

Reply: What's changed (since 1975)?

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There is a recent interest in highlighting aspects of economic practice that cannot fully be described as market led, and cannot be explained by mainstream economic models of behaviour. This new trend builds upon substantivist economic anthropology, feminist Marxism insights, petty commodity production analysis in peasant contexts, often without explicitly acknowledging it. It also builds upon a re-appraisal of some 'classical' questions of value, mainly Bohannan's multicentered economies and Mauss' theories of the gift; and upon issues of the 'morality' of economic social relations in particular value contexts that sustain particular power relations (Bourdieu's *méconnaissance*, Barrington Moore, EP. Thompson and James Scott's moral economy), i.e., the hegemonic framework of 'good' and 'bad' practice regarding production, allocation, distribution and consumption. My aim in this forum is to compare some of these new insights with the Feminist and Marxian issues that were part of anthropological literature of the 1970s and early 1980s. I find particularly interesting that it is precisely at the peak of the neo-liberal policies that (1) social science and political activism is turning to interstitial economies or modes of support provisioning, and (2) the state is shedding care/solidarity responsibilities while underscoring personalized and particularistic modes of provisioning support, in a context of increasing self-regulatory practices.

An ethnographic case

I will introduce the issues with some material from the ethnography *Immediate Struggles. People, Power and Place in Rural Spain* (Narotzky and Smith 2006). The fieldwork was carried on by Gavin Smith (in 1978 and 1995–6) and myself (1995–6) in the autonomous community of Valencia. The present-day regional economy of

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the Vega Baja where fieldwork was located is grounded in past social relations of production that presented a highly differentiated, while strongly interdependent social and spatial structure. Small factories, workshops, middlemen and home workers rely heavily on family labor, kin, and neighborhood networks to access work and labor. The traffic of favors is ubiquitous and permeates the entire social fabric. Here, the experience of work is deeply embedded in other social relations: one may work for one's father or for the friend who owns the sweatshop next door; one gets clients through kinspersons or makes friends with clients.

For the small shoe-manufacturing entrepreneur or middleman in the Vega Baja, subject to the demands and tensions of a highly competitive global market, the use of affective relations for the construction of production relations is a necessity. His/her claims over other people's work are based on shared notions of belonging that refer to 'non-economic' realms and values (family, neighborhood, friendship...). However, these claims occur in a context where the hegemonic model for labor relations is the 'contractual' model of the 'free' market. This ambiguous situation generates strong tensions both in the organization of labor *and* within affective relations and the structuring of personal and collective identities.

These tensions arise from conflicting loyalties towards those who are part of people's sense of belonging, those around which personal and collective identities are constructed and security against uncertainty is intimately build. Conflicting loyalties are experienced as part of a unique "morality of affects" that has clearly differentiated aspects, however, on the one hand economic interest, on the other hand care responsibilities. Both aspects are experienced as *simultaneously* part of the substance that builds proximity relations in between kin, neighbors, and friends. This is often rendered in the language of "favors" where people situated in very different social and economic positions try to make sense of this particular brand of embedded relationships that produce new forms of differentiation while reproducing existing forms of mutual dependency.

Traditionally this has been rendered as the characteristic of 'embeddedness' of economic or political relations within 'other' relationships generally defined in non-rational, communitarian, affective, moral terms such as kinship or friendship. In that perspective distinct modes of relationship (more/ less rational, individualistic, self-interested, universalistic, objectified, commensurable) are conceptually produced as constituting the 'logic' of particular realms of social interaction (i.e., the logic of capital accumulation, the logic of household reproduction, the logic of power holding) and *subsequently* articulated or nested in a hierarchical structure. Values are attached to these realms following their particular and distinct logics, and different values get produced and may be accumulated within each realm and logic, and they might be transferred between realms (Gudeman 2001). A classical example of this would be Bohannan's description of Tiv multi-centred economy featuring the interesting possibility of 'conversion' of value in between the hierarchically structured realms (Bohannan and Bohannan 1968). A more recent example could be that of Bourdieu's 'capitals' defined for different 'fields' of social interaction (social, cultural, symbolic, economic) and structurally articulated in his model to converge in economic capital accumulation (Bourdieu 1979). However, if we ask how the mutual responsibility bonds that convey the transfers of resources (material,

emotional, knowledge) are produced, and what value is the object of these processes, we get, I think, a different perspective.

