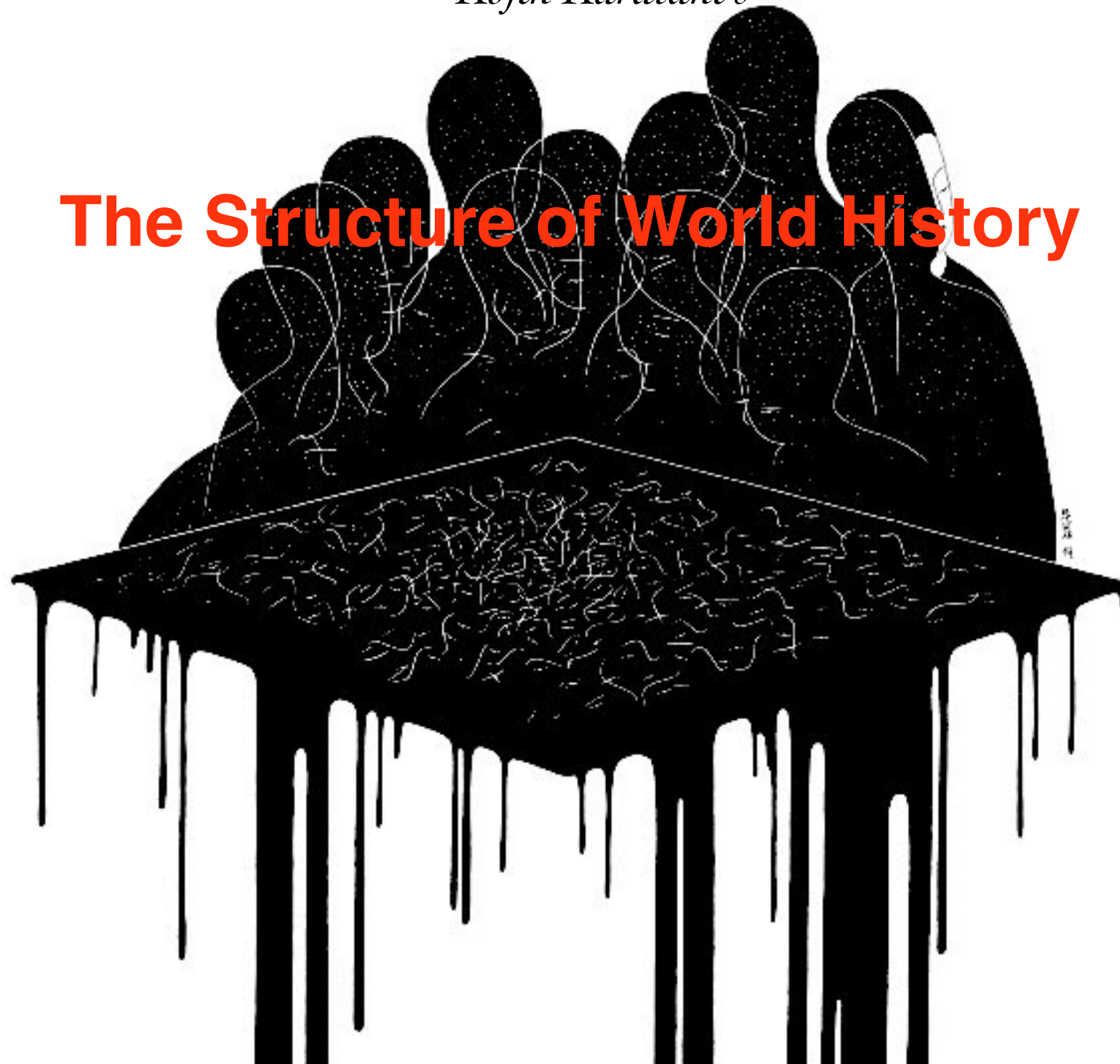


*Reading
Kojin Karatani's*

The Structure of World History



- 1. Summary and Questions**
- 2. Mini World Systems**
- 3. The Sedentary Revolution**
- 4. The Gift and Magic**

1. Schedule
2. Dynamic
3. Remarks on Karatani's method
 - Reading Saussure through Marx
 - Critique of textual metaphor
 - Transcritique and parallax
 - Knots and systems
4. On modes of exchange

- 1. Summary and Questions**
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	Mode A	Mode B	Mode C	Mode D
logic	pooling & reciprocity	plunder & redistribution	commodity exchange	mutuality of freedom
form	gift & countergift	domination & protection	value & commodity	free association of equals
order	rules	laws	international law	
power	“hau”	violence & law	money	unreciprocated gift
hierarchy	honor	status	class	
collective	between families	between communities	between states	cosmopolitan (federative)
modern concept	Nation	State	Capital	World Republic
thinker	Mauss	Hobbes	Marx	Religion/ Kant

Karatani and psychoanalysis

§1

Reading Freud, Karatani writes that "It is as if clan society perpetually killed off in advance the ur- father that would inevitably appear if matters were left to their own devices" (56). I am not quite sure myself what this would entail but I wonder what a psychoanalytic reading of his concept of modes of exchange could develop and how it could possibly integrate desire and drives into what seems to be a more political-economic analysis.

§2

Thought I would send through a random thought on something I've found quite thought provoking in the introduction. Specifically, this rather fundamental idea of certain epochs being defined by what is the dominant mode of exchange, with other modes of exchange not disappearing entirely, but co-existing as residual elements of previous (and perhaps future) developments. My thought is maybe an obvious one for anyone familiar with Lacan's work but I wonder if this model might be transposed into the idea that certain epochs have a dominant mode of enjoyment, which is either determined by the method of exchange or works against it some kind of antagonistic (or perhaps symbiotic) way. I really like that Karatani places exchange as primary to power (to avoid the Foucaultian trap) but I wonder how one might think it in relation to enjoyment. The only thing I can think of at the moment is the relationship between enjoyment and moving beyond limits, which might be thought of alongside the moving beyond boundaries of communal units but a lot of this is thinking out loud. Keen to hear if you had any thoughts on this.

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Exchange/Intercourse

(1) The first is really deferring to Gabriel's expertise and the extent to which he sees Moses Hess (who Karatani cites as the origin of his concept of 'intercourse') as truly central to Karatani's thought. Obviously Hess and the other German communists have a somewhat ambivalent relation to Marx, so I think it might be interesting to take a look at Hess's 'The Essence of Money' as well as Marx's critique of the 'true socialists' (there is also the fact that it is Hess who first converted Engels to Communism, as well as Hess's collaboration in writing The German Ideology - which Karatani has a tendency to use as his part-of-Marx's oeuvre-qua-rhetorical-bludgeon). My question though is really to Gabriel and whether he sees Karatani as truly drawing on Hess or if that is a bit of an intellectual-historical fake-out.

§6

Not so much a question but I'm fascinated by this emerging critique of metabolism, exchange (Verkehr), and stockpiling. I've noticed these gastric tropes throughout much of my research - so I'm very curious to see how this builds throughout our reading.

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Moses Hess, The Essence of Money (1845)

Life is exchange of creative life-activity. The body of each living being, i.e., of the animal, the plant, the individual man, is the medium of its life because this is the medium of the exchange of the creative life-activity of this or any being, its inalienable means of life, hence those organs of the body which are the central points of the exchanges are also its noblest, most inalienable organs, i.e., the brain and the heart. What holds good for the bodies of the smallest units holds also for those of the largest and also for the unconscious so-called earthly bodies as for the conscious so-called social bodies. The atmosphere of the Earth, the inalienable medium of the exchange of earthly productions, is the element of earthly life; the sphere in which men exchange their social life-activity with each other - namely intercourse (*Verkehr*) in society - is the inalienable element of social life. Single men behave as conscious and consciously acting individuals here in the sphere of the exchange of their social life, just as they behave as unconscious individuals, as bodies, in the sphere of their bodily life-activity, in the atmosphere of the Earth. They can as little live if separated from the medium of their social life than they can live bodily if separated from the medium of their bodily life-activity - than if their life-air is taken from them. They behave with regard to the whole social body in the same way that the individual members and organs behave with regard to the body of a single individual. They die if they are separated from each other. Their real life consists only in collaboration, only in connexion with the whole social body.

The mutual exchange of individual life-activity, the intercourse, the mutual stimulation of individual powers, this collaboration is the real essence of individuals, their real capacity (*Vermogen*). They cannot realise, make use of, exercise, activate their powers, they do not bring them to life, or (if they have brought them to life) they die out again, if they do not mutually exchange their life-activity in intercourse with the fellow-members of the same community or with the parts of the same body. As the Earth's air is the workplace of the Earth so is the intercourse of men the human workplace in which individual men come to the realisation, to the exercise of their real life or capacity. The stronger their intercourse, the stronger also is their creative power and as long as their intercourse is restricted so too is their creative power. Without their life-medium, without exchange of their individual powers, individuals do not live. The intercourse of men does not arise from their essence; it is their real essence and is indeed not only their theoretical essence, their real life-consciousness, but also their practical, their real life- activity. Thinking and doing only arise from the intercourse, the collaboration of individuals, and what is called the mystical "Spirit" is just this life-air, this workplace, this collaboration of ours. Any free activity - and there is no other since free activity that a being does not draw out of himself and so bring it about freely is not a free activity at all, at least not his but that of another being - so, any real, practical as well as theoretical life-activity is a species-act, a collaboration of different individuals. These collaborations above all realise the creative power and are therefore the real essence of each individual.

Money is, according to the principles of political economy, the general means of exchange, thus the medium of life, the human capacity, the real creative power, the real wealth of mankind. If this externalised wealth really corresponded to intrinsic wealth then each man would be worth exactly as much as the cash or money values that he owned - just as a consistent theology values a man by the extent of his orthodoxy, so a consistent economics values him by the weight of his purse. But in fact economics like theology is not at all concerned with men. Economics is the science of the acquisition of earthy goods just as theology is the science of the acquisition of heavenly goods. But men are not goods! For the purely "scientific" economist and theologian men have no value. Where conversely both these holy sciences are applied, thus in the practice of our modern world of shopkeepers, man is really only valued according to his pursue, just as in the practice of the Christian Middle Ages, which still flourishes in part, man was only judged according to his professions of faith.

Scales in SWH

1. Scaling / Gabriel talked about the scale at which we choose to see things so that certain logics will appear. I am thinking that this is not just an analytical question, but also a question of where we want to intervene, and in what way we might imagine acting on the world. And I guess this another way of asking: is the question of which scales we opt to use a free choice? Or is itself conditioned, both historically and personally? And if so, does that fold back into Karatani's approach in a mutually supportive way? Or does it create some sort of aporia or gap - a point which should be situated, but cannot be because it is, in some sense, too close for us to see it clearly?

So I would be interested in any reflections, as we go forward, that explicitly link the methodology of SWH to action - not just with respect to past activity, but also to what might be done (or not done) in the future - and which explore how thinking in terms of the scale of political action might confirm, or alternatively might change or shift, how we experience / think about the scale of analysis as a theoretical decision, as opposed to the lived, and partly unchosen, outcome of our experiences and the way they shape what modes of perception are and are not available to us.

The word incommensurable came up a lot as well. This word calls up different associations, for me almost entirely in the Christian tradition, where incommensurability is the case after the fall, while it's opposite is Paradise, communion, and so on. So the gesture of making two regimes or two spheres commensurable could take on a communitarian shape. Secular time for example is considered to maintain this word with it's negative prefix. So I'm wondering how secularism can still welcome the difficult to ignore or admit thesis of : gods are everywhere.

I'm curious about Karatani's decision to use this word parallax - it seems to have a long relationship with technology, specifically anything with a lens or sight. The use of the word resolution (low-res) makes sense here, and Karatani doesn't strike me as someone writing through vagaries, more a stick-and-move style. It reminds me a bit of Burkhardt's quick, acute lectures but with less mannerism or idiosyncrasy. But understanding parallax in terms of secular difference provides the leeway between and around regimes. This seems to be the capacity-force of this type of systematic thought.

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Philosophers

(2) The second has to do with Karatani's supposed Kantianism, which - as Daniel noted - I think would be an interesting debate to try to 'settle' by the end of the seminar (because I think in many ways that is the way Karatani seems himself, although probably viewed from a standpoint that might not be recognizable to lots of Kantians...). More specifically though, I guess I'm trying to work out more precisely the connection between 'Mode D' and a regulative 'regulative idea.'

(3) I was particularly interested in Gabriel's comment about Engels, Althusser, etc as - perhaps counterintuitively - actually the thinkers Karatani is attempting to emulate, despite

his negative assessments of them. Although he certainly offers the sort of caricature portrait of Engels by the various post-vulgar Marxists, I do think it is worth noting - to Gabriel's point - that when Engels first makes an appearance in Marx: Towards the Center of Possibility Karatani says quite explicitly that while it is true that it is "Engels who formulated Marxism as a system" (in the 'bad' dogmatic sense) Karatani clarifies describing how it would be "incorrect to suggest that Engels distorted the 'true Marx'. It is not excessive to say that, without Engels genius, Marxism would never have enjoyed such mythical, religious power" (5).

Viewing (2) from the standpoint of (3), I guess I'm curious about the relationship between the 'Kantian regulative idea,' Mode D, the 'mythic, religious power' of Marxism (elsewhere he categorizes Marxism as a 'world religion'), and the system Karatani attempts to construct in SWH vis a vis the Kantian modal categories of possibility & actuality.

2. Post-colonial / I am intrigued by the idea that Gabriel threw out that Karatani could help us reframe the question of post-coloniality, and in particular, by whether he could help us amplify, or shift, the sense of what a decolonial (or decolonised) left-wing politics would be like. I'd be very interested in any explorations of this that you guys might come up with, in particular in relation to the current moment (the upsurge in abolitionist praxis, along with renewed arguments, beyond any simple identity politics, for the foundational role of decolonial and anti-racist praxis within a revolutionary / Mode D-friendly politics).

