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### Résumé de l'article

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# Polynesian Kingship and the Potlatch

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The form of exchange seen in the potlatch is gift reciprocity which validates position in systems where ranks realign over the generations. Improved understanding of movement in hierarchy within a relatively centralized system from Polynesia stimulates fresh comparison between the Northwest Coast and Oceania. The complex stratified policy of Tonga entails rivalry and competition for title between members of the ranking elite. Competitive exchange is part of wider relations between titleholders and their supporting groups though it does not itself determine rank. Calculations to lift rank are made through marriages and warfare which bring control over the accumulation, distribution and acceptance of gifts.

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I would like to discuss certain aspects of the relationship between ritual exchange and hierarchy<sup>1</sup>. The comparative study of exchange has recognized for many years that the institution of the potlatch unites numerous themes of a social system, while it is associated most fundamentally with organization by rank. The first element of potlatch, which is a rule of generosity, is present in the simplest of human groups. After Mauss in his *Essai sur le don* (1925/1954), here the potlatch is considered to be an exchange type, rather than a regional specific. The type finds full expression in the rank systems of the Northwest Coast of North America. Traditionally, in this comparative perspective, the more centralized and highly stratified social systems have seemed too firmly seated in their hierarchical arrangements, and consequently without developed potlatch exchanges because the important attribute of rivalry was absent.

Yet who has not been struck by the similarities between the famous potlatch and the great redistributive exchanges in more complex systems?-the congregation of groups to behold the announcement of prerogative, distribution of property, elaborated oratory, hierarchy manifest in ceremonial performance and gift exchange. In this paper, I consider part of the problem which was examined by Mauss in the *Essai* and try to demonstrate that the

qualities of the potlatch are present in a centralized system. With reference to one example of this type of society, that of the Tongans of Western Polynesia, I employ the concept of potlatch as a form of validatory gift exchange in systems of changing rank.

The problem of whether this type of exchange occurs in the centralized Polynesian systems relates not only to concern for the comparative understanding of the Northwest Coast potlatch, but also to the context of the fall from paramountcy of the 'big-man-chief' model of leadership types across the Pacific. Potlatch relations are recognized for Melanesia (Mauss 1925/1954, Rubel and Rosman, 1970; Young, 1971; 1984: 14). Young, in his excellent ethnography, applies Codere's (1950) image of "fighting with property" to portray Goodenough Islanders of coastal Papua-New Guinea as "fighting with food" in their exchanges (1971). The view of Melanesian leadership being achieved as men grow to size in their generation is coupled with an emphasis on rivalry as perhaps the central element of the potlatch.

Meanwhile, there is growing evidence of hierarchy and complex formal leadership in seaboard Melanesia before colonial penetration (see Garanger, 1972; Friedman, 1981; Keesing, 1985). As Europeans suppressed regional hostilities, denied the power of priests, shut off distance trade in valuables, and introduced new forms of wealth, these hierarchies closed in on themselves, devolving into the big-man systems which anthropologists, the late comers, consider traditional. This whole big-man-chief model may turn out to be an ethnological instance of better never than late.

My concern is not with big-man exchanges but with the image of the solid chief and gift processes in complex hierarchical systems. When we examine leadership patterns over periods of several generations, these hierarchical systems are observably flexible. Choice and competition are fundamental to social process in asymmetrical organizations. The upward flow of produce, rather than being seen merely in politicized terms as 'tribute' accruing to overlords, or in simple material terms as the means by which a society 'provisions' itself, must be considered in terms of the processes by which people reproduce their social order; in terms of how the specific leadership system and communities of production are reconstructed, modified, and established again in each generation. This initial investigation presents original field data<sup>2</sup> and associated historical evidence, and is exploratory in nature and objective. The methods are uncontrolled comparison and attribute analysis. We might ultimately chart a common ground on which several societies

with similar configurations of exchange and rank can occupy their proper place.

I start by discussing the usage of the concept of potlatch as it refers to a variety of exchange transaction, and considering the classic perspective on this type of exchange and Polynesian leadership.

