Chapter 10

FOOD AND WEALTH

Ceremonial objects as signs of identity in Tonga and in Wallis*

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It was primarily the objects used in ceremonial exchanges by the Samoans and the Maori which provided Mauss, in his essay, *The Gift,* with the opportunity to discuss the system of ritual gift-exchange found in Polynesia. Since this essay, Mauss has become an obligatory reference on the question, a bit like a tradition which has grown up and now dictates that any discussion of Polynesian ceremonial exchanges must begin with Samoa and/or the Maori. The present article suggests a shift of focus to other parts of Polynesia: the societies of Tonga and Wallis. Two types of ceremonial objects will be studied, food and wealth, together with the representations associated with them in the thinking of the societies I have selected.

Through a presentation of these objects and the logics they entail, I would like to show that they are in fact privileged emblems of a group’s identity. I will use material taken from contemporary case studies, but I will also call on some historical sources. A fairly striking consistency will also appear between past and present, in terms of the nature of the gifts as well as the forms of the exchanges. However we will also have to inquire into the appearance of objects and practices which seem to have little to do with tradition.

In both Tonga and Wallis, the objects used in ritual exchanges fall into two clear-cut categories: food, or *kai,* which is comprised essentially of pork and tubers; and non-edible valuables, called *koloa,* ‘items of value’ or ‘riches, wealth’, a term that designates primarily mats, barkcloth fabric (*ngatu*) and coconut oil. The terms *kai* (food) and *koloa* (wealth, riches) denote the same objects in both societies. Two additional features should also be underscored. Generally speaking, and in spite of further shadings that will be added in the course of this discussion, both categories — *kai* and *koloa* — are strongly gendered, insofar as the ceremonial foods are produced, baked or cooked and presented by men, while the ‘riches’ are prepared, manufactured and presented by women. Finally, these objects are
produced and given by groups, though both the nature and the composition of the donor groups are subject to change.\textsuperscript{5}

To facilitate the analysis, \textit{kai} and \textit{koloa} will initially be dealt with separately.

\textbf{Kai, or food, the men's gift}

Polynesian gift-exchange ceremonies are striking both for the quantity of food collected and distributed, and for the ostentation with which this accumulation and distribution are carried out. In Tonga and in Wallis, at the time of large katoanga,\textsuperscript{6} tens and even hundreds of baskets filled with food are neatly lined up on the \textit{mala'e}.\textsuperscript{7} These baskets usually accompany offerings composed of piles of raw yams (including \textit{Dioscorea alata}), taros (including \textit{Colocasia esculenta}) or \textit{kapé} (\textit{Alocasia macrorrhiza}), topped with a large cooked pig and a number of mats and lengths of barkcloth, or \textit{ngatu}. When the \textit{kava} ceremony is nearly completed, the total number of piles and baskets is cried out together with the contents of the baskets and the name of the village or the group that has given the offerings.

The examples of \textit{katoanga} given here were deliberately chosen from different time periods. Here is the description of a \textit{katoanga} held at the end of the nineteenth century, in Tonga, for the jubilee of a missionary:

\begin{quote}
At the signal, a voice rang out, first enumerating the piles of foodstuffs. This is essential in Tongan etiquette… In addition to the masses of \textit{kava}, the official crier counted out one hundred and sixty-seven baskets of yams. Each basket held between ten and fifteen of the size of our large beets; one hundred and seventy-five roasted pigs, three of which weighed perhaps three hundred pounds; two hundred and eighty-four baskets of \textit{faikakai} ['cakes' made from the flour of tubers and coconut milk], the islanders' favourite treat which is not disdained by Whites either, each basket containing some twenty pounds; one hundred three-pound loaves of bread; many varieties of fish. Everything was piled with attention to symmetry and, at intervals, on tall poles, pieces of coloured fabric flew like flags on festive ships.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

We are fortunate in having the description of a large \textit{kataonga} that was held in Tonga at the very beginning of the nineteenth century for the lifting of an eight-month-long taboo imposed on pig, chicken and coconut. One of the privileges of a Polynesian chief, and not the least, used to be the right to taboo whatever food items he chose for as long as he decided. Violation of such taboos was supposed to entail not only physical punishment if it was discovered, but also supernatural reprisals: a sickness that would 'eat' your insides until you died, fitting retribution for someone who had ventured to eat tabooed food. The man who witnessed this lifting of the taboo, Mariner, reckoned that a little more than 400 large pigs had been killed, and 3,000 yams brought. First of all, some 20 pigs and around 500 yams were set aside to be presented as an offering near the graves of the Tu'i Tonga, the former paramount chiefs of Tonga. Mariner recounts that this food was left standing for several days before being distributed, in a state of more than dubious freshness, to the lower classes. The remaining quantity was divided into four lots, each comprising some 500 yams and 100 or so pigs. These shares were given to: 1) the Tu'i Tonga; 2) the gods (i.e. their
priests); 3) the hau (the ‘temporal’ king), who immediately shared them with his chiefs and warriors; 4) the highest-ranking chiefs. With the exception of the Tu’i Tonga’s share, these items were then redistributed according to the chiefs’ ranks, from the top to the bottom of the social ladder, ‘till every man in the island gets at least a mouthful of pork and yam’.

We see that, with the exception of the portion reserved for the Tu’i Tonga, the rest is redistributed by order of rank. These public distributions are thus a means of enabling one immediately to ‘visualise’ the social body, of reminding everyone, and perhaps of confirming, that it is based on rules and an ordering necessary to the maintenance of good order. Which of course does not prevent rivalries — enabling an ambitious man to win a place in this order; such rivalries, as we shall see, can also find expression in the accumulation of ceremonial gifts.

The third example of ceremonial gift-giving is taken from a 1989 field study done in the village of Taoa, in Tonga. That year, Prince Tupouto’a decided to go to Vava’u, in part to celebrate his birthday, on May 4th, and in part to attend the Wesleyan Church Conference, which was to be held the same day. Forewarned, the whole village began buzzing like a huge beehive well before the day set for the festivities. The men had cultivated the Prince’s plot and planted it with the best variety of yam, which used to be reserved for chiefs (kahokaho). The women took shifts in the communal house to manufacture a long piece of barkcloth and a large mat. For the day, fifty-three pola, a kind of portable ‘table’, had been planned, each of which would bear three or four small baked pigs, tubers (yams, sweet potatoes, taros), chicken, fish, lu, faikakai, and sometimes fruit juice or even cigarettes. These pola were for the meals of the guests who had been invited to both the Wesleyan Church Conference and the Prince’s birthday. When the guests had eaten their fill, the leftovers would be, as was the custom, shared out and redistributed among the village kin groups. Note that, besides the oven food, the villagers presented the Prince with a mat and barkcloth made by the women, as well as two live pigs, one big and one medium-sized, together with some one hundred raw yams (in addition to those grown for him).

Here are a few figures to indicate the quantity of food given at three katoaga held on the mala’e in Wallis, between November 1988 and January 1989.

— The 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Marist missionaries (20 November 1988):
  32 large pigs
  74 medium-sized and small pigs
  76 baskets of cooked tubers
  12 piles of raw tubers (kape)

— Marriage of the king’s grandson to the senator’s daughter (23 December 1988); the king’s gifts to the senator:
  10 large pigs
  56 small or medium-sized pigs
  56 baskets of tubers

— Installation of the new deputy, Kamilo Gata (17 January 1989):
  17 large pigs
  48 small and medium-sized pigs
  60 baskets of cooked tubers
  2 piles of raw kape and yams.
A rapid calculation reveals that the quantity of meat presented during these three katoaga comes to approximately fourteen tons! The bulk of the food was presented to the guests participating in the kava ceremony. The piles made up of raw tubers surmounted by a large pig were given to either the beneficiaries of the ceremony, for example the new deputy (the third katoaga) or the high-ranking guests (the king, the bishop, the ministers). The baskets containing cooked tubers topped with a medium-sized or a small pig were usually distributed to the guests, once the pigs had been cut up.

