

Who Benefits? The View from Futuna

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...people have been saying that exploitation may exist elsewhere, but not on the Northwest Coast. I suggest that the ... model be applied elsewhere, especially to Polynesia...
(Ruyle 1973:627)

Introduction

Who benefits from complexity? Is it the general populace as the systems' theorists would have it, or is it the elites as the Marxists would have it? And if the latter, is it the warriors? the priests? the political Big Men or Chiefs? When Hayden ventured into remote Maya villages in 1990 to answer this question, he was sure that there would be systemic advantages stemming from political leaders for everyone in times of crisis (Hayden and Gargett 1990). After all, there were many accounts of early states and empires opening up state granaries in times of famine, and our own political institutions provide assistance in times of crises. Determining who benefitted in traditional village societies was to provide the litmus test to demonstrate which model of the origins of sociopolitical complexity was most applicable functionalist or the exploitative. Determining who benefitted from early forms of complexity should provide a good indication as to who initially promoted complexity and why the institutions of complexity were established.

Great was Hayden's surprise when none of the expectations for general benefits materialized during his ethnographic work in the Maya Highlands. Instead of benefits conferred by the elites during times of crises (when benefits would have been most critical), there was blatant opportunism, exploitation of the situations, and an almost total lack of assistance in any form for commoners. Such clearcut results led to the abandonment of idealized adaptive strategies, and a more realistic look at the role of the main power brokers and what benefits they were obtaining from their positions. The "political" model that resulted from this radical reorientation in view closely resembled the theoretical political model that Tim Earle had developed for Hawai'i. There was still a substantial number of people that adhered to the view that in so-called "egalitarian" societies, no one benefitted due to leveling devices, while chiefs were so bound by the tradition of having to be generous that they were perennially in the poorhouse and did not benefit from their position either. Thus, Burrows (1936:89) argued that, in Futuna, "chieftainship leads to poverty." Chiefs were apparently supposed to be revered simply for their sacredness and that was all. They sacrificed their economic wellbeing for that of their people. Ideological beliefs were the beginning and the end of explanations for the

emergence of chiefs. There were also “feasts of merit” in which the wealthy gave away their surpluses to achieve village respect or honor from the gods. How could this be viewed as materially beneficial? Or were all the benefits really only spiritual and ego-grooming in nature?

While Hayden was convinced from his Mesoamerican experiences that elites had to be benefitting from their positions, the lipservice to egalitarianism made it difficult to determine precisely how this was occurring. Without showing how aggrandizers benefitted, other researchers would never be convinced that the elites did in fact benefit from their positions in any significant fashion. The first step was to demonstrate that there really were important inequalities within these “egalitarian” and chiefdom societies. In fact, we found that they were not “egalitarian” at all. People in the villages simply paid lipservice to the egalitarian ethic. In reality, it was a sham, and it was only used to keep people from becoming too excessive in their quest for power and material. Thus, the term, “transegalitarian societies” was used by Hayden to refer to societies where private property dominated and where there were significant socioeconomic inequalities between families. These were societies between truly egalitarian foragers on the one hand and chiefdoms with stratified classes on the other hand.

The need to demonstrate how aggrandizers acquired benefits under the watchful gaze of village promoters of egalitarianism was highly instructive. Hayden and several students spent nearly a decade exploring these issues among the Hill Tribes of Southeast Asia (Clarke 1998,2001; Adams 2001, in press; Hayden 2001a). They carefully examined the issue of who benefitted from feasts and political positions in a number of different societies. The results were quite clear. The leaders of powerful factions in Hill Tribes used feasts and other strategies to create and sustain their factional support, while the factions themselves wielded nearly life-and-death power over many households. In a context where conflict between households and between villages was endemic, being part of the most powerful factions certainly could spell the differences between wellbeing and enslavement, good social status and death, victory and route in armed conflicts (Izikowitz 1951:117, 139; Hakansson 1994:261). Conflict occurred due to many sources: stealing of pigs, livestock, or wives; damage to crops from one’s pig or water buffalo; transgression of local traditions or taboos; illicit relationships; fights between family members; injuries from dogs; boundary disputes; disputes about inheritances and unpaid debts at the time of death. Those families that lacked substantial support could be heavily fined, evicted from the community, driven to suicide, or enslaved (Condominas 1977:123,139,151,156,338-9). Individuals from powerful families might get off with a light reprimand or fine due to “extenuating” circumstances. Litigation was constantly underway in the more unpacified Hill Tribes (Condominas 1977; Leach 1954:183). Notable cases of similar political logic are recorded for protohistoric Celts in the form of individual “honor prices.” British Columbian and Sumerian judicial practices followed a similar pattern. The powerful factions also seem to have managed to appropriate the most productive economic resources for themselves, whether in the form of good land, livestock, or trade items. These resources, in turn, were used to form factions through feasting and other strategies (Hayden 2001b).

