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The Elementary
Structures of Kinship

(Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté)

Revised Edition

Translated from the French

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BEACON PRESS

BOSTON

Published first in France under the title *Les Structures
élémentaires de la Parenté* in 1949. A revised edition under
the same title was published in France in 1967.

Translation copyright © 1969 by Beacon Press

Library of Congress catalog card number: 68-12840

First published by Beacon Press in 1969

Second printing, July 1969

First published as a Beacon Paperback in 1969

Published simultaneously in Canada by Saunders of Toronto, Ltd.

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Unitarian Universalist Association

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Printed in the United States of America

CHAPTER II

The Problem of Incest

I

The problem of the prohibition of incest displays all the ambiguity which, on a different plane, undoubtedly accounts for the sacredness of the prohibition itself. This rule is at once social, in that it is a rule, and pre-social, in its universality and the type of relationships upon which it imposes its norm. Man's sexual life is itself external to the group, firstly, in being the highest expression of his animal nature, and the most significant survival of instinct, and secondly, in that its ends are to satisfy individual desires, which, as is known, hold little respect for social conventions, and specific tendencies, which, although in another sense, also go beyond society's own ends. However, if the regulation of relationships between the sexes represents an overflow of culture into nature, in another way sexual life is one beginning of social life in nature, for the sexual is man's only instinct requiring the stimulation of another person. This point must be taken up later. That it should provide a transition, in itself natural, between nature and culture, would be inconceivable, but it does give one reason why the change can and must necessarily take place in the field of sexual life above any other. It is a rule which embraces that which in society is most foreign to it, but also a social rule which retains what in nature is most likely to go beyond it. The incest prohibition is at once on the threshold of culture, in culture, and in one sense, as we shall try to show, culture itself. Let it suffice for the moment to note the inherent duality to which it owes its ambiguous and equivocal character. Rather than accounting for this ambiguousness, sociologists have been almost exclusively concerned with reducing it. Their attempts fall into three principal types, which we shall distinguish and discuss here only in their essential features.

II

Following the popular belief of many societies, including our own, the first type of explanation attempts to maintain the dual character of the prohibition by dividing it into two distinct phases. For Lewis H. Morgan and Sir Henry Maine,¹ for example, the origin of the incest prohibition is really

¹ Maine, 1886, p. 228.

both natural and social, but in the sense that it results from a social reflection upon a natural phenomenon. The incest prohibition is taken to be a protective measure, shielding the species from the disastrous results of consanguineous marriages. This theory is remarkable in that it is required by its very statement to extend to all human societies, even to the most primitive, which in other matters give no indication of any such eugenic second-sight, the sensational privilege of knowing the alleged consequences of endogamous unions. This justification for the prohibition of incest is of recent origin, appearing nowhere in our society before the sixteenth century. Following the general pattern of his *Moralia* and impartially listing all possibilities without showing a preference for any one of them, Plutarch proposes three hypotheses, all sociological in nature, none referring to eventual defects in the descendants. Only Gregory the Great¹ can be quoted to the contrary, but his work does not seem to have had any influence on the thought of contemporaries or on later commentators.²

It is true that various monstrosities are threatened to the descendants of incestuous parents in the folklore of various primitive peoples, notably the Australian aborigines. But apart from the fact that this Australian aboriginal taboo is probably the least concerned with biological proximity (it permits unions, such as grand-uncle with grand-niece, the effects of which cannot be particularly favourable), it is sufficient to note that such punishments are, in primitive tradition, commonly expected for all those who break rules, and are in no way especially confined to reproduction. The extent to which hasty observations should be distrusted is well brought out in Jochelson's remarks:

'These Yakut told me that they had observed that children born from consanguineous marriages are generally unhealthy. Thus, my interpreter, Dolganoff, told me that it had been observed among the Yukaghir that in case of marriages between cousins – which are contracted regardless of the custom of *n'exi'yini* . . . – the children die, or the parents themselves are subject to disease which frequently result in death.'³

So much for natural sanctions. As for social sanctions, they are based so little upon physiological considerations that among the Kenyah and Kayan of Borneo, who condemn marriage with mother, sister, daughter, father's sister or mother's sister, and with brother's daughter or sister's daughter, 'in the case of those women who stand to him in any of these relations in virtue of adoption, the prohibitions and severe penalties are if possible even more strictly enforced'.⁴

Furthermore, it must be remembered that since the end of the paleolithic

¹ Muller, 1913, pp. 294–5.

² Cooper, 1932.

³ Jochelson, 1910–26, p. 80. The Nuer call incest 'syphilis' because they see in one the punishment of the other (Evans-Pritchard, 1935, p. 11).

⁴ Hose and McDougall, 1912, vol. I, p. 73. These authors remark that this observation demonstrates the *artificiality* of the rules concerning incest, *ibid.* vol. II, p. 197.

era man has increasingly perfected cultivated or domesticated species through the use of endogamous reproductive methods. If it is supposed that man was conscious of the results of such methods, and also that he had judged the matter rationally, what explanation could be given as to how, in the field of human relationships, he reached conclusions running counter to those which his everyday experience in the animal and vegetable kingdoms continually served to prove, and upon which his very well-being depended? Moreover, if primitive man had been conscious of such considerations, why, instead of setting prohibitions upon himself, did he not turn to prescriptions whose experimental results had, at least in certain cases, shown beneficial effects? Not only did he not do so, but we ourselves still recoil from any such undertaking, and it has been only in recent social theories, denounced moreover as irrational, that the planned reproduction of man has been recommended. The positive prescriptions most commonly encountered in primitive societies, in association with the prohibition of incest, are those which tend to increase the number of marriages between cross-cousins (the respective descendants of a brother and a sister), and which, in this way, place identical forms of marriage, from the point of view of proximity, at the two extreme poles of social regulation: the marriage of parallel cousins (descended from two brothers or two sisters) is likened to fraternal incest, and cross-cousin marriage, despite the very close degree of consanguinity between the spouses, is regarded as an ideal.

Nevertheless, it is striking to see how contemporary thought is loth to abandon the idea that the prohibition of relations between immediate consanguines or collaterals is justified for eugenic reasons, doubtless because, as we have experienced in the last ten years, it is in the field of biological concepts that we find the last traces of deductive reasoning still prevalent in modern thought. A particularly significant example comes from a writer whose scientific work has contributed most highly in dispelling the prejudices surrounding consanguineous unions. East, namely, has shown, in some admirable work on the reproduction of maize, that the creation of an endogamous line results first in a period of fluctuations during which the type is subject to extreme variations, undoubtedly because of the resurgence of recessive characteristics which are usually hidden. Then the variabilities gradually diminish, ending in a constant and invariable type. In a work destined for a wider audience, the author, having recapitulated these results, draws the conclusion that popular beliefs about marriages between near relatives are largely justified, laboratory work merely confirming the prejudices of folklore, for, as one old writer said, 'Superstition is often awake when reezon iz asleep.'¹ This is so because 'objectionable recessive traits are common in the human race as they are in maize'.² But, except for mutations, this troublesome reappearance of recessive characteristics is explicable only where work is being done on previously selected types, the characteristics which reappear

¹ East, 1938, p. 156.

² loc. cit.

being precisely those that the age-long effort of the stock-breeder has successfully eliminated. With man, this situation is not to be found, since, as we have just seen, the exogamy practised in human societies is a blind exogamy. But more especially East's work has indirectly established that these supposed dangers would never have appeared if mankind had been endogamous from the beginning. If this were so, human races would probably be as constant and as definitively fixed as the endogamous lines of maize after the eliminations of variable factors. The temporary danger of endogamous unions, supposing such a danger to exist, obviously stems from an exogamous or pangenetic tradition, but it cannot be the cause of this tradition.

As a matter of fact, consanguineous marriages merely match up genes of the same type, while a system having the law of probability as its only determinant for the union of the sexes (Dahlberg's 'amphimixis') would mix them haphazardly. But the nature of genes and their individual characteristics remain the same in both cases. Consanguineous unions need only be interrupted for the general composition of the population to revert to what might be expected on a basis of 'amphimixis'. Consanguineous marriages contracted long before therefore have no influence; they affect only the generations immediately following. But this influence is itself a function of the absolute dimensions of the group. In any given population, a state of equilibrium can always be defined in which the frequency of consanguineous marriage is equal to the probability of such marriages in an 'amphimixis' system. If the population goes beyond this state of equilibrium, the frequency of consanguineous marriages remaining the same, then the number of carriers of recessive characteristics will increase: 'The enlargement of the isolate brings with it an increase of heterozygosity at the expense of homozygosity'.¹ If the population falls below the state of equilibrium, the frequency of consanguineous marriages remaining 'normal' in comparison, the recessive characteristics are lowered at a progressive rate of 0.0572 per cent in a population of 500 with two children per family, and of 0.1697 per cent if the same population falls to 200. Dahlberg can thus conclude that 'as far as heredity is concerned these inhibitions do not seem to be justified'² from the standpoint of the theory of heredity.

It is true that mutations determining the appearance of a recessive defect are more dangerous in small than in large populations. In fact, the chances of a transition to homozygosity are greater in small populations. However, this same rapid and complete transition to homozygosity will sooner or later ensure the elimination of the dreaded characteristic. Consequently, in a small, stable, endogamous population, as exemplified by many primitive societies, the only risk in marriages between consanguines arises from the appearance of new mutations, a risk that can be calculated since the rate of appearance is known. But the chances of finding a recessive heterozygote within the group are slimmer than would attend marriage with a stranger.

¹ Dahlberg, 1937-8, p. 224.

² *ibid.* 1929, p. 454.

Even in connection with recessive characteristics arising from mutation within a given population, Dahlberg estimates that the rôle of consanguineous marriages in the production of homozygotes is very slight, because for every homozygote from a consanguineous marriage, there are an enormous number of heterozygotes which, if the population is sufficiently small, will necessarily reproduce among themselves. Hence, in a population of eighty, the prohibition of marriage between near relatives, including first cousins, would only reduce the carriers of rare recessive characteristics by 10 per cent to 15 per cent.¹ These considerations are important since they introduce the quantitative notion of population size. The economic systems of some primitive or archaic societies severely limit population size, and it is precisely for a population of such a size that the regulation of consanguineous marriages can have only negligible genetic consequences. Without fully attacking the problem to which modern theoreticians can only hazard provisional and highly varied solutions,² it can therefore be seen that primitive mankind was not in a demographic position which would even have permitted him to ascertain the facts of the matter.

III

The second type of explanation tends to do away with one of the terms of the antinomy between the natural and social characteristics of this institution. For a large group of sociologists and psychologists, represented principally by Westermarck and Havelock Ellis, the prohibition of incest is no more than the social projection or reflection of natural feelings or tendencies, which can be entirely expanded by human nature. Quite important variations may be noted among those supporting this position, some deriving the horror of incest, the postulated origin of the prohibition, from the physiological nature of man, and others rather from his psychic tendencies. As a matter of fact, the old preconception of the 'voice of blood' has merely been revived, and here expressed more negatively than positively. This alleged horror of incest can only be manifested when a kinship relationship is supposedly known, or later established, between the guilty parties, and this sufficiently substantiates that its source cannot be instinctive. There remains the interpretation that this horror is based upon actual attraction, or the lack of it. Thus Havelock Ellis explains the repugnance for incest by the negative effect of daily habits upon erotic excitability, while Westermarck adopts a similar but more strictly psychological interpretation.³

¹ Dahlberg, 1937-8, p. 220.

² Baur, Fischer and Lenz, 1927; Dahlberg, 1930-1, pp. 83-96; Hogben, 1931; Haldane, 1938; cf. also ch. VIII below.

³ Havelock Ellis, 1906; Westermarck, 1891, vol. I, p. 20 et seq. and vol. II, p. 207 et seq. Westermarck's position provides curious variations. Moving away from the Havelock Ellis type of interpretation based on instinct, in the first edition of his *The History of Human Marriage*, he was to develop towards a more psychological conception, which is apparent in the second edition. However, towards the end of his life (Westermarck, 1934a, pp. 22-40), reacting against B. Z. Seligman and Malinowski, he returned not only to his 1891 position

The objection might be raised that these writers are confusing two forms of familiarization, the first of which develops between two individuals who are sexually united, generally bringing about a lessening of desire, and which a modern biologist declares, 'is one of the disturbing elements in every social system'.¹ The second prevails among near relatives and is thought to have the same result, although sexual activity, which plays the determining rôle in the first case, is obviously absent in the second. The proposed interpretation therefore begs the question, for without experimental verification there is no knowing whether the alleged observation on which it rests, viz., that sexual desire is less frequent among near relatives, is to be explained either by these relatives being physically or psychologically accustomed to one another, or as a consequence of the taboos which constitute the prohibition. Therefore, the observation is assumed at the very moment of its alleged explanation.

There is nothing more dubious than this alleged instinctive repugnance, for although prohibited by law and morals, incest does exist and is no doubt even more frequent by far than a collective conspiracy of silence would lead us to believe. To explain the theoretical universality of the rule by the universality of the sentiment or tendency is to open up a new problem, for in no conceivable way is this supposedly universal fact universal. Hence, if all the numerous exceptions were treated as perversions or anomalies, it would remain to be defined in what these anomalies consist, on the only level to which they might be referred without tautology, i.e., the physiological, which would undoubtedly be all the more difficult now that the attitude taken by an important modern school towards this problem runs completely counter to Havelock Ellis and Westermarck. Psychoanalysis, namely, finds a universal phenomenon not in the repugnance towards incestuous relationships, but on the contrary in the pursuit of such relationships.

Nor is it certain that familiarity is always regarded as being fatal to marriage. Many societies judge otherwise. 'The desire for a wife begins with the sister', an Azande proverb says. The Hehe justify their custom of cross-cousin marriage by the long intimacy between the future spouses, which is seen by them as the true cause of sentimental and sexual attraction.² And it is the very same type of relationship which Westermarck and Havelock Ellis regarded as the origin of the horror of incest that the Chukchee strive to make the model of exogamous marriage:

'Most of the marriages between relatives (that is, cousins) are concluded at a tender age, sometimes when the bridegroom and the bride are still infants. The marriage ritual is performed, and the children grow up,

¹ Miller, 1931, p. 398. This innate tendency of man to become tired of his sexual partner is common to him and to the higher apes, *ibid.* p. 386. ² Brown, 1934, p. 33.

but even to the belief that the ultimate origin for the prohibition was to be sought in a vague awareness of the harmful consequences of consanguineous unions (Westermarck, 1934b, p. 53 et seq.).

playing together. When a little older, they tend the herd together. Of course, the ties between them grow to be very strong, often stronger even than death: when one dies, the other also dies from grief, or commits suicide.

'Similar to these marriages are those between the members of families friendly to each other, though not connected by ties of blood. Sometimes such families agree to a marriage between their children even before the children are born.'¹

Even among the Indians of the Thompson River in British Columbia, where marriage between second cousins is treated and derided as incestuous, this hostility to even distant consanguineous marriages does not prevent men from being betrothed to girls twenty years younger than themselves.² Facts such as these could be multiplied indefinitely.

But there is an infinitely more serious confusion underlying the attitude under discussion. Why, if it resulted from congenital physiological and psychological tendencies, should the horror of incest be expressed as a prohibition so solemn and so essential as to be found enveloped by the same aura of sacredness in every human society? There is no point in forbidding what would not happen if it were not forbidden. Two answers can be given to this argument. The first is that the prohibition is only meant for certain exceptional cases in which nature has failed. But what proportion is there between the exceptions, which *ex hypothesi* must be extremely rare, and the importance of the regulations directed against them? In particular, if these errands were not regarded as harmful and dangerous, why should they be prohibited, let alone punished, with such extreme severity in many societies? The origin of the prohibition of incest must be sought in the existence, or in the assumed existence, of this danger for the group, the individuals concerned, or their descendants. We are brought back inevitably to the previous explanation. It is true that a comparison could be made with suicide, against which multiple sanctions are levelled by morality and often the law itself, even though self-preservation is a natural tendency in all living beings. But the analogy between incest and suicide is only apparent, for if society prohibits them both this prohibition applies in the first case to a natural phenomenon found commonly among animals, and in the second, to a phenomenon which is completely foreign to animal life and which should be regarded as a function of social life. Society expressly forbids only that which society brings about. Next, and in particular, society condemns suicide because it considers it harmful to its interests, and not because it constitutes the denial of a congenital tendency. A better proof is that, while every society prohibits incest, there is none which does not make room for suicide and does not recognize it as legitimate in certain circumstances or for certain motives when the individual attitude happens to coincide with some social interest. Accord-

¹ Bogoras, 1904-9, p. 577.

² Teit, 1900, pp. 321, 325.

ingly, the reasons why incest is prejudicial to the social order still remain to be discovered.

IV

The third type of explanation and the one just discussed have this in common, that they both claim to do away with one of the terms of the antinomy. In this way, they both contrast with the first type of explanation, which keeps both terms while trying to dissociate them. However, while advocates of the second type of explanation choose to reduce the prohibition of incest to some instinctive psychological or physiological phenomenon, the third group adopts the similar but contrary position of seeing it as a rule whose origin is purely social, its expression in biological terms being accidental and of minor importance. Because this last point of view is subject to more variations among its authors it must be set out in a little more detail than the others.

Considered as a social institution, the prohibition of incest has two different aspects. Sometimes it is only a prohibition of sexual union between close consanguines or collaterals, while at others this form of the prohibition, based as it is upon a definite biological criterion, is only one aspect of a broader system which is apparently without any biological basis. In many societies the rule of exogamy prohibits marriage between social categories which include near relatives, but, along with them, a considerable number of individuals for whom it is impossible to establish all but the most distant consanguineous or collateral relationships. In this case, it is an apparent caprice of the nomenclature to assimilate individuals who fall under the prohibition to biological relatives.

Advocates of the third type of interpretation give their particular attention to the broad and social form of the incest prohibition. But let us discard, without further delay, Morgan and Frazer's suggestions that exogamous systems incorporate methods for preventing incestuous unions, which are actually only a small fraction of the unions that these systems do prohibit. In fact, as is proved by societies with neither clans nor moieties, the same result could be achieved without cumbersome rules of exogamy. If this first hypothesis provides a highly unsatisfactory explanation for exogamy, it provides no explanation at all for the prohibition of incest. Much more important from our point of view are theories giving a sociological interpretation of exogamy, or else leaving open the possibility that the incest prohibition may have derived from exogamy, or categorically affirming the existence of such a derivation.

In the first group are included the ideas of McLennan, Spencer and Lubbock,¹ and in the second those of Durkheim. McLennan and Spencer saw exogamous practices as the fixing by custom of the habits of warrior tribes among whom capture was the normal means of obtaining wives. Lubbock outlined an evolutionary transition from endogamous group marriage to

¹ McLennan, 1865; Spencer, 1882-96; Lubbock, 1870, p. 83 et seq.; Lubbock, 1911.

exogamous marriage by capture. As opposed to wives gained endogamously, wives acquired by capture would have the status of individual possessions, and only they, for this reason, would provide the prototype for modern individual marriage. All these ideas can be discarded very simply, since, if they do not establish any connection between exogamy and the prohibition of incest, they fall outside our study, and if, on the contrary, they do offer applicable solutions not only to the rules of exogamy but to that particular form of exogamy which is the prohibition of incest, they are still completely unacceptable, for they would then claim to derive a general law, the prohibition of incest, from some special and often sporadic phenomenon, no doubt associated with certain societies but having no possible universality. They have this and several other methodological defects in common with Durkheim's theory, which is the most conscientious and systematic interpretation from purely social causes.

The hypothesis advanced by Durkheim in the important work which inaugurated the *Année Sociologique*¹ has three characteristics. Firstly, it is based upon the universalization of facts observed in a limited group of societies; secondly, it makes the prohibition of incest a distant consequence of rules of exogamy; and, thirdly, these rules of exogamy are interpreted by reference to phenomena of a different order. Durkheim believed that the observation of Australian societies, which were regarded as illustrating a primitive type of organization formerly common to every human society, would provide the solution to the problem of incest. As is well known the religious life of these societies is dominated by beliefs affirming an identity of substance between the clan and the eponymous totem. The belief in this substantial identity explains the special prohibitions imposed upon blood, which is considered as the sacred symbol and the origin of the magico-biological community uniting members of the one clan. This fear of clan blood is particularly intense as regards menstrual blood, and it explains why, in most primitive societies, women are subject, because of their menstrual periods, and then in a more general way, to magical beliefs and special prohibitions. Consequently, the prohibitions relating to women and their segregation, such as in the rule of exogamy, would only be the distant repercussions of religious beliefs which originally did not distinguish between the sexes, but which changed with the link which became established in men's minds between blood and the female sex. In the final analysis, if the rule of exogamy prevents a man contracting a marriage within his own clan, it is because otherwise he would risk coming in contact with that blood which is the visible sign and substantial expression of his kinship with his totem. Since the totem of others is unaffected by prohibitions and does not contain any magical force, there is no such danger for members of another clan, and accordingly there arose the double rule of interclan marriage and the prohibition of marriage within the clan. As conceived nowadays, the prohibition of incest is

¹ Durkheim, 1898.

only a vestige or relic of that complex collection of beliefs and prohibitions, with roots extending into a magico-religious system where ultimately the explanation lies. Consequently, by proceeding analytically, we see that for Durkheim the prohibition of incest is a remnant of exogamy, that this exogamy is explicable in terms of the special prohibitions relating to women, that these prohibitions originate in the fear of menstrual blood, that this fear is only a particular case of the general fear of blood, and finally, that this fear merely expresses certain feelings deriving from the belief in the substantiality of the individual clan member and his totem.

The strength of this interpretation proceeds from its capacity to systematize widely varying phenomena, which, when taken separately, are seemingly very difficult to comprehend. Its weakness lies in the fact that the connexions so established are fragile and arbitrary. Let us leave aside the prejudicial objection drawn from the non-universality of totemic beliefs. In fact, Durkheim postulates this universality, and it is highly probable he would maintain his position, in view of contemporary observations which in no way prove this theory, but which cannot give reasons to invalidate it either. But even accepting his hypothesis for the moment, we find no logical link between the various stages allowing them to be deduced from the initial postulate. The relationship linking each of the stages with its predecessor is arbitrary, and there is no *a priori* proof either for or against its existence. Take first the belief in totemic substantiality. We know that this belief poses no obstacle to the eating of the totem, but merely confers some ceremonial significance upon this eating. Marriage and, in very many societies, the sexual act itself have a ceremonial and ritualistic significance in no way incompatible with the claim that they represent a form of totemic communion. Secondly, the horror of blood, especially menstrual blood, is not universal.¹ Young Winnebago Indians visit their mistresses and take advantage of the privacy of the prescribed isolation of these women during their menstrual period.²

On the other hand, where the horror of menstrual blood seems to reach its culminating point, it is by no means obvious that the imourity should have predilections, or limits. The Chaga, a Bantu tribe living on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, have a patrilineal social organization. However, the instructions lavished upon girls during initiation put them on guard against the general dangers of menstrual blood, and not against the special dangers to which people of the same blood would be exposed. Moreover, it seems to be the mother, and not the father, who runs the gravest danger:

'Do not show it to your mother, for she would die! Do not show it to your age-mates, for there may be a wicked one among them, who will take away the cloth with which you have cleaned yourself, and you will be barren in your marriage. Do not show it to a bad woman, who will take

¹ Van Waters, 1913.

² Radin, 1920, p. 393.

the cloth to place it in the top of her hut . . . with the result that you cannot bear children. Do not throw the cloth on the path or in the bush. A wicked person might do evil things with it. Bury it in the ground. Protect the blood from the gaze of your father, brothers and sisters. It is a sin to let them see it.¹

The Aleutian does not copulate with his wife during her menstrual periods for fear of bad hunting, but if a father sees his daughter during her first menstrual period, she risks becoming blind and mute. The dangers are all for her, not for him.² As a rule, a woman is impure during her menses, not only for her clan relatives, but also for her exogamous husband, and for everyone in general. This point is vital since Durkheim claims to derive exogamy from a combination of customs and prohibitions relating to women, of which it is presumably in some way the consequence, and from difficulties to which it might provide a solution. However, these prohibitions are not lifted when the rule of exogamy is applied, and they are imposed indifferently upon endogamous as well as exogamous members of the group. Moreover, how did the rule of exogamy appear if prejudices relating to menstrual blood were its only source? The prohibition of sexual relations with the wife during her menses would be enough to avoid any risk of pollution. If the rules of exogamy have no other function, they are superfluous and incomprehensible, especially when one considers the innumerable complications which they introduce into group life. If these rules have arisen it is because they satisfy other demands and fulfil other functions.

