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INTERWEAVING SPHERES NETWORKING, STRATEGY CREATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN A NEW JAPANESE VILLAGE

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Interweaving spheres. Networking, strategy creation and social change in a new Japanese village[1].

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to consider the process of creation of social networks and economic strategies in a postwar agricultural settlement in northeastern Japan. The formation of a social reality is a multi-dimensional process which involves different spheres of interaction. In the first part of the paper, the dominant characteristics of the village's social world will be highlighted by examining the household, the basic unit of production, consumption and social reproduction (Hart 1992). The social and economic relations linking households will delineate the second spatial domain, the village. Finally, the local and translocal sphere will constitute the link between the community and the wider context of action. The development and consolidation of networks and ties with the local society, the ideologies underpinning these processes and their historical unfolding will make up the second part of the paper.

The methodology used to this end will consist in framing the data pertaining to the economic course of the village and its social steps in terms of a spatial and temporal perspective which oscillates around the notion of "social capital". This notion is to be understood here as the "incommensurable assets" of a social organization (such as ties, networks, obligations, etc.); social capital will provide an analytical tool for matching the two basic categories of "economic action" and "social behaviour" (Granovetter 1985; Seligman 1997). The final aim of this paper will be to attempt to construct a model of social change in which the most relevant features of the village under consideration will be analysed through a multi-perspective approach.

The creation of a society from the pure efforts of the newcomers and without the "constraints" the traditional Japanese family system imposes on its members is a process open to observation from different angles. One starting point could be the examination of how institutional policies and the changes in the country's economic and social conditions affected the way people made their choices and conceived of their strategies within the village. Another manner of looking at the community's social steps would be through emphasis on the role of the household, as the basic operative nucleus of the village, the inner relations among its members and the outer context of

[1] The fieldwork research on which this paper is based was conducted in the period 1996-1998 in northwestern Honshū, Japan during my MA course in Cultural Anthropology at Hirosaki University, Faculty of Humanities. Davide Torsello, Max-Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, contact:torsello@eth.mpg.de.

interaction. Moreover, to adopt a third angle, the distinctive features of a society can be also extrapolated from its participation in the local arena as well as the direct and indirect channels through which the village establishes contacts with the external and translocal sphere. This brief paper is an attempt at amalgamating these views by focussing on the most distinctive of Mikazuki's social features and on their historical mutation.

The case subject of my fieldwork, Mikazuki, is a post-war agricultural settlement[2] founded on the May 5, 1946 in the Tsugaru region, the north-western most part of Honshū, Japan's main island. The initial settler population consisted of forty-five families, but this number soon decreased to thirty-two households, a population that remained unchanged until the 1960s[3]. Today the village is composed of sixteen households, nine of which are engaged in farming activities and the others performing seasonal migrant labour mainly on building sites in central and southern Japan.

The history of the village can be framed in three distinct economic phases. The first, the *subsistence phase*, refers to the initial decade in the village's history (1946-56) and is strongly characterized by the settlers' efforts to make a livelihood on a "steep piece of land" as well as to survive general hardships and shortages. Agriculture in this phase was at an early stage of development, and crops for the villagers' own consumption (potatoes, beans, cereals and some greens) constituted the main items of production; the scarcity of technical means -- machinery, fertilizers, pesticides and even tools-- accounted for the marked subsistence character of the village's economic system. The second stage, the *technical phase* (approximately 1956-70) pertains to the period in which the village's growth in both economic and social terms is a noticeable one. Under

[2] In late 1945 the occupied government of Japan issued the initial draft of a new Land Reform which contained, among other measures, the Emergency Land Reclamation Plan (*Kinkyū Kaitaku Keikaku*), a far-reaching project of re-settlement of the repatriated occupiers of the former Asian colonies. The Policy aimed at distributing 1,550,000 hectares of land in the first round to repatriates (*hikiagesha*) mainly from Manchuria, North Korea, Sakhalin and the Philippines, and then to the second and third-born sons in the local agricultural districts, traditionally excluded from land transmission. In the Tsugaru region alone, the 1946 Plan created 103 new villages, of which 63 still exist today, although only one third of these have maintained their independent village status, the others having been integrated into the local town or village boundaries. The Policy was conceived as a possible avenue for boosting the Japanese economy after the war disasters, and its broad scope reflects the extent of the new government's efforts to re-establish viable agricultural production as well as to solve some of the urgent social problems the end of fascism had brought about. The re-integration of the thousands of repatriated families, unemployment and the low standards of living condition in rural areas were among the most critical of these dilemmas, and a 'return to the land' was seen as the most feasible way to accelerate the process of recovery.

[3] Among the thirty-two households which constituted Mikazuki's population for at least half of its history, twenty-three (71.8%) were repatriates from Manchuria, North Korea and Sakhalin, two (6.2%) settled from the mother village and seven (21.8%) came into the village at later stages, mainly from

the influence of the state agricultural policy , Mikazuki's farmers began diversifying their cultivation through the introduction of contract crops and short-term engagements with local food processing companies. Later and in line with the general trends of the region, the decisive shift to apple farming as the main source of agricultural income towards the first half of the 1970s marks the transition to the third stage, the *monocultural phase*.

A settlement, given its basic characteristic of being a social entity created "artificially", possesses certain features which distinguish its social, economic and cultural existence from that of "traditional villages". It is a particular social creature because of the absence of a rural tradition and of the social and economic relations of production which such "tradition" entails. But it is also the coexistence of people bringing with them different personal experiences and life histories, as well as the convergence of diverse economic interests, that can give the settlement its own social features. In order to be able to analyse these features and the economic process that accompanied their shaping, I find it necessary to highlight the basic conditions under which the settlements were founded.

The traditional structure of rural communities in Northeastern Japan rests solidly on two crucial elements, kinship and village organizations. Although not coincident, the two social spheres are closely intertwined, making the compactness of Tohoku rural villages one of its most visible aspects (Norbeck 1965; Bailey 1991). The region of Tsugaru is no exception; rural communities centre on the stable position of a number of lineages (*dōzoku-dan*), actual depositaries of authority at both village and local levels (Fukutake1972). Because village structure closely reflects the inner formation of kin groups, it is possible to understand the dynamics and the practices determining the process of decision making through consideration of some of the dominant characteristics of the kinship system. Tsugaru rural families are traditionally hierarchical compositions pivoting on the figure of the household head (*kachō*), and following a patrilinear pattern for the transmission of land and of headship. As in all the country, land inheritance is a prerogative of the first-born sons or of the "adoptive child" (*muko yōshi*) as the eldest daughter's groom is defined. The authority of the main family (*honke*) is rarely questioned and crucial matters such as those related to land management, marriage and the creation of branch families (*bunke*) lies strictly within its province (Ariga 1971).

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within the Tsugaru region. As regards the origin of the repatriates, at least twelve households had kinship

The introduction of apple farming[4] and its diffusion in Tsugaru rural villages marked a decisive step forward in the economic progress of the region. Agricultural diversification had been a difficult option for Tsugaru farmers because of the unfavourable climatic conditions and of the comparative lack of responsiveness to novel ideas (Hasegawa 1974). In spite of the ongoing changes that the transition to fruit farming entailed – the contraction of the farming population, the development of part-time farming and the tendency of farmers to be ever older however, the solid structure of the Tsugaru kinship system did not show appreciable signs of decline, at least until the 1970s. Within this panorama, the planned foundation of a conspicuous number of settlements was certainly not an easy task. The broad scope of the Reclamation Policy[5] soon revealed its limits, especially with regard to the social (and to a lesser extent economic) integration of the new hamlets. It quickly became evident that only two paths were accessible to the settlements: that of full integration with the mother village, or the attainment of an independent social and economic position. Mikazuki sought and pursued this second option, in the manner that will be discussed below.

The household as social locus

The household, the most basic social and economic unit in the village, constitutes the locus in which knowledge of the local environment, strategies and choices are generated and find shape. In this paragraph two principal aspects of the household will be given consideration: the marriage sphere and the relationship between household members and farm land.

