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THE SACRIFICES OF THE SAKUDEI (MENTAWAI ARCHIPELAGO, WESTERN INDONESIA):
AN ATTEMPT AT CLASSIFICATION¹

In a recent essay on the phenomenon of reciprocity, Van Baal (1975a) points out that, if one is to understand its various manifestations, a distinction must be drawn between those exchanges whose purpose is the acquisition of goods from the other party (*trade*) and those in which the goods exchanged are merely a means to a further end, namely establishing or strengthening a bond between the parties as partners with accepted social statuses (*gifts*). In trade, the reciprocity is balanced and the relationship is terminated with the exchange of the goods (*'balanced reciprocity'*); in the case of gifts, on the other hand, it is the consolidation of the relationship that is essential, and the relative value of gift and return gift depends upon the closeness and the social status of the partners. Where there are partners of equal status whose relationship is not a familiar one, the values of the gifts exchanged must again be in balance. Here, the goods are regarded as a means of expressing the closeness of the relationship; this provides the sole explanation for the fact that the relationship does not end with the exchange, as happens in simple trade.² On the other hand, where relative status is recognized as unequal or where the relationship is a familiar one, no attention is paid to equivalence, but each partner always gives or contributes as much as he can. With reference to this form of exchange, Van Baal mentions the expression *generalized reciprocity* (cf. Sahlins 1974).

In two further publications (1975b and 1976), Van Baal compares this last-mentioned situation with the phenomenon of offering, which he defines as "any act of presenting something to a supernatural being" (1976:161). Offerings and sacrifices in their elementary form are gifts with which man seeks to express a relationship with their supernatural recipient. Usually, no more is actually given away than the very tiniest of amounts; yet, in so doing, man confirms his trust in a relationship in which he is by far the inferior partner. The fact that requests are sometimes made during a sacrifice appears, at least at first sight, to

conflict with the nature of a gift; indeed it is surely part of the essence of a gift that the bond which the recipient agrees to in accepting it is such that he may decide in what way and at what time he will, to the best of his abilities, return that gift. Van Baal, however, sees this merely as a further expression of the realization that the sacrificer and the deity are of unequal status: "Requesting is both the most simple and the most decisive act of self-humiliation, the recognition at once of the requestant's dependence and of the addressee's power" (1976:170). Van Baal thereby disassociates himself from the *do ut des* theory of Tylor's: it is not a question of offering a 'bribe' with a view to receiving particular goods, but rather of consolidating an unequal bond that is beneficial to man.

The distinction between 'trading' and 'giving' must clearly not be regarded as absolute. Thus, while the exchange of goods by the groups involved in an exogamous marriage confirms the new alliance, it can also be accompanied by negotiations characterized by an interest in the demanded reciprocation which is more than merely friendly. And indeed sacrifice strikes me as an example which we must take particular care not to ascribe too one-sidedly to one of the two categories, for, even if the desire for communication and communion are frequently of foremost importance, it can also be associated with a positive desire for specific reciprocation. Van Baal also recognizes this possibility, for cases of "misfortune or disaster" (1976:168); it will however emerge below that it is not always true to the facts to restrict oneself to such situations, since there are other forms of sacrificial act in which the trading aspect is manifested.

This, however, gives rise to a distinct dilemma. The desire for particular goods is in accord with the principle of balanced reciprocity and should be accompanied by an equivalent offer. Indeed, the fact that negotiation with the supernatural 'partner' is impossible makes this requirement all the more pressing. Yet any such equivalence appears to be ruled out in advance by the difference between sacrificer and deity. Where there is a familiar, intimate relationship between man and the powers to whom he addresses his sacrifice, an appeal to their paternal care can weaken the requirement of balanced reciprocity and temper the contradiction. The dilemma is manifested in all its clarity where there is no basis for such familiarity.

This range of possibilities is the topic of the present article. I shall show, with reference to several examples, how within the same

group of people, different actions, all of which fall under the above-mentioned definition of offering, manifest various steps on the scale. It will emerge that the dilemma is consciously experienced as such, and also that an explicit effort is made to resolve it. We shall not consider to what extent the particular economic situation objectively influences the quality and frequency of the sacrifices (cf. Firth 1972). Rather it is a matter of subjective notions about the different types of sacrifice. These notions will be developed into a classification of sacrificial acts, with the degree of familiarity and the specificity of the hoped-for reciprocation as the variable factors.

The examples relate to the Sakkudei, a group living in the interior of Siberut (4,480 square km, 18,000 inhabitants), the northernmost island of the Mentawai Archipelago in Western Indonesia.³ The inhabitants of Siberut are organized into exogamous patrilineal groups of five to ten families; each group lives in a large dwelling built on stilts. Both group and dwelling are known as an *uma*. The individual *umas* are dotted along the river-banks. There, in low, marshy ground, they plant great amounts of sago and taro and, on the river-banks, coconut palms. On higher ground they lay out 'shifting cultivation' gardens where they grow other tubers, bananas and fruit-trees. They raise pigs and chickens as domestic animals. Other important activities are fishing, in the rivers and on the coast, and hunting with bow and arrow in the hilly, thick jungle of the hinterland.

They do not work metal, nor do they weave nor make pots. Formerly, the Mentawaians used neolithic techniques to fashion stone-axes, but, for several generations now, they have acquired iron tools from Sumatran traders in exchange for coconuts and rattan. There is no artisan specialization, nor is there a system of leadership. Decisions relating to the entire group may be taken only on the basis of a general consensus. Differences of opinion continually threaten each group with disintegration; it is the function of great communal ceremonies, called *puliatijat*, to contribute to reinforcing the feeling of unity. To these ceremonies everyone must contribute as much as he can, and individual contributions are distributed to each family in equal 'shares' (*otsai*) and consumed together.

