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Structure of Trust in Society

S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger

Excerpt

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## 1

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*Personal relations, trust and ambivalence  
in relation to the institutional order*

## I

This book is about some special types of interpersonal relations – above all about friendship, ritual personal and patron–client relationships – and their connections to the institutional matrix in which they develop.

The most important illustrations of such relations are blood brotherhood and affine relationships of covenanted comradeship or sacrosanct amity initiated through some ritual exchange of personal substance (blood, saliva, semen, etc.) as reported in the Muslim Middle East, in Africa (for instance, among the Zande studied by E.E. Evans-Pritchard), in Caucasian tribes and among North American Indians; practices of ‘fictive’ kinship, as found for instance among slaves of warlike African tribes who were adopted into the lineages of their captors, or in the Japanese practices of adoption of strangers into families (*mukoyōshi*) and into rural kinship units (*dozoku*); patterns of ritual kinship, such as the various Christian forms of co–parenthood (*compadrazgo*, *comparaggio*, etc.) reported in Latin America, southern Europe, the Balkans, Yugoslavia, and other eastern European settings; patron–client relations as found typically in Latin America, southeast Asia and the Mediterranean areas; ritualised bonds of friendship such as blood–friendship or ‘best’ friendship links of some African peoples and cultures of the Pacific such as the Tikopia; and the numerous forms of less formalised friendships reported in many, above all complex, societies in general and modern societies in particular.

These interpersonal relations, although in part seemingly informal, and which in one way or another are found in almost all human societies, are yet very often defined in very articulated symbolic and institutional terms. Within most of these relations, several themes are emphasised, which more or less intensively or articulatedly are

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common to many – if not all – types of informal interpersonal relations that develop in human societies.

These relations are usually defined in terms of mutual intimacy, of moral and emotional obligations, stressing above all trust and empathy, and sometimes the sharing of common ‘pure’ pristine values, as well as some equality. In the relations of friendship, this mutual trust is consistently based on the relative equality of the participants in this relationship, while patron–client relations entail hierarchical differences between the patron and his protégé, his ‘client’. Even then a moral equality of the different participants is implied, as J. Pitt–Rivers has rightly pointed out.<sup>1</sup>

Some ambivalence is also common to most of these relationships – sometimes weak, sometimes very strong – towards the more formalised organised structure of the society in which they develop.

These themes are probably common to numerous types of informal interpersonal relations that develop in human societies, but they are more fully articulated in the special types of interpersonal relations with which we are concerned in this study, namely in patron–client relations, ritual personal links, and friendship.

## II

These interpersonal relations touch on some basic aspects of the construction of social order and of the tensions and ambivalences which such construction entails.

In order better to understand the characteristics of such relations and their institutional significance it might be worthwhile first of all to examine the way in which they were analysed in the social sciences, in the ‘classical’ traditions of sociology and social anthropology. These traditions dealt, above all, with highly structured entities such as groups, social structures and institutions.

Interpersonal relations were not on the whole part of this analysis. In some cases, as in the work of Georg Simmel, or in a different vein in social psychology, they formed a distinct mode and subject of analysis, with but little connection to more central analyses of social structures and institutions. It was only the study of primary groups and relations, which developed especially in American sociology in the forties, that constituted any exception to this. But even this was only a partial exception, because most of these studies mainly pointed out the importance of such relations or groups in the life of their members and in the structure of society, but did not analyse their distinct characteristics as types of interpersonal relations.<sup>2</sup>

It was above all in the anthropological and – to a smaller degree – in

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the sociological literature that, already in the late forties and early fifties, some types of rather exceptional interpersonal relations, such as different types of friendship, of ritual friendship and of patron–client relations, were noted. But until the late fifties and early sixties, the study of these kinds of relations was in most of the social sciences – anthropology, sociology and political science – in a rather marginal position. Patron–client relations as well as relations of ritual or informal friendship – although fascinating – were seen as rather marginal in societies and were studied in the framework of the concepts, approaches and concerns which were predominant in these disciplines. They were usually treated as (sometimes negative) illustrations of the principles of organisation of macrosocietal complexes, and they were above all seen as greatly differing or deviating from the ‘corporate’ kinship and territorial groups so strongly emphasised in anthropological literature and from universalistic–bureaucratic or market frameworks which were usually portrayed in sociology or in political science as epitomes of modernity and rationality.<sup>3</sup>

