

To pay and not to pay: Symbolic meaning and structure of debt relationships in a Russian town

I

Perhaps the biggest debt that anthropology owes to Bronislaw Malinowski is caused by the fact that he delivered the nascent discipline from simplistic illusions about human nature. By dismantling the myths of both unbounded altruism and unbounded egoism of primitive man, he opened up a field of investigation of human complexity. It turned out that the most essential thing about human sociality is not that man is predisposed towards a certain kind of relationship, but that he can differentiate between different modes of interaction. Thus instead of dogmatic beliefs and quarrels about “good man” and “bad man” anthropology received a whole new field of inquiry unbound by preconceptions.

Malinowski has famously argued that there is no greater insult for a Trobriander than suggesting that ‘he conducts his Kula as if it were *gimwali*’ (Malinowski 2002 [1922]: 73). That is, humans are able to develop institutions that allow for distinguishing between these two different logics – logic of gift and logic of utilitarian exchange. The main moral imperative for a human being thus consists neither in sacrificing his own interests nor in disregarding interests of others, but in not confusing these two basic principles, in keeping gift and barter separate.

This rule operated smoothly among Trobrianders who possessed a very elaborate apparatus to distinguish between Kula and *gimwali* (which includes different types and stages of gift, strict specification of items involved, ritualized patterns of behavior etc.). However, many modern communities have no such apparatus at their disposal, which creates fundamental difficulties in interpreting the transaction and choosing an appropriate mode of behavior for participants. This, of course, doesn’t mean that modern societies are poorer in terms of institutional creativity. Rather, what differentiates these societies from Trobrianders is the shifting boundary between gift and market: obviously, institutions that enable people recognizing gifts and utilitarian exchanges function better when this boundary remains stable. This is not the case in modern societies, where many interactions traditionally framed as gifts transform into utilitarian exchanges.

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This process was subtly described by Karl Polanyi as the shifting place of the ‘economic’ in society. According to Polanyi, gradual autonomisation of economy represents the key dynamics of modernity, and it leads to the situation when the growing number of practices is governed by economic principles, rather than by social principles (Polanyi 1957a: 250). In the limit this ends up with a “disembedded” economy, which means that not only economic processes are no longer influenced by communitarian principles, but the communities themselves become embedded in the sphere of economic (Polanyi 1957b: 57). And even though full realization of this disembedding scenario would be tantamount to catastrophe (as it actually happened with fascism), it is true that there is a constant conflict between economic and social, and economic gains more and more practices that were previously governed by social. Within this dynamics, practices that have been regulated by the logic of gift since the world began, become contested and confront alternative framing in terms of utilitarian exchange.

General question is, then, what are the tools used by human communities when they face ambiguity generated by the emergence of alternative framings? What mechanisms do they use to differentiate between gift and utilitarian exchange, between economic and social? And if there are no such mechanisms at hand, how do communities cope with these difficulties?

In this paper we shall argue that debt is an important institutional solution to these problems. Due to its dual nature, debt can serve as a mediator between gift and market. Rather than resolving the ambiguity, it enables agents to defer the definition of the situation.

To substantiate this theoretical claim we will use the data collected in summer 2010 in a small Russian town called Kologriv, where local community has to attend to both survival of its members and legitimacy of profit-seeking motives. These two come to terms every time when buyer and seller have to choose the basis on which they are going to interact – whether it will be a pure utilitarian exchange or an act of support. We will show that the main mechanism employed to relieve this pressure are debts and debt books. However, debt cannot serve as a stable solution, since contradictory prescriptions concerning whether the debts should be settled are in action simultaneously. We treat local bazaar as a mechanism that helps to reproduce the border between economic and social.

II

Kologriv is a small town with nearly 3000 inhabitants, located in Kostroma region in Central Russia. Kostroma is an economically depressed region: it used to live on its woodworking and agricultural industries, but as of now both of them are almost non-existent. In Kologriv situation is particularly difficult: whereas neighboring cities have kept at least some woodwork-

ing plants operating, Kologriv is totally unproductive. The town is surrounded by small sawmills where local men fell trees, saw them and sell the wood boards to woodworkers from other regions. About 60% of population serve as public employees and are thus highly dependent on funds from federal and regional budget funds. In addition to that, Kologriv is unfavorably located: it has no railway connection, and only one road leads from town, nearest cities with railroad stations are two hours away from here. Road is bumpy and almost no public transport operates here – so, Kologriv is a relatively isolated community.

