Kinship, Neighbourhood and Social Change in Irish Rural Communities

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RURAL communities in the West of Ireland, even in the most remote and most traditional areas, have experienced immense social organisational and cultural changes during the past twenty years. Indeed, in many respects, these changes appear more fundamental than any occurring in the previous century. Although the population of these farming communities had declined rapidly and continuously from 1841 onwards, so that they had only roughly one-quarter of their initial population left by 1951,[1] and although a massive land redistribution policy had been implemented, it seems very likely that there was a strong underlying continuity in the culture and social structures of these communities right up to the end of the second world war. Certainly there was very little alteration in these external factors which could have brought about change. The economy was still largely of a subsistence peasant nature even by 1951. Farm technology was still almost exclusively based on a plentiful supply of manual labour and on horses and donkeys, while modern innovations in communication and transportation were still barely introduced.

Thus Arensberg and Kimball's description of the system of relationships and of the beliefs and values of the small farmers of County Clare in the early 1930s seems in many respects to have been characteristic of the social organisation and culture of the small subsistence farmers in the West of Ireland communities from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[2] Even a casual reading of the autobiographies of Peig Sayers, Tomás Ó Criomhthain, or Muiris Ó Súilleabháin,[3]

[1] *Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems*, 1948-1954, *Reports*. Stationery Office, pp. 10–12.

[2] Arensberg, C., and S. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, Harvard University Press, 1940; and Arensberg, C., *The Irish Countryman*, Macmillan, 1937.

[3] Peig Sayers, *Peig*, Talbot Press, 1936; Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *An tOileánach*, Stationery Office, 1929; Muiris Ó Suilleabháin, *Fiche Blian ag Fás*, Talbot Press, 2nd Edition, 1933.

for instance, reveal elements of the same sort of social system—viz., a closed, highly locality-bound, intimate set of relationships rooted in family, kinship and neighbourhood ties; a very limited involvement in the market economy and a very low level of living, unaccompanied, however, by any feelings of deprivation since the standards expected were also low and locally autonomous; and a distinctive but very rigid set of traditional beliefs and values.[4]

Some major changes in social organisation and consequent changes in culture must have occurred between 1885 and 1905 as a result of the three Land Acts which transformed over quarter of a million tenants into peasant proprietors.[5] Most of these land transfers seems to have occurred without disturbing previous settlement patterns. However, in many areas of the West the break-up of the bigger estates, when combined with the massive decline in population, led to the destruction of the previous village or *clochán* type of settlement, as well as to the transformation of local social class relationships. The narrowing of class differences due to the elimination of landlord-tenant relationships and of the differences in the various categories of tenants and owners; the sudden decline in occupations dependent on the "big house"—house servants, coachmen, horsemen, gardeners, yardmen, ordinary labourers, etc.; the local rearrangement of previous locality groupings that accompanied the land redistribution and resettlement programmes; and even the provision of new and greatly improved housing for the resettled farmers, must have brought about some major changes in the composition of locality groups and transformed many of the relationships amongst many of its members. However, if we restrict consideration to the relationships amongst the small farmers themselves such external changes are unlikely to have had any remarkable influence in transforming their relationships with each other. Indeed peasant ownership must have greatly strengthened important trends already there—viz., the identification of the family with the land, the importance of "the match" in linking two kinship groups where each family's resources were now more rigidly circumscribed than under a tenant system; patriarchicalism, where ownership gave such stronger sanctions to the father than under tenant right, etc.

Despite the lack of evidence, therefore, it could be argued that there was no fundamental change in the social organisation or culture up to the end of the second world war. Indeed any examination of the "external" factors which might have brought about such changes—e.g., the local economy, farm technology, transport and communication, etc.—shows that there was no dramatic change in these until after the second world war. Although there was a gradually increasing involvement in the market economy from the very minimal levels described by Peig Sayers to be true of the small farmers of Corcha Duibhne in the 1870's—

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[4] Some disagreements with the accuracy and generality of the kinship description have been expressed by other anthropologists, notably Robin Fox, "Kinship and Land Tenure on Tory Island", *Ulster Folklore*, 12, 1966, pp. 1–17; and Eileen Kane, "Man and Kin in Donegal: . . .", *Ethnology*, 1968, pp. 245–258.

[5] Freeman, T. W., *Ireland: A General and Regional Geography*, Methuen, London, 1990.

when tea was still an occasional luxury and the purchase of the first pair of shoes for the growing child a major rite of passage—even by the middle 1950s the typical weekly shopping-basket of most farm housewives would not have included much beyond the main staples: tea, sugar, flour, an occasional loaf, Sunday morning rashers, and an occasional purchase of fresh meat, etc. Although all clothes and shoes would have been purchased, a new set would have had to last a long time and their purchase the occasion of a major trip to the bigger local market town.

On the production side, although there was a cumulative increase in farm machinery on individual farms from the middle of the nineteenth century—so decreasing the dependence on labour previously supplied by reciprocal exchanges within the local mutual aid groups—this technology was still primarily horse-based. Indeed even by 1951 the ratio of agricultural tractors to holdings over 15 acres for the country as a whole was only 1 : 15, while for Connacht it was a mere 1 : 45, while there was nearly one draught horse for every holding.[6] Indeed the number of horses used for agricultural purposes and of horse-powered machines continued to increase right up to the end of the second world war, when the tractor first seriously started to replace horses on farms as sources of power.

In terms of transport, car ownership was very limited indeed in 1951 in Western farm communities. *Per capita* ownership averaged only 1/30 for the state as a whole, and it must have averaged less than one in sixty for the small farmers of the West.[7] Although there was a regular schedule of public buses on most main roads a trip to a bigger town would have been a major excursion for most farm wives and a major adventure for the younger children. In regard to mass media participation, in general only one in nine had radios for the State as a whole by 1951 and roughly only one in fourteen for all people in Connacht.[8] Purchase of daily newspapers was similarly equally limited.

In general, therefore, no major change occurred in the external environment comparable to that occurring after the second world war—and any gradual changes that did occur could have been assimilated within the existing system of relationships. Subsequent to 1951, however, there were major changes in the local economy, in farm technology, in personal transport, in mass communication, and in local patterns of socialisation and recruitment of new members to the local social system which has brought about major changes in local social organisation and in the local culture. The psychological isolation of local communities had been effectively breached for the first time and the autonomy of local cultural systems greatly declined. Partly as a consequence of these changes there has occurred a basic transformation in patterns of social organisation and in the underlying principles on which social organisation is based—the basic values of the people.

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[6] *Agricultural Statistics*, 1934-1956, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1960.

[7] J. Blackwell, *Transport in the Developing Economy of Ireland*, ESRI Paper No. 47, August 1969, p. 2, and p. 63.

[8] *Statistical Abstract of Ireland*, 1957, p. 286.

involved—all over the West of Ireland. Even with the limited observations available to the author it appears worth while to spell these out.[9]

The purpose of this paper is to describe some of the more fundamental changes in rural social organisation, and to relate them to underlying changes in people's beliefs and values, as well as to changes in the external environment.

Methods and Approach

The main source of the following observations comes from a participant observation study of three months' duration in one rather traditional farm community in County Roscommon. I was born, however, and lived for my first seventeen years in an equally traditional farm community also in the same region of the country with which I have kept in constant touch. The fieldwork, nevertheless, has not been long enough, nor has it probed deeply enough to come to any final conclusions. But to my mind such major transformations have occurred in Irish rural communities over the past 20 years that despite these methodological weaknesses it would be worth while to try and spell them out even in a preliminary form. In any case, any errors in observation or weaknesses in interpretation can be corrected by further study.

