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Inalienable Wealth

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inalienable wealth

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introduction

In *Essai sur le Don*, Marcel Mauss noted that things such as Samoan fine mats, Northwest Coast coppers, Maori cloaks, and nephrite weapons remained attached to their original owners even when they circulated among other people. Mauss referred to these particular objects as “*immeuble*,” in the sense that they were inalienable wealth that could not be detached from their origins.¹ He illustrated that the cultural meanings of such wealth made these objects different from those that lacked the value of inalienability. What gives Mauss’s concept of inalienable wealth its profundity is that it forces us to consider the way value is created in objects that should remain out of circulation.

Much like the Elgin Marbles or the horses of San Marcos, whatever happens to these objects, they are perceived to belong in an inherent way to their original owners. Inalienable possessions are imbued with affective qualities that are expressions of the value an object has when it is kept by its owners and inherited within the same family or descent group. Age adds value, as does the ability to keep the object against all the exigencies that might force a person or a group to release it to others. The primary value of inalienability, however, is expressed through the power these objects have to define who one is in an historical sense. The object acts as a vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles, or mythological events become an intimate part of a person’s present identity. To lose this claim to the past is to lose part of who one is in the present. In its inalienability, the object must be seen as more than an economic resource and more than an affirmation of social relations.

Inalienable wealth takes on important priorities in societies where ranking occurs. Persons and groups need to demonstrate continually who they are in relation to others, and their identities must be attached to those ancestral connections that figure significantly in their statuses, ranks, or titles. To be able to keep certain objects that document these connections attests to one’s power to hold oneself or one’s group intact. For to give up these objects is to lose one’s claim to the past as a working part of one’s identity in the present.

In this essay, I explore in some detail Mauss’s classification of things “*immeuble*” and, of

This essay departs from traditional anthropological views of exchange by focusing on the importance of wealth objects kept out of circulation by their owners. I examine the implications of such wealth through an analysis of New Zealand Maori valued objects, notably, woven cloaks and nephrite weapons and ornaments. Drawing on Marcel Mauss’s notions of inalienable wealth, I enter the debates surrounding the meaning of the Maori hau, the spirit embedded in persons and things. I illustrate the significance of the hau in relation to the historical content of objects. [exchange, history, Mauss, Maori, wealth]

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necessity, I enter the long-standing debates on what Mauss and the Maori meant by the *hau*, the spirit thought by the Maori to reside in persons and things. Lévi-Strauss (1950:xxxvii) insisted that Mauss's phenomenological approach kept him preoccupied with ethnographic data and prevented him from recognizing the structural features of reciprocity. For Lévi-Strauss, the *hau* was merely the Maori point of view and understanding the "native" meaning could not expose the structural features of exchange. Yet, when the ethnographic record is explored in depth, the data reveal the Maori *hau* as the example par excellence substantiating the dynamics entailed in keeping while giving. I elaborate these points by using historical data from the New Zealand Maori to document the meaning and use of Maori valuables that in Mauss's terms are "*immeuble*."² In my analysis the object rather than the act of reciprocity plays the dominant role. My concern is to show how a narrow understanding of the nature of things has led to rigid preconceptions in anthropology about the nature of exchange.

In the closing paragraph of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss described what he considered the universal dream expressed in an Andaman Island myth of "a world in which one might *keep to oneself*" and escape from the "law of exchange" (1969:497). The Andaman view, however, represents a reality that many societies achieve to some degree. Keeping things instead of giving them away is essential if one is to retain some measure of one's social identity in the face of potential loss and the constant need to give away what is most valued. For example, in many societies in Papua New Guinea where the degree of individual and group political power remains diffuse, stones and/or the bones of ancestors are believed to "anchor" a clan or a lineage to a particular locality, physically securing its identity and ancestral rights (see especially, Young 1983; Weiner 1982a). In those societies in Oceania where the notion of sacredness gives rise to social and political separateness between some individuals, objects other than stones and bones, perceived to have attachments to lineage or chiefly identities, may move in exchange among people. What we find in these cases is a range of solutions to the inherent problem of how one can keep while giving.

For example, in the Trobriand Islands, certain objects, lineage names, shell body decorations, and rights to land may be exchanged among individuals for years or even generations. Yet these things never lose their identity and attachment to the lineage that originally owned them. At some future time, these things should be returned to the original owners or their descendants. A lineage, or actually the person who controls lineage activities, gives up part of its resources, creating through the giving the sociability inherent in exchange, while simultaneously assuring the *replacement* for lineage members of those resources once given. As I describe more fully elsewhere (see Weiner 1980), in the Trobriands the processes of replacement are directly tied to the life cycle of individuals, for most things are reclaimed by the original giver or his descendants when the receiver dies. From this perspective, replacement is central to attaining some measure of keeping-while-giving.

Other societies, however, keep some things out of circulation on a more permanent basis and these things take on heightened qualities of sacredness. In societies with divine rulers, the ruler and her or his things must be separated from ordinary people. Although divine rulers give things to their subjects, they also keep some things out of circulation. Crown jewels and other objects of divine association are perceived to be as sacred as the office itself, and equally inalienable. In the great kingdoms of ancient Egypt, the ultimate in keeping to oneself was achieved by royal marriages between brothers and sisters.

If we begin to think about how things are kept rather than given to others, we find examples even in societies far removed from kings and queens. Among Australian Aborigine societies, the sacred *churinga* boards are the statement of a man's social identity, traced through his relation to the mythical time of the dreaming and his ancestors. The *churinga* draws together historically all those who have held the board in the past (see Myers 1980). So affectively powerful are these boards that among the Aranda in Central Australia, the boards must stay hidden

and never leave the clan house. In this case, the *churinga* is the object that one must keep to oneself and pass on only through one's clan. Even in the Western Desert among the Pintupi, where *churinga* boards are given to others to create the closest bonds of kinship, only copies of the original boards are given to others in exchange (Fred Myers, personal communication).

Therefore, we find two classes of inalienable possessions: those that should never circulate and those that under certain circumstances may be given to others either on loan, as copies, or in return for another object of the same kind. In the latter case, the affective qualities constituting the giver's social and political identity remain embedded in the objects so that when given to others the objects create an emotional lien upon the receivers.

In any situation, however, loss of an object, through warfare or theft, diminishes one's ancestral identity as a social or political force in the present, although even a tiny piece of the object may be enough to perpetuate one's identity with the past.³ All effort is made to retain some part of possessions that mark out who a person is in relation to the past. Mauss pointed out in a footnote that in old French law, as well as in Chinese and Germanic property law, relatives had the right to repurchase property that should not have passed from the hereditary line (1954:128, fn. 103). Simmel (1971) once said that objects embody "pathos" because they encompass the limits and constraints in social relations. A loss is not merely the loss of something in a social sense, or even in an economic sense, but a loss may indicate a perceived weakness in a group's identity and therefore in its power to sustain itself for future generations. Such a loss is a destruction of the past, which ultimately weakens the future.

