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**Gifts that recalibrate relationships:
marriage prestations in an Arab liberation movement**

Alice Wilson

ABSTRACT Enduring scholarly interest in the social relations of gift exchange has, following Mauss, emphasised how gifts make relationships. Where gifts break relationships, their ethnographic distinctiveness has reinforced the wider notion that gifts are good at making relations. This article examines gifts which, without the empirical distinctiveness of gifts that break relationships, both make and break relationships. Speakers of the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic in north-west Africa give post-marital gifts from the bride's to groom's party; these gifts became highlighted amongst Sahrawi refugees in Algeria, on whom the article focuses. In addition to performing reciprocity, boosting the giver's honour and making new affinal relations, these post-marital gifts also break the relationship between the bride's family and the bride. The article argues that gifts' potential to recalibrate relationships through both making and breaking relationships can be helpfully incorporated into wider thinking about gifts, alongside other distinctions amongst gifts and gift relations.

KEYWORDS *Gifts, marriage, refugees, Arabs, Western Sahara*

Enduring scholarly interest in gifts has revolved around the notion that gifts make relationships. Marcel Mauss argued that gifts make relationships because they are infused with the spirit of the giver; thus 'to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself' while 'to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence' (Mauss 2001:16). As scholars have broadened their engagement with different kinds of gifts and gift relations, it has been recognised that not all gifts are 'Maussian' in the sense of making relations between parties; rather, some gifts seek to avoid making relationships, for instance by avoiding reciprocity and recognition for the gift (Parry 1986; Laidlaw 2000). Yet empirical cases of a 'free' gift have appeared so distinct

ethnographically from Maussian gifts that the former uphold – even as they qualify – the underlying notion that gifts make relationships.

Nevertheless, as Eytan Bercovitch (1994) has pointed out, there is also a darker, ‘negative’ side to the gift. It is not merely that gifts may ‘go wrong’, potentially failing to make the desired relationship (Venkatesan 2011), or causing tense relationships (High 2010). Some people may never be ‘invited’ to take part in gifting in the first place. The grounds for such exclusion are not necessarily determined by ascribed characteristics such as generation or gender, but might arise, as Bercovitch explores, because a giver prefers to share gifts with a smaller circle of recipients, and to keep these gifts secret from others. In short, gifts may fail to make relationships when gifts go wrong, there is no possibility of giving them in the first place, or gifts have been given as ‘free gifts that make no friends’ (Laidlaw 2000).

A further aspect to the ‘negative’ dimensions of gift is the notion that gifts that look Maussian (and are given ‘correctly’) may nevertheless contribute to breaking relationships. Previously, the breaking of relationships through gifts has been associated especially (although not exclusively) with the Melanesian context where gifts between partible persons facilitate forms of detachment between persons (Strathern 1988). Thus, Marilyn Strathern (1987, 1996) has explored how bridewealth payments from the groom’s party in Hagen and elsewhere in Melanesia can ‘stop’ the flow between a woman and her natal family, so that the relatedness of children born to the marriage to their maternal kin is curtailed. Outside Melanesia, but also in a context of exogamy, in India the gift of a virgin-bride conceived as *kanyādāna* ‘utterly [severs] the connection between the bride and her family and [transforms] her into an extension of the groom and his family’ (Trautmann 1981:26). Little explored to date, however, is the possibility that in a strikingly different ethnographic context which idealises endogamy – in other words in a context which favours keeping up rather than ‘cutting’ the network (Strathern 1996) – gifts might sometimes also break relationships. Turning to the arabophone cultural sphere, which is renowned for ‘[lacking] interest in formal exogamy and thus in clear definition of social blocks’ (Dresch 1998:121), this article explores such a possibility. I argue that the (wider than previously acknowledged) incidence of Maussian-looking gifts that break relationships illuminates a hitherto under-explored dimension of gift exchange: that gifts may recalibrate relationships through both making *and* breaking relationships. I thus seek to foreground a further dimension to the heterogeneity of gifts and gift relations underscored by anthropologists (e.g., Strathern 1987; Herrmann 1997; Addo and Besnier 2008).

In order to examine the recalibration of relationships through gifts, I take up a case on the western edge of the Arab world: post-marital gifts given by the bride’s family to the groom’s party amongst Hassanophones, speakers of the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic who live in the north-west Sahara. With one (at the time of writing unpublished) exception (Boulay 2003, discussed below), these gifts, called *faskha*, have been neglected or overlooked in extensive discussion of Hassanophones’ marriage gifts (Du Puigaudeau 2009[1967]; Caratini 1989; Tazuin 2001; Bonte 2008), perhaps because these gifts contravene dominant regional patterns of gifts to, and not from, the bride or her party. Like their Arab and non-Arab counterparts in

the Middle East and North Africa, Hassanophones are known for giving bridewealth, as well as gifts from the bride's family to the bride. Hassanophones seem to be unusual (though not exceptional) in the region for also giving ceremonial gifts from the bride's family to the groom's family. Mostly overlooked to date, *faskha* gifts were nevertheless foregrounded by social changes experienced by Sahrawis, Hassanophones from the disputed territory of Western Sahara, who have been living since 1976 in refugee camps in Algeria. During two years of fieldwork with Sahrawi refugees in which, as part of a wider study of the making of the social relations of state power in exile (Wilson 2016) I traced the political transformation of marriage ceremonies, I 'stumbled' across *faskha* gifts from bride's to groom's party.¹ Due to various social changes in exile, these gifts had become more visible.

Faskha gifts are good to think with in several ways. They not only emphasise how Maussian gifts may both make and break relationships. The transformed *faskha* gifts as practised amongst the refugees also underscore the complex potential of exile. Displacement can act not only as a catalyst for social change (e.g., Gale 2007), but also as a prism for magnifying that which may have been more easily overlooked had displacement not occurred (see Navaro-Yashin 2012). Here, displacement both modified and highlighted *faskha*.

