

# Moral Economy as Emotional Interaction: Food Sharing and Reciprocity in Highland Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** In peasant studies, many anthropologists have taken the view that the peasant economy has some salient cultural traits distinct from the rational choice of neoclassical economics. This view has been criticized by political economists as ignoring the process and mechanism of peasants' economic behavior. This paper examines cases of food sharing in highland Ethiopia, in order to reveal that the sharing process among peasants is greatly influenced by their affective motivations. People in highland Ethiopia share their food crops with various persons ranging from close relatives to unknown beggars, who rarely give anything in return. While tendencies in sharing activity are analyzed in terms of the social relationship between donor and recipient, the act of food sharing itself is seen to be motivated mainly by mixed feelings of fear, awe, and anxiety. In beggar-donor interactions, beggars appear to elicit sympathy through affective approaches in order to extract the food crop. I will reconsider the issue of reciprocity, exploring the possible function of these affective approaches in emotional interaction as a form of agency towards the achievement of the distribution of wealth. This is an aspect, which has been described merely as 'moral' or 'ethic' by moral economists and reduced, in turn, by political economists, solely to 'calculative rationality'.

## Introduction

The concept of "moral economy" suggested by James Scott opens us to a particular framework for understanding the behavioral features of rural peasants.<sup>1</sup> Peasants are suggested to share salient cultural traits, characterized as anti-market, aversion to risk by the safety-first principle, and adherence to the norm of a subsistence ethic within the community.<sup>2</sup> This simplified portrayal of peasants has provoked a great deal of criticism. In particular, political economists have accused the "moral economists" for having left out important questions as to how morals work among peasants, how norms are derived in the first place, and in what way village resources are distributed.<sup>3</sup> These criticisms are targeted against the assumption underlying a depiction of the peasant economy as static, where the process and mechanisms of economic action are of minimal importance.

Despite all their criticism, however, political economists have been able to reveal only a single aspect of the mechanism of peasants' economic behavior: the rational calculation of self-

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interest. As Albert Hirschman pointed out, theoretical emphasis on "interests," among all other human passions, was historically invented and constructed in accordance with the rising spirit of capitalism in Europe.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I will suggest an alternative perspective on the mechanisms and motivations of peasants' sharing activities by focusing on such interactions in highland Ethiopia.

In most literature of peasant studies, the issue of wealth-sharing and reciprocal assistance has long been discussed in terms of their cultural aspects. Clifford Geertz, for example, argues that in colonial Java society, peasants, despite the pressures of population increase and plantation economy, maintained their socio-economic homogeneity by fragmenting their limited wealth.<sup>5</sup> Geertz thus characterized Java society using the terms "agricultural involution" and "shared poverty". In African studies, Goran Hyden elaborated his model of the "economy of affection," in which he argued that reciprocal social networks of the African peasant mode of production persist even in the post-colonial era.<sup>6</sup> These arguments are based on an assumption that some sort of moral or ethic concerning the sharing of wealth through reciprocal ties is maintained within close relationships based on kinship and the community.

George Foster's study on a rural community in Mexico illustrated the significance of "cognitive orientation" in the peasantry.<sup>7</sup> He argues that peasants, based on an "image of limited goods," fear that a stable balance of the wealth could result in a disruption. The amount of desirable objects, such as land and wealth, are always conceived to be limited. It is believed that someone's improvement in position would threaten those of others. A person who acquires, or has acquired, more than his traditional share of goods, must be pulled back to the level of all.

Despite the wide variety of concepts surrounding peasants' economic behavior, there is a common perception that the sharing custom is derived from the peasants' cultural traits. These arguments are more or less based on the assumption that peasant communities are culturally homogenous, perpetuating a system of distribution of wealth clearly distinct from the one of *homo economicus*.