The sociological interpretations of Durkheim, as well as of McLennan, Spencer and Lubbock, have one basic defect in common. They attempt to establish a universal phenomenon on an historical sequence, which is by no means inconceivable in some particular case but whose episodes are so contingent that the possibility of this sequence being repeated unchanged in every human society must be wholly excluded. In being the most complex, the Durkheimian sequence falls most heavily under this criticism. It is possible to imagine that, in a given society, the origin of some particular institution is to be explained by some highly arbitrary transformations. History provides examples. But history also shows that, according to the society considered, such processes may result in widely differing institutions, and that where analogous institutions have found independent origins in various parts of the world, the historical sequences leading up to their appearances are themselves highly dissimilar. This is what is termed convergence. But if the results of a succession of immutably repeated events were always identical (as in the physical sciences), the conclusion could be reached with assurance that these events are not the reason for the phenomenon's existence but point to a law which alone provides the explanation. Durkheim does not propose any law which might account for the necessary transition in the human mind

¹ Raum, 1939, p. 559.

² Jochelson, n.d., nos. 34-5.

from the belief in totemic substantiality to the horror of blood, from the horror of blood to the superstitious fear of women, and from this fear to the setting up of exogamous rules. The same criticism can be levelled at Lord Raglan's imaginary reconstructions. However, we have shown that there is nothing more arbitrary than this succession of transitions. Even if there were only these transitions at the origin of the incest prohibition, they would still have permitted other solutions, some of which at least should have eventuated, by the simple law of probabilities. For example, the prohibitions affecting women during their menstrual periods provided a very happy answer to the problem, and a number of societies could have been satisfied with it.

The ambiguity then is more serious than it seemed, bearing not solely or principally upon the validity of the facts involved, but also upon the way in which the prohibition itself must be conceived. McLennan, Lubbock, Spencer and Durkheim see the prohibition of incest, in comparison with current social conditions, as a survival from an altogether heterogeneous past. Consequently they are confronted with a dilemma, namely, if the whole institution is no more than a survival, how can the universality and vitality of the rule be understood, when only occasional formless traces of it might conceivably be brought to light, or does the prohibition of incest correspond in modern society to new and different functions? But this being the case, it must be acknowledged that the historical explanation does not exhaust the problem. Furthermore, might not the origin of the institution be found in those functions which are still current and are verifiable by observation rather than in a vague and hypothetical historical scheme? The problem of the incest prohibition is not so much to seek the different historical configurations for each group as to explain the particular form of the institution in each particular society. The problem is to discover what profound and omnipresent causes could account for the regulation of the relationships between the sexes in every society and age. Any different procedure would commit the same error as that of the linguist who believed that by studying the history of vocabulary he had exhausted the sum total of the phonetic or morphological laws governing the development of language.

v

This disappointing analysis at least explains why contemporary sociology has often preferred to confess itself powerless than to persist in what, because of so many failures, seems to be a closed issue. When it cannot tackle a problem of this importance, instead of admitting that its methods are inadequate and that its principles require revision and readjustment, it declares that the prohibition of incest is outside its field. It was in this manner that, in *Primitive Society*, where so many problems have been reopened, Robert Lowie came to the following conclusion regarding the question with which we are

concerned: 'It is not the function of the ethnologist but of the biologist and psychologist to explain why man has so deep-rooted a horror of incest. . . . The student of society merely has to reckon with the fact that the dread of incest limits the biologically possible number of unions'.¹ Another specialist writes on the same subject: 'It may be that it is impossible to explain or to trace the origin of any human custom that is universal; perhaps the most we can do is to correlate it with certain other conditions',² which amounts to the same thing as Lowie's renunciation. But the prohibition of incest would then clearly be the only case of the natural sciences being asked to account for the existence of a rule sanctioned by human authority.

It is true that, through its universality, the prohibition of incest touches upon nature, i.e., upon biology or psychology, or both. But it is just as certain that in being a rule it is a social phenomenon, and belongs to the world of rules, hence to culture, and to sociology, whose study is culture. In the Appendix to *Primitive Society*, Lowie, having perceived this very clearly, reconsiders the statement just quoted: 'Nevertheless, I do not believe, as formerly, that incest is *instinctively* repugnant to man We . . . must consider his aversion towards incest as a former cultural adaptation.'³ The almost general failure of theories gives no justification for the drawing of any other conclusion. Instead, analysis of the causes of this failure should lead to the readjustment of those principles and methods which provide the only possible basis for a viable ethnology. In fact, how could rules be analysed and interpreted if ethnology should confess its helplessness before the one pre-eminent and universal rule which assures culture's hold over nature?

We have shown that each of the early theoreticians who tackled the problem of the incest prohibition held one of the three following points of view. Some put forward the natural and cultural duality of the rule, but could only establish a rationally derived and extrinsic connection between the two aspects. Others have explained the prohibition of incest solely or predominantly if not in terms of natural causes, then as a cultural phenomenon. Each of these three outlooks has been found to lead to impossibilities or contradictions. Consequently, a transition from static analysis to dynamic synthesis is the only path remaining open. The prohibition of incest is in origin neither purely cultural nor purely natural, nor is it a composite mixture of elements from both nature and culture. It is the fundamental step because of which, by which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished. In one sense, it belongs to nature, for it is a general condition of culture. Consequently, we should not be surprised that its formal characteristic, universality, has been taken from nature. However, in another sense, it is already culture, exercising and imposing its rule on phenomena which initially are not subject to it. We have been led to pose the problem of incest in connection with the relationship between man's biological existence and his social existence, and we have immediately established that the

¹ Lowie, 1961, p. 15.

² Seligman, 1935, p. 75.

³ Lowie, 1935, pp. 446-7.

prohibition could not be ascribed accurately to either one or the other. In the present work we propose to find the solution to this anomaly by showing that the prohibition of incest is the link between them.

But this union is neither static nor arbitrary, and as soon as it comes into being, the whole situation is completely changed. Indeed, it is less a union than a transformation or transition. Before it, culture is still non-existent; with it, nature's sovereignty over man is ended. The prohibition of incest is where nature transcends itself. It sparks the formation of a new and more complex type of structure and is superimposed upon the simpler structures of physical life through integration, just as these themselves are superimposed upon the simpler structures of animal life. It brings about and is in itself the advent of a new order.

1. The Bases of Exchange

CHAPTER III

The Universe of Rules

I

Even if the incest prohibition has its roots in nature it is only in the way it affects us as a social rule that it can be fully grasped. In form and in field of application it varies greatly from group to group. While highly limited in our society, in certain North American tribes it is extended to the most distant degrees of kinship. In this case there is no need to add that the prohibition is less concerned with true consanguinity, which is often impossible to establish, if at all, than with the purely social phenomenon by which two unrelated individuals are classed as 'brothers' or 'sisters', 'parents' or 'children'. The prohibition and the rule of exogamy, in this case, are therefore merged. Occasionally both institutions exist side by side. As has often been observed, exogamy by itself is not enough to prevent the marriage of a mother with her son in a patrilineal system, nor of a father with his daughter in a matrilineal system. But in many cases it is the rule of exogamy or the kinship system which is decisive, without taking real relationships, apart from those of the first degree, into account. It is the same law which in the marriage of cross-cousins likens one group of first cousins to brothers and sisters and makes the other half of these same cousins into potential spouses. The same system, and others also, highly recommends and sometimes prescribes marriage between the maternal uncle and his niece, and less commonly between the paternal aunt and her nephew, whereas similar behaviour by the paternal uncle or the maternal aunt would horrify just as much as would incest with the relatives to whom these collaterals are assimilated. It has often been noted that several contemporary legal systems omitted to register one or both of the grandparents among the prohibited degrees. This discrepancy can be explained by the high improbability of such marriages in modern societies, but among the Australian aborigines – otherwise so punctilious – and certain Oceanic peoples, such a union is not inconceivable, although other unions involving a more distant relationship are specifically forbidden. Hence, the prohibition is not always expressed in terms of degrees of real kinship but refers to individuals who use certain terms in addressing one another. This remains true even of those Oceanic systems which permit marriage with a classificatory 'sister', but distinguish immediately between

kave maori, or 'real sister', and *kave kesekese*, 'different sister', *kave fakata-fatafa*, 'sister set aside', *kave i take ŋaēŋa*, 'sister from another place'.¹ It is the social relationship more than the biological tie implied by the terms 'father', 'mother', 'son', 'daughter', 'brother', and 'sister', that acts as the determinant. For this reason especially, theories attempting to justify the prohibition of incest by the harmful consequences of consanguineous unions (including numerous primitive myths suggesting this interpretation) can only be regarded as rationalizations.

Considered from the most general viewpoint, the incest prohibition expresses the transition from the natural fact of consanguinity to the cultural fact of alliance. Nature by itself already moves to the double rhythm of receiving and giving, which finds expression in the opposition of marriage and descent. But, although present in both and in some way bestowing a common form upon them, this rhythm does not display the same aspect in both nature and culture. The characteristic of nature is that it can give only what has been received. Heredity expresses this permanence and continuity. However, in the sphere of culture, the individual always receives more than he gives, and gives more than he receives. This double disequilibrium is expressed by the processes of *education* and *invention*, one being the inverse of the other, and both contrasting with the process of heredity. It is certainly not our intention here to suggest that the vital phenomena should be considered as phenomena in equilibrium; the contrary is obviously true. But biological disequilibria only appear as such in their relationship with the physical world. In comparison with cultural phenomena, they show, on the contrary, stability, whereas dynamic synthesis is now applicable to the new phenomena. Seen thus, the problem of the transition from nature to culture is reduced to the problem of introducing the accumulatory processes within the repetitive process.

Based on natural facts, which hypothetically are all that are present, how is this introduction possible? As we have just emphasized, nature, like culture, moves to the double rhythm of receiving and giving. But the two moments of his rhythm, as produced by nature, are not viewed indifferently by culture. The first stage, that of receiving, as expressed through biological kinship, finds culture powerless, for a child's heredity is integrally inscribed in the genes transmitted by the parents; whatever they are, such will be the child. The transitory effect of the environment can leave its mark, but cannot make his permanent independently of changes in this environment. But for the moment let us consider marriage, which nature requires just as urgently as descent, if not in the same way or to the same extent. In the first instance, only the fact of marriage is required, but not, within specific limits, its determination. Nature assigns to each individual determinants transmitted by those who are in fact his parents, but it has nothing to do with deciding who these parents will be. Consequently, from the point of view of nature heredity is doubly necessary, firstly as a law – there is no spontaneous genera-

¹ Firth, 1936, p. 265.

tion – and secondly as a specification of the law, for nature not only says that one must have parents, but that one will be like them. As regards marriage, however, nature is satisfied with affirming the law, but is indifferent to its contents. If the relationship between parents and children is strictly determined by the nature of the parents, the relationship between male and female is left entirely to chance and probability. Thus, mutations aside, nature contains one solitary principle of indetermination, revealed in the arbitrariness of marriage. If, in keeping with the evidence, nature is acknowledged as being historically anterior to culture, it can be only through the possibilities left open by nature that culture has been able to place its stamp upon nature and introduce its own requirements without any discontinuity. Culture yields to the inevitability of biological heredity. Eugenics itself can barely claim to manipulate this irreducible fact while respecting its preconditions. But culture, although it is powerless before descent, becomes aware of its rights, and of itself, with the completely different phenomenon of marriage, in which nature for once has not already had the last word. There only, but there finally culture can and must, under pain of not existing, firmly declare 'Me first', and tell nature, 'You go no further'.

For much deeper reasons than already given, we are opposed to those concepts, such as held by Westermarck and Havelock Ellis, which credit nature with a principle of determination, even a negative one, for marriage. Whatever the uncertainties regarding the sexual habits of the great apes, and the monogamous or polygamous character of the gorilla and chimpanzee family, it is certain that these great anthropoids practise no sexual discrimination whatever against their near relatives. On the other hand, Hamilton's observations establish that sexual familiarity lessens desire even among the Macaques.¹ Either there is no link, therefore, between the two phenomena, or, in man, the transition from familiarity to aversion, regarded by Westermarck as the true origin of the prohibition, is accompanied by additional characteristics. How can this peculiarity be explained if, *ex hypothesi*, the intervention of any step of an intellectual, i.e., cultural, origin has been excluded? The supposed aversion would have to be seen as a specific phenomenon without any sign of corresponding physiological mechanisms. We consider that if this aversion were a natural phenomenon, its appearance would have been anterior or at least external to culture, and unaffected by it. It would be useless to wonder in what way or by what mechanisms the articulation of culture with nature, without which there could be no continuity between the two orders, was brought about. This problem becomes clear when nature's indifference to the modalities of relations between the sexes is acknowledged, an indifference witnessed to by the entire study of animal life, for it is precisely alliance that is the hinge, or more exactly the notch where the hinge might be fixed. Nature imposes alliance without determining it, and culture no sooner receives it than it defines its modalities.

¹ Miller, 1931, p. 392.

The apparent contradiction between the regulatory character of the prohibition and its universality is thus resolved. The universality merely expresses the fact that culture has at all times and at all places filled this empty form, as a bubbling spring first fills the depressions surrounding its source. For the moment, let it be enough to state that the content with which culture has filled it is the rule, the permanent and general substance of culture, without asking yet why this rule exhibits the general characteristic of prohibiting certain degrees of kinship, and why this general characteristic seems so curiously varied.

11

The *fact of being a rule*, completely independent of its modalities, is indeed the very essence of the incest prohibition. If nature leaves marriage to chance and the arbitrary, it is impossible for culture not to introduce some sort of order where there is none. The prime rôle of culture is to ensure the group's existence as a group, and consequently, in this domain as in all others, to replace chance by organization.¹ The prohibition of incest is a certain form, and even highly varied forms, of intervention. But it is intervention over and above anything else; even more exactly, it is *the* intervention.

This problem of intervention is not raised just in this particular case. It is raised, and resolved in the affirmative, every time the group is faced with the insufficiency or the risky distribution of a valuable of fundamental importance. Certain forms of rationing are new to our society and arouse surprise in minds cast in the traditions of economic liberalism. Thus we are prompted to see collective intervention, when it affects commodities vital to our way of life, as a bold and somewhat scandalous innovation. Because the control of distribution and consumption affects gasoline, we readily think that its formulation was only contemporaneous with the motor-car. But nothing is less true. 'The system of the scarce product' constitutes an extremely general model. In this and many other cases these periods of crisis, to which until recently our society was so unaccustomed, merely re-establish, in a crucial form, a state of affairs regarded as virtually normal in primitive society. Thus, 'the system of the scarce product', as expressed in collective measures of control, is much less an innovation, due to modern conditions of warfare and the worldwide nature of our economy, than the resurgence of a set of procedures which are familiar to primitive societies and necessary to the group if its coherence is not to be continually compromised.

It is impossible to approach the study of marriage prohibitions if it is not thoroughly understood from the beginning that such facts are in no way exceptional, but represent a particular application, within a given field, of principles and methods encountered whenever the physical or spiritual existence of the group is at stake. The group controls the distribution not only of women, but of a whole collection of valuables. Food, the most

¹ Porteus has clearly seen this point for Australia: Porteus, 1931, p. 269.

easily observed of these, is more than just the most vital commodity it really is, for between it and women there is a whole system of real and symbolic relationships, whose true nature is only gradually emerging, but which, when even superficially understood, are enough to establish this connexion. Thurnwald tells us that in Buin women feed the pigs, relatives lend them to one another, and the villages exchange them for women.¹ This continuity is possible only because it remains within the sphere of speculation. Primitive thought unanimously proclaims that 'food is . . . something that has to be shared'.² But this is because, from season to season, the native lives in accordance with the double rhythm of abundance and famine, passing 'through the whole range of sensations from inanition to repletion'.³ From one set of conditions to another, from 'the hungry months' to 'the months of plenty', the change is brutal and complete.⁴ These observations are not just true for Africa. Among the Svanetes of the Caucasus, 'if some family decides to kill a bullock or cow, or to sacrifice several dozen sheep, the neighbours come from all around . . . Having eaten, the Svanetes will fast for weeks, content to swallow down a little flour mixed with water. Then comes another feast . . .'⁵ In view of this radical uncertainty, which might be illustrated by examples the world over, it is not unusual that primitive thought should be incapable of regarding food 'as something which could be procured, owned, and consumed by one individual alone. In childhood, or in subsequent dependent positions, it must be supplied by elders; throughout life it must be shared with contemporaries.'⁶ This sharing follows rules which are interesting to consider because they reflect, and also specify, the structure of the familial and social group.

The Eskimo hunter of Hudson Bay 'who first strikes a walrus receives the tusks and one of the fore-quarters. The person who first comes to his assistance receives the other fore-quarter; the next man, the neck and head; the following, the belly; and each of the next two, one of the hind-quarters.'⁷ But in times of scarcity, all rights of distribution are suspended, and the kill is regarded as the common possession of the community as a whole.

Another section of this work will describe the matrimonial organization of certain Burmese peoples. The reader need only refer to this section⁸ to comprehend the extent to which the native mind sees matrimonial and economic exchanges as forming an integral part of a basic system of reciprocity. The methods for distributing meat in this part of the world are no less ingenious than for the distribution of women. These methods for distributing meat have been carefully described by Stevenson.⁹ The recipient groups vary according to the importance of the feast, and those who receive meat during the *tsawnlam* feasts are not the same as those taking part in the hunting

¹ Thurnwald, 1934, pp. 119-41.

² *ibid.* 1932, p. 165.

³ Kowalewsky, 1890a, p. 53.

⁴ Boas, 1901, p. 116.

⁵ Stevenson, 1937, pp. 15-23.

⁶ Richards, 1939, p. 197.

⁷ *ibid.*; Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 83.

⁸ Richards, 1939, pp. 199-200.

⁹ Pt. II, chs. XV and XVI.

or war dances. The system of obligations is again modified at the *Ruak hnah*, *Khan Tseh* and *Pual thawn* funeral feasts:

Recipients	<i>Khuang tsawi</i> feast	Animals killed in the hunt	Funerals
Father	+	+	
Brothers (class.)	+	+	+
Sisters	+ (6)	+ (1)	+ (3)
Mother's brother	+	+	+
Wife's brother	+	+	+
Ego (feast-giver, shooter of game, or heir of deceased)	+	+	+
<i>Rual</i>	+	+	+
Headman	+	+	+
Blacksmith	+	+	+
Gun-owner		+	
Beaters		+	
Previous givers of feasts	+		
<i>Sangsuan</i>		+	
Workers (at feasts)	+	+	+
Assistant (at feasts)	+		
Owner of <i>Khuang</i> bamboo	+		

Curiously similar rules have been described for Samoa.¹

In the present example, three buffalo (*bos frontalis*) are sacrificed for the *Khuang tsawi* feast, and are cut up in the following manner (Fig. 1).

The distribution is made within the limits of the kinship group (Fig. 2).

Pa and *nau* receive three *alu* and three *amifi* (the heads to the closest relatives, and the joints to the more distant).

Farnu ngai get one *akawng* each.

Hlam hlaw farnu get one *ahnawi* each.

Nupu and *papu* share the *pasa*, or entrails.

Rual (ritual friends) get one *azang* each.

The assistants, the headman, the blacksmiths, and so on, get an equal portion from the distribution.

These rules and those determining the distribution of the bride-price are not formally of the same type, but are organically connected. There are at least two indications of this. A man is always paired with one of his sisters who is called his *ruang pawn farnu*, 'body-paired sister', whose bride-price he receives, and whose husband's *nupu* he becomes. On the other hand, the generosity expended in the feasts has the effect of raising the price which may be demanded for the marriage of the daughter.²

¹ Buck, 1930, pp. 119-27.

² Stevenson, 1937, pp. 22, 27. Other schemes for sharing may be found in Shirokogoroff, 1935, p. 220, and Lévi-Strauss, 1948a, fig. 17.

The organized distribution of alimentary products was apparently formerly applied by the Kaffirs to vegetable foodstuffs and milk as well as to meat. But even today 'the division of an ox upon the central place of the village, or

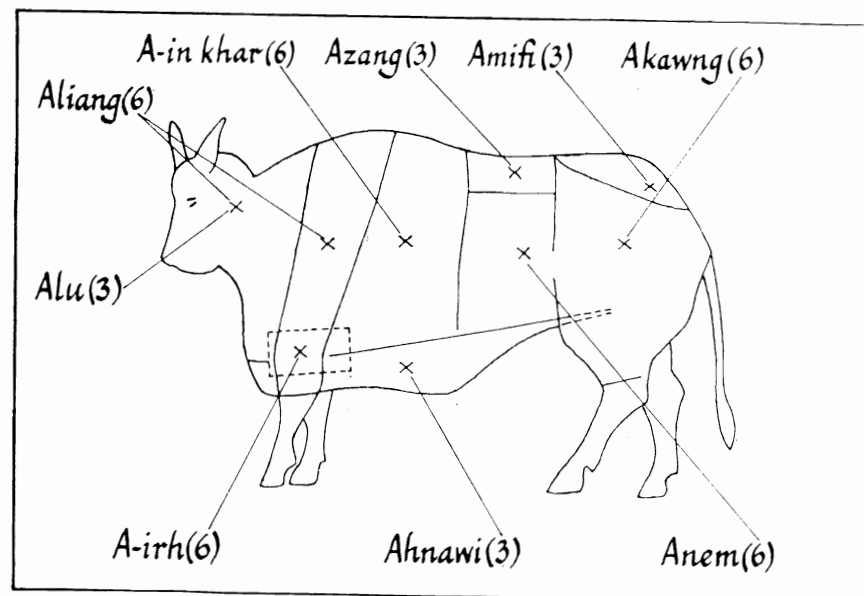


Fig. 1. Ceremonial carving-up of a buffalo in Burma. (After Stevenson, 1937, p. 19.)

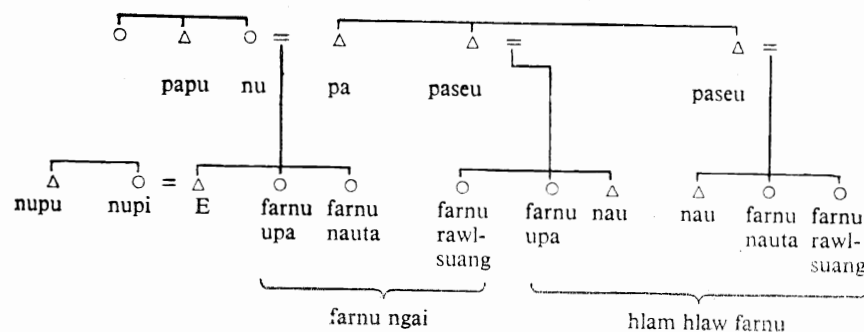


Fig. 2. Distribution of meat among relatives.

of the quarry slain in the hunt, must give young children a dramatic demonstration of the functions of kinship, and of the series of reciprocal obligations so entailed.¹ The Thonga assign a hind-leg to the elder brother, a fore-leg to the younger brother, the other two limbs to the eldest sons, the heart and

¹ Richards, 1932, p. 79. Similarly, having recalled that any activity of an Australian tribe is founded on a network of personal relationships established on the basis of a genealogical system, Radcliffe-Brown, 1940, p. 7, adds: 'When an Australian blackfellow goes hunting he provides meat, not only for himself, but for his wife and children and also for other

kidneys to the wives, the tail and the rump to the relatives-in-law, and a piece of the loins to the maternal uncle. In certain regions of East Africa, the rules are infinitely more complicated since they vary for oxen, sheep or goats. In addition to the relatives, the headman and those who helped in getting the beast have the right to a portion. This distribution is made less ostensibly than the division in the village square whose end is 'that those who are eating, and those who are not, may be seen'.¹ Authority within the family is in fact based on 'the possession and control of food'.²

Finally, the same observer's description of the division of a great antelope among twenty-two adults and forty-seven children must be quoted:

'During the division of the animal the excitement was intense . . . Before the meal there was a buzz of expectation. Women ground extra flour with enthusiasm, "Because we have so much meat to eat with it" . . . Directly after the meal the women gathered near me talking in loud voices. They kept describing with ecstasy how full they felt . . . Another old lady cried light-heartedly, hitting her stomach, "I have been turned into a young girl again, my heart is so light . . ."'³

For some years we have doubtless become more aware of the dramatic import of such situations. In any case, the reader inclined to appraise them in the perspective of our traditional culture, which likes to contrast the pathos of unhappy love and the comedy of the full stomach, cannot be too carefully forewarned. In the great majority of human societies, the two problems are set on the same plane, since, with love as with food, nature presents man with the same risk. The lot of the satiated man is just as liable to excite emotion, and is just as much an excuse for lyrical expression, as the lot of the loved man. Moreover, primitive experience asserts the continuity between organic sensations and spiritual experiences. Food is completely riddled with signs and dangers. 'Warmth' can be the common denominator of states as different for us as anger, love, or repletion. Repletion, in its turn, hinders communications with the supernatural world.⁴

There is no need to call upon the matrimonial vocabulary of Great Russia, where the groom was called the 'merchant' and the bride, the 'merchandise'⁵ for the likening of women to commodities, not only scarce but essential to the life of the group, to be acknowledged. The comparison seems less shocking if Richards's analyses of the systems of psycho-physiological equivalences in native thought are kept in mind: 'Food is the source of some of his most

¹ Richards, 1932, p. 80.

