

ATOMISM AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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In evolutionist as well as "developmental" anthropological literature, social atomism has been linked with internal social conflict. Applied in particular to "peasant society," the notion of an "atomistic-type society," in which interpersonal conflict and antagonism are assumed to be a prevailing part of the "normative order," has been widely accepted. In fact social atomism—understood as a social order which recognizes no collective allegiance and lacks instruments of collective action—is more often combined with a normative pattern that reduces the chance of internal conflict, either by separating the interests of its "atoms" or by establishing a network of "selective reciprocity" between individuals. An example of the latter is seen in the community of Tristan da Cunha, where overlapping and interlocking individual allegiances create a type of social cohesion which is here labeled "atomistic social integration."

THE EVOLUTIONIST WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER, who according to Hofstadter (1955 :51) "converted his strategic teaching post in New Haven into a kind of social Darwinian pulpit," pictured the beginnings of human social evolution as a Hobbesian jungle of envy, hostility, and suspicion: "If, as we go back over the course of evolution, we encounter less and less perfect types of association, the inference is that beyond the range of our information, in the unknown past, the measure of association approaches zero. . . . Where men are existing with slight resources on the edge of catastrophe . . . they are full of hostility, suspicion, and other anti-social feelings and habits." Remnants of this assumed "original" state of affairs were perceived to exist in so-called "primitive" societies of our own age, and the situation was referred to as "primitive atomism" (Sumner and Keller 1927 1:16-19; IV:1-4).

In later years these ideas—their evolutionist implications lightly covered by a no less partisan "developmental" robe—have had a revival in anthropological literature. Now applied mainly to "peasant" and other "backward" or "underdeveloped" societies, the notion of a strife-ridden "atomistic type" of society standing at the "lower" end of "modern development" has won wide acceptance, culminating in a collection of papers appearing in *Human Organization* (Fall 1968) under the common title "Perspectives on the Atomistic-Type Society."¹ Such a society is described as one "rife with hostility, suspiciousness, and internal conflict" (Spielberg 1968:209), where "interpersonal antagonism characterizes most of the relations of men" (Balicki 1968:191). The apparent purpose of the symposium was to establish the concept of the "atomistic-type society" as one of interpersonal strife and mutual repugnancy, assumed to be characteristic of "peasant" and other "backward" societies. In this context "social atomism" is simply *defined* in terms of interpersonal antagonism and conflict, not as an occasional deviation from a normal social order, but as a *normatively prescribed* pattern of behavior: "The atomistic-type society. . . is a society in which the nuclear family represents the major structural unit and, indeed, almost the only formalized social entity. Interpersonal relationships outside of the nuclear family are characterized by contention, suspiciousness, and invidiousness. Moreover, these

attitudes and behavior are normative" (Rubel and Kupferer 1968:189). In this statement a certain quality of interpersonal relationships (mutual antagonism) is functionally linked to a certain type of social structure (atomism) to the extent that the one virtually implies the other: "our model of an atomistic-type society. . . poses a functional interrelationship between critical features of social structure and prominent qualities of interpersonal relationships which leads us to look for one set of features in societies in which the other set is discovered" (Rubel and Kupferer 1968: 190).

We are not suggesting that conditions such as described may not have existed historically at some time in some communities, although the accounts leave us with the Hobbesian problem: How is human society possible? For if these descriptions come anywhere near giving a true and total picture of the situation, we must wonder with Foster (1960a:176) how such a community continues to function. We are, however, challenging the notion that the reported prevalence of interpersonal antagonism and conflict is a necessary concomitant of an atomistic social structure.

ACCOUNTS OF PEASANT COMMUNITIES

That these descriptions of general animosity in peasant society give at best only a partial picture of the situation is indicated not only by simple logic; discrepancies and contradictions in the accounts of some peasant communities provide clear evidence. There is in the first place the widely debated controversy concerning the Mexican village of Tepoztlán (Redfield 1930, 1941, 1955; Lewis 1963, 1960; Foster 1960a, 1960b; Pitt-Rivers 1960; Lopreato 1962; and many others). In this case the differences between the accounts given by Redfield and by Lewis could possibly be attributed, at least in part, to changes over the considerable lapse of time between the two studies (Lewis 1963:431; Wolf 1960, quoted in Lopreato 1962:21). This explanation is not suggested, however, when we have two very different and contradictory accounts of one community written by one author, with no reference to possible changes between a first and a second field study.

