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Kula Valuables

The Problem of Value and the Production of Names

Frederick H. Damon

IN THIS PAPER I describe and analyze an aspect of the kula that has only occupied the edges of my other published work – the institution's avowed central purpose, the production of « names », and their realization in « fame ». Although I noted this purpose in the first item I completed for publication (Damon 1983a : 317), only with Nancy Munn's work on Gawa (1986) has it become widely understood that the production of « fame » is the central goal of this regional system. Yet the ways names of valuables and persons relate to this intent are not yet well described. The questions I seek to address here are how, exactly, is the circulation of this shell wealth structured so that a name/fame is created ? If valuables are parts of persons, how is this representation formed and according to what processes ? In other words, what is being circulated that results in the creation of what we take to be an agent's identity ? And what exactly are the relations among valuables, which people of course name, and the naming of persons that results from their circulation ? These questions are important. While many writers about the kula have made reference to valuable names, unlike other aspects of the institution, the newer ethnography has not transformed received understandings. Among other things, a more thorough analysis helps locate what Gell calls the « anticipatory joy » that, he believes, motivates much action which our society calls « economic » (Gell 1992 : 183-184). But rather than understanding this motive as part of a fantasy world that at best parallels institutional existence, I seek to locate these forms in the center of this regional system's understanding of wealth as a social form.

This paper addresses issues that were first formally presented in a lecture entitled « The "Material" and the "Spiritual" in the Gift : Models of Exchange from the Kula, India, and 19th Century United States Culture » presented in 1991 at the Academia Sinica, Institute of Ethnology, Nankang, Taipei, Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, and at the École des hautes études en science sociales. Many people from these institutions commented on the paper, as have years of graduate students. And I thank them all, along with the institutions and persons in the United States and Papua New Guinea who have supported my years of research.

The Kula Ring

« *Kula* », from the Trobriand language, refers to the anthropologically recognized term for an institutionalized exchange of shell-wealth in Southeastern Papua New Guinea (see Map). While I employ this term here, the one used on the island where I do my research is the cognate *kun*. This word-form may be used as a noun, verb, and the base for a noun-classifier used for counting the shell valuables, as well as clay pots. In its anthropological usage it connotes the counter clockwise and clockwise exchange of two kinds of shells, « armshells », *mwal*, and « necklaces », *veigun*, around a set of islands. If, among actors in this system, in its marked sense it just refers to the exchange of the two main valuables, in an unmarked sense it refers to a set of activities used to support the exchanges : a lot of talk is « *kun* ».

Although my facts are primarily ethnographic technicalities of what was a remote place in the South Pacific, the paradigmatic use of the custom since Malinowski and Mauss (*e.g.* Murra 1995), the way data from this region fit into recent debates about gifts and commodities, alienability and inalienability, and non-western versus western social forms (*e.g.* Valeri 1994 ; Liep 1999), the continuing use of data from the region for theorizing the social (*e.g.* Gell 1992), re-conceptualizing exchange theory (*e.g.* Godelier 1999), and the expanding use of ideas derived from the exchange literature (*e.g.* Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, Biagioli 1993) make these details of considerable comparative interest. Models about

society, if not certain kinds of societies, are at stake. Hence more precision in how this system works may allow more exactitude in our theoretical endeavors. Moreover, the issue here may be more than one of comparative sociology. Recent archaeology in the northeastern corner of the Kula Ring suggests that the region has only been occupied for some 2000 years, with something like the kula as we now describe it beginning to make an appearance, derived from a well-formed social system, from 500 to 700 years ago (see Bickler 1998). These dates serve to place the social origins of this classic area in the same time frame as settlement of Madagascar, the Hinduization of Bali, and other complicated historical swirls throughout the Indo-Pacific region. In an entirely appropriate defense of the legacy of Mauss and Dumont, Jonathan Parry (1998 : 159) writes that « India is *not* a variant on Firth's Tikopia, nor even Hocart's Fiji ». On the matter of history, Parry may be incorrect. The forms and functions of the Kula Ring may have to be added to that set of human institutional experiments, and so be seen as chapter in a set of stories that spanned a major portion of the earth's surface over the last 2000 and more years¹. A detailed description of exactly how the circulation of shell wealth results in the realization of a name is, then, just what we need to expand our understanding of these historical forms and cast into comparative perspective an array of phenomenon that is, and has been for some time, global.

I shall proceed by first reviewing my previous work, stressing its bearing on the classical topic to which this set of papers speaks : how are kula valuables stores of value, and, as such, how are they the determinants of this society's form of wealth ? In the course of this review I will state what I understand to be the central positions around which this data has been employed for theoretical purposes. I then go into an analysis of the realization of names through the circulation of valuables. This section addresses how and for what valuables are mediums of exchange.

Searching Metaphors and Locating "Value"

My data derive from approximately thirty six months of research on Muyuw or Woodlark Island in the northeast corner of Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea. The first two years of this research were in 1973-1975, followed by a short return in 1982. These months were devoted to issues of exchange and production. Although the papers I refer to below contain my richest descriptions of the institution to date, other aspects of the island's history, culture, and relationships to nearby islands are dealt with in my book (Damon 1990) and subsequent publications.

Since 1991 I have been back to the region five times. Although my research shifted to ethnobotany, on each return I checked previous understandings,

1. Although this paper is not about this historical hypothesis just alluded to, I take this possibility very seriously. I have explored typological affinities between the Massim, Southeast Asia and India elsewhere and mean to return to these issues (see Damon 1997b, 2000 ; Damon & Bickler 1999).

attempted to keep myself current with my main informants', and their children's, activities, and pursued the histories of five armshells, *mwai*, that defined a certain state of excitement when I first arrived on the island in 1973. The significant new facts about the kula I learned during these returns will be noted. Although my ethnobotanical research and Simon Bickler's archaeological research transformed my understanding of the island and the system in which it is embedded, I have learned no new facts that make me think my earlier questions and syntheses were misguided. This is important for empirical and theoretical reasons. A careful reader of the main recent kula ethnography (e.g. Leach & Leach 1983 ; Munn 1986 ; Weiner 1992 ; Kuehling 1999) will realize that as a group we have presented slightly different accounts. Empirical differences explain some of this divergence. For this region is organized by sequences of variation. As it functions as a mediating institution, of necessity the kula is going to vary by place, and so must our accounts. Moreover, all locales are marked now by social trajectories defined by relations to Western capitalism. Rarely if ever have inter-island relations been significant *as a social system* to those purposes. Each place is now, and has been for at least a century, different than other places by virtue of its experience with an inconstant Western order. These matters aside, some differences existing in the literature are a matter of theoretical disagreement and/or existing states of knowledge each of us brought to our research.

For anthropologists involved in « exchange theory » over the last twenty-five years, Chris Gregory's revised dissertation, *Gifts and Commodities* (1982) is a defining moment². By first locating my work with respect to this book my point here is not to be personal, but to make evident some correspondences.

Gregory and I first met in 1974 when he made a sudden visit to Muyuw³. We met again during the 1978 Kula Conference at Kings College, Cambridge, just after I defended my dissertation and as he was assembling the data, and ideas, for his. He was billed as one of the outsiders to the collection of Massim ethnographers, and an economic anthropologist for the conference. He was coming to terms with the relationship between Marx and Lévi-Strauss, and found the discussion of *kitoum* in my paper (now Damon 1983a), just what he needed for his purposes – finding ethnographic evidence to show exactly why Melanesian exchange forms were not like those Marx and others described for our system, and Boas and others had described for non-Western systems. Although we both mused over the use of « alienation » in Marcel Mauss's essay (e.g. 1967 : 46 [1925 : 128]), I did not completely understand what he was doing. In my conference essay, and my other kula publications (Damon 1980a, 1980b, 1983b), all of which were conceived and written after the Cambridge meetings, I was following up a different line of inquiry than the ones that guided his book. Only in my 1990 and 1993 publications was I completely conversant with Gregory's

2. For other people the major text of the period is Taussig's (1980). Jonathan Parry (1989) takes them as a pair in his attempt to transpose and critique their problems with data from India.

