The Spirit of Exchange

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Notes on Contributor
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Abstract

Following the Haitian earthquake on 12th January 2010, Guyana emerged as the most generous donor of the international community despite being one of the poorest countries in the Americas. What are the politics of such gift giving? Exchange Theory has offered one answer: reciprocity is part of the rational pursuit of interest based on cost/benefit analyses, but legitimized by reference to a normative framework of equity and obligations. This chapter exposes the roots of this popular explanatory framework in the colonial discourse of social anthropology. Following an intention to decolonize IR theory, the chapter re-reads the foundation text of this tradition, Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*, through the cosmological lens of one of that text's key interlocutors, the Māori (the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand). Through this reconstruction the chapter provides an alternative heuristic of the generosity of the peoples of Guyana and a proffers a decolonial understanding of reciprocity.

Introduction: a maddening generosity[1]

[1] My thanks to the editor for his suggestions. Special thanks to Manuka Henare for his comments and guidance. Thanks also to Clinton Hutton for illuminating discussions regarding the Haitian Revolution. This chapter was written during a stay at the Centre for Caribbean Thought, University of West Indies. I thank the Centre for its hospitality. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.

In the feverish weeks of aid giving that followed the Haitian earthquake on 12th January 2010, Guyana emerged as the most generous donor of the international community. The Guyanese government had given US$1,000,000, private companies and church groups had raised almost US$900,000, and the Guyana Red Cross had collected approximately 7.2 million Guyanese dollars.[2] Guyana's GDP per capita is one of the lowest in the Americas and easily in the bottom third worldwide. So although absolute contributions from the USA dwarfed that of Guyana, in relative terms the latter's donation was 0.088% of its overall GDP while that of the former stood at only 0.0011%.[3]

A story to warm the sympathetic heart of any Kantian idealist, or a maddening generosity if one were looking through the Hobbesian lens of diffidence and self-survival. Indeed, more realistic minds could always take comfort in the remorseless self-interest at work in Guyanese politics disguised in the rhetoric of moral commitment. For example, President Bharrat Jagdeo felt it expedient that the bulk of the money from faith groups and NGOs should be channeled through an ostensibly non-partisan government organ, The National Haiti Relief Effort, headed by the human services minister Priya Manickchand. Very soon into the effort Manickchand chastised the Guyana Red Cross society for making a separate appeal for aid.[4] At least one political commentator declared more trust for the Red Cross than for a government charged with multiple cases of corruption, and besides, local and general elections were looming the campaigns of which required heavy financing.[5] Additionally, President Jagdeo began to use the Haitian situation as a proxy for regional geopolitiking.[6] Finally, self-interested - or at least communitarian – sentiments started to usher forth from some of the Guyanese population: it was poverty at home that should be addressed first, argued some, and it was rich countries that had the prime responsibility for addressing the needs of Haitians.[7]

Yet if one listened carefully enough, a sense of obligation and responsibility was being broadcast in Guyana that ran deeper than the wavelengths of expedient philanthropy, moral blame or power politics. The Minister of Health, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, spoke of Haiti's revolutionary history, the lead that its peoples had taken in ridding the Americas of slavery to become in 1804 the first post-colonial post-slaving state in the Americas, and the debt of 150 gold francs that Haitians were forced to incur

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[2] ReliefWeb, *Haiti Funding 2010*, 2010, http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fts.nsf/doc105?OpenForm&rc=2&emid=ACOS-635P2K; "Guyana Red Cross nets $7.2M for Haiti," *Kaieteur News*, January 31, 2010, http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2010/01/31/guyana-red-cross-nets-72m-for-haiti/.

[3] David McCandless, "Haiti Earthquake: Who's Given What?," *Information is Beautiful*, January 26, 2010, http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/2010/haiti-earthquake-whos-given-what/. Ghana was the second most generous donating country at 0.018%

[4] "Controversy in Guyana over Haiti Aid Efforts; Others Rush Relief to Survivors," *Caribbean 360*, January 14, 2010, http://www.caribbean360.com/index.php/news/17535.html.

[5] Freddie Kissoon, "I am Giving my Haitian Money to the Red Cross," *Guyana Observer*, January 16, 2010, http://www.guyanaobservernews.org/content/view/2467/1/.

[6] "Guyana's President Says US an Obstacle to Efforts to Help Haiti," *Caribbean Net News*, January 22, 2010, http://www.caribbeannetnews.com/article.php?news_id=21008.

[7] For example, Rayvonne Bourne, "Guyana Is in No Position to Resettle People from Haiti," *Stabroek News*, January 23, 2010, http://www.stabroeknews.com/2010/letters/01/23/guyana-is-in-no-position-to-resettle-people-from-haiti/.

in 1825 by the old colonial power France for loss of its colony. "In CARICOM", argued Ramsaran, "we tend not to give Haiti its true position; it took a long time for them to be included in the first place [and] when we look at that [it] is a slap in the face of the people who first shed their blood to show us the way."[8] Similar sentiments of indebtedness were expressed outside of government by Andaiye, a long-time social activist from Red Thread, a Guyanese women's grassroots organization.[9] Her sentiments predated the earthquake. In August 2009 she had spoken out against the violence meted to Haitian citizens by the UN peacekeeping forces and had criticized the passivity of the regional powers who let this happen. Arguing for principled engagement by Caribbean organizations, Andaiye warned, "[i]t is wrong for us not to pay our debt to Haiti, if we don't, we will regret it."[10]

Exchange theory, IR, and social anthropology

In examining this maddening generosity, it becomes more and more apparent that the obligation felt by many Guyanese to "repay" the Haitians for gifts previously given is not easily explained by either a liberal idealism predicated upon abstracted moral imperatives or a realist worldview grounded in self-interest, disguised or blatant. But these are still the dominant explanatory frameworks in the field of International Relations (IR) used to explore the relationship between morality and power.

