

## What Mauss Did Not Say: Things You Give, Things You Sell, and Things That Must Be Kept

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I began my anthropological career teaching economic anthropology in 1962. I had just been made a lecturer under Claude Lévi-Strauss. Before that, however, I had studied philosophy and had been haunted by the question: How can one compare social and economic systems, if such systems exist? At the time, two systems were vying for world domination: the capitalist system and the socialist system, which emerged in Russia in the early twentieth century and had rapidly expanded not only to China but also to Cuba. After receiving my doctorate in philosophy, I had gone into economics and even learned the rudiments of mathematical economics. In reality, I had come to ask myself three questions, which were to be the starting point of my migration to anthropology: On what conditions can economic systems be “compared”? How can one account for their appearance and then disappearance in the course of history? In what way does the Western notion of “economic rationality” enable social systems to be compared?

It was—oddly enough, it may be said—in the hope of finding answers to these questions that I turned to anthropology. For the economists—both the liberal and the Marxist varieties—had what seemed to me too ideological or too narrow a way of formulating these questions, nor was I overly convinced by the historians’ accounts of the reasons for the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. It seemed to me that it would be more productive to study the economic systems of contemporary living societies organized

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according to social and cultural logics that were fundamentally different from Western logic, even if they were subordinate to the West. It was then that I met Claude Lévi-Strauss. I had just published three articles in the journal *Économie Politique* (Godelier 1960a, 1960b, 1961). These were my first articles on the notion of "structure" in Marx's *Capital*, and I had sent them to Lévi-Strauss, whom I did not know personally at the time. He wrote me a note saying that he had found these texts most interesting and all the more so because, as a young man, before preparing the agrégation in philosophy, he had written an essay on the same topic: "The Logic of Marx's *Capital*." At the suggestion of Fernand Braudel, I met Lévi-Strauss and explained my desire to become an anthropologist and my reasons. He invited me to join his laboratory at the Collège de France. He joked that I could work "on infrastructures" and do a survey of all the material gathered by anthropologists on the economy of primitive societies.

So it was in 1963 that I began, as almost the only person in France, to explore this field. In the United States, on the other hand, many were already working in this area, disciples of Karl Polanyi, who opposed the "formalists" like R. Firth and Schneider. I began to lay out an anthropology of the systems of production, systems of distribution, and primitive moneys. At the time, Lévi-Strauss had gone back to one of Marx's ideas, that of the existence of so-called structural correspondences that "must" exist between economic, kinship, and religious structures. This was an overarching theoretical view of societies. Today, forty years later, there does not seem to be any structural correspondence between kinship, religion, and the various systems of production that have succeeded each other over time. If such a correspondence exists, I have not seen it demonstrated either in the works of my colleagues or in the field among the Baruya of New Guinea.

To give an example, I of course observed that the Baruya had strategies for saving, not on their working time, which was not a scarce resource, but on the effort expended in clearing primary forest for gardens. In this region of high mountains, they usually chose to cut halfway through the medium- and small-sized trees standing downhill from a forest giant. Then they would cut clear through the trunk of one, which would finish off their work for them by taking down the rest of the trees as it fell. This strategy was typical of certain aspects of their labor process, but it told me nothing about the social relations organizing this labor process. It told me nothing about the social relations by means of

which the Baruya control access to land and redistribute it among themselves for horticultural or hunting purposes. Nor did it tell me anything about the division of labor or about the rules the Baruya follow when redistributing the products of their labor. In the field I saw that the social relations that organized the production of their means of subsistence and their means of exchange were in fact their kinship relations and at the same time the political relations that defined the place of each clan within the tribe. This corresponded to the very un-Marxist idea that, depending on the epoch and the society, certain kinds of social relations can operate as relations of production, thus performing, as Marx would say, the twin functions of infrastructure and superstructure.