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Conflict and modes

Karatani suggests that 'In the history of social formations, shifts in dominant mode of exchange are crucial; they produce radical change' in terms of the establishment of clan society, state society, and industrial capitalist society (p.32).

He also delineates how different modes of exchange relate to ways of holding in check the dynamics that may derive from the inequalities they create from the moment that fixed settlement is taken up. For example, in relation to clan society, Karatani notes that it 'always includes elements that will generate inequalities of wealth and power, but at the same time it always holds these in check through the obligations of the gift' (p.49). Similarly, in relation to the 'triplex system, the Capital- Nation- State trinity' that organizes our contemporary capitalist market economy, Karatani argues that the development of economic disparities and class conflict are countered by the 'intention toward communality and equality' embodied by the nation, and by forms of redistribution implemented by the state (p.2).

I was wondering whether Karatani sees social conflict originated by inequalities not successfully held in check, or its prospect, as having any role to play in the shift from one dominant mode of exchange to the other, or in their combination in a given social formation.

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So-called primitive societies come in a wide variety of forms, ranging from small nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers to clan or tribal societies that engage in fishing, simple rain-fed agriculture, or slash-and-burn farming. Among clan or tribal societies, we also find many variations, ranging from chiefdoms that exist largely in name only to those that possess power similar to that of a kingship. Here, though, I will distinguish primarily between the societies of nomadic hunter-gatherer peoples and those of hunter-gatherer peoples with fixed settlements: I see a great leap in the history of social formations in the shift from the former to the latter. This is the problem I take up in part I.

In the history of social formations, shifts in dominant mode of exchange are crucial; they produce radical change. First, there is the shift to the social formation in which mode A is dominant; second, the shift to the social formation in which mode B is dominant; and third, the shift to the social formation in which mode C is dominant. To put this in other words, these shifts lead to the establishment of clan society, state society, and industrial capitalist society, respectively. Until now, most attention has been focused on the last two shifts, and there has been little or no attention paid to the shift to clan society. But when we look at the history of social formations from the perspective of modes of exchange, this first shift is of crucial importance. If the shifts to state society or capitalist society mark radical leaps, then surely the appearance of clan society also involved a similarly radical shift.

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For this reason, the question of what sort of societies existed in nomadic bands before the rise of clan society is not a problem that can be solved empirically; it must be approached as a kind of thought experiment, an imaginary problem. All we can do is extrapolate from the societies found in currently existing nomadic bands. Nomadic bands tend to form through the assembling of multiple monogamous families, sometimes including cases of polygamy. The cohesiveness of the band is maintained through such means as pooling resources and communal meals. But the bonds holding the band together are not rigid: members can leave at any time. These are generally small groupings consisting of about fifteen to fifty people. This number does not increase above the level at which pooling (equal distribution) of food-stuffs is possible, nor does it decrease to below the minimum level required to engage in communal hunting. In addition, the band as a whole is not a fixed entity, and neither are the bonds of individual families. If the husband or wife breaks away from shared life, the marriage between them is regarded as being dissolved. Bonds joining together different families are even more unstable. Consequently, the structure of family relations remains undeveloped, and no higher structure transcending the band emerges.

Clan society presents a striking contrast to this. It is a stratified society grounded in lineage, featuring a complex organization. Clan society is of course different from state society. But if we are going to stress this difference—if we are going to stress the significance of the Neolithic revolution that brought it about—then we should also stress the significance of the difference between nomadic band society and clan society and the transformations that it brought about. This is because the latter transformation represented a greater breakthrough. In clan society, we already find early stages of agriculture and livestock herding, as well as political structures such as chiefdoms. The elements that would develop into the state already existed within clan society. By contrast, in societies that precede the emergence of clan society, we find only small bands or camps gathering together—at best several families. Moreover, their form of collective life was continuous with what had existed for millions of years in species that preceded *Homo sapiens*, including primates. This is why the establishment of clan society was such an epochal development.

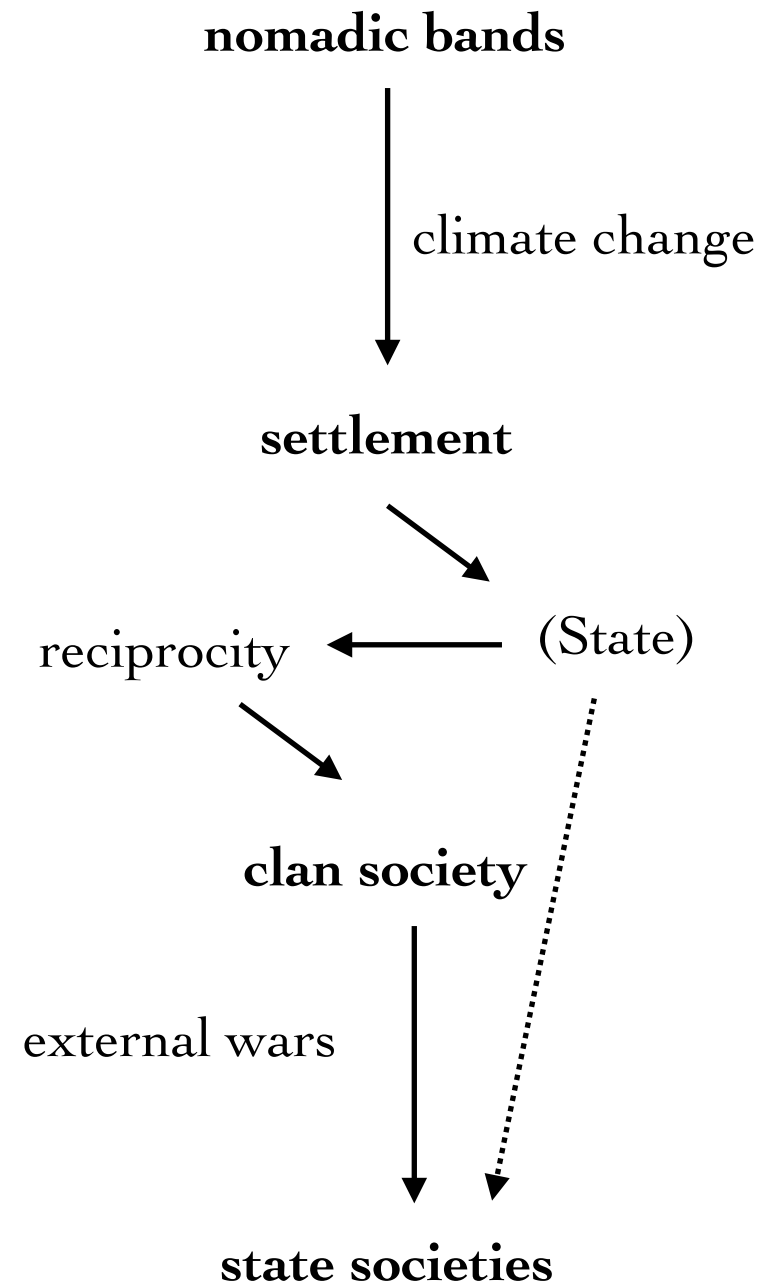
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In considering prehistoric times, we must call into question one commonly accepted notion. We find a representative version of it in the concept of a Neolithic Revolution grounded in the cultivation of crops and livestock, as proposed by Vere Gordon Childe.¹ According to this view, people first began to engage in farming and livestock herding, and then they began to live in fixed settlements. As productive capacity increased, cities developed, class divisions emerged, and finally the state was born. The first problem with this view is its assumption that agriculture led to fixed settlements; in fact, the appearance of fixed settlements preceded the appearance of agriculture. Many hunter-gatherer peoples lived in fixed settlements. Furthermore, many engaged in simple crop or livestock production. In other words, they did not adopt fixed settlements for that purpose. Rather, crop and livestock production emerged naturally as a result of hunter-gatherers having taken up fixed settlements. The real breakthrough came with the adoption of fixed settlements, which preceded the appearance of agriculture.

In general, the emergence of the state is celebrated as a major breakthrough in human history. If anything, however, what was important was the creation of a system capable of preventing the rise of inequalities and the state once these became possible with the emergence of fixed settlements and their capacity for storing up. The principle behind this was reciprocity. In this sense, clan society was not a primitive society; rather, it was a highly developed social system.³

The impetus behind the shift from small band society to clan society was clearly the adoption of fixed settlement. That being the case, how did fixed settlements come about? How did a world system, albeit a very small one, emerge from band society? Before we pursue these questions, however, we must first clarify the differences between the society of a small band and clan society. What this boils down to is the difference between pooling and reciprocity.

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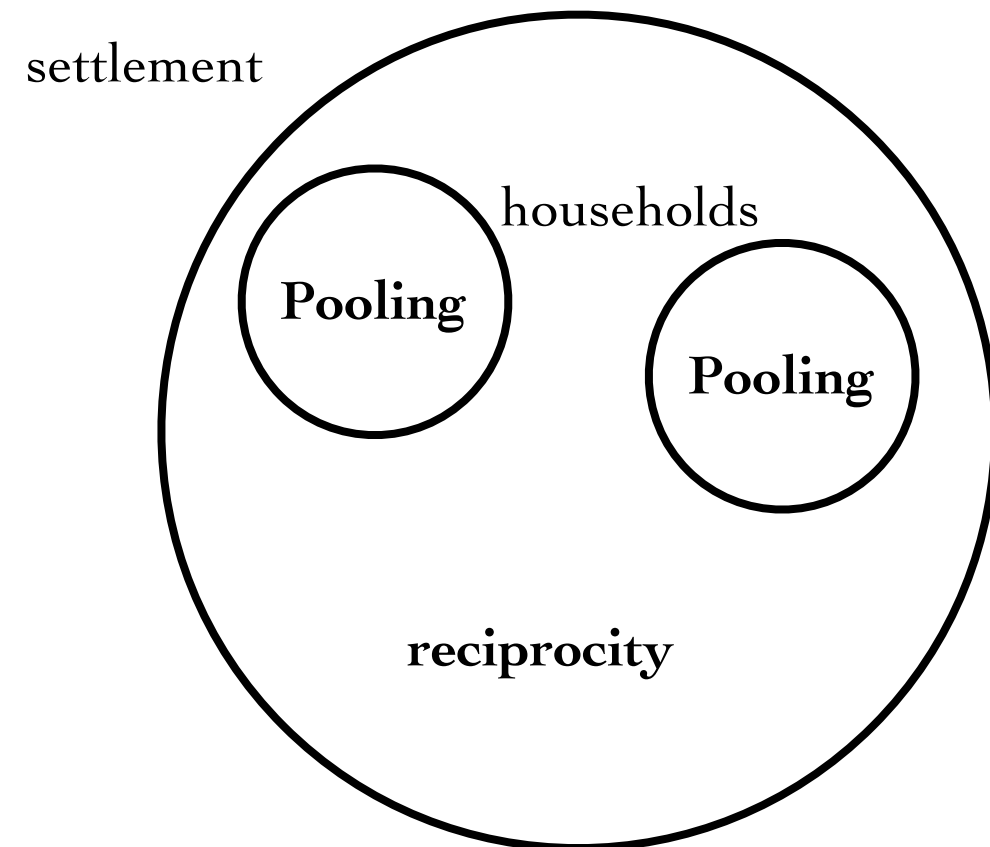
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Pooling and reciprocity

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Since Marcel Mauss, anthropologists have studied how primitive societies are based on the principle of reciprocity. But an ambiguity remains with regard to reciprocity: should gift giving (redistribution) taking place within a single household be regarded as constituting reciprocity? In other words, how should we distinguish between reciprocity and the pooling of resources? For example, within the household, the basic unit of clan society, we find pooling and redistribution, but these cannot properly be called reciprocal. Even if these constitute a kind of gift giving, they are not carried out with the expectation of receiving a counter-gift. Accordingly, Bronisław Malinowski, who researched the Trobriand Islands, distinguished transactions on the basis of motive, differentiating between those that were carried out for self-interest and those that were disinterested. In other words, he distinguished between reciprocal and pure forms of gift giving. Gift giving within households or small clan communities are instances of pure giving, characterized by an absence of the principle of reciprocity. But Mauss believed that even instances of what appeared to be pure gift giving were actually governed by reciprocity. If the donor feels a sense of satisfaction, then that in itself constitutes a kind of reciprocity, just as it does when the recipient feels a certain sense of obligation.