Thus, aggrandizers promoted the creation of important roles (such as lineage or clan heads, village administrators and ritualists, &c) and social norms (such as taboos, ownership, inheritance, primogeniture, bride prices, reciprocal debts, ancestors’ influences on the living, display funerals, &c). These roles and norms could be superficially portrayed as benefitting the larger social kin or residential group. Often the people that came to fill roles such as lineage heads were not typical aggrandizers, but came to their role by dint of birth or age. Thus, many lineage heads were ineffective leaders or disinterested administrators; in other cases heads of social groups genuinely had the greater interest of the group at heart and were relatively benevolent and selfless in their actions. In many cases, there were “aides” who were intensely

pragmatic and took care of lineage business. These aides were probably chosen for their more aggrandizer-like qualities. Similarly, taboos and most other transegalitarian values could be enforced in a lax fashion or in a severe fashion. The important point is that when aggrandizer personalities did move into leadership roles either by right or by manipulation, these roles and the associated values *could* be actively used to promote aggrandizer self-interest and benefits. The key was establishing the *structure* that enabled aggrandizers to manipulate the system when they managed to access key roles including administrative aides. The key was establishing the sociopolitical structures that made substantial gains possible at all. These potentials were clearly not fulfilled by every individual in a leadership role, but they were fulfilled by the gifted and the ambitious who managed to achieve those positions.

The benefits that aggrandizers obtained in such sociopolitical systems included the ability to broker the best bride prices or doweries, the greatest wealth exchanges with the most desirable families, the use of corporate wealth items held “in trust” for their social group, consuming the best foods and wearing the most opulent garments in all public displays, the ability to manipulate group finances for one’s own benefits (via demands for feasts or other group undertakings), elevated decision making power within the group and the community, a greater ability to survive crises (such as famines, illness, accidents, litigations, and threats of attack), the ability to obtain more desirable mates and more of them, as well as the ability to produce more children and be assured of a secure old age. Supporters within the kin or social group could expect to obtain many of these same benefits (albeit to a lesser degree) through active support of a successful aggrandizer leader. Individuals who did not actively support group feasts or other undertakings could be delisted from genealogies of the social unit (as in Toraja), marginalized in terms of all the above benefits and essentially relegated to poverty, or even enslaved by their own kin or others as documented by Condominas.

Chieftoms in Theory

Despite these advances in understanding who benefited and how they did it in transegalitarian societies, reviewers and other critiques maintained that the situation was somehow different in chieftoms. They argued that ritual and ideology was much more entrenched and powerful in chieftoms. We were intrigued by these arguments and resolved to see if there was any truth to them, or whether the political model was ultimately still the most reasonable. Tim Earle (1997), Jean Arnold (1996) and others have nicely summarized the major theories about how chiefs come to power. The major contenders are: circumscription, warfare, trade and wealth finance, control over staple production, population pressure, the systemic advantages of redistribution, and extortion.

Thus, armed with results from studies in transegalitarian societies together with an array of theoretical models, we ventured into the Pacific in order to determine (at this late date in ethnographic research) if it was possible to detect who benefited in traditional chieftom societies and how they did it. In order to successfully undertake such research, we reasoned that a study of the most traditional chieftom society available would be the most meaningful. All professional advice indicated that the chieftoms on Futuna, some 500 km northeast of Fiji were the best suited for these purposes. Indeed, although the population had been converted to Catholicism 150 years ago and although French aid policies had begun to have major impacts on the island since about 1960, a great deal of the traditional power structure still seemed to remain intact as far as we could tell from the historical literature and contemporary feasting patterns. We spent several months in 2001 and 2002 investigating the feasting and political aspects of Futunan society. We are well aware of the changes that have taken place and that we may have a somewhat distorted view of “traditional,” pre-contact society on Futuna. Yet, from historical accounts it appears that the underlying feasting structure has not changed fundamentally, and the

political and family structures also appear fundamentally the same. Thus, we propose that our results are directly relevant to understanding who benefits in simple chiefdom societies and how they do it.

It is also worth mentioning that we walked into this research with a preferred political model based on feasting and alliances. We viewed the military conquest theories as unrealistic since warfare seemed to be endemic among most or all transegalitarian societies without ever resulting in more complex sociopolitical structures. Once again, some paradigm modification turned out to be necessary to accommodate overwhelming claims and data that were contrary to initial expectations. These will be discussed below.

