

DEALING WITH SCARCE RESOURCES: RECIPROCITY IN ALTERNATIVE FORM AND RITUAL

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Selected contexts for resource exchange in a Tagalog community are described. The analysis focuses on personal relationships such as real and ritual kinship, friendship, patron/client bonds, and ties based on utang-na-loob reciprocity as foundations for pooling and redistributing limited resources within and between social classes. The roles of sentiment and interpersonal values in this process are also discussed. Finally, it is suggested that because many of the exchanges documented are ritualized, attention is deflected from the economic nature of these events to their social and ceremonial aspects.

Introduction

In stratified social systems, some means of redistributing and pooling resources are often essential if members of the lower classes are to meet basic needs. In the lowland Philippines, this is frequently accomplished via personal relationships (see Foster [1961] on the "dyadic contract" model; see Davis and Hollnsteiner [1969: 66] on its applicability for Philippine social organization).

The most extensive study of this process was conducted by Mary R. Hollnsteiner (1973) on *utang na loob* reciprocity (see also Kaut 1961). Hollnsteiner noted that:

In a society such as the Philippines, where the gap between social classes is marked, *utang na loob* reciprocity stabilizes the social system in a special manner by acting as a bridge between the separated sets . . . *Utang na loob* reciprocity is the operating principle which enables a (poor) person to lodge claim on the rich man's wealth (Hollnsteiner 1973: 87).

The objective of this paper is to expand Hollnsteiner's (1973) discussion of reciprocity and redistribution to include a number of alternative personal relationships and social contexts. I shall demonstrate that a wide range of personal bonds and social processes generate exchanges which enable members of the lower class to deal with economic scarcity.

These exchanges occur both within and across social classes and are often ritualized in a way that masks their inherent economic content.

The Socio-Economic Context

This discussion is based on data collected in Tanay, a municipality of 35,000 people located 55 kilometers southeast of Manila in Rizal Province.¹ Ethnographies of nearby towns (e.g., Mendez and Jocano 1974) suggest that many of the patterns to be described here occur elsewhere in the Tagalog region. The following analysis, therefore, is probably applicable to other towns in this area.

Tanay, like other lowland municipalities, may be divided into two broad social classes: the "big people" and the "little people" (Lynch 1979). Such a dual class system is recognized by most residents of the town, although many people would more meticulously divide the population into three, four, or more strata based on income. Generally speaking, however, the two-tiered model represents the way most people think about the socio-economic system in Tanay.

The small upper class is composed of professionals, including government employees, lawyers and business men and women, and those who have inherited wealth, usually in the form of land. The annual

income of this strata is in excess of P50,000. The larger lower class includes farmers, fishermen, vendors and shop owners, drivers of buses, jeepneys and "tricycles," tailors and dressmakers, carpenters, teachers and others whose annual income is less than P20,000. The majority of these people earn between P7,000 and P12,000 per year, however, and those who work irregularly earn less. When this amount is considered in light of a government statistic, released at the time of fieldwork, that a family of four required a minimum of P15 per day to meet basic needs in the provinces, the economic difficulties of Tanay's lower class become apparent. This amount (roughly P5,500 per year) does not include medical expenses, clothing or leisure activities. Furthermore, many families in Tanay include more than two children with only a single parent (usually male) working regularly.

The economic situation for the "little people" is therefore difficult at best. Indeed, very few families manage to meet daily expenses without borrowing. The question arises, then, how do these people meet extra expenses for illness, death, weddings, baptisms, the town fiesta and other events, left alone everyday items and crises? Some people borrow from close kin and friends who may have more money but, as we shall see later, this is not a valued alternative. Others turn to local lending agencies which, as usury, entail high interest rates.² Few borrow from banks because they lack collateral and are reluctant to sign forms that reveal personal economic information.

Many people meet their needs through personalized exchange. Such exchanges occur within and across class lines and among real kin, ritual kin, friends and others in a variety of contexts. We shall now consider the process of these exchanges in some detail.

The Forms and Rituals of Reciprocity in Tanay

Summarizing the work of Mauss (1954),

Malinowski (1960) and Levi-Strauss (1957), Hollnsteiner (1973: 85) notes that "gift exchange . . . is connected simultaneously with the social, economic, legal and other aspects of culture" and restates Gouldner's (1960) thesis that social exchange is a constant reciprocal process (Hollnsteiner 1973: 86). Once a gift is accepted a "norm of reciprocity" dictates that it must be repaid; if it is not, one faces the negative judgments of his/her peers (see Gouldner 1960). Another aspect of social exchange — one which distinguishes it from purely economic transactions — was noted by Blau (1964) who observed that sentiments such as generosity, gratitude and trust enter into social exchange. These sentiments create a special bond between the gift giver and the recipient of the gift.