3. Gregory was touring old gold fields in Papua New Guinea. The trip was Hank Nelson's, who was conducting research for his book (1976).

argument, also by then well read in Western and US social and economic history and knowingly presenting social facts largely consistent with models outlined in *Gifts and Commodities*.

My first four papers on the kula (1980a, 1980b, 1983a, 1983b) were designed to mediate the differences I understood to exist between the version of structuralism I was learning and an emerging dialogue with Marx. The reasons for this, although part of an intellectual shift in anthropology in the 1970s, were empirical. I went to the Kula Ring to do research as an exchange theorist whose ideas were marked by the Bateson-Lévi-Strauss end of the exchange spectrum⁴. As such, and as a US-trained anthropologist, I assumed that to be valid those models had to be immediately applicable, that I should be able to use « exchange theory » to explicate the way Muyuw people understood what they were doing. There was, and remains, much of great value in my original theoretical toolkit. Among other things, the analysis of form found in Claude Lévi-Strauss's discussion of « generalised exchange » (Lévi-Strauss 1969) has more of direct relevance for the kula than anything Marx ever wrote (hence Damon 1980a). Yet I could not do what I wanted. I saw, of course, many kula exchanges and heard and talked about hundreds of others. I soon learned about the way Muyuw people model their clan system in their gardens such that four clans perpetually pass women, and other things, back and forth. However, I also quickly learned that kula exchanges were dependent upon lower level exchange relations and conditioning productive activities. Moreover the kula itself involved a struggle over what seemed like the production of prestige or rank, not « exchange ». Then there was this curious new category, *kitoum*, superficially at least, an individually owned category of valuable. Not only was it not in Malinowski's œuvre, it seemed inconsistent with the model of exchange that just stressed reciprocity⁵.

It was a while before I could understand this data in terms of a production perspective derived from Marx. Nevertheless, the facts did not fit the understanding of exchange that motivated my understanding of society. Further, the clan marriage model was part of a vast « symbolic » order (see Damon 1990 : ch. 5), the exchange-of-women model clearly embedded in that larger order. That order's problem is conceived to deal with paradigmatic problems of production. Fairly soon Marx's discussion of the logical origin of a « universal equivalent » (*Capital* I, 1.3), which broaches issues of commensurability, and these forms' relationships to the production process⁶, seemed more to the point,

4. As opposed to the transactionalist end of which Pierre Bourdieu (1977) became the most sophisticated example.

5. In the model of *The Gift* I was taught the focus was on the three obligations of reciprocity not, for example, on Marcel Mauss's use of words like « value », « alienation », or the reasons for him putting in italics his original questions : *Quelle est la règle de droit...* And *Quelle force y a-t-il dans la chose* (Mauss 1967 : 1 ; 1925 : 3). It is with respect to his use of « value » that he raises a major question for Malinowski's data (1967 : 24 ; 1925 : 74-75).

6. By which I mean the disjunction between the first two Parts of *Capital* and Parts III-VII. There is an analogous disjunction between the Muyuw clan marriage model and the actual way men and women marry. The « actual » way concerns how their productive capacities are distributed through time. See Damon 1983c.

in the Maussian sense more « totalizing », than models of restricted or generalized exchange. So, at the initial level of searching metaphors, I had to switch from « exchange » to « production », to the analysis of how « this » was turned into « that » by virtue of conceived human effort.

The literature most relevant to me at the time derived from Maurice Godelier (1972, 1977), Marshall Sahlins (1972), Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar (1979), the recently translated *Grundrisse*, including Martin Nicolaus's accompanying « Forward » (Marx 1973), and a host of related work⁷. The unevenness of this literature, in part deriving from the different ways writers were situated with respect to Marx's history, became itself a creative tension.

First of all, a certain line of inquiry, seen in Eric Hobsbawm's published extract from the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1965), an influential essay by Claude Meillassoux (1972), and the implicit and explicit assumptions in Marshall Sahlins' leading essays in *Stone Age Economics* (1972), all assumed that « precapitalist » societies of the kind anthropologists classically studied produced something identical or analogous to what Marx meant by the sphere of « simple circulation », C-M-C'⁸. In the received wisdom of this perspective, and in one of its initial uses in *Capital* (Part VII), this formulation stood for production designed for mere replacement. « Use values », or subsistence. This literature conveyed a purpose that bridged some of the gaps between the « exchange theory » I had and a metaphor for production which I sought. Nevertheless, the idea of replication or simple circulation, or even reproduction, hardly corresponded to the roughly seventy-five years of kula history I reconstructed during my first research period, and the social facts as I saw them between 1973 and 1975. People were not trying to reproduce themselves ; they struggled to make something new. Individual lives rose and fell, and were so conceived to rise and fall, by the successes and failures of kula action. So too did villages (Damon 1980b). Moreover, in spite of a social and demographic collapse occasioned by the island's hundred and fifty years of Western involvement, a lot of social action fit beneath the colonial order, while people manipulated that order for their own purposes (e.g. Damon 1983b). This action itself was, and remains, nearly opaque for that colonial order because it assumed, and still does, that little went on amongst the islanders. They just gardened to eat, or

7. While doing my initial research my primary adviser, Professor Martin G. Silverman, was in the midst of his own transition, and he kept me apprised of this rapidly expanding literature. Among the things he sent me is Martin Silverman [1975]. Works by Eric Hobsbawm, Claude Meillassoux, Emmanuel Terray, and others form a part of this work. Martin Silverman's own published synthesis appeared in a set of essays co-written with Steve Barnett (Barnett & Silverman 1979). The central essay in that collection, an attempt to put together the Marx of *Capital*, along with David Schneider and Louis Dumont, was given to me in 1975, just after I returned to the US from doing my first round of fieldwork. As a matter of intellectual history, the role these essays played in, e.g. Strathern (1988), is probably unrecognized.

8. Taussig's justly famous *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* followed this line, which amounts to taking the dialectical relation Marx formulated between use value and exchange value and severing it, historically or typologically. Marshall Sahlins uses aspects of the same formulation, though now probably re-conceived by virtue of Gregory (1982), in a 1992 publication : « man the objective of production by contrast to a modern world in which production is the objective of man » (Sahlins 1992 : 13).

often did not even do that. On the contrary, many struggled to do much. And the idea of production of « use value » shed, for me, little light on the matter⁹.

So my early publications sought to describe and explicate social forms that deal with a dynamism more in keeping with something analogous to « exchange value », the sphere of M-C-M', than use value. The production of names is central to this. They go « up » and « down » with the sizes and numbers of kula valuables a person exchanges. The relationships exchanged items make are the vehicles for the realization of these names. This makes these relationships like temples in Bali, as described by Schulte Nordholt (1996 : 156-157)¹⁰.

The point to the kula is making a « high » or big name, and this is a quantitative idea. I first sorted this out thinking through Martin Nicolaus's discussion of the « point of departure » issue in the *Grundrisse* (Nicolaus 1973 : 35 sq.). Nicolaus sought to show that while writing the *Grundrisse* Marx realized he had to begin with a social system's central purpose, not its history, its « concrete » facts, nor supposedly abstract concepts¹¹. Hence from the *Grundrisse* on Marx begins his work by forefronting, and locating his analysis in, the commodity form. In putting the names that kula action creates in this category I did not think I was making them identical to what Marx meant by commodities, only that in this social system, the social system of the kula as I apprehended it at a certain point in time, names occupied the same place as commodities do in capitalist societies, and as, say, « merit », occupies in much of South and Southeast Asia (see Lehman 1996)¹².

Aspects of this line of thinking I understood before I left Muyuw for the first time in 1975, and so I could ask the people whom I knew best, and who knew me well, what was really important to them. The reflective answer was always the kula. Late in my research « what is most important » was a non-trivial question, and I received non-trivial answers from people who had spent their whole lives watching, or aiming for, the institution's grandest heights.

From this line of reasoning there were two immediate repercussions, one clearly empirical as it related to the received wisdom of kula ethnography, the other verging on the theoretical.

