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Between Morality and Rationality: An Analysis of Interpersonal Economics in Rural Ireland

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Abstract: Social scientists interested in peasant societies have tried to make sense of their economies in terms of the "political" and "moral" economy paradigms. It is the aim of this paper to assess critically the applicability of such models to the informal sector of Irish family farms and, in so doing, to postulate the necessity of a different theoretical approach. The simplistic dichotomy between "rational" and "moral" behaviour is shown to fall short of a satisfactory account of economic relationships in this particular context. The complex intersection of different forms of rationality on an Irish family farm, half-way between peasant and capitalist agricultural producers, calls for newer and less rigid hypotheses.

I INTRODUCTION

The particular type of social behaviour that we define as "economic" has been over-analysed and rationalised by such a powerful social science as economic theory. Even though the task of economic anthropology can be said to lie in the understanding of economic practices *beyond* the logic of market rationality, the research of economic anthropologists very often has to be carried out within a jungle of non-anthropological competitors. This is especially clear for those of us who have chosen to work in western Europe. Precisely because in this particular context, there does not seem to be any significant economic activity beyond the rationality of the market.

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The aim of this paper is to look at some aspects of the economic behaviour of western Irish farmers and to problematise the concept of moral economy as regards the specificity of their mode of production. Taking kinship and neighbourhood as the social spaces that culturally resituate that economic behaviour, my first point will be that the definition of kinship and neighbourhood as moral universes precludes us from a simplistic application of an individualistic methodology. The investment logic characteristic of market transactions cannot be extrapolated to other social spheres, because in so doing we overlook the distinctive social framework incorporated by their specific system of exchanges. At the same time, I will also argue that there is a material basis for those moral universes, that there are material consequences derived from the implementation or failure to implement their idiosyncratic ethos, and that these material consequences result from the flow of material exchanges that circulate within their respective sphere of transactions. Still, the contradiction between morality and rational individualism will be left somehow inconclusive; a third possibility will be suggested on the basis of data provided by ethnographic research.

My theoretical and methodological framework is that of social and cultural anthropology. The data were obtained between 1990 and 1991 during 15 months of participant observation in a community of middle-sized family farmers in east Co. Galway (average land holding: 56.9 acres). Intensive qualitative research allows no claims to any general applicability of one's findings beyond the group of families that were under scrutiny, but it permits a better understanding of the social and cultural texture embedded in economic activities. What I present in this article is not so much the analysis of a new type of economic relations, but rather a new form of analysis of a well-known, if not old, socio-economic formation. My objective is also, to some extent, to build a model, or maybe to suggest the possibility of working with a model with the insight provided by an anthropological perspective. But this is a model that will attempt to grasp the cultural specificity of western Irish farmers' mode of production. At the same time, I will try to think of this cultural specificity as the particular combination of more general patterns characteristic of non-market rationalities in a context of social and economic change.

II THE WEST OF IRELAND AND PEASANT POLITICS

The farming communities of the west of Ireland are in a process of rapid social change. In fact, they have been going through this process for quite a long time; but according to the people's historical memory, it looks like a relatively recent phenomenon. Everybody agrees that rural society is no

longer what it used to be and, furthermore, that it will not continue to remain as it is now. The past seems to be definitely lost in a cloud of confusing and contradictory accounts, idealised and abhorred at the same time. The future is imagined by means of current ideologies of modernisation that foresee urbanisation and industrialisation, mercilessly devouring the traditional rural economy. And in between there is the ambiguous present situation, in which a persistently dwindling community of family farms strives to make a living amidst the esoteric dictates of the Common Agricultural Policy and the world economy.

It might be because of this uncertain panorama that the farmers of the west of Ireland do not seem to fit well into ordinary sociological and anthropological categories. To consider them equivalent to the fully fledged capitalist farmers from England, and maybe the eastern regions, would definitely be inaccurate; to see them on an equal footing with Third World peasant societies does not look entirely appropriate either. It is true, on the other hand, that anthropologists working in Europe do not hesitate when it comes to defining their subjects as "peasants"; perhaps because they are interested, for comparative purposes, in approaching (conceptually) their subjects to those analysed by their collegues in more underdeveloped countries. But I have my doubts about the suitability of such a category in what concerns western Irish farmers, even if it is just because they themselves use it only in a pejorative sense. Perhaps this paper will show how inappropriate the term "peasantry" can be when applied not only to western Irish farmers but also to western European agricultural producers in general.

