I have never found a man so generous and hospitable that he would not receive a present, nor one so liberal with his money that he would dislike a reward if he could get one.

Friends should rejoice each others' hearts with gifts of weapons and raiment, that is clear from one's own experience. That friendship lasts longest—if there is a chance of its being a success—in which friends both give and receive gifts.

A man ought to be a friend to his friend and repay gift with gift. People should meet smiles with smiles and lies with treachery.

Know—if you have a friend in whom you have sure confidence and wish to make use of him, you ought to exchange ideas and gifts with him and go to see him often. If you have another in whom you have no confidence and yet will make use of him, you ought to address him with fair words but crafty heart and repay treachery with lies.

Further, with regard to him in whom you have no confidence and of whose motives you are suspicious, you ought to smile upon him and dissemble your feelings. Gifts ought to be repaid in like coin.

Generous and bold men have the best time in life and never foster troubles. But the coward is apprehensive of everything and a miser is always groaning over his gifts. Better there should be no prayer than excessive offering; a gift always looks for recompense. Better there should be no sacrifice than an excessive slaughter?

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INTRODUCTORY

GIFTS AND RETURN GIFTS

THE foregoing lines from the Edda outline our subject matter.[1] In Scandinavian and many other civilizations contracts are fulfilled and exchanges of goods are made by means of gifts. In theory such gifts are voluntary but in fact they are given and repaid under obligation.

This work is part of a wider study. For some years our attention has been drawn to the realm of contract and the system of economic prestations between the component sections or sub-groups of 'primitive' and what we might call 'archaic' societies. On this subject there is a great mass of complex data. For, in these 'early' societies, social phenomena are not discrete; each phenomenon contains all the threads of which the social fabric is composed. In these total social phenomena, as we propose to call them, all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression: religious, legal, moral, and economic. In addition, the phenomena have their aesthetic aspect and they reveal morphological types.

We intend in this book to isolate one important set of phenomena: namely, prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest. We shall note the various principles behind this necessary form of exchange (which is nothing less than the division of labour itself), but we shall confine our detailed study to the enquiry: In primitive or archaic types of society what is the principle whereby the gift received has to be repaid? What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return? We hope, by presenting enough
data, to be able to answer this question precisely, and also to indicate the direction in which answers to cognate questions might be sought. We shall also pose new problems. Of these, some concern the morality of the contract: for instance, the manner in which today the law of things remains bound up with the law of persons; and some refer to the forms and ideas which have always been present in exchange and which even now are to be seen in the idea of individual interest.

Thus we have a double aim. We seek a set of more or less archaeological conclusions on the nature of human transactions in the societies which surround us and those which immediately preceded ours, and whose exchange institutions differ from our own. We describe their forms of contract and exchange. It has been suggested that these societies lack the economic market, but this is not true; for the market is a human phenomenon which we believe to be familiar to every known society. Markets are found before the development of merchants, and before their most important innovation, currency as we know it. They functioned before they took the modern forms (Semitic, Hellenic, Hellenistic, and Roman) of contract and sale and capital. We shall take note of the moral, and economic features of these institutions.

We contend that the same morality and economy are at work, albeit less noticeably, in our own societies, and we believe that in them we have discovered one of the bases of social life and thus we may draw conclusions of a moral nature about some of the problems confronting us in our present economic crisis. These pages of social history, theoretical sociology, political economy and morality do no more than lead us to old problems which are constantly turning up under new guises. [2]

THE METHOD FOLLOWED

Our method is one of careful comparison. We confine the study to certain chosen areas, Polynesia, Melanesia, and north-West America, and to certain well-known codes. Again, since we are concerned with words and their meanings, we choose
only areas where we have access to the minds of the societies through documentation and philological research. This further limits our field of comparison. Each particular study has a bearing on the systems we set out to describe and is presented in its logical place. In this way we avoid that method of haphazard comparison in which institutions lose their local colour and documents their value.

PRESTATION, GIFT AND POTLATCH

This work is part of the wider research carried out by M. Davy and myself upon archaic forms of contract, so we may start by summarizing what we have found so far. [3] It appears that there has never existed, either in the past or in modern primitive societies, anything like a 'natural' economy.[4] By a strange chance the type of that economy was taken to be the one described by Captain Cook when he wrote of exchange and barter among the Polynesians.[5] In our study here of these same Polynesians we shall see how far removed they are from a state of nature in these matters.

In the systems of the past we do not find simple exchange of goods, wealth and produce through markets established among individuals. For it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by obligations; [6] the persons represented in the contracts are moral persons—clans, tribes, and families; the groups, or the chiefs as intermediaries for the groups, confront and oppose each other.[7] Further, what they exchange is not exclusively goods and wealth, real and personal property, and things of economic value. They exchange rather courtesies, entertainments, ritual military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts; and fairs in which the market is but one element and the circulation of wealth but one part of a wide and enduring contract. Finally, although the prestations and counter-prestations take place under a voluntary guise they are in essence strictly obligatory, and their sanction is private or open warfare. We propose to call this the system of total prestations. Such institutions
seem to us to be best represented in the alliance of pairs of phratries in Australian and North American tribes, where ritual, marriages, succession to wealth, community of right and interest, military and religious rank and even games [8] all form part of one system and presuppose the collaboration of the two moieties of the tribe. The Tlingit and Haida of North-West America give a good expression of the nature of these practices when they say that they ‘show respect to each other’. [9] But with the Tlingit and Haida, and in the whole of that region, total prestations appear in a form which, although quite typical, is yet evolved and relatively rare. We propose, following American authors, to call it the po f latch. This Chinook word has passed into the current language of Whites and Indians from Vancouver to Alaska. Potlatch meant originally ‘to nourish’ or ‘to consume’. [10] The Tlingit and Haida inhabit the islands, the coast, and the land between the coast and the Rockies; they are very rich, and pass their winters in continuous festival, in banquets, fairs and markets which at the same time are solemn tribal gatherings. The tribes place themselves hierarchically in their fraternities and secret societies. On these occasions are practised marriages, initiations, shamanistic seances, and the cults of the great gods, totems, and group or individual ancestors. These are all accompanied by ritual and by prestations by whose means political rank within sub-groups, tribes, tribal confederations and nations is settled. [11] But the remarkable thing about these tribes is the spirit of rivalry and antagonism which dominates all their activities. A man is not afraid to challenge an opposing chief or nobleman. Nor does one stop at the purely sumptuous destruction of accumulated wealth in order to eclipse a rival chief (who may be a close relative). [12] We are here confronted with total prestation in the sense that the whole clan, through the intermediacy of its chiefs, makes contracts involving all its members and every-thing it possesses. [13] But the agonistic character of the prestation is pronounced. Essentially usurious and extravagant, it is above all a struggle among nobles to determine their position in the hierarchy to the ultimate benefit, if they are successful, of their
GIFTS AND RETURN GIFTS

own clans. This agonistic type of total prestation we propose to call the 'potlatch'.

So far in our study Davy and I had found few examples of this institution outside North-West America,[14] Melanesia, and Papua.[15] Everywhere else—m Africa, Polynesia, and Malaya, in South America and the rest of North America—the basis of exchange seemed to us to be a simpler type of total prestation. However, further research brings to light a number of forms' intermediate between exchanges marked by exaggerated rivalry like those of the American north-west and Melanesia, and others more moderate where the contracting parties rival each other with gnf: for instance, the French compete with each other in their ceremonial gifts, parties, weddings, and invitations, and feel bound, as the Germans say, to revanchieren themselves.[16] We find some of these intermediate forms in the Indo-European world, notably in Thrace.[17]

Many ideas and principles are to be noted in systems of this type. The most important of these spiritual mechanisms is clearly the one which obliges us to make a return gift for a gift received. The moral and religious reasons for this constraint are nowhere more obvious than in Polynesia; and in approaching the Polynesian data in the following chapter we shall see clearly the power which enforces the repayment of a gift and the fulfillment of contracts of this kind.
CHAPTER I

GIFTS. AND THE OBLIGATION TO RETURN GIFTS

I. TOTAL PRESTATION

MASCULINE AND FEMININE PROPERTY

(SAMOA)

In our earlier researches on the distribution of the system of contractual gifts, we had found no real potlatch in Polynesia. The Polynesian societies whose institutions came nearest to it appeared to have nothing beyond a system of total prestations, that is to say of permanent contracts between clans in which their men, women and children, their ritual, etc., were put on a communal basis. The facts that we had studied including the remarkable Samoan custom of the exchange of decorated mats between chiefs on their marriages, did not indicate more complex institutions.[1] The elements of rivalry, destruction and fighting seemed to be absent, although we found they were present in Melanesia. We now reconsider the matter in the light of new material.