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ties in the Tsugaru region, while the remaining eleven did not.

[4] Apple farming was introduced in the Tohoku regions in the early Meiji period (1868-1911). As part of the wave of innovation which swept the country as a result of its opening of its harbours to foreign trade, agronomists and biologists were invited to Japan from 'western countries'. The outcome was that research and experimentation centres (*nōgyō shiken-jo*) were founded in different locations in the north, and Sapporo was chosen as the host city of Hokkaido University, the northern academic centre which developed after the foundation of its Agricultural Institute.

As for the data concerning the spread of apple farming in Aomori, some clear indications can be provided as follows: in 1894 only 690ha of land were being used to cultivate apples in the whole prefecture. The number leapt to 7,941ha in 1920, and continued growing until the end of the Second World War (19,369ha in 1945). After a brief halt in 1950 (19,045ha), the figures show a tendency to increase steadily with the peak being reached in 1975 (24,646ha). Today, apple fields cover 22,900ha of land overall (1995). Data from: *Aomori-ken Nōrin-suisan tōkei nenpō* (Yearly Statistics of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in Aomori Prefecture) 1955-1998. Aomori: Aomori-ken Nōrin-suisan Shō (Aomori Prefecture Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries).

[5] The number of planned settlements in the sole Aomori prefecture was 269 units (4,977 households) covering a total land surface of 24,453 hectares. The cultivable and inhabited land shrank to 11,853ha towards the end of the Policy (1970), whereas, interestingly, the number of settled hamlets increased to 302 (4047 households). The failure of a significant number of planned settlements is a reality not easily established by means of statistical data; it requires the empirical evidence of the actors involved.

Analysis of the local records[6] gives evidence that, during the fifty-four year of its existence, Mikazuki was inhabited by a total number of forty-two family nuclei, instead of the planned forty-five. Only thirty-two of these, however, resided in the village for a significant length of time - such as that necessary for the completion of a child's whole basic educational. Therefore, for statistical purposes, it can be assumed that the settlement's population was composed of thirty-two households, the presence of which was directly determinant for the social and economic course taken by the community.

The first problem related to the analysis of intra-household relations concerns the manner how kin ties are created through marriage. Today eleven of the sixteen families (68.7% of the total) actually living in the village share kinship relations acquired through intermarriage in different historical periods. Furthermore, if to this number one adds that of the families that moved out of the hamlet, there is a total of nineteen families sharing blood relations within the village. This accounts for 59.3% of the overall households (forty-two) ever residing in the village.

The marked endogamous character of Mikazuki's marriage sphere can be explained in terms of the initial difficulty the settlers had in finding brides. The absence of a tight human network within the local society, the mere fact of being "settlers" and the paucity of economic means were all factors accounting for the need to search within for what was denied outside. In this situation, the option of the ´marriage inside' was easily seen as an optimal solution. These are two of the comments that informants gave when asked about the marriage situation in the initial period.

> "The biggest problem for us singles was to find a woman. When you don't know anybody in the neighbourhood and there is no family around you it's difficult. Then we were 'settlers'; some of us could not even understand this dialect. If I hardly know what they say when they speak in their dialect, imagine if I had to find a wife!"

> "I didn't know it was a settlement. Nobody had said it before my father accepted the marriage. Had I known it I would have opposed it.. You don't go and live in a place like a settlement, in the mountains and poorer than any other village!" *(From one of the two women who married in Mikazuki from outside in the initial stage.)*

[6] The main sources of the demographic data are: Kaitaku-chi Einō Jisseki Chōsa (Survey on the result of agricultural entrepreneurship in the reclaimed areas) (triennial) 1956-73. Aomori: Aomori-ken Nōrin-bu Kaitaku-ka (Aomori Prefecture Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Reclamation Section); *Shūzai Hyakunen* (Centenary of the Shūzai Primary School, Susono) 1992. Hirosaki: Shūzai Shōgakkō (Shūzai Primary School).

After the end of the first phase (1946-56) the situation changed significantly. Though with some difficulties, the village slowly found its way towards establishing its own social and economic position within the local context. One of the consequences of this was the significant enlargement of the marriage sphere. It became easier for the farmers to find a wife, and less natural to marry within the village. Interestingly enough, among the brides welcomed in Mikazuki by this generation no one came from a village closer than fifteen kilometres, which means that the area within which marriages were contracted enlarged beyond, but did not include, the neighbouring villages. The reasons for this "translocal marriage" are clear if one considers Mikazuki's difficulties in achieving a solid economic integration within the local agricultural circuit. Until late 1971 the village was refused membership in the local cooperative agency because of its low standards of production, and the reality of being a "settlement" was a factor barely forgettable, both by the people of Mikazuki and by its neighbours.

However, the negative aspects of making a livelihood in a "place where few would go to live" are also counterbalanced by other prospects that the traditional villages would not easily disclose. Seven families settled in Mikazuki during the second half of its history (after 1970) without purchasing land and starting any agricultural activity[7]. The significance of this number has to be understood in relation to the historical setting of this late settlement. Since the end of the 1960s, as a consequence of the country's incipient industrialization and urbanization process, Tsugaru villages had started undergoing a serious process of decline due to the abandonment of the land and the appreciable contraction of the farming population. Mikazuki was alone among the settlements in the area in encountering further waves of incoming population in this period, and this accounts for its relative demographic stability, at least until the early 1970s[8]. Apart from one household, which entered the community after marrying in Mikazuki, the incoming families shared the common exigency to find a suitable and more accessible place to start a new existence. What is worthy of notice, here, is that their choice of Mikazuki was certainly not dictated by the case. Partly, they were attracted by the relative ease with which they could become active members of this small society, and partly they saw in the comparatively less expensive and more "natural" village life a means of escape from debts and unemployment. The following

[7] Of the seven households which settled in the village in later stages, only one received a plot of land to cultivate, but it did not show any interest in farming. The remaining six families all shared a common pattern: the heads of the household performed migrant labour for seven to nine months a year while the women maintained their village residence and looked after children and the elderly, taking part-time employment in local shops or public services.

[8] The population of Mikazuki remained constant until 1960 (32 households); in 1968 it decreased to 26, then to 22 in 1980, 17 in 1990 and 16, the present number, was reached in 1997.

are some of their comments on the motives leading to their joining the community in Mikazuki.

> "I was looking for a more human place to live, so my wife and I decided to come here. We like the air and the nature in this place, and people were so friendly from the beginning. It was like finding new relatives. I don't think you can find the same thing in a 'normal village'."

> "For me coming here meant starting a new life. I had problem with my work-place, debts and my family didn't seem to want me. I knew that places like the settlements are poor, and that people lead hard lives there. I surely have no regret that I came here."

> "One like me, ill and without a solid (economic) position, could never find a wife in another place. But here I found a woman, and a nice family, too. They treated me as a new son, I would never have expected it."

According to most of the interviewees, the choice between opening a social niche in a traditional rural village and in a "young village" like this one was not at issue. The solidity of traditional rural villages in Tsugaru left little space for new members, and this the newcomers were very well aware of.

The settlers' having access to land resources for the first time was what marked their starting a new economic activity, and this was particularly true in the case of those among them who had never ploughed a field[9]. The moment of distributing the assigned land was repeatedly depicted by the villagers as a delicate stage in which "there was hardly the possibility to find a common agreement". The concomitance and divergence of personal interests, as well as the differing degrees of farming experience, were the factors which contributed to slowing down the process of distribution. On the other hand, the scarcity of nuclei settling from the mother villages paved the way for a process of assignment based on purely egalitarian principles . Partition of the cultivable plots was decided by drawing lots, while the villagers agreed to locate the sites for house construction along two intersecting roads, in order to achieve a compact core of

[9] The settlers' lack of experience in agriculture was one of the leading factors accounting for the failure of a large number of postwar settlements all across Japan. In the case of Mikazuki, almost one fourth of the settling households had never had any previous farming experience. Although the 1946 Policy provided training in farming techniques for the newcomers, lasting approximately one month, this proved insufficient, especially in the light of the initial scarcity of technical equipment (tools, machinery, chemical fertilizers).

dwellings[10]. The distribution indeed resulted in both satisfaction and discontent among the newcomers, and the distance of the plots from the houses was one of the features that the villagers pointed out as hindering the process of land clearing. Conversely, the wide dispersal of farming plots (only three cases were encountered in which the farmers were lucky enough to have had their plot located behind the house) contributed to enhancing the extent of contact among farmers, because isolated households were not present in the hamlet.