There is one major difference between Arensberg's communities and the ones dealt with here, however. In both sites the average size of farm was far larger than in either of Arensberg's sites. Only one of the farms in "Luogh" was over 25 acres; for instance, whereas the average size of farm for the 18 farm families in the three townlands covered here was 36 acres; the land was also much more fertile, with very little waste land. The farms were also far more commercialised, even in the early 1930s.

In the formal sense, using a social system perspective, it seems to me that the overall pattern of relationships in traditional rural communities can best be described or understood in terms of three basic kinds of relationship systems: family and kinship systems; neighbour group systems; and communal-institutional systems. The former two only have those basic primary group characteristics—permanent face-to-face relationships characterised by affectivity and diffuseness in orientation, and non-instrumental in function—that is alleged to hold for all relationships in traditional rural communities. Although market relationships—with shopkeepers especially—are often of the same nature, this is usually because of the "interference" of previously existing kin and neighbour group relations. The communal system on the other hand is composed of a series of local but much wider institutional relationships—of the local economy and of the local religious, educational, recreational and political institutions—which are more formal and contractual in nature and which integrate the other two primary group systems into a wider community of relationships. The loci of interaction of these wider institutional systems—through local shops and fairs and markets, churches, schools, pubs, football teams and recreational facilities, etc.—are to varying extents concentrated at the same point, in local villages or towns. As a result the various "service areas" of each of these local services coincide in varying degrees from community to community. Usually, however, the local smaller villages serve as centres for many of these services and act as an institutional focus for the surrounding farm hinterland.

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[9] The underlying assumptions of the analysis are based on what could broadly be called the "Redfield model" of cultural change: R. Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, University of Chicago Press, 1956; and *The Primitive World and its Transformation*, Cornell University Press, 1953. See also, Art Gallaher, *Plainville Fifteen Years Later*, Columbia University Press, 1961; and B. Benvenuti, *Farming in Cultural Change*, Van Gorcum Press, Assen, 1962, for actual studies of such cultural and social organisational changes in American and Dutch farm communities.

This paper, however, concentrates only on neighbour group and kinship systems. It attempts firstly to describe the distinctive structure and functions of the traditional neighbour group and kinship systems—disagreeing with Arensberg and Kimball's description which tended to confuse the two. And secondly, it attempts to describe and explain how and why changes have come about in these relationships over the past twenty years—by relating them to basic changes in the culture and to changes in the economy, farm technology, and transportation and communication patterns.

The Traditional Kinship and Neighbour Group Structure

In Arensberg and Kimball's description the predominant patterns of mutual help and cooperation amongst individual farm families were all explained in terms of kinship rights and obligations. The exchanges of labour and the mutual lending of scarce farm tools and machines, the general supportive pattern of cooperation amongst neighbouring families in dealing with sudden family and farm crises was explained in terms of the rights and obligations holding amongst neighbouring kin, in exactly the same way, in fact, as was communal participation in family rites of passage whether festive or in mourning.[10]

The generic term "cooring" was given to all non-monetary cooperation of this sort. This appears to be a direct translation from the Irish *comhair* which means mutual cooperation or mutual borrowing or exchange of labour amongst neighbouring farm families. Arensberg and Kimball link this word *comhair* to another one, the verb cóir, which has in fact a completely different root—as in *ba chóir dom*: I am obliged to; or, I should; etc. And they go on to suggest that these categories as used by the small farmers of Clare refer only to obligations amongst kin. Indeed an analysis of all such intricate exchanges involved in haymaking in one small community revealed that in each case a kinship relation was involved. As the authors remark "the countryman is a family man in this cooperation with his fellows, as well as in his work at home".[11] And they further suggest that those without any relatives near at hand were isolated and did not participate in the system.[12]

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[10] Arensberg and Kimball, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–78.

[11] *ibid.*, p. 66. [12] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Now there are clear distinctions in Irish between the terms for neighbours—*na comharsain*—and the terms for kin—*muintir* or *gaol*. And the word *comhairedeacht* or *comharsan*, as defined by Dinneen, refers to this system of reciprocal labour and tools exchange amongst neighbours or to the mutual set of obligations and rights involved. It is very significant in this respect also that when the authors are later dealing with the institution of the *cuaird*—the informal evening visiting or "rambling" amongst neighbouring household members—or with the composition of the very influential old men's clique, or even with the younger men's cliques, that such kinship relationships were not usually involved.[13]

On the basis of lifelong observations in my home community, on observations on the two communities in Roscommon, and on the basis of the careful reading of *Peig*, and *An tOileánach*, and more casual reading of similar works it seems to me that in the traditional Irish rural community there were two very distinct sets of relationships involved—the neighbour group system and the kinship system. Each of these had distinct types of interaction patterns, and differed in the content of exchange and functions performed. Although at many points the kinship system buttressed the neighbour group mutual aid system so that both kin and neighbours cooperated in the same task; and although the kinship system was often directly superimposed on the neighbour group system, in the more remote and more mountainous areas, so that most of the neighbours were kin; still in most areas of the West both systems are, even to the present day, operationally distinct and are seen to be conceptually distinct.

It is very significant that the actual fieldwork on which Arensberg and Kimball's conclusions were based was carried out in the village of "Luogh", a small, then very isolated, village of small subsistence farmers in the mountains of North Clare. In communities like "Luogh" it is very likely that even to the present day there is far greater intermarriage amongst local families—within the few small townlands involved—than would be the case in more open country communities, and this may account for the blurring of distinctions between the two. Certainly only in one of the three small neighbour groups known to the author was there any intermarriage at all.

In general not only do people in the countryside clearly distinguish between kin and neighbour groups, but they also differentiate amongst the different neighbour groups themselves. In these areas the various neighbour groups are not only identified by name but they have acquired in the public consciousness a distinct personality and reputation of their own. While one neighbour group would be known as friendly and helpful, another one would be known as thrifty, while a third might be known far and wide for the open and continuous conflict and lawsuits amongst the neighbours. Kinship groups are often similarly distinguished, categorised and stereotyped, except in these cases the boundary of the group involved would not have been so clear-cut.

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[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 181–201.

Up to 15 or 20 years ago such neighbour groups functioned as very tightly integrated systems of mutual help and cooperation in most West of Ireland communities. In most cases they appeared to be composed of from four to ten or twelve contiguous families where the farms had been "in the family" for two generations or more. The boundaries of these groups were marked by either natural or symbolic barriers—roads, rivers, a "break" in contiguous settlements, townland boundaries, etc. In the cases discussed below they were in each case most closely related to perceived townland boundaries, although these did not always conform to those outlined on the Ordnance Survey maps. In one of the three neighbour groups studied townland boundaries were indicated and a townland name was used which, in fact, covered two original townlands. Each "townland" or village name and area had a history attached to it in the local folklore.

The existence of these "natural" neighbour groups was most obvious when they operated as a corporate group in the *meitheall.* This would only have occurred seasonally—at haymaking and drawing in the hay to the haggards, at the cereal harvesting and threshing, at bringing home the turf, digging the potatoes, and occasionally at such Spring work as planting the potatoes. In the more Northern communities much larger cooperative mutual aid groups could be seen in operation in the flax harvesting operations of pulling, retting, spreading and gathering up the dried flax.

In each of these cases all the adult men of the neighbourhood would go as a group from farm to farm harvesting all the crops. To offer money for the help of one's neighbours in such circumstances would have been insulting, such help being returned in kind and a balance struck between neighbours over the year's work. When machines were scarce—even horse machines such as mowers, potato diggers, hay turners and rakes—the possession of such machines by any one of the neighbours would guarantee him more than the usual complement of helpers. This added help was of course reciprocated by the mowing of his neighbours' meadows. Such horse machines as mowers, hay turners and rakes, sprayers, potato diggers, drill ploughs were also frequently owned in partnership amongst neighbours. They were as frequently the cause of ill-feeling over conflicts about responsibility for breakages and repairs.