During all the katoaga preparations I saw — arranging the piles, lining up the baskets, raising the poles decked with manu (the Wallisian equivalent of pareo in Tahiti), and so forth — a joyous hubbub invariably reigned on the mala’e, though not free from rivalry between the donor groups: for instance, in Wallis, between the three districts (Hahake, Hihifo and Mua), or between villages. For the first katoaga cited above, the presentation was made by the village, and one had only to ‘hear’ the silence that fell as each village’s gift was called out. At stake in these events is the prestige of each village, but also of each Wallisian who, on this occasion, identifies with his village. I add that, during the three katoaga, the food publicly presented and enumerated was not eaten there, but taken home and shared out to the members of each kin group (kaiga). Although it was not possible to verify this, all my informants concurred in saying that a great number of people in Wallis ate pork on those days.

But the sharing of food also serves to re-create an order disturbed by an event such as a birth, a marriage or even more, a death. One such ‘re-ordering’ occurred in a fairly striking manner in Tonga, on the occasion of the funeral of Taoa’s village chief, Maka.xix Here is the list of the food prepared by the chief’s widow and the villagers of Taoa, which was subsequently distributed and eaten on site by the villagers and their guests (whose number fluctuated between 50 and 350):

- 8 large pigs (puaka hula)
- 11 medium-sized pigs
- 1 horse (boosi)
- 4 cows (pulu)
- 2 tins of corned-beef weighing 20 kg each
- 2 boxes of mutton chops (sipi) weighing 20 kg each
- some 100 baskets containing taro, kape manioc and yams.

The men of the village killed and cut up the animals, scraped the tubers, made the ovens and watched over them. The women prepared the poultry, the lu and the faikakai.22 For the duration of the five-day funeral, the village did nothing but prepare food from dawn to dark. As I said, the food was given first of all to the guests. When they had eaten their fill, it was the villagers’ turn to eat and then to divide up the leftovers. The amount of food, and of meat in particular, consumed over the five days was considerably greater than everyday fare.23 For the villagers of Taoa, this was a time to do their fatongia to their village chief. The term, which means both ‘duty’ and ‘fee’, designates in fact everything an inferior owes to a superior in terms of family, social, domestic or political hierarchy. Finally, according to my informants, during these five days, the whole village worked as a single kin group, a single kainga, united around the mortal remains of their chief.
A comparison can be made between this funeral of a Tongan chief and the installation ceremony for the deputy for Wallis, however different the circumstances may be. It can be considered, for instance, that, in the case of the second ritual, the presentation, sharing and consumption of food constituted an event designed to bring the effervescent election campaign to a close and to underscore, for the space of the ritual, a somewhat shaken social peace. These distributions of foodstuffs also, at least temporarily, created relations between people (divided in this case along political lines) who habitually clashed or ignored each other. The installation of the deputy according to tradition, in particular with distribution of food — and kava of course — is a good example of the adaptation of ‘custom’ to a modern-day event. Perhaps it would even be better to speak of custom appropriating a modern-day event.

Piling up, distributing and destroying food — since it is perishable, it is eaten — are also designed to make clear to everyone who is who: in effect, a chief accumulates and distributes more than an ordinary man. His wealth and his liberality are measured first of all in food. But a chief is also someone to be fed. In the Tongan myth relating the origin of kava, a couple too poor to fulfill their obligations to the Tu‘i Tonga sacrificed their leprous daughter to him. The mark of absolute poverty is not to be able to give an ʻumu containing both tubers and a pig to one’s chief.24 What is true for the poorest couple is also true for each chief, from the bottom to the top of the Tongan social pyramid: each must make gifts to his hierarchical superior, and first of all gifts of food, if he wants to maintain his rank. Furthermore, the chief himself is very often a big eater, and embonpoint is a sign of rank.

In the societies of Tonga and Wallis, the chief is still seen as the mediator between humans and the powers above, spirits of the ancestors or god. It is the chief’s mana that is believed to make the crops grow in the ground. In Tonga, villagers receive their plot of land from the prince; however when they offer him presents, when they fulfill their fatongia, they do not see it as an exchange of ‘land for tribute’ but as a relation of indebtedness: the ceremonial gifts are presented to the prince in token of gratitude not so much for the land as for past and future harvests. It used to be that the chief’s mana — and especially that of the paramount chief, the Tu‘i Tonga — was believed to cause the crops to grow from the land, but also babies in their mother’s womb. Today the growth of babies in utero is believed to be the work of the Christian god. Yet it is not unusual for Taoa villagers to send the prince a basket of yams when the birth of a child in the village is announced. In Wallis, a poor harvest is still today interpreted as a sign that the chief has lost his mana. If the breadfruit trees do not yield, if the yam harvest is meagre, if the sows produce small litters, the chiefs, or at least the village chiefs, are held responsible for these failures, and are promptly dismissed!25 There is thus a relationship between the supernatural, the chief and product of the land.26 The chief must bear witness to this relationship, especially by his generosity: ‘To be hospitable is to follow in the footsteps of one’s ancestral god, by whose agency the earth originally gave forth its fruits and the sea its fish.’27

Myths ensure a detailed account of the nature of the relationship between such items and the supernatural. In Tonga, most products of the land come from the gods. The chiefs’ yam (the kahokaho) was stolen from the gods of Pulotu (the Tongan paradise) by a Tongan spirit woman. The shark sprang from the sacrifice of the goddess Hina. The coconut palm grew from
the spot where Hina buried the head of her lover, a serpent-god. The most-valued foodstuffs came into existence through defying the gods or through a sacrifice, which enabled these items to be transposed from the supernatural to the human realm. In this light, food constitutes a sort of link with the divine.

Koloa or wealth, the women's gift

In addition to food, a number of objects were traditionally considered to possess exceptional value and therefore to be appropriate for ceremonial giving. Before discussing more specifically women's wealth, koloa, we need to take stock of the items covered by this term.

The objects formerly regarded as precious are the following:
1) mats, barkcloth, coconut oil
2) decorated baskets, combs, chiefly decorations
3) clubs, lances, canoes, incised and carved whale teeth, wooden headrests, kava bowls or tano'a

This break-down into three categories can be explained by the following reasons: all the objects in the first category are manufactured by women only, but intended for men and women alike. They used to circulate among commoners as well as among chiefs, even if not the same objects were involved in the two cases. These objects ranked explicitly as valuables, as 'treasure', as their name, koloa, indicates. Once given, these objects could be redistributed. However, some, the most precious, used to belong only to chiefs; these were kept and transmitted as heirlooms.

The objects in the second category used to be manufactured exclusively by women of high rank. They could be given to men or to women, but they always circulated among the chiefly families. It seems that, as a rule, once given, they were no longer redistributed, but kept and passed down. Nevertheless, according to one old source, noble women made them into a 'sort of trade'. With the exception of the baskets, these objects are no longer made.

The objects in the third category were manufactured exclusively by men and intended for men. Those who manufactured them were craftsmen (tufunga) working in the service of chiefs; their job was precisely to make these objects either for the chief's own use or for him to give to other chiefs. These objects were probably not redistributed once they had been given, but were kept and passed down as heirlooms, particularly the whale teeth, because they were so rare. Today such objects are produced primarily for the tourist trade.

There is an obvious similarity between the objects in the second and the third categories: all are chiefly objects which circulate only among the aristocracy. They are given, then kept and transmitted rather than being redistributed. They are also sometimes exchanged.