The Futunan Chiefdom

Futuna is a relatively small volcanic island, only 20 x 5 km. At first census there were only 1,500 people divided into two chiefdoms with 7-10 villages in each polity. However, archaeological and ethnohistoric data indicate that there may have been as many as 4,000 inhabitants at peak periods during the past. Today, the island supports 5,000 people who are still politically divided into two competing chiefdoms.

There are scant references to either the political or feasting structures by early European visitors or residents on the island.

The most information about pre-European culture comes from the earliest missionaries who arrived in 1835, especially Père Chanel who was killed by a staunchly traditional chief. According to the early accounts, there were several island-wide feasts attended by both paramount chiefs together with representatives from all communities, and probably all major corporate kindred groups (*kutunga*) of the island. At least one of these was on the occasion of the first fruits celebration--a ceremony generally used as a pretext for paying subsistence tribute to chiefs throughout Polynesia. The early missionaries also record a series of village feasts probably attended by the paramount chief and other chiefs in the chiefdom alliance. These village feasts appear essentially the same as village feasts today (described below) and a great deal of surplus was transferred to the chiefs at these events. In other cases, feasts were hosted by a pair of villages (perhaps constituting a district) and several paramount chiefs were the guests. Details of these early observations on ritual and feasting have been summarized by Pat Kirch (1994). The overriding impression is that the paramount chiefdom was an unstable confederation of villages with each village chief retaining a great deal of autonomy and able to switch allegiance according to political conditions. Such political dynamism is probably characteristic of chiefdoms in general (Earle 1997). Feasting and warfare appear to be what held paramount chiefdoms together.

Benefits of Chieftainship

Although some ethnographers maintain that chiefs do not benefit significantly from their positions, we have found ample evidence that they (or more accurately, their supporting kindred) do benefit today just as they have in the past. It is the corporate kindred (the *kutuga*) that ultimately holds title to the land as well as the owning the administrative titles such as village chief and his supporting ministers. What are the benefits that accrue to chiefs? From historical sources and contemporary observations they can be enumerated as follows:

1. Ownership and control over land, especially good land. The most valued lands are the irrigated taro fields about which Pat Kirch (1994) has written so much. He argues that competition over control of irrigated taro fields accounts for most wars in Polynesia. Today, some elite family members claim that there is no rivalry over these fields and that everyone gets to use a portion. With changing economic conditions on the island this may be the case today;

however, if so, it is strikingly different from the situation in the past. In 1936, Burrows (1936:97,141) noted that the most tenacious lawsuits were over control of irrigated taro fields, while Frimigacci (1991:131,155) mapped out ownership of the largest taro gardens on Futuna. He recorded 70% of these lands as belonging to the families of the paramount chief's and first minister's families, while the remaining parcels belonged to other noble families. One consequence of this is that traditionally, elite families could produce greater surpluses that enabled them to raise more and larger pigs (Viala 1919:244) and thus host larger feasts.

2/ Labor was supplied to chiefly families by all households to help in cultivating chiefly fields and other productive endeavors. We were told that traditionally each family supplied three days of labor per month. Such demands for labor were probably justified by claims that chiefs needed high levels of production in order to fulfill their duties of office such as giving away food at feasts. While such claims have some basis in fact, it is easy to manipulate such systems for one's own benefit by diverting some of the production as discussed below.

3/ Chiefs were given large amounts of food at a number of occasions.

First Fruits: The most important of these was the annual first fruits, or harvest, feast. These were, in essence, "tribute" feasts in which everyone contributed a great deal, everyone ate a great deal, and the chiefly elites kept a great deal. Kirch and Green (2001:226,259) argue that the chiefly rights to a percentage of the first harvests, as well as chiefly holding of title to all land, is a general characteristic of ancestral Polynesian societies. These feasts were among the first recorded by Europeans (Kirch 1994:271,283; Smith 1892:47) and Melville (1846:171-184) appears to describe a similar early feast in the Marquesas Islands. In an accounting of what was probably a first fruits feast in Fiji in the early 19th century, 420 large pigs and 3,500 yams were divided as follows:

--20 pigs and 500 yams were set aside for offerings at the tombs of past paramount chiefs (therefore probably appropriated by the reigning paramount);

--100 pigs and 500 yams were given to the reigning paramount chief, and the same amount was given to the secular "king", the gods (priests), and the other ranking chiefs as a group (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:117,123).

Each of these recipient groups certainly passed along a large portion of what they received to subordinate families in their families or political domains, however, it also seems apparent that the elite distributors kept a disproportionate amount for themselves (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:100). It is important to emphasize that pigs represent a consummate wealth item in traditional Futunan society, and Polynesian societies in general. According to our data, they represent a household's major investment of surplus food and labor. It generally takes about two to three years to raise a 600 kg pig at a cost of about 2-300 Polynesian Francs per day, representing a total value of about 1,500 PF's per kilo.