9. This was also a matter I discussed with Gregory during the 1978 Cambridge Kula Conference. Since he then knew the economic side of the Marxist literature better than me it was reassuring to have confirmed my belief that the idea of « use value », and its corollaries, was neither appropriate nor accurate as a point of departure for defining a social system's purpose. Consequently, over the next decade when the correlative concept « reproduction » became fashionable, I ignored the literature. No regrets.

10. Schulte Nordholt writes that « the ruler constructed his *negara* through the building of his temples » (1996 : 156). Much on his pages 156 and 157 bears close scrutiny for parallels and maybe cognates with kula dynamics.

11. Marx's concerns with how to begin resonated with the questioning of analytical categories one experienced reading Rodney Needham and David Schneider in the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, the re-universalizing of categories that one begins to see in, e.g. Appadurai (1986) struck me as a major regression.

12. I remain impressed by the ethnographic descriptions of « merit » found in such work as Fruzzetti (1982) and Vatuk (1975). New work on exchange in India located in and derived from Raheja (1988) notwithstanding, the order of relations evident in ties between material gifts and merit, *dan* and *punya*, remain poorly described and are in need of critical attention.

First, in the legacy of Bronislaw Malinowski, which the most recent ethnographers reproduced (*e.g.* Campbell 1983a, 1983b), kula valuables gained in stature or prestige as they accumulated history, through their travels around the islands. But this is not what my informants said. For them the ranks for valuables were more or less fixed by the sizes they had when they were produced. I was told this outright, it emerged as part of the logic of *kitoum*, and I also heard people tell what they thought were funny stories about certain valuables over which there was a lot of dispute. They imagined these disputes going off down projected paths, the peoples there hearing the stories, and then imagining that the valuables must really be big if they generated so much talk. So they would start making various plays for the valuables. Eventually the «famous» article would appear before them, and they would see what it was really like. And realize that it was not as big as its talk. From straightforward reports and from hearing stories like this it became very clear to me that what I was hearing was very different than what Malinowski reported. I was so certain of this that when ethnographers reported otherwise in the 1978 Cambridge Conference I was astonished. Consequently, I have checked myself every time I've returned. One of the proofs is this: through 1975 everybody I spoke to about the highest armshell reported that it was one called Klibulouboul, which for years had been pegged to the necklace Senubet. By 1991, however, Klibulouboul had been replaced by a new valuable, called Kibutkanvесе. And by 1999, still considered highest by all my sources, that *mwal* had not yet completed one revolution around the circle. It was not conceived to have the highest rank because of its accumulated history, because it contained a lot of exchanged time, the accidents of its coursing from one place to another. Of these, history, exchange time, or accidents, it had very little at all. Rather it was given its supreme rank because of its size.

For me it was another easy step to assume that what determined a valuable's rank was the conditions of its own production, that is, the fact that to be created labor had to be put into it. More labor does go into larger than smaller valuables¹³. However, this issue is getting beyond where we need to be at this point. For to the question « what is produced » the answer is not « kula valuables ».

Related to the empirical questions are two theoretical issues. I will take up first Gregory's thesis about the differences between gift systems and the Western system of commodity production. Gregory has been criticized for creating another simple binary opposition, dividing Them and Us, and more than a few people (*e.g.* Appadurai 1986) have attempted to abrogate the analysis of variation, and specific historical transformation, *Gifts and Commodities* attempted to organize.

13. No shell valuables approximating the modern kula's have been found associated with any of the megalithic ruins strewn across the northern side of the region. Those megaliths stopped being produced about the same time evidence for a new mortuary system appears, roughly 600 years ago. Bickler, however, has been able to date to about this time a peculiar kind of conus shell valuable. This is one of a number of carved shells that have been found in several undated contexts in the Massim. At least seven of these valuables have been described previously (note Leach & Leach 1983: plate 6). As stores of value, of human effort, these shells with etched designs resembling other Massim artwork, may mediate the efforts that went into creating the megaliths and that which now goes into contemporary kula.

Nevertheless, the facts here fit Gregory's patterns. In his model of commodity production transactors are thought to be legally equivalent to one another¹⁴, and the problem is the rank order of the things they exchange. Depending upon the kind of commodity theorist, it is said that either labor time or the preferences and accidents of supply and demand determine this rank order. By contrast, in his model of gift societies, the things exchanged are non-problematically ranked, and the problem is figuring out the rank of the transactors. Exchanges determine the rank of the transactors, not the ranks of the valuables. In this elegantly simple model it is clear that Malinowski's legacy describes the kula in terms of a commodity system whereas, in fact, in the Muyuw rendition at least, it much more closely resembles Gregory's idea of a gift system¹⁵. My informants did not argue about the ranks of valuables nor did they think those ranks changed. But their exchanging these valuables was most certainly an « argument » over their own ranks, the relative sizes of their names. Creating these names/ranks was what they thought was the most important thing they did¹⁶.

The second issue concerns the status of a labor time theory of value. One of the principle stimulants for Gregory's book was Maurice Godelier's discussion of salt money among the Baruya (1977). What was important for Gregory was seeing how Godelier could distinguish between different uses and social relations in which the salt products entered, so that now salt was a gift, now it was a commodity. For me the significance of Godelier's piece was the attempt to employ a labor theory of value for understanding indigenous forms of production, as well as determining the exchange rates of Baruya products (see also Cook 1976). Godelier's research entailed measuring the amount of time that went into producing this and that product and then seeing to what extent timed labor could explain exchange rates. Although I did not have the kind of quantitative data that could speak directly to his study, it seemed obvious from the rates of exchange and conditions of production that I knew that there was a rough correspondence between the amount of effort put into an activity and what it would be exchanged for. It is very clear, for example, that equivalently scaled things are exchanged in the schemes of Muyuw exchange relations. Large conus shells, from which large *mwal* derive, require more time to be fashioned just as large necklaces, which are generated by grinding shell pieces to smaller diameters, require

14. Gregory (1982 : 42) only briefly refers to the complicated ideological matters here when he invokes the idea that all exchangers in Western societies are « strangers », a representation effected through Luther and Calvin.

15. An examination of Bronislaw Malinowski's use of the word « value » in *Argonauts* makes it evident he did not understand the debates still underway in his time about the use of the word ; « value », as it had been used by political economy was being replaced by the « goods » of the economists. By contrast, Marcel Mauss (1967 : 21, 93-94 [1925 : 68]) appreciates this change, and distinguishes himself from Malinowski.

16. Undoubtedly there is a perspective from which one can make Gregory's distinction dissolve. But for anyone who has an appreciation of *Capital*, and perhaps Louis Dumont as well, the distinction does not dissolve so that commodities are everywhere. To the contrary, every system is some kind of gift system, a use of things for the determination of relations among persons. In the haste of anthropology finding commodities everywhere, it is fascinating to watch the history of early modern Europe find Mauss-inspired analyses of increasing relevance for the analysis of our own social system (e.g. Biagioli 1993).

more time. So scaled magnitudes of time, if not equivalent amounts of time, are exchanged for one another. Equivalently sized pigs replace one another, and these kinds of proportions are maintained throughout Muyuw exchange spheres. People did not, however, count hours, so there was a point at which the specific application of our measures were, or seemed to be, an unwarranted imposition. But it is at this point that « the point of departure/what is produced ? » issue raised by Nicolaus intervenes. Godelier assumes that what the Baruya were producing was salt money. But this was an answer to unasked questions : « what is being produced in that regional setting », and « to what extent is an indigenous notion of time related to that endeavor ? » And for the kula, again, the answer was unequivocal. People were not producing the things that otherwise were used to mark this or that spatial complementarity – vegetable products here, fish there, both elsewhere (more in the past than now), different craft products in other places, outrigger canoes in Gawa, etc. Rather these were the instruments for their primary activity, which was, and is, producing those kula generated names. And those most definitively were understood to be repositories of time. It was, and is, held that the more one participates in the kula the older one becomes. There is a two-fold measure of one's success in the kula, the size of one's name, which is the same as the distance from one's home it is visible, and the degree to which one has aged. Muyuw understand these representations synonymously. In this sense the exchange of valuables was taken as the measure of time, and the more the former, the more the latter. People assume their bodies age according to their degree of kula participation, so the form of appearance – literally wrinkled skin, missing teeth – of their bodies measures the magnitude of their kula. And, as Muyuw understand the system, this evaluation mediates the different labor forms found throughout the region. Activities, and their duration, are significant. This idea about bodies reflecting lived time was the kind of data I needed to take seriously an analysis based on a notion of labor time¹⁷.