But the objects explicitly ranked as wealth, or koloa, are above all those in the first category; coconut oil, mats and barkcloth (made from the hiapo or paper mulberry, Broussonetia papyrifera). These objects have a number of functions. They are at once profane objects, everyday objects, precious objects symbolically overcharged and a 'currency'. They are used in ceremonial and in commercial exchanges. They can be a medium of payment. They can also be hoarded and transmitted as heirlooms. But while the material base of each of these
functions is the same, the objects which are utilised and/or exchanged are not strictly the same as those which are kept. Those which are kept and transmitted are more precious than the rest. We are going to see that, alongside those objects that circulate regularly, there are what Annette Weiner calls ‘inalienable possessions’, which are stored.33

When they talk about *koloa*, wealth, today’s Tongas and Wallisians visualise above all mats, barkcloth and coconut oil. In Tonga, the term was given at the beginning of the nineteenth century as the equivalent of ‘riches, property, anything of value’.34 The dictionary compiled by the Marist missionaries translates it as ‘richesses, tout objet précieux, ce qu’on possède’.35 Churchward’s dictionary lists the following meanings: ‘goods, wealth, riches, possessions; what one values; cargo, store, shop, produce (of a country).’36

Barkcloth, mats and coconut oil are items whose manufacture requires the use of procedures ranging from the extremely simple to the highly sophisticated.37 The production sometimes also entails the use of rituals, as in the case of the black tapas.38

As ceremonial exchange objects, *koloa* appear in two contexts: rites of passage and chiefly ceremonies. In the rites of passage — birth, marriage and death, and formerly circumcision and onset of menses — *koloa* can have several different functions. Some *koloa* are not exchanged but are closely connected with the body of the beneficiary(ies) of the ceremony. The skin of the newborn child, of the young spouses and of the deceased is rubbed with coconut oil. The baby is presented to the mother’s and the father’s people lying on a little bed comprised of barkcloth and a mat. During the ceremonial exchanges, the young couple sits on a seat made of one or several rolls of barkcloth and one or several mats rolled together, which later serves as the bridal bed. The body of the deceased is exposed on a ‘mattress’ made of a length of barkcloth and one or several mats, before being buried rolled in one (or several) pieces of barkcloth and one or several mats, and then covered with more mats. The coconut oil, barkcloth and mat are placed on the body in that order.

Most *koloa* enter the gift/counter-gift system and are exchanged between kin groups. They are always presented *together with* food, *kai*, the men’s gift, with which they form a whole. The two *kainga*, that of the groom and that of the bride, in the case of a marriage, the paternal *kainga* and the maternal *kainga* in the case of a birth or a death, exchange gifts of *kai* and *koloa*. To give an idea of the way these exchanges are conducted, here are three examples, all connected with marriage. The first took place in Tonga, at the beginning of the twentieth century:39

When the bridegroom and his people arrived at the place where the bride and her people waited, the gifts from the groom’s relatives were presented to the bride’s, being deposited before the house in two lines running parallel to the house front. The line closer to the house consisted of manufactured articles (*koloa*) such as tapa and mats furnished by the women of the bridegroom’s people. The outer line consisted of oven (food) gifts and kava called *ngaue* (work) furnished by the men of the bridegroom’s people.40

What is interesting here is the joint presentation of the women’s goods, *koloa*, and the men’s goods, the food gifts, which Gifford tells us are called *ngaue*, a term meaning ‘work’ or ‘effort’.
The second example, again from Tonga, is given by Collocott and also dates from the beginning of the twentieth century. The scene takes place after the gifts have been deposited in front of the house where the marriage ceremony is to take place (in Tonga this is usually the house of the father of the groom).

The house is filled with women connected with the bride, no men are there, their place is with the food, which is their especial care. Presently a woman is called from the house. She approaches the bride, assists her to rise, and leads her by the hand into the house, where the women divest her of her clothes. … This clothing had been provided by the bride's family and will subsequently fall to the share of the bridegroom's people. She is then arrayed in clothing, inferior in quality and quantity to that taken from her but still good, provided by the bridegroom and led forth again to her mother's lap [the two spouses in effect sit on the knees of their respective 'male mothers', in other words their maternal uncle] but presently another woman is called from the house to come and lead her in. Again, she is undressed and clothed afresh in raiment given by the husband. The clothing taken from her on this second occasion is for the bride's people.

According to Collocott, this scene can be repeated several times if the bridegroom is sufficiently rich, but usually twice is enough. Collocott's description goes on to show the bridegroom being in turn subjected to the same changes of clothing.41

Here now is the last example. It is a description of a marriage which took place in 1988 in Wallis, between the king's grandson and the senator's daughter, at which I was present:

The bride arrived on the royal mala'e dressed in a European-style wedding gown of white lace. After the church service, the royal kava ceremony took place. While the kava was being prepared, the bride was led into the garden, behind the royal palace. There the women of her people removed her white dress (given by the king, thus by the groom's people) and dressed her in an impressive quantity of fabrics of all kinds, particularly velvet and satin, for which Wallisians have a high regard. Thus arrayed, the young bride returned before the palace and sat down. The preparation of the kava continued, as did the speeches. After some ten minutes, the young woman was led away again. This time it was the king's women relatives — her husband's people — who undressed her, then powdered her with lega (saffron powder) and finally dressed her in an enormous quantity of barkcloth, even more than the first time. The bride then returned to take her seat, with some difficulty given the quantity and the weight of the cloth she was wearing. Into her hair had been inserted a number of banknotes, some 100,000 Francs CFP (the equivalent of 1100 dollars at the time). When she had been installed, she was served the first bowl of kava. After the ceremony, the couple left for the senator's house, where the bride was undressed by her women relatives and the cloth gifts shared out among the members of her group.

Once again, in spite of the introduction of money, there is a striking continuity, on the one hand, between Tonga and Wallis, and, on the other, between the beginning of the twentieth century and today. In the last two cases described, it is clear that the ‘undressers’ keep their booty. The gifts are exchanged here by the agency of the recipients’ bodies, those bodies which don the koloa and transmit them from one kin group to the other.
It is also noteworthy that the groom’s people gave visibly more than the bride’s. The reason for this is that the groom is a relative of the king, whereas the bride is a relative of the senator. By virtue of his high rank, the king — and his kin group (kainga) — has a duty to show more generosity than the senator and his kainga. All gifts are exchanged in public, and the days following these ritual exchanges will be spent discussing them. It must also be said that even with commoner families, the exchanges of gifts ostensibly take place between the kainga involved and that here too the group’s status is taken into account. In effect, in Wallis, where the principle of seniority is particularly important, if either of the spouses is an eldest child, his or her family has an obligation to show more generosity than the other.

Generally speaking, when it comes to marriage, whoever is called ‘father’ oversees the sharing and distribution of the food. For the distribution of the koloa, in each of the kin groups involved — that of the bride or the groom — the task usually falls to the father’s sister. This is almost systematic in Tonga, where the mehekitanga (paternal aunt) — or her proxy — always occupies the place of honour and, before beginning the distribution, takes her share, usually the finest piece.42

The ceremonies concerned with hierarchy — bestowal of titles, visits, homecomings, chiefly rites of passage — give rise to large-scale kataonga; these presentations of ceremonial gifts take place on the chief’s mala‘e. The gifts are brought by the chief’s kainga, in other words his subjects. The gifts are solemnly enumerated and counted before being distributed. If for one reason or another, the meeting involves two chiefs, they exchange gifts furnished by their respective kainga.

As one observer at the beginning of the twentieth century remarked: ‘the amount of cloth and mats collected are indications of the wealth and station of the families’. 43 Today the presentation of koloa, whether on the occasion of a rite of passage or a great chiefly katoanga, still represents a public display of the wealth and status of the groups involved.

Nowadays, in chiefly families, despite the equalising influence of Christianity, these purportedly non-competitive exchanges can abruptly spill over into frantic rivalry between two families, particularly on the occasion of a marriage, and ultimately empty the houses of both family heads. The rivalry for family status is so strong in koloa exchanges, especially in Tonga, that, when the social distance between two families is too great, the future newlyweds often prefer to elope to the capital and get married on their own, with the blessing of the poorer family.44 Gift objects are thus one way for each of the groups involved in an exchange to decipher the wealth and station of the other groups. But gift-giving is also, at least insofar as kin groups are concerned, a way of challenging the respective rank of those concerned. Woe to him who does not maintain his rank; glory to him who enhances it! As one inhabitant of Wallis pointed out, even for the most critical individuals, it is very hard not to yield to the pressure to give, and to the ensuing incitement to outgive.

Finally, koloa are also hoarded, accumulated like ‘treasure’. In fact that is the exact translation of the word koloa. In past times, in Tonga, the rarest, the finest, in a word, the most precious koloa were manufactured by groups of women under the direction of women from the aristocracy. Like the objects manufactured by artisans and reserved for the chiefs of a noble kainga, these koloa were regarded as the property of the chief’s sister, or more precisely of her kainga, and constituted her ‘treasure’, or better the family treasure. Each aristocratic kainga thus
owned a certain number of fine mats and ngatu, some of which were very old, very worn, but extremely prestigious.

