of power that elders can muster. It is the pattern of contradictions—the set of productive inequalities—that conditions the developmental cycle. Societies, then, do not simply "have" developmental cycles. Rather, men and women with varying types and degrees of power (specified in superstructural discourses and practices) tend to produce and reproduce various sorts of household systems. The level of development of the productive powers limits the range of possible inequalities, but it does not, as Meillassoux assumes, uniquely specify them. A variety of productive relationships exists, and a more complex and flexible formulation than Meillassoux's is required in order to comprehend that variation.

My goal in this chapter has been twofold: on the one hand, to bring the results of recent discussions in Marxist theory into anthropological discourse, and on the other, to use the peculiarity of a type of political economy unknown to most social theorists—specifically, so-called tribal ones—to clarify wider issues in historical materialism. This has required a reformulation of G. A. Cohen's exposition of the fundamentals of historical materialism. I have argued that a new definition of productive inequalities is required, if societies radically different from capitalism are to be included within the purview of historical materialism. I have also claimed that a greater attention to the problem of functional alternatives is needed, if the notion of determination is to be made compatible with the actual complexity of social evolution. These general issues in Marxist theory led finally to anthropology and to a critique of Claude Meillassoux's work. Refracted through the lens of historical materialism, the subject of kinship, anthropology's traditional stronghold, begins to look different. In the next chapter, I shall attempt to illustrate that difference in an analysis of the Maale way of producing.

3. Epochal structures II: The anatomy of Maale production

The framework constructed in the preceding chapter has no claim on our attention except as it guides and illuminates the examination of actual cases. Marx and Engels themselves insisted that historical materialism is not a self-contained philosophy that can be used to trim the edges of history:

When reality is described, a self-sufficient philosophy loses its medium of existence. At best its place can be taken only by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which are derived from the observation of the historical development of men. These abstractions in themselves, divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, the difficulties begin only when one sets about the examination and arrangement of the material...

So, as Marx and Engels said, the difficulties now begin. The analysis of Chapter 1 treated households as givens. The problem in this chapter will be to use Marxist theory to explain household structures themselves. Our problem, in other words, will be to understand the Maale way of producing.

Let me begin with the level of development of productive powers. The Maale case fits Meillassoux's specification of productive powers for the domestic mode. From the late nineteenth century until 1975, productive powers were relatively stable in Maale. Slash-and-burn horticulture was always the main line of production, and human energy always the main source of power in the production process. The only exception involved a small development by 1975 of ox-drawn scratch plowing; such plowing was employed by less than a third of highland households

and only then for selected fields that had already been cultivated by hand.

For clearing new fields, each adult man possessed a simple tool kit: for chopping down trees, a hand axe; for clearing secondary growth, a curved billhook with a wooden handle; and for cultivating and weeding, iron-tipped hoes in various shapes. Crops were stored in granaries, small thatched-roofed replicas of Maale houses set on platforms off the ground. And, finally, food was processed with an equally simple technology: Every adult woman possessed a large gourd and harness for carrying water on her back, a pair of stones for grinding grain, a clay griddle for baking unleavened bread, and various sized clay pots for cooking and storage. Only relatively wealthy Maale – and not all of them – possessed a few manufactured metal utensils in 1975.

The iron working necessary to produce axes and hoes was done by males of an endogamous outcaste group called gito. The gito, alone with another caste to be described below, lived interspersed over Maaleland, even though they were not thought of as “Maale.” Gito blacksmiths worked iron individually with a simple technology of charcoal fires, bellows, and an anvil. The other outcaste group, the mani, were potters and tanners; women of the caste potted without a wheel, and men tanned the large cowhides that Maale used for sleeping mats.

Besides horticulture, other lines of production such as cattle-keeping, beekeeping, and hunting had their technologies in Maale. Raising cattle required few tools, save ropes and crude corrals that every adult Maale man could make. Increasingly during the twentieth century, however, Maale bought firearms from northern traders in order to protect their cattle from Banna raiders from the south – a threat that continued in cycles of varying intensity through 1975. Beekeeping involved the construction of beehives – long cylinders of straw-covered bark closed at both ends by wooden disks. And in hunting (game was scarce by 1975), traditional bows and poisoned arrows were widely used, even though firearms were also present. Metal tips for the arrows were constructed by gito, and poison was prepared by men of the mani caste.

In addition to tools, land was also a productive power in Maale. Since horticulture was practiced in the form of slash-and-burn cultivation, it was not land in any form that counted but land with the right kind of forest cover. The swidden cycle in the Maale highlands differed from that in the lowlands. In the highlands, there were two plantings a year and two kinds of cycles, correlated with the big and small rains. Big-rain fields were planted with sorghum, corn, and finger millet on relatively heavier soils originally covered with forest growth. These fields were cultivated from three to five years and then left to regenerate for fifteen to twenty. Small-rain fields, in contrast, were placed on lighter soils, often on hillsides with relatively little cover; they were planted only twice, the first time during the small rains with sorghum and tef (an Ethiopian grain), and then again during the following big rains with finger millet.

In the Maale lowlands that surrounded the highland core on all sides, horticulture was less productive, and cattle-raising was correspondingly more important. Often, Maale in the lowlands compensated for their grain deficit by trading cattle for highland sorghum and corn. In any case, since rainfall in the lowlands was less abundant than in the highlands, there was correspondingly only one type of field and only one cultivation per year. These fields were planted during the big rains with fast-maturing sorghums. They were cultivated for two or three years and then left to regenerate for approximately twenty.

Finally, besides land and tools and the knowledge of their use, labor was the last major productive power in Maale. Labor was, in fact, the limiting factor of production for Maale producers, since land was relatively abundant and tools were easily obtained. Labor organization was, correspondingly, complex, and there were, as Chapter 1 has already shown, four kinds of social units that carried out horticultural work: households, helma, mol'o, and dabo.

Households typically passed through a number of distinctive phases, moving toward stem-family composition. In Chapter 1, comparisons of relative labor supply over those phases were derived by restricting the notion of labor to horticultural work. Since all working members of Maale households participated in most horticultural tasks (and so could substitute for one another), domestic units were treated as more-or-less homogeneous pools of labor. Now we must reconsider the division of labor in Maale – the whole differentiated array of people’s productive interactions with nature.

From this broader point of view, it is immediately clear that Maale households were not built of completely similar units of labor. Many tasks were divided into two great spheres – male and female. Such tasks were, in a phrase, engendered and engendering. That is, a person became male or female and reaffirmed his or her gender by continually performing such work; a male, for example, could not regularly do female work without becoming “female.” Most biological males took up
male-engendered tasks, but a small minority crossed over to feminine roles. Called ashtime, these (biological) males dressed like women, performed female tasks, cared for their own houses, and apparently had sexual relations with men. The opposite case, of biological females taking up male-engendered roles, appears to have occurred less frequently and to have had fewer social consequences. Such behavior did not set up a new gender category nor prevent females from living with husbands.

Not only were some tasks engendered, but it was precisely these that children were taught first. Female work included fetching water and firewood, grinding grain, cooking meals, preparing beer, feeding and caring for children. By the age of six or so, young girls began to carry water in miniature gourds strapped on their backs and to grind grain, building up the heavy calluses on their palms that all Maale women have. By ten, young girls took over more of their mothers’ work, caring for younger children, cooking, and so forth. Girls learned to carry out these tasks in a particular style. In movement and work, measured and deliberate, girls were taught to keep their sexual selves covered: While boys went naked, girls wore short, string skirts. In cooking or at other tasks, women bent over at the waists with their knees together; when they sat, it was always with both legs straight in front, knees together.

In contrast, male tasks included hunting, the care of goats and cattle, beekeeping, cattle raiding, and the heavy horticultural work of clearing new fields. Young boys by the age of six or so began herding goats and were away from their homes most of the day; at that point, they began to learn archery. By ten, they often graduated to herding cattle (except in the most dangerous areas), and they sometimes accompanied cattle to distant pastures where they lived in cattle camps. Beekeeping, raiding with guns, and heavy horticultural work were tasks that followed. In all of these, boys became men through tasks performed, again, in a particular style: Traditionally, men, even old men, wore no clothes. Men always sat or squatted with their knees wide apart. Given to quicker

2 In 1975, I was aware of only one ashtime in Maaleland, though informants asserted that more had existed in the nineteenth century. Indeed, part of the Maale king’s traditional installation had consisted in a ritual ordination of an ashtime. The king installed in the 1930s, however, had refused to carry out this part of the rite, and in general, it appears that imperial Ethiopian culture — centered on Orthodox Christianity — put increasing pressure on Maale roles such as that of ashtime during the twentieth century.

3 During the twentieth century, Maale men rapidly took up northern styles of clothing, particularly when they travelled. To Orthodox Christian northerners, rulers of the empire, nakedness indicated sin and heathenism.

and more expansive movements, men were the free and uncovered sex.

Households, then, were built out of two fundamentally different and complementary sorts of labor, and any household that did not have both was not a fully functioning economic unit. But households, even fully-

4 The bulk of horticultural work — the mainstay of the economy — was not gendered. Both
formed ones, were not sufficient unto themselves, and cooperative work groups knit households together into a number of larger structures. These groups – helma, mol o, and dabo – could accomplish horticultural tasks much more quickly than households (sometimes the horticultural cycle required large inputs of labor during a relatively short period of time). And work groups probably also increased labor productivity through conviviality and coordinated effort.

These, then, were the powers that Maale used to produce their material life: technology, land, and labor. According to Marx and to Meillassoux, the level of development of these powers determines productive inequalities. Were domestic inequalities, as Meillassoux has characterized them, the result in Maale?

Meillassoux’s formulation does not prepare us for what we find. In addition to domestic inequalities within households, we find tributary relations between commoners, on the one hand, and chiefs and a ritual king, on the other. These tributary relations were of a peculiar kind. The Maale polity was not a state in which the extraction of tribute was backed by a monopoly of coercive power. Coercive power was in fact only weakly developed. Rather, the giving of tribute was bound up with ritual and cosmology, with notions that tribute to the chiefs and king was necessary in order to insure biological fertility.

