Funerals As Feasts: Why Are They So Important?

Brian Hayden

Extremely lavish funeral feasts are common and expensive in many village and chiefdom societies. Anthropologists and politicians often explain such apparently economically irrational expenditures in terms of culture values or traditions. However, viewed from the broader perspective of other types of promotional feasts in transegalitarian or more complex societies (including marriages and house feasts), overtly competitive funeral feasts are used to advertise the success of the surviving family and kin groups. This socioeconomic promotion is important for attracting powerful/successful/wealthy families as affines and allies. Such allies are critical for defending family and individual self-interests in village political and economic struggles that are endemic. Funerals are especially apt contexts for these displays and political manoeuvres.

This is an exploration of funeral feasts and why they are so important in many traditional cultures and to archaeologists. Funeral feasts in traditional societies often constitute the single most important and costly event in the history of a family. Families frequently use all of their available resources to host Extremely Lavish Funeral Feasts (ELFFs) or ostentatious funeral feasts, in honour of their most important (and sometimes not-so-important) family members. Many families even borrow as much as their credit will allow, thereby driving them into debt for years after the funerals. Among the hill tribes of Southeast Asia where I have worked (including the Akha, Hmong and Yao), this is almost a universal pattern. Funeral feasts are also of central importance throughout Melanesia (Weiner 1988; Hamilakis 1998, 116). Even more lavish are the funerals of the Torajans and Sumbans of Indonesia whose renown is largely due to their funeral feasts (Fig. 1; see Adams 2001; 2004). Family funerals in Polynesian chiefdoms are also among the most lavish events that households or lineages sponsor (Hayden & Villeneuve n.d.). And the funerary potlatches of the Northwest Coast of North America are legendary (e.g. Beynon 2000). John Adams (1973, 51) and Tybjerg (1977, 193) even note that money and food are *only* given out at funeral feasts or the totem pole feasts that follow several years after the death of the most prominent individuals. The 'mourning' feasts of California tribes are perhaps less widely known but similar in nature to Northwest Coast potlatches.

In their excavations in the ruins of early states, archaeologists have tended to focus on actual graves and grave goods accompanying the dead rather than on remains of feasts held surrounding the graves. The tombs of the rulers of Egypt, Sumer, Moche, the Maya, Ch'in and even in chiefdoms such as Kaminaljuyu, are well known in the archaeological literature. However, we can surmise that, in the social realm, the feasts which accompanied their funerals were commensurately grandiose to their spectacular burial monuments in the material realm. In many of these societies, there is good evidence that the elites loved feasting and there is every reason to believe that early state elite funerary feasts would have been unprecedented in scale and lavishness. Evidence comes from material remains, artistic depictions and written records. In some artistic representations such as Minoan frescoes we can see amphorae of wine and sacrificial animals being carried to the funeral (Fig. 2). In written accounts such as those of Homer, we read about the lavishness of elite funerals with their games, sacrifices, feasting and great funeral pyres as in the case of Patroclos (O'Shea 1984, 287; see also Hamilakis 1998). Sometimes, at the chiefdom level, as with the megalithic tombs of western Europe, the material remains of feasting are located immediately outside the burial chambers or in enclosures used for

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Figure 1. *Dragging a stone for a funeral dolmen in Anakalang, Sumba. Work feasts are held every day for those dragging the stones and a much larger funeral feast is held when the dolmen is completed and the remains are placed inside. (Photo: Ron Adams.)*



Figure 2. *A Minoan funeral or ancestor feast recorded on the Hagia Triada sarcophagus. Individuals bringing wine and cattle to be sacrificed for the feast are clearly depicted. (From Marinatos 1993, fig. 27.)*

funerary rituals (Bradley 1984, 5, 24, 28; Patton 1993, 109; Schulting in press). In fact, the only place where large-scale Neolithic feasts were held appears to have been at tombs; and judging from the estimated thousands of animals present in the ditches of West Kennet or the 4300 bucrania at a single burial mound in Bronze Age Kerma (Bonnet 2000), they were grandiose, indeed. By comparison, the Bronze Age chiefdom tumulus of Gayhurst boasted only (!) 600 cattle (Schulting in press). At the tribal level, sometimes funeral feasts were transformed into corporate affairs involving the entire community or even groups of allied communities such as the Huron Feast of the Dead. These events were usually the most important community events in each culture's social repertory.

The importance and lavishness accorded to such funerals has always been somewhat of an enigma for archaeologists and anthropologists and even to younger generations in these societies who complain about the wasted resources and effort spent in funerals that could be put to better use (Beynon 2000; Weiner 1988, 49, 120). Not only are enormous amounts of time and resources spent for no apparent material benefit, but in many ethnographic cases, families actually become destitute (at least temporarily) in their obsession to hold impressive funeral feasts (Izikowitz 1951, 308, 326–32; Young 1971, 200). Moreover, all this is done in the name of deceased individuals who are incapable of repaying these efforts or expressing appreciation. For many social scientists and archaeologists, these excessively lavish funeral feasts (ELFFs) constitute the height of economic and self-interest irrationality. From their culturalist perspective, ELFFs can only be explained in terms of ideological cultural traditions and inculcated beliefs that follow non-economic logics of their own (Isbell & Cook 1987; Demarest & Conrad 1992; Harrison 1985; 2000). In these schemes, practical and economic concerns are annulled by almost infinitely malleable cultural beliefs concerning status, ritual requirements for the dead to enter heaven, ancestral powers, or other ideological values. Individuals and families are viewed as powerless to counteract such beliefs or assert their own self-interests and thus many are driven into poverty by these ideological and cultural juggernauts. For some ethnographers like Foster (1967, 123–4), Nash (1958), Carrasco (1961) and Kirkby (1973, 31) it is the idea that there is only a limited amount of good and prosperity in the world which impels other community members to exact debilitating expenditures from prosperous families in order to curtail excessive accumulations.

For other social theorists, it is the ideological need to favourably impress the dead so that, as ancestors, they will dispense fertility, wealth and success on their living descendants (Friedman & Rowlands 1977;

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Bender 1985). For yet other anthropologists, it appears to be simply the maintenance of social status within the community and shame for those who cannot or will not host large funeral feasts (Rosman & Rubel 1971; as well as Bender 1985; Friedman & Rowlands 1977).

Such explanations of ELFFs might make sense in isolated cases, especially to ethnographers whose main goal is to try to understand the internal logic of a different cultural system. However, when we draw back and begin to examine the broad range of traditional cultures, we find that these feasts constitute a recurring feature far more frequent than one might expect on the basis of irrational, economically-debilitating and random constellations of cultural values. If there were only a few such cases, we could certainly appeal to unusual values and beliefs created by happenstance, historical developments or other factors. However, the great effort and expense involved and the recurrent regularity of these feasts in so many parts of the world makes one suspect that much more basic underlying forces are responsible for the phenomenon. Moreover, there appears to be a definite cultural pattern to the occurrence of these elaborate funerary feasts. Namely, we know of no such feasts among generalized hunter-gatherers. It is only with complex hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists such as those that potlatched on the Northwest Coast or feasted in New Guinea, that we begin to find ELFFs. If this kind of behaviour had been entirely dictated by cultural beliefs, one would be at a loss to explain why such beliefs only characterize 'transegalitarian' and more complex societies but not generalized hunter-gatherers. Here, I use the term, 'transegalitarian' to encompass both complex hunter-gatherers and simple horticulturalists (as well as many pastoral nomads). The term refers to societies that have characteristics intermediary between egalitarian bands at one end (with minimal private ownership and widespread sharing) and stratified chiefdoms at the other end. Transegalitarian societies therefore have ownership over resources and products, they have prestige goods and socioeconomic inequalities, but they lack the political stratification characteristic of true chiefdoms (see Hayden 2001a, 232).

Because the ELFF pattern seems to begin with and be common among, transegalitarian societies, they form the focus of the following discussions. Whether ELFFs are universal among transegalitarian societies is an open question. They certainly appear to be very common, but other alternative means could have been employed to achieve the same (inferred) goals of ELFFs and attitudes towards the dead may not have been the same everywhere. In particular, the importance of inherited rights to resources may have varied from group to group and affected the ideological roles of ancestors, just as the control of labour could have been achieved by other means than ancestral veneration and feasting (for example, via high bride prices or dowries as documented by Meillassoux (1981) and Adams 2007, 195). However, such an extensive analysis of variation is beyond the more modest goals of this article and I make no claims for any universal occurrences.

Feasts and promotional displays

What underlying forces might be involved in producing ELFFs where they do occur and why they should focus on funerals is certainly not immediately apparent either from the emic statements of those hosting the feasts or from the descriptions of ethnographers. However, recent studies of feasting from a cross-cultural and 'palaeo-political ecology' perspective have provided important insights into the kinds of benefits that people expect to derive from hosting feasts in general and the socioeconomic dynamics at work within transegalitarian communities. Ethnographic studies by Michael Dietler and Ingrid Herbich (2001) in Africa, by Michael Clarke (2001) in Thailand, by Ron Adams (2004) in Indonesia, by Polly Wiessner (2001) in New Guinea, by me and Suzanne Villeneuve (n.d.) in Polynesia and by me in Southeast Asia (Hayden 2001c) have been pivotal in demonstrating how feasts are critical in obtaining political, social and economic advantages in traditional communities. These studies have also emphasized the great diversity of types of feasts and the fact that larger feasts are complex phenomena, often playing many roles at once, although there usually is a dominant purpose for the events.