It was not, of course, irrelevant that my two year experience on the island easily confirmed that people in gardening villages with the largest gardens, patently a product of their greater effort, were more successful ; that men in sailing villages who spent more time with their boats sailing were the most successful there ; and that the latter easily named the former all across the Muyuw landscape. It was not just a matter of « magic » and « symbolism » that those more successful in the kula wore out quicker. They knew more and worked harder.

This understood, my task then became to work out the value transformations which realized these activities. And that entailed tacking back and forth among models available to me from others' work, – *Capital* and *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* – and those relations I had become to grasp from Muyuw's vantage point.

17. Dissolving bodies were not the only collective representation relevant to the issue. Muyuw origin mythology begins with a world in which the Creator effects effortless and timeless production. That Eden-like existence is replaced by the present regime in which people wear out producing food with which they produce the next generation (see Damon 1990 : 45-53).

In addition to positioning the category « commodity » in *Capital*, two aspects of Marx's discussion of money and commodities spoke to my data. One was its elaboration of form. The other devolved upon the complicated ways in which Marx tried to understand contradictions embedded in capitalist social forms, about which I will say nothing further here. But by the first I mean the analysis of the metamorphosis of value into use values and exchange values, the alternation between the commodity form and money form, both within specific spheres, say C-M-C' and M-C-M', and between them. Marx's analysis is critical, especially for anthropologists who cannot pre-suppose culturally specific structures. When wedded to the earlier economic anthropology's notion of exchange spheres, Marx's method becomes particularly powerful. It is not clear to me that this lesson is sufficiently evident in some of the literature that has taken up issues of the comparative analysis of currency of late¹⁸.

I shall show how these ideas work and bring this section to a close by a quick review of the technicalities of the kula (see Damon 1983a for more details). Existing ethnography suggests the procedures I reveal here are quite standard throughout the region, although terms (and interpretations!) vary. I shall employ Muiuw terms for these procedures.

There are now two main kinds of valuables, *mwai*, from Malinowski's time translated as « armshell », constructed from a single conus shell whose end has been cut off and spots sanded away; and *veigun*¹⁹, « necklaces », strings of red shells through which individual holes have been drilled, the whole necklace ground so that its pieces are uniformly small, of even red color, and tapered from one end to the next. The features which rank necklaces are all qualities derived from attentive production. The two valuables circulate counterclockwise and clockwise around the circle of islands (see Map). Although there is always some exchanging going on everywhere, the valuables tend to travel in waves with some always leading and following the crest. It is important to note that the valuables are understood to circulate around the participating islands. The continuous, but pulsed, circulation is a phenomenal presence. There may be some 500 or more valuables of each kind.

Although in theory everybody in the kula region proper may participate, in fact this is not the case for a variety of institutional reasons. First, the Muiuw region was divided into areas with occupational specialties that tended to make some regions non-participants. Those regions whose work was primarily devoted to producing craft products did not and do not kula very much. Second, circulation forms of the main valuables lead either to an expansion or collapse of one's standing, and this creates an extremely competitive institution. Individuals and communities strive to do better than others. Some men, and villages, accumulate enormous positions, effectively making it very difficult for

18. I have in mind the thrusts of the recent volume by David Akin and Joel Robbins (1999).

19. Unlike many other places, most of the time Muiuw use this word. However, Muiuw will say that *bagi* is correct generic term even though it is not the one they use.

others to have much success at all. Until his death in 1995 a single man, Mwalubeyay, increasingly dominated the southeastern corner of the Ring. Although most successful people concentrate their activities with a few primary partners, and he had his favorites, he nevertheless gathered *veiguns*, « necklaces », all across the Muyuw landscape, from Kavatan in the far east to Yemga in the far west. Mwalubeyay's place was so dominant that in early 1990s Muyuw spoke as if fewer and fewer southeastern corner people and villages and islands were interested in the institution. Although the local Milne Bay Province newspaper, *The Eastern Star*, reported in 1998 that few but elder people from the southeastern corner participated any more, my informants and teachers denied that and told me their partners were, once again, younger. The death of the dominant elder seems to have opened things up. Finally, there is the sway of contemporary culture. On Muyuw itself, although the distribution of valuables was probably less concentrated throughout the 1990s than it was between 1960 and about 1978, fewer people were participating. This was partly because a Christian revival swept the island in the early 1990s, to some extent in the wake of a decade of timber activity (see Damon 1997), and intensified gold exploration. As a consequence many, but not all, of the people in the north central part of the island proclaim that they no longer participate.

Transaction rules are such that for a valuable of one kind the opposite must be returned. The initial gift, « opening gift » (see Damon 1983a : 341, n. 4), whether an armshell or necklace, is called a *vag*, a word form that is accurately translated as both « make » and « debt ». The return gift, « closing gift », is called a *gulugwal*. If the *vag* is an armshell, *mwal*, the *gulugwal* must be a necklace, *veigun*. If the *vag* is a necklace, the *gulugwal*, return, must be a *mwal*.

The ritual of giving that accompanies the actual hand-over of a valuable entails a marked asymmetry between the giver and the receiver, more intensely expressed as the size of the valuables increases. The giver stands above, may speak harshly to, and then throws the valuable down, for the receiver. The latter usually sits, sometimes without recognizing the giver, says nothing, and may have somebody else pick up what is now his valuable. This asymmetry is far more marked with the *vag*, opening gift, than the *gulugwal*, closing gift.

Although these two gifts are, as Malinowski wrote, different in name, nature and time, they must be equivalent (Malinowski 1961 : 352-353). In Muyuw if they are not equivalent it is said they are *ikayal*, and that means the second cannot be a *gulugwal* for the first. What is meant by equivalent is identical in rank. So for a very highly ranked armshell only a very highly ranked necklace can be returned, for the one to be the return on the other. And sooner or later one must be a return on the other.

The critical issue is how valuables can be considered both different and the same simultaneously, and how an armshell, considered male in Muyuw, can take the place of the differently shaped necklace, considered female. Here, initially, of course, is a contradiction. And it is here where, for my informants, the category *kitoum* comes into play.

In Malinowski's account there are two categories of valuables, armshell (*mwai*) and necklace (*veigun*). But with the *kitoum* idea there appear to be three, armshell, necklace, and *kitoum*. In fact, however, these categories are different forms that metamorphose into one another. My informants explained to me that a « return gift », *gulgulwal*, had to be equivalent to an « opening gift », *vag*, because a *vag* was necessarily somebody's *kitoum*. They understand that all kula valuables are somebody's *kitoum*, although they do not know who lays claim to all of them. This means that there is an oscillation between the forms *kitoum*, *mwai*, and *veigun*. At a certain level a cycle will begin with a valuable that is, for somebody, simultaneously a *mwai*, and *kitoum*. When the valuable is thrown, it will remain the original owner's *kitoum*, but it will become the recipient's *mwai*. When a necklace/*veigun* comes back for that *mwai* it will eventually be given to the first *kitoum* owner, the original *mwai/kitoum* passing on, in principle or fact, to the person who held the *veigun* as a *kitoum*. The *kitoum* that was in the form of a *mwai* becomes a *kitoum* in the form of a *veigun*. Conducted in this guise the exchanges just described merely reproduce initial positions, *i.e.* socially defined relations, and at this level Étienne Balibar's understanding of « reproduction » sums what has happened : a certain state of social relations has been reproduced (Balibar 1977 : 269). Mauss spoke of obligations being « resident in » the items Malinowski described while at the same time being unclear as to the « sanctions » (*règle de droit*) behind the forms (1967 : 21, 24 [1925 : 67, 74-75]). *Kitoum* are what is resident in, which « play in » (*qui jouent* [1925 : 67]), the valuables, and the reasons for their returns. A person must receive an equivalent for the *kitoum* he has given away or else the exchange is « uneven », and *somebody* has suffered a loss.