Pooling and reciprocity



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Pooling and reciprocity

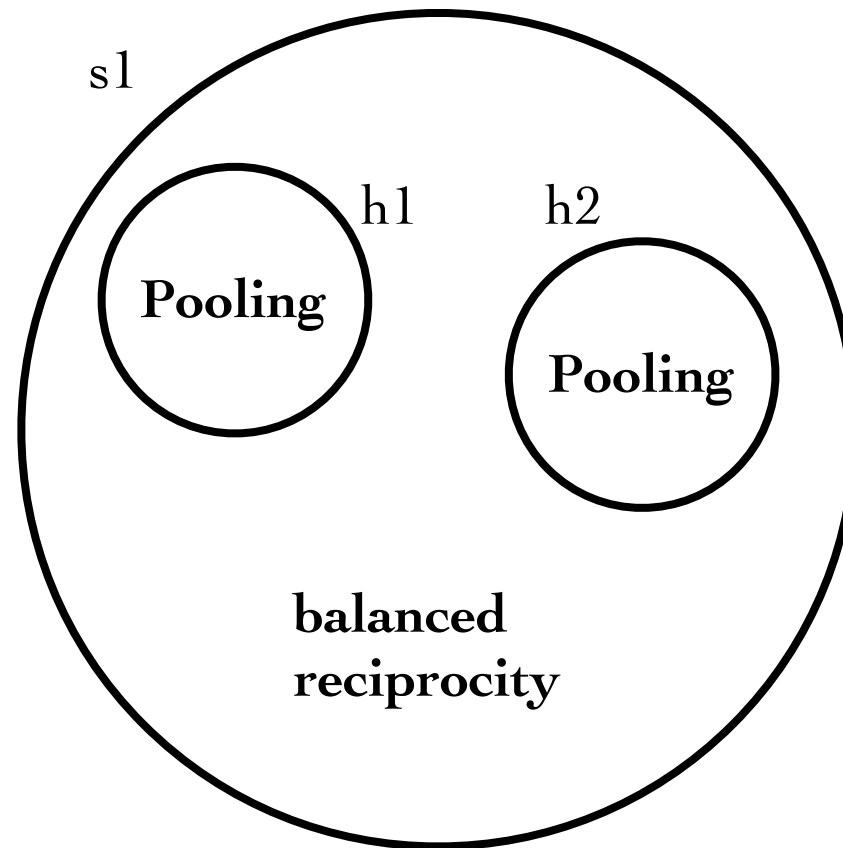
What Morgan discovered as “communism in living” and what Marx called “primitive communism” can only exist in band societies, consisting of a limited number of households. Pooling that exists in clan societies is already under the sway of the principle of reciprocity. This is why Sahlins acknowledges that the principle of reciprocity penetrates into the household.² Yet it is important that we retain the distinction between pooling and reciprocity.

It is also important to distinguish between the reciprocity of the gift and trade. For this purpose, Sahlins defines two extreme poles in order to explain how reciprocal exchanges are of a completely different nature from trade. At one extreme, reciprocity takes the form of pure gift giving, and at the other extreme, it takes the form of something like a war of reprisal. Moreover, he attempts to see how the character of reciprocity is spatially defined within the community. In other words, he thinks that the character of reciprocity displays different aspects depending on whether it is positioned in the core or on the periphery of the community. It can be differentiated into three levels, depending on relative kinship distance from the core household (family).³

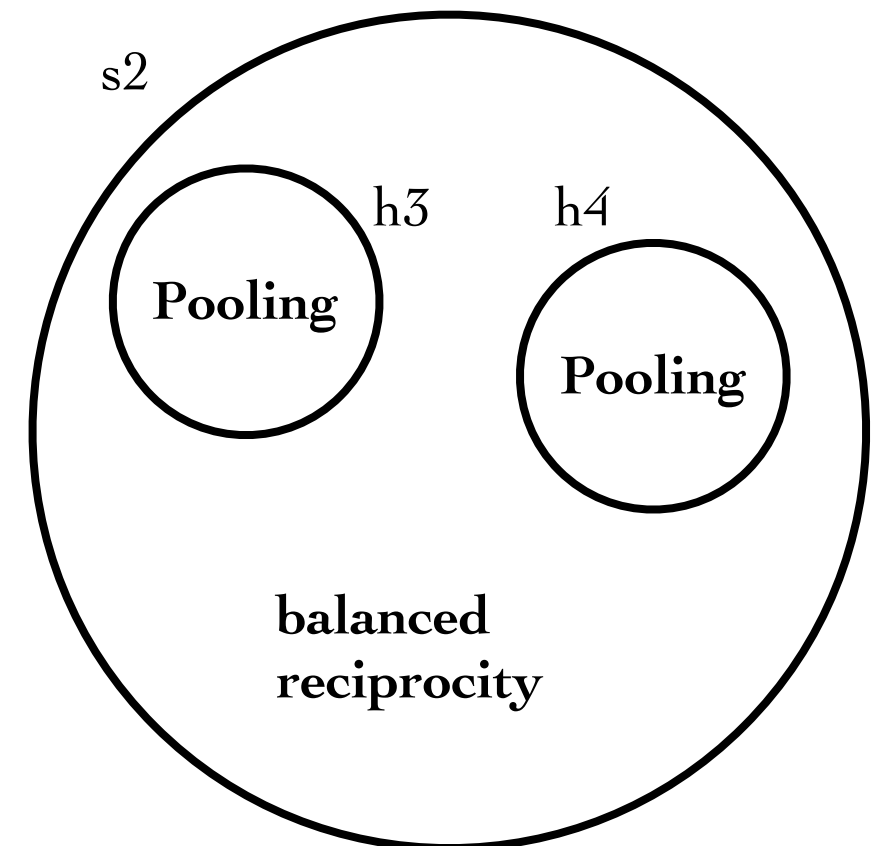
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- 1 Core (the family): generalized reciprocity / the pole of solidarity (within a lineage)
- 2 Within a settlement: balanced reciprocity / the midpoint (within the sphere of a tribe)
- 3 Between tribes: negative reciprocity / the pole of asociality

Pooling and reciprocity



negative
reciprocity



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Pooling and reciprocity

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Generalized reciprocity, the first item, is the kind of reciprocity found within a household (family). But it appears to be a kind of pure gift giving. Accordingly, insofar as we confine ourselves to looking within the core of the community, reciprocity gives the impression of being purely altruistic, filled with good will. We have to keep in mind, however, that there are two kinds of reciprocity: positive and negative. The negative form of reciprocity appears in the third example, between tribes. As examples of this, Sahlins discusses haggling, chicanery, and theft, and we could also more broadly include here the kind of reciprocity found in a vendetta. Even reciprocity that appears at first glance to be positive in fact harbors antagonism. For example, in a potlatch ceremony one subjugates others by showering gifts on them that they are unable to reciprocate.

In relation to these two extremes, the second example, which takes place within the sphere of a single settlement, represents the midpoint. If it approaches the first type, reciprocity takes on a positive form and even approaches the state of nonreciprocal pure giving. But if it approaches the third type, it becomes negative and antisocial. It is at the midpoint between these two that balanced reciprocity appears. Hence, we can conclude that reciprocity has different functions depending on its spatial deployment. In this case, the space of tribal society is not simply a space that spreads out horizontally from its core. Tribal society is stratified: its clans are composed of individual households, the tribe itself of clans, and above those we have confederations composed of tribes. Seen from this perspective, it is clear that the core is positioned near the lowest stratum, while the sphere between tribes is positioned near the highest stratum.

Pooling and reciprocity

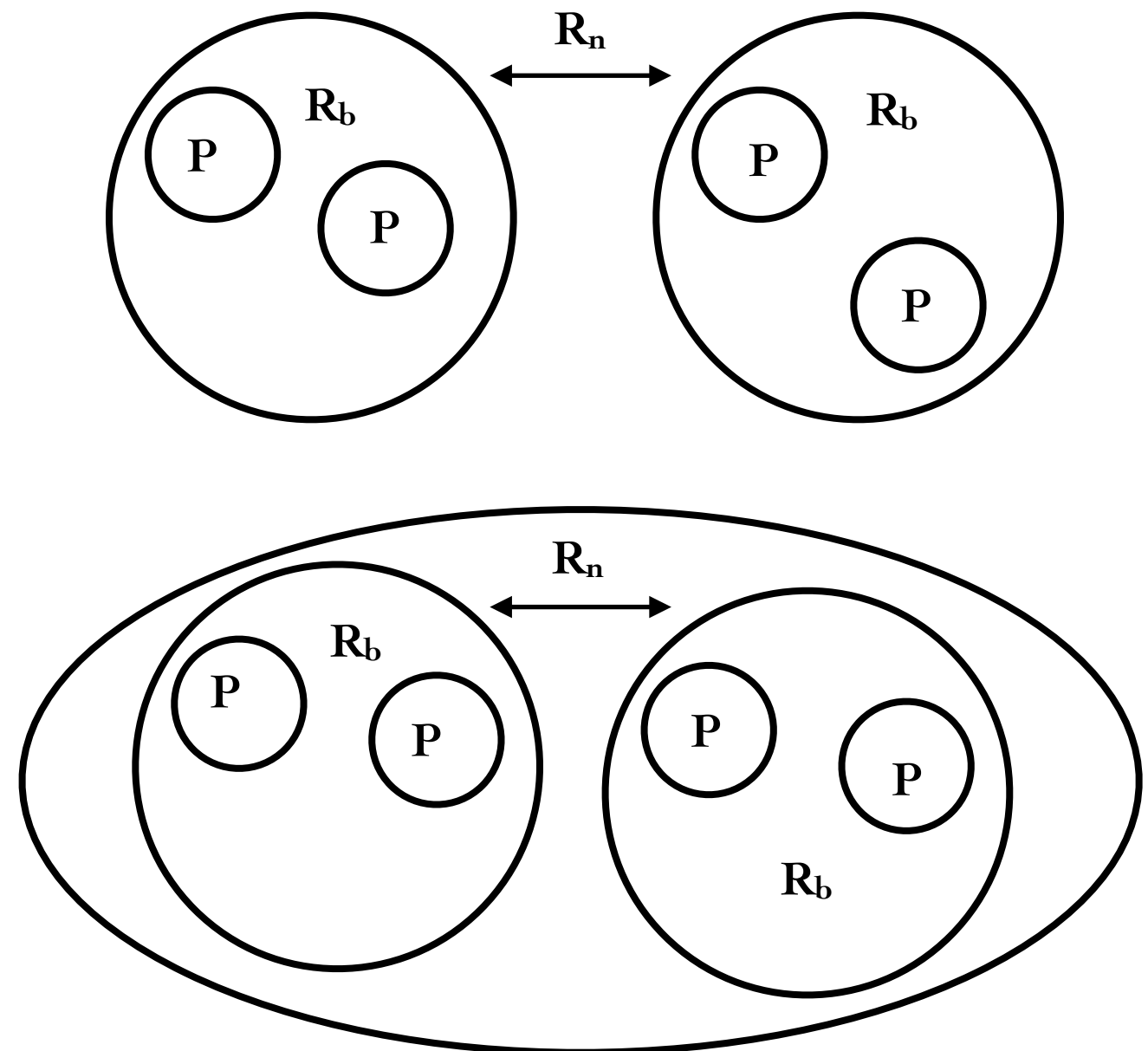
At any rate, it seems that we should think of the characteristics of reciprocity not so much in terms of the second type (balanced reciprocity) but rather of the first and third types—that is, in terms of the reciprocity that exists within communities on the scale of a single household and the reciprocity that exists in relations with other communities. In the first type, it is clear that reciprocity can lead to pooling or equalization. Consequently, it is easy to confuse reciprocity and pooling. In the third type, we see how reciprocity in gift giving can create amicable relations between previously hostile communities. Moreover, we see how reciprocity provides the principle for expansion of the community.

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I would like to examine the nature of the third type, reciprocity in the form of a relation to the exterior. Clan societies do not exist in isolation from other groups. This is because they need to engage in trade of various goods. But economic exchanges between clans are possible only in cases where they belong to some higher-order collective or, absent that, when mutually amicable relations exist between them. Both of these situations are produced through acts of gift giving.

Trade and war

Negative reciprocity, I:
Trade



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Trade and war

Negative reciprocity, I:
Trade

We can see one example of this in the *kula* exchanges from the Trobriand Islands, as reported by Malinowski in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.⁴ Kula is a mode of exchange carried out between a large number of clans who live within a wide sphere enclosed by a ring of islands. Kula is carefully distinguished from what is called *gimwali*, a purely economic exchange of useful goods. That is to say, kula is not carried out for profit or to fill actual needs. A kind of currency called *veigun* is used in conducting kula. When people are given veigun, they are obligated to then give it away to someone else. In this way, veigun circulate from island to island. As a result, “social” relations between peoples living on the various islands, ordinarily isolated from one another, are reconfirmed.

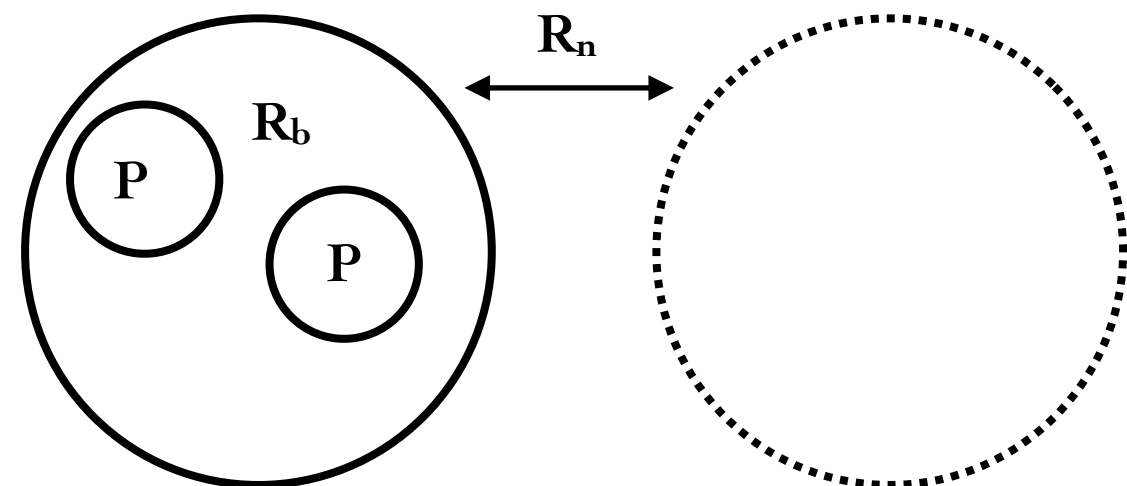
It goes without saying that kula is of a different nature from economic exchange. It is a competitive ritual of ostentatious displays of generosity in the form of gift giving. But what is important here is that kula is followed by bartering for material necessities. In other words, it is not the case that economic exchanges are looked down on in this society. It is precisely because they are necessary that the need arises to establish relationships that will render them possible. Kula occurs within the sphere of a higher-order community that links together the various islands. This ritual of gift giving reconfirms and reactivates the already existing confederation of tribes.

