

# The Obligation to Reciprocate Gifts and the Spirit of the Item Given: From Marcel Mauss to René Maunier

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In *Essai sur le don* (Essay on Gifts), a work that the author himself noted was only indicative and incomplete, Marcel Mauss recommended in his conclusions on general sociology and morality that the analysis should be taken further and future research should focus on certain cultural areas that he had not been able to take into account: Micronesia, Indochina, Tibet, Burma, and North Africa, among others. And he stressed the existence, among the Berbers, of “remarkable practices of *taoussa*,” the study of which, he said, had been the business of Douffé and Maunier (Mauss 1968b: 274, n. 1).

It is well known that Mauss’s *Essai* appeared in 1925 in the first volume of the second series of the *Année Sociologique*. What is less well known is that the second volume of the new series, which was published two years later, included *Recherches sur les échanges rituels en Afrique du Nord* (Studies of Exchange Rituals in North Africa), by René Maunier. This work was devoted to the comparative description and analysis of the practices of ritual collections of money during festivals in Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt. This work undoubtedly was overshadowed from the outset by the work of Mauss, and, in any case, has been long forgotten. It is worth returning to this work today, however, because Maunier was not content simply to continue the work of his master, like a faithful pupil. Certainly, one finds in Maunier’s work most of the important concepts placed in the forefront by Mauss: comprehensive social phenomenon; system of comprehensive levies of an antagonistic type; the obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate. Maunier, like Mauss, devoted most of his attention

to the obligation to reciprocate, which was very characteristic of the rites that he studied, and it was precisely there where he showed himself to be most innovative.

One can draw out from Maunier's study a set of essential analytical distinctions: there is the obligation and its properties; there are the various types of sanction; and, finally, there are the moral values and religious beliefs that underlie obligations – or, to put it another way: a) what has to be done, to whom, in what way, and under what circumstances; b) why it has to be done, that is, the values that underlie or motivate obligations; c) what happens if one does not fulfill them, sanctions of all kinds. Even though Maunier does not theorize very much, his work represents a clarification and an important advance compared to Mauss's approach. The latter, whose main aim was to find the magical-religious foundations of the obligation to reciprocate gifts received, attached very little importance to the various concrete qualities of the obligation, or to sanctions themselves.

Maunier's work differs from that of Mauss in another very important respect. Indeed, Maunier does not adopt the very famous theory of *hau*, which constitutes the fundamental thread of *Essai sur le don*. It is well known that, in the societies that he studied, Mauss did not seek only to establish that the obligation to reciprocate gifts was based on moral and magical-religious values. The hypothesis went a great deal further, the values in question having always to be of the same type – whether one was dealing with Melanesian *kula*, the *potlatch* of the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, or ancient Roman, Hindu, or Germanic rights. Mauss used his interpretation of certain facts relating to Polynesian ethnography, particular Maori, to present us with a belief system that he thought could be found elsewhere. Even though Mauss's interpretation of the Maori evidence is still discussed and debated today,<sup>1</sup> it is useful to call to mind its crucial aspects.

Mauss sought to establish what “spiritual mechanism” obliged the return of the gift received or its equivalent, and wanted to highlight the “moral and religious reason” behind the constraint to make restitution, and, more generally, “the execution of real contracts” (Mauss 1968b: 153). As he himself later noted, his work focused essentially on “the religious and moral value of the objects handed over” (Mauss 1947: 105). In his preparation for a work on *Le Péché et l'Expiation* (Sin and Expiation), Hertz already

had assembled a large number of “demonstrative facts” concerning Polynesia. According to Mauss, these facts proved that “the sanction for theft is the simple magic and religious effect of *mana*, of the power which the owner retains over the stolen object and that, moreover, the latter, surrounded with taboos and marked with signs of ownership, is completely charged by them with *hau*, with spiritual power” (Mauss 1968b: 159, n.1). It is obvious that, for Mauss, it was this *hau* “which avenges the person robbed, which takes control of the thief, casts a spell on him, leads him to death or forces him to restore the object.”

The theory elaborated by Mauss was already present “in embryo” in a remark by Hertz in connection with the words of a Maori wiseman, as reported by E. Best, the New Zealand ethnographer. Here is Hertz’s remark: “When I give a *tonga*<sup>2</sup> and when the recipient gives it to a second beneficiary, the latter, impelled by *hau*, by the spirit of the first present, can, under no pretext, keep it for himself. He is obliged to return it to the first giver” (quoted in Mauss 1969: 45). Mauss’s commentary extended beyond that of Hertz,<sup>3</sup> and there were only two more points to be refined for the theory of *hau* to appear in its complete form.

In the first place, the spirit of the object given is a part of the soul of the giver, who, by these means, has a hold on the recipient: “It is easy to understand, in this system of ideas, that it is necessary to return to another that which is, in reality, part of the other’s nature and substance, because to accept something from someone is to accept something from his spiritual essence, from his soul. To keep this thing would be dangerous and mortal, not simply because it would be illicit but also because this thing which comes from the person, not only morally but physically and spiritually, this essence . . . gives a magic and religious hold over one” (Mauss 1968b: 161). Then, secondly, it only remained to postulate that honor, a moral value, could be considered one of the attributes of the magical-religious force common to the donor and his gift: “the Polynesian *mana* itself symbolizes not only the magic force of each individual, but also his honour, and one of the best translations of this word is: authority, wealth” (Mauss 1968b: 203).

Thus, as we have mentioned above, the theory of *hau* did far more than put forward the hypothesis according to which the obligation to reciprocate gifts is founded on magical-religious and moral beliefs. It also makes the important supposition that

these beliefs are always of the same type and imply: a) the presence in the gift of an active spirit; b) that this spirit is a part of the soul of the giver, inseparable from the object itself even after it has been handed over; c) that, by magic, this spirit forces the recipient to make restitution of the present or its equivalent, under pain of a magic sanction; and d) that moral beliefs, honor, rank, and prestige are only properties of the magic power common to the donor and his gift.