George M. Foster threw himself into the Tepoztlán debate on the side of Lewis by collecting (or selecting) evidence from various ethnographic accounts to show a "remarkable unanimity of opinion" in describing "peasant society" in general as "naturally uncooperative" and with a "prevalence of conflict" (Foster 1960a). In a subsequent paper (Foster 1965) he attempted to explain these assumed negative qualities of interpersonal relations in peasant society by his model of the "image of limited good," which posits a sufficient causal relationship between perceived shortness of supplies and prevalence of interpersonal conflict. This model, Foster (1965 :297) explains, "was first worked out on the basis of a wide variety of field data from Tzintzuntzan," another Mexican village. We must assume, then, that Foster regarded this community as a typical case of the conflict-ridden "peasant society."

In a different and unrelated context, however, Foster (1961;1963) presents the very same village of Tzintzuntzan as a community with a pronounced atomistic structure, yet well integrated by a network of durable and positive interlocking, reciprocal, interpersonal relationships, described as "dyadic contracts".² Here we have, in fact, a description of a type of social integration that appears to be very similar to the one observed in the island community of Tristan da Cunha (see below).

Although it is not clear on what basis Foster considers conflict as "prevalent" over cooperation in this Mexican village, it is quite evident that he has been looking at the community from two different angles. In one instance he was looking for the (overt or covert) interpersonal conflicts expected in a "peasant" community, and of course he found them, for there is probably no human community (peasant or otherwise) where interpersonal conflicts could not be found. In the other instance he was looking for the "centripetal forces" (Foster 1960a: 178) that obviously kept the community together, and he found some of them, too, in the shape of a network of "dyadic contracts."

Which picture represents reality? In regard to Tepoztlán, Redfield is quite generous in granting credibility to both, each representing "one phase of a complex truth" (1955: 135). We take a more skeptical view of the matter. Any account paying exclusive attention to discord and distrust in interpersonal relations in an existing and functioning community is at best one-sided and probably exaggerated. And when discord is presented as prevalent or dominant and characteristic of most relationships, not only in a particular community at a particular point in its history, but quite generally in the whole of peasant culture, the account must be received with extreme caution, especially in view of the complexity and diversity of cultures that commonly go under the label of "peasantry" (see Dalton 1972).

"COGNITIVE ORIENTATIONS"

Most of the "discord reports" that we have seen strongly confirm Pitt-Rivers's observation that "they are nearly all evaluatory in the sense that they presuppose a standard in relation to which they measure the characteristics of behavior and without which they are meaningless" (1960:181). Moreover the standard applied is usually not that of the community under study.

Foster speaks much of a "cognitive orientation" shared by the members of every society, which "provides the members. . . with basic premises and sets of assumptions normally neither recognized nor questioned which structure and guide behavior in much the same way grammatical rules unrecognized by most people structure and guide their linguistic forms" (1965:293). Presumably anthropologists also share such a cognitive orientation of their own; when Foster describes the cognitive orientation of peasants as "unrealistic" (1965:296) and "out of tune with reality" (1965:295), apparently because it is "adversely influencing economic growth" and poses problems "for capital accumulation" (1965:296), we clearly have a view of the situation that "reflects the realities of the modern world" (1965:296) but that is quite alien to peasant society. It is this cognitive orientation, "normally neither recognized nor questioned," that defines peasant society as "backward" and "underdeveloped," and we suspect that the "remarkable unanimity" in describing peasant society as "naturally uncooperative" and dominated by interpersonal conflict may be explained by the fact that this "developmental" cognitive orientation is shared by a great many social anthropologists. And we submit that Redfield, with his more artistic approach to the study of human society (e.g., Redfield 1948), may have been more sensitively attuned to the cognitive orientation of Mexican villagers than either Lewis or Foster.