Because of this lack of mobility Kologriv is a relatively closed community. For those who prefer to live here, horizon is rather narrow and the world is small. Although Moscow is not that far away in terms of distance, for local people it appears to be almost another planet. Given the fact that almost nothing is produced here except wood boards, one can easily discern flows of resources that secure the livelihood for community. First and foremost it is local shops – few dozens of them operate in the town, selling commodities brought from neighbor cities and regions. Second, it is periodic bazaar that meets on Thursdays (its role will be discussed in detail below). Finally, there are, of course, flows of resources within the community. People in villages near Kologriv, as well as citizens themselves, raise vegetables; two or three farmers raise cattle and keep shops, thus providing local people with fresh meat.

Certainly, of these sources the most important are shops, which provide for most of the needs of local population. Some of them specialize in food or building materials, while others are filled with this and that. Shopkeepers are local entrepreneurs (few shops are owned by businessmen from other towns) who operate as retailers, buying goods in neighboring areas and reselling them in Kologriv. Some entrepreneurs own several shops, thus forming small retail chains; depending on the scale of business, they work as vendors or devote themselves to management. Usually these are family businesses so that husband and wife own and manage them together.

The position of this group in local community is rather ambiguous. This can be explained by discerning two elements which are, according to Sombart, constitutive of the spirit of capitalism: adventure capitalism and bourgeois capitalism (Sombart 1967). On the one hand, entrepreneurs in Kologriv turned out to be the most adaptive to institutional change that happened twenty years ago: they were among few who ventured to set up their own business – a pattern of behavior, which is very unconventional among local people who used to rely on authorities for their subsistence. This ability to respond to the new environment, courage and self-reliance that gained them relatively prosperity makes them look like Sombart's adventurers and brings them influence and respect within the community.

On the other hand, they face suspicion or even contempt, which can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, in present situation town is highly dependent on these entrepreneurs. As Sombart has noticed, the bourgeois component of the spirit of capitalism can cause negative attitude towards it, since profit-seeking motives are treated as destructive for the whole community (for that reason such motives are often delegated to marginal groups standing at the periphery of community, such as Jews). Secondly, on initial stages of entrepreneurial activity people Russia tended towards negative attitude towards entrepreneurs in general (Radaev 1997). This was partly explained by perceived unfairness of income distribution in the context of limited opportunities. And even though general attitude has changed since then, in areas with low chances of upward mobility, such as Kologriv, people still may consider entrepreneurial success to be unjust.

Thirdly, there is still an ideological prejudice against retailers, which stems from the distinction between productive and unproductive labor that served as a cornerstone for Soviet national income statistics. Soviet economists derived this distinction from Marx's theory of value and labeled all activities with no material outcome as unproductive¹. Despite institutional changes and abandonment of Soviet economic statistics, 'productivity' is still regarded by many as the most important dimension of labor. This makes the entire tertiary sector of the economy look morally inferior to material production, and retailers are obvious victims of this attitude, since their income is believed to result from pure speculation that adds nothing to economy (Humphrey 2002: 69ff). It is no surprise that in a poor town where no manufacturing industry whatsoever operates for a long time, resellers are regarded as a convincing evidence of decay.

There is a problem of choosing an appropriate mode of behavior for the retailers operating in these settings. This can be seen in regular transactions: vendors in the shops often hear customers complaining that they have no money to pay for the purchases. Theoretically speaking, vendor can perceive such declaration as a rejection of the deal and hence refuse to transfer goods to the customer. Since participants to the situation agree that it takes place in a 'market economy', this solution wouldn't appear to them to be completely inadequate. However, as anthropologists have noted countless times, requests for means that satisfy basic human needs usually shouldn't be rejected in human communities, and these means are unlikely to be fully marketized (see, e.g., Polanyi 1957a). Thus, faced with a justification by urgent needs, vendor is in-