Over against this 'generalized reciprocity' within the group, there is, carefully supervised, a 'balanced reciprocity' with neighbouring groups. Both the (non-prescriptive) exogamous marriages and also the

ceremonial relationships of friendship are associated with an exchange of gifts; through long negotiations, an endeavour is made to achieve a precise balance (cf. Schefold 1975:59). Occasional simple trading relationships are also characterized by balanced reciprocity. In this way each *uma* seeks to build up alliances throughout the whole region which can contribute to the preservation of peace in potential situations of conflict. Only when tensions between groups flare up is the law of balanced reciprocity violated. Then the group which feels insulted invites friends to a great feast, at which they are regaled with the meat of many pigs. Then, in the language of the slit-drums, they challenge opponents from the rival group to outstrip them. These opponents must seek their revenge and the competition can become so intense that open fighting ultimately breaks out (cf. Schefold 1973a:60f).

Human beings, animals, plants, even objects all possess an individual soul. Man's soul lives on after death as an ancestral spirit (*ukkui*). Each *uma* has its own settlement of the ancestors, whose location is known—perhaps in secluded areas of the jungle or on small islands off the coast. The people have an ambivalent relationship with their ancestors: on the one hand, the ancestors belong to the group; on the other, they are both alien and dangerous. This duality is expressed in many ritual patterns of behaviour, all of which are accompanied by sacrificial acts.

Example I

The most inconspicuous manifestation of the lasting bond with the ancestors is at the daily meal. The members of the *uma* gather in families around the well-filled bowls of food. The head of the family takes a little piece of food and drops it between the floorboards of the pile-house, saying "With blessings" (*tulu*); "With blessings" the others respond, and they start eating. This little piece of food is the ancestors' 'share' (*otsai*), to which they are just as entitled as the living, and which in this way documents their membership of the group.

Every now and then, the people feel the need to give even more emphatic expression to their feeling of oneness with their ancestors. There is a special ritual for this, 'the bringing in of the ancestors' (*guruake saukkui*). This ritual lasts about a month. The external impulse is usually the death of a member of the *uma* a few months before. All the forefathers in the *uma*'s settlement of the dead are invited, especially those who have died recently, since they have a particular longing for

their surviving relatives and also for the possessions, above all the pigs, which they have perforce left behind. This is an opportunity to be reunited with the ancestors and to forestall any desire they might have to call their relatives and the souls of their pigs to them prematurely.

The ceremony is preceded by weeks of preparation: the provision of sufficient food, the gathering of firewood, etc. The ritual begins late in the afternoon with a solemn invocation of the ancestors. They are addressed with the name of the settlement of the dead of the *uma* in question; the case described here is that of the *Satepu* group, whose ancestors dwell on the island of *Beriloga* ('many squirrels'). It is assumed, however, that the souls of more distant relatives and of deceased friends also come to watch. The medicine-men call across the valley: "Come ancestors of Beriloga, we shall borrow you, we shall sing and dance!" Then they sing to the ancestors as follows:

"Let us dance, o ancestors of Beriloga, on the broad back of the dance-floor, o ancestors of ours.
 Only the longing in our hearts makes us dance, o Beriloga.
 Gather the blossoms with us, o ancestors, *totonan*-blossoms.
 Let us bedeck ourselves with fringes of yellow blossom, o ancestors.
 Let us dance till we fly over the broad back of the dance-floor.
 Let us bedeck ourselves, bedeck ourselves with blossom, o ancestors,
 Let us bedeck ourselves with flowers with longing in our hearts.
 Adorn yourselves, o ancestors, with our blossoms.
 Let us bedeck ourselves with flowers, let us dance.
 We orphans, the drum is awaiting us, the drum that craves for a hot back.⁴
 A youth is there to protect the brilliance of the fire.
 Let us bedeck ourselves with flowers, o Beriloga."

Sacred plants are made ready in the *uma*. The ancestors are invited to take some; then the people use them to decorate themselves with. There now follows a ceremony which is designed to neutralize the dangerous radiation from the inhabitants of the settlement of the dead (*bajou*; cf. Schefold 1973b:96f). In the meantime, women and youths have been preparing the meal, which is now portioned out into wooden bowls. At first, those present sit down around the bowls, doing nothing and waiting. Only occasionally does one of the men summon the ancestors to partake: "Come, come, o ancestors, let us now eat!" A little later, the call is heard: "We shall eat what remains", and only then do the living eat their fill. Thereafter there is dancing till dawn.

The following day is spent gathering flowers in the vicinity and making decorations with them. In the evening, everybody assembles in the inner room of the *uma*. Guests wishing to watch have also arrived by

now, as indeed have friendly ancestors from other settlements of the dead. At first, everyone sits peacefully; a few gently sing a song to the ancestors. Then the women roll out a large mat which covers the entire dance-floor. The flowers are strewn over the carpet, and little wooden boxes, in which the families keep their ornaments and their cloths, are placed beside them. The boxes are opened and their contents invitingly displayed to view. The master of ceremonies, the *rimata*, stands in the entrance to the house by the veranda and calls into the inside of the house: "Come, come, o ancestors, let us bedeck ourselves with flowers, come all of you!" While the ancestors are decorating themselves, the living continue singing songs to them, and some start sobbing quietly as they become conscious of the presence of their deceased relatives. This lasts about half an hour. Then, hesitantly, the living also begin to decorate themselves. Suddenly, as if a sign had been given, they all dash towards the flowers, the children in front, and adorn themselves as beautifully as possible. In the meantime, further spectators have arrived, and they too adorn themselves; again the dancing continues until dawn. In contrast with the dances on other occasions, each one of these dances is introduced with a song to the ancestors. The ancestors join in with the dancing, and their movements make the medicine-men so giddy that they continually fall down in a trance. Men who are not medicine-men, women and even children may also take part in these dances.

For some four weeks thereafter, this spectacle is repeated every second night, each occasion being separated from the next by a night's rest. Throughout this time pigs are continually slaughtered and served up at banquets. Not until the final day, however, is it the turn of the big castrated hogs (*babui*) from the estate of the newly deceased. On this day the flowers have been laid out by midday. The son of the deceased sings, tears streaming from his eyes, while the meat from his father's swine is distributed: "Alas, father, thus he dies whom you reared. Even though you have become the wind in the sky, yet we have borrowed you."

