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Anthropological Theory 2010 10: 303

DOI: 10.1177/1463499610372181

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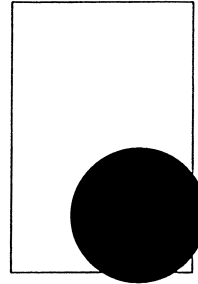
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'You aren't the first and you won't be the last'

Reflections on moral change in contemporary rural Ireland

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Abstract

During the last decades of the 20th century, notions of morality related to sexuality and family life underwent a dramatic transition in Ireland. In this paper, I explore changing attitudes towards a rapidly growing population of unmarried mothers in a small community in rural Ireland. In my analysis, I draw upon recent work on the anthropology of ethics, morality, and cultural change to analyze the ways in which individual experiences of ethical conflict and transformation relate to aggregate processes of cultural change. My analysis of one woman's account of her own moral epiphany speaks to the limits of conceptualizing ethico-moral change as a necessarily conscious or cognitive process.

Key Words

Catholicism • cultural change • ethics • freedom • Ireland • morality • unmarried mothers

In his 1999 *Powers of Freedom*, Nikolas Rose describes the proliferation of the language of ethics in a number of fields (Rose, 1999), and the discipline of anthropology is certainly no exception. Much time has been spent discussing our own professional ethics (Asad, 1973; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Said, 1989; Scheper-Hughes, 1992, 2000), outlining the contours of the ethical problems that have come into being alongside recent advances in the biological sciences (Rapp, 1999; Rose, 2006), examining the problems related to translating bioethics cross-culturally (Adams, 2003, 2004, 2005; Stonington and Ratanakul, 2006), and exploring the effects of ethical discourse in contemporary forms of governance (Rose, 1999). More recently, anthropologists have also turned towards idioms of ethics and morality¹ as resources for conceptual tools that might allow us to better describe a series of persistent problems related to the analysis of practical reason, social change, and conflicts over the valuation of incommensurable goods (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006; Faubion, 2001; Laidlaw, 2002; Lambek, 2000; Robbins, 2004, 2007; Zigon, 2008).

Among the most productive of these recent works are the writings of Joel Robbins (2004, 2007, 2009) and Jarrett Zigon² (2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). In this essay I engage their writings on situations of conflict and breakdown that render prior ethico-moral frameworks inadequate in relation to an analysis of changes in attitudes towards unmarried motherhood in late-20th-century Ireland. Like Robbins, I am interested in exploring the macro-historical events which created the conditions of possibility for what Robbins has called a 'morality of freedom' (Robbins, 2007). Yet, my analysis of cultural change as the product of an aggregation of discrete moments of ethical experience speaks to the difficulty in drawing clear connections between some moments of ethical experience and broader macro-historical trends.

In my attention to these intimate moments of ethical experience, my work is closely related to that of Zigon. Yet, where Zigon focuses on the role of conscious decision-making in these moments of ethical work (Zigon, 2007, 2009b), I argue that moments of ethico-moral transformation are not always experienced as conscious deliberations in the way Zigon describes. In this sense my work troubles Zigon's distinction between non-conscious morality and conscious ethics.

My reading of the relationship between ethico-moral experience, macro-events, and cultural trends avoids a determinist frame that would view the consequences of globalization and secularization as always and already given, or which would require us to locate a single cause for complex cultural shifts. Rather, the mode of analysis I propose in this essay allows us to examine the intimate processes by which ethico-moral changes occur, while also exploring the limits of our ability to conceptualize the ethico-moral decision-making as a necessarily conscious or cognitive process.

In 2001, I conducted preliminary fieldwork on the growing acceptance of unmarried mothers focused on a string of towns and villages that fell along a 20 km stretch of road in a county in western Ireland. I was interested in studying the conditions that had led to a dramatic rise in the rates of unmarried motherhood in Ireland and in trying to understand how families and communities that had previously ostracized unmarried mothers had come to accept them. The people living along the piece of two-lane highway that defined my field site made their living primarily through non-agricultural employment in the small town of Ballinlough and supplement this income through the raising of cattle and sheep. My preliminary study focused on four unmarried mothers and their families. These case studies were gathered through approximately 6–12 hours of formal and informal interviews with each woman, tape-recorded when appropriate. In addition, I spoke with local priests, nuns, schoolteachers, a high school guidance counselor and other members of the community and observed interactions at family events and outings. As my interest in the anthropology of ethics has developed since then in relation to my research on Child Protective Services social workers in the United States and faith-based orphan support organizations in Uganda, I have often found myself returning to the following story as being 'good to think with' (Levi-Strauss, 1963), both demonstrating and helping to refine recent conceptual advances in the anthropology of ethics.