Rural sociologists, on the other hand, who are probably less interested in "primitivising" their object of research, have conversely stressed the increasing commoditisation of social relations in European "post-peasant" economies. Unlike industry, agricultural development usually implies a process of externalisation which multiplies commodity relations (Van der Ploeg, 1986, p. 35; see also Curtin, 1986 and Leeuwis, 1989 for the development of the derived concept of "incorporation"). But in many places that process of externalisation does not seem to have reached its final stage, where the traditional peasant self-sufficiency has been fully replaced by a "putting-out system". In these conditions, when there are still factors of production, especially a remarkable amount of human labour, that circulate outside the market sphere, an ambivalent space of economic practices thrives between two different, if not antagonistic, value systems. It is precisely this notion of ambivalence between capitalists and peasants or simply non-capitalists that will somehow constitute the springboard of my argument.

As a matter of fact, and from another point of view, ambivalence can also be considered as an idiosyncratic characteristic of the peasantry itself, half-way between modern industrial societies and the "primitives" or tribal peoples (Wolf, 1966). That is why, interestingly, some of the debates that have taken place among students of peasant cultures turn out to be particularly relevant to the present discussion. I do not want to go into any detail on this subject except for a very concrete question, which I will try to present in the most straightforward terms.

In the 1970s, the actuality of peasant revolutions in South-east Asia aroused the interest of American political scientists. The possibility of peasant political action had been dismissed by traditional Marxist theory, since peasants were thought to be no more than "potatoes in a sack" (Marx, 1987, p. 332) with no capacity for collective organisation. Nevertheless, at that time they appeared to be closer to overturning the capitalist world economy than did the industrial proletariat. But what was the real nature of a "peasant revolution"? What made peasants rise up against their oppressors, it was argued, could not be understood without a proper analysis of peasant society and culture, in particular, the specificity of those economic institutions that constituted the backbone of peasants' social and political consciousness. Received political theory did not seem to provide adequate analytical tools for this type of enquiry.

From here the concept of "moral economy" started to take shape, a concept conspicuously pregnant with anthropological overtones. The moral economy of the peasantry, as it was analysed in Scott's seminal work (1976, cf. Thompson, 1971), clearly incorporated the theoretical antithesis of capitalism. The very idea that the economy could be "moral" explicitly contradicts the most fundamental characteristic of the capitalist ethos, that defines itself precisely as liberated from the jurisdiction of morals (Dumont, 1977, pp. 61-81). Thus, an economic system predicated upon the concepts of individualism, selfishness, profit-maximising attitudes, etc., found its counterpart in the communitarian and altruistic values of the re-discovered peasantry.

Although "moral economists" took great pains to make their arguments sophisticated, they carried the danger of a romantic idealisation of peasant societies that did not escape their critics. Shortly after the publication of Scott's study, Popkin retorted with another analysis of peasant politics in South-east Asia with the very meaningful title of "The Rational Peasant" (1979). Methodological individualism was substituted here for the "moral economy approach" to peasant society. Theories of individual decision making and individual choice were used for the interpretation of peasant institutions in an analogous fashion to the analysis of ordinary market

economies. "Instead of an investment logic for markets, on the one hand, and a normative logic for villages and patron-client relations, on the other", Popkin claimed that, "there is a similar investment logic for both situations" (p. 244). He was very explicit, however, when it came to distancing his approach from that of free-market economics. His was "political economy" and not "market economics", since this latter overlooks the socio-political context in which peasants' economic behaviour takes place.

The necessity of making sense out of a very concrete historical situation — peasant insurgency in South-east Asia — sparked off this controversy between "moral" and "political" economists. But still, it remains clear that the general theoretical background upon which it developed has important implications for the conceptualisation of economic behaviour in a non-market context. For moral economists, economic action in peasant societies has a normative character; it has to be understood as the implementation of a moral rule with complete disregard for the interests of the individual, otherwise it will appear to us as utterly irrational. For political economists, by contrast, it is the primacy of the individual's interests and his/her strategically oriented behaviour that deserve the utmost attention, taking into account the important qualification that those individual interests include both economic and socio-political dividends.

