Holding Worlds Together

Ethnographies of Knowing and Belonging

Edited by
Marianne Elisabeth Lien and Marit Melhuus
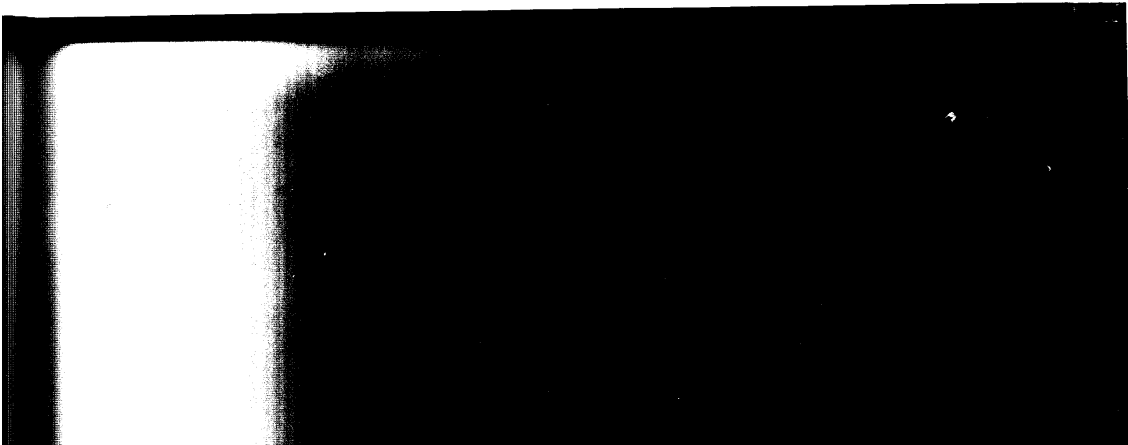
Chapter 1

Trust and Reciprocity in Transnational Flows

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

A curiously overlooked dimension of globalisation concerns the motivations explaining why millions of people engage, and invest in, the increased connectedness which is taken as a premise and a starting-point for much of the academic literature in the field. In this chapter it is argued that trust and reciprocity, on the one hand, and humiliation and marginalisation on the other, are in fact central aspects of transnational processes, which contribute to explaining some of their dynamics and resultant patterns. Keeping such webs of commitment alive can be hard work, but millions are prepared to pay the price.

Seen through the lens of trust-based reciprocity, there are four sources of tension and conflict in transnational relationships:
- the refusal to give
- the refusal to receive
- the refusal to return a gift, and
- refusing others to return a gift.

One should not rule out the possibility that the second and fourth point are more common than the first and third.

Themes in the globalisation literature

Certain frameworks and concepts dominate the social science literature on globalisation. In a representative introductory book about globalisation, written by the sociologist Malcolm Waters (2001), the chapters have been given titles like 'A world of difference', 'Open spaces', 'States of flux', 'Clashing civilizations' and 'Globalizing cultures', each of them encapsulating a recurrent theme in the academic globalisation discourse. These are some of the most common ones:

The concept of the network

Established as a staple in studies of globalisation by two of the most prominent theorists in the field (Castells 1996 and Hannerz 1992, 1996), the concept of the network implies that stable hierarchies and structures are giving way to nodal, multicentred and fluid systems, and that this change takes place in numerous fields of interaction. (This concept should not be confused with the ANT idea of the network, to which it is related: ANT networks include both human and non-human agents.) In Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000), a book which famously argues the disappearance of territorial powers to the benefit of a jellyfish-like, omnipresent force that they call 'empire', the influence from Deleuze and Guattari's contrasting of rhizomes and treelike structures (*rhizomes et racines*) in *Mille plateaux* (1980) is crucial, and Hardt and Negri's description of the world of global capitalism is also reminiscent of Castells' account of global networks based on the 'space of flows' rather than the 'space of places'.

The glocal

Although the term itself is relatively uncommon, glocalisation (Robertson 1994) is a standard theme in nearly all anthropological writing about globalisation as well as most of the sociological and geographical literature. The argument goes like this. In real life, there exists no abstract, huge, global level of affairs on the one hand and local, lived realities on the other. The local level is in fact infused with influences from outside, be they culinary novelties or structural adjustment programmes; but these 'influences', on their part, have no autonomous existence outside their tangible manifestations. 'Microsoft' thus exists as a company based in Seattle, and also as the computer software used to run most personal computers in the world, but it does not exist as a global entity except as an abstraction of debatable value. It has numerous concrete manifestations, all of them local, and it offers a shared language which makes transnational communication (and file exchange) possible, but as a global entity it exists only at the level of thought. Moreover, concepts describing impurity or mixing – hybridity, creolisation and so on – are specific instances of this general approach stressing the primacy of the local. The local–global dichotomy is, in other words, misleading.

Reflexivity and fluidity

Bauman's (2000) term 'liquid modernity' sums up this theoretical focus, which emphasises the uncertainty, risk and negotiability associated with phenomena as distinct as personal identification, economies and world climate in the 'global era'. That identities are not fixed and given once and for all is not exactly news to anthropologists, but it is widely held that the current 'post-traditional' (Giddens 1991) era is characterised by an unprecedented breadth of individual repertoires, forcing people to choose between alternatives and to define themselves in ways which were not necessary in earlier, less unstable and more clearly delineated social formations. Ambivalence and fundamentalism in the politics of identity are seen to stem simultaneously from this fundamental uncertainty.

