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The central argument of Annette Weiner in ***Inalienable Possessions,*** if I may summarize it somewhat generally, can be broken down into three affirmations:

1 / Underlying all economic practices described in terms of reciprocity is a more profound reality: preserving the goods that escape reciprocal exchange. These "inalienable possessions," which make up the essence of the paradox of "keeping-while-giving," are markers of identity, difference, and power. Weiner thus distances herself not only from her predecessor in this field, Malinowski, but also from all those who have seen in the pair "gift/counter-gift" an instrument of power neutralization. She 'thus has in her sights Mauss himself ("Even when Mauss described the ambivalence generated by the gift . . . he still avowed that, ultimately, reciprocity neutralized power" [p. 43]), as well as Bataille, who opposes the ideal of "consumption" to capitalistic utilitarianism but does not see that the possibility of simultaneously keeping goods while responding to the demands of expenditure and

display results in the creation of strong hierarchical differences ("It is in the potential threat of violence and destruction that power emerges, transfixed at the center of keeping-while-giving" [p. 41]). Closer to home, she criticizes Sahlins, who "could not integrate the concept of gain with the Maussian (and Hobbesian) belief that exchange made enemies into friends" (p. 43).

2 / Women occupy a distinctive place and play a predominant role in the fabrication of inalienable possessions and, by the same token, in social reproduction. This second affirmation is itself the synthesis of three complementary propositions. First, anthropologists have not, in general, accorded enough importance to the economic and symbolic value of goods of vegetal origin, what she calls ***cloth*** (including "all objects made from threads and fibers," such as Trobriand banana-leaf bundles [p. 157n]). These goods belong nonetheless to the category of those that are destined to be kept as well as to be given away. Second, even if women, in general, have played a larger role than men in cloth production, men are implicated in and dependent on cloth treasures. In a like fashion, women play a role in the circulation and guardianship of hard substances such as jade, shells, or ancestral bones and are thus involved in the political realm. Third, contrary to what certain feminists have affirmed, the role of women in biological reproduction does not condemn them everywhere and always to political nonexistence, and the proof of this assertion can be found in their role in the control and transmission of inalienable possessions, both soft and hard, that are associated with symbolic systems concerning both biological and cultural reproduction.

3 / Sibling intimacy is a fact just as remarkable as the sibling incest taboo. In fact, the existence of the sibling incest taboo does not at all imply the absence of strong ties between brother and sister ("Like inalienable possessions, this ritualized sibling bond remains immovable because in each generation politically salient social identities and possessions are guarded and enhanced through it" [p. 67]). Sibling intimacy is essential in cultural reproduction (from close economic and social dependence to real or virtual incest).

My modest contribution to this forum devoted to the work of Annette Weiner is the product of a double paradox. First of all, I have only a bookish and distant rapport with Oceania. Secondly, my Africanist research has acquainted me with populations that privilege accumulation over exchange and where, by way of parenthesis, weaving activities were essentially masculine.

After having declared my admiration for the remarkably structured and well-argued work of Annette Weiner, I will limit myself to citing a few facts about Africa, some of which may serve as a further demonstration of her

ideas and others of which may serve not as a refutation but as a catalyst for further interrogation.

I will make reference here, for the most part, to the West African societies of Akan tradition that, as common traits, have strong political structures (chieftainships and kingdoms), are matrilineal, and accord a large importance to loincloths, which, with gold objects, figure in the lineal treasures. These societies are display-oriented, with the exhibition of riches highly ritualized, but they do not practice destruction or ritual circulation of goods.

I would like to remark first of all that Akan societies always accord an important place, both symbolically and politically, to the mother or the sister of the chief or king in power. The idea would never occur to anyone (not even to an ethnologist) to deny this role. The accordance of this importance, however, does not appear to me to be linked to a particular function in the activities of production: weaving, once again, was a masculine activity; it seems that the production of sea salt brought the two sexes together; gold extraction was the domain of men. It must be added that in those societies that began commerce with Europe very early, the work force was essentially made up of slaves or descendants of slaves (both men and women).

