

CONFLICTING VALUES RECIPROCITY AND ITS DEFIANCE IN MELANESIA

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The concept of reciprocity was first formulated from Melanesian ethnography (Thurnwald 1916; Malinowski 1926). It has played an essential role in the interpretation of Melanesian exchange. Consolidated as *the principle of reciprocity* it has become a canonical concept in anthropological theory. The importance of reciprocity in exchange has supported the view that Melanesian societies are fundamentally egalitarian. Since the publication of Andrew Strathern's edited volume *Inequality in New Guinea Highlands Societies* in 1982 there has, however, been a rising critique of the assumption of social equality. Various forms of inequality in Melanesia have been discussed. The existence of rank and chiefly leadership here and there in seaboard Melanesia has been pointed out (Douglas 1979); they may indicate former more widespread hierarchies in the Austronesian past in Melanesia (Pawley 1982; Bellwood 1996; Spriggs 1997). The exploitation of women in the production of pigs used by men in ceremonial exchanges in the highlands has been argued (Modjeska 1982; Josephides 1985) as has that of the subordination of juniors in initiation rites (Godelier 1982, 1986). These questions also surfaced in the reconsideration of traditional Melanesian leadership in the debate on big men and great men (Godelier 1986; Godelier and M. Strathern [eds] 1991). Yet the idea of egalitarian Melanesia still lives on. Thus a recent textbook on Melanesia repeatedly states that Melanesian societies are egalitarian because they are stateless, acephalous societies and their exchanges aim at equivalence (Sillitoe 1998: 63, 65, 149, 189). Joel Robbins published a strong defence of equality as a paramount value in Melanesia in 1994. Again, the *locus classicus* of equality is located in exchange. 'What Melanesians value in exchange is equality. Relationships bear value by being the vehicle for equal exchanges.' (Robbins 1994: 39)

In this paper I propose to show that in a Melanesian society reciprocity may be held as a value and practiced in important forms of ceremonial exchange institutions. Nevertheless, there is at the same time a dominance of senior big men through their control of the exchange of high-ranking wealth and through their manipulation of a complex finance system. Reciprocity and inequality may be intertwined in social life. My argument is in direct response to a critique from Robbins. In a Forum in this journal on my book, *A Papuan Plutocracy: Ranked Exchange on Rossel Island* (2009), he raised an important point (Robbins 2009). The main theme of my book is the complex system of ranked exchange on Rossel Island, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea. My analysis, however, has also led me towards a critique of the principle of reciprocity and of theories of gift exchange, especially the obligatory return of the gift. Further, I argue that a stratum of big men through their ownership of high-ranking shell money and superior control of ceremonial exchanges take a dominant position in the social life of the island. I sketch a class-like social stratification on Rossel and even suggest that the dominance of the big men may be called a plutocracy. I believe that the exchange system can not be understood

by an assumption that actors in exchange interact on terms of equality and I find that in exchange processes reciprocity is often compromised.

Robbins points out that in my book I in fact report and analyse a number of exchange institutions which produce reciprocity between the parties in the long term. (I shall take up these cases below.) This would, he argues, rather indicate a society where people value and aim to maintain relations of symmetry and equality. This critique I take as a valid intervention. Robbins goes on to suggest that ceremonial exchange on Rossel Island is just a 'game' which the big men play among themselves, but which has little real power underneath. It takes place in a sphere apart from real society where people go on practicing reciprocity and equality. This solution to the problem I find misleading. I have argued this in my response to Robbins in the JFAS Forum (Liep 2009c). Nevertheless, there is a dilemma here which is not entirely resolved in the book. Even worse, I have myself in an early paper on mortuary rituals (written in 1981 but first published in 1989) argued that these elements of symmetry in Rossel exchange worked to prevent the rise of social hierarchy, traces of which are found elsewhere in the Massim region. This conundrum must be faced and this is what I will attempt to do in this essay.