The article proceeds as follows. After situating gifts that break relationships within wider anthropological debates about gifts, I introduce Hassanophones and Sahrawi refugees in particular, and then describe common marriage prestations in the Middle East and North Africa. Next I analyse *faskha*, arguing for the need to look beyond questions of reciprocity, honour, and the making of affinal relations, to consider how *faskha* also breaks relationships, and therefore invites broader reflection about gifts.

A Theme and Variations

Mauss' writings on the gift have given rise to an ever-expanding legacy in anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Sahlins 1972; Strathern 1988; Godelier 1999).² His central tenets – that where gift exchange entails an obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate, these obligations spring from the inalienability of the gift in which some part of the giver is passed on – underscore a quintessential anthropological theme. Because things and persons are mutually constitutive, gifts are good at making, maintaining, and renewing relationships between persons.

This theme has many variations. One version is that gifts make relations of varying, potentially highly contrasting kinds. Gift exchange can take place between actors who exchange because they consider themselves potentially equals, for example as has been suggested for *kula* exchange, or between parties who construe themselves in a hierarchical relationship to one another (Werbner 1990). Often the case in ceremonial gift exchange, the giving of gifts can encourage or even demand reciprocity; at times there is a tension between volunteerism and obligation in gift exchange (Åkesson 2011). Even when gifts are donated anonymously and therefore seemingly sidestep reciprocity, both donors and recipients may

imagine themselves in a relationship (e.g., Orobitch and Salazar 2005). If gifts initially fail to make a relationship, one may still be made in myth over time (Venkatesan 2011).

Another iteration of the theme that gifts are good at making relations is the debated contrast between gifts as a form of exchange that makes relations between people, and commodities as a form of exchange that, taking place between transactors perceived to be in a state of mutual independence, does not make relations between people (e.g., Gregory 1982). In practice in a given context there may be a considerable overlap between the social relations of gift exchange and those of commodity exchange, as things move in and out of the status of gift or commodity (Appadurai 1986; Addo and Besnier 2008), sometimes in the same transaction (Herrmann 1997). Yet even when distinctions between gifts and commodities are blurred, the sign that gift relations have ‘infiltrated’ what might otherwise have been a commodity transaction is often assumed to be the fact that relations between persons have been forged: it is through ‘the degree to which a garage sale is about connecting people, instead of solely about exchanging goods, that it acquires a gift-exchange/dimension’ (Herrmann 1997:925-926). The notion that gifts specialise in making relationships thus re-emerges.

A third variation on the theme that gifts make relationships is more indirect. Jonathan Parry (1986) and James Laidlaw (2000) have studied how certain religious gifts in Hindu and Jain tradition avoid making relations between giver and recipient in order for the appropriate religious benefit for each party to follow. Religious gifts (*danadharna*), Parry explains, rule out reciprocity: ‘Under no circumstances, and under pain of terrible supernatural consequences, is the gift resumed’ for its ‘evil “spirit” must *not* come back’ (1986:461, emphasis in original). Taking the religious gift *dan* in Jain tradition to be an ethnographic approximation that is close to Derrida’s notion of the free gift, Laidlaw describes the elaborate lengths to which donors and Jain renunciators go to preclude the possibility that the gift of food to renunciators might create a relationship. Renunciators vary their route from household to household where they ask for food, and they mix up any food given with other donations so that an individual donation cannot be distinguished (Laidlaw 2000:618-9). The fact that a gift that ‘makes no friends’ has to be so highly stylised to distinguish itself from gifts that do make relations ultimately reinforces the idea that the Maussian gift – given openly, received openly, and susceptible to reciprocity – is good at making relations between people.

There is nevertheless a counter-point to the notion that gifts make relationships: the ‘negative’ side to gifts of which Bercovitch (1994) writes. By making certain relations, gift exchange may prevent the forging of other kinds of relations. Taking inspiration from cases in which certain groups, such as youths or women, can be denied access to the resources that would allow them to take part in certain forms of gift exchange, Bercovitch describes how amongst the Atbalmin of the Solomon Islands, goods such as food which could have been shared with a wider circle may be withdrawn from public circulation and reserved for consumption in private. If those who have been excluded from this hidden exchange come to suspect it or find out about it, this may cause a rift in their relationship with the instigator.

Gifts in this hidden exchange risk breaking relationships between those included and those excluded. But they still conform to the wider pattern of gifts making relationships to the extent that even in hidden exchange, the shared food reinforces relationships between those who take part in the exchange. In other words, it is for the sake of making some relations through gifts that others are put at risk.

Yet the darker side of gifts may also extend to not only making, but also breaking, relations between those who are implicated in (rather than excluded from) a particular exchange. Following James Weiner, Marilyn Strathern reminds us that ‘in a relationally based world, “the task confronting humans is not to sustain human relationships... [but] to place a limit on the relationship”’ (J Weiner 1993a:292 in Strathern 1996:529). Exogamy may require such a cutting of relatedness, specifically between the bride (and her offspring) and the bride’s family. In the case of bridewealth in Hagen, Papua New Guinea (Strathern 1987), and for the ‘Are’are of the Solomon Islands (see Strathern 1996), gifts from the groom’s party to the bride’s party are used to ‘stop the flow’ of relatedness between the woman and her family. In India the gift of the bride herself (*kanyādāna*) breaks the relationship between the bride and her family for the sake of the bride becoming an extension of the groom and his family (Trautmann 1981:26). In each of these settings, gifts are a means of ‘cutting the network’ (Strathern 1996) of flows and relatedness.