Of course it is not at all unusual that communities get fractured, divided against themselves, and eventually dissolve; and when this state of affairs is recognized by the

members of the community, we may have a situation like the one described by Lopreato for a community of his acquaintance: "The peasants of Stefanacani [in South Italy] are given to suspicion, quarrels, vituperation, abuse, violence, and conflicts of all sorts. But what is more important. . . is that they are cognizant of the fact, and in moments of reflection they condemn themselves for it. . . . *By their own standards*, Stefanacani are a pathological people" (1962:22, emphasis added).

But to generalize from such a case to the whole of "peasant society" is farfetched, explains nothing, and has no predictive value with regard to other communities. A more fruitful approach would be to investigate the particular circumstances of such a community in order to identify the causes of its "pathological" breakdown of social cohesion. This is what Redfield actually did in the case of Dzitas (1941: 151), and what was attempted regarding a threatening disintegration of the community of Tristan da Cunha (Munch 1964, 1971, 1974). But this would bring us far beyond the intended frame of this paper.

ATOMISM AND SOCIAL ORDER

Rubel and Kupferer (1968) appear to have adopted the concept of "social atomism" from a seminar entitled "Atomistic Social Systems," given in 1962 at the University of North Carolina by John Honigmann, who in turn claims Ruth Benedict as his source (Honigmann 1968:227nl). In Benedict's use of the term, however, there appears to be no connotation of repugnancy, antagonism, or conflict. Her definition of an atomistic society is clear: "The very simple societies are atomistic. They recognize only individual allegiances and ties. They lack the social forms necessary for group action" (quoted by Maslow and Honigmann 1970:323; cf. Honigmann 1968 :220). Allegiances and ties of social obligation, in other words, are not lacking in social atomism. On the contrary, the individual member of an atomistic society "may attain his goals by helpfulness to other individuals, but he helps them on their enterprises and they help him on his, rather than carrying out enterprises that some permanently constituted group engage in together. . . . Individual acts [of helpfulness] are at the discretion of the individual" (Maslow and Honigmann 1970: 323).

The main theme of Benedict's lectures at Bryn Mawr College in 1941—the principal source of this information—apparently was her concept of "synergy," by which she referred to the degree to which collective and individual interests and desires coincide and are mutually reinforced by the normative action patterns of a society. In this regard she concedes that "anthropologists have not found any atomistic society with high synergy. . . extremely low synergy. . . is the commoner rule" (Maslow and Honigmann 1970:326). The important point, however, is that this "extremely low synergy," which *may* result in internal conflicts of interest and aggression, is not an intrinsic part of the concept of "social atomism."³ Rather, normatively prescribed behavior patterns in societies with an atomistic structure may just as often aim to minimize the chances of individual conflict and to limit individual aggression, either by selective cooperation or by separation of interests—in the latter case we presume, with "extremely low synergy."

As described by Ruth Landes (1961: 102), "Politically and economically the Ojibwa are an atomistic society. Functionally, the household is the irreducible unit;

but in the cultural thought, the individual person is the unit". Her description was later corroborated for the Wisconsin Chippewa by Victor Barnouw, who, like Honigmann, refers to Ruth Benedict as the one from whom he adopted the concept of the "atomistic society" (Barnouw 1961: 1006). Of particular interest in our context are the normatively prescribed economic arrangements of the Chippewa, which effectively prevent existing rivalries from coming to expression in overt hostilities:

All accounts of old Ojibwa life are shadowed by fear of starvation, and each man hunts for himself, alone on his trails, the hunters scattering as widely as possible in order to make the most of the thin supply of game. The household of wife and children. . . lives in complete isolation during the winter season (November-March), and households come together in village life only during certain summer months. Then three to fifteen families live for a time in close proximity, but there is no village organization. It is a time of games and ceremonies, but each family lives to itself alone. (Landes 1961: 87)