The type of farming system present—dairying, mixed tillage and dairying, store cattle, tillage, etc.—to a large extent determined the pattern of mutual aid practised, certainly the frequency and occasions that corporate groups operated. The type of farming practised by the small farmers of the West could not be categorised so simply as Arensberg and Kimball have done. There was considerable variation from one part of the country to the other even amongst the smaller under-50 acre farmers. And in each of these different areas the pattern of co-operation would vary. In purely dairying areas only at haymaking would such a corporate grouping have been necessary. The more tillage that was involved the more frequently the local group would act corporately and presumably the more integrated the neighbour group would become.

On such occasions of communal labour nearly all the older men of the neighbourhood had their special jobs while the "boys" carried out the more menial tasks. Furthermore since the distribution of tasks on these occasions was usually related to the relative statuses of the different families and individuals involved the fine status distinctions within the neighbourhood could easily be observed. The same subtle distinctions could equally be observed in the seating and order of serving the men at meals.

Besides its corporate expression in the *meitheall* such neighbour groupings were often explicitly recognised by the religious authorities as natural units within the parish, in the "station areas". A "station area" usually covered one or a small number of townlands. In the three areas observed it used to conform exactly to the neighbourhood boundaries. Mass was celebrated in a different house each year within reach of these areas. Each family in the neighbourhood sent representatives to attend the Mass and to pay their dues. And all of these neighbours would be entertained afterwards at the "station" breakfast. The children of the area also would later be entertained to tea and cakes in the evening while on their way home from school. In recent years, however, due to the population decline such "station areas" have been expanded to cover a number of townlands.

The neighbour group also acted corporately on other occasions such as at family rites of passage or at sudden farm or family crises, e.g., a cow falling into a drain, a sudden family illness or accident, etc. At every death in the townland, at most weddings, occasionally at a christening, or a first Holy Communion or Confirmation the neighbour group was also apparent as a corporate entity where neighbouring families came together to help each other in their misfortunes or were invited to celebrate each others' blessings. On each of these occasions, however, the kin group was almost invariably a far more important supportive group and played a far more important role.

In addition to these corporate expressions of mutual help and cooperation, exchanges of tools and machines and individual help occurred continuously on a day-to-day basis. Scarce or expensive tools—hedge cutter, knapsack sprayers, turf spades, etc.—or even everyday tools were borrowed or exchanged on a day-to-day basis.

Such an exchange system did not rest on any contractual basis but depended on a widely-shared system of reciprocal rights and obligations which were held to be self-evidently "natural", and which came into play spontaneously. If help was seen to be needed it did not have to be requested, or if requested was immediately responded to without thought of immediate returns. However, a clear but implicit set of norms operated which could clearly be seen operating behind the sanctions which were imposed on anyone who did not fulfil his obligations, or did not reciprocate previous help received. Within the neighbour group exchanges were expected to be reciprocal, so that if an individual tried to take advantage of his neighbours by not returning favours previously given he would be very quickly isolated.

The type of economy within which such a mutual aid system flourishes was what anthropologists call a "peasant" system—a partly monetised system of production, distribution, and consumption where only a small portion of what is produced or consumed passes through the market.[14] Money was used to pay the rates, the annuities, and grocery and drapery bills. But very little besides the staples of tea, sugar or flour would have been purchased. Bread, bacon, all the vegetables, the milk, and nearly all the food consumed would have been produced or processed within the household. And although such local artisans as the weaver, the tailor and the shoemaker had long disappeared from the local economy, any clothes and shoes purchased had to be made to last a long time.

In such a subsistence economy neighbourhood mutual aid systems not only made it possible to save crops which had a high labour peak demand, it also shared the costs of new machines and tools amongst a larger number of "owners", by paying for their use with labour so that their advantages could be enjoyed without a monetary outlay. And the mutual concern for each other's welfare, and the mutual help that was spontaneously given gave a degree of security which would not otherwise be attainable, since it shared the risks of failure amongst a lot of people outside the immediate family. The system ideals included a set of collective or communal concerns or aspirations that would have defined individualistic competitiveness or achievement of more commercially-oriented farmers as selfishness or greed.

In time of loss or calamity, goods would have been as equally shared as labour, although in the case of severe hardship the nearest kin would have been obliged to help out before the neighbours. And both systems combined gave individual families a sense of strength and security that could not be threatened as long as aspirations were moderated.

Such an institutionalised system, however, is highly resistant to change. It is highly inimical to the development of those individualistic achievement motives, acquisitive consumption values, or that individualistic competitiveness that seems necessary for the development of a modern competitive capitalistic farming system.[15] Even simple technological changes will run into difficulty when being introduced to the system if they are perceived as attempts to maximise individualistic goals. One can hardly seek, and certainly one will not for long be given communal help to augment one's own status which only creates a greater social distance between oneself and one's helpers. Where the production of a surplus is dependent on community aid which is freely and spontaneously given the spending of that surplus will be very conservatively determined and the initial entrance into the rat-race of competitive consumption delayed. The whole overall influence of the system is highly conservative, therefore, and any change occurring in it will be fraught with conflict. In general, therefore, the system works only amongst status equals or those with minimal and stable status relations. Any individual attempt to move "out of line" to change the stable status relations, will lead to gossip, jealousy, backbiting, etc.

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[14] In fact Manning Nash in a comparative study of peasant economies placed the Irish small-farm economy, as described by Arensberg and Kimball, in terms of the ratio of subsistence to exchange, as equivalent to that of some South American Indian tribes. See Manning Nash, *Primitive and Peasant Economic Systems*, Chandler, California, 1966, p. 38.

[15] See Bertram Hutchinson, "On the study of non-economic factors in Irish economic development," *Economic & Social Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, July, 1970, pp. 520–529, where he suggests that deficiencies in the landlord-tenant, patron-client, relationship might have led to a compensatory development of local mutual-aid systems and a strengthening of their conservative influences.

Besides its more mundane economic functions the neighbour group also functioned as a main arena of pleasurable social activity. Neighbours' children played with one another and went to school together as a group. The boys fought for one another at school. And later on, as teenagers, they all went to games and dances together, or, at least helped each other out with lifts to dances and so on. For the children it was the most important primary group beyond the family and kin, and was often more important than the kin-group. It had, therefore, major socialisation and social control functions which reinforced the family at most points. Some of the objections to local school consolidation seem to be closely related to these social control functions; viz., that they can no longer "see" what the children are doing once they are taken away in the school bus, and that one cannot depend too much on complete strangers to look after the children. Such "bussing" of pupils, in fact, takes the children completely away from the socialisation and social control efforts of local parents.

Every neighbourhood had its local clowns and tricksters, and its host of stories about local characters and tricks people played on one another. All of these stories, in fact, appear to be peculiarly similar from neighbour group to neighbour group all over the West of Ireland. Nearly every neighbour group similarly had its "rambling house" (*céili* house) although frequently such hospitality centres crossed neighbourhood boundaries. In the long winter evenings the older more mature farmers gathered there for card playing and interminable discussions about farming and politics and local affairs. The younger men usually went to a different house or to the local crossroads in the long summer evenings. The talk there would be freer and the subjects far more frivolous. Very rarely did older women go rambling and the younger girls usually went around together, visiting each other in pairs or in much smaller numbers than did the boys. Local neighbourhood dances had died out in the areas covered in the early 'thirties, so that most of the young people growing up in the early 'forties and 'fifties would have gone to the bigger local commercial dance halls or parish halls. However, in parts of Counties Roscommon and Sligo the local dances and the local summer open air "Maypole" dances were held right up to the war years. It was only after the war that the extreme locality-boundedness of such recreational and courtship patterns had completely broken down.