Nevertheless, the discipline has by no means ignored the phenomenon of gift giving. At some point in the 1970s, American political scientists started to look beyond the "security dilemma" towards forms of social behavior that were predicated upon norms of equivalence and/or obligation. How could these behavior patterns, manifested in practices of burden-sharing, foreign aid giving and trade negotiations, be explained as part of an international system that principally operated in terms of self-interest and self-help? In other words, how might economic exchange be understood as social behavior that implicated the pursuit of political power?[11]

Exchange theory helped to answer this question by defining reciprocity as a form of power understood as the rational pursuit of interest based on cost/benefit analyses, but one that legitimized itself by reference to a normative framework of equity and obligations. By this definition reciprocity could be understood as a power relation of *quid pro quo*, a morally inflected competition to foster unequal obligations. Perhaps Joseph Nye's "soft power" or Hilary Clinton's "smart power" are contemporary incarnations of this theoretical approach.

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[8] Guyana Government Information Agency, "Panel Discussion Addresses Haiti Disaster and Future of Country", January 18, 2010, http://www.gina.gov.gy/archive/daily/b100118.html.
[9] Ibid.; for background, see Alissa Trotz, "Red Thread: The Politics of Hope in Guyana," *Race & Class* 49, no. 2 (2007): 71 -79.
[10] "Region Must Save Haiti - Andaiye," *Stabroek News*, August 5, 2009, http://www.stabroeknews.com/2009/stories/08/05/region-must-save-haiti-andaiye/.
[11] See especially David A. Baldwin, "Power and Social Exchange," *The American Political Science Review* 72, no. 4 (1978): 1229-1242; Robert O. Keohane, "Reciprocity in International Relations," *International Organization* 40, no. 1 (1986): 1-27.

The sources of exchange theory in IR are multiple, but the field is probably most indebted to prior discussions within American sociology.[12] We should further note that George Homans, widely seen as the father of exchange theory in American sociology, asserted that heretofore the only explicit theoretical work on the subject was to be found in a social anthropology text from the 1920s**,** *Essay on the Gift,* by Marcel Mauss.[13] Indeed, when exchange theory has been utilized in contemporary IR, Mauss's text is often cited; and even if done only in a cursory fashion, this in effect, confirms its canonical importance.[14]

I want to dwell on this influence, even if it is understated, because, in the wider field, the application of a sociological lens to the anthropological investigation of the "native" has played an important but underestimated role in the development of IR theory. Specifically, social anthropology has provided an influential analogical mode of thought that allows for international relations to be conceived of as a socially constituted sphere of human interaction.[15] In this analogical imagination, anarchy in the international realm is to be understood not as the absence of governance but rather the presence of "primitive" forms of governance that exhibit weak, multiple and diffused political hierarchies and obligations. In this imagination, more advanced – or "civilized" – forms of governance are related to the inside of states in terms of the hierarchical political relationship between government, law and citizen.[16]

In this respect it is important to recognize that, as a field, IR inherits the founding methodological and political tendency of social anthropology to fit variegated societies and peoples into a hierarchical status binary of being either primitive/traditional or civilized/modern.[17] By virtue of colonial intervention, ethnographers representing civilized/modern peoples set themselves up as active observers and collectors of the knowledge of primitive/traditional peoples who were imagined only to be passive repositories of this knowledge. In other words, the ethnographic-observers of the civilized world would reveal to the primitive-observed the meaning and value of their own life worlds through the application of sociological method to ethnographic interpretation. With these epistemological assumptions, social anthropology, especially in

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[12] See especially D.A. Baldwin, "Exchange Theory and International Relations," *International Negotiation* 3, no. 2 (1998): 139-149.

[13] George C. Homans, "Social Behavior as Exchange," *The American Journal of Sociology* 63, no. 6 (May 1958): 597–598.

[14] See for example, Baldwin, "Exchange Theory and International Relations," 139, 144; Keohane, "Reciprocity in International Relations," 6; Tomohisa Hattori, "The Moral Politics of Foreign Aid," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (April 2003): 232–234.

[15] For a summary of these issues see R. Shilliam, "Modernity and Modernization," in *IPSA Encyclopedia of Political Science, 8 vols.*, ed. B. Badie, D. Berg-Schlosser, and L. Morlini (London: Sage, 2010).

[16] An important work in this vein, influencing both Kenneth Waltz and Hedley Bull, is Roger D. Masters, "World Politics as a Primitive Political System," *World Politics* 16, no. 4 (1964): 595-619. An acute analysis of these influences can be found in Aaron B. Sampson, "Tropical Anarchy: Waltz, Wendt, and the Way We Imagine International Politics," *Alternatives* 27 (2002): 429-457.

[17] Of course, over the last forty years Anthropology has done much to reflect critically on its colonial roots. In fact, the discipline is increasingly taking Western institutions to be its object of inquiry. In a world where the materiality of Western power is fast being spread out amongst non-Western powers, is classical anthropology fast becoming an impossibility?

the early twentieth century, promoted a colonial division of humanity between those who produced valid knowledge of the human condition and those who were unable to do so and could only provide raw data.