When the farming population began declining after the second half of the 1960s, land became a topic of discussion and probably a source of conflict because of the need to redistribute it among the resident farmers. The village's social committee decided that, irrespective of their location, abandoned plots had to be divided among those farmers who wished to benefit from them. The result of this orientation was an increased fragmentation of farming plots, and in the long run, a polarization between households which „had" the capacity to work more extensively, and those who "did not have" such a prerogative. In spite of this imbalance in the property domain, Mikazuki did not show any tendency to stratification or empowerment of single elements within the kin group and in the village. Two motives can be identified for underpinning the conservation of a "communal character". On the one hand, the remarkable absence of newcomers from the neighbouring villages accounted for the settlement's substantial freedom from external influences in the process of decision-making and for its comparative lack of vertical social relationships[11]. On the other hand, the avoidance of a hierarchical social structure with decisional power concentrated in the hands of a chief can be considered as one of the most distinctive strategies that the community's members adopted in order to cope with social change, one to which they strictly adhere in moments of hardship.

As regards the process of land transmission, following the traditional pattern of rural village Japan, primogeniture was the formal prerequisite for inheriting the land, whilst if land was available, second and third-born sons were able to form branch families within the community. However, this norm was here not always strictly followed. A remarkable elasticity in the transmission of property rights can be interpreted, within the

[10] The relevance of this choice has to be seen in comparison with the other three settlements of the area. Here houses are more dispersed and the case of building on the cultivable plot is not rare; in the case of branch families from the mother villages, indeed, their intermediate location between mother and new hamlet is often an index of their "intermediate social status". Mikazuki is the only case in which there is a visible evenness in house location, as well as a clear preference for agglomerating rather than scattering.

[11] Indeed, in the case of two other hamlets founded in the same area the flux of local incoming population played a significant role in their social and economic progress by consolidating the blood ties and creating economic dependence on the mother villages.

new communities, as the index of two factors: first, the lack of a "rural village tradition" to support such a practice, and second, the relative paucity of economic resources (not only land) that hampered the process of creation of branch families. Indeed, the content of the Reclamation Policy, promoting the colonization of the new land by local second-born sons[12], had considerably limited the social reproductive capacity of the newcomers who were characterized by not having blood ties with the mother village and thus lacked precious sources of both economic and social capital. Moreover, the scarcity of land and the general crisis of the agrarian sector, which had followed the country's economic boom since the late 1950s, severely constrained the new farmers' options. Primogeniture could hardly constitute the norm in the settlements, and as the steady process of industrialization and urbanization had made a growing number of new job opportunities available to the younger members of rural communities, it became clear that only those households that had the 'means' to endure change (both social and economic) would succeed in establishing a comparatively solidly ramified kin network within their communities[13].

Indeed, in the case of Mikazuki only five cases of split and creation of parallel families within the village are to be discerned. However, in four of these five cases it was the first-born son who inherited the household and its inalienable possessions, whereas the second or minor son started a new family. This was done through purchasing land from one of the nuclei that had moved out of the village for other destinations and engaging in farming in close cooperation with the main family. In the fifth example, the creation of a branch nucleus did not imply acquisition and management of land. Here, the ties between the two households tended to be somewhat looser than in the other four cases, probably because of the male family members' seasonal employments. The general picture is, however, that Mikazuki experienced to a smaller extent the phenomenon described for the other settlements and land transmission remained the prerogative of the elder sons. As I had occasion to ascertain, of the nine present farming households only one did not follow the primogeniture norm, and the second son inherited the land; when questioned on their actual willingness to

[12] Since the 1950s the Reclamation Policy had shifted its priorities from the reintegration of the repatriated families to the provision of land to local second-born sons. In most of the areas the measure had the effect of syphoning rural overpopulation onto the new lands with the side-effect of creating an imbalance in the economic systems the newcomers, who has fewer resources, had been establishing.

[13] The study of the historically changing surnames on the map of Tsugaru villages is perhaps one of the most direct and simplest ways of observing the movements of the kinship system. To quote an example, Mikazuki's mother village, presents an interesting variation of fewer than ten surnames across more than a hundred households. A similar phenomenon is today detectable in the other settlements, where depopulation seemed to bring about a lower diversification of surnames, or in other words a stronger presence of local branch families.

succeed to the household headship, the farmers concordantly stressed their "feeling of responsibility" that they should do so[14].

Today, the issue of land inheritance is felt with more seriousness. In fact, many of my informants showed pessimism and a veiled resignation when speaking of the possibility that their first sons would continue farming. There is a diffuse estrangement of the younger generations from agricultural work. Six of the nine farming households in present-day Mikazuki have declared their expectations that one of the sons will take after the land, but this is certainly not an easy process. As the comments below clearly show, the future of the village is tightly bound to the directions the local economy will follow. The following are the remarks of three farmers concerning their hopes of having their land taken over by one of their sons.

> "Once you wash the dirt of the earth from your hands it's over. There's no way back. Once you start earning money from *dekasegi* [seasonal migrant labour] you can't go back to farming. Your time is decided by the others, and you get used to the comfort of punctually having money in the bank."

> "I don't want to force my children to become peasants. This gloomy job is not to be for them. I took my elder son to the fields with me more than once. I showed him everything; I tried to teach him what I could and to make him understand my passion for this work. Unfortunately, at the moment he is working in Tokyo. He doesn't earn that much. Life is hard there with two kids. I still hope one day he will understand and come back here."

At harvest time, the busiest of farming procedures, only in two households out of nine did I observe the participation or help of daughters and/or sons in their parents' work. Surprisingly, most of the households were forced to request help from relatives, or even to pay for hired labour. When asked why they could not involve their sons in the work in the fields, most of the farmers gave the same answer: "The young do not want to participate in the 'dirty work' of the land. They saw what farming means, they know the hardships from the past and now they want a better future for themselves" [15].

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[14] Here are the words of two of the farmers concerning this issue:
"I was working in Tokyo when my father asked me to take over the land. He was old and could not continue alone. First I said no, I could not come back to the village after I had started another life. But then, I felt the weight of my responsibility. I was the first son after all".
" I had been working in Akita [one of the biggest cities in Tohoku] since I was very young, but I knew that one day I had to come back here. It would have been a bad example for my brothers had the elder son refused to take over the land. I am not the only one to think so here".

[15] I would surmise, conversely, that the farmers today tend to discourage their children from taking up agriculture because they have other aspirations for them. The lack of eagerness of parents to teach their sons the techniques of apple growing could well be a consequence of the villagers' non-farming origin.

Indeed, daughters who become the brides of outside males show a tendency to continue their economic contribution to the household of birth through 'loans' of their labour[16]. However, sons who have decided to earn their own livelihood outside Mikazuki (and agriculture) do so less frequently. On one of the last possible days for harvesting the apples in mid November, the eldest son of one of the informants was peacefully watching the television at home, while a few villagers and myself were frenetically working together with the sixty-five year old couple of farmers in a quasi-snowstorm. The involvement of white-collar sons of the farming households in their parents' economic situation seems to be confined to financial help in case of need, even though people did not seem ready to talk about this problematic issue.