In all these cases, from Trobrianders to Egyptian rulers to Australian aborigines, things kept to oneself carry the affective qualities of sacredness that constitute the social self in relation to a past and future that, out of all the myriad possibilities, create a totality of ancestral identities. The immaterial characteristics that inalienable objects absorb, such as one's mythical or sacred origin, one's antecedents through past generations, and one's hierarchical position vis à vis others, give to these objects a force that carries beyond the social or political exigencies of the moment. An individual becomes more than she or he is because the self is enlarged and enhanced by the power of the past. In linking persons with things, the things are made into more than their own materiality, for the things themselves stand as the means through which individual mortality is transcended, ensuring some measure of the person's or group's immortality. Whether such objects remain hidden away as sacred possessions, or circulate among other people or whether the objects actually return to their original owners in one generation, in six generations, or never, the fact that they remain attached, that they belong to "the capital stock of substance belonging to a family" (Granet 1975:89) makes keeping them the primary element in the creation of value.

Mauss's legacy

In *Essai sur le Don*, Mauss described objects as embedded with "a spiritual matter, comprising men and things" that created the obligation to give, to receive and to repay:

[O]ne 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. . . . 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 [Mauss 1954:10].

Mauss found the ethnographic key to this view in a brief Maori text which described the concept of the *hau*, thought by the Maori to be the vital essence of life found in human beings, in land, and in things. Because the *hau* is connected through people to land and things, things take on the power of personification.

Mauss's critics found this view of the "gift" mystical and inappropriate for a rational under-

standing of exchange. Yet Mauss's formulation was based on comparative ethnographic reports. His first example was from Samoa where he noted that two kinds of objects were used in exchange. Fine mats ('ie tōga) presented by a woman's kin to her husband's kin at marriage are also exchanged at births and deaths. Another kind of wealth ('oloa), consisting of expendables such as food and traditionally produced and Western manufactured goods are given by the man's relatives to his wife's relatives at marriage. Mauss, in noting these sets of exchanges, labeled fine mats and 'oloa, respectively, "feminine" and "masculine" property. Mauss argued that fine mats, given in marriage by the woman's side, were "more closely bound up with the land, the clan, the family and the person" than the other property called 'oloa (Mauss 1923–24:157) (my translation).

Mauss called fine mats "*immeuble*" (1923–24:156), a word used in French medieval legal codes to refer to landed estate, fixed, real property. In contrast, 'oloa was called "*meuble*," personal property, chattel, things that could be confiscated. What Mauss emphasized in making this discrimination was that fine mats were more valued and were held in higher esteem than things called 'oloa and that the former things were associated with women and the regeneration of some fundamental aspect of kinship identity.

Although in the first pages of *Essai sur le Don*, Mauss called attention to significant differences between inalienable and alienable wealth, his insights have not been recognized by others who continue to analyze exchanges of fine mats and 'oloa as balanced reciprocity (see for example, Shore 1982:203–205). Yet fine mats differ considerably from 'oloa in substance and meaning. Some of the most highly valued fine mats are from 100 to 200 years old. Fine mats take on a history in their circulation and specially prized fine mats possess specific titles and secret stories of origin which belong to the histories of certain high titles. Even with the contemporary cash economy in both American and Western Samoa, fine mats still are presented in exchanges associated with births, marriages, deaths, and the taking of chiefly titles.

When a person brings fine mats or 'oloa to an exchange event, she or he receives 'oloa as payment for the work of helping those in charge. The distribution of 'oloa neither negates nor changes the statements about relationships made through fine mats (see Weiner 1982b, n.d. for more extensive discussion). Although the specific fine mat given does not return directly to the original givers, whoever presents a fine mat should receive another in return. In actual practice, based on the social and political circumstances of the moment, a person may receive a better fine mat or one of lesser value than she or he originally gave. Although fine mats are not inalienable in a total way, they represent an example of those cases in which some measure of replacement is secured. The attributes of age, names, and the histories of a fine mat's circulation associate the presentation of fine mats with the giver's title or status. Because fine mats are recognized and ranked in terms of the above criteria, the replacement of another fine mat for one given cannot always be equivalent. For example, when a particularly well-known fine mat has been stored away for many years and then taken out and presented at the death of a person who had a very high title, the presentation itself addresses the immediate political situation. But the donor's loss of the fine mat is a communication beyond the level of immediate politics. The full range of the statement that this fine mat makes about its own genealogy and title cannot be repeated with any other fine mat. Its age, name, and associated history make it unique and therefore not fully replaceable.⁴

In a later passage in *Essai sur le Don*, Mauss noted another example of inalienable wealth among the ranked societies of the Northwest Coast:

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. . . . They have also the valuable family property—talismans, decorated coppers, skin blankets and embroidered fabrics. This class of articles is transmitted with that solemnity with which women are given in marriage, privileges are endowed on sons-in-law. . . . *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 [1954:41–42; emphasis mine].

From Franz Boas's Kwakiutl ethnography, Mauss found several examples that documented the importance of inalienable wealth. Boas reported that the Kwakiutl possess two categories of coppers: those of the highest value which should never leave the family and others which "circulate intact, of less value and, as it were, satellites of the former" (Mauss 1954:115, fn. 206). Further, according to Boas, the latter coppers were only partially destroyed. One piece was broken off at one potlatch, but then at the next one, the person would try to regain that piece and rivet it onto the copper, thereby increasing its value (Mauss 1954:115, fn. 205). Here we find another solution to the problem of keeping while giving. Keeping some coppers out of circulation contributes to the value of those that are given by substantiating the power of the group to keep its ancestral identity intact, as expressed in the coppers one retains. Even with those coppers that do circulate, the replacement process, achieved through the restoration of the broken copper, sustains the continual recreation of inalienable wealth.

the New Zealand Maori case reexamined

Following the Samoan example of fine mats (*'ie tōga*), Mauss briefly surveyed other parts of Polynesia. The most important parallel was with the Maori *taonga* (valuable).

In the Maori, Tahitian, Tongan and Mangarevan languages it [taonga] 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. . . . 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 [1954:7–8; emphasis mine].