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Trade and war

Negative reciprocity, I:
Trade

There are also cases of gift giving being used to open up exchanges with previously unknown others—for example, the practice of silent trade. In it, one places some article in an already-established place, gives a signal, and then hides—whereupon the other party appears, places an article thought to be of equal value next to the first article, and then departs. If the two parties are both satisfied with the article supplied by the other, they take it home and a trade is realized. In this way, useful goods are exchanged, but contact between the two parties is avoided. This is different from the reciprocity of gift giving, but it partakes of the same mode: the exchange of useful goods (commodity exchange) is executed in a reciprocal form. Accordingly, silent trade shows how trade (commodity exchange) is made possible.

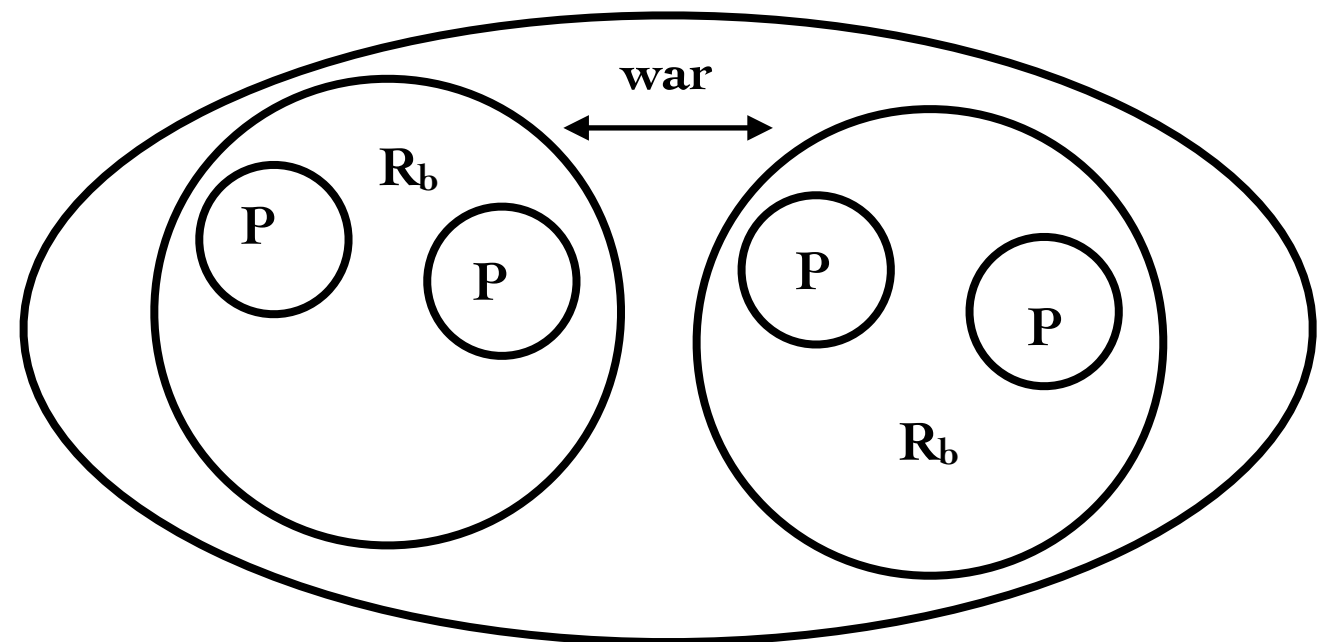


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Trade and war

Negative reciprocity, II:
war

As a rule, the earliest folkloric records show that such societies were in fact extremely belligerent. Clastres points out that the Yanomami tribe of the Amazonian backcountry, which has had no contact with the outside world, engages in endless warfare; he asserts that war is not simply caused by a failure in exchange but rather is the reigning presumption. Exchange (gift giving) is carried out, if anything, for the sake of establishing alliances that are useful in waging war. In his view, war brings about decentralization within the interior of the community. Thanks to this warfare, the formation of a centralized state is rendered impossible. It is precisely the ceaseless warfare between tribes that explains why such communities do not transform into states.

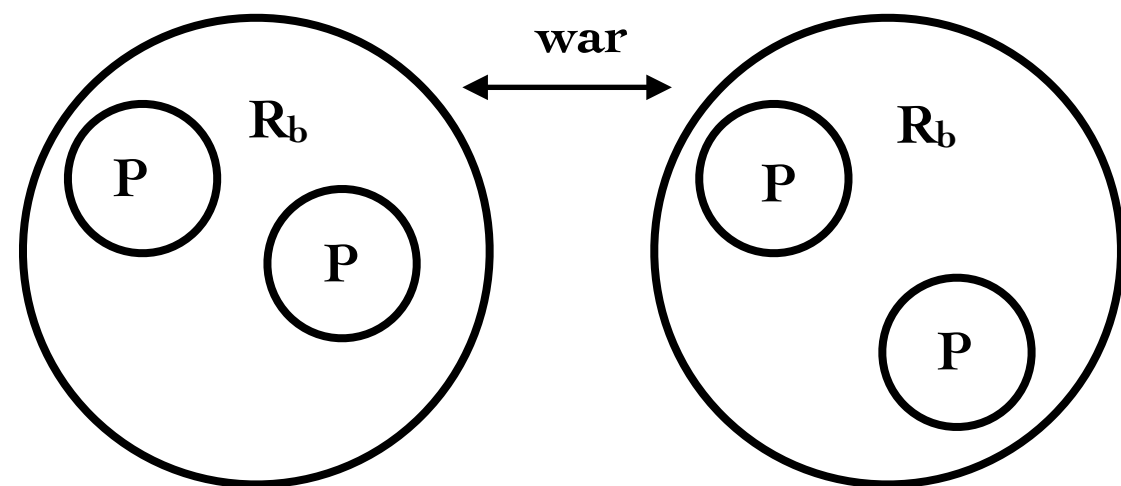


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Trade and war

Negative reciprocity, II:
war

But the warfare that Clastres sees in the Yanomami tribe occurs within a higher-dimension community. It is of a different nature from war waged against the outside world. The wars that Lévi-Strauss described as arising from a failure to secure peace through gift giving pertained to encounters between a higher-order community and its exterior. Accordingly, the existence of warfare within the tribal community does not amount to a negation of the principle of reciprocity: this sort of warfare is in fact a kind of reciprocity. In many ways it resembles vendetta or potlatch. By waging war the tribes are attempting to vanquish their rivals, and there are even cases of extermination. But this is not done for the purpose of subordinating those rivals. War is carried out for the sake of one's "honor"; it is a kind of sacrifice. It helps build a sense of cohesion and identity for each of the participating clan communities and does not lead to the conquest of other clans. Accordingly, just as is the case in vendettas, warfare here is carried out endlessly. This sort of war exists because there is no transcendent power capable of towering over the various clans and tribes—in other words, because there is no state—just as this war is what renders the establishment of such a state impossible.



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Trade and war

Negative reciprocity, II: war

Reciprocity impedes the formation of the state through its positive character (amicability), but even more so through its negative character (war). Reciprocity impedes the concentration of power, the formation of a higher stratum. Reciprocal gift giving generates close bonds between communities and a higher-order community—in other words, reciprocal gift giving leads to the stratification of communities. But this is not at all hierarchical. Reciprocity does not recognize one community (clan or tribe) as standing in a higher position, nor does it recognize one chief as standing in a position superior to other chiefs. It does not permit the establishment of a state.

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Stratification

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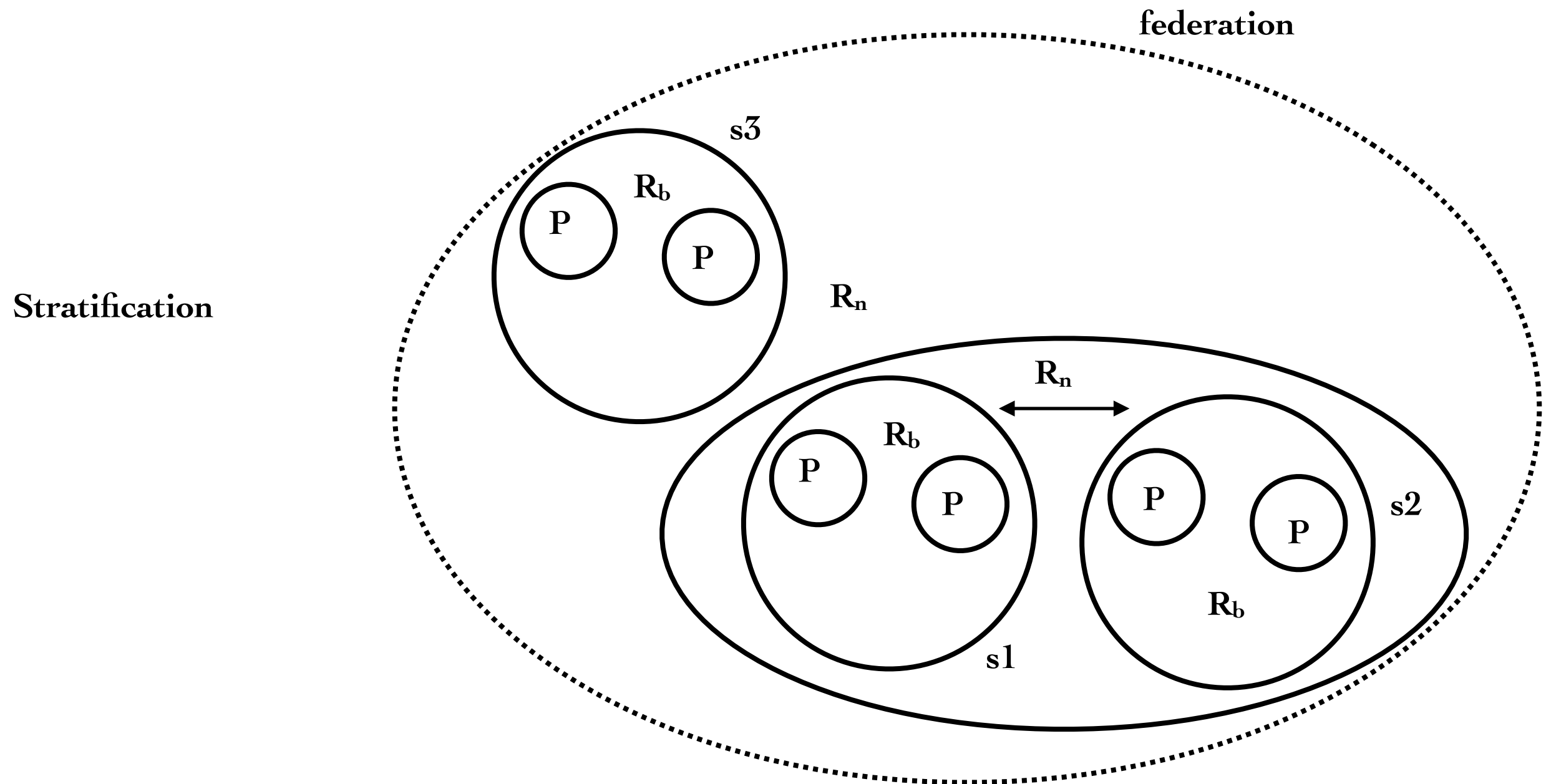
Unlike the agrarian community that is organized by and subordinated to the state, the higher-order community formed through gift giving neither unites nor subordinates the lower-order communities. In tribal societies, even if a higher-order community is established, the independence of the lower-order communities does not disappear. In that sense, antagonism continues to exist within the interior of the tribe. As a result, while gift giving builds amicable relations with other communities, it also frequently becomes aggressively competitive. In potlatch, for example, the goal is to overwhelm one's rivals by giving in such excess that they are unable to reciprocate. Of course, this is not done for the sake of ruling over others. It is carried out for the sake of defending the independence (honor) of the community—in other words, of liberating it from the threat posed by other communities. It is also for the sake of strengthening the sense of identity within the community.

In this sense, vendetta is also an instance of reciprocity. For example, when a member of one community is murdered by a member of another community, revenge (reciprocation) is pursued. The “obligation” for reciprocation here strongly resembles the “obligation” of gift-countergift. When a member of the community is killed, it is a loss to the community and hence can only be repaid by imposing a similar loss on the perpetrator's community. But once a vendetta is initiated and revenge obtained, this in turn must be reciprocated, so that the process continues without end. The gift exchanges of a potlatch sometimes continue until both communities completely exhaust their resources, and it is the same with vendetta. Vendetta is abolished only when a higher-order structure capable of sitting in judgment of crime arises: the state. This shows, in reverse, how the existence of vendetta impedes the formation of a state. This is because vendetta restores the independence of each community from the higher-order structure.

Stratification

The reciprocity of the gift, as the trade in kula shows, establishes a federation among multiple communities—a kind of world system. This kind of league is not stable and always harbors much internal chaos, meaning that it must from time to time be reconfirmed through additional reciprocal acts of gift giving. The unity of the community established through reciprocity is segmentary in nature. To wit, it does not become a structure capable of governing from above—a state. Most likely, we can situate the form of chiefdom as a further extension of this sort of tribal confederation. This represents the stage just before the emergence of the state. Even here, however, the principle of reciprocity that resists the state remains in effect. The state will only emerge after a nonreciprocal mode of exchange becomes dominant.