Besides all these functions the neighbour group functioned also as a very strong focus of identity, both for participants themselves and for outsiders who labelled them with the community's stereotype for the neighbourhood, a practice which frequently led to fistfights amongst small boys in local primary schools and occasionally more seriously to the formation of factions which prevented common action.[16]

[16] See E. Kane, *op. cit.*

Along with the family and kin group the neighbour group exhausted, and to a large extent still exhausts, the primary group relations of the great majority of rural people. They are *both* strongly ascriptive systems. There is a saying in some parts of the West that "a stranger is your best neighbour". But, by and large, strangers were not easily incorporated into the neighbour group system. In one of the three townlands observed five of the seven families involved had been moved there in the early 1930s when an old estate was being divided. All of the incoming families appear to have got on well with each other right from the beginning although they all came from different parts of the parish. But they were not fully accepted by the local people for a long time. Now, however, their children are fully accepted and play a full role locally although their less prestigious origins are often alluded to.

Although there appeared to be, therefore, considerable similarity in neighbouring patterns and norms from place to place and most people could have been adequately socialised in them, it appeared that these behaviours could not be transferred easily to another locality. It usually took a long time before one's new neighbours knew one intimately enough and had gradually built up trust in one for long enough before they would accept one fully as a fully-fledged neighbour. Such relationships were of a very personal particularistic nature which was only built up step by step over a long period. For children born into the system, of course, such a long "gestation period" was so gradual and "normal" as not to be noticeable. But for incoming strangers it was usually a very long-drawn-out, often frustrating process. This particular kind of ascriptive relationship contrasts very sharply with the kinship relationship, where, once a close kinship is revealed, "strangers" are immediately accepted and can enjoy the rights ascribed to the relationship.

The Traditional Kinship System

The traditional system has been clearly and adequately described by Arensberg and Kimball, and the model they propose of it seems to fit most other areas of the West of Ireland both in terms of the formal kinship structure described and of the particular rights and obligations involved.[17] Unlike their description of "Luogh", however, in most other open country small farming areas, outside the more hilly, boggy areas, one would not find the kin so closely congregated together. Although nearly all farm families would have some kin within the confines of the parish, or the neighbouring parish (within four or five miles), most neighbour groups appear to be exogamous. This may have sprung from an extension of the incest taboo to neighbours' children that one grew up with, and of the close intimacy and strict sex segregation of local children's play groups. So, one's sisters played with neighbouring girls while the boys similarly played together—a segregated association that extended into adolescence and the early courting years and that would militate against local liaisons. In any case, since early courtship was almost invariably clandestine, being hidden from parents especially, the close surveillance of the neighbourhood would make it difficult.

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[17] Arensberg and Kimball, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–98. But see E. Kane, *op. cit.*, and R. Fox, *op. cit.*, for somewhat divergent views.

In the earlier traditional matchmaking system there was a very good practical reason for not marrying a neighbour—since it only marginally expanded the system of family alliances that one could call on in distress, whereas a new alliance with some family from outside the already supportive neighbourhood created a completely new set of obligatory supportive relationships.

Neither of these considerations, however, would exclude two or more sons on neighbouring farms marrying and bringing in their wives from outside. However, this would only occur in very odd cases on small farms—where a neighbouring farm could be bought for one of the sons, or where an older neighbouring relative would have left the farm to one of the sons. It is my impression, however, that in most situations of such highly localised kin groups they were either formed in this way, or brothers or near relatives were placed together like this when the Land Commission was redistributing farms at the end of the nineteenth century.

Nearly all farm families, however, have a rather large network of kinsfolk within the larger parish area or within the neighbouring parishes. If we limit consideration to the parents of the current farm families in the three "townlands" observed, of the eighteen different families involved only one family had no siblings of the parents living within the parish, six families had one sibling, seven had two, one had three, two had four, and one had five siblings living within the same parish. Most of these siblings were married and nearly all had children, so that each growing family had an average of two uncles or aunts within the parish and roughly twelve to fourteen first cousins. If we go beyond the first cousin range we can easily see how large the local kinship group becomes, and how the local marriages of each new generation constantly generates or recreates these linkages. If we further include the migrants, and those who marry locally but outside the local parish boundaries, the kin group becomes very large indeed.

I have only done a dozen complete genealogies in the three areas concerned so that the following figures can only be taken as illustrative. Amongst this dozen taken from the parents of families in the two townlands in Roscommon the total number of kin recognised varied from 150 to 380 with an average of 270. One husband and wife pair could identify between them and sketch in the linkages of 720 relatives, "out" to the children of second cousins. The total number of "known kin"—where names, residences, and exact linkages were fully known—was much smaller and varied from 102 to 260 for each individual. Both of these figures are very much higher than those quoted for London by Firth. And the relation between the universe of kin that could be identified and those that could be named and exactly positioned is also much higher, being only about one-third in Firth's case but well over half in this case. This would perhaps indicate the much larger size of family in the Irish farm situation, and the much greater importance of the kin group itself. On the other hand the size of the effective or "intimate" kin group was remarkably similar, varying from fourteen to thirty-two with an average of nineteen in this case, while in Firth's study the average of the "effective" kin set, which was in any kind of continuous contact, was twenty.[18]

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[18] R. Firth, J. Hubert, and A. Forge, *Families and their Relatives*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970, pp. 158–202.

Intimate kin are those the individual keeps in close touch with and is closely attached to. They are almost invariably recruited within the first cousin range. If within the same church area—and this would not hold for four of the eighteen families observed who had no kin within the same church area—many of these see each other at least every Sunday at Mass; and it is very unusual for a month to go by without meeting most of the nearby kin at some time. On average, for the eighteen families surveyed there were slightly less than three other local families with whom they were so intimately related, with a range of from one to twelve.

As in the case of the neighbour group the existence of such a kinship group is most obvious when they act corporately. The greatest mobilisation of kin occurs at funerals, up to second cousins being expected to attend. Up to first cousins are expected to go at least twice—to the wake and to one of the funerals (church or graveyard). This decreasing importance of kin obligations with "distance" from ego is nicely illustrated by the term "funeral cousins" which is sometimes humorously used to refer to "far out" relatives—those "beyond" second cousin or so—who are only seen on these occasions.

Weddings and christenings are two other rites of passage where all of the kin gather. They are the major emotionally supportive group at these crises. It is noticeable that even though the neighbours serve instrumentally supportive functions at these times—milking the cows and looking after the stock and farm generally—it is the kin who are the main mourners, who always have the main emotionally supportive functions at the wake and funeral and who come back to the house after the funeral for the after-funeral meal. The deep emotional bonds that even hold first cousins together in these circumstances are far more potent as reintegrators than neighbour bonds. When compared to the emotional depth and the ascriptive potency of the kin bond, neighbour bonds are usually not nearly as deep nor as resilient. You can fall out with a "neighbour" as with kin. But kin obligations *require* help despite this. Such family crises, in fact, often act as a stimulus in overcoming quarrels amongst kin and often amongst neighbours as well. In some cases, however, neighbours especially appear to be able to fulfil their obligatory crisis obligations while maintaining their normal mutual antipathy by avoiding communication with each other.[19]

[19] In one typical case known to the author the agricultural adviser on a farm visit to a rather mountainous area of the county was unfortunate to have the two wheels of his car slip into a deep drain on the side of a steep hill road. He was obviously observed, for within twenty minutes three older men appeared and helped him to get the car back on the road. He was intrigued to find that all the men were most civil and talked freely to him, but never said a word to each other. Putting this down to the stereotyped eccentricity of the mountainy men he went about his business and forgot the episode. But about two months later on the same road he was stopped by one of the three men, now far more excited because one of his cows had just fallen into a deep drain. He went to help, to discover the other two men already there before him with one other neighbour. They still weren't talking to each other although the other man was talking freely enough to them all. He subsequently discovered that they were three neighbours who hadn't been talking to each other for years but who still felt bound by the obligatory norms of good neighbourliness to help each other out in crisis situations.