Cognates of *taonga* and *'ie tōga* occur in many Polynesian languages. The reference is to valued property, including barkcloth and mats. For example, in Tahitian, *taoa* means property or goods and in ancient Tahiti, barkcloth was among the most valued wealth objects. In Tonga, *tooga* refers to fine mats and in Mangareva, *toga* is the word for a cloak made from the paper mulberry tree. Yet such "cloth" wealth seldom is given prominence by anthropologists as a valued resource.⁵

In my earlier research on Trobriand exchange (Weiner 1976), I examined the economic importance of bundles of dried banana leaves, an object of exchange ignored by Malinowski and other early writers. More recently (Weiner 1982b, n.d.), I illustrated that these bundles of banana leaves are not isolated, exotic objects. From a comparative perspective, they are elementary forms of "cloth" wealth related to barkcloth, fine mats, and cloaks found throughout Polynesia. In these latter cases, not only are forms of cloth of economic significance, but such wealth has sacred value as it becomes the documentation for the histories of mythical and ancestral connections. In turning to the Maori material, these similarities become extremely important because their woven cloaks, often called mats in the early literature, are one of the two primary traditional wealth objects. The other class of *taonga* includes nephrite weapons and ornaments.⁶

Among Robert Hertz's papers, Mauss found a reference to a Maori text which, he said, illuminated the relationship between Samoan fine mats and the Maori *taonga* and gave "the key to the whole problem" (p. 8). The text was translated by Elsdon Best (1909:439) from his noted Maori informant, Tamati Ranapiri. Based on the Maori text, Mauss developed his argument that the *hau*, the spirit of the thing given, was the force embedded in an object that demanded a return.

In the Maori text, Ranapiri described a series of exchanges in which the return for a valuable that had passed from A to B to C would go from C through B and back to A. With some changes

in Best's text, Mauss quoted the following brief passage in which Ranapiri explained the meaning of the *hau*:

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. 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*), 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 since they are the *hau* 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 [Mauss 1954:89].

We now have two translations of this Maori text (Best 1909; Biggs as quoted in Sahlins 1972), Mauss's revised quotation of Best's translation, three reanalyses of Mauss's interpretation of the text (Firth 1959; Johansen 1954; Sahlins 1972) and two critiques of Sahlins's (1972) interpretation (Gathercole 1978; MacCormack 1982). In all these readings of the text, the enigmatic *hau* dominates attention, eclipsing the significance of *taonga*.

Looking carefully at Best's translation, however, we immediately find the ethnographic problem. Best translated *taonga* with a variety of words such as "item," "article," "present," and "goods," indicating that he attached no significance to Ranapiri's use of *taonga*. Mauss must have recognized Best's inconsistency because in the middle of the text, he substituted *taonga* for Best's varied translation. In Ranapiri's Maori text, however, which Best also recorded, the meaning of *taonga* was not ambiguous, for Ranapiri used only the word *taonga*. Professor Biggs in his translation of Ranapiri's Maori text (see Sahlins 1972:152) used the word "valuable" each time Ranapiri referred to *taonga*. Thus, Ranapiri was very clear. The *hau* was not to be found in all "gifts," but only in those classified as *taonga*. In order to understand Ranapiri's comments to Best and Mauss's enthusiasm for this "key" example, I now discuss the attributes of cloaks and stone *taonga*.

Maori cloaks as *taonga* Traditional cloaks made from flax fibers (*Phormium tenax*) are called *kahu* and the same term is used as a prefix for special cloaks, such as those made from birds' feathers and dogs' skins (see Best 1898b; Buck 1926; Mead 1969; Roth 1923 for discussions of production, styles, and weaving techniques). Although the Maori word base *kahu* is a reflex of the Proto-Polynesian term *kafu*, which means covering or cloth, among the Maori the following meanings of *kahu* indicate that some connection among cloaks, birth, death, and ancestors exists. For example, *kahu* designates the membrane surrounding the fetus (Buck 1950:462; Williams 1975:84). The term, *whare kahu* is the name for the special house in which Maori women give birth. *Whakakahu* refers to the person who cuts the umbilical cord (see for example, Best 1914, 1929b). Another set of meanings refers to death and ancestors. *Kahukahu* is the germ of a human being, the spirit of the deceased ancestor, a stillborn infant (Williams 1975:84–85; Buck 1950:462) and the cloth used by women during menstruation (Shortland 1882:107; Tregear 1891:113).

In traditional Maori thought, lesser gods and ancestors were believed to come from miscarriages and abortions (see Best 1905–06:12–15; Buck 1950:462–465; Shortland 1882:294). Best noted that the spirit of the aborted fetus is thought to develop into a dangerous and malevolent spirit (*atua*). But these same spirits from miscarriages might be cultivated into war gods so that their power could be directed against powerful enemies (1905–06:15). The notion that power is associated with miscarriages occurs elsewhere in Polynesia. In Samoa, ancestral spirits (*aitu*) are believed to come into being from clots of blood and miscarriages (see Cain 1971). Thus, even linguistically, the relation between *kahu* as cloak and *kahu* associated with giving

birth, miscarriages, and *atua* spirits suggests a significant sacred and venerable connection between cloaks, human life, and the power of gods and abortiveness.

Not only cloaks, but flax threads and the art of weaving ritually occupy a vital role in activities associated with birth and death. For example, at a chief's death, his children and relatives would take their place alongside his body. Forming one line of women and one of men, each person held a piece of flax fastened to a tag on the dead man's cloak. Then they would give a tug northwards as a sign that the spirit of the dead man should start off in that direction. The lines of flax were subsequently pulled until they broke off, sending the spirit of the dead man on its way (Tregear 1904:387).⁷

The power of flax threads to incorporate ancestral spirits occurs in other situations as well. Religious experts carried wooden staffs with carved heads which they used for calling upon the help of gods. The staff was placed in the ground, a piece of flax tied around the neck of the figure, and then the expert tugged on the flax while chanting a spell. Through the flax, the god was induced to enter the stick (Best 1924a:158; Smith 1910:221). This intimate connection between cloth and gods is not unique to the Maori. For example, in ancient Hawaii, where barkcloth was a major wealth object, special kinds of barkcloth were wrapped around carved figures of gods and ancestors in the temples. The cloth was thought to attract the ancestor or god into the stone figure. Without the cloth, the figure had no power at all (Kooijman 1972:165). Similarly, in ancient Tahiti, red feathers and sennit gave sacred powers to stones and images of gods (see Henry 1928:166–168; Oliver 1974:74, 893, 1234–1235).

Maori "god-sticks" were similar in form to weaving poles (see especially, Shortland 1882:29). All weaving was done by women, except for certain kinds of dog skin cloaks which were used in warfare and sometimes attended to by men. Each weaver had to participate in rituals conducted by a religious expert in order to learn the craft (for example, Mead 1969:170). A state of sacredness surrounded the weaver, the flax, and the poles. During the time of weaving, both the poles and the threads had to be attended to appropriately or sickness or even death was thought to occur (see Best 1898a:129; Buck 1926; Mead 1969 for details).