My suggestion here is that gifts may more often be a means of breaking relationships than has been assumed in discussions of how gifts make relationships or must go to great lengths to avoid doing so. To explore this, I take up the case of a prestation from bride’s to groom’s party called *faskha*, practised on the western edge of the Arab world. Differing from the Melanesian and Indian cases of ‘cutting the network’ for exogamy, Arab contexts are characterised by a ‘lack [of] interest in formal exogamy and thus in clear definition of social blocks’ (Dresch 1998:121). This means that there is not the same need, as in the Melanesian and Indian cases, to curtail a woman’s relatedness to her kin for the sake of her children’s relatedness to their father. Neglected by scholars of the north-west Sahara region, *faskha* these gifts attained a heightened visibility amongst Sahrawi refugees.

Conflict in the North-West Sahara

On the western edge of the Arab world lies the north-west Sahara. From the 13th to 16th centuries CE, Arab tribes originally from the Arabian peninsular migrated into this region. Living as mobile pastoralists, they mixed with Berber and black populations and introduced their dialect of Arabic, Hassaniya (Norris 1986). In pre-colonial times, the spaces in which Hassanophones lived were the Saharan lands out of reach of bordering imperial powers, such as the Moroccan sultanate, the empire of Mali and the Songhay empire. In the colonial and post-colonial world, Hassanophones’ homelands have been traversed by nation-state borders and today span southern Morocco, south-west Algeria, disputed Western Sahara, Mauritania and parts of Mali and Niger.

This history of lying partially or, at times, wholly, out of reach of projects of state power is one factor contributing to the sensitivity surrounding what term, if any, could be used to describe Hassanophones as a people. Hassanophones' social structures have centred historically on patrilineal 'tribes' (*qabīla* pl. *qabā'il*),³ and stratified status groups (elite warrior and religious groups, tribute payers, blacksmiths, slaves and freed-slaves). There is no Hassaniya term to describe a Hassanophone people inclusive of all status groups.

Hassanophones who, under colonisation, found themselves in the Spanish Sahara have come to be known as Sahrawis (a contested term – see Zunes and Mundy 2010:92-3, 110-11). From the 1950s, many Sahrawis moved from mobile pastoralism to settle in the new towns of Spanish Sahara. This trend, amongst others, contributed to the development of Sahrawi nationalism. By 1974 Spain was planning to decolonize Spanish Sahara, but decolonization was abandoned in 1975 when Spain allowed Morocco (and, briefly, Mauritania) to annex the greater part of the territory. To this day, Morocco and the liberation movement of Western Sahara, Polisario Front (henceforth Polisario), have been vying for sovereignty over the territory known in international circles as Western Sahara. The dispute between Morocco and Polisario has stretched from war to ceasefire, and prolonged UN failure to organise a referendum on self-determination.⁴

The conflict has divided Western Sahara and its population. A Moroccan-built military wall divides a westerly portion of Western Sahara, larger and richer in resources and under Moroccan control, from an easterly portion, without coastal access and under the control of Polisario. Where the western portion hosts Sahrawis living under Moroccan rule (alongside Moroccan settlers believed to outnumber Sahrawis), other Sahrawis fled Moroccan annexation. They became exiles in refugee camps located in the desert near Tindouf, Algeria, some 50km from the border with Western Sahara. The Sahrawi refugee camps are governed not by Algeria, but by Polisario in an administrative fusion with the (partially recognised) state it founded in 1976, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The refugees may currently number some 160,000, and annexed Sahrawis slightly more (although the size of all Sahrawi populations is contested).⁵

In the wartime years of the 1970s and 1980s, the refugees lived in conditions of severe material shortages and relied on rations. At this time Polisario's rule was also austere, tending towards strict control of political life as well as everyday living conditions. Polisario assigned refugees (unpaid) work, mandated where they could pitch the tents in which they lived, forbade the mention of tribes, and placed strict limits on marital prestations. Another change in exile (not directed by Polisario) was that, since husbands were usually absent for long periods at the front, refugee brides ceased to move near their affines. Instead they set up their marital households near their natal families. Tensions surrounding Polisario's repression of political opposition came to a head during protests in 1988 that eventually led to a 'Sahrawi perestroika' (Shelley 2004:179). Following this and the UN-brokered cease-fire of 1991, the refugee camps opened up to greater freedom of movement of people and goods into and through the camps. Private trade, virtually unknown in the 1980s, flourished as the camps developed marketplaces (see San Martín 2010; Wilson 2016). Individual refugees (and some

households) migrated to various destinations (see e.g., Gómez Martín 2011). Migrants' remittances helped finance dependent refugees' new mud-brick homes, consumer appetites, expensive gifts from groom to bride at the time of marriage (although Polisario still tried to limit these – see Wilson 2016), and the post-marital gifts from the bride's to groom's party with which this article is concerned.

Familiar Marriage Gifts

Marriage gifts across the Muslim Middle East and North Africa vary enormously. Marriage gifts themselves, as well as marital and intimate relations more broadly, have transformed and continue to change in response to economic, religious and political pressures (e.g., Drieskens 2008) – changes which fall beyond the scope of this article. Typically, it is marriage gifts from the groom's party to the bride's that have most preoccupied analysts. Such a prestation, a common name for which is *mahr*, is required in Islam to make sexual relations between the groom and bride permitted, *ḥalāl*. In practice, the fulfilment of the Islamic requirement for a prestation from groom's to bride's party admits extensive regional variety. *Mahr* – often going by alternative names – may be sourced from the groom or more widely from his kin, and bestowed upon the bride and/or her party (e.g., Cunnison 1966; Peters 1980; Delaney 1991). Sometimes multiple groom-to-bride prestations may see the bride's family use some of these prestations to endow the bride (e.g., Barth 1964; Hart 1976; Tapper 1981). The bride's family may also use their own resources to endow the bride, in a sense thus matching bridewealth with a dowry (e.g., Antoun 1972; Hart 1976; Mundy 1995). Much more rarely does one find that some of the groom-to-bride prestation may be returned to the groom or one of his relatives (Barth 1964:19; Buggenhagen 2011:720). The idea of the bride's party using property of its own (rather than part of a groom-to-bride prestation) in order to make gifts to the groom's family (rather than to the bride), however, runs counter to the trends for which the region is known (even though such gifts do take place).⁶ Indeed, when I have discussed the possibility with colleagues and friends who study or are from the region, my inquiry is usually met with surprise, and often a question along the lines of 'why are they giving things for their daughter to be taken?'