Village Feasts: Village feasts are hosted and organized by individual chiefs in conjunction with the village administration and elders. Such feasts appear to have been held when the first Europeans stopped at the island in 1616 (O'Reilly 1962:62). The first missionaries recorded such feasts (Kirch 1994:270) and they were certainly a major feature in the Futunan cultural landscape when Burrows conducted his ethnographic work (1936:100). In the past, these (and other) feasts were said to be held in order to honor the gods (Smith 1892:46), while today each village has its patron saint. It is particularly interesting to observe that prior to conversion, the gods were said to reside in the bodies of the chiefs (Rozier 1963:100-101). This is a rather transparent self-serving claim of the elites clearly meant to provide them with material and political advantages. Today, and probably in the past, each village has its separate feast day in the year so that the feasts rotate from one village to another and the rotation is repeated every year. Chiefs from other villages and the paramount chief are invited and given lavish amounts of food so as to create as much of an impression of wealth as possible. Village

feasts are clearly competitive displays of productive ability and success between villages. Numerous lines of pigs, taro, yams, kava, mats, and other prestige items are laid out on the plaza in front of the main village feasting structure (*fale fono*). The give-away (*katoanga*) occurs after the feasting, dancing and ceremonies. Typically, a guest village chief will receive one to two lines of pigs and gifts (about 6-8 large pigs) to be subsequently divided up among the households in his village. Again, as distributor, he is in an ideal position to retain a disproportionate amount for himself or to use disproportionate distribution to reward energetic supporters or create special favors and debts. These are critical advantages in creating any political structure. The paramount chief receives two pigs for his exclusive use and distribution to his most important family members or other supporters.

These feasts, although less grandiose than the first fruits feasts or the Fijian feasts, are nevertheless very impressive events especially considering the relatively small population of Futuna. On nearby Wallis Island, three relatively small feasts in 1988 involved the distribution of 14 tons of pork alone (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:117). It is also significant that the major organizers were the chiefs together with leading *kutuga* elders. Forming a *fakatele* committee they set specific quotas for households to fill for these feasts. If a family did not supply their quota, fines and punishments were imposed. This system seems attested to by some of the earliest accounts (Kirch 1994:270; Burrows 1936:100). Chiefs controlled enforcement cadres (see below) and used accounting systems to ensure that everyone met their quotas (Viala 1919:247).

Other feasts: In addition to first fruit tribute and village feasts, there are many other feasts sponsored by individual families or corporate kindreds. These include first communion (in the past, circumcision ceremonies), marriages, funerals, curing, and birth feasts. At all of these, families with pretensions of influence provide lavish gifts of food and ensure that the village and paramount chiefs attend or receive a large amount. To obtain some idea of the magnitude that this sometimes involves, we were told that a single family consumed or gave away 20 pigs for their child's first communion. Among salaried families, about 60% of the income received is spent on such feasting and gifts. Thus, in one year, one village chief received 47 large pigs and 30 small pigs from families celebrating first communions alone.

On nearby Wallis Island, Douaire-Marsaudon (1998:99) reported that in 1998, each family gave 20 pigs to the chief. It is difficult to know how normal this is, but all of these separate accounts point to the same conclusion: notably, that chiefs receive very large amounts of meat, vegetable foods, and wealth from first fruit feasts, village feasts, and family feasts. While some of this is redistributed, it would be naive to think that a great deal is not kept or that the redistributed food is not disproportionately allocated as political favors so as to solidify political power. Chiefs also received a portion of all fish caught traditionally (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:123), however, few fish are caught today. Finally, the early accounts record what we would term "calamity or propitiation feasts" organized by the paramount chiefs (Kirch 1994:272,275; Smith 1892:46; Rozier 1963:117). These were feasts held to request rain, but seem like transparent pretexts to gather additional surpluses and endebt less powerful families at times when resources were scarce. The overall picture that emerges on Futuna is remarkably similar to the situation among chiefs on the Northwest Coast of North America where one fifth to one half or more of all food produced was surrendered to chiefs for redistribution in potlatch feasts. In reality, considerably less was redistributed than was received (Ruyle 1973:615).

While some ethnographers pretend that a chief's duty to give could render him destitute, it is clear that the chiefs promote others' duty to feed and support their chiefs (ibid). Perhaps it is only the administratively incompetent that are impoverished by such duties.