Certain rituals surrounding the birth of a child not only illustrate the same associations, but reveal a direct link between *taonga*, the *hau* of a person and the *hau* of cloaks. According to Best (1924a:10), the principal tutelary being of Maori women, *Hine-te-iwaiwa*, presided over both childbirth and the art of weaving. The poles used by women to support themselves during delivery were similar to those used for weaving and the god-sticks (Shortland 1882:29). Following a birth, a dedicatory formula was recited, during which time a small hank of dressed flax fiber was placed in the infant's hands. When the umbilical cord was to be cut, it was tied with a piece of prepared flax (Colenso 1868:355; Best 1905–06:21), and in the case of infants of high rank, the cord was cut with a valued nephrite adze (*taonga*). These stones had special names with references to cloaks.⁸ In the naming ceremony following each birth, however, we find the associations between *taonga* and *hau* even more specifically expressed.

After the removal of the umbilical cord, the child and mother left the birth house (*whare kahu*) to return to the village. Before returning, however, a special ritual, *tohi*, was performed in which the child received its name (Best 1914, 1929a, 1929b).⁹ The parents, infant, and relatives went with a religious expert to a stream in a secluded place. Here at the bank of the stream a variety of the finest woven cloaks was spread out and arranged in a specific way so that the hems of the collars were at the edge of the water.¹⁰ Nephrite adzes (*taonga*), if available, were placed on the cloaks. The parents then seated themselves on the cloaks, now called *paparoa*, the place of honor (Best 1929a:248). The expert recited a chant describing the strength and beauty of the child. After immersing the infant in water, and reciting the child's name and other magical chants that called upon various gods, the expert returned the infant to its mother.

The expert next took a small captive forest bird and, holding the bird, he chanted another text. "In this he calls upon the child by name to open its ears, to cultivate a receptive

mind . . . and at the close of his chanting, he touches the head of the infant with the bird” (Best 1929a:250). These latter chants addressed either the expected strength of the child for warfare if a boy or the ability of the female child to learn to weave (Taylor 1870; Mead 1969:169).¹¹ The group then returned to the village and the cloaks were “lifted by the collars and carried away” by the father’s parents or grandparents (Best 1929a:250). In the village the cloaks were again spread out in a formal way at the sacred place—the window space on the porch of the principal house. The infant was placed on the cloaks, and gifts were placed around the child.

I have described the *tohi* ceremony at length because, although Best made no mention of the bestowal of *hau* in the above discussion, in another publication he noted that in this ceremony the infant is endowed with “life, vigor . . . and the *hau-oro*, i.e., the *hau* of life or living *hau*” (1900–1:193; see also Taylor 1870:76). An account by Gudgeon specifically explains the way the *hau* is conferred during the naming ceremony.¹²

[W]e are told that the *hau* is conferred upon the child by it’s [*sic*] elder relatives when they perform the ceremony of *tohi*, hence if there has been no *tohi* there can be no *hau*. . . . It is a perfectly logical conclusion so far as the Maori is concerned to say that the *tohi* produces the *hau*; because according to their own traditions the first man was merely clay until life and intellect was [*sic*] conferred upon him by the breath of the god . . . and therefore the Maori is justified in assuming that the child is mere clay until the *tohi* has invested him with the divine spark [1905:127].

Thus the *hau* of each person was activated in the *tohi* ritual as a sign of each person’s vitality, knowledge, and ability. But the *hau* vested in a person could be lost at any time. A person’s *hau* could be attacked by others, causing death. In order to kill someone, an expert first had to obtain a piece of flax thread that belonged to the subject. This thread was then inserted into a hole in a mound of earth made to resemble a human form. Spells were recited causing the *hau* of the subject to descend the cord into the hole where it was confined and destroyed (Best 1901:88).

From these examples, we see that the *hau* can be separated from the person. The *hau* brings to the person the potential for strength and knowledge, but the person always is in danger of its loss. The association between persons and things, however, draws on more than the *hau*. For threads and cloaks act as agents of transmission, extending the presence of a person into situations where the material object, the cloak, or even its threads, stands for the person.¹³ From this perspective, it is not unreasonable to envision the kind of power that cloaks are perceived to have. Although all cloaks were believed to take on a person’s *aahua* or semblance (Mead 1969:175), chiefs’ cloaks were so heavily *tapu* that no one else would dare to touch them. Even after a person died, her or his cloaks were still active. Depending on the rank of the person, some cloaks were buried with the deceased, others, with the *tapu* removed, were stored in large carved wooden boxes for continued use by the dead person’s relatives (Tregear 1904:393).

In all these examples associated with birth and death, flax threads and cloaks figure significantly in the transmission of powers from gods as they also absorb the very power embedded in the life force of the *hau*. Threads and cloaks are not only the symbol of these powers, but they are perceived as their active agents incorporating the *hau* of their owner. If, however, Maori cloaks as *taonga* play a paramount role throughout and beyond a person’s life, what is the relationship between cloaks and stone *taonga*?

nephrite *taonga* Stone *taonga* are made from nephrite (*pounamu*; also called “greenstone” or, wrongly, “jade” in the ethnographic literature). The stone itself was believed to have a mythical origin and is “endowed with life” (Best 1912:175). Many early sources recount the importance of nephrite weapons (for example, *mere* or *patu*) and ornaments (*tiki*) used as compensation payments and as “gifts” (e.g., Best 1902:235, 1912:175–200; Polack 1838, 1:390). The most valued nephrite *taonga* each had an individual name and when these objects were on view, the histories of battles and ownership would be recounted (Best 1912:215–216; Yate

1835:151; Firth 1959:354, fn. 1). *Taonga* were presented at naming ceremonies, ear piercing rituals, marriages, and deaths (Angas 1847:355; Best 1903:62, 1924b:115, 1959:314–315; Williams 1975:99). An account of an incident in 1856 involving the sale of land to Europeans depicts the Maori attitude toward the nephrite *taonga*:

[A] chief . . . struck into the ground at the feet of the Land Purchase Commissioner a greenstone axe, saying:—"Now that we have for ever launched this land into the sea, we hereby make over to you this axe, named Paewhenua, which we have always highly prized from having regained it in battle after it was used by our enemies to kill two of our most celebrated chiefs. Money vanishes and disappears, but this greenstone will endure as a lasting witness of our act, as the land itself, which we have now, . . . transferred to you for ever" [Best 1912:245].