While it is true that many farmers did not exhibit much eagerness to bring their children up to practise agriculture, on the other hand, the weight of external influences on the growing process of the young must not be underestimated. Until the mid-1970s only one household had a television set, attracting almost the whole of younger and older community members during the long winter nights. Today the situation is only slightly different from that of any other family in Japan: each household possesses a television, and thirty percent of them a personal computer. Moreover, the present Japanese schooling system has, among others, the prerogative to keep students at school at least for the same average timethat salaried European men spend in their workplace.

The household is the first of the fields in which social behaviour and economic choices are structured and acquire significance. The study of the manner in which relationships among actors are constructed, shaped and how they change is the essential prerequisite for observing the characteristics of a social formation in depth. As I hope Mikazuki's example will suggest, undertaking the creation of a social reality from zero is an extremely complicated task and the analysis of such a process can only be successfully achieved by focussing on the diverse dimensions of social interaction, i.e. the relations of property, marriage and kinship, the village, the external sphere. What follows is a description of the village's social world viewed from the perspective of the interrelation among its members.

Another explanation, however, seems to be that the long life expectation as well as the impressive vitality of the farmers, who do not abandon the fields until their late 70s, means there is no early retirement. Younger family members would know, in the farmers' terms "the right moment to come back".

[16] In the case of non-farming families it is not rare that she helps farming relatives in the crucial phases of the agricultural cycle. The role of non-farming households is still very important for the economy of the village. Those members of the families who maintain their residence in Mikazuki while the men are engaged in seasonal work in the cities of central Japan, i.e. women and older people, are willing to cooperate with the farmers.

Inter-household relations and the village

Exploration of the economic dimension of the village provides useful data for the analysis of both endogenous and exogenous social relations. In the initial period (1946-56) an accent on mutual help and cooperation constituted a must rather than a strategy aimed at gaining profit. The scarcity of tools, relative inexperience in agricultural work and the process of land clearing were all factors that played significant roles in shaping the manner in which the settlers interacted within the newly forged society. The settlers' capacity to act like a "group", and hence the elimination of natural conflicts of interest, were the first conditions the community imposed upon its social growth; and besides, the concomitance of various other external and internal factors contributed to strengthening their importance. First, the absence of kin ties with the mother village heavily influenced the people's strategies of adaptation to the new situation. The lack of tools and the scarcity of economic means in general made land clearing an extremely time and labour consuming process. Moreover, the urgent and primary need to build dwelling structures left little space for agricultural planning: people united their efforts to transform what had formerly been a military training base[17] into cultivable fields, and meanwhile worked on their private houses.

Second, the life histories of the new colonists influenced their processes of economic and social decision-making. Because of their being repatriated from the former Japanese colonies in Asia, a significantly high percentage of the households had previous experience of settlement life. Though most of them had not occupied military positions in the colonial context, ideological emphasis on values such as "cooperation", "equality" and 'adaptability' imbued part of the common choices at the initial stage. As an example, at the time the settlement was founded, the absence of habitations was obviated by the construction of a large communal lodging, instead of attempting to create private constructions from the scant materials the Reclamation Section had provided. This choice proved an important strategy in harmonizing and "levelling" individual economic progress, as the settlers could only move out of the common house when an acceptable number of new houses were ready. Interestingly enough, the only two households to settle from the mother village showed a preference to remain at their

[17] The land on which the village was founded had been used for paddy-field cultivation since the second half of the last century. The state purchased the land following the local landowner's bankruptcy and in the first decades of the 20th century a training base for land militia replaced the abandoned paddies. At the time of initial settlement, the future inhabitants a wide, slightly hilly plain with no trees, separated from the mother village by a forest, the property of the local inhabitants.

previous place of residence until the new houses became inhabited, thus avoiding the establishment of visible signs of social difference.

Third, the early efforts of the Policy to consolidate ties and networks among the new villages, and to a significantly lesser extent between these and the local society, had the unexpected outcome - in communities were the presence of locals was less marked - of widening the distance between mother village and settlement. In 1946, shortly after its foundation, Mikazuki was invited to join the *Kaitaku Jikkō Kumiai* (Settlement Executive Association), an economic organization under the guidance of the local Reclamation Policy Section (*Kaitaku-ka*) with the aims of conveying the new policy measures to settlers and of "guiding" their economic steps. Membership was limited to farmers from the new villages, though presence of representatives of the local communities was inevitable. However, in Mikazuki and few other cases, significant personal relations could be established, primarily among settlers, whereas the influential presence of mother village members contributed to prioritizing private interests in lieu of "collective exigencies".

Confrontation with other settlements, in addition to the Policy's efforts to accelerate social integration within the new communities were among the factors promoting the ideological origin of a "sense of group" (*danketsu*) in Mikazuki. Villagers felt the social consolidation of the new community to be an urgent task that had to be fulfilled before being in a position to experience disintegration or encapsulation in the mother village (*boson*). The idea of *danketsu*, therefore, probably reminiscent of some of the villagers' past colonial experiences, was enforced by the lack of family ties in the neighbourhood and the kind of relationship with the mother village[18].

In the second period (technical phase), Mikazuki's slow economic growth required the creation of a more solid and compact body of social relations. The farmers' productive efforts were shifting from subsistence to profit, and the vital precondition to this change was the achievement of an established position within the local agricultural circuit.

[18] It is worthy to point out that Mikazuki's relation with its mother village was not extremely smooth. In the late 1940s a case of quarrel occurred as the villagers were deliberately drawing on the forest resources of their neighbours. Wood was collected for domestic use, but also for being exchanged on the local market. The matter was solved after formal apologies were submitted to the village. Moreover, the settling of two local males in Mikazuki did not bring about a further interest of the mother community for the new lands. The two communities "remained at distance", at least in the first two decades of Mikazuki's history. For more detailed accounts of the relationship between Mikazuki and the neighbouring villages see Torsello (1998).

Of the settlements in the area[19], Mikazuki was the one which demonstrated the most marked propensity to diversify its agrarian system. The years between 1956 and 1971 registered an increased activity of the farmers willing to embrace profitable new productions options, as well as to establish vital channels to the local agricultural market. The so-called "technical cultivations" (*kōgei saibai*), including rape, sugar beet and maize, share-cropping and contract farming became widespread as the plentiful availability of new land attracted local entrepreneurs into the settlements. The common pattern was that a firm came into the village and offered a global three to five year contract for share-cropping (tomatoes, mushrooms, strawberries, mint and many other products). Besides, there were also several cases of single households which entered into similar contracts with farmers from the neighbouring villages, to which they were tied through friendship or because of already established exchange transactions.

With the country's economic takeoff and steady growth from the beginning of the 1960s, the contents and direction of agrarian policies became highly diversified, and their budget significantly constrained. The most significant political event for this case study was the end of the Land Reclamation Policy (1971). Japan needed modern, rational and efficient farms, and this was to be achieved through a speeding-up of the development of agriculture, already suffering from the counter-effects of the changes which followed Japan's economic takeoff[20]. In this panorama, the coexistence of a double guideline, one directed towards the protection of the delicate economic systems the new villages were constructing, the other towards urging the modernization and rationalization of agriculture, was hardly tenable. The result was that Mikazuki's farmers were precipitated into a contradictory state: that of abandoning their past as "settlers", thus ceasing to benefit from the Reclamation Policy's measures, and that of being ready to open a niche in the market with their own forces. As some farmers observed, "we were abandoned to our own destiny, the state would not care for the new villages any longer".

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[19] In 1946, in the region where Mikazuki was founded two other settlements were established. Nanaizumi, with an initial population of 30 households and an overall cultivable land surface of 84 ha; Yūhigaoka , settled by 27 households occupying a land surface of 63 ha. Whereas the first hamlet was the only to experience at a ceratin extent ricre farming, due to availability of water resources, in the second case agricultural production was centred upon vegetables and greens.