4/ A fourth benefit of being chief involves the surrender of fines and penalties to the chiefs as well as "spices" given to them when they serve as judges. Chiefs claimed the right to impose taboos and laws on those under their rule, even if these decisions seemed arbitrary. Such

plys are apparent in many transegalitarian cultures where it is claimed that violation of community taboos (generally promulgated by local aggrandizers) endangers the spiritual health of the community and especially its leaders (see Condominas 1977). This not only reinforces the control of aggrandizers over community behavior, but results in material benefits to community leaders who receive the wealth, surpluses, or labor that are exacted from the wrongdoer. On Futuna, the chiefs receive fines which generally consisted of a month's labor or the surrender of a large pig (Panoff 1963:154). Of additional interest is the differential degrees of guilt, extenuating circumstances, and variable fines that chiefs can impose upon transgressors who are affiliated with the elites versus those who have few connexions. In all these circumstances, as well as in the enforcement of feasting quotas, chiefs benefit considerably by controlling an enforcement cadre, or "police" force, although it is not clear whether this was a pre-European institution or not. Oral history certainly maintains that chiefs in the past ruled primarily through instilling fear (Froment et al., n.d.) rather than through belief or respect. Opposition to the chief could result in death.

5/ Chiefs were also generally the only ones to be polygynous in the community. This not only indicates that they controlled considerably more resources and were more wealthy than other families, but that they probably needed more labor to productively exploit the resources they did own. Polygyny may also have been used to create political support.

6/ The exchange of prestige goods was also largely controlled by chiefs. Chiefly families were the only ones capable of underwriting the construction the larger canoes used for interisland trade. In the 19th century when European commerce began to impact the Pacific to a significant degree, the Futunan chiefs issued edicts to prohibit interisland travel (Viala 1919:237; Burrows 1936:87).

7/ Because elites only tend to marry into other elite families of similar wealth and political standing, they also reap benefits from marriage payments and exchanges.

8/ Finally, in addition to the above material benefits, chiefs benefit from the exercise of great political power in the general defense of their own and their family's interests, whether in litigation, in land disputes, or other domains.

Today, there are other resources that have become available to the inhabitants of Futuna and Wallis. These take the form of substantial salaries and contracts provided by the French Territorial government as well as commercial undertakings. As would be predicted by our view of elites benefitting the most from complex sociopolitical arrangements, the traditional political structures have been used primarily in order to accrue benefits to the elites, especially the chiefly elites. Today, there are only about 30% of Futunan families that have salaried positions and we were told that all of these positions held by elite family members. Typically, many people in these positions perform a minimum of actual productive labor. This has been an ongoing source of vexation for French administrators. One recent attempt to impose a no pay for no work rule resulted in the sinking of the French administrator's boat after which he fled the islands. Similarly, we were told of a number of instances where well qualified people were ignored for scholarships in favor of elite family members who later dropped out of the programs. Interisland and international travel to sports events is also funded by the French government, and such travel is viewed as highly desirable. The teams chosen for interisland competition, however, rarely are the most meritorious, but rather reflect members' family connexions. Informants on Futuna often said that "everything is politics" in Futunan society. Merit seems to have little place in the awarding of benefits. It should therefore come as little surprise that we were told that all of the key political positions established by the French Territorial government are held by noble families. It is these "elected" officials that control the purse strings for contracts and salaries. They are elected by dint of the support that they can muster and the success that they can

demonstrate and the gifts that they are willing to distribute to supporters. Given the traditional power structure of the island and the important role feasting plays in creating networks of mutual support between families, it hardly seems surprising that these networks would be effectively used in marshalling voting behavior of large factions of families in the islands.

As we and others have noted, competition was always fierce in traditional Futunan society between families, between chiefs vying for more desirable ranks, between villages, and between chiefdoms (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:99). Such overt competition and displays of material success make little sense from an ecological point of view if there are not substantial material benefits to be gained. Today, this competition is rampant between elite families to control seats in the Territorial Council. Candidates for Territorial office publicly distributing 10,000 PF notes (\$100 bills) to ceremonial dancers (who are generally from elite families) and provide enormous pigs for feasting events. It is obvious that these people are competing over support to acquire the political positions that control the most important resources of the island--the cash salaries and contracts provided by the French government. There are no significant exports from the island so that the only source of cash is from French aid. In the past, the resources were primarily land and labor. It is clear that in all cases, the chiefs and their most active supporters were the ones to have benefitted to a far greater degree than anyone else.

All this is not to say that general community members did not also benefit, or at least they hoped to benefit from supporting a successful chief. For ultimately, chiefs could be, and often were, deposed due to incompetence or overbearing demands and insufficient gifts to households under their jurisdiction (Viala 1919:231). Thus, elites had to provide a minimum level of redistributed feasting foods, land, defense, support for marriages, and similar advantages for the general populace. However, one might consider the situation similar to contemporary land developers.

