

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

# Anthropology Optional Economic and Political Organization; Social Control

**Paper 1 · Unit 6**

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How non-market societies produce, exchange and govern: the formalist-substantivist quarrel, Polanyi's three modes of integration with the Kula and Potlatch as set-piece cases, Service and Fried on political evolution, and how law works without a state.

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## UPSC SYLLABUS

2. Economic organization: Meaning, scope and relevance of economic anthropology; Formalist and Substantivist debate; Principles governing production, distribution and exchange (reciprocity, redistribution and market) in communities subsisting on hunting and gathering, fishing, swiddening, pastoralism, horticulture and agriculture; globalisation and indigenous economic systems. 3. Political organization and Social Control: Band, tribe, chiefdom, kingdom and state; concepts of power, authority and legitimacy; social control, law and justice in simple societies.

## Economic Anthropology — Scope and the Formalist-Substantivist Debate

Economic anthropology studies how societies without price-making markets organise production, distribution and exchange, and whether the tools of Western economics apply to them. The whole sub-field is organised around one quarrel, the formalist-substantivist debate, so build the answer on that spine and attribute the two camps correctly.

- Economic anthropology is the comparative study of economic systems, above all in small-scale, non-industrial societies where the economy is not a separate institutional sphere but is embedded in kinship, ritual and politics. Its relevance is that it shows the categories of formal economics (scarcity, the maximising individual, the market price) to be culturally specific rather than universal, which is a claim the examiner rewards when it is argued, not asserted.
- The formalist position holds that economic theory, the logic of scarce means and alternative ends, of maximising and economising, is universal and applies to any society, because everywhere people allocate scarce resources under constraint. The individual is a rational maximiser whether trading yams or shares. Its leading figures are Raymond Firth (*Malay Fishermen*, 1946; *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, 1939), Melville Herskovits (*Economic Anthropology*, 1952), Harold Schneider, Robbins Burling and Scott Cook, whose essay 'The Obsolete Anti-Market Mentality' (1966) is the manifesto against the other camp.
- The substantivist position, founded by the economic historian Karl Polanyi (*The Great Transformation*, 1944; *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, 1957), holds that the formal, market-derived concept of the economic does not fit societies without a market system. Polanyi's substantive meaning of economic is the material provisioning of society, the instituted process of interaction between people and their environment, and this process is embedded in social relations rather than governed by a self-regulating market. Its anthropological champions were George Dalton and, in his early work, Marshall Sahlins.
- The core of the disagreement is whether the maximising individual is a human universal or a product of market society. Formalists say scarcity and choice are everywhere; substantivists say that in a society where a man gives his surplus to his sister's son because kinship requires it, calling the act 'maximising' either explains nothing or smuggles the market back in.
- Polanyi's constructive contribution is his three forms of economic integration, which organise the whole distribution question and which the next section unpacks: reciprocity (movement between symmetrically placed groups), redistribution (movement to a centre and out again), and market exchange (movement at bargained, price-making rates). Only the third rests on a self-regulating market, and only modern society is dominated by it.
- The debate was eventually judged a partial stalemate that both sides transcended. Substantivism won the point that the formal model cannot be applied uncritically to embedded economies, but formalism was right that people in such societies do calculate and economise within their institutions. A third, Marxist or neo-Marxist strand (Maurice Godelier, Claude Meillassoux, and in cultural-materialist form Marvin Harris)

shifted the question from exchange to production and to the social relations of production, arguing that neither camp explained how surplus was produced and who controlled it.

- Relate the modes to the productive base, as the syllabus asks. Hunter-gatherers (the !Kung San, the Hadza) and simple fishing communities run largely on generalised reciprocity within the band. Swidden (shifting) cultivators and horticulturalists layer balanced reciprocity and redistributive feasting onto household production. Pastoralists exchange livestock as bridewealth and alliance. Settled plough agriculture and, later, market integration bring exchange proper and the erosion of the older modes, which is the story globalisation now tells.

Formalist versus substantivist

| Dimension                 | Formalist                                          | Substantivist                                                                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Core claim                | Economic logic (scarcity, maximising) is universal | The economic is the material provisioning of society, embedded in social relations |
| Unit of analysis          | The rational, choosing individual                  | The instituted process, the whole system of provisioning                           |
| Leading figures           | Firth, Herskovits, Schneider, Cook                 | Polanyi, Dalton, early Sahlins                                                     |
| View of Western economics | Applies everywhere                                 | Fits only market society                                                           |
| Weakness                  | Smuggles market assumptions into non-market life   | Understates real calculation within institutions                                   |

#### KEY TERMS

**Substantive economy** — Polanyi's concept of the economy as the instituted process of material provisioning, embedded in social relations rather than driven by a market.