There follow many individual ceremonial acts designed to ensure that, despite this great scene of carnage, they will continue to enjoy success in breeding pigs. Then portions of pork are stacked up in little piles for the individual families and close relations from other *umas*; everything is again offered to the ancestors, and then everyone carries his share home to cook. That night, they dance for the last time.

On the following day the departure of the ancestors takes place. First a great banquet is held, then everyone decorates himself. Before leave is taken of the ancestors, measures are adopted to prevent the souls of the living, which have now been in prolonged contact with their forebears, from believing that they are now one of their number and from following them back to the settlement of the dead. A bur is placed on the little children's fontanelles as a 'barrier for the soul' (*kekera-t-simagere*) - their souls are regarded as especially vulnerable and are considered to be stuck fast, as it were, in this way. The medicine-men take up little bamboo-quivers filled with smoked meat and blossoms; these are also intended to induce the souls to remain in the *uma*. All those present sit in the inner room, and they all begin to weep, even the little children, carried away by the general atmosphere. The medicine-men exclaim: "Slowly, slowly, do not go yet!", and continually run up to the entrance, barring it with arms held out wide. Then, on behalf of the ancestors, they go up to each individual and, sobbing, take his hand - at the same time maintaining their grip on the bamboos in order to hold the soul fast. Finally, they escort the ancestors as far as the platform in front of the veranda.

Thereafter, they call up their own souls, using the decorated bamboo-quivers as lures; water is poured into them and sprinkled over the children, whose burs have meanwhile been removed.

The Mentawaians do not much concern themselves with what happens to the actual 'share' of the ancestors in this ceremony. They see it as consisting in a kind of invisible emanation from material reality, but, unlike the Tikopia (cf. Firth 1972:322), they do not even have a name for this, but arbitrarily interchange such expressions as 'soul' (*simagere* or *ketsat*), 'smell' (*beu*) and 'smoke' (*otsut*). This is why the ancestors may be offered the same objects time and time again. It is precisely this apparent indifference that reveals the closeness of the relationship of trust. Nothing is requested, but every man makes available what he has, and thus does not need to specify it.

Example II

The ancestors are also continually invoked during the *uma*'s normal rituals (*puliatjat*; cf. Schefold 1973b:109). The individual ceremonies that take place during the rituals usually have a specific magic purpose, namely to ward off sickness and sorcery and to ensure success in hunting and daily work. By means of ritual acts and texts they conjure up those



The decorating of the dance-floor for the ancestors at the ritual of the *guruake saukkui*.



A piece of food is offered to the ancestors.

particular phenomena which they wish to influence. Special mediators (*gaut*) are used for this purpose, particularly certain sacred plants whose souls are called upon to lend their support in influencing the souls of the relevant phenomena to grant the wishes uttered in the invocations. The people however always begin by offering some of these mediators to the ancestors, the familiar authority that is competent for all their concerns. They commit themselves to their protection and, in this way, sanction their own actions.

At the festive meals held during these ceremonies the ancestors are invoked more explicitly than in everyday life. The head of the family holds a piece of food above a crack in the floor to allure the ancestors. He asks them in general terms to ward off all evil from the group and then drops the piece of food down through the crack. Only when, after several weeks, the climax of the ceremony is reached are the ancestors solemnly invited into the house again. As in the ritual described above, the people embellish the veranda with flowers and decorations, and perform dances to delight both the ancestors and their own souls. On this occasion, the ancestors stay only until the following day. Before they leave, those present address a short speech to them in which they are again invited to take any decorations and food that appeal to them. Then they are informed of the problems preoccupying the group, and their aid is implored. Above all they are asked to ward off sickness, and rather to send it to unpopular neighbours. The speech concludes with valedictory formulae, and the ancestors return to their settlements.

Thus, in these ceremonies, a sense of oneness with the ancestors is combined with a clear appeal for general aid. As with the ceremony described previously, the wish for communion is still markedly in the foreground. The people offer what they have in the expectation that the bond they have thereby renewed will have beneficial consequences, just as in daily life the members of the *uma* assist one another to the best of their abilities. The atmosphere is still that of the general give and take that characterizes 'generalized reciprocity'; it is left to the ancestors to determine the nature of the reciprocation. In this instance, however, the reciprocation as such is expressly requested.

Example III

The Sakuddei believe that the souls of the living are continually detaching themselves from the body and roaming about independently. This cannot be prevented, but the soul of every man should regularly be

called back to him, so that it does not wander off too far. Otherwise there would be a danger of its losing its bearings and not finding the way back. If this happens, it becomes afraid and takes refuge with the ancestors - and this is what they wish to obviate, for, if the soul settles with the ancestors, adorns itself and eats with them, so the man must die. That is why everyone's soul is called to every ceremonial meal. And the hub of the great *puliatijat*-rituals is a ceremony in which the medicine-men entice the soul of each member of the *uma*, calling out his name, and solemnly present the soul to its possessor.

On this occasion, the ancestors are asked to help entice the souls. This therefore differs from the example described above in that a specific contribution from the ancestors is hoped for. An element is hereby introduced into the relationship that transcends the giving of arbitrary gifts in a pure gift-relationship. This is clearly expressed in certain of the Sakuddei's modes of behaviour.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the *rimata* (see above) sticks a *kinumbu*-decoration into the sand of the riverbank near the landing-place. This decoration is cut from the stalk of a reed-like plant (*gojo*), rather thicker than a thumb, and about a metre long. One end is hammered against a stone until it is frayed, and the fibres are coloured yellow with turmeric. Then blossoms of various colours are attached to it, as are simple little fishes and birds (*jajaj*) woven from strips of leaf. The *rimata* calls out over the valley to the ancestors and the spirits residing in the area:

"O forebears, o ancestors, o spirits, here is a *kinumbu* for you, the purchase price at which we, your grandchildren, would buy our souls, the purchase price at which we, your grandchildren, would buy our lives. We, your grandchildren, call our souls that they should not remain out here in the cold. Give them to us, send them to us. This, a *kinumbu*, is the purchase price at which we would buy them!"