But what had also struck me about the Baruya was that they produced a salt money that enabled them to obtain a whole series of objects necessary to the organization of their society. The salt was exchanged for the polished stones used to make their adzes, and therefore for means of production. But it was also exchanged for means of destruction: arrows made by their neighbors. Finally, it was exchanged for bird-of-paradise feathers or cowry shells—that is, for the components necessary to the social reproduction of the status of the initiated men. In short, the Baruya's economy was part of a regional economy. Even on this scale, there was no such thing as a purely local economy, and it found in other neighboring societies, within a regional division of production, some of the conditions of its own reproduction. And for this to work, the societies had to exchange. Salt served as an exchange currency and circulated from one group to another as a good. But within the Baruya group itself, salt was never exchanged. It was redistributed as part of the gifts exchanged by kin and affines. This meant that even lineages that did not possess salt-producing lands had salt to exchange [products]. Salt, a gift object for the Baruya, became a commodity that detached itself from the person of its owner and became totally alienated when it entered the goods circuit at the regional economic level. But material and economic dependence between groups did not explain the internal organization of these groups, what made them a local society, a whole that must reproduce itself as such. In fact I realized that the two aspects of their economy—the organization within the group of the production and distribution of the means of the everyday existence of the lineages and families, and the organization of the exchanges with outside groups—could not explain what made the Baruya society a whole, and a whole that had to be reproduced and reproduced as such.

What made this society a whole was not its economic relations. It was the system of political and religious dependencies linking all the lineages and clans, and the system that set these dependencies in motion was the system of male and female initiations. It was there, in those practices, a portion of which were addressed to what for us are imaginary realities, that the Baruya affirmed themselves in the eyes of others as a society. But these were not the only practices by which they affirmed themselves; they also affirmed themselves by claiming sovereignty over a territory that they had divided among themselves and that they defended weapons in hand.

My fieldwork had thus brought me face-to-face with commercial forms of exchange, with noncommercial gifts and counter-gifts, and with sacred objects used in ceremonies and which the Baruya would neither sell nor give to their neighbors. That is why, thirty years later, I have returned, not really to full-blown economic anthropology, but to that privileged domain of analysis we call "exchange." And that is why I have chosen to devote this chapter more generally to why there are some things one sells, others one gives, and yet others that can be neither sold nor given, but which must be kept and transmitted. It is clear that the reasons do not reside in the things themselves. The same object may successively be bought as a commodity, circulated in gift exchange, and ultimately hoarded in a clan treasure as a sacred object and as such withheld for a time from any form of circulation, commercial or noncommercial. Michel Rannoff (1969) showed this nicely in his study of the seashells used by the Maenge of southern New Britain.

In exploring this theme, my point of reference can be only one of the great moments in this history; Marcel Mauss's indispensable text, *The Gift* (1990). In a moment I will trace the context in which the essay was written, but first I would like to outline the three reasons that moved me to return to the analysis of these problems and to write a book, *The Enigma of the Gift* (1999). The first is what I discovered in the Baruya society; second, my twenty-year-long dialogue with Annette Weiner and my reading of her *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (1992); and finally, the globalization of the Western capitalist system. I will say a few words about each of these contexts.

The Baruya provided me with the example of a society that still practiced gift exchange—the exchange of women, for example—but that did not have potlatch. They also produced a sort of "currency commodity," salt, which they bartered with neighboring tribes for tools, weapons, feathers, and other

goods that they did not produce themselves. But salt was never used as money within Baruya society; there it circulated in the form of gifts. Finally, there were the sacred objects, which the Baruya treated with the utmost respect, the *kwainathie*, used in the boys' initiation ceremonies and presented as gifts from the gods to their ancestors, gifts that they might not give to other human beings.

Now for Annette Weiner. Our friendship dates back some twenty years to the publication of her *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (1976), which transformed the view we had inherited from Malinowski of the way society worked on Kiriwina. I wrote to her at that time, and she responded with an invitation to come to Austin. Thereafter we regularly exchanged papers and critiques, much to our mutual benefit. It was not only our interpretation of the *kula* that was renovated by her discovery of two notions with which Malinowski was unfamiliar: the notions of *kitoun* and *keda*. It was also, and especially, the fundamental role of women in this society, as she revealed it in her analysis of the notion of *dala*, the substance handed down by the founding female ancestors of the clan, an everlasting substance that circulated through the women and constituted the timeless identity of the clans. This was a dazzling demonstration that a feminist perspective on anthropology brings out the silences, the gaps, the distortions implied by all too often exclusively male observations that are unaware of the consequences this bias entails. But we are indebted to her for more than simply a new interpretation of one particular society. With the publication of her last book, *Inalienable Possessions* (1992), Annette Weiner initiated a reassessment of the whole problem of the interpretation of gift giving. She was the first to propose a different reading of Mauss, to seize upon some of his observations that had hitherto been left unanalyzed by his commentators, foremost among them Claude Lévi-Strauss. Annette Weiner's book triggered my desire to return to my material on the Baruya and to re-think the facts.