This picture has changed since about the late fifties, especially with respect to the study of patron–client relations, which became more central to sociological and anthropological analysis.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in this area, the change was connected with the shift in the objects of these studies from relatively limited, dyadic, interpersonal, semi-institutionalised relations between a single patron and usually one or at most a few clients to a much greater variety of types of social relations and organisations. These ranged from semi-institutionalised personal dyadic or tryadic relations in more organised settings (such as various bureaucratic agencies) to relatively loose, less rigidly prescribed social relations, often organised in complex networks and connected by different types of brokers, as well as to loose cliques and factions in political machines.

Second, this change was connected with the spread of these studies over a very wide range of societies throughout the world – in the Mediterranean, the Near East, Latin America, India, southeast Asia and other parts of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Third, the centrality of these studies became connected with the growing awareness that patron–client relations were not destined to remain on the outskirts of society or to disappear with the development and establishment of democratic or authoritarian regimes or with economic development and modernisation or with the development of class consciousness among the lower strata; and that, while any single type of patronage, as for instance the personal semi-institutionalised kinship-like personal dyadic patron–client relationship, may disappear under such conditions, new types of such relations may

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appear, and may be found, in a great variety of forms, in different societies, cutting across different levels of economic development and types of political regimes, and seemingly performing important functions within such more developed modern frameworks.<sup>6</sup>

## III

The various types of such interpersonal relations as blood brotherhood, ritual kinship or pseudo-kinship, and different types of less formal or institutional friendship have been studied even since the fifties much less systematically and continuously than patron–client relations.

The study of the more fully institutionalised types of such interpersonal relations was mostly undertaken within tribal and peasant societies, within the framework of systematic anthropological analysis. In these studies, structural variables such as the character of kinship and of territorial and other groups were stressed initially as explaining the development of such relations. In later anthropological studies, from about the mid-sixties onwards, with the growing stress in the social sciences in general (and in anthropology in particular) on the autonomy of the symbolic dimension, there did develop also the interpretation of these different types of interpersonal relations as part of the symbolic domain of the structuring of human relations.<sup>7</sup>

The study of the more informal types of interpersonal relations in general and of friendship in particular in more complex societies – and especially in modern ones – was discontinuous, even if undertaken from various perspectives by socio-metric and psychosociological analyses, as well as by sociological and to a smaller degree anthropological ones.<sup>8</sup>

The psychosociological and socio-metric approaches have naturally stressed in particular the element of choice and of mutual attraction in the constitution of such relationships and the possible importance, in such choices, of compatible or incompatible but complementary personal attributes.<sup>9</sup>

Lately several studies of friendship have also been undertaken from the point of view of developmental psychology, either from an ethnological–developmental point of view or from a developmental–structural vantage point greatly influenced by Piaget.<sup>10</sup>

The more specifically sociological analyses – best exemplified in the works of Parsons and White, of Naegele and of James Coleman<sup>11</sup> – stressed the importance of such interpersonal relations in general and of friendship in particular in structuring or facilitating the transition, in American society at least, from the world of childhood into that of

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adulthood, from the seemingly secure solidary world of the family and of childhood into the world of 'adult' competition.

In the same vein S.N. Eisenstadt's analysis of age groups<sup>12</sup> has stressed the importance of formalised age groups – as well as of less formalised youth groups, movements and the like – as providing such interlinking mechanisms in those societies in which the broader macrosocietal institutional principles differ from those of the family structure, i.e. are universalistic and specialised. Although in this work no special emphasis was laid on purely interpersonal relations as such, yet it was those characteristics of the age groups and youth movements – above all their strong stress on ascriptive criteria and on solidary relations, which stood close to the traits of such interpersonal relations – that were stressed in this study. Hence Eisenstadt's somewhat later analysis of ritualised interpersonal relations<sup>13</sup> was a natural offshoot of this more comprehensive analysis.