The regional pattern of a predominance of groom-to-bride prestations, potentially combined with dowry-like prestations, has not troubled anthropologists. Rather, if the Middle East and North Africa has offered anthropologists a puzzle, it has been the preference to marry the closest relative to ego who is not prohibited by an incest taboo (Lévi-Strauss 1959). Analysts have tended to see prestations in the north-west Sahara (which vary amongst Hassanophones) as conforming to regional trends in marriage prestations (and 'close' marriage). Hassanophones give a groom-to-bride prestation in fulfilment of *mahr*, known locally as *ṣadāq*.⁷ *Ṣadāq* has generally been reported as a gift from the groom's family (father) to the bride's family (father). For mobile pastoralist Sahrawis in the 1950s (Caro Baroja 1955), *ṣadāq* typically comprised a number of camels, and some prestige goods such as pieces of cloth. Historically, the prestation has varied by tribe (Caro Baroja 1955), status group (du

Puigaudeau 2009[1967]), and the proximity or (stratified) social distance between marriage partners (Bonte 2008). If the groom hailed from a higher social standing than the bride, *ṣadāq* could be low. If bride and groom were close relatives from the same tribe, *ṣadāq* could also be low. But if a bride and groom were of similar high status, but not from the same tribe, then *ṣadāq* could be high.

In addition to *ṣadāq*, and by no means exceptionally as regards wider practices in the Middle East and North Africa, Hassanophones also give a second prestation from the bride's family to the bride, called in Hassaniya *rḥīl* (from *r-ḥ-l*, meaning 'go away'). This takes place at the time, often a few months after the marriage (and potentially after the birth of the couple's first child), when the bride moves to live with her husband's family. At *rḥīl*, the bride is endowed with property of her own by her natal family. Traditionally, this endowment consisted of camels, a woollen tent and its furnishings (Du Puigaudeau 2009[1967]:227, 233; Caratini 1989:224). Interlocutors who had grown up living in the pasturelands stressed to me that the family of the bride had to use different camels from any that had been given with the *ṣadāq*, as it would be 'shameful' to give back some of the camels that had originally been given by the groom's party.

Thus conceptualised, Hassanophones' marital prestations are comparable to those observed across the Muslim Middle East and North Africa: prestations from groom's to bride's party that fulfil the Islamic requirement for *mahr*, and further prestations from the bride's party to the bride (using their own property). In aspects of marital relations other than prestations, Hassanophones have been perceived by scholars (Tillion 1983) and, I have discovered in conversation, by some Arab compatriots as exceptional. A Hassanophone woman may remarry (multiple times and unstigmatised) with relative ease; there is little tolerance for polygamy amongst Hassanophones; and Hassanophones may hold a party to celebrate the return to marriageability of a recently divorced woman once the period of waiting (of three menstrual cycles) required in Islam has lapsed. These practices make Hassanophones seem 'exotic' to even (perhaps especially) Arab peers in the region. In practice, whilst uncommon amongst Arabs, tolerance for women's remarriage after divorce and a celebration of a divorcee's marriageability are found amongst other non-Arab Saharan peoples (e.g., Lhote 1944:295).

If Hassanophones blend Middle Eastern and North African trends in marriage prestations with non-Arab Saharan marital relations, there is nevertheless little to suggest from North African, Middle Eastern or Saharan peers, or indeed from published accounts of Hassanophone marriage practices (Caro Baroja 1955; Du Puigaudeau 2009[1967]; Fortier 2001; Bonte 2008), that Hassanophones might also engage in a marriage prestation sourced from the bride's family (and not from a groom-to-bride prestation), and given to the groom's family (rather than the bride). Yet, one sleepy afternoon, I learned that such a prestation existed.

Unusual Post-Marital Gifts

In autumn 2007 I was enjoying post-siesta tea with Khadija, a refugee in her early sixties or thereabouts, and her most recently married daughter, Minetou, in her early twenties.⁸ The setting was typical of the Sahrawi refugee camps in the late 2000s. We were seated on the floor of a mud-brick room that was used in a manner which recreated the feel of the tents that were also features of many refugee homes. Although these tents had been provided by aid agencies, they were treated as familiar spaces by many refugees, who identified with a mobile pastoralist background. Conversation with Khadija and Minetou turned to the forthcoming Eid al-Adha, the Muslim festival when each head of household who could afford to do so would sacrifice a sheep or goat. As mentioned earlier, unusually for the Arab world refugee brides had adopted the practice of living near their natal home rather than near their husband's home. I knew from Minetou's older sister, Ghalia, who had been married for several years and lived next door to Khadija, that in exile a married woman and her husband took the Eid sacrifice for their own household to the husband's family.

I asked Minetou, who had married five months previously, if she would make a visit similar to Ghalia's. 'No,' she told me. Kindly, she added an explanation: 'Because I haven't ever been to see them.' This explanation, however, left me none the wiser. My confusion must have shown, for between them the women explained to me that the first time a bride went to see her in-laws, she took special gifts, called *faskha*, to greet them. These gifts must consist of matching numbers, e.g., ten or twenty, of items associated with hospitality such as blankets, cushions and dishes. In addition, there should be a set of clothes for the groom's parents, and further items associated with hospitality, such as a rug(s) and tea set(s). Until she had given the *faskha* gifts, Minetou could not see her in-laws. As she had not yet made the *faskha* visit, Minetou was staying at home for Eid.