Are these characteristics no longer applicable to newly established settlements dependent on cash crops, or multi-ethnic urban-like communities? In the rapidly changing situation of rural Africa, it is now widely observed that peasant communities are heavily dependent on cash economy or waged labor, and the demographic mobility between the urban and the rural is increasingly growing. The view of peasant economic behavior based on static cultural features has to be reconsidered.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper, I will focus on a rural community in highland Ethiopia, where multi-ethnic migrants have settled for the production of cash crops. People have different cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs. It is almost impossible to find a single cultural trait or concept shared by all the villagers. This culturally heterogeneous community can provide a much wider basis for understanding the dynamic processes of food sharing in a changing society of contemporary Africa.

The research village is located in southwestern Ethiopia, which is known as the possible origin of *Coffea arabica*. People grow coffee as cash crop and cultivate maize for subsistence. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, immigrants have increasingly moved to this area in search of fertile land. According to the national census in 1994, the population of the research village was 1987 individuals in 451 households. In my extensive survey of 404 households in

2002, more than half of the household heads were Oromo (61.4%), many of them being recent settlers from various areas.<sup>9</sup> Most of the Oromo people were Muslims, but some of them are Christians. The second largest ethnic group was Amhara (18%), who had migrated to this area from the north. All of them were Christians belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The third group was "Kullo" (Dawro and Konta) (8.0%), coming from the southern part of Ethiopia mainly as coffee pickers.

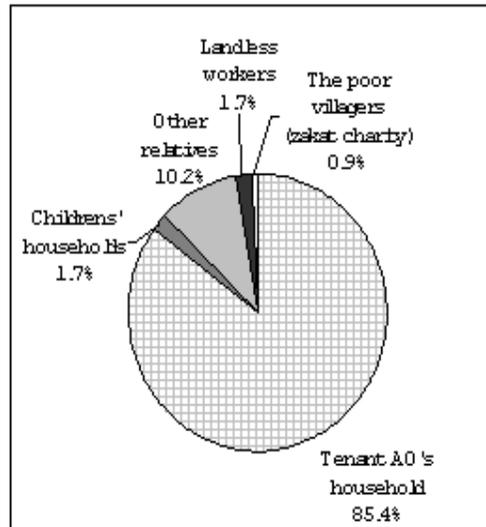
#### FOOD SHARING IN HIGHLAND ETHIOPIA

In this newly populated multi-ethnic village, people usually share and distribute their food crops. After the maize harvest, the poor villagers get around begging for a portion of maize. Most of them are elder women, but sometimes strangers also join in the attempt. Those who reap the harvest are expected to share the crops with those who do not. How do people share food with others? What motivates them to do so? I shall begin by describing two types of crop distribution observed in the village setting: the first being those practiced immediately after the maize harvest; the second, among villagers in everyday life.

##### Maize distribution after the harvest

In highland Ethiopia, sharecropping is common practice. The ratio of harvest shared between landholder and tenant depends on the provider of oxen used for plowing. When a landholder provides the oxen, he is entitled to half the harvest. When a tenant provides the oxen, the tenant receives two-thirds. However, the crops are not only shared between landholders and tenants. During the harvest, tenants try to secure the a force through various means. One of the main such means is through labor exchange. In addition, tenants usually ask relatives and friends for help. Furthermore, landless poor villagers often join the work in expectation for a reward in crop.

A.O., a tenant farmer in his sixties, was cultivating maize with his two unmarried sons in 2000, using oxen provided by the landowner. During the harvest, A.O. was assisted by a total of twenty persons including his two sons. Among them were six agnatic and matrimonial relatives, four villagers working for labor exchange, five helping as friends, and two landless peasants working for reward. Immediately after the completion of this harvest, A.O. and his two sons reciprocated their work as labor exchange to eight persons including four relatives and four labor exchangers, and distributed maize to nine persons including two married children, three relatives, and two landless workers, and two poor villagers.