¹ Holesovsky argues that it was a mistake to refer to Marx in identifying material/non-material distinction with productive/unproductive, since Marx repeatedly stressed that the appropriate criterion for productiveness is not materiality, but role of labor in reproduction of social relations under capitalism. Hence Marx's idea of 'productivity' is simply inadequate for non-capitalist modes of production, such as Soviet economy. The productive/unproductive distinction, so influential in Soviet society, is much closer to Smith's conception of material production (Holesovsky 1961).

clined to give food or construction materials for free. But this, of course, makes him liable, since such complaints and requests are not infrequent, and it would be unwisely on entrepreneurs' part to bear the responsibility for the lack of currency within the community. The situation is further complicated by the fact that vendor usually acts as a representative of shopkeeper. As an employee, she obviously is not authorized to make such decisions; however, she has to make them on a regular basis, thus taking responsibility for livelihood of clients, prosperity of the employer and her own job and status in community.

In the situation described above, both options are unacceptable for the supply side: neither can it let the community perceive it as an immoral profit-seeker, nor can it subsidize the livelihood of community. Still, the decision has to be made, and what is at stake here is much more than technical details of a particular deal: the supply side (more specifically, the vendor) has to choose the logic of relationships with a particular customer. Adoption of 'take it or leave it' strategy will be immediately recognized as an attempt to frame the whole relationship between these particular persons as utilitarian exchange, whereas readiness to make a gift will destroy the image of profit-seeker and damage future market communication.

It was Sahlins' idea that choice between assistance and self-interested exchange depends on social (kinship) distance between participants (Sahlins 1972: 191-202). This perspective treats social distance as a precondition for an interaction: equating social distance with kinship distance aims to show that distance is a totally exogenous parameter. However, distance is what is constantly at stake in interaction: the decision concerning the behavior in particular situation can and will redefine the distance. If vendor chooses to make a gift, it is likely to shorten the distance, while refusing to give assistance will definitely lengthen it. Kinship relations are no exception: as we now from Bourdieu, these are not stable at all, but represent the object of constant strategic manipulation of those who would like to become 'more relative' or 'less relative' towards certain family (Bourdieu 1980: 312-330).

Callon and Latour (1997) make a provocative claim that what determines the choice is in fact material infrastructure. They consider an instance of community in Corsica where market trade of cheese becomes possible due to counter and box that serves as cash des. Members of the same community, even close relatives, when they find themselves in such settings, understand that they're involved in a market transaction and payment should come immediately and no haggling is allowed, irrespective of personal relationships between partners.

In Kologriv local shops are even better equipped with technological apparatus signaling the presence of the market. In addition to counter, showcases, price tags and price lists, one can find here cash-register machines. This environment does, of course, part of the job described by

Latour and Callon: nobody really expects that interaction between customer and vendor (and also customer and shopkeeper) inside the shop will be a mere continuation of their relationships outside. This is not a place where people exchange gifts, this is for certain. Still, customers are often reluctant to accept the terms of market transaction and prefer to appeal to vendor's conscience. In such case both sides seem to be in a stalemate.

III

One might suggest that when it is impossible to make a choice between two polarities, a compromise should be sought. Perhaps two most important distinctions between market exchange and gift are related to time and equivalence: there should be a time interval between gift and counter-gift and equivalence of counter-gift cannot be demanded (although adequate answer is expected) (Malinowski 2002; Mauss 1970). In order to modify market relationship and make it look more like a gift, one should resort to institution that combines elements of gift and market. Debt represents an example of such institution, since it allows deferring the payment and protects the transaction from degenerating into gift². Time interval is introduced, but at the same time debt preserves the requirement of equivalence. Debt is neither a market nor a gift: it arises out of the conflict between the two.

This combination explains why debt doesn't necessarily imply interest. Both economists and sociologists frequently ran into conceptual problems when trying to account for this phenomenon. For economists, markets mechanisms operate on assumption that time interval creates uncertainty, and hence interest is indispensable for agents trying to hedge their investments (Knight 2006: 168). For sociologists, gift implies that equivalence is insulting, and hence every gift "must be returned with interest" (Mauss 1970: 40). Both analyses turned out to be wrong (Hudson 2002; Graeber 2009), and we believe that it happened because for a long period economists and sociologists didn't recognize that debt doesn't conform to the logic of market nor to the logic of gift – it combines equivalence with time interval.