[20] The steady economic growth that Japan experienced since the mid-1950s had on the one hand the effect of making large capital available for improvement in the primary sector (ameliorations of infrastructurs, mechanization, improvement of crops and land). The other side of the coin, however, shows an increase in depopulation of the rural regions in favour of the developing industrial and urban centres of south-western Japan.

This transition was not an easy one, as many of the farmers, indebted from the first stage[21], were not in the position to join the enthusiastic local transition to apple-farming centred agriculture. Therefore, the long-term outcomes the influence of institutional changes had on the village were the steady decrease of the number of farming households and a reduction in the land farmed by the village overall[22].

However, the monocultural phase is marked by a renewed social and economic involvement of Mikazuki's farmers, visible both on an outer and on an inner level. The outside dimension of this process will be discussed in the following paragraph; at this point however it is worth underlining the relevance that an event such as the formal admittance of Mikazuki to the local agriculture cooperative circuit (the village had been previously refused membership due to its level of production) had for the economic and social life of its members. Apart from the clear implications that integration into the local market via the state controlled cooperative had for the village's agrarian system, this step constituted an important advance in the farmers' efforts towards coordinating and organizing their production cycles at village level. The villagers had read in the cooperative's previous rejection of their wish for membership the need for a higher degree of inter-household cooperation, as well as the consolidation of a denser web of social networks with the outside and local world.

The manner in which Mikazuki's people dealt with these shortages of social capital was twofold. On the one hand, the village strove to enforce its inner momentum of social interaction through emphasis on regularly scheduled community meetings in which the activity of its agricultural cooperative groups was melded with that of the social clubs. On the other hand, what farmers pursued was the construction and subsequent consolidation of a solid external façade, in which the new village could be identified as a whole, and the efforts of the single households could find recognition at a local level. The "settlement amidst the mountains" became a village. This is to be understood not merely as the outcome of changes in policy directives; rather it should

[21] The agricultural credit system introduced by the Reclamation Policy in 1946 provided that settlers would have borrowing facilities aimed at accelerating the process of land clearing in the first instance, improving land productivity (chemical fertilisers and pesticides, machineries) in the second, and diversifying cultivation in the last instance. Credits were made available in the form of long-term loans with zero or low interests and were conveyed into the Agricultural Savings Bank in which the beneficiaries were required to open accounts. This system had the advantage of tying the farmers to the state's agricultural programs through their affiliation with the Agricultural Bank. On the other hand, however, indebtedness became a heavy condition for those farmers who were not sufficiently prompt to follow the new market (and policies) directions, such as the shift to apple farming, and could, therefore, barely pay off their debts from the initial period.

[22] The contraction of the arable land accompanied the decrease in the farming population after the 1960s. In 1970 the total extent of Mikazuki's cultivated land barely reached 39.4ha, and of 26 households, only 17 were practising agriculture. These figures eventually shrank to 29.8ha in 1980 (17 farming households out of 22) and to 14.8ha (9 farming households out of 16) in 1998.

be seen in relation to the already-mentioned stress on "group identity" and on the meaning that this concept assumed towards the outside world, an issue that will be discussed in the following chapter.

The economic existence of Mikazuki as a "new village" was indeed one of the factors which contributed to enforcing the sense of *danketsu*. The greater flexibility of Mikazuki's agrarian system, due to its relative impermeability by external influences in the process of decision making, as well as the precariousness of the settlement's economy, became the important prerogatives allowing for the introduction of novelty. Elasticity in the employment of economic resources, however, required a relatively solid body of social relations and networks underpinning the process of agricultural diversification. This is where the ideological accent on the notion of *danketsu* played a significant role. Mikazuki farmers were striving to overcome the initial disunion that the settling process brought about, and the idea of "communal action" was a possible escape avenue. Furthermore, the concomitance of the above mentioned social and demographic preconditions (i.e. lack of kin ties with the mother village and experience in colonizing land) eased the process of consolidating group consciousness among the villagers, and it was at the point of their increased economic dynamism (technical phase) that the external sphere began to perceive the "social presence" of the village more intensely.

Regarding the community's inner bodies of social cooperation, the main one was the *Mikazuki Bukai* (Mikazuk Departmental Organization), which included all the social, cultural and economic initiatives that villagers commonly undertook. Participation in this association was and still is plenary and the role of this institution is to be found on those occasions when it provides for consultation on issues of common interest, as well as for moments of sharing a more relaxed atmosphere. Two of the social domains of the *Bukai* are the Communal Hall (*Kōminkan*) and the Shrine (*Mikazuki Jinja*). Both constructions were erected in the late 1960s as part of the "cultural enhancement of settlement societies" programme sponsored by the Land Reclamation Section. After formal permission was obtained from the local Shinto authorities to build a sacred place, Mikazuki established a yearly summer festival in honour of the enshrined deity. Festivals became occasions of reunion for families who had left the village for more profitable destinations and returned to see their relatives only once a year. Moreover, the significance of the event can be highlighted when considering that none of the other settlements in the area, despite having established such a practice, has succeeded in perpetuating it up to present.

The provision of a communal hall, similarly, contributed greatly to the process of accumulating social capital. The facility is generally used for public ceremonies (mainly marriages and funerals), as well as for meetings of the diverse organizational groups in the village. It is important to underline that the absence of this structure in former times often contributed to the slow progress of negotiations or decision making processes within the community. The informants recalled the initial meetings as being beset by hardships and obstacles that the diverse origin of the settlers and the initial lack of inner kin ties had interposed. Because of the lack of a common space, and of the relatively large population of the village community in the 1950s-1960s, meetings were held in the village's largest houses (only two or three could serve the purpose). This meant that participants hardly felt free to express their own opinions on matters on which the hosting households held different ones, and they would either keep silent about their dissent or express it abruptly by leaving the meeting. The construction of a Public Hall removed these impediments at last by providing the villagers with a "neutral" place in which discussion and confrontation could take place[23].

Later, from the early 1980s on, apples became the main, and subsequently the sole, product of the area, and many important changes took place. The farming population contracted dramatically (from 26 households in 1963 to 14 in 1985), while land served mainly for apple production (90% of the total extension) and produce for the farmers' own consumption. Phenomena generally observable in the primary sector in Japan from the 1980s on, such as ageing of the farmers, lack of heirs and decrease in birth rates, also affected the village. The most immediate of the outcomes was that farming operations became the burden of increasingly aged couples with rapidly decreasing possibilities of land inheritance among the younger generation. Farmers repeatedly referred to the shift as a both a "good" and a "bad" moment in Mikazuki's history. Apples gave Tohoku (and particularly Tsugaru) the opportunity to become agriculturally competitive on a national basis, and in the golden age of their production (1975-90) brought those farmers ready to embrace the novelty with substantial profits[24].

[23] The accent on the neutrality of the Communal Hall became clear to me when, after asking my host family about the possibility of renting a room in their house for the duration of my fieldwork, they suggested and warmly encouraged me to seek the village's official permission to reside in the Hall instead. "There you will be free to meet people, and everybody will see that you did not come here only for us" was the explanation I received on this matter. Indeed, the facts confirmed their opinion, since meetings and drinking parties doubled during the time I was staying there.

[24] Apple farming was introduced in Mikazuki towards the end of the 1950s. The villagers pointed out how initially only two households had the idea of undertaking the experiment of planting apple trees on their plots. These were among the best off faming nuclei who also private access to wells and had even had experience, albeit briefly and with poor results, of rice farming. The rapid economic success of these

In the case of Mikazuki, moreover, the village benefited earlier than other "established communities" from the spread of apple farming, thanks to the greater availability of land and to the relative flexibility of choices and economic strategies. Therefore, although it can be stated that the transition to apple farming proved dramatic for some of the settlers unready to embark on such a project, it can be assumed that it sanctioned the definitive achievement of "village status".