But this stimulus would not have sufficed without the third context, that of the Western capitalist societies with their widening gulf between the economy and society, their growing appeals for gifts, for generosity to plug the gaps, the tears in the social fabric. Gift giving is once again becoming a social necessity wherever the economy excludes millions of people, at a time when an earned income has become the general condition for one's material and social existence, where family and community solidarity have shrunk or broken down

altogether, and where the individual is isolated within the society by society. Exclusion from the economy quite simply means potential exclusion from society as a whole. In an era in which the idea that "everything is for sale," as the title of Robert Kuttner's book (1997) says, is rapidly gaining worldwide credence, it is urgent that historians and anthropologists begin to reexamine the place of noncommercial relations in market societies and to seek to determine whether there are realities essential to the life of societies that lie beyond the market and that will continue to do so.

These then are the three contexts that meshed and sparked my desire to re-explore the question of gift giving and to reread Mauss. But a rereading of Mauss is not necessarily a return to Mauss, for many of the facts reported in his book have not been analyzed, either by Mauss himself or by his commentators, and many of the questions he raised have gone unanswered, first of all by himself. But perhaps it would be helpful at this point to recall the climate in which Mauss wrote *The Gift*. It was immediately after the end of the First World War, in which Mauss had lost one-half of his friends. As a socialist, he had backed Jaurès, one of the leaders of the European socialist movement, who was assassinated for opposing the war. As a renowned academic, Mauss wrote a column for the popular weekly, *L'Humanité*. Again as a socialist, he had made a postwar visit to Russia, where the communists were building their power structure, and had come back hostile to Bolshevism for two reasons: because the Bolsheviks wanted to construct an economy that bypassed the market, and because they systematically used violence to transform society. But Mauss was most critical, in his essay, of liberalism, and he did not want society to become progressively imprisoned in what he called the "cold reasoning of the merchant, the banker, and the capitalist." In 1921, fifteen years before the Front Populaire swept to victory in France, he drew up a "social-democratic program" in which he called upon the state to provide workers with material assistance and social protection. But he also appealed to the rich and the powerful to demonstrate the kind of self-interested generosity that was practiced by the Melanesian chiefs and the Kwakiutl noblemen, and which had formerly been exercised in Europe by the ancient Celtic and Germanic noblemen. Furthermore, he considered that, even after centuries of Christianity, charity is "still wounding for him who has accepted it." So you see, there seems to be a continuity between our era of global world economy and the era that inspired Mauss.

What did giving mean for Mauss? It is an act that creates a double relationship between donor and recipient. To give is to share of one's own free will what one has or what one is. An obligatory gift is not a gift. A gift freely given brings the giver closer to the receiver. But at the same time, the gift creates a debt, an obligation, for the receiver. Giving does two things at once, then. It both reduces and creates distance between the two parties. It creates a dissymmetry, a hierarchy between giver and receiver. Thus, from the outset, Mauss set out the analytic principle that gift giving cannot be studied in isolation; it is part of a set of relations between individuals and groups that arises from the concatenation of three obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to accept the gift, and the obligation to reciprocate once one has accepted.

It was because he had defined the giving of a gift as the first link in a chain of acts whose structure must be analyzed as a whole that Lévi-Strauss celebrated Mauss as the precursor of structuralism, that is, as his own forerunner. But only a precursor, for, according to Lévi-Strauss, somewhere in the course of *The Gift*, Mauss had unfortunately lost sight of the methodological principles he had established at the outset and had mistaken for a general scientific explanation of the obligation to reciprocate what was actually a particular indigenous explanation: old Tamati Ranaiipiri's account to the anthropologist Elsdon Best of the Maori beliefs concerning the existence of a *hau* (spirit) in the thing given that compelled the receiver to give back the thing or something equivalent. In sum, according to Lévi-Strauss, Mauss had allowed himself to be "mystified" by a subtle and complex indigenous ideology; this was not the first time an anthropologist had fallen into such a trap.