Rights issues

While it has become unfashionable to defend cultural relativism as an ethical stance, opinion remains divided as to the legitimacy of group rights and, more generally, the relationship between group and individual in the contemporary world. Since the very existence of groups cannot be taken for granted, the individual is often foregrounded. The debates may concern intellectual property rights, cultural and linguistic rights, as well as multicultural dilemmas such as the conflict between individualist agency and arranged marriages in North Atlantic societies.

The globalisation discourse tends to privilege flows over structures, rhizomes over roots, reflexivity over doxa, individual over group, flexibility over fixity, rights over duties, and freedom over security in its bid to highlight globalisation as something qualitatively new (notwithstanding a few dissenting voices like Friedman 1994). While this kind of exercise is often necessary, it tends to become one-sided. Although many anthropologists talk disparagingly about the jargon of 'globalbabble' or 'globalitarism' (Trouillot 2001), they tend to react against reductionist generalisations by reinserting the uniqueness of the local, sometimes analysing it as identity politics, sometimes not.

A shift of perspective is needed. There is doubtless something qualitatively new about the compass, speed and reach of current transnational networks, but it is not primarily their 'glocal' character that needs attention presently – this is currently being taken care of authoritatively and well by hundreds, possibly thousands of researchers worldwide. The other central perspectives hinted at above, far from being irrelevant, nevertheless fail to address the question of what it is that gets transnational networks started and what keeps them going. A networked world needs an energy source, and large-scale business interests do not explain the intensity of interpersonal networks which are not driven by profits in a conventional sense.

Now, some globalisation theorists argue that the shrinking of the world will almost inevitably lead to a new value orientation, some indeed heralding the coming of a new kind of person (e.g. Sennett 1998). These writers, who seem to proclaim the advent of a new man, or at least new set of uprooted, deterritorialised values, are often accused of generalising from their own European middle-class experiences. The excellent sociologist John Urry, lending himself easily to this criticism, argues in the final chapter of his *Global Complexity* (2003) that globalisation has the potential to stimulate widespread cosmopolitanism (however, he does not say among whom). But, as he readily admits in an earlier chapter in the same book, the principles of closeness and distance still hold, for example in viewing patterns on television, where a global trend consists of viewers' preferences for locally produced programmes.

Slavoj Zizek (2003) has recently shown how Deleuze and Guattari could be interpreted, unjustly, as 'organic intellectuals' for the new ruling class, surprisingly accusing Hardt and Negri (the 'radical chic' Deleuzians) of doing exactly this. Be that as it may, there is an almost uncanny convergence in terminology and perspective between the neoliberal defences of global capitalism and 'new work', and

mainstream academic analyses of globalisation (as recognised, a tad apologetically, by Trouillot 2001). This does not mean that the latter are 'wrong', but that there is more, or more accurately less, to globalisation than meets the eye. Statements about fluidity and flux may be accurate at a macro level, but they tend to be less relevant at the level of experience. Durkheimian-type moral communities continue to thrive – and they are in fact, I will argue, necessary for transnational connections to be at all possible. As Melhuus (2003) says in an analysis of legal aspects of sperm donation, 'the issue of commodification and the efforts to restrict the influence of the market, represent an important nexus of contestation'. In other words, the moral aspects of exchange are rarely far away.

While, as a student in the mid-1980s, I was planning my first fieldwork in Mauritius, recognising the ethnic plurality of its population and the mixed character of settlements, I imagined Mauritians to have a profoundly reflexive, negotiable and ambivalent attitude to cultural practices and ethnic identity. Being confronted with a bewildering array of options, epitomised in the everyday lives of their neighbours, I expected them to treat group identification with ironic distance. This did not turn out to be the case. In fact, the majority of Mauritians took their own notions and conventions for granted, more or less ignoring what their neighbours were up to. Moreover, the social universe inhabited by most Mauritians was much simpler than an assessment of the actual ethnic diversity of the island would lead one to expect. Categories were lumped and taxonomies were simplified, and group identification was usually taken for granted. This reminds us of the trivial, but often forgotten fact that cosmopolitan societies do not necessarily create cosmopolitans; that globalisation does not create global people.

Yet many millions are transnational in the sense that they maintain important ties of obligation across vast distances. However, upon close examination of these transnational ties, it often turns out that they resemble the old ties in the sense that they build on similar commonalities and obligations. Of course, in the absence of continuous face-to-face relationships, it can be hard work to keep the networks operative and the obligations effective, yet this work is carried out, and it functions. Consider the diaspora Somali hawala system of remittances. Money, in the form of legal tender, is sluiced from the diasporic Somali via a network of travelling middlemen, ending up among clansmen in Somalia itself. This kind of transaction would have been impossible unless the moral community, and the sanctions upholding it, remained intact in the diasporic situation.

The Maussian themes

There exist by now many excellent analyses of the impact of capitalism on local economies and their interaction at the 'glocal' level. Studies of identity politics reacting to, and simultaneously resulting from, globalisation are perhaps even more numerous. However, granted that globalisation is not exclusively a macroscopic process of technological change and capitalist expansion, with its accompanying cultural dynamics, it is necessary to ask what it is that motivates the hundreds of

millions of interactions and dislocations taking place through networks in the space of flows. The answer, I shall argue, is close at hand for anthropologists. It is, simply, reciprocity in the sense that this fundamental dimension of human life has been studied since Mauss, but as will be argued below, his original theory needs some embellishment and modification to work properly. Notably, Mauss and his commentators have overlooked the centrality of *humiliation* as a (de-) motivating force directing action and shaping ideology in many of the situations influenced by globalising processes.