*Rossel Island money*¹

The exchanges I shall take up involve the complex system of shell money on Rossel and, in some instances, also valuables such as ceremonial greenstone axes and red shell necklaces (locally called *bagi*) which are found widely in the region. The system of shell money is remarkably hierarchical. There are two kinds of money. The *ndap* money is single, polished *Spondylus* shells. There are twenty categories of *ndap* shells ranked from scarce and sacred heirloom shells at the top of the system down to common low-value shells at the bottom. The nine categories of high-ranking *ndap* are believed to be made by the gods on Rossel and are all individually named. There are myths about some of them and their history of ownership is known through some generations. These shells are indeed 'something more than money' as Raymond Firth once wrote (1958 [1938]: 80). Nowadays, more than a means of payment they are tokens of eminence like Western orders and decorations. In olden days all *ndap* ranks were circulating but from the time of the First World War the high-ranking shells became stationary.² They are now owned by senior big men (and a few women) and excluded from ordinary circulation. They are 'inalienable possessions' in Annette Weiner's sense (1992). Nevertheless, they play an important role in exchange rituals where they appear in initial exchanges only to be returned to their owners again. These shells serve to 'licence' an agreement and they lend their prestige to the occasion. In the ritual display they are solemnly handled and carried around to be touched by witnesses. Their owners and other important big men take precedence in the circle of men involved in this ritual. While high rank *ndap* thus play an important role in exchange rituals the actual transfer of *ndap* money is restricted to the lower half of the rank scale. Lower-ranking *ndap* shells are lined up on the ground in order of rank. This display of graded value objects thus again reflects the social importance of contributors on the one side and recipients on the receiving side. The entire span of *ndap* ranks displays differences of social importance. They measure worth qualitatively. The

higher in the system the more personalised and memorable the shells are; they are coveted and people are attached to them.

The other kind of money, the *kê*, is a set of ten shell-discs made from the *Chama* bivalve strung on a fibre string. (It will be convenient to refer to such a set just as 'a shell'.) They vary in diameter from 40 millimetres of the very highest rank down to 8 of the lowest. Formerly, they were regarded as female money but they are now exchanged by both sexes. The *kê* system is auxiliary to the *ndap* system. The names of the eleven highest ranks of *kê* follow those of the corresponding *ndap* ranks, only the three lowest rankings have special terms. Although high-ranking *kê* are highly valued they do not carry individual names. At ceremonial payment rituals numbers of *kê* sets are strung together in order of rank into long 'ropes' for display. After the transfer of the payment the rope of *kê* is cut and the individual sets carefully reconstituted. In contrast to the *ndap* system where the upper half of the money ranks have been withdrawn from real circulation, all ranks of *kê*, except the very highest one, are still in circulation. In practice, however, owners of 'big' *kê* often demand the return of their shells after some time. I shall discuss this practice below. Most ceremonial payments consist of two payments, one of *ndap* and one of *kê*, which are transferred together. Mortuary payments are exceptional in that *kê* is excluded from them while stone axes and shell necklaces are transferred together with *ndap* money. Although the Rossel monetary system possesses some unique features, such as the remarkably large number of ranks and the withdrawal of the high-ranking *ndap* from circulation, systems of ranked currencies are found elsewhere in the Pacific and may have been widespread in former times.³

Rossel has been involved in the plantation economy and the market for more than a hundred years. People are quite familiar with modern state money and eager to find ways to earn it. Modern money, however, is mainly reserved for school fees, church contributions and trade goods. It has only partially penetrated some ceremonial exchanges. It is very significant that the big men have been able to exclude modern money from bridewealth. In this way they have forestalled young men using their cash earnings to marry and avoid dependence on their elders in the collection of shells for the large bridewealth. In the context of this paper I shall leave out further discussion of state money and concentrate on the exchange of 'traditional' money and valuables.⁴

Ranked exchange is a complicated affair. Important payments demand so much money that those men in charge of organising a payment must set out on tours collecting low-ranking shell money and arrange complicated 'loans' of high-ranking shells. To elicit such cherished possessions from their owners, safeguarding procedures are needed. In some instances a security of the same or even higher value than the shell loaned is given. In others the lender agrees to take more risk and is only given a shell of lower rank as a pledge. In general, people who have contributed shells to a payment expect a return at some time in the future. In the case of the high-ranking *ndap*, which enter only *pro forma* into exchanges, the return is of course automatic. With regard to contributions of low-ranking *ndap* and all *kê*, repayment is more indefinite. Return may be years delayed or never forthcoming. This depends on the personal relationship and negotiating power of the parties.