Khadija's and Minetou's longer 'explanation' raised more questions for me than it resolved. The prestation that they described struck me as odd in the context of regional emphasis on gifts to the bride and her party, from the groom but sometimes from the bride's party too. Gifts such as *faskha*, however, from the bride's party to the groom's, did not 'fit'. Moreover, I could not recall reading any mention of *faskha* in accounts of Hassanophone marriage.

Intrigued and keen to learn more of *faskha*, I asked Khadija to be sure to let me know when Minetou's *faskha* took place so that I could attend. Minetou had married Al'asri (who also hailed from the same tribe). Upon his marriage, Al'asri moved c. 20 km from Smara refugee camp (where his parents lived) to Boujdor refugee camp, close to Khadija.⁹ Al'asri's new home held the attraction of being in the only refugee camp with mains electricity. His job as a taxi driver made regular visits to his parents feasible. He often took fares between Boujdor and Smara camps along the comfortable tarmac road which linked them. Yet his move upon marriage was not unproblematic. Al'asri was his elderly parents' only son. Because, until *faskha*, Minetou could not see her in-laws, Al'asri was forced, until *faskha* took place, to choose at any one time between his duties as a son and those as a husband.

Some ten months on from the marriage of Minetou and Al'asri, Khadīja surprised the young couple. Khadīja was a businesswoman, who ran a (rudimentary) *ḥammām* from her home. She therefore had (a fluctuating) income of her own. Her surprise was her announcement that she had amassed the *faskha* gifts (blankets, cushions, dishes, clothes etc), and that Minetou should take them as soon as possible. At the time of Khadīja's announcement and the ensuing *faskha* visit, I was with camel herders in the pasturelands at several hours of travel from the camps, and beyond the reach of mobile phone networks. It was thus not possible for Khadīja to contact me so that I could attend. When I returned to the camps and visited Khadīja, she explained that she had saved to amass the *faskha* gifts. When I asked her why, she explained that it was 'not right' for Al'asri, who was needed by his parents, to be kept from spending more time with them by returning at night to Boujdor to be with his wife. Now that *faskha* had taken place, Minetou could travel with him. The couple began to make trips of several nights to stay with Al'asri's family.

Khadīja's announcement was unexpected not only because of her single-handed preparations, but also because of the timing. If Minetou and Al'asri had not yet turned their minds to *faskha*, this was quite legitimate. *Faskha*, other refugees later explained, usually only took place once the marriage in question had produced a first child. In 2008 I was living in Ausserd camp, where Māghalāha was my hostess. She and her three adult daughters were as excited as if for their own family when, a few months after the birth of her first child (a daughter), Thawria, the daughter of close neighbours, began to prepare her *faskha*. Indeed, the whole neighbourhood buzzed with excitement for Thawria. Discussions focused on the contributions from relatives, neighbours and friends to her *faskha* gifts. These widely sourced contributions to Thawria's *faskha* were perceived as expected, which suggests that wide participation from the bride's kin and connections to prepare *faskha* was more common than Khadīja's approach.¹⁰ Seeing neighbours come by Thawria's home to leave contributions for her *faskha*, I took advice from Māghalāha and contributed a blanket. This became, briefly, the talk of the neighbourhood.

The appointed day of the *faskha* visit was to fall during my forthcoming absence from the refugee camps to renew my visa. Frustrated that once again I would 'miss' *faskha*, I listened eagerly to the women's patient replies to my many questions. On receipt of the *faskha* gifts, I learned, Thawria's husband's family would give out all the gifts that they received to their own kin and neighbours. When I returned to the refugee camps, I heard how Thawria had made the visit accompanied by female relatives and friends and stayed several nights before returning to Ausserd camp. Thawria also gave me a piece of female clothing (*milḥafa*). She explained that it was part of some gifts that she had brought back from her in-laws, and that she was in turn distributing to those who had helped her amass her *faskha* gifts. Her in-laws, she explained, once alerted to the forthcoming *faskha*, had amassed some of their own gifts. I asked if these were in set numbers too. 'No,' she explained, adding that they were 'just something to send back... so that we can give them to people who helped us with our gifts'.

Although my hopes of attending a *faskha* visit in person were frustrated, over the following months as I asked brides and their families about *faskha* gifts and visits in which they had

taken part, mothers would offer comparisons with the *faskha* of their youth. In Khadija's case, her *faskha* took place before she became a refugee. It seemed that *faskha*, though apparently neglected in historical accounts of Hassanophones, was a long-standing practice that predated exile.

Some months after my return from the field, the puzzle of *faskha* seemingly unravelled when I read an (unpublished) doctoral thesis on practices relating to the tent amongst mobile pastoralist Hassanophones in Mauritania in the late 20th century. Sébastien Boulay (2003:362-367) offers a detailed description and analysis of *faskha* which concurs with many aspects of *faskha* in the refugee camps. There is thus a striking continuity in the form and content of *faskha* gifts in multiple accounts across mobile pastoralist and sedentary settings: Boulay's, the descriptions that I collected from Khadija, Thawria and other refugee brides, the recollections of older refugees who remembered *faskha* from mobile pastoralist pre-exile times, and the accounts that I was later able to collect from Sahrawis living under Moroccan rule. In all cases, *faskha* entails a particular content of hospitality gifts (blankets, cushions and dishes), taking the form of set numbers of gifts (such as multiples of ten) assembled from families close to the bride and given to the groom's family, often after the birth of a first child. There was, however, a crucial difference between *faskha* outside exile and in the refugee camps. In exile, because brides tended to stay living near their natal families, the bride's family no longer endowed the bride with property on the occasion of her moving to live with her husband's family.¹¹ Elsewhere, however, *faskha* typically took place at the same time as *rhīl*.