**Figure 1.** Proportion of maize distribution of total harvest for tenant AO (in weight)

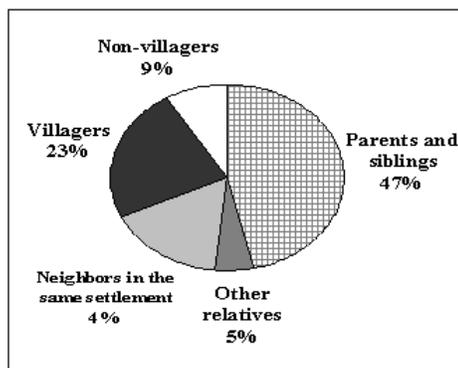
Figure 1 shows that out of the total maize harvest for tenant A.O. (1137.8 kg), about 15% in weight was distributed outside his household. A notable share was distributed to his family and relatives. Although labor exchangers were not given any crop but reciprocated only in labor for their own harvests, three kinship members received labor in addition to a distribution in maize. A portion of the crop (0.9%) was voluntarily donated to two poor villagers as *zakat*, or Muslim charity. Out of the friends who helped in the harvest work, only one was given crop for the reason that he was landless and poor. The other three friends were not given any because they were young and unmarried, and the one poor villager, who worked briefly for A.O., was denied because of the shortness of the period he offered help. From this case, it can be pointed out that maize distribution after harvest occurs mainly between those in fixed relationships, notably agnatic kinsmen and poor villagers, and in large amounts at a time.

#### Food sharing in everyday life

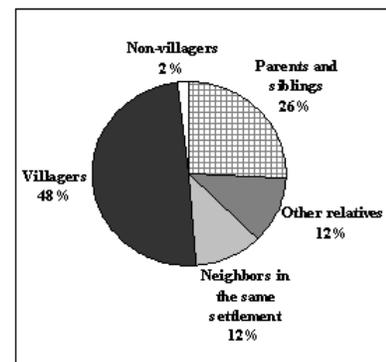
The sharing and distributing of crops are not restricted to the immediate post-harvest period, but takes place in everyday life. Here I will focus on the case of B.Y., a tenant farmer in his thirties who was also my chief informant. B.Y. lived with his wife and a baby and cultivated a small plot. Not so rich a farmer, he worked hard to produce maize as well as cash crops including coffee, taro, peanuts and so on. I collected his data on food sharing and gift-giving for two periods between 2002 and 2003: two months during the dry, post-harvest season and another two months during the wet, pre-harvest season.

Maize harvest, which usually takes place between October and November, is followed by a dry season during which coffee beans are reaped. This is the best time of the year for farmers, as both food and income abound. The wet season, in contrast, corresponds to the preharvest

season, when villagers are usually affected by food shortage. An analysis of B.Y.'s case shows that he shared more food during the wet food shortage season with a wide range of people from kinsmen to unknown beggars. While data for the dry season totaled an equivalent of 58 Birr in crops such as maize, taro and peanuts, which in turn were distributed to 14 persons, in the wet season the total reached 88 Birr distributed to 28 persons. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 indicate that about half of the sharing in cash-equivalent value was for those who are not kinship members, but neighbors, villagers, and even non-villagers.



**Figure 2.1** Food sharing during rainy season (in cash-equivalent value)



**Figure 2.2** Food sharing during dry season (in cash-equivalent value)

Interviews with B.Y. on each case of sharing revealed that food sharing can be classified into six categories according to the social relationships involved in each case: parents and female siblings; close relatives and male siblings; employees and younger collaborators in farming; respected persons and those to whom the donor is indebted; villagers and acquaintances; and unknown beggars.

Firstly, when the recipients were parents or female siblings, the provider showed a tendency to share as a voluntary act, supporting his family members in times of trouble. Such sharing opportunities were frequent and not fixed. The amount of crop shared in each case was small, but the demands from the needy recipients were hardly ever refused. Secondly, sharing with close relatives and male siblings implied an obligatory attitude on the provider's behalf, to show his faith to relatives living close by. Compared to the first category, the amount of shared crop was much larger, but opportunities were usually limited to fixed occasions, as on the completion of harvest.