There follow various ceremonies in the house that do not relate specifically to the ancestors. Then begins the enticement of the souls of the people. The *rimata* walks from one person to the next with a little chicken and strokes it across each of them:

"The chicken for me and my children. This shall be the food for our souls. Slowly, slowly the souls will put their confidence in our bodies. We shall kill you, that you may be food for our souls."

The chicken is killed and cooked. From its flesh, food is made, which the medicine-men now use to entice the ancestors and the souls. Throughout the evening, deep into the night, there is dancing and singing so that the enticement will be irresistible. Then the souls are ready to

gather on the plate with the food. The medicine-men go with the plate from person to person, inviting the souls to jump across to their possessors.

Finally, the medicine-men assemble around the plate with the food, and one of them sacrifices some of it in thanksgiving to the ancestors; he calls to them:

"O our departed forefathers, this is your reward for what you have brought!"

Then the dancing continues throughout the night till dawn.

These actions show clearly that the Sakuddei are perfectly aware of the distinction between a kinship-based commensalism with their ancestors and appeals for specific help. The ancestors remain a reliable, familiar authority. They will not insist upon exact recompense for their assistance, for man is poor in comparison with them. Although he is not a 'slave' of the supernatural powers as in hierarchical high religions, he is referred to as a 'suckling' in the songs in which the medicine-men act as the ancestors' mouthpiece. Nonetheless, however small the offering, a specific request must be accompanied by a specific gift. This becomes almost excessively clear in the way in which it is expressed: only in such a context is the word 'purchase price' (*saki*) used with regard to the ancestors; thus the little *kinumbu*-tree is referred to with the same expression as is used for offering a piece of goods to a neighbouring group or the Sumatran traders on the coast in exchange for something of theirs. As if to underline the disparity, they gild the lily by offering a 'reward' (*upa*) which again is presented to the ancestors only in this context: at the conclusion of the ceremony, they give them the food with which they had tried to achieve themselves what they now are asking of the ancestors - an admission of dependence which the pompousness of the expression cannot gloss over.

Example IV

As well as the souls of the dead, the Mentawaians recognize many other categories of spirit: in the rivers, in the jungle, in the sky, under the ground and in the sea. At the foot of the main pile of every *uma* dwells 'the shaker' (*si Gegeugeu*), the spirit who causes the earthquakes. In a myth, it is told that he was originally a human being, an orphan who, early in life, displayed supernatural abilities and taught men how to build houses and perform the associated ceremonies. His relatives killed him out of envy: during the construction of the house, they bade

Invoking the ancestors at the *kinumbu*-decoration (right).
Two medicine-men entice the souls to settle on the plate (below).



him climb into the hole that had been dug out for the main pile and then dropped the pile down onto him, smashing him to pieces. His soul became a spirit. When the house was finally completed and was to be consecrated, he brought about an earthquake which cost many lives. The house collapsed but all other houses constructed since then were originally made possible by him. Although he does not count as one of their own ancestors, every *uma* maintains a friendly relationship with him.

Part of the great rituals of the *uma* is a sacrifice to the earthquake-spirit, and also to his family (about which no details are given in the myth). The medicine-men (*kerei*) assemble on the veranda, and one of them holds a piece of cooked pig's liver over a crack between the floorboards. They all lower their eyes and sing in chorus, slowly and solemnly, a dialogue with him:

"Old man, old man, ruler of the settlements, old man,
 Answer as we *kerei* call to thee,
 And knock at thy village.'
 'Yes, o grandchildren, wherefore do you knock at the customs of the village?'
 'Yes, o orphaned one⁵, open thy door of board-roots of *menegat*,
 That cannot be raised, that cannot be turned,
 Bring out thy broken plate⁶,
 The place for thy food, the liver of a swine with markings on its side, old man,
 The purchase price at which we, thy grandchildren, would buy our lives, old man.
 Do not tilt the plate, old man, do not tilt it,
 The place for thy food and the food of thy grandchildren,
 Otherwise we will be in trouble, we *kerei*.
 Thou art testing the *kerei* who are invited from settlement to settlement, the seeing *kerei*⁷. Come, have pity, old man,
 Level, hold it level, old man, the meat for thee and thy grandchildren is falling."

The medicine-man lets the meat fall, and they all sing together the thanksgiving of the earthquake-spirit:

"'Blessings to you for my food and the food of my grandchildren!'
 'Yes, o orphaned one, may the wind of the settlements of the dead be far from us, thy grandchildren,
 Here is the price at which we, thy grandchildren, would buy our lives, old man.'"

Now the medicine-man takes up a vessel made of coconut-shell containing some meat-broth. He holds it tilted over a crack in such a way that the liquid just fails to pour out. It is for Tajirigetmanai, the sister (or wife?) of the earthquake-spirit. Everyone sings:

"Mother, mother, Tajirigetmanai, mother,
 Bring thy broken coconut-shell, o mother,
 The place for thy meat-broth, o orphaned one,

That frees the body, that purifies the body, that cools the body,
The price we pay for our lives."

The medicine-man tilts the bowl until the meat-broth flows out.

Everyone invites the spirits to give themselves time:

"Slowly, slowly, old man, mother, and give us a good fruit-season, old man!"

For the earthquake-spirit is also lord of the fruit of trees.