PAR FOR THE COURSE

In 2000, Nora³ gave birth to Thomas, named after her own father, in the local hospital in rural western Ireland. Her boyfriend Peter served as her birth coach. Nora's mother,

father, brothers, and sisters arrived just after the birth to celebrate the baby's arrival. Nora's brother, Craig, documented the event in a poem he wrote for her entitled 'Don't Call Me Baby'. The line 'The fans came in, in fours and threes/Humming round like busy bees/No time to rest, oh none a' tall/The fans rolled on till baby bawled' marks the celebrations that surrounded the birth of Nora's son. Two years after Thomas' birth, Nora and Peter married in the Abbey across the street from her childhood home.

Comprehending the significance of this event requires an understanding of Nora's older sister Moira's experience of unmarried motherhood⁴ in 1988. When Moira found out that she was pregnant, she was mortified and did not tell anyone, not even her boyfriend John, until she began bleeding so heavily that she was afraid she would lose the child. It was not until she had to go to the hospital for a second near miscarriage that she told her mother Margaret and father Peter about the pregnancy.

They knew something was wrong 'cause I was going in and out, and going into the sitting room and into the kitchen, and following them around. And I said, 'I've got to talk to you.' [After I told them] daddy didn't really say anything. He just really – I dunno he was reading the paper or something, and he was just in such shock at the time. And of course mum was really mad. She just 'Oh, my God,' and 'what are you doing,' and 'what.' Oh she just really – she was really upset, I suppose. And she said 'Well, you can't go back to Knocknamona, maybe you should go to England, and maybe, and did you think of adoption.' She just, I suppose she totally over-reacted. So, um, Mammy just wanted me to – before anyone would know – to actually leave Ireland, and go to England. She just didn't really want me – she wouldn't have liked me to have been there. She just – it was just such an awful thing for somebody at the time. I mean, it was always cover up then. You would rarely see people that were pregnant, and very few that would actually go out – that would actually let it be seen that they were pregnant.

A month later Moira boarded a ferry to England to stay with her older sister, Eleanor. She was exhausted, alone, and six months pregnant. As difficult as it might have been to leave home at this time, it was easier for her in England because she did not have to worry about hiding the pregnancy. Several months after the birth, Moira and John were married in a dingy Dublin suburb and only immediate family members were invited. Following the marriage, Moira and John moved into a house several miles away from Moira's parents home and Moira gave birth to four more children in rapid succession.

Moira's experience was typical of the experiences of unmarried mothers prior to the late 1990s who had also been shunned, hidden, or sent away (Arensberg, 1961; Connell, 1968; Salazar, 1999, 2006; Scheper-Hughes, 2001). Many unmarried mothers gave birth in religious-run mother-and-baby homes, where unmarried women in their first pregnancy could give birth in secret and later return home (O'Hare et al., 1983; Smith, 2007). Others were forced to enter the Magdalen Asylum system in which former prostitutes and some unmarried mothers were subject to forced labor and other forms of penance. It is estimated that over 30,000 women passed through the Magdalen Laundries in Ireland from the time they opened in the mid-19th century until the last one finally closed in 1996 (Finnegan, 2004; Smith, 2007). Children of unmarried women were, in the words of one of my neighbors, often 'rubbed out of the record',

having been drowned or abandoned (Connell, 1968), hidden in industrial schools (Raftery and O'Sullivan, 1999), passed off as their mothers' siblings or cousins (Arensberg, 1961), or sent to America where they were passed off as orphans (Milotte, 1997). The ways in which these children were systematically made to disappear may also account for the strikingly low rates of documented illegitimacy (Salazar, 1999) that preceded a late-20th-century jump when the percentage of babies born to women in Ireland who were not legally married rose from 5 percent in 1980 to 31 percent by 1999 (CSO, 2000).