In brief, transnational flows tend to be initiated, maintained and routinised through webs of commitment reproduced by reciprocity and underpinned by a moral community based on cultural or other commonalities. I shall argue that recent studies of exchange in social life, notably Weiner's (1992) and Godelier's (1999) readings of social dynamics in Oceania, could in fact offer a needed impetus to redirect attention – away from the flows, uncertainties and cultural mixtures studied so far, towards the factors that create stability, predictability and order; replacing, in a word, descriptions of form with an improved understanding of content and motivation.

There is an irony, but also perhaps an historical justice, in the fact that the ethnography most often mentioned as the benchmark study defining the task of anthropology as being the synchronous study of a small-scale, isolated village-based society (that is, the very opposite of the study of transnational connections), offers the key to this approach to globalisation. I am, of course, referring to Malinowski's *Argonauts*. As Jean-Loup Amselle (2000) recently pointed out, 'it is striking to discover that the society which has come to incarnate the model of primitive society – the Trobriands – should be just the one where commerce – in the most general sense of the term – plays a major role' (Amselle 2000: 218, my translation). The kula, impressive in its scope already in Malinowski's account, has been showed to be even more encompassing than initially believed, stretching not only across the Coral Sea but also far into the highlands of New Guinea (Devyver in Amselle 2000: 218).

How should this iconic piece of ethnography, the kula ring, be explained? The question has been raised regularly for eighty years. It is clear that the kula is not primarily motivated by economic gain motives in the narrow sense, as seen (if somewhat grudgingly) by Malinowski himself, who regards the quest for fame as central to the kula; and more forcefully by Mauss, who interprets the kula as a manner of establishing relationships within the community and between persons belonging to different communities, thereby also between communities (the kula approached a total social fact in his analysis). In his important critique of Mauss, Lévi-Strauss (1987 [1950]) nevertheless argues that the analyses in *The Gift* and Mauss's preceding discussion of *mana* (in 'Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie', 1903) do not go far enough. Instead of seeing the concepts of *mana* and *hau* as the 'empty signifiers' (that is, vessels that can be filled with any content) they are in reality, Lévi-Strauss argues, Mauss is too faithful to the indigenous interpretations denoting *mana* as an expression of certain social sentiments, and *hau* as the 'soul' of the object or service given in exchange, which compels the receiver to offer a return gift.

Lévi-Strauss then outlines a structuralist view of the terms, seeing them as elements in a symbolic order (or 'unperceived totality'). This need not detain us here, but Lévi-Strauss's comments on the relationship between the real and the symbolic concerning *mana, hau* and exchange are pertinent enough, since the exchanges that we are looking at in transnational communication are often symbolic, mediated through mass communication and appropriated as something different to gifts, yet often implicitly following the principles of prestation and counterprestation characterising gift exchange.

As Malinowski admitted, in an argument strengthened and elaborated by Weiner (1976), the quest for fame, or *recognition*, was a driving force in the kula trade, which could also be understood as a way of ranking political actors in a situation of unstable leadership (cf. Hart 1999: 190). In other words, recognition, or the attention of others, was perceived as a scarce resource in the Massim. If the globalisation of communication and the growth of transnational migration and labour markets have led to one result in the symbolic economy of exchange, it is this. The attention and recognition of others is a valued commodity in short supply. In Kurt Vonnegut's science fiction novel *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), the ultimate punishment inflicted by one of the many civilisations covered by the book, is a contraption which enables whoever enters it to understand his or her true significance in the cosmic scheme of things. All who enter the machine leave it seconds later as broken men and women (all right, there is one exception, but he would later become the ruler of the known universe). This story could serve as a parable of the information age, where the potential compass of networks is huge, where recognition and the attention of others are in short supply, and where the feeling that 'the action is elsewhere' appears to be extremely widespread.

A second important point from the recent literature on exchange, famously developed by Weiner and later given a detailed treatment by Godelier, is the fact that certain items are *not* available for exchange. These are the 'inalienable possessions' spoken of by Weiner (1992), 'possessions that are imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners' (op. cit. p.6) and which must therefore either be kept or ultimately returned to their owners. Weiner largely locates them to the female sphere in the Trobriands, but such items were already mentioned in passing by Mauss in his account of the potlatch, where he speaks of 'certain coppers' which are displayed but never given.

In a stimulating discussion of identity politics, Simon Harrison (1999) suggests that perhaps the group identity *itself* could be seen as something non-negotiable, non-transferable; that it is in fact a kind of inalienable possession. Importantly, the kula, according to Weiner and Godelier, makes men famous, but the underlying motivating force is the quest for political power. A man who is able to hold on to a valuable kula shell for years without re-entering it into circulation, thereby giving the impression that it is inalienable – *immeuble* or unmovable, accumulates power through this very act. Accordingly, attempts to commercialise group identities for the benefit of tourists (see Henningsen's chapter) are often commercial and perceived as deeply immoral by many of those whose identities are thereby being 'sold'.

A third point relevant in the present context is the fact, recognised by Mauss, that givers remain superior to receivers as long as gifts are not reciprocated. Someone who is unable to pay his debt is, certainly in our kind of society as well, seen as 'enslaved by debt'. A common saying in Scandinavia is that 'it's expensive to be poor'. A highly relevant question which can be raised in the context of charities and foreign aid, is whether one can be enslaved by debts of gratitude. Referring to the Maussian legacy, Nustad (2002) entitled his book about Norwegian foreign aid *The Power of the Gift* (*Gavens makt*). Also, we need to investigate perceptions of hegemonic discourses among nonhegemonic groups and persons, to find out whether or not their sense of alienation and marginalisation can be understood within the logic of reciprocity.