### *Attributes of Potlatch-Type Exchange*

What are the characteristics of potlatch-type exchange? The qualifier 'type' is used to distinguish from the specific events for which the Northwest Coast societies are so famous, and to designate a generic form of ceremonial exchange. The precedent for a universal view was established in Mauss' work (1925/1954). The Kwakiutl, who figure so prominently in works on the subject, have at least four terms for those ceremonial events of different occasion which the ethnography calls potlatch (see Dawson, 1887:79; Goldman, 1975:31). The concept is an artefact with several levels of meaning.

As a type of exchange transaction, potlatch can be distinguished by reference to certain definitive attributes. On an index of forms of reciprocity, potlatch stands between equivalent exchange, among groups of equal status, and tribute, paid by groups under qualitatively political submission. The following are the attributes of this form of exchange, deriving significantly from Mauss (1925/1954) and Barnett (1938, 1968). I would consider all of these characteristics essential for full potlatch:

1. conspicuous display of valuables and food as well as songs, dances and other non-corporeal property;
2. the obligation to give the wealth, and for recipients to accept it and ultimately make return;
3. the conferring through this wealth of honour and position in society;
4. the element of usury on gift credit;
5. distribution according to rank;
6. rivalry, ideationally focussed on presenting larger gifts to make claim and to lift rank;
7. the performance of these acts at transformative rituals such as at birth, puberty, marriage, succession to title and funerals;
8. that these performances validate a claim to a title or to a new position in society, as indicated in the life junction at which they occur;
9. in pre-colonial times, the person for whom the potlatch was held had to be born in the correct social stratum.

Among the Northwest Coast societies exhibiting potlatch behaviour, stratum endogamy was common, and rank or consciousness of rank perme-

ated every aspect of social life. We also find that relations between high and low ranks entail asymmetrical reciprocity, where products with use-value and exchange-value are ceremonially given to those who control sea and land.

The systems of social stratification involved most closely resemble stratification by estate, in which different divisions of people in the society have different jural rights. This is why Boas and other writers of European background called the Northwest Coast social strata 'nobles' vs. 'commoners'. The right to move into a position, and to validate this move by potlatch was transmitted within the higher divisions of the society.

Up and down the Coast there was considerable variation in the details of the ceremonies and the character of the groups involved. The features cited above identify its essential form.

### *Gift and Potlatch in Polynesia*

Early on, Mauss observed in Polynesian gift exchange the basic elements of conspicuous display, the conferring of honour and prestige through wealth, usurious return, the complex of obligations, and distribution according to rank. On the basis of evidence available in his day, and the then established understanding of the nature of political hierarchy in the region, he determined that the element of rivalry was absent. His statement, contained in a note to the text, is worth quoting. Possibly the full potlatch had existed in earlier Polynesian society, yet the system had evolved to be more centralized and rigid:

There is in fact good reason why it should have disappeared from a part of the area, for in the islands there is a hierarchy of clans clustered around a monarchy; thus one of the chief conditions of potlatch is absent: an unstable hierarchy changeable from time to time by the jealousy of chiefs (Mauss, 1954:91, n. 68).

The implication is that succession to title, and rank relations between the titles and descent groupings, were very clearly defined, were not changing through the generations, and the system did not entail obligation to make strategic gifts to validate a claim.

Therefore, I will focus on validation and the most contentious attribute-rivalry. Processes of validation bring attention to bear on relations between titleholders and the lower ranks, as well as relations within the stratum of titleholders.

### Ceremony and Social Structure

The ceremonies which mark transitions in the lives of Tongan lords, and punctuate the existence of groups attached to them, are termed collectively *pongipongi*. The main products exchanged are kava, pigs, yams and other root crops, the results of men's labour, and the women's products or valuables termed in Tongan *koloa* and consisting of painted tapa, special baskets and fine mats. Customarily, contributions for *pongipongi* are made to a superior on the occasions of the installation of a superior leader, the installation of oneself to a title, the death of one's leader, his return from a voyage, and the leader's wedding.

In the field I witnessed and recorded details of several of these formal exchanges, including two installations to title, one aristocratic marriage and two occasions of presenting welcoming honours to His Majesty Tupou IV. Leadership and the system of rank and titles are more fixed and prescriptive since the Constitution of 1875 (see Marcus, 1980:43-73). Succession to noble titles is by male primogeniture under royal statute. Competition for leading title in Tonga recently is considered "a dormant political force" (Gunson, 1979:49). The associated ceremonialism exhibits remarkable continuities up to the present day. The features of these exchange transactions as they were before Christianity and statehood can be reconstructed in outline through the combination of field records and relevant historical information.