All of these points ring true for reciprocity in Tanay. The examples which follow will illustrate the intimate connections among the social, economic and ceremonial aspects of Tanay's cultural system. Gouldner's (1960) and Blau's (1964) work reflect the mechanisms by which personal relationships in Tanay are reinforced through reciprocity (see Foster 1961: 1176). To turn Foster's (1961) idea on its head, these relationships can be viewed as bases for the initiation and maintenance of social exchange. Thus, the association between personal bonds and reciprocity is a two-way street with each reinforcing or serving as a foundation for the other.

The relationships which are most often bases for social exchange in Tanay include real kinship (see Lynch 1973a for a collection of studies), ritual kinship (see Lynch and Fox 1956; Hart 1977), friendship (see Morais 1981) and patron/client bonds (see Hollnsteiner 1963). Market exchange partnerships (*suki*) also involve social exchange but are normally restricted to a market context and will not be detailed here (see Anderson 1969; Szanton 1972; Davis 1973). Each of these personal bonds can be tied to *utang na loob* reciprocity, although this relationship can

exist independently of any other personal bond (see Morais 1980: 111-122). All of these relationships are lines for the redistribution or pooling of resources within and across social classes. Some specific examples will illustrate this process.

The Wake

When an individual dies in Tanay, a wake (*lamay*) is held soon after death and prior to interment. Kin, friends and acquaintances come to the home of the deceased's to pay their last respects, to offer a small contribution for funeral costs and to lend emotional support. They also bring food and liquor for their night's vigil during which they comfort the family of the individual who has died. (See Isidro 1978 for a description of the events surrounding death in a town adjacent to Tanay).

The wake is an occasion for the pooling of resources among kin, friends and others. Financial and emotional support offered by these people help the deceased's family cope in a difficult time when these resources are taxed. While there is no discussion of repayment, those who help know, perhaps unconsciously, that when they are in a similar situation they, too, will be able to count on those close to them for support. This kind of sharing — of grief as well as pesos — also contributes to social solidarity in general and tightens the personal bonds of the most involved participants.

Ritual Kinship Giving and the Life Cycle

Throughout the course of life in Tanay, there are a number of rites of passage which are recognized even by those who are minimally Catholic. Primary among these are baptism, confirmation and marriage. In Tanay, as elsewhere in the lowland Christian Philippines, special sponsors are selected for these rituals and become fictive kin to those they sponsor (see Lynch and Fox 1956; Hart 1977 on the *compadrazgo* or *compadrinazgo* system of the Christian Philippines). As Arce

(1973) noted, the economic level of sponsors is often higher than those who ask them (see also Potter 1974; Morais 1980). Thus ritual kinship often has a similar function to *utang na loob* reciprocity (see Hollnsteiner 1973) and often overlaps with it (see Morais 1980).

The responsibilities of sponsor are numerous and ideally life-long. Sponsors become morally obligated to aid their ritual kin financially or non-materially (e.g., securing him/her a job). They normally help cover the costs of the ceremonies they sponsor and often give gifts throughout the year on special occasions (e.g., birthdays, Christmas) to children they have sponsored.

For members of the lower class in Tanay, this system has obvious economic significance. On one hand, it is a means of coping with the expense of life cycle rituals. On the other hand, ritual kinship creates or intensifies links between individuals which may be activated for a number of needs. While these links are seldom used for coping with everyday needs, they do provide a basis for seeking personal assistance from others for the expenses of life cycle rites and for additional, occasional aid. Ritual kinship is therefore another means of redistributing and, in the case of ritual kin who are class equals, pooling resources. Like *utang na loob*, it often results in delayed reciprocity with the giver benefiting at a later point in time for his/her generosity. Ritual kinship is also similar to *utang na loob* because it entails a moral commitment for social exchange.