I will return to the significance of this colonial division of intellectual labor presently. But having made some links between current exchange theory in IR and sociology to the colonial science of social anthropology let us now turn in more detail to Marcel Mauss, nephew to the great don of sociology, Emile Durkheim, and specifically to Mauss's influential social-anthropological text, *The Gift*, and in particular the most controversial section of Mauss's text, *The Spirit of the Thing Given.*[18]

The spirit of the gift

Mauss was somewhat of a dissenter to the model that justified a colonial division of intellectual labor, as described above. He argued that "archaic societies" should not be examined as "undeveloped" but rather as "total social phenomena". That is to say, for Mauss, "native' societies not only incorporated the religious and moral dimensions of social interaction but also those dimensions usually associated with modern/civilized societies, especially the legal and the "economic". Through this approach, Mauss wished to show that, while seemingly voluntary, exchange made by means of gifts in archaic societies were in fact reciprocal obligations that included not just goods but peoples, values and relations.[19] As a number of commentators have noted, Mauss, similar to his contemporary Karl Polanyi, hoped that his anthropological investigations of exchange and the economy would validate the European socialist alternative pursued in the inter-war years.[20]

The controversial section of Mauss's text rotates around a discussion of the practices of the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Māori, and in particular the exchange of gifts from the forest. The main source that Mauss uses is a set of letters exchanged between a Māori *tohunga* (sage),[21] Tamati Ranapiri of Ngāti Raukawa, and Elsdon Best, a New Zealand administrator and ethnographer of European descent who translated the thoughts of his interlocutor into English. Copies of the letters were found by Mauss when he posthumously edited the works of his colleague, Robert Hertz.[22]

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[18] See in general Lygia Sigaud, "The Vicissitudes of The Gift," *Social Anthropology* 10, no. 3 (2002): 335-358.

[19] See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 1–3.

[20] David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 153–155; Keith Hart, "Marcel Mauss: In Pursuit of the Whole. A Review Essay," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 2 (2007): 5–8.

[21] More than an "expert" a tohunga is a "person chosen or appointed by gods to be their representative and agent by which they manifested their operations in the natural world by signs of power accurately"; Māori Marsden, "God, Man and Universe: A Māori View," in *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*, ed. Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (Masterton: The Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 14.

[22] Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*, 169.

Mauss presented the guiding question of his inquiry as "what is the principle whereby the gift received has to be repaid? What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return?"[23] In order to address this question Mauss discusses at length a hypothetical scenario that Ranapiri conveys to Best concerning the appropriate use of the *taonga (*gifts) of the forest. One person gives a gift to another, who, after time has passed, makes of this a gift to yet another. After more time has passed this last person decides to reciprocate by giving another gift to the second person who must pass this gift back to the person who first gave a gift. To not reciprocate the gift in this way is to invite death.

I will go into more detail with this passage presently. For now, however, it is enough to note that what Mauss finds crucial in this text is the obligation that remains with the receiver even after the gift has been passed on. Mauss understands this obligation as arising from the workings of a spiritual power articulated in the Māori language as *hau.* His interpretation of Ranapiri's scenario by reference to this power deserves to be quoted at length:

> For the *taonga* [gift] is animated with the *hau* of its forest, its soil, its homeland, and the *hau* pursues him who holds it. It pursues not only the first recipient of it or the second or the third, but every individual to whom the *taonga* is transmitted. The *hau* wants to return to the place of its birth, to its sanctuary or forest and clan and to its owner. The *taonga* or its *hau* - itself a kind of individual – constrains a series of users to return some kind of *taonga* of their own. [24]

Mauss then typifies these exchange relations as:

> first and foremost a pattern of spiritual bonds between things which are to some extent parts of persons, and persons and groups that behave in some measure as if they were things.[25]

Subsequent receptions of Mauss, no matter how sympathetic, have tended to criticize precisely his interpretation of *hau* as a form of spiritual power to the extent that it mystifies the power that binds exchange relations through obligation and reciprocity.[26] And, in light of the tendency I ascribed to twentieth century social anthropology to work within a colonial division of intellectual labor, it is instructive to now examine some of these critiques.

The critique of Mauss

Social anthropological critiques of Mauss have mostly sought to disassemble the implicit cosmology behind his notion of *hau* - glossed as spiritual power – so as to

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[23] Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, 1.
[24] Ibid., 9–10.
[25] Ibid., 11.
[26] See Manuka Arnold Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society - From Tribes to Nation" (DPhil Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2003), 92.

rearticulate this form of power as a variant of either material, ideological or symbolic power. For example, Raymond Firth, a New Zealand born anthropologist who became a leading figure in the English school of social anthropology, complains that Mauss's interpretation ignored the fact that *hau* required human agency to move.[27] For Firth it would seem that a notion of spiritual power cannot incorporate a critical (and implicitly emancipatory) understanding of human agency. Firth is one example of the project of de-spiritualizing – or *making profane* - Mauss's interpretation of the *hau* of the gift. By exploring the critiques of two other notable anthropologists I will show how this endeavor supports a colonial division of labor that impels practitioners in the Western academy to decipher particular "native" forms of knowledge production in order to reveal a putatively universal body of profane social scientific knowledge.