In the third and fourth categories, when the food crop was given to employees and younger collaborators for farming and to respected persons and those to whom the donor is indebted, the donor voluntarily gave out food crops and other commodities. His aim seems to be to maintain a good relationship with the recipient. Finally, in the case of the fifth and sixth categories, which consist of villagers and acquaintances and unknown beggars, sharing was not

usually voluntary, but preceded by begging on the recipient's part. The amount of the crops given in each case was very small, but its occurrence was most frequently observed.

These cases indicate that people do not always give more to those in closer relationship, but share their food with various persons ranging from close relatives to unfamiliar persons and even unknown ones. Moreover, in all the cases, the donor did not seem to expect any reward in return. In fact, counter-gifts were given in only exceptional cases.

Why do people so frequently share their foods with others? Are they willing to give some crops without any hesitation? Why are people sharing food with others beyond the boundary of kinship or even village? I will explore these questions by examining the actual interaction of sharing and some episodes, which reflects people's perception of giving and receiving.

## MOTIVATIONS AND INCENTIVES OF FOOD SHARING

### Expected sharing and inevitable dilemma

What views do people have on giving crops to others? Farmer B.Y. said: *"Everyone knows who harvests a lot of crops, or who are digging taro now. They come and tell us that they will soon come to take taro"*. His words imply that those who have many crops are always expected to share with those who do not. Moreover, the recipients often behave as though sharing is a normal obligation of the rich.

One day, a poor woman living in the village came to B.Y.'s compound and said, *"Last time, you gave me too little. Did you mean to give me anything at all?"* The woman's attitude, which struck me as quite arrogant, indicates that she viewed, or at least pretended, sharing with the poor to be an ordinary thing and even a duty for those who were relatively better off. At that time, B.Y. refused her demand and said, *"It was enough and even too much!"*

I asked B.Y. if he was expecting reciprocal assistance in case of food shortage. B.Y. replied, *"People never appreciate our gift, and never return us a thing. Far from it! Suppose we were suffering when they were not in trouble. They'd never even come close to us."* The implication here is that those who give crops do not necessarily expect to receive reciprocal assistance in times of need. And yet, why do people share food?

People often emphasize the importance of sharing food with the poor by adhering to Islamic principles. When farmer B.Y. gave some maize to an unknown beggar, he explained the reason as follows: *"Because Allah gives us food, it's bad for us not to give anything when we are begged. If you tell a lie that you don't have any crop, all the crop in your house will disappear."*

During my research, however, I observed many cases that run counter to these words. Once, an elderly widow came to B.Y.'s compound and begged his mother for food. In an appeal for crops she complained that her son was sick and that she was hungry. At that time, B.Y. said to his mother, *"Don't give her anything! We cannot afford to do that!"* I asked him why he said so and refused to give something to a poor woman. He replied: *"When I was a child, my parents did not mind giving our crops to others, and wound up losing our annual storage in six months. It was quite terrible!"*

While people seem to share food with their relatives, neighbors and poor villagers, they also face the dilemma that too much giving could make them suffer from food scarcity,

especially during rainy season. So it sometimes happens that people refuse the demand for crops and repel the beggars. They do not always follow the religious precepts without hesitation.

### Food Sharing and Social Relationships

In spite of such a dilemma, people actually share food with various kinds of persons ranging from kinship members to unknown beggars. What differences are there between sharing with close relatives and sharing with strangers? Sahlins classifies reciprocity into three categories: "generalized reciprocity" -- the altruistic gift giving without expectations for immediate return; "balanced reciprocity" -- the direct exchange of equivalents; and "negative reciprocity" in which people try to make gains at the expense of others.<sup>10</sup> Sahlins argues that these three types of reciprocities are related to social distance: "generalized reciprocity" is based on close relationship among kinship members; "negative reciprocity" is observed on remote distant relationship between other ethnic groups and strangers; and "balanced reciprocity" is built up in between.