² *ibid.* p. 81.

³ *ibid.* 1939, pp. 55-9.

⁴ *ibid.* 1932, p. 162.

⁵ Kowalewsky, 1890*b*, p. 480. The same symbolism is to be found among the Christians of Mosul where the marriage proposal is stylized: 'Have you any merchandise to sell us? . . . Upon my word, yours is excellent merchandise! We shall buy it.' Kyriakos, 1911, p. 775.

relatives to whom it is his duty to give meat when he has it.' Elkin, 1934, p. 9, uses much the same terms: 'Kinship rules also lie at the basis of the distribution of gifts; this explains why a native shares his earnings with others.'

intense emotions, provides the basis for some of his most abstract ideas, and the metaphors of his religious life . . . To the primitive man it may come to symbolize some of his highest spiritual experiences, and express his most significant social ties.¹

Let us first examine the feature of growing scarcity. There is a biological equilibrium between male and female births. Consequently, except in societies where this equilibrium is modified by customs, every male should have a very good chance of obtaining a wife. In such circumstances, is it possible to speak of women as a scarce commodity requiring collective intervention for its distribution? It is difficult to answer this question without posing the problem of polygamy, any discussion of which would go too far beyond the bounds of this work. We shall confine ourselves, therefore, to a few rapid considerations which will be less a demonstration than a brief indication of what seems to be the soundest position in this matter. For some years, the attention of anthropologists, especially those attracted by the diffusionist interpretation, has been drawn to the fact that monogamy seems to predominate in those societies which otherwise appear to be at the most primitive economic and technical level. From this and similar observations, these anthropologists have drawn more or less hazardous conclusions. According to Father Schmidt and his students, these facts must be seen as the sign of man's greater purity in the archaic stages of his social existence. According to Perry and Elliot Smith, they attest to the existence of a sort of Golden Age before the discovery of civilization. We believe that each author observed the facts correctly, but that there is a different conclusion to be drawn. At these archaic levels, it is the difficulties of daily existence, and the obstacle they present to the formation of economic privileges (which, in more highly evolved societies, are easily recognized as still providing the substructure of polygamy), which limit the cornering of women for the benefit of a few. Purity of soul, in the Vienna School sense, is never a factor in what might more readily be called a form of abortive polygamy rather than monogamy, for, in these societies as well as in those which favourably sanction polygamous unions, and in our own, the tendency is towards a multiplicity of wives. It was earlier indicated that the contradictory nature of the information about the sexual habits of the great apes does not allow any resolution, on the animal plane, of the problem of whether polygamous tendencies are innate or acquired. Social and biological observation combine to suggest that, in man, these tendencies are natural and universal, and that only limitations born of the environment and culture are responsible for their suppression.² Consequently, to our eyes, monogamy is not a positive institution, but merely incorporates the limit of polygamy in societies where, for highly varied reasons, economic and sexual competition reaches an acute form. The very small degree of social unity in the most primitive societies accounts very well for these particular characteristics.

¹ Richards, 1932, pp. 173-4.

² Miller, 1931, p. 392.

Even in these societies, moreover, monogamy is not a general rule. The Nambikwara, semi-nomads of western Brazil, who live for most of the year by collecting and gathering, sanction polygamy for their headmen and sorcerers. The securing of two, three or four wives by one or two important persons in a band of sometimes less than twenty people necessarily obliges their companions to be celibate. This privilege by itself is sufficient to upset the natural equilibrium of the sexes, since male adolescents occasionally can no longer find wives available from among the women of their own generation. Whatever the solution given to the problem – homosexuality among the Nambikwara, fraternal polyandry among their northern neighbours, the Gupf-Cawahib – the growing scarcity of wives does not appear less serious a problem in a society however predominately monogamous it might be.¹ But even in a strictly monogamous society, the considerations of the previous paragraph still retain their validity. This deep polygamous tendency, which exists among all men, always makes the number of available women seem insufficient. Let us add that, even if there were as many women as men, these women would not all be equally desirable – giving this term a broader meaning than its usual erotic connotation – and that, by definition (as Hume has judiciously remarked in a celebrated essay²), the most desirable women must form a minority. Hence, the demand for women is in actual fact, or to all intents and purposes, always in a state of disequilibrium and tension.

Considerations drawn exclusively from the study of relations between the sexes in our society could not reveal the truly tragic nature of this disequilibrium in primitive societies. Its sexual implications are secondary. Indeed, primitive society, even more than our own, provides many ways of overcoming this aspect of the problem. Homosexuality in some groups, polyandry and wife-lending in others, and finally, almost everywhere, the extreme freedom of premarital relations would prevent adolescents from experiencing any discomfort while waiting for a wife, if the wife's function were limited to sexual gratification. But, as often noted, in most primitive societies (and also, but to a lesser extent, in the rural classes of our own society) marriage is of an entirely different importance, not erotic, but economic. In our society, the difference between the economic status of the married man and the unmarried man amounts almost solely to the fact that the bachelor has to replace his wardrobe more frequently. The situation is altogether different in groups where the satisfaction of economic needs rests wholly on the conjugal society and the division of labour between the sexes. Not only do man and wife have different technical specializations, one depending on the other for the manufacture of objects necessary for their daily tasks, but they are each employed in producing different foodstuffs. Accordingly, a complete, and above all regular, food supply indeed depends on that 'pro-

¹ Lévi-Strauss, 1948a, and 1948b.

² Hume, 1886, p. 154. Likewise, 'If all were excellent here below, then there would be nothing excellent', Diderot, 1935, p. 199.

duction cooperative', the household. The Pygmies, who consider women and children as the most valuable of the active part of the family group, say that 'the more women available the more food'.¹ Likewise, Hottentot women, during the marriage ceremony, chorus the praise of the groom and of the men who, like him, are looking for a wife, 'since today they have enough to eat'.²

It would be almost impossible for an individual by himself to survive, especially at the most primitive levels, where hunting and gardening, as well as collecting and gathering, are made hazardous by the harshness of the geographical environment and the rudimentary nature of techniques. One of the deepest impressions which I retain from my first experiences in the field was the sight, in a central Brazilian native village, of a young man crouching for hours upon end in the corner of a hut, dismal, ill-cared for, fearfully thin, and seemingly in the most complete state of dejection. I observed him for several days. He rarely went out, except to go hunting by himself, and when the family meals began around the fires, he would as often as not have gone without if a female relative had not occasionally set a little food at his side, which he ate in silence. Intrigued by this strange fate, I finally asked who this person was, thinking that he suffered from some serious illness; my suppositions were laughed at and I was told, 'He is a bachelor.' This was indeed the sole reason for the apparent curse. This example could be multiplied many times. Denied food after bad hunting or fishing expeditions when the fruits of the women's collecting and gathering, and sometimes their gardening, provide the only meal there is, the wretched bachelor is a characteristic sight in native society. But the actual victim is not the only person involved in this scarcely tolerable situation. The relatives or friends on whom he depends in such cases for his subsistence are testy in suffering his mute anxiety, for, from the combined efforts of both husband and wife, a family often barely derives enough to avoid death by starvation. Hence, in such societies it is no exaggeration to say that marriage is of vital importance for every individual, being, as he is, doubly concerned, not only to find a wife for himself but also to prevent those two calamities of primitive society from occurring in his group, namely, the bachelor and the orphan.

We apologize for amassing a number of quotations and comments here, but it is essential to illustrate if not the generality of these attitudes, which doubtless no one would contest, then rather the vehemence and conviction of their expression in primitive thought everywhere. 'Among these Indians', write Colbacchini and Albisetti of the Bororo, where the observation contained in the previous paragraph was made, 'celibacy does not exist, and it is not even imagined, for its possibility would never be admitted.'³ Likewise, Schebesta says, 'the Pygmy despises and jeers at bachelors as abnormal creatures.'⁴ Radcliffe-Brown notes: 'One man was mentioned to me as being a

¹ Schebesta, 1933, p. 128 and 1936, pp. 138–9.

² Schapera, 1930, p. 247.

³ Colbacchini and Albisetti, 1942, p. 51.

⁴ Schebesta, 1936, p. 138.

bad man because he refused to take a wife after he had reached the age when it is considered proper for a man to marry.¹ In New Guinea, 'The economic system, the traditional partition of labour between man and woman, make a community of life between the sexes a necessity. Indeed, all persons attain that state except cripples.'² 'With the Reindeer Chukchee, no man can live a tolerable life without a separate house of his own and a woman to take care of it . . . A man full-grown and unmarried is despised by the people, and in reality is looked upon as a good-for-nothing, a loungeur, a tramp, idly wandering from camp to camp'.³

Gilhodes says of the Kachin of Burma:

'As to voluntary celibacy, they seem not to have even the idea of it. It is a glory for every Kachin to marry and to have children, and a shame to die without posterity. You find nevertheless some rare old boys or old spinsters; but nearly always they are half-witted people or of an impossible temper, and at their death they are given a ridiculous burial.'⁴

Again:

'Some rare cases, however, are found of old bachelors and old spinsters. In their lifetime they are ashamed of their condition and at their death they inspire fear chiefly to the young . . . Young men and young girls, for fear of not being able to settle themselves in the future, take no part . . . in the funeral meals; the ceremonies are chiefly done by the old men and women and in a somewhat ridiculous manner . . . The dances are done inside out.'⁵

Let us conclude this brief survey with a report from the Orient. 'If a man has no wife, there will be no Paradise for him hereafter and no Paradise on earth' . . . If woman had not been created, there would have been no sun and no moon, no agriculture and no fire.'⁶ Like the eastern Jews and the ancient Babylonians, the Mandaean make celibacy a sin.⁷ The unmarried of both sexes (and particularly monks and nuns) are given up defenceless to the dealings of demons 'and so [evil] spirits and goblins proceed from them which plague mankind'.⁸ The Navaho Indians share the same theory. Even in the first three of the inferior Four Worlds, the distinction of the sexes and their relationships is maintained, so difficult do the natives find it to imagine a form of existence, be it the lowest and most miserable, which did not possess this benefit. But the sexes are separated in the fourth world, and monsters are the fruit of the masturbation to which each sex is reduced.⁹

There are no doubt several exceptions to this general attitude. Celibacy seems to be of some frequency in Polynesia,¹⁰ perhaps because in this part of

the world the production of food is not a critical problem. Elsewhere, as among the Karen of Burma and the Tungus,¹ it is rather a consequence of the rigour with which these people apply their rules of exogamy. When the prescribed spouse is subject to a strict determination, marriage becomes impossible without there being a relative in exactly the required position. In this last case at least, the exception proves the rule.

What would happen, then, if the principle of collective intervention expressed purely formally by the rule prohibiting incest – without regard to particular circumstances – did not exist? It might be expected that privileges would arise in that natural aggregation called the family, by reason of the greater intimacy of its inter-individual contacts, and by the lack of any social rule tending to limit this family and to establish equilibrium in it. We are not suggesting that every family would automatically maintain a monopoly of its women. This would be to assert the institutional priority of the family over the group, a supposition far from our mind. We merely postulate, without posing the question of the historical precedence of the one over the other, that the specific viscosity of the family aggregation would act in this direction, and that the combined results would confirm this action. As has been shown, such an eventuality is incompatible with the vital demands not only of primitive society but of society in general.

¹ Bogoras, 1904–9, p. 570; Frazer, 1919, vol. II, p. 138.

¹ Radcliffe-Brown, 1933, pp. 50–1.

³ Bogoras, 1904–9, p. 569.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 277.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 65.

² Thurnwald, 1916, pp. 383–4.

⁴ Gilhodes, 1922, p. 225.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 17.

¹⁰ Firth, 1936, *passim*.

⁶ Drower, 1937, p. 59.

⁹ Reichard, n.d., p. 662.

CHAPTER IV

Endogamy and Exogamy

I

By establishing a general rule of obedience, whatever this rule may be, the group asserts its jural authority over what it legitimately considers an essential valuable. It refuses to sanction the natural inequality of the distribution of the sexes within the family, and on the only possible basis it institutes freedom of access for every individual to the women of the group. This basis is, in short, that neither fraternity nor paternity can be put forward as claims to a wife, but that the sole validity of these claims lies in the fact that all men are in equal competition for all women, their respective relationships being defined in terms of the group, and not the family.

This rule also has advantages for individuals, since, by obliging them to renounce a limited or very restricted share in the women immediately available, it gives everybody a claim to a number of women whose availability, it is true, is checked by the demands of custom, but a number which theoretically is as large as possible and is the same for everyone. If it is objected that such reasoning is too abstract and artificial to have occurred at a very primitive human level, it is sufficient to note that the result, which is all that counts, does not suppose any formal reasoning but simply the spontaneous resolution of those psycho-social pressures which are the immediate facts of collective life. In non-crystallized forms of social life, such as communities arising spontaneously out of accidental circumstances (bombardments, earthquakes, concentration camps, children's gangs, and so on), which still await psychological investigation – and are so rich in both elemental and universal processes – it is soon learnt that the perception of another's envy, the fear of violent dispossession, the distress resulting from collective hostility, and so on, can wholly inhibit the enjoyment of a privilege. The renunciation of a privilege need not be explained by the intervention of authority, nor as being calculated, but may be merely the resolution of an emotional conflict, the pattern of which has already been observed in the animal kingdom.¹

Even when thus corrected, this method of posing the problem remains

¹ Zuckerman, 1932; Köhler, 1928, p. 88 et seq., 300–2; Yerkes, 1935, ch. 21; Nissen and Crawford, 1936, pp. 383–419.

approximate and provisional. We shall have an opportunity to specify and elaborate upon it later. However, even in this approximate form, it is sufficient to show that there is no need to assume an apprenticeship of thousands of years to understand that in the course of history savage peoples have clearly and constantly been faced with the simple and brutal choice, powerfully expressed by Tylor, 'between marrying-out and being killed out'.¹

But for the demonstration to be effective, it must extend to every member of the group. It is this condition, in a most developed form, of which the prohibition of incest provides the ineluctable expression. Marriage is an eternal triangle, not just in vaudeville sketches, but at all times, and in all places, and by definition. Because women have an essential value in group life, the group necessarily intervenes in every marriage. It does this in two ways: firstly in the form of the 'rival', who, through the agency of the group, asserts that he had the same right of access as the husband, a right upon which the union is conditional and which must be shown to have been respected; and secondly through the group as a group, which asserts that the relationship which makes the marriage possible must be social, that is, defined in group terms and not in the natural terms having all the consequences incompatible with collective life which have already been indicated. Considered in its purely formal aspect, the prohibition of incest is thus only the group's assertion that where relationships between the sexes are concerned, *a person cannot do just what he pleases*. The positive aspect of the prohibition is to initiate organization.

Doubtless the objection will be made that in no way does the prohibition of incest fulfil any organizing function. Is it not true that in certain areas of Australia and Melanesia this prohibition is adapted to a virtual monopoly of the women by the old men, and, more generally, to polygamy, the results of which we ourselves have emphasized?

But these 'advantages', if one wishes to see them as such, are not unilateral, for, on the contrary, analysis shows that they always entail a positive counterpart. Let us return to the example cited above of the Nambikwara chief who jeopardizes the demographic equilibrium of his little band by monopolizing several women, who would normally have made as many monogamous wives for men of the following generation. It would be arbitrary to isolate the institution from its context. The chief of the band bears heavy responsibilities, since the group relies on him entirely to fix the itinerary for its nomadic life, to choose the camping places, to know every inch of the territory and the natural resources to be found there during each season, to determine the position and movement of hostile bands, to negotiate or fight with them, as the occasion arises, and finally, to organize sufficient reserves of arms and everyday objects so that everyone has what he needs. Without his polygamous wives, who are companions rather than wives, freed by their social status from the constraints of their sex, and always ready

¹ Tylor, 1889, p. 267.

to accompany and assist him in his reconnaissances, agricultural work or handicrafts, the chief could not face up to all his responsibilities. His plurality of wives, accordingly, is both the reward for and the instrument of power.

Let us push the analysis a little further. If the Nambikwara had combined their rule of bilateral cross-cousin marriage¹ with a strict monogamy there would be a perfectly simple system of reciprocity, both quantitatively, since the system would guarantee roughly a wife for every man, and qualitatively, since this general guarantee would result in a network of reciprocal obligations based on individual kinship relationships. But the polygamous privilege of the chief upsets this ideal formula. It results in an otherwise non-existent element of insecurity for every individual. Where, then, did this privilege originate, and what is its significance? By recognizing the privilege, the group has exchanged the *elements of individual security* which accompany the rule of monogamy for a *collective security* arising out of political organization. Each man receives the daughter or the sister of another man as his wife. The chief receives several wives from the group. In exchange, he gives a guarantee against want and danger, certainly not to the particular individuals whose sisters or daughters he has married, and not even to those perhaps condemned for ever to celibacy by the exercise of his polygamous right, but to the group as a group, for it is the latter which has suspended the common law in his favour.²

Polygamy, therefore, does not run counter to the demand for an equitable distribution of women. It merely superimposes one rule of distribution upon another. In fact, monogamy and polygamy correspond to two types of complementary relationship. On the one hand, there are the systems of prestations and counter-prestations which bind together the individual members of the group, and on the other hand, there are the systems of prestations and counter-prestations which bind together the group as a whole and its chief. This parallelism can become so transparent that in the Trobriand Islands, for example, the chief, who receives a wife from each of the sub-clans, is regarded as a sort of 'universal brother-in-law'. Political allegiance and the presentation of tribute are no more than just a particular case of that special relationship which in this part of the world places the wife's brother under obligation to his sister's husband.³

Besides, so far only the most summary aspect of the prohibition of incest has been considered, that is, from the viewpoint of a rule as a rule. Considered from this angle, the prohibition does not yet provide a solution to the problem. It is merely a preliminary measure, useless in itself, but necessary for future development. In short, the prohibition of incest asserts that natural distribution should not be the basis of social practice regarding women. What this basis should be still remains to be determined. To borrow an expression familiar to modern regulation (but eternal also in some ways) of

¹ For the definition of this marriage rule and its theoretical study, see below, ch. IX.

² Lévi-Strauss, 1944, pp. 16-32.

³ Malinowski, 1929, pp. 131-32.

the 'scarce product', the first logical end of the incest prohibition is 'to freeze' women within the family, so that their distribution, or the competition for them, is within the group, and under group and not private control. So far this has been the only aspect of the prohibition examined. But it can also be seen to be the one primordial aspect coextensive with the whole prohibition. Passing from the study of the rule as a rule to the study of its most general characteristics, it now has to be shown how the transition from an originally negative rule to a collection of entirely different stipulations was accomplished.

II

Considered as a prohibition, the prohibition of incest merely affirms, in a field vital to the group's survival, the pre-eminence of the social over the natural, the collective over the individual, organization over the arbitrary. But even at this point in the analysis, the converse of this ostensibly negative rule has already appeared. When considered from this new point of view, the prohibition of incest appears so laden with positive modalities that this over-determination is itself an immediate problem.

In point of fact, marriage rules do not always merely prohibit a kinship circle, but occasionally also fix one within which marriage must necessarily take place, under pain of the same scandal as would result if the prohibition itself were violated. There are two cases to be distinguished here: on the one hand endogamy, or the obligation to marry within an objectively defined group; and on the other, preferential union, or the obligation to choose as spouse an individual who is related to Ego in some particular way. It is difficult to make this distinction in classificatory kinship systems, for all individuals in a defined kinship relationship to each other, or to a given subject, fall into one class, and consequently it is possible to pass from preferential union to endogamy, properly so called, without any marked change. Any system of marriage between cross-cousins could thus be interpreted as endogamous if all the parallel cousins were designated by one term, and all the cross-cousins by another. This double appellation could hold good even after the disappearance of the marriage system considered, and consequently an exogamous system *par excellence* would make way for a new system, which, on the contrary, would offer all the appearances of endogamy. This artificial conversion of genuine exogamous systems into ostensibly endogamous systems may be seen in the field, and the difficulties it raises in the interpretation of certain Australian systems will be seen later.¹

It is advisable then to distinguish between two different types of endogamy. One is merely the reverse of a rule of exogamy and is explicable only in terms of this rule; the other – or true endogamy – is not an aspect of exogamy but is always found along with the latter, although not in the same regard, but simply in connexion with it. From this point of view, any society is both

¹ cf. ch. XIII.

exogamous and endogamous. Thus among the Australian aborigines the clan is exogamous, but the tribe is endogamous, while modern American society combines a family exogamy, which is rigid for the first degree but flexible for the second or third degrees onwards, with a racial endogamy, which is rigid or flexible according to the particular State.¹ But contrary to the hypothesis examined above, endogamy and exogamy are not here complementary institutions and they could appear symmetrical only from a formal point of view. True endogamy is merely the refusal to recognize the possibility of marriage beyond the limits of the human community. The definitions of this community are many and varied, depending on the philosophy of the group considered. A very great number of primitive tribes simply refer to themselves by the term for 'men' in their language, showing that in their eyes an essential characteristic of man disappears outside the limits of the group. Thus the Eskimos of Norton Sound describe themselves exclusively as the 'excellent people', or more exactly as the 'complete people', and reserve the epithet 'nit' to describe neighbouring peoples.² The generality of the attitude lends some colour of truth to Gobineau's hypothesis, according to which the proliferation of the fantastic beings of folklore – dwarfs, giants, monsters, and so on – is to be explained less by a rich imagination than by the inability of fellow-citizens to conceive of strangers in the same way as themselves. Certain Brazilian tribes identified the first black slaves imported to America as 'earth monkeys', in comparison with the arboreal species which was the only kind known to them. When certain Melanesian peoples were asked for the first time who they were, they replied: "Men," meaning that they were not demons or ghosts, but living men; and they did so because they did not believe their visitors to be men, but rather ghosts themselves, or demons, or spirits belonging to the sea.³ On their arrival in the New Hebrides, the Europeans were at first taken to be ghosts, and were so named. Their clothes were called 'ghost skins' and their cats 'the ghosts' rats'.⁴ Lévy-Bruhl has collected other accounts of no less significance, such as horses taken for their riders' mothers, since they carried them on their backs, in contrast with missionaries who were called lions, because of their fair beards, and so on.⁵

In all these cases, it is merely a question of knowing how far to extend the logical connotation of the idea of community, which is itself dependent upon the effective solidarity of the group. In Dobu, the white man is considered as 'another kind', not really a human being in the native sense of the word, but as a being with different qualities. These differences, however, do not extend to yams, which are regarded as people. The order of affinities is therefore: the native group, *tomot*; yams, which reproduce in the same way as the group and allow the group to survive; and finally, white men, who are set completely outside the community. All this is because the group's continuity depends on the continuity of the vegetable lines. There are masculine

¹ Johnson, 1943.