Marshal Sahlins critique provides a clear and influential example of this practice. For Sahlins, *hau* is better understood as meaning "return on", and in this respect Sahlins argues that Mauss's use of the term "spirit" should be replaced with the term "profit".[28] In fine, Sahlins believes that the set of exchanges described by Ranapiri are best interpreted as the workings of a profane moral economy. Through this lens, Sahlins interprets the main obligation in this kind of economy to be the handing over of the yield (productiveness) on any gift to the original donor: "one man's gift should not be another man's capital, and therefore the fruits of a gift ought to be passed back to the original holder."[29] In this act of interpretation Sahlins deciphers *hau* as an expression of animatism - an impersonal power over which humans can have partial control. Therefore, *hau* does not refer to a spiritual quality per se, as Mauss seemed to have suggested by "individualizing" it. Rather, *hau* functions ultimately as a quality associated uniquely with fecundity and, at a higher level of understanding, an imperative to exploit the natural and social world in a sustainable fashion.[30]

What I want to note here is that Sahlins interpretation is based upon a categorical distinction between the spiritual and social-material dimensions. Hence, the core function of obligation and reciprocity in exchange relations is to morally moderate material exploitation by and between social beings. The residue of this explanation is that social beings must be educated to be moral despite their profane human nature. Thus, for Sahlins, exploitation and its moral solution – reciprocity - are ontologically material and not spiritual phenomena; in short, the spiritual has been transmogrified into a profane morality. But if Sahlins makes the particular exchange relations described by Ranapiri profane for social anthropological analysis, Lévi-Strauss renders profane Te Ao Māori (the world of Māori) entirely.

Lévi-Strauss reminds the reader that Mauss delineates the extent of his inquiry as nothing less than "total social phenomena". However, he charges Mauss with falling short of his own aim. The challenge of this form of interpretation argues Lévi-Strauss,

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[27] See Joan Metge, "Returning the Gift - 'Utu' in Intergroup Relations: In Memory of Sir Raymond Firth," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 111, no. 4 (2002): 319–320.
[28] Marshall Sahlins, "The Spirit of the Gift," in *Stone Age Economics* (London: Tavistock, 1974), 159–160.
[29] Ibid., 160.
[30] Ibid., 165–166.

lies in arriving at an objective understanding of a totality from the outside but at the same time manages to incorporate the subjective understanding of living within this totality.[31] In effect, he claims that the method of "total social phenomena" demands that the anthropologist incorporate "native" subjectivity into a social-scientific objective account. Moreover, Lévi-Strauss assumes that such a challenge can only be supplied in the language of outsiders.[32] Who are these outsiders? They are, of course, the ethnographers who, unlike the native, can presumably break the cardinal rule of total-social analysis when they come to interpret their own European-modern societies as having supplied the profane standpoint from which the cultural world can be approached in both subjective and objective terms. In other words, the objective social-scientific account is only accessible from a particular epistemological-cultural standpoint.

Lévi-Strauss claims that structural linguistics is the best tool available to allow the ethnographer to work from such a standpoint. Structural linguistics makes spiritual power (Lévi-Strauss calls it "magic"[33]) profane by articulating that which can be felt but not seen – i.e. structure - as a symbolic realm distinct from ideology (i.e. belief systems) and material relations. In this realm a "deep grammar" determines the position of each signifying element to the whole, and in so doing the grammar produces the meanings of various practices. For Lévi-Strauss, the structure of this grammar rests upon the relation between the unconscious and conscious planes. The "fundamental phenomena of mental life" are to be found on the plane of the unconscious because we do not realize our essential self on this plane, but rather, we uncover symbolic activity that is both ours (conscious self) and not ours (unconscious other). Understanding this activity holds the potential to let us "win back our estranged selves".[34] Once this is realized, Lévi-Strauss claims that it is simply an act of transposition to apply the same principles to the self-as-ethnographer and the other-as-native.[35]

In this way, structural linguistics, when applied to anthropology, provides a universal language of communication that incorporates subjective interpretation (unconscious self/native) into objective analysis (conscious self/ethnographer). Yet this transposition effectively relegates *both* the conscious and unconscious elements of the lived experience of the "native" into the sphere of unconsciousness, and concomitantly promotes both the unconsciousness and consciousness of the observer into the sphere of consciousness. In other words, Lévi-Strauss supports an effective mingling of un-reflexivity with that which is observed, and a gluing of sufficient reflexivity to the observer.

Precisely through this reasoning, Lévi-Strauss charges Mauss with mystifying Te Ao Māori by confusing a subjective belief system – *hau* as spiritual power – with an objective explanation of the underlying reality of exchange. For Lévi-Strauss this reality

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[31] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 28–30.
[32] Ibid., 31.
[33] Ibid., 35.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 36.

cannot be explained in the formulations of insiders (i.e. the cosmology of the Māori sage), but in the rendering objective of these beliefs by structural linguistic analysis:

> Hau is not the ultimate explanation for exchange, it is the conscious form whereby men of a given society, in which the problem had particular importance, apprehended an unconscious necessity whose explanation lies elsewhere.[36]

It is not necessary to go into what ultimate explanation Lévi-Strauss provides for exchange using this method, except to say that he renders spiritual power as a floating-signifier necessitated by the inability of the finite human condition to allocate totality to a signified.[37] But what we should take from this discussion is that in Lévi-Strauss's critique of Mauss, the "native" is not allowed to possess an adequate self-reflexivity – i.e. a conscious articulation - of their own belief system. Rather, the particular consciousness of the "native" must be transmogrified into a universal unconsciousness that can then only be adequately articulated through the profane worldview of the ethnographer.