III THE "MORAL ECONOMY" OF FAMILY FARMERS

None of these models in their most simplistic formulation — which, certainly, does not do full justice to their actual complexity — seemed to be consistent with my observations among western Irish farmers, especially in relation to their non-market economic relations. Even though the farming communities of the west of Ireland are deeply integrated into the world market economy, they undoubtedly participate in the individualistic and profit-maximising ethos that characterises all capitalist societies, they still have a substantial sphere of non-commodity transactions. According to my data (cf. Hannan, 1972 and 1979),[1] despite the increasing importance of work done by agricultural contractors, non-market economic relations are basically found among middle-sized farmers in what concerns the organisation of the labour processes. This is what is normally defined as the sphere of "informal co-operation". Even though I lack the required quantitative evidence, I would suspect that it is precisely among this type of agricultural producers, those who are neither very big nor very small,

1. See also the debate between Hannan (1979) and Cuddy and Curtin (1983) about the hypothetical existence of a "natural economy" in rural Ireland before the Second World War.

that informal co-operation develops more intensively.[2] And it is in this domain of economic relations that neither the moral economy nor the political economy approaches provided, in my view, an entirely satisfactory perspective.

Yet at the same time, both of them hint at important attributes of that sphere of non-commodity transactions. Farmers exchange all sorts of different services and products on a regular basis without taking any account of what is given for what. No customary regulation seems to rule this unsystematic flow of exchanges but a diffuse norm of generalised reciprocity. In the absence of explicit contractual agreements, there is a certain feeling of moral bonding that obliges one to reciprocate the help that one has obtained. It is a feeling of moral bonding that never seems to harden into a precise normative conduct, though. On the other hand, it would not be difficult to work out an underlying "investment logic" in all those informal transactions, especially if we take a long-term perspective (Bloch, 1973). But to look for surreptitious strategic attitudes behind an apparently normative or quasi-normative behaviour is always a tricky endeavour.

In any case, I should make it clear that on closer examination those unsystematic exchanges turned out to be less so. Generalised reciprocity always presupposes the existence of a social framework that sanctions the development of an otherwise arbitrary gift-giving. A first approach to the nature of this social framework in the farming communities of the west of Ireland can be represented in a very simple model. By and large, farmers seemed to co-operate informally only with people falling into at least two of the following categories: relatives, neighbours and farmers. That is to say, they would mainly co-operate with people who were either relatives and neighbours, relatives and farmers, neighbours and farmers or all three at the same time. The explanation runs as follows.

Relations of generalised reciprocity, as opposed to contractual agreements, do not involve any fixed and predeterminate form of payment. But what they certainly involve, however, is an expectation that some form of counter-service will flow in the long run. That is why a trust bond constitutes the basis of a relation of generalised reciprocity. The question we have to answer now is how such expectation is created. A farmer can

2. Even though Hannan's initial research on rural communities in Ireland remarked on the replacement of the more communal orientation of earlier times by interests in personal gain and individual family advancement (1972, p. 181), he also noted how the disintegrating mutual aid system had given rise in many cases to dyadic or triadic alliances amongst the more commercialised farmers and to the strengthening of a more widely scattered kin group (p. 182).

easily reciprocate the help he received from another farmer, since both are engaged in the same type of work, but two or more farmers will very rarely co-operate unless they happen to be also neighbours or relatives. It is easy to understand why. Were I to help a farmer who did not live in my neighbourhood I would have few possibilities of getting back any assistance from him, since he would probably not travel too long a distance just to reciprocate my help. So the expectation of getting my return would be very low. Now, if the man is not my neighbour but happens to be my relative he might not travel that distance either, but there is already a circulation of reciprocal services between the two of us and our respective families: we exchange gifts at every rite of passage, we visit each other on Sunday afternoons, we might borrow money from each other, we might help each other in situations of family crisis, etc. Therefore, I can draw upon the already existing system of exchanges in order to "get paid" for the help I offered. The expectation of getting my return is, consequently, higher. But what would happen then if the man who is helping on my farm were a relative but not a farmer? There would already be a system of exchanges linking the two of us as kin or affines. But that would not suffice to guarantee that I would have enough opportunities to return the help I was getting from him *on my farm*. He would have then a low expectation of having his help reciprocated. That is, unless there was something more to it: unless he was a neighbour too. Similarly to kinship, neighbourhood provides another system of off-farm reciprocal exchanges: babysitting services, lifts to town, any type of domestic assistance, visiting, etc. Therefore, the combination of those two systems of reciprocities, those involved in kinship and those involved in neighbourhood, increases the likelihood that the help I got from my neighbour relative on my farm can be reciprocated.