Each lineage seems to have a duty with a presiding priest who had in charge the fakafaanga or precious and sacred possessions of its god. Part of the fakafaanga were fine mats which constituted a form of wealth.45

The most precious pieces of Tongan barkcloth were ‘embossed’. The blocks, kupeisi, used to produce the design were made following a pattern that was forbidden to replicate outside the kainga and which constituted the family seal. Only noble families had the right to own and use the blocks, which were passed on from one generation to the next.46 Even today the chiefly barkcloth fabrics are called ngatu eiki (literally: ‘aristocratic barkcloth’), a name which distinguishes them from ordinary tapas.47 These koloa were indeed, as Mauss says, ‘precious articles, talismans, emblems’.48

As for the mats, the biggest and finest were reserved for the chiefs. Each also had a ‘name’, given by the original design which indicated they belonged to a particular noble kainga.49 Thus the words of one missionary speaking of the fine mats of Samoa can also be applied to the ngatu and the mats of Tonga:

Among the mats … there were three categories: ordinary ones, sacred ones and illustrious ones. The latter are renowned: people know where they come from, where they are from and who is the great chief who, by wearing them, attached to them an indelible memory of honour. However shredded and worn they may be, they are nevertheless held in great esteem. The experts in the science of mats, the d’Hozier of the area, know the name and the history of the famous mats, for each has a name. Without needing to examine them, they will tell you what they are worth. These illustrious mats are brought out only on important ceremonial occasions.50

It is these koloa, to the exclusion of the others, that come close to the Maori taonga described by Mauss. It is they which are, in this author’s words, ‘strongly linked to the person, the clan, and the earth … They are the vehicle for its mana, its magical, religious and spiritual force.’51 According to Gifford, in Tonga, the centrepiece of the family ‘treasure’, the fakafaanga comprised in particular of fine mats, was a special mat which was treated as the shrine of the ‘clan’ spirit or god.52

These particular koloa, unlike the rest, are ‘known’, as are their owners. They are at once ‘wealth’ and ‘signs of wealth’. The chief’s treasure is there to testify to the number of his subjects, to the number of persons in his kainga. This is precisely why these koloa are not distributed outside the kainga but transmitted and/or given to a prominent member of the kin group, who will transmit them in turn. On this point, our analysis of the Tongan material is perfectly consistent with the paradox of ‘keeping-while-giving’ so brilliantly developed by A. Wiener53: certain koloa are kept, while others are exchanged; and it is not the same ones which are kept or exchanged. The most valuable, those that bear the family name or blazon, circulate only within the confines of the kin group, whereas the others circulate between groups. Of course a high-ranking chief must also be able to distribute an
impressive quantity of mats and ngatu, selected from among those manufactured for exchange. It is therefore the totality of what is known as koloa which, among the aristocracy constituted and still constitutes the family property, its reserves or its treasure. In speaking of this set of valuable objects, some of which are kept and others given, one could also use M. Godelier’s expression, ‘keeping-for-giving’, which goes further than Weiner’s ‘keeping-while-giving’.55

Gifford tells us that, when a chief died, part of this property was distributed by the deceased’s paternal aunt or by his sister, but another part, the koloa kelekele, was buried with the body.56 It was thus possible to accumulate koloa over a lifetime, sometimes through personal merit. But how?

In Tonga, all koloa used to be controlled by the women of high rank, who supervised and directed the women’s work. They had authority over all the koloa manufactured by the women under them and disposed of the items as they wished, including more less making a commerce of them.57 ‘Commoner’ women had to ask their permission to use these koloa, which it is unthinkable that they could do without, given the role they play in rites of passage.

The accumulation of koloa was therefore probably exclusively a matter for chiefly families. For these, one means of accumulation was marriage. High-ranking chiefs were polygamous, and marriage strategies took into account the potential koloa wealth of the bride-to-be. But koloa could also be won in war. During the early nineteenth-century civil wars, chiefs would capture women and share them out for the explicit reason that they would be able to manufacture koloa.58 Furthermore, each fortress or village taken was systematically pillaged primarily for the purpose of taking spoils of koloa.59

Amorous feats were also a good means of appropriating koloa. Mana’ia were young men whose romantic exploits enabled them to collect kie taupo’ou, or virginity mats. A great number of mats raised the standing not only of the interested party, but of his whole kin group, giving rise to veritable strategies for accumulating these mats on the part of the kainga.60 Here too a connection with the divine appears: these manaia were thought to possess a god-given power (mana) which enabled them to attract women and therefore wealth. But it can also be said that these koloa, these riches, as representations, are supposed to produce or create wealth. On one hand, they are accumulated wealth, treasure, on the other, they are signs of wealth and power, insofar as they also testify to the number of the chief’s subjects, who work for him. Finally, they are also believed in themselves to attract wealth and power. As Mauss shows in the case of the Kwakiutl coppers, these hoarded objects are ‘mingled together as regards use and effect’.61 He who amasses great numbers of koloa possesses mana, and since these koloa are themselves mana, they are believed to attract more koloa. As far as mental representations go, in any case, koloa function as a kind of capital.62

I must stress here a fundamental aspect of gift-exchange in Polynesia: if, as I attempted to show, chiefly groups used to have strategies for accumulating koloa, it is because competition for power in terms of ‘wealth’ was indeed a reality; in this case, and on this specific point, gift-giving, and least in Tonga and in Wallis, would be of the same order as potlatch.63 In Tonga, for example — before the nineteenth-century constitution froze it into
a British-type system — the traditional socio-political hierarchy was based on a system of titles (ha'a) of great vitality, which bore witness to the political history of Tonga; some titles grew in prestige while others fell into disuse; some lineages even ‘captured’ titles.\(^{64}\) Competition for rank thus remained open and constituted one of the principal driving forces of Tongan history. This rivalry was carried on by war, of course, but in times of peace, also by competition in terms of (high-ranking) wives and ‘riches’.

Today the groups of women (kautaha) who, in Tonga, manufacture the *koloa* function on a much more democratic basis than they used to,\(^{65}\) and commoner women now control their own production of mats and tapas, even though ownership of the blocks (*kupeSi*) continues to be restricted. In the Tongan village of Taoa, when the village women manufacture a length of barkcloth for the crown prince, Tupouto’a, they use a special block with original designs, which is kept by the wife of the village chief (*pule kolo*). In principle, this block may be used only in the manufacture of barkcloth for the prince and his family. In reality, however, I observed that certain women in Taoa had received permission to use the prince’s block and owned a roll of barkcloth bearing his ‘arms’.\(^{66}\) These fabrics are used as prestigious gifts to be presented, for example, to foreign visitors. As in the past, marriage and the birth of the first child are occasions for a couple to accumulate *koloa*.

In Tonga, even the poorest women, once she is married, must have at least one roll of barkcloth (*ngatu*). Not to have one’s stock of *ngatu* is degrading. All the women in Tonga told me the same thing, even the youngest. It is the essential item of a dowry: ‘When you get married, if you don’t have at least one roll of barkcloth, of *ngatu*, it means you’re poorer than poor, it’s worse than if you didn’t have a roll of toilet paper’, one informant told me. The same kind of representation is found in Wallis; a family that ‘has any self-respect’, rich or poor, has to have at least one roll of barkcloth and a few mats, so as, explicitly, to meet one’s ceremonial obligations; otherwise ‘you are a nobody’. Note that barkcloth is usually manufactured by groups of ten or so women who are either relatives of the person for whom the fabric is being made or neighbours.\(^{67}\) In this context, too, the idea prevails that in order to have a large quantity of fine barkcloth, you must have a gift for gathering, a quality that raises you above other mortals. Of course, in Tonga as in Wallis, when a person is unable to manufacture their own stock of barkcloth and mats, they buy them.\(^{68}\)

The relationship between these gift objects and the basis of identity, including its most individual aspect, is clear here: these objects serve not only to link one group to another into a vast network of social relations, but also to enable an individual to acquire his or her place in this network and to become ‘somebody’.