Control over fertility – the bringing of rain, the sprouting of crops, the births of children, calves, and goats, the creation of all wealth in Maale and the corresponding destruction of all enemy generative power – was the master symbol of Maale political economy. All good fortune was thought to be the result of the special powers of a hierarchy of living persons, and behind them, lines of deceased ancestors. Tribute at once established and acknowledged this hierarchy. At the apex of the system was the ritual king.

In the nineteenth century, Maaleland was divided into thirteen chiefdoms, each presided over by a hereditary chief known as goda or master. No master worked, but instead drew labor tribute from the inhabitants of his chiefdom. Subchiefs called gatta organized work on masters’ fields. Each subchief, blowing an antelope horn, periodically summoned commoners from districts of the chiefdom to work on the master’s field.

Above the thirteen masters was the kati or ritual king. The king had no particular area of his own but presided over all of Maaleland, drawing labor tribute from all the chiefdoms. First, the king sent a messenger to a master, then the master instructed one of his subchiefs to take workers to the king’s fields. These fields were located in the center of Maaleland and could not be cultivated by anyone except the king. One plot was named warshabashe, “too much for a multitude.” Besides labor tribute, the ritual king could also demand tribute in kind. For all the sacrifices made when he prayed to his ancestors for rain, the king sent orders to the masters, who informed their subchiefs, who in turn decided whose cattle or goats should be sent to the king.

If coercion was only weakly developed in the Maale polity, how was this system of tribute maintained? There was, of course, a certain amount of reinforcement of the notion of the special powers of the chiefs and kings during good years. After receiving tribute, the king propitiated his ancestors, and indeed the rains came. But a string of good years probably also encouraged a certain amount of laxness; if current patterns of observance of social obligations are any guide, some Maale inevitably did not give tribute. What happened in those cases? Unlike officials in states, the king and chiefs had relatively few resources with which to compel the obedience of subjects. In extreme cases, subjects could be executed, but such power was infrequently used. This meant that conflicts between officials and others often festered and accumulated; refusing to give tribute was, after all, the quintessential way that persons proclaimed social status in Maale. Over time, up-and-coming kin groups may have been able to make good on their claims, to rise in the hierarchy, and eventually to assume new offices.

Such mobility was made rare, however, by conservative interpretations of bad times. When any large-scale misfortune intervened (and droughts and raids by enemies occurred too frequently) past transgressions of the established order, so-called gome, came to the center of public discourse: The misfortune occurred because of gome. During such times, it took an extraordinarily strong opposition to define a misfortune as the result of a past misordering of society – as for example the result of a chief’s lack of power over fertility, the fact that he was not a “true”
chief and had to be displaced by the "real" line. Instead, it was precisely during the beginning of bad times that belief in established chiefs and kings seems to have swelled strongest and tributes increased. Ironically, bad times appeared to many Maale as prime facie evidence of the power of kings and chiefs.

The dominant productive inequality in nineteenth-century Maale was, then, the relationship between the ritual king and chief on the one hand and commoners on the other. The king and chiefs quite literally lived on the labor of others. Although this kind of productive inequality cannot be described as domestic, it nevertheless built on and articulated with two other inequalities that resemble Meillassoux's formulation. One was the relationship between minimal lineage heads (Meillassoux's aînés) and others in and married into their lineage segments; the second involved the ties between household heads and their wives and coresident working children.

Lineages in Maale were constituted on the basis of what has been called conical clans. That is, the entire group was hierarchized so that each member was either higher or lower in status, depending upon his relative closeness to one line -- that of eldest sons descending from the founder. In Maale, the hierarchy was not just on status differences but also on real productive inequalities. In order to describe these, let me begin with a hypothetical example of an old man, himself an eldest son, who has three sons -- a group I shall call a minimal lineage.

When the old man dies, his property is functionally divided, with much the greatest share going to his eldest son (who, it should be remembered, had continued to live in his father's household while younger brothers had moved out). By that point, the three brothers, members of the same minimal lineage, each preside over their own household economies (I shall describe the inequalities involved in these below). But the two younger brothers do not yet have full control over the results of their and their dependents' labors, for the eldest brother "owns," according to the Maale way of thinking, the property of the entire minimal lineage -- including that of his younger brothers.

But what "owning" means in this case is not control over productive powers as they are used in the process of production. Younger brothers carry out production independently of the eldest. Rather, ownership in Maale refers to the fact that only the eldest brother can carry out the

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A Maale subchief overseeing labor tribute in 1975. His necklace of heirloom beads, inherited from forebears, is an insignia of office. The horn under his arm was used to summon workers.

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rituals that legitimate minimal lineage property and make it consumable. The eldest brother does so by presenting first fruits to his ancestors, most immediately to his dead father. Only after the ancestors have been ritually presented with new grain, new honey, or fresh milk does the eldest brother ritually consume these products. And only after the eldest has tasted them can his younger brothers do with their crops, honey, or cattle what they would like. Before, this property is tabooed, and if a younger brother consumed or exchanged it, misfortune would surely befall him, according to the Maale.

The power of eldest brothers becomes clearer when we consider how minimal lineages segment. The eldest can grant his younger brothers the right to perform their own first fruits rituals. He does this by formally dividing the group’s property, by, as the Maale say, making his younger brothers “go out.” Even though he cannot take away cattle willed to younger brothers by his father, the eldest has wide latitude to take property that younger brothers have accumulated by their own or by dependents’ labors. After this division, each younger brother becomes the head of his own minimal lineage, with new rights to propitiate his ancestors and new control over his own and dependents’ labor.

As with the giving of tribute, we are in a very different world from capitalism. Does the Maale system described here represent real material inequalities, or is it, as they say, only ritual? To ask the question in this way misleads an analysis of Maale and, ironically, betrays a misunderstanding of our own society based on capitalism. The sources of capitalist inequalities also depend upon “beliefs”: They are superstructural. That the sources of Maale inequalities are ritual, then, should be no surprise — even if Maale rituals are different from our own.

Why don’t younger brothers resist the ritual control over their property by the eldest? The answer is that sometimes they do, and if younger brothers move far enough away, they sometimes manage to do so successfully. What happens in such cases is that the minimal lineage is effectively split, and any memory of old links between the two kin groups slowly dies out. There is good reason to believe that this is how most local lineages were in fact founded; myths of origin often mention conflicts between elder and younger brothers and movements to new areas.

If a younger brother who infringed the rights of his eldest continues

9 The distance between capitalist and noncapitalist social orders can now be appreciated. As I argued in Chapter 2, historical materialism requires a definition of productive inequalities that will encompass both Maale notions of ownership and capitalist ones.

to live in the same area, however, the whole load of social expectations will make it difficult for the breach between them to persist permanently. It is not, as in capitalist society, that the power of the state is used to set right contracts not fulfilled. The state does not exist. Rather, every misfortune in the younger brother’s life (and given the material organization of Maale society, there will performe be misfortunes) will be interpreted by those around him as a consequence of his resisting proper control by his eldest brother. In the end, as his child lies dying or as locusts destroy his field, an estranged younger brother will almost have to present a compensation payment to his eldest brother in order, as the Maale believe, to prevent further tragedy. And the payment may be greater than the value of the original bone of contention between the two.

To return to the specification of productive inequalities in traditional Maale: The relationship between eldest and younger brothers (with the latter’s wives and children) was the second major productive inequality.
After eldest brothers made younger brothers "go out," this material inequality ceased, but status differences among brothers, and among all lineage mates, persisted.

I come finally to the last kind of productive inequality, that between household heads and their wives and working children. Unlike inequalities within minimal lineages that were articulated in relation to control over cattle, goats, and honey, the power relationships within households typically involved horticulture. The production of all crops was under the authority of the household head. Within households, men and boys performed a certain array of male tasks, women and girls female ones. Everyone in the household had a right to consumption by virtue of his or her membership, but it was only the mari ado, the "father of the house," who held the power to dispose of any surplus above what was consumed. Of course, a surplus did not just fall from the sky (in this sense, the word is misleading). Rather, surpluses were systematically created by heads who determined the size of fields, oversaw and paced the labor process, and husbanded granaries.

However a surplus was used, the mari ado, in part, controlled the fruits of others' labor. This is not to say that wives and children had no influence over matters of household decision-making. They did. Nor is it to assume that wives and children could not resist their husbands and fathers in certain ways. They could. Rather, the point is that social arrangements gave husband-fathers greater power in determining how to use household resources. At first approximation, then, a major opposition would appear to have existed between married men, on the one hand, and their wives and coresident, adult children, on the other. Most especially, men would appear to have been opposed to women.

Actually, productive inequalities were more complex. And the complexity resulted from shifts in roles as households moved through the developmental cycle. The Maale, as I have pointed out, had (and continue to have) a stem family developmental cycle. All daughters and younger sons move out of their parents' households soon after marriage to found new, independent economic units. Eldest sons, in contrast, continue to live and to work with their parents under the authority of their fathers, even after marriage.

Over the developmental cycle, the position of wives changes vis-à-vis their husbands. During the early stages, wives are indeed opposed to their husbands. But as more and more children are born, and as these children take up work roles within the household, the mother becomes a relatively more powerful figure. By the last and most expansive phase of stem family development, the configuration of household power has fundamentally changed.

Recall the composition of a typical household at this stage: an elder and his wife, their eldest son and the latter's wife and children, along with any unmarried daughters and younger sons. The household head, the elder, retains the formal authority to allocate household surpluses, but by this point, his wife has become so assimilated to the household and influential with regard to her children that the fundamental divide in economic interests occurs between the elder and his wife, on the one hand, and their coresident working children, on the other. Past menopause, the elderly wife becomes in some respects, more "male," and the elderly couple, together, supervise the labor of others—the man, his son, the woman, her daughter-in-law.

