social "reality" but as the very stuff of which that reality is formed.

The style of Lederman's ethnography and theoretical argument is scholarly and measured rather than stridently polemical. She is, for instance, scrupulously fair to the earlier Mendi specialist D'Arcy Ryan, making the most of what his considerable ethnography has to offer rather than dwelling at length on their differences of theory and interpretation. It would be a pity if that wholly laudable and refreshing restraint, the book's high price, and problems with its availability prevent it from achieving the wide readership it clearly deserves.

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