In terms of the shell money Rossel must be regarded as a remarkably 'monetized' society. Shell money (and valuables) is essential in bridewealth and mortuary exchanges,

institutions which are central in creating, maintaining and concluding kinship relations. Further, shell money is significant in pig feasts and in payments (together with valuables) for the construction of houses and canoes for important men. Shell money may also pay for garden crops and some forms of labour. Formerly, it could also pay for girls captured for prostitution and, before pacification, for cannibal victims. Adult people on the island have a recurrent need for shell money. They participate more or less eagerly in ceremonial exchanges and are often called upon to contribute to the payments of kinsmen, affines or other connections. The life world of Rossel people, one may say, is saturated by considerations of money.

Revisiting reciprocity in Rossel Island exchange

Before discussing reciprocity as it appears as an element of social structure on Rossel Island I must briefly outline the descent group system. There are fifteen dispersed matrilineal clans on Rossel. Most clans are further divided into subclans. Except for one large clan there is exogamy at the clan level. Subclans are associated with territories of land which are often distributed in several places on the island. The local section of a subclan is a more effective unit, but hardly a corporate group in terms of leadership and management of land. Residence is mainly patri-virilocal and sons usually stay in their father's place. This may produce *de facto* local patrilineages, a trend that has become more marked recently (cf. Levinson 2006).⁵ It is in kinship exchanges that a local subclan takes on the character of an action group. Ceremonial exchanges are conceived as between two 'sides'. At the centre of a side is a local subclan section, a member of which organises the prestation. To assemble the payment subclan members are the first contributors, but the subclan also calls in help from other members of their clan, from 'linked subclans' in other clans (see Liep 2009a: 112–113), and from subclan filiates and affines. A wide fan of relationships is thus activated when a subclan undertakes to make a prestation.

In the Massim, hierarchy is associated with asymmetric affinal exchange. Wife-takers and wife-givers exchange contrasted goods, often called 'male' and 'female'. In Kiriwina Island of the Trobriands this asymmetry has supported a chiefly hierarchy where the chief sparingly dispensed shell valuables to his wives' lineages that worked to produce his yam harvest 'tribute'. Elsewhere in the Massim a structure of such 'unequal exchange' between affines may be a trace of former hierarchy. On Rossel Island the marriage system is constituted differently. A large bridewealth of shell money is paid to the bride's side.⁶ This would seem to indicate an unequal relationship between affines, but the bridewealth seems more to be concerned with moving the bride to the husband's place and establishing rights of the husband in children of the marriage. There is no system of harvest prestations to affines. In fact, the relationship between brothers-in-law is characterized by equal expectations to assist with heavy tasks of work and with contributions of shell money to each other's prestations.⁷ The affinal relationship thus works out symmetrically. This is again reflected when children of the marriage themselves marry. The father's and the mother's sides both pay their part of the bridewealth on behalf of sons and they both take their part of the bridewealth for daughters. After the unilateral payment of bridewealth there is thus a long-term practice of reciprocity and symmetry over two generations between