The performance at the events mentioned above are denoted by a specific term or by a designating suffix to the general term. The formal marriage ceremony is termed *unoho* and the accompanying exchanges are usually called simply *pongipongi* or sometimes *katoanga* (festival). The presentation of gifts at a titleholder's installation is known as *pongipongi hingoa* (naming ritual). For funeral exchanges of ranking leaders, both Kaepler (1978) and Bott (1982) after Churchward (1959) cite *pongipongi me'afaka'eiki*. People in the northern Vava'u Group also use *pulua* for rank funerals which they contrast to *putu*, a common funeral. In past times the holding of a *pulua* was the prerogative of aristocrats and chiefs only, but today the clergy, which constitutes a new estate since missionisation, as well as wealthy commoners, host these funeral exchange ceremonies in attempts to reinforce their position in the community. Such levelling, which allows rich commoners to sponsor a ceremony, resembles post-contract changes in the potlatch pattern on the Northwest Coast. The celebration at the leader's arrival from voyaging is known as

*pongipongi folau* and in the case of the King, *tali tu'uta* (waiting at the shore). This presentation is made when the King conducts formal visits between islands. All these exchanges mark transformative episodes where the person of rank re-enters the community from outside or into a new identity and role.

As indicated in Mariner's report on Tonga at the beginning of the contact period, the society was composed of five principal strata, these being *hau* (paramounts), *'eiki* (aristocrats), *matapule* (ceremonial attendants or heralds), *mu'a* (lesser chiefs) and *tu'a* (commoners); there were also slaves, termed *popula*, though these appear to have been relatively few in number (see Martin 1817/1981:290-297). The leadership system was a variant of a form well known further west in the Austronesian-speaking region and which Indonesianists usually call 'diarchy': dual kingship or complementary government. In this west Polynesian case the dualism consists of the sacred Tu'i Tonga and the military or executive leader the Hau. Descent and inheritance of political title were optative (entailing choice) with an agnatic bias; kinship rank descended significantly through women. Tongan society does not feature intact descent groups integrating members at all levels of the society. Rather, at one level are the *ha'a*, or groups of genealogically-related titles and attached followers, which are conceptualized in Tongan as noble houses. Formal kava-circle ceremonial seating arrangements integrated the titles of all the *ha'a* in the archipelago. The two other significant kinship groupings are the *fa'ahinga*, which I tentatively define as a shallow agnatic-centered landholding group, and the *kainga*, which in this context refers to a set of bilateral kin and dependents residing together on an inherited plot. The term *kainga* applies also to the ideal kindred, and to the political or tenant community that identifies with a given titleholder.

The formal recognition of political rank is most conspicuous in the order of serving kava. The seating pattern for all kava ceremonies assumes the familiar elliptical shape. The central position belongs to the King or to the highest ranking person in attendance. The order of precedence of nobles is indicated by their nearness to the King with the positions alternating from right to left; each noble has a ceremonial attendant seated at his right side. A good representation of rank and seating order in the royal kava circle, the *taumafakava*, is given by Latukefu (1975:5).

### *Ceremonies of Validation*

The titleholder giving a formal exchange ceremony is in a situation where he must prove his worthiness. The person of rank is said to feel public shame (*ma*) if he is unable to make the appropriate presentations. A titleholder gives, as Islanders explain, "because he has a name . . . to show he is worthy to hold the name". The host of the ceremony depends on several obligation relationships to amass property for distribution. First are ties with his agnatic landholding group, second are the mother's people, third is the wife's kindred, and fourth is his political or tenant community on the lands of the title. These groups together make up a contributing community. The claimant of highest genealogy who has created obligations in others, who demonstrates ability, is efficacious, is *mana*, receives support. Tenants and relations providing support have a *kavenga* (responsibility), the performance of which is their *fatongia* (burden).

The central importance of the obligation to contribute in preparation for *pongipongi* or other presentation is tied to a fundamental condition of the associated production system, which in technique and organization is relatively 'undeveloped': dry field swidden with digger and hoe technology, absence of irrigation, domestic and local cooperation units, relatively elementary division of labour, and preliterate transmission of knowledge. The titleholder stewards production but his domestic unit do not themselves produce the total amount of wealth and food used in ceremony. The claimant relies on exchange and labour obligations to accumulate property. It is not unusual for individuals in a contributory relationship to expend major resources, kill substantial pigstock and activate other wealth obligations to make contribution. This pooling demonstrates support for and makes possible the titleholder's claim.

