

The word 'economics' is commonly derived from the Greek 'oikos' and 'nomos', house and rule. These two as well as the notion of the 'illogical' mindset that Levy-Bruhl ascribed to so-called 'primitive peoples', are being reassessed anew in anthropological circles. Care of the natural environment understood as eco – nomics is discovered as the background of many a religious practice that used to count as illogical. One century after his shocking book, I shall start by recalling the 'economics', which Bronislaw Malinowski - the Polish-British initiator of participant research and famous contemporary of Levy-Bruhl - discovered in West Pacific.

In the centenary year of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, and 80 years after his death in the ill-fated 1942, a stag of commentaries occasioned by his Kula-analysis fills the shelves from economics down to religious anthropology. The rich and dense report he gave of the events surrounding the highly valued Kula-activities provoked a flurry of studies on non-monetary economics, after Marcel Mauss made this *fait-social-total* a centerpiece of his ground-breaking study on gift-giving. But one aspect of that *fait-social-total* is largely overlooked. While the role of religious rituals was clearly spelled out, the link of the spiritual to the ecological setting was given little attention. How spiritual considerations demanded a careful use and treatment of the natural setting was indeed an underrated part of the functionalist approach that Malinowski advanced amidst the disputes over the 'illogical'; but it is now getting more attention. I briefly recall this Trobriand-case before turning to my own observations in Ghana.

The Trobriand Islands were visited by Malinowski in the early 20th century. He spent 2 years studying notably the Kula-expeditions that caught his attention for being both 'illogical' and yet highly functional. The islanders travelled around some 17 islands, in a ring-shape route, to ritually exchange their prized jewelry of shells, red necklaces circulating one way and white bracelets the other way. A Kula-visit to the neighboring island is a costly, complex and hazardous enterprise, not only because of the seafaring hazards but also because of the uncertainty of exchanges which depended largely not so much on haggling skills but on social prestige. Spiritual help was invoked on both sides and a visiting group was to be welcomed and entertained at great costs of food and entertainment. Malinowski describes this in detail, stressing the possibility that either of the two parties gets ostracized because of misbehavior. This concerns mostly social conflicts, but we also note cases of a person's standing being negatively affected by berated ecological conduct that offended spiritually sanctioned patterns of exploiting the environment. The feared failure of a Kula-visit and gift-exchange due to the ostracism by neighbors was, indeed, what made Trobrianders adhere to such rules. It means that the spiritual forces did exercise an indirect ecological control via the Kula-customs.

Archaic religion's ecological control

Wolfgang Palaver has recently analyzed the opposition between the sacred and the saintly in Girardian terms, by relating it to the Bergsonian polarity of the closed/static versus the open/dynamic society. The sacred he reads in terms of scapegoating and sacrificial rituals, which Girard explains as the harnessing of social conflicts and rivalry due to escalating mimetic behavior. The mimetic desire of an undividable reality is the standard example of the underlying threat. Social scarcity causing feuds, then, count as the deciding factor. Yet, in archaic religions we often find idols, deities or spirits as space- or time-bound icons that

impose interdicts or ritual prescriptions to be strictly observed. The so-called totemic rules are a typical example. Whereas Levi-Strauss stresses the mental operation that arranges these prescripts, Girard rightly points to the conflictual reality underneath. Yet, they both tend to forget what earlier observers had noticed, that specific rules may indeed carry some ecological considerations. Levi-Strauss mentions the detailed environmental knowledge but without explaining rituals in terms of critical ecological issues. But Girard's critique neither brings these into the equation.

The example of the sacred sabala rules in South-East Ghana may help us grasp the logic involved. In the coastal Ewe-Anglo-area in Ghana's Volta-region of Ghana, surrounding the royal town of Angloga, we find, stretched out over many miles, a picturesque array of onion-fields of very specialized cultivation. Their triple yearly harvest of highly prized small type of sabala-onions is traded widely inland and even far abroad along Africa's Westcoast. An economic success-story, more than a century old. Like the Dutch tulip-fields, these have been created by mixing the coastal sand with the soils of the marches and lagoons inland, North of the inhabited strip of sandy dunes. The fields are interspersed with hundreds of pits from which they are daily hand-sprinkled, often by children before and after their school time. At school they are taught, what every farmer is acutely aware of, namely that this crop needs careful handling to avoid the characteristic fungal disease from spreading and destroy the crop of the entire region. Essential, in this regard, is the minute scheme of spreading the activities over time, to avoid onions in different stages of their growth being close together, since this might allow the fungus to spread.

Interviews with the farmers bore out that all of them knew of this scientific reason for the calendar of activities. At the same time, they all stressed that a religious obligation made them follow its pattern. Indeed, the area is divided in various parts by clan-ownership and is protected by the respective clan-deities, whose festivals were spread over the year. Each of the twelve clans has various deities with their respective priests, sanctuaries, devotees, and totemic rules, and together they form a powerful mental frame deciding the time of farm activities, thereby undergirding the ecological calendar. The staunch supernatural hold on the system and the fear of divine sanctions are readily formulated. This remarkable mix of religiously motivated behavior and scientific insight is a clear feature of what might count as 'illogical' logics that marked this generally well-educated society. The system's logic was spelled out to me by an 84-years-old London-trained royal advisor - who sometimes outran me in the mull sand of the town's narrow alleys - and by an equally aged, destitute herbalist, the most respected yet poorest inhabitant of the town, whom I came to know as the truly devoted 'holy' head of the ancient Anago-soothsayers guild.