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Why then would these peoples choose to adopt fixed settlement? When we consider this, we must first rid ourselves of one common bias: the unfounded belief that human beings are essentially sedentary dwellers, that they will naturally settle down in one place if conditions allow. In fact, even today, even when state coercion is employed, it is not easy to force nomadic peoples to adopt fixed residence. This was all the more true for hunter-gatherer peoples. Their pursuit of a nomadic lifestyle did not necessarily come about because they needed to follow their prey. If that were true, then, for example, they would settle down in one location if it provided sufficient food. But we find that this is not the case. That alone was not sufficient to cause them to abandon the nomadic mode of life that had persisted since the primate stage. It seems clear that they disliked fixed settlement because it produced a variety of difficulties.⁸

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Sedentary Revolution

Sedentary settlement requires direct confrontation with various difficulties that were previously avoided through constant movement. Why in the world did hunter-and-gatherer peoples adopt fixed settlement? Basically, the reason was climate change. During the Ice Age, the human race advanced to cover an area stretching from the tropics to the midlatitudes, and in the late Paleolithic age, tens of thousands of years ago, it further expanded into the subarctic regions of the midlatitudes. Large-game hunting was the central occupation during this period. But with the warming that followed the end of the Ice Age, temperate areas of the midlatitudes saw increasing forestation and a concomitant disappearance of large-game animal stocks. Foraging too was affected by the increasingly pronounced seasonal variations. In this period, human beings adopted fishing. Unlike hunting, fishing requires the use of equipment that cannot be easily transported. As a result, it became necessary to take up sedentary settlement. Most likely the very first fixed settlements were located at the mouths of rivers.

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Sedentary Revolution

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEDENTARIZATION IN THE HUMAN HISTORY

Masaki NISHIDA
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1. Sanitation
 - (a) shelter from wind, floods, and extreme weathers
 - (b) waste and excrement disposal
2. Resource acquisition
 - (a) acquisition of food, water, and materials
 - (b) trade
 - (c) communal hunting
3. Social factors
 - (a) conflict resolution among camp members
 - (b) avoiding enemy attack
 - (c) to go to ceremonial sites
 - (d) knowledge exchange and visiting acquaintances
4. Physiological factors
 - (a) satisfying physical and psychological urges
5. Cognitive factors
 - (a) putting past traumas
 - (b) leaving behind corpses

In such light, sedentarization can be understood not as the history of factors that made it possible, but as the history of factors that made the nomadic way of life impossible. Starchy seeds require efficient cooking methods, utensils (stoneware, earthenware, baskets), and facilities (hearth, drying sheds and storage space), and big amount of harvest must be stored. Heavy utensils, set facilities, and stored food inconvenience nomadism. The choice for starchy seed utilization means, therefore, at once that of abandoning nomadism.

The above scenario has shown how man in the mid-latitude forest environments of about 10 thousand years ago adapted to the deterioration of the environment resulting from population increase and climate changes by opting for the lesser choices in both their way of life and food utilization. Man has continued to sharply increase population density, and it is an ecological principle that quality of life will deteriorate when population density increases beyond a certain point.

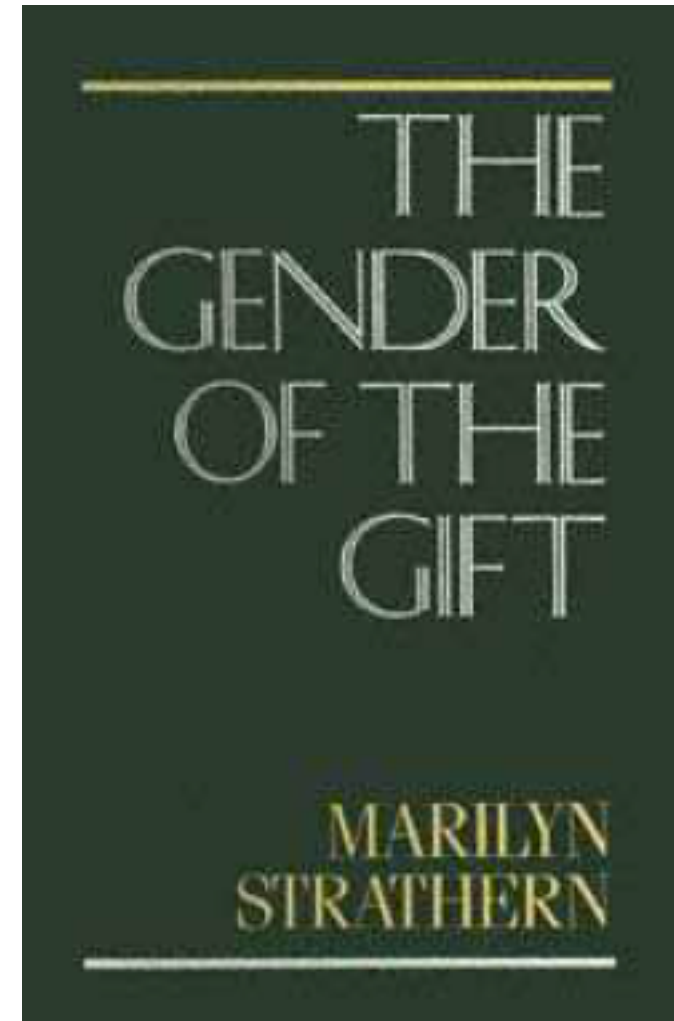
Sedentary Revolution

Sedentary life brought about other unintended results. For example, simple crop cultivation and livestock herding arose almost as a matter of course once sedentary settlement was adopted. This is because, taking for example the case of cultivation, the very fact of people taking up residence in a fixed space leads to a change in the vegetation of the surrounding primeval forest, as seeds from the plants the people eat take root and grow. Just as fixed settlement leads to the development of cultivation as an extension of gathering activities, so too does herding of livestock develop as an extension of hunting. In this sense, the adoption of sedentary settlement precedes the rise of agriculture and livestock herding. This kind of cultivation and livestock rearing was not connected to the Neolithic Revolution. Yet fixed residence did bring about a change more important than the Neolithic Revolution: the emergence of clan society grounded in the principle of reciprocity.

The adoption of fixed settlements also created problems with regard to the status of women. When a hunter-gatherer people took up fixed settlement, in actual practice it pursued its livelihood through fishing or simple cultivation and herding, but it preserved the lifestyle that had existed in the hunter-gatherer phase. In sum, a division of labor persisted in which men engaged in hunting and women carried out foraging. But in reality the men's hunting became a largely ritual activity. With the adoption of sedentary settlement, the necessary production was increasingly carried out by women. Yet it is important to note that this change led not to an elevation but to a lowering in the status of women. The males, who produced nothing directly but only engaged in symbolic production or supervision, stood in the superior position.

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Sedentary Revolution



The concept of 'the gift' has long been one of anthropology's entry points into the study of Melanesian societies and cultures. Indeed, it provides a springboard for general theorizing: the reciprocities and debts created by the exchange of gifts are seen to comprise a form of sociality and a mode of societal integration. In Melanesia, gift exchanges regularly accompany the celebration of life-cycle events and are, most notably, instruments of political competition. Often gifts subsume persons themselves, especially under patrilineal regimes where women move in marriage from one set of men to another, although this is not the only context in which objects, as they pass from donor to recipient, appear to be categorized as male or female. However, one cannot read such gender ascriptions off in advance, not even when women appear to be the very items which are gifted. It does not follow that 'women' only carry with them a 'female' identity. The basis for classification does not inhere in the objects themselves but in how they are transacted and to what ends. The action is the gendered activity.

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Sedentary Revolution

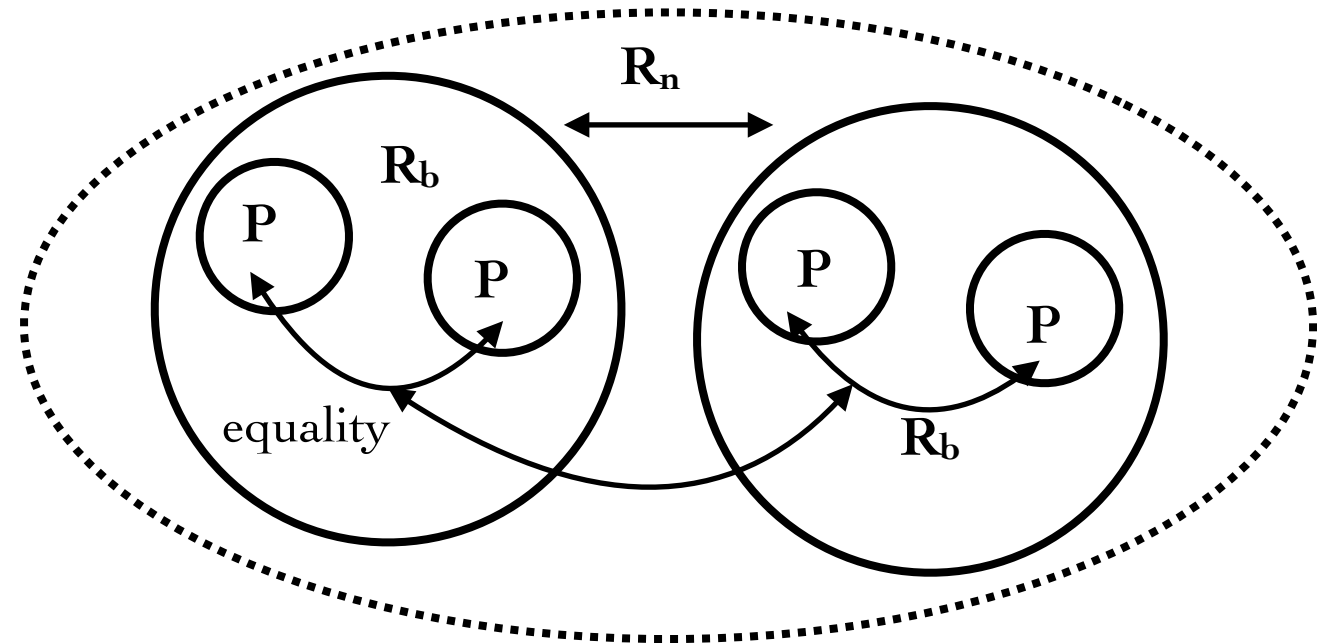
While the status of women declined with the appearance of sedentary settlement, it is no mistake to assert that the status of women in clan societies was relatively high. The decisive decline in status came with the establishment of the state and the beginning of agricultural civilization. After this, production was carried out by women and by conquered subordinate peoples. On the other hand, clan society also had a functioning system for dissolving the inequalities of wealth and the hierarchies of power it incessantly generated, one that preserved the equality that had prevailed in nomadic society even in the society at the stage of fixed settlement, where it was no longer practically possible: a system of reciprocity. Following Masaki Nishida, I would like to call this the *sedentary revolution*, to distinguish it from the Neolithic Revolution that produced the state.¹⁰

In clan societies there was a chief who took charge of pooling and redistribution. But this chief did not possess absolute power, precisely because the principle of reciprocity prevented it. For example, the position of chief was obtained by giving away acquired wealth through treating others without reserve to feasts—but this is also how the chief lost wealth and, eventually, the position as chief. The principle of reciprocity blocked the emergence of class differences and the establishment of a state. In this sense, it is not true that fixed residence immediately led to class society or the state. To the contrary: fixed residence led to the rise of a system that rejected class society and the state.

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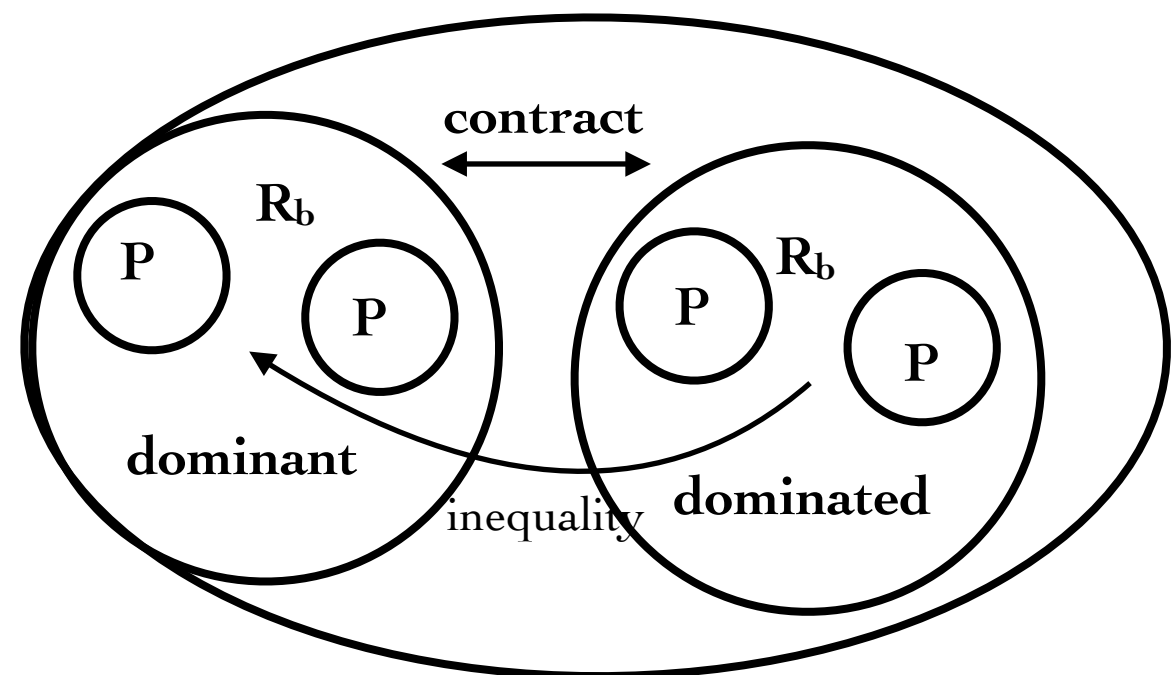
nomadism
hunter-gatherer