In this sacrifice, too, the close relationship with the recipient is emphatically stressed. The human beings refer to themselves as 'grand-children', thereby giving expression not only to their inferior position - as with the name 'suckling' with regard to their ancestors - but also to the kinsmanlike familiarity (the expression 'grandchild' is extended in Mentawaian linguistic usage to subsume the children of the children of all people with whom one has friendly relations). Just as in the cases mentioned under Example II, the hoped-for reciprocation is alluded to only in general terms, 'life', 'favour', 'good fruit-season' and the 'warding off' of all that threatens. It is striking, however, that, here too, the expression 'purchase price' is repeatedly employed. We have encountered this expression in connexion with the ancestors only in the more specific request made in the previous example, whereas the present situation corresponds rather to the general appeal to the ancestors made in the course of the sacrifices in Example II, where there was nowhere any mention of a purchase price.

It appears to me that this diversity of expression is explicable only in terms of the difference between the people's distance from the ancestors and their distance from the earthquake-spirit. Before he died, he was a man, so that he too is an ancestor, but an ancestor of other men. Everything is shared with one's own ancestors; one actually gives less, but in so doing one is behaving no differently from a weak member of the *uma* who is still entitled to a full share. With the earthquake-spirit, the situation is different. He does not belong to the group like one's own ancestors, rather he is equivalent to a member of a friendly group with whom one also exchanges goods, if need be, but all the time paying careful attention to the equivalence in value of what is offered and what is received. This explains why terms are used with relation to the earthquake-spirit which make the sacrifice appear more important than it is, even here where the appeal for reciprocation is so general that it barely detracts from the gift character of the sacrifice. The Sakuddei are aware that the little piece of liver cannot represent an

equivalent for the favour they hope will be bestowed upon them. Yet their relationship to the earthquake-spirit is such that they cannot expect this favour to be offered as a gift. Thus they endeavour to see to it that the required balance in the reciprocal relationship be achieved at least verbally. Materially, the disparity remains, of course. However, since the request for reciprocation is made in symbolic terms only and is accompanied by an appeal to their own inferiority, the Sakuddei do not feel any more concerned about it.

Example V

The situation is different where the purpose of making a sacrifice to spirits is the extraction of specific reciprocation. Such a situation is found in interaction with the spirits of the wood (*sai ka leleu*). In a myth (cf. Schefold 1973b:100), it is told that these spirits were also previously human beings. But one day, they came to have separate domains; the men that now are spirits of the wood became invisible and settled where the men of today believe they see wilderness: their plantations are the jungle, their swine are the deer, and their chickens are the monkeys.

At the end of each of the great *puliatijat*-ceremonies, the Sakuddei set up a simple hunting-camp (*alaman*) for a few days far upstream in the jungle. After weeks of complex ritual activities, in which the entire cultural order has been symbolically expressed and consolidated, this sojourn seems like a return to a more elementary form of society - a situation which may be best referred to with Turner's (1969) expression 'Communitas'. But, at the same time, it involves entering alien territory, the domain of the spirits of the wood and also of the ancestors of other *umas* which perhaps used to live there.

In return for permission to hunt in their territory, a purchase price (*saki*) is paid to them as well. Outside the hunting camp, a plant, one metre high, with, at the top, branches spreading out in clusters, is stuck into the ground (*pasaksak*: 'crash down'). The branches are tied at the top to form a kind of funnel. The *rimata* stands next to it, and calls out into the surrounding terrain:

"Come hither, o ancestors, o spirits, all of you who have plantations here by the river, we shall pay the purchase price for the monkeys, the purchase price for life. *Jeee*, let your bodies be seen, ancient fathers of the plantations, ancient mothers of the plantations, o ancient planters, munificent with the wild life of the woods. *Jeee*, let your bodies be seen, you whose land this is by the river, come, we shall pay the price!"

While the *rimata* is convoking the spirits, the others go one by one to the 'crash down' place of sacrifice and put some of their possessions on it: ornaments, cloths, etc.

"The place of the things for you, o ancestors, with the name 'crash down'. The monkeys will crash down before our eyes, before the eyes of the dogs. Here are things for you."

Thereafter the spirits of the wood receive an ornament made specifically for the purpose, just as, in Example III, the *kinumbu* was placed on the riverbank. One of the men has used a piece of charcoal to paint a hard-boiled egg carefully with decorative spirals. He now takes it in his hand and hides it behind his back. He is exhorted by everybody to sacrifice his egg to the ancestors as well. But he coils himself up in theatrical despair, claiming that he is especially attached to this egg, that it would be too much to give up, that he could not possibly give it away. The idea is to make it clear to the spirits that this is really something quite out of the ordinary. After lengthy persuasion, he finally yields and, with a tortured expression on his face, puts the egg beside the other objects on the stem of the little 'crash-down' plant.

"We have given you various things, o spirits, and now we have here a toy for you, a round one, we also are well-rounded in life, we'll round up the monkeys, what you give will be round!"

During the days that follow they hunt, for monkeys above all. Sometimes, they are lucky enough to shoot a deer or a wild boar. If the Sakuddei carry off one of these animals, the successful hunter cuts off a piece of the animal's left ear before they leave the jungle and slams it - crash! (like the crash of the falling animal) - down on a fallen leaf:

"O, our departed forefathers, friends, o spirits, friends, a tiny young monkey has fallen before the eyes of your grandchildren. Here is meat for you, let us share the spoils of the woods. Where shall I lay it? On a fallen leaf. Make his companions fall now too, his spouse, make those who come from his villages fall, those who bear his name, his cousins. Do not be grudging in your hearts."

This little piece of ear is thus a thanksgiving to the spirits of the woods, and at the same time it is also their share, designed to induce them to continue ensuring successful hunting.

There is obviously a striking disparity between their share and what is being asked for in return. The hypothesis mentioned at the beginning of this article would predict that this disparity would merely reinforce the bond which man establishes with the spirits of the wood: the disparity would allow him to appeal to their superior power and to show that he was in need of help and could, in the context of 'generalized

reciprocity', expect to receive a greater gift in return.