While there seems to have been a greater supply of game in Wisconsin than in the Canadian regions inhabited by the Chippewa, the subsistence level never encouraged large aggregates of population. Before 1870 the situation was probably similar to that in Canada, where summer villages, consisting of about a dozen families, tended to split up in the fall, with family groups often remaining isolated during the winter months. (Barnouw 1950:15-16) Every man owns privately the hunting grounds where he alone may hunt and trap. A man stakes out his trapping territory in one or more places, and the territory cannot be crossed without permission under pain of death at sight. The boundaries of the grounds are clearly marked by blazed trees, trails, traps, and a hunter's shack. A land with such "improvements" upon it is tabu to all but the owner. . . Each hunter is absolutely self-dependent, never giving thought to aiding or competing with the hunters of other households. (Landes 1961 :88)

Similar arrangements are found in regard to fishing and fishing places (Landes 1961: 90). Avoidance of competition and conflict is also characteristic of the arrangements connected with the manufacture of maple sugar. Even when a man invites another household to work in his maple grove and share his wigwam (as an expression of individual allegiance), there is no cooperation between the host and his guest:

Each family occupies its own half of the wigwam, and the housekeeping of each half is conducted independently. The guest's work on the groves is conducted as independently as the housekeeping. The host stipulates the number of hours a day his guests may work, the number of trees, draining pans, and vats that may be used. . . . All that such a guest produces for himself is his own property.

If no cooperation exists between a host and his guest, between a man and his neighbors, it is not surprising to find that there is no competition. A man claims as large a grove as he thinks he can handle, and is satisfied with the results. Nor does he think of working faster or more productively than his neighbor. The conditions of the host's permission prevent open competition. (Landes 1961:92)

This is not to say that competition and conflicts do not occur among the Chippewa. Ruth Landes talks much of the "latent hostilities" even between households of the same village. But the important point is that although such hostile attitudes may be expected and to some degree tolerated in the culture, their overt expression is not normatively prescribed (d. Rubel and Kupferer 1968:189). On the contrary—in spite of the atomistic structure of the society and the absence of communal organization and control, the shared "cognitive orientation" of this society and the normatively prescribed behavior patterns derived from it effectively discourage open conflict by emphasizing mutual recognition of individual rights and claims, and by channeling competition and rivalry into relatively harmless games and joking relationships (Landes 1961:103,115).

Other examples of atomistic societies that minimize competition and interpersonal conflicts by separation of individual interests may be seen in Agmagsalik Eskimo society of the east coast of Greenland (Mirsky 1961) and among the Paliyans of South India (Gardner 1966); we are sure that many more could be found. There is obviously a low degree of social integration and "synergy" in these societies at any level beyond the nuclear family, although "synergetic" arrangements may not be totally absent (Benedict, as quoted by Maslow and Honigmann 1970:326). But the evidence shows that an atomistic social structure, however low its "synergy" level, is not functionally correlated with a prevalence of "normatively prescribed" hostility and conflict, nor are such negative qualities of interpersonal relations particularly characteristic of atomistic societies.

ATOMISTIC SOCIAL INTEGRATION: TRISTAN DA CUNHA

Among the atomistic Chippewa, conflict is avoided by separating the interests of individual households during the scarce winter months, eliminating both competition and cooperation, and resulting in what appears to be an extremely low degree of social integration. We shall here present another atomistic community, where selective cooperation based on individual allegiances permeates all activities, creating a continuous network of overlapping and interlocking interpersonal obligations, and tying the community together in what we describe as "atomistic social integration."⁴

In the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, about midway between South Africa and South America, lies a small group of islands surrounded in all directions by a vast expanse of open ocean. When first discovered in 1506 by the Portuguese navigator Tristão da Cunha, who named it after himself, it was uninhabited by man, and it remained so for more than three hundred years to come. The present community is Western in origin, of nineteenth-century vintage. It was founded in 1817 by a Scotsman named William Glass, a corporal in the Royal Artillery, who with his wife and two male companions decided to stay when a British garrison was removed after a brief occupation. Up through the nineteenth century, the group was occasionally augmented by a European sailor or American whaler settling down, and a few women arrived from St. Helena, some of whom were of mixed race. In 1970 the population was 175, all living in a village on the northwest side of the main island of Tristan da Cunha.