The system of contractual gifts in Samoa is not confined to marriage; it is present also in respect of childbirth,[2] circumcision, [3] sickness, [4] girls' puberty, [5] funeral ceremonies [6] and trade.[7] Moreover, two elements of the potlatch have in fact been attested to: the honour, prestige or mana which wealth confers; [8] and the absolute obligation to make return gifts under the penalty of losing the mana, authority and wealth.[9]

Turner tells us that on birth ceremonies, after receiving the oloa and the tonga, the 'masculine' and 'feminine' property, 'the husband and wife were left no richer than they were. Still, they had the satisfaction of seeing what they considered to be a great honour, namely, the heaps of property collected.
on the occasion of the birth of their child.[10] These gifts are probably of an obligatory and permanent nature, and returns are made only through the system of rights which compels them. In this society, where cross-cousin marriage is the rule, a man gives his child to his sister and brother-in-law to bring up; and the brother-in-law, who is the child's maternal uncle, calls the child a tonga, a piece of feminine property.[11] It is then a 'channel through which native property [12] or tonga, continues to flow to that family from the parents of the child. On the other hand, the child is to its parents a source of foreign property or oloa, coming from the parties who adopt it, as long as the child lives.' This sacrifice of natural ties creates a systematic facility in native and foreign property.' In short, the child (feminine property) is the means whereby the maternal family's property is exchanged for that of the paternal family. Since the child in fact lives with his maternal uncle he clearly has a right to live there and thus has a general right over his uncle's property. This system of fosterage is much akin to the generally recognized right of the sister's son over his uncle's property in Melanesia.[13] We need only the elements of rivalry, fighting and destruction for the complete potlatch.

Now let us consider the terms oloa and more particularly tonga. The latter means indestructible property, especially the marriage mats [14] inherited by the daughters of a marriage, and the trinkets and talismans which, on condition of repayment, come through the wife into the newly founded family; these constitute real property.[15] The oloa designates all the things which are particularly the husband's personal property.[16] This term is also applied today to things obtained from Europeans, clearly a recent extension.[17] We may disregard as inexact and insufficient the translation suggested by Turner of oloa as foreign and tonga as native; yet it is not without significance, since it suggests that certain property called tonga is more closely bound up with the land, the clan and the family than certain other property called oloa.[18]

But if we extend our field of observation we immediately find a wider meaning of the notion tonga. In the Maori,
Tahitian, Tongan and Mangarevan languages it denotes everything which may be rightly considered property, which makes a man rich, powerful or influential, and which can be exchanged or used as compensation: that is to say, such objects of value as emblems, charms, mats and sacred idols, and perhaps even traditions, magic and ritual.[19] Here we meet that notion of magical property which we believe to be widely spread in the Malayo-Polynesian world and right over the Pacific.[20]

2. THE SPIRIT OF THE THING GIVEN

(MAORI)

This last remark leads to a contention of some importance. The taonga are, at any rate with the Maori, closely attached to the individual, the clan and the land; they are the vehicle of their mana—magical, religious and spiritual power. In a proverb collected by Sir G. Grey [21] and G. O. Davis,[22] taonga are asked to destroy the person who receives them; and they have the power to do this if the law, or rather the obligation, about making a return gift is not observed.

Our late friend Hertz saw the significance of this; disinterestedly he had written 'for Davy and Mauss' on the card containing the following note by Colenso: 'They had a kind of system of exchange, or rather of giving presents which had later to be exchanged or repaid.' [23] For example, they exchange dried fish for pickled birds and mats.[24] The exchange is carried out between tribes or acquainted families without any kind of stipulation.

But Hertz had also found—I discovered it amongst his papers—a text whose significance we had both missed, for I had been unaware of it myself. Speaking of the hau, the spirit of things and particularly of the forest and forest game, Tamati Ranaipiri, one of Mr. Elsdon Best's most useful informants, gives quite by chance the key to the whole problem.[25] 'I shall tell you about hau. Hau is not the wind. Not at all. Suppose you have some particular object, taonga, and you give it to me; you
give it to me without a price.[26] We do not bargain over it. Now I give this thing to a third person who after a time decides to give me something in repayment for it (utu),[27] and he makes me a present of something (taonga). Now this taonga I received from him is the spirit (hau) of the taonga I received from you and which I passed on to him. The taonga which I receive on account of the taonga that came from you, I must return to you. It would not be right on my part to keep these taonga whether they were desirable or not. I must give them to you once they are the hau [28] of the taonga which you gave me. If I were to keep this second taonga for myself I might become ill or even die. Such is hau, the hau of personal property, the hau of the taonga, the hau of the forest. Enough on that subject.'

This capital text deserves comment. It is characteristic of the indefinite legal and religious atmosphere of the Maori and their doctrine of the 'house of secrets'; it is surprisingly clear in places and offers only one obscurity: the intervention of a third person. But to be able to understand this Maori lawyer we need only say: 'The taonga and all strictly personal possessions have a hau, a spiritual power. You give me taonga, I give it to another, the latter gives me taonga back, since he is forced to do so by the hau of my gift; and I am obliged to give this one to you since I must return to you what is in fact the product of the hau of your taonga.

Interpreted thus not only does the meaning become clear, but it is found to emerge as one of the leitmotifs of Maori custom. The obligation attached to a gift itself is not inert. Even when abandoned by the giver, it still forms a part of him. Through it he has a hold over the recipient, just as he had, while its owner, a hold over anyone who stole it.[29] For the taonga is animated with the hau of its forest, its soil, its homeland, and the hau pursues him who holds it.[30]

It pursues not only the first recipient of it or the second or the third, but every individual to whom the taonga is transmitted.[31] The hau wants to return to the place of its birth, to its sanctuary of forest and clan and to its owner. The taonga or its hau—itself a kind of individual [32]—constrains a series of users
to return some kind of *taonga* of their own, some property or merchandise or labour, by means of feasts, entertainments or gifts of equivalent or superior value. Such a return will give its donor authority and power over the original donor, who now becomes the latest recipient. That seems to be the motivating force behind the obligatory circulation of wealth, tribute and gifts in Samoa and New Zealand.

This or something parallel helps to explain two sets of important social phenomena in Polynesia and elsewhere. We can see the nature of the bond created by the transfer of a possession. We shall return shortly to this point and show how our facts contribute to a general theory of obligation. But for the moment it is clear that in Maori custom this bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself. Secondly, we are led to a better understanding of gift exchange and total prestation, including the potlatch. It follows clearly from what we have seen that in this system of ideas one gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence. To keep this thing is dangerous, not only because it is illicit to do so, but also because it comes morally, physically and spiritually from a person. Whatever it is, food, possessions, women, children or ritual, it retains a magical and religious hold over the recipient. The thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place.

**3. THE OBLIGATION TO GIVE AND THE OBLIGATION TO RECEIVE**

To appreciate fully the institutions of total prestation and the potlatch we must seek to explain two complementary factors. Total prestation not only carries with it the obligation to repay gifts received, but it implies two others equally important: the obligation to give presents and the obligation
to receive them. A complete theory of the three obligations would include a satisfactory fundamental explanation of this form of contract among Polynesian clans. For the moment we simply indicate the manner in which the subject might be treated.

It is easy to find a large number of facts on the obligation to receive. A clan, household, association or guest are constrained to demand hospitality, to receive presents, to barter or to make blood and marriage alliances. The Dayaks have even developed a whole set of customs based on the obligation to partake of any meal at which one is present or which one has seen in preparation.

The obligation to give is no less important. If we understood this, we should also know how men came to exchange things with each other. We merely point out a few facts. To refuse to give, or to fail to invite, is—like refusing to accept the equivalent of a declaration of war; it is a refusal of friendship and intercourse. Again, one gives because one is forced to do so, because the recipient has a sort of proprietary right over everything which belongs to the donor. This right is expressed and conceived as a sort of spiritual bond. Thus in Australia the man who owes all the game he kills to his father- and mother-in-law may eat nothing in their presence for fear that their very breath should poison his food. We have seen above that the *taonga* sister’s son has customs of this kind in Samea, which are comparable with those of the sister’s son (vasu) in Fiji.

In all these instances there is a series of rights and duties about consuming and repaying existing side by side with rights and duties about giving and receiving. The pattern of symmetrical and reciprocal rights is not difficult to understand if we realize that it is first and foremost a pattern of spiritual bonds between things which are to some extent parts of persons, and persons and groups that behave in some measure as if they were things.

All these institutions reveal the same kind of social and psychological pattern. Food, women, children, possessions,
charms, land, labour, services, religious offices, rank—everything is stuff to be given away and repaid. In perpetual interchange of what we may call spiritual matter, comprising men and things, these elements pass and repass between clans and individuals, ranks, sexes and generations.

4. GIFTS TO MEN AND GIFTS TO GODS

Another theme plays its part in the economy and morality of the gift: that of the gift made to men in the sight of gods or nature. We have not undertaken the wider study necessary to reveal its real import; for the facts at our disposal do not all come from the areas to which we have limited ourselves; and a strongly marked mythological element which we do not yet fully understand prevents us from advancing a theory. We simply give some indications of the theme.