It is apparent from this that the farm provides a space for reciprocal exchanges and social interaction. But this space can only be operative, as far as relations of generalised reciprocity are concerned, if it acts in combination with other two similar spaces, neighbourhood and kinship. Left on its own, that is to say, without the complement of those two sets of social relations, the farm would lose much of its social character, it would become a purely economic entity that could relate to its subjects only through contractual agreements, the same as any other capitalist business. Conversely, kinship and neighbourhood provide a social space for a particular type of economic activity: farm work. But they can only be operative, as far as that economic activity is concerned, if they act in combination with each other, or in combination with the space provided by the farm itself. Left on their own, they would lose much of their economic

significance, as happens with kinship and neighbourhood in the rest of capitalist society.

Underlying the capacity of the farm to assimilate, so to speak, different sets of social relations, there is the propensity of farm labour to circulate within social spheres that we would not normally associate with the economy. In so doing, the economic nature of farm work seems to become more and more confused into different orders of non-economic transactions and, at the same time, those non-economic transactions become generously pervaded by a certain sense of economic logic. This is what, in the last instance, turns the farm into the meeting point of different types of "rationalities", economic or otherwise. As Mendras has argued, "on the family farm everything is both social and economic, and purchases of a tractor, a refrigerator, or a washing machine are all made according to the same procedure, allowing no opportunity for the economist to impose his point of view." (1970, p. 87).

This de-economisation of farm work also has another significant consequence: it enables the farm to absorb and to become fused into the cultural specificity of its social milieu. Even though the model that I have just outlined has been couched in very abstract terms, it is important to note that the relevance of kinship and neighbourhood as social frameworks for a specific set of productive relations cannot be taken as a universal fact. On the contrary, it is widely accepted that the so-called "amoral familism" of rural societies foils in other cultural contexts the possibility of co-operative links between un-related neighbours (Banfield, 1958; Campbell, 1964) — despite the strong theoretical and methodological criticism that such a concept has received (Silverman, 1968). Similarly, kinship and affinity do not always suit the implementation of economic functions, as Ott has observed among Basque shepherds (1981, p.61; cf. Abrahams, 1984, pp. 114-115).[3]

The above model has very little meaning unless we refer it to the particular cultural features of western Irish farmers. Thus, the principle of unigeniture in what concerns the inheritance of the family agricultural land, coupled with the widespread practice of offering a building site to non-inheriting children, gives rise to the proliferation of what we could call "extended family neighbourhoods": a farmer is very likely to have some of his brothers' or sisters' non-farming families living nearby. Hence the overlapping of kinship and neighbourhood is not merely a coincidence but

3. According to Hannan and Katsiaouni, despite all the "modernising" changes that have been affecting Irish rural communities for so long, the primary ascriptive groups of kinship and neighbourhood still constitute the most significant networks of interaction (Hannan and Katsiaouni, 1977, pp. 86-87).

the result of a distinctive inheritance practice. Similarly, a remarkable pattern of local exogamy combined with occupational endogamy — farmers usually marry farmers' daughters from other parishes — extends affinity bonds beyond the limit of one's vicinity, so that the existence of those affinity bonds in non-neighbouring farmers appears in this case as the outcome of a specific marriage custom.

A case study will help us put a bit of flesh and blood into this somewhat arid discussion. But before that, it is worth having a closer look at the meaning of kinship and neighbourhood in their role of social frameworks for the farm economy.