Spiritual revolution

It would be trite to charge Sahlins or Lévi-Strauss with being colonizers. But their creative efforts to render profane Mauss's explanation of the *hau* of the gift must be understood as part of an epistemological policing of social anthropology. The coloniality of power operates in the sphere of epistemology when spiritual power cannot be allowed to hold any explanatory power in and of itself but must be consistently transmogrified into a profane form of power, whether symbolic, moral or ideological. This policing of epistemology cannot be divorced from the broader colonially-induced disciplinary nature of the relationship between the ethnographer – the observer – and the "native" – the observed. In other words, spirituality, when it is entwined with explanatory frameworks, must be taken only as a sign of the primitiveness, or in more polite terms, unreflexivity of the native. The profaning of their explanation is the civilizing of their being.

Against such civilizing missions, Ashis Nandy makes the following plea:

> Must a society always choose between materialism and spiritualism, between hard realities and unreal dreams? Or is the perception of such a choice itself a product of [the] imperial mission?[38]

Let us be sensitive to this plea. Let us consider how attributing explanatory value to the spiritual dimension undermines the hierarchical divide between the observing ethnographer and observed native. I say this not to make a normative argument for the goodness of spirituality - or at least religion - per se, but in order to promote an epistemological intervention that seeks to decolonize the conditions of knowledge

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[36] Ibid., 48.
[37] Ibid., 61–62.
[38] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983), 80.

production in the Western Academy.[39] In other words, we should not assume that exploring the human condition as a profane condition produces a higher, more advanced truth of said condition; rather we must remember that such activity has usually promoted a particular project of domination in thought and practice.

With this in mind, let us briefly return to that contested section of Mauss's text, *the Gift*. Manuka Henare has recently pointed out the significance of a mistranslation of Ranapiri's letter introduced by his interlocutor, Best. It occurs when Ranapiri discusses the repayment of the gift from the third to the second person. When considering whether to pass this gift back to the original giver, Best's text (the source for the various translations utilized by Mauss, Sahlins, Lévi-Strauss and others) states:

> Now, that article that he gives to me is the hau of the article I first received from you and then gave to him.

I have underlined the contentious part. Henare notes that the grammar of Ranapiri's text does not use the definite article "the" – in *Te Reo Māori* (the Māori language) "te"; rather, it uses the possessive article "your" – "tō". The correct translation given by Henare is:

> Now that gift which was given to me, is your life force in your gift given to me before.[40]

Henare explains that the Māori language makes a fundamental distinction between temporary possession articulated as a location, and ownership articulated as possession.[41] It is the later that Ranapiri alludes to in the text.

The significance of this re-interpretation, for Henare, is that Ranapiri is referring to the *hau* (which Mauss glosses as spiritual power) *of the original donor* and not only of the object that is donated by her/him. In fine, this *hau* is associated with the original ownership of the gift and travels with it. To my mind this corrected translation highlights the purposeful and inescapable weave of spiritual, social and natural forces within exchange relations in Māori cosmology. Henare represents this weave in terms of a matrix – rather than hierarchy - of values of which *hau* acts as one of a number of cardinal points.[42] I might add that Best's translation always laid the way open for an unweaving of the spiritual from the social-natural world to the extent that the second gift in his translation is described as a depersonalized (fetishized?) object that simply substitutes for the original object.[43] In this articulation, the embededness of spiritual power in relations of social-natural exchange is diluted, hence leading the way to a

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[39] See Enrique D. Dussel, ed., *Coloniality at Large ; Latin America and the Post Colonial Debates* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
[40] Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society," 105.
[41] Ibid., 103.
[42] Personal communication with Henare, 16th January, 2011.
[43] As a general point, see David Thompson, "The Hau of the Gift in its Cultural Context," *Pacific Studies* 11, no. 1 (1987): 63-79. For a cognate critique of the Western misunderstanding of indigenous thought and practice regarding worldly "objects" in the Americas see Rodolfo Kusch, *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), chap. 13–14.

profaning of the entire exchange relationship by e.g. Sahlins, Lévi-Strauss and others. Henare observes that this is a trap that Mauss, despite the mistranslation he worked with, seems to intuitively avoid when he explains exchange as:

> first and foremost a pattern of spiritual bonds between things which are to some extent parts of persons, and persons and groups that behave in some measure as if they were things.[44]

In light of these observations, let us, if not for the sake of a decolonial politics then for the sake of the best tradition of European-modern experimentation, follow Mauss's intuition and dare to relax the imperial disciplines of the social sciences. So in what follows, I shall glean some knowledge of the *hau* of the gift from what is provided within Māori cosmology, spiritualism and all.

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The three baskets of knowledge

A detailed knowledge of Māori cosmology would, in the past, have been esoteric (and probably in many ways still is). Nevertheless, in taking the first uninitiated steps we are not faced with an untranslatable or entirely mystical/mystified worldview, rather, one that requires long periods of slow, careful and compassionate translation/transformation. First, the weaving of the spiritual, natural and social dimensions in Māori cosmology must be studied so that we can better understand exchange relationships in the terms presented by Ranapiri. For this purpose, I depend upon the writings of Rev. Māori Marsden, a noted twentieth century *tohunga,* and also on the more recent work of Henare.[45]

Henare has proposed a new definition of Māori cosmology (his term is "metaphysics") as a philosophy of vitalism and humanism rooted in the belief that there is an original and singular source of life that, as a force, "imbues and animates all forms and things in the cosmos."[46] The ultimate reality of life and the cosmos is therefore the spirit or, as Marsden calls it, *wairua*.[47] Social beings are both human (natural) and divine because the cosmos is an open system into which the spiritual dimension impinges; and being open, it is also possible for social beings to discern the spirituality of processes.[48]

While the ultimate reality may be spiritual, there are many facets to the experience of this reality that are woven into the originating impulse, key of which for

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[44] Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, 11.
[45] That Marsden was also Christian in no way de-authenticates him as an "expert" of Māori cosmology unless we assume that the cosmology of Christianity, a religion emerging from the cultural crossroads of Africa and the Levant, is as exclusionary and *sui generis* an intellectual artefact as Western social science!
[46] Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society," 47.
[47] Māori Marsden, "The Natural World and Natural Resources: Maori Value Systems and Perspectives," in *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*, ed. Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (Masterton: The Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 33.
[48] Māori Marsden, "Kaitiakitanga: A Definitive Introduction to the Holistic World View of the Māori," in *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*, ed. Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (Masterton: The Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 65.