In the societies of North-East Siberia [41] and amongst the Eskimo of West Alaska [42] and the Asiatic coast of the Behring Straits, the potlatch concerns not only men who rival each other in generosity, and the objects they transmit or destroy, and the spirits of the dead which take part in the transactions and whose names the men bear; it concerns nature as well. Exchanges between namesakes—people named after the same spirits—incite the spirits of the dead, of gods, animals and natural objects to be generous towards them. [43] Men say that gift-exchange brings abundance of wealth. Nelson and Porter have given us good descriptions of these ceremonies and the effect they have on the dead, on the game, the fish and shell-fish of the Eskimo. They are expressively called, in the language of British trappers, the 'Asking Festival' or the 'Inviting-in Festival'. [44] Ordinarily they are not confined within the limits of winter settlements. The effect upon nature has been well shown in a recent work on the Eskimo.[45]

The Yuit have a mechanism, a wheel decorated with all manner of provisions, carried on a greasy pole surmounted with the head of a walrus. The top of the pole protrudes above the tent of which it forms the centre. Inside the tent it is
manoeuvred by means of another wheel and is made to turn clockwise like the sun. It would be hard to find a better expression of this mode of thought. [46]

The theme is also to be found with the Koryak and Chukchee of the extreme north-west of Siberia.[47] Both have the potlatch. But it is the maritime Chukchee who, like their Yuit neighbours, practise most the obligatory-voluntary gift-exchanges in the course of protracted thanksgiving ceremonies which follow one after the other in every house throughout the winter. The remains of the festival sacrifice are thrown into the sea or cast to the winds; they return to their original home, taking with them all the game killed that year, ready to return again in the next. Jochelsen mentions festivals of the same kind among the Koryak, although he was present only at the whale festival. The system of sacrifice seems there to be very highly developed. [48]

Bogoras rightly compares these with the Russian koliada customs in which masked children go from house to house begging eggs and flour and none dare refuse them. This is a European custom. [49]

The connection of exchange contracts among men with those between men and gods explains a whole aspect of the theory of sacrifice. It is best seen in those societies where contractual and economic ritual is practised between men. Where the men are masked incarnations, often shamanistic, being possessed by the spirit whose name they bear, they act as representatives of the spirits.[50] In that case the exchanges and contracts concern not only men and things but also the sacred beings that are associated with them.[51] This is very evident in Eskimo, Tlingit, and one of the two kinds of Haida potlatch.

There has been a natural evolution. Among the first groups of beings with whom men must have made, contracts were the spirits of the dead and the gods. They in fact are the real owners of the world's wealth. [52] With them it was particularly necessary to exchange and particularly dangerous not to; but, on the other hand, with them exchange was easiest and safest.
sacrificial destruction irriplies giving-something that is to be repaid. All forms of North-West American and North-East Asian potlatch contain this element of destruction. It is not simply to show power and wealth and unselfishness that a man puts his slaves to death, burns his precious oil, throws coppers into the sea, and sets his house on fire. In doing this he is also sacrificing to the gods and spirits, who appear incarnate in the men who are at once their namesakes and ritual allies.

But another theme appears which does not require this human support, and which may be as old as the potlatch itself: belief that one has to buy from the gods and that the gods know how to repay the price. This is expressed typically by the Toradja of the Celebes. Kruyt tells us that the 'owner' can 'buy' from the spirits the right to do certain things with his or rather 'their' property. Before he cuts his wood or digs his garden or stakes out his house he must make a payment to the gods. Thus although the notion of purchase seems to be little developed in the personal economic life of the Toradja, nevertheless, the idea of purchase from gods and spirits is universally understood. [54]

With regard to certain forms of exchange which we describe later Malinowski remarks on fact/of the same order from the Trobriands. A malignant spirit is evoked—a tauvau whose body has been found in a snake or a land crab—by means of giving it vaygu’a (a precious object used in kula exchanges, at once ornament, charm and-valuable). This gift has a direct effect on the spirit of the tauvau. [55] Again at the mila-mila festival, [56] a potlatch in honour of the dead, the two kinds of vaygu’a -- the kula ones and those which Malinowski now describes for the first time as 'permanent' vaygu’a [57] -- are exposed and offered up to the spirits; who take the shades, of them away to the country of the dead; [58] there the spirits rival each other in wealth as men do on their return from a solemn kula. [59]

Van Ossenbruggen, who is both a theorist and a distinguished observer, and who lives on-the spot, has noted another point about these institutions.[60]Gifts to men and to gods have the further aim of buying peace. In this way evil influences are
GIFTS AND RETURN GIFTS

kept at bay, even when not personified; for a human curse will allow these jealous spirits to enter and kill you and permit evil influences to act, and if you commit a fault towards another man you become powerless against them. Van Ossenbruggen interprets in this way not only the throwing of money over the wedding procession in China, but even bridewealth itself. This is an interesting suggestion which raises a series of points.[61]

We see how it might be possible to embark upon a theory and history of contractual sacrifice. Now this sacrifice presupposes institutions of the type we are describing, and conversely it realizes them to the full, for the gods who give and repay are there to give something great in exchange "for something small. Perhaps then it is not the result of pure chance that the two solemn formulas of contract, the Latin do ut des and the Sanskrit dadami se, dehi me have come down to us through religious texts.[62]

A further note: on Alms

Later in legal and religious evolution man appears once more as representative of the gods and the dead, if indeed he had ever ceased to be so. For instance among the Hausa there is often a fever epidemic when the guinea-corn is ripe, and the only way to prevent it is to give presents of wheat to the poor.[63] Again, among the Hausa of Tripolitania, at the time of the great prayer (Baban Salla), the children go round the huts saying: 'Shall I enter?' The reply is: 'Oh prick-eared hare, for a bone one gets service' (the pool-man is happy to work for the rich). These gifts to children and poor people are pleasing to the dead.[64] These customs may be Islamic in origin,[65] or Islamic, Negro, European and Berber at the same time. Here at any rate is the beginning of a theory of alms. Alms are the result on the one hand of a moral idea about gifts and wealth, [66] and on the other of an idea about sacrifice. Generosity is necessary because otherwise Nemesis will take vengeance upon the excessive wealth and happiness of the rich by giving to the poor and the gods. It is the, old gift morality raised to the position of a principle of justice; the gods and spirits
consent that the portion reserved for them and destroyed in useless sacrifice should go to the poor and the children. Originally the Arabic *sadaka* meant, like the Hebrew *zedaqa*, exclusively justice, and it later came to mean alms. We can say that the Mishnic era, the time of the victory of the Paupers at Jerusalem, begot, the doctrine of charity and alms which later went round the world with Christianity and Islam. It was at this time that the word *zedaqa* changed its meaning, since it does not mean alms in The Bible. [67]

The value of the documents and commentaries we have quoted in this chapter is not merely local. Comparison takes us farther afield. For we can say that the basic elements of the potlatch are found in Polynesia even if the complete institution is not found there; [68] in any event gift-exchange is the rule. But to emphasize this theme would simply be a show of erudition if it did not extend beyond Polynesia. Let us now shift the subject and demonstrate that at least the obligation to give has a much wider distribution. Then we shall show the distribution of the other types of obligation and demonstrate that our interpretation is valid for several other groups of societies.
CHAPTER II

DISTRIBUTION OF THE SYSTEM:

GENEROSITY, HONOUR AND MONEY

The facts here presented are drawn from various ethnographic areas, whose 'connecting links it is not our business to follow. From the ethnological point of view the existence of common potlatch traits in the Pacific, in North America and even in North Asia may be readily explained. But the existence of a form of potlatch among pygmies is strange, and no less puzzling are the traces of an Indo-European potlatch. We abstain from all considerations of the method by which the institution has spread. It would be naive and dangerous to talk of borrowing or independent invention. Moreover, the maps which have been drawn for the sake of such arguments represent no more than our present knowledge or ignorance. Let us then for the moment content ourselves with demonstrating the nature and wide distribution of a single theme. It is for others to reconstruct its history if they can.

I. RULES OF GENEROSITY (ANDAMAN ISLANDS)

Customs of the kind we are discussing are found with the pygmies who, according to Pater Schmidt,[1] are the most primitive of men. In 1906 Radcliffe-Brown observed facts of this order in North Andaman, and described them admirably with reference to inter-group hospitality, visits, festivals and fairs, which present the opportunity for voluntary-obligatory exchanges—in this case of ochre and maritime produce against the produce of the chase. Despite the importance of these exchanges, 'as each local group and indeed each family was able to provide itself with everything that it needed in the way
of weapons and utensils . . . the exchange of presents did not serve the same purpose as trade or barter in more developed communities. The purpose that it did serve was a moral one. The object of the exchange was to produce a friendly feeling between the two persons concerned, and unless it did this it failed of its purpose. . . .[2] No one was free to refuse a present offered to him. Each man and woman tried to outdo the others in generosity. There was a sort of amiable rivalry as to who could give away the greatest number of most valuable presents. [3] The gifts put a seal to marriage, forming a friendly relationship between the two sets of relatives. They give the two sides an identity which is revealed in the taboo which from then on prevents them from visiting or addressing each other, and in the obligation upon them thereafter to make perpetual gift-exchange.[4] The taboo expresses both the intimacy and the fear which arise from this reciprocal creditor-debtor relationship. This is clearly the principle involved since the same taboo, implying simultaneous intimacy and distance, exists between young people of both sexes who have passed through the turtle- and pig-eating ceremonies together.[5] and who are likewise obliged to exchange presents for the rest of their lives. Australia also provides facts of this kind.[6] Radcliffe-Brown mentions rites of reunion—embracing and weeping1—and shows how the exchange of presents is the equivalent of this.[7] and how- sentiments and persons are mingled.[8] This confusion of personalities and things is precisely the mark of exchange contracts.