Conversely however, monocultural farming seemed to severely undermine the social and economic structure that Mikazuki's people had had formerly, when they faced common difficulties. Significantly enough, when asked about the negative sides of the transformation of the village's agrarian system, farmers raised the point of the reduced need for cooperation and group work that apple cultivation involved. It is as if the changes in the agrarian structure have brought about a growing scepticism as regards the village's ability to accumulate and preserve social capital.

The analysis of the processes of social behaviour and of their relationship to the sphere of agricultural production is of particular importance for understanding the values people from Mikazuki attribute to their life in common. As indicated above, the shift between different forms of cultivation (subsistence oriented in the first stage, cash oriented in the second and more in conformity with local trends in the third) moved the accent onto different levels of social interaction. The household was the dominant arena of economic life in the first period, even though scarcity of means meant the settlers had no choice but to work communally, especially as far as the clearing of the land was concerned. During the second period, Mikazuki became more actively part of the local circuit, through the sharing of contract farming activities with other communities, and thanks to a tighter inner cooperative network. With the transition to "monocultural farming", on the one hand the village achieved an established position locally, with farmers interacting more often with other local farmers and decision making processes becoming more significantly influenced by their membership of the government cooperative agency. On the other hand, the community's inner ties (kinship and informal networks) played an important role in backing the apple-farming centred economic system. The decrease in the farming population and the polarization of the economy –agriculture and migrant labour- contributed to magnetizing people's social and economic commitment. The bipolar village structure – farmers and non-farmers[25]-

framers triggered the spread of apple cultivation in the village in the first half of the 1960s, but, as indicated above, the difficult economic situation of many households did not allow enough space for the shift.

[25] Today, of the sixteen households inhabiting the village, nine are landowning and perform farming as their primary economic activity. Six of the remaining seven nuclei are ex-farmers who sold their land and

can be thought of as both a product of social and economic change at a higher level, and as a community strategy to survive times of rapid and dramatic social change. The cultural features of such strategies find expression in the accent on collectively shaped individual values such as "reliability", "harmony" and "flexibility". In Mikazuki these values are applied to the social sphere through diligent adherence to moments of cooperation and group action, as well as by pursuing a kind of "communalism" that the lack of any verticality in the village structure vividly demonstrates.

The local and translocal spheres of interaction

The nature and degree of Mikazuki's participation in the local sphere of social and economic interaction have been already stressed within the historical framework introduced above. The relatively loose ties with the neighbouring villages is one of the key factors in explaining Mikazuki's initial difficulties in the face of hardships in general, and the paucity of economic resources. This paragraph aims to summarize the most relevant characteristics of our village's process of interaction with the local and translocal spheres.

Practically everywhere in the country, postwar settlements shared similar social and economic preconditions: they were born "poorer" because of the scarcity of resources and of the lower quality of cultivable land allocated to the new villages (Dore 1984: 182; Ikeda: 1982). Moreover, for many of the colonists the status of "new farmers" constituted only a temporary occupation, to be pursued whilst waiting for "better times", whilst the lack of infrastructure influenced the process of social integration within the local communities profoundly. As data from the other settlements in the area clearly demonstrate[26], only the most robust households were able to survive the weight of historical changes. Their ability to fit into the new social and economic

became engaged full-time in seasonal migrant labour (*dekasegi*). Though their reasons for abandoning farming are to be sought in the problematic shift to apple farming, it is worthy of notice that their social position is by no means affected by their estrangement from agriculture. Rather, it can be asserted that it is merely their prolonged absence from the village that influences the non-farmers' participation in the common decision-making and strategy-creation process.

[26] Of the other three settlements of the area, Yūhigaoka was abandoned two years after its foundation. The reason seems to have been the severe lack of building materials (mainly timber) and its disadvantageous position because of its great distance from irrigation sources. Five years later, however, minor sons from the neighbouring community received the land and settled, successfully establishing an agrarian system founded on vegetable farming. As in Mikazuki, the third settlement was founded by repatriated families without any link with the local circuit. Although its population has remained roughly unchanged (30 households in 1956 and 29 today), what the statistics cannot reveal is the deep process of social change that this village has encountered. Towards the early 1960s, almost half of the population abandoned the village after the sale of the land to farming families of the mother village. The re-settlement took place

system strongly depended on their ability to build and maintain efficient social relationships within and outside the community, as well as on their readiness to improve their cultural capital in relation to agriculture, i.e. to acquire and incorporate knowledge of farming procedures.

The question is: how did the new community cope with the substantial problem of their encapsulation within the existent social context? The initial goal of the Reclamation Policy was to reintegrate the repatriates from the country's occupied territories and provide them with the most basic of economic resources, i.e. land, in order to start a livelihood. Towards the end of the 1940s, however, a shift of priorities, determined by worsening unemployment and economic stagnation, led the occupied government to extend the benefit of rights to land in the new settlements to minor sons from the local rural communities. The aim of the manoeuvre was to control overpopulation of the rural areas and to prevent urban centres, paralysed by the slow process of economic recovery, from becoming overwhelmed demographically by waves of landless and jobless people from the countryside. The outcome of the move can be read in positive terms, if one considers that settlements became increasingly able to achieve social, economic and cultural integration within the local sphere, and that villages gained space for siphoning off their excess population.

Nonetheless, as the case of Mikazuki suggests, the interest of local minor sons in the "new lands" was not always easy to arouse. The hamlet not only did not become the object of "re-settlement" by local farming households, but also retained its delicate inner social order through maintaining the "distance" from its mother village. The main reason accounting for this lack of interest in Mikazuki can be found in the settlers' reluctance to experiment with rice farming, which at the time constituted the main economic asset of the mother community. This choice probably results from the settlers' inexperience in paddy field cultivation, as well as in their limited economic means; but it could also be explained in terms of the social dimension.

Rice cultivation constitutes the fundamental element of the economy of Japanese rural villages. Authors have stressed how the choice of rice is in extremely close relation to the 'traditional' social structure of village communities and, conversely, that in order to understand the modality of social interaction and the features of the Japanese kinship system it is necessary to take the analysis of the rice-centred economy (Emori:1983). There are three prerogatives necessary for the establishment of a profitable agrarian system based on rice farming: water management, the knowledge of

rapidly as second and third-born sons from the area grasped the lucrative opportunity of acquiring land

farming techniques and the availability of human and social capital. Mikazuki's failure in introducing rice into the cleared land is partly explainable in terms of the above-mentioned directives of the Japanese agricultural policy towards diversification of production, but more significantly, through the farmers' lack of most of the necessary preconditions[27]. Our village did not have the economic assets vital to the establishment of a "rice economy", and the weak social ties with the mother village can be considered both a precondition for and a result of the markedly diversified character of Mikazuki's economy.

The body through which Mikazuki, before achieving cooperative membership, was formally bound with the local environment, was the Town Assembly (*Chōkai Kaigi*). This constitutes the most significant of the village's political organs. Participation in the Assembly is organized on a regular basis, with an annually elected representative member for each community acting as a delegate reporting the village's demands and needs. The role of the community delegate (*Chōkai-chō*) is crucial in bridging the social presence of the village with the neighbouring sphere at a formal level. The task of representing the community is usually assigned by means of direct election and it is, therefore, in close relation to the influential power of individuals[28]. In all the other settlements in the area the delegate was elected yearly, but their term of office could be extended for up to three years.

In Mikazuki the *Chōkai-chō* position has always been determined by drawing lots. Once a member is selected, he (usually, it is a man) represents his community for two years; afterwards the task passes automatically to the neighbouring household. This rotational type of selection is an important feature of the village's mechanism of social and political authority. It can be asserted that there are scarcely any traces of authority of the kind ascribable to a top-down model of social structure. Indeed, the deliberate avoidance of any headship formation is based primarily on the above mentioned accent on "communal efforts" and cooperation, and it finds justification in the ideological accent on the idea of *danketsu*. The absence of an election system, the low level of

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and creating branch families in the immediate vicinities of their community.