After a short-lived attempt to establish a trade in sea elephant oil and seal skins with the Cape Town market, the economy of the settlement was based mainly on barter with passing sailing vessels seeking fresh supplies of water, vegetables, and meat. For this the island was eminently suited, for it is situated in the "Westerlies," a principal traffic lane for east-bound sails. In addition, American whalers cruising the Atlantic in great numbers found the island of Tristan da Cunha a convenient refreshment station. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, as steam replaced sails in transoceanic commerce and the Suez Canal diverted much of the traffic from the South Atlantic, the island community grew more and more isolated from the rest of the world. The barter economy was gradually replaced by a subsistence economy based on hunting and gathering and such farming and fishing as harsh weather conditions and primitive tools and methods would permit. By the turn of the century the transition was almost complete, with a resulting gradual depletion of the natural

resources of the island due to overexploitation, including the disappearance of fur seal and sea elephant, the near extinction of three species of albatross, and the deterioration of pastures from overgrazing, deforestation, and subsequent erosion (Wace and Holdgate 1976). It was during this period of extreme poverty that the islanders learned to name as "luxuries" many things that had previously been taken for granted and during which, on the whole, they developed that incredible frugality for which they have been noted (Munch 1945:71-73, 1971:124-37), presenting a living refutation of Foster's "model of the image of limited good" and its presumed correlation with a prevalence of conflict and mutual hostility.

Shortly after the Second World War, a South African fishing company established a crayfish industry on the island, introducing a money economy based on wage labor and commercial fishing. This brought an enormous improvement in the material comfort of the islanders. The new economic system, however, never supplanted the traditional subsistence economy. Partly because of limitations imposed by adverse weather and the absence of a sheltered harbor, and partly because of the attitudes of the islanders and perceived conflicts with established values and customs (Munch 1970), the fishing industry could only supplement the traditional, subsistence economy. And it was in this traditional sector of community life that the atomistic structure of the community as well as its characteristic form of social integration continued to come to its fullest expression.

At the outset the Tristan community was anything but atomistic. It started as a utopian enterprise based on the principles of equality and anarchy, but with a communal arrangement of its economic and social life. In a document that was signed in front of witnesses by William Glass and his companions, it is stipulated "that the stocks and stores of every description in possession of the Firm shall be considered as belonging equally to each," that all profit arising from the enterprise "shall be equally divided," and that "in order to ensure the harmony of the Firm, No member shall assume any superiority whatever, but all to be considered as equal in every respect, each performing his proportion of labour, if not prevented by sickness."⁵ This presupposes allegiance to the "Firm" as a corporate unit.

The implementation of this utopian combination of communal enterprise with the absence of corporate authority and control posed some serious problems, which soon became apparent. With the arrival of new settlers who were not committed to the original agreement the corporate allegiance failed, and conflicts arose that threatened to disrupt the little colony. An attempt was made to save the communal quality of the enterprise by emphasizing its corporate nature, abandoning the principles of anarchy and equality of all. A new agreement was drawn up establishing corporate ownership exclusively by the two remaining original settlers, and designating Glass as "being at the head of the firm" with authority to assign work to the members, yet retaining communal operation and benefit.⁶

Eventually, however, all thought of a communal enterprise was abandoned. Within a few years all but two of the signatories of the second agreement left the island. New settlers arrived who apparently were not about to submit to Glass's tenuous authority and the restrictions of communal operation and control. Presumably the documents of agreement between the early settlers were simply ignored and forgotten.⁷ Whatever happened, in the 1850s we find a population of nearly one hundred,

consisting of nine or ten households living together in a village but economically independent of each other, each man cultivating his own plots of land cleared by himself, and raising his own flocks of sheep and cattle (Taylor 1856). Clearly the trend had been reversed, and the principles of anarchy and equality had been restored, ensuring the "harmony of the Firm" by separating rather than joining interests, resulting, we may assume, in a low degree of "synergy" and social integration.