2. PRINCIPLES, MOTIVES AND INTENSITY OF GIFT EXCHANGE (MELANESIA)

We saw that the Melanesians have preserved the potlatch better or developed it more highly than the Polynesians. The same is true throughout the whole field of gift-exchange. In Melanesia also the notion of money appears more clearly, [9] and while the system is more complex it is easier to understand.
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New Caledonia

In Leenhardt's documents from New Caledonia can be seen the ideas and modes of expression to which we have been drawing attention. His preliminary description of the pitu-pilu and the system of feasts, gifts and prestations of all kinds, including money,[10] clearly qualifies them as potlatch. The statements on custom in the formal discourses of the heralds are quite typical. Thus at the start of the ceremonial presentation of yams [11] the herald says: 'If there is some old pilu which we have not seen in the country of the Wi...this yam will speed there just as, formerly such a yam came from thence to us.[12] Later in the same speech the spirits of the ancestors are said to make the effects of their action and power felt upon the food. 'Today appears the result of the act, which you have accomplished. All the generations have appeared in its mouth. There is another no less graphic way of expressing the link: Our feasts are the movement of the needle which sews together the parts of our reed roofs, making of them a single roof, one single word.[13] The same things (the same thread) return.[14] Other authors have mentioned facts of this kind. [15]

Trobriand Islands

At the other side-of the Melanesian world there is a highly evolved system like that of New Caledonia. The Trobrianders are among the most advanced of these peoples. Today as prosperous pearl fishers, and before the arrival of Europeans as nourishing potters and stone workers, they have always been good business men and sturdy sailors. Malinowski compares them with the companions of Jason and names them well the 'Argonauts of the Western Pacific'. In his book of this name, which stands among the best works of descriptive sociology, he treats the subject with which we are concerned, describing the whole system of inter-tribal and intra-tribal commerce known as the kiila.[16] We still await a full description of then most important institutions, of marriage, funeral ceremonies, initiation, etc., and hence our present remarks are only provisional. But already we have some definite facts of capital importance.[17]
The *kula* is a kind of grand potlatch; it is the vehicle of a great inter-tribal trade extending over all the Trobriands, part of the d'Entrecasteaux group and part of the Amphletts. It has indirect influence on all the tribes and immediate influence on some: Dobu in the Amphletts; Kiriwina, Sinaketa and Kitava in the Trobriands; and Vakuta on Woodlark Island. Malinowski does not translate the word, which probably, however, means 'ring'; and in fact it seems as if all these tribes, the sea journeys, the precious objects, the food and feasts, the economic, ritual and sexual services, the men and the women, were caught in a ring around which they kept up a regular movement in time and space.

*Kula* trade is aristocratic. It seems to be reserved for the chiefs, who are chiefs of the *kula* fleet and canoes, traders for their vassals (children and brothers-in-law) and, apparently, chiefs over a number of vassal villages. The trade is carried out in noble fashion, disinterestedly and modestly. It is distinguished from the straightforward exchange of useful goods known as the *gimwali*. This is carried on as well as the *kula* in the great primitive fairs which mark inter-tribal *kula* gatherings and in the little *kula* markets of the interior; *gimwali*, however, is distinguished by most tenacious bargaining on both sides, a procedure unworthy of the *kula*. It is said of the individual who does not behave in his *kula* with proper magnanimity that he is conducting it 'as a *gimwali*'. In appearance at any rate, the *kula*, like the American potlatch, consists in giving and receiving, the donors on one occasion being the recipients in the next. Even in the largest, most solemn and highly competitive form of *kula*, that of the great maritime expeditions (*uvalaku*), the rule is to set out with nothing to exchange or even to give in return for food (for which of course it is improper to ask). On these visits one is recipient only, and it is when the visiting tribes the following year become the hosts that gifts are repaid with interest.

With the lesser *kula*, however, the sea voyage also serves as an opportunity for exchange of cargoes; the nobles themselves do business; numerous objects are solicited, demanded
and exchanged, and many relationships are established in addition to *kula* ones; but the *kula* remains the most important reason for the expeditions and the relationships set up.

The ceremony of transfer is done with solemnity. The object given is disdained or suspect; it is not accepted until it is thrown on the ground. The donor affects an exaggerated modesty. Solemnly bearing his gift, accompanied by the blowing of a conch-shell, he apologizes for bringing only his leavings and throws the object at his partner's feet.[23] Meanwhile the conch and the herald proclaim to one and all the dignity of the occasion. Pains are taken to show one's freedom and autonomy as well as one's magnanimity,[24] yet all the time one is actuated by the mechanisms of obligation which are resident in the gifts themselves.

The most important things exchanged are *vaygu'a*, a kind of currency.[25] These are of two sorts: *mwali*, the finely cut and polished armshells worn on great occasions by their owners or relatives, and the *soulava*, necklaces worked by the skilful turners of Sinaketa in handsome red spondylus shell. These are worn by women,[26] and only rarely by men, for example, during sickness. Normally they are hoarded and kept for the joy of having. The manufacture of the one, and the gathering of the other, and the trading of these objects of prestige and exchange form, along with other more common and vulgar pursuits, the source of Trobriand wealth.

According to Malinowski these *vaygu'a* go in a sort of circular movement, the armshells passing regularly from west to east, and the necklaces from east to west.[27] These two opposite movements take place between the d'Entrecasteaux group, the Amphletts, and the isolated islands of Woodlark, Marshall Bennett and Tubetube, and finally the extreme south-east coast of New Guinea, where the unpolished armshells come from. There this trade meets the great expeditions of the same nature from South Massim described by Seligman.[28]

* See page 93 for the important note on the principle adopted in discussing the idea of money.
In theory these valuables never stop circulating. It is wrong-to keep them too long or to be 'slow' and 'hard' with them; they are passed on only to predetermined partners in the arm-shell or necklace direction. They may be kept from one kula to the next while the community gloats over the vaygu’a which its chief has obtained. Although there are occasions, such as the preparation of funeral feasts, when it is permitted to receive and to pay nothing; these are no more than a prelude to the feast at which everything is repaid.

The gift received is in fact owned, but the ownership is of a particular kind. One might say that it includes many legal principles which we moderns have isolated from one another. It is at the same time property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold and an object bought, a deposit, a mandate, a trust; for it is given only on condition that it will be used on behalf of, or transmitted to, a third person, the remote partner (murimuri). Such is the economic, legal and moral complex, of quite a typical kind, that Malinowski discovered and described.

This institution also has its mythical, religious and magical aspects. Vaygu’a are not indifferent things; they are more than mere coins. All of them, at least the most valuable and most coveted, have a name, a personality, a past, and even a legend attached to them, to such an extent that people may be named after them. One cannot say that they are actually the object of a cult, for the Trobrianders are positivists in their way. But it is impossible not to recognize their superior and sacred nature. To possess one is 'exhilarating, comforting, soothing in itself'. Their owners handle them and gaze at them for hours. Mere contact with them is enough to make them transmit their virtues. You place a vaygu’a on the brow or the chest of a sick man, or dangle it before his face. It is his supreme balm.

But more than that, the contract itself partakes of the nature of the vaygu’a. Not only armshells and necklaces, but also goods, ornaments, weapons, and everything belonging to the partner, are so alive with feeling, if not with personality, that they have
their part in the contract as well.[36] A fine formula, the spell of the conch-shell,[37] is used after invoking them to charm or attract towards the partner the things he means to ask and receive.[38] (A state of excitement [39] seizes my partner.) [40] A state of excitement seizes his dog, his belt, his gwara (taboo on cocoanuts and betelnuts), [41] his bagidou necklace, his bagiriku necklace, his bagidudu necklace. . . .

Another more mythical spell expresses the same idea. The kula partner is an animal, a crocodile which he invokes to bring him necklaces.[43]

'Crocodile, fall down, take thy man, push him down under the gebobbo [part of the canoe where the cargo is stowed]

'Crocodile, bring me the necklace, bring me the bagidou, the bagiriku. . . .'

A previous spell in the same ritual invokes a bird of prey.[44]

The last spell of the partners in Dobu or Kitava, by the people of Kiriwina, contains a couplet of which two interpretations are given.[45] The ritual is very long and is repeated many times; its purpose is to enumerate everything forbidden in the kula, everything to do with hatred and war which must be conjured away so that trade can take place between friends.

'Thy fury, the dog sniffs,

'Thy warpaint, the dog sniffs. . . .'

Other versions say:

'Thy fury, the dog is docile. . . .'

or:

'Thy fury ebbs, it ebbs away, the dog plays about,

Thy anger ebbs. . . .'