The above quotation illustrates the way a valuable acts to condense historical circumstances into a document about the present. Although each tribe had its own origin stories and genealogies of its most sacred *taonga*, what all *taonga* had in common "was their ability to act as a focus for ancestral power and talk" (Salmond 1984:118).

Nephrite ornaments also took on qualities of individual identities and histories. The sculptured *hei-tiki* (neck pendants) resembled a cross-legged human being carved with its head tilted to one side and in most cases, with female genitals. These neck pendants received individual names and were inherited by other relatives after an owner died (Donne 1927[1859]:199–200). Early Maori sources suggest that the *hei-tiki* represented the immortalization of an individual in the way that other nephrite weapons represented the chief and the tribe. Yate (1835:152) described the manner in which a *hei-tiki* would be wept and sung over in remembrance of the person to whom the ornament had once belonged. Donne (1927[1859]:201) suggested that while the bones of the deceased were finally interred, the *hei-tiki* remained to circulate among the relatives of the deceased. The *hei-tiki*, he noted, "acquire some of the personality, actual identity, or spirit, of their owners, and thus. . . [they] become a virtual part of their living existence" (p. 198).

Archaeological evidence provides another clue. The use of nephrite for weapons and ornaments does not appear in the archaeological record until the Classic Maori Phase dated about AD 1300 to AD 1500. In sites reflecting earlier cultural patterns, generally called the Archaic Phase (see Golson 1959), ornaments were made from human bones, moa bones, whale ivory, and whale teeth (e.g., Golson 1959; Bellwood 1979). Burials from this phase disclosed that skulls and other bones were often missing. Bellwood (1979) suggested that such bones "were very probably removed for ancestor rituals and to make ornaments of relatives" (p. 388).

Hei-tiki were not always made from nephrite. According to Donne (1927[1859]), the parietal bone as well as whalebone were fashioned into these pendants and "such a memento would be very much revered, and both the chief, whose head provided the bone, and the wearer of the *tiki* would be honoured" (p. 202). The ornaments made from bone predate the use of nephrite. The use of nephrite *taonga* appears to be an elaboration of earlier valuables, taking on the attributes and qualities of sacredness and power as well as the genealogical histories attached to bones and cloaks. Cloaks no doubt circulated as *taonga* from very early times. The ancestors of the Maori who first came to New Zealand brought with them the technique for barkcloth production used widely throughout Polynesia as well as the paper mulberry tree (Buck 1950:161). The climate prohibited extensive cultivation of the tree, and the barkcloth itself was inadequate against the colder weather. The subsequent use of flax, with the introduction of a more complex finger weaving technique (see Buck 1926), created a technology unique to the Maori. Although the first evidence of a cloak from a burial site is dated in the 17th century (Simmons 1968), burials from the much earlier Archaic period included many cloak pins (see Golson 1959). The wider Polynesian tradition of cloth wealth (see Weiner 1982b, n.d.) underlies the evolution of Maori cloaks, not just in terms of technology, but in relation to the

sacred qualities of cloth that implicate such wealth directly in social and political events of the greatest importance.

Many ritual uses of bones and cloaks suggest their close connection as primary Maori inalienable properties. The Maori practiced multiple burials and each time that the bones were exhumed, they were carefully wrapped in cloaks before they were reburied or finally deposited in a cave (Taylor 1870:99–100). Best (1924b) described the ritual associated with the reburial of bones that is similar to the display of a child after the naming ceremony discussed above: “On reaching the village the bones would be deposited in the porch of the principal house, below the window space, and on mats [cloaks] spread for the purpose” (p. 74). At the completion of this final stage, if the deceased were a chief, the bones would be carefully wrapped in cloaks and deposited in some part of the ancestral land. Mead (1969:175) wrote that through these secondary burials the deceased becomes an ancestor, whose spiritual presence is realized through bones and cloaks.

When bones are buried or placed in caves or tribal property, they manifest the ultimate in inalienability. But they equally exemplify the problem to be found in ultimate solutions. Once buried, they no longer can be displayed publicly at appropriate times, nor can they be inherited by individuals through generations. The transformation of bones into objects that, like bones, are physically durable, but unlike bones, continue to move with people through time and space is a significant step in the hierarchical conversion of the value of objects within a society.

One final example following from the burial of bones with cloaks illustrates the similarity of the ritual veneration of bones and cloth in relation to nephrite weapons. Smith (1900:230) gave an account of the discovery of a famous nephrite adze which had been lost for seven generations. Yet everyone still remembered the stories associated with the adze as well as its description. In 1877, the adze was discovered and when recognized, it was cried over by 300 people who assembled to view it. On exhibit the adze was wrapped in 16 of the most valued and finest cloaks.

the circulation of *taonga* Although most writers emphasize the significance of nephrite valuables, and cloaks often are ignored, cloaks and nephrite were accorded the same sacredness and power. Like nephrite adzes, cloaks were used as payment for ceding land title to others (see Firth 1959:389, fn. 3). In fact, the relation between Maori cloaks and land is clear in an example about the burial of the umbilical cord. When a child was born, the umbilical cord was buried on the land to which the child had rights (Colenso 1868:362) and the cord was wrapped in a piece of “old garment.” Both cloaks and nephrite were used as payment to religious experts for training others and for the performances of rituals (Best 1914:156, 1924b:4). Compensation for crimes was paid in both objects (Polack 1838, I:39), and trade in cloaks was as extensive as trade in adzes (see e.g., Best 1912:314; Colenso 1868:345–355; McNab 1908:375–376; Shortland 1851:36–37).

Cloaks and nephrite both moved in the same direction when they were distributed at births, marriages, and most importantly, at deaths. Cloaks, like nephrite *taonga*, were displayed and handled and elicited historical recountings. Cruise in 1823 reported that a family wept over the cloak of their son as though it were the corpse (cited in Mead 1969:176). Tregear (1904:392) noted: “After the body was buried these mats [cloaks] were displayed and traditions connected with them were expounded by the elders” (see also Buck 1950:420). Many early writers described the large quantity of cloaks that, following a death, are brought by relatives and spread over the deceased as “coverings” (e.g., Angas 1847, II:70; Buck 1950:420; Polack 1838, II:72; Tregear 1904:390–391).

Both cloaks and stone *taonga* circulated widely, as trade objects, as payments for services and also in some kinds of exchanges. However, there were highly revered *taonga*, owned by

individuals of high rank, whose circulation was of a different nature. Like certain of the Kwakiutl coppers, these *taonga* were inalienable. The role *taonga* played in warfare illustrates the attachment of *taonga* to their places of origin and the enormous effort to keep *taonga* within these individual and tribal boundaries.