Even if one can demonstrate that Mauss's hypothesis fits perfectly with the Maori facts,<sup>4</sup> this would not mean in any way that the general application of the theory of *hau* to other cultures would become an easy task. Even if one can acknowledge that many societies, unlike ours (or to a lesser extent than ours), do not set rights over people against rights over objects, and even if one frequently discovers beliefs that create a degree of "mystical" consubstantiality between the giver and the object given, it does not follow that one must admit that only beliefs of this kind are capable of assuring respect for the obligation to reciprocate, and of creating sanctions around it, in such societies. Nor does it follow that there exists almost everywhere, except in modern societies, the equivalent of a spirit of *hau* mystically linked to the donor and pursuing every recipient when the gift is not returned.

On the other hand, by not adopting the theory of *hau*, Maunier came to describe a system of moral and magical-religious values different from the one that Mauss thought could be found in a very large number of primitive or archaic societies. Nevertheless, the system of values analyzed by Maunier created a foundation for the obligation to reciprocate as effective as the theory of *hau*, even though it assumed a different relationship between obligation and sanction on one hand and moral and religious values on the other. Thus, as much by the definition of obligation that he elaborated as by the analysis of the values that underlay it, Maunier already had made an important contribution to the development of research on systems of ritual or ceremonial exchange. Before discussing the two principal contributions of Maunier to this research, first we should make some substantial remarks on a work that, unfortunately, is not at all well known.

## I. *Taoussa* Among the Kabyle and the Obligation to Reciprocate Gifts

Maunier devoted the early section of his essay to Kabyle *taoussa*, which he defined as a ritual collection in which “anyone who gives a festival receives a regulated contribution from the guests on the implied condition that it would be reimbursed” (1927: 22).<sup>5</sup> Since Kabyle *taoussa* was “an elaborated and systematized form of the practice of gifts in festivals,” Maunier chose to study it by a monographic approach (22, 45), and the quality of the facts he collected in this way allowed him to make a description and analysis of ritual collections, the results of which are still extremely useful today.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. *The Occasions and the Actors*

A *taoussa* always takes place in public. It is closely tied to a festival in which it represents only one episode, along with other rites, dances, meals, and games (24, 62). In general, the festivals in which *taoussa* takes place mark important changes of status in the life of a man or a woman – whether it be birth, circumcision, engagement, marriage, or funeral (24–25, 47, 62).<sup>7</sup> In this way, for example, during marriage ceremonies, after the bride has crossed the threshold of the house of her new husband’s parents, a collection is made for the father of the groom who is the “master of the festival.” In the Bou Zegza *douar*, one even might hold two separate collections. The first, for the father of the groom, is made among the elders, while the second, to which the younger people contribute, is for the groom (25).<sup>8</sup>

When a man organizes a festival for the marriage of his son (as his duty),<sup>9</sup> it is to him, as master of the festival (*moul’el ars*), that the gifts gathered during the collection are given. The father of the family advances the cost of the festival, above all for the food, and receives, thanks to the *taoussa*, offerings in money from his guests. “The essence of the *taoussa* is the donation by the guests to the host, who enjoys the benefit of it for a time” (68).<sup>10</sup>

The master of the festival is the only passive subject in the collection. Among the principal active subjects, one finds various categories of guests (28–29):

1. Relatives, that is, members of the immediate marriage line and those of the *kharouba*, are invited as of right.<sup>11</sup>
2. Invitations also are given to villagers who are not relatives but partners and affiliates of the same *çof*.<sup>12</sup>
3. Less frequently, inhabitants of other villages of the *douar* are invited, even those who are not members of the tribe.
4. In addition, everyone living in the village, even if they are not invited, can take part in the festival. Thus a member of the opposing *çof* can be present and make a large gift, which would be considered a challenge to the honor of the host.
5. Finally, all the men in whose festivals the host of the day has taken part and to whose collections he has contributed must take part. They are not invited explicitly; the simple rumor of the approach of the festival plays the role of a tacit summons.

In this way, during a particular festival three hundred persons could be brought together to take part and contribute to the collection. To these are added a few secondary actors – witnesses or auxiliaries – whose participation is often indispensable to the collection: the *marabout* recites prayers to bring holiness and *baraka*, the herald or crier announces the name of each donor and the value of his offering, and a *gadi*-lawyer writes everything down (30). The important heads of family or tribe and the *Kaid* of the *douar* also take part in the collection frequently, giving it prestige and solemnity. But only the presence of the herald seems to be indispensable.

## 2. The Act

Let us first of all consider the procedures for inviting guests to the festival (30–32). The summons can be verbal, or it can be expressed by a gesture such as the sending of a meat *couscous*, which, since it is not an everyday dish, “is equivalent to a symbolic summons” (31). It is also possible, as we have already mentioned, for the invitation to be implied. By means of conversations in the village house or on the way to the fountain, I learn that “X” soon will be holding a festival, and, since he already has contributed to a collection held during a festival that I organized, I know that I am invited in full right to the festival of “X,” where I must give to the collection: “thus appears the juridical notion of tacit commitment and the idea of *de jure*

publicity is formed" (31). The festival is a public act and no one can ignore it: as a person who is in "X"'s debt, I must go to the festival that he is organizing without receiving any special notice.

The appointed day for the ceremonies arrives. The participants gather in the open air at the place chosen for the festivities. They bring the material required for the collection. An Arab rug (or a Berber blanket) is spread out in the middle of the circle formed by the guests. A large embroidered and brightly colored silk scarf (*fouta*)<sup>13</sup> is put down. Into the center of this scarf is placed a large silver ring (*khalkhal*),<sup>14</sup> serving as a recipient, into which are tipped grains of wheat and beans as a sign of abundance and fertility. Later, the gifts, in the form of silver coins, are placed on the scarf.