This means: 'Thy fury becomes like the dog that plays about.' The point is the metaphor of the dog that rises and licks its master's hand. The Dobuan and his wife should then act in this way. The second interpretation—according to Malinowski somewhat sophisticated and academic, but indigenous all the same—gives a commentary which is more in keeping with what we know already: 'The dogs play nose to nose. When you mention the word dog, the precious objects also come to play.'
We have given armshells, and necklaces will come, and they will meet, like dogs which come to sniff.' The expression and metaphor are neat. All the sentiments are seen at once: the possible hatred of the partners, the *vaygu'a* being charmed' from their hiding-places; men and precious objects gathering together like dogs that play and run about at the sound of a man's voice.

Another symbolic expression is that of the marriage of armshells, female symbols, with necklaces, male symbols, attracted towards each other like male and female.[46] These various metaphors mean exactly what Maori customary beliefs denote in other terms. Once again it is the confusion of objects, values, contracts and men which finds expression.[47]

Unfortunately we know very little about the sanction behind these transactions. Either it was badly formulated by the people of Kiriwina, Malinowski's informants, or else it is quite clear to the Trobrianders and only needs further research. We have only a few details. The first gift of a *vaygu'a* has the name of *vaga*, opening gift. [48] It definitely binds the recipient to make a return gift, the *yotile*, well translated by Malinowski as the 'clinching gift'.[49] Another name for this is *kudu*, the tooth which bites, severs and liberates.[50] It is obligatory; it is expected and must be equivalent to the first gift; it may be taken by force or surprise.[51] One can avenge non-payment by magic [52] or a show of resentment if the *yotile* does not come up to expectations. If one is unable to repay, one may, if necessary, offer a *basi*, a tooth which does not bite right through but only pierces the skin and leaves the transaction unfinished. It is a temporary affair, the interest on an overdue payment, and although it appeases the creditor it does not absolve the debtor.[53] These details are interesting and the expressions are 'clear, but the sanction is not at all evident. Is it only mystical and moral? [54] Is the man who is 'hard' in the *kula* only scorned and bewitched? Does not the unfaithful partner lose something else—his rank or at least his position among chiefs? This is something we are not told.

From another angle the institution is typical. Except in old
Germanic custom we have found no system of gift exchange more clear or complete and also better understood both by participants and observer than that described by Malinowski for the Trobrianders.[55]

The *kula* in its essential form is itself only the most solemn part of a vast system of prestations and counter-prestations which seem to embrace the whole social life of the Trobrianders.

The *kula* (particularly the inter-island form) appears to be merely the crowning episode of this life. Although it forms one of the great interests of all Trobrianders, and is one of the main reasons for the great expeditions, it is only chiefs, and maritime chiefs at that, who take part in it. The *kula* is the gathering point of many other institutions.

The exchange of *vaygu'a* is set amidst a series of different kinds of exchange, ranging from barter to wage-payment, from solicitation to courtesy, from hospitality to reticence and shame. In the first place, except for the *uvalaku*, the great expeditions of a purely ceremonial and competitive nature, all *kula* transactions are an opportunity for ordinary exchange, *gimwali*, which does not necessarily take place between established partners.[56] Alongside the established partnerships there is an open market between persons of allied tribes. And then between *kula* partners there pass supplementary gifts in an unbroken chain. The *kula* demands them. The association or partnership it sets up and through which it functions starts with a preliminary gift, the *vaga*, which is strenuously sought after by means of solicitory gifts. To obtain this *vaga* a man may flatter his future partner, who is still independent, and to whom he is making a preliminary series of presents.[57] Although one is certain that the *yotile*, the clinching gift, will be returned, one can never say whether the *vaga* will be given in the first place or whether even the solicitory gifts will be accepted. This manner of soliciting and receiving is the rule. Gifts thus made have a special name, in this case *pari*.[58] They are laid out before being presented. Others have names signifying the noble and magical nature of the objects offered.[59] To receive one of these gifts means that one is desirous of entering into and
remaining in partnership. Some gifts of this kind have titles which express the legal implications of their acceptance, [60] in which case the affair is considered to be settled. The gift is' normally an object of some value, like a large polished stone axe or whalebone knife. To receive it is actually to commit oneself to return the *vaga*, the first desirable gift. But still one is only half a partner. It is the solemn handing over of the *vaga* which finally fixes the partnership. The importance of these gifts arises from the extraordinary competition which exists among members of an expedition. They seek out the best possible partner in the other tribe. For the cause is a great one; the association made establishes a kind of clan link between I partners.[61] To get your man you have to seduce him and dazzle him.[62] While paying proper regard to rank,[63] you must get in before the others and make exchanges of the most valuable things—naturally the property of the richest man. The underlying motives are Competition, rivalry, show, and a desire for greatness and wealth.[64]

These are the arrival gifts; there are other analogous gifts of departure, called *talo'i* on Sinaketa,[65] and of leave-taking; they are always superior to the gifts of arrival. Here again the cycle of prestations and counter-prestations with interest is accomplished alongside the *kula*.

Naturally at the time of these transactions there are prestations of hospitality, of food, and, on Sinaketa, of women. Finally there are continual supplementary gifts, always regularly repaid. It even seems that these *kortumna* represent a primitive form of the *kula* since they consist of the exchange of stone axes and boars' teeth.[66]

In our view the whole inter-tribal *kula* is an exaggerated case, the most dignified and dramatic example, of a general system. It takes the whole tribe out of the narrow circle of its own frontiers. The same holds also for the clans and villages within the tribes, which are bound by links of the same sort. In this case it is only the local and domestic group and their chiefs which go out to pay visits, do business, and intermarry. Perhaps it is not proper to call this *kula*. Malinowski, however,
rightly speaks, in contrast to the maritime *kula*, of the *kula* of the interior and of *kula* communities which provide their chiefs with articles for exchange. It is no exaggeration to speak in these cases of the real potlatch. For instance, the visits of the Kiriwina people to Kitava for mortuary ceremonies (*s’oi*) [67] involve more than the exchange of *vaygu’a*; there is a feigned attack (*youlawada*), [68] a distribution of food, and a display of pigs and yams.

The *vaygu’a* axe not always acquired,[69] manufactured,[70] and exchanged by the chiefs in person. Most of them come to the chiefs as gifts from their vassal relatives of inferior rank, particularly brothers-in-law, or from sons with their own fiefs elsewhere.[71] And then on the return of the expedition the *vaygu’a* are solemnly handed over to the village chiefs, the clan chiefs or even to commoners of the clans concerned: in short, to whomsoever has taken part, however indirectly, in the expedition.[72]

Lastly, alongside the internal *kula*, the system of gift-exchange pervades the whole economic life of the Trobriands. Social life is a constant give-and-take; [73] gifts are rendered, received and repaid both obligatorily and in one's own interest, in magnanimity, for repayment of services, or as challenges or pledges. We here set down a few of the most important forms they take.

A relationship analogous to the *kula* is that of the *wasi*. [74] This sets up regular and obligatory exchanges between partners, between agricultural tribes on the one hand and maritime tribes on the other. The agricultural partner places produce in front of the house of his fisherman associate. The latter, after a great fishing expedition, makes return with interest, giving his partner in the agricultural village the product of his catch.[75] Here is the same principle of division of labour as we noticed in New Zealand.

Another remarkable form of exchange takes the form of display.[76] This is *sagali*, a great and frequent distribution of food, made at harvests, during the construction of the chief's house, the building of canoes and funeral ceremonies.[77] The
distribution is made to groups that have given their services to the chief or to his clan by means of their crops, or house-beams, or the transport of heavy tree-trunks for canoe-building, or else by services rendered at a funeral by the dead man's clan, and so on.[78] These distributions are in every way similar to the Kwakiutl potlatch, even to the elements of combat and rivalry. Clans and phratries and allied families confront one another and the transactions are group affairs, at least so long as the chief restrains himself.

These group rights and collective economic factors are already some way distant from the *kula*, as are all individual exchange relationships. Some of the latter may be of the order of simple barter. However, since this simple barter takes place only between relatives, close allies or *kula* or *wasi* partners, it hardly seems that exchange even here is really free. Moreover what one receives, no matter by what means, one may no keep for oneself unless it is quite impossible to do without it. Ordinarily it is passed to someone else, a brother-in-law perhaps,[79] It may happen that the very things which one has received and given away will be returned on the same day.

Returns of prestations of all kinds, of goods or services, fall into the same categories. Here are some presented in no special order.

The *pokala* [80] and *kaributu*,[81] solicitory gifts, which we saw in the *kula*, are species of a much wider genus which correspond fairly closely to what we know as wages. They are offered gods and spirits. Another generic name for the same is *vakapula* or *mapula*; [82] these are tokens of recognition and welcome an they too must be repaid. In this regard Malinowski makes what we believe to be an important discovery which explains economic and legal relationships between the sexes in marriage; services of all kinds given to the woman by her husband are considered as a gift-payment for the service the woman renders when she lends him what the Koran calls 'the field'.

The somewhat immature legal language of the Trobriandes has multiplied the names distinguishing all kinds of prestation and counter-prestation according to the name of the prestation
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repaid,[84] the thing given,[85] the circumstances,[86] and so on. Certain names cover all these considerations: for example, the gift to a magician or for the acquisition of a title is known as laga. [87] It is hard to say just how far the vocabulary has been complicated by a strange incapacity for abstraction, and by odd embellishments in the nomenclature.