Christmas Giving

Christmas is an occasion when the wealthy are expected to give to the poor but no immediate reciprocity is expected. On Christmas day in Tanay, many of the poorer families visit the homes of their wealthier kin (both real and fictive kin who may be their patrons as well) and are given pesos and a good meal. While no gifts are offered in return, both parties are aware that some form

of repayment will be forthcoming. Thus, the gift givers will not hesitate to call on the beneficiaries of their generosity throughout the year for favors (e.g., hauling away rubbish, driving them to distant destinations). Gouldner's (1960) "norm of reciprocity" virtually guarantees that the poorer kinsmen will fulfill their tacit obligations. From the perspective of both parties, this is a fair arrangement; the poorer kin receive a good meal and some extra cash while their wealthier counterparts are assured of people to help them with certain tasks throughout the year. Furthermore, because this reciprocity occurs within an aura of generosity and appreciation, it reinforces positive social relationships between kin whose class differences might otherwise generate tension and social distance.

The Personalized Savings Club

While most members of the lower class in Tanay seldom have money to spare, some can occasionally join a temporary savings club (*paluwagan*). *Paluwagans* include five to eight close friends or kin who pool their money on a short term basis. Each individual will put, for example, P10 into the "pot." Thus, if there are five members of a given group, the total "pot" is P50. By drawing lots, a sequence is decided and each week one of the five members will draw P50 (actually P40 plus his/her own P10) until the cycle is completed in five weeks. The pool may begin again with the same or new members or disperse.

The participants in each *paluwagan* know one another well and trust is an essential part of the enterprise. There is no formal written contract to insure that one of early drawers will not quit the club before the cycle is completed. Fraud is rare, however, because the members of these groups are all living in the same community and peer pressure coupled with shame (*hiya*) seem to be sufficient monitors.

The *paluwagan* is a means for persons of

equal class rank — it does not cross-cut social class — to pool their money and has two basic functions. First, it is a method of saving that is attractive to the many people who choose not to deal with local banks. Second, for the early drawers, it functions as a loaning system with no interest. A latent positive function of the *paluwagan* is that it creates and intensifies interpersonal trust and solidarity which can be generalized to other contexts, such as a request for a personal favor from a co-member of a *paluwagan*.

Gambling

Gambling (*sugal*) is the most popular past-time for many adults in Tanay.³ Although most gambling games are illegal according to Presidential Decree No. 1602, bingo, *interkwatro*, *kara y kruz*, Russian Poker and *mahjong* provide an opportunity to make some extra money within a leisure context. Gambling in any of these forms is a classic example of Sahlins' (1965) notion of negative reciprocity (Sahlins 1965: 149), for the gamblers are attempting to gain as much as they can at as little cost as possible. What is interesting about gambling — and what places it in contrast to Sahlins' (1965) characterization of those involved in such exchanges — is that it involves kin and friends rather than strangers and enemies, as Sahlins contended. The participants in gambling activities in Tanay are people who have positive regard for one another but engage in "zero-sum" contests where one person benefits at the expense of the other. Yet there are few habitual winners or losers in these games and money lost one day is recovered the next. Thus gambling may be viewed as a process of "sharing" money — although it may seem peculiar to think of it in these terms. Seen this way, however, gambling is not unlike the previously noted mechanisms that serve to redistribute or pool resources via personal relationships. The difference in gambling lies in the basic nature of the transaction: to take what one can with no obligation to repay one's "benefactors."

Other Contexts for Reciprocity

These examples of social exchange suggest, but do not exhaust, the many contexts for reciprocity in Tanay. Housemates (*kasambahay*) engage in constant exchanges of household items and gangmates (*kabarkada*) often pool their money for drinks and other activities (see Morais 1981). But these exchanges are distinguished from the examples noted above in that the latter include a wider range of individuals and/or cross-cut social class lines. All of these forms of reciprocity are, however, important strategies for members of Tanay's lower class in dealing with limited resources.

While social exchange is indeed pervasive in Tanay, it should be noted that it may be avoided. Hollnsteiner (1973: 88) pointed out that debts on the magnitude of *utang na loob* are dreaded by some people because of the pressures they bring in terms of unspecified obligations. In Tanay, many people would rather turn to a lending agency (and pay high interest rates) than borrow from a kinsman or friend. With impersonal borrowing, one avoids the negative judgments of others and can pay back the loan at clearly specified intervals. I will argue later that the ritual content of many of the examples noted earlier obviate these concerns.

Two Additional Considerations: Sentiment and Values

A key aspect of the exchanges that we have considered is that they are forged by personal relationships. As such, there are two critical features of them which must be noted: their content in terms of sentiment and the role of interpersonal values in these exchanges.