*Gestures* Each participant approaches the scarf in turn, holding in his hand the silver coins that represent his contribution. He gives them to the herald, who places them on the *fouta* in full view of everyone, in a small separate pile. Sometimes the gift is given to the *marabout* (or to the *Kaïd*), who then passes the money to the herald. In one form or other, the tradition is *longa manu*, it is made formal and public through the mediation of at least one official personage. The gifts are given in an ordered fashion. In the most simple procedure, each person gets up in turn, from the beginning to the end of the semicircle that the participants trace around the fire. However, if the *marabout* is present, he begins the collection. The others follow in turn: the close marriage relatives, members of the *khrouba*, the inhabitants of the village, members of the tribe, and then outsiders. The object given is always the same: silver coins, very often in the form of Spanish *douros*. As a rule, the value of a gift is not fixed in advance; each one gives as he pleases,<sup>15</sup> and the value varies according to the better or worse quality of that year's harvest. The value of an individual gift is determined in advance only if the donor is reimbursing the host for a gift received by him during an earlier festival. The return gift includes an increment compared to the original one. Once the gifts are given, the herald passes everything to the host who disposes of it as he pleases for a certain time. Then the meal is served, which is followed by talking until daybreak (32–34).

*Spoken and Written Word* Before the beginning of the collection, the *marabout* recites a prayer. Then, while each participant

risers to make his offering and returns in silence to his place, the herald solemnly announces in a loud voice the value of the gift and the name of the donor according to a stereotypical formula, which, nonetheless, varies from place to place. In addition to the religious aspect, which is represented by a blessing, and the moral aspect, which concerns honor, these formulas possess strong legal connotations. Gift and counter-gift are "declared, proclaimed and verified in public." In addition, in satirical words the herald suggests, encourages, and stimulates the gifts, scolding all hesitation on the part of a guest to fulfill his obligations (16, 76; Maunier 1929b: 114). Between the conventional formulas that he pronounces while the guest is getting up and making his offering in silence and with conventional gestures, the herald takes on the role of a jester, evoking laughter from those present by often subtle word play. Thus the herald is also a local comedian, who, like other comedians, is paid for his work.

As for the host, the master of the festival, silence is expected even though his presence is indispensable to the carrying out of the ritual collection. However, occasionally he himself thanks a guest and promises to reimburse him on the first opportunity, thus making verbally explicit the obligation of reciprocity, which remains implicit most of the time. Even though it is sometimes expressed in words, this obligation usually needs only the declaration of a public gift before witnesses in order to be established (35–36).

Frequently, a scribe (*khodja*) or a *gadi*-lawyer is present at the herald's side and writes down the name and amount of the offering of each guest in the order that the offerings are made and announced by the herald. Afterward, the sheet, the register, or the wooden tablet where all the gifts are written down remains in the possession or at the disposal of the master of the festival (36).

### 3. *The Effects: Obligation and Blessing*

As Maunier himself pointed out, it is only in the interest of analysis that one is justified in dissociating the legal, economic, and religious aspects of a festival and the collection that takes place. But the villagers themselves are aware of three principal effects. The *taoussa* is a source of obligation, a means of association, and



a cause of blessing (37, 76). Here, we will deal only with the first and last of these effects.<sup>16</sup>

*Obligation* Just like Mauss, Maunier devoted some of the longest sections of his study to the obligation of reciprocity (37–42, 77–80, 95–97). Even though one does not find it mentioned in the written *Ganouns*,<sup>17</sup> the obligation is very strict. It acts as a “customary duty” and as a “traditional imperative” that generally is respected to the letter. It is the nonwritten practice that is the source of the obligation. It is necessary to reciprocate the gift received simply because that was the Ancients’ way of doing things. In addition, the custom does not require any verbal commitment: “It is the gift itself, proclaimed in public assembly, which creates the duty to reimburse” (37–38).

As for the period of obligation, it is not predetermined. It is when “X” gives a festival that I go to reimburse him for what he has given to me in an earlier festival collection, at which festival I was the host. The obligation is postponed, the period uncertain. One cannot foresee precisely the moment of a birth, a circumcision, and so on, and one never organizes a festival with the sole aim of receiving gifts. The occasion of a festival could never be so arbitrary and self-interested. It does not take place at the will of the organizer. Its term is thus statutory and not contractual: I have no means of action to be reimbursed and must wait for the moment when custom gives me the opportunity to organize a festival (38, 77).

Thus, the obligation can exist over a number of periods and reimbursement can be made in installments. I am not required to reciprocate all at once everything that I have received from my guests during a collection. I make a return to each of them when one of them organizes a festival. And it is in general difficult for me to foresee the time necessary to wipe out the whole of my debt, because this depends on casual, accidental events (38).

It is necessary to return to each guest more than one has received from him. Restitution is thus usurious. To return only the equivalent constitutes an insult and a breaking of friendship. To make no return at all is a challenge – a declaration of hostility, which may end in bloodshed. With the exception of such situations where the antagonistic character of the *taoussa* can tend toward the extreme,<sup>18</sup> the value of the supplement is not defined

strictly. It is acceptable to reciprocate with an increase of fifty percent, but the increment is often smaller or larger. Here everything depends on the degree of friendship and wealth of the families in question: "individual decision and personal situation affect the size of restitutions" (39–40). Finally, there is not an indefinite progression of gifts and counter-gifts.<sup>19</sup> If I owe nothing to "X," but even so, give him a *douro*, he is required to give back at least a little more and things stop there as far as the increment is concerned. If I take part in a second festival organized by him, I am free to fix the value of my offering as I wish.

Even though restitution is usurious, the value of the increment does not depend on time. There is no interest on the borrowed capital in that sense. The value of the increment remains the same no matter what the length of time is separating the festival in which I received from that in which I gave – what Maunier called *taoussa*-donation and *taoussa*-restitution. To preserve friendship and safeguard honor, it is sufficient that there should be an increment, no matter how small (40).