First of all, I will introduce episodes that illustrate background motivations for food sharing among close relationships. One day, a female cousin of farmer B.Y. said to his mother: *"I have been laid up these days, but B.Y. has never visited me at all. Bring him to divine justice!"* The expression of this "divine justice" connotes a severe accusation. B.Y. heard of her words from his mother with embarrassment and said: *"I have been in the field all day long. I've never heard of it. And again, she is always laid up with stomachache, headache or something bad. That's why I give her milk or butter each and every time. This time, too, she wants me to bring her something."* Despite all these words, he visited her after a few hours.

There is no way to confirm whether or not the female cousin really wanted B.Y. to bring her anything at all. But it was obvious that he himself felt expected to share something with this neighboring relative. In the research village, relatively wealthy persons constantly feel the pressure to share wealth with other kinship members.

I came across an incident in which B.Y. found a fist-sized object covered by plastic buried in his maize field. He took it to a witch doctor and asked what it was. The witch doctor said, *"One of your relatives planted this witch medicine. It is intended to make your field barren."* At that time, I could not understand why the relative had to do such a thing, because they could possibly gain some benefit from B.Y.'s harvest. B.Y. explained to me: *"Relatives don't want you to be richer than themselves."* This indicates that indebted feelings or senses of inferiority invoked by food sharing and gift-giving can have a significant implication among close relationships.

According to B.Y., *"People often work against wealthy kinsmen. They use witch medicines or spread malicious rumors for preventing him from becoming richer."* In close relationships such as with kinship members, there is an antagonism against wealthy relatives. Those who are somewhat richer than other kinsmen are forced to consider negative pressures or envy among relatives. Then the fear of envy and hostile action can be an important incentive for people to share their wealth with close relatives.

In the case of sharing with strangers, what are the motivations? One morning, a stranger came to farmer A.O.'s compound. The man said *"Please give me something to eat."* A.O. replied,

"Come in. My wife will serve you a meal." After the man finished it and went away, A.O.'s wife said, "Yesterday, he came to the house next door. We were drinking coffee, and invited him in. He must be a thief and is now about to go to a different village to steal." It is frequently observed that people serve strangers meals or give some crops. Why do people share their limited wealth with strangers, and even with a suspected thief?

There is an oft-told story among Muslim villagers. The rough storyline is as follows: A ragged beggar visits a farmer, who chases him away, but eventually people find that the unknown beggar is a *wali* (Muslim holy man). In fact, a rumor of a man in the village ran quite similar to this story. Once, a stranger with dirty clothes came to the village. He was usually walking around and picking up rags in the village. It seemed to me that he had some mental problem. The villagers, however, saw him in a different way. They said: "He looks like a madman, but in fact he is a great wali." Strangers are easily associated with holiness or sacredness, respected and sometimes, feared by the villagers.

Furthermore, the status of other ethnic groups indicates their unique position in the community. Out of seven witch doctors around the village, four are Kullo, two are Amhara, and one is a different branch of Oromo. Interestingly, all of them are from other ethnic groups or from a remote area. The Kullo have migrated to this area as temporal coffee pickers and they are regarded as being lowest in status in the research area. Nevertheless, it is widely believed that the spiritual power of the Kullo is most formidable and dangerous. People feel a kind of respect and awe as well as fear toward strangers. It can be argued that these mixed feelings drive people to share food even with socially distant persons despite their own dilemma.

#### The process of begging and giving

It appears that different kinds of emotional feelings have to do with peasants' sharing activity. In this section, I examine the actual process of narrative interaction between a donor and a beggar. These verbal exchanges can sometimes be quite obnoxious, as I have suggested above, and in other cases peaceful or even funny. The following scripts are abridged from the narrative of a begging woman (H.M.) who was a Christian Amhara allegedly over a hundred years of age. She visited a house of a Muslim Oromo farmer and spoke in the Oromo Language.

H.M.: "Two children (young men) were quarreling over my (grand)daughter. That's why I've come here today. They're surely going to kill me. I do not have any relatives around here. So I am very scared. When they come to my home, my daughter gives them bread and milk, but nothing for me. I am fasting and spending nights without any meal."