Yet by the time Nancy Scheper-Hughes revisited the rural community of An Clochan in 1999, one of the things that most surprised her was 'the extent to which single parenthood can be openly discussed as marginally acceptable' (Scheper-Hughes, 2001: 55–6). During my 2001 fieldwork interviews with unmarried mothers, their parents and friends, school teachers, clergy, and other neighbors confirmed this growing acceptance of unmarried motherhood in an area where ten years prior it was not uncommon for unmarried women in the area to spend their pregnancy at a center for unmarried mothers far away from their homes. Other scholars examining unmarried motherhood in Ireland during the latter part of the 20th century have also noted this shift (Flanagan and Richardson, 1992). While Salazar notes that unmarried motherhood can still be considered a 'morally irregular' behavior in Ireland, though it is now thought to be a problem of ignorance and irresponsibility and not a failure of obedience to the Church's teachings (Salazar, 2006), the profound changes in the ways in which unmarried mothers were treated by their families and the frequency with which unmarried motherhood was spoken of as simply 'par for the course' represents a striking example of collective ethico-moral transformation.

ANTHROPOLOGIES OF ETHICAL TRANSFORMATION

These individual and collective ethico-moral shifts offer an opportunity to think about how ethico-moral change occurs and what the relationship between established ethico-moral traditions and the human capacity for change and creative action might tell us about this process.

In his essay on the relationship between ethics and freedom, James Laidlaw begins by considering the relationship between ethics and freedom in Durkheim and Kant's theories of morality. Durkheim argued that social organization is based on the group's adherence to 'moral facts'. These 'moral facts' are rules which arise from society and which inspire the respect of all (Durkheim, 1953; Laidlaw, 2002). Durkheim's proposition concerning the origin of these rules can be distinguished from Kant's philosophy in which transcendental moral law can be derived through the use of reason after it has been freed from the constraints of affect and social convention. Both Durkheim and Kant were concerned with questions of moral obligation, but their understandings of the source and universality of these obligations are diametrically opposed.

More significantly, Laidlaw distinguishes the writings of Kant and Durkheim based on their treatment of human freedom. Laidlaw argues that for Kant freedom was the condition upon which any philosophy of morality was necessarily based. Ethics were in fact the very 'laws of freedom'. If there is no freedom from the press of social convention, there is no need for ethics (Kant, 1965). For Durkheim, on the other hand, morality was the respectful adherence to a set of social obligations. In this system,

transgressions represent a societal breakdown or a sub-optimal inculcation of the rules. Laidlaw's concern to reintroduce freedom to the anthropology of ethics turns on his indictment of Durkheim's theory of moral obligation. He argues that Durkheim's society was effectively 'Kant's notion of the moral law, with the all-important change that the concept of freedom, which was of course central for Kant, has been neatly excised from it' (Laidlaw, 2002: 312). Laidlaw argues that anthropologies of ethics and morality since Durkheim have inherited this error. Without paying attention to freedom as a defining feature of morality and ethics,

it is impossible . . . to see how specifically ethical consideration might be distinguishable from other causal factors that make . . . people function as they do . . . an anthropology of ethics will only be possible if we take seriously . . . the possibilities of human freedom. (Laidlaw, 2002: 315)

For Laidlaw, ethics is the realm of human experience which attempts to answer the Socratic question 'How should one live?' from a position of freedom.

Yet, Laidlaw's conception of the role of freedom and free enquiry in moral life differs from Kant's. Laidlaw rejects what he sees as Kant's proposition that the action one ought to take in a given circumstance can be deduced from the universal maxim that has already been discovered through the use of free reason (Laidlaw, 2002). Laidlaw finds this formulation of ethics to be far too limiting, appealing instead to something that is closely akin to Aristotle's flexible, cultivated, pragmatic, situation-dependent *phronêsis*.

Laidlaw also distinguishes freedom from agency, as it is most often used in anthropology. Laidlaw objects to agency on the grounds that most anthropologists use it to refer only to those acts which are '[to] various degrees structurally or transformatively important, or powerful' (Laidlaw, 2002: 315). In addition, Laidlaw argues that agency is generally conceptualized as something equally accessible to all actors across space and time. In making this point, Laidlaw is building from Foucault's discussion of agency and freedom. For Foucault, freedom was something that is distributed in greater and lesser degrees over the space of human action (Rabinow and Rose, 1994). In some moments there is more freedom to choose one's speech or action, in others less. Agency, on the other hand, as it is most often used in anthropology, is something that can be described as an inalienable and uniformly distributed human characteristic.

It is this problem of variegated freedom which brings us to the writings of Joel Robbins, Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thevenot, and Jarrett Zigon and to questions concerning the mechanism by which an individual moves from moments of lesser freedom to moments of greater freedom. I argue that it is ultimately this process that we must consider when thinking about the processes of change.