IV MORALITY AND RECIPROCITY

The possibility that kinship and neighbourhood might fulfil this particular function stems directly from their capacity to constitute themselves as moral universes. It is from this "moralistic" point of view that the sphere of transactions distinctive of those two social domains cannot be too hastily subsumed under an investment or profit-maximising logic. Within one's kindred or neighbourhood there is a specific set of rights and obligations that does not apply to outsiders. This is what classical anthropological theory defined as "amity" or "prescriptive altruism" for the kinship sphere (Fortes, 1969, pp. 219-249, who explicitly referred to its possible extension to neighbourhood relationships (pp. 242-245)). Following Young and Willmott's study of east London (1986), Fortes explained this moral character in terms of the ascriptive character of kinship bonds (p.242). Because I do not relate to my kin out of my own will but simply because they are my kin, we can have full confidence in each other since we are not linked by any particular interest; our relationship is beyond our will.[4]

Let us see now the qualities of these moral universes as regards their respective "spheres of exchange". The logic that underlies the exchange of gifts as opposed to the exchange of commodities corresponds to what

4. It is true, on the other hand, that Fortes, and anthropological theory on kinship in general terms, defines the specificity of the kinship bond in opposition to affinity. The extent to which affinity stems out of a marriage *contract* seems to exclude it from the sphere of ascriptive relationships. It should be noted, however, that this contractual character affects the link between husband and wife, but it appears as much less definitive in what concerns the relationships of each partner with his/her respective in-laws. The fact that I relate to my in-laws has to be explained in terms of the kinship — and, therefore, ascriptive — bond that links them to my wife, despite the contractual nature of the bond that links me to my wife. Furthermore, the affective content encapsulated in a marriage bond sets it quite apart from any other form of ordinary contractual relationship. I shall return to this.

anthropologists call "generalised reciprocity", following Sahlins's elegant theorisation (1972). When goods and services circulate freely between people who do not expect anything in return for what they give there is the notion that mutual debts will balance out in the long term. The combination of Sahlins's theory with the moralistic perspective argued by Fortes suggests the possibility of establishing a scale that would go from "pure" contractual relationships, including both commodity exchanges and barter, to "pure" moral links. At the one extreme we would have all those exchanges that do not entail any moral bond between the parties; monetary transactions would figure prominently among them.[5] Somewhere in the middle we would find all the different gradations of "reciprocal exchanges" in which some feeling of delayed returns is not entirely absent, so that they cannot be understood as merely the result of a moral duty; but at the same time, the parties are not entitled to offer their services in the expectation that they are going to be reciprocated (Pitt-Rivers, 1971, p. 139), so there is in them some sense of moral obligation as well. Finally, at the other extreme we would have those transactions that take place simply as the implementation of moral responsibilities and for which no counter-service is in any form envisaged. Therefore, the degree to which a specific service is offered with some expectation of reciprocity, or the degree to which it is offered out of a moral obligation, would help us to place each particular transaction between the two poles of the spectrum.

The morality of kinship and neighbourhood that I could see in operation among the family farmers of the west of Ireland was of a very special sort. It was far from the universalistic character that, according to social philosophers, should distinguish all moral precepts.[6] It had a very apparent material dimension that somehow reminded me of the relevance of individual interests, that somehow evoked a disguised "investment logic". But to reduce it to a mere long-term maximising rationality appears to me as a cunning simplification that misses important elements of human experience. In what follows I will present a very brief case study that will illustrate some of the points that have already been developed. Perhaps the dramatic intensity of an ordinary event might help us to reformulate more clearly our theoretical predicaments.

5. Cf. Macfarlane's analysis of the "ammoral" character of money as "the root of all evil" (1987, pp. 98-122; cf. Bloch and Parry, 1989, pp. 17-19).

6. Cf. Campbell's assertion that the values of honour and prestige among the Sarakatsani "have a moral content of their own but they cannot be referred to any universal moral principle" (1964, p. 317).

V HAY TIME IN THE WEST OF IRELAND

This case-study was recorded in a farming community of County Galway, during the hay harvest of the summer of 1990. The hay harvest is such an important event in the farming communities of the west of Ireland that it really looks as if making hay is what farming is all about to them. The hay harvest turns out to be a catalyst for social engagements of unparalleled intensity and transcendence. For the hay harvest, anyone who happens to be around will be recruited: farmers and non-farmers, men and women, children and elders, neighbours, relatives, strangers, anthropologists, are all thrown into the hay field. The result is a rich and complex mixture of social relations: informal co-operation, contractual agreements, kinship obligations, good neighbourliness. It seems to me that the hay harvest can be taken as a kind of synecdoche of the social world of the farming communities of the west of Ireland, a singular event endowed with the strange capacity to materialise in a few weeks, maybe in a few days, all the intricacies of a particular social structure.