Boulay's observation that *faskha* and *rhīl* would normally take place at the same time points to traces of *faskha* in accounts where it has gone unnamed. Sophie Caratini (1989:223) and Aline Tauzin (2001:190) mention in one line, without naming them or analysing them, gifts from the bride to her in-laws given at the time the bride moves to live with them. The tendency to neglect, and in most cases to overlook altogether, *faskha* in discussions of Hassanophones' marriage gifts perhaps arises from *faskha*'s being doubly disguised. *Faskha* gifts were concealed by falling at the same time as *rhīl*, and by the fact that, since they contravened the regional trends in marriage prestations, they were 'unexpected' in the first place. On visiting families in Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara, where most Sahrawis live in urban environments (Deubel 2012:304), I learned that *faskha* had become even further disguised there. From the 1990s, families started to send their daughters to live with their husbands a few days after marriage, rather than after a few months. The opportunity to observe that a pre-*faskha* bride could not visit her affines therefore virtually disappeared. In exile, however, where *faskha* was uncoupled from *rhīl* to become the only post-marital prestation, these gifts were exposed.¹² This exposure invites reflection on *faskha*, and gifts more broadly.

Gifts that Make and Break Relationships

Whilst *faskha*, at least outside exile, has been conceptually and ethnographically difficult to ‘see’, once acknowledged it does not seem to present an analytical challenge. A number of interpretations of *faskha* concur with well-known themes of gift-giving. Two are explored by Boulay. First, if in ceremonial gift-giving there is an obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate, then *faskha* seems to fulfil, for Hassanophones, an otherwise unfilled gap for reciprocity. The opportunity to reciprocate *ṣadāq* is not fully met through *rḥīl* in the sense that, whilst *ṣadāq* is given from the groom’s party to the bride’s, *rḥīl* is given from the bride’s party to the groom’s party, who had given *ṣadāq*. Thus, as Boulay (2003:382) points out, *faskha* is a counter-prestation to *ṣadāq*. From the perspective of the importance of reciprocity in gift exchange, then, there would be little ‘unexpected’ about *faskha*.

Second, as the potlatch and other forms of ceremonial gifting have shown, gift-giving can be an important means of givers making a claim to honour and reputation through their generous, even excessive hospitality.¹³ Such a tendency has sometimes been observed for Muslim wife-givers who have received bridewealth, and who go on to use a (potentially bigger) prestation from the bridal party to the bride as a means of stressing their own honour and generosity (e.g., Tapper 1981). Amongst Hassanophones, as amongst other Arabs, marriages conventionally take place between social equals (including ‘close’ marriage), or between a groom hailing from a superior status group and a bride of an inferior status group, but not between a groom of inferior social status and a bride of superior status (Bonte 2008). It being possible, then, that a groom might hail from a superior status group (which, we saw above, occasioned a lower *ṣadāq*), Boulay (2003:382) analyses how *faskha* in such circumstances can become a means for the bride’s party to ‘save the honour of the group’ by the giving of a high *faskha*. Like other counter-prestations, then, *faskha* would be an opportunity for receivers-turned-givers to stress their own honour.

Third, as post-marital prestations that take place on the occasion of the first affinal contact between the bride and her affines, *faskha* gifts appear to perform the familiar work of making relationships, here between affines. There is regional precedent for post-marital gifts making affinal relations – even if not in the form of gifts from bride’s party to groom’s party. In some parts of Berber North Africa, a bride’s relatives’ first visit to the marital home, or the husband’s first visit to his affines’ home, may entail gifts for the bride’s party (Hart 1976:141). Like these gifts, *faskha* gifts would thus mark the making of relationships between persons, here between affines.

If we merely conclude that *faskha* gifts fulfil reciprocity, proclaim the givers’ honour and make relationships between givers and recipients, then there would be little of wider interest in them as gifts. Yet whilst each of these interpretations of *faskha* is helpful, each may still be problematic. Anthropologists may often have been only too ready to ‘find’ reciprocity (Dresch 1998). Accordingly, Strathern (2012:406) has suggested that reciprocity may

‘conceal’ something else. A similar question could be raised about maintaining honour and making relations: might such ready interpretations of *faskha* conceal other concerns?

A closer look at the how marital relations play out in the refugee camps suggests a further interpretation of *faskha* that is of broader interest for thinking about gifts. As we saw, refugee brides usually did not move to live near their husband’s families (as had been the case in the mobile pastoralist context and as continues to be the case in Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara). This ‘change’ can in fact be seen as the projection onto exile – in theory a non-permanent state – of long-standing Hassanophone practices allowing for a wife’s temporary residence near her own family either during the early stages of the marriage, or during a husband’s prolonged absence. If exilic post-marital residence was not entirely new, its extended tolerance for women living near their natal families nevertheless had a new effect for husbands and their affines, as an examination of daily habits in exile shows.

Of the three daughters of Māghalāha, my hostess in Ausserd camp, only Suelma, the eldest, was married in 2008. As was common in the refugee camps, Suelma lived next door to her parents. Accompanied by her two young daughters, Suelma spent much of each day in Māghalāha’s home. In the evenings, when each household would gather for evening tea, Suelma drank tea in her home with her husband, Mohamad, who was her father’s brother’s son. In the pauses between servings of the three rounds of tea, Suelma would come to see what was happening in Māghalāha’s tent. But she never came with Mohamad. For most of the time that I lived in Ausserd camp, Mohamad was not working because the government ministry where he was a civil servant had stopped paying its employees (on the grounds that it had run out of money to do so). Spending most of his days without work did not mean staying at home with Suelma, though. Most days, Mohamad would walk 20 minutes back to his sister’s home, and spend the day there. He would return in the evening to drink tea in his home. Daytime and evening, he avoided Māghalāha’s tent.