Joel Robbins introduces two concepts that may help us to bridge the gap between the moments where actors are faced with greater and lesser degrees of freedom. The first position is what he calls 'morality of reproduction', referring to moments in which a relatively stable ethico-moral system is being exercised to make a judgment about a particular situation. Robbins contrasts this concept with a second, 'morality of freedom', with which he refers to moments at which the existing moral systems prove somehow inadequate to the situation at hand (Robbins, 2005, 2007).

In Robbins' schema, actors move from moralities of reproduction to moralities of freedom when value-spheres come into conflict with one another or when hierarchies within a single value sphere become destabilized (Robbins, 2007: 301). To understand how this might happen I turn to the writings of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot and Foucault. In *On Judgment*, Boltanski and Thevenot outline a series of six moral worlds, or polities, which they argue structure the value judgments made by those operating within the French business community. In addition to demonstrating how these mutually exclusive regimes of value have developed and are currently used, they discuss how these 'polities' come into conflict with one another. One mode for managing these conflicts is the compromise, which they argue is an essentially unstable arrangement that avoids, and thus does not resolve, the task of determining which of two mutually exclusive regimes of value will prevail in a given conflict. The other mode for managing a conflict is the crisis, which often follows the practical breakdown of an unstable compromise. This moment of breakdown is the catalyst for the task of making a true value judgment in a setting where two or more polities are in conflict with one another (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006).

Boltanski and Thevenot's crisis is similar to Foucault's writing on problematization (Foucault, 1997b). Foucault defines a problematization as

the ensemble of discursive and nondiscursive practices that make something [specifically, an institutionally legitimated truth claim, previously taken for granted] enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought. (Foucault, 1966: 598, quoted in translation, Rabinow, 2003: 18)

Furthermore, for a problematization to occur something 'must have happened to introduce uncertainty, a loss of familiarity; that loss, that uncertainty, is the result of difficulties in our previous way of understanding, acting, relating' (Foucault, 1966: 598, quoted in translation, Rabinow, 2003: 18). Thus a problematization, which inspires many forms of response, is one way of thinking about the relationship between crisis or uncertainty and a move into a space of greater freedom and ethical reflection.

Both crisis and problematization can be used to describe the types of situations that might lead to Robbins' 'morality of freedom' as each signifies a break where the available schemas for ordering social action prove inadequate. It is just this sort of break that moves us away from the possibility of a Durkheimian determinism and towards a conceptual framework which requires a vision of *anthropos* as the type of being capable of exercising and articulating reasoned thought. In this view, the decisions that are made in these spaces of uncertainty, these moments of freedom, are anything but pre-ordained.

As noted by Robbins, the sorts of crises capable of leading to cultural change are more likely to occur at certain moments than at others (Robbins, 2009). The changes in the prevalence and acceptance of unmarried parenting in Ireland can certainly be linked to the other extraordinary political, social, and economic changes that took place during the same period. But, as we will see below, these events are not sufficient to explain how individual actors came to change the way they responded to unmarried mothers in their families and communities.

CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY

In 1973, Ireland joined the European Community. A rapid period of economic growth began in earnest in 1993 with the investment of technology companies in Ireland. The computer sector began to soar, and with that other sectors of the economy began to improve as well. This economic boom led to Ireland being christened 'The Celtic Tiger'. In 1973, just before Ireland joined the European Community, its GDP per capita measured in purchasing power was 61 percent of the EU-15 average. By 1990 it was 73 percent and by 2001 it had surpassed the average at 115 percent (*The Economist*, 2001). Unemployment fell from 15.9 percent to 5.1 percent from 1993 to 1999 (*The Economist*, 1999) and the massive tide of emigration reversed its course. In 2001 many people in Ireland had a living standard that met that found in many areas of the United States. The clang of new construction and the gleam of the four cars parked in my neighbors' driveway made the changes palpable to even the most casual observer. This period of economic growth opened up new opportunities for employment and offered attractive new status symbols that do not rely on moral superiority.

In addition, 'The Celtic Tiger' arguably decreased people's dependence on traditional aspects of life such as the Catholic faith and a socially integrated rural economy. In the past these institutions would have made the forces of shame and honor discussed above extremely powerful. With the introduction of new economic options, both for women and for the population in general, the economic outcomes of social sanctions no longer carried the far-reaching consequences that they might have in the past. Similarly, the passage of the Unmarried Mother's Allowance⁵ in 1973 also helped to create a climate in which single parenting was practically possible.