In 1995 elders told me that one tries to increase the size of one's *kitoum*. This had apparently contradicted what I was told before. Then people stressed making the return gift equivalent, so that they were not *ikayal*, uneven. When I responded to the newly received information such that it implied somebody was losing people said yes. And added that it was very important that you increased the size of your *kitoum* slowly over the years²⁰ and be able to tell the stories of the transitions of how, for example, a middle ranked armshell/*kitoum* (the category is *mwai*) could now be represented in terms of a highly ranked armshell/*kitoum* (*mwai*). This is critical. These stories effect the socialization of the transition, making all members of the story complicit in one actor's gain. Which, of course, does not hide the fact that for one actor to gain another must lose. It would be interesting to see if one could correlate specific such transitions with certain persons or villages dropping out of the kula. I suspect this might be more common along the southern side of the Kula Ring than along the north (see Chowning 1983 : 418, 425).

However much *kitoum* figure into a cycle of simple reproduction, or zero-sum extraction, what was most interesting about my informants' explanation of the

20. « Unlike the people on island X who lie constantly ».

pattern concerned the dialectical consequences of its very existence. The necessary return of a *kitoum* meant that the relationship created by the original opening gift was over, and that was not desirable. For ultimately the kula is not a potlatch contest between givers and receivers. It is a mechanism for creating alliances designed to build names. And partners are judged according to their ability to do what is necessary to build names through time. Relationships are instruments of names. If one only returns what one must, the unequivocal message is that one is not « strong ». Instead partners attempt to maintain debts between each other. Elsewhere I have charted the many informal and formal ways this can be done (Damon 1983a : 327-333)²¹. Unless these methods constitute mere talk, which quickly is discovered with the consequent end of the relationship, all strategies involve increasing the numbers of valuables flowing on a particular relationship, and the expansion of all the support networks needed to sustain it. And, at least in Muyuw's region, the dynamics of this expansion, which includes failures, have generated the central political attempts to organize or disorganize relations among people – thrusts for at least the last hundred years²².

The metamorphosis, and not mere substitution, of identities outlined in the *mwal-kitoum-veigun* cycle exists in other guises as well, if less regularly. An order of spheres rests beneath the exchange of kula valuables and if not carefully reciprocated they can lead to the conversion of a lower-level article into a higher valued *kitoum*. A, for example, may give B a pig with the understanding that later B will reciprocate that pig – size and gender necessarily held constant. Such exchanges, and less significant ones, are part and parcel of the kula, and experienced to convert into the kula sphere. Lower level spheres enable the development of higher ones, these conversions well-formed conceptually, with a whole series of metonymic expressions used to define desires leading to the highest, the kula, the metonym for which is « you think ». In any case, if B fails to return the pig A may claim one of B's kula valuables as a *kitoum*, whether or not it was B's *kitoum* in the first place. « Women » too are converted into *kitoum*. For a man to be a man he must take his spouse to his village to complete the gender definitions of their marriage process, and in so-doing, as long as the woman's brothers have fulfilled their obligations, he becomes obligated to replace her by a *kitoum* upon her death. One man once told me that a subclan was like a bank, and when I asked him what was in the bank he said « *kitoum* »²³. These conversions create assets, though not the relationships on which names are created, the ultimate purpose of intelligent kula action. Making and enhancing these relationships,

21. Gell should have considered these for his discussion of the kula, and the relationship between indigenous formal models and actual practice (1992 : 276-285).

22. I include the consequences of relatively large-scale logging that began on the island between 1980 and 1982 (10,000 logs cut in the first six months of cutting, to July 1982). The logging company owner married the daughter of an extremely ambitious, if frustrated, central Muyuw man. Due in no small part to the money that flowed to the father because of the marriage, he acquired the famous Klibulouboul about 1994. The logger was not aware of these practices.

23. The flow between persons and shell wealth is an important if yet underdeveloped theme in the consideration of « currencies », as Stéphane Breton's recent case makes clear (1999). Destruction, implicitly or explicitly sacrificial in appearance, often centers these conversions. See Bloch 1998 : 41.

continually moving the asset-like entities into relationships is, therefore, the central activity, and it is the contradiction between having to return an equivalent and ending the relationship the initial gift makes that impels either collapse or, sometimes, extraordinary development.

And if, at base, *kitoum* locate these dynamics in very specific, and historically determined productive activities – from making actual valuables to feeding pigs to creating gardens and manufacturing outrigger sailing craft – then at the opposite end of this continuum is the making of a name. The stores of value, the content of a subclan as an informant expressed it, *kitoum* also allow us to pass to the consideration of how valuables are media of exchange.

From the Side to the Center : Becoming Named by Fame

« Having made these remarks, I will now argue that, in analyzing a gift, whatever it may be, one needs to consider the relationship that existed between the giver and the receiver *before* the former made a gift to the latter » (Godelier 1999 : 13).

Building on the relationships just described, I now turn to the forms entailed in realizing what Muyuw call *bulagan*, « fame », or, as some Muyuw people translated it for me in 1999, « news ». This is the recognition that kula action generates. People say that through kula exchanges one's name « climbs » (*-mwun*). To express the same idea in different terms, it travels around the islands. The more kula valuables a person gives and receives, and the larger those valuables are, the higher one's name, the greater the distance it travels around the ring. The idea being expressed here is a quantitative one. Greater numbers of exchanged valuables and higher ranked valuables translate directly into a bigger or higher name. Consistent with this understanding is its opposite, that a person can have no name, or that the name can « fall » (*kalow*). A person who once participated successfully but then stopped, loses his name. The Muyuw social landscape is marked both by high names and gaps created by fallen ones²⁴.

This idea of name is literal, virtually tangible. Muyuw speak of « hearing » (*-ligen*), or « seeing » (*-kin*) another's name. The verb for « see » is the more common of these two, and in its duplicated form, *-kakin*, its better English translations are « know » and « understand ». Duplication in the Muyuw language expresses the idea of continuous, intensified action, so with the duplicated form of the verb « see » the sense is of « knowing » or « seeing ». The connotation here is decidedly active. Another person is known because he is continually seen, vis-à-vis kula valuables that he has held and thrown on ; similarly a carver « knows » carving work because he first continually watched it and then continually carved. Muyuw say that in every kula district one or two people are « seen/known » all the way around

24. Now and again I recall « high » people being referred to as very « thick » instead of just high, in the same way that they may refer to a tree of enormous girth as *badubad*, « thick ». Unfortunately, I cannot attest to the exactness of the botanical metaphor, which would in fact be extremely interesting if the term I translate as fame is cognate to the Sanskrit *nagara*, an idea that takes a forested surrounding as part of its scene.

the Kula Ring. But as one moves closer to any given district more and more names come into view. I could ask, for example, a successful kula man – Dibolel (see Damon 1993) – between 1974 and 1982 how far his name was seen. Still overshadowed by his father he said « perhaps to Iwa ». However by 1991 Dibolel thought he was seen everywhere. In 1995 I tested that in a conversation with the Trobriand paramount chief, Pulayasi. Although he had then not met Dibolel, he knew him well from the kula (he wanted to talk about Mwalubeyay instead!).

Some will view my analysis of how these names are realized to be following in the footsteps of Igor Kopytoff's justly famous essay analyzing the « biography of things » (1986). On the contrary, I draw much more extensively on a different literature (*e.g.* Lévi-Strauss 1966 ; Fernandez, 1974 ; Sapir & Crocker 1977) that was concerned with the transformation of states, the intentional spinning of « thises » into « thats », metonymies into metaphors. For very quickly the biography of things becomes irrelevant as they are turned into relationships among people, which in turn crystalize those names. I begin with a recently learned model about the very space where this activity begins, *i.e.* a locating of the naming of kula valuables. For the « ground » from which valuables are found is well known, placeable in principle if not fact.