That is why debt is used in Kologriv to mediate between conflicting principles of gift and utilitarian exchange. In agreeing to sell on credit shopkeepers and vendors admit that they have some responsibilities before the community, as long as it concerns subsistence. The rhetoric of survival is often employed by customers describing debt relationships: *'I can't imagine how we would survive without it. Life is, so to say, below the average level – so, we have to borrow in*

² We don't discriminate here between credit and debt relationships. Convincing reasons for treating them as two sides of the same token can be found in: (Peebles 2010).

shops, to borrow and to pay back. Shopkeepers thus demonstrate that they do trust customers: open distrust is likely to be perceived as an insult (independently of customer's credit reputation).

On the other hand, selling on credit is not philanthropy, and debt is also a tool that supports this border. As for material infrastructure that Latour and Callon would probably look for, it is debt books that are responsible for supporting the frame of debt. These small notebooks are perhaps not as noticeable as cash machines (usually they're even hidden under the counter – perhaps with an eye to protect the customers from unnecessary temptation), but everybody knows that every vendor has one at hand. Debt books with accurate records remind clients that deference of payment is not the matter of reciprocity – one cannot expect to reciprocate with some assistance or present in future. Debtor owes exact sum of money, which is equivalent to the goods provided.

One possible objection to this explanation of debt might be that it is in fact in shopkeepers' interest to sell on credit, since otherwise they would lose their sole distribution channel and suffer from overstocking. This is partly true, particularly with respect to durables and expensive goods: credit turns then in a form of hire-purchase system, thus encouraging customers to buy what they actually can't afford. The point, however, is that things aren't exactly what they seem, and real financial situation of family may differ substantially from what is declared. People try to keep in secret information about their wealth: it is dangerous to have a reputation of being well-off, since this may multiply requests for help and simultaneously decrease the chances to get a credit. *'Clever people usually don't tell if something good happens to them. Whether good or bad, everything becomes gossip here'*. By concealing their real wealth, families can expect to save enough money to buy something expensive. As one shopkeeper puts it, *'some people look so pompous, but that's just for show – pretending they have money... It turns out they have none. Others behave modestly, they're not conspicuous, but money... they have lots of money'*.

Should shopkeepers decide to suspend selling on credit, from pure financial point of view this would probably result in a more uniform spending over a month and some decrease of demand for durables and expensive goods. It shouldn't come as a surprise that the whole discourse of survival is more of a blackmail: real danger is not that somebody will starve, but that entrepreneur will be suspected of trading the interest of community for profit. As Roitman shows, changing the mode of regulation of debt relationships can raise doubt concerning the legitimacy of wealth (Roitman 2005: 83ff), and that is what entrepreneurs wouldn't like to happen.

Since difference in prices and choice of goods is negligible, competition between shops is structured mainly in terms of reputation. Customers usually have preferences, and these are af-

fectured by the personality of shopkeeper and relationships between customer and shopkeeper. Refusing to sell on credit is likely to be interpreted according to the logic of gift – that is, as an attempt to increase social distance. That will definitely evoke customer to reconsider his relationships with other members of community and push the customer towards other shopkeepers, which is important given the fact that there is no price competition. Again, debt combines elements from logics of gift and market.

IV

One might conclude from previous section that debt is in fact a workable compromise between gift and market, between economic self-interest and social ties. However, as we have indicated, utilitarian exchange and gift represent not just two extremes of the same continuum (as they do for Sahlins), but two different logics of relationships, one based on economic and other on social principles. And although debt allows for mediating between them and deferring the choice between them, it is not a logic of its own – there is no autonomous principle behind debt.

This is best evidenced if we look closer at one important aspect of debt relationships: the settlement. Debt enables both parties to avoid conflict during the act of purchase and to save faces, but it also means that the issue will reappear. Usually debts are made ‘till next salary day’, and part of them is indeed settled as family receives funds. But this is not always the case: often settlement becomes real problem for both sides. Generally, it is accepted in Kologriv that ‘debts should be paid back’. Although debt relationship doesn’t involve promissory notes, nonpayments are considered to be dishonest by both customers and entrepreneurs. It is unlikely that somebody would incur debt in bad faith, with a determinate intention not to pay.