**Formalism** — The position that the economising logic of scarcity and maximisation is universal and applies to all societies.

**Embeddedness** — Polanyi's idea that in non-market societies economic activity is submerged in kinship, religion and politics.

## Modes of Exchange — Reciprocity, Redistribution and Market

Polanyi's three forms of integration are the organising grid for the entire distribution and exchange topic, and the anthropology paper expects you to place ethnographic cases inside them. Define each by its pattern of movement and its supporting social structure, and note that real economies combine all three in different proportions.

- Reciprocity is the exchange of goods and services between people or groups who stand in a symmetrical social relation, typically kin, with no central agency and no immediate price. It rests on obligation and long-run balance rather than on bargaining, and it is the dominant mode among band societies. Its supporting structure, in Polanyi's term, is symmetry.
- Redistribution is the movement of goods to a central point, a chief, a temple, a state, and their reallocation outward, from which the centre takes a portion and gains prestige or power in the process. Its supporting structure is centrality, a recognised centre. Chiefly feasting, tribute, the Inca storehouse system and modern taxation-and-welfare are all redistribution; the mode presupposes some political centralisation, which is why it marks the move from band to chiefdom.

- Market or (price-making) exchange is the movement of goods between parties at rates set by supply and demand, through a self-regulating market that determines price. Its supporting structure is a system of price-making markets. Polanyi's crucial point is that isolated marketplaces (a village haat) are not the same as a market system: barter and local marketplaces exist in many societies without any self-regulating market setting prices across the economy, and it is the latter that is historically recent and society-transforming.
- The three are not evolutionary stages that replace one another but modes that coexist in shifting dominance. A modern economy is market-dominant yet reciprocal within the family and redistributive through the state; a chiefdom is redistribution-dominant with reciprocity beneath it. The examiner rewards the recognition that every society mixes the modes and that the interesting question is which one is dominant and why.
- Marshall Sahlins refined reciprocity into a continuum keyed to social distance (Stone Age Economics, 1972), and this sub-typology is examined in its own right. Generalised reciprocity is the pure gift: help or goods given to close kin with no accounting of return and no fixed time, as when parents feed children or band members share meat; the return is diffuse and assumed. Balanced (symmetrical) reciprocity is direct exchange of equivalents within a finite period, as in trade partnerships, bridewealth and gift-for-gift; the relationship survives only if the debt is settled. Negative reciprocity is the attempt to get something for nothing, haggling, barter with strangers, cattle-raiding and theft, the unsociable extreme.
- Sahlins's governing insight is that the type of reciprocity tracks kinship distance and social morality: generalised reciprocity at the centre among close kin, balanced reciprocity at the middle range with acquaintances and allies, negative reciprocity at the periphery with strangers and enemies. Exchange thus maps the moral geography of the society, which is why the same goods move as gifts inside the group and as sharp barter outside it.
- Place the productive systems inside the grid: foragers and simple fishers run on generalised reciprocity; swidden horticulturalists add balanced reciprocity and redistributive feasts; pastoralists move livestock through balanced reciprocity and alliance; agrarian and market-integrated societies shift the weight to exchange. Globalisation is precisely the expansion of price-making market exchange into economies formerly integrated by reciprocity and redistribution, which dissolves indigenous systems, monetises subsistence, and converts gift valuables into commodities.

Polanyi's modes and Sahlins's reciprocity continuum

| Mode                    | Pattern of movement                                | Supporting structure / case                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Reciprocity             | Between symmetrical groups, no centre              | Symmetry; band societies, kin exchange           |
| Redistribution          | To a centre and out again                          | Centricity; chiefly feasting, tribute, the state |
| Market exchange         | At price-making rates via a self-regulating market | Market system; modern economies                  |
| Generalised reciprocity | Gift to close kin, return diffuse                  | Centre of the kin field; !Kung meat-sharing      |
| Balanced reciprocity    | Equivalent return within a set time                | Middle range; trade partners, bridewealth        |
| Negative reciprocity    | Getting something for nothing                      | Periphery; barter with strangers, raiding        |

## KEY TERMS

**Reciprocity** — Exchange between symmetrically placed parties resting on obligation and long-run balance rather than price (Polanyi).

**Redistribution** — Movement of goods to a centre and back out, presupposing a recognised political centre (Polanyi's centrality).

**Generalised reciprocity** — Sahlins's altruistic pole: giving to close kin with no expectation of a timed or equivalent return.

**Negative reciprocity** — Sahlins's unsociable pole: seeking to gain at another's expense, as in haggling, barter with strangers, or raiding.