Finally, all inhabitants of Maale households occupied positions of relative power vis-à-vis outcasts. No Maale person blacksmithed, potted, or tanned; to do so was to accept outcaste status. Similarly, no outcaste gito or mani was allowed to cultivate the soil in Maaleland (this taboo was relaxed only in the 1960s and then unevenly). Maale consequently obtained craft products from outcasts in exchange for grain. But this exchange was conditioned by a systematic difference in power, and the terms of trade undoubtedly favored the Maale. Symbolic antitheses of ritual kings, outcasts were thought to have the inherent ability to bring not fortune, but harm. Outcasts were sometimes blamed for misfortunes and driven from the land. A final productive inequality obtained between all outcasts and all Maale.

So far, I have discussed tributary, lineage, domestic, and caste inequalities as if they operated separately. Obviously, they did not. Households and their changing productive inequalities were encapsulated within minimal lineages, and minimal lineages functioned within chiefdoms and kingdom as a whole. A household head who was himself an eldest brother and therefore the head of a minimal lineage—with some control over the results of the labor of his younger brothers and their dependents—was in a different structural position from others. His range of options was wider. He could add domestic to lineage surpluses in order to politick in various ways, or he could use lineage surpluses to increase consumption levels within his own household in order to smooth over contradictions there. Generally, it seems that wives and children were better off, in the widest social sense, in eldest brothers' households than in others.

The patterning of productive inequalities within households, then,
up to form a domestic mode of production – whether in Sahlins’s or Meillassoux’s formulation. Rather, it was more inclusive structures, particularly the way tribute was organized, that shaped households and, indeed, that conditioned the whole way of producing in Maale.

Productive inequalities in Maale having been located, the next step in our analysis is to understand how they are reproduced. When Marx posed a similar problem in regard to capitalism, he began his answer in Capital with an analysis of the concept of commodities. In capitalism, commodities appear to have a power that, in reality, they do not possess. This appearance, according to Marx, is not mere illusion; it is in fact generated by the social world just as, for example, mirages are created by atmospheric conditions. The particular aspect of capitalism that invests commodities in general (and capital in particular) with illusory powers involves the organization of production. When workers sell their labor power and the capitalist buys it to produce goods with machines, it appears as if the machines in themselves are responsible for a great increase in output, for the surplus produced at the end of the day. It seems natural, then, that the owner of the machines should be entitled to the surplus (just as the workers as owners of their own labor power had been entitled to their wages).

It is hardly an illusion that capital investments make workers’ labor more productive. What is illusory is the discourse that abstracts machines from the labor process to speak of the “productivity” of capital – of “money making money.” Capital, of course, produces nothing; in itself, it is only the product of past workers’ labors. The only human element, the only active component of the production process, is labor. But this reality is inverted in social discourse, and capital seems to take on a life of its own. Ironically, the thing that men and women created with their own powers appears not as a result, a created thing, but as something endowed with creative powers of its own – powers that subsequently dominate men and women. As Marx put it in his early writings,

Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, the human brain and the human heart detaches itself from the individual and reappears as the alien activity of a god or of a devil, so the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. It belongs to another. . . . 9

Exactly how this process of so-called fetishization occurs in capitalism is unique, but something broadly analogous occurred in Maale political economy. In Maale, things were not invested with an aura of creative power, but persons, living and dead, in certain social relationships. Maale discourse was dominated, in a phrase, by a fetishization of fertility. Whereas in reality the success of men and women in accumulating wealth and in bearing children depended on their own productive and procreative powers, the way that labor was organized in Maale made it appear as if that success depended on other people’s fertility: that of the king and chiefs in the first place, that of descent-group elders in the second, and finally that of husband-fathers in the third. As it turns out, this appearance is the key to a number of Maale concepts—from ownership to gender to filiation.

In relation to the king and chiefs, fertility fetishism was grounded in the ordering of Maale horticulture and hunting. It was taboo (ketse) for anyone in Maaleland to plant his fields before the king. As the end of the dry season approached, each of the chiefs with his subchiefs brought tribute to the king. The king entertained them, and he prayed to his ancestors for rain. As the rains came, the chiefs sent labor tribute from their districts, and the king planted his fields. Only after the king had planted was it ritually permissible or shati (shati was the opposite of ketse) for the chiefs to plant, and only after the chiefs had planted was it shati for the subchiefs to plant. Finally, after the subchiefs had planted, commoners could begin. And among commoners, a hierarchical order was also maintained: first, the most senior elder of a local descent group (the eldest son of eldest sons) followed by successively more junior elders, down to heads of minimal lineages. Finally, within most Maale households, only men were allowed to place the seeds in the ground.

This ritual ordering was reversed when a man killed a large animal such as a buffalo or lion or an enemy man (such kills were the final mark of prestige for Maale men and were celebrated in numerous ways). After making the kill, a man took a trophy from the dead—the buffalo’s hind leg or the lion’s tail or the enemy’s penis—and came dancing back to his minimal lineage head with it draped around his neck. The lineage head ritually made the kill again and presented the trophy to his ancestors, thus beginning the process that would make the killer shati or remove his state of taboo. (A killer was like a man who had planted his crops out of order; he had gotten out of line. Unlike the pattern in horticulture, however, the ordering of production in hunting had to be done after the fact rather than before.) The ritual was repeated at each step in the hierarchy over the killer, to his more senior lineage elders to his subchief to his chief to the king—near whose compound, in the case of killers of enemy men, the penis was finally deposited.

The conceptual scheme behind this ordering conditioned the very notion of “ownership” of things and, indeed, the concept of “persons” who did the owning. In capitalist society we think of persons as autonomous legal entities with power of control over things they own vis-à-vis other persons. In Maale the notion of personhood and the associated concept of control over property was different. No Maale man (I shall consider gender below) conceived of himself or was conceived by others as an isolated “individual” set against other individuals. Rather, each man was a constituent member of a lineage descended from an original founder, set within a particular chieftdom, set within the kingdom. And depending on his place within this array, each man exercised only relative control over his “own” property. To those to whom he was indebted for his very physical existence, to those who begat him—the ancestors along with living members of his lineage closer to the line of eldest sons of eldest sons, and the chiefs and king—a person was bound to defer various kinds of control over property that otherwise he referred to as his own. For it was the fertility and generative power of these others that was responsible, it seemed, for the property in the first place.

Consider the case of a younger brother who had managed to acquire a cow in trade for grain that he himself had grown. The man referred to the cow as his own, but his control over it was conditioned by claims of other persons located in the social hierarchy over him. The man’s minimal lineage head could also say with justice that the cow was “his” (inasmuch as the head had the right to take the cow when the group segmented), as could the man’s chief and the king (inasmuch as they had the right to take the cow in tribute). These claims rested on the notion that the cow was the result, not of the labors of the man, but of the generative powers of a hierarchy of persons, each one of whom had rights over what, according to Maale appearances, he had caused to come into existence.

The mystical endowment of others with one’s own productive and procreative powers occurred at each level of social organization: from the kingdom as a whole to chiefdoms to lineages to households. It was, in fact, in households that the primary process of fetishization took place, primary in the sense that it provided the low note, the reverberating
base for the system of ideas being discussed: namely, the creation of "men," as opposed to "women," and the endowment of "men" with peculiar powers over biological and social reproduction.

There were, as I have pointed out, three genders in traditional Maale: atinke, lali, and ashitime. Male, female, and transvestite. The first two were thought of as normal inasmuch as their combined sexual energies and productive labors were fertile and gave issue in children. But ashitime were considered abnormal, wobo or crooked. The one transvestite that I was able to interview in Maale presented himself in such terms: "The Divinity created me wobo, crooked. If I had been a man, I could have taken a wife and begotten children. If I had been a woman, I could have married and borne children. But I am wobo; I can do neither."

The intent of this self-presentation (no more pitiful condition existed, according to Maale standards, than not having descendants) was to deflect hostility and to invoke a certain acceptance. But this self-statement also reflected a central element in the fetishization of fertility: the identification, the misidentification, of social with sexual reproduction. In fact, the reproduction of Maale society had as much to do with labor as with biological generation; indeed, the transvestite mentioned above had raised three orphans, cultivating large fields by brewing beer and sponsoring dabo to obtain male labor. But no cultural vocabulary existed for talking about, for valuing labor in itself. Instead, social success - the result of a complex of real causes - was displaced onto and attributed to persons' fertility, and various kinds and amounts of fertility were codified into a set of gender concepts. In this semantic field, ashitime represented the paradigmatic lack of fertility. Silently pitied, partially feared, but generally accepted as part of the scheme of things that existed, ashitime were dead ends of ancestral lines.

What it meant to be a "man" or a "woman" was, in contrast, intimately tied up with generative power, good fortune, and the successful continuance of society. And everything was done to emphasize the complementary natures of men and women - that both were required for social reproduction. As we have already seen with respect to the sexual division of labor, the differences between men and women were exaggerated to the extent that no Maale man or woman could exist without access to the kind of labor that the other carried out. Similarly, with respect to Maale theories of sexual reproduction, it was believed that both males and females contributed to biological generation, men semen, women menstrual blood.

But if men and women completed each other, they were by no means equivalent. Men were the cause of sexual and social generation. Men were the actors, the initiators, the ones who gave form and organization to life, whereas women were more passive and sometimes unreliable receptacles - as the Maale said, like the earth in which seeds were planted.

Action and inaction were strictly enforced in customs surrounding sexual intercourse. It was considered wanton of a woman to initiate sex with a man (such behavior was gossiped about, particularly by women). And it was absolutely taboo for a woman to refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband. A man so refused had either to beat his wife into submission (one husband in this situation slashed his wife's legs) or to divorce her instantly. A woman who exerted her will with respect to procreation upset a fundamental hierarchical relationship in Maale.

The definition of men and women becomes clear in how the words were used as epithets: "lali!" "Woman!" was an insult, especially when addressed to a man but also, to a lesser extent, when said to a woman. A man thus insulted had few verbal defenses, but a woman taunted with her sex was likely to retort, "Whose ass do you think you dropped from?" On the other hand, "atinke ke" "is a male" - a phrase said with an entirely different inflection - was a compliment, even when half-admiringly applied to a woman.
Any man who continued to live in such an upside-down world faced sterility and death.