The devil, however, is in the details: time interval installed by debt relationship can be subject to manipulation. When families suffer from the lack of currency, time becomes strategic resource. There is almost no problem of allocation of money in Kologriv: *‘You receive your salary, then you pay debts. Only little sum is left, and this is used to pay for utility bills, every month. And what is left then is enough for week or two... So, you go to the shop and borrow again. Many people live like this here. From debts to debts.’* But this is true only for those who pay debts in time, as they are only in control over their own money. Manipulating with time enables to control over others’ money: depending on how long you are able to defer the payment, you can save enough money to buy a car, for instance. It is not by coincidence that local people often say ‘borrowing’ instead of ‘buying on credit’, since selling on credit often functions as interest-free cash loan with lender exercising no control over the uses of funds. Shopkeepers are usually the only lenders available: *‘You can borrow only in shops. Otherwise you have to look*

for somebody to owe you. You won't probably find anybody to borrow from... Look, there's nobody to borrow from. Everyone is as poor as we are.' It is thus unwise to pay the debts in time, since it means rejecting only opportunity to manage time and money.

Therefore, two contradictory imperatives are in operation simultaneously: to pay and not to pay. Relation between them can be described using Bourdieu's idea of misrecognition that is rooted deep in the logic of gift. According to Bourdieu, nobody should acknowledge, neither publicly nor to himself, that adequate counter-gift is mandatory, even though this truth is inscribed deep in practice. Gift depends on this self-deception, and revealing the truth will automatically destroy gift relationship (Bourdieu 2000: 191-192). With respect to debt we notice the inverted misrecognition: while everyone admits that debts should be settled, on the level of practice local people act out of understanding that it would be sheer madness to follow this rule all the time. Again, confessing that there is actually a whole debt economy behind simple practice of selling on credit would betray the fact that creditors subsidize the community far beyond the limits of pure survival.

Since many debtors don't pay back in expected time, shopkeepers and vendors have to concern themselves with collecting debts. In order to 'wring' money from debtors they try to exercise pressure on them all the time, and not only in shops – spirit of debt relationships permeates many everyday interactions, including glancing past each other on the street. And when a non-payer comes for another purchase, debt book immediately reminds him of the fact that there is still unresolved ambiguity about previous transactions. When expressing their dissatisfaction to such clients, vendors fall back upon the vocabulary of prestige: *'It must be that you don't respect me at all'*. Vendors try to represent payment as a matter of respect: whoever refuses to pay in time undermines market relationship between two free and independent agents³.

Again, the question is which logic shall be adopted: if logic of gift reigns, no exact time of payback can be determined, it suffices that debtor promises to pay in future. In such case, the request to pay back may be considered inappropriate. If, however, debt relationship is governed by the logic of market, delaying payment is equivalent to violation of the contract and abuse of confidence. It is obvious that debt doesn't solve the conflict: even though it relieves some pressure from shopkeepers and vendors and mediates between gift and utilitarian exchange, it can only defer the showdown. The tension between two opposite logics, between economic and so-

³ Principal character of Anton Chekhov's play 'Ivanov' (1887), a half-ruined noble man, owes large sum of money to Zinaida, wife of a landlord, and asks her for a deferment of payment. Zinaida pretends that she is frightened by such suggestion and reacts with the words, *'How is that possible? What kind of order do you suggest?'* That is, Ivanov's suggestion is perceived as an attempt of *reversal of the order*.

cial, permeates all practices, and the growing number of interactions becomes economized – that is, governed by economic logic. The atmosphere of low trust, secrecy and suspiciousness that surrounds relations in Kologriv testifies to the fact that community is in growing dissociation – or, as Gudeman (2008: 60) puts it, market relationships erode the base of the community and lead to its debasement.

V

Community faces an important challenge: it has to develop tools to draw the border between economic and social, to set the limits of dissociation. Community is constantly interrogated on whether it does exist as a community and where are its borders, both in terms of those who belong to it and in terms of practices that are governed by the logic of community. We have demonstrated that debt relationships constitute in a way reaction to these challenges, but they don't solve the problem: it is still unclear whether there are communitarian links between shopkeepers and customers, between lenders and debtors.