Other Melanesian Societies

It is unnecessary to multiply the comparisons from many other Melanesian peoples. However, some details may be taken from here and there to strengthen the case and show that the Trobrianders and New Caledonians are not abnormal in having evolved a principle which is strange to other related peoples.

In the extreme south of Melanesia, in Fiji, where we have already identified the potlatch, there are other noteworthy institutions belonging to the gift system. There is a season, the kerekere, when it is forbidden to refuse a man anything.[88] Gifts are exchanged between families at marriages, etc.[89] Moreover Fijian money, cachalot teeth, is the same as that of the Trobrianders. It is known as tambua. This is supplemented by stones ('mothers' of the teeth), and ornaments, mascots, talismans and lucky charms of the tribe. The sentiments of the Fijians in regard to the tambua are the same as those just described: They are regarded by their owners very much as a girl regards her dolls. They like to take them out and admire and talk about their beauty; they have a "mother," who is continually being oiled and polished.' Their presentation is a request, and their acceptance a pledge.[90]

The Melanesians of New-Guinea and the Papuans influenced by them call their money tautau; [91] it is of the same kind and the object of the same beliefs, as that of the Trobriands.[92] We should compare this name with tahutahu which means a loan of pigs (Motu and Koita).[93] Now this word is familiar to us as the Polynesian term, the root of the word taonga of Samoa and New Zealand—jewels and property incorporated in the
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family. The words themselves are Polynesian like the objects.

We know that the Melanesians and Papuans of New Guinea have the potlatch.

The fine documentation by Thurnwald on the tribes of Buin and the Banaro have already furnished us with points of comparison. The sacred character of the things exchanged is evident, in particular in the case of money and the way it is given in return for wives, love, songs and services; as in the Trobriands it is a sort of pledge. Thurnwald has analysed too one of the facts which best illustrates this system of reciprocal gifts and the nature of the misnamed 'marriage by purchase'. In reality, this includes prestations from all sides, including the bride's family, and a wife is sent back if her relatives have not offered sufficient gifts in return.

In short this whole island world, and probably also the parts of South-East Asia related to it, reveal similar institutions. Thus the view which we must adopt regarding these Melanesian peoples, who are even wealthier and more commercially inclined than the Polynesians, is very different from the view which is normally taken. They have an extra-domestic economy and a highly developed exchange system, and are busier commercially than French peasants and fishermen have been for the past hundred years. They have an extensive economic life and a considerable trade that cuts across geographical and linguistic boundaries. They replace our system of sale and purchase with one of gifts and return gifts.

In this type of economy, and in the Germanic as we shall see, there is an incapacity to abstract and analyse concepts. But this is unnecessary. In these societies groups cannot analyse themselves or their actions, and influential individuals, however comprehending they may be, do not realize that they have to oppose each other. The chief is confounded with his clan and his clan with him, and individuals feel themselves to act only in one way. Holmes makes the acute observation that the Toaripi and Namau languages, the one Papuan and the other Melanesian, which he knew at the mouth of the Finke, have
only a single word to cover buy and sell, borrow and lend'. Antithetical operations are expressed by the same word. Strictly speaking, the natives did not borrow and lend in the manner that we do, but something was always in the form of a honorarium for the loan when it was returned.[100] These men have neither the notion of selling nor the notion of lending and yet carry out the legal and economic activities correspending to these words.

Nor is the notion of barter any more natural to the Melanesians than it is to the Polynesians. Kruyt, one of the better ethnographers, while using the word 'sale', describes exactly this state of mind among the inhabitants of Central Celebes.[101]

And yet these Toradja have long been in contact with the Malays who are well known for their trading.

Thus we see that a part of mankind, wealthy, hard-working and creating large surpluses, exchanges vast amounts in ways and for reasons other than those with which we are familiar from our own societies.

3. HONOUR AND CREDIT (NORTH-WEST AMERICA)

From these observations on Melanesian and Polynesian peoples our picture of gift economy is already beginning to take shape. Material and moral life, as exemplified in gift-exchange, functions there in a manner at once interested and obligatory. Furthermore, the obligation is expressed in myth and imagery, symbolically and collectively; it takes the form of interest in the objects exchanged; the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them; the communion and alliance they establish are well-nigh indissoluble. The lasting influence of the objects exchanged is a direct expression of the manner in which sub-groups within segmentary societies of an archaic type are constantly embroiled with and feel themselves in debt to each other. Indian societies of the American North-West have the same institutions, but in a more radical and accentuated form Barter is unknown there. Even now after long contact with
Europeans it does not appear that any of the considerable and continual transfers of wealth take place otherwise than through the formality of the potlatch.[102] We now describe this institution as we see it.

First, however, we give a short account of these societies. The tribes in question inhabit the North West American coast the Tlingit and Haida of Alaska,[103] and the Tsimshian and Kwakiutl of British Columbia.[104] They live on the sea or on the rivers and depend more on fishing than on hunting for their livelihood; but in contrast to the Melanesians and Polynesians they do not practice agriculture. Yet they are very wealthy, and even at the present day their fishing, hunting and trapping activities yield surpluses which are considerable even when reckoned on the European scale. They have the most substantial houses of all the American tribes, and a highly evolved cedar industry. Their canoes are good; and although they seldom venture out on to the open sea they are skilful in navigating around their islands and in coastal waters. They have a high standard of material culture. In particular, even back in the eighteenth century, they collected, smelted, moulded and beat local copper from Tsimshian and Tlingit country. Some of the copper in the form of decorated shields they used as a kind of currency. Almost certainly another form of currency was the beautifully embellished Chilkat blanket-work still used ornamentally, some of it being of considerable value.[105] The peoples are excellent carvers and craftsmen. Their pipes, clubs and sticks are the pride of our ethnological collections. Within broad limits this civilization is remarkably uniform. It is clear that the societies have been in contact with each other from very early days, although their languages suggest that they belong to at least three families of peoples.[106]

Their winter life, even with the southern tribes, is very different from their summer life. The tribes have a two-fold structure: at the end of spring they disperse and go hunting, collect berries from the hillsides and fish the rivers for salmon; while in winter they concentrate in what are known as towns. During this period of concentration they are in a perpetual
state of effervescence. The social life becomes intense in the extreme, even more so than in the concentrations of tribes that manage to form in the summer. This life consists of continual movement. There are constant visits of whole tribes to others, of clans to clans and families to families. There is feast upon feast, some of long duration. On the occasion of a marriage, on various ritual occasions, and on social advancement, there is reckless consumption of everything which has been amassed with great industry from some of the richest coasts of the world during the course of summer and autumn. Even private life passes in this manner; clansmen are invited when a seal is killed or a box of roots or berries opened; you invite everyone when a whale runs aground.

Social organization, too, is fairly constant throughout the area though it ranges from the matrilineal phratry (Tlingit and Haida) to the modified matrilineal clan of the Kwakiutl; but the general characters of the social organization and particularly of totemism are repeated in all the tribes. They have associations like those of the Banks Islanders of Melanesia, wrongly called 'secret societies', which are often inter-tribal; and men's and women's societies among the Kwakiutl cut across tribal organization. A part of the gifts and counter-prestations which we shall discuss goes, as in Melanesia,[107] to pay one's way into the successive steps [108] of the associations. Clan and association ritual follows the marriage of chiefs, the sale of coppers, initiations, shamanistic seances and funeral ceremonies, the latter being more particularly pronounced among the Tlingit and Haida. These are all accomplished in the course of an indefinitely prolonged series of potlatches. Potlatches are given in all directions, corresponding to other potlatches to which they are the response. As in Melanesia the process is one of constant give-and-take.

The potlatch, so unique as a phenomenon, yet so typical of these tribes, is really nothing other than gift-exchange.[109] The only differences are in the violence, rivalry and antagonism aroused, in a lack of jurat concepts, and in a simpler structure. It is less refined than in Melanesia, especially as regards the
northern tribes, the Tlingit and the Haida,[110] but the collective nature of the contract is more-pronounced than in Melanesia and Polynesia.[111] Despite appearances, the institutions here are nearer to what we call simple total prestations. Thus the legal and economic concepts attached to them have less clarity and conscious precision. Nevertheless, in action the principles emerge formally and clearly.

There are two traits more in evidence here than in the Melanesiari potlatch or in the more evolved and discrete institutions of Polynesia: the themes of credit and honour.[112] As we have seen, when gifts circulate in Melanesia and Polynesia the return is assured by the virtue of the things passed on, which are their own guarantees. In any society it is in the nature of the gift in the end to being its own reward. By definition, a common meal, a distribution of kava, or a charm worn, cannot be repaid at once. Time has to pass before a counter-prestation can be made. Thus the notion of time; is logically implied when one pays a visit, contracts a marriage or an alliance, makes a treaty, goes to organized games, fights or feasts of others, renders ritual and honorific service and 'shows respect', to use the Tlingit term.[113] All these are things exchanged side by side with other material objects, and they are the more numerous as the society is wealthier.