Indeed, what seems to be happening in the Vega Baja's decentralized and heavily 'informal' footwear production is that social actors *cannot* easily separate their everyday practices into distinct realms of value. The 'logic' or 'moral' argument that sustains the economic practice is ambiguous. Thus my contention is that it is precisely this overlapping of the realms of value that operates and enables a particular form of exploitation by capitalist firms and a particular mode of governmentality that shifts and blurs conflict locations and obscures knowledge about the localized and globalized processes of capital accumulation. In the present conjuncture we might want to think about a realm of value that is constituted by *both* incommensurable and commensurable value-aspects operating simultaneously, so that it is not so much a process of 'conversion' between distinct value realms, but a process of value creation within a hybrid value regime that enables accumulation in present day capitalism.¹ It seems to me that it is the ambiguity of 'semiotic mediation' (Keane 2008)² in the production of value realms and its production as precisely ambiguous that is central to present-day practice of capitalism.

New proposals

Alternative ways of thinking about the economy and about the making of "value" are increasingly central in the debates of social anthropology but also of other social sciences that are inspired by classical and contemporary anthropological works (Mauss, Malinowski, Bohannan, Polanyi, Gudeman, Hart, Appadurai, Weiner,

¹ For buyer driven commodity chains such as footwear, apparel, etc. Foster speaks of a "value chain" that encompasses two poles of value creation, part of a unique process. He points to branding in consumption processes in the context of commodity chain structures of production as a form of value creation and accumulation that is based on the articulation of surplus value extraction in a classical labor/capital relationship and a 'work of love' in consumption practices which also produces value that is extracted and accumulated by capital (Foster 2008, p. 20). A similar argument is made by Thrift about the centrality of 'affects' in the added value creation process (2005) and in politics (2004).

² (Keane 2008, p. 33) has "argued that the boundaries among regimes of value are always vulnerable to slippage and retrospective recategorization. This is due both to the semiotic ambiguity inherent in material things themselves, and in the temporal dimension of virtually any exchange that extends beyond barter for immediate use. Both the ambiguity and temporality provide openings for social intervention and individual opportunism. For instance, a loan that is never returned can become a 'gift'—or a 'theft'. Goods given by one party in an ethos of generalized reciprocity ('we never calculate among brothers'), if never reciprocated, may in time become subject to a bitter reckoning of accounts after all. An incomplete marriage exchange may register as the Maussian debt that creates solidarity among affines—or, in time, produce a shameful relation of subordination. If transactions are events, they are geared to exerting control over definitions and outcomes in the future, beyond the event. They thus contain within themselves metalanguages of action, that is, reflexive characterizations (explicit but more often implicit) of the kind of event now taking place, and the kinds of participants entering into it. Distinctions among regimes of value require indigenous forms of objectification and self-consciousness that tell people, for instance, 'this now is a case of swapping, not selling', and so forth." He adds: "It is, I want to suggest, in the very nature of social institutions and actions that the mediating role of semiotic forms in systems of exchange, of the metalanguages that discipline them, and thus of the social relations they continue to reflect and even reproduce, should play a critical role even in the newest economic formations." (Keane 2008, p. 36).

Caillé). Recently, many have pointed to a crisis in economic models (Escobar 1995; Gibson-Graham 2005; Fine 2001; Mingione 1997; Laville 2000). These authors highlight the fact that old models of economic growth seem to have a diminishing capacity to tackle current social and economic problems and recurrent crises, and are unable to produce viable alternatives. In fact, what these theorists suggest is that economic models that segregate the market from specific social and historical contexts and that limit wealth producing processes to the market are unable to account for a large part of what actually and substantively are ‘economic’ resources both for capital and for sustaining citizens’ wellbeing and political social cohesion. Moreover, these critiques point to the fact that different “regimes of value” are at play constantly even in the more developed, rationalized and commodified systems of economy. From this perspective it becomes increasingly central to the debate on the global economy to include what has been variously termed “*économie solidaire*”, “social economies”, “community economies”, “care economies”, “moral economies”, “third sector economies”, all of which—although distinct in some respects—have in common:

- (1) The inescapable embeddedness of market social relations.
- (2) The awareness of shifting regimes of value.
- (3) The centrality of social networks of support.
- (4) The effects of context based forms of morality for designing personal and institutional, entrepreneurial and life-sustaining processes.
- (5) The proposal of alternative economies and political participatory frameworks.