Although all of the post-1970 area ethnographers learned that the peoples of this region knew more about one another than seemed evident from the earlier ethnographies, for the first time in 1998 I learned that knowledge of other places was understood in terms of a dominant paradigm that framed the whole region. Several sets of informants told me that all islands are placed along an axis that runs from high to low. In this model the northwest sector is considered « low » (*watinow*) the southeast « high » (*wanakaew*). Southwest and northeast, the latter where Muyuw is located, are both thought to be « in the middle ». Among other things, stars, especially those used for navigation, are understood with this model. The first critical point about this conception is that it places the entire social field of the direct region in an organized space. Although this is conceived as a geographical space, it entails, on a geographical – or geological – plane, an inversion of the social relations, « status » relations, in this area. By no means just for ethnographers, Trobriand hierarchy, with its Southeast Asian-like form, contrasts with the more egalitarian or lowly statuses elsewhere, especially of the peoples extending east, from approximately Tubetube onward to Rossel (see Wagner 1989). The most recent ethnographer of Dobu, Susanne Kuehling, revealed facts consistent with the basic points of this model, though from a Dobuan point of view they varied a bit (personal communication, July 1998 ; 1999 : 219, diagram 11).

Not content with my understanding of this model, in 1999 I sought to pursue it further²⁵. One extremely knowledgeable man re-oriented the discussion.

25. I am not confident my understanding of this model is complete. One of the men I spoke to in 1998 told me in 1999 that the high/low contrast flip-flops over the course of the year. This may relate to the winds or, since these models relate to navigational principles, the flip-flops may relate to the spinning of the axis of the Milky Way.

From my queries about how names moved high and low, to which I will return, he shunted into a discussion of relations of height defined by the circulation of valuables. So, for example, he told me that a *veigun*, a necklace, « goes down » (*bibus*) from Central Muyuw to Eastern Muyuw, and it keeps going « down » at every step until it circles to Gawa, and then climbs back up to Central Muyuw. This record was actually the second time I asked this man about these details. The first time we went over this coursing he was more definite, but also surprised by the evident contradiction – an asymmetrical form on a circular route – and used two words to describe the transition, *katuvin* and *kantavin*. Both have the sense of « turn over » or « go end for end ». This occurs somewhere between Gawa and the Trobriands, so that those are low points, and things go down to there but turn over and start going up after that.

The point of this data here²⁶ is that in two different respects we see that the spaces of this region are totalized, understood as a complex social whole, a whole moreover that can be defined with respect to orienting activities. Within this field of defined sociality other forms oppose and correlate mutually defined social groups providing a regional definition to everyone. From at least Iwa in the northwest to the Tabetube region in the southeast places are known to have ritual firewood used in various prestations. The wood is selected because it typifies the activities of the particular community. Iwa, a tiny island densely planted in various nut and fruit-bearing trees, has as one of its ritual woods that obtained from one of the nut trees it plants. Boagis, a sailing village, has as its firewood a tree that provides what is considered to be the most important and critical part of the large outrigger canoes that ply the eastern half of the kula region. Other places on the main island of Muyuw tend to have their wood drawn from the successional stages of the forests from which they ideally cut their gardens – early fallow, middle fallow, old, and no fallow firewood (*i.e.* they do not garden) trees. For our purposes here what is important about this information is that we see how items drawn from the context of group activities facilitate the positioning of places with respect to one another. These people are related, and they relate themselves by their different activities, and, of course, by the kula exchanges reconfiguring these relations.

Now the first thing that stands out about the finding, making, and naming of kula valuables is that they derive from things or activities on the edge of intentional activities. *Veigun*, necklaces, derive and are known to derive from Rossel Island, an area that is outside of the Kula Ring proper. Muyuw people produce many armshells but it is notable that nobody goes looking for conus shell. Rather, when fishing on the reefs people occasionally come across them and then try to gather them. Names of valuables fit these circumstances.

To begin discussing these names it is best to point out that my informants often did not know the reason behind many valuables' names, and nobody ever explained the significance of a valuable by giving me an account of its naming.

26. That there are two ways these spaces might be organized is consistent with Claude Lévi-Strauss's formulation of generalized exchange, and its problem with transitivity and cyclicity (1963 : 302-303).

Dalmeyon, for example, is the name of a very highly ranked *veigun*, and the real name of my main tutor in 1995 and 1996, but my best source for kula valuable names did not know where the name came from. Nor did he know the reason behind the name of a *mwai*, Mikal Pwadau. But it is widely known that if large enough new kula valuables are named either by the person who first finds them, or makes them, or puts them into circulation.

These names are drawn from some significant event in the namer's flow of life experiences. Not surprisingly many recent names inflect an obvious encounter with things or activities that follow from the « Western » influences. Nevertheless, from an unorganized syntagmatic chain of events one is selected for special consideration and applied to the new kula valuable. Nimov is the name of a large *mwai* I've been following since 1973. Although nobody ever brought up the story of its name to me earlier, in 1998 one informant told me it was named after a village on Misima called Nimov, which was close to the reef where it was found. This was before my source was born (*ca* 1945). A « half-caste » woman who lived near Tubetube in the southeastern corner of the Kula Ring bought it from Misima people when she was working copra. She is credited with naming the valuable. Another valuable called Klibuloboul, and, according to Muyuw, the highest ranked armshell, *mwai*, until just recently, was named for the village in which its owner lived at the time the valuable was found. A schoolteacher coming home for the holidays brought several new *veigun* to Muyuw from Rossel Island in December of 1973. All were given to affines or mothers as *kitoum*. One was called Damun, named by the affine who received it, marking the circumstances of his acquisition. Damun, according to the namer, is the name of the village where the valuable was made. An elder central Muyuw man has a son who works for the House of Assembly representative from Muyuw's region and so he named one of his new *veigun* « Parliament ». Names such as these obviously commemorate the event of finding, making, or originally owning the valuable. So the valuables become classed carrying an aspect of a particular person's self, his aesthetic judgment as to what is appropriate for that item. One well-known but middle-sized valuable is called Long Talosis because, Muyuw say, when it was made its maker was wearing long trousers, « long talosis » the Muyuw pronunciation. One of my older informants named a valuable « Good Friday » because it was on that day that the conus shell was found. His son, Dibolel, later named another valuable National Day because he found it while gathering fish for a looming National Day celebration in 1975. Another he named was Plaplowes, his version of the « English » « flowers ». The beauty of the reefs struck him where the valuable was found. So something « along side », to use a Muyuw expression frequently heard, the person is selected to name a valuable.

Other aspects of an aesthetic judgment go into the making of the valuable and the decorations attached to it, and Campbell (1983b) has described some of these. Such work entails making the valuables' « faces » decorating them with shells and seeds and beads and various flotsam and jetsam from all across the

Kula Ring region. The larger (and the newer) the valuable, the more attention given these decorations. John Kassaipolova, from the Trobriands, is now well-known for putting many things onto the new valuables he puts into circuit, and my main host in Muyuw, Dibolel, spends hundreds of hours threading beads onto the many new valuables he is generating²⁷. Although this making a face shares aspects of what Muyuw think is the role of the father in the production of a child – its « face » should look like the father – the shells and beads and other items attached to *mwal* and *veigun* are impermanent and not thought to effects its rank. Though fiddled with wherever they stop, unlike what is reported for many other places in Papua New Guinea (e.g. Dalton 1999), the significance of these valuables is not that they carry sums of human memory, and increasing sums of those memories. Although intentionally and repeatedly adorned and redecorated, and momentary objects of fancied gaze wherever they alight, kula valuables do not become famous by these names and decorations. The commemorated events by which valuables are named are not what kula valuable names mean. Klibuloboul as a *mwal* name does not mean a *mwal* named after a village. That village, long since just a memory, is only where the name – and not the valuable – came from, and I would guess that few people outside of Muyuw know the circumstances of its naming. Instead, until about 1980 « Klibulouboul » referred to the highest ranked armshell. And this means it could only be exchanged for its paradigmatic opposite, a *veigun*, of equivalent stature, one named Senubet or perhaps Lapwayat. That only these two may go for the valuable is important. Muyuw, for example, believe that the first, and therefore oldest, *veigun* is one called « Kassabweybwelet », about which there is a famous myth (Malinowski 1961 : 307 ; Young 1983). Although a large valuable and the one with the longest history/memory, it is not sufficient for Klibulouboul. Nobody, in my experience, could offer explanations for more than a few valuables' names. And valuables whose conditions of naming are not known are surely not lacking in meaning. But what is known is that humans from this region gather these valuables in the course of their activities, designate them in some appropriate fashion, and the valuables become classed in the process. The names and decorations become slots whose significance is altogether different. It is not memory that circulates in valuables but rather the intentionality of turning that item into this resemblance.