But even Examples III and IV have shown that this hypothesis is only partially compatible with the Sakuddei's way of thinking. Where 'something specific was being asked for, such as the ancestors' help in calling up the souls, or where the bond was less close, as with the earthquake-spirit, the use of the expression 'purchase price' laid a particular emphasis on the sacrifice such that the image of pure generalized reciprocity was relativized. The present example involves both aspects: they are asking a specific favour of spirits to whom they are not closely related. Now it is no longer sufficient for them to appeal to their not being adults. At first they try to diminish the value of the spirits' gift by pointing out that they are presenting them with only a tiny sample. Above all, however, they now endeavour to increase the value of their own offering. In the introductory offer of a 'purchase price' after the camp was set up, this was achieved by means of theatrical distortion. The value of the sacrifice of the ear described above is however the subject of a myth which brings out how intensely the Sakuddei experience the conflict between, on the one hand, their feeling that, given the type of relationship they have with the spirits of the wood, their request for the gift they desire should be accompanied by an introductory offering equal in value and, on the other hand, their inability to bring this about. This myth was recounted to me in the following way⁸:

"There was once a man who was a keen tracker of game. One day he tracked down a deer and shot at it with bow and arrow. Whoosh! He shot at it, and followed it and followed it. He came to a wallow and lost the track. A short time after, he went tracking again, and again shot a deer. Whoosh! He followed it, came to a wallow, but the tracks had disappeared and he couldn't find them any more. Another day he went out again. He walked and walked through the wood, walked and walked, walked and walked and then saw a deer. Whoosh! He shot at it. He went and followed its tracks, followed and followed, came to a wallow, but did not catch up with his prey, did not even see it, did not even find its tracks any more.

This had now been happening so frequently that all his brass-tipped arrows were used up. He began to weep. He wept and wept - then suddenly his eyes opened and he saw a great house. And as for the wallow, it had become a feeding-place for pigs, just like what we have at home. And he saw a spirit who said:

'Come up here, grandchild!'

So the man climbed up to the house. And there he saw his brass-tipped arrows that he had previously shot at the deer and wild boars. He saw them sticking out of the roof which was thatched with leaves. He saw them - 'Hey, aren't these my arrowheads? So this is where the game is that I shot. So the people here have eaten it!'

The spirit said: 'What is wrong, my grandson, you are weeping!'

'I am weeping, grandfather, because I am looking for the animals I have shot, and I cannot find them.'

'Are you? Then go and fetch sago for the pigs, my grandson!'

Then he went and fetched sago for the pigs. He chopped up the great logs, and then carried them, carried and carried, and laid them down in front of the veranda. Now the spirit said:

'Quickly, throw it onto the feeding-place, the food for the swine.'

Then he threw it. Crash, crash, crash, he threw it, to the last piece. And then he called them together, 'Kiooo!' Then wonderful deer came with antlers branching out wide! The man however said to himself in his thoughts: 'So, this must be where they come from, this is the feeding-place of the deer. Then somebody must own them!'

Now the spirit asked: 'Tell me, when are you going back, my grandson?'

'Yes - I was just on the point of going!'

'When you go, my grandson, I shall give you something to take with you. Meat for all of you, and for your wife.'

'So be it, grandfather.'

Now the spirit tested the man. He said: 'Fetch your arrows, my grandson, shoot that little deer and take it with you.'

Then the man thought: 'What, if I only shoot a little one, it will not be enough for all of us. I will shoot a big one.' And he fetched his brass-tipped arrows and shot a magnificent deer. Whoosh! He shot it, and it died. Then he went back up to the house:

'Grandfather, it is dead.' The spirit answered:

'You are truly clever. It is right that it should be so.'

'What shall we do, grandfather? Shall we share the meat?'

'So be it.'

They now singed the deer. Singed and singed, and then cut up, cut up the meat. The head they laid in a wooden trough. And now the spirit put his foot against the deer's ear. His left ear. 'Come now, divide the meat into two halves, my grandson.'

And he divided up the meat. Divided, divided, into exactly equal pieces. But the spirit said: 'What is this, my grandson? That is not very much meat for us, for your grandparents. You have given us only a little, we have come off worse'.

'No grandfather, the shares are exactly equal', answered the man. In his thoughts, however, he said to himself: 'What ever shall I do?' He divided it up again, so that he came off worse. He did not give himself much, but he did give a large quantity to the spirits. He divided and divided, and all the while the spirit tapped his foot against the deer's left ear.

'So, grandfather, that is the meat for you.'

'Grandson, what you are doing is wrong. That is not enough for us. You are simply giving us too little. Really, you're doing nothing but making sure we come off worse!'

'No, grandfather, you have more, there is only a little for me.'

'No.' And, so saying, the spirit tapped his left foot against the deer's left ear.

Now the man noticed the spirit's foot on the deer's ear, and said to himself: 'What ever is he trying to convey? Maybe he's trying to indicate that he would like to have the meat of the ear for himself?' He tried this out, and cut off the ear. Cut, cut off the deer's ear.

'Yes indeed, my grandson, that is the meat we want! If you ever again shoot a deer, or a wild-boar, or a Simakobu monkey, or indeed any kind of game, then give us, your grandparents, its ear as our meat. Its ear - you will be giving but a little, but for us it is a

great deal. Even if you cut the body into equal halves, even if you give us yet more, it is not much, it can never be much. The ear, on the other hand, is more than enough!'

He said this to the man, who went to fetch palm-leaflets to pack everything in, the whole body and the bones, he packed and packed, and then he made to leave. 'I shall go now, grandfather.'

'So be it, go now, grandson.'

And so he walked off, walked and walked, and arrived home. And since the deer he had shot was there, he called his brothers, called his sisters, his brothers-in-law and his nephews. They all ate up the venison, ate it, ate it up until there was none left.

Then he went to fetch wood. While he was fetching the wood, the spirit saw him again. He went up to him and said:

'How is it, my grandson, is your meat all eaten up?'

'Yes, grandfather, it is all eaten up.'

'Why, grandson, we still have a great amount. We, your grandparents, still have something left.'

'Really?'

'If you think I'm lying, come and see.'