In fact, perhaps the scarcest resource of all consists in the *right to reciprocate*, an obligatory right of which hundreds of millions are deprived. For this potential source of humiliation to be effective, it must be established who gives and who receives. This is by no means always evident. In the case of transnational adoption, analysed by Howell (2003, and Chapter 2 below), there is no straightforward answer. Do the adopters save the adoptees from an unworthy life, or are they exploiting third world countries? As Howell's material shows, there is more than one answer to this question.

What are the scarce resources?

Heavily Melanesian and Polynesian at the level of ethnography, the insights developed by Mauss, Sahlins, Weiner and Godelier claim universality. Paradoxically, and I repeat this point, one of the research areas in anthropology which is the furthest removed from the study of liquid modernities – ceremonial gift exchange in traditional societies – may provide the key to a proper understanding of what is at stake for the millions of individuals who, largely voluntarily, engage in the transnational flows of communication and consumption; or who, often somewhat less voluntarily, are pulled into global systems of production.

The theoretical perspective developed in *The Gift*, positing reciprocity as 'the glue' which ties individuals and groups together, presupposes that commitment, trust and stability in relationship (recurrent interactions) are fundamental aspects of social life. The downside of reciprocity – the gift-giver's power over the gift-receiver – is not given much attention by Mauss himself, but it has been developed by later anthropologists, including Bateson (1958 [1937] – I particularly have the concept of schismogenesis in mind), Leach (1954, although he did not comment directly on Mauss, his account of the mayu-dama relationship revealed some of the perversions of kinship alliances) and Bourdieu (1980). As Mauss was perfectly aware, any coveted resource might serve as a gift, material or immaterial. In one of his main contemporary examples, the *kula* ring, the scarce resource seemed to be recognition; elsewhere, Malinowski described how magical rites and incantations could be transferred through inheritance. Mauss famously made a list of typical total prestations, stressing that 'such exchanges are acts of politeness, banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals and fairs, in which economic transaction is only one element ...' (Mauss 1954 [1925]: 5), adding that although

gift-giving and return gifts were theoretically voluntary, they were in practice compulsory, and the sanctions brought upon whoever failed to comply were very serious.

To this, Weiner (1992) adds that certain objects and intangibles cannot be transacted freely, notably those which affirm identities and hierarchies – these are her 'inalienable possessions'. Also, certain objects are kept while other, similar ones, but somewhat inferior, are given away; thus her notion *keeping-while-giving*, developed subsequently by Godelier (1999: 32ff.) into the idea keeping-for-giving, since these objects etc. are necessary as standards of value, and thus crucial to the very circulation of gifts. It should be noted that in both Weiner's and Godelier's accounts, the usual rules of exchange apply to this latter category. Inalienable possessions can be circulated, but only within the group, usually through some form of inheritance. Reminiscent of the more mundane notion of economic spheres, but adding perspectives on symbolic order, power and hierarchies, the cluster of ideas put forward by Weiner and Godelier deserves to be articulated with the anthropology of transnational flows. In an era of massive information exchange, which has its own standards of scarcity and abundance distinct from those of the industrial economy, most exchanges are of the keeping-while-giving kind. One gives something away – knowledge or information – but keeps it at the same time, usually also keeping the recipe for making that kind of knowledge (which is, in the informational economy, an important form of inalienable possession). The current debates over intellectual property rights (IPRs; see Strathern 1999) and cultural property rights (see Kasten 2004) exemplify this general point, as do – naturally – the concerns stirred up by the copyleft movement in computer software distribution (see below). In perfect symmetry with the rules of kula exchange, programmers who subscribe to copyleft (see below) relinquish any exclusive property rights to their pieces of code, but their unnegotiable reward consists in their name being attached to the software for eternity.

It is my contention here that *anything which circulates, which is in short supply and which is not exchanged through balanced reciprocity*, can be analysed in Maussian terms. This premise enables us to expand the original framework with Weiner's and Godelier's elaborations and the added insight that the pair recognition–humiliation constitutes a main, sometimes dominant, aspect of exchange in transnational communication and interaction.

It should be noted that the seminal authors on reciprocity and trust who have inspired this perspective tend not to see anything non-contractual or moral in the economic relationships of the capitalist market. Like Mauss himself, Godelier ends his book about gift exchange with some reflections about contemporary society. Again, like Mauss, he bemoans the individualisation and commodification that permeates our societies and relegates gift exchange to insignificant corners of social life. Godelier, ending his book on a pessimistic note, clings to the fact that certain relationships remain unmarketable even at the height of capitalist dehumanisation: 'not everything can be negotiated: there remains all that goes into the bonds between individuals, all that comprises their relationships … all that means that human beings live in society abut that they must also produce society in order to live' (1999:

210). Castells, commenting on neo-liberalism, has similarly stated that markets are necessary to regulate economies, but that they are lamentably inadequate when the task at hand consists in organising society.

Typically, authors who see contemporary society as being dominated by agonistic and competitive individualism, see the state as a possible mitigating force and as the place to look for alternative principles which might govern social life. I disagree fundamentally: non-utilitarian social bonds remain healthy and widespread, and indeed, capitalism itself has an important symbolic, 'Maussian' dimension. Also, the state or public sector does not necessarily represent an alternative, non-contractual morality in this era of deregulation, governmentality and new public management.