² Rink, 1887, p. 333.

³ Codrington, 1891, p. 21.

⁴ Deacon, 1934, p. 637; Radcliffe-Brown, 1933, p. 138.

⁵ Lévy-Bruhl, 1935, pp. 59–60.

and feminine gardens, each descended from ancestral seed, hereditarily transmitted from the mother's brother to the sister's son or daughter. If a 'race' of seeds is lost, the human line is in jeopardy, for the woman will not find a husband, nor will she raise children to succeed to her miserable inheritance and share the contempt attached to her destitution. A person deprived of his hereditary seeds cannot count upon charity, nor upon grain borrowed from outside: 'I knew of several women in this position. They were thieves, or fishers, sago workers and beggars.'¹ Thus yams are real persons, for to be without them is to be orphaned. When all is said and done, the economic and social structure of the group does justify the restrictive definition of itself as a community of tubers and cultivators. But let us not be deceived. The strict endogamy of the Mormons is based on formally analogous considerations, even although they are spiritual. If a girl cannot find a partner possessing the true faith, it is better for her to marry her father, for it is the possession of this faith which is the prime essential in their definition of a human being.²

Similar distinctions are found also in groups in which rank and fortune are rated highly. But in all these cases, endogamy is merely the expression of a conceptual limit and of a negative reality. It is only in the exceptional case of highly differentiated societies that this negative form can take on a positive aspect, viz., as a deliberate calculation to maintain certain social or economic privileges within the group. Yet this situation is still more the result of a concept of endogamy than its locus of origin. Generally, 'true' endogamy simply represents the exclusion of marriage outside the culture, which itself is conceived of in all sorts of ways, sometimes narrowly, sometimes broadly. The apparently positive formula of being obliged to marry within a group defined by certain concrete characteristics (such as name, language, race, religion, and so on) thus merely expresses a limit, socially conditioned, to the capacity for generalization. Beyond the precise forms just alluded to, the expression of the formula in our society is diffuse, since the proportion of marriages between cousins is known to be greater in general than would be the case if marriage were contracted at random.³

By contrast, the other form of endogamy previously distinguished might be called 'functional endogamy', since it is only a function of exogamy, or the counterpart of a negative rule. In cross-cousin marriage, for example, the class of possible spouses is never an exogamous category, in spite of the appearances emphasized earlier. Cross-cousins are not so much relatives who must intermarry, as they are the first persons among relatives between whom marriage is possible once parallel cousins are classified as brothers and sisters. This vital characteristic has often been misunderstood, for in certain cases cross-cousin marriage is not only sanctioned but obligatory. When

¹ Fortune, 1932, pp. 69–74, 102.

² 'Der sexuelle Anteil an der Theologie der Mormonen', 1914.

³ Hogben, 1931, p. 152.

possible it is obligatory because it provides the simplest conceivable system of reciprocity. Indeed, we shall attempt to show later that cross-cousin marriage is essentially a system of exchange. But whereas, in this case, only two marriages are required to maintain the equilibrium, a more complex and consequently more brittle cycle becomes necessary, with less likelihood of the desired result, when the kinship relationship between the spouses becomes more distant. Marriage between outsiders is a social advance (because it integrates wider groups). It is also a venture. But the best proof that the class of marriageable cross-cousins is determined simply by eliminating the class that is forbidden (so that endogamy here is clearly a function of exogamy, and not the contrary), is that there is no trouble if a potential spouse of the required degree of cousinhood is missing, for a more distant relative can be substituted. The category of possible spouses in a system of preferential marriage is never closed, for what is not prohibited is permitted, though sometimes only in a certain order and to a certain extent. Moreover, this preference is explained by the mechanism of exchanges proper to the system considered, and not by the privileged nature of a group or class.

The difference between the two forms of endogamy is particularly easy to make when the marriage rules of strongly hierarchical societies are studied. 'True' endogamy is all the more marked when the social class practising it occupies a higher rank, as in ancient Peru, the Hawaiian Islands and certain African tribes. By contrast, it is 'functional endogamy' whenever the relationship is inverted, that is, when the apparent endogamy steadily diminishes as one rises in the hierarchy. The Kenyah and the Kayan of Borneo are divided into three unequally privileged classes, and while these are normally endogamous, the highest class is subject to village exogamy.¹ Thus, as in New Zealand and Burma, exogamy is specified at the top of the social hierarchy, and is a function of the obligation of feudal families to maintain and widen their alliances. The endogamy of the lower classes is one of indifference, and not of discrimination.

Finally the case must be considered where preferential union is not directly determined by a relation of kinship but by the membership of a clan or a marriage class. Here, there are constituted groups, and would it not appear that marriage obligations which pair these groups off one with another are equivalent to forming 'true' endogamous categories, each consisting of two clans or classes practising intermarriage? But in reality, things are less different than they seem. The classes and the sub-classes of the Australian aborigines are not so much groups defined in extension as positions which are alternately or successively occupied by the members of one line of descent or by the partners in an alliance. Among the Bororo Indians, whom I studied in 1936, the situation is less clear, for marriage preferences seem to make a direct pairing of the clans and not the classes. But then it is the very temporariness of these clans, their presence in one village, their absence in another,

¹ Hose and McDougall, 1912, vol. I, pp. 71, 74.

and their possible division or subdivision into sub-clans, which enables them to elude the fixity and strict delimitation of endogamous categories. One is tempted to see the clan preferences not as an outline of 'true' endogamy but simply as a technique of adjustment to ensure matrimonial equilibrium in the group, the clan itself continually changing to suit the demands of this equilibrium.¹

The correlation between the concepts of endogamy and exogamy emerges elsewhere, and particularly clearly in the neighbouring example of the Apinayé Indians. These are divided into four exogamous groups, or *kiyé*, united by a system of preferential marriage, so that a man of *A* marries a woman of *B*, a man of *B* marries a woman of *C*, and a man of *C* marries a woman of *D*, and a man of *D* marries a woman of *A*. This appears to be what is later described as a simple system of generalized exchange,² except that here the rule of descent makes the system static, with the first result that it excludes cousins from the number of possible spouses. With regard to the *kiyé*, boys succeed to their fathers' status, and girls to their mothers'. Hence, men of *A* and women of *B* are all descended from marriages between men of *A* and women of *B*; men of *B* and women of *C* are all descended from marriages between men of *B* and women of *C*; and so on. The apparent division into four exogamous groups thus conceals a division into four endogamous groups, viz., men of *A* and women of *B*, these being related to each other, men of *B* and women of *C*, these being related, men of *C* and women of *D*, these being related, and men of *D* and women of *A*, these also being related to each other. By contrast, there is no relation of kinship between the two groups, one of male kin, the other of female kin, which go into the formation of the *kiyé*.³ Unlike Lowie,⁴ we believe that this system is not exceptional, but is merely a particular application of a general formula, which will be studied in another work, and which is more typical than it would seem.⁵ We confine ourselves here to this brief description, which is sufficient to show in a precise case that exogamous and endogamous categories have no objective existence as independent entities. Rather, they must be considered as viewpoints, or different but solidary perspectives, on a system of fundamental relationships in which each term is defined by its position within the system.

¹ Lévi-Strauss, 1936.

² cf. ch. XII.

³ Nimuendajú, 1939, p. 29 et. seq. Our interpretation is in agreement with those of Henry, 1940 and Kroeber, 1942.

⁴ Lowie, 1940, p. 468.

⁵ Williams, 1932, pp. 15-81; and chs. XXVI and XXVIII of this work. Maybury-Lewis, 1960, p. 196, refers to the above sentence as a 'startlingly specific remark', because, he says, it does not take into consideration the difference between 'descent' and 'filiation'. Is there any need to emphasize that this book is concerned exclusively with models and not with empirical realities? It is only in connexion with the latter that this distinction, rightly criticized by Leach in his controversy with Fortes, can be said to have any meaning. With all due respect to Maybury-Lewis, Williams - almost thirty years before him - had fully isolated from the Melanesian data the theoretical principle of 'parallel descent' as it exists among the Apinayé, writing, in the article cited above: 'The essence of [sex affiliation] is that male children are classed with their father's group and female children with their mother's.' Williams, 1932, p. 51.

Furthermore, in certain cases the relative reciprocity of endogamous and exogamous relationships already appears in the vocabulary. For example, the Ifugao term for 'relative-in-law', *aidu*, corresponds to a root found in every area of Indonesia with the original meaning of 'the other group' or 'outsiders', and the derivative meanings of 'enemy' or 'relative by marriage'. Likewise, in other Malay languages, *tulang*, 'all kin of the same generation' as Ego, comes to mean, on the one hand, 'aborigines' (Formosa, Buginese), 'brother and sister', 'sister', 'woman', and on the other, 'relative-in-law', or 'spouse'.¹ Compare this with the Japanese *imo* which sometimes designates the sister and sometimes the wife.² May we assert, as do Barton and Chamberlain, that the ambivalence of certain ancient terms bears witness to the former existence of consanguineous marriages? The hypothesis does not seem improbable when it is noted, as above, that ancient Japanese texts, by limiting the definition of incest to marriage with the younger sister, would seem to legitimize marriage with the older sister, as in Egypt and Samoa. The preference for marriage with the matrilineal cousin among the Batak and in other regions of Indonesia, and indications that the same system formerly existed in Japan,³ would suggest another interpretation, while not, however, excluding the previous one. Although referred to by the same term, women of Ego's generation would be distinguished as to whether they were possible or prohibited spouses. In this regard it will be noted that in the vocabulary of the Batak, the term *tulang* is applied by a man to the mother's brother and to the latter's daughter, who is the preferred spouse, while a woman addresses outsiders as 'father's sister', or as 'mother's brother',⁴ that is, the names given respectively to the clanswoman who marries elsewhere, or to the uncle whose sons a woman cannot marry.

If the most general meaning of *aidu* is 'stranger', and if its derived meanings are 'affine' and 'enemy', it is clearly obvious that these last two meanings are two distinct modalities of, or more exactly two ways of looking at, the same reality. Among the 'other groups' some are my affines, others are my enemies. They are both enemy and affine at the same time, but not for the same person. This relativist interpretation, which is clear in this particular case, can also be easily applied to the former without resorting to the hypothesis of a former marriage with the sister. It is sufficient to consider that, starting from the general meaning of *tulang* as 'girls of my generation', the latter are either 'sisters' or 'wives'. Just as a group of 'affines' is at the same time 'someone's enemy', a 'married woman' must necessarily have been, for me to have married her, 'someone's sister'.

Thus we have distinguished a 'true' endogamy, which is a class endogamy (in the logical sense, but in many of the societies practising it, in the social sense of the term class as well), and a functional endogamy, which might be called endogamy of relation, since it is merely the counterpart or positive

¹ Barton, 1941, pp. 540-9.

² Chamberlain, 1932.

³ cf. ch. XXVII.

⁴ Loeb, 1933, pp. 22, 25.

expression of exogamy and expresses the apparently negative nature of the latter.

But, as we have emphasized at the beginning of this chapter, complementary endogamy merely serves to recall to mind that the negative aspect is only the superficial aspect of the prohibition. A group within which marriage is prohibited immediately conjures up the idea of another group, with clearly defined features (the prohibition of incest joined with an exogamous system), or vague characteristics (simple prohibition without exogamy), with which marriage is merely possible, or inevitable, according to circumstances. The prohibition on the sexual use of a daughter or a sister compels them to be given in marriage to another man, and at the same time it establishes a right to the daughter or sister of this other man. In this way, every negative stipulation of the prohibition has its positive counterpart. The prohibition is tantamount to an obligation, and renunciation gives rise to a counter-claim. It can now be seen how impossible it is to consider exogamy and endogamy as institutions of the same type, as is often done. This is true only for what has been called functional endogamy, which is none other than exogamy itself seen in terms of its consequences. The comparison is only possible on condition that 'true' endogamy, a passive principle of limitation incapable of development, is excluded. By contrast, the analysis of the notion of exogamy sufficiently shows its far-reaching effects. The prohibition of incest is not merely a prohibition, as the previous chapter suggested, because in prohibiting it also orders. Like exogamy, which is its widened social application, the prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity. The woman whom one does not take, and whom one may not take, is, for that very reason, offered up. To whom is she offered? Sometimes to a group defined by institutions, and sometimes to an indeterminate and ever-open collectivity limited only by the exclusion of near relatives, such as in our own society. But at this stage in the research I believe it possible to ignore the differences between the prohibition of incest and exogamy: in the light of the previous considerations, their formal characteristics are in effect identical.

Furthermore, in the technical case of marriage 'by exchange' so-called, or in any other marriage system whatsoever, the result of the incest prohibition is fundamentally the same, viz., that as soon as I am forbidden a woman, she thereby becomes available to another man, and somewhere else a man renounces a woman who thereby becomes available to me. The content of the prohibition is not exhausted by the fact of the prohibition: the latter is instituted only in order to guarantee and establish, directly or indirectly, immediately or mediately, an exchange. It is now for us to show how and why.

CHAPTER V

The Principle of Reciprocity

I

The conclusions of the famous *Essai sur le Don* are well known. In this study, which today is regarded as a classic, Mauss sought to show that exchange in primitive societies consists not so much in economic transactions as in reciprocal gifts, that these reciprocal gifts have a far more important function in these societies than in our own, and that this primitive form of exchange is not merely nor essentially of an economic nature but is what he aptly calls 'a total social fact', that is, an event which has a significance that is at once social and religious, magic and economic, utilitarian and sentimental, jural and moral. It is well known that in many primitive societies, particularly those of the Pacific Islands and the North-west Pacific coast of Canada and Alaska, every ceremony celebrating an important event is accompanied by a distribution of wealth. Thus in New Zealand the ceremonial offering of clothes, jewellery, arms, food and various goods was a common feature of Maori social life. These gifts were made on the occasions of births, marriages, deaths, exhumations, peace treaties, crimes and misdemeanours 'and many other things too numerous to mention'.¹ Similarly, Firth includes among ceremonial exchanges in Polynesia 'birth, initiation, marriage, sickness, death and other social events, as well as much religious ritual'.² In a more limited section of the same region, another observer cites betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, birth and death, and describes the presents offered by the young man's father at the betrothal feast, viz., ten baskets of dried fish, ten thousand ripe and six thousand green coconuts, the young man himself receiving in exchange two cakes four feet square and six inches thick.³

These gifts are either exchanged immediately for equivalent gifts or are received by the beneficiaries on condition that at a later date they will give counter-gifts often exceeding the original goods in value, but which in their turn bring about a subsequent right to receive new gifts surpassing the original ones in sumptuousness. The most characteristic of these institutions is the *potlatch* of the Indians of Alaska and the Vancouver region. During

¹ Best, 1929, p. 36.

² Firth, 1939, p. 321.

³ Hogbin, 1931a, p. 28. See also the astonishing figures collected by Firth, 1929, p. 317 et seq.

the *potlatch* considerable valuables are transferred in this way, sometimes amounting to several tens of thousands of rugs handed over in kind, or in the symbolical form of copper plaques whose face value increases in terms of the importance of the transactions in which they have figured. These ceremonies have a triple purpose, viz., to return gifts previously received, together with an appropriate amount of interest, sometimes as much as 100 per cent; to establish publicly the claim of a family or social group to a title or prerogative, or to announce officially a change of status; finally, to surpass a rival in generosity, to crush him if possible with future obligations which it is hoped he cannot meet, so as to take from him his prerogatives, titles, rank, authority and prestige.¹ Doubtless the system of reciprocal gifts only reaches such vast proportions among the Indians of the North-west Pacific coast, virtuosi who display a genius and an exceptional aptitude for the treatment of the fundamental themes of primitive culture. But Mauss has been able to establish the existence of analogous institutions in Melanesia and Polynesia. For example, it is certain that the main purpose of the feasts of several New Guinea tribes is to obtain recognition of a new *pangua* by an assembly of witnesses,² that is, the same function which, according to Barnett, is the fundamental basis of the Alaskan *potlatch*. The same author sees the desire to go one better than anyone else as a characteristic peculiar to Kwakiutl ceremonies, and regards the interest-bearing loan as a preliminary transaction to the *potlatch*, rather than as one of its modalities.³ Doubtless there are local variations, but the various aspects of the institution form a whole found in a more or less systematized way in North and South America, Asia and Africa. It is a question of a universal mode of culture, although not everywhere equally developed.

But it should also be stressed that this attitude of primitive thought towards the exchange of goods is not only expressed in clearly defined and localized institutions. It permeates every transaction, ritual or profane, in which objects or produce are given or received. Implicitly or explicitly, the double assumption is found everywhere that reciprocal gifts constitute a means - normal or privileged, depending on the group - of transferring goods, or certain goods, and that these gifts are not offered principally or essentially with the idea of receiving a profit or advantage of an economic nature. 'On birth ceremonies,' writes Turner of the refined Samoan culture, 'after receiving the *oloa* and the *tonga*, the "masculine" and "feminine" property, the husband and wife were left no richer than they were.'⁴

Hogbin remarks that neither partner acquires any real material benefit from such exchanges.

'Indeed, at times the gifts exchanged are of precisely the same kind. Thus a ball of sennit ceremonially presented may be returned by a similar

¹ Davy, 1922; Murdock, 1936, pp. 3-20; Barnett, 1938b, pp. 349-58.

² See later, ch. VI.

³ Boas, 1897; Barnett, 1938b, p. 351 et seq.

⁴ Mauss, 1925, p. 42.

ball of exactly the same size, presented with exactly the same ceremony. Or again, a parcel of food may be returned by another parcel of the same kind of food cooked according to the same recipe.¹

On the southern coast of New Guinea, the natives make long voyages to participate in a transaction which from an economic viewpoint seems totally meaningless. They exchange live animals.² It is the same with the exchanges that accompany a Yukaghir marriage: relatives who have received a reindeer give a reindeer.³ In fact, the exchange does not bring a tangible result such as is the case in commercial transactions in our own society. The profit is neither direct nor inherent in the things exchanged as in the case of monetary profit or consumer gain. Or rather it is not so according to our own conventions. In primitive thought there is clearly something else in what we call a 'commodity' that makes it profitable to its owner or its trader. Goods are not only economic commodities, but vehicles and instruments for realities of another order, such as power, influence, sympathy, status and emotion; and the skilful game of exchange (in which there is very often no more real transfer than in a game of chess, in which the players do not give each other the pieces they alternately move forward on the chessboard but merely seek to provoke a counter-move), consists in a complex totality of conscious or unconscious manœuvres in order to gain security and to guard oneself against risks brought about by alliances and by rivalries.

Amundsen's misadventures show the cost of losing the meaning of reciprocity. From the generous gifts that Amundsen gave the Eskimo, in return for their presents, they quickly concluded that it was to their advantage to offer all their goods as presents. It soon became necessary to decline any present and to resort to proper commerce.⁴ Likewise, Holm states that an exchange with one native opens a general claim on the part of all the others to the same gift: 'The natives explained that they always gave people everything they asked for.'⁵ But the true meaning of this statement must be specified:

'When a person wishes to start one of these [i.e., a *pā-tukh-tūk*] he takes some article into the *kashim* [the men's house] and gives it to the man with whom he wishes to trade, saying, at the same time, "It is a *pā-tukh-tūk*." The other is bound to receive it, and give in return some article of about equal value; the first man then brings something else, and so they alternate, until sometimes two men will exchange nearly everything they originally possessed; the man who received the first present being bound to continue until the originator wishes to stop.'⁶

This passion for the gift, accompanied by the ritual obligation on the recipient to accept and to give, is found at the other end of the American continent, among the Yaghan.⁷

¹ Hogbin, 1932, p. 13.

² Williams, 1936, p. 137; Armstrong, 1920-1.

³ Jochelson, 1910-26, p. 96.

⁴ Boas, 1897, p. 374. ⁵ Nelson, 1896-7, p. 309.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Gusinde, 1937, p. 980 et seq.

Radcliffe-Brown's observation on gift exchange among one of the most primitive peoples known, the Andaman Islanders, answers the problem posed by Turner in the text quoted above, and which concerns a highly developed culture: 'The purpose that it did serve was a moral one. The object of the exchange was to produce a friendly feeling between the two persons concerned.'¹ The best proof of the supra-economic nature of these exchanges is that in the *potlatch* there is no hesitation in sometimes destroying considerable wealth by breaking a 'copper' or by throwing it into the sea, and that greater prestige results from the destruction of wealth than from its distribution, because however liberal it may be distribution always requires a similar return. Although it is always limited and qualified by the other aspects of the institution of exchange, the economic character still persists. 'It is not, however, the mere possession of wealth which gives prestige; it is rather its distribution. . . . The amassing of wealth has as its sole aim the buying of high status.'² As a matter of fact, 'the idea of a free gift is alien to Malekula culture . . . A gift is at most a venture, a hopeful speculation.'³ However, 'even when pigs are given for pigs and food for food, the exchanges are not wholly without economic significance, for they are definitely valuable as a stimulus to work and for the need to which they give rise for organized co-operative effort'.⁴

II

The idea that a mysterious advantage is attached to the acquisition of commodities, or at least certain commodities, by means of reciprocal gifts, rather than by individual production or acquisition, is not confined to primitive society. The Alaskan Indians distinguish objects of consumption or provisions which do not go beyond the circle of production and family consumption, and wealth - property *par excellence* - which the Kwakiutl call 'the rich food'. The latter includes painted rugs, horn spoons, bowls and other ceremonial containers, ceremonial clothes, and so on, any object whose symbolical value infinitely outweighs the value of the labour or raw material, and which alone can enter into ritual cycles of tribal and intertribal exchange. But a similar distinction still operates in modern society. There are certain types of object which are especially appropriate for presents, precisely because of their non-utilitarian nature. In some Latin countries these objects can only be found, in all their luxury and diversity, in stores set up especially for this purpose, such as 'casas de regalias' or 'casas de presentes', and which are similar to Anglo-Saxon 'gift shops'. It is hardly necessary to note that these gifts, like invitations (which, though not exclusively, are also free distributions of food and drink), are 'returned'. This is an example of reciprocity in our society. It is as if in our society certain non-essential goods, such as flowers, sweets and 'luxury articles', to which is attached a great psychological,

¹ Mauss, 1925, p. 62.

² Deacon, 1934, p. 199.

³ *loc. cit.*

⁴ *ibid.* p. 202.

aesthetic or sensual value, are thought to be more properly acquired in the form of reciprocal gifts rather than as individual purchases or for individual consumption.

In our society also certain festivals and ceremonies regulate the periodical return and traditional style of vast exchange transactions. In North American society, which often seems to seek the reintegration into modern society of the very general attitudes and procedures of primitive cultures, these occasions assume quite exceptional proportions. The exchange of gifts at Christmas, for a month each year, practised by all social classes with a sort of sacred ardour, is nothing other than a gigantic *potlatch*, implicating millions of individuals, and at the end of which many family budgets are faced with lasting disequilibrium. Richly decorated Christmas cards certainly do not attain the value of 'coppers', but the refinement shown in their selection, their originality, their price (which although individually modest, is none the less to be multiplied by the number), and the quantity sent or received, are the proof, ritually exhibited on the recipient's mantelpiece during the week of celebration, of the wealth of his social relationships or the degree of his prestige. The subtle techniques of gift wrapping must also be mentioned, all expressing in their way the personal bond between the giver and the gift, and the magical function of the gift, such as special wrapping paper, ribbons appropriate to the occasion, heraldic labels and so on. Through the uselessness of the gifts, and their frequent duplication because of the limited range of objects suitable as presents, these exchanges also take the form of a vast and collective destruction of wealth. Without calling upon the very significant theme in modern folklore of the millionaire lighting his cigar with bank notes, there are many little facts in this example to remind us that even in our own society the destruction of wealth is a way to gain prestige. The skilful merchant knows that a way to attract customers is to advertise that certain high-priced articles must be 'sacrificed'. The motive is economic, but the terminology retains an air of mystery.