affines. This appears again in the mortuary ritual. A payment of reconciliation consisting of *ndap* and valuables from the deceased's spouse's side is returned at the mortuary feast when the surviving spouse dies. I conclude that at the level of descent groups, exchange practice effects symmetry and equality in the long-term relationship between the groups. One may say that a value of reciprocity, or balance, guides exchange here. However, in a society where women formerly often died in childbirth and senior men remarried one or two times many years often pass before the death of the surviving spouse. Meanwhile, the recipients of the first payment have this wealth and may use it for other purposes while the donors do not have it. A long-term imbalance between the two sides exists. When the surviving spouse finally dies the personnel on both sides have partially been replaced, as actors have died and younger people have become responsible. To return a former payment from a long time ago may be experienced as a new requirement. Thus, such long term reciprocal moves appear rather as two imbalances far apart in time and partly involving different persons. There are also ways of opening strategic 'new points' at mortuary feasts: payments which further address rights in land and persons. What structurally looks like straight reciprocity in fact may be open to some manipulation. One should therefore be aware of jumbling together the simple reciprocity of short term like-for-like exchanges and much more complex forms of delayed return under a common label of 'reciprocity' and take them equally as evidence of social egalitarianism.⁸

Reciprocity is also evident in pig feasting. Here two sides are again opposed. The 'pig owner' is the man (and his household) who have raised a pig. His opponent, the 'pig eater' is the sponsor paying for the pig, or rather the main part of it, the middle back. Both men are backed by a group of relatives and other associates.⁹ Often the two men have agreed that after some time—one or several years—their two roles will be reversed. The pig eater at the first feast will now offer a pig and the former pig owner will sponsor the payment for the main part. As I show below, a pig feast is a most complex thing to accomplish financially, and to raise a pig to the huge size required for a Rossel feast is also regarded as a major task. When the second feast has been accomplished both men have demonstrated the ability to raise a pig and to manage the assembling of the large payment for the main part. In this delayed reciprocity pork and vegetables as well as shell money have passed both ways. Affines often make their *début* in high-level exchange by arranging to 'eat' each other's pigs. When this has been successfully accomplished the two opponents have equally passed through a double 'status-taking ritual', an important step in their exchange careers.

Reciprocity of pig feasting is frequent, but does not invariably take place. There are circumstances (such as for example illness or death) that may prevent one of the parties fulfilling such an agreement. I believe also that big men later in their careers prefer to participate in other men's pig feasts without so often taking the main responsibility in the role of pig owner or pig eater.

Pig feast finance

The process of financing large ceremonial prestations on Rossel is complex. To elicit high-ranking shells to take part in a payment demands a number of supporting transfers of

lower-ranking shells. Valuable shells are not just given, they must be extracted, as Marilyn Strathern says (1988: 198; cf. Graeber 2001: 40). They sit tight with their possessors and, to launch them in exchange, trust must be built up through persuasion and presentation of securities or pledges. This takes the most complicated form in pig-feast financing.

Some time before the pig feast a pig owner will, together with his associates, send a number of low-ranking shells as initiatory gifts to the pig eater who distributes them between himself and his associates. These men now begin to 'work' mobilizing the high-ranking shells for the superior part of the payment. This takes place through a series of expanding contributions along a chain of men. In each of these 'loans' a lower-ranking shell serves as a 'pledge' that is given to the next man in the chain. The latter keeps this pledge-shell and gives a higher-ranking shell, which now becomes a pledge-shell for the next man in the chain. This man may be the one who releases the high-ranking shell which will actually be transferred in the payment to the pig owner's side at the feast. Or there may be yet another link in the chain of mobilization. In this way, if the operation is done properly, risk is spread among a number of men. They will usually all attend the feast and will be given pieces of pork in proportion to the rank of the shells they have contributed. For each of the larger parts of the pig one high-ranking *ndap* and a number of valuable *kê* are released, hedged by a number of pledge transfers, to take part in the payment. The big *ndap* must go back after the feast and is replaced by a large number of low-ranking *ndap*, the most valuable of these also having pledges, and a number of low-ranking *kê* are added to the big ones in the 'rope' that is transferred to the pig eater and his associates. Thus the financing of a pig feast involves a large number of complicated loans and debts.