There exist other, less moralistic approaches to contemporary capitalist consumption. Two authors who discuss money, capitalism and exchange in the global era in original and possibly pioneering ways are Daniel Miller and Keith Hart. Miller, one of the few social scientists to see Maussian themes in the consumption practices of contemporary capitalism (Miller 1994, 1998), has likened shopping to sacrifice, and has moreover argued that what motivates engagement on the Internet is chiefly a desire to communicate, not a wish to make or save money (Miller and Slater 2000, 2003). Hart (1999) regards electronic, cyberspace-based money as a possibility to move away from fetishism and capital accumulation – a technology enabling humanity to retain the positive aspects of money while abolishing the negative ones. Although their perspectives will not be developed in any detail here, the present view on the potential for ties of trust and commitment in contemporary society is closer in spirit to theirs than to authors like Godelier and Mauss. Neither Mauss's evolutionary triad of societal forms nor Godelier's fourfold typology – both distinguish between societies on the basis of the varying social significance of gift exchange as a main criterion – can do away with the fact, reiterated by both authors, that reciprocity, in the sense of exchange with delayed return involving enduring moral obligations, is fundamental to social life everywhere, can involve any coveted resource, and has wide-ranging implications.

Moral exchange logics

1. Keeping-while-giving

The *copyleft* movement associated with Open Source (Linux) software represents an interesting contemporary example of a 'gift economy'. Unlike the software giants (Microsoft and others) who jealously protect every line of code, the code of Open Source software is freely available, and anyone is entitled to use it in their own applications. However, if someone copies your piece of code, they are obliged to make their work freely available in the same way: *anyone* must be allowed to copy the copy, and the copy of the copy. Violations could be compared to plagiarism, and the transgressor loses face when caught out. Interestingly, the *names* of all contributors to a piece of software should accompany it. Among other things, recognition thus seems to be a source of motivation for the programmers. If the Maori attempt to
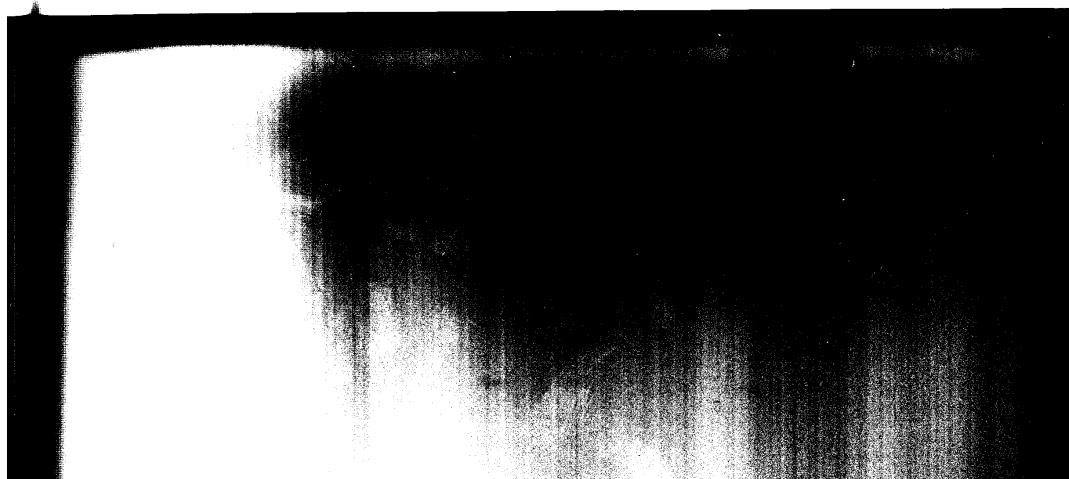
monopolise their spiritual relationship to the land can be said to be similar to copyright, secret knowledge and protection of source code, then the 'copyleft' practices of Open Source are reminiscent of the *kula* trade (see J. Leach 2000 for a similar comparison; see also Carrier and Miller 1998). These contrasting ways of dealing with knowledge represent two opposite, and competing, views of cultural property: it should be shared with as many as possible, or it should be protected. Indeed, in his analyses of language and symbolic power, Bourdieu (e.g., 1982) has argued that the French academic system favours a high degree of protectionism regarding knowledge. A contrasting view of cultural property is developed in Kasten's (2002) analysis of repatriation in Kamtchatka, where he concludes that 'if we are to deal with repatriation, we should concentrate on making appropriated local cultural knowledge available again to local communities', not for them to monopolise it, but for them to be able to benefit from it through profits and also, perhaps most importantly, through recognition. This view comes very close to the Open Source ideology in that it posits that knowledge should be freely available, but in using it, one has moral obligations towards its originators.

When information is your commodity, the circulation of valuables is different from the circulation of material goods. You always keep it even if you give it away, so that scarcity does not relate to the commodity itself but to the acknowledgement of its origin. As Marshall McLuhan says: 'This information is top secret. When you have read it, destroy yourself.' Plagiarism becomes a main form of theft.

2. Reciprocity as the glue of transnational networks

Partly for methodological reasons, partly for ethical reasons, there is little extant research on the informal economy of migrants to the West, but there is every reason to believe that it is very important and based on trust. A successful immigrant entrepreneur in Oslo explained on television in 2004 that the secret of his success consisted in employing only people from his own ethnic group. He knew their fathers, their cultural idioms and their norms. He could exert moral pressure on them in a way that would have been impossible with ethnic Norwegians. This kind of practice is typical of 'ethnic entrepreneurs' everywhere.