Indeed there was a flaw in Mauss's reasoning, and Lévi-Strauss lost no time in seizing upon it, proposing instead another explanation of the notions of *hau* or *mana*, which he interpreted as "signifiers in their pure state" or "floating signifiers." For Lévi-Strauss, whenever the human mind is confronted with something it cannot explain, it invents empty concepts that directly manifest the unconscious structures of the mind and at the same time attest to the symbolic origin of society. In short, the notions of *mana*, *hau*, and *manitou* demonstrate the primacy of language and, on a deeper level, the primacy of the symbolic over the imaginary and the real. For Lévi-Strauss, symbols are ultimately even more real than the reality they symbolize. I think that, if I had to assign primacy, I would say that it is the imaginary that dominates the symbolic rather than the other way around. For sacred objects and valuables are

first and foremost objects of belief; their nature is imaginary before it is symbolic because these beliefs concern the nature and the sources of power and wealth, whose content has always been in part imaginary. The shells exchanged for a woman or given to compensate the death of a warrior are symbolic substitutes for human beings, the imaginary equivalents of a life and of life.

But where exactly is the flaw in Mauss's theory? In explaining the first two obligations, that of giving and that of accepting gifts, Mauss had advanced sociological reasons. One is obligated to give because giving creates obligations, and one is obligated to accept because to refuse a gift threatens to create a conflict with the giver. But when he came to the third obligation, that of reciprocating, Mauss offered another type of explanation, one that relied primarily on ideological reason and, in the case at hand, on mystical religious beliefs. What compels the receiver of a gift to reciprocate, he argued, is a force, the action of a "spirit" present in the thing received that compels it to return to its original owner. But the thing itself seems to have a soul as well, and therefore to exist as a person with the power to act on other persons. In short, by espousing these Maori beliefs, Mauss seems to have been trying to indicate that the thing given was not completely alienated, that it remained attached to its owner and was therefore at the same time both inalienable and alienated. How can this duality be explained?

Lévi-Strauss appealed to the unconscious structures of the mind, Mauss to the religious representations of societies. Perhaps the explanation lies in neither but in the fact that the thing given is invested with two legal principles at the same time: an inalienable right of ownership and an alienable right of use. This very interpretation is the one used by the Trobriand Islanders to explain the functioning of their ceremonial exchanges, the famous *kula*, which Mauss analyzed as the Melanesian counterpart of the American Indian potlatch. But Malinowski never discovered this explanation of the kula mechanism, and Mauss could not have known about it. We owe this discovery to Annette Weiner and to Frederick Damon, who began fieldwork in the 1960s in the Trobriand Islands and on Woodlark Island, respectively, two essential points in the kula ring, the set of exchange routes that connects a series of islands and societies in the New Guinea Massif region.

Before going on, I want to repeat that Mauss was not interested in all forms of gift exchange. He was concerned with what he called "total prestations,"

those exchanges involving whole groups or persons acting as representatives of these groups. Mauss was not interested in the gifts that a friend might make to a friend. Nor was he interested in the (imaginary) gift a god might make of his life in order to save mankind. He was interested in gifts that are socially necessary for producing and reproducing social relationships—kinship relations, ritual relations—in short, a certain number of the social conditions of the existence of the individuals and groups in a given society. As examples these gifts he cites gifts of women between clans, rites performed by one moiety of a society for the benefit of the other moiety, and so forth. Such prestations he qualifies as "total," a term that he uses to designate two different things: either the fact that gift giving has a *number of dimensions*—economic, political, religious, artistic—and therefore the act condenses many aspects of the society itself; or the fact that, by engendering a constant flow of counter-gifts, gift exchange mobilizes the wealth and energy of numerous groups and individuals, drawing the whole society into the movement and presenting itself as a mechanism and a moment that are essential to the reproduction of the society as a whole.

But Mauss emphasized something that we have forgotten, that there are two types of total prestation, one of which he called "non-agonistic" and the other "agonistic." However, he says almost nothing about the logic of non-agonistic prestations, and his book privileges the analysis of agonistic gift exchange, which he designated in a general way by a term borrowed from the Chinook language: potlatch.

Yet Mauss clearly indicated (something that is not usually mentioned) that the starting point of his analysis was non-agonistic gift exchange; but this departure point is not to be found in *The Gift*.<sup>1</sup> Rather we find it, for example, in his *Manuel d'ethnographie* (1947). There he cites the examples of the exchange of goods, rituals, names, and so forth between the groups and individuals of the two moieties of dualist societies. He mentions in passing the names of several Australian or North American tribes but without going into the particular logic of these gift exchanges. I will attempt to fill in this gap because, in the course of my fieldwork in New Guinea, I observed the exchange of women between the lineages and clans that make up the Baruya society in which I spent so many years.