Many writers describe the way wars were fought in order to capture a famous nephrite adze, but cloaks figured just as significantly in those attacks, for men were known to kill others in order to obtain a particularly fine and well-known cloak (Smith 1910:193–194). The power of cloaks was perceived to be so great that by throwing a cloak over a condemned person, the person's life would be spared (Taylor 1870:56–58). In one account, the head of a chief was returned to his clan by the payment of a nephrite weapon (Best 1912:179). If a chief knew that another group planned to attack his village and if he thought that his own group would not be able to defend itself, he would give up his most valued *taonga*. The chief knew that the real objective of the attack was to gain “tribal treasures.” Therefore, he and his relatives would pay a ceremonial visit to those whom they feared and give up their prized cloaks and nephrite weapons (Donne 1927[1859]:189–190). As Mead (1969) noted, when a challenging party accepts cloaks instead of fighting, they have attained the “*aahua*—the semblance of victory” (p. 176). Each victory, however, was short-lived, because the loss of *taonga* triggered later attacks to return the valuables to their “*foyer d’origine*” (see Best 1912:216).

As Ann Salmond wrote, summarizing the way Maori perceive nephrite *taonga*:

For each treasure [*taonga*] was a fixed point in the tribal network of names, histories, and relationships. They belonged to particular ancestors, were passed down particular descent lines, held their own stories, and were exchanged on certain memorable occasions. *Taonga* captured history and showed it to the living, and they echoed patterns of the past from first creation to the present [1984:118].

Thus, if *taonga* take on these qualities of inalienability, what is the relation of *taonga* to the *hau*? Attention to this question not only brings into focus Mauss's use of the Maori data, but illustrates how, following Mauss, subsequent attempts by anthropologists to define and analyze both exchange and goods have failed to take account of the objects themselves. Therefore, I begin by reviewing the two major critiques of Mauss's notions of the *hau* by Raymond Firth and Marshall Sahlins.

on Mauss's interpretation of the *hau*

Firth's (1959:418–421) critique of *Essai sur le Don* in his book, *Primitive Economics Among the New Zealand Maori*, is a classic example of how preconceptions about reciprocity led scholars to overlook the significance of *taonga* and thus to distort the very nature of the exchange they intended to study. Firth argued that ethnographically, Mauss was mistaken about the power of the *hau*. Rather than an active agent, searching always to return to its *foyer d’origine*, the *hau* was passive and “alone effected nothing” (p. 419). If reciprocity was not forthcoming, then other sanctions such as magic were used to destroy the thief. Even more serious was Mauss's contention that the *hau* of the person was “at the basis of the compulsion to repay” (p. 420). Since the Maori text made no mention of the *hau* of the person, Firth argued that Mauss had no justification for his conclusion that the *hau* of the gift was tied to the person. Mauss, according to Firth, overintellectualized the Maori text, making supernatural sanctions the primary force initiating a return.

In another chapter, however, Firth (pp. 353–356) did explore the subject of *taonga*. Although he noted the Maori belief in the magical power of *taonga*, he never associated *taonga* with *hau*. Firth translated *taonga* as “heirloom,” and he referred only to nephrite objects, not considering cloaks *taonga*. In an important paragraph, however, Firth described *taonga* as objects which have references to individuals within chiefly families or as tribal property, “held in the nature

of a trust by the chief." "Such heirlooms were brought out on ceremonial occasions that the people might admire them and perhaps *tangi* [mourn] over them in greeting; and when circumstances warranted they were even handed over as gifts to chiefs of high rank in other tribes" (1959:353–354). The histories and obligations created through their circulation were recounted by elders and "handed down from one generation to the next" (p. 416). For Firth, the economics of the exchanges were deceptive, as "often the exchange is made for objects of precisely the same type, and of quality perhaps inferior."

Despite his sensitivity to the properties of time, history, and affective qualities in *taonga*, Firth reduced the value of *taonga* to associations of "sentiment." Since *taonga* were, in effect, heirlooms, the lack of observed equivalency in returns of *taonga* was explained away because "sentiment" was socially sanctioned. Economic factors following from self-interest and maintenance of prestige obligated those involved in exchanges to a "compulsion" to give and repay. Therefore, *taonga* circulated like any other valuable in "gift-exchange," bonded to the social and economic sanctions which define equivalences in value.

In Sahlins's (1972:149–184) interpretation of the "true meaning" of the *hau*, the question of the meaning of *taonga* is never raised. Accepting the tenets of economic gain in reciprocity, Sahlins searched for an example to prove that Mauss's seemingly mystical reading of the *hau*, in reality, is nothing other than the return of a "material yield" to the first party. Sahlins focused on Ranapiri's discussion of the *hau* of the forest because the passage quoted by Mauss was from Best's ethnography on Maori forest lore.

In order to show that the *hau* of things encompasses more than economic yield and that Sahlins's approach is limited, I consider the main issues in Sahlins's discussion. This necessitates a digression into certain aspects of Maori hunting ritual, for Sahlins drew on Ranapiri's comments about the *hau* told to Best in the context of Best's questions about the ritual, *whangai-hau*, in which forest birds become available for hunters. Ranapiri described the importance of placing a talisman (*mauri*), usually a small stone, a piece of wood, or a bird's feather, in the forest as a representative of the *hau* of the forest. The talisman, made and hidden by priests, promoted fecundity of birds for trappers and hunters. Anyone entering the forest to kill birds should throw away the first bird as an offering to the hidden *mauri* to ensure further success. When successful hunters retired to their home, another offering was made to priests who cooked the birds over a sacred fire.

Sahlins's interpretation of the *hau* as the "material yield" of a gift given centers on Ranapiri's comment that the priests eat the offering from the hunters. For Sahlins the mystique of the *hau* was evidenced in the following assumptions. The priests represent the original givers of fecundity to the forest. The forest, in turn, gives birds to the hunters. Therefore, the return to the priests, the birds cooked on the sacred fire, is the return from the third party:

The meaning of *hau* one disengages from the exchange of *taonga* is as secular as the exchange itself. If the second gift is the *hau* of the first, then the *hau* of a good is its yield, just as the *hau* of a forest is its productiveness . . . the point is neither spiritual nor reciprocity as such, if it is rather that one man's gift should not be another man's capital, and therefore the fruits of a gift ought to be passed back to the original holder, then the introduction of a third party is necessary. It is necessary precisely to show a turnover: the gift has had issue; the recipient has used it to advantage [Sahlins 1972:160].