The Catholic Church, which had a nearly unquestioned hold on the moral lives of the Irish, also underwent significant changes during this same period with many people either turning away from the Church (Inglis, 1987) or embracing new forms of charismatic Catholicism which are less closely tied to the institutional Church (Allen, 2000; Eipper, 2001; Taylor, 1995). However, as Taylor notes, many older people have remained devoted to the Catholic Church, attending mass at least weekly if not daily and regularly keeping vigil with the Blessed Sacrament overnight. Yet, by 2001 most of the younger people I spoke with had stopped attending church, or only went because they thought it was good for their children to see them go. My neighbor Molly was so angry with the Church that she absolutely refused to go, driving her mother and her nieces down to the church in the rain and returning to pick them up an hour later.

Many of these people had turned away from the Church following a series of scandals that highlighted the hypocritical and abusive actions of clergy members and the tragic consequences of the repressive sexual mores. In 1992, Dr Eamon Casey was forced to resign as Bishop of Galway following the discovery of his having fathered a son with an American divorcee with whom he had had a relationship since 1973. The news caused public outrage and led many to break with the Catholic Church. This sense of betrayal was especially sharp for those who had followed Casey in his attempts to encourage a new and more liberal post-Vatican II church in Ireland. For these liberal followers, the scandal troubled their hopes for the new Church. For others, it seemed that the priests who had preached to them about the parishioners' sinful bodies, who had shamed them into obedience, were in fact sinners themselves (Inglis, 1987).

Worse scandals broke after that. Priests had physically, sexually and emotionally abused the children in schools and in the church. The cruelty of the Christian Brothers and Sisters of Mercy who ran the industrial schools, for orphans, and those they thought might as well be, was on the nightly news. With their televisions tuned to RTE and books like *Banished Babies*, *The Magdalene*, and *Suffer the Little Children* competing for space on the shelves of local bookstores, many believed that there was not a holy priest left in Ireland and slowly many people turned away from the Church altogether, believing that it had betrayed them.

In the spring of 1984, the death of Ann Lovett, a 14-year-old girl who died in childbirth, after giving birth alone in a grotto dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was similarly brought to the attention of a shocked Irish public. This was followed by the investigation of Joanne Hayes, a 24-year-old woman wrongly accused of killing the newborn baby that washed up on the shores of White Strand in County Kerry (Inglis, 2004). What became known as the Kerry Babies case further rocked the country and renewed the protest against the anti-abortion amendment passed in 1983. In 1992, the public silence concerning Irish women and girls who traveled abroad seeking abortions ended with the dramatic and tragic X Case concerning a 14-year-old school girl who was banned from traveling abroad for an abortion in England after being impregnated by a classmate's father. The case brought public outrage and heightened the tensions surrounding the June 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty that formally established the European Union. Ireland ultimately ratified the treaty and subsequent efforts to prohibit women from traveling abroad to seek abortions were unsuccessful (Conrad, 2001).

At the same time leaders of the Catholic Church in the area, long-time adversaries of single parents, had also shifted the ways that they responded both publicly and privately to unmarried mothers. Father Liam, the Catholic priest who founded the diocesan Family Center, said that while some people in the parish do take issue with the services offered at the Family Center, arguing that it is against Catholic doctrine to counsel people in a way which might lead to divorce or to encourage the use of artificial contraception, he feels that the work they do is an important part of pastoral care. In discussing his work at the Family Center, Father Liam said:

You have to take people where they're at and work from there. It does no good to condemn people for the smaller points at the risk of losing them altogether. When *Humanae Vitae*⁶ was issued there was a lot of hubbub, negative and positive about it, but now people have really gone away from a strict adherence to the no birth control message. Natural family planning would have been really stressed a long time ago but now it's not really by anyone in the Church that I know. When people come to confessing that they've used artificial birth control, as a priest in the confessional I have to say that it was a sin and forgive them of it. But after the confession I often advise the person to think about their specific case and to personally decide whether or not they *choose* to see contraception as a sin. They have to look at what's best for them in specific. What's best for you health-wise and in your relationship with your partner? Can you really deal with having a child right now? Together we will usually decide that birth control is the best choice for them given the present circumstances.

Father Liam's emphasis on each individual's need to make decisions on matters like contraception in relation to their own particular situation was at the center of his understanding of his work as a priest and stands in marked contrast to the focus on obligation and papal infallibility of prior decades. While the Catholic Church has not changed its position on contraception since the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, changes in pastoral practices have altered the ways in which the church attempts to address the people who continue to come to mass or to places like the Family Center.