So they went to the home of the spirits. And there was meat everywhere, he saw it in the bamboo-carriers, he saw it in pots, he saw it in pans and - in what enormous quantities! All from the deer's left ear. The spirit said: 'Look, that meat of ours, how much there still is. You took away the whole body, and we took only one of its ears, but what an enormous amount has come from that!'

'Yes, indeed.'

'Well, take these for your people, grandson, these two bamboo cooking-vessels full of meat.'

So the man took a couple of bamboo cooking-vessels full of meat away with him when he left. Took them away, away, away, came home, and there they ate it up again, ate it, ate it up.

This is the story and the significance of our sacrificing the deer's ear and the ears of any game we capture. This and no other."

The immediate import of this tale is obvious. Man learns that what appears little to him is a great amount to the spirits. And what to man are deer are pigs to spirits. What to man is jungle is cultivated land to spirits. If we followed this track farther, we would encounter many similar conceptions in other contexts: men speak, spirits sing; when it is dark for men, it is light for the spirits, etc. The idea crops up repeatedly that, in the realm of the ancestors and spirits, everything is changed round. Right becomes left.

Such a 'symbolic reversal' (cf. Needham 1973:306ff) with reference to the world of the spirits is a device frequently employed by ethnic groups of Indonesia to delineate their own cultural order and mark off contexts. Therefore, it would certainly be misguided to ascribe such ways of thinking in Mentawai simply to the people's attempt to resolve the dilemma inherent in the sacrifice. The myth surrounding the sacrifice of the ear merely makes use of already existent principles of thinking. But, at the same time, the myth brings out certain elements that lift

the sacrifice of the ear out of the generalizing give-and-take atmosphere of the pure gift in an unequal relationship. The meat is not intended for a meal to be consumed by spirits and men together, but it is divided up and eaten separately, and the portioning out of the meat is accompanied by negotiations such as are necessary for all instances of balanced reciprocity and as characterize simple trading the world over. This is expressed unambiguously by such phrases as 'come off worse'. Man shoulders the burden of killing, but if he wishes to continue profiting from it in the future, he must be prepared to abide by the agreement which guarantees the possessors of the slain animals their fair share.

Nor is a lasting bond excluded here either. The kinship terminology used reveals a hope in the persistence of a relationship, the value of which is yet again emphatically underscored by the episode concerning the generosity of the spirits at the end of the tale. For the alien spirits of the wood, however, such munificence is no matter of course. Man owes them some equivalent for his own specific desires. Judged by human standards, he is incapable of offering any such equivalence, and, in this case, an appeal to his own weakness of the type made to the ancestors is no longer of any avail. The notions of symbolic reversal release him from his dilemma. The myth teaches that the spirits will be satisfied with the left ear and thus helps man to overcome a dilemma for which a seeming solution is clearly better than no solution at all.

Example VI

There is, however, one situation known to the Sakuddei in which sacrifice entails a real material loss. This situation is the one which is most readily comparable with the cases of 'misfortune' or 'disaster' mentioned by Van Baal (see above). Characteristically, one of the components of the dilemma sketched out in the previous examples is, in this situation, completely turned about: no endeavour is made to establish a bond with the recipient of the sacrifice; rather the aim is, through the gift, to achieve complete separation. In such a situation, it is obvious that no trust will be placed in the seeming solution offered by a previously concluded agreement, as with the spirits of the wood. Now man must surrender some of his own possessions, however severely this may affect him. This situation arises on the death of a member of the *uma*.

When a man dies, his soul goes to join his ancestors and is admitted into their settlement. For two days and two nights the deceased is

mourned at home, then he is taken to the funeral place and there laid to rest above the ground in a coffin set on a scaffold. But just as man, when he is alive, leads his own existence, even if his soul is roaming around somewhere else, so the Sakuddei believe that, even now the soul has settled with the ancestors, the body has an independent individuality. From the decaying flesh and the bones there arises a spirit, the *pitto*, one of the most feared phenomena on Siberut. The *pittos* are full of envy, they are jealous of the living who still have their beautiful bodies, and are continually threatening to return and settle in the *uma* and harm the people living there. Part of every great *puliatijat*-festival is a nightly ceremony in which the medicine-men run them to earth and drive them out of the vicinity of the people.

In order to mitigate the *pitto*'s envy from the very outset and to buy freedom from being persecuted by it, the people make a sacrifice at the funeral once and for all. Before the coffin lying on the funeral place is closed, gifts are laid next to the body. This is done almost stealthily, lest their actions inspire thoughts of establishing a new relationship - in clear contrast to the words uttered during the sacrificial acts discussed above, in which they enhance the value of their meagre gift with fine words. A chicken is killed, and laid into the coffin, with the whispered words: "Here is a chicken for you"⁹. Bowls of meat-broth and cooked taro are added. Then the heirs surrender some of their inheritance: if it is a man who has died, perhaps a bush-knife, an axe, an iron bowl, some glass beads, a few of his ornaments, some brass bracelets, and several yards of white and coloured materials. A bow and a few arrows are also put in, but only after having been damaged a little, so as not to give the *pitto* the chance of shooting the animals that are game for the living¹⁰.

All these funeral gifts must remain in the coffin and decay with it. They are called 'successors' (*usut*). What the gifts are depends on the value of the estate. Sometimes an agreement about this, too, is made in advance: the dying man announces expressly what he wishes to take with him. The Sakuddei claimed that they themselves would always abide by such agreements, and rebuked neighbouring *umas* for not doing so; I was unable to check what the true facts are.

This is therefore a real case of things being given away. Only when the coffin crumbles away and its contents have fallen to the ground may those objects which are still intact be taken back. In the meanwhile, the fear of that particular *pitto* will have abated. But even yet the



Old decaying coffin on a scaffold
with a plate, a fishing-net and cloth
as gifts for the *pitto*-spirit of the deceased.

funeral gifts are felt to be sinister, and only in great destitution do people get over this feeling. This is true, for example, of the old beads, which are esteemed more highly than those that are now imported. The objects are ceremonially cleaned to neutralize the dangerous radiation (*bajou*; see above) that still attaches to them from their past. The old property-rights are however now forfeit. Whoever comes along may take possession of such objects.