While the comparative study of feasting demonstrates that there is a diverse array of practical purposes for feasting in general (everything from atonement, to forging military alliances, to investments, to soliciting favours, to organizing work parties), the *funeral* feasts that I am discussing here involve a much more restricted set of advantages. I must also emphasize that I am not dealing with all funeral feasts, such as those of the very poor, or of slaves, or of modern Industrial funerals. Rather, I am only dealing with the ostentatious funerals, that constitute the social norms for 'respectable' community members in so many transegalitarian (and more complex) traditional societies.

The range of variation of funerals in the transegalitarian communities where I have worked can be appreciated from the following examples. Among the

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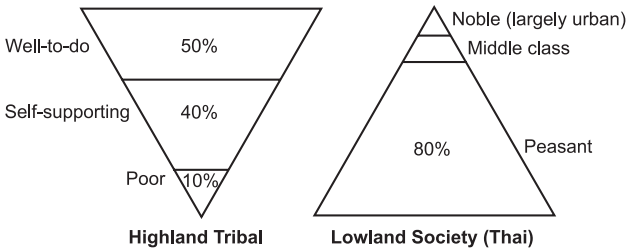


Figure 3. *A typical economic pyramid such as characterizes the developed polities of lowland Southeast Asia where wet rice agriculture predominates, versus the inverted pyramid characteristic of transegalitarian societies such as those of the Southeast Asian Hill Tribes who rely on swidden rice cultivation. (Adapted from Falvey 1977, 41.)*

Akha, who are relatively low on the scale of complexity and inequalities, funeral attendances range from 20 people to over a thousand; there may be 20 to over 700 serving vessels and the number of animals slaughtered range from a modest-sized pig up to five water buffaloes and several pigs. At more lavish funerals, there are also some gifts (silver to ritual specialists, meat to lineage supporters) and copious alcohol (Clarke 1998, 115, 135). In contrast to these richer funerals, the poor provide only enough food necessary for those who make the coffin and prepare the body. However, in general, families try to hold the largest funeral feasts that they possibly can.

In the somewhat more complex communities of remote areas of Tana Toraja (Sulawesi) with greater inequalities including slavery (formerly), there are a range of different magnitudes of funeral feasts that are emically recognized according to Adams's (2001, 82–3; 2004, 64–5) data:

- Simple funerals: 1–2 nights with 1 pig and possibly 1 water buffalo. Frequency in Simbuang village is about 20 per year and these are for the poor, slaves and infants.
- *Dipetallu* funerals: 3–5 nights with 12 pigs and 2 water buffaloes. Frequency is 1–15 times per year for the less wealthy elite class.
- *Duang pitu* funerals: 14 nights with 24 pigs and 7–8 water buffaloes. Frequency is about 2 times per year for more wealthy elites.
- *Duang kasera* funerals: 18 nights with 24 pigs and 9–10 water buffaloes. Held about once a year.
- *Tallu kasera* funerals: 27 nights with 36 pigs and 12–15 water buffaloes slaughtered. Last performed 20 years ago.
- *Aluk sukku* funerals: 27 or more nights with more than 36 pigs and 16 water buffaloes amounting to a value of about US$67,000 for livestock alone. This is the highest level of funeral held only for the wealthiest individuals, according to oral history, only two occurred in the last 70 years, one of which involved 26 water buffaloes.

Well over a thousand people attend the more lavish funerals. That ELFFs are the norm in these societies is evident not only from these data, but also from the 'inverted socioeconomic pyramid' illustrated by Falvey (1977, 41) as characterizing Hill Tribe (and, I would add, most transegalitarian) societies, although this depiction is not quite accurate since there are almost always a few families that stand out as having unusual amounts of wealth. Thus, it might be more appropriate to draw this inverted pyramid, more as a top-flattened diamond shape (Fig. 3).

Some ethnographers may quibble over whether these feasts are genuine funeral feasts instead of being 'commemorative' feasts for the dead. In some cases where the body is buried at death and a commemorative feast occurs some time later, it may be possible to make this distinction. However, the dividing line is often far from clear in other cases, such as the Torajan case where the body is not buried until a suitably lavish feast can be held and the body properly buried, sometimes up to five or more years after the actual death. During all this time, the body is kept wrapped in many layers of cloth in a corner of the house. In other cases, the body is buried shortly after death but then exhumed and reburied a second time (often with a cleaning of the bones) when sufficient resources have been amassed for a large funeral feast. In still other cases, such as the Trobriand Islands, there is an immediate feast a few days after death; however, the family then goes into mourning for four to eight months until they can amass the required materials and foods for the larger funeral. In effect, there is no break in the funeral process from death until the final funeral feast and there are usually smaller scale feasts held periodically during this preparation time as subsidiary funeral feasts. It is not, therefore simply a commemorative feast held after a funeral; it is part of a very long, drawn-out funeral. This is a relatively common pattern among transegalitarian and chiefdom societies and the feasts for the deceased that are held months or years after their actual death are generally referred to as 'funeral' feasts in most ethnographies. Aside from these considerations, archaeologists dealing with feasting remains associated with burials are unable to determine whether they represent feasts held at the actual time of death, at the end of a long series of funeral feasts, or 'commemorative' feasts. It also seems apparent that the ultimate function of any

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Figure 4. *Funeral feasts often involve graceful processions, dancing and singing, such as the entry of this contingent of guests in a funeral in the Torajan village of Banga. (Photo: B. Hayden.)*

initial burial feasts and the ultimate farewell feasts is fundamentally the same (see below). Thus, from an archaeological perspective, such nice anthropological distinctions appear rather academic and I will refer to ELFFs as 'funeral feasts' for the purposes of trying to understand this unusual form of behaviour.

Several of the characteristics of ELFFs in transegalitarian societies provide clues to the nature of the underlying motivations for holding them.

1. The most striking aspect of the feasts is clearly their ostentation. Typically, in tribal Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, and Polynesia, host families attempt to kill, consume and give away as many valuable domestic animals as possible. Domestic animals are the major means of storing surplus wealth in these traditional societies (Falvey 1977; Hayden 2001b). Among transegalitarian hunter-gatherers on the Northwest Coast, stored foods such as dried salmon or deer meat and valuable starchy roots played the same roles in this respect as domestic animals.
2. Even in cultures that give much lip service to egalitarian ethics and where ostentatious displays are normally viewed as socially unacceptable, funerals generally constitute an exception and provide a context in which families compete without restraint to display and consume as much surplus as they can marshal themselves or borrow from kin and allies putatively on behalf of the deceased person. For example, in the more remote Hill Tribe transegalitarian communities of northwest Thailand, Clarke (2001, 146–9, 155) and I repeatedly were told that everyone was 'equal' in the Akha communities where we worked and that there were no rich people in the community. This is also true in Polynesia (Bennardo & Capell 2006). Livestock holdings, however varied dramatically between lineages, ranging from 0–19 water buffalo and less than 10 to over 200 pigs per lineage. These discrepancies were most prominently displayed in funeral feasts which varied in cost between U$25 to over US$1000 (cash equivalents of food) and involved a range of animals depending on family and lineage wealth, as noted above.
3. Another ostentatious characteristic of ELFFs is that hosts try to invite and feed as many people from as large an area and as high rank as possible (Fig. 4). This was certainly the case at the large feasts

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Figure 5. *While much of the meat from slaughtered cattle and pigs is consumed at funeral feasts, large portions are also put aside as gifts for important guests to take back with them to their households or villages where they can continue the feasting in a cascading fashion. Meat division is generally carried out by specialists such as depicted here at a Hmong funeral in Khack Noi (Petchabun), Thailand. (Photo: B. Hayden.)*

that I attended in Southeast Asia (whether funerals or marriages) and has also been noted by other ethnographers in other areas (e.g. Cooper 2006, 154; Tybjerg 1977, 193, 195). Hosts typically give away large amounts of food to special guests so that the feast may be continued in other families or more distant communities in a cascading fashion (Fig. 5). Again, ostentation toward guests is what characterizes these feasts and gifts of valued foods typically constitute contractual reciprocal obligations for the return of a similar or more valuable gift in kind. Some funerals involve so much surplus that it is impossible to consume a significant amount of it and the emphasis shifts to food gift giving with reciprocal obligations.

There have been a number of recent archaeological studies that have focused on funerary feasting involving these characteristics. Researchers in South America have been particularly active, especially Gummerman (2004) deaing with family or lineage-level Moche funerals on the Peruvian Coast, Hastorf (2003) and Lau (2002) for more elite Andean funerary feasts especially in Highland enclosures. Shimada *et al.* (2004, 383, 386) also infer large-scale funerary feasting in plazas on the North Coast of Peru. All these examples include the brewing of large quantities of chicha beer as well as large-scale consumption of food. Considerable archaeological attention has also been devoted to the feasting aspects of European Megalithic and Bronze Age funerary sites (some of which has already been mentioned, but the work by Hamilakis (1998) and Jiménez & Guerrero (2006, 2007) needs to be emphasized). Additional insightful examples have been developed in Mesoamerica by McAnany (1994), in the PPNB and Halafian Neolithic of the Near East by Goring-Morris (2000) and Kansa & Campbell (2002), in the Bulgarian Chalcolithic cemetery of Durankulak by Todorova (2002), in the remarkable breweries associated with Celtic burial mounds (Stika 2005) and in the Chinese Neolithic by Kim (1994). While these studies are all exemplary in terms of documenting the existence of funeral and ancestor feasting, with notable exceptions (such as Gummerman, Lau, Hamilakis, Jiménez and Guerrero), few archaeologists who document feasting extend their analyses to deal with the underlying reasons and social dynamics for holding such feasts or the community-individual dynamics involved.