Although the kin group are not nearly as important as the neighbour group as a normal day-to-day mutual aid group, still even in this, purely economic function, they become more important at times. If an economic crisis is long drawn out and serious and demands help from others for a longer period than a day or two, then kin are expected to help out long before neighbours. These norms are highly institutionalised and neighbours will react strongly if they feel that they are being expected to do things that a brother or first cousin or uncle should be doing. In a crisis situation the neighbour gives the immediate help but kin are expected to give long-term sustained help. Immediate short-term help, on the other hand, and normal seasonal farm help is a neighbour obligation.

Similarly there is also a clear distinction as to the content of communication amongst neighbours and amongst kin. "I would never be that serious with a neighbour" was the answer of one man to a question as to what sorts of "secrets" he would share with kin that he wouldn't with neighbours. Private family information—about family rows, trouble over money or over bills or wills—will not be discussed with neighbours. They can't be trusted. They will gossip. Close kin, on the other hand, are bound together by strong solidary obligations and a common identity where shame on one member brings shame on another. Indeed, kin identities are so strong in cases that to gossip about a close relative to an outsider is to gossip about yourself. They won't gossip, at least not to strangers; or if they do reactions can be very strong indeed.

Both systems, therefore, are structurally very different and they serve different functions. Both are compulsively ascriptive and particularistic in nature. They are both mutual aid groups and serve important instrumental, social emotional, socialisation and social control functions. And both of them have undergone significant changes over the past fifteen to twenty years that in many situations have led to the complete disintegration of the neighbourhood, to a general weakening of kinship bonds, and to the growth of new forms of informal social organisation no longer based on such ascriptive principles.

To a large extent, however, both of these relationship systems still exhaust the primary group relationships of most farm families in the more traditional areas of the country. It is very noticeable that our urban, largely middle class, concept of "friend", as a freely chosen confidant and intimate to whom one is joined in mutual benevolence, is still used by the older people in rural areas to refer to one's kin. Such types of very close confidants within the traditional system were almost exclusively chosen within the ascriptive bounds of kinship or neighbourhood. Besides the obvious physical limitation in forming new relationships, by the very restricted educational, occupational, and residential mobility present in these communities and the very limited transport present, both primary group systems were so clearly identified with, and had such strongly ascriptive boundaries that it could only be the odd, unusual men who could form such friendships outside both systems. In any case if one is efficiently socialised within such a closed system of primary groups with such differentiated functions it will be quite difficult to form such freely chosen "friendships" even if the opportunity arises, both because of the in-built ascriptive biases and of the difficulty in playing the new role of "friend" which incorporates elements of neighbour and kin obligations.

To summarise, therefore, there are distinct differences in the structure and functions of neighbour groups and kin groups which Arensberg and Kimball tend to confuse. From the point of view of function, neighbourhoods tend to be pervasively instrumented in function, being primarily mutual help or reciprocal exchange systems. The kind of help exchanged usually involves such things as seasonal labour, machines and tools, help in crises, etc. Such exchanges also are expected to be completely reciprocal or complementary, the balance of exchanges over the year being evened out from family to family. Kinship's obligations, on the other hand, are not necessarily reciprocal, since one is expected to help one's close relatives without the implicit expectation of such help being reciprocated.[20] This characteristic of kinship's obligations is complemented by an equal differentiation in the time and duration of help. Neighbours give immediate short term help in family or farm emergencies or crises when immediacy and speed of reaction is very important. If long term or more onerous help is required—as in prolonged illness, death of the breadwinner or mother, long term economic difficulties—the kin are expected to help. Similarly, in sharing confidences or in seeking emotional help or support, kinships has a much stronger attraction. There are other important differences in the functions of neighbour groups and kin groups which have not been explored here. The functions of both groups appear to be different in the socialisation and social control of growing children and in the recreation or social life of adult men and women and of younger children. I haven't, however, sufficient information upon which to base any conclusion in these cases.

In conclusion, therefore, the often undifferentiated structure and functions of primary groups is regarded as being seriously in error when viewing traditional rural society, or indeed any society.[21] In an abstract formal sense both neighbour groups, and kinships groups are primary groups; but they have a different structure and they serve different functions.. Friendships groups, clique groups, etc., are equally primary-group in nature but they are also structurally and functionally distinct from the former two. The formation of such freely chosen intimacy groupings, however, outside the traditional ascriptive bonds of neighbour or kinship group starts to occur on a large scale only as fundamental changes occur in the culture and as new technology facilitates it.

Changes in Traditional Structures

Over the past twenty years certain changes in a limited number of "external" factors have brought about some profound changes in rural social organisation.

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[20] This is a matter of degree only for when no close kin are available neighbours are expected to give help in crises, even when no reciprocal exchange is possible. However, when local kin are available this is usually not the case.

[21] See E. Litwak and I. Szelenyi, "Primary Group Structures and their Functions: Kin, Neighbours and Friends", *American Sociological Review*, 34, 4, 1969, pp. 465–481.

(1) Demographic changes: the population of the remoter rural communities has fallen by more than 40 per cent in the past two decades. Similarly the process of replacement of the existing local population has changed, so that younger sons and daughters of farmers are not entering farming at the same rate or through the same pathways as previously.

(2) There has been a considerable growth in farm mechanisation powered by tractors rather than horses.

(3) There has been a revolution in family and personal transport through the introduction and widespread use of the motor car; and in communication through the growth in mass media coverage.

(4) There have been important changes in the farm economy which have reduced the dependence on local mutual aid systems.

(5) There was a very important growth in the numbers and influence of government-employed agricultural advisers who were very influential as catalysts in this situation.

(6) Finally, but most importantly, there have been very significant and unprecedented changes in people's values, beliefs and attitudes.

Demographic Changes

Population decline although slightly slower in recent decades than at the end of the last century has probably been of greater consequence for the integration of small local communities, in that, being now combined with greater mobility on the part of the remaining population, it has led to far more closures or partial bypassing of local schools, shops, churches, local halls, etc. The weakening or destruction of such foci of integration within the wider local community must have profound consequences on neighbour group cohesion. Neighbours no longer share in the same services—schools, churches, shops, fairs and markets, etc.—to the same extent as they did previously, so that they are that less integrated amongst themselves.[22] The closing down of such local institutional centres of community integration must not alone have consequences for the wider integration of the diverse neighbour and kinship groups present locally, but must also have consequences within the neighbour and kin groups themselves. The latent functions of these local institutional "integrators" are not usually so obvious until a closure is threatened and provokes a highly emotional reaction locally.[23]

[22] See G. Homans, *The Human Group*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1951, pp. 112 ff. Here he puts forward the hypothesis: "if the frequency of interaction between two or more persons increases, the degree of their liking for one another will increase (all other things being equal), and vice versa". He provides a considerable amount of evidence there and in his later book, *Social Behaviour*, to back up the hypothesis.

[23] See Loomis, C. P. and Beegle, J. A., *Rural Social Systems*, Prentice-Hall, 1950, pp. 498–500, where a number of studies are reviewed which indicate that the highly emotional local reaction to school and church consolidation is motivated by these fears.