Halfway home, a ceremony is performed to repel the dead man, should he still be following. Yet again he receives *usut*. A coconut palm is partly defoliated and the top cut off, which causes the whole to die. Some time later the same is also done to a few sago palms and fruit-trees; but these do not die completely. They should however never be sold or given away. Lest the trees take it ill of the people that they should put them to such miserable use, they later plant there particular bushes, to whose soul a calming influence is ascribed, saying: "Here are flowers for you, o trees, they are cool, your voices will be cool here, our bodies will also be cool. We have given you to the dead as trees." – As they continue their way home, they paddle their dugouts through a gate constructed of two slender stems, branching at the top, that have been stuck into the river-bed, and say: "We are passing through. The shadow-beings cannot see us any more, the dead man can see us no more!" Thus they leave the domain of death behind and return to life.

Conclusion

All the actions described here fall under the definition of offering mentioned at the outset as an 'act of presenting something to a supernatural being'. Our examples have however shown that this 'presenting' may be variably emphasized according to the situation and the donors' assessment of the recipient. Our point of departure was Van Baal's fruitful, ideal-typical distinction between a gift-relationship, which establishes a bond between partners, and a trading relationship, whose purpose is the bilateral acquisition of goods; in this distinction, typical offering and sacrifice should belong to the former category. The examples from the Sakuddei have however shown that this category assignment, even in normal situations, is in no way appropriate for all types of sacrifice. Our first example was characterizable as a pure gift: what took place with the *guruake saukkui* was completely in line with the conception of the sacrifice first expressed by Robertson Smith as a "communion of the participants with one another and the deity"

(Lessa and Vogt 1972:323). As, progressing through the following examples, we found that the offering of sacrifices became increasingly clearly linked with a request for specific reciprocation and ever more distant authorities were called upon, so the conceptions began to diverge more and more from the typical characteristics of the exchange of gifts. This was apparent not only in the forms of expression used, but also in the people's attempts to increase the value of their own, human contributions. For their strongly felt need to achieve an equivalence of gift and return gift is incompatible with the generalizing give-and-take of unequal contributions by unequal partners, as must be the case in a pure gift-relationship between men and spirits. Rather, it belongs to the sphere of trade, where goods are measured up against one another irrespective of social statuses. Nonetheless, even the most extreme of these actions - the sacrificing of the ear - did not lack something of the gift. That sacrifice ensured the consolidation of a mutual bond that made the seeming resolution of the discrepancy between the inadequacy of human powers and what was really necessary nonetheless seem satisfactory and harmonious. Only in the last example, where this bond was no longer guaranteed, did the sacrifice entail real material loss.

Employing the two variables discussed above, the relationship with the recipient of the sacrifice and the specificity of the request for reciprocation, one may represent the six types of sacrificial acts performed by the Sakuddei as follows:

Relationship with the recipient	'Gift'		
	Type of request not expressed	expressed in general terms	expressed in specific terms
kinship	I Union (communion) with the ancestors	II 'Share' for the ancestors to obtain general help	III 'Purchase price' and 'reward' for the ancestors to obtain the souls
trust	-	IV 'Purchase price' paid to the earthquake-spirit for general help	V 'Purchase price' and negotiated 'share' given to the spirits of the wood for game
enmity	-	VI Required destruction of inherited property, for the <i>pitto</i> , to achieve 'separation'	-

'Trade'

It is clear from this table that nothing but a combination of our two criteria is sufficient to differentiate the various acts. Only in this way does the particular character of each type of sacrifice emerge.

Accordingly, the kind of result that the sacrificers expect appears in a different light in each case. By finding a name for each of these results, the particular nature of each type may be expressed in yet more general terms. Using the same tabular lay-out as above, we may refer to these types using the following terms:

Communio	Blessing	Assistance
1	Favour	Recompense
	Non-affliction	2

Examples from other cultures would doubtless permit an extension of this classification. For example, a sacrifice made to superordinate powers without explicit requests (position 1) could be characterized as an expression of trust in their 'protectorate', or a substantial renunciation of goods to inimical powers in order to achieve relief from a specific calamity (position 2) as a 'ransom'¹¹.

There thus emerges an initial attempt to set up a classification of sacrificial acts, the basis for which is the way in which the sacrificer himself views the event. Each type characterizes a particular kind of relationship with the otherworldly powers. In this way, the various sacrificial acts, alongside their tacit or explicit purposes, also contribute to expressing an order among those powers. Thus they are consistent with an endeavour to which the recipient of this Festschrift has referred as 'man's innate desire': 'Man has to arrange his world in some sort of pattern so as not to lose his foothold in the surrounding chaos.' (Schulte Nordholt 1971:435f).

NOTES

- 1 To all those who commented on early drafts of this article, and to Lachlan Mackenzie who translated the text into English, I wish to express my appreciation.
- 2 This principle is applied differently in the case of the competitive giving of gifts, where one partner endeavours to humiliate the other by giving more valuable gifts.
- 3 The fieldwork in Mentawai (1967-1969 and 1974) was financed by the Swiss National Foundation and Granada TV (London).

- 4 The skins of the dancing-drums are stretched by being heated before the fire.
- 5 In the myth, the earthquake-spirit is an orphan.
- 6 In the myth, everything was broken in the earthquake.
- 7 The Mentawaiian medicine-men can see spirits and souls.
- 8 The present version is slightly abbreviated.
- 9 The Sakuddei do not like doing this, since they are afraid that the chicken could take the miserable purpose to which it has been put amiss and could incite the other chickens against them. This is why pigs are never slaughtered on such occasions.
- 10 For analogous reasons, a little slit is made between the thumb and index-finger on the right hand of respected men after their death.
- 11 It strikes me as less appropriate to characterize such cases as 'bribes', as Van Baal (1976:175) proposes, since this term introduces an unsuitable note of illegality into the relationship.

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