The reason that Mohamad stayed away from Māghalāha’s home – where his father’s brother, Māghalāha’s husband, lived along with his sons and daughters, Mohamad’s close agnates – was the same reason that every other Hassanophone son-in-law, whether his affines’ agnate or not, stayed away from the home of his affines. This reason was the strict modesty code, *hishma*, which dictates shyness and embarrassment around allusion to sexual relations in front of those to whom one owes respect. *Hishma* resembles *hasham*, the modesty code that offers an avenue to honour for male and female dependents amongst the Awlad Ali Bedouin in Egypt, and which has a specific form in a sexual modesty code (Abu-Lughod 1986). Amongst Hassanophones, *hishma* covers not merely explicit words, but also words or actions that imply the occurrence of sex: marriage, henna or its application, bathing (an activity associated with the preparation of a spouse for marriage), and breast-feeding, inter alia. It affects not only relations between affines, but also between kin. For example, a Hassanophone son or daughter may not discuss his or her marital life, potential or actual, face-to-face with his or her father or another senior male relative.

In Abu Lughod's account of *hasham*, 'sexual shame and modesty... is more essential to women than to men' (1986:155). Amongst the Awlad Ali, it is more important for men to master pain, fear, hunger and dependency than sexuality. By contrast, amongst Hassanophones, adherence to *hishma* in the form of sexual modesty is equally, perhaps even more important for men than for women. Hassanophone wives and husbands should feel *hishma* in front of their in-laws, especially senior males. But whereas a wife would be expected to establish an unstrained relationship of interaction with her mother-in-law, as for instance Minetou did with Al'asri's mother, a son-in-law typically never overcomes his *hishma* in front of his mother-in-law and father-in-law (just as a son or daughter never overcomes *hishma* to his or her father). Because he is the sexual partner of their daughter, a husband's very presence in front of his parents-in-law is interpreted to refer to sexual activity. Under ordinary circumstances, a son-in-law adheres to *hishma* by not interacting with his parents-in-law at all: he avoids contact with them as much as possible. If he has to enter their home, he puts on a turban to cover his face except the eyes. If Mohamad ever had to come over to look for Suelma at Māghalāha's, he would only approach wearing a turban to cover his face.

It is by no means only Hassanophones who are affected by the avoidance of affines (e.g., Pans 1998), or by a modesty code such as *hishma* (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986). According to Boulay (2003), *hishma* is especially important for Hassanophones because as tent-dwelling mobile pastoralists, they had to create social barriers to substitute for walls. Yet notably Hassanophones' observance of *hishma* seems extreme, even compared to other mobile pastoralists. Amongst Rwala Bedouin, although a bride does not attend her own marriage contract, the groom does (Lancaster 1981) – but at a Hassanophone marriage contract, neither bride nor groom attends, so as to avoid appearing in front of affines. One Sahrawi interlocutor highlighted the severity of *hishma* by telling me about his friend, a young husband in the refugee camps who was having tea with friends when he heard the approaching voice of his father-in-law. Rather than encounter his father-in-law, the young husband dived out of the window of the mud-brick room and made off.

The constraints of *hishma* were not specific to exile. Khadija recalled the early months of her marriage to Minetou's father, when, before the conflict began, she was still living near her family in the pasturelands. Her husband would visit from the capital of Spanish Sahara, El Ayouné, to where she later moved on making *faskha* and *rḥīl*. Every night during one of her husband's pre-*faskha* visits, Khadija's mother put up a cloth tent for her and her husband to sleep in, to be taken down the next morning and then set up the following night. Each night Khadija – married – would nevertheless begin nights in her family's tent. She would wait for her father to go to sleep, sneak out, go to the marital cloth tent, and sneak back in the morning before her father awoke. Though married, Khadija had to disguise the fact that she was sexually active. The place of the married couple's conjugal union, the cloth tent, was 'erased' every morning so that the place of their union could not even be seen. If there was something novel in exile, then, it was not *hishma* itself, but rather the fact that the period in which the groom lived in '*hishma* alert' – in or adjacent to a household where the only reason for his residence, away from his natal family, was the very sexual activity the foregrounding of

which in that place was an acute embarrassment to all – was prolonged for the duration of the marriage.

If *hishma* is at an extreme amongst Hassanophones (and nowhere more so than for Sahrawi refugees amongst whom grooms live for the duration of marriage next to their affines), might Hassanophones' unusually extreme modesty code provide some purchase for thinking through their unusual post-marital gifts, *faskha*? The intersection of *faskha* and *hishma* as a modesty code partially suppressing acknowledgement of marital sexual relations raises a number of interesting questions. These include the contrast between *ṣadāq* as a prestation that makes sexual relations legal (*ḥalāl*) and *faskha* as a prestation that makes legal-yet-liminal sexual relations licit, as well as the particular importance of *faskha* for Sahrawi refugees in attenuating a prolonged situation of sexuality out of place. These questions fall beyond the scope of what can be examined here. At present, I focus on what might be concealed in *faskha* as gifts.

Hishma alerts us that Hassanophones must situate marital sexual activity at a social distance (whether or not combined with physical distance) from the parents of the bride. This social distance is achieved through a partial breaking of the relations as they have hitherto existed between the bride and her family. In the pasturelands as well as in the Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara this rupture is achieved by the bride physically leaving her natal family. A Hassaniya proverb reflects on how moving to a marital home breaks (at least partially) a woman's connections with her natal family: 'A woman's home is where she brought up her children, not the home where she was brought up.'¹⁴ In exile, Sahrawi brides no longer physically left their families upon marriage. But as we saw with Suelma, marriage still introduced a separation between a married woman and her natal family, even when they were next-door neighbours. Because of *hishma*, a bride could not aspire to share daily interactions with both her husband and her natal family. Missing out on most of the natal family's evening tea (except in snatches when a married daughter might pop over) is but one example of a wider sense in which wives' marital responsibilities separated them from their families. Marriage took wives out of one set of immediate social relations, and placed them into another. That refugees experienced marriage in this way is one reason, I would suggest, that during a husband's absence a refugee wife would shut up her tent and mudbrick rooms and move back in with her mother next door, transferring her domestic labour from one household to the other.