Finally, Mary Robinson, Ireland's president from 1990 to 1997, played a significant role in opening up new spaces of opportunity for women. Made famous by her fight to liberalize Ireland's laws on divorce, homosexuality, and contraception and her subsequent work as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson energized the diversifying women's movement and worked to liberalize both secular and religious cultures of Ireland.

Yet, rather than attributing Nora's family's reaction to her pregnancy in 2001 to these events, I now want to look more closely at her mother, Margaret's, own account of her changing heart. I do so not in an effort to discount the effects of public events but rather to think about the more intimate processes through which public events are transformed into private choices, private choices that ultimately become public change.

SPACES OF FREEDOM

While these trends worked in part to create the conditions of possibility for the radical cultural transformations which took place in Ireland at the turn of the 21st century, they are not in themselves a sufficient accounting of the ways in which individual actors made the choices which, when aggregated, led to a new status quo. In looking towards the level of individual experience, I return to the story of Margaret, a devoutly Catholic mother of 11 children, two of whom you met at the opening of this essay. What makes Margaret's story particularly interesting is the way it speaks to her abilities to reconfigure her ethico-moral frame without altering her commitment to her Catholic faith, making her change of heart something quite different than secularization.

In analyzing her story, I have sought to identify four moments. First, I describe a moment akin to Robbins' 'morality of reproduction'. Second, there is a break, event, or crisis, which renders this taken for granted morality problematic. This break leads to a space of greater freedom, moving the actor into the ethical space and creating the need for something akin to Robbins' 'morality of freedom'. By using this framework to analyze how Margaret transformed her understanding of what was required of her as a good Catholic mother, we can see how, when combined with the intimate choices of thousands of others, they lead to a new structure, the fourth moment, a new 'morality of reproduction'. In this model, freedom, and the freedom to choose, is variegated (see also Zigon, 2009b). It is only at certain historical moments when a mother may decide to banish a daughter for becoming pregnant before her wedding day *or* welcome the pregnancy with open arms. Before or after these moments, the choice to banish or welcome is somewhat more constrained.

Margaret was in her late 60s when I met her. I stayed with her and her husband for two weeks when I first arrived in Ireland. Even after I moved out into my own house, I would drop by to chat in her large warm kitchen, and she and her husband Thomas would occasionally pass by my village to pick me up before heading out to

community-sponsored *Ceili* dances. From the beginning, this project would not have been possible personally or practically without Margaret's kindness and generosity. Only later did it become clear that she would be at the center of the analysis as well. She relayed the following while we waited for a loaf of coarse brown soda bread to come out of the oven.

In 1999, Margaret's seventh child, Eileen, told her that she had accepted her then boyfriend's proposal and that they planned to marry. The trouble was, this boyfriend, Brian, had been married before and was divorced, but the Catholic Church had not annulled the marriage. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, he was still married to his former wife, and Eileen and Brian would thus need to marry civilly, and thus, in the eyes of the Church, would not truly be married. And as one of her daughters-in-law put it, 'For Margaret, it all comes back to the men in black.'

She left on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje⁷ a short time after learning of her daughter's proposed nuptials, and among other things prayed fervently that Eileen would change her mind and call off the wedding. Margaret then described how one afternoon towards the end of the trip, while she knelt praying in the church, she felt as though she had suddenly heard a voice from heaven, and realized that it was not her daughter who needed to change but rather that she needed to learn to accept the situation. 'I ran out of the church crying like a child,' she told me, 'crying to the priest who had brought us on the pilgrimage, crying and crying, so glad for what I had realized.' Margaret came home and reconciled with her daughter and attended the wedding. While she said that she was still not completely happy with the situation, she remains convinced that acceptance was the right choice in this situation, and since we are here interested in questions of ethics, shifts in what one considers to be the 'right' action in a given situation is very significant indeed.

What makes Margaret's change of heart challenging to analyze is the speed with which this crisis was opened and was resolved. In addition, the entire process occurred within the space of prayer and revelation, making it inaccessible to an analysis of explicit reasoning. When Margaret entered the church that day, the problem that would lead to her change of heart was present but the realization that she might change her position was not, the space of freedom had not yet opened. She was praying for her daughter to change. In the space of prayer and sudden realization, the crisis was both opened and resolved. In seeking to understand the shift in her position, logic and analytics find their limit. In the ecstatic experience, we find both an impenetrable mask and a legitimate cause for the transformation of moral systems.