The Function of Sentiment

As mentioned earlier with reference to Blau (1964), social exchange is distinguished from purely economic exchange by its affective content. The affective intensity of an exchange relationship varies with the

particular kind of exchange and the type of bond between the exchange partners. Hollnsteiner (1973) noted that the affective content of *utang na loob* reciprocity is higher than that of "contractual" and "quasi-contractual" reciprocity (Hollnsteiner 1973: 83; see chart on page 85). Elsewhere, I have argued that sentiments central to friendship are important foundations for continuing social exchange and for the creation and intensification of other exchange relationships (Morais 1981).

Sentiments such as gratitude, trust, solidarity and positive or negative regard are tied to the rewards – or disappointments – of social exchange. Homans (1974) contended that when individuals have a rewarding interaction, positive sentiments increase; when the interaction is unrewarding or disappointing, negative sentiments will result. For exchanges with positive consequences not only is there a good feeling among those involved, but an increased likelihood that another exchange will follow. The converse is true for negative exchanges.

These principals are applicable to the examples of reciprocity noted earlier. These exchanges are generated by personal relationships which are normally high in affective content (e.g., kinship and friendship). Thus affect is not only a basis for exchange but, following a rewarding transaction, is an impetus for further reciprocity. Even gambling accomplishes this because of its jovial atmosphere. The functional significance of affect as a "prime mover" in reciprocity should therefore not be underestimated.

Interpersonal Values

Lynch (1973b) and Bulatao (1964) have identified a number of lowland Philippine values which shape interpersonal interaction. Such values as *pakikisama* (concession; camaraderie) and *hiya* (shame; embarrassment; shyness) are particularly important in social exchange in Tanay. *Pakikisama* often compels

people to engage in exchanges they would otherwise avoid. *Hiya*, in contrast, functions as a monitor of potential breachers of the "norm of reciprocity." The phrase *walang utang na loob* (no sense of gratitude) operates in much the same manner. Both this phrase and *walang hiya* (without shame) are value judgments which would lead to extreme embarrassment in the offender of social norms concerning reciprocity.

These values are similar to sentiment in their role as antecedents and monitors of reciprocity. There is still much we do not understand about the function of values in Philippine life and further research is needed if we are to fully document their role in social exchange.

Conclusions

One of the values noted by Lynch (1973b) is the strong desire among Filipinos to meet everyday needs without borrowing from others (Lynch 1973: 17). Yet a few pages earlier, Lynch contends that for Filipinos "security is sought not by independence but by interdependence" (1973b: 14; italics in original). The data presented here may shed some light on the apparent contradiction between these two propositions.

On one hand, many Tanayans would rather borrow from a lending agency at high interest than request a loan from a relative or friend (see Morais 1980: 214-218). On the other hand, less formal delayed exchanges of resources (including money) are considered appropriate among kin and friends in certain

contexts. The key to resolving this discrepancy may be that many of the latter contexts are marked by rituals (e.g., wakes, life cycle rites, gambling, Christmas). These seem to deflect attention from the economic transactions of these events to the ritual itself or, in the case of life cycle rituals, to the relationship that is being forged. A more overt request for money from another person is not masked in this fashion and is therefore revealed to be both a plea for economic assistance and an admission of need.⁴ In ritual contexts, it is almost as if the gift giving is secondary, although it is not in most cases.

All of the types of social exchange documented here are based on the dyadic and polyadic bonds which comprise the "personal alliance system" (see Lynch 1959; 1973c; Schlegel 1964; Davis and Hollnsteiner 1969; Hart 1971). Without this system, the members of Tanay's lower class would encounter great difficulties in dealing with the basic needs of life. With it, they manage not only to meet these needs but to enjoy the process of social exchange as well.

Finally, Hollnsteiner (1973) suggested that as the Philippines moves from a redistributive to a market exchange system *utang na loob* reciprocity may decrease in importance in economic transactions (Hollnsteiner 1973: 87-89). While this may be the pattern for purely economic needs in some cases, until the Philippine economic system becomes less rigidly stratified and resources are more equally distributed, the forms and rituals of reciprocity described here are likely to continue.

Notes

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²Usury is illegal but is nonetheless widespread in Tanay.

³I will exclude cockfighting from this discussion because it often involves strangers rather than kin or friends.

⁴Gambling is somewhat unique in this respect because the participants are, in a sense, "earning" their money.

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