## IV

Side by side with these studies there have also been, in the last three decades, several attempts to bring these various studies of friendship, ritual kinship and the like into somewhat more comprehensive frameworks. The first such attempt at bringing the various studies of friendship into a systematic comparative framework was probably the Harvard Seminar on Friendship conducted in 1955 and 1956 by Cora Du Bois – the proceedings of which were however never published. In 1956 Eisenstadt presented one of the first published comparative analyses of these relationships. In 1961 Y. Cohen published another such broad survey, basing himself on a wider range of data.<sup>14</sup>

In 1966 E. Wolf presented, already in close relationship with the study of patronage, a classification stemming to some degree from Aristotle's work on different types of friendship, stressing mainly the difference between emotional and instrumental friendship. In 1969 a Symposium on Friendship was conducted by R. Paine and E. Leyton in the University of Newfoundland and parts of its proceedings, with some additional materials, were published in 1974.<sup>15</sup>

The systematic analysis of ritual kinship of pseudo-kinship has been, since the fifties, most continuously pursued by Julian Pitt-Rivers while the literature on friendship has been analysed by Odd Ramsøy in the *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* and more recently by R. Paine and C. Du Bois in the Newfoundland Symposium.<sup>16</sup>

In these various analytical summaries of the field – especially in the later ones – some attempts were made to connect the disparate analytical or theoretical approaches to the study of these various types

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of interpersonal relations; yet very often these very attempts have highlighted the lack of direct connection between these approaches. Thus, to give only one illustration, Ramsøy's article in the *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* does not contain reference to most of the anthropological studies, while Pitt-Rivers' article on pseudo-kinship in the same work does not refer to the more psychological or sociological analyses of friendship. It is perhaps only in the Newfoundland Symposium that at last an attempt has been made to combine these various strands of analysis.

## V

Despite the relative discontinuity and the great disparity of the approaches in the study of these different types of interpersonal relations and between them and patron–client relations, some common themes can indeed be discerned in most of them. These can be identified with respect to the definition of the most salient features of such interpersonal relations in general and of friendship in particular; with respect to the broader conditions which generate them or within the context of which they develop, as well as with respect to attempts to classify them. Among these themes stand out, first of all, the (most voluntary) construction of a realm of solidarity and trust, and, second and to a smaller degree, the problematics of emotional affinity, intimacy and participation in a realm of pristine spiritual values. Most of the definitions and descriptions of the patterns of these interpersonal relations have emphasised very strongly at least part of these themes as constituting the central core of these interpersonal relations.

Thus for instance in 1956 Eisenstadt proposed – albeit referring only to more fully institutionalised types of such relations – the following definitions of their basic analytical characteristics:

they are particularistic, personal, voluntary and fully institutionalized (usually in ritual terms). By particularistic I mean that the incumbents of the relationship act towards one another in terms of their respective personal properties and not in terms of general universal categories. In this they are very close to kinship relations and groups (which are also predominantly particularistic) but unlike the latter in that they are incurred in a voluntary way.

... In order to understand more fully the nature of these relationships, we should also inquire into the contents and nature of the obligations that they incur. The fact that these relations are both voluntary (hence to some extent contractual) and also particularistic and personal indicates that we have some interrelation between solidary and instrumental obligations. In all such relations there exists a set of mutual obligations in the instrumental and economic fields. Some such obligations seem to recur in most of these cases – e.g. mutual

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help in cases of economic hardship, illness or other calamities – some sort of mutual insurance in common economic enterprises, participation in funeral expenses, participation in some costs of educating children, etc. . . .