When I attempted to delve more deeply into what happened with these debt relationships, I seemed to enter a maze of contradictory statements. It was clear that people regard a pledge-shell as a token of their right to a return. I was told that a man can go and present his pledge to the man who has received his higher-ranking shell and ask for return. The borrower may find the original shell or he may provide another shell. If he is a 'good man' he will return a better shell. But it may also be the case that he drags out the repayment. He may say that the original shell is 'lost' but he is looking for another. I talked to men who had waited years and had given up hope of any return. It appeared that the meat that people have received and eaten at the pig feast is not truly regarded as being an equivalent of the money one has contributed to the payment of the pig (see Foster 1990 on non-equivalence in exchange). I was astonished when my best informant one day declared that sooner or later all the money paid in a pig feast should go back to the donors. Others said that the 'small *ndap*' people bring to the feast are just 'pay for meat', but the big shells, those raised by giving pledges, should be returned. Anyway, on Rossel it is the lender who must ask for return, the borrower 'cannot worry about him'. I was also told that a debtor 'cannot ask for nothing': he must need the shell for a definite purpose. My informant even maintained, when we were discussing long-standing debts to people who had helped him to pay bridewealth, that a creditor could only ask him to return shells if he were himself collecting for a bridewealth. It would not do if he was out collecting for a pig feast, for example. This is a kind of 'special-purpose thinking' about the use of money where a debt is identified with a specific context and relationship. Together with the notion of the non-equivalence of pork and shell money, mentioned

above, this reveals a certain mental resistance to the full realization of exchange value and the abstraction of money found in a system of commodity exchange.

This uncertainty about return of loans was further illustrated when I found out that the word *ngm:aa*, which I call 'pledge', in fact means '[to] dodge' as one would do to evade a spear thrown at one. As I read it, the borrower of a valuable shell drops a dodge to the lender to avoid the point of debt—at least for an indefinite period of time. I heard a lot of bickering about unpaid debts and complaints about all the tricks and humbugging of the big men.

It seems that terms such as 'loan' and 'debt' are clumsy and even misleading tools for understanding what is going on in Rossel Island finance. It is such experiences which led me to take a critical view of 'the principle of reciprocity' and 'the obligation to return the gift': tenets almost canonical in anthropology. Malinowski's principle of reciprocity implies that actors are independent and equal agents who find it in their best interests to return gifts fairly in order to maintain good relationships. The give-and-take of everyday life sustains symmetry of social structure (Malinowski 1926: 25). For Mauss (1990 [1923–1924]), people are bound by strong moral obligations to give and return generously. In general, gift theory assumes that reciprocity maintains equality among people. These concepts, I have found, are not able to account for the situation on Rossel. I have therefore taken a different perspective. For me, actors are not free and equal agents to enter and leave exchange on terms of fair return. They are bound into already existing relationships which are often not equal. Actors are positioned as males and females, seniors and juniors, big men and lesser men. Their decisions in exchange are not freely taken but influenced by kinship obligations, persuasion or pressure. Gifts of valuable things are extracted and return must likewise be extracted. This is a field where differences of power inflect the exchanges among people. Return of a debt depends on the force a claimant is able to exert. Further, an exchange relationship cannot be understood as just an affair between only two parties. It is dependant on a context of other relationships, exchanges and interests.

Conclusion: the rupture of reciprocity

One may say that there is a general 'value' of reciprocity in Rossel society, although such 'grand' values are always anthropologists' constructs. I have heard people despise old men who had become misers and only thought about accumulating shell money. They also praise 'the good man' who makes generous return. In a more particular way they want a return of money they have contributed in prestations. People indeed practice delayed reciprocity, as I have shown, between affines and in the reversal of pig feasts. Big men, who always take a leading role in ceremonial exchanges, are participants in these strategies that aim at symmetry and balance. But this is only one dimension in the field of exchanges on Rossel Island. Across the formal exchange operations of delayed reciprocities there runs the whole process of financing these complex ranked exchanges. When one delves beneath the public events of exchange displays and the general statements of their formal structure and function one finds another dimension: that of the collusion of the leading

big men in monopolizing high-ranking shells and of their cavalier handling of reciprocity in credit relationships.