As well as being increased and imposed, restitution also has sanctions attached to it. The constraint exercised by opinion is very strong, playing the role of a legal sanction. For a default in reimbursing with interest, the principal sanction is loss of honor (*nif*, *horma*). A man without honor is at the margins of society, almost boycotted by the community. A debtor who does not give back with interest sees his honor and prestige decline, sarcastic remarks are directed at him, he is vigorously criticized, and he loses the friendship of his creditor (41). It also should be noted that there is a less important sanction of a magical-religious nature. The one who fails to reciprocate the gift can, indeed, "be possessed by *shaitan*, the devil" (42, n. 1). Finally, the inevitable sanction for someone who does not reciprocate is physical violence, which is the main way of responding to behavior considered to be a challenge or direct attack on the honor of the creditor.

*Blessing* Since it is part of a festival, *taoussa* has the consequence not only of creating obligations but also, in its function as a religious rite, it produces a blessing (*baraka*), itself a source of fertility, prosperity, peace, honesty and purity:<sup>20</sup> "to give and reciprocate gifts, to obey the laws of honour in a public assembly, to hand over and to bind, is also to purify and make fertile" (42).

In this way, the rite has several effects. It not only creates objects and guarantees honor, it produces peace, happiness, and prosperity for the receiver, for the donors, and for all who take part (86–87). This allows one to understand the existence of a religious sanction for those who do not respect the three obligations. In particular, the failure to reciprocate with interest can result in misfortune: “it is to commit a sin, and thus to lose purity” (80).

The gift has two religious or mystical effects. It drives away evil and brings about good. Giving allows impurity to be absolved and interdictions (such as mourning) to be lifted. It drives away evil spirits and appeases the anger of benevolent spirits who do not like impudent prosperity, shot through with boasting and presumptuousness, preferring to see a man humble himself and make a sacrifice in giving gifts, rather than to see a man feel assured of their support.

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*Taoussa* can be considered as a loan-gift, a temporary loan, bearing in mind, however, that the increment that is part of the return of the loan in no way constitutes interest evolving over time. In addition, the loan is not explicit but veiled, it is not contractual but statutory and imposed (91, 96).<sup>21</sup> From a legal point of view, *taoussa* implies the existence of a “right of cult,” of a kind of “obligation of festival.”

## II. Ritual Collections in Morocco

The definition of the obligation of reciprocity applies fully to Kabyle *taoussa*, but not to all the other forms of ritual collection that Maunier examines in the comparative section of his essay (Maunier 1927: 45–87). However, the definition is sufficiently detailed and precise to allow us to see whether it can be applied to more recent ethnographic data, and if so, under what conditions. Only two monographs have been found that continue Maunier’s comparative analysis and illustrate the contemporary relevance of his approach: they deal extensively with ritual collections practiced by the Berber communities of Morocco.<sup>22</sup> The first of these monographs discusses an example of collection that corresponds almost point for point to the definition of the obligation of reciprocity given by Maunier. Among the Iqar’iyen

of the Eastern Rif (Jamous 1981), the collection (*ghrama*), which takes place during a marriage differs from *taoussa* only in the nonusurious character of the obligation.<sup>23</sup> A type of collection has been observed among the Ayt Arbaâ, however, which is sufficiently different from the Kabyle *taoussa* to modify Maunier's definition.

The Ayt Arbaâ, "people of the quarter," inhabit several villages in a small valley in the High Atlas (Jouad and Lortat-Jacob 1978). In two of their festivals, the *tazz'unt* and the *Lâamt*, they practice a very elaborate form of collection. Since the procedures are the same for both festivals, an analysis will be presented only of the first.

The *tazz'unt*, which opens the festival season, is celebrated by the whole community on 31 July, according to the Julian calendar. It consists of a religious celebration of the *mousse*m type, but, unlike other festivals of this kind that are known elsewhere in Morocco and the rest of North Africa, the *tazz'unt* of the Ayt Arbaâ concerns a relatively small number of people, about a thousand, and does not include a *souk* or displays of folk singing and dancing (Jouad and Lortat-Jacob 1978: 50–51, 54).

The celebrations involve a group of relations by marriage, the *ighss* (bone, kernel), who are men and women living in a valley that harbors several villages.<sup>24</sup> The site of the festivities is on the territory of the *ighss*, outside the villages, in the vicinity of a small tomb where Sidi Isdal, a Muslim saint of the sixteenth century, is buried. This place, reserved for communal prayer (*ms'lla*), is for the group of villages what the mosque is for each village. By not holding the festival in a particular village each year, one avoids forcing a particular village to take responsibility for all the participants. Every village in the valley takes its turn organizing the festival.

A few days before the *tazz'unt*, two men nominated by the assembly visit all the houses, and each family in the *ighss* has to pay off the debt contracted during the auction sales held at the previous year's festival. The two collectors make a meticulously calculated set of accounts in a notebook. If someone cannot pay, because of death or some other valid reason, the community settles the debt. The two collectors then hand over their notebook to the two people responsible for the purchases. These men have to buy the animals, especially the male and female goats, from the merchants of the *ighss*. These are not

professional merchants, but simply owners of animals, which they sell and often resell, like other members of the group. The number of animals bought in this way can go from a dozen to around twenty. If the amount received in the initial collection is not sufficient, new requests for subscriptions are made. If the funds are superior to the year's needs, however, the surplus is loaned to certain members of the community, on condition that it be reimbursed the following year by the purchase of new animals.

Then the animals are taken to the sanctuary of Sidi Isdal, where they are sacrificed. Their throats are cut one after the other in front of the door of the small building. The three men who volunteer for this job have the right to a few animals from the common herd, which they may resell, consume, or even offer to the saint during the auction. They also may be indemnified by a sum of money taken from the total amount destined for the expenses of the festival. After the sacrifice, the animals are quickly cut up. The hind quarters (legs, fillets, offal) are put on one side together with the heads and the skins, which are destined for the first auction in the afternoon. The forequarters are, after being cooked for a long time, handed out at the end of the day to all the participants.