Thus, let us examine the advantages that ELFFs confer especially by bringing together large numbers of people from many potentially important regions and relationships. I will then discuss how funerals can be considered particularly suitable contexts for these displays. What kinds of practical benefits in general might be obtained from ostentatious displays and gifting of valuable material goods? We may glean some clues from general ecology. In the animal world, extra energy and resources are often channelled into the production of ostentatious physical displays. Moose or elk antlers, elephant tusks, peacock tails and bright colours on fish are all ostentatious displays that require considerable genetic and energy investments. They do not improve the procurement of subsistence resources or assist in defence against predators. Rather, the adaptive practical advantage of these ostentatious features (sometimes referred to as epideictic displays) appears to be to impress other animals of the same species with the biological fitness, success and desirability of individuals exhibiting the best displays either for mating or alliance purposes. These are generally accepted conclusions of biologists (Zahavi & Zahavi 1997) and have been more recently modified by behavioural ecologists to deal

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with human 'signalling' (under the rubric of 'signalling theory' (Bleige-Bird & Smith 2005). However, there is an important difference between the use of signals in the classical world of animal ecology and the use of lavish displays in human feasting at funerals that I will discuss after considering funeral feasts in more detail.

When we observe ostentatious displays of wealth or material goods in our own culture, some of the goals *do* seem to be essentially the same as elk and peacock displays of fitness — that is, to attract other individuals into relationships that are beneficial for those putting on the best displays. In the case of Industrial societies, these displays may be used to attract mates, however, the most lavish displays are not usually intended to attract mates, but rather to establish economic relationships between individuals, families, corporate elites, or polities. Those producing the most lavish displays are generally corporations out to obtain commercial exchanges. Today, we call this behaviour, 'advertising', or 'promotion'. These terms might also be appropriate to use in reference to elk horns, peacock tails, or some aspects of traditional funerals. The advertising benefits to both elk and Industrial businesses seem fairly clear to us, but the practical benefits to be obtained from excessively lavish funeral displays in traditional cultures are perhaps not quite so apparent and entail added dimensions (especially reciprocity and social bonding) that are largely lacking from zoological examples or modern promotional displays. In order to understand lavish displays in traditional societies, it is necessary to examine the political and economic dynamics that characterize transegalitarian and more complex societies in a bit more detail.

Transegalitarian dynamics

To summarize these succinctly, we can say that the usual notions of prestige and status, with their implicit psychological/ego-gratification motivations, do not get us very far in understanding ostentatious feasts. As generally used in our society and by anthropologists, there is little practical benefit to status or prestige other than as grooming of the ego. On the other hand, when these terms are examined carefully as they are used in transegalitarian contexts, it is clear that they are being used as synonyms for economic and political 'success' (Boone 2000; Hayden 2001a). As John Adams (1973, 118) observed, among the Gitksan of the Northwest Coast, the social worth of people is equated with the amount of food and wealth that they distribute publicly and this equates to a kind of credit rating. When we examine transegalitarian community dynamics, proven success is probably the major criteria (after close kinship) used for establishing important relationships between pairs of individuals, families, lineages, clans and communities. In contrast to entirely verbal promises (or self-promoting claims about one's abilities), past and ongoing proven successes constitute tangible demonstrations, or proofs, of desirability and reliability. In transegalitarian societies, favourable relationships on a number of levels, from individuals to communities, are critical for survival, security and sexual reproduction at the individual, household and village levels (Roscoe in prep.). Such mutually supportive relationships play vital roles in at least five specific contexts:

1. Endemic warfare is a common occurrence among transegalitarian and more complex societies. Archaeology and ethnography are replete with accounts of very high levels of mortality (10–30 per cent) in New Guinea, the Amazon, the Northwest Coast, the California Coast and, in fact, most areas of the world at these levels of cultural complexity (Keeley 1996, 63–4; Walker 1989; Cybulski 1994; Meggitt 1977; Gat 2006, 129–31). On Sumba, Adams's (2007, 91) data shows that inter-household disputes frequently led to violent confrontations and small-scale warfare between clans in the past. Thus, having strong and successful allies in these situations was critical for survival.
2. Marriage becomes a costly affair among many transegalitarian societies probably due in large part to aggrandizer strategies to promote their own self-interests (Meillassoux 1981; Modjeska 1982, 56–8, 67–8; Adams 2007, 195). Therefore, affiliation with individuals or families that can help cover bride price or dowry expenses is often essential in one's ability to marry at all, not to mention marrying a productive or desirable spouse, or obtaining several spouses. Without economically and politically successful kin or friends, one may never marry, or one may end up with an indolent spouse who provides poorly for themselves and their own family.
3. Drawing people into alliances is also critical for accessing and investing wealth or other more basic resources. Intermarrying families are typically among the most important of these allies. For example, on the Northwest Coast, marriages entailed a series of codified back-and-forth exchanges between the groom's family and the bride's family that minimally lasted for years (Barnett 1955, 182–4, 190, 194; Drucker 1951, 275, 286, 291–2; Elmendorf 1960, 349, 358, 362). Affines were always among the most reliable supporters in other affairs. On Sumba, ongoing exchanges between

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affines ensured labour support, economic support and political support (Adams 2007, 110–12). These are the major reasons why marriages are so important for parental families. In general, access to the best fishing locations, fertile garden areas, or other resources was established through descent *and* marriage between two families. Kin and fictive kin of varying degrees of social distance are all potential allies for helping to arrange and underwrite wealth or resource exchanges achieved through intermarriage.

4. Alliances are critical for engaging in regional trade since this involves transiting across others' territories. Thus, elites commonly marry into neighbouring groups in order to secure trade advantages (Teit 1907, 736; Tybjerg 1977, 202; Hayden & Schulting 1997). Alliances between families in a region can also be extremely important in providing sponsors for household or even village relocations when these are necessary or desirable, as is periodically the case among Hill Tribe swiddeners (Clarke 1998; 2001, 149).
5. Finally, as Michael Clarke (1998) has shown in his study of the Akha in Thailand and as is evident in Condominas's (1977) work in Vietnam and Ron Adams's (2007, 61, 69–70, 86, 88, 97–105, 225) work in Indonesia, alliances are essential in transegalitarian societies for protecting one's self-interests against the exploitative schemes of others and against misfortunes (natural or social) that may befall household members. Such misfortunes include: natural illnesses, debilitating accidents, reparation claims arising from damages a family's animals or members have caused and atonement for intended or unintentional transgressions of cultural taboos or 'laws'. Moreover, typically, there are powerful and unscrupulous (aggrandizer) individuals in these societies who do not hesitate to lay charges of sorcery or trumped-up debts or damage claims against families if they think another family or individual is vulnerable. In these politically-charged situations, powerful allies are necessary in order to fend off destitution, ruin or even slavery. Above all else, *this* is what politics are about in transegalitarian villages.

All of the above reasons (defence, reproduction and marriage, economics and political self-defence) are why alliances are critically important for survival in transegalitarian and more complex communities. Alliances are also important in egalitarian bands like the Western Desert Australian Aborigines and the !Kung Bushmen (Wiessner 1982; 1986; Hayden 1987). However, these are established mainly to create subsistence safety-nets; and they are *not* predicated on surplus or wealth production, but rather on ritual and marital exchanges. In contrast, surplus and wealth typically become major criteria for alliance formation among transegalitarian societies and political/wealth/defence/reproductive concerns dominate the reasons for alliance formations. This is a critical distinction since moving survival advantages into the arena of economic production creates a positive feedback system. Surpluses and wealth become indexical of the number of productive individuals in a social group (including allies) as well as the level of their energy and skill in production. And the more productive people there are in the group, the more surpluses can be generated and the more advantages gained.

I argue that maintaining beneficial or desirable surplus-based alliances is why ostentatious displays of success are important in these communities, even those that normally 'mask' inequalities behind an egalitarian façade of respectability (Trinkaus 1995, 57). To avoid such displays is to advertise a family's economic and social weakness. Poor displays convey the message that there is little or no clout wielded by the family and little or no respect for the household in the community or region. As Roscoe (in prep.) explicitly observed in New Guinea, in all important domains (acquiring spouses, resources, or allies), families that put on poor displays must yield to the interests and desires of those that put on more powerful displays. Van der Grijp (2002, 28) recorded the same behaviour in Polynesia and Clarke (2001, 150) makes a similar point for the Akha: advertising success encourages deference from others; the wealthy are viewed as 'blessed' and intelligent and their opinions hold more weight. Izikowitz (1951, 117, 139) says it more bluntly: the rich decide everything of importance. That is why all households that can sponsor ELFFs and can appear to be affluent do so and why households try to outperform each other in these events. Obviously, it should be in the interests of even the poorest families to forge such alliances. However, some households simply cannot marshal the necessary resources to create the economically-based alliances that characterize the majority of households in transegalitarian societies, whether due to historical accident, innate limitations, or lack of motivation (often resulting from alcoholism, drug addition, or apparent lethargic dispositions).

Superficially, the previous observations would seem to support recent models of behavioural human ecologists who have developed 'signalling theory'. Bleige-Bird & Smith (2005, 224) have argued that the use of expensive 'signals' to indicate likely outcomes of conflicts can curtail even more costly physical confrontations. While lavish displays certainly do serve

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as such signals to other social groups, the adaptive value of lavish displays is not restricted to curtailing expensive physical confrontations as Bleige-Bird & Smith imply. There is much more to feasting than simple signalling theory connotes. Instead of the pre-emptive repelling of physical conflicts, signalling in traditonal feasting is much more frequently used to *attract* desirable partners for wealth exchanges, in marital partnerships and as military allies. Even more importantly, such displays typically entail the giving of prestige foods and gifts with the unstated, but implicit contractual understanding that such gifts *must be repaid*. They thus form a reciprocal obligation, the social bonding effects of which go far beyond any simple signalling value. These reciprocal obligations encompass the political, economic, ritual and social universe. Reciprocal obligations are the stuff of which transegalitarian social networks are made and feasting obligations are among the most important. As Ongka states in the film *Ongka's Big Moka*, if his rival guest did not repay the gift Ongka gave to him, Ongka would slit his throat. This is not signalling. It is the equivalent of an illicit dealer absconding with goods without paying for them. Thus, lavish feasts go well beyond the importance of signals.