This form of prayer seems somehow different, less conscious perhaps, than that experienced by Aleksandra Vladimirovna in Zigon's 2007 article 'Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand'. Aleksandra Vladimirovna prayed to God for help in resolving an ethical dilemma related to whether or not to pay a fine or a bribe after boarding a train without paying (had she waited in line for a ticket she would have missed the train). She ultimately decides to pay the fine and that if no collector comes she will give the money to charity (Zigon, 2007). While she describes this ethical moment as one resolved by God through prayer, her prayer feels much more closely related to a cognitive decision-making process than the prayer experience described by Margaret. Margaret's understanding of her experience as one in which she heard what she needed to do from 'a voice from heaven' troubles the presumably cognitive moment of moral freedom at the center of both Robbins' and Zigon's accounts.

Margaret's shift also raises an interesting question in relation to the relative ease with which someone operating from a virtue-based mode for determining right action, such as Catholicism, might be able to change, relative to someone operating within an emotivist moral frame (MacIntyre, 1984). In an emotivist framework, what a person 'feels' is the right thing to do in a given situation is the central determinant of correct behaviour; there is no place for an appeal to a higher moral aim. While virtue ethics is also based on the desire of an individual acting in a practical situation, as opposed to the rigid application of rules, these desires are inculcated through a process of voluntary self-training. During this period of training it is entirely possible to strive for what is 'right' without yet experiencing the 'feeling' or 'desire' for that right behavior. As a system shaped by a teleological virtue-based morality, Catholicism recognizes higher order definitions of the 'right' which the Church claims are 'right', even when an individual believer may not 'feel' that that these definitions are valid. The believer is encouraged to engage in processes of self-training through which these virtues might be inculcated such that the believer will eventually experience the desire for right action as a spontaneous feeling. Margaret's case seems to suggest that it was her Catholic background which allowed Margaret to accept Eileen's marriage as the 'right' thing to do, even though she was not yet 'comfortable' with the decision.

Margaret's realization resulted not only in her changed attitude towards Eileen's nuptials, but also her response to the extramarital pregnancy of her youngest daughter, Nora, discussed at the opening of this essay. In reading Margaret's response to Nora's pregnancy, in contrast to her reaction to Moira's pregnancy, we find the beginning and end points of the four-part framework I laid out above. Margaret's reaction to Moira's pregnancy represented one 'morality of reproduction' in which a mother's ability to ensure the virginity, or appearance of virginity, of her daughters prior to their marriages held a higher rank than the unconditional loving acceptance, or appearance of unconditional loving acceptance, of one's daughters. Understanding the values and virtues which flipped places in the transition from one 'morality of reproduction' to another requires a degree of subtlety, as it is not mercy and chastity which switch places in the hierarchy, but rather mercy and the appearance of the ability to inculcate chastity in one's daughter which switch positions. Following the ethical break at Medjugorje, the relative rank of these two values was reversed for Margaret. And so in responding to Nora's pregnancy, Margaret is again reacting in a type of 'morality of reproduction', but it is a morality of a new order, which she herself has participated in transforming.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have attempted to construct a composite theory using the writings of Laidlaw, Robbins, Boltanski, Thevenot, and Foucault to think about the relationship between individual experiences of ethical transformation and broader forms of cultural change. While this framework is similar to that developed by Zigon (2007), my analysis of Margaret's account of her experience at Medjugorje raise important questions concerning the limits of approaching moments of moral freedom with the assumption that what happens in them is necessarily cognitive. Taking seriously Margaret's own description of her experience at Medjugorje requires that we alter our models of what constitutes ethico-moral work to accommodate alternate emic understandings of ethics that may not privilege cognitive deliberation.

At a different level, using ethico-moral experience as a site for analysis leaves the outcomes of macro-level changes such as globalization or economic development open, thus avoiding an analysis that erases contingency in favor of simplistic master narratives. This frame of analysis based on the writings of scholars in the nascent field of the anthropology of ethics offers new insights into the complex questions posed by countries that have undergone radical cultural changes within short stretches of time. The case elaborated here demonstrates the potential utility of such a method for understanding how social actors both change and are changed by the ethico-moral frameworks which shape their lives.