These « thises » are designated positions in one of two hierarchical sets of positions. Table 1 provides an overview of these positions emphasizing the parallels to human society.

Created by humans, kula valuables constitute a reduced model of society. The model is reduced because valuables do not show clan and subclan affiliations, and unlike persons, who should scale from a younger to an older category, kula valuables are not thought to age in such a way that they would, for example, pass

27. See Damon 1993 (and Godelier 1999 : 95). By 1995 Dibolel pictured himself replicating Billy's procedures, having a « factory » for producing valuables. He was overstating his case. He was making many, but he was not hiring others to do his work.

Kula Valuables				Persons			
Rank	Mwal/Male	Veigun/Female	Behavior	Age	Male	Female	Behavior
High	<i>mwalikau</i>	<i>bagilikw</i>	Only moves when path well laid out	Old	<i>Tamwey</i>	<i>Numwey</i>	Moves only along path
	<i>mwalibut</i>	<i>bagido'u</i>	Fast, but with intentionality		<i>Tawbwat</i>	<i>Vinabwat</i>	Married but still very active
Low	<i>mwal</i>	<i>soulav</i>	Without reason	Young	<i>Tawlot</i>	<i>Guwavin</i>	Impermanent relations

Kula Valuable Person Rank Orders

from a « *mwal* » to a « *mwalikau* ». Yet the model entails extensive analogies concerning gender and rank/age designations. Muyuw view rank in two ways. First, each set of articles is divided into three categories each of which is understood to be like the behaviors of three Muyuw age grades. The lowest class armshells are called « *mwal* », the middle class « *mwalibut* », the highest « *mwalikau* ». From smallest to largest necklace classes are « *soulav* », « *bagido'u* », and « *bagilikw* ». The incidence of naming fits the analogies made between valuables and human age grades. *Mwal* and *soulav* are likened to *tawlot* and *guwavin*, respectively, unmarried but courting males and females. These youths are supposed to be looking for spouses but are often accused of « running around without reason ». Similarly, the valuables are so small that people toss them around with little care, and because of that they often « cause trouble ». Like the youths who are too young to have created names, these valuables have no names. *Mwalibut* and *bagido'u*, the middle sized valuables, are likened to *tawbwat* and *vinabwat*, married men and women with at least one child. These people are still young, so they move quickly, but unlike the lowest grade of person, and class of valuable, they move with « intention ». Here « intention » means a calculated « path » or « road », *ked*, a marriage with respect to persons, and a line of partners for the appropriate kula valuables. Just as these valuables are named so do these kinds of people usually have established names. The highest two classes, *mwalikau* and *bagilikw* go by the respectful terms *tamwey* and *numwey*, categories that denote considerable seniority. These valuables and these people only move when their paths are well laid out, and they go very slowly with great deliberation. People pay close attention to their every action. Once when this order was being explained to me people said these large valuables were like people who were so old they were blind, they walked with canes, and only when their paths firmly set. The parallel between ranked/aged humans and ranked valuables is graphic.

The paradigmatic order of the three classes does not imply that, for example, all *mwalikau* are of equal rank. Valuables are further graded so that informants could relatively easily list the top twenty or so armshells and necklaces, all of which are considered *mwalikau* and *bagilikw* respectively. Kassabweybweyleta, the aforementioned *veigun*, is very highly ranked. But it is equivalent to and has been circulating against a *mwal* like Nimov for the last twenty years, a *mwal* no more than tenth highest.

The two sets of ranked valuables form a metaphoric image of society to which people aspire. Every male I met wanted to be an «elder», someone who achieved a stature like the highest ranked valuables – «known» and talked about everywhere. This mode of representation supplies the model that creates what Gell (1992 : 183) means by the *anticipatory joy* that motivates individual decisions in the kula. Aspiring agents know these valuables, consider their fame, their travels, now and again see them, and want to handle them so they can be like them, transcending the bounds of their current circumstances.

At a well formed conceptual level kula valuables exist as two sets of paradigmatically opposed principles, *mwāl*, male, fast, moving to the right, and *veigun*, female, slower and moving to the left. It is important to note that the same analogies exist with taro and yams, both being classed so that there is a male and female dichotomy, one thought to grow fast and large, the other slower and smaller, and with respect to yams also to be associated with right and left movement (see Damon 1990 : 165-172). A common factor with both kula valuables and these crops is that they are effectively means of production for the production of persons. As *related* bodies are produced by means of crops, so are names produced by means of shells. In both cases crops and shells are organized pools of properties conceived to be like the order of humans, a more or less exact metaphoric image as well as product of it. Husbanded well or badly, they are values stored until they can be realized for the purpose of producing different aspects of the human order that generates, models, and models itself after them²⁸. Although more than ritual action is at stake, in both cases too a point from Maurice Bloch is appropriate (1998 : 41). He writes that :

« Rituals thus exploit the parallels and connections established by the partly shared life processes of humans and non-humans in order to link dramatically the former with the latter. This is most often done through substitution and the subsequent killing of the animal, performed to bring about beneficial results for the human ritual partner, such as for instance, curing, renewal, or even a form of immortality. »

In each case the destructive acts, necessarily in the public, are productive. Yams are consumed to create people, to reproduce the conditions for their creation (mortuary rituals) and of course to make new yams. Kula valuables are « thrown » with a loss – the giver's name falls – that creates both the recipient and the giver's partner once removed, his *mul*. As David Akin and Joel Robbins (1999 : 4) point out for many currencies, these valuables are not destroyed in this exchange process (yet see Damon 1990 : 77). Just the same, and in keeping with Bloch's invocation of sacrifice, they are the vehicles for the destruction of

28. This correspondence is deep. While men are conceived to produce garden crops in Muyuw women are in charge of the distribution of the product. The same is said with kula valuables. Men acquire them and usually formally give them away, but virtually every Muyuw man will say that he only does so when his wife gives consent. Formally, she is in charge of the distribution of things. There are wry jokes about this, and it is well known that these relations do not prevail further to the west, from Gaw on to the Trobriands. I have also heard people compare kula relations to gardens so that one spends time « clearing » and « chopping », and then obtains the fruit of those exertions.

what is really being exchanged, parts of persons. And it is through this destruction that there is accumulation, to which I return.

Now just as the course of events in a person's life leads him to select some aspect in a chain of events to name kula valuables, so are the courses of kula valuables used to name people. Important people lay the names of valuables they handle on infants born about the time valuables are obtained. Talibonas is the name of a large *mwal*, therefore a « male valuable », that went through Wabunun in southeastern Muyuw by 1960 and then went to Kaulay in central Muyuw. In Wabunun it was used to name a recently born woman ; in Kaulay an infant boy received the name. The name in both cases refers to the respective namers and their experiences with the *mwal*. Although it distinguishes, it does not refer to the named persons. A whole set of brothers in Wabunun received famous kula valuable names from their very important mothers' father, the names being Tawaw Kaudon, Tamagwal, Tuidaman, Dalmeyon and Tamnugwad Tanuboiy. Since there is no sense that these names are determining the fates of these people, instead referencing the fate of the namer, it comes as no surprise to anybody who knows these names that so far only one of them has achieved any kula-generated renown, Tamagwal, the real name of Dibolel. As such these names are a past with no necessary future, the reciprocal of the fact that there is no necessary history to the « original meaning » of the names. One of my informants who knows stories behind many names did not know anything about the naming of the valuable Dalmeyon, a fact which does not diminish its rank. As noted, Klbulouboul is not important because it references a man from a forgotten village who found the valuable in a distant reef and put it in circulation. It is important because it is big.