The basic principle is familiar: one lineage gives a woman to another lineage, a man gives one of his real or classificatory sisters to another man, who in

turn gives him one of his own real or classificatory sisters. To all appearances, these reciprocal gifts should cancel the debt each created. But this is not the case. When a lineage gives a woman to another lineage, it creates a debt in the receiving lineage and finds itself in a relationship of superiority with respect to it. But when the first lineage in turn receives a woman, it now becomes indebted and of inferior status. Finally, at the close of these reciprocal exchanges, each lineage finds itself both superior and inferior to the other. Both are therefore once more on an equal footing, since each is at the same time in a superior and an inferior position with regard to the other. Thus counter-gifts do not cancel the debts created by gifts. They create new debts that counter-balance the earlier ones. According to this logic, the gifts constantly feed obligations, debts, thereby setting up a flow of services, mutual assistance, and reciprocal obligations of solidarity. These debts are never canceled or extinguished in one fell swoop; instead, they gradually die out over time.

These examples show that to give in turn does not mean to repay, which is hard for a Western mind to grasp. They also show how absurd it would be for a man to give two women for the one he had received. The end result of such non-agonistic gift exchanges is a relatively egalitarian redistribution of the resources available to the groups that make up the society, resources in the form of human beings (women and children), goods, labor, and services. According to this logic, a woman equals a woman, the death of one warrior is compensated by the death of another warrior, and so on. The sphere of equivalencies between objects and subjects, between material wealth and human beings—living or dead—remains restricted. It is no use amassing wealth to get women or women to accumulate wealth. Accumulating wealth and women does not enhance your name, therefore your influence, and therefore your power. We now see why this type of gift giving in New Guinea is often associated with the Great Man societies rather than with Big Man societies. In the latter, as the work of Andrew Strathern, Darryl Feil, and many others has taught us, the fame of a Big Man and his group depends on their continued success in a cycle of competitive ceremonial exchanges like the *moka*, the *teq*, and so forth.

The potlatch (and agonistic gift exchange in general) operates on an entirely different logic. Mauss emphasizes that the potlatch is a veritable "war of wealth" waged for the purpose of winning titles, ranks, and power, in which the spirit of competition dominates that of generosity. We are dealing, as he said, with another type of "economy and moral code dominated

by gift-giving." Using descriptions taken from Boas and older Russian and Canadian authors, Mauss shows that potlatches were given to legitimize the transmission of a title that had already been acquired or to obtain the recognition of one's right to acquire it. The potlatch is therefore an exercise in power that entails accumulating massive quantities of valuables and subsistence goods in order to redistribute them in a splurge of ceremonial feasting and competition. At the outset there are several competing clans and their chiefs, but at the finish line there is only one winner, at least until another clan can mount a challenge with an even bigger potlatch. This is no longer the logic of non-agonistic gift exchanges that end in the relatively equal distribution of the resources necessary to the reproduction of the social groups involved. Another difference is that a potlatch debt can be cancelled by a counter-gift; a debt is canceled when a man gives more than he has received, and the ideal is for a clan ultimately to give so much that no one can reciprocate and it stands alone, unrivaled. Once again we see that debt is an essential component of the logic of gift exchange. And in the potlatch it is the very goal. But as a debt can be canceled by a greater counter-gift, which in turn creates a new debt, a whirlpool movement is set up that produces a relentless escalation of gifts and counter-gifts, thereby sucking the entire society into the spiral.

This is a rough outline of Mauss's analysis of the potlatch. However, in his text we find some facts that he did not investigate and that his commentators have not mentioned. For instance, in a footnote he states that the best Kwakiwlt coppers, like their greatest titles, "do not go outside of the clans and tribes" and were never entered in potlatch. They were kept in the treasure of the clan, whereas the other coppers—the greater number—that circulated in the potlatches had less value and seemed to "serve as satellites for the first kind." Of all those who commented on this text, only Annette Weiner pointed out the importance of these observations, in her *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (1992). This point, which no one else had seen as a problem, in fact altered the whole perspective on those things that could be given or sold, since it introduced the category of things that must neither be sold nor given, but must be kept.