When William Glass died in 1853 no one was formally installed as "head of the firm" in his place, although Peter Green, a Dutchman who had joined the community in 1836, eventually rose to recognized prominence. Apparently in this atomistic and highly individualistic community there was no felt need for well-defined leadership or for strong communal organization. On the contrary, any thought of establishing a governmental structure for the community was met with strong resentment on the part of the islanders. In 1903 one amazed observer reported: "There is no form of government, and the men were curiously averse to any individual being considered to have more influence than the rest" (Watts-Jones 1903:12). Another observer elaborated:

In the days of Peter Green the Government might have been described as patriarchal, but since his death there is no recognised head of the settlement. Here we have in the present century, in a civilised community, society reduced to its most elementary form, when the parent bears rule only over his own family as *pater familias*, the family being the social unit.

This leads to rather an extraordinary state of things. There is no real head or recognised authority [of the community] —each doing as seemeth right in his own eyes. Even [Old Sam] Swain, although from his being the oldest man and an excellent character, he appears to command the respect of his fellow islanders, can command nothing else, nor can the most intelligent and energetic man there—Repetto—impose his will on anyone but his wife and children. (Hammond Tooke 1906:27)

Similar conditions were found in 1938 (Munch 1945:236-57). When commercial fishery was established on the island the British Colonial Office introduced a rudimentary form of government, with an Island Council and an elected chief, but with supreme authority vested in an administrator sent out from England. To all appearances, however, this formal superstructure had little effect on the internal structure of the community. Even today the community is an atomistic aggregate of independent households, where every man is his own master and nobody's servant. The reward of high esteem goes to the one who minds his own business, minds it well, and leaves everybody else to do as he pleases. In particular no one feels, or is expected to feel, that he has any obligation to the community as a whole.

If Rubel and Kupferer's concept of the "atomistic-type society" were to have any validity at all, we should expect the Tristan community to be rife with conflict, suspiciousness, and invidiousness. This is far from the case. The Tristan islanders have justly won the reputation of being a very peace-loving people. Kindness, considerateness, and respect for another person's individual integrity are outstanding traits of the "group character" of the Tristan community, guarded by strong sanctions in the form of a severe loss of prestige for anyone who might break this code of behavior.⁸ As one islander expressed it: "The worst thing you can do on Tristan is to be unkind to someone."

An atomistic social structure does not, of course, preclude voluntary allegiances in a variety of forms of cooperation and mutual aid between individuals. And the

Tristan islanders like to do things together, not as a community, but in small, selective, and more or less durable voluntary associations that may vary in size from just two individuals (or two households) to a score or more, depending on the nature of the activity. Much of this cooperation is prompted in part by practical considerations such as the nature of the job at hand, and by the fact that in so much of their work the islanders depend on boats requiring a crew. But the pattern of selective cooperation also applies to situations where practical reasons do not seem to demand it. The tendency is to turn almost every job of any significance into a cooperative affair.

One important form of cooperation is joint ownership. Most of the cattle are owned by small groups of joint owners, usually two to four in number, each group owning one to four head of cattle, with some men having shares in as many as four different groups. In apple orchards planted in sheltered places around the island, each tree may be owned by a similar group of joint owners. The same applies to huts and shacks built for shelter on the neighboring island of Nightingale and other outlying areas. And each homemade longboat, the most precious possession of any islander, is built and owned jointly by a select group of men just large enough to form a full crew, usually six or seven.

There is also extensive mutual aid, and even here the pattern is always individually selective and reciprocal. Even for larger jobs, such as putting a new thatched roof on a house—a job that has to be done every ten or twelve years and requires a working gang of twenty or more men, since the job must be completed in one day while the weather is good—the owner summons the assistance, not of the whole community or of an indiscriminate number of volunteers, but of specific individuals whom he "calls," almost as if to a private party. And the only material reward he gives to his helpers is the meals for the day and the prospect of a return service as occasion may arise. When a young man builds himself a new house in preparation for marriage, he may involve an even larger number of people by inviting different helpers on different days. Such large jobs are special occasions, and so is the "carding gang," where a woman calls a number of helpers to card and spin her wool. But on a smaller scale the same sort of thing is going on all the time. A person may call in one or more helpers for almost any kind of job, whether it is painting or remodeling the interior of a house, adding another room, building a cabinet, shearing sheep, fencing a garden or a new potato patch, breaking in a young bullock, or whatever it may be.