The integrity of community in Kologriv is also endangered because of obvious lack of public spaces. Local inhabitants often complain that there are no more places to go out, which makes a sharp contrast to Soviet period, when many entertainment sites were at people's disposal, such as cinema, palace of culture, and others. Nowadays there are almost no options left: while young people can spend nighttime either at disco club or in the only bar of the town, adults have nowhere to go out even on holidays. Obvious reason is, of course, absence of infrastructure, and citizens tend to blame local authorities for it. Causality, however, works backwards either: the erosion of community makes opening of new public spaces unlikely, since it would probably require some collective effort on the part of citizens.

In the present circumstances the only public space available for all the population is periodic bazaar. It has emerged more than twenty years ago, when centralized purchasing system has failed and people from neighboring villages were forced to sell their products in the town. Later bazaar underwent substantial transformations: it has moved to the central part of the town, and peasants were replaced by peddlers from other cities of region, who buy goods in Moscow (whether on open-air markets or from wholesale warehouses) and resell them in Kostroma region. These peddlers form a caravan that travels around biggest towns of the region: each town has a fixed day of week for bazaar. It arrives in Kologriv on Thursdays early in the morning and leaves after lunch. Number of stalls on bazaar may vary – some informants say that peddlers usually try to find out in advance whether people in Kologriv have money this week in order to decide whether to come or not. Every week bazaar attracts the majority of citizens and also peas-

ants from neighboring villages. People normally get the permission to leave from office in order to go to bazaar. Many informants stress that bazaar is *'the only place to walk... to chat, to meet acquaintances'*.

Given the importance that local people attribute to bazaar as public space, one might expect to see market relationships intermeshed with manifestations of sociability. Indeed, Geertz argues that such practices intensive search for information, which implies active communication (and not only identification of prices), haggling and clientelization (that is, maintenance of stable relationships with particular partners) are constitutive to bazaar (Geertz 1978). In Geertz's bazaar economy the success of traders and buyers depends on their social and communicative skills, their ability to be well connected and find necessary information.

However, communication on bazaar in Kologriv has little in common with this image. The line of stalls divides bazaar into two groups, traders and customers, so that there is intense communication within these groups, but weak interaction between them. Traders show little enthusiasm in advertising their goods, and even requests for information about prices and quality may be left without attention. Technical information about goods is usually the only thing that customers discuss with traders, which stands in a sharp contrast to constant exchange of views on both sides of the stall.

Inactivity of traders can be easily explained by the fact that vast majority of those who show up on bazaar end up buying nothing but a small thing. From economic point of view, bazaar is almost useless: with several exceptions, it doesn't offer anything beyond what can be found in local shops, while prices are sometimes even higher due to logistic expense. Obviously, nowadays bazaar plays next to no role in supplying Kologriv with goods – it thus differs from open-air markets in many post-Soviet cities, which are crucially important for subsistence (Czakó, Sik 1999). For local people bazaar is rather a kind of *'town festival'* or *'a holiday'*: as one informant puts it, *'My wife goes to bazaar, because she is a Kologriv citizen, after all... Going to bazaar is a habit here'*. Many customers come alone and don't intend to buy, but still they consider it to be their duty to walk through bazaar, follow changes in placement of stalls and assortment and greet acquaintances.

There is, however, one important exception to this general needlessness of bazaar: apparel. Few local shops provide clothes, but it would be wrong to infer that this is the reason why most of bazaar traders specialize in selling apparel. It is rather the other way around: buying clothes is too closely associated with bazaar, so that offering it in shops would meet only limited

demand⁴. This link between apparel and bazaar is again related to its status of public space and to the fact that people put on their best clothes when going there. As one woman has admitted, *'people go to bazaar to look for fashionable clothes'*. Choosing clothes and trying them on extends this process of public self-presentation and communication, particularly for those who come to bazaar en famille. *'People are fickle here, they like dressing up'* – this might sound strange in a town where most people complain that they barely survive, but this is precisely how bazaar functions: it is a public place where dresses are bought and demonstrated at the same time.

Bazaar in Kologriv is thus a good example of public space that enables people to gather and perceive themselves as a community. Richard Sennett argues that public spaces are crucially important for forging public realm as opposed to private, and maintaining borders between these two encourages forging social bonds and prevents communitarian life degenerating into collection of private interests (Sennett 1977). But there is another significant element of reproduction of community in Kologriv: amidst this every-Thursday explosion of sociality in a profoundly dissociated town, bazaar traders appear to be complete strangers despite the fact that they come here every week and regularly participate in this reassembling of community.