As we have seen, Mauss was trying to understand why a thing that has been given must be returned to the donor or must provoke the return of something equivalent. Already in 1921, while praising the richness of Malinowski's

ethnographic material, Mauss regretted that it did not cast much light on the gifts and counter-gifts exchanged in the kula. He writes:

Sociologically, it is once again the mixture of things, values, contracts, and men that is so expressed. Unfortunately, our knowledge of the legal rule that governs these transactions is defective. It is either an unconscious rule, imperfectly formulated by the Kiriwina people, Malinowski's informants; or, if it is clear for the Trobriand people, it should be the subject of a fresh enquiry. We only possess details. (Mauss 1990:26).

It is not certain that Mauss believed it was clear for the Trobriand people, for he speaks of their confusing categories. But his formulation of the problem was prophetic. The answer, however, came only with new research begun in the 1970s by Weiner, Frederick Damon, Nancy Munn, Jerry Leach, John Liep, and others and conducted in a dozen societies, all of which were part of the kula ring.

Their findings made us realize that the kula that Malinowski described as being practiced on Kiriwina was an exception and not the rule. On Kiriwina only the nobles may engage in kula, and not the commoners, who are thus deprived of the means of raising their status by success in kula exchanges. This is not the case in other kula-ring societies. But let us look once more at the way kula is conducted. The practice is to send an armband into circulation in the hope of obtaining in exchange a necklace of the same rank, or vice versa. Note that, in this game, it is never the same object or kind of object that takes the place of the object given. It is therefore impossible to argue that a spirit present in the thing compels the receiver of the gift to give it back to the original owner. Mauss regretted this, writing:

Malinowski has not found any mythical or other reasons for the direction of this circulation of the *wygi'a* [i.e., the valuables which circulate in the kula]. It would be very important to discover them. For if there was any reason for the orientation of these objects, so that they tended to return to their point of origin... the fact would be miraculously identical to the... the Maori hau. (Mauss 1990:102).

Unfortunately, that is not what was found. Malinowski had missed two key indigenous concepts that illuminate the kula exchanges and explain why the

owner appears to remain present in the object, even after it has been given. These two concepts are *kitoum* and *keda*. A kitoum is something owned by a lineage or even an individual: canoes, shells, stone ax blades, and the like. As kitoum, they can be used by their owners in various contexts and for different purposes. They can be used as compensation for the killing of an enemy, or as bridewealth, to obtain a wife; they can be exchanged for a large canoe, or sold to an American tourist, and so forth. But they can also be launched on a kula exchange path, a *keda*. Once a necklace is sent along a kula path and has left its owner's hands and comes into the possession of the first recipient, it becomes a *wygi'a*, an object that can no longer be used for any purpose other than kula exchanges. It continues to belong to the original giver, who can ask the temporary possessor to give it back, thus taking it out of kula. This practice never happens, but the fact that it is theoretically possible clearly indicates the relationship between the owner and original donor and the object he has given. What he ceded when he gave the object is not its ownership but the right to use it for making other gifts. None of those through whose hands the object will pass may use it as a kitoum and thus give it to compensate a killing or to procure a wife. And yet the object given never returns to its original owner, for what comes back in place of a necklace is an armband of equivalent rank, which has been ceded by someone who owned it and wanted to exchange it for a necklace. The armband then travels back along the chain of intermediaries until it finally reaches the necklace owner, who will appropriate it as a kitoum, which closes that particular exchange path (*keda*).

So there is indeed a legal rule that explains how valuables circulating in gift exchanges can be alienated and still be the inalienable property of their original donor. But what this rule does not explain is why it applies to valuables but not to sacred objects, which are often of the same nature as the valuables: rare shells or very old coppers, for example. And yet, like sacred objects, valuables are endowed with an imaginary value not to be confused with the labor invested in locating or manufacturing them or with their relative rareness. This imaginary value reflects the fact that they can be exchanged for a life, that they are made equivalent to human beings. The time has come, therefore, to cross the line that Mauss did not cross.

But before I take this step, I will conclude my analysis of the potlatch and other forms of agonistic gift exchanges by proposing the following hypothesis, which Mauss did not suggest, namely, that such forms of competition

emerge historically only if two sociological and ideological conditions are present and associated. First, marriage must no longer be based primarily on the direct exchange of women; this practice must have yielded to the generalized use of bridewealth, that is, the exchange of wealth for women. And second, some of the positions of power and prestige characteristic of a society, and therefore part of its political field, must be accessible through the redistribution, in the form of ceremonial gift exchanges, of wealth accumulated by the competing groups and individuals. When these two types of social relationships are combined within the same society, it seems that the conditions are present for the emergence of potlatch practices. Moreover, potlatch societies are not as numerous as Mauss imagined. He saw this as a widespread transitional economic system situated between primitive societies practicing non-agonistic gift exchange and market societies. To be sure, today we know of many more examples of ceremonial gift exchange than did Mauss—for example, in New Guinea, Asia, and so forth—but the number is still low and cannot be compared with the much more frequent presence of non-agonistic giving of gifts and counter-gifts.