As we have seen, the *koloa* distributed in ceremonies are always accompanied by food, *kai*, produced by men and presented raw and/or cooked by them in the ground oven. This contradicts what Linnekin writes of ceremonial exchanges in Samoa, where men’s goods are exchanged for women’s goods:\(^{69}\) ‘The normative structure of exchange events, the archetype of which is marriage exchange, is that *toga* are exchanged for *‘oloa’.*\(^{70}\) In Tonga and in Wallis, each group gives a set of gifts comprised both of men’s and women’s goods.\(^{71}\) Moreover, this is perfectly consistent with the cognatic organisation of these *kainga*, where both male and female lineages are taken into account.\(^{72}\) In other words, gift exchange is an indication not only of the wealth and station of the exchanging groups, but of the respective skills of the men and women who comprise them.
Food and wealth: ‘the origin of things’

Can we now go a bit further with the elucidation of the symbolic charge with which kai and koloa are invested? It must be kept in mind that the ultimate objective of the food and wealth, over and beyond the means employed to procure them, is first and foremost to fulfill one’s ceremonial obligations on the occasion of rites of passage with respect to those who are kainga or to those of higher rank. It is possible, therefore that, when one groups presents kai or koloa to another group or to a chief, it is representing itself in both its productive and its reproductive capacities. The idea I am defending here is not a logic along the lines of ‘a pig is the equivalent of a man’ or ‘a mat is the equivalent of a woman’; instead, I am arguing that food and wealth, ceremonial objects par excellence, are more than simply substitutes for persons, they are a way of over-representing the men and women of a group, of re-presenting them with something added, something their material, physical presence does not possess. To better explain this, I will turn to the system of representations of the life cycle.

In the representations of the life cycle in Tonga as in Wallis, the person’s bodily sheath is thought to come both from the transmission of the parents’ bodily substances and from the food consumed over the course of one’s life. In Tonga as in Wallis, food played — and continues to play — a decisive role in ‘making’ a child: the child’s flesh results from a series of transformations, one of which consists in changing the products of the land from their ‘raw’ state to ‘cooked’ — men’s work par excellence — before they go on to be transformed by the maternal substances after being eaten. Sharing food grown on the same land and baked in the same oven is also believed to make non-kin into kin. Following this line of thinking, the ceremonal food gifts, produced and cooked by men, commoners, would represent not only, materially, the work (ngaue) done by the men of the group, they would also be the sign of these same men’s reproductive capacities: even if these men do not ‘grow’ the crops in the earth or the children in the women’s womb — creative processes which are the sole purview of chiefs, they still have their own part in perpetuating the group.

On the other hand, koloa, as we have seen, are valuables produced by the women of a kainga in view of being given and/or kept (in the past exclusively by noble women, today by the kin group concerned). But their symbolic value, too, appears to be connected with the representations of the life cycle. Several indications, listed below, have led me to this conclusion: First of all, the application of the three elements, coconut oil, barkcloth and mat, on the recipient’s body, in that order, on the occasion of rites of passage, whether birth, marriage or death. In Tonga, when nobles marry, the couple sits on a large roll of barkcloth fabric, the components of which are gendered: ‘The male kumi hoko and the female kumi kupu are folded together and rolled up into a single very large bale to serve as a seat for the wedding couple.’ In the past, one of the mats that had comprised the deathbed was once again spread out after the funeral and watched over by the family; they would wait until an insect lit on it as the sign that the deceased had passed on into another life. Last of all, equally significant is the presence, in the shrines of the gods or the deified ancestors who existed before Christianisation, of such objects as a whale’s tooth or a piece of wood or a weapon, objects which, when they had been rubbed with coconut oil and turmeric powder, then dressed in a piece of barkcloth (feta‘aki) were believed to house the god.

All these examples of rituals, many of which disappeared with the arrival of Christianity, suggest that the representations of koloa were linked first of all to the
conception of the continuity of the kainga. In the rites of passage, the overlaying on the body of the oil, then the barkcloth, then the mat could represent ‘skins’ within which the mysterious alchemy of life is created or perpetuated or recreated, just as it occurs inside the woman’s womb. The roll comprised of the mat and the ngatu is called fala‘aofi, the term ‘aofi meaning at once ‘hollow’, ‘inside’ and ‘to shield someone as with one’s body’. In this case, coconut oil, barkcloth and mats would represent, in addition to material goods regarded as wealth, capacities for giving or perpetuating life.

If such is the case, the very concrete set of items comprised of tubers, one or several pigs and a roll of koloa (barkcloth and mat) would be not only the fruit of labour — or a work — but also signs of the promises of life embodied by the men and women of a group. Food and riches, kai and koloa, would be the very expression of the kainga, which is therefore conceived as a group ‘in the making’, an entity engaged in intergenerational continuity.

In this event, as Mauss said, when one exchanges objects ceremonially, it is ‘because one is giving and returning ‘respects’ … Yet it is also because by giving one is giving oneself’. This is even the only way of giving oneself, momentarily, to others. But at the same time, because these ceremonial objects are also a promise of life, they symbolically go beyond their producers, men and women, and inscribe them in a chain of generations, a filiation, in short in a duration.

The competition between kainga thus becomes understandable, as one group seeks to prove that it is stronger, more powerful than the other. This competition, expressed in ‘exterior’ signs of wealth, is itself merely the sign of another rivalry, that which opposes the groups in terms of their numbers, present and to come. Today, in large-scale katoanga, the gifts are still enumerated by a crier: this is to show the size of the ‘people’ (kainga) of the high-ranking chief in question. Which brings us back to the Polynesian notion of mana: mana is the capacity to accumulate and distribute, but this capacity is measured first of all by the number of people the chief can gather around himself. And it is precisely the gifts of kai and koloa which represent these capacities.

In traditional Tongan society, the production of gifts of kai and koloa was supposed to result from cooperation between the chief of the kainga and his people. His subjects would provide the physical and material labour of preparing the ground and its produce; the job of the chief was to infuse the process of production with the life-force of his mana. Study of the great biannual ʻinasi ritual — found in similar forms in Wallis and throughout Polynesia — shows the position each person was supposed to occupy in the work of reproducing the social body as a whole: during the ten days of the ritual, from the far ends of the archipelago to the royal mala‘e, all Tongans, from the humblest commoner to the highest-ranking chief, would flock to present the first fruits of their harvest to the Tu‘i Tonga and to his sister, the Tu‘i Tonga Fefine, the living earthly representatives of the bisexual deity, Hikuleo, who provided the products of the land and the sea. It is the force that flows from the gods, mana, which causes the fruits of the land to grow and multiply, and each chief, at his own level, possesses a share of this force, which he uses for the benefit of all. The kai and the koloa contain a share, ʻeiki, a value received from the chief and which makes them part of the supernatural, divine world to which the chiefs themselves are linked. The sacrifice of the first fruits, called polopolo in both Tonga and Wallis, is not a gift made to the chief in the hope of
receiving something in return: in the form of a portion — this is the literal meaning of the word ‘inasi’ — meant to be a minimal share, it is a symbolic restitution of everything the Tongans have received from the gods through the agency of their chiefs; and at the same time, it is the sign of the indelible debt they have contracted vis-à-vis the latter.

Today the Tu’i Tonga and the Tu’i Tonga Fefine are no more, and the missionaries have relegated the god Hikuleo to the rank of shameful accessory to paganism; a whole section of the old socio-cosmic representations vanished with the advent of Christianity. Still, what is one to make of the answer I received on several occasion from my village informants when I asked them why they gave gifts to the chief: ‘It is out of gratitude!’? How is this answer to be understood if not by placing it in a reasoning identical to that exposed above: a chief’s subjects do not give him gifts in order to receive something from him; they are giving the chief back a portion, regarded as minimal, of what he has given them. They are thus, today as yesterday, in a relationship of permanent indebtedness to the chief, which provides the basis, generation after generation, of their mutual relations.