The Parable of the Developers: On the idyllic Gulf Islands, less than an hour away from Vancouver by boat, many residents retired from the travails of life and lived a more peaceful, integrated existence. For many years, the islands were protected from the incursion of industrial city life by transport and time barriers of the sea. However, with substantial population growth in Vancouver during the 1990's, many land developers began to think of the islands as yet another potential bedroom community within accessible commuting distance to the metropolis. These developers hoped to benefit handsomely from selling lots to wealthy Vancouverites. However, island residents felt firmly in control of their lives, and it seemed that the developers who wanted to increase island population densities and ruin the tranquil island lifestyle, would not be able to get a foothold for their projects. Undaunted, the developers through long experience, began to offer local municipal councils a number of benefits that developments could bring to their communities: parks, infrastructure, sewage treatment, and other desirable items, including personal benefits for key councilors who stood to gain handsomely through the sale of their lands to developers. Using these techniques, the developers were able to subvert opposition to their plans in many cases and proceed with selling land to wealthy Vancouver commuters.

The important lesson from this true story is that although development did technically produce benefits for the community at large, it was not these benefits that were the primary motive behind the developments. The primary motivation was the disproportionate enrichment of the developers (or aggrandizers) themselves: it was the self-interest of the developers. They merely made concessions to the wider community where it was absolutely necessary to implement their schemes for becoming wealthy and powerful. We suggest that aggrandizers in transegalitarian and chiefdom societies operated in a similar fashion. While they did provide some real benefits to their communities as a whole, these were simply the price that was required for operating lucrative aggrandizer schemes. Aggrandizers clearly benefitted disproportionately

and were motivated by the prospect of enhancing their own self-interest as much as possible rather than by idealistic concern for community welfare. As an ongoing process over time, the interplay between aggrandizer self-interests and concessions to the greater good of the population may be viewed as a dialectic that inexorably raises the general standard of living of the population as a whole, but also raises the standard of living of the aggrandizers to a much greater extent.

All this being said, it must be emphasized that it is always the prospect, the hope, or the calculated probability of achieving such windfall benefits (or benefits at others' expense) which is the primary motivator. Nothing guarantees that such schemes will always work, and their were probably just as many failures in the past because of incompetence, misjudgements, competition, or unforeseen factors as there are business failures today. In all aggrandizer schemes, the potential rewards may be breathtaking, but the risks of failure are equally dramatic. Contemporary developers and aggrandizers risk bankruptcy and the loss of everything they own. Transegalitarian aggrandizers and chiefs, not only might forfeit their prestige, status, and all that they owned, but they often forfeited their lives as well to competitors and rivals. The New Guinea Big Man, Ongka, recounted attempts on his life by his rivals (Strathern 1976), and there are many instances of Polynesian chiefs being sacrificed by victorious rivals as well as many accounts on Futuna of local and paramount chiefs being overthrown through intrigue or through war (Viala 1919:231; Douaire-Marsaudon 1998:101). As Earle (1997:140) notes, chiefs rarely died old; most died in conflicts (see also Kolb and Dixon 2002). This consistent incidence of extreme risk taking by elites and conflict between them only really makes ecological sense if there are very substantial benefits to be gained from occupying elite chiefly positions. The major wars between the two paramount chiefs of Futuna may well have been ongoing attempts of rival contenders to destabilize each others' alliance and support network.

Chieftdom Dynamics and Benefits to Constituent Families

While the greater population may benefit in some ways from chiefly activities on a general level, there must also be disproportionate benefits to particular families that are critical to understand the functioning of chieftdoms. Before exploring this issue, however, there is another key aspect of chieftdoms that we first need to address: the role of warfare. Because of the many ecological and political models that purport to explain the ontology of chieftdoms (described by Earle 1999), we had expected that there might be major production or distribution benefits or personal entrepreneurial benefits that underlay the origin of chieftdoms. We assumed that economic and political factors such as the control of trade or irrigation or other economic factors conferred on aggrandizers made the most sense in terms of the basis for power consolidation.

It came as quite an unexpected surprise to find that warfare was so strongly--even adamantly-- identified as the origin of the Futunan chieftdoms (Frimigacci 1991:170-174). We had always assumed that warfare was more of a byproduct of chieftdom development, rather than a causal factor in its emergence. After all, warfare also exists in transegalitarian societies such as those of New Guinea and Amazonia without resulting in chieftdoms. Yet, in investigating the ethnographic literature elsewhere in Polynesia, the same story was repeated over and over: chieftdoms were founded through war and conquest. Further afield, warfare is viewed as a critical factor in generating the hierarchies in Irish chieftdoms (Gibson 2000), while warfare is argued to be omnipresent in South American chieftdoms and tribes (Redmond 1994:44). On a still broader scale, Carneiro (1970, 1981) claims that chieftdoms universally originate from warfare. Roscoe (2002:158), too, identifies warfare together with subsistence as the important determinants of sociopolitical complexity. Similarly, warfare is one of the central strategies that

Earle (1999:105-131) identifies as creating chiefly power, although in his view it is an unstable and difficult to control source that is an insufficient base of power.