What these new approaches stress is the multilayered competition between different economic practices articulated to multi-scale national and regional spaces of regulation and intervention (Gupta and Sharma 2006; Randeria 2007; Lovering 1999; MacLeod, 2001), which in turn raise key issues of ethics and responsibility (Young 2004; Massey 2004).

Stemming from feminist insights (Fraser 2001) an important strand in this literature seeks to integrate an ‘ethics of care’ in the analysis of individual and household economic practices (McDowell 2004; Lawson 2007). Generally, these forms of support and sustenance fall outside the range of recognized economic transactions, constituting non-marketable variables that are central to social reproduction, however. An earlier feminist literature had pointed at the value of women’s housework, socialization, and care work for the social reproduction of the economic and political system (Dalla Costa and James 1972; Elson 1979). Engaging with classical Marxists concepts of value, this multidisciplinary literature put into question the market exchange centred perspective on value, pointing at the centrality of cultural constructions of the family and to the ideological and moral aspects that produced ‘other’ very ‘productive’ values in terms of continuity and social cohesion of the capitalist system (Picchio 1992; Barrett 1980; Michel 1978). Thus, the erosion of relations of solidarity and cooperation has significant implications not only for the individual actors but for the capacity of the entire economic and political system to endure.

These observations effectively articulate a critique to hegemonic models of the economy that render such important relations and activities invisible while focusing

on 'the market' in a rather short-sighted appraisal of what market relations could mean (vs. Polanyi 1957; Bohannan and Dalton 1965). What this new research stresses is that the market cannot reproduce itself in a vacuum, external to and distinctive from social relations such as kinship, friendship, and neighbourhood. Neither can it avoid particular frameworks of moral obligation and responsibility (Keane 2008; Foster 2008), bringing to mind an older literature that had pointed to this issue in historical and 'traditional' societies (Moore 1978; Scott 1976; Thompson 1971).

Scholars have not only been concerned with elaborating critical accounts and pointing to the shortcomings of standard models of the economy (Gramain and Weber 2001). Rather, there have been numerous attempts to rethink categories and propose radical alternatives to hegemonic models of the economy (Godbout and Caillé 1992; Laville 2000; Latouche 1998). For this challenging task, many thinkers have turned to the work of Polanyi and in particular his concept of embedded economy (Polanyi 1971) and to the work of Mauss on the gift (Mauss 2002 [1923–1924]) (Weber 2000). They have also reappraised Bohannan's multiple sphere of value circulation paradigm (1968). These perspectives stress the importance of reconstituting social relationships through active social involvement and mutual dependency building. Thus, citizen engagement and civic solidarity is seen as central to any project aimed at producing new and more effective models of the economy, stressing the 'social' aspect of the economy (Mollona 2007). These authors call for the revaluation of non-market social relations as a starting point to enable new solutions to individual and social economic crises and problems. From this perspective, new forms of cooperative labour and innovative entrepreneurship are addressed ('third sector' economy) as well as modes of institutionalizing support networks ("économie solidaire") (Santos 2006; Laville 2000). The appraisal of these processes is not without presenting dangers for citizen's and worker's rights in democratic countries that have been noticed and should be addressed, preventing a romanticized perspective of "community economies" (Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2006; Narotzky and Smith 2006; Sassen 1998; Smith 1999).

In many ways what these new perspectives on the economy want to do is to go beyond the classical duality of a logic of accumulation structuring social relations of production on the one hand, and 'the rest' of social relations on the other. But also go beyond the triangular 'logic' of market, civil society and the state that overlapped the duality public/private (cf. Pateman 1987; MacKinnon 1982). More generally, the various categories and oppositions that emerged during modernity with the rise of liberal capitalism and helped structure social relations in a particular way, seem to become both theoretically and politically less central to present-day forms of capitalism.