In fact, she usually spoke only Amharic and the Oromo farmer could also speak Amharic fluently. But at that time, she used the Oromo language and made a pitiful story to appeal for food crops. It seemed to me that the Oromo farmer did not fully believe what she said, but her words and expressions were enjoyable enough to create a pleasant atmosphere between them.

(After some turns of the conversation, finally the farmer gave her some taro.)

H.M.: "*Oh, my brother. Allah, give him a long life. Like a person receiving a reward, I shall enjoy the food, lying down on my bed. When I go home and put two taros in my mouth, I will boast it as if our Oromo ancestor killed an animal [such as lion] (Oromo phrase).*"

H.M.: "*Allah, give her a peaceful life. Give her a good harvest of taro every year. Give her a child every year. Our great Abba Yabu (Muslim holy man), bless you and bless your crops. (lifting the taros on her back with an effort) Ass of the mother you kicked out after marriage! (Oromo phrase meaning like 'oops-a-daisy') I won't go anywhere, now. I shall return home directly by way of the meadow.*"

Tracing these rhetorical utterances of a female beggar, it can be pointed out that religious belief and even ethnic identity are utilized as means for obtaining food. She weaved various stories of misery, referred to Oromo ancestor and Muslim holy man even though she was a Christian Amhara, and told with humorous expression in a friendly atmosphere, which successfully aroused the donor's sympathy to the point where he could no longer resist giving her something. This process suggests that "moral" or "norm" may not be embedded in the society or in peoples' mind in advance. Instead, they are repeatedly evoked and reminded by sentimental approaches, through socially affective discourses or symbolic resources such as language and religion.

All these cases suggest that the process of food sharing is not automatically practiced according to a moral or a norm, but that people are negotiating with each other for validity between sharing with others and keeping for themselves. It is a dynamic process negotiated over the distribution of the wealth. In the process of this interaction, I have pointed out that some mixed emotions like fear, respect, awe, and sympathy do function as a key element affecting the outcome of food sharing. Only those who are able to manipulate these emotions in their negotiation can receive their share of food. In the next section, I will discuss this point in detail with reference to literatures on reciprocity.

## EMOTIONAL INTERACTION IN FOOD SHARING

### Reciprocity and religious principle

The issue of food sharing has long been discussed in terms of various concepts such as 'egalitarianism', 'leveling mechanism', 'reciprocity' and 'moral economy.' I will start my argument with the concept of 'reciprocity' in anthropology. As I have pointed out, sharing behavior in highland Ethiopia can be summed up in two distinct characteristics: despite difference in motivation, food sharing is undertaken among various individuals from family members to unknown beggars; and in each case any counter-service in return is hardly practiced.

As discussed above, these results are not in accordance with Sahlins' formula on relationships between social distances and 'reciprocity,' in which he argues that in closer relationships people are more likely to share food with less return, whereas in alien relationships people tend to act more selfishly. There is no doubt that the relationships among family members and relatives are apparently much closer and tighter than the ones with

villagers of other ethnicity or with unknown beggars. Why do villagers provide their valuable food crops even for unfamiliar persons?

First of all, I have indicated that the religious belief of Islam would lie as an influential discipline for sharing activities. Just as Schneider points out in the case of the Christianity of Europe, it can be argued that the Islamic principle would liberate people from the community-based, blood and territorial relationship and introduce the egalitarianism or brotherly compassion based on the extended relationship of the religious community.<sup>11</sup> There is no doubt that religious beliefs have something to do with food sharing in the research village.