The ethnographic situation from which Sahlins builds his case is more subtle and complex than the conclusion that materially "the gift has had issue." Not only the priest eats the first birds at a sacred fire, but women of high rank also eat these first "offerings," an act of such importance that Ranapiri stated it twice (Best 1909:438, 440). In one passage he explains:

Those birds selected as an offering are cooked at a sacred fire. Only *tohunga* (priests, adepts) may eat the birds cooked at a sacred fire. Certain other birds are selected to be cooked at the *ahi tapairu* [the women's sacred fire], and only women (of rank) may eat those [Ranapiri as quoted in Best 1901:438; emphasis mine].

Although Sahlins included this remark of Ranapiri's about women at the sacred fire in a footnote (pp. 158–159, fn. 10), he omitted the translation of "the women's sacred fire," the phrase "of rank," and in his analysis he made no mention of their presence.¹⁴ But the involvement of women in this forest ritual gives us a clue that the birds given to the priests and to the women are not a "turnover" in any mere economic sense.

Best, who usually dismisses the sacred (*tapu*) importance of women in much of his writing, called attention to the role women play in the ceremony similarly called *whangai-hau*, but performed to free warriors from a state of *tapu*. Two fires are kindled and, "At each of these the priestly expert roasted a sweet potato, and he himself ate the tuber cooked at the former fire, and handed that of the latter to a woman selected to act with him in this *tapu*-removing rite" (1924a:242).

When individuals had to engage in certain activities such as warfare, hunting, and childbirth, they entered into a ritual *tapu* state which brought them under the influence of gods and spiritual beings (*atua*) (see Hanson and Hanson 1983). In this state, the person underwent not only rigorous taboos but danger from such close connection with spiritual gods (*atua*) and when the activity was completed, the *tapu* state was removed through the *whagai-hau* (Taylor 1870:76–78; Smith 1910:192, 512).

Eating cooked food was the most commonly used agent for the ritual removal of spiritual influences, for cooked food was thought to draw *atua* influences to itself (Hanson and Hanson 1983:94–95; Shortland 1882:26; see also Best 1924a:238). So powerful was the *tapu* of cooked food believed to be that when visitors to another village were given cooked birds to eat by their hosts, they were forbidden to take any portions of the birds away with them. They had to remain and eat the birds in their host's village (Best 1909:435).

Therefore in order for anyone to eat the birds caught in the forest, the sacred priest and a high ranked woman first had to eat the birds, absorbing the *atua* powers themselves and thereby making the food free from *tapu* for everyone else (see Shortland's example 1882:27). The offering of the birds to the priest had nothing to do with the "yield" of the *hau* in an economic, secular sense, as depicted in Sahlins's analysis. The significance of the forest *hau* is related to the state of *tapu* that the *hau* maintains. The force of the *hau* lies in its ability to promote fecundity, but only for those who own the land (see Best 1909:437).

Consider the following comment from another of Best's informants. Although visitors to another village may not take away cooked birds, they may carry uncooked birds away with them to their own place:

But still one of those uncooked birds must be returned to the donors, the villagers, as a *tautawhi*—that is to say, one bird will be taken by the villagers out of the *mata* (basket of birds) and presented to the visitors. *Tautawhi* means a holding, a retaining of the birds (of the forest), lest they follow those given to the visitors, and which will be taken away [Best 1909:435].

Even when forest birds are given to guests, the danger that future loss will occur is thus expressed in the taboos of giving that demand keeping some portion of the gift.

The example of keeping birds while giving them to others illustrates the same principle we have seen with the Kwakiutl coppers and with *taonga*. The things kept allow a person to circulate other things. Analytically there are two levels that must be separated. From a global perspective, the circulation of things appears constant: the give and take of social exchange. From an individual perspective, however, it is essential that something is retained so that a person is not excluded from access to the resource. As long as the person retains one thing, other things will return to her or him. With nothing retained, no other things will be drawn to the person. The circulation of *kula* shells operates under similar circumstances. As long as a person has shells moving through *kula* paths, other potential partners will seek him out and therefore, other shells will come to the person. If, however, everything is lost and a person has no shells at all, then no shells flow through the person and no one is drawn to him.

With the Maori, the talisman (*mauri*) which protected the *hau* of the forest also protected birds, fish, persons, and land. The talisman “protects the *hau* of all” (Best 1909:442). If the talisman was taken away, sterility and nonproductiveness would ensue (Best 1909:442). Thus we see that the *hau* creates the retention of things but only for persons who have the appropriate rights to the things. The *hau* secures replacement and, in this way, the *hau* bridges the problem of keeping while giving. The *hau*, as with all persons, things, and property, can be lost or stolen. The *hau* attests to each person’s potential power and each person’s potential vulnerability.

When a *taonga* is given to someone, the *hau* of the *taonga* forces a return, not because the return is a “yield” or because social “sentiment” is tied to economic goals. The *hau* is thought to bring back either the original *taonga* or a replacement. Keeping something is imperative, for without at least one thing, nothing more will follow. The *taonga* and the *hau*, however, are not identical, for a *taonga* carries the force of history, which makes the object part of its owner in an inalienable way. Mauss recognized this difference when he wrote, “The *taonga* seem to have an individuality beyond that of the *hau*, which derives from their relationship with their owner” (1954:87, fn. 32).

A contemporary account of the circulation of *taonga* is most revealing in this regard. In funeral practices:

greenstone weapons and ornaments with names and histories . . . feather cloaks and fine flax mats . . . [are presented]. Such gifts may be kept for years, but are ultimately returned to the donors on a comparable occasion. *The recipients hold them in trust: they do not “own” them and should not dispose of them to anyone except a member of the donor group. Pakehas [Europeans] who are given such gifts as recognition of their social or political standing often offend in this respect out of ignorance* [Metge 1976:260; emphasis mine].

Thus we see that Ranapiri’s explanation was quite straightforward. When a *taonga* is given to someone, either the original or a replacement must return whether it is given to the second, the third, or the tenth person. The *taonga* carries the “semblance” (*aahua*) of the person in the form of the *hau*. The *taonga* given should return, but the *hau* can be detached from the object so that another *taonga* may carry the original “semblance.” In this way, a replacement for the *taonga* is created through the returning *hau*.

Mauss was correct: “the thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified” (1954:10). For *taonga* are “to some extent parts of persons” (p. 11) in the sense that the *taonga* is the material document of its owner’s ancestral past and is itself the carrier of the *hau*. The stone and cloth valuables believed to contain the same life force, the *hau*, as do humans, are not only the agents of individuals, but through their collective histories the valuables become the proof of a group’s immortality. To lose a *taonga* forever is a material admission of one’s own mortality and a sign of the weakening of a tribe’s identity and power.

keeping-while-giving

Anne Salmond, in describing the way nephrite *taonga* bind tribal groups together wrote, “The alchemy of *taonga* was to bring about a fusion of men [and women] and ancestors and a collapse of distance in space-time” (1984:120). As John White recounted in 1888:

[I]n the old custom it was proper for such men [chiefs] to exchange such weapons, because they represented the descent lines which held them in keeping. A prized greenstone weapon was kept for a time by the descendants in one line of descent, and then they carried it and presented it to those in another line of descent from the tribal ancestor who first made it [quoted and translated by Salmond 1984:119].