And this brings us to the relations that make a person's name climb. These forms take particular valuables, whose existence so far has been defined by that paradigmatic image of valuables likened to ranked persons, and turn them into the means for constructing relationships of a determinant form and purpose.

Persons' kula names are created through the organized syntagmatic chains people construct with particular kula valuables. And while the movement of valuables creates the particular relationship, these relationships are spoken of as if they have a determined form, partly defined by the rules described in the previous section, and partly defined by the distribution of agents I now describe. These created chains of relationships actually make and realize the name. People speak as if they « walk on » a relationship, *ked*, it being the form that determines their course. We may speak of this as reification ; alternatively, it may be considered an acute sense of the social forms that govern action. This is not Indian hierarchy, but it most certainly is a world in which well-constituted ideas about the whole determine individual action²⁹.

29. The stress some Massim ethnographers put on the idea of autonomy is, I think, unwarranted and unsupported by the analysis of the region's collective wisdom. Differentiating processes are, in these analyses, confused with, if not by, our notions of autonomy.

These relationships are understood formally. Take the set of people n-A-B-C-D-E-n. The relationship C has with B and D is denoted by the term *veiyou-*, a word best translated as « partner », perhaps « friend ». Although the use of this term is reciprocal the relationships are not strictly symmetrical. C gives *veigun* to B and receives *mwal* while he gives *mwal* to D and receives *veigun*. The relationship between C and A (and every n), and the relationship between C and E (and every n), is denoted by the word *-mul*. « Partners of partners » is a reasonable translation. Marcel Mauss (1967 : 22 ; 1925 : 71) drew attention to the Trobriand cognate, *murimuri*. Both the *veiyou-* and *-mul* relationships are recursive : C's *veiyou-* are B and E, but B's are A and C ; A and E are the first *-mul* for C, but for B n and D are the first *-mul*.

This manner of speaking deserves note given the way I have elaborated these forms with respect to *Capital*. Marx (1977, I : ch. 2 *vs* ch 3) constantly weaves back and forth between the ways things are understood or represented and the forms he thinks actually exists. He deduces from the qualities and implications of the qualities of the representations he analyzes his most acute analyses of forms. However, the most inclusive orders he reveals are not presented as if they are experienced as wholes. By contrast, in the kula practice I believe the sense of interrelated connections is formally part of the conscious understanding of this productive system. Daniel de Coppet writes of chains of transformations (1981 ; 1995). That is exactly how my informants represented their experiences in the kula.

A manner of speaking about valuables conforms to this array of kula agents, and specifies how names are in fact realized by means of the shell/person tie. When C and B speak about a *veigun* that C holds they may refer to it by its particular name. But more likely they will talk about it as if it was somebody's « hand » (*nama-*). Occasionally one hears this usage with respect to a very important person down the line somewhere, but my informants told me that one's first *-mul* is the person to whom this idiom should be applied. C, for example, may not use D in this reference. Rather he should refer to his *veigun* as « E's hand ». This manner of speaking suggests the valuable is a part of E. And of course it is. When a person throws down a valuable it is said his name « falls » and the recipient's « climbs ». It is this fall that signals the physical loss that is tied to the aging process that first allowed me to understand how time was understood in this system. And of course it is by « knowing », by « seeing » many of E's hands that E becomes a big or high name/person in the kula. Through being decomposed many times vis-à-vis kula valuables, each one of which is an aspect of a person's identity, people create themselves as high elders, as metaphorically like the highest kula valuables, watched by everyone. One's fame is held in the perspective of others.

Not only do all kula valuables begin as parts of persons when they are made, they become parts of a person when they are received. When a person receives a valuable it is said his name goes up. The valuables are then put on display, often becoming the first thing one sees in a house when one looks into it. The valuables are talked about, handled, discussed. They are part of the holder's being. As noted

earlier, they are associated with the distinctive aspect of human beings, their ability to think and reason. If you want a kula valuable from somebody you do not directly ask them for it. You tell them to « go think », that later you will come by and talk. People, unlike animals, think, follow rules, etc., and the epitome of being human is participating successfully in the kula, of doing something³⁰. *Nag aveiyag ivag*, « Not-what-he-made », « He hasnt done anything ! » is an expression often used to put somebody else down. « They do not have a mind », *Tevag nanon*. The metonymical reference to thinking, « minds » and making, becomes then the vehicle for the person's transformation in the fundamentally sacrificial act of throwing down a valuable. When C throws a valuable to B, C's name goes down, B's goes up, and with B's physical acquisition of the valuable, a part of C which comes from D, so rises D's name. He is resurrected.

Although I have stressed the clear conceptual paradigms Muyuw provide for talking about these relationships it should be noted that these facts are concretized in every encounter and transaction. In other words, once a valuable is given away the giver has a good idea of where it is going next. And in my experience this is often what is thought about in the time immediately after an exchange. While the initial throwing of a valuable is experienced as a loss, and often an angry one, fairly soon my informants assumed an attitude that was more like dancing. « *Mwan won* » is the term employed for this condition, and it is reasonably well translated as « ecstasy ». It is a sense of coming back to life as one envisages a valuable moving on down a line of actors. This experience of being, perhaps like being blessed, is the realization of fame one imagines. Dedicated kula actors necessarily constantly think about the movements of their valuables, and the parts of their selves that move with them. Through the stored bits of persons that are the ranked valuables, people convert their bodies into names realized in others' knowledge of them.

« "Blessed are those who can accelerate their success by giving gifts" » (Ciampoli, quoted in Biagioli 1993 : 39).

By taking on the issue of how kula valuables are currencies, of how they are stores of value and media of exchange, I have sought to tie together two kinds of literature in this paper. On the one hand I have taken a certain view of Karl Marx's mature work and transposed it so that it is appropriate for analyzing forms that are decidedly not those of the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, I have wedded to this analysis aspects of anthropology's long fascination with how humans order and categorize themselves through their experience of the world, and how these forms operate through ritual action. Apparently as different as the economy is different from religion, the reasons for keeping these two inquiries apart dissolve as soon as one realizes how important analyzing categories and

30. This is part of a well-formed and conscious way of making requests for things. See Damon 1990 : 132-133 and 255, n. 8.

understanding their positional significance was for Marx. Marx's work sought to show us how behind an order of things was a social order just as the West was beginning to deny that it existed in a social field. By contrast anthropology's task has been to help us mediate between our own views and those we experience in the remnants of other social universes. The marriage between these endeavors ought to be richer than it has become to this point. For surely if Marcel Mauss can be stimulated by « 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 » (1967 : 11 [1925 : 52]) then so might we.

KEYWORDS/MOTS CLÉS : kula/kula – value, exchange/*valeur d'échange* – production theory/*théorie de la production* – Marxism/*marxisme* – structuralism/*structuralisme*.

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Frederick H. Damon, *Kula Valuables: The Problem of Value and the Production of Names*.

— This article shows how the production of kula valuables and, through their circulation, the naming of persons becomes the preeminent form of wealth for the people of Muyuw, Woodlark Island, in the northeast corner of the Kula Ring in Papua New Guinea. The first half of the argument describes the circulation forms of the kula in the context of the last thirty years of exchange theory as it has been reformulated through the reading of Karl Marx. The second half of the article describes the metonymic and metaphoric transformations entailed by persons naming valuables and becoming named through their circulation throughout the regional system that is the kula.

Frederick H. Damon, *Les objets précieux du kula : le problème de la valeur et la production des noms*.

— Cet article montre comment la production des biens précieux échangés dans le *kula* et, par le biais de leur circulation, l'établissement du renom des personnes, devient la forme de richesse prééminente pour les habitants de Muyuw (île de Woodlark, dans la partie nord-est de l'anneau du *kula*, en Papouasie-Nouvelle Guinée). La première partie de l'article décrit la circulation des formes de richesses dans le *kula*, en se plaçant dans la perspective de la théorie de l'échange de Karl Marx, telle qu'elle a été reformulée au cours des trente dernières années. La deuxième partie traite des transformations métonymiques et métaphoriques occasionnées par le fait que les personnes donnent des noms aux biens précieux du *kula* et acquièrent du renom par le biais de leur circulation au sein de ce système régional.