What are we to make of these conflicting claims? If war was so central, why did chiefdoms not arise in New Guinea or Amazonia? Redmond (1994:45) suggests that in tribes, warfare is motivated by revenge, whereas in chiefdoms it is motivated by a chief's desire to possess land and power. The critical difference here would seem to be one of aggrandizer values, but this leaves open the question as to why these should vary in this way especially given aggrandizer tendencies to invent values that are self-serving. Carneiro's (1970, 1981) arguments about the role of population pressure in fomenting warfare do not seem to account for the emergence of chiefdoms or warfare either since there are numerous conclusions that population pressure was insignificant in many transegalitarian and chiefdom societies (Clark and Blake 1994:19; Brumfiel 1994:7; Cowgill 1996; Knauft 1990:269,281; Rousseau 197; Kang 2000; Kelly 2000:135; Earle 1997:122). Several of these authors stress that warfare does not emerge from scarcity, but rather is precipitated by the accumulation of surpluses and wealth that envious rivals covet (Brumfiel 199:7; Kelly 2000:135; Cowgill 1996). This is entirely consistent with our political ecology views of aggrandizers and their strategies and motivations. We would also agree with Earle that by itself, warfare is an unstable and difficult to control basis for building power hierarchies.

We suggest that the critical element in stabilizing these hierarchies is the amount of surpluses that can be reliably used to host feasts or generate prestige items. It is these surpluses that are critical to establishing the debt relationships that bind supporters to leaders. As Rambo (1991) has noted, the energy requirements of maintaining administrative structures increase geometrically as complexity increases. As is evident in Futuna, it is the feasting and the gift-giving that provides the sociopolitical glue, the cohesion, the motivation that holds hierarchies together. War may often provide the initial impetus that places the title and rights to land and produce in the hands of conquerors. This accords well with Gilman's (1981) view of extortionist aggrandizers. However, where there is not enough surplus to consolidate and integrate the subject populations (or key family heads) through feasting and prestige gifts, the hierarchies are bound to collapse over time. Judging from indications on Wallis Island, it is only where the productive potential is ample enough to support the production of surpluses on the order of raising 20 extra pigs per family per year for chiefly feasting (plus the number required for one's own family feasts), that feasting can take place on a scale sufficient to create and maintain alliances between chiefs and key lineage or kindred figures in the communities involved. We are in accord with Carneiro (1981:61) when he states that:

By the selective distribution of food, goods, booty, women, and the like the chief rewards those who have rendered him service. Thus he builds up a core of officials, warriors, henchmen, retainers...it is through the shrewd and self-interested disbursement of taxes that the administrative machinery of the chiefdom...is built up.

Having said all this, the ultimate source of feasting-based power should be viewed as residing with the *kutuga* corporate kindred elders. In Futuna, it is the *kutuga* (kindred) elders that wield the most power and make the most critical decisions. They make alliances, and the elders in the most powerful alliances determine who will be elected chief, who will be a Territorial representative, and who will be given salaried positions or contracts. The elders (and others) assess the desirability of establishing alliances on the basis of the size, wealth, and motivation of other *kutuga* kindreds. This is largely determined by the size and the opulence of member family feasts at key family events such as first communions, marriages, funerals, and births. Prospective or current allied elders (and their affiliates) from other *kutuga* are invited to these events. If there is a strong alliance relationship, the invited elder is expected to make a

substantial gift contribution in support of the event, and will receive a substantial gift of food and prestige items to take back to his own *kaiga* or *kutuga* to distribute. The invited elder must also reciprocate with a similar invitation to his host whenever his kindred holds a major feast. This is the way that alliances are created and maintained, materialized and made firm, whether in transegalitarian or chiefdom societies. Failure to honor these expectations, or tacit contracts, results in sociopolitical rupture and hostility. Elders and their constituents obviously benefit from the system because it is they who hold title to the land (as descendants of the original conquerors) and they who ultimately decide all matters of importance. If a junior member of a family or *kutuga* requires help in marriage arrangements or in times of difficulty or in political contests, he or she is dependent on the kindred elder to supply those benefits. Thus support of one's elder can also provide benefits to the general kindred membership in a manner reminiscent of mafia godfather-client relationships. Similar power structures typify much of transegalitarian Southeast Asia.