Maale marriage customs confirmed this image of men as active and women as passive. Young men looked for wives in a kind of dating called “pulling a girl out,” lali gocane. At night, a young man went to a girl’s father’s compound, entered stealthily, and “pulled out” the girl. The two went outside and sat down together, the young man on the right, the girl on the left (right and left indicating higher and lower statuses in Maale culture), and it was taboo for the girl to get up and leave while the boy remained seated. Boys, then, roamed about at night, choosing girls to court, while girls remained at home waiting to be courted.

Once a girl had consented to marry, the process was organized by a discourse that portrayed the bride’s father as “giving” her. Traditionally, Maale fathers accepted no gifts when their daughters married. Contrasting themselves with the neighboring Ari, who practiced bride-price, Maale said that they did not “sell” their daughters. Rather, after consulting the intestine oracle to determine whether the union would be fertile, the father and his lineage “gave,” ingene, the girl to the man and his lineage. In essence, the father saw himself as giving the girl’s fertility, her capacity for bearing children. In one stroke, the girl’s own procreative powers were made into a gift given by men, and her labor, just as crucial for successful reproduction as biological generation, was silently assimilated to this fetishized concept.

Unlike a process of buying and selling that has no further social consequences, this “giving” of fertility set up a long-lasting relationship of status inequality – between the groom and the bride’s father and brothers and between successive generations of the descent groups of the two. In Maale culture, there was no way to repay a gift of fertility, so the husband and his descendants were permanently indebted to the wife’s lineage. The indebtedness of the husband’s lineage required them to respond to continual, if diminishing, demands for help – crops during bad years, a goat to slaughter when someone was sick, or occasional help with cultivation.11

If a girl’s lineage “gave” her in marriage, the groom’s “took” her. Indeed, there was no other way to express the fact that a man married except to say that he “took a woman,” lali ekene. All the preparations for the wedding revolved around the young man’s actions. In order to marry, he had to mobilize help from kinsmen and neighbors to provide a feast for the girl’s female relatives and to give a cloth to the girl’s mother. The girl’s female relatives (not her male ones) had to receive gifts because it was they who had done the hard work of raising her – it was the mother’s cloth the girl had urinated on while she was a child. Interestingly, although such gifts appeared to recognize women’s labors, what they actually did was to de-emphasize women’s procreative powers. Everything was done to underline the fact that the bride’s father’s gift of future fertility could never be repaid, but the bride’s mother received only a cloth to replace the one that her daughter had spoiled as a child.

Where was the bride in the discourse that defined marriage? In fact, she had a great deal of influence over whom she married. Fathers and mothers sometimes forbade certain marriages, but in actual practice it was difficult to prevent a determined girl from marrying whom she chose. But even if she chose, this fact did not appear in how the marriage was talked about. Whatever she did, a bride was “given” by her father and “taken” by her husband. To say that a woman married, one said simply that she “went,” loene. This verb, which meant precisely to go along level ground, was one of a set of three that meant variously to go down in elevation, to go up, or to go at about the same altitude. No woman ever “took” a husband; she simply “went” – neither up nor down but from her father’s compound to her husband’s.

Households, once constituted, provided the context for the definition of the relationship between parents and children. And notions of gender and fertility conditioned the definition of filiation in Maale. This became clear in a conversation I had with a Maale elder. When I explained that some people practice matri-filiation and asked him why Maale children belonged to the lineages of their fathers – not mothers – the old man exclaimed, exasperated, “Well, it’s the man who did it, isn’t it?” In other words, it was the man’s active fertilizing force that produced the child; it was he who planted the seed. Without him, there would have been no crop. The crop, therefore, belonged to the father.

I use the word “belong” advisedly, for in Maale the notion of filiation was intimately related to that of ownership. Indeed, one might say that ownership was a kind of filiation rather than the reverse; that is, owners of things were thought of as those persons whose force of fertility and
begetting carried with it, then, a notion of an inherent right to control. In this respect, fertility fetishism in Maale inverted commodity fetishism within capitalism: Instead of things apparently having power over people, people appeared to beget things.

In this cultural world, wealth was ultimately a matter of descendants, not of things. For an adult, particularly a male adult, to die without children was the misfortune of all misfortunes. Maale said that such a person died “with a bad taste in his mouth,” that is, he died tragically early, in the morning, as it were, before he had had time to rinse out his mouth. Almost everything was done to separate, indeed to obliterate, such misfortunes from memory and from continuing life. Fields of a man who died without descendants (fields designated by a special term, gabile) became ritually impure, and no one was allowed to take seeds from them. The dead person’s name was tabooed, and anyone in the vicinity who happened to have the same name would change it. If pointedly questioned about such cases, Maale, depending on their distance from the person who had died, responded variously with information in lowered voices, awkward pauses, and evidently painful silences. In cultural terms, these deaths were almost too much to think about. Persons without descendants became black holes in genealogical space.

The opposite of these tragedies, indeed the kind of social success that made such cases so poignantly tragic, was the elder who died leaving many children and children of children. His funeral took on an air of celebration. Before his body was buried, the old man’s eldest son knelt over the corpse and touched his forehead three times to the forehead of his father. (He would do the same four times when his mother died.) In this way, the eldest son – and only the eldest son – inherited his father’s position, his force of character, his power to curse and to bestow fertility. The word for forehead in Maale, balliti, is the same one used to refer more generally to a concept of “fortune,” “luck,” “power” – in a word, fertility.¹²

To summarize, gender provided the ground for fetishization of fertility in Maale. To be a man was to generate. To be a woman was to reproduce, but in a way that entirely depended on a man. These categories motivated the hierarchy of persons in Maale from the ritual king to chiefs to subchiefs to senior lineage elders to more junior ones and finally to

¹²In his installation rituals, the king wore an iron phallus on his forehead. The symbolic connections between forehead, fortune, and male fertility were, then, explicit.
have sexual relations with women. But lying with an ashtime was not interdicted. It was as if the king and the entirely male relationships that surrounded him in the lion house provided a nucleus that dominated and provided direction for the more female surrounding medium — everything else in Maale. Ironically here, ashtime, otherwise symbols of sterility, became part of the generativity of maleness in Maale.

After discussing the concept of commodities and of fetishism of commodities, Marx used these culturally specific notions to construct schemata to explain how productive inequalities are reproduced. And one of his major contributions in *Capital* was the explanation of why the continuance of class relations could never be an entirely smooth process but in fact required a certain dynamic, a certain cycle of booms and busts, set against a background of technological innovation and changes in class consciousness.

A comparable analysis of the laws of motion — to use too grand a phrase — of noncapitalist modes of production has barely begun. Instead, there has been a persistent tendency within Marxism, beginning with Marx himself, to assume that noncapitalist modes have no such dynamic. In this respect, as I pointed out in the Introduction, Marxist theory has borrowed from a long line of bourgeois scholarship that has portrayed technologically simpler societies as static instead of dynamic, as based on status rather than on contract, on tradition rather than modernity. In such views of so-called precapitalist societies, social reproduction hardly becomes problematic.

In the Conclusion, I shall return to the issue of why this image of non-Western societies arose. From the results of decades of ethnography (unavailable to Marx himself), it is clear that such a point of view is, quite simply, wrong. If so, what tendencies can be seen in the reproduction of Maale inequalities? What dynamic animated reproduction schemata?

As I have shown above, there were three main productive inequalities among Maale: household heads over their wives and coresident children; senior lineage elders over more junior ones and their dependents; and finally the chiefs and king over others. In maintaining their positions, the dominant men in all these relationships acted to maximize

13 What Western societies would classify as homosexual behavior did not affect the gender identity of a man unless he assumed the receptive role. Consequently, men who had sexual relations with ashtime were hardly the less "male" for it.
not profits, but the number of persons who could be counted as dependent on their fertility. This strategy gave them access to control over the results of others’ labor, and as I shall show below, such control could be used, in turn, to expand the range of persons who could be considered as dependent on their fertility.

In all three productive inequalities there were cyclical sets of patterns that interacted, within limits, to reproduce inequalities over time. Let me begin with households. Over the developmental cycle, there were definite changes in a domestic unit’s ability to produce a surplus, accompanied by changes in the pattern of typical conflicts and coalitions. The early years of a new household were the most precarious, and the divorce frequency during the first five years of marriage was far greater than at any other time. After especially bad arguments, particularly after beatings, a young wife often retreated to her parental home, and her father and brothers refused to return her until her husband showed contrition. Being in a position to take back his daughter, the father once again was able to emphasize that it was he who “gave” her and that consequently his son-in-law was eternally beholden.14

One Maale elder described newly-founded households in the following terms: “In Maale, young wives are their husband’s ‘enemies.’ After they have borne us many children, they become our ‘relatives,’ but while they are still young, they are treacherous.” He went on, with much disapproval, to tell a (probably apocryphal) story of a young wife who, while surreptitiously seeing a lover, murdered her husband. In other words, relationships between young husbands and wives were interpreted (especially by men) in relation to Maale gender concepts: men as orderly and responsible, pitted against women as unpredictable and irresponsible. It is ironic and perhaps noteworthy that young women’s resistance to what was objectively an unequal relationship merely confirmed Maale gender ideologies. Women, particularly young women who questioned husbands’ dominance, were quarrelsome and unpredictable.

As young wives had more and more children into middle age, the conflict between men and their wives usually subsided. There seem to have been a number of reasons for this transformation. Often with three to five children by the age of thirty-five, middle-aged wives probably found it more difficult to exit from unpleasant situations, and their parents may have been less willing to take on the support of many non-working children. Also by that time, wives had greater interests in preserving their husbands’ households; children were women’s future source of support and influence.