clan society
cultivation/herding \neq ritual hunting



Sedentary Revolution

state
production \neq power



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Social Contract

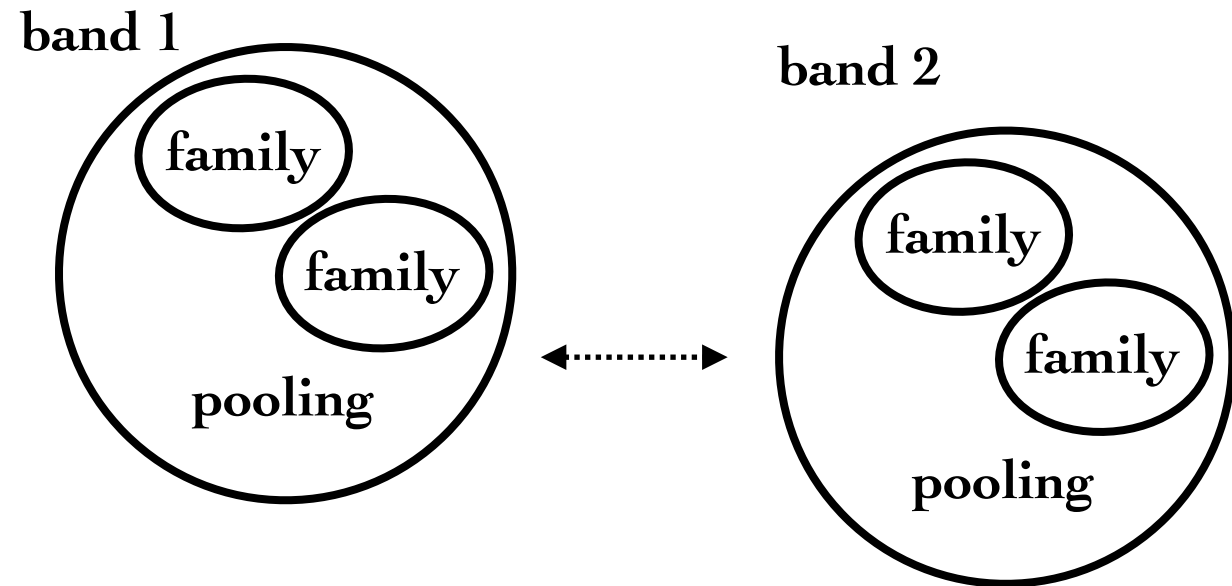
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I would like to consider the process by which clan society took shape, especially in comparison to the rise of the state. As a thought experiment, we have already considered a situation in which a hunter-gatherer people takes up some sort of fixed settlement, coexisting with many other bands and households. What sort of situation was this? Even before adopting sedentary settlement, the nomadic band would have been in contact with other bands. In other words, the possibility for trade, war, and gift giving with others had already existed. For example, as Lévi-Strauss writes,

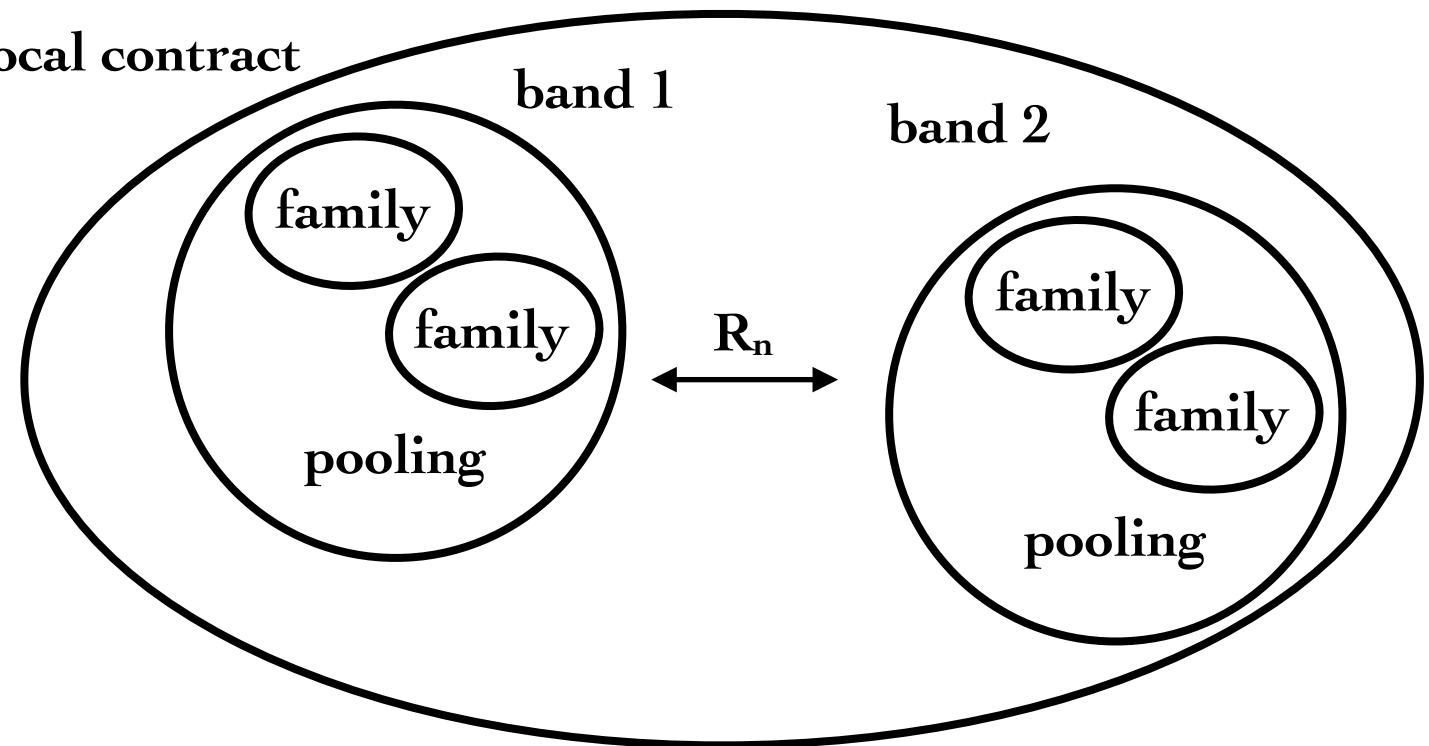
They live in mutual fear, and yet at the same time they must somehow come into contact and carry out exchanges with each other. To achieve this they must first exchange in gift giving and thereby create amicable relations. But in the case of nomadic bands such as the ones Lévi-Strauss discusses, lasting relations with other bands are not established, because they quickly move on to new locations. For this reason, reciprocal exchanges will not lead to the formation of a higher-order community. No structure beyond the family can emerge.

But the example that Lévi-Strauss offers also suggests that gift giving offers a possible way out from the fearful state of nature that exists between bands. Thomas Hobbes saw the state as a social contract that led to peace by leaving behind the state of nature, but Sahlins argues that we can see another form of social contract in the gift.¹² Of course, this is of a different nature from the social contract that Hobbes saw as the basis of the state (in which each individual transfers away his or her natural rights). In this version of the social contrast, natural rights are not transferred away; they are instead *given*. In this case, the donor retains the power of the gift. In other words, the recipient of the gift acquires the right to act as the agent of the donor, but at the same time, the recipient is also bound by the donor. Their relationship is bilateral, which is to say reciprocal.

Social Contract



reciprocal contract



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Social Contract

Both sides of this are worth noting. In band society, the household (family) belongs to the band but is not subordinated to it. This also means that the binding force of the household is relatively weak: the husband-wife relation is easily dissolved. People come together to form a community, but the possibility always exists for them to leave that community. Even after the rise of clan society, the nomadism that characterized band society remains basically unchanged. For example, if the population increases or if there is an outbreak of discord within it, people are free to emigrate. This leads to the foundation of a new independent clan, albeit one that remains allied with the original clan. This kind of alliance, based on the principle of reciprocity, extends from the clan to the tribe and from the tribe to the confederation of tribes. But this kind of alliance never becomes a hierarchical order. While the lower-level groups are in some sense subordinated to the higher-level group, this is not a total subordination; they preserve their independence. This is a defining characteristic of mini world systems, which are grounded in the principle of reciprocity.

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The Obligations of the Gift

Band societies engage in pooling—all things are owned in common. But once band societies take up sedentary settlement and each household begins stockpiling goods, inequalities and competition arise. The reciprocity of the gift is the method adopted to dissolve these outcomes. According to Mauss, reciprocity is sustained by three obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to accept a gift, and the obligation to make a counter gift. It is through these obligations of the gift that strong bonds are born between groups that were originally hostile or distant. It is also through the gift that the principle of equality that originated within the household is expanded to encompass the entirety of a larger community. Clan society always includes elements that will generate inequalities of wealth and power, but at the same time it always holds these in check through the obligations of the gift.

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The Obligations of the Gift

There are many kinds of obligations of the gift. For example, the incest taboo cannot be separated from the obligations of the gift. Scientists who study anthropoids have shown that incest is almost unknown among them.¹⁴ The avoidance of incest, then, is not unique to humans. The incest prohibition seen in primitive societies must not be a simple avoidance, but rather something born of a different purpose. Emile Durkheim was the first to propose that incest was prohibited for the sake of exogamy, but he tried to explain this in terms of such factors as impurity of blood.¹⁵ It was his nephew Mauss who linked the relation of the incest taboo and exogamy to the reciprocity of the gift. Exogamy is a system of reciprocity in which the household or clan gives away a daughter or son, and then receives in turn.¹⁶ This is precisely why incest must be prohibited. The incest taboo is the renunciation of the “right to use” within the household or clan. But when daughters or sons are given away to some external group, they still belong to the original household or clan. In this sense, this represents not a transfer of ownership but a gift.

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The Power of the Gift

We have been considering reciprocal exchange not as a system existing within a single community, but as an activity by which a community creates a state of peace with another community. As a result of this sort of reciprocal exchange, a larger community with a segmentary form is established. In this process, reciprocal exchange becomes institutionalized—in other words, it becomes an obligation imposed by the community. But this obligation does not function with regard to other communities. That being the case, how does the gift come to have the power to transform antagonistic relations between communities?

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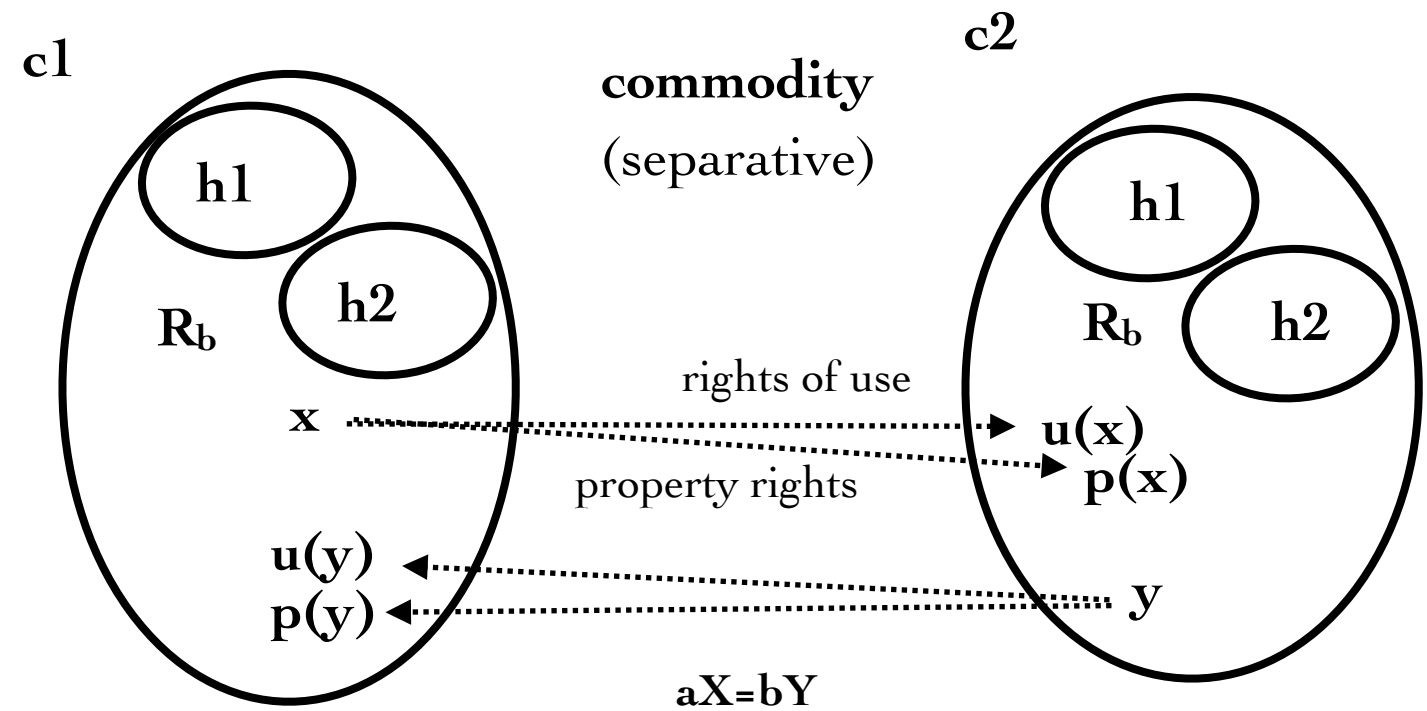
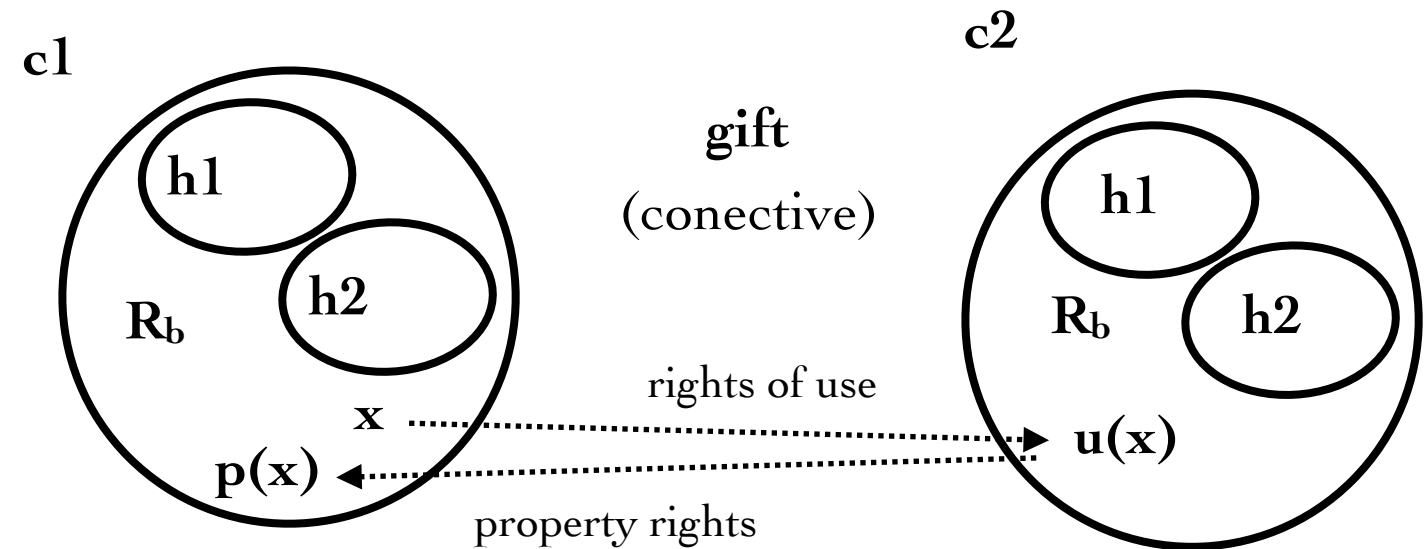
The Power of the Gift