In guise of a preliminary conclusion, I would like to advance the idea that the ceremonial gift objects of food and ‘riches’, in the societies of Tonga and Wallis, serve as strong identity markers because they are connected with the divine, with the ‘origin of things’, as M. Godelier puts it. But another reason is that food and wealth are also the signs of promises of life, in other words, the token of the future of a kin group as well as of the society as a whole. In this sense, they reveal another paradox — different from Weiner’s ‘keeping-while-giving’ or Godelier’s ‘keeping-for-giving’ — since native thinking attributes them a twofold function: that of transcending history by being the token of a perpetual contract, and that of implementing history by providing a group or a community with the material and conceptual means to inscribe itself in the duration of time.

Metamorphoses of the ceremonial gift

As we have seen, the ceremonial objects of Tonga and Wallis are identical. They are given and/or exchanged in almost identical forms and for almost identical purposes. Furthermore, there is remarkable consistency over time as far as both the objects themselves and their representations go. When one knows that the societies of Tonga and of Wallis have undergone and are still experiencing profound religious, economic, social and historical upheavals, the ‘historical weight’ of these objects and their representations can seem surprising. In any case, it provides a major indication of the staying power of certain identity markers. But it also raises other questions: at what point do the transformations of a society become so great that these markers disappear? Is anthropology equipped to detect — let alone prevent — these moments of identity loss?

The reader will have noticed that other objects than those we have just discussed appear in the ceremonial exchanges of both Tonga and Wallis. This is true in the case of food, of corned-beef or mutton chops, which clearly have nothing to do with custom. It is also true, among the koloa, of manu, of cotton, of satin and other fabrics. It is true in Wallis of the kava papalangi or the ‘White people’s kava’, in other words whisky, which is a suitable present for a visiting White to give to customary chiefs.
These objects, even though they are not indigenous products, are clearly imbued, within and by ritual, with a value and a function identical to those of the traditional objects of ceremonial exchange. The same is true of whisky, even if its effects on the body are different from those of traditional kava. Finally, as we shall see, it is also true for money, at least when it was first introduced. In Tonga, money appears in the large-scale kataonga alongside the other gifts, from the end of the nineteenth century, where it is generally presented with the koloa, that is by the women, which might seem surprising given that currency, at this time, generally came into a family via male labour. Even before the introduction of money, however, it seems that koloa served as legal tender: according to a missionary writing at the end of the nineteenth century, ‘before the importation of money, mats were almost the only coin of exchange’.

It is possible that, if, in the ritual context, money was spontaneously classified as koloa, it is because it fulfilled, at least when first introduced, the same kinds of functions as indigenous ‘riches’. One of the kataonga in Wallis described above shows a bride whose hairdo was garnished with banknotes. There too it could be said that the function of this public display of money is no different from that of the other objects, at least in this ritual context. We thus have new objects, objects from the modern Western world, but which have been first taken over and then integrated into the gift-giving rituals on an equal footing with those objects hallowed by tradition.

However, objects from the modern world are not always simply new. Sometimes they bring with them practices which break sharply with the vocation of the traditional gift. Examples can be found in both Tonga and Wallis, but they are perhaps more flagrant in Wallis insofar as its society seems to have been made more vulnerable by the changes it has experienced; unlike Tonga, the society of Wallis does not enjoy the advantage of numbers (6,000 inhabitants in Wallis, 100,000 in Tonga), and above all it is totally dependent on a foreign state.

But let us begin with Tonga. We have seen that, in Taoa village, relations between a noble chief and his land-holders are governed by the notion of long-term exchanges dictated by a debt, a debt of ‘honour’, as the villagers say. The chief is seen as the dispenser of land and of the fruits of this land: he grants his people tracts of his domain and, as mediator between god and men, he is the guarantor of future harvests. The land-holders carry out their fatongia; they cultivate the prince’s yam plot and present him with an offering of ceremonial gifts at various times of the year. This set of gifts and counter-gifts probably provided a model for relations which still prevails. However, in the last few years, due to a surge in the population, Tonga has seen a serious land shortage. In connection with this problem, a wholly new set of practices has appeared and developed. Today certain nobles grant plots of land to people in exchange for what in the West would be regarded as a substantial bribe; I hasten to add that this practice is entirely unlawful. As the villagers see it, however, things are considerably more ambiguous. In effect, some class the ‘money-for-land’ transaction under ceremonial gifts, given from time immemorial by a person to their hierarchical superior: the gifts used to be in kind, now they are in the form of money. Even though Tongan informants claim to share this view, at the same time they measure the perverse effects of the situation: on the one hand, the amount of money given for the same
piece of land rises significantly each year and, on the other, particularly, the use of money considerably reinforces the inequality of land-holders before access to land. Furthermore, noble families, especially those in the business world, increasingly tend to restrict the sphere of those with whom one was traditionally supposed to show generosity to the family circle: relatives, subjects or ‘clients’.

In Wallis, as our informants saw it, particularly those most politically engaged, the traditional chiefly families, on the one hand, and the Catholic mission, on the other, are today the best institutional representatives of Wallisian identity, particularly with respect to the French administration. But at the same time, some members of these families or of the mission are seen as sorcerer’s apprentices whose actions sometimes jeopardise this same identity. They are for instance criticised for the use of ‘envelopes’, a practice which appeared a few years ago and is becoming current. Today among the ceremonial gifts made to the church or to chiefs on the occasion of rites of passage or public katoanga feature sums of money, presented alongside the other gifts, but in an envelope. The problem here is not that money figures among the gifts, but that this money is presented in a sealed envelope, hidden from sight and thus not subject to the usual social control; in sum it has neither colour nor odour, and therefore could be — and is — kept for one’s personal use (put in the bank) instead of being redistributed.

This practice is a complete break with tradition and should be compared with another, also new, procedure. Today possession of a food freezer enables its owner to keep pork, whereas in the past, this same item used to be, by definition, the first in need of redistribution. The reproach addressed to the traditional chiefs is that, without being clearly aware of it, they are transforming the system of customary gifts by placing it in the service of non-indigenous practices. By perverting the practice of gift-giving — by making the gift a means of personal enrichment — they are betraying the custom that they are in principle charged with representing and defending. It is obvious that these practices mark a change which affects the value system of these societies. One informant summed it up in the following way: ‘A fellow’s value used to be measured by what he gave away, today it is measured by what he keeps.’ Behind the modification of the relationship between people and objects stands the alteration of relations between people themselves.

Such observations about ceremonial objects, in Tonga as well as in Wallis, nevertheless allow us to shade this somewhat trenchant opinion. The oddest thing, perhaps, is that these two behaviours — amassing to give away or amassing to keep — do not function as two terms of an alternative but exist side by side, as values, within the same society, though in different spheres. One can even wonder why money, a universal equivalent introduced decades ago, has not finally replaced the traditional ceremonial gift objects. As we have seen, money indeed features among these gifts either among the gift objects or alongside them, but not instead of them. Without being a financial specialist, it can be said that, since money is by definition anonymous and interchangeable, it cannot represent a person, neither a man, nor a woman, nor a group. It can therefore not replace such objects as food and wealth, since their characteristic feature is precisely that they are the sign of a group and provide its members with identity markers. It should also be noted that ‘riches’, koloa, function as a means of identification beyond the borders of each country, at least in Polynesia.
Wallisian goes to Futuna, to Samoa or to Tonga, or even to Tahiti, the best passport, in his view, is still a length of barkcloth carefully rolled up in a mat and accompanied, if possible, by a basket of food. Finally, one last remark: today it is increasingly common for gift objects to be bought with money. Nevertheless, their immediate function remains unchanged: to be exchanged in the traditional gift-giving circuit.

Food and wealth as ceremonial gift objects appear, in the societies of Tonga and Wallis, as identity markers. Bound up with representations of the life cycle, these objects bring into play the entire network of relations — between groups, genders, individuals or hierarchies — which forms the basis of the social order. At the same time, the incursion of either new gift objects or new ways of giving attests to new ways of thinking these social relations. This leads me to remark on two things: first of all on the longevity of customary objects and the traditional practices of gift-giving — that obstinate tendency to last which constitutes the strength of things; and second, on the simultaneous transformation of the paradigm of the relations between people and objects — in other words, between people.