Marsden seems to be the material, psychical and symbolic. Moreover, the weave takes on many shades, intensities, relationalities and sequences. In this respect, three dimensions of the cosmos seem to be crucial for Marsden: the world of potential, symbolized by Te Korekore (begotten not created), the world of becoming symbolized by Te Pō (the world of nights), and the world of being symbolized by Te Ao Mārama (the world of light).[49]

As Marsden makes clear, the mindset of social anthropology is in many ways a burden to apprehend Māori cosmology to the extent that it constantly seeks to collapse the varied dimensions of human existence into a narrow analytic of the profane symbolic, ideological and material. Indeed, as I have shown above, this is effectively what Sahlins and Lévi-Strauss do in their re-interpretations of Mauss. Alternatively, Marsden allows the dimensions to function in their specificity except that this specificity is not interrogated through a methodological individualist approach but rather is folded back into a relational-pluralistic reality woven together by spiritual forces. In this way, the material can be material *and* spiritual, whereas in the social anthropological understanding that is predicated upon making the social and natural world profane, the spiritual must be ontologically transmogrified *into* material cause (or ideology or symbol).

Moreover, it seems that Marsden uses the symbolic realm (so beloved of Lévi-Strauss) more as a medium to help draw out a deeper spiritual reality than as the ultimate language of reality.[50] Marsden comments that poetic imagery, especially when tied into narratives, facilitates understanding of Māori cosmology much more than social-anthropological approaches.[51] Following Marsden's advice, I shall use the framework provided by the story of Tane, the progenitor of humankind and forest life. Tane ascended through the varied worlds of existence to arrive at the ultimate world occupied by Io-Matua-Kore (the supreme parentless god). There he obtained three baskets of knowledge, with which he descended back into the world of humanity.

Knowledge in these three baskets relates to the conditions of potential, becoming and being. In one basket lies knowledge of Te Ao Tua-ātea - the world beyond space-time. This is the transcendent and eternal world of the spirit, of potential, of the first cause – Io-taketake, and a world towards which the cosmos as a whole is tending. It is, in short, the ultimate reality.[52] In another basket is knowledge of Tua-uri, the real world, but a world of darkness (*te pō*) that exists behind the natural world of sense perception. It is the "seed bed of creation" wherein space-time is gestated, evolves and refined into the various and specialized manifestations of the natural world. It is in this world of becoming that four related concepts are manifested: *mauri*, the life force that "interpenetrates all things to bind and knit together, creating unity in diversity"; *hihiri*, a pure energy refined from *mauri* that manifests as radiant light; *mauri-ora*, the "life principle", a bonding force that further refines energy to make life possible; and *hau-ora*,

[49] Marsden, "God, Man and Universe," 20.
[50] Marsden, "Kaitiakitanga," 62.
[51] Marsden, "God, Man and Universe," 23.
[52] Marsden, "Kaitiakitanga," 63.

the "breath or wind of spirit which is infused into the process of birth to animate life."[53] As Marsden puts it, "*hau-ora* begat shape, shape begat form, form begat space, space begat time and time begat Rangi and Papa".[54] Ranginui – the sky father – and Papatūānuku- the earth mother embraced each other in this world of becoming until their children, including Tane, forced their separation and birthed Te Ao Mārama – the world of light. In this respect, Papa refers to land from beyond the veil, that is to say it is the personified form of *whenua* - the natural earth.[55] This, then, leads us to the final basket of knowledge of Te Aro-nui, the natural world of being that can be apprehended through our senses in terms of events, sequences, cycles, regularities and, in general, chains of cause and effect. [56]

Having sketched out the basic constituency of the cosmos, it is now possible to better understand the manipulation of the environment in which human beings live. And through this endeavor it will be possible to glean the importance of *hau*, the concept that is so central to Māori cosmology yet has been so difficult to grasp in its fullness.[57]

The *hau* of the gift revisited

Marsden makes an important distinction between the material-natural, psychic (emotional and intellectual) and spiritual aspects of human existence. For example, will-power (*ihi*) is not spiritual but psychic power.[58] Hence, in Marsden's recounting of Māori cosmology, the will to power that is invoked in realist explanations of exchange is in no way denied but is clearly differentiated from the channeling of spiritual power. This is also an important distinction to note because it preempts the strategy used in social anthropological explanations to transmogrify the spiritual to the affective and/or ideological.