Only men can purchase at the first sale, and, as buyers and sellers belong to the same community, everything is conducted in a closed circle. At the edge of the circle formed by the participants, two men preside over the conduct of the auction. The first is a sort of auctioneer, who, after having fixed a starting price, which is always more or less the same as the normal market price, passes a piece of meat to the second auctioneer, who is a sort of crier. The latter goes round the square, repeating the price quoted while brandishing a piece of meat, which he finally gives to the one who makes the highest bid. A third man writes in his notebook all the appropriate details for each purchase (the amount and the purchaser). All the money will be handed over the following year, when the two collectors visit the families of the *ighss*.

After the *marabout* has recited the first chapter of the Koran, proceedings move on directly to the second auction. This is carried out in roughly the same way as the previous one, except that the products put on sale publicly become gifts that have a clear propitiatory invention, carrying out commitments made

during the course of the year by the donors in thanksgiving for their fulfilled prayers. The gifts are made to the saint or to the *marabout*. Only a few large animals are sacrificed and sold at high prices. The remaining gifts consist of small separate quantities of butter, eggs, barley, and poultry – which is always sold alive.

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Like the Kabyle *taoussa*, the collections practiced by the Ayt Arbaâ are the source of an obligation arising from a festival. But the *tazz'unt* and the festival of *Lâamt* do not mark a change in the state of a person's life. The *tazz'unt* is an intervillage religious festival involving many more participants than a marriage. In addition, the difference in the status of host and guest tends to become confused in a celebration of this kind. It is as if the community, the *ighss*, were inviting itself by means of its appointed representatives. Contrary to the *taoussa*, there is no distinction between a single passive subject (the host), and a number of active subjects (guests, witnesses, or auxiliaries). Nor is the collection made for the benefit of the host. Each member of the community gives and receives during the same festival: I pay in money my debts from the previous year; I receive meat and other food products that I must repay with an increment next year.

The obligation is customary; it arises from the collection made during this year's festival and is paid off during the collection of debts in the days preceding the following year's festival. The obligation also may be postponed, but the term is not uncertain. If one cannot foresee the precise moment at which a marriage will take place, one always is certain when *tazz'unt* takes place. In addition, the counter-payment is not divided up; the obligation is not repaid over a number of different time periods: it is all at once that I reimburse the collectors for all the debts contracted during last year's festival.

The obligation is also solemnized or ritualized, constituted by proclamation and levy. But a significant difference exists here between the Ayt Arbaâ collection and *taoussa*. In the latter, the levy and the counter-levy are made in money, in public and with witnesses. On the other hand, during *tazz'unt*, the levy is made in kind and the counter-levy in money. Only the levy takes place in public, during an auction sale with the same auxiliaries as

*taoussa*, who, however, hand over the gifts of representatives of the community to the guests, rather than receiving the gifts from the guests, as in the *taoussa*. As for the counter-levy, it does not take place in public, and those who carry it out are not the same as those who conducted the levy; rather, it involves two collectors – not the herald and the auctioneer.

The obligation is usurious. The increment is determined directly by the level of the bids: the money surplus that I pay this year for a chicken that I obtained during the auctions at last year's festival is calculated by taking into account the difference between the price of the chicken on the market this year and its price at the auction sale. Thus, the increment does not change according to the time that has passed between one festival and another.

Finally, the obligation is tacit and concealed. It is not necessary for me to make a verbal and explicit commitment to pay next year for what I acquire this year. Because of a lack of ethnographic data concerning sanctions, it is impossible to say what might happen if ever I did not meet my debt.

The obligation of reciprocity that arises from the collection serving to finance a festival like *tazz'unt* is quite different from the obligation produced by the *taoussa*. In fact, the difference between the *tazz'unt* and *taoussa* obligations is far greater than the difference between the *taoussa* obligation and the ritual collection made during a marriage among the Iqar'iyyen. If one wishes to take into account the *tazz'unt* of the Ayt Arbaâ and the *ghrama* of the Iqar'iyyen, it is necessary to make some small modifications to the definition that Maunier presented of the obligation of reciprocity of the *taoussa*. In the Kabyle collections, as in those of the Ayt Arbaâ and the Iqar'iyyen, the characteristics of the obligation are fairly similar. The obligation of reciprocity is customary and deferred. The period, however, can be usurious or not, multiple or single. When it is usurious, the increment does not vary according to the passing of time. With respect to the solemnity of the obligation, it is not implied that both the levy and the counter-levy should be conducted and proclaimed in public: it is sufficient that only one of the two be public, through the mediation of a herald (who may be joined by a scribe, an auctioneer, a *Kaid*, or other people). It is extremely likely that, in case of default, the obligation is always

sanctioned by the loss of honor and of the virtues of *baraka*, but any generalization on this subject requires an examination of monographs that deal specifically with sanctions.

### III. *Hau*, Honor, and *Baraka*

Maunier's definition of the obligation of reciprocity in ritual collections of the *taoussa* or *ghrama* type is sufficiently precise for it to be useful now for comparative purposes. This represents Maunier's first important contribution to the study of ceremonial exchanges, and his contribution is remarkable regarding the link established between the obligation of reciprocity and the magical-religious values or representations that underlie it, and on the sanctions connected with it. According to Maunier, there are certainly ethical and magical-religious sanctions in the event that someone does not reciprocate, but the Kabyle evidence does not conform to the theory of *hau* elaborated by Mauss.