It is also known that interest-free loans among relatives are common among many moral communities consisting of migrants, as is the aforementioned transmission of money via middlemen from refugees to kinspeople in Somalia. As Fuglerud has shown in his detailed ethnography of Tamils in Norway (1999), first-generation Tamil migrants may in some respects be poorly integrated into greater Norwegian society, but they are tightly integrated among themselves and, not least, towards their fellow *jati* members in Sri Lanka. The total value of remittances has been estimated to exceed the sum total of foreign aid globally.

3. Asymmetrical gifting as a source of humiliation

Using his Baruya material and, notably, the Baruya institution of symmetrical wife-exchange between two lineages, Godelier (1999) develops a distinction between agonistic and non-agonistic exchange: in the former, return gifts make the parties

'even', but in the latter, debt is not wiped out through payment of a return gift; rather, a relationship of mutual trust and commitment is consolidated through delayed returns and vague obligations to reciprocate.
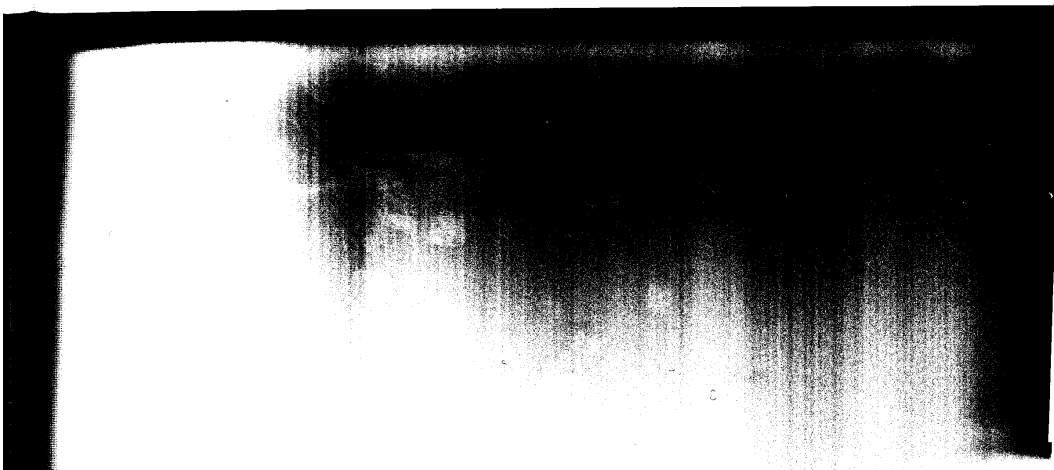
Charity can be seen as a perversion of both forms of exchange, since the recipient is neither allowed to reciprocate evenly (balanced gifting) nor to surpass the giver (potlatch). Mauss regarded charity as shameful for the recipient, a view which Godelier (1999: 209) develops, noting that contemporary charities are run in a bureaucratic way, drawing on mass media and state agencies as well as a plethora of NGOs, thus becoming almost a 'socially necessary condition for the reproduction of society' (op. cit.). At the same time, Godelier adds, this time it will not be a question of the reciprocal giving of equivalent things. He does not explore the implications of this important point, which are all the more significant given his earlier insistence of the intimate relationship between gift exchange and power. There are at least four large areas of contemporary social life involving transnational processes, where asymmetrical gifting play a central role:

(i) Clientification of asylum seekers and refugees in the rich countries
In many countries, including Norway, asylum seekers are kept in detention centres for long periods, sometimes for years. They are fed and housed by the state, but at the same time, they are explicitly instructed not to give anything in return. They are discouraged from learning Norwegian (since their application is unlikely to be approved anyway), they have no work permit and in many cases are not allowed to perform activities useful to the community. They are, it could be argued, taught how to lose their self-esteem sufficiently to become professional welfare clients. If we expand the perspective to include symbolic exchanges and symbolic power (which we should), it is easy to show that non-Western immigrants tend to be dominated conceptually by the host society in that the skills and knowledge demanded of them are defined by the majority. Their own skills and knowledge are silenced and overlooked, their acts of reciprocity ignored.

(ii) The psychological and social effects of foreign aid
Idi Amin is said to have sent a shipload of bananas to Great Britain when this country, Uganda's former colonial master, went through an economic crisis in the aftermath of the oil crisis of 1973–1974. True or not, this anecdote is a reminder of the humiliating and demeaning effects of foreign aid hinted at by Godelier. Following the 2004 tsunami, India similarly decided not to accept offers of foreign aid, preferring to alleviate the suffering on its southern coasts by its own means. But in fact, most of the poor countries that receive foreign aid reciprocate lavishly through repayment of debt and cheap labour, but these 'prestations' are not acknowledged as such. The gratitude expected from aid givers is in no way matched by similar expectations from debt payers and workers in, say, Jakarta's sweatshops. The asymmetry, thus, is comparable to the situation experienced by non-western immigrants in Europe (see also Chapter 5 on asymmetrical reciprocities engaged in by transnational Dominicans).

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In many countries, including Norway, asylum seekers are kept in detention centres for long periods, sometimes for years. They are fed and housed by the state, but at the same time, they are explicitly instructed not to give anything in return. They are discouraged from learning Norwegian (since their application is unlikely to be approved anyway), they have no work permit and in many cases are not allowed to perform activities useful to the community. They are, it could be argued, taught how to lose their self-esteem sufficiently to become professional welfare clients. If we expand the perspective to include symbolic exchanges and symbolic power (which we should), it is easy to show that non-Western immigrants tend to be dominated conceptually by the host society in that the skills and knowledge demanded of them are defined by the majority. Their own skills and knowledge are silenced and overlooked, their acts of reciprocity ignored.