Alternatively, Marsden works with a relational plurality of forces and effects/affects: the natural refers to basic needs; the psychological to cultural values of sharing, caring and obligation; and the spiritual (always beyond the full grasp of mortal humans) to the achievement of divinity (*atuatanga*).[59] In this ultimate spiritual endeavor, which has the deepest influence upon the human environment, two qualities are decisive: *mana* (authority/power) and *tapu* (sacredness). I will focus here on *mana,* except to say with regards to *tapu* that it does not work as the moral opposite (taboo) of *mana,* and that it might be best to describe *tapu* as the latent form of *mana*.[60]

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[53] Ibid., 60–61.
[54] Ibid., 62.
[55] Marsden, "The Natural World and Natural Resources," 44.
[56] Marsden, "Kaitiakitanga," 61.
[57] Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society," 51; Metge, "Returning the Gift," 320.
[58] Marsden, "The Natural World and Natural Resources," 41.
[59] Marsden, "God, Man and Universe," 5; Marsden, "The Natural World and Natural Resources," 39–40.
[60] Marsden, "God, Man and Universe," 6; Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society," 48–50.

Marsden defines *mana* as "that which manifests the power of the gods", that is to say, "lawful permission delegated by the gods to their human agents and accompanied by the endowment of spiritual power to act on their behalf and in accordance with their revealed will."[61] *Mana* incorporates relationships through time and space, e.g. in relation to the spiritual powers of ancestors, and is manifested through action.[62] In affective economies such as those operating within and between various Māori corporate entities,[63] *mana* is pursued as a practice of reciprocating and balancing with others (*utu)* over the long run in ways that tend to re-produce an inequality of obligations.[64]

The pursuit of *mana* might be confused with the social-scientific articulation of exchange as the pursuit of self-interest by other means, e.g. the "soft power" competition to foster unequal obligations. While it would be trite to deny that this *ihi*-powered pursuit is undertaken by real-existing human beings, Marsden makes clear that the human is never the source of mana (unlike psychic forces such as *ihi*) rather, she/he is the agent and channel of the gifts of the gods – and *mana* is a gift that can be rescinded. *Mana* therefore remains a spiritual power manifested in pursuit of divinity through actions that pursue the integrity of things. This integrity is forged through the gradual intensification of *mauri* in Te Pō (the worlds of becoming) and manifested in Te Ao Mārama (the natural world). That this human pursuit in the material-natural world might be inflected through the will to war, as much as guided by the moral compass of compassion, is a given. *Mana* therefore has to be associated with respecting and upholding the *mauri* that is immanent within all things in the natural world and the *hau ora* (breath of life) through which *mauri* is most clearly manifested.

There is, in this respect, a subtle but important distinction that Marsden makes between inanimate and animate objects: when referring to the latter, *mauri ora* and *hau ora* are synonymous, when applied to the former, *mauri* does not have its qualifying adjective *ora* (life). Moreover, human life is the expression of *mauri ora* in its highest principle.[65] What can be gleaned from these subtle distinctions is that even when working within a cosmology that posits spiritual power as the ultimate reality, and even when this potential power is taken to be imbued and woven into all things from their becoming to their being, it is still possible to entertain distinctions – *but not of the categorical kind* - between the spiritual, natural and the social-natural world. Again, and recalling the discussion above of Sahlins' critique, such subtle distinctions are not possible in the profane world of social anthropology.

More importantly, these subtle distinctions lead me to think that, because the breath of life (*hau ora*) that animates human beings operates as the highest instantiation and refinement of spiritual power, it is also the most critical element to attend to in terms of balance and obligation, i.e., in terms of the integrity of the weave of the cosmos itself. In this respect, it is important to relate a subtle distinction that Henare makes between

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[61] Marsden, "God, Man and Universe," 4.
[62] Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society," 49.
[63] Ibid., 153.
[64] Metge, "Returning the Gift," 317.
[65] Marsden, "God, Man and Universe," 6; Marsden, "The Natural World and Natural Resources," 44.

mauri and *hau*: while both are fundamentally spiritual phenomena, the former can be understood as the cement that binds body and spirit together, while the later is that which determines outcomes especially in terms of relationships.[66] This special significance given to *hau* also seems to be affirmed in a part of the Māori creation story. *Hau* was a gift from Hauora, a child of Rangi and Papa. The children argued over the rights and wrongs of separating their parents – i.e. of creating the natural world - and in the course of argument each tried to destroy the *hau* of the others.[67] Implicated in this story of creation, "the spiritual impulse that is *hau* urges reciprocity in human relations with nature and in relations with other people".[68] Indeed, as I have mentioned already, Henare notes that *tikanga hau* forms one of the cardinal ethics and virtues – the "ethic of the spiritual power of obligatory reciprocity in relationships with nature, life, force, breath of life."[69]

We might, then, propose the following understanding of exchange as it emerges from Māori cosmology. The materiality of exchange lies in unequal relations of reciprocity pursued indefinitely in a world of cause and effect; the morality of exchange lies in the imperative to ensure that wilful actions (*ihi)* do not fundamentally disturb the balance of the natural world in which – and as part of which – human beings exist; the symbolism of exchange provides a narrational medium through which we might glean the spirituality of exchange; and the spiritual power underlying exchange seeks to ensure that the weave of the cosmos retains an integrity that supports the manifestation of its divine potential. This framework of understanding is not mono-causal: the spiritual has a distinct ontology that should not be confused or conflated with the material, moral or symbolic. But neither is the framework simply multi-causal: spiritual power is the ultimate reality precisely because it alone weaves its way through *all* these other intervening aspects of human existence. It now remains to apply this understanding to the obligation that many Guyanese felt they owed to Haitians after the earthquake in 2010.

Conclusion: the spirit of the Haitian Revolution

Atlantic slavery was a practice that sought to destroy the spiritual integrity of enslaved Africans and their descendents. Slave plantations in the Americas were built on the (near) eradication of indigenous peoples, the exhaustion of their *whenua*, and the death-by-labor of imported workers. Platitudes aside, the enslaved were not treated as human beings but rather as things - material factors of production for the accumulation of super-profits. The plantation system effectively turned Te Ao Mārama – the world of being – into a living death, especially for the enslaved Africans.