From these examples, we can see that Ranapiri’s text was not enigmatic, nor was Mauss’s interpretation of the *hau* mystical. The opposition in anthropological interpretation between a spiritual explanation and a material explanation has been falsely constructed. The *hau* attached

to objects embodies the relation of the person to a sacred world of spiritual force. The ethnography shows us that the *hau* must be given following birth and is lost at death, and that it must be replaced continually in people and things, thereby making people and things more than they are. As the agent of replacement, the *hau* is a force against loss, securing a group's individual strengths and identities against the demands of others.

The *taonga* also attends to the problem of loss and the expansion of self, but from an historical perspective. By bringing one's ancestral and mythical histories into the present, the *taonga* endows present actions with greater force. If Mauss's (1979) essay on the role and place of the person is read in conjunction with *Essai sur le Don*, the relationship between persons and things inalienable becomes more explicit. For example, in his discussion of Zuni rituals and ancestral names, Mauss called attention to the importance of understanding that the person had to be seen in relation to his or her past. "What is at stake . . . is more than the privilege and authority of the chief of the clan; it is the very existence both of the latter and of the ancestors" (1979:68–69). The clan is constituted by persons, who play particular roles in social life, but the purpose of these roles is "to symbolize, each in its own portion, the pre-figured totality of the clan" (p. 65).

An individual's role in social life is fragmentary unless attached to something of permanence. The history of the past, equally fragmentary, is concentrated in an object that, in its material substance, defies destruction. Thus, keeping an object defined as inalienable adds to the value of one's past, making the past a powerful resource for the present and the future. The dynamics surrounding keeping-while-giving are attempts to give the fragmentary aspect of social life a wholeness that ultimately achieves the semblance of immortality, thereby adding new force to each generation.

The dilemma of the situation is apparent, loss, decay, death, and defeat shatter the semblance of wholeness and the vision of immortality. The *hau* can be lost; the *taonga* can be taken away. Therefore, the value created through keeping must be seen in relation to the constant threats and needs of giving. Replacement allows the keeping of things while giving things to others. For replacement allows a person to retain some part of inalienable possessions or some degree of inalienability. The need to exchange with others is inherently dangerous because a person not only gives away material things, but a measure of her or his own identity.

Keeping, giving, and replacement are the three fundamental processes through which persons play out the dynamics of social exchange. Keeping, however, is primary as the means for achieving wealth that not only expresses a person's or a group's identity, but concentrates that identity into a symbol of immortality. Thus, true inalienability is extremely difficult to attain. Taking account of inalienable wealth in a range of societies, we find various solutions to the problem of keeping-while-giving. For future research, differentiating how these solutions accommodate the degree of ranking and the nature of kinship and gender relations in these societies should give us important comparative insights. What seems clearly established, however, is that the creation and possession of wealth that has the qualities of inalienability is a major step in sustaining marked, hierarchical relations between individuals and groups. As this wealth stands for the totality of a person's social history in relation to her or his clan or lineage, it seems no accident that the objects are made from cloth and the material amplifications of human bones. Susanne Langer (1953) wrote that in art it is necessary to have "visual substitutes for the things that are normally known by touch, movement or inference" (p. 73). With inalienable wealth, we also find "visual substitutes" for history, ancestors, and the immortality of human life.

notes

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¹In the English translation (Mauss 1954:7) of *Essai sur le Don*, “*immeuble*” is translated “indestructible.”

²Early Maori sources often are problematic. I have tried to use the materials judiciously by checking as many references as possible to the same events or descriptions. This is especially important in Elsdon Best’s material, for his descriptions vary considerably from one of his texts to another on the same subject. Although regional cultural differences exist, the basic distinctions I make in this paper about valuables called *taonga* seem to be constant.

³This may be the reason, for example, that strips cut from a valued bark blanket among the Tlingit are “esteemed far beyond their intrinsic value” (Emmons 1907).

⁴I suspect that the partial inalienability of Samoan fine mats is reflective of their particular system of titles and rank.

⁵John Murra’s (1962) essay on cloth in the development of Inca civilization did not generate comparative interest. Major work on social stratification in the Pacific (Goldman 1970; Sahlins 1958) failed to consider the significance of cloth wealth.

⁶A major confusion in Mauss’s text is his use of words such as “charms” and “idols.” In a footnote, however, he is more precise: “they [*taonga*] comprise: the *pounamu*, jades that are the sacred property of the clan chiefs; the rare, sculptured *tiki*; various kinds of mats” (1954:87, fn. 32).

⁷Best (1905–6:165) describes a similar ritual among the Tuhoe in which the spirit of the deceased is believed to be sent on its way with flax about the mouth.

⁸According to Shortland (1851:37), the best quality stone used to cut the umbilical cord was called *Kahurangi*, the cloak of heaven.

⁹The ritual components differed from one geographical place to another. The major changes, however, seem to have been in the use of water and the use of the bird.

¹⁰The collars of cloaks had special significance. Best writes “when presenting a cloak to a person, it would be laid outspread . . . so that the upper part, the collar, would be next to him. When gifts were made in a house . . . a garment was deposited so that the neck faced the window” (1929b:35), which was a sacred part of the house. *Whiri* is the Maori word for collar and it also was the Maori term first used for plaiting mats (Best 1898b:652).

¹¹The gender differentiation between women and weaving and men and warfare is significant since both activities are *tapu*. In forthcoming work, I plan to focus more specifically on the role of Maori women in relation to cloak production.

¹²Gathercole (1978), pointing out the difficulty in relying completely on Best’s work, referred to this early description by Gudgeon.

¹³If a chief wanted to make a place sacred, he took his cloak or even a thread from his cloak and tied it to a pole in the ground (Taylor 1870:56). If a woman threw a cloak over a man, he would become her husband (Smith 1910:289). Best (1914:159) noted that if a well-born member of one tribe marries someone from another tribe, “he or she will act as a ‘cord’ [flax thread] to draw that tribe to our assistance in war.”

¹⁴Ranapiri also told Best, “You are right about the *ahi tapairu*. That is for first-born females of families of rank only. They alone may eat of the food cooked at the sacred fire. The bulk of the women eat afterwards” (Best 1909:440).

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