The continuation of the lineage, which progressively integrated a considerable number of endowed women from outside the community, slaves of both sexes, and descendants of these two groups, required the distinction, within the matrilineage, between the "pure" line and the adjacent branches. From another angle, and despite the existence of a theoretically preferential marriage with the matrilateral cross-cousin, the primary concern was to accumulate men and women, not to circulate them. This condition resulted in a whole series of practices that can be seen as forms of metaphoric incest: the slave wife of a man would call him "father," but, from the point of view of lineal relationships, she was like his sister and he could have children with her who would be, at the same time, both sons and uterine "nephews" (members of the matrilineage). On her side, a woman could, notably if she was the sister of the head of the lineage, marry a slave or have children without allying herself to another lineage. As a general rule, marriage "to the closest" ***(au plus prés),*** whose preeminence in the case of semicomplex systems of alliance was established by Françoise Héritier, was the best assurance of the ideological continuation and the demographic growth of the great lineages. The double obligation, it is quite clear, was achieved by the types of alliances that incontestably evoked the forbidden and fascinating image of the brother/sister couple.

This fascination is more explicitly acted out in the case of royal dynasties, in which the person of the sister appears almost as a component of what one

may call "the triple body of the king." The Agni king has a slave double, called ***ekala*** (from the name given to one of the aspects of his person), and who is considered as the carrier of the royal ***ekala,*** literally doubling the person of the king and thus protecting him by deflecting to himself any attacks that might be made against the king. But the body of the king is not only double: a sister or uterine cousin of the king (the ***balahinma)*** assures, with a man other than the king, the royal descendance. All three (the king, his ***ekala*** slave, and his ***balahinma*** sister) perform a dance from time to time in the courtyard of the palace that is peculiar to them and whose figures highlight the plurality of the sovereign body: because an Agni king would be nothing without the ***ekala*** and the ***balahinma.***

In the kingdom of Abomey, in former Dahomey, a little further east, the king could marry women of the royal clan, notably an agnatic half-sister, but the children resulting from these unions could not pretend to the succession. The crown prince could only be the son of a woman outside the royal couple. The royal couple (the king and his half-sister), in a fashion similar to those of certain kingdoms of East Africa, incarnates the dynasty and is a symbol of its permanence but not the means of its biological reproduction. In the Agni kingdom, the formula is the opposite: the children of the polygynous king do not play any role in the dynastic succession and the "queen-mother" (sister, niece, or uterine cousin of the king) freely chooses her sexual partners and gives birth to the potential successors to royal power. It should be added that among the Ashanti, as Rattray has already pointed out, the possibility of marriage with the patrilateral cross-cousin was reserved to princely families, thus assuring, every other generation, the return of the agnatic line into the matrilineage and the accumulation upon one individual of the principles and substances attributed respectively to each of the two lines of descendances.

These conditions suggest three remarks to me. The first, already formulated, is that, in the African examples I am familiar with, the role of women in the biological and cultural reproduction of the group does not appear to be obviously linked to a specific place in production activities. I would add that the women explicitly invited to exercise an ordinarily masculine function (political among the Lagoon cultures of the Ivory Coast when they fulfill a role of "regent" of the lineage, commercial among the Nuer where a woman could "endow" other women whose children would be hers) were women somewhat older, beyond menopause and thus outside the sphere of biological reproduction.

The second remark would concern the fact that in the matrilinear societies to which I have briefly made reference, the agnatic ideology is very strong (the essential powers are supposed to be transmitted from father to

son, or from paternal grandfather to grandson, while the women are described as "pirogues," assuring the transport of the children to be born without contributing substantially to their composition). The most obvious feminine power is that of the women closely associated with the control of objects that guarantee the perpetuity of the clan and thus of the person of the sovereign.

The third remark is an extension of the second. Everything is organized as if, in the African theories of power, there was a desire to prevent the best-positioned women in the clan or lineal hierarchy from controlling the two modes of reproduction: in the Dahoman model the children of the wife-sister of the king may not pretend to the succession; in the Agni model the sister of the king assures the reproduction of the dynasty, but not through union with her brother. The difference in the filiation principles can in part account for this contrast, but one may consider this difference as actually constitutive of it.

I have put myself in the difficult position of commenting on Weiner's analyses on the basis of examples in which the role of "keeping" is more evident than that of "giving"-- the societies I have spoken about having been implicated for a long time in intra- and intercontinental exchange of a decidedly commercial nature (and extending as well to human merchandise). But it seems to me that Weiner's propositions can find, in these "counter-examples," an extension and a verification.