The affirmation of rank and reciprocal duties is found in the text of ceremonial speech. In ceremonial presentation the food gifts are termed *ngaue*, the general term for 'work', and the contributing community are thanked for their work towards the presentation. I suspect that the word *ngaue* is a stative, indicating a condition of being. There exists an active metaphorical identity between people and produce. The principle of giving support for their leader's claim partly explains why Tongan commoners insist that their contributions are voluntary. They put forward their property as material representation of themselves and their support.

Pooling of wealth and food is part of the followers' affirmation of the leader's claim to position. The

titleholder must be able to disperse property to get his claim publicly accepted. The subsequent acceptance of the gifts including the formal drink of kava by other leaders validates his place in the titleholder hierarchy.

As the ceremony the gifts to be exchanged are opened for inspection. Under direction of the attendants to the highest ranking titleholder present, a representative of the sponsor known as the *pule ngaue* (leader of the work), enumerates the gifts by size and category. This display is followed by repeated thanks for the work, the tapa-making (*koka'anga*) and the mat-weaving (*lalanga*). Then commences the formal speech, the broadcasting: "*Oku 'i ai e lea 'oku sasala he fonua*" ("There is a saying that is spreading over the land") This speech before the kava distribution opens with the "Fakatapu-tapu". The phrase "Tapu mo", which precedes each name, has no equivalent in the English language but a most insightful source<sup>3</sup> explained that it implies "With the consent of", from which I conclude that the speaker seeks acceptance of the gift of words and his representation of ranks and identities in the assembled order. The address establishes the hierarchical relationships starting with the highest rank and proceeding through the nobles, different house groupings and heralds. The orator declares that if he makes a mistake he takes refuge in the sacred ring, that is the kava circle. It would be a major breach to leave out a name or put them in the wrong order. The rank of a claimant is made manifest by placement in the presentation sequence. Refusal of the cup by any member would be considered a challenge to those inside the sacred ring and tantamount to a declaration of hostility. Acceptance of the kava gift by each ranking member betokens acceptance of the validity of the claim and relative rank of the claimant.

As the Tongan economy becomes commoditized and money gains importance in everyday life, transactions in indigenous products persist as the way to validate position. The imperative of the system is so strong that it continues to define the forms of 'rent' for Tongan commoners. Tenants on government estates pay rent in money, while tenants on the land estates of the King and nobles pay rent in esteemed foods and valuables (Morgan, 1985:51-86). The food and wealth goods move into the exchange circuit between titleholders.

The importance of validation through exchange is visible again in marriage, which today entails two ceremonies. The Christian rite is followed by a formal transfer of prescribed gifts between families. This second component attracts far more interest and a greater number of people. *Kava* is drunk.

Foods are distributed. The valuables-mats and painted *tapa*-are retained by the senior women of each side. Ideally, after the couple have intercourse, the man takes the bedding to the woman's family and expresses thanks. He kills a pig, specially termed *umu tuvai*. The ratification of the marriage is public and is complete when these transfers are accepted.

What is being validated in these periodic ceremonies is a renewal of order among those involved. The word *pongipongi* also means 'morning', or more exactly, 'early morning', 'at and just following dawn' (see Churchward 1959:415). At first I thought they were merely homonyms but after consideration it became clear that there is a metaphoric association in the image of a cycle of fall and re-ascendance.

Position in the hierarchy must be validated, and this imperative weaves titleholders not only into relations within the seated order but also with the contributing community which provides property to be distributed. Leadership in systems of this type relies on a dual foundation where exchanges support and affirm relations both above and below. So far it is shown that, rather than being purely ascriptive and stable, ascendance to and maintenance of position must be verified by the accumulation, distribution and acceptance of property. I now consider the possibilities for rivalry and shifts in the hierarchical arrangements.