In the summer of 1990, the hay harvest of my neighbour Joe Maloney[7] validated in the apparent simplicity of a prosaic episode the complexity of all those cross-cutting connotations. Joe is a full-time farmer with 45 acres of land; he is married and has four children aged between 12 and 3 years. For the hay he usually gets the help of his friend and next-door neighbour Seán Rabbitte, a young bachelor and part-time farmer. That summer, however, Seán was not available. The weather had been very good thus far, but heavy showers in a few days had been forecast, so everybody in the parish was suffering from "hay madness". Networks of reciprocity were put to their limit; some of them were broken, new ones created. To save the hay was the top priority at the time, at whatever cost.

But Joe found himself collecting the bales on his own, with the help only of his wife and his eldest son. To pick up bales of hay is a tough job; they have to be lifted with a fork and thrown into a trailer, where somebody has to build them up. Even though Joe's wife and the child were doing their best, the work was advancing very slowly, much to Joe's distress. In the meantime, Pádraig Kelly, Joe's foster brother who also happens to live just a few yards from him, was coming home from work at half past five every evening without paying too much attention to his neighbour's sufferings, and not entirely because he is not fond of farm work. Pádraig is a factory worker, married as well with three little children, and reared on the same family farm as Joe. Enthusiastic as he always was for the things of the farm, he inherited only a building site from his foster father; Joe got the

7. All proper names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

farm. Very bitter feelings have arisen between the two men ever since.

Despite this bad relationship between Joe and Pádraig, their two respective wives, Máire and Teresa, get along extremely well. They baby-sit for each other now and again and have lots of cups of tea together every day. While Máire has a driving licence, Teresa does not, so the latter gets lifts from the other whenever she wants; this is very important in isolated settlements. Maybe it was this well-established relationship of good friendship and domestic reciprocities that triggered off the concern of Pádraig's wife for what was going on. "It is a sin to see our neighbours killing themselves at the fields and not give them any help", she would repeat now and again, with no positive answer from Pádraig. But sometimes she would adopt a more conciliatory tone, "and then again we are not farmers, you see, we are independent and we owe nothing to them. It's time for them to do a bit of work, all year round sitting back while we are working every day!" In any case, whatever changes of mood she might show, probably just a device to get around Pádraig's assertive patriarchalism, she was perfectly aware of her increasingly delicate situation. She had become the precarious link between two antagonistic moral universes: her husband's and her friend's husband's.

It was a fragile tie that was about to break if those moral universes fell too violently apart. The following Saturday the two women were supposed to go to mass together. Teresa phoned her neighbour to ask her about it, but one of Máire's sons said that she was not in. "But she must be in since the car is at the door", Teresa observed. That Saturday, Máire was not going to give her any lift. Whatever the reason for it was, the important thing to note here is her own personal interpretation. "That's it, see, we didn't help them for the hay, now I couldn't go to mass." In her understanding of the situation, there was a unique circuit of reciprocities linking the two households wherein farm labour, domestic services, friendship and neighbourhood relationships of whatever kind all mixed together and were mutually exchangeable, in such a way that the breaking of that circuit by any of its components, farm labour in this case, would inevitably stop the normal flow of the rest.

Fortunately, things did not go all that far. The next day Joe realised that he could not manage only with the help of his wife and son, so he decided to ask Pádraig explicitly for help. Confronted by his foster brother's explicit request, there was no way Pádraig could refuse it if he really did not want to provoke a very serious estrangement between the two of them. He was even thinking of taking a day off from the factory to work with Joe. In a few days he would have his summer holidays and he would certainly not feel like working then. "When you are at home all day

you cannot avoid helping." So for the following three days Pádraig went to the hay field as soon as he came home from the factory. And an immediate reactivation of the circulation of reciprocities between the two households ensued. While the two men were working together with the help of Joe's wife, Teresa did the baby-sitting of the small children for the two families. (Before that they had been with the old couple, Joe and Pádraig's foster parents.) Furthermore, on Wednesday, when the women of the parish usually go to bingo, the two women went together in Máire's car.