. . . these mutual (or, as sometimes in cases of godparent–godchild relations, unilateral) instrumental obligations are set within a framework of diffuse solidarity. These obligations are not defined as stemming from some specific, limited contractual, market-type commitments and relations, nor are they set in terms of universalistic categories of people.<sup>17</sup>

A similar strong emphasis on trust or on solidarity can be found in the more psychosociological or sociological definitions of these relations. Thus the relative importance and strength of such dimensions of solidarity in these relations has been also a major starting point for most of the attempts at classification of them. Y. Cohen distinguished between inalienable, close, casual and expedient friendship, while Wolf differentiated between emotional and instrumental friendship; similarly Cora Du Bois presented in the Newfoundland Symposium several basic dimensions according to which different types of interpersonal relations can be distinguished.<sup>18</sup> Common to all of them, according to her, is that they are voluntary and preferential, and they differ as to whether they are expressive or instrumental, dyadic or polyadic, as well as in the degree of intimacy they entail and in their mutability and duration. She then distinguishes between three major categories of friends – exclusive, close and casual, which differ in these dimensions – and summarises the dimensions and types of friendship as shown in table 1.<sup>19</sup>

*Table 1. Dimensions and types of friendship*

	Exclusive	Close	Casual
Expressive–instrumental	Primarily expressive	Expressive–instrumental	Largely instrumental
Dyadic–polyadic	Dyadic/exclusive	Multiple dyads	Polyadic
Intimacy (confidence, responsibility)	Inclusive	Selective	Incidental
Mutability	Assumed permanent	Hoped durable	Not stressed

Similarly, K. Naegele<sup>20</sup> identified as the most prominent feature of friendship that connected with trust and personal choice, and as complementary the elements of dependability, mutual understanding and general acceptance and a varying presence of interest considera-

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tions and positive emotions. These emphases were found to different degrees among the various categories of friendship identified by high school students in that study: namely just friends, a gang, people one knows, people one hangs around with, people who are close, people who are one's best friends.

## VI

The theme of trust, of solidarity and of the search for pristine values has also been central in the attempts to explain the conditions which generate these various types of interpersonal relations, and which themselves changed in their emphasis with developments in sociological theory and analysis which have developed since the late fifties or early sixties. Thus in 1956 Eisenstadt propounded an analysis of the conditions which give rise to such – especially institutionalised – relations, stressing the functions of social control.

Such conditions arise mostly in some types of predominantly particularistic societies and are related to some tensions and strains inherent in the societies.

. . . It seems to me that in such societies there exist two main areas of strains and consequent problems of integration. The first are strains which exist within the basic constituent groups of such societies (lineages, clans, castes, some territorial groups, etc.) and which are inherent in the structure of these groups. Second are the various strains and tensions between the main groups and categories of people of which such societies are composed, and the consequent problems of their integration . . . Most of these tensions can be related to the fact that in such groups, by the very nature of their organization, there usually is but little specification of the allocation of the various major obligations within the group or category. These are left – at least on many occasions – to the internal arrangements of the particular group. Sometimes these relations may be structured and clearly defined – quite often in ways which may increase the tensions (as in the right prescription of seniority rights) – but quite often they may be left to some internal unspecified arrangements of the group involved. These may enable the exercise of many pressures, of bargaining and of illegitimate power, etc. Moreover, it is not always specified, and in many cases cannot be specified by the very nature of the case, which of the members of a group will start a chain of activities or become involved in some problems or conflicts, which may then affect the whole group. Thus it can never be known who will start a particular feud which may involve the group or some of its members, or who will engage in various commercial or economic activities with other groups, etc., or who will show more initiative or ambition in any field of organization, etc. While it may perhaps be easy to identify such persons in terms of individual idiosyncrasies and characteristics, these do not necessarily coincide with any definite structural positions within the group or within a broad category of people. Thus the very nature of such particularistic groups, with their emphasis on diffuse solidarity (sometimes



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also on seniority, etc.), lends itself to easy manipulation by certain people who may easily go beyond what seem to other persons to be their legitimate rights. This is especially so in those areas of life and in those enterprises which involve not fully structured intergroup relations, which are not entirely contained within the group and regulated by it, and which yet may easily involve the group itself and many of the members by the very existence of clear definition of situation.

An additional factor of strain in such societies is the possibility of conflicting claims and pressures from different groups or categories of people or any persons, and the limiting of the area of the individual's choice or private life through such pressures. This seems to be especially important in problems of inheritance, the amount and type of property that one can bequeath according to his own wish, etc. . . .