General attitude towards bazaar traders in Kologriv is rather disdainful: as one Muscovite who owns a house in Kologriv has put it when asked about perspectives of bazaar-type entrepreneurship, *'Entrepreneurs? These people do just buy-and-sell, they're not entrepreneurs – they're hucksters!'* This pejorative term is often employed with relation to bazaar traders, which can be explained by both distrust towards 'unproductive labor' and the fact that peddlers don't belong to local community. Most of them represent other cities of Kostroma region and aren't perceived as subjects of communication process. Haggling is rare, since both sides are perfectly aware of sellers' costs, and so is debt, although traders sometimes suggest buying on credit in order to sell the goods off. Marketers themselves share this perception of their business as inferior and explain that 'there's nothing left to do'. The narrative of the bazaar is that things are getting worse due to diminishing purchasing power of local population, and that's what talks between traders hinge on. A former bazaar trader admitted that *'before, the atmosphere on the bazaar was different... It was interesting... We were socializing with each other. Now there's no socializing like this anymore... because of competition.'* Stigmatizing of hucksters who seem to accept it allows

⁴ Product assortment on bazaar is thus consumer-driven. See (Marcinićzak, Van Der Velde 2008) for a description of apparel bazaar in Poland that functions as a sales outlet for local textile industry and therefore integrates the region into global economy.

for 'building the barricades around the community' (Sennett 1977: 296), which means that public spaces can be used not only for reassembling the community, but also for closing it.

That it is bazaar that operates as a public space in Kologriv and demarcates the border of the community, implies that this border is dependent on drawing another distinction, the one that was discussed throughout this paper – the distinction between economic and social. It is highly significant that this distinctively non-economic sociality, pure communication and self-presentation, takes place in the settings of a market, which is believed by many to be a blueprint of economic reason. The logic of utilitarian exchange is contested precisely on market, where it is easy to identify traders with self-interest and exclude them from demonstratively non-utilitarian interaction.

Anthropologists have tended to adopt one of two approaches to bazaar: either to treat it as a prototype for economic market, where social is evaporated by economic (formalist approach) or to argue that bazaar requires good deal of sociability to be economically successful and thus intertwines economic with social (see Fanselow 1990). Our argument is that bazaar can be a tool of distinction between economic and social, rather than replacement or mixture, because here economic is most visible and challenging. Marginalization of economic on bazaar enables to re-install the border between economic and social, to keep them apart and thus to prevent the dissolution of the community.

VI

In this paper we draw upon important distinctions suggested by classics of anthropology in order to elaborate a theoretical approach to debt. Understanding debt within the context of the conflict between the logic of gift and the logic of utilitarian exchange allows for taking into account the specificity of debt, its irreducibility neither to gift nor to market. Using the evidence from small Russian town we argue that key symbolic function of interest-free debt is that it mediates between economic and social in a highly ambiguous context. Debt relieves the pressure from both shopkeepers and their clients, allows for deferring the framing of situation in terms of gift or market and thus protects community from overt conflict.

It is, however, important not to make a mistake in conceptualization of debt. Despite its difference from gift and market, debt doesn't imply a separate logic of interaction: it would be a mistake to treat it as an alternative principle of institutional organization, as it is an important institutional arrangement. Debt implies the payback, which reintroduces the issue of framing of transaction. In Kologriv this results in a tension arising from the conflict of two mutually contradictory prescriptions, to pay and not to pay. As debt relationships are omnipresent in a communi-

ty that experiences lack of currency, this tension influences significantly various economic practices.

We consider bazaar to be a tool for demarcating economic from social in Kologriv. The site that is believed to be permeated by the spirit of self-interest, in fact functions as a public space. Marginalization of hucksters as representatives of economic reason reproduces non-instrumental communication and secures the existence of local community. Both debt and bazaar are institutional arrangements that can be regarded through the perspective of conflict between economic and social: whereas debt acts on everyday basis to relieve the pressure generated by this opposition, bazaar intervenes once a week to remind the community of the limits of economic and reinstall these limits.

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