This long-lasting (temporal) journey of ceremonial objects and traditional gift-giving practices in societies otherwise undergoing decisive mutations is surely a testimony to the health of their identity markers. And more perhaps? For instance, the sign that, in the present case, the ambient cultural homogenisation has reached one of its limits? Today such a conclusion is still premature.

Footnotes
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1 See Mauss (1990:8ff).
2 See Linnekin (1991b) and Weiner (1992). The latter's demonstration is also based on the case of Hawaii.
3 Tonga is an archipelago of 169 islands, with a total of 100,000 inhabitants. It is the only independent Polynesian kingdom that subsists today. Wallis (Uvéa) is an island some 125 km square, to the northwest of Tonga; it has a population of 6,000. The country is headed by a king, the Lavelua. In 1961, Wallis was combined with the island of Futuna into the overseas territory of Wallis and Futuna. History has created numerous bonds between the Tonga and Wallis. Besides the fact that the two were originally (1000 BC) settled by Polynesians from the same stock, the island of Wallis was conquered and for a large part colonised by Tongans in the 15th century. The Wallisians threw off this domination at the end of the 17th century, but maintained close ties with Tonga until the arrival of French Catholic missionaries (1837), who cut off exterior contacts for fear of Protestant influence. Today, while the inhabitants of Tonga and Wallis are firmly attached to their specificity, they speak nearly identical languages and recognise common origins, traditions and customs (see Douaire-Marsaudon 1998a).
4 No doubt the ceremonial drink, kava, should be added as a third category. But since kava is associated particularly with chiefly rituals and therefore entails implications other than those of gifts of kai and koloa, I chose to leave this subject to one side.
Agnatic or uterine kin group, descent group, the subjects of a chief, the village, etc. For both societies, in each of these settings, the group in question is called the *kainga*, a term whose broadest meaning is ‘relatives’ or ‘family’.

Public presentation of ceremonial gifts.

Public ground reserved for ceremonial gatherings.

For the full description, see Martin (1981: 94–96).

Taoa village is located in the Vava’u archipelago to the north of Tonga. Situated in the hereditary domain of crown prince Tupouto’a, it has some 450 inhabitants, most of whom are his tenants. Prince Tupouto’a does not live in the village, but in the capital. In the prince’s absence, authority is exercised by a commoner chief (*pule kolo*).

This plot is cultivated every three years. When the prince is absent, baskets of yams are sent to him by boat.

*Lu* are bundles of banana leaves tied up into a packet containing various delicacies prepared by the women, such as pieces of meat or fish in coconut milk, with taro leaves. *Faikakai* is a kind of cake made of wheat flour (formerly flour from tubers) and coconut milk cooked with sugarcane and wrapped in banana leaves. The bundles of *lu* and *faikakai* are laid in the ground oven, covered and cooked along with the other contents.

A large pig weighs between 100 and 150 kgs, sometimes more; a medium-sized one, between 50 and 100 kgs.

The two live pigs were bought with the money collected from the ‘tables’ or *pola* each of which usually seated relatives.

In Wallis, the term is spelled differently.

The content of these baskets is the same as that indicated in the preceding text, namely: between 10 and 15 yams, depending on their size, per basket and about the same number of *kape*; the number of taros ranges between 18 and 25.

The piles measured 2m in length by 1m in width by 1.5m in height.

The piles measured, respectively: 11.5m long by 1m wide by 1.5m high, and 4.5m long by 2m wide by 1.5m high.

This was the *pule pulo*, the commoner chief, as opposed to prince Tupouto’a, the noble chief.

In fact, while the *’uma* were being prepared, I saw that some small pigs had also been killed, which had been brought by family or *’api*, but I was unable to count them.

These boxes contained frozen mutton chops from New Zealand.

See above.

Some three tons of meat were distributed over the five-day funeral. Everyday fare consists above all of tubers (taro, *kape* and manioc) accompanied by either products from the lagoon or canned fish (bought in village shops, *fakekoloa*).

The same idea of the sign of absolute poverty is contained in not having a roll of barkcloth fabric, an essential item of women’s goods (see below).

After discussion, the villagers go to the village chief and explain that they no longer want him; the adults of the village then proceed to nominate a new chief, whose name is submitted for approval to the customary hierarchy, in particular to the king. This can happen to any chief, including the king. Everything depends on the seriousness and the extent of the damage. In Tonga, the deposition of a noble chief by his tenants is inconceivable; if their harvests are poor, they have only themselves to blame.

This is a widespread notion in Polynesia. Here is what Firth has to say about Tikopia: ‘He [the chief] is considered to be able through his relations with his ancestors and gods to control natural fertility, health and economic conditions in the interests of his dependants. Material evidence of his powers is given in native belief by the condition of the weather, of crops, of fish and of sick persons whom he attempts to cure’ (1940: 490).

See Bell (1931: 131).

On these various myths, see Gifford (1924: 155–64 and 181–84).

31 Tongans exchanged their koloa and particularly, it seems, their barkcloth fabric (ngatu) for valuable products from other archipelagos: fine mats from Samoa, wooden objects from Fiji (weapons, kava bowls, headrests; see on this subject Kaeppler 1978: 246–52). Each group of islands had its 'speciality', which was renowned and which made these objects much prized, precious, within a space that extended well beyond the boundaries of each island or archipelago.

32 At the time of a funeral, or after a birth, a number of koloa are also used to pay for the services of a specialist, for example the ha'a tufunga, who, in Tonga, organises the funeral ceremonies for members of chiefly families (Gifford 1929: 198). Likewise, koloa can also be given to the midwife or, sometimes, to the priest.

35 See Missions maristes (1890: 165).
36 See Churchward (1959: 270). The term koloa is sometimes combined with another particle, as in falekoloa (lit. 'house of koloa'), which designates village grocery stores. The expression angakoloa applies to someone who seems to have a 'natural' gift for accumulating wealth (Churchward 1959: 10).

37 The oil is still made for daily bodily use in all Tongan families. The mats are used for sitting or sleeping. In former times they were used as sails; some were waterproof and worn by men at sea. The coarsest mats still cover house floors or are hung across the entrance in cold weather (Martin 1981: 367). The finest are used to make the tā'ōvāla, the belt worn over one's clothing when going outside. Barkcloth is less used as a household product than it once was, having been replaced by cotton; but white (tutu), undyed tapa used to be worn as everyday apparel. Hung vertically, it still divides the fale into separate rooms. At the beginning of the 20th century, it also served as a periodical napkin (Gifford 1929: 187).

38 See Tamahori (1963: 67-68), Kooijman (1972: 306). 'In early times, the women had to refrain from sexual intercourse for two days before starting to make the dye…. By custom, women who prepare this dye do not leave their special house until all the work is finished, sleeping during the day and working by night. During this time they do not bath and their food is brought to them' (Tamahori ibid.).

39 This is not the place to describe the entire marriage ceremony, simply the exchange of gifts.
40 See Gifford (1929: 192).
41 For the whole ceremony, see Collocott (1923: 222–23).
42 On the importance of the brother/sister relationship in Tonga, see Douaire-Marsaudon (1993, 1996b, 1998a, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). It should also be noted that a share of these koloa is kept out of the exchanges and given to the young people as a sort of dowry; but all testimonies agree that it is important first of all to give each one what they have given, attempting to balance the exchanges between the kin groups. In other words, the young couple may end up with a very small share in spite of the quantities exchanged.
43 See Collocott (1923: 222).
44 See Marcus (1979: 87).
45 See Gifford (1929: 317).
46 See Kooijman (1972: 314, 319).
47 See Kooijman (1972: 331).
48 Mauss (1990: 10).
50 See Monfat (1890: 145).
51 Mauss (1990: 51).
52 See Gifford (1929 317). It is possible that this mat-shrine is also what Gifford called falauti, of which he says that it was 'a mat that is called by a name and used as a god' (Gifford 1929: 241).
55 It must be said that the ceremonial objects which circulate between groups are not, properly speaking, guaranteed by a store of highly valuable objects as is the case with the gold standard for money. But the symbolic value of the objects given by a donor group is, in effect, based on the group's standing, which is itself expressed and in a certain manner, guaranteed by the family 'treasure'.
56 See Gifford (1929: 181).
No trace is to be found in the sources of a conception similar to that of the New Zealand Maoris, for whom, according to Mauss, gift objects are inhabited by a spirit, hau, which makes them want to return to where they came from. The term exists in Tonga and Wallis, but it generally designates the temporal aspect of the king's function, which he exercises physically and militarily. In Tonga, the term hau also designates a champion, someone who is victorious because of his physical strength, which comes from the gods (or the ancestors).