"What power is there in the object given which ensures that the recipient gives it back?" Throughout the *Essai sur le don*, Mauss attempts to give "by a large number of facts, a response to this precise question" (Mauss 1968b: 148). Such is the central proposition that should not be overshadowed by the many themes surrounding it – such as the comprehensive social phenomenon, the role of the obligation to give and to receive the relatively indistinct difference between rights over persons and rights over things, and the characteristics of simple or antagonistic systems of comprehensive levies. Among all the questions raised, Mauss claims to provide a reply only to the central question: there is a magical, religious, or "mystical" link between an owner and his goods, between the donor and the gift that he offers. This is *hau* or its supposed equivalent in other cultures: the spirit of the object given, a piece of the soul of the donor, which, not being detachable from the gift even after it has been handed over, forces the recipient to make restitution or punishes him in case of default. Such is the "spiritual mechanism," the "moral and religious reason for this constraint," the power that impels "the reciprocation of something received, and in general the execution of real contracts" (Mauss 1968b: 153).

Generally known as the "theory of *hau*" because it follows directly from Mauss's interpretation of certain Maori beliefs,



Mauss's response rests on a very restrictive hypothesis and postulates much more than the simple founding of the obligation on certain magical-religious values. These values must be defined and articulated in a very precise manner:

1. A part of the soul of the donor who owns the given object remains in the gift even after it has been handed over, and the object cannot be dissociated from its initial holder.
2. It is this fragment, alive and often personified, that forces the recipient to make restitution, under pain of being put under a spell by the spirit of the gift: "*hau* pursues all holders" (Mauss 1968b: 159).

Even if one accepts that such conditions can explain adequately Maori beliefs, and that neither Hertz nor Mauss were mistaken in their interpretation of the words of Tamati Ranaipiri, a general application of the theory of *hau* remains problematic. Even keeping to the data considered by Mauss, the hypothesis is far from validated, particularly in connection with systems of comprehensive levies of an antagonistic type, like *potlatch* and *kula*, or where moral notions (honor, prestige) seem to play a greater role than belief in the spirit of the given object. Thus, for example, to mention only *potlatch*, Mauss succeeds in establishing no more than the following few points:<sup>25</sup> objects exchanged or destroyed in an ostentatious fashion are animated by an active spiritual principle and often personalized; they are closely linked to the donor or to his family group; it is for honor and prestige that one reciprocates with interest; one loses face and rank and risks enslavement by debt if one does not respect the obligation.

Mauss in no way establishes any of the following conclusions from the facts that he analyzes: that there is a mystical link between the donor and the principle that animates the gift; that it is this spirit that forces the donor to make a return gift with interest, with threat of punishment if he does not do so; that honor and rank reasonably can be considered as properties of a soul common to the gift and to the donor. Whether he is dealing with *potlatch*, *kula*, or with ancient Roman, German, and Hindu law, Mauss never establishes in a convincing manner the presence of beliefs that would ensure the existence of the two necessary conditions that would validate his theory of *hau*. For Mauss's

theory to be verified, it is not sufficient that there be a magical sanction when one does not return the present received or its equivalent. It is also necessary that the spirit responsible for the sanction be linked to that of the donor. Nor is it simply sufficient that there be a mystical link between the owner and his goods. It is necessary also that this consubstantiality, which implies a relative indistinctiveness of rights over persons and rights over things, entail the existence of a sanction that brings about the intervention of the spirit of the object given.

In conditions such as these, one can see that it is scarcely likely that the theory of *hau* can explain more than a few isolated cases, such as the Maori case, and perhaps that of the pledge in ancient Germanic law (Mauss 1968b: 253–255; 1969: 48–49). Mauss's hypothesis is much too constricting and specific for it to be applicable to a significant number of cultures that impose comprehensive levies – whether of an antagonistic type or not.<sup>26</sup> It is as though the author of the *Essai*, in pushing the demonstration too far, did not realize that establishing that the obligation to reciprocate was founded on magical-religious and moral values was sufficient. It was extremely risky to attempt to establish, on top of this, that these beliefs and representations always would conform to the particular conditions of the theory of *hau*, requiring on every occasion the reduction of the ethical to the religious and the unambiguity of the type of sanction.

In his study of ritual exchanges, Maunier drew from Mauss the idea that, in the system of antagonistic levies, the obligation of reciprocity was founded on magical-religious and moral values: honor and the virtues of *baraka*. But he did not adopt the theory of *hau* because, among the Kabyle, there was no belief in a spirit of the object given, nor did there exist a mystical link between goods and their owner. Here the religious and magical values were different:<sup>27</sup> if I do not give back with interest, I risk losing the virtues of *baraka*. Since one of these is protection against evil spirits, it is thus possible that I could be possessed by *shaitan*, who in no way is linked to the gift, and who obviously is not a part of the donor's soul.

Honor is a moral principle that cannot be considered as a simple virtue or aspect of *baraka*. It does not involve a magic quality common to the donor and the gift. The relationship of the moral to the magical-religious here supposes a more intricate distinction than is required by the theory of *hau*. In Berber socie-

ties,<sup>28</sup> behavior, attitudes, and values linked to honor are aimed at ensuring the defence of the symbolic domain of the forbidden (*h'aram*), women, the interior of the house, and land: "Only scrupulous and active vigilance to the point of honour (*nif*) is able to guarantee the integrity of honour (*h'urma*) – exposed by its nature, in so far as it is sacred, to sacrilegious outrage – and provide the consideration and the respectability given to those who have sufficient points of honour to keep their honour safe from attack" (Bourdieu 1980: 316). In such a context, there ultimately can be a subordination of honor to *baraka*, but it is impossible to consider the former simply as an aspect of the latter.<sup>29</sup>

If I do not reciprocate with interest, I not only risk losing the virtues of *baraka*, I dishonor myself or I challenge the respectability of the donor. In this last case, as has been mentioned already, the sanction is not of a magical-religious kind; I will not see myself automatically pursued by the evil eye, my punishment does not consist necessarily of poor harvests or the sterility of my wife. More likely, I would be mocked and despised, and in extreme cases I would be boycotted by the group and forced into exile. If my behavior is thought to be a slight on the honor of the donor, he will seek to avenge himself by means which are always very violent, frequently going as far as murder. It is possible that sanctions of this type could represent the indirect result of a loss of the virtues of *baraka*, of the unleashing against me of the anger of good spirits or of the malice of evil spirits. Since the two types of value that underlie the obligation are quite distinct, so are the sanctions that accompany them.