(ii) The psychological and social effects of foreign aid
Idi Amin is said to have sent a shipload of bananas to Great Britain when this country, Uganda's former colonial master, went through an economic crisis in the aftermath of the oil crisis of 1973–1974. True or not, this anecdote is a reminder of the humiliating and demeaning effects of foreign aid hinted at by Godelier. Following the 2004 tsunami, India similarly decided not to accept offers of foreign aid, preferring to alleviate the suffering on its southern coasts by its own means. But in fact, most of the poor countries that receive foreign aid reciprocate lavishly through repayment of debt and cheap labour, but these 'prestations' are not acknowledged as such. The gratitude expected from aid givers is in no way matched by similar expectations from debt payers and workers in, say, Jakarta's sweatshops. The asymmetry, thus, is comparable to the situation experienced by non-western immigrants in Europe (see also Chapter 5 on asymmetrical reciprocities engaged in by transnational Dominicans).

(iii) Anti-establishment identity politics

If respect and recognition are scarce resources, and I believe they are (*pace* authors as different as Charles Taylor and Francis Fukuyama), then one way of overcoming a lack of recognition (or, better, the respectful attention of others) is by opting out of the perverted circuits of reciprocity denying one one's rightful place, and instead setting up one's own system of trust, commitment and exchange (symbolic and instrumental). This kind of account, which describes identity politics as being fuelled by resentment or 'sour grapes' in Elster's (1983) sense, does not explain how particular collective identities come into being, but it may explain why they are, at certain historical junctions, politicised, becoming imperative and demanding. Malays have been Muslims for over five hundred years, but as Malay intellectuals complain, many of them have in recent times become 'more Muslim and less Malay'. A shared global Islamic identity is being spurred on by mass media, air travel and – last but not least – Western policies towards the Islamic world, which are widely perceived as hostile and disrespectful. Islam demands of its faithful that they should give, accept, and return gifts amongst themselves. But naturally, other forms of identity politics could also be seen as responses to thwarted attempts to be included in dominant circuits of symbolic exchange. There is nothing like a common enemy for the 'we-feeling'.

(iv) Media flows

Although local and national mass media thrive in ways unpredicted by early prophets of global communication, it probably makes sense to talk of a hegemonic production of media knowledge. Very large numbers of educated people (i.e., media consumers) feel that their voice is not being heard; that the available news is biased and untrustworthy, and that it is a tool of ideological domination. This familiar scenario can be analysed with the tools outlined above, keeping in mind that recognition – being seen – is no less a scarce resource today than it was in Frantz Fanon's day.

4. Transformations of reciprocity proper (a total social fact) into narrowly economic/instrumental transactions

The man who is currently dominating and subverting the kula ring is, according to Damon (1993), a European named Billy, who has made a lucrative business out of buying, polishing and distributing large quantities of shells, turning them into kula objects. Yet it is easy to see that this narrowly economic activity threatens to deprive the kula trade of its social and political fibre. It may be comparable to the moral place of prostitution in North Atlantic societies, although it is unclear from Damon's account whether Melanesians make a sharp distinction analogous to that routinely constructed by Europeans, between sex carried out in the context of conjugal love on the one hand, and as a commodity on the other.

I have recently argued (Eriksen 2004) that controversies over the authenticity of Norwegian folk costumes are really about the *hau* of the objects in question: their inalienable element, that which makes a handmade folk dress something more than a mere garment or commodity. Folk costumes, in Norway, signify not only national

but regional belongingness, and there are powerful informal rules regulating and distributing rights to wear particular dresses, as well as norms regulating their production (a proper folk costume should be sewn by hand in Norway). An entrepreneur who entered the heavily politicised market of folk costumes, enlisting highly skilled, inexpensive seamstresses in Shanghai to do the time-consuming stitching, was met with rage and disbelief from the established industry. He had crossed an invisible line. Just as certain coppers among the Kwakiutl, or land among many traditional peoples, or magical rites among the Trobrianders, can only be transmitted within a closely knit moral community, the skills and practices that go into the making of a Norwegian folk costume cannot be generalised. It is a bit like publishing details about the secret rituals of Freemasons.

The topic at hand contains a great deal of complexity and ambiguity which has not been addressed here. Yet many of the other chapters in this book contribute towards fleshing out the picture. Nearly all of the contributors describe movements from dislocation to relocation, or from disembedding to reembedding, decentering to recentering. Lien's story from Tasmania (Chapter 6), where nonendemic plants are literally being eradicated, shows how place is being re-created as a rooted, trustworthy place, just as Lund's Scandinavian diaspora informants from the USA (Chapter 4) re-embed themselves through recounting their genealogies. Henningsen (Chapter 8) shows how trust and reciprocity, embedded in local identity, becomes a marketable commodity. His argument is mirrored from the skewed angle of highland New Guinea in Hirsch's analysis (Chapter 7) of the slippery category of cultural authenticity. Melhuus and Harvey (Chapters 3 and 9) both question scientific knowledge, relating it to folk notions, but in very different ways: while Harvey discusses the decentring of 'expert knowledge', Melhuus's research on the transnational flow of eggs and sperm raises questions as to which gifts to accept, who is really the giver, and how to reciprocate. Howell's work on adoption (Chapter 2) connects to a classic theme in the anthropology of kinship, that of descent versus alliance and place versus kinship, and it indicates difficulties in establishing trusting relationships when the terms of reciprocity are unclear. Who gives and who receives when what is being transacted is a small child? It appears that the Indian and Ethiopian governments do not have the same views on this issue. Krohn-Hansen's material on Dominicans in New York (Chapter 5) indicates that they are totally dependent on extant webs of reciprocity, managing their lives through a variety of trust-based, often informal survival strategies as well as maintaining deep ties of commitment to their communities of origin.