In addition, according to Codding & Jones (2007, 350, 354–5), signalling theory is handicapped by its theoretical foundations that tie it to a static, negative feedback cultural dynamic in which positive feedback and resulting dramatic cultural changes are excluded. Contrary to these expectations of signalling theory, the political ecological approach that I advocate expects feasting, competitive displays and the political-economic advantages that they confer to result in constant pressures to increase production and foment positive feedback changes. Ecologically-oriented ethnographers have documented these pressures in a number of areas (e.g. Modjeska 1982; Blanton & Taylor 1995; Izikowitz 1951 — see also Hayden 2001c, 27) and such positive feedback pressures arguably account for the rapid rate of culture change among transegalitarian societies wherever the resource base can support intensification. In fact, the exponential rate of change in technology, demography and social complexity that have been documented in the archaeological record over the last 30,000 years can plausibly be attributed to the positive feedback effects of feasting (Hayden 2001c). It is also important to note that once some individuals in a population achieve differential success by adopting these strategies, all other individuals are obligated to imitate them or be socioeconomically disenfranchized often entailing being relegated to evolutionary oblivion due to lack of ability to marry or reproduce. Thus, the palaeo-political ecology model predicts widespread eager and competitive participation in lavish displays. In contrast, according to Codding & Jones, signalling theory predicts that only the highest ranking individuals should participate in lavish signalling behaviour (Codding & Jones 2007, 353). Others have criticized the signalling interpretations of the ethnographic cases used by advocates and very different interpretations for the 'signalling' behaviours cited have been proposed (Gurven *et al*. 2000, 195; Hill & Kaplan 1993; Marlowe 1999; Wood 2006). Thus, in contrast to palaeo-political ecology, signalling theory deals only with a rather narrow range of phenomena within the gamut of feasting effects and the adaptive advantages of feasting.

Why funerals?

But why are funeral feasts the focus of these displays? First we must recognize that for surplus-based sociopolitical strategies to work, there must be some generally acknowledged venue for the ostentatious display of economic success and the forging of sociopolitical bonds.

Second, we must understand the basic logic behind the hosting of feasts. Feasts provide excellent venues for alliance displays because feasts attract crowds. Feasts are sensuous events that put people in favourable moods and dispositions (often with the aid of intoxicants). And feasts with their unusual dishes, ritual performances and costumes or gifts are pregnant with symbolism. If the goal of feasts is to reaffirm or alter others' attitudes and relationships toward specific people or groups, then one must appeal to their emotions and attempt to influence guests' and supporters' emotions. This is the ultimate meaning of the sharing of food. Sharing of food generates, or at least is indexical of, feelings of social closeness and intimacy. The roots of these feelings undoubtedly run deep, for we find the giving or sharing of food being used in many primate societies in order to solicit favours or show alliance (e.g. McGrew 1996). As Hamilakis (1998, 117–18), Schulting (1998, 219), Dietler (2001) and Wiessner (2001) have emphasized, the feasting context is an ideal one to reaffirm or introduce new concepts, new values and to manipulate people's emotions in ways that favour hosts' political and economic interests. Bond (1987, 56) explicitly observed that Zambian funerary rituals were manipulated in pursuit of individuals' own personal interests and social goals and I think this is probably typical of most pre-Industrial societies. This is not to say that all funerary feasts or events are used in a conscious manipulative fashion.

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Figure 6. *Funerals also often involve dramatic animal or even human sacrifices. Here one of many water buffaloes is being sacrificed before the entire assembled funeral guests as a dramatic display of the wealth and power of the family hosting the funeral. (Photo: B. Hayden.)*



Figure 7. *Host families and their supporting kin wear fine prestige clothes to impress guests at funeral feasts in the richer communities, such as these Torajan girls in Banga village. (Photo: B. Hayden.)*

My point is that the opportunity and structure for such manipulation is in place for those who want to use funeral situations to promote their own agendas. And, all indications are that in transegalitarian societies, there are always some aggrandizing individuals who are keen to do so for their own benefit. If successful, it is they who set the standards for others to follow and have probably been responsible for the escalations in the ostentation of funeral displays.

In order to more effectively manipulate individuals' emotions, many other elements are added to feasting which produce favourable attitudes and sway the feelings of guests and supporters. Thus, dramatic rituals often take place ranging from graceful and colourful blessings, to large-scale animal sacrifices (Figs. 4 & 6) or even human sacrifices. Thus, intoxicating substances are proffered and consumed while drunkenness and chaos are sometimes purposefully promoted (Huntington & Metcalf 1979, 114; Chagnon 1977, 117). Thus, elaborately costumed dancers, singers and drummers can be part of feasts to make spectators and participants *feel* united and *feel* the power of the sponsoring groups and the ideologies that they are promoting (Fig. 7). Thus, valuable prestige goods are given away. Dramas are acted out (Fig. 4). And in more affluent areas, monumental commemorations are often erected, requiring the participation of hundreds or thousands of people (Fig. 1). These kinds of auxilliary elements of feasts may be found wherever the goal is to manipulate attitudes or create alliances. All these stratagems provide numerous archaeological remains depending on the scale of display, from the simple remains of a few domestic animals (in the case of poor funerals or communities without much surplus), to large-scale feasting remains associated with cemeteries, to special temporary structures for funeral guests and the staging of events (Fig. 8), to special cooking facilities and hearths with unusually large cooking vessels and serving vessels with large accumulations of food remains (Fig. 9), to megalithic or monumental structures associated with food preparation areas and remains.

So why are funerals especially good stages for the playing out of these sociopolitical relationships and dramas? Theoretically, any event might suffice as a pretext for holding such feasts for attracting allies: the

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phase of the moon, the appearance of certain stars, weddings, births, auspicious omens, harvests, sicknesses and so on. There is no limit to the kinds of pretexts that can be used and new ones are constantly being explored or incorporated into feasting repertories (Yan 1996). Realistically, however, it must be recognized that some pretexts are relatively transparent self-serving ploys and would not appeal to wide segments of a population (e.g. personally interpreted omens), whereas other events seem to lend themselves particularly well to the manipulation of emotions due to their very nature. Thus, people's emotions are generally stirred up and interactive at events such as weddings, various rites of passage, at completions of large-scale projects involving many people such as house constructions or even more monumental endeavours. But of all these pretexts, death and grieving are aspects of life that tend to affect people's emotions the most profoundly — sometimes even of more distant kin.

In essence, what I would like to argue is that of all the pretexts that might be good for holding alliance or promotional feasts, funerals are probably *the* most ideally suited. At no other type of event are people's emotions as likely to be as maleable (Huntington & Metcalf 1979, 18, 23ff.). The intentional use of drunkenness and chaos may be meant to not only help transform grief but also to enhance emotional mobility in order to achieve ulterior political motives. Funerals are typically events where many individuals display support, condolences, gratitude, sympathy and/or warm feelings towards each other. Certainly, attitudes towards death may vary somewhat from one culture to another and thus account for the relative variation in ELFF manifestations between cultures, although I know of no cross-cultural studies that deal with this issue and my experience has been that death is an upsetting experience almost universally, even characterizing many of the higher mammals (Masson & McCarthy 1994). Certainly, as is evident in Figure 7, not everyone attending funerals experiences grief or even



Figure 8. *Archaeological remains of funeral feasts can include the construction of special structures to host guests and stage the events. The coffin stage in Figure 1 was specially constructed for the funeral as were the structures behind the procession in Figure 5 which formed an enclosed square. The magnitude of these temporary constructions can be gauged from this photograph of a rear view of such a construction at Banga. Note the figure at bottom left for scale. (Photo: B. Hayden.)*

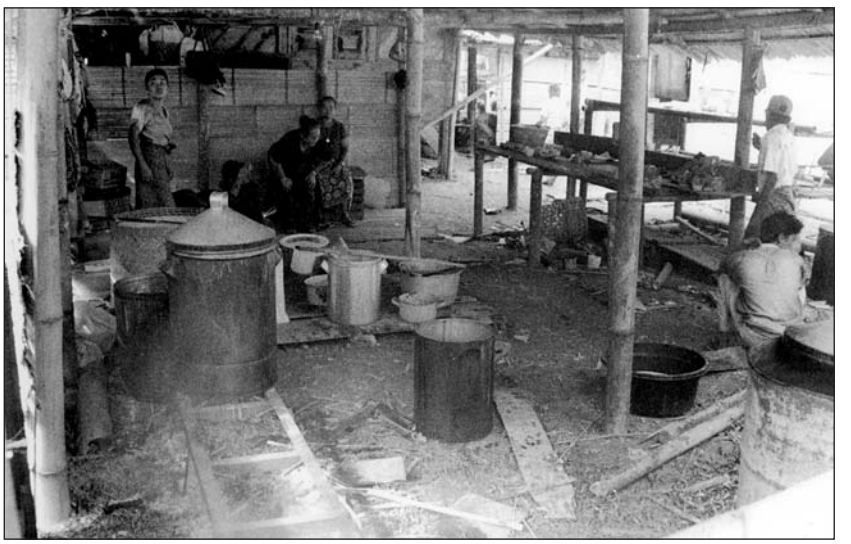


Figure 9. *Another archaeological indicator of funeral feasts is the establishment of special cooking areas. These involve large sometimes multiple hearths, large cooking vessels and sometimes special structures. One of several special kitchens constructed to feed the hundreds of guests at the Banga funeral is visible in this photograph. (Photo: B. Hayden.)*