Godelier (1999: 159). Godelier recalls that, for Mauss, potlatch 'disappears' from Polynesia because the hierarchy had become fixed ('the clans have definitively become hierarchised'), thus paralysing all or some of the competition, one of the essential conditions of potlatch being 'the instability of a hierarchy'. This is forgetting that Polynesian hierarchies did not become definitive before contact with the West — the case in Hawaii, Tahiti and Tonga — before that, competition for power was almost an institution, as N. Gunson so well demonstrates in his article on leadership in Polynesia (1979). As far as Tonga is concerned, while the same hierarchy tended to turn into a caste system, rivalry for power was accentuated by the fact that the number of young nobles was on the rise at the end of the 18th century.

In this case the barkcloth also bears the indication koe sisi o Tupoutoa, which means 'this is the garland — the pattern — of Tupoutoa.'

This is true, for example, of certain women in Tonga who live in the capital. In Wallis, families are accustomed to buying their barkcloth from Futuna: this is the siapo, renowned yesterday as today for its delicate patterns (on the siapo from Futuna, see Chevron 1841: 32).

Note that, on the occasion of a marriage, there are, alongside goods exchanged between the kin groups, others which constitute a sort of dowry for the bride and the groom. The groom is expected to contribute 'men's' goods: land, (live) pigs, etc. And the bride is supposed to bring women's goods: mats, tapas, coconut oil. But since these objects constitute the estate of the new household, one can hardly speak of 'exchange' of women's goods 'for' men's goods. Likewise, in both Tonga and Wallis, one can still trade a roll of barkcloth for a pig and vice versa. In this context, a female object is exchanged for a male object, but this transaction is neither the 'standard structure of exchange', nor, in any case, 'the archetype of marriage exchange'. This kind of exchange is practiced 1) in view of obtaining something one needs; or 2) because one does not have the necessary currency. It is therefore barter, which can eventually enable a person to obtain money. But in no case can it be termed an exchange of ceremonial gifts.

See Linnekin (1991b: 3). For Samoa, following Mauss (1990: 8–10) many authors, among whom Mead (1930: 73–74), Shore (1982: 203–204) and Linnekin (1991b: 2) class women's productions — tapa, coconut oil and mats — as 'ie toga and men's productions — canoes and tools — as well as European products — commodities and money — as 'oloa. This is an inversion of terms with respect to Tonga. Nevertheless, recent observations would seem to indicate that the traditional Samoan model was actually quite similar to that of Tonga, down to the vocabulary (Tcherkézoff, personal communication).

This is true of Futuna, too, as well as of Puka-Puka (the Cook Islands, see Hecht 1977: 191) and Rotuma (J. Rensel and A. Howard, personal communication). To the best of my knowledge, the two contexts in which men's products are exchanged for women's products are the following: when a boy is officially courting a girl and gives a kava in her honour: ‘The boy usually prepares an umu (small piglet and some yams) for the girl who reciprocates with a mobenga (lit. ‘bed’; barkcloth and mats)’ (Rogers 1975: 399); and in ritual exchanges between brother and sister. These exchanges take place in the privacy of the domestic setting.

According to G. Milner, in Samoa today, the groom's family gives a sum of money ('oloa) to the bride's family, who is responsible for providing the food for the feast (1966: 164).

This kind of conceptions are found in Samoa (see Tcherkézoff 1992b: 3), and in Hawaii: ‘The term for adoption is hanai, ‘to feed’: one becomes a child of another by nurture. So likewise, to be long supported by
the food of a given land is to become *kama'aina*, a ‘child of the land’. In both cases, kinship is the sharing of substance through eating’ (Sahlins 1992a: 199).

75 See Kooijman (1972: 321), see also Tamahori (1963: 162).

76 See Gifford (1929: 328).

77 We could mention other rituals in which *koloa* are clearly connected with the life cycle. The umbilical cord ritual is still performed today: when a girl is born, her umbilical cord is usually buried under a *hiapo* (Broussonetia papyrifera) for the explicit purpose of making her into a good producer of barkcloth. Tongan oral tradition tells that, when a young chief sets off for other islands, his mother rubs him with coconut oil and gives him a new *taiovalu* (fine mat). The same stories speak of the virginity mat, *kie taupo'o*, that girls used to give to their first lover.

78 See *Missions maristes* (1890: 34).

79 Food and wealth, it should be recalled, are accompanied in many rituals by the ceremonial drink known as *kava* (an extract of the root of a pepper, *Piper methysticum*). If one accepts the theory — which I have defended elsewhere — that *kava* roots are a substitute for ancestral bones, it is clear that *kai, kava* and *koloa*, are, in the context of gift-exchange rituals, the expression of all those who make up the *kainga*: ancestors, the living and their descendants (Douaire-Marsaudon 1993: 766ff, 1996a, 1998a: chap. 18, 1998b, 2001).

80 Mauss (1990: 46; author’s emphasis).

81 C. Gailey classifies *koloa* by opposition to men’s productions. According to her theory, women’s productions, including children, are conceptualised as *koloa*, therefore as valuable goods, while men’s productions are classed as *ngaue*, meaning ‘work’: this is supposed to be proof of the lesser value ascribed to men’s productions (Gailey 1987: 105ff). Yet it must be borne in mind that, in Polynesia, gender difference is cross-cut by differences in rank, which are not gender based. *Koloa* are regarded as valuable goods, but certain men’s items like weapons, canoes or incised whale-teeth enjoy the same reputation. Alongside fine mats, a ‘treasure’, *fakafaanga* would also contain particularly valuable weapons (Gifford 1929: 318).

82 For the different forms and values of the respective services of the dominant and dominated parties in ‘the reproduction of society’, see Godelier (1994).

83 See Douaire-Marsaudon (1993: 813ff). Today the *'inasi* ritual has been replaced by a large-scale demonstration of agricultural prowess some aspects of which are reminiscent of the past (see Bataille-Benguigui 1976).

84 For Mauss, the Polynesian gift and counter-gift system is not the same thing as potlatch because ‘the element of usury in the reciprocal service rendered is lacking’ (Mauss 1990: 88, n. 9), which explains in part the fact that these exchanges are not agonistic (*ibid*.:7). Everything depends on what is considered to be provided as service and counter-service. In Polynesia, the chief’s service has an undeniably usurious character because it is inconceivable that his tenants could ever extinguish the debt they owe him. Here too the example of the ceremonial exchanges of goods in Samoa may have led Mauss to this conclusion, contrary to what seems to be the lesson of the same exchanges in Tonga and Wallis, where they seem to be of an agonistic nature.

85 See Godelier (1999).


87 For economic and political changes in Tonga, see van der Grijp (1993a, 1993b, 1997, 2004), Benguigui (1989) and the article by Bataille-Benguigui and Benguigui in the present volume, Chap. 11.


90 See Gailey (1980).

91 See Monfat (1893: 441). Note that the word ‘mats’ is used by the missionary as a generic term clearly designating both mats and barkcloth (*ibid*).

92 One of many examples of the problems of identity raised by such dependence; up until 1989 — the time of my last trip — French was taught to the children of Wallis just as it was to French children, as a mother tongue. Whereas in the majority of homes Wallisian is still spoken.

93 In principle and according to constitutional law, every man of 16 years and older has the right to use the land, called *'api*. In reality, today a little over 60 per cent of the men in Tonga do not have their reglementary plot.


95 See Marcus (1980).
This was the case when a Greek city-state or a medieval seigneury struck coin. It is the case even today with modern States. It will become less and less true with the advent of a currency such as the pan-European Euro, and perhaps even more with the development of electronic payment.

But the foodbasket — often composed of yams — is forbidden on planes.

Once they enter the traditional gift circuit, these objects can be given over and over, but to my knowledge they do not leave the circuit again to be exchanged for money.