. . . It seems to be characteristic of most of these relations and obligations, especially in the instrumental field or in political relations (as, for example, among the Azande), that they are not entirely 'contained' and regulated by the particularistic criteria and relations of each of these groups and by what may be called their routine interrelations. Many of these mutual obligations are not clearly and concretely defined simply because they are not stated in general, universalistic and specific ways but rather in more diffuse and particularistic terms, and are limited within the framework of diffuse solidary relations. Thus the exact demands that a noble can make of a commoner among the Azande, or a member of a superior caste among the Tanala towards a member of a lower one, are not usually clearly defined and may give rise to a lot of 'private' interpretations and extortions. The same seems to be true of the demands of members of senior age groups towards younger ones or of the demands between certain family groups in the spheres of intermarriage, etc. This is especially so in cases of eruption, or continuous existence, of hostile relations between such groups or their members. In such cases the exact definition of mutual obligations, compensation, etc. may be a very vexing and uncertain problem . . .

. . . In other words, it seems that the very kind of social organization existing in such societies creates some types of undefined situations or types of situations of potential conflict malintegration. These situations may be of either of the two main types mentioned earlier. They may arise in those cases wherein the internal solidarity of each of such sub-groups may come into conflict with various exigencies of cooperation and interrelationships between such groups. Or the extent of interrelationship between such different sub-groups may be so loose and small that it is difficult to maintain any regulated relations between them or their members.

. . . It is our basic hypothesis that the various forms of ritualized personal relationships constitute also a mechanism of social control which tends to mitigate some of the tensions and strains of predominantly particularistic societies analysed above.

. . . What seems common to most of them is that some incompatibility develops between an individual's instrumental obligations, his solidary obligations, and his predispositions in these spheres. His solidary relations to

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some groups or categories of people may become strained because of conflicting or illegitimate claims in the instrumental field made by members of such solidary groups, and/or he may be incapable of fulfilling his instrumental obligations and aspirations because of such solidary claims or because of lack of what to him seems adequate support from his solidary groups. It may therefore be a plausible suggestion that this type of strain is most likely to occur in those situations in which both problems of intra-group solidarity and of intergroup relations arise. In other words, in such situations there arise problems both of societal integration and of individual tension and adjustment.

... It is because of these various characteristics of situations of strain that the different types of ritualized personal relations are so closely related to them. The basic characteristics of ritualized personal relations, analysed in the first part of this paper, enable these relations to mitigate precisely these types of conflicts. In order to avoid imputation of any teleological implications in this argument it should be stated at the outset that we do not assume that, whenever such tensions exist, these (or any other) mechanisms of social control always develop, nor that these are necessarily the only types of such mechanisms which could perform this function.

... A closer analysis of the different types of obligations incurred through relationships of ritual kinship, as well as of its voluntary and personal nature, will illustrate the way in which these relations tend to mitigate the above-analysed tensions, from the point of view of both the individual and the social structure.

... As has already been indicated, most of these obligations contain some element of insurance against unexpected risks and calamities. These may be the cases of illness, of death, of unexpected sudden economic demands, hardship, etc. In still other cases we find some sort of assurance of safe ways in strange and hostile parts of the country ...

... But in all these relations there exists an additional basic element – namely, that the performance of these obligations is assured through a special personal bond which transcends the usual existing groupings and categories of people and cuts across them. This bond is usually seen as no less binding – sometimes even more – than that with the categories and groups. In some cases, this bond is more or less expressly oriented to assuring the individual's will as against possible pressures from different groups ...

... Their ability to perform these functions of social control and alleviation of tensions that arise under the conditions specified above is made possible because the very nature of these relationships is set firmly within the basic structural principles of these societies. As has been pointed out above, they are particularistic, diffuse, and are sanctioned in terms of the most important values and symbols of their respective societies ...

... Moreover, it is the fact that they are sanctioned by the highest ritual sanctions that enables these relationships to 'compete,' as it were, with the usual kinship, etc., relations which are also related to the ultimate values of these societies ...

... This is especially seen in the organization of instrumental and solidary relations on the one hand and of personal and particularistic relations on the