Gross population figures, however, do not adequately represent the decline in the actual number of men available for neighbouring. Up to the late 1950's at least two sons in most farm families stayed at home on the farm for a few years upon completion of primary education and prior to emigration or alternative local employment. Since only a minority of sons went beyond primary school level at the time most farms would have two or more sons working full-time on the farm for a few years, although only one son would inherit the farm eventually. Twenty years ago amongst the six families in Muckroe, one of the neighbour groups we observed, the maximum number of men and "boys" available for a *meitheall* at any one time was 15. Today only seven men are available. And even given that all the families concerned are now at a different stage of the family cycle, it appears very unlikely that the figure will ever again go any higher, for only two of the households now have young families. Even if there were more young families present the number would not be much higher, since it is now very unusual to find any growing sons staying on the farm immediately on completing primary education; and it is not at all unusual to find many families with no sons willing to take over the farm.[24] Twenty years ago there appears to have been considerable under-employment of family labour on farms, while today quite the opposite seems to be the case. Thus even if there was no change in production or consumption patterns on farms the labour available for exchange now has a much higher opportunity cost.

This decline in the overall retention rate of sons on farms has also direct consequences for the cyclical regeneration of the local kinship group. In previous generations at least two and sometimes three or more sons or daughters would have stayed at home and got married in the local area. This is rarely the case nowadays, for to match the son who will take over the farm there will be very few farm girls in the future who will have been as conservatively socialised as their mothers who worked until marriage on the home farm.[25] The coming generation of farmers will have to depend far more on their first cousins, for they will have very few siblings married locally. In fact such population changes probably will have greater direct effects on the local kinships system than on the neighbour group.

Technological Changes

There was a dramatic change in the type of technology used on the smaller

[24] See J. Scully, "Western Development—The Problems in Perspective", Paper Read at the Annual Conference of the Agric. Sc. Association, Galway, 1967. Over 50 per cent of farmers in the west of Ireland were found to have no direct heirs. And preliminary results from a study by the author of over 400 nuclear farm families, with both parents and children present in the household, in the ten western counties indicate that in nearly 20 per cent of the cases the parents did not expect any of their sons to take over the farm.

[25] See D. Hannan, *Rural Exodus*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1970, p. 130, where less than 5 per cent of farmers' daughters upon leaving primary school stayed at home on the farm to help in the household. Whereas in the above-mentioned study the great majority of the farm wives interviewed were socialised in this way.

Irish farms during the course of the 1950s. Previous to 1950 there was a constant build-up of power and machines on even the smaller Irish farms from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards—but this was almost completely dependent on the horse. Draught horse numbers, in fact, constantly increased in Ireland right up to 1946, when they first started to decline. Agricultural tractors were of minor importance as sources of power on small farms even by 1951 when only one in 45 farms over 15 acres in the west of Ireland had tractors.[26] Between 1951 and 1961, however, for the country as a whole the total number of tractors increased by 350 per cent, while the number of agricultural horses dropped by half.[27] Small farm production, therefore, has changed from a situation of almost complete dependence on a plentiful supply of manual labour and a simple horse-based technology, to one where labour now is rather fully utilised and where the tractor has replaced the horse as a source of power, at least for most tillage operations. The effects of this constantly increasing mechanisation have been augmented by the decreasing importance of tillage on the smaller farms of the west. Between 1951 and 1966, for instance, the total tillage acreage in Connaught decreased by over 46 per cent. As a result of both of these trends, even if nothing else had changed, the demand for local cooperative labour in dealing with the high peak requirements of these crops had greatly declined.

The introduction of the agricultural tractor and its associated machines into the traditional mutual aid system of the neighbour and kin group had a far more direct influence on these reciprocal exchanges than the gradual cumulation of horse-based machines ever had. The high cost of such mechanisation, and the break with tradition required for its introduction, meant that it was very selectively introduced. It was only the more commercially oriented farmers who could afford the costs involved. These differential acquisitions created new status barriers amongst neighbours that were far more obvious than differences in the number of draught horses kept. They also symbolised the newly-growing differences in the commercial or cultural orientations amongst neighbours.

Even if these new cultural and status barriers were not created the tractor technology was so qualitatively different from the horse-based one that it was very difficult to integrate it into the mutually understood and reciprocally balanced system of equivalent exchanges of labour and horse power. In the initial period of mechanising Muckroe there were constant disputes over inequalities in exchanges. These could have been objectively resolved where equivalent things were being exchanged, but the working out of the number of man or horse days that was equivalent to one tractor and mower hour, demanded calculation at a higher level of abstraction than was necessary when exactly equivalent items were being exchanged. These initial difficulties in working out the new terms of trade were compounded by the new cultural differences then arising, when interests in personal gain and individual family advancement were replacing the more communal orientation of earlier times.[28] For four to five years following the acquisition of the first tractor by the biggest farmer in Muckroe in 1952 there were constant minor conflicts of this sort. These frictions were especially noticeable between two of the families concerned. In retrospect the newly-arising status distinctions may have been partly to blame for they appear to have been the two largest and most respected families in the neighbourhood in 1950, but by the end of the decade the income and level of living differences between them had greatly increased in favour of the one first mechanised.

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[26] *Agricultural statistics*, 1934–1956, *op. cit.*

[27] *Statistical Abstract of Ireland*, 1969, p. 76.

The introduction of the new farm technology combined with the newly-arising differences in cultural orientation upset the fine balances and status distinctions amongst neighbour group and kin. And amongst the neighbour group, especially, it appeared to bring with it considerable inter-family conflict. Indeed amongst the local kin of the families of Muckroe the advance of one of the families appeared to be usually an occasion for congratulation and pride.

Eventually, given these increasing differences in levels of mechanisation the tractor owner ceased to take part in the local system of mutual exchange. The other neighbours started to pay the local machinery contractor to do jobs that were previously done on the *comhair* system. Consequently, whereas in the early 1950s only the thresher would have been hired, by the end of the decade most of the hay and cereals was cut and harvested and most of the ploughing and spring cultivation was done by hired machinery on an individual basis.

Transport and Communication

The differential introduction of the tractor and powered farm machinery was accompanied by corresponding local distinctions in car, radio and television ownership, and daily newspaper coverage. Although at the present time almost all households have radios, in 1951 only slightly more than half the families involved had them. Television was not introduced in any big way until the mid-1960s. Even at the present day there is only one television set per 12 persons in Connaught.[29] In a recent survey of 400 farm families by the author only 45 per cent of the families involved had television, while, on the other hand, in the three townlands observed only 4 of the 18 households involved do not now have a television.

Car ownership has similarly grown from the position in 1951 where less than one in 40 in Connaught had cars to the position in 1966 where one in 12 had one.[30]

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[28] See Benvenuti, B., *Farming in Cultural Change*, Van Gorcum, Assen, 1961. Chapters 2, and 3: where the selective "growth" of this ability to think in abstractions, combined with "individuation"—the process whereby the individual comes to take more and more responsibility for choices amongst alternative courses of action rather than uncritically accepting the traditional formulae—are treated as central variables in conceptualising and measuring the processes of cultural change in a traditional Dutch farm community.

[29] The ratio of persons to radio licences in Connaught in 1951 was 14:1 whereas it was only 8:1 in 1961. *Statistical Abstract*, 1962 and 1969 respectively.

[30] Blackwell, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

All of these items of consumption, part of the "standard package" of middle-class life-ways, were equally selectively introduced into neighbour group and kinship network. Initially their introduction did facilitate local integration. Neighbours came in to watch television, they helped each other out with lifts to church on Sunday or to town for shopping or did messages for each other. Over time, however, the selective introduction and use of these new communication facilities led to constantly cumulating differences between farmers in shopping and recreational patterns; in the selective growth of new networks of informal social relations, and of semi-informal contractual relations in farm production and market services; thus differentiating and creating distinctions amongst farmers on the basis of equivalence of resources and of cultural orientations. Initially despite some differences in the magnitude of resources controlled, all farmers shared the same culture, the same technology, the same limitations in transport and communication. The consequence of these constantly cumulating differences within the locality, however, has been the disintegration of the local mutual aid system. It has been replaced by a confusing series of local dyadic or triadic alliances amongst the smaller more traditional neighbours; by semi-contractual arrangements amongst the more commercialised farmers; and in many cases, given the newly increased ease of intercommunication, by the strengthening of the local but more widely scattered kin group. Since kin groups are usually much more homogeneous in resources and cultural orientation, and are held together by a far stronger collective identification of interests, their increasing importance was almost predictable; especially given the obvious difficulty in forming new local alliances on purely non-ascriptive bases.