In Futuna, elders are ranked according to the importance of their *kutuga*. Traditionally these ranks were always subject to revision to correspond to material realities as well as valor in warfare. One of the contending paramount *kutugas* was established through the killing of an enemy paramount chief in 1838. The real merit and rank of this "newcomer" *kutuga* is still a matter of contention and rivalry between it and the more established *kutuga*'s that hold rights to filling paramount chiefly roles. Today, elders still sit in prescribed seating orders at village meetings (*fono*) and dominate the proceedings according to the standing of their families. Many lower ranking families strongly support the traditional political structure even though they receive few benefits. This is because if one's *kutuga* or *kaiga* is not in a strong position, one can still hope to benefit from the system in the future given a change in corporate fortunes (or in the past, luck in war). Since almost 80% of the families on Futuna appear to have at least some distant claim to noble heritage, almost everyone could at least hope to benefit from the system if their fortunes improved at some point.

This system is duplicated at a higher level in relationships between chiefs, with the paramount chief trying to hold together a coalition of allied village chiefs through a series of annual and special event feasts, debts, and obligations. These tacit contracts were often enforced via fear, physical force, and the display of power (compare also Ruyle for Northwest Coast enforcement cadres 1973:616). It is perhaps the inability of some chiefs to meet their reciprocal obligations (due to incompetence, rival disruptive factions, poor luck, or other factors) that led in the past to sociopolitical rupture within the paramount chief's alliance, and a realignment of political/feasting allegiances to rival paramount chiefs. Such events must have happened frequently and must have resulted in warfare between chiefdoms. The first European residents on Futuna recorded two major wars in just one year (1838). Thus, along with feasting, warfare appears to have been the major means of organizing constituent polities under a chiefdom umbrella in Polynesia. These were the chief's two main responsibilities, and perhaps his only distinctive activities aside from related ritual performances. We suggest that these factors: adequate surpluses (in the form of food or goods), feasting, and warfare, may be the essential core of all chiefdoms, although the form these take and the relative emphasis on individual components may vary according to time and place as Earle (1997) has suggested in his staple versus wealth finance systems perhaps reflected in Western European Neolithic megalithic herding chiefdoms versus the craft-dominated Neolithic polities of Southeastern Europe.

Conclusions

We side firmly with Earle (1997:12,147) in his view that material leverage rather than mental leverage is the key to understanding the emergence of chiefdoms, although it is readily recognized that elites promoted ideologies and value systems that were transparently self-

serving. They must have achieved acceptance of these value systems among large portions of the communities by dint of material leverage. We believe that claims to the effect that chiefs served their communities to their own material detriment are inaccurate generalizations and can be accounted for by several factors.

--Some ethnographers appear to have ignored the basic economic realities of traditional societies in which “gifts” should have been more accurately portrayed as long term loans, the reciprocal return of which was a tacit contract (see, for example, Mauss 1925; Codere 1966; Rousseau 1979:241).

--Some chiefs undoubtedly were incompetent administrators who did become impoverished by holding office; however, like contemporary capitalist economies, the basic socioeconomic structure of chiefdoms was set up so as to make it possible for most chiefs to substantially increase their (or their family’s) wealth and power most of the time. It was above all the *prospect of potential* great increases in wealth and power (rather than guaranteed outcomes) in these domains that motivated people to fill these positions. In many cases, performance undoubtedly did not match up to promises or hopes, just as stock market investors today rarely achieve the glowing returns that investment brokers lead clients to expect.

--The intense levels of competition and extreme risks associated with these chiefly positions in the past are strong indicators that significant material benefits were entailed with holding office. In contrast, the French government and international economy have severely undermined the traditional power basis of chiefs today and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find anyone willing to assume positions of paramount chief. The primary loci for controlling the most desirable resources has now shifted to the Territorial Council positions, with the expectable result that competition is now most intense over these positions.

--Traditionally, chiefs had to contend with disgruntled producers who were reluctant to surrender as much surplus as chiefs wanted. In order to blunt critics, it would have been in the chief’s interest to plead destitution in order to give more weight to his requests for material support for “community” needs such as hosting the annual village feast. Pleading destitution would also blunt criticism that the chief was getting wealthy on the backs of his supporters. Like the Melanesian Big Men described by Reay (1959), Polynesian chiefs almost certainly (misre)presented their community-oriented persona in public (and to ethnographers) while they privately pursued their own self-interests according to their own devious schemes and values.

We believe that these factors are responsible for accounts in the literature that portray chiefs as becoming materially disadvantaged due to office holding. There is abundant literature to indicate that chiefs are no economic lemmings (e.g., Ruyle 1973:615; Rousseau 1979:241;). On the basis of our own research and the accounts available in the literature, it seems clear that chiefly families were the main beneficiaries of the chiefdom political organization.

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