Acknowledgements

The research for this article was conducted in Ireland in 2001, with the support of the University of California at Berkeley and a Haas Scholars Research Grant. The writing of this article was undertaken at the University of California San Francisco and was supported by a Graduate Research Fellowship from the National Science Foundation. I would like to thank Vincanne Adams, Lawrence Cohen, Jennifer Johnson-Hanks, Misha Klein, Paul Rabinow, Jamie Saris, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Paul Scherz, Summer Star, and Lisa Stevenson for their support and constructive comments at various points in the development of this project. I would also like to thank the editors of *Anthropological Theory* and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and guidance. My greatest debt is, of course, to the women and men who shared their time and stories with me during my fieldwork in Ireland.

Notes

1 Scholars writing on the anthropology of ethics use the terms ethics and morality in different and often contradictory ways. Arthur Kleinman made an attempt to distinguish ethics and morality by defining ethics as a set of formal abstract rules or principles, and morality as the messy enactment of these rules in daily life. Using this definition draws attention to the need for anthropology as a method of elucidating the details of moral experience, in contrast to the study of formal ethical systems (Kleinman, 1999). While what Kleinman had in mind was the application of bio-ethical principals in cross-cultural medical practice, we might also think of him as juxtaposing Kantian deontology with Aristotelian *phronêsis*, but calling Kantian deontology ethics and Aristotelian *phronêsis* morality.

James Laidlaw's definition of ethics is closer to the Aristotelian sense of the term, in that it focuses on *phronêsis*, or the practical ability to make judgments about right action in specific situations. Following this tradition, Laidlaw defines ethics as situation-dependent practice informed by a process of self-training. This definition of ethics is anything but the application of a system of formal rules (Laidlaw, 2002). Following Nietzsche, Laidlaw uses the term morality in a more limited sense to refer to a subset of ethical systems where 'self-denying values inform law-like obligations' (Laidlaw, 2002: 317).

More recently, Jarrett Zigon has attempted to distinguish morality from ethics by defining morality as being made up of the institutions, public discourse, and embodied practices which allow people to go about their daily lives in an ethically unproblematic way. Ethics, by contrast, is for Zigon a conscious reflection on these

embodied practices, discourses, and institutions in which 'the person must perform certain practices on herself or with other persons to consciously be and act moral in the social world' (Zigon, 2009b: 261). As we will see below, this distinction between ethics and morality, is similar, but not identical to, the distinction Joel Robbins has made between what he terms 'morality of reproduction' and 'morality of freedom'. While the distinction that both Robbins and Zigon draw between these two ethico-moral moments is central to my concerns in this essay, I find the use of Robbins' terms to be more productive, given the inconsistent use of the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' in the current literature.

In my own writing I use the terms ethics and morals along with the term ethico-moral interchangeably in a more conventional fashion to refer to assemblages of technologies, norms, practices, and modes of reasoning (Ong and Collier, 2005) related to situated judgment about 'the right' or 'the good'. I should also note that in using the terms 'the right' and 'the good' I am referring to the ways in which these terms would be defined by actors operating within a particular ethical assemblage and do not make any a priori assumptions about any particular content ascribed to these terms.

- 2 I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for bringing Jarrett Zigon's work to my attention. I have found it very useful to engage this work and have been encouraged in my argument by the way the framework I had developed before reading it productively articulates with the one he lays out.
- 3 All personal names and place names have been changed to protect the identities of the people who participated in the study.
- 4 In this paper unmarried mothers are defined as women who were not legally married at the time of the birth. This definition is in keeping with the way unmarried mothers are counted by the Central Statistics Office in Ireland. In addition, this definition is useful for my work as I am primarily interested in the events and responses surrounding pregnancy and birth and secondarily concerned with the parenting issues of unmarried mothers. Single mother and single parent will also be used in this paper, particularly where my discussion might be applied to a larger group encompassing divorced, separated, and widowed parents.
- 5 The Lone Parents Allowance (LPA) replaced the UMA in 1976. The LPA was open to both men and women who found themselves parenting a child alone. The LPA was itself replaced in 1997 by the One-Parent Families (OPF) allowance, which encourages single parents to take up work outside the home.
- 6 *Humanae Vitae* was a papal encyclical issued in 1968 that reaffirmed the Catholic Church's condemnation of the use of artificial contraception.
- 7 The Bosnian town of Medjugorje became a popular pilgrimage site for Irish Catholics following reports of a Marian apparition in 1981. In his account of Irish pilgrims in Medjugorje, Lawrence Taylor emphasizes the importance of Medjugorje as a site that is 'open' to interpretation, new miracles, and a certain sort of 'new age' Catholicism, facts which are not insignificant to Margaret's experience there (Taylor, 1995).

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