The Economy

There has been a major change in farm production in the west of Ireland in the past twenty years. Between 1951 and 1966 the acreage of crops tilled in Connaught declined by 46 per cent, both sheep and pig numbers increased by 28 per cent and the total number of cattle kept by 25 per cent.[31] There has, in general, been a considerable switch away from tillage and other lines of production demanding a high labour input, particularly those requiring high seasonal inputs. These changes—whether they preceded or came as a consequence of changes in labour availability—when combined with the constantly increasing levels of mechanisation of individual farms, inevitably resulted in the decline of demand for co-operative labour. Certainly, the local neighbour mutual aid corporate group—the '*meitheall*'—is no longer required and is very rarely mobilised, except for the threshing. Even in this case the hired thresher can get through any of the three townlands observed in two days work; whereas in 1951 in Muckroe it would have taken at least ten days to complete the threshing in the neighbourhood. Indeed in the three neighbour groups observed the threshing remains the only farm operation where the *meitheall* is organised, whereas in 1951, in Muckroe it was either partly or fully mobilised for potato planting, sugar beet thinning, hay making, corn harvesting, potato picking, threshing, etc. In all three townlands farm production has changed so much, and individual farms have been so mechanised—where seven of the 18 farmers involved have tractors and tractor-driven machines—that such a strong mutual aid or labour exchange system is no longer required to anything like the same extent.

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[31] *Agricultural Statistics, 1934-1956, op. cit.,* and *Statistical Abstract of Ireland, 1969, op. cit.*

The Influence of Change Agents:

These changes in farm technology and economy did not occur purely spontaneously; there were government employed, professional advocates involved in trying to stimulate such changes. These were, however, relatively unimportant up to the end of the second world war. Even by 1950 there were only 83 agricultural advisers employed in the whole country—roughly one per 3,000 holdings over 15 acres—and only about 2 per county for the Connaught counties. These numbers, however, were rapidly built up throughout the 1950s to 230 by 1960 and 327 by 1967.[32]

In the early 1950s the advisers were then so few that they had to select their clients very carefully indeed if they were to have any impact at all. The first adviser in the Muckroe area after the war had to work with 1,500 farmers. Instead of trying to reach all farmers he appears to have worked very closely with a rather small number—probably no more than a hundred or so. The selection of clients appears to have been based on his estimation of their probable return on his investment of time; i.e., the most commercially oriented and those most open to outside influences. Through working very closely with these people he brought about some startling transformations in their farming practices over a ten year period. He seems to have become a very important reference person for each one of them. Although he left the area over 14 years ago he is still remembered with great affection and held in very high esteem by the whole community; much to the disadvantage indeed of later advisers who were expected to live up to this paragon. This seems to have been a very general experience in most counties in the west of Ireland. It is likely that the influence of such advisers was magnified in that they were able to act as catalysts at a very opportune time when the various other influences were also for the first time strongly acting in the same direction. These change agents were dealing with a situation where many of their clients were for the first time breaking out of their highly traditional strait jacket, and were beginning to take on and identify with outside reference groups. The effective agricultural adviser in these circumstances would have been the main reference "group" and the main supportive bulwark in a very trying time for farmers who had to stand up to and overcome the sanctions of their more traditional neighbours. And since he would have been the main guide and support in a situation of such rapid cultural change no later adviser, no matter how effective, can ever expect such a positive emotional response. Any area, therefore, that was fortunate to have such an effective change agent at that time appears to have changed much faster than others. Certainly, comparing the two sites which were less than 80 miles apart, it was remarkable that changes in farming practices that were made by the better farmers in the Muckroe area in the mid 1950s were only being made in the Roscommon sites in the late 1960s.

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[32] H. Spain, *Agricultural Education and Extension*, Paper read at the Agricultural Adjustment Unit Conference, Dublin, April 1968.

In the Muckroe area the influence of a very effective adviser during the 1950s decade appears to have been a crucial one. In the townland itself he worked very closely with one family only, seeing them about two or three times a month. This influence was equally selectively exerted all over his area of nearly 1,500 farmers. This, when combined with the initial 'cultural readiness' of the farmers concerned, led to rapid change in farming practice and accelerated their speed of modernisation. One of the consequences of such effective advisory work, however, where advisers had to be very selective in their operations, appears to have been to exaggerate the already selective or differential nature of the cultural change process.

Cultural Change

Of all the factors bringing about change in the local social organisation none has been so important as the very basic and profound changes in cultural orientations. These changes occurred gradually and selectively and both influenced and were affected by the changes in the economy, in farm mechanisation and transport and communication. The effect of these cultural transformations has been to create differences amongst families within many previously homogeneous neighbourhoods.

If we accept the Redfield view that such cultural changes originate in the cities and diffuse throughout the countryside as the isolation or "insulation" of traditional communities is breached it is apparent that such cultural changes occur selectively.[33] Some farmers change much faster than others. Thus over the twenty-year period focussed upon, the previous rather homogeneous culture of the neighbourhood has been replaced by a far greater variation in the beliefs and values of the people involved, and a far more heterogeneous and more fluid set of interaction patterns. The growth of these cultural differences will be illustrated by examining three different sets of value orientations: (1) bourgeois consumption values versus peasant subsistence values; (2) individualistic achievement values versus communal achievement values; (3) voluntaristic or "free choice" values versus ascriptively determined values.

The breaking down of the cultural barriers that had previously isolated rural people from meaningful urban contact, resulted in their adoption of outside reference groups. They thus began to perceive and evaluate their own situation from the perspective of prestigious outside reference groups. These groups appear to be mainly the middle class of the local towns, the local government officials and change agents, and migrant relations and friends.[34]

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[33] See Redfield *op. cit.*, Benvenuti, *op. cit.*; and Gallagher, A. *Plainville 12 Years Later*, Columbia U.P. New York, 1961, pp. 225–258.

Thus a relatively closed cultural system whose reference groups were highly localised was gradually replaced by one where a number of families gradually started to identify with and take on the values exemplified by the urban middle class or the more prosperous working-class. Once some families start to change their values in this way inter-group conflict occurs. Neighbour group exchanges will be viewed by some as similar to any other exchange in an individualistic competitive economy while others will still view such exchanges in terms of non-economic neighbourhood obligations. Once farm production is linked through the market to family consumption, and family consumption standards are linked directly to the constantly rising aspirations of the urban middle class a very powerful impetus for change has been introduced. And given the cultural differentials within any neighbour group in this respect, conflict over norms will occur, and will result in a further weakening of the neighbour group, and even of the more prescriptive non-reciprocal nature of kinship obligations.

These differences in cultural orientations are clearly illustrated by the case of the Holmes and the Brees, two neighbouring families within one of the neighbourhoods. John Holmes* is an old man now of over 70 years. Twenty years ago he was the biggest and most respected man in the area. He always kept three draught horses and had a whole range of farm machinery to go with them. His farm was the largest in the neighbourhood, being over 65 acres, most of it on pretty good land. He used to have about 15 acres of tillage, and on the rest of the farm he kept dry cattle and produced some of the biggest and heaviest store cattle at the October fair. His wife was about 15 years younger than him, and they only had one daughter. Sean Bree* was only 30 at that time and had inherited a farm from his father who had just died. His farm was small and wet and poorly stocked. He had only one old mare and very little machinery. He "coored" with John Holmes who cut his hay for him and dug the potatoes.