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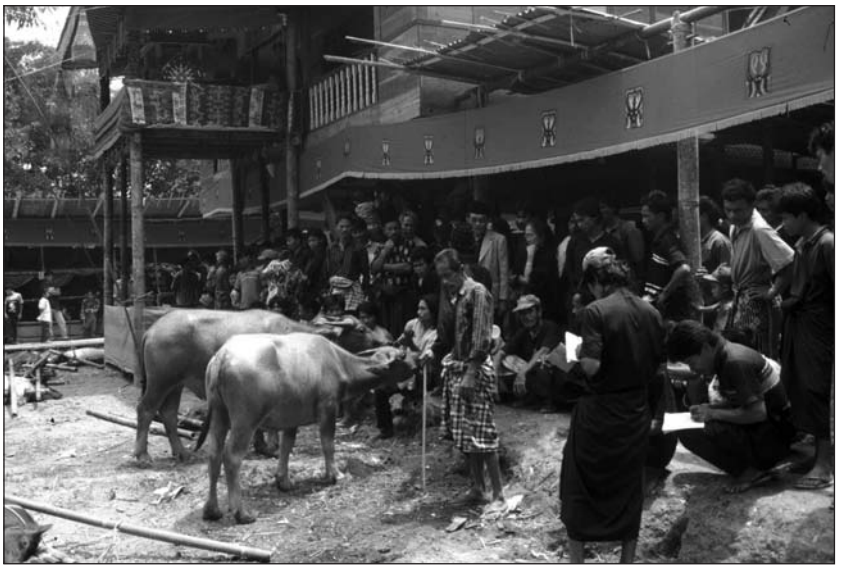


Figure 10. *Although promotional displays of wealth are key features of funeral feasts, major contributions of cattle, pigs, or other prestige items must be repaid. Reciprocity is a key feature of these events. All domestic animals constitute valuable forms of stored wealth. When dozens of cattle and scores of pigs are involved, keeping track of debts can become difficult. At the Banga funeral, supporting contributions of water buffalo are being recorded in duplicate notebooks so that debts will not be forgotten or ignored. Such gifts are more like contractual loans. In the past, tally sticks or specialized individuals (paid 'witnesses' on the Northwest Coast) using memory aids would record such debts. (Photo: B. Hayden.)*

sympathy to the extent that those people who are intimately familiar with the deceased do. However, enough people in key positions would experience such emotions to warrant the use of ELFFs for political purposes. Thus, these feelings can probably be more easily manipulated, or even created, in funeral contexts than in any other context. This is yet another key feature of funeral feasts that lies outside the scope of signalling theory. Moreover, because of their emotional nature and relevance to a wide spectrum of kin and perhaps for self-interested genetic reasons, funerals are events that can draw more people from more widely dispersed social groups than almost any other type of event at the family or clan level. Only marriages might rival funerals in this respect. Since those people who typically come to funerals are kin, affines, other allies or potential allies/affines, funerals constitute an ideal context to reinforce or create relationships of alliance and support and to try to cultivate even more advantageous relationships, all largely via reciprocal gift-giving combined with indexical displays of success. Moreover, deaths in various families within these wider support or alliance groups happen frequently enough so that these relationships can be affirmed on a fairly regular basis, with each kin group taking their turn several times per generation. Furthermore, Weiner (1988, 122–3, 134–6) draws attention to the fact that deaths of important family and lineage members creates uncertainties as to the ability of surviving members to maintain previous social, production and political roles. Thus, it becomes important to demonstrate to allied kin, to the rest of the community and to regional affiliates that the surviving members' positions have not been adversely affected due to the loss of a prominent member. For Weiner, funerals are reaffirmations of lineage strength in the brokering of political power and the dominance hierarchy of lineages.

It is in this kind of context that it is most advantageous to display, advertise and promote one's success to as large a number of people as possible from as wide an array of actual or potential allies as possible.

Finally, because so many people can be drawn to funerals, these are also ideal events for support groups to demonstrate their size and importance. Thus, funerals become not only affairs of individual families, but to a considerable extent, they reflect the power and importance of the kinship or other allied support group to which the household belongs. In tribal Southeast Asia, kin frequently provide support in terms of staple food contributions (often a litre of dry rice per family or more), or loans of animals to be sacrificed or given away (at minimal or no interest rates), or similar loans of prestige items. Such assistance, or course, creates reciprocal debts thereby intensifying and consolidating bonding between various households in mutual support networks (Fig. 10). Thus, funerals provide the best possible contexts in which to display success in order to enhance household advantages for marriage, defense, political support, wealth exchanges and other types of desirable alliances. *This* is why no expense is spared and families often go into debt. It is an opportunity to show off to large numbers of important people and to consolidate support networks without appearing to be aggressively dominating. In terms of promotional displays, transegalitarian funeral supporters may be considered on a par with

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television commercials during the Olympics, while the Olympic-sponsoring countries and their athletes are similar to the hosts of funerals. Both sponsor countries and commercial supporters hope to benefit from the event.

All the ostentatious foods, gifts and offerings at funerals are presented ostensibly in the name of the dead person and to benefit their situation in the hereafter. Surviving kin are lauded for their efforts to provide for the dead and are thus shielded from reproach in sponsoring competitively lavish displays of material success. Guests are favourably disposed to the hosts; guests offer conciliation and/or support rather than immediate rivalrous criticisms. These are opportunities which do not occur for a family or lineage very frequently and indeed, if they occurred more frequently, could not be financed on the same scale. I would suggest that major funeral events that occur at the rate of once or twice per generation per family probably come close to maximizing the amount of food and wealth that can be amassed for single events by households. The same logic undoubtedly also accounts for the lavish use of grave goods and the building of lavish funeral monuments frequently encountered in the archaeological record (Fig. 1; Adams 2007; J. Adams 1973). While some archaeologists speculate that rich grave goods were a means of keeping prehistoric economies going or preventing inflation in the value of prestige items in prehistoric societies (Winters 1968), it seems far more likely that prestige grave goods were simply meant to impress spectators in the same way that funeral feasts are used in the transegalitarian world.

Summary

Thus, there are really two aspects to funerals. They are arenas for creating socioeconomic and political alliances via gifts, favours, services or support, together with their consequent debts. Funeral feasts are also extensively used for information displays (social signalling: Roscoe in prep.) promoting past successes, as well as advertising the present state of health and vitality of specific households and their support groups similar to epideictic displays in the animal world. Because household fortunes can rise and fall precipitously in transegalitarian societies, it is periodically essential to revalidate one's political and economic 'status' at a range of different levels. Funerals are the most inclusive of large numbers of people that households want to impress as lavishly as possible. Due to the enormous costs and preparations involved, extremely lavish funeral feasts are, on average, the least frequently hosted types of feasts for individual households or lineages and they generally are only held for the most important members. As might be expected from the less significant roles that they play in alliance formations, young children and the poor usually are accorded only small and inexpensive funeral feasts, although for very prominent families, the deaths of children or attached servants can sometimes be used as additional pretexts for displays of power.

Given these considerations and understanding the power dynamics in transegalitarian and more complex societies (driven by economic risks and aggrandizers' aspirations), it should come as no surprise that funerals are used so widely for ostentatious displays. With the emergence of stratified chiefdoms and state societies, the importance of political alliances and funeral feasts among the elites rises to new heights due to the greater wealth and power stakes involved. I would argue that prehistoric and historic chiefly and early state funeral displays were driven by the same basic logic and positive feedback dynamics as transegalitarian funeral feasts. At these higher levels of political integration, there are even greater intrigues, competition, infighting and aggression with the goals of controlling resources, defending ones self and family, creating allies and protecting many other self-interests. While today, in industrial societies, the major socioeconomic units of production and competition have taken new corporate forms, corporations still use some of the old principles for creating advantageous relationships. Today, there is no scarcity of lavish corporate feasts and parties meant to display success and to woo clients or create alliance between the most prominent executives of corporations.

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Brian Hayden is Full Professor of Archaeology at Simon Fraser University. He has conducted ethnoarchaeological research over the last 40 years on lithic technology, traditional resource use, household characteristics and feasting. His current research focuses on small community political dynamics, especially concerning ritual strategies. His latest book on this topic is: *Shamans, Sorcerers, and Saints: a Prehistory of Religion* (Smithsonian Books, 2003).

Comments

From Martin Jones, Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3DZ, UK; mkj12@cam.ac.uk.

Whatever you think about it, Hayden's seminal work on feasting has changed the way we all think about that practice, and has certainly inspired me in my own work. The paper published here continues the theme putting forward an argument that might be brutally compressed as follows; extremely lavish funeral feasts enable large alliances, which as well as providing a range of protections, enhance the potential scale of surplus production, which in turn is pivotal to the reproduction of the transegalitarian societies in which these feasts repeatedly occur. The general theme of society being reconstituted through practices of sharing food is one with which readers of a variety of theoretical persuasions will be familiar and comfortable. However, a parallel theme of this article is to argue for one theoretical strand, setting it against another.

The second of these strands is attached to such ideas as 'cultural value', 'tradition' and 'self-interest irrationality'. In terms of explanatory power, Hayden's preferred strand is instead attached to 'practical benefits', 'economic rationality' and 'adaptive success'. He argues that, in order to understand these funerary feasts, we need to look beyond and beneath the lived experiences, to peel away the intoxication, the grief, the dancing and the gorging, to reveal the cool and clinical Darwinian game that lurks beneath. The feasts constitute a form of display, one that may be compared with courtship and territorial display among other species, and signalling theory can help us understand why only a subset of the population might pursue that strategy. To underpin his argument, Hayden takes us on an impressive tour through time and space, and certainly leaves us with the impression that there's been a lot of it going on.