Otsuka, an anthropologist studying Islam, highlights the significance of exchange theory, which indicates 'reciprocal connection' in wealth-sharing among Muslims.<sup>12</sup> To sum up his point, *zakat* in Islam implies a kind of 'reciprocity' between a Muslim and Allah (or a holy man), in which his contribution can lead to his mundane interests in return. Then *zakat* does not mean a material donation to the poor, but a display of devotion and faith to Allah or a holy man. Therefore, according to the principle of Islam, the real recipient of the donation would be Allah or a holy man, not the poor or beggars. In fact, farmer B.Y. mentions to a poor villager, "*We are giving in favor of Allah, not for you.*"

It is an oversimplification, however, to treat the Islamic principle as the sole ground for explaining food sharing in rural communities. Actually, the sharing activity is not limited to the Muslim villagers, but also present among Christian villagers and even between both. Furthermore, not everybody devotes himself to sharing food without hesitation. If all people actually believed that Allah would always guarantee rewards to the *zakat* giver, nobody would refuse to give. Hence the principle of 'reciprocity' cannot fully clarify the context of food sharing in the village. It rather seems to be an idealistic discourse among Muslims.

The villagers often say: "*We Muslims have to leave one-tenth of our crops in the field, even if monkeys or boars are going to finish it up.*" In reality, however, no one is likely to leave their valuable crops in the fields. At the same time, in everyday life, they face the dilemma in which they are at risk of food shortage by giving away a certain amount of their crops. Therefore, since there is a discrepancy between the religious ideology and people's actual behavior, we should take into account as to what context, and who, utilizes the Islamic discourse for obtaining their share.

In anthropological theory of gift exchange, it is generally argued that the gift recipient would be forced to reciprocate, or at least be subjected to an expectation to do so. Mauss calls it 'total service' with three obligations: the obligation to reciprocate presents that have been received; the obligation to give; and the obligation to receive.<sup>13</sup> The creation of obligatory relationships in gift exchange would be at the center of the principle of 'reciprocity.' As Blau also argues in his theory of social exchange, these obligatory exchanges could bring power relationship to the donor and the recipient by placing the recipient in debt.<sup>14</sup>

In a way, the ideology of Islam could be considered as a strategic approach to prevent people from indebtedness. Each time when the poor beggars refer to Allah for the giver's blessing, the words implies that *zakat* would be for Allah and not for the beggars, who would be freed from responsibility of the debt and counter-service. Hence the Islamic principle would bear authority as a powerful discourse in interactive negotiation over food sharing.

In order to avoid reciprocal indebtedness, the recipient can also take approaches such as 'alienation' to the donor. As the villager's words, "*when they are not in trouble, even if we are suffering, they never come close to us,*" indicate, the recipient of shared food tends to avoid frequent contact. If they keep in touch, they would always be reminded of the indebtedness, which places them in a subordinate position against the donor. Avoidance of everyday contact by the recipient can be considered as a way of concealing hierarchical relationships between the donor and the recipient.

Of course, the donors also have strategic means to gain advantage in the interactive negotiation. When begged, they often show their annoyance in an obvious manner and refuse the demand. The words thrown at the begging women: "*it was enough and even too much!*" and "*Don't give anything! We cannot afford to do that!*" clarify that the speakers do not always give crops out of kindness and that they are in superior position in the negotiation over sharing. These donors' approaches, however, are subject to counter-approach from the recipients.

#### Emotional interaction over sharing food

Hence the interaction of food sharing appears to be a kind of tug-of-war interaction over the obligation and indebtedness induced by reciprocity. Among others, as I suggested, envy is definitely a significant element for the interaction. It has been repeatedly pointed out that envy would function as a leveling mechanism. Its operation, however, cannot be explained in simple terms such as: "food is shared because the rich are envied." How can we understand the way in which envy works as an incentive for food sharing?

In his essay on envy, Foster stresses the importance to recognize the correlation between 'envy' and 'jealousy.' "Envy stems from the desire to acquire something possessed by another person, while jealousy is rooted in the fear of losing something already possessed."<sup>15</sup> Thus an emotion of 'envy' and 'jealousy' necessarily includes the mutual interaction between the envier and the envied.

we can say that man fears being envied for what he has and wishes to protect himself from the consequence of the envy of others; man also fears he will be accused of others, he wishes to allay the suspicion; and finally, man fears to admit to himself that he is envious, so he searches for rationales and devices to deny to himself his envy and to account for in terms other than personal responsibility, the conditions that place him in a position inferior to another.<sup>16</sup>

Foster argues that envy is activated by multiple fears. The cases in highland Ethiopia can also be explained to some extent by these multiple fears. What is of most importance here is that food sharing is always driven through the mental interaction of expectation and fear between the rich and the poor. On the one hand, the poor expect an act of sharing, or at least they pretend as if this expectation is well-deserved, without admitting that they are envious, inferior, or indebted. On the other hand, the rich sense this envy and the expectation to share, and fear unfavorable outcomes should they fail to do so. These hidden interactions between the envier and the envied are present in food sharing process.