### *Rivalry and Strategy*

The question of competition and agonistic behaviour is problematic not only for the centralized systems of the Pacific but also for the rank systems of the Northwest Coast. Partly because of the heavy attention given to the Kwakiutl material, writers have greatly emphasised rivalry. Yet for the Nuuchal-nulth (Nootka), Drucker (1951:383-384) and Arima (1983:74) state that their potlatches do not feature the rivalry or exaggerated competition of their neighbours. Oberg reports a rule of Tlingit potlatch that only the sponsor presents gifts, which contrasts with the competitive Kwakiutl potlatch where guests counter-give property at the ceremonial performance (1973:127). The most highly exaggerated rivalrous exchanges occurred in the circumstances of post-colonial aggregation of autonomous groups at the trade location of Fort Rupert; there was a similar situation among the Coast Tsimshian at Port Simpson, on the northern British Columbia coast (Drucker, 1955:126-129). The theme of rivalry by gift found historically specific, heightened expression in these contexts.

Even with these important observations for the Northwest Coast, we see competition and argument in Tongan exchange ceremony. The west Polynesian system clearly meets Mauss' "condition of potlatch. . . an unstable hierarchy changeable from time to time by . . . chiefs". First I note the competition in the wider field, and then consider its expressions in exchange.

It is my suggestion that the forms of competition are intertwined with three strategies of gift exchange as distinguished by C. A. Gregory in his recent contribution to the theory of reciprocity economics, these being 'finance strategy', 'destruction strategy' and 'production strategy' (1982:58-61), and that in the Polynesian area the production strategy is highly developed.

As described, leadership in the Tongan system was centered around the Tu'i Tonga and Hau diarchy. The best information available on accession to the ritual headship indicates hereditary primogeniture in the male line (Gunson, 1979:34; Bott 1982:99). The Tu'i Tonga office was reduced by competing dynasties in the early historical period and has been defunct since 1865. Today the Tupou line and the Christian God hold the powers of this divine lord.

We know that accession to secular title was not stable. The historian Niel Gunson, in a recent scrutiny of the more insightful primary sources and a comparative philology of leadership terms in central Oceania, shows that the positions of supreme Hau as well as *hau* over different regions were contested by males and in at least one case a female in the upper stratum (Gunson 1977, 1979). The Tongan term Hau means 'conqueror', 'champion', or 'victor'.<sup>4</sup> The competition to be Hau took place within a framework of indigenous concepts of stratification, leadership and identity between followers and hero. The outcome was the result of the military strength of groups which supported the most astute and able aristocratic contenders. The support of maternal kin, and therefore marriage strategy, as well as adoption, were very important in determining strength and consequence.

Typically, in this Hau system, over periods of generations houses of chiefs rise from being localized *ha'a* with a limited land base and following to eclipse rivals and secure high titles as part of their inheritance. Early generations establish power around a home place. Marriage to local women reinforces position in the local area. Lesser titleholders are sent to outer islands to get a foothold and receive *ha'a* leaders when they visit. Ceremonial links to outlying communities assume more overt political form as high ranking sons of third and

fourth reigning *ha'a* leaders are sent beyond the home locale to proximate land districts and to strategic communities in outer islands, there to marry daughters of local leaders. From these marriages, ranking heirs absorb rights over land and leadership in peripheral communities. By strategic moves some lines of chiefs incorporate lesser lines and rights to these groups' productive lands and labour. Others are unsuccessful in moves to create followings in outer communities; failure is frequently attributable to miscalculated marriages and consequent lack of land base and matrilineal support.

Tongan history shows many instances where collateral lines have slowly superseded those genealogically superior to them. Genealogies might then be recomposed to provide an ideological charter for the concrete result.

These adjustments are followed by gift exchange but stem originally from military action on the one hand and successful aristocratic marriage on the other. In the late Queen Salote's discussions with Elizabeth Bott we find ready evidence of at least eight titles which increased their rank through marriage, four of which slip again in subsequent generations (see Bott, 1982:67-69). As with potlatch arrangements, changes in kava circle seating-order reflect the fluctuations in rank.

A major effect of these marital and martial calculations is to increase a land base and following to expand especially the matrilineal support group and tenant populations bound by *kavenga* relations for the land. Thus two important sources of labour and property are expanded.

Rivalry and competition are fundamental to the system. As gift exchange itself is part of the system, giving and the ethos of gift transactions include rivalry.