Whether that evidence also persuades us that Hayden's preferred strand has the superior explanatory power is another matter. I can't help thinking that a quite different argument could be assembled from a very similar tour picking up on different aspects of the same feasts. If we turn to the instances of display and signalling he draws from behavioural ecology, the obvious approach to strengthening that argument would be by making explicit the linkage with reproductive success. That is less easy here. It isn't sufficient to show the linkage between the host families and their own success; there needs to be some evidence that these feasts as hosted by some members of a transegalitarian societies confer a greater reproductive success on the wider range of active participants, than might be the case were surplus to be expended in some other way. This is virtually impossible to observe in examples drawn from the past. In the present, it is not made easy by the circumstance that so many of the observed 'transegalitarian' societies equate with declining and sometimes endangered populations, complicating the central notion of 'reproductive success'.

However, I think there is a more intrinsic tension in Hayden's argument, which relates to the role of intentionality. When behavioural ecologists study the other species, the animal's experience of the evolutionary process may or may not connect with our analysis of the Darwinian process at work. Some parts of Hayden's argument resonate with this. For example he distances the emic accounts of these feasts, referring us instead to 'underlying forces', and there is certainly no formal necessity for the adaptive dynamics of a human population to be directly experienced. However, Hayden does at various stages allude, in both the hosts and the guests, to the centrally active place of intentionality. The hosts are portrayed as promoting their political agendas, manipulating the malleable feelings and emotions of their guests. These same guests recognize their indebtedness, on which they will subsequently act, even to the extent of engaging in warfare. His participants seem a little schizophrenic, sometimes

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social persons actively immersed in the emotion, the drama and the spectacle of the moment, but at the same time sentient biological organisms at the 'driving seat' on a deeper Darwinian journey.

I have never felt comfortable with the separation between social person and biological organism that seems the consequence of following either a cultural or an evolutionary explanation. It may be true that some aspects of studying humanity lend themselves reasonably comfortably to that separation, but sharing food does not, at the elaborate feast, just as at the modest meal, social person and biological organism are inseparable. In working towards my recent book (Jones 2007), I became increasingly sceptical about treating the elaborate feast as a separate category. From the largest feast to the most solitary consumption, it would seem we humans achieve two things simultaneously, our nutrition as biological organisms and our constitution as social persons. This, I would argue, is equally true of the multitudes assembled to devour the 4300 beasts at Bronze Age Kerma as it is of the solitary fast food diner in front of the television screen.

When we share food, with our family, our friends, thousands of feasters or millions of TV watchers, we simultaneously and consciously put our worlds in order at a whole variety of different levels. At the most local level, we put our bodies in order, supplying our tissues with the right elements, and keeping the wrong elements outside. We put our family in order, delineating who is kin and who is stranger, and similarly our tribe in order. At a different level still, we put our spiritual worlds in order through sharing food, acknowledging deities and ancestors, separating order and purity from chaos and danger.

The two contrasting explanatory stances indicated in Hayden's article each seek out a singular level to drive the entire system; the contrast is that they settle for different levels. To me that seems neither necessary in explanatory terms, nor appropriate in representational terms. The wonderfully complex, multi-layer process of sharing food neither needs nor has a single driver; it can endure, iterate and collapse in a variety of ways. A further scrutiny of the enlightening examples of elaborate feasts that Hayden has brought together, in significant part through his own fieldwork, would no doubt reveal many examples of all that happening. I am grateful for the rich harvest of evidence he brings to our attention. I don't feel the need or advantage of containing that within a singular explanatory template, be it a Darwinian analysis of the biological organism, or a cultural analysis of the social person.

From Christine A. Hastorf, Department of Anthropology, University of California-Berkeley, 232 Kroeber Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-3710, USA; hastorf@berkeley.edu.

Feasts are an important social event in communities, both past and present. Who has not awaited a feast with anticipation, if not for the food then the people they will see? Hayden visits this topic again in this paper, building on his earlier (2001c) work on feasts. Here he is focusing on the funeral feasts in what he calls transegalitarian societies, small self-identifying groups. There is no doubt that in many groups of intermediate size, funerals have been an important moment of coming together, where social relations are realigned and society is renewed, where sorrow is expressed and status is demonstrated. Hayden clearly outlines a range of engaging aspects of these feasts, their unique magnificence, their economic drain on families, and their locus for status gain. But his main thrust is that these events in the end are launched to promote the host's position within their society, and that they are deeply political in nature. This directive constrains our views of people's actions however and makes us equate all feasts. I am not sure all funerals were to promote the power of the family. I think that other social and familial urges drive some of these large and small funeral feasts, including sorrow, closure and mourning.

Many feasts are political in nature, clearly performative, expensive events that can be transformative. Such feasts cost a lot of money and supplies, where many people will dedicate much effort in the planning. These events trigger multiple meanings that operate at many levels for each person who attends. Status maintenance, political position, marriage partners are goals of feasts as Hayden notes, but not of every feast and perhaps not every funeral feast focuses on the dead family. Hayden provides wonderful images of funeral feasts that evoke the large pig feasts of Highland New Guinea as discussed in Roy Rappaport's famous book, *Pigs for the Ancestors* (1967). That feast was linked to war and boundary disputes. And in many ways these Indonesian performative feasts strike a cord, being part of all societies, no matter what the size, from state processions to family wakes.

What this article proposes, however, is that there is a broad communality to all feasts, with their political goals, as if funeral feasts function like other feasts. Hayden stresses the western rationalities of these functions, the goods and surplus labour expenditure that can be transformed into status and position. Funeral feasts surely can operate across many broad dynamics, but these feasts also honour the loss of someone. Sorrow

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makes people do many things. Humans are sorrowful about the death of a loved one, look at the reaction of the USA after 9/11 and England after 7/11, there were many events that transpired due to sorrow over the death of so many in New York City and in London. Anthropologists have also noted that funeral feasts are forms of ritualized sorrow. Sometimes they are not for social gain but solely for social communion.

Feasts are important nexes for social realignment of both inscribed and incorporated meanings, and thus are events that we archaeologists love to be able to identify. In the details presented here we can see the materialization of these events, building, platforms, pits and burials. But these events do not only hold political and economic gain, they also hold the roots of loss. Just because a great deal of effort goes into these funerals does not mean that there is political gain. Mike Parker Pearson (1982) noted that gypsies hosted very elaborate funerals and gravestones that did not seem to shift their political position within English society.

The desired impacts of such social and highly charged feasts can vary wildly as these events can never be orchestrated perfectly. Performance always adds an unknown edge to the outcome. Slippage can occur as Warren DeBoer (2001) demonstrates at Shipibo feasts where a little too much drink and dancing promotes fist-a-cuffs all around. Fights over inheritance, anger with succession often break out in the thick of loss and emotion, leading to permanent rifts that had not been present previously. My point is that I sense that the article started out with a multi-valiant tone to these feasts in their cultural setting but turned in the end to the cultural materialistic, political aggrandizement message of self-interest and alliance building that is associated with corporate businesses. In fact the corporate business use of feasts is his final topic.

A point Hayden mentions that does deserve further discussion is how debt participates in funeral feasts. Feasts are a locus for indebtedness at many levels, by the attendees who come to eat and mourn, but equally important are the debts called in to attain the food required to host these larger feasts. All members of the family rally to the cause of honouring the dead. Returning to Marcel Mauss and the theme of debt and gifting leads us to the basis of society, the social universe of give and take. Mauss (1980) placed these interactions centre stage in society in that they allowed for moments where people could interact and renew their bonds. Like inalienable possessions described so eloquently by Annette Weiner (1992), memories and histories of debts keep the system going. This is also part of why some groups honour the dead so much. Many people see the dead not just as ancestors but also as the proprietors of important resources, resources that the living depend upon. While Hayden focuses on the impact of funeral feasts on the living, in many groups, it is their impact on the dead that is important. For if the dead are content with gifts of food, then they will reciprocate and send good harvests, wild animals to hunt and rain. This social and political relationship of give and take is not brought into Hayden's equation and for many, this relationship is the reason why some societies expend so much effort on the funeral, making it not just a subset of all feasts but a special type of performative ritual.

From Ryan Rabett, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3ER, UK; rjr21@cam.ac.uk.

In this article Hayden sets out to use ethnographic evidence — a considerable proportion of which coming from his own fieldwork and that of his students — to assess the social significance of extremely lavish funeral feasts. He also provides evidence to support his contention that this type of funeral feast is potentially a product of 'basic underlying forces' within transegalitarian societies. Key to his thesis is the linkage between lavish feasts and their appearance at certain, generally infrequent, types of funeral in transegalitarian societies.

Hayden establishes that there is considerable social mileage to be gained by hosting and participating in large-scale feasts in general within such societies, noting that they are often 'critical in obtaining political, social and economic advantages in traditional communities'. He then places the most lavish funerals (and funeral feasts) into context; situating them in relation to a range of less ostentatious, but more frequent funeral types found in transegalitarian societies. Three characteristics of lavish funeral feasts are listed and their potential as archaeological markers is noted. These characteristics are:

1. the killing of often large numbers of domestic animals as a display of wealth;
2. competition between families through such displays;
3. efforts to extend the sphere of a family's influence by inviting and feeding people from as wide a catchment area as possible.