The hard work referred to at the beginning of this chapter, that of reproducing or recreating place, trust and reciprocity in a networked world where all this no longer goes without saying, is a theme common to all these, otherwise diverse, contributions to the anthropology of transnationalism. It may be that the centre no longer holds, but since the world is created on the basis of interpersonal, trust-based networks, it is not threatened by falling apart.

The amount of work invested into networks, chiefly to keep them going, is tremendous in the informational or network society. Think of yourself as a student or scholar. Responding to e-mails, sending and receiving SMS messages, or talking on the phone to people in conversations where the main objective consists of reminding them of your existence, is likely to take up a major proportion of your precious time. The vulnerability of moral communities based on trust and reciprocity thereby made tangible, is chronic. This does not mean that they 'no longer exist' or 'no longer exist in the West', but that keeping them operative requires continuous effort when society is complex (i.e., does not consist of a single moral community), and especially so when one's personal network is partly transnational. In this sense, Giddens is right in claiming that our era is post-traditional. Tradition no longer recommends itself – it must be defended actively; similarly, communities of trust and commitment no longer perpetuate themselves through convention, but must be guarded and nurtured. Yet they remain powerful attractors – the first place to look for ordering instances in a world of teeming movement.

The vision of the individual as a hybrid, moving, unstable entity engaging in networks of variable duration, dominant in the anthropological globalisation discourse, is limiting and exaggerated. Moral commitments in relationships, cultural conservatism and coercive pressures to conform remain extremely powerful everywhere. However, they no longer encompass all of society. This is why life on the New York streets is so unsafe: the reason is not that individuals are not full members of moral communities based on trust and reciprocity, but that the people they are likely to encounter in dark alleys belong to other moral communities – they are outside the intermediate circle of balanced reciprocity in Sahlins' famous diagramme depicting moral distance in tribal societies (Sahlins 1972), they belong to the realm of negative reciprocity. Viewed from the bird's-eye view of the macrosociologist, contemporary societies must appear profoundly disordered. Viewed through the magnifying glass of the ethnographer crawling on all fours, it remains faithful to the basic sociological principles set out by Mauss and his successors.

This means, among other things, that the cosmopolitan consciousness or global awareness seen by some as an implication of the increased global interconnectedness, is unlikely to catch on outside certain privileged classes (to which you and I naturally belong). Transnational networks are interpersonal, imbued with trust and intimacy, and these qualities form the moral basis for exchange. I suggest that we now direct attention towards the webs of trust and reciprocity that create transnationalism at the micro level, and towards the situations where reciprocity fails, creating unpayable and humiliating debts of gratitude, silencing at the receiving end of unidirectional systems of exchange, exclusion from dominant circuits, and a lack of respect. When Osama bin Laden speaks about the USA or Israel, he sounds almost like a disenchanted ragamuffin from London's East End: there is little about economic domination or world imperialism in his rhetoric, but the words arrogance and disrespect recur. The implications of not being seen and respected is an underestimated affliction in the contemporary world. As Martin Buber says, you cannot become a martyr if nobody is looking.

The scarce resource, in this case as well as in the other examples mentioned in this chapter, is the recognition of others, the means to achieve it is reciprocal commitment, and the spirit of the transnational kula trade, magnified by global capitalism, militarism and consumerism, remains stronger than ever in the contemporary world.

Acknowledgements

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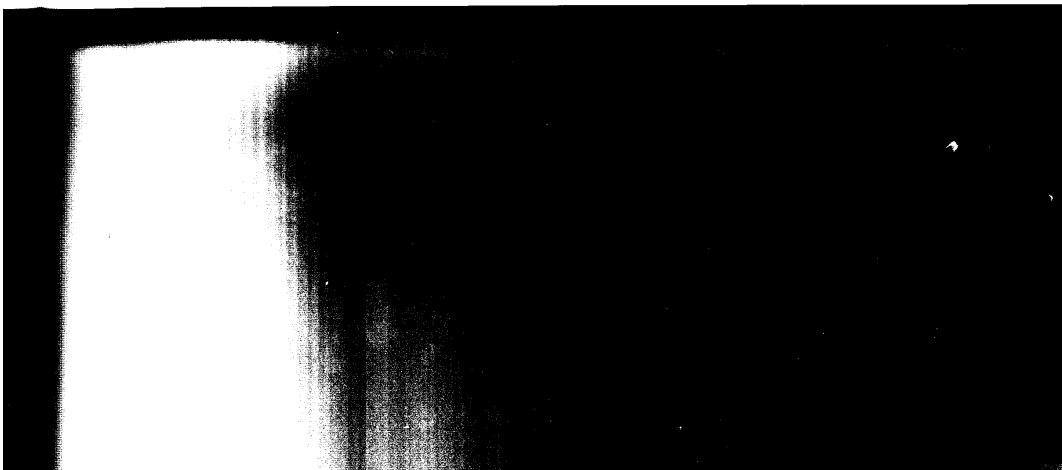
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