It seems to me, however, that their perspective is still tied to an idea of different realms and value domains being 'articulated' or 'embedded' in particular instances of practice. This pervasive distinction of separate worlds of subjective experience and moral responsibility is what makes much of this literature inescapably romantic even when pointing at crucial aspects of the contemporary structure of capitalism and presenting us with exciting political projects. If this is so, then, it is often difficult to perceive what is so 'new' about these new perspectives if we compare

them with the 1970s and 1980s feminist and neo-Marxist perspectives that dealt with ‘articulation of modes of production’, housework and the production of labour, formal subsumption, petty commodity production, and so on.

Conclusion

In the present conjuncture, social relations of production and distribution resemble more and more those awkward relations that were described for petty commodity production³ or ‘transitional’ stages in general. They seem to have become more (instead of less) central to contemporary capitalist processes in all sectors of provisioning and to present day governance systems (Randeria 2007). Marx (Capital, v. 1, 1976) thought that alienation from social ties was necessary to produce the free wage worker that capitalism needed,⁴ and Polanyi thought that the disembedding of economic relations that was the natural trend of capitalist evolution would destroy society and had to be limited in order for capitalism to reproduce (Polanyi 1971). But re-embedding in the context of the hegemony of a capitalist system was about introducing limits to the penetration of the capitalist logic into all realms of social life, state regulation had to carve out spaces that would preserve humanity. For Marx on the other hand, ‘formal subsumption’ was an imperfect form of capitalist relations where ‘fictitious commodities’ were not yet set fully free from other social obligations and ties, from other realms that produced them as *other types* of value. However, both Marx and Polanyi construct their entire theoretical argument on the lynchpin of ambiguous social processes: duality of the value form, commodity fetishism, and fictitious commodities. This is the methodological insight I propose to recuperate. We need a different type of categories that allow for pervasive ambiguity in order to understand present-day processes of value production, circulation and accumulation.

The general theoretical argument I want to make is about a shift in perspective away from conceiving distinct confronted realms of value creation, material production, and social organization⁵ that would be dialectically intertwined and result in the co-opting of one by the other.⁶ Rather, I suggest we think instead in terms of an ambivalent⁷ value realm that would be predicated in the ambiguity of simultaneous experiencing these domains of social interaction that were previously perceived as opposed. A value realm allowing agents for greater flexibility and opportunism and a wider scope for reconfiguring relations according to tactical

³ Including all of the ‘transitional’ historical and present-day cases such as proto-industrial putting-out, petty-commodity producing peasantries or artisans, and colonial ‘articulation’ of modes of production in capitalist dominant social formations.

⁴ Marx’s distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘real’ subsumption of labor and the eventual transition from the first to the second is here relevant.

⁵ (base / market; reproduction / production; embedded / disembedded; emotional / rational; informal / formal; non-capitalist / capitalist; non-state / state).

⁶ In an analogy to the ‘articulation of modes of production’ theory, for example.

⁷ Ambivalent because it is referred to the previous dual model that proposed distinct obligations with different ‘values’ ascribed to different domains of social interaction.

needs, a value realm highly arbitrary and morally shifting and contradictory. In my hypothesis, this perspective would present us with a complex insight to the contemporary forms of value extraction and capital accumulation. It would address the present-day construction of a new hegemony that is based on the blending of value realms that were previously (re)produced as differentiated. It would provide also a useful perspective of the related transformations of the liberal state into its present form of overlapping responsibilities and its fuzzy—rational-emotional—modes of regulation.

All this occurs at the moment when audit cultures are penetrating almost every aspect of our life, directly or indirectly, in a movement that appears as one of absolute disembedding of most social relations, replacing trust with accountability, increasingly a formalized grid of self-regulatory practices (Shore 2008). Is it a paradox of the neo-liberal state? I think it is part of the same process, a process where fuzziness invades what used to be thought of as distinct realms of value that provided a structure for ordinary people's lives. As Shore has observed this is an insidious process that "shapes our thinking and our subjectivities" (2008:283). A process where social and subjective suffering takes place at the point of ambiguity where value gets extracted and governance acts through the blurring of incommensurable moral domains.

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