This brings us to the things that must not be sold or given but must be kept—for example, sacred objects. Sacred objects are often presented as gifts, but gifts that the gods or the spirits are supposed to have given to the ancestors of men, and which their present-day descendants must keep safely stored away and must neither sell nor give. Consequently they are presented and experienced as an essential component of the identities of the groups and the individuals who have received them into their care. These groups and individuals may use them on their own behalf or for the benefit of all other members of the society. But they can also use them to inflict harm. Sacred objects are thus a source of power within and over society, and, unlike valuables, they are presented as being both inalienable and unalienated.

My fieldwork in New Guinea gave me numerous occasions to see the uses to which a sacred object might be put. Among the Baruya, a certain number of clans own *kwainatinie*. These are bundles containing objects that are never seen and that are wrapped in strips of red-colored bark, the color of the sun. The Baruya call themselves the “sons of the Sun.” The word *kwainatinie* comes from *kwala* (men) and *ninatinie* (to cause to grow). The *kwainatinie* are kept in a secret place in the house of the masters of the boys’ initiations. These masters represent the clans responsible for the different stages of the

initiation, which takes place over a period of more than ten years, ending with the boys’ marriage. At around the age of nine, the boys are torn away from their mothers and the world of women and sequestered in the men’s house at the top of the village. There they are introduced to various sacred objects: the flutes, the bull-roarers, and the *kwainatinie*. Later they learn that the flutes were originally owned by the women and that an ancestor of the men stole them. These flutes contained, and still contain, the powers women have to make children, even to make them without men. The bull-roarers are said to be objects that the *Yimaka*, the forest spirits, formerly gave an ancestor of the Baruya; they are supposed to contain powers of death: the power to kill game or enemy warriors.

Thus, in the sacred objects, the exclusive property of certain clans that only a few men may touch or handle, are conjoined two types of powers: women’s powers, powers of life that the men are supposed (imaginarily) to have expropriated; and men’s powers, powers of death and war received directly from the forest spirits. But in the eyes of the Baruya, women still own the powers of which they were dispossessed by men, even if they are no longer able to use them. This is why men must resort to violence to separate the boys from the women’s world and initiate them into the secrets of these powers they have appropriated from women. Baruya men justify this expropriation by telling how the first women did not use their powers for the good of society. They killed too much game, for instance, and caused many kinds of disorder. The men had to intervene and dispossess them of their powers so that society and the cosmos might be restored to order.

Finally, a sacred object is a material object that represents the non-representable, which refers men back to the origin of things and attests to the legitimacy of the cosmic and social order that replaced the primal time and its events. A sacred object does not have to be beautiful. A splinter of the “true cross” is not beautiful; it is more than beautiful, it is sublime. A sacred object places man in the presence of the forces that command the invisible order of the world. For those who handle and exhibit them, sacred objects are not symbols. They are experienced and thought of as the real presence of forces that are the source of the powers that reside in them.

The sacred object, then, is a “material” synthesis of the imaginary and symbolic components present in the relations that organize real societies. The interests at stake in the imaginary and in the symbolic always have a real social



impact. For instance, when the rites have been performed in the name of their myths, Baruya women are really, and not merely symbolically or imaginarily, dispossessed of landownership, the use of weapons, and access to the gods.

From this standpoint, one might postulate that the monopoly of sacred objects, rites, and other imaginary means of access to the forces which control the cosmos and society must have sociologically and chronologically preceded the development of the various forms of exclusive control of the material conditions of social existence and production of wealth, namely the land and its resources or individuals and their labor. And one might cite the example of the Australian Aboriginal rites for multiplying the living species and the initiated men's monopoly of the sacred objects, the *tjuringas*.

I am not saying that religion is the source of the caste or class relations that have grown up in many parts of the world since Neolithic times. But it does seem to me that religion may have furnished ready-made models for representing and legitimizing the new forms of power in places where certain social groups and their representatives were beginning to raise themselves well above the others and were desirous of legitimizing their place in this now different society by a different origin. Did not the Inka present himself as the son of the Sun? And Pharaoh as a god dwelling among men?