But as important as these reasons, I would argue, was the fact that the objective economic contradiction between men and their wives had lessened, if not disappeared. Remember that husbands controlled only surpluses above consumption. As Chapter 1 showed, middle-aged men’s households had so many nonworking (but consuming) children, such a low supply of labor relative to consumption requirements, that they produced very little surplus. In other words, the household head’s control of the product above consumption momentarily was of little social consequence. Inasmuch as both husbands’ and wives’ futures depended on their children, their interests began to coincide. A lull between two storms, middle-aged households were preoccupied with rearing the next generation.

When the oldest child began full-time work, the household’s situation began to change. Specifically, its relative labor supply began steadily to increase. By the time that most men and their wives reached old age, their households possessed the greatest surplus potential of any phase of development. Not surprisingly, this economic strength correlated with status. No older man or woman with children was addressed or referred to by his or her own names; rather a man was known by the more respectful teknonym, “father of X,” a woman by “mother of X,” X being their first child.

The elder and his wife, then, partially controlled the fruits of others’ labor, particularly the labor of their eldest son and his wife. The eldest son and his wife carried out much of the household’s work while parents managed and decided how household surpluses would be used. The typical pattern of conflict that resulted was related to this pattern of economic contradictions, but the discourse of conflict in elders’ households — how tensions were conceived and talked about — partially masked such structures.

The position of the eldest son was pivotal. As his younger brothers, lower in status and standing, moved out to establish their own independent households, he was expected to stay in his father’s household, still subordinate to his parents’ authority. Having remained, as the Maale said, “to feed his father and mother,” the eldest son could expect to inherit most of his father’s wealth and his ritual position. After his father died, the eldest son would continue “to feed his father” in first-fruit rites, not only for himself but also on behalf of his younger brothers. If

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14This line of argument was inspired by Jane F. Collier’s Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
an eldest son did not fulfill his obligations during his father’s lifetime, he could be disinherited, at least of his father’s material wealth. Elders had the right to dispose of their property however they saw fit, and when they could, old men personally divided their property in spoken wills, just before death.

The weight of Maale conceptions about social continuity and orderly male reproduction fell, then, upon eldest sons, and any expression of conflict between eldest sons and their parents was a serious matter. Eldest sons’ wives, however, occupied a different role. The simplest (and Maale) way of putting the matter is that wives were, after all, women. And women were unpredictable. It is not too surprising, then, that conflicts in elders’ households typically involved disorderly daughters-in-law and their husbands’ parents, particularly their mothers-in-law. Being women, daughters-in-law were considerably freer to express the tensions that economic asymmetry produced in their and their husbands’ experience. As long as conflicts could be attributed to the deficient character of the young wife – her very femaleness – notions of orderly male social reproduction were protected.

Often what happened was that the eldest son and his wife temporarily moved out of his father’s house until no younger siblings remained “to feed their parents.” The wife (less often, the mother-in-law) was blamed, and the eldest son was able, as the saying goes, to have his cake and eat it too. He retained his prospects for inheritance (the separation was not his fault), and, like his younger brothers, he could enjoy economic independence, at least temporarily.

These processes tended, then, to reproduce household inequalities over time. The typical experiences produced by these patterns made ideological concepts such of those of gender seem all too real. In turn, ideological notions, of male fertility for example, explained and informed recurrent kinds of social outcomes. Conflicts, at least the sorts described above, did little to call ideological notions into question. Just the opposite. They appear to have been crucial parts of the overall process of reproducing inequalities.

Like the reproduction schemata for capitalist firms, these patterns operated only within certain limits. Household heads, as I have said, had the power to control surpluses above consumption. This immediately made the level of consumption itself a political fact, and a variety of customs seemed almost designed to prevent “overexploitation” of wives and children. Although husbands had the right to open granaries one by one, wives had the right to decide on the day-to-day taking of crops from whichever granary was in use. It was taboo for a husband to interfere in this process, and his doing so was interpreted as a gome – a transgression and a potential source of misfortune. Women, thus, were given the power to ensure a decent level of support for themselves and their children. This level was socially determined; it reflected patterns
of interaction throughout the economy, not just ones internal to productive units.

If this "reasonable" level of consumption was consistently compromised, wives had the right to divorce their husbands and to find new ones who would provide for them. While children were young, they accompanied their divorced mothers, and growing up in stepfathers' households, children were likely to be ritually filiated to descent groups of their mothers' new husbands. A husband, therefore, could go only so far. If he pushed his wife beyond a certain limit – using too much household production for reasons other than consumption – he risked losing everything.

Once socially defined levels of consumption were met, how did husbands use surpluses? In general, the principal goal involved the exchange of grain (perishable) for goats and cattle (which continued to reproduce). This was done in one of two ways. The first involved barter; whole granaries were bartered for cattle and goats. The second involved the establishment of a permanent kin-like relationship in which one partner gave crops (sometimes supplemented by goats or honey) and the other gave a young heifer or steer. In this way, the two became belli, bond kinsmen, and they addressed each other with "bee" – the greeting used between brothers and sisters.

So far I have deferred mentioning the wider lineage context within which men's households developed. Clearly, the same factors that shaped the development of stem family households (the prominence of the eldest son versus others and his inheritance of his father's ritual position and wealth) set the stage for the development of conical lineages. What other factors were involved in the reproduction of inequalities between eldest and younger brothers?

If a key material transformation in the reproduction of household inequalities was the conversion of grain into cattle, the comparable process for descent groups, at least those in the horticultural highlands, was the conversion of cattle into rights over land. In the nineteenth century, most of the highlands was divided into plots of land known as dini, and these were owned by individuals, usually by senior lineage elders. Ownership in this case was not focused on excluding others from one's land; just the reverse – dini owners attempted to attract as many followers as they could to cultivate their land. These followers were required occasionally to brew beer for the owner or to work in his fields. In other words, a quasi-tributary relationship existed between owners and others, a relationship justified, like all inequalities in Maale, by the notion that it was the owner's power over fertility that was partly responsible for prosperity and product.

This kind of tributary control over land was crucial for the development of large, coresident lineages. For despite the fact that household processes continually produced male sibling sets differentiated between eldest and younger brothers, no coercive power existed to require younger brothers to continue to live close to their eldest brothers and hence to subject themselves to various ritual demands for cattle. With some effort, any younger brother could move away from his eldest (even to other ethnic groups surrounding Maale), sever old lineage ties, and set up an independent descent group, as a new follower of a locally prominent man. Indeed, for younger brothers in descent groups without much wealth in land, mobility seems to have been the norm.

Senior elders within developing lineages were, then, in a delicate position. If they pushed juniors too far, if they took away too many cattle when making their younger brothers "go out," they risked their position of seniority. For seniors without juniors were not seniors. Being able to keep juniors in their place – and thus sending resources up the lineage hierarchy – depended on seniors' ability to dispense various kinds of favors. Support in cases of social conflict, help in marrying and sponsoring wedding feasts, and, perhaps most important, access to land on a basis guaranteed by kin ties were just some examples.

How did senior lineage elders build up the wealth necessary to found lineages in the first place? It is precisely here that the role of raiding and hunting becomes important. No more masculinizing acts existed in Maale – none more implicated in fertility and power over fortune – than raiding cattle from enemy peoples, killing a large game animal like a lion or buffalo, or killing an enemy. A man beginning a lineage, and descendants after him, who were successful in these connected pursuits were more likely to be able to gain control over land, for raided cattle or other animals received in exchange for buffalo or lion skins could be traded for land. And gaining control over land meant that succeeding elders would have more to offer followers and would be more likely to be able to keep juniors in their positions of dependence. That meant, in turn, that large, ramified descent groups would form.

The continuance of large lineage groups depended, of course, on more than wealth in land. In times of crisis (a serious drought may have occurred as often as every generation), those without crops or cattle had to trade land away. In time, lineages grew and declined, as senior elders were more or less successful in controlling wealth in its various forms.
Hunting and especially raiding were critical in maintaining wealth, since they tended to shift the burden of reproduction from within the group to without. In this context, the celebration of raiding and of hunting and the connection of these pursuits with maleness and fertility appear not just as aspects of Maale “culture.” Rather, they make sense as motivated parts of the experience that men and women had in living in this particular political economy – in seeing certain lineage elders succeed and others fail.

From the reproduction of household and descent group inequalities, let me turn finally to those between commoners and the chiefs and king. At first glance, this relationship – tributary rather than based on descent or gender – seems qualitatively different from those discussed above. In fact, there are important continuities. Lineages, inasmuch as they depended upon land ownership, already operated on quasi-tributary relationships between senior owners and junior followers. What chiefship and kingship did in this context was to repeat and extend the same notions and relationships, as inequality was pyramidized on inequality. The dynamics of this process was distinctive inasmuch as it involved new actors: heads of large lineages in competition with chiefs, and chiefs in competition with the king.

Chiefs were almost invariably the heads of large ramified lineages. Obviously, the causal relationship between office and lineage went in both directions; that is, holding chiefly office gave heads of local descent groups advantages in keeping juniors beneath them. But the opposite was also true. Heads of large lineages tended to become chiefs. The ideology of chiefship obscured this latter process to the degree that it denied the very possibility of replacing a chief (without the previous chiefly line in office the land’s fertility would be destroyed). Replacements did in fact occur, however, and when kings appointed new lines to office, they looked to heads of large lineages. To the Maale, the wealth of these men, both in dependents and in possessions, proved their mystical powers over fertility and fortune. And, more mundanely, such men occupied an advantageous position in gathering tribute for the king; they had, first of all, a large following of kinsmen to call upon.

Even though replacements of chiefly lines were probably infrequent during most periods (actually the rate depended upon the king’s power vis-à-vis important chiefs, and this, as I shall show below, waxed and waned), there was a continuous, if subterranean, competition between chiefs and the heads of other important lineages within their districts. If a chief alienated the king, if the tribute he brought was inadequate, ultimately he risked losing his position to others. For it was always in the interests of other lineage heads to advertise, as it were, their availability, by giving large tributes to the king. In this context, tribute was not so much something forced out of chiefs and lineage heads; it actually was in their own interests to give, since tribute validated givers’ claims over fertility and thus over the labor of those beneath them.