But when sun set, the enslaved would gather clandestinely, and with drums, song and dance reach out into Te Ao Pō – the dark world of becoming – to pick up once more the threads of spirituality begotten in Te Korekore – the realm of potential. In so doing, the enslaved would allow the spirits of their African ancestors and gods to animate their

[66] Personal communication with Henare, 16th January 2011.
[67] Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society," 52–53.
[68] Ibid., 151.
[69] Ibid., 90.

living-dead-slave bodies with *hau ora*. Out of such Vodou circles in Saint Domingue would burst forth the insurrectionary Kongo militias. Blessed with *hau*, filled with *ihi*, these militias would on pain of mortal death fight the French, Spanish and British for more than a bloody decade between 1791 and 1804.[70] This spiritual war would, in the name of cosmic balance (*utu*) and for the redemption of the *mana* of the African ancestors, leave inscribed for posterity a moral commandment in the first constitution of the Empire of Haiti, a commandment that all the revolutions of slave holding powers had heretofore left unwritten: "Slavery is forever abolished".

The struggle to ensure a meaningful freedom continued after independence as social forces from both within (the predatory elites) and without (the surrounding slave holding powers and their sympathizers) sought to impoverish and neutralize the *mauri* of the Haitian peoples. France demanded payment for the loss of its colony, attempting to transmogrify the *utu* of the Revolution into a profane pecuniary sum.[71] Throughout the twentieth century, but initially in order to protect its own investments and its own racialized division of labor, the United States regularly intervened, destabilizing and undermining further the *mana* of independent Haiti in the name of balancing interests in the Western hemisphere. The last coup mounted against President Aristide is the latest episode in this long story.

And yet, Haiti was at the same time a beacon of light to the other Americas and Americans. It was the independent southern republic of Haiti that Simon Bolivar fled to in 1815 for protection from colonial forces. From there Bolivar returned to the mainland to pursue the wars of independence with Haitian troops given on condition that, wherever he went, Bolivar would ensure the abolition of slavery. But more than anything else, the Revolution made it impossible for the slaving and slave holding powers to presume that the many and regular insurrections of the enslaved were the actions of unthinking brutes. This revelation engendered shock, guilt, confusion, curiosity, even incredulity… but above all fear. A mortal blow was thus dealt to Atlantic slavery far more powerful than any given by Quakers and abolitionists or, indeed, the "new' economics of the industrial age.[72]

The Haitian Revolution was, therefore, a *taonga* (a gift) to the enslaved of the Americas and their descendents of the most *tapu* (sacred) kind: it was, quite literally, the gift of *hau ora* – a spiritual breath that would animate the slaves with their own life. In this respect, the Haitian Revolution was at the same time also a gift of humanism to all in the Americas and beyond, borne out of the inhuman Atlantic triangular trade that had unbalanced three continents in its pursuit of material accumulation.

Imbued with the life blood of its givers, the *hau* of the Haitians travels with the gift of liberation. And this *hau* wants to return to the place of its birth. The gift must be reciprocated so that the spiritual weave of the cosmos retains an integrity that supports

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[70] On this interpretation see Clinton Hutton, *The Logic and Historic Significance of the Haitian Revolution and the Cosmological Roots of Haitian Freedom* (Kingston: Arawak, 2007).
[71] In Te Reo, *utu* is a term that should not be used to indicate an instrumental commercial transaction.
[72] Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988).

the manifestation of its divine potential. To not return the gift would be to invite, as Ranapiri prophesised, a "consequence of death";[73] or in this particular context, it would be to vindicate the treatment of humans in general - but non-Europeans especially - as living dead. Perhaps Andaiye feels the *tapu* nature of the calling of the original gift when she issues her urgent warning: "[i]t is wrong for us not to pay our debt to Haiti, if we don't, we will regret it". In the glare of such sacredness, self-interest, realpolitik and soft power (while all too real attributes of the Te Ao Mārama) take on a pallid hue. They are revealed as inadequate explanations for the generosity of the Guyanese people.

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As I was writing this chapter, an earthquake of the same magnitude as that suffered in Haiti hit Christchurch in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. Almost immediately, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga launched an appeal fund. The Hon Dr. Feleti Vakauta Sevele, who had completed his secondary, undergraduate and graduate education in Christchurch, stated:

> The Government and the people of New Zealand are always amongst the first to come to our assistance in our time of need so I urge the people of Tonga to give generously to this appeal fund. I also appeal for the Tongan public's moral support and prayers for the people of Christchurch.[74]

Within less than a month, a staggering donation of NZ$634,500 was raised and the message that accompanied the donation read:

> Please accept this small gift from all the People and the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga. This gift is tiny and insignificant but it comes from the depths of our hearts. With it comes our prayers and hopes that with God's help, you will continue to rebuild and recover from the devastating earthquake.[75]

Is there no end to this maddening generosity?

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[73] Henare, "The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society," 105.

[74] Prime Minister's Office, "Prime Minister Launches Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Fund", September 16, 2010, https://www.pmo.gov.to/rime-minister-launches-christchurch-earthquake-appeal-fund.html.

[75] Prime Minister's Office, "NZ$634,500 Donated to Red Cross Christchurch Earthquake Appeal", October 17, 2010, https://www.pmo.gov.to/nz634500-donated-to-red-cross-christchurch-earthquake-appeal.html.

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