To get to the bottom of the nature of sacred objects, we would need to go even further and understand that they are an ultimate testimonial to the opacity necessary for the production and reproduction of societies. In the sacred object, the men who manufactured it are at once present and absent: they are present but in a form that dissimulates the fact that men themselves are at the origin of the forces that dominate them and that they worship. This is the very same relationship men have with money when it functions as capital, as money that makes money, thereby appearing capable of reproducing itself unaided, of generating money independently of the men who produced it.

It is not true, then, even in highly developed capitalist societies, that "everything is for sale." Let us take the example of the constitution of a Western democracy. It is a fact that votes can be, and frequently are, bought in democratic societies, but it is not yet possible to run down to the supermarket and buy a constitution. Democracy signifies that each person, however rich or poor, of whatever gender or social function, possesses an equal share of political sovereignty. To be sure, a democratic constitution is not a code of law given by God. It is a set of principles that people give to themselves as a

means of organizing their life together and that they oblige themselves to respect. A democratic constitution is a common good that, by its very essence, is not the product of market relations but of political relations and negotiation. For this reason, in a democracy, the political power of each person is an inalienable possession.

But let us go a step further. The expansion of the market has its limits, and some of these are absolute. Can one imagine, for instance, a child making a contract with its parents to be born? The very idea is absurd, and its absurdity demonstrates that the first bond among humans, namely birth, is not negotiated between the parties concerned. From its inception, life is established as a gift and a debt, in whatever society this new life may appear.

In conclusion, I would like to present a sort of general hypothesis concerning the conditions of existence and production of human societies. For people not only live in society, like the other primates and social animals, they also produce society in order to live. And it seems to me that, to produce society, three bases and three principles must be combined. There must be certain things that are given, others that are sold or bartered, and still others that must be kept for good. In our societies, buying and selling have become the main activities. Selling means completely separating the thing from the person. Giving means maintaining something of the person in the thing given. And keeping means not separating the thing from the person because in this union resides the affirmation of a historical identity that must be passed on, at least until such time as it can no longer be reproduced. It is because these three operations—selling, giving, and keeping—are not the same that objects in these contexts are presented respectively as alienable and alienated (commodities), as inalienable but alienated (gift objects), and as inalienable and unalienated (sacred objects).

Today the global economy, which encapsulates not only the society of the Baruya but also that of France and many other countries, is no longer a regional globality, as it was in the two or three valleys of New Guinea before the Europeans arrived. It is now a world globality. Local economies are now encapsulated by a single system, the capitalist system, the most highly developed form of market economy. Once again this does not mean that all local culture and forms of social organization are going to be reduced to pale copies of European and American ways of living and thinking. Not everything is for sale, nor will it ever be, and identities continue on through their own transformations. The time has

come, it seems to me, to develop a new area of economic anthropology; one that, without claiming to exhaust the complexity of local societies, will explore the new linkages between local and global levels.

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## 2

### Keeping-for-Giving and Giving-for-Keeping: Value, Hierarchy, and the Inalienable in Yap

James A. Egan

Maurice Godelier has recently modified Annette Weiner's thesis of "keeping-while-giving" by drawing attention to the simultaneously interdependent and autonomous relationship between alienable and inalienable things. "Keeping-for-giving and giving-for-keeping" is offered as the formula for how people use things of value to create their social worlds. Through discussion of a very unusual ethnographic case, I will show that the complementary processes govern what is and isn't given can also illuminate much about the process of alienation itself and its place in the production of hierarchy. In Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), land is the item of inalienable wealth that possesses the imaginary power that underscores value, encodes history, and provides the ideological basis for hierarchy. Yet land, too, is transferred between groups—namely, between people of different matrilineans in each generation. These transfers, which form the basis of Yapese land tenure, do not occur all at once. Nor do they result in the wholesale and immediate alienation of land from members of one matrilinean as it is taken by those of another. Rather, alienation becomes a matter of degree and is realized over a number of generations—and never completely. The reproduction of chiefly authority, land-based stratification, and the political presence of women in Yap all require land to be both given and kept, while other things of value mediate this apparent paradox through their own exchange as forms of gendered wealth. Along the way I will undertake a search for the sacred. Having found it in land, we will see that at the heart of the sacred—and the source of its imaginary power to reproduce hierarchy—are the very tensions between the alienable and the inalienable.