A contentious spirit surrounds the exchanges between leaders and their groups. The installation ceremony is the most important politically, always involves the superior leaders, and manifests movement in leadership through the generations. The *pongipongi* for the installation of a Hau is attended by the ranking titleholders from all political groupings in the archipelago. Early in the proceedings there may be a friendly argument (*talanga*) between the holder of the name Motu'apuaka on the right and Lauaki on the left to see who will direct the distribution of the kava. Motu'apuaka always wins these arguments but in a good exchange the history of both names and their duties are fully recounted (Bott, 1982:125). At other times, argument might start when the leaders are taking their seats, as to whether or not the assigned seat is correct. One claims "No,

I should be further up there", others retort, "No, sit down, that's where you belong". These disputes are explained away as being merely to entertain the people. Some arguably represent attempts to move up in the seated hierarchy before the formalities begin. Rivalry between group leaders is expressed in mock debate.

Formalized derision and abusive language are observed in a prosperity ceremony in the neighbouring Fijis and it is considered an obligation of ritual for the descendants to emulate the contentious relationships between their respective gods (Hocart, 1952:46). Competition occurs between deified ancestors and their representatives in the living world who hold their ancestral identity.

A central ideological expression of this theme in Tongan is the concept of *fakavahavaha'a* or 'giving to gain social recognition'. This premise fuels antagonism and enthusiasm for making gifts. The competitive atmosphere envelops relations between following communities and their leaders who vie to outdo each other in size of presentations. Each donor earns prestige and esteem from his or her gift to the pool. In general, the size and value of the gift corresponds to the relative status and wealth of the donor and reflects their credit and production skills and ability to command necessary domestic and cooperative labour.

Recently C.A. Gregory distinguished three strategies in potlatch-style rivalry. The first, 'finance strategy', entails manipulation of lines of gift debt to increase the velocity of exchange and accelerate credit for property accumulation; the classification is adopted from A.J. Strathern's work in the New Guinea Highlands (Gregory, 1982:57-59). I would argue that this strategy is highly developed on the Northwest Coast and in Melanesia. The finance strategy would appear to be responsible for the perspective on the potlatch which emphasizes accrued credit with usury as the main source of wealth and led Boas to see "the interest bearing investment of property" (1895:341) as the underlying principle of potlatch.

Gift roads in Tonga are termed *hala*, and these pathways link nobles and noble houses, villages and dispersed commoner groupings. Accumulation for major ceremonies as well as a variety of subsidiary forms of exchange follow these routes. The description by Gifford of a marriage exchange at the beginning of this century reveals credit in Tongan exchange. In the distribution of received presents the "bridegroom's father or other official representative of his people . . . the father's sister . . . had in mind what each person had donated toward the present

that had been given to the bride's people, and each got his original gift returned in double quantity" (Gifford 1929:193). Gifford appends the anticipative note that this process is "suggestive of the potlatch of the north Pacific coast of America" (1929:193 n.).

In the Northwest Coast potlatch area, a significant expression of rivalry is the destruction of property. Canoes are smashed, valuable coppers broken and human property in slaves killed in attempts to shame opponents. Destruction, Gregory argues, has the effect of removing property from circulation so that it becomes difficult for rivals to accumulate toward counter prestation (1982:59-61). The killing of pigs is seen as analogous to the destruction of property in valuables on the Northwest Coast; pork is consumed, rather than retained for future circulation like valuables. This part of the argument receives important support from the Northwest Coast where the broken copper is said to have been "killed" (see Codere, 1950:120).

Pigs are considered by Tongan villagers today as being the most important male property exchanged in ceremony. Independently two elderly men reported that in times past there were fewer pigs and the volume of exchange was lower than in present times. When encouraged to suggest how this change developed, one stated that it was the lesser titleholders who called for more pigs from their communities. I surmise that the inflation of demand for destructible property in pigs represents some intensification over time of the destruction strategy.