VI ROOM FOR THE INTIMATE

That was the social framework of the farm economy in operation. Case-study analysis is a time-honoured research tool in social and cultural anthropology with not many adherents among the rest of the social scientists. But when it is meaningfulness rather than generality that we are looking for it turns out to be an irreplaceable technique to grasp the intricacies of social interaction. Let us have a quick glimpse at the radiography of that social framework. At this concrete level, it certainly turns out to be slightly more complex than it looked in the abstract model. We have, on the one hand, relations of good neighbourhood qualified by a loose bond of fictive kinship (fosterage) linking the two men, Joe and Pádraig. On the other, we have the same relation of good neighbourhood coupled with an even looser tie of what we could define as "fictive affinity" linking the two women, Máire and Teresa. In both of these situations we could claim that there is a certain feeling of moral duty derived from the intersection of two sets of social relations, kinship and neighbourhood, two sets of social relations that should also be understood as moral universes. But it is a moral duty that incorporates very different emotional contents and, furthermore, a difference that seems to be inversely correlated with the presence of the (fictive) kinship bond. Máire and Teresa, only fictive affines, keep on good terms; whereas Joe and Pádraig, foster brothers, have a very cool relationship. This emotional dimension, on the other hand, is even more apparent in the tie that, in turn, links the two men with the two women: marriage. It is because Teresa is married to Pádraig and Máire to Joe that the contingencies of the relationship between the two foster brothers reverberate on the set of reciprocities linking the two women: Máire did not get her lift because her husband did not help Joe.

It could be argued from this that the economic relation that enabled Joe to save his hay has an undeniable moral nature. But to understand this economic relation as an instance of a moral economy should not make us

overlook the capacity of such a relation to act as an "emotional container", so to speak. Because, in the last instance, that emotional content decisively determined the actual possibility of the economic transaction between the two foster brothers. Pádraig was under a moral obligation to help Joe with the hay harvest. But the bitter feelings that exist between the two men, and that prevented Pádraig from giving a hand to his foster brother in the first place, cannot be deduced from that moral duty. I have suggested that Pádraig's dis-inheritance from the family land has certainly contributed to that animosity. But in a system of unigeniture, such as that prevailing in the west of Ireland, there is dis-inheritance from the family land at every generational replacement, and this does not necessarily lead to the breakdown of all relationships between siblings! In other words, what I am trying to suggest is that the hostility between the two foster brothers cannot be understood without considering the emotional side of all long-standing and intimate relations. It is a hostility that, interestingly, was always explained to me in terms of the lack of a blood tie.

On the other hand, we could cynically claim that the pressure exercised by Máire on her husband, although couched in a moral language ("it is a sin to see our neighbours killing themselves at the fields and not give them any help"), was in actual fact motivated by her interest in maintaining a good relationship with Joe's wife. But why did Pádraig give in to his wife's persuasion? Because he did not want to strain the stability of his own marriage by putting at risk his wife's friendship with Máire? Because he eventually felt the moral duty that obliges him to help his neighbour and foster brother? Or maybe the moral duty that compels him to keep his wife happy no matter what? Again, we realise that the dichotomy normative/strategical does not exhaust all the possibilities of human behaviour.

This dichotomy normative/strategical reverberates in other well-established oppositions in social theory that are now being put into question: contract/status, gift/commodities, community/association, individualism/collectivism, etc. All of them, to some extent, are derived from the now much-criticised discrimination between tradition and modernity. In what way does the present discussion help overcome such time-honoured polarities? In the foregoing account I have been emphasising the importance of the emotional side in the social relationships under study. Structural analysis in social anthropology (both British and French) has always been at pains to cast away the sphere of personal emotions and sentiments as merely "psychological" variables, inimical to the undisputed sociological method that lies at the heart of anthropological theory (cf. Rosaldo, 1993, pp. 59sq.). It is not my intention to vindicate the need for introducing some form of psychological bias into the analysis of social

relationships, but merely to open the space for a deeper (sociological) understanding of the economic behaviour we have been looking at in the previous paragraphs.