Doubtless gambling provides, in modern society, the most striking picture of these transfers of wealth with the sole purpose of gaining prestige. Gambling really requires a special study by itself, but here we shall confine ourselves to a brief statement. During the last hundred years, gambling has shown exceptional development each time the means of payment were found considerably to exceed the local availability of commodities. The fabulous gambling stories of the Klondyke of Alaska, during the mining expansion, are echoed by those of the Amazon region during the great rubber period. Thus it seems as if money, which we have become accustomed to regard as a simple means of obtaining economic goods, found, when it could not be used up in this way, another archaic rôle, formerly attributed to precious things, viz., as a means of gaining prestige by the value of the gift or sacrifice, which has actually been made or simply mooted. This ritualization of the use of 'surpluses' corresponds with the regulation, already examined in chapter

III, of the use of 'scarce products'. Between these two extremes there is a kind of zone of indifference and freedom. Martius's remarks on the Arawak are well known: 'Although they may have the idea of individual property, what each possesses is so common and easy to obtain, that everyone lends and borrows without too much concern for restitution.'¹ The Yakut refused to believe that somewhere in the world people could die of hunger, when it was so easy to go and share a neighbour's meal.² Thus the refinements of sharing or distribution appear with the urgency or the absence of the need.

But there is still a general model here. In the significant field of the offering of food, of which banquets, teas and evening parties are modern examples, the language itself, as in 'to give a reception', shows that among ourselves, as in Alaska or Oceania, 'to receive' is to give. The characteristic of reciprocity is not the only justification for comparing meals and their rituals with the primitive institutions that we have considered:

'In economic and social relationships the expression *fai te kai*, "prepared food" is very frequently heard, and signifies the preliminary act of initiating the relationship, since a basket of food is the common medium of prefacing a request, atoning for an injury, or fulfilling an obligation. In native descriptions of how to act in a variety of situations the words "go to your house, prepare food . . ." often begin the instruction.'³

One 'offers' dinner to a person whom one wishes to honour, and this type of invitation is the most frequent way of 'returning' a kindness. The more the social aspect takes precedence over the strictly alimentary, the more stylized also is the type and presentation of the food offered; the fine porcelain service, the silverware, and the embroidered table-cloths, which are usually carefully stored away in the family cupboards and buffets, are a striking counterpart of the ceremonial bowls and spoons of Alaska, brought out on similar occasions from painted and decorated chests. The attitudes towards food are especially revealing. Even among ourselves what may be called 'rich food' has a function other than the mere satisfaction of physiological needs. When one 'gives' a dinner-party, the ordinary daily menu is not served, and the literature has copiously conjured up all the banqueting folklore, such as *saumon-mayonnaise*, *turbot-sauce mousseline*, *aspics de foie gras*, and so on. Moreover, if the occasion requires certain traditional foods, their very appearance, by a significant recurrence, calls for shared consumption. A bottle of vintage wine, a rare liqueur, a foie gras, pricks the owner's conscience with the claim of someone else. These are some of the delicacies which one would not buy and consume alone without a vague feeling of guilt. Indeed, the group judges with singular harshness the person who does this. During Polynesian ceremonial exchanges it is required that goods be exchanged within the group of near paternal relatives, but must as far as possible go to other groups and into other villages. To fail in this duty is called

¹ Von Martius, 1867.

² Sumner, 1901, p. 69.

³ Firth, 1939, p. 372.

sori tana, 'giving into one's own basket'. And at village dances convention demands that neither of the two local groups consume the food which it has brought, but that they exchange their provisions and that each shall eat the other's food.¹ The action of the person who, like the woman in the Maori proverb, *Kai kino ana Te Arahe*, would secretly eat the ceremonial food, without offering any of it,² would provoke from his or her near relatives irony, mockery, disgust and even anger, according to the circumstances and persons. But each of these sentiments in its way rouses a faint echo of similar emotions, which we have referred to in the preceding chapters. It seems that the group confusedly sees a sort of social incest in the individual accomplishment of an act which normally requires collective participation.³

But the ritual of exchange does not take place only at ceremonial meals. Politeness requires that the dish, salt, butter and bread be offered to one's neighbour before serving oneself. We have often observed the ceremonial aspect of the meal in the lower-priced restaurants in the south of France, especially in those regions where wine is the principal industry and is surrounded by a sort of mystical respect which makes it 'rich food' *par excellence*. In the small restaurants where wine is included in the price of the meal, each customer finds in front of his plate a modest bottle of wine, more often than not very bad. This bottle is similar to his neighbour's bottle, as are the portions of meat and vegetables which a waitress passes around. Nevertheless, a remarkable difference in attitude towards the wine and the food is immediately manifested. Food serves the body's needs and wine its taste for luxury, the first serving to nourish, the second, to honour. Each person at the table eats, so to speak, for himself, and the noting of a trifling slight in the way he has been served arouses bitterness towards the more favoured, and a jealous complaint to the proprietor. But it is entirely different with the wine. If a bottle should be insufficiently filled, its owner will good-humouredly appeal to his neighbour's judgment. And the proprietor will face, not the demand of an individual victim, but a group complaint. In other words, wine is a social commodity, while the *plat du jour* is a personal commodity. The little bottle may contain exactly one glassful, yet the contents will be poured out, not into the owner's glass, but into his neighbour's. And his neighbour will immediately make a corresponding gesture of reciprocity.

¹ Firth, 1939, pp. 311, 321.

² Best, 1924, vol. I, p. 425.

³ cf. the Greek and Cambodian versions of *Ass's Skin*, in which the king symbolically reveals his incestuous desires towards his daughter: 'A man has a lamb that he himself has raised or nourished. Is it better that he eat it himself or that another man eat it?' And in the Khmer version: 'Summoning his mandarins one day, he asked them if a man should eat or sell the fruit from a tree that he has planted.' Cosquin, 1922, p. 9. Inversely, among the Baiga of central India, incest is expiated by offering great feasts (Elwin, 1938, pp. 237-54). And the natives of the Trobriand Islands justify their indignant condemnation of father-daughter incest, which in a matrilineal system is not an infraction of the exogamous law and which is not punished by ritual illnesses, by saying that it is 'very bad because already he married her mother. Already he caught hold of the first marriage present.' Malinowski, 1929, pp. 530-1.

What has happened? The two bottles are identical in volume, and their contents similar in quality. Each person in this revealing scene has, in the final analysis, received no more than if he had consumed his own wine. From an economic viewpoint, no one has gained and no one has lost. But the point is that there is much more in the exchange itself than in the things exchanged.

The situation of two strangers less than a yard apart, face to face on both sides of a table in a cheap restaurant (an individual table is a privilege to be paid for, and is not granted below a certain tariff), is commonplace and sporadic. Nevertheless, it is highly revealing, for it offers an example, rare in our society (but many instances are found in primitive society), of the formation of a group, for which, doubtless because of its temporary nature, no ready-made formula of integration exists. The French custom is to ignore people whose names, occupations and rank are unknown. But in the little restaurant, such people find themselves in a quite close relationship for one to one-and-a-half hours, and temporarily united by a similar preoccupation. A conflict exists, not very keen to be sure, but real enough and sufficient to create a state of tension between the norm of privacy and the fact of community. They feel both alone and together, compelled to the usual reserve between strangers, while their respective spatial positions, and their relationships to the objects and utensils of the meal, suggest, and to a certain extent call for, intimacy. For a short time these two strangers are forced to live together, although not for as long or as closely as if sharing a cabin of a transatlantic liner, or a sleeping-car, but for this reason also no clear cultural procedure has been established. An almost imperceptible anxiety is likely to arise in the minds of these table-companions with the prospect of trifling disagreements that the meeting might produce. When social distance is maintained, even if it is not accompanied by any sign of disdain, insolence or aggression, it is in itself a matter of sufferance in that any social contact entails an appeal, an appeal which is a hope for response. This is the fleeting but difficult situation resolved by the exchanging of wine. It is an assertion of good grace which does away with the mutual uncertainty. It substitutes a social relationship for spatial juxtaposition. But it is also more than that. The partner who was entitled to maintain his reserve is persuaded to give it up. Wine offered calls for wine returned, cordiality requires cordiality. The relationship of indifference can never be restored once it has been ended by one of the table-companions. From now on the relationship can only be cordial or hostile. There is no way of refusing the neighbour's offer of his glass of wine without being insulting. Further, the acceptance of this offer sanctions another offer, for conversation. In this way a whole range of trivial social ties are established by a series of alternating oscillations, in which offering gives one a right, and receiving makes one obligated, and always beyond what has been given or accepted.

And there is still more. The person beginning the cycle seizes the initiative,

and the greater social ease which he has displayed puts him at an advantage. For the opening always involves a risk, in that the table-companion may respond to the drink offered with a less generous glass, or the contrary risk that he will take the liberty to bid higher, obliging the one who made the first offer (and we must not forget that the bottle is small) either to lose his last trump as his last drop, or to sacrifice another bottle for the sake of his prestige. We are faced then with a 'total social fact' – on a microscopic scale, it is true – the implications of which are at once social, psychological and economic. This apparently futile drama, which perhaps the reader will think has been given a disproportionate importance, seems on the contrary to offer material for inexhaustible sociological reflection. We have already indicated our interest in the non-crystallized forms of social life,¹ viz., the spontaneous aggregations resulting from crises, or (as in the example just discussed) simply by-products of collective life, providing fresh traces of very primitive psycho-social experiences, and whose equivalent scale might vainly be sought in the irremediably inferior animal life, or in the much superior life of archaic or savage institutions. In this sense, the respective attitudes of the strangers in the restaurant appear to be an infinitely distant projection, scarcely perceptible but nevertheless recognizable, of a fundamental situation, that of individuals of primitive bands coming into contact for the first time or under exceptional circumstances meeting strangers. The characteristics of this very tense experience in primitive society have been shown elsewhere.² Primitive peoples know only two ways of classifying strangers. They are either 'good' or 'bad.' But one should not be misled by a naïve translation of native terms. A 'good' group is one accorded hospitality without question, and given the most precious goods. A 'bad' group is one from which one expects and to which is promised, at the first opportunity, suffering or death. With one there is exchange, with the other, fighting. It is in this light that the Chukchee legend of 'the invisible ones', in which mysteriously conveyed goods exchange themselves, must be understood. Nothing clarifies this better than a description of their former markets. Everyone came armed, and the products were offered on spear points. Sometimes a bundle of skins was held in one hand and a bared knife in the other, so that one was ready for battle at the slightest provocation. The market was also formerly designated by the one word, *Elpu'rIrkIn*, 'to exchange', which was also applied to the vendetta. A new verb, *vili'urkIn*, 'to trade', corresponding to the Koryak *vili'vikIn*, 'to make peace with', has been introduced into the modern language. The author to whom we owe these observations adds: 'The difference in meaning between the old and the new term is very striking.'³

III

Exchange, as a total phenomenon, is from the first a total exchange, compris-

¹ p. 42. above.

² Lévi-Strauss, 1948a.

³ Bogoras, 1904–9, pp. 53–5.

ing food, manufactured objects, and that most precious category of goods, women. Doubtless we are a long way from the strangers in the restaurant, and perhaps it will seem startling to suggest that the reluctance of the southern French peasant to drink his own flask of wine provides the model by which the prohibition of incest might be explained. Clearly, the prohibition does not result from this reluctance. Nevertheless, we believe that both are phenomena of the same type, that they are elements of the same cultural complex, or more exactly of the basic complex of culture. Moreover, this basic identity is apparent in Polynesia, where Firth distinguishes three spheres of exchange in terms of the relative mobility of the articles involved. The first sphere comprises especially food of various types, the second includes plaited cord and bark-cloth, and the third, shell fishhooks, rope, turmeric cylinders and canoes. He adds:

'Apart from the three spheres of exchange mentioned a fourth may be recognized where goods of unique quality are handed over. Such for instance was the transfer of women by the man who could not otherwise pay for his canoe. Transfers of land might be put into the same category. Women and land are given in satisfaction of unique obligations.'¹

Perhaps we shall be criticized on the ground of having brought together two dissimilar phenomena, and we will answer this criticism before proceeding. Admittedly, the gift is a primitive form of exchange, but it has in fact disappeared in favour of exchange for profit, except for a few survivals such as invitations, celebrations and gifts which are given an exaggerated importance. In our society, the proportion of goods transferred according to these archaic modalities is very small in comparison with those involved in commerce and merchandising. Reciprocal gifts are diverting survivals which engage the curiosity of the antiquarian; but it is not possible to derive an institution such as the prohibition of incest, which is as general and important in our society as in any other, from a type of phenomenon which today is abnormal and exceptional and of purely anecdotal interest. In other words, we shall be accused, as we ourselves have accused McLennan, Spencer, Lubbock and Durkheim, of deriving the rule from the exception, the general from the particular, and the function from the survival. Perhaps it will be added that there is only one common characteristic between the prohibition of incest and the reciprocal gift, viz., the individual repulsion and social reprobation directed against the unilateral consumption of certain goods, but that the essential characteristic of reciprocal gifts, i.e., the positive aspect of reciprocity, is entirely missing in the first case, so that strictly speaking our interpretation could be valid only for exogamous systems (and particularly dual organizations) which present this reciprocal characteristic, but not for the prohibition of incest as practised in our society.

We shall begin with the second objection, already alluded to in the previous

¹ Firth, 1939, p. 344.

chapter. We have maintained that the prohibition of incest and exogamy constitute substantially identical rules, and that they differ from each other only in a secondary characteristic, viz., that reciprocity, present in both cases, is only inorganic in the first, while it is organized in the second. Like exogamy, the prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity, for I will give up my daughter or my sister only on condition that my neighbour does the same. The violent reaction of the community towards incest is the reaction of a community outraged. Unlike exogamy, exchange may be neither explicit nor immediate; but the fact that I can obtain a wife is, in the final analysis, the consequence of the fact that a brother or father has given her up. But the rule does not say in whose favour the person shall be given up. On the contrary, the beneficiary, or in any case the beneficiary class, is delimited in the case of exogamy. The only difference then is that in exogamy the belief is expressed that the classes must be defined so that a relationship may be established between them, while in the prohibition of incest the relationship alone is sufficient to define continually in social life a complex multiplicity, ceaselessly renewed by terms which are directly or indirectly solidary. This transformation in itself poses a problem. This problem will have to be resolved, and we shall do so by showing that exogamy and the prohibition of incest must both be interpreted in terms of the simplest pattern, that provided by marriage between cross-cousins. But whatever solution will have to be proposed, it can be seen that the prohibition of incest does not differ from exogamy and from exchanges of prestations of another order.

The other objection touches an equally important point, for it is a question of choosing between two possible interpretations of the term 'archaic'. The survival of a custom or a belief can in fact be explained in two ways. Either the custom or belief is a survival without any other significance than that of an historical residue spared by chance or as a result of extrinsic causes, or else it has survived because through the centuries it has continued to play a rôle and because this rôle is the same as might account for its initial appearance. An institution can be archaic because it has lost its reason for existing, or, on the contrary, because this reason for existing is so fundamental that any transformation of its ways of acting has been neither possible nor necessary.

Such is the case with exchange. Its rôle in primitive society is essential because it embraces material objects, social values and women. But while in the case of merchandise this rôle has progressively diminished in importance in favour of other means of acquisition, as far as women are concerned, reciprocity has on the contrary maintained its fundamental function, on the one hand because women are the most precious possession (in chap. III we have justified the exceptional position they occupy in the primitive system of values), but above all because women are not primarily a sign of social value, but a natural stimulant; and the stimulant of the only instinct the satisfaction of which can be deferred, and consequently the only one for

which, in the act of exchange, and through the awareness of reciprocity, the transformation from the stimulant to the sign can take place, and, defining by this fundamental process the transformation from nature to culture, assume the character of an institution.

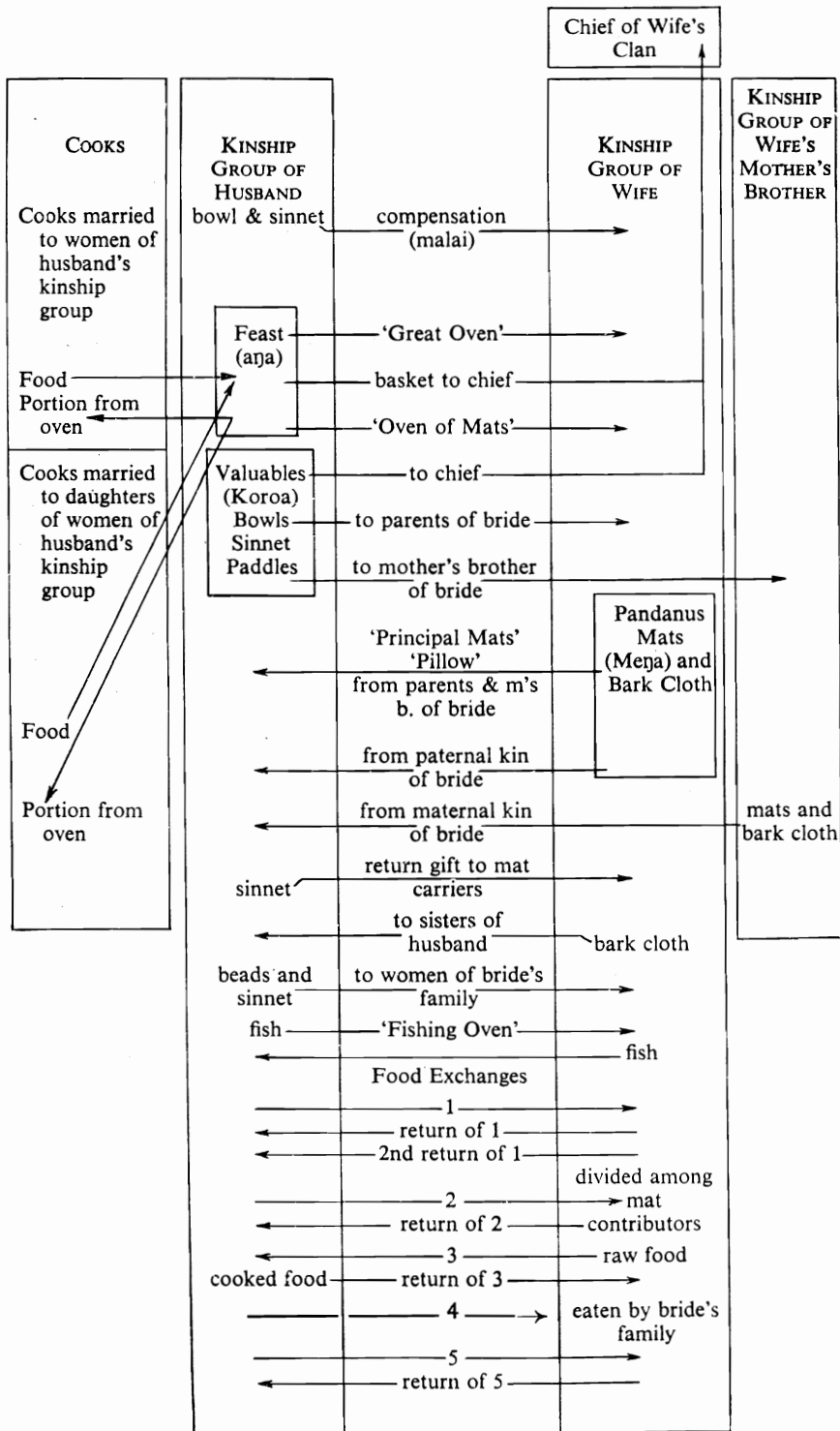
IV

The inclusion of women in the number of reciprocal prestations from group to group and from tribe to tribe is such a general custom that a whole volume would not be sufficient to enumerate the instances of it. Let us note first of all that marriage is regarded everywhere as a particularly favourable occasion for the initiation or development of a cycle of exchanges. The 'wedding presents' of our society are obviously to be included in the group of phenomena studied above.

In Alaska and British Columbia, the marriage of a girl is necessarily accompanied by a *potlatch*, to such an extent that the Comox aristocrats organize pseudo-marriage ceremonies with no bride, for the sole purpose of acquiring rights in the course of the exchange rites.¹ But the relationship which exists between marriage and gifts is not arbitrary. The marriage itself is an inherent part of the prestations which accompany it. It forms merely the central motive (Fig. 3). Not so long ago it was the custom in our society 'to ask for' a young girl in marriage, and the bride's father 'gave' his daughter in marriage. 'To give away the bride' is an expression still used in English. And of the woman who takes a lover, it is also said that she 'gives herself'. The term 'gift', in the Germanic languages, still has the two meanings of 'present' and 'betrothal'. Likewise, in Arabic, *sadaqa* means alms, bride-price, justice and tax. Doubtless, in this last case the comparison can be explained by the custom of wife-buying. But marriage by purchase is a special institution only in its form. In reality, it is only a modality of that basic system analysed by Mauss, according to which, in primitive society and still partially in our own, rights, goods and persons circulate within the group according to a continual mechanism of prestations and counter-prestations. Malinowski has shown that in the Trobriand Islands, even after marriage, the payment of *mapula* represents on the man's part a counter-prestation intended to compensate for services provided by the wife in terms of sexual gratification. This still seems to be the function of the engagement ring in our society, since the custom is for it to be left to the wife in case of divorce, and not to be included in the property settlement.

Although less important than those associated with funerals, the astonishing complexity of the matrimonial exchanges illustrated in Fig. 3 deserves to engage our attention. This complexity is expressed both in the number of prestations and in the number of social ties that they involve. In fact, marriage involves five different types of family and social relationships. To the right

¹ Barnett, 1938*b*, p. 133.



of the husband's lineage there can be seen, firstly, the wife's lineage, and secondly, the wife's maternal uncle's lineage. The fact that the latter may be distinct from the former indicates that descent is patrilineal, as is actually the case in Tikopia from where this example has been taken.¹ To the left of the husband's lineage, the group of 'cooks' (or rather those called upon to play this rôle in this particular circumstance) is also subdivided, firstly into relatives by marriage with the women of the husband's lineage, and secondly into relatives by marriage with the women related to these affines themselves. When one of its members marries, the husband's lineage is then, as it were, supported by two groups of sons-in-law, the direct and the indirect sons-in-law, and its prestations are made to, and returned to it by, two groups of parents-in-law, viz., parents-in-law proper, and the parents-in-law of these parents-in-law.

In chapter XVIII we shall find this type of structure binding each lineage, in a system of directional exchanges, to its 'near sons-in-law' and to its 'distant sons-in-law' on the one hand, and, on the other, to its 'near parents-in-law' and to its 'distant parents-in-law'. The point of the comparison is to show that a society the study of which certainly pertains to complex kinship structures (for preferred degrees are unknown in Tikopia, and marriage between cousins is prohibited there) nevertheless conforms with our methods of analysis and can be defined, at least in a functional way, as a society with a long cycle, in the sense given to this term in chapter XXVII. From a more general point of view, it will be sufficient to note here that a new marriage renews all marriages concluded at other times, and at different points in the social structure, so that each connexion rests upon all the others and gives them, on its establishment, a recrudescence of activity.

Finally, it must be noted that the 'compensation' (*te malai*), which initiates the matrimonial exchanges, represents an indemnity for the bride's abduction. Even marriage by capture does not contradict the rule of reciprocity. Rather it is one of the possible legal ways of putting it into practice. The bride's abduction dramatically expresses the obligation upon any group holding girls to give them up. It shows clearly that they are *available*.

It would then be false to say that one exchanges or gives gifts at the same time that one exchanges or gives women. For the woman herself is nothing other than one of these gifts, the supreme gift among those that can only be obtained in the form of reciprocal gifts. The first stage of our analysis has been intended to bring to light this basic characteristic of the gift, represented by women in primitive society, and to explain the reasons for this. It should not be surprising then to find women included among reciprocal prestations; this they are in the highest degree, but at the same time as other goods, material and spiritual. This syncretic character of the conjugal bond and, over and above the conjugal bond and doubtless before it, of the alliance itself, emerges clearly from the protocol of the marriage proposal

¹ Firth, 1936, ch. XV.

among the Bushmen of South Africa. Approached by an intermediary, the parents of the young girl replied: 'We are poor, we cannot afford to give our daughter away.' The suitor then visits his future mother-in-law and says: 'I have come myself to speak to you. If you die, I will bury you, if your husband dies I will bury him.' And gifts immediately follow.¹ This expresses perfectly the total character, sexual, economic, legal and social, of this collection of reciprocal prestations which make up marriage. In Ontong Java, an island of the Solomon Archipelago, the ceremonial exchanges take place in the following way (Fig. 4).