In my view, however, we don't need to rely on the theory of reification to explain this. In commodity exchange, one specific commodity—gold, for example—possesses the power of being exchangeable for all other commodities. We call this money. Without considering how it comes to possess this power by being situated as the universal equivalent form, people tend to think that the power dwells within this object itself. This resembles the belief in reciprocal exchanges that holds that *hau* dwells in the gift-object itself.

The difference between these two forms, however, is more important than their resemblance—the difference, that is, between commodity exchange and reciprocal exchange. In commodity exchange, right of ownership is transferred from one party to the other. Accordingly, to possess money is to possess the right to acquire ownership over other things. For this reason, the desire to accumulate money arises—the perverse desire (fetishism) for money instead of things. This does not happen with the gift. In the gift, rights of usage are handed over, but not rights of ownership. The gift-object functions as a kind of money, but unlike actual money, the gift-object does not possess the right to own other things: to the contrary, it brings with it the obligation to give things away (the obligation to make a countergift). In sum, whereas money promotes stockpiling and expanding possession, *hau* functions as a force that rejects ownership and desire.

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The Power of the Gift



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Magic and Reciprocity

Mauss employed the Maori concept of hau to explain the power of the gift. This amounted to explicating reciprocity through the religious beliefs of a clan society: this was the target of Lévi-Strauss's criticism. But the problem with Mauss does not rest on the fact that he tried to explain reciprocity through magic. If anything, he should have tried to explain magic through reciprocal exchange, but of course he didn't. Magic is the attempt to control or manipulate nature or other people by means of the gift (sacrifice). In other words, magic in itself already includes reciprocity. Like the reciprocity system, magic is not something that existed from the start. At the stage of nomadic bands, magic had yet to develop. Its development began with the adoption of sedentary settlement.⁴

Animism precedes and forms a precondition for the appearance of magic. Animism is a belief system that regards all things, whether created by nature or humans, as being animate (possessing life spirit). It already exists at the stage of the nomadic band: the practice of burying the dead proves this. Yet while animism is the foundation of magic, it does not itself bring about magic. Magic appears only when a relation of reciprocal exchange is established with this *anima* (spirits). This development occurs only after the nomadic band takes up fixed settlement and a clan society is established.

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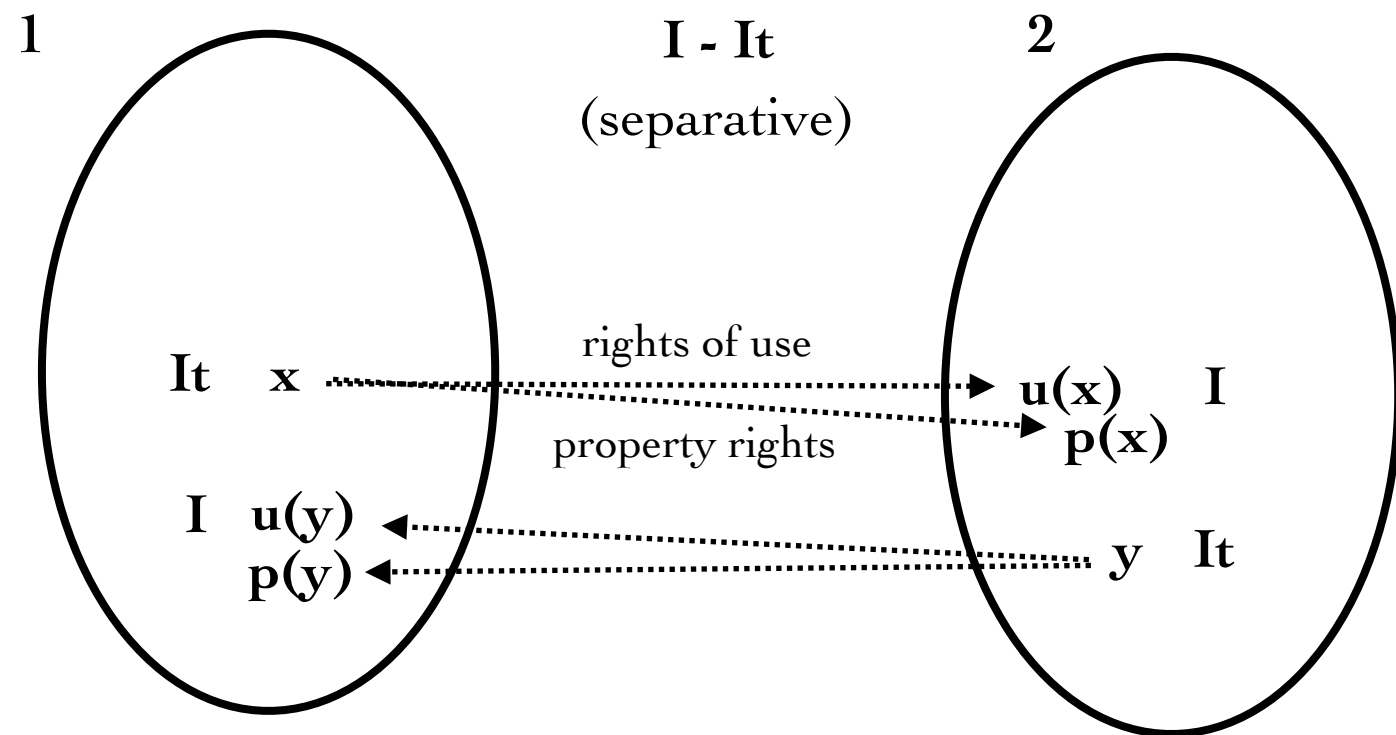
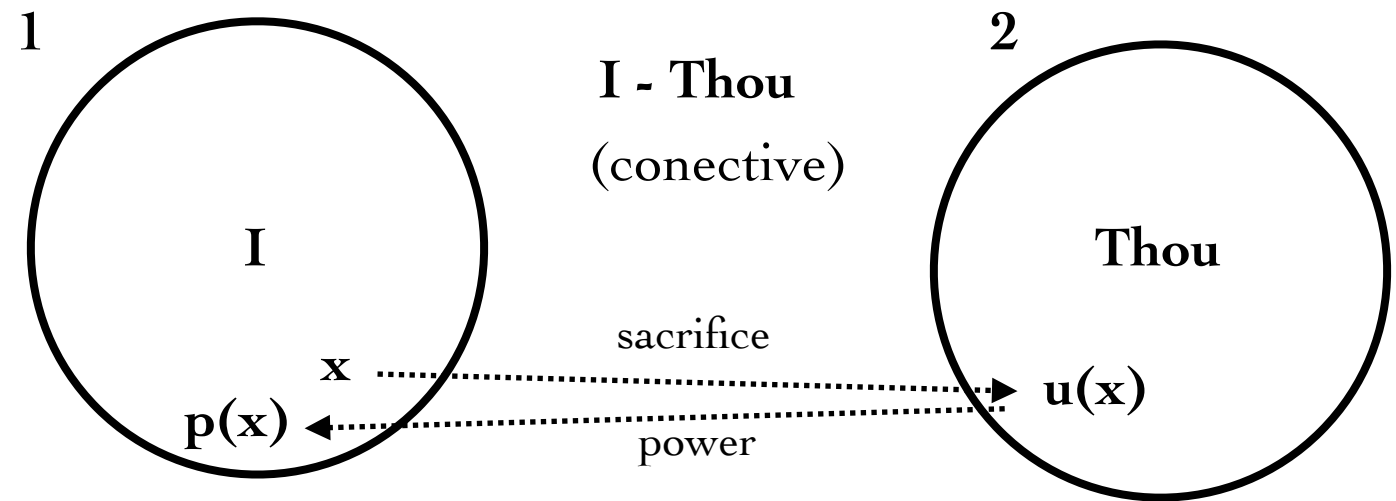
Magic and Reciprocity

Still, it is possible for us to approach the world of animism without resorting to analogies with the infantile or psychopathological. Animism consists of an attitude that sees all objects as being anima. This is not especially difficult to understand; we can understand it by way of a phenomenological approach. The key to this can be found in Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. He divides human attitudes toward the world into two types: the "I-Thou" relation and the "I-It" relation. The *It* in the latter is not limited to things: we could just as well use *he* or *she*. Whether a person or a thing, it can be found whenever something is objectified as *It*. At that moment, *Thou* disappears. The reverse is also true: if we adopt the attitude of I-Thou, even a material thing can become *Thou*.

On the other hand, the I in the I-Thou attitude is of a different nature from the I in the I-It attitude. In the latter, I is a subject in relation to an object. Accordingly, in the I-Thou relation, *Thou* is not an object, nor is I a subject: "When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no *thing*; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation."⁷ When we take up the I-Thou attitude, both humans and nature are *Thou*, and they seem to harbor anima. We can call this way of thinking animism.

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Magic and Reciprocity



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Magic and Reciprocity

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Animism is thus the taking up of an I-Thou stance toward the world. This is not a characteristic limited to primitive peoples. For example, Buber describes his experience of exchanging gazes with a cat. For a fleeting moment, it seemed as if they had encountered one another as Thou. But, Buber writes, “the rotation of the world which introduced the relational event had been followed almost immediately by the other which ended it. The world of *It* surrounded the animal and myself, for the space of a glance the world of *Thou* had shone out from the depths, to be at once extinguished and put back into the world of *It*.”⁸ In short, Buber concludes, modern man is already living in a world of an I-It relation, making it exceedingly difficult to bracket this and encounter the world or others as Thou.

Hunter-gatherer peoples faced the opposite difficulty. Freud tried to explain animism and magic from a child’s feeling of omnipotence, but “adult” primitives could not live exclusively in an I-Thou world: they were not “children.” The adults could not imbibe the sense of omnipotence that arises from the environment of a child, who needs only to cry to get its mother to tend to its needs. As a matter of practical reality, adults had to live in an I-It world. But in order to do so, they needed to bracket the I-Thou relation and treat natural objects and people as if they were merely It. For example, as hunters they had to kill animals, but an anima dwelled in each animal. To be able to engage in hunting, these adults had to transform their attitude toward the world from I-Thou to I-It. This transformation was carried out by means of what we call sacrifices.