On this point, legal and economic theory is greatly at fault. Imbued with modern ideas, current theory tends towards a priori notions of evolution,[114] and claims to follow a so-called necessary logic; in fact, however, it remains based on old traditions. Nothing could be more dangerous than what Simiand called this 'unconscious sociology'. For instance, Cuq could still say in 1910: 'In primitive societies barter alone is found; in those more advanced, direct sale is practised. Sale on credit characterizes a higher stage of civilization; it appears first in an indirect manner, a combination of sale and loan.' [115] In fact the origin of credit is different. It is to be found in a range of customs neglected by lawyers and economists as uninteresting: namely the gift, which is a complex phenomenon especially in its ancient form of total prestation, which we are
studying here. Now a gift necessarily implies the notion of credit. Economic evolution has not gone from barter to sale and from cash to credit. Barter arose from the system of gifts given and received on credit, simplified by drawing together the moments of time which had previously been distinct. Likewise purchase and sale—both direct sale and credit sale—and the loan, derive from the same source. There is nothing to suggest that any economic system which has passed through the phase we are describing was ignorant of the idea of credit, of which all archaic societies around us are aware. This is a simple and realistic manner of dealing with the problem, which Davy has already studied, of the 'two moments of time' which the contract unites.[116]

No less important is the role which honour plays in the transactions of the Indies. Nowhere else is the prestige of an individual as closely bound up with expenditure, and with the duty of returning with interest gifts received in such a way that the creditor becomes the debtor. Consumption and destruction are virtually unlimited. In some potlatch systems one is constrained to expend everything one possesses and to keep nothing.[117] The rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige. The principles of rivalry, and antagonism are basic. Political and individual status in associations and clans, and rank of every kind, are determined by the war of property, as well as by armed hostilities, by chance, inheritance, alliance or marriage.[118] But everything is conceived as if it were a war of wealth.[119] Marriage of one's children and one's position at gatherings are determined solely in the course of the potlatch given and returned. Position is also lost as in war, gambling.[120] hunting and wrestling.[121] Sometimes there is no question of receiving return; one destroys simply in order to give the appearance that one has no desire to receive anything back.[122] Whole cases of candle-fish or whale oil,[123] houses, and blankets by the thousand are burnt; the most valuable coppers are broken and thrown into the sea to level and crush a rival. Progress up the social ladder is made in this way not only for oneself but also for one's
family. Thus in a system of this kind much wealth is continually being consumed and transferred. Such transfers may if desire be called exchange or even commerce or sale; [124] but it is an aristocratic type of commerce characterized by etiquette and generosity; moreover, when it is carried out in a different spirit, for immediate gain, it is viewed with the greatest disdain.[125]

We see, then, that the notion of honour, strong in Polynesia and present in Melanesia, is exceptionally marked here. On this point the classical writings made a poor estimate of the motives which animate men and of all that we owe to societies that preceded our own. Even as informed a scholar as Huvelin felt obliged to deduce the notion of honour—which is reputedly without efficacy—from the notion of magical efficacy.[126] The truth is more complex. The notion of honour is no more foreign to these civilizations than the notion of magic.[127] Polynesia mana itself symbolizes not only the magical power of the person but also his honour, and one of the 'best translations of the word is 'authority' or 'wealth'.[128] The Tlingit or Haida potlatch consists in considering mutual services as honours.[129] Even in really primitive societies like the Australian, the 'point of honour' is as ticklish as it is in ours; and it may be satisfied by prestations, offerings of food, by precedence or ritual, as well as by gifts.[130] Men could pledge their honour long before they could sign their names.

The North-West American potlatch has been studied enough as to the form of the contract. But we must find a place for the researches of Davy and Adam in the wider framework of our subject. For the potlatch is more than a legal phenomenon; it is one of those phenomena we propose to call 'total'. It is religious, mythological and shamanistic because the chiefs taking part are incarnations of gods and ancestors, whose names they bear, whose dances they dance and whose spirits, possess them.131 It is economic; and one has to assess the value, importance, causes and effects of transactions which are enormous even when reckoned by European standards. The potlatch is also a phenomenon of social morphology; the reunion of tribes,
clans, families and nations produces great excitement. People fraternize but at the same time remain strangers; community of interest and opposition are revealed constantly in a great whirl of business. [132] Finally, from the jural point of view, we have already noted the contractual forms and what we might call the human element of the contract, and the legal status of the contracting parties—as clans or families or with reference to rank or marital condition; and to this we now add that the material objects of the contracts have a virtue of their own which causes them to be given and compels the making of counter-gifts.

It would have been useful, if space had been available, to distinguish four forms of American potlatch: first, potlatch where the phratries and chiefs' families alone take part (Tlingit); second, potlatches in which phratries, clans, families and chiefs take more or less similar roles (Haida); third, potlatch with chiefs and their clans confronting each other (Tsimshian); and fourth, potlatch of chiefs and fraternities (Kwakiutl). But this would prolong our argument, and in any case three of the four forms (with the exception of the Tsimshian) have already been comparatively described by Davy. [133] But as far as our study is concerned all the forms are more or less identical as regards the elements of the gift, the obligation to receive and the obligation to make a return.

4. THE THREE OBLIGATIONS: GIVING, RECEIVING, REPAYING

The Obligation to Give

This is the essence of potlatch. A chief must give a potlatch for himself, his son, his son-in-law or daughter [134] and for the dead. [135] He can keep his authority in his tribe, village and family, and maintain his position with the chiefs inside and outside his nation, [136] only if he can prove that he is favourably regarded by the spirits, that he possesses fortune [137] and that he is possessed by it. [138] The only way to demonstrate his fortune is by expending it to the humiliation of others, by putting them
in the shadow of his name'.[139] Kwakiutl and Haida noblemen have the same notion of 'face' as the Chinese mandarin or officer.[140] It is said of one of the great mythical chiefs who gave no feast that he had a 'rotten face'.[141] The expression is more apt than it is even in China; for to lose one's face is to lose one's spirit, which is truly the 'face', the dancing mask, the right to incarnate a spirit and wear an emblem or totem. It is the veritable persona which is at stake, and it can be lost in the potlatch [142] just as it can be lost in the game of gift-giving,[143] in war,[144] or through some error in ritual.[145] In all these societies one is anxious to give; there is no occasion of importance (even outside the solemn winter gatherings) when one is not obliged to invite friends to share the produce of the chase, or the forest which the gods or totems have sent;[146] to redistribute every thing received at a potlatch; or to recognize services[147] from chiefs, vassals or relatives[148] by means of gifts. Failing these obligations—at least for the nobles—etiquette is violated and rank is lost.[149]

The obligation to invite is particularly evident between clans or between tribes. It makes sense only if the invitation is given to people other than members of the family, clan or phratry.[150] Everyone who can, will or does attend the potlatch must be invited.[151] Neglect has fateful results.[152] An important Tsimshian myth [153] shows the state of mind in which the central theme of much European folklore originated: the myth of the bad fairy neglected at a baptism or marriage. Here the institutional fabric in which it is sewn appears clearly, and we realize the kind of civilization in which it functioned. A princess of one of the Tsimshian villages conceives in the 'Country of the Otters' and gives birth miraculously to 'Little Otter'. She returns with her child to the village of her father, the chief.

Little Otter catches halibut with which her father feeds all the tribal chiefs. He introduces Little Otter to everyone and requests them not to kill him if they find him fishing in his animal form: 'Here is my grandson who has brought for you this food with which I serve you, my guests.' Thus the grandfather grows rich with all manner of wealth brought to him by
the chiefs when they come in the winter hunger to eat whale and seal and the fresh fish caught by Little Otter. But one chief is not invited. And one day when the crew of a canoe of the neglected tribe meets Little Otter at sea the bowman kills him and takes the seal. The grandfather and all the tribes search high and low for Little Otter until they hear about the neglected tribe. The latter offers its excuses; it has never heard of Little Otter. The princess dies of grief; the involuntarily guilty chief brings the grandfather all sorts of gifts in expiation. The myth ends: 'That is why the people have great feasts when a chief’s son is born and gets a name; for none may be ignorant of him.' [154] The potlatch—the distribution of goods—is the fundamental act of public recognition in all spheres, military, legal, economic and religious. The chief or his son is recognized and acknowledged by the people.[155] Sometimes the ritual in the feasts of the Kwakiutl and other tribes in the same group expresses this obligation to invite.[156] Part of the ceremonial opens with the 'ceremony of the dogs'. These are represented by masked men who come out of one house and force their way into another. They commemorate the occasion on which the people of the three other tribes of Kwakiutl proper neglected to invite the clan which ranked highest among them, the Guetela who, having no desire to remain outsiders, entered the dancing house and destroyed everything.[157]