Chiefs were only occasionally replaced, but the line that occupied the kingship appears not to have been changed since the founding of the kingdom. Again, it is difficult to separate the claims of ideology from actual historical processes (nowhere was there more at stake than with regard to kingship). But it seems unlikely that wholesale changes in the kingly lineage took place. What did change was the line within the royal lineage that was installed in office. Such changes were related to struggles between holders of the kingship and the occupants of the two most important chiefships in the center of Maale.

The chiefs of these two districts, Bola and Makana, could not be replaced by the king. They, along with the elders of Bola, chose the next king by consulting the intestine oracle, and they played primary roles in the rituals that installed and confirmed a new king in his office. In effect, the king and the chiefs of Bola and Makana were the three most powerful men in Maale, interconnected in a triangular relationship in which two were often allied against a third. If a king grew especially strong, he invited the opposition of the two chiefs, who could delay important rituals in his confirmation. Similarly, if one of the chiefs somehow grew too powerful, the interests of the king and the other chief made them natural allies in opposing any further usurpation of privileges.

The state of these triangular relationships influenced the process by which lines that occupied the kingship were changed. Whenever a king died, two alternatives presented themselves. The first, by far the most common, was to install the dead king’s first son (in the nineteenth century and earlier, the king was allowed to have only one wife). But another possibility existed, one that had to be used when a king died without male heirs. That was to decide, in essence, that the deceased king had not been a “real” king at all; if he had, he would not have died without male issue. One of the dead man’s brothers was then installed as king. If the brother had already died, his bones were dug up and ritually installed, after which the brother’s living son was made to succeed. In this way, the perfect chain of connecting links that extended back to the first king of Maale was preserved, but the particular line within the lineage that occupied office was replaced.
If a king grew especially exploitative, if he alienated the chiefs of both Bola and Makana, this stratagem could be used even though he had produced sons to inherit. The Bola elders and the chiefs of Bola and Makana could decide that the country had been destroyed and that the land's fertility had dissipated. Rather than installing the dead king's son (who carried the same supposed lack of power over fertility and who, more mundanely, might be presumed to carry on the overweening ways of his father), the elders and the chiefs could install a brother of the dead man. Relationships within the royal lineage were then reformed and reordered. What had previously been a junior line was made into the senior one, and kinship terms were appropriately recast. This kind of reordering of royal relationships occurred once during the twentieth century after Maale had been incorporated into imperial Ethiopia, but it appears always to have been an option, in the nineteenth century and before.\footnote{For a study of this kind of reordering of royal relationships among the Tswana of southern Africa, see John Comaroff, “Rules and Rulers: Political Processes in a Tswana Chiefdom,” Man 13 (1978): 1–20.}

Inequality stacked upon inequality, each interacting with the other, Maale political economy was composed of an ensemble of reproductive patterns and cycles. Nothing was guaranteed about any of these processes. Some households failed. Husbands misjudged their possibilities and lost their wives and children. One man's loss was another's gain, and while some failed, others succeeded on an even larger scale.

One step higher in the hierarchy of inequalities, some lineages did not manage to stay together. Without the right mix of internal pressure on juniors and external sources of wealth, lineage seniors sometimes found themselves without juniors. That meant that other prominent men gained followers. Finally, some chiefs and kings did not keep or pass on their positions. Misjudging their rivals, whether heads of important lineages or brothers, or alienating their closest associates, some chiefs and kings were replaced.

Over the ups and downs of these processes, what stayed more-or-less the same was the way men gained power over others, the way that they thought about inequalities. In other words, what remained constant was the way of producing in Maale.

So far, I have analyzed Maale in itself, rather than as an instance of a more general mode of production. By doing so, I have postponed issues surrounding determination – determination of reproduction schemata by productive inequalities and of inequalities by productive powers. For it is only in comparisons between societies that determination becomes clear.

Here, as with the related problem of functional alternatives, I can only sketch possible answers. Too much depends upon kinds of research not yet done. Let me begin with the relationship between productive powers and inequalities, using the results and terms of reference established in non-Marxist anthropology. For the level of productive powers generally described by Meillassoux for his domestic mode of production and actually observed in Maale, what is the full range of compatible productive inequalities? The first source of information, approximate as it is, is
George P. Murdock’s work on cross-cultural comparisons. Out of the 563 societies listed in Murdock’s sample, 63 depended on extensive slash-and-burn cereal horticulture for significantly more than half of their subsistence. Of these, 22 were stateless, 39 were chieftdoms, and only 2 were classified by Murdock as states.16

It would seem that there is a strong association between the level of development of productive powers that we have been discussing and productive inequalities associated with so-called tribal societies (that is, societies in which inequalities are formulated only in kinship terms) and chieftdoms (societies that include, in addition, weakly developed tributary relationships). The question is whether tribes and chieftdoms are two variants of the same mode of production or whether they belong to different modes. So far, anthropologists and others have provided different answers. Both Marshall Sahlins and Gerhard Lenski, for example, lump tribes and chieftdoms together as “advanced horticultural societies” and “tribesmen” respectively, whereas Eric Wolf has recently taken the other tack of separating domestic modes of production from “tributary” ones (the latter category comprehending societies from Maile to feudal Europe to imperial China).17

There are several reasons for believing that the first alternative permits a better categorization of empirical materials. First, no study, as far as I am aware, has been able to show that the level of development of productive powers is higher in chieftdoms than in kin-based societies. Second, in world history there seems to have been a constant flux between tribes and chieftdoms; many tribes evolved into chieftdoms, and chieftdoms disintegrated into tribes. It is difficult to document these changes historically, but social anthropology has at least one well-analyzed example in Edmund Leach’s study of the Kachin.18

Third and perhaps most important, the type of inequality between chiefs and their subjects is not radically different from that between, for example, fathers and sons or elder and younger brothers. Most of all, the power of chiefs is not backed by a monopoly of coercive force and does not, therefore, reach directly into the productive affairs of domestic groups beneath. Instead, inequality is stacked upon inequality, without any radical change in the productive constitution of households. Only punishment — a varying amount of goods given not so much out of fear of punishment but for basically ritual and religious reasons — is sent up in hierarchy. According to Sahlins, a chief “is usually spokesman of his group and master of its ceremonies, with otherwise little influence, few functions, and no privileges. One word from him and everyone does as he pleases.”19 This description is perhaps an overstatement, but it vividly illustrates the contrast with more developed modes of production in which kings control access to land in such a way that tribute is backed by the coercive arm of the state.

If tribes and chieftdoms are only two moments of the same mode of production, what determines those moments and how is the transition made from one to the other? Jonathan Friedman’s insightful analysis of the Kachin case provides an answer.20 Below, I use his arguments to sketch a brief description of the dynamic of the mode of production of which Maile appears as a particular example.

Let me begin with a hypothetical case of conjugal family households in which productive inequalities oppose husbands to wives. Let me assume further that husbands’ effective power is upheld by a system of patrilineal ancestor propitiation in which only married men are thought capable of interceding with ancestral spirits to assure fertility and social continuity. No doubt, there are other superstructural ways of stabilizing power differences in this mode of production; belief in ancestral spirits is just one such way.21

Now, imagine that something begins to encourage a concentration of power in the hands of particular men. We have already seen how competition over people — given the right conditions — could lead to such a result. This new degree of power can be stably reproduced — given the structure of the mode of production — in extremely limited ways. In the present case, there are basically two ways. Either productive inequalities can be expanded in scope (that is, fathers can keep married sons in their households to form stem or grand family household systems, for example), or inequalities can be stacked on top of each other. The latter alternative would maintain households as they are but bind certain

21It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze other superstructural arrangements that are functional equivalents to the Maile ones discussed here. It is, nevertheless, important to recognize that such equivalents appear to exist. I shall return to this issue toward the end of this chapter.
household heads in tribute-like relationships to others. Given the nature of kinship systems, there are only certain ways this can be done. One way that recurs in the ethnographic record involves the formation of conical lineages; that is, all younger brothers are made “tributary” to eldest ones.

I should emphasize that in my just-so story, the powerful become eldest brothers rather than eldest brothers becoming powerful (although once power has been institutionalized and defined by this particular kind of superstructural arrangement, the latter occurs to the degree that power is stably reproduced across generations). That kinship relations are reformed to fit the distribution of actual power is evident in many ethnographic reports. The point here is that new power relations have to be legitimated somehow, and, given the pattern of kinship ideology, there are only certain ways of accomplishing this. One involves the formation of conical lineages with eldest brothers given the sole role of making sacrifices to the ancestors. The eldest brother becomes the only intermediary, the principal embodiment of control over fertility and fortune.

In this movement toward greater concentration of power, notice exactly what has changed. A new inequality has been instituted with regard to the production of a society’s total product, and this inequality has been culturally defined and legitimated by a new mode of access to ancestral propitiation. But it would be a mistake to conclude in this case, as Maurice Godelier and Jonathan Friedman have done, that “religion” functions as a productive relation. The new productive inequality, like every other one, is instituted materially; if the eldest brother had only status and no real control over division of the total social product, then we would not refer to a new productive inequality.

It is true that if the new inequality is to be stably reproduced over a period of time, the form of ancestral propitiation described above (or some other superstructural arrangement) is necessary. But to say that “religion” functions as a productive inequality is misleading, not least because it implies that when productive inequalities are “economic,” superstructural ideas are materially unimportant.

The process of pyramiding productive inequality on inequality can be extended at least two or three steps further. Minimal lineage heads can be made subordinate to chiefs, and chiefs subordinate to paramount chiefs.

Subordination consists of two aspects: To qualify as a productive inequality, it must consist of some power to collect tribute in labor or in kind. And this raw power must be legitimated and culturally clothed, in the present case, by notions of the privileged and prior access of chiefs to power over fertility and good fortune.