The idea that *faskha* is a prestation that marks a breaking of relations is suggested in the very name. In classical Arabic, the root *f-s-kh* means 'cancel, sever, break'. It might be suggested that the prestation thus marks the cancellation of a debt created by the otherwise unreciprocated *ṣadāq*. Yet in the Hassaniya dialect, *f-s-kh* is used to mean separating that which would otherwise be tightly joined together, such as peeling off sweaty clothes or wresting off a tightly fitting bracelet. More specifically, it is the verb used for giving something precious from close to one's own person, such as a piece of jewellery, to someone whom one wishes to honour such as a guest. This captures in metaphor how for Hassanophones, *faskha* gifts, even as they highlight the honour of the giver who gives away

from very close to the self that which is most precious, mark the separation of that which has been be tightly joined – a daughter and her family.

Faskha gifts emerge, then, as being of particular interest *as* gifts. In addition to performing familiar aspects of gift relations (reciprocity and honour-boosting), *faskha* shows how gifts may combine the making of new relationships, namely between the bride and her affines, with the breaking of other relationships, namely those as they have existed to date between the bride and her family. These dynamics are present in *faskha* in the pasturelands, in urban settings and in exile: across all these contexts, when *faskha* gifts are given at the first encounter of the bride and her family with the groom's family as affines, thereafter the bride's previous closeness to and daily involvement with her natal family is curtailed. The advent of this rupture is sharpest in the pasturelands and in the cities of Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara, where the bride physically moves away. In exile where brides no longer moved away upon marriage, the physical distance was vastly reduced. But the social distance, as we have seen, was still marked. Crucially, in exile the very act of giving *faskha* was made visible (by the fact that *faskha* became the only post-marital prestation). The simultaneous making and breaking of relationships that occurs through *faskha* – long-standing amongst Hassanophones, but easily overlooked until exile made *faskha* visible – makes *faskha* interesting as gifts.

Recalibrating Relationships through Gifts

Gifts preoccupy anthropologists because they are good at making relationships. The 'negative' aspect of gifts, through which anthropologists have explored how gifts can also break relationships, has come to the fore in specific circumstances, such as gift exchange that seeks to exclude potential partners (Bercovitch 1994), 'free gifts' which seek to disguise that there is a gift or a giver at all (Laidlaw 2000), and gifts which perform the work of 'cutting the network' (Strathern 1996) of relatedness (Trautmann 1981; Strathern 1987). Through the ethnographic distinctiveness of their form and context, gifts that break relationships underpin the wider notion of the power of gifts to make relationships. In taking up the case of bride's to groom's party post-marital gifts amongst Hassanophones, I have nevertheless shown that gifts that look Maussian – in that they perform reciprocity, enhance the honour of the giver and make new, here affinal, relationships – may *also* be engaged simultaneously in the work of breaking relationships. Thus a Hassanophone bride's family give *faskha* gifts to mark their willingness to break off a bride's daily relations with her natal family so that she can take on new responsibilities and relations with her affines. The breaking of relationships emerges as a wider part of the work of 'Maussian' gifts than has previously been acknowledged.

If gifts that break relationships have previously been treated as a very specific category of gifts, this is at least in part because theoretical preoccupations not only with reciprocity (Dresch 1998; Strathern 2012), but also with the making of relationships through gifts, have predominated. *Faskha* gifts, however, invite us to reflect not in terms of how gifts make *or*, in

rarer circumstances, break relationships. Rather, a broader dynamic may be at stake whereby the making and breaking of relationships coincides. Gifts can be understood to recalibrate relationships, where recalibration accommodates both the making and the breaking of relationships. In the case of *faskha*, the making and breaking of relationships is intimately related. The breaking off of some relationships creates the social space for the making of new relationships – for Hassanophones a space for the groom's sexuality at a suitable social (if not always physical) distance from his affines.

There are many productive distinctions through which anthropologists have approached gifts and gift relations: gifts make relationships of equality as well as hierarchy; gift relations may stand in contrast to, or overlap with, commodity relations; gifts bespeak volunteerism and obligation; some gifts make relations whilst others avoid or break relationships. Hassanophone post-marital gifts from bride's to groom's party caution against an over-emphasis on making *or* breaking relationships through gifts, and invite us to attend to the ways in which the making *and* breaking of relationships may coincide as gifts recalibrate relationships.

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² For a review of changing discussions of gift relations, see Sykes 2005.

³ ‘Tribe’ is a problematic term in anthropology e.g., see Fried 1975.

⁴ On the Western Sahara conflict, see Zunes and Mundy 2010.

⁵ On population figures for the camps, see Chatty, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Crivello (2010:41).

⁶ In parts of rural Egypt, following the groom’s first gift of marriage gold, the bride’s family send ‘return’ gifts including lamb, fruit, vegetables, flour and rice.

⁷ *Ṣadāq* is used elsewhere in North Africa (see Mir Hosseini 1993). Here I use *ṣadāq* to refer to the prestation made by Hassanophones in fulfilment of *mahr*.

⁸ All names of interlocutors are pseudonyms.

⁹ The refugee camps are named after cities in Western Sahara.

¹⁰ The possibility of widely-sourced contributions means that it is hard to say how much *faskha* costs a family. The amount is likely to be the equivalent of several hundred euros. *Faskha* gifts were remembered or discussed as expensive for the bride’s family both in exile and beyond.

¹¹ A refugee bride relied on the *mahr* gifts from her husband to equip her home. Thus *mahr* in exile changed in content from pre-exile times (see Wilson 2016).

¹² Whether settled in cities or in refugee camps, Sahrawis have modified their marriage prestations, albeit in different ways.

¹³ On the relationship of hospitality to gift-giving, see Candea and Da Col 2012.

¹⁴ Hassanophone wives may nevertheless still claim protection from their families in the case of marital strife.