Some of these selective cooperative groups have considerable permanence and may even continue over several generations such as, for instance, the longboat crews and certain groups of joint cattle owners, where shares may be handed down from father to son. Other associations may become lifelong arrangements, as when two households agree to do their potato digging together or to join forces on the big hunting trip to Nightingale in March of each year. Occasional and transient groups may be formed to go fishing or hunting on the mountain, to fetch firewood from the hillside, or to go for apples. In these cases the catch or harvest of the day is divided equally between the members of the group.

Gifts also play an important part in the social life of the islanders. Small tokens are given on special occasions such as birthdays, usually combined with a formal visit to the recipient's house. Then there are gifts from an occasional abundance, as when

a man returns from a successful fishing trip or when he kills a bullock or a cow. In the latter case about half the meat is probably given away. Again, however, the gifts are not distributed generally or randomly. They go only to specific individuals selected by the donor.

The importance of these acts of cooperation, aid, and service lies in the fact that they are individually selective and reciprocal. They are symbolic expressions and confirmations of individual allegiances, of specific interpersonal relations involving durable, mutual obligations.

The most important basis for these allegiances is kinship, which in Tristan da Cunha is truly bilateral, giving equal recognition to relations through mother, father, and spouse, resulting in a diffuse and rather complex maze of kinship relations throughout the community. Every person in the Tristan community stands at birth in a *potential* relationship of mutual allegiance, not to a defined corporate unit like a "clan" or other kinship group, but to a large number of individuals within a diffuse segment of the community, unique to each individual person but overlapping with everybody else's similar segment of potential relationships, cutting across a number of vaguely defined joint-family identities and other congeries, as well as practically all prestige levels.

In practice, however, not all kinship relations are given equal weight. The obligations implied by kinship may be modified by a number of other considerations, such as friendship ties established during childhood and adolescence, in-law relationships, relative prestige, and even personality and compatibility. In exceptional cases the social significance of even such a strong and demanding kin relationship as that between brothers may be practically obliterated. In other words each individual is free, within limits set by decorum and decency, to select the kinship relations he or she chooses to recognize; this is how people establish their places in the community and thereby their own individual identities. And the all-important instrument in this self-identifying process is the selective reciprocity of cooperation and mutual aid by which certain individually selected relationships are given expression and thus confirmed and reinforced, while others are played down and more or less ignored.

These confirmed individual allegiances do not generally lead to the formation of mutually exclusive cliques. Like the kinship relations on which they are primarily based, they are diffuse over large segments of the community rather than convergent on a few select individuals. Each cooperative group is formed for a particular task or function, and although close friends may do a variety of things together, hardly ever does precisely the same group of individuals operate in different functions. A man typically digs potatoes with one group of associates, fetches firewood with another, goes fishing with still another group one day and with a different group the next time. He may own cattle with one associate at Sandy Point on the east side of the island, with a couple of others at Stony Beach on the south side, and with two or more different groups of joint owners on "this side," that is, near the village. And each of his associates distributes his confirmed individual allegiances in a similar manner. So differentiated are these cooperative groups that when the islanders go to Nightingale for eggs or for birds' fat, the longboat crews dissolve temporarily as soon as the boats have been landed and secured, whereupon the islanders regroup to go "egging" or "fating" with prearranged groups of individuals different from the ones they were sailing with.

In this manner, as a person's ascribed kinship relations certainly overlap but never coincide with those of any other individual, so these chosen and confirmed individual allegiances never concur entirely with those of anyone else. Yet the individual allegiances of each member of the community are interlinked with those of the others, whose allegiances are in turn interlinked with those of their associates in such a way that they form a continuous network of individually selective but overlapping and interlocking relationships that in the end covers the whole community, leaving no one untouched. In this community there is a fair chance that any member may be at least a friend of a friend of one's own friend, a circumstance that—along with the deeply ingrained respect for individual integrity—may serve as a powerful deterrent against any antagonistic feeling being given overt expression; a hostile action or unfriendly word against another person may have repercussions throughout the community via the lines of individual allegiances, and may eventually return to backfire on its author. This network is, in fact, what makes this loosely organized aggregate of independent households a *community* in more than an ecological sense, where a person belongs, not by virtue of a collective identity at the expense of individuality, but by virtue of a personal identity expressed and confirmed in those individual allegiances chosen for reinforcement in a pattern of selective reciprocity.