Just how far the process of pyramiding may go is not clear, although there are obviously limits. The more intervening links between the king at the apex and direct producers at the bottom, the more difficult it becomes to collect tribute. Consequently, as chiefdoms grow, they routinely segment. Unlike states, chiefdoms have no developed coercive power at their center to prevent segmentation. Each lower-level chief serves the same economic, political, and ideological functions as the one at the apex, so that relatively few organic ties bind the polity. Units at the periphery regularly secede. Tributes are no longer sent, and the king’s mystical power over local fertility is no longer acknowledged.

Segmentation depends, of course, on the availability of land. Let us assume for the moment that extra territory is not available. Assuming a fixed area of land, a dependence on extensive swidden horticulture, and the level of productive powers described above, total output should, as Friedman has argued, depend on labor input in the manner shown in figure 5 (overleaf).

Figure 5 is constructed on the assumption that each person works the same length of time so that population size (and density) is directly proportional to total labor input. The straight line, C, represents the fixed measure of consumption that every worker requires both for him or herself and for nonworking dependents. And the curved line T is the maximum possible total output.

Potential surplus – the difference between T and C – and how potential surplus relates to population density are the critical questions. There are three regions of the production function to consider: First, with population densities up to P1, the addition of another adult at any point will

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23Friedman, “Tribes, States, and Transformations,” and Godelier, Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology.

24Henry T. Wright and Gregory A. Johnson, “Population, Exchange, and Early State Formation in Southwestern Iran,” American Anthropologist 77 (1975): 267–89, define a state (the next most developed polity after chiefdoms in most typologies) as having three administrative levels: “... the highest level involves making decisions about other, lower-order decisions rather than about any particular condition or movement of material goods or people” (p. 267). Traditional Maale had three distinct levels of political offices, but the highest level was not functionally specialized to any significant degree; decisions that the ritual king made were more or less of the same type as those of chiefs below him.

result in a constantly increasing increment in potential surplus. This obviously is the region in which productive inequalities can be most easily pyramided. A chief, by gathering around him more and more followers, will be able to extract increasingly more tribute with every person added, all other factors being held constant. Since most of the surplus will be redistributed to the chiefs' followers, chieftainship in this region of the production function may actually benefit many of the populace, even if it does so unevenly.

The second region of population density, from $P_1$ to $P_2$, has different characteristics. With each new person added to the territory, the total surplus continues to rise, but it does so at a decelerating rate. That is, at any point in this region, the potential surplus that an additional person allows is always less than that added by the previous person. Total potential surplus nevertheless continues to rise with increases in population density. Since pyramiding is dependent on total surplus, it can continue to expand in this region, but its presence is obviously approaching a limit, namely, $P_2$.

After $P_2$, a third portion of the production function commences, in which total potential surplus decreases with each new person added. This decrease results from well-known causes: An increase in population density requires a decrease in average length of fallow for swidden fields. And with a decrease in fallow, and therefore of fertility of fields, each unit of labor begins to produce less and less. Total output climaxes at $P_3$ and assuming, as we have done, that people continue to work the same length of time per day, total yield begins to decrease with increasing population density until the limit of $P_4$ is reached.

From $P_2$ to $P_4$, therefore, a certain amount of economic and political devolution must take place. The only way that chiefs could continue to appropriate the same amount of surplus would be to force subjects to work longer hours, and chiefs generally do not enjoy such powers. Presumably, in this context, chieftainships tend to destylify and productive inequalities to "unstack" toward tribal organization. Either chiefs accept their fates and subside into mere figureheads, or they persist in pressing demands past what material conditions will bear, and revolts from below reestablish more egalitarian relationships. Relatively high population densities — without a change in technology — lead theoretically to fewer productive inequalities. This is a process that Jack Goody, for example, has argued is supported by the ethnographic record.

The conclusion to this line of thinking is that nineteenth-century Maale was apparently only one moment, one instance of a more complex set of possibilities circumscribed by its mode of production. Observed at a different point in time, Maale political economy might have looked quite different — even though productive inequalities remained broadly the same. Within the possible variants of this way of producing, there operated a certain unitary dynamic. The competition in rights over people drove the social system toward greater complexity, toward tributary inequalities grafted onto domestic ones. Simply put, Meillassoux's domestic mode of production appears to involve considerably more than domestic inequalities.

Instead of a Sherlock Holmes mystery, this chapter and the one before it have turned into what Northrop Frye called an anatomy.

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26For an example, see Leach, Political Systems of Highland Burma.
28Even though technological sophistication remains constant in the scenario above, the level of productive powers changes with population size. As the mass of productive powers increases, productive inequalities at first increase, then decrease, as the size of the surplus increases and then decreases. In other words, there appears to be a certain equilibrium point around which the relationship between powers and inequalities may oscillate. This oscillation, for technologically less developed societies, is tied to population processes.
are large-scale attempts to show how apparently disparate and unconnected facts are parts of a single, articulated pattern. Essential human nature; the sexual division of labor in Maale; the relationships between husbands and wives, between fathers and sons, and between eldest and younger brothers; the connections between Maale ideas of personhood, of ownership, and of reproduction; the conferral of individuals’ own powers over fortune and fertility to a fetishized notion of a more “male” other; the definition of kingship as the embodiment of male gender; the placement of Maale as one moment in a series of possibilities that includes both tribes and chiefdoms: A historical materialist analysis has required attention to all of these topics.

Why then were Maale households constituted as they were? By now, it should be clear that there are a number of levels on which this question can be answered. Households were, first of all, shaped by the fact that Maale occupied one particular moment in a series of possibilities given by a larger mode of production. That moment involved other productive inequalities besides domestic ones – inequalities between lineage elders and juniors and between the king and chiefs and commoners. These latter relationships provided the context in which households were formed, and, if they did not fundamentally reorder relationships within domestic groups, higher-order productive inequalities nonetheless affected how households operated.

Within the context defined by kings, chiefs, and lineage elders, households were continually created by a set of recurrent, interconnected practices. Households engendered children, “males” and “females,” for whom the concept of maleness was intimately tied up with mystified power over fertility and with actual power over women and children. In this way, political power in Maale was grafted onto biological sex; political economy became sexual, and sex, economic and political.30 “Males” and “females” produced by these practices married and re-created, in turn, household structures in such a way that differences between “men” and “women” atinke and lali, were confirmed by patterns of ordinary experience.

All these processes were required to produce domestic units in Maale. The neoclassical analysis of Chapter 1 assumed them as givens and proceeded to work out certain logical relationships among labor time, the ratio of consumers to workers within households, and possible patterns of labor flow among households. But because what is assumed cannot at the same time be explained, Chapter 1 necessarily could not, I contended, deal with larger issues of history, power, and ideology.

How much further has the present Marxist inquiry progressed? I would argue that we have begun to bring power and ideology into focus. In fact, these two have been shown to be inseparably related. In order to be regularly reproduced, productive inequalities require certain sets of cultural discourses and practices that naturalize systems of domination; they require, in other words, ideologies. To the degree that people live within these discourses and practices, ideologies explain power. But Marxism asserts the reverse as well. Productive inequalities, as de facto distributions of power, “select” ideologies. Ideologies exist because they stabilize and secure a certain kind of power. Following out these connections in the relationships between kings and commoners, eldest and younger brothers, fathers and eldest sons, we have now, I suggest, a fuller understanding of power/ideology.

And yet some part of the analysis of these two is still missing, and that part relates to a lack of specification of the third master concept of this book – history. So far, I have constructed a set of reproduction schemata, a set of recurrent practices animated by a system of cultural understandings, in turn confirmed by repeated kinds of experience. These schemata show a certain internal dynamic, a tendency toward stacking inequality upon inequality, driven by an endemic competition in rights over people. But in no sense can the foregoing analysis, nor, for that matter, Marx’s own reproduction schemata in Capital, be considered an explanation of particular events located in historical time. Both are schematic models of central tendencies in social orders, considered over whole epochs. It is for this reason that I have used the phrase “epochal structures” in the titles of this chapter and the last.

Implied in this phrase is the notion that societies can be placed into certain broad types and that history can be divided, at least roughly, into contrasting epochs. According to Marxist theory, the distinctive feature that demarcates social types and historical epochs is the nature of productive inequalities. Power differences grounded in material life define epochal structures. The polysemy of the adjective “epochal” is useful here, for productive inequalities are not only those patterns that delinate epochs. They are also those structures, according to Marxist theory, with particularly important consequences.

One of these consequences, according to the reproduction schemata constructed above (and in Capital), is that productive inequalities, once
such as “Birds have hollow bones because hollow bones facilitate flight.” What this claim means is that genetic processes randomly created individual birds with lighter bones, and those birds consequently reproduced at higher rates.

Controversially, G. A. Cohen has argued that Marxism as a theoretical system can be defended even when feedback mechanisms cannot be specified.\(^{33}\) In this respect, according to Cohen, functional explanations of biological traits were philosophically defensible before Darwin formulated the concept of natural selection. Even if Cohen is correct, it is clear (and he does not deny) that particular attempts to apply functional explanation can fall into a myriad of pitfalls. These have been described by many critics, among them Carl Hempel and Jon Elster. A consideration of some of these difficulties, in relation to the reproduction schemata above, will be helpful in establishing the limits of epochal analyses — of understanding exactly what they do and do not accomplish.

According to the presentation above, fertility fetishism existed in Maale from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth because it instituted and upheld a certain degree of social inequality. This inequality existed because it was compatible with the level of productive powers and their further development. Let me consider some of the objections that could be raised against these “because” statements.

(1) Hempel has argued, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, that functional explanations have to consider the problem of what he called functional equivalents.\(^ {34}\) That is, other patterns of social thought could have fulfilled the same function as fertility fetishism, in which case we have not provided an explanation for the existence of the latter — even if it had the postulated effect of institutionalizing a certain degree of required inequality.

How one should distinguish functional equivalents is not clear.\(^ {35}\) In a trivial sense, every social trait may be said to be different from every other one. When should a difference count as “fundamental”? Is, for example, the productive inequality in capitalism different when workers


have the right to strike versus when they do not? A positive answer would seem to divide variants too finely, but it is not clear what general principle should be used to avoid such a result.