In the Rossel exchange system money plays an essential part. I have emphasized that Rossel money is very different from modern money. Its main use is as a means of payment. It is a ranked currency which measures worth qualitatively, not as our money which is first and foremost a means of exchange, measuring prices in a market economy. Rossel money forms a hierarchy of tokens of social status and power. In these aspects the money stands in contrast to modern money. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Rossel money, I believe, shares an aspect of all money. Money is a symbolic token that may stand for other valuable things. It may stand for human exertion in work, for the products of work, for rights in things and persons. But money is also a symbol 'that stands for itself' (see Wagner 1986): money objects are commonly acknowledged deposits of value. Therefore, money is attractive in itself. When people accept money into their networks of social relationships they find that considerations of money may displace social considerations.

On Rossel Island important ceremonial exchanges are the most popular public celebrations. Large crowds of visitors and participants congregate, especially at pig feasts if they are followed by sing-sings which carry on the whole night. Such occasions are entertaining social gatherings, but they are also arenas for the display of money wealth, the power of ownership and of financial acumen. Big men collect to authorize and take part in high-level exchange. To be able to exchange and handle high-ranking money is a confirmation of one's status and recognized expertise. Big men are frequently on the road collecting money, arranging loans and attending feasts here and there. I suggest that it may become a passion and a thrill for some men to take part in shell money finance as one would do in gaming. Big men are prone to involve themselves in as many exchange occasions as possible. Thereby they tend to overextend their financial reach and collect too many liabilities. Such men will often use their power to take back a high-ranking *kê*, which they have committed in a prestation, soon after the event to use it for another exchange. They will be forced to satisfy some debtors while ignoring others.¹⁰ It is difficult for most men to honour all their debts but big men seem to get away with it more often than others. The more shrewd gamblers fool the less shrewd. Most big men have this reputation for sharp practice in exchange. They are, however only a powerful minority of people. Many men, I believe, resign themselves to participating in exchange in a more moderate way. Some may have experienced disappointment, losing their shells on occasion. They (and their wives) do not want to toil feeding pigs, arranging feasts or frequently going around trying to solicit money.

I think I have demonstrated that there are two conflicting dimensions, or axes, of exchange in Rossel Island exchange. On the one axis, there is a general value of fair and equal return and there are practiced structures of reciprocity. On another axis, there is a monetary system of concrete objectifications of desirable value. It is structured as a ladder of increasing prestige and worth and it penetrates many essential social events and manifold social relationships. The entire upper part of the *ndap* money is monopolized by a 'class' of big men keeping the shells for themselves but still insisting that they must formally and briefly take part in ceremonial exchanges. It is a prime example of Weiner's principle of 'keeping-while-giving', or rather it is 'giving-while-keeping' (Weiner 1992). Big men also tend to be owners of high-ranking *kê* and control their exchange. Further, the

complex finance system of the island opens avenues for competitive gaming and tempts cunning participants to cheat. There is, I suggest, an entrenched inequality on Rossel Island based on control of wealth. Thus a general regard for reciprocity is continually in conflict with a widespread enticement of monetary wealth.

I have a last example which shows vividly how reciprocity and inequality may be combined. An informant told a story about the times of old when the big men were much more powerful. At that time big men would have 'soldiers', a bodyguard of young men who could also occasionally be sent out to ambush a victim for a cannibal feast. Victims were usually young unmarried men or girls. A big man would have his connections among the big men of neighbouring areas. Two such men could meet at some occasion and one of them might say to his crony, 'I have this young boy. He is lazy and never hears what his elders tell him to do. If you need a victim some time, you could as well take him.' Such a service would later be returned. Thus the big men were swapping cannibal victims. They nicely respected reciprocity among themselves while the ordinary village people, and especially the young, lived in fear for their lives. The story of course has the character of a legend. It may not be an accurate rendering of conditions of life on Rossel before pacification. The fact that it lives on shows at least that it appeals to the imagination of contemporary Rossel people.