Magic and Reciprocity

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Sacrifices are gifts that impose a debt on nature, thereby sealing off the anima of nature and transforming it into an It. The same is true for magic. It is a mistake to think that magic consists of manipulating the natural world by means of spells or rituals. Magic made it possible to objectify nature as an It by despiritualizing it by means of the gift. For this reason, we can say that magicians were the first scientists.⁹

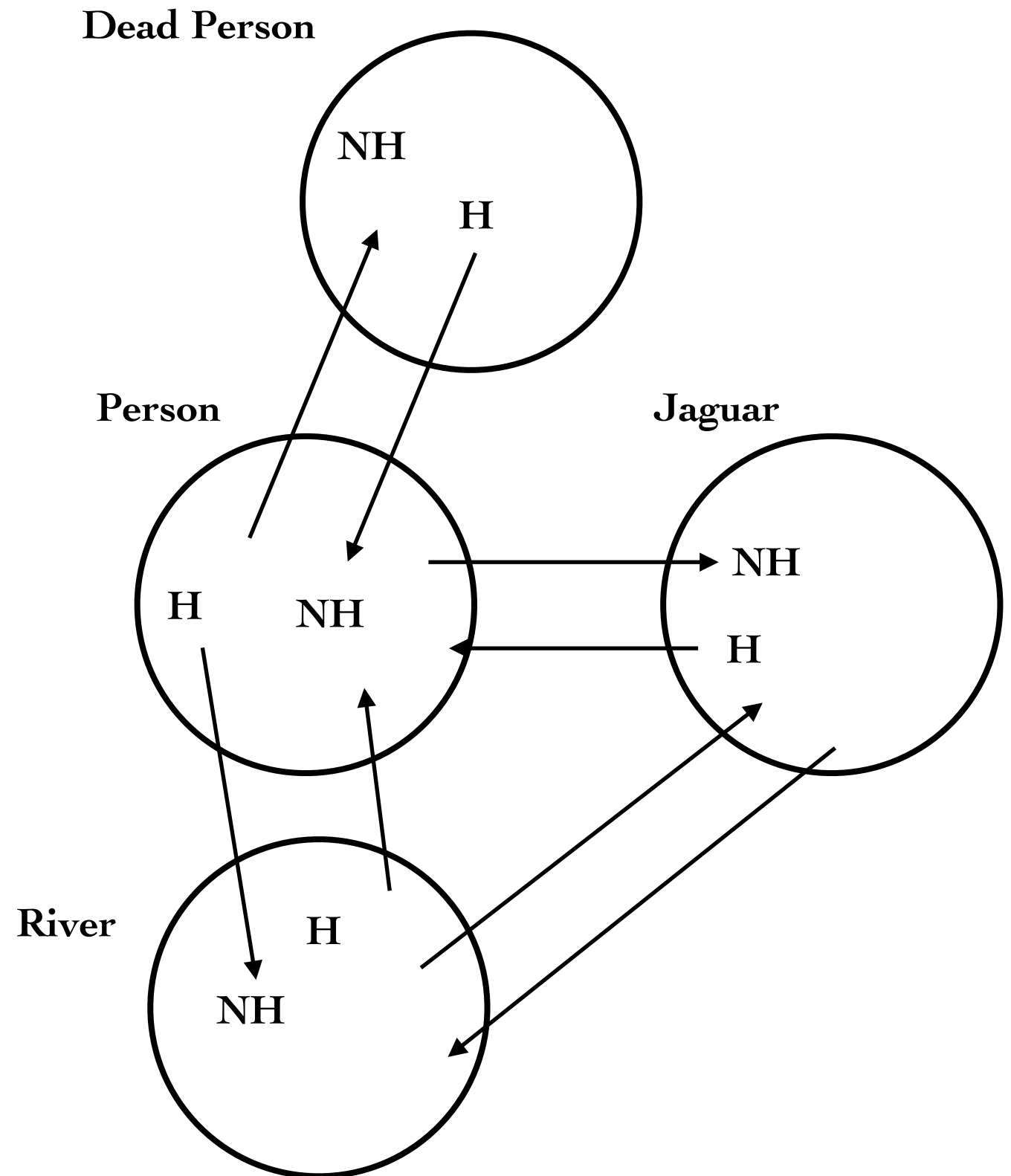
But, as I have already suggested, magic was rarely practiced in the society of nomadic hunter-gatherer peoples, precisely because they were nomadic. They had little need, for example, to fear the spirits of the dead: all they had to do was bury them and move on. The same was true for the victims of their hunting. One of the difficulties that arose with fixed settlement was the need to coexist not only with other people but also with the dead. People offered gifts in order to keep the spirits of the dead in check. This took the form of funeral rites, as well as ancestor worship. The dead became the ancestral gods who were responsible for unifying clan society.

From the perspective of nomadic hunter-gatherer peoples, a purely objectified It does not exist: everything is Thou. Things are equated with spirits. In sedentary clan society, however, an I-It attitude again emerges. It is for this reason that magic develops and the social status of the magician-priest rises. But there is a limit to this: the principle of reciprocity itself bars the magician-priest from assuming a transcendental status. This is similar to the way the status of a chief in clan society may be bolstered, but the chief never acquires the kind of absolute authority enjoyed by kings. But in the state societies that appear after the rise of clan society, the anima of Thou is rendered absolute in the form of God, while nature and other people become It, objects to be manipulated.

Magic and Reciprocity

I - Thought - I
Thought - I - Thought

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The problem of Migration

I have described how the shift from nomadic band to clan society began with the adoption of sedentary settlement. The question is not why fixed settlement led to state society, but rather why it led to clan society. In other words, why did fixed settlement lead down the road to peace, equality, and a segmentarily organized society instead of war, class society, and centralized authority? There was no necessity for adopting this particular course: it only came to seem necessary after it had been adopted. If anything, it was more likely that the adoption of fixed settlement would have led to class society and, eventually, the rise of the state. Accordingly, we should regard the establishment of clan society not as a preliminary stage leading toward state formation but rather as the first attempt to sidestep the path that led from fixed settlement to state society. In this regard, clan society is not primitive; instead it discloses to us a possibility for the future.

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The problem of Migration

In considering this problem, I think we need to return to a text that is today entirely ignored by anthropologists: Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1912). He was concerned not so much with totem as with the problem of how within primitive society the bonds of brotherhood were established and maintained. To summarize, Freud was interested in how tribal society produced the equality and independence that characterized clans. He sought the causes for this in the foundational event of a murder of the patriarch by his sons. Needless to say, this represents the application of the psychoanalytic concept of the Oedipal complex to the history of the human race. In doing so, Freud referred to the views of the leading scholars of his day, borrowing in particular from the theories of Charles Darwin, James J. Atkinson, and

Today's anthropologists completely reject this theory. There was no such "ur-father" in ancient times: rather than resembling the dominant males of gorilla bands, Freud's version seems more like a projection back onto clan society of the figure of the patriarch or king that emerged only after the rise of the absolute-monarchy states. This does not, however, render meaningless Freud's understanding of the murder of the primal father and of its subsequent ritual repetition. Freud's real interest lay with the question of how the brotherhood system was maintained.

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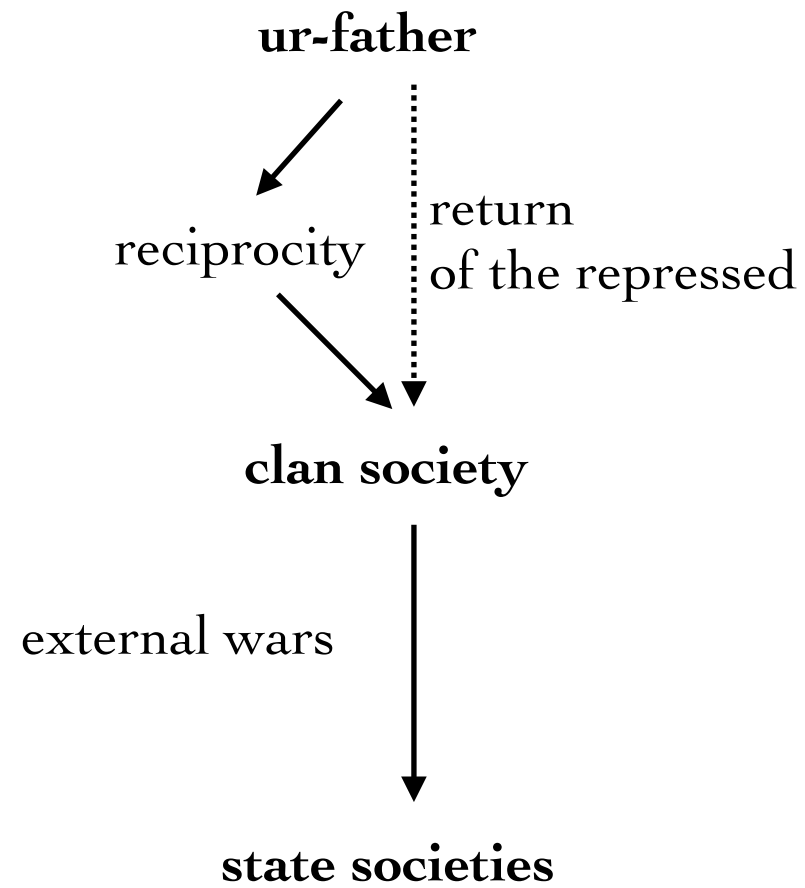
The problem of Migration

In nomadic band society, there was no primal ur-father. To the contrary, the bonds uniting the band and family were fragile. In this sense, the theories that Freud relied on were mistaken. Yet the adoption of fixed settlement meant that the appearance of inequalities and war—that is, the rise of a state or ur-father—was now possible. Clan society, the brotherhood, was established by suppressing this possibility. Considered in this light, Freud's explanation remains valid: it explains why clan society did not transform into a state. It is as if clan society perpetually killed off in advance the ur-father that would inevitably appear if matters were left to their own devices. Even if the primal murder of the father never occurred empirically, it was nonetheless the cause that sustained the structure produced through reciprocity.

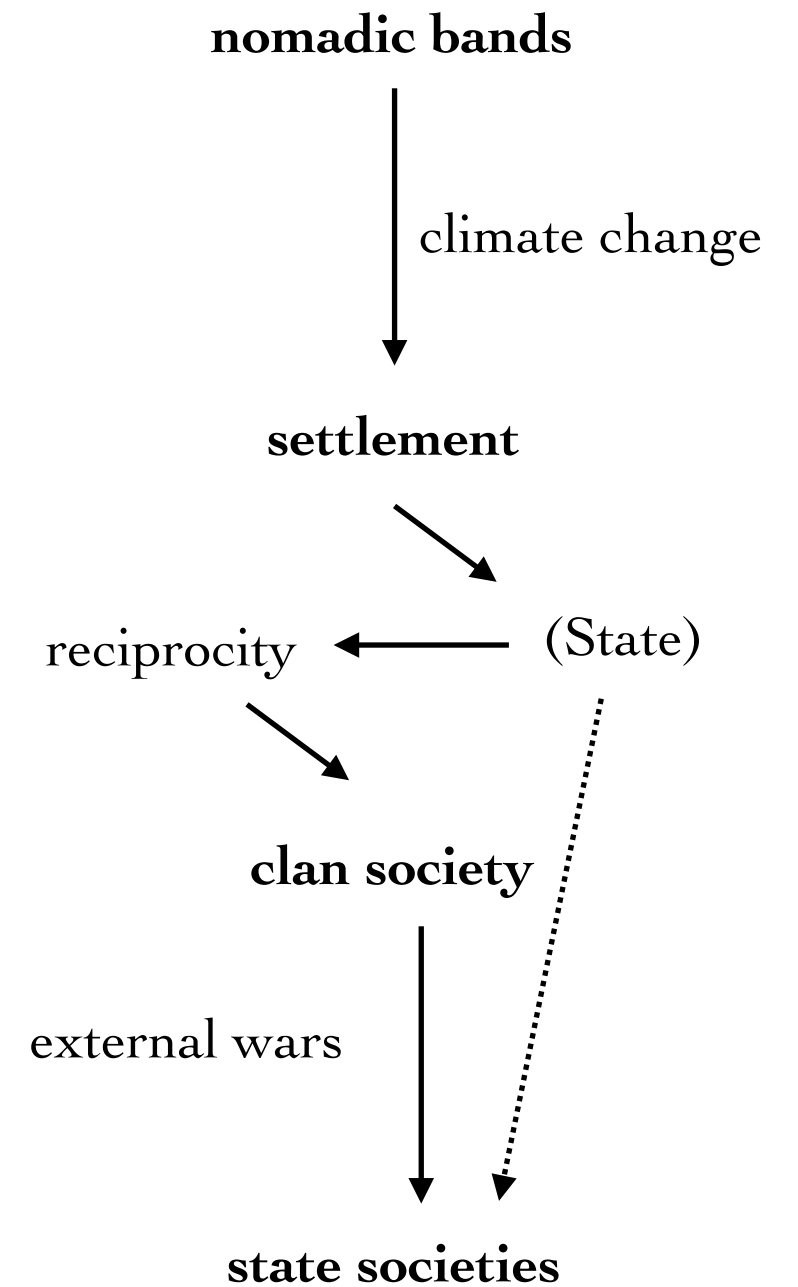
The egalitarianism existing in clan societies is quite powerful: it permits no uneven distribution or disparities in wealth or power. But this egalitarianism cannot be explained in terms of personal jealousy or some kind of nostalgic idealism: it is compulsory. Freud explains its compulsory nature in terms of “the return of the repressed.” In his view, when that which has been repressed and forgotten returns, it appears not simply as a memory but as a threat.¹¹ In Freud's theory of clan society, what returned was the murdered father. But in my view, what came back in this “return of the repressed” was the nomadism (freedom)—since equality came with nomadism—that was abandoned with the adoption of fixed settlement. This explains why the principle of reciprocity functioned with the force of a threat.

1. Summary and Questions
2. Mini World Systems
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The problem of Migration



(Freud)



(Karatani)

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Marx took up the history of social formations from the perspective of modes of production. To see this history in terms of modes of production is to see it from the perspective of who owned the means of production. In Marx's vision, primitive communism was characterized by communal ownership, class society by class struggle between the dominant class that owned the means of production and the class that did not, and the final stage by the return of communal ownership in a higher dimension. But this view fails to distinguish between the nomadic stage and the fixed-settlement stage of clan society. Moreover, while this view places great weight on the equality that existed in the first stage, it ignores the nomadism (freedom) that made this possible in the first place. In short, it is apt to see communism only in terms of equality of wealth, and not in terms of nomadism (freedom). We can overcome these errors by rethinking the problem from the perspective of modes of exchange.

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