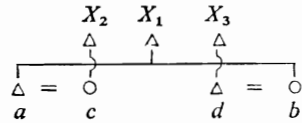


Fig. 4. Ceremonial exchanges in the Solomon Islands.

Suppose X_1 is the headman of the group of a and b ; a is married to c , whose headman is X_2 , and b is married to d , the headman of whose group is X_3 . At one exchange, a and his brothers give fish to X_1 , and c and her husband's brothers' wives give puddings to him. In return, a gets puddings, and c fish. At the same time, d gives fish to X_3 , and b gives him puddings, and they receive the opposite in return. At the other exchange, a gives fish to X_2 , and c gives him puddings, and each gets the opposite in return. At the same time, d gives fish to X_1 , and b gives him puddings.² Thus, 'in one exchange the headman received fish from his male blood relatives, and taro puddings from his female relatives by marriage. In the other he received fish from his male relatives by marriage, and puddings from his female blood relatives. On both occasions he kept some of the gifts for himself and then gave to each person the opposite to what he or she had presented.'³ Thus economic exchanges offer an ideal commentary on marriage transactions.

Analysing a special kinship relationship (to which we shall have to return) in force among certain groups in New Guinea, Seligman remarks:

'For example the folk of Beipaa (Veifa) feed pigs and bring up dogs but these pigs and dogs are not for them, they are for the village of Amoamo, their *ufuapie*, and in return the pigs and dogs from Amoamo come to Beipaa . . . The same condition holds in the matter of marriage; the girls of a village, according to the accepted rule, should not marry any others than the men of the *ufuapie*.'⁴

These examples, which might easily have been multiplied almost to infinity, show not only that the system of prestations includes marriage, but also

¹ Schapera, 1930, p. 106.

³ *ibid.* p. 55.

² Hogbin, 1931b, p. 47.

⁴ Seligman, 1910, pp. 363-4.

that it *keeps it going*. In Alaska the rivalry of the *potlatch* takes place essentially between the father-in-law and the son-in-law, and in the Andaman Islands the son-in-law is bound specially to honour his parents-in-law with gifts well after marriage. In New Caledonia, the sister's name perpetuates the memory of these exchanges at the same time that her status as exogamous wife guarantees their continuity. She is called *puneara*, 'the provider of food', and the expression indicates that any brother is welcome at a meal in the territory where his sister has married.¹

In short, the system of prestations results in marriage.

On reaching puberty, the Konyak Naga boys begin to look for girls from the complementary clan to their own, and they exchange little gifts the value and nature of which are strictly fixed by custom. These gifts are of such importance that a boy's first question to the young girl whose favours he seeks is as follows: 'Will you take my gifts or not?' The answer being, perhaps: 'I will take them', or 'I have taken the gifts of another man. I don't want to exchange with you.' Even the wording of these overtures is fixed by tradition. This exchange of gifts initiates a whole series of reciprocal prestations which lead to marriage, or, rather, constitute the initial transactions of marriage, viz., work in the fields, meals, cakes, and so on.²

The small nomadic bands of the Nambikwara Indians of western Brazil are in constant fear of each other and avoid each other. But at the same time they desire contact, because it is the only way in which they are able to exchange, and thus to obtain products or articles that they lack. There is a link, a continuity, between hostile relations and the provision of reciprocal prestations. Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions. This feature is clearly witnessed to by the fact that the transition from war to peace, or at least from hostility to cordiality, is accomplished by the intermediary of ritual gestures, a veritable 'reconciliation inspection'. The adversaries inspect each other and, with gestures which still hint of combat, examine the necklaces, earrings, bracelets and feathered ornaments of one another with admiring murmurs.

And from being arrayed against each other they pass immediately to gifts; gifts are received, gifts are given, but silently, without bargaining, without any expression of satisfaction or complaint, and without any apparent connexion between what is offered and what is obtained. Thus it is a question of reciprocal gifts, and not of commercial transactions. But a supplementary stage may be reached. Two bands which have thus come to establish lasting cordial relations can decide in a deliberate manner to join by instituting between the male members of the two respective bands the artificial kinship relationship of brothers-in-law. Given the marriage system of the Nambikwara, the immediate consequence of this innovation is that all the children of one group become the potential spouses of the children of the other group and vice versa. Thus a continuous transition exists from war to exchange,

¹ Leenhardt, 1930, p. 65.

² von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1938, p. 363.

and from exchange to intermarriage, and the exchange of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts, which effects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship.¹

¹ Lévi-Strauss, 1943*a*; 1943*b*, pp. 398–409.

CHAPTER VI

Dual Organization

I

The fundamental characteristic of marriage as a form of exchange is seen particularly clearly in the case of dual organizations. This term defines a system in which the members of the community, whether it be a tribe or a village, are divided into two parts which maintain complex relationships varying from open hostility to very close intimacy, and with which various forms of rivalry and co-operation are usually associated. These moieties are often exogamous, that is, the men of one moiety can choose their wives only from the other, and vice versa. When the division into moieties does not regulate marriages, this rôle is frequently assumed by other forms of grouping. There may be a second bipartition of the group, parallel or perpendicular to this earlier division, the moieties may embrace exogamous clans, sub-clans or lineages, or, lastly, the modalities of marriage may depend upon specialized forms called marriage classes.

Dual organizations have numerous features in common apart from this direct or indirect exogamy. Descent is most often matrilineal; two culture heroes, sometimes older and younger brothers, sometimes twins, play an important part in the mythology; the bipartition of the social group is often continued into a bipartition of the universe into animate and inanimate objects, and the moieties are connected with such characteristic opposites as Red and White, Red and Black, Clear and Dark, Day and Night, Summer and Winter, North and South or East and West, Sky and Earth, Terra Firma and Sea or Water, Left and Right, Upstream and Downstream, Superior and Inferior, Good and Evil, Strong and Weak, Elder and Younger. Along with dual organizations there is sometimes a dichotomy of power between a secular chief and a sacred chief, or a secular chief and a military chief. Finally, the moieties are linked not only by the exchange of women, but by the furnishing of reciprocal prestations and counter-prestations of an economic, social and ceremonial nature. These links are frequently expressed in ritual games, which clearly show that double attitude of rivalry and solidarity which is the most striking feature of relationships between moieties. Sports races in North-east and Central Brazil, and ball games, with exactly the same function, in Australia and North, South and Central America

provide examples of these. These similarities in detail have often suggested the hypothesis that dual organizations have spread from a single point of origin. We believe rather that these similarities rest on a common basis, reciprocity, which has a functional character and which must have an independent existence in countless human communities. As we shall try to show, the dual system does not give rise to reciprocity, but merely gives it form. This could at times have been a local discovery, subsequently imposed by conquest or borrowed for its convenience. It could never have spread if the basic conditions making its adoption desirable or facilitating its imposition had not been present everywhere.

The distribution of dual organizations has features which make this type of organization particularly remarkable. These features are not apparent among all peoples but are encountered in all parts of the world, and generally at the most primitive levels of culture. This distribution therefore suggests a functional character peculiar to archaic cultures rather than a single unique origin. Naturally, there are exceptions, but in support of this view it may be pointed out that in more numerous cases still it is possible to discern vague outlines or survivals of dual organization among neighbours evolved from groups which exhibit this organization more definitively. Thus in Indonesia, traces of dual organizations may be found among the Sakai of Sumatra, in the Macassar region, and in central and southern Celebes, on Sumba, Flores, Timor, and in the Moluccas. There is evidence and some suggestion that they existed, and still exist, in the Carolines and Palau of Micronesia. They are found in New Guinea, in the Torres Straits and the Murray Islands. In Melanesia, Codrington, Rivers, Fox and Deacon express their agreement in almost the same words, that dual organizations are the most archaic social structure. Finally, traces or embryonic forms have been observed in the Banks Islands, the New Hebrides, Fiji (by Hocart), Samoa, Tahiti, and perhaps even on Easter Island: 'The ten tribes or *mata* were split into two groups that were probably nothing more nor less than two hostile confederations', writes Métraux of the former social organization of this island.¹ Meanwhile, in another work, the same author points to the belief in a mythical dichotomy which accounts for the very origin of these tribes,² and he describes the forms of ritual co-operation between *Tuu* and *Hotu-iti*.³ It is unnecessary to dwell on Australia, for the division into exogamous moieties is known to be a frequent feature of Australian aboriginal cultures and has nowhere else been subject to such refinements.

Writers of the sixteenth century had already pointed out forms of dualism in Central America and Mexico, and during the same period similar indications were forthcoming for Peru. In North America, moieties extend widely throughout the whole eastern zone, notably among the Creek, Chickasaw, Natchez, Yuchi, Iroquois and Algonquins. They are found in the cultures of the Plains, distinctly or as survivals, among the Sauk-Fox,

¹ Métraux, 1941, p. 70.

² *ibid.* 1942.

³ *ibid.* 1940, pp. 124-5.

Menomini, Omaha, Kansas, Osage and Winnebago, and as less and less clear vestiges among the western groups. They are lacking in particular among the Arapaho and the Cheyenne, but reappear in the primitive cultures of central California. Finally, it has been only in the last ten years or so, but with a richness which has all the force of a proof, that dual organization has been observed in the most primitive cultures of South America. If dual organization, which is present at least in principle among the Nuer, the tribes of the Lobi branch, and the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia,¹ nevertheless seems less common in Africa than elsewhere, it could be shown that even where there is no dual organization certain mechanisms of reciprocity persist which are functionally equivalent to this type or organization. Among the Nuer of the White Nile, whose clans are still split even today into exogamous pairs, their origin is explained in the following myth:

'A certain Gau, who descended from heaven, married Kwong (according to one account an even earlier arrival from heaven), by whom he had two sons, Gaa and Kwook, and a number of daughters. As there was no one with whom these could marry, Gau assigned several daughters to each of his sons, and to avert the calamities that follow incest he performed the ceremony of splitting a bullock longitudinally, decreeing that the two groups might intermarry but that neither might marry within itself.'²

This myth obviously accounts for the theoretical origin of exogamous pairs. The same author tells us that among the Bari, where this dichotomy is unknown, the same 'splitting ceremony' is observed when there is some uncertainty as to the kinship relationships of the two who are engaged to be married. Here then, the theoretical risk of incest is avoided by an ideal reconstitution of a correlative and antagonistic couple. Moreover, the sacrifice of the bullock or goat to ward off an abnormal relationship between the spouses is widely spread throughout Africa, and elsewhere it has significant equivalents.

It is true that we might be guilty here of begging the question, since we seem to assume, instead of proving, as is our object, the basic identity of dual organization and customs which on the surface vary greatly. Nothing is more dangerous to a sound method of research than to adopt such a vague and elastic definition of the institution under examination that afterwards it is difficult not to read everything into it. The study of dual organization has especially suffered from this type of excess.

Wherever dual organization appears, it has a certain number of consequences. The most important of these is that individuals are defined in relationship to each other essentially by whether they belong or do not belong to the same moiety. This feature does not change, whatever the mode

¹ Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Labouret, 1931; Richards, 1937, pp. 188-93; Haekel, 1938, p. 654.

² Seligman and Seligman, 1932, p. 207.

of transmitting the moiety's name may be. Whether it be through the male or the female line, the mother's collaterals will always be grouped in one category, and the father's in another. Consequently, a single term will usually serve to designate the mother and her sisters, and likewise another for the father and his brothers. This system, which is usually far more complex, has been called 'the classificatory kinship system', and it can be seen that its specific nature is very readily accounted for by dual organization. For this reason, Tylor and Frazer have suggested that dual organization can always be postulated at the origin of the classificatory system. As the classificatory system exists, or can be found in almost all human societies, the seriousness of this hypothesis can be seen, since it implies nothing less than the universality of dual organization. We believe it impossible to hold this hypothesis in such a strict form, for we have already indicated that the essential thing, as we see it, is not dual organization but the principle of reciprocity of which it constitutes, in some way, the codification. But we agree that the classificatory system can be seen as proof of the generality, if not of dual organization itself, then at least of mechanisms, potentially more flexible and capable of functioning independently of any systematic apparatus, which none the less attest to the fundamental rôle of this principle of reciprocity.

II

Where does dual organization begin and where does it end? Moieties have this in common with clans, that descent is always unilineal. But we know of societies divided into clans and being without dual organization, societies with clans grouped into moieties, and lastly, societies with moieties not subdivided into clans. The principal difference between moieties and clans seems then to be one of size.

Let us take the simplest hypothesis – and the most favourable one – viz., that in which both clans and moieties are exogamous. An immediate distinction has to be made. For a clan to be exogamous does not inform us as to the marriage rules in the society considered. We would only know that an individual cannot seek his spouse in his own clan. To which clan should he turn? What degrees of closeness are permitted? Do preferential unions exist? This we do not know. The Crow Indians are divided into thirteen exogamous clans. All we learn from this is that a man can regard twelve out of every thirteen women as a possible spouse. Apart from the scale, the marriage rule is as indeterminate as in our own society.

The situation is wholly different in a society similarly divided into several unilineal groups, each of which, however, maintains defined marriage relationships with one or several others. For example, suppose that group *A* and group *B* always intermarry, and that it is the same for group *C* and group *D*, group *E* and group *F*, and so on; or else, that group *A* gives women to group *B*, which gives its women to group *C*, which in turn gives its women

to group *D*, and so on . . . or any other analogous combination. In every instance here, the groups together represent a system, which was already true in the case of the previous hypothesis. But the system now has a stable structure, and a marriage law may be isolated for every combination, informing us completely as to the nature of the exchanges in whatever group is being considered. The term *clan* will be reserved for unilineal groupings which, in that they are exogamous, permit a purely negative definition, and the term *class*, or more exactly, *marriage class*, to those groupings which permit a positive determination of the modalities of exchange.

The distinction between the two forms is not always easy to make. There are clans which have none of the characteristics peculiar to classes. The Tupí-Cawahib of the Upper Madeira have such clans, each comprising one or more villages occupying an hereditary territory. There are twenty clans, and the only marriage rule is a recommendation to take a wife from outside. Thus each clan finds itself in the position of maintaining marriage relationships with several others, there being no limit to the number, no permanency in the alliances, and no marked preference for any particular combination. Obviously, in cases of this type, it cannot be said that the clan is not a functional unit. Its exogamous nature alone makes it such. But this functional rôle is reduced to a minimum and the factors determining the number of clans, their appearance and disappearance, their geographical location and their numerical importance, are more historical than anything else.¹

With the Bororo, who have already been referred to,² the situation is more complex. The clans are unequal in number and importance. Their distribution and even their internal structure vary from village to village. Nevertheless, the clans are always distributed among two exogamous moieties and two other ceremonial moieties. Furthermore, the clans are linked in twos, or in more complex combinations, through marriage preferences which yet are not strict. Consequently, we are dealing with social categories possessing the characteristics of both clans and classes, without these characteristics completely overlapping. By contrast, among the Kachin of Burma marriage is regulated by two large groupings which are simultaneously both clans and classes.³ Finally, in Australia there are marriage classes which are not clans, since the successive members of the same line of descent can be assigned to different classes.⁴

The distinction, however, is of great theoretical importance. If we try to interpret dual organization as a particular case of clan organization, and, more precisely, to compare moieties with a system with *n* clans in which *n* = 2, we meet with insoluble difficulties. As long as *n* > 2, the notion of

¹ Lévi-Strauss, 1948b.

² cf. pp. 48-9. The Mundurucu likewise have exogamous moieties, one (White Moiety) composed of nineteen clans, the other (Red Moiety) of fifteen clans. According to legend, these clans, formerly rival tribes, became 'brothers'. There are also clans which maintain closer relationships and are called *i-barip*, 'related', Kruse, 1934, pp. 50-7.

³ cf. ch. XV.

⁴ cf. ch. XI.

clan is not bound up with any positive determination, or only with very vague determinations. But when the number of groups falls to two, everything changes, negative determinations become positive, and instead of it being impossible for a man to marry into one group, he learns that he must marry into the other. Generally speaking, for every act of social life governed by dual organization, a *partner* is immediately identifiable. Hence Lowie's embarrassment in trying to treat moieties as clans: 'It is a puzzling question how this reciprocity is to be interpreted',¹ and his subsequent abandonment of this position.²

But moieties belong in fact, not to the 'clan' series, but to the 'class' series, and it is not enough that the number of clans be reduced to two, through demographic extinction or for any other reason, for a dual organization to emerge. Lowie rightly quotes the case of the Crow who today have only two military societies, the 'Foxes' and the 'Lumpwoods'. There were seven when Maximilian visited them.³ The pseudo-dualism on this occasion has no significance from the dual organization standpoint. It would be the same if, as exemplified in South America, two clans surviving from a more complex organization together sought alliance with other villages or tribes. Thus the much discussed problem of whether clan organization resulted from a subdivision of moieties, or whether moieties were formed by an aggregation of clans has no significance whatsoever. Both are possible, as examples given below will show. Moreover, they are not the only possible methods. Dual organization may result from the establishment of organic ties between two villages, and even between two tribes. I myself have seen this happen between two tribes which did not speak the same language, and develop to such a point that only the names of the moieties were missing for there to be a characteristic and definite dual organization.⁴

These considerations perhaps provide an answer to a recent polemic on the unique or multiple origin of dual organization. Against Olson, who supports the former interpretation,⁵ Lowie points out that institutions which are to all appearances heterogeneous are confused under the title of dual organization.⁶ In North America alone the Iroquois have exogamous moieties consisting of several clans; the Hidatsa, non-exogamous moieties but also consisting of several clans; the Fox and the Yuchi, non-exogamous moieties, organized without any reference to clans; the Crow and the Kansas, indeterminate phratries; the Creek, ceremonial and non-exogamous moieties; the Keres and the Tewa, ceremonial moieties, tending to endogamy with the transfer of the wife to the husband's moiety if she does not belong there in the first place; and so on. In short, the one common characteristic of moieties is that there are two of them, and the duality is called upon to play

¹ Lowie, 1961, p. 133.

² *ibid.* 1934, p. 325.

³ *ibid.* 1924, p. 87.

⁴ Lévi-Strauss, 1943*b*; legend, as has been seen, attributes the same origin to the Mundurucu clans (cf. note 2, previous page).

⁵ Olson, 1933, pp. 351-422.

⁶ Lowie, 1961.

highly varying rôles as the circumstances require. Sometimes it governs marriages, economic exchanges and ritual, sometimes just some of these, and sometimes only sporting contests. There would thus appear to be as many different institutions as there are distinguishable modalities. Lowie even goes so far as to treat systems with patrilineal moieties and systems with matrilineal moieties, systems with exogamous moieties and systems with non-exogamous moieties, as virtually independent 'species'.¹

The American sociologist is no doubt right in attacking certain abuses. Yet this attack must extend to the very nature of these abuses. Olson and his predecessors, principally Perry,² were doubly wrong. They defined dual organization in the most complex and most developed form that it is capable of attaining, and whenever they observed a hint or embryo of dualism they interpreted it as a vestige of this complex form and as a sign of its former existence. In that case, as Lowie once jokingly observed, the duality of political parties in the United States might be the survival of a former dual organization in which Democrats and Republicans acted as moieties.

But if dual organization rarely reaches the institutional stage, it nevertheless has to do with the same psychological and logical roots as all those sketchy or partial forms, sometimes simply outlines, which are formulations of the principle of reciprocity for the same reason (though not always as systematically) as dual organization is just such a formulation. Accordingly, dual organization is not in the first place an institution. If we wished to interpret it in this way, our search for its beginning and its end would be doomed as hopeless, and we would risk being thrown back on Lowie's atomism and nominalism. It is, above all, a principle of organization, capable of widely varying and, in particular, of more or less elaborated, applications. In some cases, the principle applies only to sporting competition. In others, it extends to political life (and the question of whether the two-party system is not an indication of dualism can be put without fear of absurdity), in others again, to religious and ceremonial life. Finally, it may extend to the marriage system. In all these forms, there is a difference of degree, not of kind; of generality, and not of type. To understand their common basis, inquiry must be directed to certain fundamental structures of the human mind, rather than to some privileged region of the world or to a certain period in the history of civilization.

It has been pointed out that we are ignorant of the origin and evolution of dual organizations, as well as their forms of decomposition. However, must the edict setting them up in some particular case be known for their functional validity to be affirmed? Inversely, must certain definite cases of dual organizations having undergone changes due entirely to contingent events such as wars, migrations, internal struggles, and so on, necessarily lead to the affirmation of their historical origin? American ethnologists were pleased to show how interpretations which are too theoretical can come to grief, when

¹ *ibid.* 1940, p. 427.

² Perry, 1923,

it was established that the number and distribution of exogamous units in certain systems had varied in a relatively short space of time. They concluded that such unstable structures elude all systematic analysis.¹ But this is to confuse the principle of reciprocity, which is always at work and always oriented in the same direction, with the often brittle and almost always incomplete institutional structures continually used by it to realize the same ends. The contrast, the apparent contradiction, we might almost say, between the functional permanence of systems of reciprocity, and the contingency of the institutional matter placed at their disposal by history, and moreover ceaselessly reshaped by it, is supplementary proof of the instrumentality of these systems. Whatever the changes, the same force is always at work, and it is always to the same effect that it organizes the elements offered or abandoned to it.

In this respect, discussion is no substitute for the three examples analysed in the following pages. They are drawn from three different regions, and reveal, firstly, how dual organization can arise, secondly, the crises to which it is exposed, and thirdly, the specific modifications which it causes in a social system which may be observed independently of its action.

III

The Motu and the Koita of New Guinea were originally two different tribes. Nevertheless, they tended to bring their villages together. The new village was either formed simply from two groups of houses, or the two villages remained distinct although contiguous. In certain cases, the Motu penetrated into Koita territory, and in others the opposite happened. However, marriage exchanges have in general been so frequent that it is difficult to find 'in the eastern moiety any considerable number of people of Koita blood who have remained pure for three generations'.² In particular, the social structure is so organized that one may no longer dare to distinguish the legacy of history from the conscious or unconscious ends of the system. Thus the centre of Poreporena today consists of four villages grouped into two sub-divisions, each comprising a Koita village and a Motu village.

Hohodai (K.)	}	Hanuabada	}	Poreporena
Hanuabada (M.)				
Tanobada (M.)	}	Tanobada		
Guriu (K.)				

The reasons for each particular migration are to be found in demographic, political, economic or seasonal circumstances. Nevertheless, the general result gives proof of integrating forces which are independent of such

¹ Lowie, 1940; Kroeber, 1938, pp. 305-7.

² Seligman, 1910, p. 45 et seq.

conditions, and under the influence of which history has tended towards system.

The Mekeo, also studied by Seligman, provide an even more striking example. The plan of their social organization is a subtle and complex symmetry, and the historical vicissitudes to which its component elements have been exposed have never succeeded in abating its strictness. Legend connects the origin of the Mekeo with successive migrations caused in the first place by a quarrel as to the *ongoye* bird's laugh, which some said was oral and others supposed to be anal. In addition to the fights between factions and migrations, apparently alluded to in this legend, Seligman cites war, revenge, and transfers of territory. The history of the Inawi and Inawae villages is crammed full of such factors.¹

And yet the villages coincide with social units whose nature, number and distribution cannot be the mere results of chance. The Mekeo are divided into two groups, *Ofa* and *Vee*. Each group is in turn subdivided into two *ngopu*, meaning 'group of common descent', and named Inawi and Inawae for the *Ofa*, and Ngangai and Kuapengi for the *Vee*. Each *ngopu* consists of one, two or several *pangua*, clans or local groups within the village, while the clan is divided into sections, each characterized by a men's house or *ufu*.