For this purpose, I will borrow Cheal's concept of "structures of intimacy" (1988, pp. 106sq.), a concept that he developed in his study of the gift economy in a Canadian urban community. Cheal criticises Mauss's failure to distinguish between what he calls structures of community and structures of intimacy as regards the moral economy of gift transactions. It is a distinction that has to do with the way in which the individual feels compelled to give gifts. The gift offered under a community structure is always the result of an overarching moral norm, originating either in neighbourhood, kinship, religious community, etc. But nothing of that exists when the gift circulates within a structure of intimacy; in this case, it can be seen only as the consequence of a personal attachment, independent of any group norm. "Moral individualism" is the expression Cheal uses to characterise the logic of this type of transactions (p. 173). Gifts exchanged by lovers on Valentine's Day constitute a good example.

Even though Cheal is dealing mainly with "ritual" transactions that have little to do with the sphere of informal co-operation that I am interested in, I think that his distinction between community and intimacy is particularly relevant to my argument. There is, we could claim, a sphere of transactions, or a sphere of human behaviour in general terms, that cannot be subsumed either to an individualistic profit-maximising rationality or to a collectivistic normative logic. This is what we could loosely define as the domain of the emotional, radically distinguished from the principles of economic rationality but, at the same time, with an indisputable individualistic imprint that sets it well apart from any moral or normative sphere. Nothing terribly original has been said so far. That human beings can be sentimental, in the same way as they are rational and moral, should be no surprise to anyone. The important thing to point out here is not the suitability of a psychology of emotions to make sense out of this "sentimental logic", but the existence of a particular *social structure* that turns personal sentiments into socially relevant attitudes. We need to know more about the specific characteristics of these social structures in different cultural and historical contexts. In any case, Cheal's gift economy is one example of it, and I believe that informal co-operation among western Irish farmers is another one. In this case, those personal sentiments turn out to be not just socially but *economically* relevant, since they form a constitutive ingredient of a specific set of productive relations.

VII CONCLUSION

The "post-peasant" character of the farming communities of the west of Ireland puts their mode of production in an uncomfortable conceptual space. If we take the moral nature of peasant economies as a theoretical hypothesis (i.e., the empirical refutation of which does not affect the validity of our argument), we can claim then that the farm economy of the west of Ireland has lost its moral constitution because western Irish farmers are no longer peasants, they are simple or petty commodity producers well integrated into the world capitalist market. But at the same time, they do not fully participate in the capitalist rationality since their productive process has not been fully commoditised; they still have a substantial sphere of non-commodity transactions that cannot be merely subsumed under an "investment logic". To unravel the specific logic of this sphere of non-market relationships, we have taken two steps. First, we have identified the spheres of exchange that intersect the informal economy of family farmers: kinship and neighbourhood. Second, we have analysed the nature of those spheres as they constitute the social framework for a particular set of productive relations. A case-study analysis has suggested that the economic behaviour predicated upon these relations of production could not be fully understood on the basis of the dichotomy between normative and rational action. The concept of "sentimental action" has been somehow advanced as a possible third way.

Undoubtedly, further research will be required to turn into a more definitive argument what at this stage appears as a kind of theoretical intimation. And yet some preliminary conclusions should be advanced even if they are only to serve as a stimulus to that effect. There are some social structures or even, as in our case, productive relations, that make personal sentiments socially and economically relevant. To reduce those personal sentiments and emotions to "long-term" individualistic interests, or to see them as more or less abortive expressions of moral codes, makes us blind to the genuine meaning of this type of human experience. To disregard the emotional content of human behaviour in a particular social setting prevents us from distinguishing the specific nature of this social setting — in other words, inhibits the perception and understanding of a different form of social relationship and blocks the possibility of monitoring its economic effects. My belief is that in rural Ireland, and probably in much of rural Western Europe, this form of social relationship results from the combined effect of a vanishing "moral economy" system with a not fully dominant "market economics" rationality. We need to know more about the internal characteristics of economies in transition, and particularly, about

the role of specific social relations and cultural traditions in shaping changing economic contexts.

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