[27] Water, though not scarce, was not sufficient for the creation of paddy fields in Mikazuki. Although the settled land did have a pond large enough to be used for the purpose, the use right pertaining to this resource is in the hands of an external, who refused to grant it as a concession to our village. Regarding farming knowledge, I have registered at least eight cases of settlers relatively experienced in rice cultivation (many of them came from rice farming families), but it is worth noticing that my informants agreed on the low feasibility of paddy-field cultivation on Mikazuki's land. The insufficient financial resources, the problem of irrigation and the lack of family labour power were the main reasons for the initial inclination towards different forms of agricultural cultivation.

interference by the *boson* in Mikazuki's economic actions, the strong emphasis on values and virtues emphasizing social harmony and cohesion, are all evidence of the same corollary. Mikazuki attempted to build within what it found itself precluded from in the outer sphere, and its "originality" in both economic and social terms draws heavily upon the very nature of such a choice.

It would be, however, reductive to underemphasize the role of the single actors in establishing social networks and ties outside the village. Since the early days of Mikazuki's life, informal ties with the local people have been of vital importance for the settlers in order to allow them to sell or exchange agricultural products, timber and other commodities. Such relationships commonly relied on pre-existing kin ties (mostly beyond the neighbouring area), but in quite a number of cases also on new relations, as farmers felt the very urgent need to carve out niches in the local market. Since the early stages of its history, personal relationships have been of vital importance for the settlers in order to gain access to the local market. Agricultural products were exchanged locally for basic foods such as rice and fish, whereas the sale process of village products tended to follow rather informal channels (i.e. direct sale to local food stores or to market places) because of the inaccessibility of ordinary avenues such as cooperatives. Furthermore, Mikazuki's people resorted to external and translocal ties in order to counterbalance their shortages of knowledge of agriculture, as well as of human capital. It was clear that those farming units who had relatives sharing the same occupation were in a better position to extend and consolidate their knowledge of agricultural practice. This leads us to an important point, that of the social role of individual personalities within the community.

The social presence of some village personalities is also a dimension of the village's process of interaction with the local environment. Apart from the individual characters of these figures, what I find it important to stress is that their actions, choices and strategies are characterizable both at household and community levels. On the one hand, because of the personal assets accrued from social capital, such figures have a higher potential for economic profit, as well as wider ranges of strategies. On the other hand, because of the potentially "disruptive" power that the accumulation of outer social assets can exert on the village order, these figures often hesitate in pursuing the full exploitation of their potential. This explains why the ongoing process of contracting external ties and networks within the local and translocal context had little influence on the social equilibrium of Mikazuki, i.e. it did not brought about any relevant form of

[28] At the time of my fieldwork, all the other communities were represented by the head of one of the stem

social stratification. Villagers strive to keep their private interests out of the community and this is usually achieved through a neat separation of the domains of social interaction. The village, on the one hand, is the environment in which negotiation and networking with exponents of the local market take place. On the other hand, the household, through the social lives of its members, provides the appropriate sphere for the creation of personal channels. At the time at which I was living in the community, four farming households showed a preference for making use of external ties (mainly relatives and friends from the other villages) in order to gain access to the agricultural market. This behaviour was tacitly criticized by other members who adhered strictly to the "Mikazuki model" ("individualism is increasing" was the only remark I could extract from informants), and maintained that a fixed portion of their production was to be sold through the cooperative. It seemed that such behaviour could generate disunion among the farmers. However, when the harvesting operations had finally come to an end and the problem of transporting the apples to the cooperatives or to the local fruit dealers was occupying all the cultivating units, then it was time to reconstitute the collective once more. In this case, the household head who has "connections" with some truck owner or shipping company will function as a pivot, organizing the pricey transportation for the other farmers and sharing the cost on an equal basis. The picture of this moment in the farming operations that remains in the memory is one in which mountains of boxes are piled on the ground surrounding the shrine and the public hall, the fruits of one year of sweat. After some days this space is once more occupied; this time it is the Communal Hall that is filled with the farmers and the shipping connection(s), who loudly celebrate the end of the task to musical accompaniment and with a number of bottles alcoholic beverages.

Theoretical assumptions: the notion of 'social capital'

The concept of 'social capital' developed from James S. Coleman's work. Here, social capital is considered to be the set of resources inherent in family relations and in community social organizations related to the cognitive or social development of a young person (Coleman 1990). Following Coleman's insights Putnam, in his influential work on the different patterns of economic and political development in Northern and Southern Italy (Putnam 1993), maintains that social capital refers to certain features of social organization such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the "efficiency"

families that moved in from the mother villages.

of a society by facilitating coordinating action. The basic elements of the notion are on the one hand the so-called "norms of reciprocity", on the other the "networks of civic engagements". The former series of factors are regarded as regulating economic transactions through the establishment of a "continuing relationship of imbalanced exchange" that involves mutual expectations of reciprocity ("generalized reciprocity"). The latter, conversely, refers to a highly determinative component of social capital, serving to restrain opportunism and solve problems of "collective action".

The notion of a social form of capital is among the central arguments of Bourdieu's theoretical assumptions. The French sociologist posits the idea of different forms of capital

(economic capital, social, cultural and symbolic, but also political and juridical capital) in his attempt to investigate the "two-way relationships between objective structures – those of social fields, and incorporated structures – those of the habitus (Bourdieu 1998:vii). Notions such as that of "capital" (as well as that of "habitus" and "field") are found within the contextualization of the potentialities which are inscribed in the social agents and in their interrelation. Following Coleman, Bourdieu points out that social capital is the most effective asset that domestic units (and in particular 'extensive families') possess, and it can be successfully managed for collective purposes, such as for pursuing economic profit. Therefore, social capital (similarly to cultural and symbolic capital) can be converted into economic capital insofar as it is transferred from the social sphere (ties, networks and obligations) to the economic context of interaction.

An accent on the notion of "social capital" can provide the observer of social phenomena with a valuable instrument for penetrating the diverse layers of the reality under scrutiny. As the old debate between "formalist" and "substantivist" positions[29] showed, one of the most delicate issues within the field of social sciences and humanities in general is that of how to deal with the relation between economic action and social behaviour. Whereas formalist theorists, drawing upon the utilitarian tradition and the enlightenment rationalism of Hobbesian origin stressed that self-interested, rational behaviour of economic actors was affected only minimally by social relations, the substantivist side of the story placed the accent on the "embeddedness of economic actions" (Polany 1944). Economy is far from being a separate compound, or a cluster, within a social system, because the individual's search for profit takes place within his/her social and cultural context of belonging and it is, therefore, shaped by the social conditions of its action. In other words, what Marx defined as social relations, i.e.

relations among people engaged in a process of production, can be viewed as merely another side of the coin: the economic behaviour of social actors is inextricably bound to the social system in which they operate. The features (ties, networks, organizations, norms values, etcetera) that characterize such a system in the everyday context of interaction among its actors are the determinant factors to be examined when considering individuals' economic choices and strategies. Within this framework of analysis, the idea of a form of capital that would be convertible into profit-seeking economic action, but that nonetheless would transcend the purely economic sphere can be usefully adopted not only as a wide-reaching notion bridging elementary and essential categories such as "economic action", "social behaviour" and "cultural repertoire", but also as a valuable tool of analysis of ethnographic material. In addition, the emphasis on social agreements, the manner in which they are contracted and represented by the actors, focuses attention on the problem of the acquisition and transmission of "knowledge" (Long and Van der Ploeg 1988).

In order to understand the process of socialization within a community created from zero, i.e. a settlement, it is necessary to investigate not only the processes of social interaction and those through which social ties are created, but also the mechanisms through which individuals internalize such networks, i.e. accumulate social assets, within their strict context of action, the household. Afterwards, the significance that such assets assume for the individual will be extended at the village level. At this point, the processes of "harmonization of choices", "sharing of knowledge" and the mediating role played by the common set of norms and value needs to be taken into consideration.