To a certain extent it is known how a *pangua* subdivides and gives rise to new units. A *pangua* normally consists of several *ikupu* or enlarged families. An *ikupu* can acquire a jural personality by proclaiming itself the 'younger section' (*ekëi*) of a *pangua*, and the other *ikupu* of the *pangua* are then known as the 'older section' (*fāngiaiu*). It can also break completely with its clan and found a new *pangua*. There is a third process of subdivision whereby the *pangua* gives rise to two groups, on the one hand *fāa aui* or *lopiā aui*, which is always a segment of the older section and includes the political chief, and, on the other, *io aui*, which can be a segment of the younger section but always includes the war chief. Demographic pressure, internal quarrels, economic inequalities, political ambition or the desire for prestige, seem to be the principal motives in these processes of fission, and Seligman gives detailed examples of them.²

And yet, each *pangua*, or *ikupu* group within the *pangua*, maintains a particular type of relationship with certain *pangua*, or *ikupu* groups in the same or different *pangua*. *Pangua* or *ikupu* interjoined by this special tie are called *ufuapie*, or 'men's house from the other side of the village'. The *ufuapie* exchange prestations which are economic, legal, matrimonial, religious, or ceremonial as the case may be, and it is no exaggeration to say that the *ufuapie* relationship is the regulating principle for the whole social life of the Mekeo. In one sense, then, the *ufuapie* structure is the final cause of the complex system of *ngopu*, *pangua*, *ikupu* and *ufu*. There is so much truth in this that, in referring to the native theory which reduces the disorder and apparent confusion of present-day groups to two sections (*Biofa* and

¹ *ibid.* pp. 315-19.

² *ibid.* pp. 328-46.

Vee), each consisting in two *ngopu* which are *ufuapie* in relationship to one another, Seligman, at the end of a detailed analysis, acknowledges that 'the conditions actually existing . . . are almost exactly those required by the hypothesis founded upon native history'.¹

Thus the social structure of the Mekeo has been modified by two factors, firstly, by migratory movements which have introduced allogeneous elements, and secondly, by an internal tendency: 'There is, and apparently always has been, a centrifugal tendency which, with the absence of a central dominating authority, has permitted the formation of a large number of *pangua* by fission from the parent stock.'² The ancient organization of the *Biofa* and the *Vee*, each divided into two exogamous moieties with reciprocal prestations, has been complicated and diversified. However, it is still revealed in the *ufuapie* relationship, which can be explained less as a historical survival than as a regulating principle which, though no doubt imperfectly, has nevertheless continued to exist.

IV

This respective independence of the principle of reciprocity and the temporary institutions in which it is expressed, whatever the society and whatever the moment in its history, stand out equally clearly among the Naga of Assam. Their northern and eastern representatives, the Konyak, are divided into two linguistic groups, Thendu and Thenkoh, and are also distinguished by peculiarities of clothing. Both groups are endogamous, whether they live in the same village³ or in different villages.⁴ But each village has a men's house or *morung*, some having two, others more. Each *morung* corresponds to a *khel* or subdivision of the village, and groups together several hierarchized clans among which marriage is forbidden. In certain cases at least, then, the *morung* functions as an exogamous unit. Nevertheless, the existence of clan exogamy does not prejudice the exogamy of the *morung*, and in certain villages, Wakching for example, the *morung* are coupled to form two exogamous pairs, viz., Oukheang and Thepong, on the one hand, and Balang and Bala on the other. Marriage is concluded by an exchange of gifts between the bridegroom and his parents-in-law 'which is repeated at intervals until his death and in some cases for even longer'.⁵ This system of prestations between *morung* regulates the whole economic and ceremonial life of villages practising it. Thus, 'the *morung* of the Konyak Nagas are the centres of village life and the pillars of their social and political organization. The *morung* system regulates the relations of every man and woman with the other members of the community, and forms a framework for the numerous mutual obligations between individuals and groups. It strengthens the sense of social unity . . . and at the same time encourages competition . . . thus stimulating the activities of the whole village.'⁶

¹ Seligman, 1910, p. 352.

² *ibid.* p. 367.

³ Hutton, 1921*b*, p. 114 et seq.

⁴ von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1938.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 362.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 376.

This basic system of reciprocal rights and duties is at the constant mercy of conflicts and quarrels which necessitate a complete reorganization of the structure. According to custom, the Thepong boys once rebuilt the *yo* (the girls' dormitory) for the Bala girls. They thus acquired the privilege of courting these Bala girls in the *yo*. The Thepong boys became aware that the girls also received visits from some Ang-ban boys who had no such right. Their reproaches being ineffectual, the Thepong invaded the *yo* and cut down the bamboo bed platforms. The girls, outraged, then demanded a fine, which the boys refused to pay unless the girls also paid a fine for having illegally received the Ang-ban. Tempers were lost on both sides, and relations were completely broken off between the Thepong boys and the Bala girls. The two groups no longer sing or dance together, they go separately to the fields, and they no longer exchange gifts. In these circumstances, the Ang-ban clan has maintained good relations with both the Thepong and the Bala, and by interposing itself between the two has prevented interruption of the circuit of prestations. For their part, the Bala and Thepong have opened a new cycle of relationships with other *morung*.¹

Another incident, which its narrators traced back to the beginning of the century, is equally typical. The men of the Bala *morung* had made themselves unpopular because of their arrogance and quarrelsome nature. One day one of them fell into a game pit dug by a man from Chingtang, and died from his wounds. Although this was only an accident, the Bala swore to take revenge. The other *morung* intervened with the Bala, asking that they be content with a heavy fine. The Chingtang said they were quite willing to pay, but the Bala refused, lay in ambush, and inadvertently killed a Wakching woman instead of the Chingtang they were expecting.

The other *morung* then lost their patience and demanded that the Bala should deliver the two culprits to Wakching, in order to avoid a war between the two villages. However, the culprits escaped, and the Bala satisfied Wakching by buying a slave whose head served to avenge the murder.

The incident might then seem to have been settled. However, relations between Bala and Thepong continued to worsen, and a quarrel about the rights in a certain song ended in an open fight. Both *morung* fought desperately, not only with clubs, which are generally used in fights of this type, but also by throwing stones. The Bala even attacked their adversaries with spears and wounded several of them. Furious at such a violation of the rules, the Thepong killed a Bala.

From then on all hope of peace was lost. The four *morung*, Oukheang, Thepong, Balang and Ang-ban, decided to finish once and for all with the trouble-makers. But since it is forbidden to destroy a *khel* of one's own village, they asked the Ang of Chi to do the job for them. The Ang of Chi agreed on condition that the people of Wakching place one of Chi's younger

¹ *ibid.* p. 364.

brothers at the head of their own Ang. It was in these circumstances that the Bala *khel* was burnt down and its members driven out.

However, the Bala did not entirely disappear. Some found refuge among the Balang, although the latter had participated in the conspiracy. But the Balang had attacked the Bala as a different *morung* to their own, not as their fellow-clansmen in that *morung*. As such, the Bala had a right to be protected by the Balang, and knowing this took refuge only with those *morung* with which they could not intermarry, and not with their relatives-in-law. The Bala *morung* had disappeared, but a good half of its numbers were accepted among the Balang and treated as such. Only fifteen years later was the Bala *morung* rebuilt and reopened.¹

There is no doubt that in most cases such events do account for the present-day form of a social structure, but it would be singularly shortsighted not to see beyond this. Despite incident, conflict and destruction, the structures just considered still remain structures of reciprocity. Their true nature derives from those factors which cause them to survive as such, and not from the spasmodic history which continually forces them to readapt.

v

The Yokut and the Western Mono of California provide just as striking an example, since here is a group in which only certain elements are affected by dual organization, and then not to the same extent. In particular, where this dual organization does exist, it is superimposed upon a more general form of organization which it specifies and amplifies without being inconsistent with or replacing it. This general form of organization consists firstly in a system of patrilineages which it is agreed today is basic to the social life of Californian tribes, and secondly, in a continual demand for reciprocal prestations between persons, families, lineages, villages, or tribes: 'On all occasions of . . . jubilation or sorrow there was always a reciprocal group who supplied services or gifts which were balanced with gifts of equivalent value in the form of bead money, baskets, feather ornaments, furs, or foodstuffs.'² Roughly speaking there are, on the one hand, groups (or more exactly partners, since relationships of reciprocity exist between two groups, two persons, or even a person and a group, as in the case of propitiatory rites to the totem of an animal which has been hunted and killed), and on the other, a network of bilateral relationships between these partners. At the same time, marriage is prohibited between all the *ta.a'ti* or kin, including all cousins up to the second and sometimes even the third degree.

What happens in the Mono or Yokut tribes which superimpose a division into moieties upon this general organization? Nothing changes and nothing is omitted, but the moieties do add something: firstly, a further type of correlative opposition with a function analogous to the previous types;

¹ von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1938, pp. 366-7.

² Gayton, 1945, p. 416.

secondly, a principle of systematization allowing the grouping and simplification of the previous network of relationships; and, finally, a common method for handling relationships (such as marriage) which prior to this had not been consciously assimilated to reciprocity.

The moieties, like the lineages, are patrilineal, and the grouping of the lineages into moieties does not prevent them from keeping their respective totems. Nevertheless, the totems acquire an order or arrangement which they previously lacked, for they too are divided between the two moieties. 'For example, the Tachi assigned Eagle, Crow, Falcon, etc., to the *Tokelyuwiš* moiety, Bear, Raven, Coyote, etc., to the *Nutuwiš* moiety.'¹ A man whose patrilineage has the crow as its symbol is then both Crow (with respect to lineage) and *Tokelyuwiš* (with respect to moiety). He shows the customary respect for his own symbol, and at least perfunctory respect for all other symbols of his moiety. Likewise, on ceremonial occasions, the bipartite tribes classify the products from collecting and hunting into *Tokelyuwiš* (seeds and mushrooms) and *Nutuwiš* (berries, birds, game). The moiety 'owning' the food would collect the first fruits and offer them to the other moiety. This second moiety must take its share in order to lift the alimentary prohibition that would otherwise be imposed upon the first group. In the tribes without moieties redemption ceremonies for an animal killed during hunting are observed by the eponymous lineage. In tribes with moieties, these ceremonies become the business of one of the two principal divisions, the interested family having no more than an officiating rôle.²

There are other changes also. The official titles ('chief' and 'messengers') are the prerogative of the Eagle and Dove lineages in the tribes without moieties. In tribes with moieties, the Eagle lineage (*Tokelyuwiš* moiety) keeps the first place in the hierarchy. But a second chief, from the Coyote lineage, appears in the *Nutuwiš* moiety, and the Eagle-Coyote duality becomes characteristic of the whole organization. In this way, authority acquires a dual structure that it otherwise lacks. But the marriage system merits special attention. There is no complete rupture with the rules previously described. Cross-cousin marriage remains prohibited, and marriage within the moiety is possible when there is no known relation of kinship. However, a person tends to apply the term *ta.a'ti* to all members of his moiety. Moiety exogamy, without being compulsory, corresponds to a general tendency, 70 to 75 per cent of marriages among the Yokut being exogamous. The Yokut and Western Mono observe the annual mourning ceremony in conjunction with a neighbouring tribe which acts as partner for the exchange of prestations and counter-prestations. The guest tribe does not have to be the same one every year, but in tribes with moieties the reciprocal pairing must always be a *Tokelyuwiš* moiety of the host tribe and a *Nutuwiš* moiety of the guest tribe, or vice versa. However, reciprocity is not all embracing. It is not one moiety accepting another, but rather a

¹ *ibid.* p. 420.

² *ibid.* pp. 420-2.

general principle applying to all the constituents (families and persons) of both the respective groups. The family of the host chief receives the family of the guest chief, and, depending upon their particular relationship, the families are thus grouped into host and guest pairings. Thus the principle remains whereby the lineage continues to be the fundamental social unit, cutting across hamlet, village, homogeneous tribe, or tribe divided into moieties.¹

As the author of these observations rightly says, the Californian moieties are not crystallized institutions corresponding to rigorously defined concepts. Rather, they reveal a principle of reciprocal grouping, according to associated or opposed poles, of the very same constituents found among peoples without moieties in the same region, viz., the person, the family, the lineage, or the tribe. There is a general preponderance of the patrilineage, and where there are moieties these serve only to intensify and extend the mechanisms of reciprocity which are equally characteristic of the whole region, without prejudice to the forms of organization which everywhere correspond to them.²

VI

These facts tally with others which might have been added in revealing dual organization less as an institution with certain precise and identifiable features than as a method for solving multiple problems. It is from this multiplicity of content that dual organizations draw their apparent heterogeneity. However, it would be wrong to confuse this basic diversity with the simple and constant form imposed upon it. On the contrary, the extreme generality of this form can be recognized without falling into those two traps of purely historical ideas, viz., general history and the monographic study.

Even in societies where the clan (as defined above) is the predominant form or organization, rough outlines of classes can be seen appearing when the normal system does not provide any ready-made solution to unexpected problems. Few people seem so far removed from dual organization as the Ifugao of the Philippines, who prohibit marriage between first cousins, and, apart from exceptions, between second and third cousins. Furthermore, in the case of such exceptions, a special ritual beginning with a sham fight must be observed. The bridegroom's family would proceed in arms to the bride's village, where her family, likewise armed, were waiting for them. The two groups would then start an argument more or less as Barton has reconstructed it:³

BOY'S KINDRED: We have come for the debt you owe us.

GIRL'S KINDRED: Debt? We owe you nothing. We borrow only within our own family!

BOY'S KINDRED: Is it lost? Have you forgotten?

¹ Gayton, 1945, pp. 420-4.

² *ibid.* p. 425.

³ Barton, 1946, pp. 164-5.

GIRL'S KINDRED: Yes, of course it's lost because we never borrowed.

Take your impudence to your own village and get out!

BOY'S KINDRED: What? Are you quarrelsome? Well, let's fight it out.

A sham fight would then ensue, but with real weapons, and although the weapons were not aimed at anyone in particular, the natives recount that it was best for a man 'to keep his eyes open because there might be bad shots'. A short time later someone would cry out: 'Enough, enough! Let's arrange it by an intermarriage, else a pity for our bodies.' Rites of pacification would then be celebrated, followed by invocations to the gods and ancestors: 'Ye ancestors are involved because we who were enemies are making peace . . . Let not the children who introduce an intermarriage (to terminate their enmity) become rusty or fat-sided.'¹ Consequently, for marriage to be possible within the exogamous group, there has to be a real, or at least, a simulated rupture of this group. This brings to mind those peoples of New Britain where the moieties are referred to as 'the boundaries of marriage',² or the people of Guadalcanal, who are divided into exogamous moieties, and who refer to marriage between members of the same division as having broken the moiety.³ In Africa, as we have seen, the same mechanisms have a very general field of application.

This functional aspect of dual organization is not always as obvious as in the following example from a region where marriage is usually concluded between villages, and where the whole village helps pay the price for the marriage of each of its members. However,

'in one village where marriage within the village had occurred a row of logs across the centre of the village divided it into halves. These halves acted to each other with all the forms used between separate villages connected by marriage . . . In validating the marriage of another of their village members who had married normally outside the village both halves sank their division and worked together, the one for the other's business and reciprocally co-operating and pooling their wealth, instead of halving it and exchanging their half's respective pools, as they did when validating the marriage within the village.'⁴

Thus we can see emerge, on a purely empirical level, the notions of opposition and correlation basic to the definition of the dualistic principle, which is itself only one modality of the principle of reciprocity.

¹ *loc. cit.*

³ Hogbin, 1937, p. 78.

² Trevitt, 1939, p. 355.

⁴ Fortune, 1932, pp. 60-1.

CHAPTER IX

The Marriage of Cousins

I

The very nature of the principle of reciprocity allows it to act in two different and complementary ways, either by setting up classes which automatically delimit the group of possible spouses, or by the determination of a relationship, or a group of relationships, so that in each instance it can be said whether a prospective spouse is to be desired or excluded. Both criteria are given simultaneously, but their relative importance varies. The class is of the greater importance in dual organizations or in societies with marriage classes, whereas on the other hand the relationship is used first of all, in a negative form, with the simple prohibition on incest.

But there is one special case in which both aspects of the principle of reciprocity co-exist, or rather have the same relative importance, and where they overlap exactly and cumulate their effects. This is marriage between cross-cousins. In this, more than any other, the class and the group of individuals determined by the relationship are co-extensive. This is why Morgan, Tylor and Frazer were led to observe that dual organization had the same kinship terminology as systems of cross-cousin marriage, and that the cross-cousins were distributed as if they belonged to different moieties. In fact, cross-cousin marriage is to be distinguished from the prohibition of incest in that the latter employs a system of negative relationships, and the marriage of cross-cousins a system of positive relationships. The incest prohibition says who cannot be married, while the other establishes which spouses are preferred. At the same time, cross-cousin marriage is to be distinguished from dual organization in that the latter has an automatic procedure (unilineal descent) for sorting out individuals into the two categories, while the other has a discriminatory procedure which it applies separately to each individual. Finally, cross-cousin marriage is the only type of preferential union which can function normally and exclusively and still give every man and woman the chance to marry a cross-cousin, wherever the kinship terminology divides all the members of the one generation, and of the other sex, into two approximately equal categories, viz., cross-cousins (real or classificatory) and brothers or sisters (including real brothers and sisters and parallel cousins). To our way of thinking, whenever sociologists

have grouped cross-cousin marriage with other systems, such as the levirate, the sororate, or avuncular marriage, under the general title of preferential union, they have failed to show the real importance and place of this form of marriage. The levirate, the sororate, and avuncular marriage are not *preferential unions*, because for obvious reasons they cannot constitute the exclusive or even preponderant rule of marriage in any group. We would prefer to call them *privileged unions*, since they presuppose other modes of marriage on to which they themselves are grafted.

For example, take the Miwok of California, Gifford supported the thesis that the marriage of cross-cousins in this group is a recent innovation, and that the former system of marriage was with the wife's brother's daughter. The first point will not be discussed here. In our opinion, the fact that the marriage system is or is not reflected in the kinship terminology (and Gifford establishes that it is not) cannot legitimately be used to support the anteriority or the posteriority of a system.¹ However, it is certain that marriage with the wife's brother's daughter has never been the normal form, for the simple reason that for someone to marry his wife's brother's daughter he must already have a wife. The wife, similarly, cannot be thus defined without there being a vicious circle. Consequently, this form of marriage can never have been more than a privileged form, and doubly so, firstly, because it is a privilege for a married man, whose wife has a brother, and whose brother has a daughter, to be able to claim this daughter as a second wife, and secondly, because this system has the quality, which struck Gifford so forcefully, of being reflected in twelve different forms of designation.

But for it to be possible to invoke this last fact in favour of the anteriority and generality of the system, it must needs be, as in our society, that individuals should never be united by just one kinship relationship. There are rare cases of this in societies with classificatory systems, but never in groups with a relatively low population density and in which marriages take place within a restricted circle. In such societies individuals must choose from among the multiple kinship ties which join each of them to all the others.² For example, there is nothing to prevent the father's sister from being at one and the same time the mother's brother's wife, if she marries her cross-cousin; a grandmother (if the father's mother's brother has a marriage claim to the sister's daughter); a mother-in-law (if someone marries the father's sister's daughter); and a wife (if someone has a marriage claim to the maternal uncle's widow). In this way the system allows five different terms to be applied to the one individual. In these circumstances, what determines the term chosen? It may be the fact that a form of marriage is old or general. Perhaps, however, it may also be the fact that it is exceptional. The holders of a privilege may wish to enshrine the principle of the matter by bringing

¹ cf. pt. II, ch. XXII.

² R. Firth has made similar observations concerning Polynesian societies, cf. Firth 1930, pp. 235-68; 1936, p. 266 et seq.

the corresponding term into common usage, or it may please the whole group to emphasize any marked oddity arising from the conflict between an exceptional form of marriage and a normal form.

For example, most of the kinship systems of South American tribes practising cross-cousin marriage identify grandparents with parents-in-law. This custom is easily explained by the practice of avuncular marriage. When a girl marries her maternal uncle, her parents-in-law and her grandparents are identical. However, this purely feminine perspective ought, from the male point of view, to result symmetrically in identifying the parents-in-law with the sister and the brother-in-law. Yet this does not happen. For a reason open to many different interpretations the feminine perspective is the one imposed upon the group. On the other hand, cross-cousin marriage establishes a third system of identification which is generally adopted, namely, that which groups the cross-uncle and the cross-aunt under the one term with the spouse's father and mother.

The Nambikwara have only one term for grandfather, mother's brother and father-in-law, and only one term for grandmother, father's sister and mother-in-law. The conclusion to be drawn is certainly not that in South America avuncular marriage is older than cross-cousin marriage, or vice versa, but that, in accordance with the circumstances and the groups, it is one possible solution to conflicts of terminology, and one which has prevailed over other equally acceptable solutions. Perhaps the adoption of the feminine perspective, identifying grandparents with parents-in-law, should even be interpreted as a reaction of the cross-cousin terminology to that of avuncular marriage. The status of cross and parallel cousins would remain as it was if the terminological confusions resulting from avuncular marriage were transferred to the previous generation. It would not be so if this asymmetrical terminology prevailed in the generation in which the potential spouses, the brothers-in-law and the sisters-in-law, are bound together in reciprocal relationships. If this interpretation is correct it follows, not only that the system of nomenclature peculiar to avuncular marriage proves nothing in support of the priority of this form of marriage in South America, but that the peculiar modalities of this system reveal a concomitant and opposed form.

However, the exceptional importance of cross-cousin marriage, as we see it, does not derive merely from its unique position at the very hub of matrimonial institutions. Its importance is no longer limited to its rôle as the 'pivot' between the incest prohibition and dual organization. The interest of cross-cousin marriage lies especially in the fact that the division that it establishes between prescribed and prohibited spouses cuts across a category of relatives who, from the viewpoint of biological proximity, are strictly interchangeable. This point has often been used to prove that marriage prohibitions have no biological basis, but it seems to us that its full significance has never been clearly perceived.

It is precisely because cross-cousin marriage disregards the biological factor that it should be able to establish that the origin of the incest prohibition is purely social, and furthermore to reveal what its real nature is. It is not enough to repeat that the prohibition of incest is not based on biological grounds. What then is its basis? This is the real question, and while it remains unanswered the problem cannot be said to have been resolved. For the most part, an answer to this is very difficult to give because the prohibited degrees of kinship, taken as a whole, are biologically closer than the permitted degrees. Consequently, there is always a doubt as to whether it is the biological degree, or the social degree, which is the basis of the institution. The difficulty is completely eliminated only in the case of cross-cousin marriage, for if we can understand why degrees of kinship which are equivalent from a biological point of view are nevertheless considered completely dissimilar from the social point of view, we can claim to have discovered the principle, not only of cross-cousin marriage, but of the incest prohibition itself.

This method seems so obvious to us that it may be wondered why it was not used in the first place, and why cross-cousin marriage was regarded as a marriage system like any other, instead of as a phenomenon of another order, as we have proposed. The answer is simple. Sociologists have trapped themselves in their own argumentation. Because cross-cousin marriage is an arbitrary regulation from the biological viewpoint, they have proceeded to assert that it is arbitrary in the absolute, whatever viewpoint is adopted. Alternatively, but to the same effect, they have tried to reduce it to a secondary consequence of heterogeneous institutions, just as some people explain the Jewish and Moslem prohibition of the eating of pork by the risk of it being bad in old unhygienic civilizations. It is denied that the *raison d'être* of an institution might be found within the institution itself; instead, it is reduced to a series of contingent connexions, derived as often as not from dual organization and the practice of exogamy.

This intellectual position is particularly apparent in one of the extreme writers, who, in a highly tendentious frame of mind, it is true, has made a close analysis of cross-cousin marriage:

'The first form of exogamy, that of the dual organization, bears every trace of artificiality; certain groups of relatives are possible mates, while others are forbidden; the children of brother and sister, cross-cousins may marry, while those of two brothers or of two sisters may not marry. Such a rule is not founded on any prohibition devised for some other purpose.'¹

We realize clearly that Perry, in making this statement, is merely attempting to find a basis for a preconceived system, and that this is even more riddled with historicism than are those of his predecessors. It is not a bad thing, however, to borrow a quotation from a writer whose work is generally

¹ Perry, 1923, p. 381.

denounced as an extravagant abuse of the historical method, for, from our present viewpoint, such illustrious predecessors as Tylor and Morgan are guilty of just as great an error in method, since it has led them to an analogous conclusion. Perry identifies cross-cousin marriage with dual organization, and he claims to explain them both historically. But Morgan and Tylor are no different, for when they analysed cross-cousin marriage they saw it simply as a residue of exogamous customs and dual organization. What should have been done, on the contrary, was to treat cross-cousin marriage, rules of exogamy, and dual organization as so many examples of one basic structure. This structure should have been interpreted in terms of its total characteristics, instead of being broken up into bits and pieces and set alongside one another in a juxtaposition which might justify an historical interpretation but would have no intrinsic significance. It was especially necessary to see that, of the three types of institution, cross-cousin marriage is the most significant, making the analysis of this form of marriage the veritable *experimentum crucis* in the study of marriage prohibitions.