Soothsaying logics

Let us briefly consider what counts as the 'illogic' oracles that deal with cases of witchcraft, sorcery, and other adverse realities. To me the lengthy sessions at his poor thatch-covered home, sometimes going on for several days, illustrated an intriguingly mixed logic. Several types of mishaps were treated, in which the consultation of the Afa-deity and its 256-stades by throwing of the *gumaga*-string was inserted in lengthy conversations of therapeutic and social-psychiatric type. Characteristically, the outcome would include the advice (or even an order) to bring offerings to one of the clan-deities. But in the process, the client's conduct and compliance with the social rules had been scrutinized. These would include the kinship regulations, but also the observation of such clan rules, as the agricultural rules mentioned above. If the *gumaga*-string pointed toward some possible witch-activity, the conversation

did not search only or primarily who was guilty, but what the client might have contributed to the worrying situation. Indeed, the old soothsayer explained to me, time and again, that neither the deities nor the witches cause harm unless they are provoked or goaded. While the offences often seemed flimsy in a stranger's eyes, they deserved an closer look, in which ecological considerations might surface. Next to infringing the sacred calendar, the trespassing of totemic rules also often featured, as well as harm done to natural settings, such as sites of medical herbs. The old man had been told that the English word for his trade was soothsaying or soothing, in the old meaning of pacifying conflictive conditions to even out bumpy social paths beset with rivalries. He stressed that healing herbs were often to be found in places dedicated to sacred forces. When asked about the link between the two, he mostly quoted some mythic story attached to one of the 256-gumaga-signs, implying that their awe-inspiring myth and rituals had a function and a logic, which was 'known' and 'unknown' at the same time.

This reminded me of Girard's concept of *meconnaissance*, albeit with an inverse pointer. Girard emphasizes that the society uses cultural and religious forms of violence, such rules and interdictions, which people know to be 'unjust', but needed to avoid the devastation of mimetic crises. The rules and rites mentioned above are known to be restrictive for positive ecological reasons, but still need authoritative backing. The opponent in this case is not a rival, but the person's own selfish urge to do violence to the common good.

The sacred and the saint

In the animal kingdom, we find not only avoidance of conflicts, but also a care of the natural habitat. Girard's mimetic theory focuses the former, viewing the sacred as care of the social harmony. Human evolution has produced an impressive array of tools to control that social order. But there is a growing awareness that it has resulted in an overexploitation of the natural habitat in ways that jeopardize the very existence of the biosphere. Girard has explained that the overcoming of the sacrificial logics has opened the way to the rationality of scientific research. But he also noted that much of this research takes as its target the alleged divine order imbedded in creation and revelation, thereby making it part of an age-old mimetic rivalry and turning it into a new scapegoat. The medical and genetic ethics are a point in case. Philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, Henry, and Bergson have signaled that the empiricist turn hailed by Galilei does end us up in a closed rather than open society, with economics as the scientific reply to human desires sitting at the heart of this process. Where Palaver in line with Girard and Bergson presents the saint as the breaching of the occlusive nature of the sacred, we may need also to focus the ecological dimension that points to the total harmony beyond the pacification of human competition.

Although most etymologists derive both saint and sacred from the same cluster with the PIE-root **snk*, there are other connotations. While 'sacred' and 'consecrate' point to the setting apart by sacrificially cutting and separating, in relation to the Latin *secare*, 'saint' rather refers to *sanare*, making whole, sane, healthy. The Germanic holy/heilig is known to relate to healing (Dutch: heling), as making whole and sane, to sanitize. Whereas sacred applies primarily to the objective order (rituals, shrines, etc.), saintliness is rather an internal aspect of a person. I refer to the notorious dispute about the translation of Jn 17:19. Jesus says that he sanctifies (*hagiazō*) himself so that we all may be holy in truth. Some translations render this as 'consecrating', thereby accenting a separation that rather contradicts the intended sense. It can be argued that Western Christianity, by favoring the Paulinian and synoptic hermeneutics of the sacrificial crucifixion, has placed this vision at its center.

An economy built on the extracting raw materials for transformation and the fulfilment of artificial desires demands a reexamination as to its basic impulses and ethics. Where Girard stresses the evangelic breach with the sacred, we need yet be aware of the transformation of the latter into a scientific and technocratic drive which tends to scapegoat natural forces as hostile foes. The question arises how saintliness can be pursued in eco-friendly manner, while still answering to rightful demands of a global population that is still growing due to the medical advances.

The 'house' (*oikos*) for their living will require cutting a niche from the natural environment. The eco – nomics cannot order (*nomos*) to leave nature untouched, with a quasi- Spinozist identification of God and nature (*deus sive natura*). Indeed, human needs, like that of all living beings, require interventions that cannot void doing harm other beings. Can Girardian ethics formulate a conduct in which negative mimesis is overcome and production is led by the moral principles of Adam Smith of maximal service to each other? Would that undercut the devastating exploitation of the natural habitat? Bergson's open society has been inserted into an evolutionary framework by Teilhard de Chardin, who makes the Christosphere a teleological target of evolution. How can the ecological concern be made part of the saintliness he envisages in the words of Jn 17:19, which contain Christ's vision of the positivist mimesis ?