While both the finance and the destruction strategy are evident in the Polynesian system, it is the third approach distinguished by Gregory, the 'production' strategy, which probably was the greatest source of food and valuables for ceremonial exchange in Tonga. Movement in this system of hierarchy, as demonstrated, is defined significantly by marriage and warfare. As rights to land are assumed through these relationships the leader gains a wider support following in various relations to himself. Ties to kin and affines involve credit and gift debt to strengthen obligations for help toward ceremony. An enlarged tenant community is bound to the titleholder significantly through an ideology of asymmetrical reciprocity for land. A titleholder avoids usury and equal gift debt to his tenants through defining control of land as the basis for asymmetrical reciprocity. In the Polynesian system, the ability to tie reciprocity to the provision of land allows leaders to use tenant labour as a greater source of ceremonial gift property. Through a series of feedback loops, the very processes of warfare and marriage which take



the titleholder up the path to greatness also provide added means to validate claims to the greatness won.

### Conclusions

Just as the potlatch is the focal institution of Northwest Coast society, in the western Pacific it is the *kava* ceremony which commands a central place in social life. The formal exchanges in these ceremonies manifest the relations between the leading people and the component groups in these societies. The exchange ceremonies are a means, in the absence of the state, of broadcasting and ratifying a renewal or change in the social order.

It has been argued that hierarchical organization, as represented by the Polynesian system of Tonga, was far more flexible than usually believed. Choice and competition result in observable movement through generations. Such hierarchical systems experience what we might term cycles of integration, in which different lines consolidate power and rise to control high office, perhaps only to fall again as a rival line expands and gains power.

Leadership and hierarchical arrangements in the centralized system, rather than being firmly seated, were to some extent supple and changeable. Further similarities exist between the Northwest Coast and Oceania in the areas of display, obligation, interest, wealth conferring honour and prestige, and distribution by rank. Further work is needed to expose and understand the significance of other parallels such as the importance of fertility rituals by titleholders, first catch and first harvest gifts, the periodicity of ceremonies, chiefs' possession, identification and alliance with the life-giving sun, and the logic of offerings for growth and renewal. On the Northwest Coast, as in the Island Pacific, there existed a fundamental relationship, which is not yet adequately understood, between leadership and beliefs about control over fertility.

At this stage, such parallels raise more questions than they answer about the logic and the imperatives that hierarchical systems entail. Fortunately, with the wealth of ethnological and historical material available today, we can create expectations from observations in one area that can be tested elsewhere. The time is right for more comparative investigation.

An initial conclusion to this exploratory work is that when potlatch is viewed as a type of transaction, rather than as a phenomenon with the specificity of the Kwakiutl or of the Northwest Coast, it is present in at least one centralized system, that of the west Polynesian Tongans. This finding supports propos-

als for further investigation into other Pacific systems where complex hierarchy is the frame for polity.

Second, in this potlatch-type system, gift exchange is not the primary determinant of ceremonial rank; rank derives from descent and accomplishments in war and marriage. Where wealth has taken on new cultural value it is easy to forget that gifts, unless they are just a noble form of bribery, are part of the total system of competition. When seeking to understand processes that order potlatch seats, it is necessary to consider the possibility that there is an illusion in the power of the gift itself. This illusory power appears as rights derived from war and marriage provide substantial gifts for the ceremonies where people convene to acknowledge that these social successes have raised a rank.

Finally, early investigation stimulates a proposition about regional variations in the strategies behind exchange. Everywhere, important exchange items call for considerable labour input to produce in volume. The production strategy in Melanesian Papua-New Guinea is probably responsible for the heavy labour demands made on females, which place "strains on the relationship between a man and his mother and/or wife" (Gregory, 1982:60). Production as a gift strategy can help explain the importance of slave labour alongside women's labour on the Northwest Coast, as discussed by Donald (1983). Otherwise, in these two regions the main emphasis is on finance by usury and destruction by "killing" of coppers and pigs. Potlatch-type exchanges in the centralized systems of Polynesia, by comparison, while they are destructive and usurious, rely more significantly on production by a community which makes presentations to nobles in reciprocity for their land. These patterns are regional differences on a widespread theme in the relationship between hierarchy and ritual exchange.

### Notes

1. An abbreviated version of this paper was read to the Canadian Ethnology Society Annual Conference, 18 May 1986, session "Theory and Method", at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Stuart Piddocke kindly provided written comments on that draft.

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3. Mr. Soane Hurrell, currently at the East-West Institute in Hawaii, to whom I owe thanks for work on the translation of ceremonial texts.

4. Today, the ceremonial usage of "Hau" refers to the reigning sovereign His Majesty King Tupou IV; the term may be heard in popular language referring to an elected member of Parliament or a successful boxer.

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