II

If cross-cousin marriage is not a consequence of dual organization, what is its real origin? Swanton¹ has suggested that the origin is to be found in a desire to keep the most valuable possessions within the family. However, even if such an explanation were conceivable for the tribes of British Columbia or India, how could it be extended to the semi-nomadic bands of the Nambikwara of western Brazil, whose members are equally poor in material goods and in social prestige to hand on to their descendants? It is true that some people do not see any reason to treat the marriage practices of widely differing societies as the one and the same phenomenon. For example, Lowie concluded his analysis with these words: 'Cross-cousin marriage is in all probability not a phenomenon that has evolved from a single cause but one that has independently arisen in several centres from diverse motives.'²

A multiplicity of origins would in no way be excluded if the institution of cross-cousins were nothing but a highly specialized form of preferential marriage. For example, cross-cousin marriage is frequently encountered in the form of preferential marriage with the maternal uncle's daughter, and it is by no means certain *a priori* that, wherever this type of marriage is met with, its explanation should rest on a single unique cause. Rivers has given a plausible if not indubitable account of it, in the Banks Islands, as a form of matrimonial privilege over the girls of the group, handed on to the sister's son by the mother's brother. Also plausible but no more certain is Gifford's explanation for it among the Miwok, as a privilege over the wife's brother's daughter handed on to his sons by their father. But the question is not

¹ Swanton, 1905b, p. 50 et seq. In the same sense, Wedgwood, 1936a, pp. 612-13; Richards, 1914, pp. 194-8.

² Lowie, 1961, p. 31.

altogether posed in this way. Side by side with marriage with the mother's brother's daughter, there is, less frequently it is true, marriage with the father's sister's daughter. Moreover, in the great majority of cases, there is marriage with the father's sister's daughter who is *at the same time* the mother's brother's daughter (when the father's sister has married the mother's brother); there are innumerable cases, nevertheless, even where cross-cousin marriage does not exist, of the mother's brother's children and the father's sister's children falling into a common category, to be distinguished from the father's brother's children and the mother's sister's children who are called brothers and sisters. There are even more frequent cases of special terms, or a common term, being used to isolate the mother's brother on the one hand, and the father's sister on the other, from parallel uncles and aunts who are generally identified with the father and the mother. There are symmetrical cases – but not always – in which nephews and nieces descended from a brother or a sister of the same sex as the speaker are called sons and daughters, or are simply distinguished from nephews and nieces descended from a kinsman of the opposite sex and are called by different terms. There are the matrimonial privileges of the maternal uncle over the sister's daughter, and more rarely, of the brother's son over the father's sister. Finally, even when there are no matrimonial preferences and privileges, and sometimes when they are both expressly denied, there is a whole range of special relationships between cross-cousins, between cross-aunts and cross-uncles and cross-nephews and cross-nieces, characterized by respect or familiarity, authority or licence.

No doubt each of these features has its own particular history, and doubtless also its history can vary from group to group. At the same time, however, no feature is to be seen as an independent entity isolated from all others. On the contrary, each appears as a variation on a basic theme, as a special modality outlined against a common backdrop, and it is only the individual qualities in each which are to be explained by reference to causes peculiar to the group or the cultural area under consideration. What, therefore, is this common basis? The only one possible is a general kinship structure, more or less completely reflected in every system, but which all systems with any of the features enumerated in the preceding paragraph partially exemplify, though in differing degrees. As systems without any of these features are far less common than systems with at least one of them and probably more, and as the latter systems are scattered all over the world, no region being completely devoid of them, it is this general structure, of all the rules of kinship, which, second only to the incest prohibition, most nearly approaches universality.

III

The idea that kinship must be interpreted as a structural phenomena, and not simply as the result of a juxtaposition of terms and customs, is not new.

Goldenweiser asserted it when he remarked that there must be a way to approach the study of kinship systems which avoids their apparent and impossible complexity, and when he outlined how a particular example could be subjected to this structural analysis.¹ Spier has not only shown that this ought to be the sociologist's point of view, but that it might also be that of the natives. He says that it is with very good reason that the word 'system' is used for the collection of terms which serve to describe kinship relationships. It seemed clear to him that the Maricopa themselves conceived of kinship terms as a clearly defined system. He adds that the female informant needed to know only the sex and relative age of the brothers and sisters composing the lineages to give, without any hesitation whatsoever, the terms employed between any two kinsmen belonging to subsequent generations, however distant the degree.²

'In fact, it is partly as a theoretical formula that subsections are carried intertribally', says Stanner³ of the Murinbata of Australia, and he adds: 'Those who doubt the aborigines' power of such abstract reasoning can never have heard them expounding to their tribe's fellows how *ninipun* (subsections) should work, by inference from the theory to the case under attention. In this way an abstraction becomes a flesh-and-blood reality.'⁴ The same writer has given a fascinating description of how a complex system with marriage classes can be borrowed and learned in a theoretical form:

'One or two exceptionally intelligent natives are regarded by their tribes as experts in the new fashions. Each of them is a traveller, having roamed beyond the tribal homelands, often over very great distances. They have been schooled in alien camps until they know perfectly these verbal accounts of how the subsections work. One described to me how he had sat down for days at a time near the mosquito-ridden Victoria River and had been patiently instructed by his Djamindjung friends . . . His instructors had drawn marks in the dust, or broken twigs, each mark or twig a subsection or a man. This man was pointed out to him as his *kaka*, this one as his *ntan* (brother), that woman whose name was not even to be whispered was his *pipi ninar*. Each one was this or that "skin" who in turn "made" another "skin". In this way he learned. The formulae are in a real sense a book of rules.'⁵

Deacon gives evidence which helps to throw light on the theoretical nature of the native's conception of his own marriage system. Deacon's description is all the more significant because it refers to one of the most complex systems known, the six-class system of Ambrym.⁶ On two different occasions the natives gave Deacon demonstrations, using diagrams. Once an informant placed three white stones equidistant on the ground, each

¹ Goldenweiser, 1913, pp. 281-94.

² Spier, 1933, p. 209.

³ Stanner, 1936, p. 202.

⁴ loc. cit.

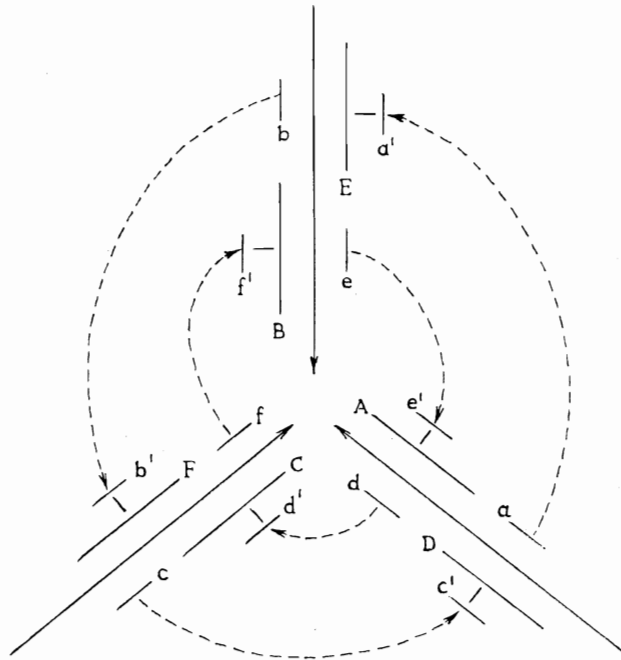
⁵ *ibid.* p. 208.

⁶ The Ambrym system will be studied and discussed in another work.

representing a line joined to the other two by a unilateral marriage relationship. Another informant drew three long lines on the ground (D, E, F), each representing a man from one of the three lines (Fig. 5). The marriage of each man and his children were represented by lines of different lengths placed to the left of the principal line for the spouse and to the right for the children. Boys and girls were distinguished by the length of the linear symbols given them. The two marriage cycles were indicated by two circles closing in opposite directions. This diagram revealed the whole functioning of the system and agreed perfectly with hypotheses to be made from the theoretical system:

Fig. 5.

Diagram traced by the Ambrym natives to explain their kinship system. (The long lines stand for men, and the short for women; the arrows separate the 'lines' within the same bilateral group (*bwelem*).



'It is perfectly clear that the natives (the intelligent ones) do conceive of the system as a connected mechanism which they can represent by diagrams . . . The way they could reason about relationships from their diagrams was absolutely on a par with a good scientific exposition in a lecture-room.'¹

The same author describes similar experiences in Malekula, in the New Hebrides, and he adds:

'The old men explained the system [of marriage] to me perfectly lucidly; I could not explain it to anyone better myself . . . It is extraordinary that a

¹ Deacon, 1927, pp. 329-32 and n., p. 329.

native should be able to represent completely by a diagram a complex system of matrimonial classes . . . I have collected in Malekula, too, some cases of a remarkable mathematical ability. I hope . . . to be able to prove that the native is capable of pretty advanced abstract thought.'¹

Bateson seems to be of the same opinion with regard to the New Guinea natives: 'Thus the culture is to a great extent in the custody of men trained in erudition and dialectic',² which are put to use in such quarrels as between the Sun and the Mother moieties. It is a question of which of these two great social units can claim ownership of the Night. One moiety claimed that Night was a positive reality in itself and could thus be appropriated freely, while the other moiety defined it as the negation of day, the consequence of the absence of the Sun totem, whence any claim by the Sun moiety must be a contradiction in terms.³

This logical versatility is ultimately reflected in the terminology. The study of kinship vocabularies shows that the native conceives of kinship phenomena as a system of relations rather than as a collection of statuses. Later we shall see how Radcliffe-Brown was induced to interpret Australian aboriginal kinship systems using an analysis, the basic elements of which are relationships (e.g., 'pairs', 'cycles' and 'couples'⁴), and not terms. But native theory preceded him in this discovery. The Kanakas have special terms for the combinations formed respectively by:

husband and wife (pair): *duawe*
 father and son (couple): *duanoro*
 mother and daughter (cycle): *duaduwe*

and even for relationships which are still obscure for the theoretician:

grandfather and grandson (alternate generations): *duaeri*
 maternal uncle and nephew (avuncular relationship): *duarha*.⁵

Likewise the Fijian system has nine dual terms each expressing a specific relationship between two persons, or two groups of persons, rather than the persons themselves; father and child; mother and child; brothers; sisters; brother and sister; grandfather and grandchild; grandmother and grandchild; uncle and nephew; cousins of the same sex; cousins of different sexes; husband and wife.⁶ To this list may be added the term *veiqaravi*, 'those who stand opposite one another',⁷ which expresses the relationship of partners which is implied in any ritual: between god and worshipper, victim and sacrificer, priest and acolyte, king and priest, etc.⁸

Primitive thought, therefore, is not incapable of conceiving of complex structures and apprehending relationships. Lowie called explicitly on these

¹ *ibid.* 1934, pp. xxii-xxiii.

⁴ *cf.* ch. XI.

⁶ Hocart, 1929, p. 34.

² Bateson, 1936, p. 227.

⁵ Leenhardt, 1930, p. 59.

⁷ *ibid.* 1933.

³ *ibid.* p. 230.

⁸ *loc. cit.*

capacities when, in a now classic article,¹ he set out to question Rivers's interpretation of cross-cousin marriage in the Banks Islands, replacing Rivers's local and historical explanation with the permanent function of exogamy. In this particular case we believe such an appeal is most unreliable, but this is no place to start a debate on the problem. At all events, the general direction which Lowie gave to the study of kinship problems was right, just as he was right in showing that exogamy as a regulating principle, stripped of its historical or local modalities, is always likely to follow two different courses in its action, firstly confusing direct and collateral lines, and secondly confusing generations. It is in the same spirit that attention must be drawn to a third structural orientation, not limited to exogamy, although a necessary concomitant of it, and found also in a great number of systems without clans and dual organization. We mean the distinction between collaterals of the same degree, according as kinship is established through a relative of the same or of different sex. In other words, it is the idea that the *brother-sister* relationship is identical with the *sister-brother* relationship,² but that these both differ from the *brother-brother* and the *sister-sister* relationships, which are identical with one another. Even more succinctly, it is the principle whereby there are considerable differences of status attached to whether the structure of collateral relationships (from the point of view of the arrangement of the sexes) is symmetrical or asymmetrical.

In this way we arrive at the most general formula for the phenomena studied in the previous chapters. An uncle does not have the same status for his nephews if he is the brother of a father who is his own brother, or the brother of a mother who is for him a sister, and it is the same with the aunt. Nephews and nieces are distinguished according as they are the children of my sister (if I am a man), or of my brother (if I am a woman), or according as they are the children of my brother whose brother I am, or of my sister, whose sister I am. Finally, a female cousin or a male cousin, the child of a brother's brother, or a sister's sister, is to me, as it were, a brother or a sister, while if we are kinsfolk in an asymmetrical structure, sister's brother or brother's sister, he, or she, becomes something else entirely, perhaps even the person farthest removed from a kinsman, i.e., a spouse. *In a very great number of societies there are consequences, ranging from a mere difference in terminology to a transformation in the whole system of rights and duties, following from the fact that there is or is not a change of sex in passing from the direct line to the collateral line.* Let us repeat: undoubtedly, this principle and all the consequences arising from it coincide perfectly with dual organization; nevertheless, they cannot be explained as resulting from this type of social organization. Firstly, such an interpretation, as we have seen, would lead to cross-cousin marriage itself being made a consequence of dual

¹ Lowie, 1915, pp. 223-39.

² Except in the most endogamous systems in which marriage with the (older) sister is permitted only because the two relationships are not reciprocal; cf. ch. I, p. 9-10.

organization, but neither the facts nor the analysis of the respective theoretical characteristics of the two institutions would justify such a conclusion. Secondly, this distinction of the relationships between the direct line and the collateral line, according as they reproduce symmetrical structures or asymmetrical structures, is met with in societies which do not practise cross-cousin marriage and which have no division into moieties.¹

It would be just as useless to invoke the levirate and the sororate, which are very widespread, because these institutions, for the same reason as the features listed earlier, are elements of an original complex to which they owe their existence but of which they embody but few of the characteristics. Therefore, supposing it were alleged that some of the characteristics of the complex could be explained by one institution, and some by another, and so on until they had all been exhausted, it would still have to be shown how this complex can have the structural nature on which we have insisted, and how this structure can be both simpler but richer in possibilities than the isolated elements which are claimed to be primary. Before the institutions, and as a condition of their existence, there is in fact the apprehension of a relationship, or more exactly the apprehension of the opposition between two relationships. These relationships concern both the direct line and the collateral line, and the difference emerges from the fact that these two lines can be linked through relatives of the one sex, or relatives of different sexes. Why is this difference seen as an opposition?

The characteristic feature of cross-cousin marriage cannot merely be reduced to the existence of a social barrier between biologically identical degrees. Neither is it a purely negative limit merely excluding parallel cousins from marrying, but a complete reversal in direction. The antipathy shown to parallel cousins does not simply disappear in the presence of cross-cousins; it is transformed into its opposite, that is to say, into affinity. Consequently, it is not enough to give a separate explanation for the prohibition of parallel cousins, nor would it serve any useful purpose to give an interpretation ignoring the fact that cross-cousins are included among the possible spouses. Positive and negative phenomena mean nothing by themselves, but form parts of a whole. If our general concept is correct, cross-cousins are recommended for the same reason that parallel cousins are excluded.

These difficulties are clarified if cross-cousin marriage is seen as the elementary formula for marriage by exchange, and if exchange is seen as the *raison d'être* of the system of oppositions the structural qualities of which were emphasized in the previous paragraphs. In our opinion, the source of all the uncertainties surrounding the problem of incest and the study of marriage prohibitions is none other than our tendency to think of marriage in terms

¹ By comparing the relationships of reciprocity between cross-cousins among the Azande, and father and son among the Pawnee, Hocart has clearly seen that both forms derive from a basic relationship between a male individual and a female individual. (Hocart, 1935, pp. 149-51.)

of our own institutions, as a unilateral act of transfer and as an asymmetrical institution, when in fact (and even among ourselves) it is a bilateral act and a symmetrical institution. The only difference is that preponderantly in primitive societies the symmetrical structure of the institution involves two groups, while in modern societies the symmetrical elements are on the one hand a class tending to be reduced solely to the individual, and on the other a class which extends so far as to be confused with the social group as a whole. We have already come across an analogous formula in accounting for polygamous marriage and the relationship of reciprocity between the chief and his band.¹ In this regard, the juridical basis of modern marriage appears as the generalization or democratization of a model with a more limited application. However, let us begin by determining the true nature of cross-cousin marriage.

Suppose there are two patrilineal and patrilocal family groups, *A* and *B*, united by the marriage of a *b* girl and an *a* man. From the viewpoint of group *A*, the *b* woman represents an acquisition, while for group *B*, she represents a loss. Thus, for group *A*, which benefits, the marriage is expressed by a change to a debit position, and for group *B*, which is decreased by the loss of one female member to the profit of group *A*, by the acquiring of a credit. Similarly, the marriage of each of the men of group *B* and of group *A* represents a gain for his respective group, and thus places the group in general, and the family involved in particular, in the position of debtor. By contrast, the marriage of each of the *a* or *b* women represents a loss, and thus opens up a right to compensation. Related women are women lost; women brought in by marriage are women gained. Each family descended from these marriages thus bears a sign, which is determined, for the initial group, by whether the children's mother is a daughter or a daughter-in-law. Families descended from a daughter and a son-in-law result from an impoverishment of the group, and, from the initial group's viewpoint, have a credit to their account. Families which derive from the marriage of a son and daughter-in-law are families of acquisition, and since they have gained, they must give. The sign changes in passing from the brother to the sister, since the brother gains a wife, while the sister is lost to her own family. But the sign also changes in passing from one generation to the next. It depends upon whether, from the initial group's point of view, the father has received a wife, or the mother has been transferred outside, whether the sons have the right to a woman or owe a sister. Certainly, in real life, this difference does not mean that half the male cousins are destined to remain bachelors. However, at all events, it does express the law that a man cannot receive a wife except from the group from which a woman can be claimed, because in the previous generation a sister or a daughter was lost, while a brother owes a sister (or a father, a daughter) to the outside world if a woman was gained in the previous generation.

¹ cf. ch. IV, p. 44.

A diagram will illustrate this analysis (Fig. 6). Each couple bears a (+) or (-) sign, according to whether it results from a woman being lost to or

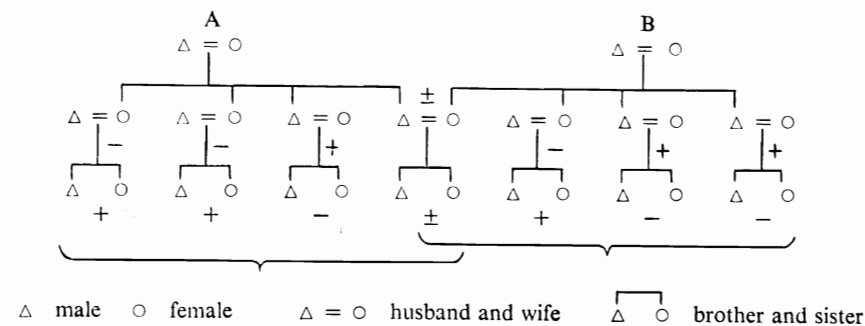


Fig. 6. Cross-cousin marriage.

The cousins who are in the (+ -) relationship are cross; those who are in the (+ +) or (- -) relationship are parallel.

acquired by line *A* or *B*. The sign changes in the following generation, the members of which are all cousins to one another. The pivot-couple, formed by an *A* man married to a *B* woman, obviously has two signs, according to whether it is envisaged from the viewpoint of *A*, or that of *B*, and the same is true for the children. It is now only necessary to look at the cousins' generation to establish that all those in the relationship (+ +) or (- -) are parallel to one another, while all those in the relationship (+ -) or (- +) are cross. Thus, the notion of reciprocity allows the dichotomy of cousins to be immediately deduced. In other words, two male cousins who are both in the credit position towards their father's group (and in the debit position with regard to their mother's group) cannot exchange their sisters any more than could two male cousins in a credit position with regard to their mother's group (and debit position with regard to the father's group). This intimate arrangement would leave somewhere outside not only groups which did not make restitution, but also groups which did not receive anything, and marriage in both would be a unilateral transfer. In the final analysis, therefore, cross-cousin marriage simply expresses the fact that marriage must always be a giving and a receiving, but that one can receive only from him who is obliged to give, and that the giving must be to him who has a right to receive, for the mutual gift between debtors leads to privilege, whereas the mutual gift between creditors leads inevitably to extinction.

There is nothing to prevent us from supposing in our theoretical diagram that exchange has already taken place in the parental generation. In this case, all the marriages will conform to the pivot-couple's marriage, that is, between *A* men and *B* women, or between *B* men and *A* women. Furthermore, the

children will be cross or parallel in both the paternal and the maternal lines, instead of in only one, the general structure remaining the same. It might also be supposed that the initial exchange had taken place between the grandparents, the *A* grandmother being the sister of the *B* grandfather, and vice versa. In this case, the following generation (that of the parents) will already be composed of cross-cousins, and the children's generation will have the same structure as in the preceding case, for the exchange of sisters or daughters, wherever it takes place, makes cross-cousins. The children of cross-cousins are cross-cousins in relation to one another; children descended from an exchange of sisters between men without any kinship relationship are cross-cousins; and even children descended from an exchange between parallel cousins are cross-cousins.

It may have been noted that we have assumed what might be called, so as not to prejudice institutions, a paternal perspective. That is, we have regarded the woman married by a member of the group as acquired, and the sister provided in exchange as lost. The situation might be altogether different in a system with matrilineal descent and matrilocal residence, i.e., in which the children belong to the mother's group, or where the mother's group profits from the husband's services. But, whatever the system, the same phenomenon is always to be found, although it may be expressed in more or less complex ways. In fact, the advantages or losses resulting from marriage are rarely shared out as simply as we have supposed for the clarity of the diagram. Each group loses and gains at the same time, according to the way in which the rights are distributed. Descent may be gained while residence is lost, or vice versa, and material goods and social titles are not necessarily transmitted homogeneously. The essential thing is that every right acquired entails a concomitant obligation, and that every renunciation calls for a compensation. In marriage by exchange, these renunciations and acquisitions always affect both unions symmetrically, but inversely. Even supposing a very hypothetical marriage system in which the man and not the woman were exchanged, it would only be necessary to reverse all the signs in the diagram and the total structure would remain unchanged.

But there is no need, in this theoretical case, to postulate any precise type of institution. If there is any real case corresponding to this theoretical one it is clearly that of primitive bands composed of biological families set closely side by side, or, on the contrary, without regular contacts, and still at a very elementary stage of organization. As a matter of fact, our interpretative diagram does not imply the existence of stable institutions, or the establishment of a particular rule of descent or residence. It merely implies that women are regarded as valuables – a psychological attitude sufficiently attested to in the great majority of primitive societies, and by the relationships between the sexes at the animal level – and the apprehension by the individual of reciprocal relationships of the type: *A* is to *B* as *B* is to *A*; or again, if *A* is to *D* as *B* is to *C*, *C* must be to *D* as *B* is to *A*; that is, the two formulas

for the exchange of sisters and for cross-cousin marriage. The acquisition of a capacity to apprehend these structures poses a problem, but a psychological, not a sociological one. We shall return to this point later. We know for a fact that structures of this type are conceived of by primitive thought.