Although it is recognized that lavishness of funeral feasts has value as a signalling device in self-promotion, Hayden argues that this alone does not adequately address the reciprocity and social bonding that these particular funeral feasts also embody. These latter two features he explores by looking at

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the importance of creating and maintaining successful relationships at all levels within transegalitarian societies. However, after a considerable portion of the article has been put over to a detailed and wide-ranging ethnographic discussion, the central question still remains, why should funerals be the most appropriate venue for such feasting events and their associated displays and reciprocal obligations?

Hayden argues that the opportunity and structure for building and extending social influence is already in place in funeral situations, and it is this which makes them an ideal setting. Death and grieving tend to affect people's emotions profoundly and potentially places them at their most susceptible to persuasion and the promotion of socio-political agenda. I have concerns about this justification for three reasons. Firstly, there is a worrying circular sense to the argument. The funeral structure provides the best context for advancing, social promotion, but is itself defined by these acts of social promotion. Secondly, it seems unlikely that these features would be confined to one type of funeral gathering. Promotion, alliance formation and reciprocity are every bit as important in any hunter-gatherer society. Thirdly, the reasoning that Hayden is presenting is not exclusive to funerals, but is arguably available during any rite of intensification. The same social promotion, alliance and reciprocity (be that by exchange of goods or exchange of allegiance for fortune) objectives apply. I am not suggesting that his wider thesis is wrong, only that I have concerns about the strength of the arguments he raises to validate it.

One element that gets surprisingly little attention in this otherwise thorough discussion, and which has critical bearing on the significance of funeral proceedings, is the place and status of the deceased. Without the deceased, there is no funeral. The absence of any treatment about the place of the deceased in the context of lavish funeral feasting is a key point that weakens Hayden's argument. If the aim of the article is to help understand the importance of such funeral feasts, compared to other types of funeral within transegalitarian societies, or against those in egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies, then the social status of the body (in life and in death) must surely be considered. If transegalitarian societies are defined by characteristics of ownership — manifesting both in the spheres of access to resources and accumulation of products derived from them — and thus also evidence of prestige goods and of social inequality, how does this affect the nature of the social individual? One might argue that in a socio-economic environment where wealth is signified by material accumulation, the deceased becomes a material resource in its own right. In life, a person is a materialized means of storing wealth, different but parallel to other forms of accumulation. In death, that stored potential is now released (cashed in). It becomes the reason for organizing an extremely lavish funeral feast and by extension the opportunity for a family to promote itself and create or reinforce alliances. Within transegalitarian societies, the certainty of death (and the dead body) may, in effect, become an insurance policy against the constriction of social influence.

While the analysis and interpretation of burial evidence has formed a rich sub-field within archaeology for decades, attention to the social dynamics that underlie the funeral feasting, particularly in later prehistory, has received comparatively less consideration. One of the reasons for this, Hayden suggests in this article, lies in the fact that the social importance of extravagant funerals is poorly understood. He proposes that the extremely lavish funeral feasts that occur in many transegalitarian societies are best explained not as economically irrational cultural events, but rather as venues for social promotion and sanctioned displays of wealth. They are a crucial axis around which key social alliances are formed or maintained. This makes them not only very worthy of archaeologists' attention, but also of considerable importance in their efforts to reverse-engineer past social mechanisms from burial evidence. While I question some of the reasoning behind the importance of lavish funeral feasts presented in this article, I feel that future refinements and the identification of associated, archaeologically visible, markers will provide an important new dimension to funereal study.

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Hayden presents a persuasive thesis outlining the socially competitive nature of extremely lavish funerary feasts. It is broad in scope and generalizing in approach, offering a valuable comparative perspective on socio-economic promotion at funeral feasts. In reading the article I found myself thinking about the phenomena of ELFFs in comparison with other events and as arenas for social relations. I offer some questions and comments on these topics here.

Hayden's explanation that lavishness of funeral feasts depends on the current relations that the lineage enjoys with others is a refreshing change from explanations based on the rank of the deceased individual, and provides important emphasis on collective agency.

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Hayden's insight that not every person or every generation among societies practising ELFFs receives notable funerals strikes a chord with me: throughout British prehistory most of the dead have left little trace, but even among those interred in cists, cairns or barrows not all are marked as being of a high status and the same monument is often shared by several bodies (including cases where round barrows are constructed after several graves are filled). While funerary sites are relatively common in Neolithic and early Bronze Age Britain, evidence for feasting is rarer. To an extent this is due to issues of deposition and preservation. But it would be interesting, in light of Hayden's article, to review the evidence for how often feasts in the British Neolithic, say, accompanied funerals compared with those which did not. As well as lavish feasts there were massive building projects for which we can reasonably expect a work-force was fed and which formed arenas for large-scale socio-political interaction including feasts. Some of these monuments do not contain any burial chambers, graves or human remains. To what extent are ELFFs absolutely different than other means of 'socioeconomic promotion' including smaller-scale funerals, other extremely lavish feasts, or the construction of monuments which are not funerary in nature? While prehistoric acts of feasting and monument construction might be examples of '…alternative means [that] could have been employed to achieve the same (inferred) goals…', and while in some cases the funerary evidence has not survived or its relationship to the feasting is ambiguous, the boundaries between less extravagant mortuary rites, ELFFs and other extremely lavish feasts or large ceremonial gatherings where prestige was negotiated are worth further consideration. Rather than seeing ELFFs as always a discrete phenomenon, perhaps it would be fruitful for archaeologists to explore how, where and when funerals, ancestral veneration, monument construction, calendar rites and so on became separate from one another or merged, became intimately associated with lavish feasts, and when the relative emphasis on each of these spheres of activity shifted.

To a certain extent it seems that the difference between ELFFs and ordinary funeral feasts is a matter of scale rather than of a fundamentally different set of rites. If the premise is that the larger and more lavish the event the greater the social scale involved, then much the same kind of outcome might be achieved by something like a *moka* ceremony as by a funeral. Should we not see funeral feasts as integrated within a system of exchanges and transformations, alongside marriages and celebrations of puberty rites, for instance (cf. Barraud *et al.* 1994)? As Hayden recognizes, ELFFs may well develop in order to promote relationships which can support extremely lavish marriage feasts. *When* the most lavish event of a person's existence occurs (including after their death) would also seem important as an indicator of the social and cultural milieu and the opportunities for individual aggrandizement during life. Are different kinds of mortuary practices, different treatments of human remains, as well as the details of what food, what gifts are given to whom, not significant to understanding how social relations are transformed in these contexts? It would be interesting to explore the role of durable gifts at ELFFs compared to other exchange arenas, for instance. As for the significance of the funeral at the feast, Hayden posits the emotional force of grief as key to the special and politically-malleable potency of the funerary sphere. This may be correct, but if so we could ask *why* that is so different from the emotive force of joy, for instance. Is Hayden also suggesting here that ELFFs 'win out' against other arenas of prestige negotiation? Further comparative reflection on the emotive force (and range of emotions) at various large gatherings, rites of passage, and events where the ancestral dead are collectively venerated, and comparison of the ways that people try to channel these emotions, would help resolve whether there is variation in how prestige is negotiated through different evocative events.

I would question whether there is necessarily a conflict between interpretations that couch ELFFs in terms of 'culture values or traditions' and those which view them as 'socio-economic promotion'. The presence of generalizing arguments does not necessarily invalidate other, particular and contextual, interpretations — both have value. Those vying for position may attempt to demonstrate their probity with respect to traditional values and practices (indeed, Hayden illustrates how devotion to the dead through a lavish funeral may 'shield' the host from accusations of self-aggrandisement). The extent to which Hayden stresses competitiveness and 'socio-economic promotion' overshadows other aspects of human behaviour with which these co-exist in tension, such as conviviality and sociality. Many anthropologists examine the active constitution of persons and communities through prestigious gift exchanges, feasts and rites of passage. Rather than seeing these as simply arenas for signalling existing identity, such arenas are interpreted as vital to the constitution of personal identity in relation to others and in relation to social values (see, for instance, Battaglia 1990; Munn 1986; Strathern 1988). Acts of donation can be seen as acknowledgements of debt or gratitude to the wider community who played a key part in

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constituting the identity of the deceased (in the case of funerary rites) and are instrumental in the construction of the host community itself (e.g. through economic interactions, through marriages, through past political support). Hayden acknowledges the force of debt, but focuses on indebtedness to the feast hosts rather than *their* senses of gratitude, their senses of sociality, social duty and pre-existing indebtedness to others who had played a part in the constitution of the lineage, or their indebtedness to creditors as they raise resources for the event. Indeed, I wondered whether it was significant to whom families indebted themselves when they borrowed extensively in preparing for ELFFs. Does taking out a debt open up new social relations with the creditors, and could this redirect the interactions of a lineage in a new way, even tying them in to new (unwanted) obligations? How often are ELFFs successful in lineage promotion, and do all members of society perceive the results of ELFFs in the same way?

As a whole I agree with Hayden's argument that engaging in ELFFs makes good sense to the protagonists, and it is clear that social competition occurs in these arenas. Events at which prestations occur, including feasts, may be seen as key to building and acknowledging a variety of social relationships just as they can support socio-economic promotion for the hosts. I think that it is vital to consider how ELFFs co-exist with other arenas for social interaction within their cultural contexts. There are other relations of give and take and other large-scale events to be considered alongside ELFFs (e.g. acts of charity, feasts in honour of guests, communal festivals). How ELFFs relate to differing economic regimes, differing beliefs about death and the cosmos, other important socio-cultural events such as rites of passage and other feasts, and different ideologies of self and society, seems significant. Different forms of socio-political interaction, including different kinds of competition, involved in certain types of feasting are also important (e.g. 'entrepreneurial', 'patron-role' and 'diacritical' feasting: Dietler 1996). Such considerations may help in differentiating common ways in which ELFFs are effective in socioeconomic promotion compared with other social arenas, and further situate specific ELFFs within their cultural contexts. This, to my mind, is the intriguing challenge Hayden's article presents to us.