Today the position is quite the reverse. Sean Bree is married with two sons in the local secondary school. He has a modern three-bedroom bungalow with partial central heating, from a modern oil-fired stove. The kitchen, sitting-room and bedrooms are all furnished in a middle class suburban style. He has a tractor and a range of machinery, and he changed his car two years ago. He bought two other small farms locally with a loan from the Agricultural Credit Corporation when they came up for sale, and with an added 20 acres, which he rents on the 11 months system, he farms a total of 80 acres. He has kept in very close touch with the agricultural adviser since the latter appeared in the parish and the adviser now regards him as one of the two best and most efficient farmers in the parish. John Holmes, on the other hand, still lives in the old two-storey slated house that was built around 1880. His wife still goes to the well for water. The house is very clean, the floors polished, the parlour elegant in a style that was fashionable around the 1920s. He only keeps one horse now, and he has given up tillage altogether. But he still produces those big, heavy, Shorthorn bullocks for the October fair. He mustn't be making much money on them nowadays, however, for cattle buyers regard them as too old and too heavy; and Sean Bree wonders how he can make any money at all when he has to keep cattle for so long. John doesn't really resent the success of his neighbour, but he values the old ways so much and wouldn't consider changing at this stage. The differences between these two men may be partly due to age and family circumstances but such cultural differences are very common amongst people of exactly the same age and family position.

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[34] Indeed one of the important sources of change during the '50s was the increasing contact with migrant siblings and their children. The switch in emigration patterns from the USA to Britain combined with the improvement in public and personal transportation and the increased income of the migrants led to greatly increased contacts and to the growth in importance of migrants as reference groups.

*These names are fictitious. (Ed.).

Individualistic achievement values are also replacing the more traditional communal concern values. Although not exactly complementary both these values are very closely connected. In a mixed tillage-cattle enterprise system, such as existed in many western small farm communities, crops which demanded high peak labour inputs could only have been saved by the *meitheall* system. In these circumstances the individual producer got a satisfying sense of achievement out of doing the job well communally, and he had a great interest in and concern for the welfare of his neighbour. Jimmy Kelly* summed up the core of these changes when he recalled the old days when even though you had your own corn cut and stooked you really wouldn't feel fully satisfied until all your neighbours' were done as well: "And then you would feel even prouder if you had all finished before Carribdubh. Now you hire a 'binder' or a 'combine' and if its a good crop you are delighted, especially if none of your neighbours are finished yet." In a well-integrated neighbourhood there could have been no argument at all about the desirability of helping out a neighbour in difficulties, while the alternative of "not helping" or even of trying to buy out the farm would not have been considered. Yet in another community known to the author exactly that situation obtained, and different people took different positions on the morality of the particular neighbour's behaviour who chose the second alternative.

Thirdly there have been major changes in the values governing association or group formation. Perhaps Eamonn Meehan's* views are an extreme case but they very clearly illustrate the extent to which some of the younger farmers have changed in their views. "In the old days all your friends and neighbours were given to you and you had no choice about it. . . . Now, I can't stick my first cousins; and my neighbours are real stick-in-the-muds. So I'd much rather go out with somebody I'd like for a drink. . . . And it's much better to cooperate with somebody who thinks the same way as you do." So Eamonn hardly talks to his neighbours and only meets most of his cousins at funerals. Certainly, Eamonn's

*These names are fictitious. (Ed.)

case is very different from that of a neighbouring family where it was reported the sons have to hide the newspaper until after dinner each day, or their father would be off to a funeral every day of the week. "He'd go to the other end of Roscommon for a third cousin" was perhaps an exaggeration but it illustrates the differences between young and old in their views about the importance of kinship obligations.

Using Parson's pattern variables to describe this change one might say that there is a change from particularistic ascriptive criteria to universalistic achievement ones; i.e., from forming relationships on the basis of specific pre-existing groupings and their particular relationships to oneself, independently of their achievements; to forming relationships on the basis of achievements or characteristics judged by generalised standards applicable to anyone irrespective of any pre-existing relationships.[35] People come increasingly to value the free choice of associates and intimates while their wider association and greater mobility make this choice possible.

In summary, therefore, these value changes, whether they precede, accompany or are consequent on the other situational changes mentioned, certainly interact with them to bring about some profound changes in local patterns of social organisation.

Conclusion

This paper has explored in a preliminary way some recent and rather fundamental changes in rural social organisation. The data on which these observations are made were less rigorously collected and more subjectively analysed than one would wish. But in the absence of any alternative this exposition is probably worth making if only to provoke disagreement and further research.

The patterning of social relationships has changed radically in most rural communities especially since the end of second world war. Up to then, and even up to the mid-1950s in many areas, rural communities had retained most aspects of their traditional social structure and culture. In this there were three basic kinds of relationships systems—the neighbour group system, the kinship system and the local institutional system. The former two were highly ascriptive primary group systems with clear boundaries and were highly localistic in context. Culturally they were rather insular and isolated with a relatively autonomous and rigidly traditional set of beliefs and values where all the reference groups were within the system.[36]

Since that time there have been such major changes in farm technology, in the farm and household economy, in transport and communication systems and in the extent and frequency of contact with outside groups, as well as with government agencies which were directly attempting to bring about changes, that as a result the whole pattern of local relationships has been changed. Neighbour group bonds have been greatly attenuated. Kinship contacts have declined outside the first cousin range—so that most young people growing up nowadays do not know who their second cousins are, nor care. Formal secondary groups have proliferated both in the economic and social sphere. Nearly every parish has a branch of one of the national farmers' organisations or the countrywomen's association. Auction marts have been set up on cooperative lines all over the country as have other cooperatives for milk, vegetable, and meat processing. Economic transactions in general have become much more rationalised and social and recreational life more "modernised".

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[35] T. Parsons, *The Social System*, The Free Press, Illinois, 1951, pp. 60–63.

[36] The rigidity and unquestioning acceptance of these beliefs was nicely illustrated by one modern articulate sceptic: "You were told what to think at home, in the school and in the church. Your questions were never answered. You weren't even expected to have questions. In religion they were called "doubts", the promptings of the devil. Great Catholic intellectuals had also doubts but had answered most of them. And that should be good enough for you".

At the same time, such changes have not completely transformed all of the more traditional patterns, nor have they affected all people equally. Most of the older people in rural areas still retain those values and beliefs characteristic of the older traditional order as in their group loyalties and sense of identification. Still even in these cases their actual extent of interaction with neighbour groups especially has greatly declined. The neighbour group, indeed, even where values and sentiments are still supportive, has almost ceased to function as a corporate group, while the rate of individual exchanges amongst neighbours has also greatly declined; although mutual help and cooperation and labour exchanges are still carried on amongst isolated triads or dyads within the larger neighbourhood. In the case of those with very traditional values nothing has emerged to replace the old traditional neighbourhood patterns although in many cases the local kin group does seem to be more active.

Amongst the younger more commercially oriented farmers the neighbourhood mutual aid system has lost its function, while social and recreational life is no longer so locally restricted. Even here, however, old loyalties and sentiments still persist. It is impossible for many of them to form contractual relationships on the basis of mutual interest irrespective of previous group membership. The transfer of loyalties and the changes in values required are far too great. This may explain the extent to which many of the new cooperative machinery rings, as in grass silage making, are composed of kin members.

In general, therefore, the social organisation of rural communities at the present time presents a confusing picture. There are clear remnants of the old traditional patterns, there are clear elements of modern "urban" patterns and there are all sorts of intermediate stages. Strong feelings of attachment, of identification or loyalty to traditional locality systems still exist amongst the great majority of rural people in the west of Ireland. But the interactional basis of these feelings has been considerably weakened. At the same time new patterns of social organisation—new groups and even new types of relationships—are being formed which are more functional in modern commercial farming systems and in the changed circumstances of modern communication and transportation methods.

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