The case of highland Ethiopia, however, implies that envy works as a strong motivation especially in close relationships. There are also different kinds of fear observed in the interaction of food sharing such as fear of the religious principle or of God, or strangers and those from other ethnic groups. Furthermore, these fears include mixed feelings of awe, anxiety, and

respect that often emerge as ambivalent sentiments. Fear of God, includes not only fear of sanctions from God, but also respect for his sacredness. Fear for strangers includes not only fear of unfamiliar persons, but also anxiety about the potential for misfortune. Reference to Allah by the recipients can exert pressure only when the donor feels fear and awe toward Allah. If one has no faith in Islam, those words may not have an effect. The same could be applied to witch medicine, which can exercise pressure on the rich only if they bear fear of witch doctors or magicians.

These kinds of multiple emotions may cause people to act in certain ways, which political economists have hardly taken into account. Hyden argues that in the economy of affection actors share a common set of expectations.<sup>17</sup> The point is that those shared expectations can function only by being activated and reproduced through the cycle of emotional interaction among people.

In highland Ethiopia, relatively vulnerable persons such as the poor, beggars, and socially weak minorities are in more advantageous positions for negotiations through emotional interaction. They would consciously and unconsciously manipulate these mixed emotions and gain superiority in the negotiation over sharing. As a result, the food crops not infrequently flow from the haves to have-nots. If this interpretation is correct, another possibility emerges: the influx of migrants with growing social mobility could even accelerate sharing activities among the peasants. Although it is quite difficult to see whether or not the amount of food shared among peasants has increased, the relationships to be shared could possibly have become much wider and diversified in accordance with the growth of social heterogeneity. The classical argument of peasant studies has focused solely on relatively closed and homogenous peasant communities. The framework of emotional interaction for food sharing can provide a useful perspective in considering the contemporary situation in rural Africa.

## Conclusion

The principle of political economists can be seen as 'economy of rational calculation,' in which individuals always account their interests, utility, cost and benefit. The process of interactions in highland Ethiopia, however, indicates that people are often driven into the sharing of food through ad hoc emotional incentives. These affective motivations are sometimes ambivalent and mixed, including fear, respect, and sympathy. This 'economy of emotional interaction,' I think, is one of the significant agencies that bring about the situation described as "moral economy."

Peasant studies have identified a distinct feature maintained among the peasants, which is completely irreconcilable with the capitalistic or market-oriented standard. Nowadays, however, most agrarian societies in Africa have been rapidly integrated to the market economy and capitalism. Many anthropologists of peasant studies have set up their theory based solely on peasant societies *outside* the market economy. That is the reason why their framework limits their view of peasant economic behavior within culturally homogenous communities with persistent essential features. In order to reveal the "moral economy" *within* the market economy, the economy of emotional interaction is a concept to take into account the dynamic process of contemporary situation surrounding peasants in rural Africa.

**Notes:**

1. Scott 1976.
2. Scott 1976.
3. Popkin 1979.
4. Hirschman 1977.
5. Geertz 1963.
6. Hyden 1980.
7. Foster 1965.
8. Roseberry 1989.
9. Matsumura 2003.
10. Sahlins 1972.
11. Schneider 1990.
12. Otsuka 1989.
13. Mauss 1990, p. 13.
14. Blau 1964.
15. Foster 1972, p.168.
16. Foster 1972, p.166.
17. Hyden 2004, p. 9.

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