Reply from Hayden

I thank the commentators for their additional insights into funeral feasts, and I am grateful for their general recognition of the importance of this topic. I concur with Jones's sentiment that it would be wonderful to use hard field data to document a linkage between this kind of feasting and survival/reproductive success, as well as Fowler's notion that such feasting should be situated in broader contexts of varying economic regimes, beliefs about death, other types of feasts, and other arenas of social interaction. However, this article was simply meant as an initial step in proposing a broader program of investigation. As such, I felt that it was first necessary to recognize and to define a key phenomenon (excessively lavish funeral feasting) that appears critical for understanding the social, economic and political dynamics that underlie some important aspects of past and present transegalitarian cultures. Once this foundation has been established, it should be possible to examine other linkages and variations in more detail. Whether taking these successive steps may be possible among living traditional societies (due to globalization and other disruptions of traditional cultures) is an empirical issue, as well as a function of research-funding priorities. So we get what information we can with the funding available and try to understand what is actually transpiring in traditional cultures as best we can.

The major difference between my perspective and those of some commentators (Hastorf and Jones in particular) revolves around the importance of non-economic or practical motivations for holding funeral feasts. I would like to make it very clear that I fully recognize the importance of grief, sorrow, closure, and various cultural beliefs in understanding human behaviour, including many aspects of funeral feasts. It is true, as Hastorf rightly emphasizes, that sorrow and grieving form a part of funeral rituals in general, and can account for many specific and general aspects of funerals. Where we differ, I think, is in recognizing types of behaviour that go well beyond the ability of these factors to account for such behaviour. There are multiple facets to funeral feasts, but if we want to understand specific components, we need to ask very specific questions. The point I tried to make in this article is that the extreme expense, effort and planning involved in ELFFs does, in fact, go well beyond what grief, sorrow, or simple cultural beliefs (lacking major practical entailments) are capable of explaining by themselves. Moreover, the widespread occurrence, the social pressures to engage in ELFF displays, their manifestly competitive nature, and their persistence over the millennia all indicate that something much more fundamental than grief is at play on a cross-cultural level.

Undoubtedly, within the range of human variation of any large population, there could be a few wealthy people that might be so aggrieved that they

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might liquidate all of their holdings as part of a rejection of this life and materialism, as Hastorf seems to suggest. However, archaeology deals primarily with major trends rather than idiosyncratic episodes or unusual individual variants. While prehistorians can model the general forces (economic or political) behind major trends and predict frequencies of idiosyncratic occurrences (extreme grief), we cannot really identify these idiosyncratic motivations within more general trends when they have the same material equifinality as the general trends.

Ethnographically, people hold large feasts, including funeral feasts, for specific reasons. They carefully plan some of them for years and invest heavily in them as part of various strategies. They are *not* simply spontaneous outpourings of grief or joy. Frequently, ELFFs occur years after an actual death, when grief might be assumed to have largely abated.

Moreover, cultural values involving ancestors should be viewed as concepts that benefit only some individuals (especially lineage heads, elders, and males). The key question is how those who benefit from (and who presumably invent and promote) concepts such as powerful, beneficent, or wrathful ancestors manage to get others to believe in them or at least acquiesce to public claims for their existence and their power. Exceptional personal charisma may account for sporadic occurrences, but not for persistent patterns, especially when high costs are involved and sceptics constantly act to undermine such claims. My research has shown that there is great variability in beliefs in traditional communities with at least 10–20 per cent of residents not accepting even such 'core' beliefs as: ancestors who can bestow fertility or wealth or who can punish social offenders; or elder sons who have innate priorities; or powerful spirits that inhabit the chests of claimants; or even the very existence of heaven or spirits (Hayden 2003, 15–18). Thus, some other leverage or benefit is required to have these supernatural claims adopted and to maintain them as part of community traditions. Feasting and the debts they create seem to be key elements.

To answer Fowler's query, it is apparent that not all members of society perceive the results or activities of ELFFs (or other events/concepts/values) in the same way. There is a strong tendency to view and interpret them according to individual or factional self-interests, especially in the context of village power politics. This result is one of the great benefits of conducting systematic household survey research in ethnoarchaeological projects such as those that I have developed in Mesoamerica and Southeast Asia. I cannot emphasize its importance enough for documenting and understanding the full range of cognitive and behavioural variability in these communities. I would also mention in response to Jones's qualms about the 'schizophrenic' nature of feasting actors in my portrayals, that a great deal of the power politics in transegalitarian villages are understated and implicit. These villagers nominally adhere to an egalitarian ethic, and gross contraventions of this ethic adversely affects support and allies. Nevertheless, everyone implicitly recognizes which lineage heads are the real power brokers and what the real consequences are when a family is viewed as vulnerable to predatory interests; and they act accordingly. So, to avoid public censure, people justify their competitive and alliance-forming actions publicly in other terms, like feasts for the dead or 'curing' feasts for individuals who are not sick.

From my palaeo-political ecology perspective, removing responsibility for debts from the living to the dead, as Hastorf would have it, should be viewed as a ploy by one of the community factions to advance their own interests. The assumption that these are cultural values that develop on their own and somehow achieve widespread acceptance strikes me as a romantic Boasian view of traditional village life. In my experience, village politics and economics stay close to the self-interests of most households and are rife with brutality for the marginalized or unsupported (recall the hundreds of Bronze and Iron Age European bog bodies and graphic descriptions of conflict in the village ethnographic accounts of Condominas and Chagnon). Hence, the critical importance of holding impressive feasts, reciprocating feast debts, establishing social 'status', and avoiding giving the impression of being weak or vulnerable, i.e. without social or political support.

Once these feasting practices become established, or at least large segments of communities acquiesce to their performance, they do become part of the cultural traditions. However, it also appears that accepted beliefs and practices are constantly being reassessed by sceptical individuals or rival factions and modified accordingly as is evident from the fundamental changes so prevalent today.

Thus, the emphasis is, and should be, on the surviving social units that host the feasts rather than on the deceased, although this is certainly important for understanding other aspects of funerals. I do make at least passing mention of the social status of the deceased (usually prominent members of social units, but not always; even children or lesser lineage members can be used to flaunt lineage power if circumstances are favourable). Yet, as Rabett phrases it, the ongoing corporate members basically use the

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deceased as a material resource (beginning with ELFFs) in part as 'an insurance policy against the constriction of social influence' and in part to acquire social and economic advantages in relation to others.

While Hastorf feels that my analysis gives the impression that 'funeral feasts must function like other feasts', this is not what I had intended. In fact, I have been at considerable pains in both this article and my other publications to emphasize the diversity of types of feasts (including a diversity of goals within feast types — funerals of the poor are different from lavish funerals; hosts often have more than one agenda they are pursuing), and the diversity of goals behind general feast types, whether for solidarity, alliances, marshalling labour, group promotion, or other objectives. On the other hand, as Fowler and Rabett note, pretexts other than funerals for achieving certain goals via feasts can, and often do, serve very similar functions as ELFFs. I made this same point, and as examples, I cited marriage and house endowment feasts (installing prestige items, carving house fronts, etc.), but the *moka* exchanges and puberty rites noted by Fowler also provide good cases. This comparative perspective is *not* at all meant to lead researcher 'to equate all feasts' (*contra* Hastorf's impression).

Fowler's additional suggestion is welcome to the effect that other emotions such as joy may play a similar manipulative role as grief in these other large lavish feast types (marriage, puberty rites, and house endowments in particular) and could serve to distinguish these from funeral feasts in terms of the emotions exploited at events to help achieve specific goals. I would not say that ELFFs 'win out' over other arenas; they are simply one of several major strategies employed, when the occasions permit, to achieve specific social and political goals.

The potential for conflict at large events that Hastorf mentions is simply part of the factional political dynamics of transegalitarian communities in general, as are the webs of debt involved in maintaining those factions. Such outbreaks are not uncommon at feasts and typically have been simmering between individuals or factions for years.

From my ethnnoarchaeological research, I would agree with Jones that there are common social, biological, and cultural elements in all meals, including feasts, and that sharing food has a variety of 'drivers'. However, I would insist that there are unique characteristics (quantitative and qualitative) that clearly set ELFFs apart from individual or routine meals. It seems to me difficult, if not impossible, to understand the display and competitive aspects of ELFFs from the perspective of individual or routine traditional meals. Some grey cases almost certainly occur, especially in industrial contexts where consumer wealth is rampant (including lavish dining even for solitary restauranteurs) resulting in the blurring of more traditional feasting characteristics.

Finally, I emphatically agree that indebtedness pervades not only the hosts, but all the major players in sponsoring the ELFFs and that this web of indebtedness is structured largely by pre-existing social relationships (almost always involving debts), but is also structured by desires to establish new relationships with other social units, which can indeed sometimes be unwelcome or unaffordable. If one compares the number of animals sacrificed at Torajan funerals to the number of pigs and water buffaloes owned by households, it is apparent that the average household must borrow up to 9–11 pigs and 1–2 water buffaloes for hosting funerals (Adams 2001, 82–3, fig. 4.44). One last clarification for archaeological applications is that funeral feasting, or the bulk of it, often does not happen at grave sites. In Southeast Asia, the great ELFFs commonly take place at the residence of the deceased some distance from the actual burial ground.

I would like to thank all the commentators for the opportunity to refine some of these discussions and for helping to give future investigations of funerary feasts a push along productive pathways.

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