The Obligation to Receive

This is no less constraining. One does not have the right to refuse a gift or a potlatch.[158] To do so would show fear of having to repay, and of being abased in default. One would 'lose the weight' of one's name by admitting defeat in advance.[159] In certain circumstances, however, a refusal can be an assertion of victory and invincibility.[160] It appears at least with the Kwakiutl that a recognized position in the hierarchy, or a victory through previous potlatches, allows one to refuse an invitation or even a gift without war ensuing. If this is so, then
a potlatch must be carried out by the man who refuses to accept the invitation. More particularly, he has to contribute to the 'fat festival' in which a ritual of refusal may be observed.[161] The chief who considers himself superior refuses the spoonful of fat offered him: he fetches his copper and returns with it to 'extinguish the fire' (of the fat). A series of formalities follow which mark the challenge and oblige the chief who has refused to give another potlatch or fat festival.[162] In principle, however, gifts are always accepted and praised.[163] You must speak your appreciation of food prepared for you.[164] But you accept a challenge at the same time.[165] You receive a gift 'on the back'. You accept the food and you do so because you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy.[166] When chiefs confront each/other in this manner they may find themselves in odd situations and probably they experience them as such. In like manner in ancient Gaul and Germany, as well as nowadays in gatherings of French farmers and students, one is pledged to swallow quantities of liquid to 'do honour' in grotesque fashion to the host. The obligation stands even although one is only heir to the man who bears the challenge.[167] Failure to give or receive,[168] like failure to make return gifts, means a loss of dignity.[169]

The Obligation to Repay

Outside pure destruction the obligation to repay is the essence of potlatch.[170] Destruction is very often sacrificial, directed towards the spirits, and apparently does not require a return unconditionally, especially when it is the work of a superior clan chief or of the chief of a clan already recognized as superior.[171] But normally the potlatch must be returned with interest like all other gifts. The interest is generally between 30 and 100 per cent. a year. If a subject receives a blanket from his chief for a service rendered he will return two on the occasion of a marriage in the chief's family or on the initiation of the chief's son. But then the chief in his turn redistributes to him whatever he gets from the next potlatch at which rival clans repay the chief's generosity.
The obligation of worthy return is imperative.[172] Face is lost for ever if it is not made or if equivalent value is not destroyed.[173]

The sanction for the obligation to repay is enslavement for debt. This is so at least for the Kwakiutl, Haida and Tsimshian. It is an institution comparable in nature and function to the Roman nexum. The person who cannot return a loan or potlatch loses his rank and even his status of a free man. If among the Kwakiutl a man of poor credit has to borrow he is said to 'sell a slave'. We need not stress the similarity of this expression with the Roman 'one'.[174] The Haida say, as if they had invented the Latin phrase independently, that a girl's mother who gives a betrothal payment to the mother of a young chief 'puts a thread on him'.

Just as the Trobriand *kula* is an extreme case of gift exchange, so the potlatch in North-West America is the monster child of the gift system. In societies of phratries, amongst the Thngit and Haida, we find important traces of a former total prestation (which is characteristic of the Athabascans, a related group). Presents are exchanged on any pretext for any service, and everything is returned sooner or later for redistribution.[175] The Tsimshian have almost the same rules.[176] Among the Kwakiutl these rules, in many cases, function outside the potlatch.[177] We shall not press this obvious point; old authors described the potlatch in such a way as to make it doubtful whether it was or was not a distinct institution.[178] We may recall that with the Chinook, one of the least known tribes but one which would repay study, the word 'potlatch' means 'gift'.[179]

5. THE POWER IN OBJECTS OF EXCHANGE

Our analysis can be carried farther to show that in the things exchanged at a potlatch there is a certain power which forces them to circulate, to be given away and repaid.

To begin with, the Kwakiutl and Tsimshian, and perhaps others, make the same distinction between the various types of
property as do the Romans, Trobrianders and Samoans. They have the ordinary articles of consumption and distribution and perhaps also of sale (I have found no trace of barter). They have also the valuable family property—talismans, decorated coppers, skin blankets and embroidered fabrics.[180] This class of articles is transmitted with that solemnity with which women are given in marriage, privileges are endowed on sons-in-law, and names and status are given to children and daughters' husbands.[181] It is wrong to speak here of alienation, for these things are loaned rather than sold and ceded. Basically they are sacra which the family parts with, if at all, only with reluctance.

Closer observation reveals similar distinctions among the Haida. This tribe has in fact sacralized, in the manner of Antiquity, the notions of property and wealth. By a religious and mythological effort of a type rare enough in the Americas they have managed to reify an abstraction: -the 'Property Woman', of whom we possess myths and a description.[182] She is nothing less than the mother; the founding goddess of the dominant phratry, the Eagles. But oddly enough—a fact which recalls the Asiatic world and Antiquity—she appears identical with the 'queen', the principal piece in the game of tip-cat, the piece that wins everything and whose name the Property Woman bears. This goddess is found in Tlingit[183] country and her myth, if not her cult, among the Tsimshian[184] and Kwakiutl.[185]

Together these precious family articles constitute what one might call the magical legacy of the people; they are conceived as such by their owner, by the initiate he gives them to, by the ancestor who endowed the clan with them, and by the founding hero of the clan to whom the spirits gave them.[186] In any case in all these clans they are spiritual in origin and nature.[187] Further, they are kept in a large ornate box which itself is endowed with a powerful personality, which speaks, is in communion with the owner, contains his soul, and so on.[188]

Each of these precious objects and tokens of wealth has, as amongst the Trobrianders, its name,[189] quality and power.[190]
The large abalone shells,[191] the shields covered with them, the decorated blankets with faces, eyes, and animal and human figures embroidered and woven into them, are all personalities.[192] The houses and decorated beams are themselves beings.[193] Everything speaks—roof, fire, carvings and paintings; for the magical house is built not only by the chief and his people and those of the opposing phratry but also by the gods and ancestors; spirits and young initiates are welcomed and cast out by the house in person.[194]

Each of these precious things has, moreover, a productive capacity within it.[195] Each, as well as being a sign and surety of life, is also a sign and surety of wealth, a magico-religious guarantee of rank and prosperity.[196] Ceremonial dishes and spoons decorated and carved with the clan totem or sign of rank, are animate things.[197] They are replicas of the never-ending supply of tools, the creators of food, which the spirits gave to the ancestors. They are supposedly miraculous. Objects are confounded with the spirits who made them, and eating utensils with food. Thus Kwakiutl dishes and Haida spoons are essential goods with a strict circulation and are carefully shared out between the families and clans of the chiefs.

6. 'MONEY OF RENOWN' (RENOMMIERGELD) [198]

Decorated coppers[199] are the most important articles in the potlatch, and beliefs and a cult are attached to them. With all these tribes copper, a living being, is the object of cult and myth.[200] Copper, with the Haida and Kwakiutl at least, is identified with salmon, itself an object of cult.[201] But in addition to this mythical element each copper is by itself an object of individual beliefs.[202] Each principal copper of the families of clan chiefs has its name and individuality;[203] it has also its own value,[204] in the full magical and economic sense of the word, which is regulated by the vicissitudes of the potlatches through which it passes and even by its partial or complete destruction.[205]
Coppers have also a virtue which attracts other coppers to them, as wealth attracts wealth and as dignity attracts honours, spirit-possession and good alliances. In this way they live their own lives and attract other coppers. One of the Kwakiutl coppers is called 'Bringer of Coppers' and the formula describes how the coppers gather around it, while the name of its owner is 'Copper-Flowing-Towards-Me'. With the Haida and Tlingit, coppers are a 'fortress' for the princess who owns them; elsewhere a chief who owns them is rendered invincible. They are the 'flat divine objects' of the house. Often the myth identifies together the spirits who gave the coppers, the owners and the coppers themselves. It is impossible to discern what makes the power of the one out of the spirit and the wealth of the other; a copper talks and grunts, demanding to be given away or destroyed; it is covered with blankets to keep it warm just as a chief is smothered in the blankets he is to distribute.

From another angle we see the transmission of wealth and good fortune. The spirits and minor spirits of an initiate allow him to own coppers and talismans which then enable him to acquire other coppers, greater wealth, higher rank and more spirits (all of these being equivalents). If we consider the coppers with other forms of wealth which are the object of hoarding and potlatch—masks, talismans and so on—we find they are all confounded in their uses and effects. Through them rank is obtained; because a man obtains wealth he obtains a spirit which in turn possesses him, enabling him to overcome obstacles heroically. Then later the hero is paid for his shamanistic services, ritual dances and trances. Everything is tied together; things have personality, and personalities are in some manner the permanent possession of the clan. Titles, talismans, coppers and spirits of chiefs are homonyms and synonyms, having the same nature and function. The circulation of goods follows that of men, women and children, of festival ritual, ceremonies and dances, jokes and injuries. Basically they are the same. If things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns 'respects' and
'courtesies'. But in addition, in giving them, a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself—himself and his possessions—to others.

7. PRIMARY CONCLUSION

From our study of four important groups of people we find the following: first, in two or three of the groups, we find the potlatch, its leading motive and its typical form. In all groups we see the archaic form of exchange—the gift and the return gift. Moreover, in these societies we note the circulation of objects side by side with the circulation of persons and rights. We might stop at this point. The amount, distribution and importance of our data authorize us to conceive of a regime embracing a large part of humanity over a long transitional phase, and persisting to this day among peoples other than those described. We may then consider that the spirit of gift-exchange is characteristic of societies which have passed the phase of 'total prestation' (between clan and clan, family and family) but have not yet reached the stage of pure individual contract, the money market, sale proper, fixed price, and weighed and coined money.