This is the social significance of the small, selective, more or less permanent but often transient cooperative groups that characterize all activities connected with the traditional subsistence economy of the Tristan community. These associations, because they are based on individual rather than collective allegiances, are active expressions and reinforcements of fundamental values in the life of the community by which each person is granted the integrity of individual identity as well as the security of belonging. This is what constitutes the "atomistic social integration" of this community.

CONCLUSION

Whether this type of social integration is a general phenomenon in human society is a question that goes beyond the scope of this paper. We strongly suspect that it is. In particular, we suspect that in many societies that appear to be lacking either corporate integration through collective, cognitive identification (Durkheim's "mechanical" solidarity) or functional integration through division of labor and subsequent interdependence (Durkheim's "organic" solidarity), some degree of "atomistic social integration" may have evaded the attention of researchers because of their lack of appropriate conceptual tools. Such a tool has been available for some time in J. A. Barnes's concept of "network," which he put to good use in analyzing the social structure of a Norwegian community (Barnes 1954). Unfortunately it has since been blunted, partly by misuse and partly by overloading it with conceptual content, resulting in a situation "reminiscent of what is said to have existed in Babel" (Wolfe 1970:228). As originally used by Barnes, the concept of "network" appears to correspond fairly closely to our concept of "atomistic social integration." On the other hand, if "links that persons have as members of groups or categories" are to be considered "a part of their total social network" (Wolfe 1970:229), the concept of "atomistic social integration" becomes useful in distinguishing a network based on atomistic, individual allegiances from one that involves cognitive social categories

and collective identifications, as well as from one that is based on a functional division of labor and instrumental corporate organization.

NOTES

1. The collection consists of four case studies (Balicki 1968, Piker 1968, Spielberg 1968, Langworthy 1968) with an introduction by Rubel and Kupferer (1968) and comments by Honigmann (1968) and Levy (1968).

2. The four case studies in *Human Organization* (Fall 1968) mentioned above lean heavily on Foster's "discord reports" (1960a, 1965) as a source of interpretation and confirmation, largely ignoring his "concord reports" on the "dyadic contracts" (1961, 1963).

3. This point is made also by Honigmann, who nevertheless asserts (1968:221-22): "When I speak of social atomism, or simply of atomism, I refer to both the relatively overt and the inferred aspects of that phenomenon," the latter term referring to the "underlying but not directly verifiable psychological states that are either reflective of, or in a motivational sense productive of, structural atomism. . . [such as] covert hostility, envy, a view of social relations as fraught with danger, [etc.]."

4. This type of social integration has previously been described as an "individualistic" or "atomistic integrity" of the community (Munch 1967:23, 1975:5-6, 1977). In a related work, the term "atomistic solidarity" was chosen in order to facilitate a comparison with

Durkheim's famous concepts of "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity, combining the three concepts into a trichotomous theory of social integration (Marske 1976).

5. The document is now in the British Museum. For the full text see Munch 1945:19, 1971: 29-30; Marske 1976:Exhibit I.

6. This agreement, a copy of which is likewise in the British Museum, was signed December 10, 1821, by all the men, who at that time numbered eleven. For the full text see Munch 1945:22-24.

7. The documents were probably kept tucked away in a drawer in William Glass's house until his widow took them along when she left the island in 1856 and settled in New London, Connecticut. Here they were discovered in 1933 in the custody of a granddaughter of William Glass (Gane 1933) and later deposited in the manuscript collection of the British Museum.

8. The concept of "group character" was used by Theodor Geiger (1939:101) as "that complex of character traits in which the members of a group mutually reinforce each other." On the "group character" of the Tristan islanders see Munch 1945:62-74.

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