The reason for these steps in the process of accumulating social assets resides in the bidimensional character of the notion. The construction of values and norms aiming at both accumulating and re-defining social resources is predicated at two levels – the individual and the societal. Therefore, the adoption of the concept of social capital can serve to simplify the investigation within the horizontal spaces of social interaction, i.e. from the local society to the global arena, and help to integrate data that would be conventionally stored in predefined categories (such the 'economic', the 'political' and so on).

[29] For an exhaustive account of the theoretical contribution of the debate on "substantivists" and

Conclusion: towards a model

It would be possible to use the case of Mikazuki as the basis for the construction of three different analytical models. The first, of vertical design, would consider the weight of the historical shifts in Japan's agricultural policies from the immediate post-war period, via the age of the economic take-off, to the present day. The stories Mikazuki's people were ready to tell me would then count less than the economic performance of the community and of the region as a whole, whilst the significance of their choices and strategies would quickly be obfuscated by the power of numbers, statistics predicting the future of the village. The second model, focussing on the importance of the individuals' social and economic behaviours, would aim at describing such strategies as leitmotifs of the social life in Mikazuki. In this case, paying attention to the spatial dimensions of the village society (intra-household relations, inter-household ties and local interaction) could provide the ethnographic case with a depth of analysis often unknown to research where fieldwork is absent or only marginal. However, the utility of the third model, in which the notions of social and cultural capital are regarded as parameters of identification of both a society's inner qualities and of its modality of interaction with the local and trans-local environment, must not be underestimated.

In order to understand the logic underpinning the third model proposed here, two assumptions will be considered as the discourse hallmarks. The first is that the social assets of a community must be considered as elements varying in time and space. The whole repertoire of ties, networks and relations that characterize a social system, as well as the values, norms and ideologies people construct within it, are in constant movement. People's responses to external factors and conditions change as the historical situation urges them to seek adaptation in different ways. Subsequently, such changes are continuously moulded at an individual and a local level, while being introduced into the everyday sphere of action.

The second assumption refers to the potential inherent in a social system to permeate and significantly affect the outer sphere of interplay. After framing the social and economic paths followed by Mikazuki within a spatial and temporal structure, it becomes possible to consider in what manner particular forms of social capital influence and to what extent they eventually shape the contacts that external agents (villagers from other communities, cooperative members, entrepreneurs from food processing companies and so on) have with our villagers. To simplify the idea, the process can be thought as one of "circulation": external factors and influences are absorbed by the

"formalists" see Issac (1993).

actors and commuted into their responses (choices and strategies). These responses propagate concentrically from the family out towards the local arena (and back) and they eventually expand further to the external and translocal stage. It is at this point that the circle closes, as external agents who are involved in economic transactions with the farmers, in order to be able to deal with them "profitably", tend to seek adaptation of their choices, values and norms. In other words, what is created at a household level gains space to exert its counter-influence on the outer sphere, which in turn will make use of this feedback to seek gain (in merely economic terms) or to adjust to the local expectations of the village. In order to clarify the assumptions on which this model rests, I will introduce two brief case-examples in support of this thesis.

The first concerns the changes that followed the shift from the first (subsistence) to the second (technical) economic phase. Mikazuki's farmers, responding to the state's policy orientation, which urged agriculture to abandon its traditional inflexible structure based on intensive rice growing, began to diversify their options as far as cultivation was concerned.. Contract farming and seasonal (or annual) cash crops became widespread among the settlements, which lacked the static structure of traditional paddy-field farming villages. Subsidies had been made available by the State since the late 1950s, and the village was not the only beneficiary of such an orientation. One of the most exemplary cases of agricultural production was the establishment of a small processing factory for the processing of peppermint for cosmetic use in 1958. The factory was built with a state subsidy, and its operations lasted up to ten years, during which work and profit were equally shared by its "members". They had, in fact, agreed to contribute to the mint operation by all putting an equal portion of their land aside for the cultivation of the mint and participating, on the basis of a rather complex turn-taking system, during the processing phases. The outcome was, as far as the economic point of view is concerned, extremely positive. Farmers could benefit from immediate cash revenues which helped them repay the debts accrued in the initial period. More significantly however, this event had the effect of contributing to the consolidation of both inner and outer social ties. First, the villagers experienced moments of profit-oriented cooperation for the first time (rather than of "striving for survival" as the previous economic actions can be characterized), which, by levelling disagreements and frictions constituted a boosting factor for the creation of a more solid and cohesive group. Second, the village's increased social compactness drew attention at the local level. The image of a "poor settlement" had to be redefined as its increasingly dynamic economic activity called for external investments in the area. Villagers came into direct

contact with the productive chain, skipping the common intermediate step of the local cooperative agency, and personal relations with companies became crucial for the process of accumulation of both social and economic assets. Moreover, the contribution such contracts brought to the local economy must be seen within the context of their providing work for the neighbouring villages, since they required an extensive type of farming. As in the case of the mint factory, some farmers from the *boson* worked to help Mikazuki during the peak season, whereas other farming units joined our villagers in establishing similar activities of their own particularly during the period 1956-70.

The second episode is that of the erection of the village shrine. Following the example of another settlement, Mikazuki built its own shrine in 1966 and shortly after called for the introduction of a summer shrine festival (*Mikazuki Jinja Matsuri*), which is still held on the third of August. The event was formerly "warmly and cheerfully accompanied by children's performances, games, dances and music", especially at times when the presence of the young in the village was more substantial. This important pause in the economic activity of the community was interpreted by its promoters as a "tradition" to be established, and the facts soon confirmed this opinion. Not only could relatives, from the village itself or from outside, , join their family in a delightful atmosphere on this day, but the occasion was also propitious for inviting and welcoming "desired guests". Cadres of the local cooperatives, the heads of some of the food processing companies, as well as local political and religious authorities were among those attending the festival, and their participation was not only occasional. The festival came to be seen as a moment in which the community had "something to offer" to its guests, to thank them for their concern with the village's socio-economic presence, and to sanction the existence of important ties with its visitors. The creation of a festival tradition drew all the villagers' efforts together in cooperation and group organization. At the same time, Mikazuki increased its potential to "call attention" to itself. The festival was considered by the local inhabitants a "dignifying example of the villagers' social assets", and in this sense its members' work to consolidate personal relations with the outer world was crowned by the institution of an out-of the-ordinary, informal occasion of interaction.

Although slightly different, the examples above provide evidence of how social capital is accumulated in the village, and how it can be used to procure economic resources. The creation of social networks within the community, the establishment of what Granovetter defines as "weak ties" with strategically important elements of the outer sphere and the re-elaboration of such relations at a household and village level are

historically definable at all points. As the cases above suggest, changing external conditions prompted and inspired diverse answers from the farming households and of their community. Such responses are surely conceived in terms of "profit-seeking" (or "struggling for survival", as the times required). Nevertheless, the logics underscoring these choices are far from being mere economic rationales; they go beyond Weberian rational speculations.

The difficulty in accounting for the social and cultural resources that shape the villagers' response to changing historical conditions could be counterbalanced by the visibility of their "social products". Concepts such as "social harmony", "flexibility" and "cohesion" are unlikely to assume similar significances in other contexts even a few kilometres from Mikazuki. Because of the remarkable variability that characterizes such resources, the applicability of the idea of capital to the social realm is not self-exhaustive and needs to be constantly put to discussion. This accounts for the adoption of a model in which values and patterns of behaviours are neither mechanical products of the "impact" of overall changes, nor features with an end in themselves. They are elements of a more complex synergic mechanism, one in which actors are alternatively donors and recipients of influence in time and space. As one of the farmers said to me: 'They wanted apples, we made apples. Some years ago cheaper apples came from New Zealand, so we started making perfect fruits, big as melons and red as cherries. They liked them, but I know that one day this won't be enough. So I started making pears, I said to myself, one day the Japanese will learn to enjoy pears!' (And they actually did; since 1997 pear consumption and production has steadily increased in the prefecture.)

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