I do not propose to solve this conceptual problem. Rather, let me consider an example that, intuitively at least, appears to furnish a difference fundamental enough, on most any count, to constitute a true functional alternative to the Maale system described above: At broadly the same level of technological development, many highland New Guinea societies do not have chiefs but so-called big men, and the local idioms of power does not center on who begot whom but on who fed whom. In these societies, notions of gender and of households are strikingly different from those in Maale. If such an alternative exists, we have not, in a strict sense, provided an explanation for the existence of fertility fetishism in Maale.

But, I would argue, this is not what epochal analyses attempt to do. In Capital, Marx did not provide an explanation for exactly why capitalist relations appeared in England. In Part VIII, he investigated some of the changes that logically had to occur - given the structure of the capitalist system. But, for the most part, Marx simply assumed the presence of capitalist relations and went on to explain how, once in place, they took on a certain momentum of their own. Similarly in the Maale case, we observed the presence of fertility fetishism and went on to explain how, once in place, it created a particular pressure in local social life. Hempel's point, therefore, does not invalidate epochal analyses but rather clarifies their explanatory claims. In the present case, why fertility fetishism, not some New Guinea equivalent, existed in Maale becomes a historical question - not one answerable in epochal terms.

(2) Elster has argued not only that a specification of feedback mechanisms between a trait's consequences and its persistence is required in valid functional explanations, but that such mechanisms are typically more complex than those involved in natural selection, at least as far as productive inequalities are concerned. Human beings exist in cultural systems. Unlike genes, persons act intentionally. Therefore the feedback

loops that occur in reproduction schemata typically involve a combination of intended and unintended consequences. Once unintended consequences are postulated, however, some link must be shown to exist between them and actual intentions. According to Elster, this may be accomplished by demonstrating that there are agents who (a) benefit from the unintended consequences, (b) perceive that they benefit from them, and (c) are able to reinforce the pattern in order to obtain those benefits.

The powerful in Maale - kings, chiefs, lineage elders, and husbands - clearly benefited from fertility fetishism. They were also aware of this benefit. I believe, even if their awareness was taken simply as the way things should be. Finally, within limits, the powerful in Maale did act to reinforce fertility fetishism. A woman who refused intercourse with her husband could have her thighs slashed. A commoner who outraged Maale customs could be ostracized, or in extreme cases, executed. In general, the voices of the powerful influenced the formation of public opinion, particularly in public forums like divinations and dispute settlements: in which, for example, the misfortunes of a man who had defied his eldest brother were decided to be the result of his transgression, or a drought was said to be the result of the fact that commoners had not given enough tribute to the chiefs and king.

Considering how functional explanations should be stated and defended helps to clarify two aspects of epochal analyses: on the one hand, that they are limited in the sense that they do not give explanations of history - of why what happened happened - and on the other, that they nonetheless provide an essential prerequisite for historical understanding, a required first step.

With regard to the first point, this chapter began with an observation that a set of productive inequalities was maintained roughly in the same form in Maale from the late nineteenth century to the Ethiopian revolution. It then constructed a set of reproduction schemata that attempted to explain some of the interconnections that gave rise to this persistence: how Maale men and women continually acted in different structural contexts to produce intended and unintended consequences, which in turn had the effect of producing a certain system of inequality.

Nothing in this method of analysis implies that Maale inequalities had to continue over this period of time. Instead of establishing any kind of

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teleology ulterior to history, Maale reproduction schemata uncovered a series of what Jon Elster has called filters, filters that selected certain outcomes and blocked out others. 39 Analyzing these filtering processes helped to explain what in fact happened in Maale, not what had to happen.

If the reproduction schemata themselves do not contain a sufficient explanation of why Maale inequalities persisted through the early twentieth century, do other parts of epochal analysis? To recall, the second “because” statement above was: Maale inequalities existed because they were compatible with the level of productive powers and their further development.

G. A. Cohen has offered a robust defense of the logic of this kind of statement, the so-called primacy of productive powers, and my exposition of Marxist theory has followed his. More accurately, my arguments have been based on one of Cohen’s formulations of this thesis, for I believe that he has conflated two claims, one of which is true and the other not. The true version is:

When relations [productive inequalities] endure stably, they do so because they promote the development of the forces. When relations are revolutionized, the old relations cease to exist because they no longer favour the forces, and the new relations come into being because they are apt to do so. Dysfunctional relations persist for a time before being replaced. During that time the character of the relations is explained by their suitability to a past stage in the development of the forces. . . .

This way of stating the matter sets up no historical teleology for any particular society. Certain societies may not persist at all, and successful revolutions do not have to occur in every case of contradiction. Notice the different claim implied in the following statement:

. . . with sufficient development of the forces the old relations are no longer compatible with them. Either they will have changed without lag along with productive development, or . . . there will now be “contradiction” between forces and relations. But if contradiction obtains, it will be resolved by alteration of the productive relations. 41

These two statements appear to confuse (a) a certain pattern in evolutionary process that becomes visible only in retrospect and only over

the sweep of epochal time with (b) what has to happen (according to the theory) in any particular society. These two different levels of inquiry also appear in Darwinian theory. 42 Over the entire sweep of biological evolution, more and more complex forms of life have evolved. But this (epochal) truth cannot be transferred to the particular (historical) trajectory of every species. It is in this sense, I argue, that epochal analyses are limited. Locally, they explain not what happened but, more generally, how things, if they happen, happen.

What occurred in Maale at any point was determined by a series of factors that we have not yet investigated, namely, the particular play of dominant power against local resistance. This historical causality operated whether productive powers and inequalities were in a state of compatibility or contradiction. 43 In either case, the local balance of power between groups was the proximate cause of whether productive inequalities were maintained in more or less the same form, were modified in ways that nevertheless preserved the same way of producing, or were fundamentally transformed. Weighing this balance between conflicting tendencies, at any particular moment, is what defines a historical, as opposed to an epochal, analysis. Hence E. P. Thompson’s citation of Jean-Paul Sartre: “History is not order. It is disorder: a rational disorder.”

Since dominant power may be opposed and established ideology contested, discordant meanings and practices, ones that do not fit into Maale reproduction schemata, have to be considered: What were the forces that opposed dominant power? What kinds of consciousness escaped fertility fetishism? These issues will be examined in the next chapter.

41 Ibid., p. 135. Marx’s statement in the preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy that “No social formation ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed” is also objectionable if social formation is taken to refer to individual societies.
42 Stephen Jay Gould writes, “Does a land snail that is blown by a hurricane to a distant island, fertilizes itself, and becomes the progenitor of a new species fit in some predictable way into an overarching order of things? I don’t know what to say about such an event except that it just happened. Nature produces some order by rejecting the ill-adapted, but we can hardly hope to specify an optimal arrangement of adapted species.” An Urchin in the Storm: Essays about Books and Ideas (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), p. 205.
43 The position for which I am arguing is one that recognizes a hierarchy of levels of analysis and of “causes.” G. A. Cohen in Karl Marx’s Theory of History, pp. 148–9, calls attention to this hierarchy when he discusses the relationship between class struggle and mode-of-production explanations: “Now it is true that for Marx the immediate explanation of major social transformations is often found in the battle between classes. But that is not the fundamental explanation of social change. . . . why does the successful class succeed? Marx finds the answer in the character of the productive forces.” To the degree that more than one kind of reproduction schema is compatible with productive powers and their further development, the same complex hierarchy of causes operates in the case of successful social reproduction. The question of which level of analysis may be said to be “fundamental” seems answerable only in relation to what one wants to know.
44 E. P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p. 38.
I have emphasized the limits of epochal analyses. But I would like to conclude this chapter with my second point: Epochal inquiries, mode-of-production analyses, nevertheless provide the necessary beginning point for historical explanations. This is an aspect of Marxist theory that E. P. Thompson, for example, does not adequately acknowledge. The dice of history are loaded. Moreover, they are loaded differently in different modes of production. Without understanding the loading - something that is visible only over a span of epochal time - any student of history is apt to misunderstand why what happened happened in any particular place and time.

Epochal structures pinpoint the key sites in which social loading takes place. It is precisely there that something has to happen, as it were, for either reproduction to occur or change to be effected. Without a focus on these hinge points in interactional patterns, the study of history threatens to become a matter of the proverbial one-darn-thing-after-another. In contrast, disorder becomes rational - or at least understandable - when it is examined against the outlines of epochal structures, what Marx called ways of producing.

### 4. History at one point in time: “Working together” in Bola, 1975

Historical explanation is perhaps easier to perform than to analyze. Indeed, analysis often appears to lead away from, rather than to, the actual complexities of historical understanding. Thus historical materialists themselves have tended to divide into two: one focused on camps: social theorists concerned with models of whom the actual histories of particular societies;

1. a problem (for example, G. A. Cohen and Lewis) historians (Eugene Genovese and E. P. Thompson) interpret particular histories but who rarely do in relation to underlying issues in social theory.

My goal in this chapter is to connect social analysis, unlike previous parts of this book in which social explanation is presented forth between abstract concepts here I have discovered it difficult to rise very far above the “facts.” For it precisely something about the complexity of facts and how they interrelate that appears to be at the heart of historical explanation.

Raymond Williams has come closest to enunciating the kind of approach I wish to pursue:

In what I have called “epochal” analysis, a cultural process is seized as a cultural system, with determinate dominant features: feudal culture or bourgeois culture or a transition from one to the other. This emphasis on dominant and definitive lineaments and features is important and often, in practice, effective. But it then often happens that its methodology is preserved for the very different function of historical analysis, in which a sense of movement within what is ordinarily abstracted as a system is crucially necessary. . . . In authentic historical analysis it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies within and beyond a specific and effective dominance. . . . We have certainly still to speak of the “dominant” and the “effective,” and in these senses of the hegemonic. But we find that we have also to

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