The Rossel Island regime of wealth may be extreme. But disrespect for reciprocity is not at all unique for Rossel. The same is the case in the practice of kula exchange in the Massim region, and in my book I quote further reports of deception in exchange from the Meybrat of West Papua, the Mae Enga of the New Guinea highlands and Palau in Micronesia (Liep 2009a: 318–319). More examples may be found in the literature.¹¹ I suggest that especially those Melanesian societies where money (or, if one prefers, valuables) is widely used in important social exchanges experience similar conflicts between reciprocity and calculated self-interest in their life worlds. Such conflicts can only be exacerbated when modern state money is accepted into these exchanges. When people give over their lives and relationships to be influenced by flows of value objects which stand apart from themselves this seems to be an inevitable result.

Note

This is a revised version of a paper presented in the session *Anthropology of Value in Oceania* convened by Susanne Kuehling and Andrew Moutu at the 8th Conference of the European Society for Oceanists (ESfO), University of St. Andrews, Scotland, July 2010.

NOTES

¹ A somewhat longer outline of Rossel Island money and exchange is found in Liep 2009b and a full exposition in Liep 2009a.

² At this time a finance crisis broke out on Rossel Island. It began when many valuable *ndap* shells stored in a house in the possession of two rich big-man brothers caught fire and the shells were lost. The result was that trust among the big men on the island dwindled and the credit system was in danger of collapse. From then on the big men in the island held on to the big *ndap* in their possession. The former

circulation of high-ranking *ndap* in payments came to an end, but the big men insisted that they should still, formally, play a part in ceremonial exchanges.

³ Ranked currencies are, or were recently, found in eastern Indonesia, on the Bird's Head peninsula and in the highlands of West Papua, in the kula exchange of the Massim in Papua New Guinea, in the Mono-Alu and Santa Cruz islands of the Solomons, in Palau and Yap of the Caroline Islands and in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa (see Liep 2009a: 15 for references).

⁴ In this essay, when referring to actors in exchange, I shall speak of 'men' only. Women possess shell money of their own and participate in exchanges. Wives also often have a say in their husbands' spending of shells. But women only very rarely leave their home village to collect shells and they do not take a leading role in exchange events.

⁵ The linguist Stephen Levinson, who has done research on Rossel since the mid-1990s, has argued that there is a double-descent system on Rossel. I am not prepared to accept this argument as there is no term for patrilineage and the formation of de facto patrilineages is quite recent. Societies with matrilineal descent groups and patrilocality are not unknown in Melanesia (Epstein 1969: 102–104; Panoff 1976).

⁶ One bridewealth payment I observed consisted of some 55 *kê* and 850 *ndap*. My assistants said that this was an unusually large payment for a bride. They blamed this on the greed of the big men. I was told that bridewealth has grown much since the early twentieth century. I suggest that this inflation has been caused by an increasing competitive 'capitalization' of brides over time.

⁷ To parents-in-law on both sides the relationship is unequal. It is the senior part that expects labour services.

⁸ There is a preference for patrilateral marriage on Rossel which could be taken for another tendency of reciprocity. This is complicated, however, by a prohibition on marriage between close cousins. This form of marriage is thus only with classificatory 'women out of wife-takers'. This produces a semi-complex system of marriage in a more open cycle than immediate patrilateral marriage. Further, it is only a trend or strategy, not a norm or rule.

⁹ Other parts have been given by the pig owner to associates of his and these sub-owners arrange with other men to 'eat' their part.

¹⁰ When a big man takes back a high-ranking *kê* he will give instead the lower-ranking *kê* he received as a pledge to the pig owner. (This substitution will take place via the sponsor of the payment, the pig eater.) The recipient on the pig owner's side will just have to put up with a lesser *kê* and the provider of the pledge will probably find it more difficult to regain his *kê*.

¹¹ I have recently retrieved another example from the Tolai of New Britain (Salisbury 1966).

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