Thus, in these societies, if one reciprocates with interest, it is to protect honor and respectability, to preserve or increase prestige and rank. It is also to ensure the support of good spirits and to protect oneself from evil spirits, and to bring prosperity and abundance. It is not because one fears being pursued and put under a spell by the spirit of the object given and not returned. It would be better, as Maunier did, to abandon the theory of *hau*, except for eventual verification in a few cases, and to retain from Mauss only his most overarching hypothesis: if one reciprocates, in systems of comprehensive levies, it is as a result of magical-religious and moral values, with a possibility of ethical and magical sanctions if there is no restitution of the gift or its equivalent. In general, it is better not to postulate that the sanction arises automatically from the obligation, nor that

moral values are transformed into religious or magical values. The theory of *hau* describes only one possible system of values linked to the obligation to reciprocate gifts. Normally, "the rule of law and of interest which ensures that the present received is returned as an obligation" is not a magical power that links the donor to his present, contrary to what the initial question of Mauss leads one to suppose (1968b: 148).

It is deplorable that Mauss sought throughout the *Essai* to defend a hypothesis that was linked too strongly to the interpretation of one particular case. The result of such an approach was to provoke the rapid abandonment not only of the theory of *hau*, but also of the more general hypothesis, according to which the obligation to reciprocate gifts in societies with systems of comprehensive levies is founded on moral and religious values, rather than on legal and economic ones. As a result, despite the great and continuing notoriety of Mauss's work, if one refers to it in any detail, it is only in connection with the secondary themes of the *Essai*. Thus, setting aside the interminable debate about the applicability of the theory of *hau* to the Maori evidence,<sup>30</sup> Mauss's work is consulted usually to determine if a system of ceremonial exchange can be considered as a total social phenomenon, through using as criteria the interindividual or intergroup nature of transfers of goods, symbols, services, or persons;<sup>31</sup> and to deal with the relations between values and exchange within the comprehensive social phenomenon, without (unfortunately) taking into account the obligations and the sanctions attached to them.<sup>32</sup> No one, it seems, thinks of following Maunier's approach to the study of systems of ceremonial exchange, that is, of defining the properties of the obligation, the sanctions attached, the moral and religious values, and the type of link involved in the obligation to reciprocate. But it is not too late to take up Maunier's approach, an enterprise that, if conducted in a comparative fashion, would demonstrate quite quickly that the general hypothesis of Mauss is as judicious and fruitful as its limitation to the theory of *hau* is rash and sterile.

## Notes

1. Mauss's interpretation of the Maori evidence soon was disputed by Firth (1929) and the debate has continued ever since. See, for example, Gathercole (1978); Hanson & Hanson (1983); Howell (1989); Johansen (1954); Lévi-Strauss (1968); McCall (1982); McCormack (1976, 1982); Parry (1986); Sahlins (1976); and Weiner (1985).
2. As the spelling of native words differs from one author to another, the spelling used here reflects the spelling used in the source material.
3. Mauss goes in the same direction: "in order to fully understand the Maori jurist, it is sufficient to say: 'the *taonga* and any strictly personal properties have a *hau*, a spiritual power. You give me one and I give it to a third person; he gives me another one back because he is impelled by the *hau* of my gift; I am forced to give you this object because it is necessary that I return to you what is, in actual fact, the product of the *hau* of your *taonga*'" (Mauss 1968b: 159). The words of Tamati Ranaipiri are quoted in Mauss (1968b: 158–159); see Sahlins (1976: 200–220) for a new translation and a new interpretation.
4. This is what Weiner (1985) almost managed to demonstrate.
5. In this section, any reference of this type is to Maunier (1927).
6. Before he made his own observations, all that was available to Maunier was a good description of ritual collection in Kabylia (Devaux 1859: 88–92). Solid bibliographies on Kabyle ethnography can be found in Lacoste (1962), Servier (1962), Hart (1976), and Bourdieu (1980a). To the best of the author's knowledge, *taoussa* has not been described or analyzed since Maunier's work. Bourdieu (1972b) deals with it briefly and regards it as a modality of the exchange of honor.
7. Similar to the cycle of festivals in this way, *taoussa* depends on the seasonal cycle. On the seasonal cycle in Kabylia and its magical-religious symbolism, see Bourdieu (1980b), Calvet (1957), Ouakli (1933), Servier (1962), Schoen (1960), and Van Gennep (1911).
8. The organization of public and private space is very important for the proceedings of a festival and for the collection that takes place. On the Kabyle house, its construction, and its symbolism, see Bas-sagna and Sayad (1974), Bourdieu (1980c), Genevois (1955), Maunier (1926).
9. On Kabyle marriage, see Yamina (1960) and Bourdieu (1980d).
10. Along with the *touiza* and the *maouna*, *taoussa* is one of the main forms of mutual help known in Kabyle societies. The most important is the form of work in which all the men of a village take part, such as the building of a house (Maunier 1926). The second is a

loan in kind: grains, other foodstuffs, etc. (Maunier 1927: 73). Contrary to these first two forms of help, which are immediate in work or in kind, *taoussa* is a deferred help; it compensates, after the event, the host who advanced the cost of the festival. If it is made to benefit the husband, it will help to pay for the expenses of the dowry and of the gifts after the wedding (the gifts are made to friends and servants), and it also may be used to pay for the construction or renovation of the house. If it is made to benefit the bride, however, it will be used to purchase clothes and silver jewelry (Maunier 1927: 92–93). During a *taoussa*, the host receives much more than is necessary to cover the expenses of the festival, but a large amount – if not the total amount – of this surplus will have to be reimbursed with an increment, the rate of which frequently may be as high as 100 percent. As the whole amount has to be reimbursed within a maximum period of three years, the recipient of the collection often decides not to use this money and hoards it. If, on the contrary, he indulges in spending the money, he may have to undergo the humiliation of borrowing in order to reimburse those who made him some gifts (Maunier 1927: 93–94).

11. The *kharouba* is a group of families who believe they all come from the same ancestor through legitimate affiliation (Maunier 1927: 29; Khellil 1984: 33–48).
12. The *çof* is a kind of league or political faction made up of *kharouba* or families who are not always related. Traditionally, these groups had a fairly important role in the wars of honor, and, as a rule, there are two hostile ones in each village (Khellil 1984: 33–35).
13. A *fouta* is headscarf that men use as a belt or a turban.
14. Women wear this type of ring around their arms and feet.
15. Acting in his capacity as representative of his kin group, the brother of the bride gives more than the others (Maunier 1927: 33, n.1).
16. The major economic consequences of *taoussa* are cooperation, acquisition, and transfer (Maunier 1927: 92–95).
17. Under the colonial administration, many items of customary village law were committed to paper. See Bousquet (1952), Marcy (1939), and Surdon (1938), among others.
18. *Taoussa* is a system of comprehensive levies of the antagonistic type, and therefore can be compared with *potlatch*, even though there is no destruction of goods and it is the host who receives the gifts (Maunier 1927: 78–79). It is a “tournament of parading and ostentation,” where the obligation to reciprocate is a “duty of pride” (Maunier 1927: 39; Marcy 1941). Bourdieu’s analysis goes in the same direction: “Generous exchange tends to become an assault of generosity. The largest gift is also the most likely one to throw the recipient into disrepute by prohibiting him from making any counter-gift. In this way, *tawusa*, a publicly proclaimed gift made by guests

on the occasion of big family festivals, often gives rise to competitions of honour and ruinous outbidding. In order to avoid such a situation, it often happens that a maximum amount for gifts is agreed upon" (Bourdieu 1972b: 30).

19. Certain systems of Melanesian ceremonial exchange, such as the *moka* in the high lands of Papua New Guinea (Strathern 1971), or the *abutu* on the island of Goodenough (Young 1985) have a progression in three stages rather than two: "A" gives  $a$  to "B," "B" returns  $b (= a + x)$ , "A" gives  $a' (= b + x')$ . As to the existence of an indefinite progression in *potlatch*, it seems that Boas may have been on the wrong track (Gregory 1980). Mauss and Maunier adopt Boas's position.
20. Because of its whiteness, the silver ring placed on the *fouta* symbolizes peace, purity, and honesty. The seeds that are tipped onto it symbolize fertility and abundant crops (Maunier 1927: 42).
21. *Taoussa* is a loan of honor between men that is very different from the loan between women. In the language of men, the expression *err arrt'al* means to avenge oneself or to return the gift, whereas in the language of women, it means to pay back the loan. The exchange of honor and the loan practiced by women are thought of as opposites. For instance, it is said that if a man borrows money too easily, his face will become yellow as a result of turning pale with shame every time he lowers himself to ask for a loan, and that his loans are similar to those made by women. "Indeed, loans are more frequent and more natural among women who lend and borrow anything for any sort of use. As a result, the economic truth contained in the give and take appears more clearly in exchanges among women which are subject to precise terms ('until my daughter gives birth') and the precise calculation of the quantities lent" (Bourdieu 1980d: 318).
22. Excellent basic bibliographies on Berber tribes in Morocco can be found in Hart (1976) and Jamous (1981). Works by Westermarck (1921, 1926) contain a lot of useful information; see also Berque (1955). In Westermarck (1921), one can find several descriptions of *ghrama* in different tribes in Morocco. On the code of honor and institutionalized violence in Berber societies, see Bourdieu (1972b), Favret (1968), Hart (1971, 1976: 313–338), Jamous (1981: 63–188), and Peters (1967); and for a comparison with other Mediterranean societies, see Perestiany (1965).
23. "Each marriage concludes certain exchanges when a guest returns a sum equivalent to that he received for his own wedding. It heralds others when there are gifts which will have to be returned at a future wedding" (Jamous 1981: 275).
24. From a segmentary point of view, the *ighss* does not exactly coincide with the *Ayt Arbaâ* group.

25. Mauss asserts that it is possible to “prove that in the objects exchanged in *potlatch*, there is a virtue which forces gifts to circulate, to be given and to be returned” (Mauss 1968b: 214). But the demonstration is only at the level of an outline (Mauss 1968b: 217–227).
26. Among the members of the Ecole Française de Sociologie who studied the magical-religious aspect of social sanctions, not one of them put forward a hypothesis as one-sided as that of Mauss. See, for instance, the position of Fauconnet (1920), Davy (1922), and Huvelin (1907). In his work, Huvelin mentions many cases where there is a magical sanction for theft or for failure to make restitution, without involving the intervention of the spirit of the object given, whether or not it is linked to the donor.
27. On magical-religious beliefs in Berber societies, see Bel (1938), Bourdieu (1980b, 1980c), Gellner (1969), Hart (1976: 149–174), Servier (1962), and Westermarck (1926).
28. On honor, see the analyses by Bourdieu (1972b) and Jamous (1981: 63–188).
29. On *baraka*, see Bel (1938), Gellner (1969), Hart (1976: 175–202), Jamous (1981: 182–242), and Westermarck (1926).
30. See references in note 1.
31. See, for instance, the works of Feil (1984), Meggit (1965), Sillitoe (1978), or Strathern (1971).
32. See the works of Barraud (1979), Barraud et al. (1984), Coppet (1981), and Iteanu (1983) – inspired by Dumont’s approach (1983).

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