## The Gift — Mauss, Prestation and Total Prestation

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Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* is the founding text on non-market exchange and the source of the reciprocity concept the whole unit rests on. Its thesis is counter-intuitive and examinable: the gift is never free. Attribute prestation and the hau to Mauss precisely, because casual answers credit them to Malinowski or Levi-Strauss.

- Marcel Mauss (*Essai sur le don*, *The Gift*, 1925), Durkheim's nephew and student, asked why in archaic societies a gift received must be returned, and what force in the thing given compels the return. His answer founded exchange theory: gift-giving is a total social phenomenon that is at once economic, legal, religious, moral and political, so no purely economic reading of it can be adequate.
- The gift, Mauss argues, carries three obligations, not one: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate. Refusing to give, to accept, or to repay is a declaration of hostility and a loss of honour. The gift therefore looks voluntary and disinterested but is in fact obligatory and interested, which is his central paradox.
- Prestation is Mauss's term for a gift or service that is part of this obligatory reciprocal cycle. Total prestation names the case where whole groups, not individuals, are bound to exchange the entirety of their assets, persons, feasts, rituals, women, in a continuous cycle, as between the phratries or clans of a society. The Kula and the Potlatch are his two great cases of the agonistic, competitive form of total prestation, where giving becomes a contest for prestige.
- The hau is the concept Mauss took from Maori ethnography to explain the compulsion to reciprocate: the spirit of the thing given, which wishes to return to its origin, so that to keep a gift is dangerous because part of the giver's spiritual essence remains in it. Later scholars (Levi-Strauss, Firth, and Marshall Sahlins in his essay 'The Spirit of the Gift') questioned whether Mauss over-read a native theory, but the hau remains his proposed answer to the force in the gift.
- The theoretical payoff, and the reason the essay anchors the unit, is that reciprocity, not the market, is the elementary form of exchange and the basis of social solidarity: the circulation of gifts binds groups into enduring relationships, which is why Levi-Strauss built alliance theory on Mauss by treating marriage as the exchange of women, and why the substantivists treated the embedded gift economy as the norm against which the market is the exception.
- The contrast to hold in mind is gift versus commodity. In a gift economy things are inalienable, they carry the identity and history of the giver and create an enduring bond between persons; in a commodity economy things are alienable, severed from the seller, and the transaction ends the relationship. This distinction, sharpened later by C.A. Gregory (*Gifts and Commodities*, 1982), is what globalisation reverses when it turns Kula valuables and heirlooms into things that can be sold.

## KEY TERMS

**Prestation** — Mauss's term for a gift or service embedded in an obligatory cycle of reciprocal exchange.

**Total prestation** — Exchange in which whole groups are obliged to give and return the entirety of their assets, as in the Kula and Potlatch.

**Hau** — The Maori-derived spirit of the gift, which for Mauss compels the recipient to reciprocate.

**Total social phenomenon** — Mauss's idea that gift exchange is simultaneously economic, legal, religious, moral and political.

## The Kula Ring (Malinowski)

The Kula is the single most cited case in economic anthropology and a near-certain source of examples, so command the detail: the two valuables, the two directions, the separation of ceremonial from utilitarian trade, and the functions the exchange performs. Attribute it to Malinowski's Trobriand fieldwork.

- Bronislaw Malinowski (Argonauts of the Western Pacific, 1922) described the Kula as an inter-island system of ceremonial exchange among the Massim peoples of the Trobriand archipelago off eastern New Guinea, in which two kinds of valuable circulate in opposite directions around a ring of islands. It is the founding case of participant-observation ethnography as well as of economic anthropology.
- Two valuables move in fixed opposite directions. Soulava, long necklaces of red shell, travel clockwise around the ring; mwali, armshells of white shell, travel anticlockwise. A man receives a necklace and must, after a time, pass it on for an armshell, and vice versa, so the valuables never rest and never leave the circuit permanently. They are inalienable in Mauss's sense: the famous pieces have names, histories and reputations that a holder shares while he keeps them.
- The Kula is strictly separated from ordinary trade. The ceremonial exchange of soulava and mwali is a matter of honour, ritual and lifelong partnership, and it is never haggled; alongside it, and made possible by the same voyages, runs gimwali, the ordinary utilitarian barter of pots, food, tools and other goods, which is bargained hard. Confusing the two is the standard error: the Kula valuables are useless as objects and are valued only as tokens of relationship.
- Kula partnerships are lifelong and inherited, spanning many islands, so a man's network of partners is his standing in the world. The exchange is competitive for prestige (fame attaches to those through whose hands the most renowned valuables pass), which is why Mauss classed it with the Potlatch as agonistic total prestation.
- The functions the Kula performs, which are the analytic point of the case: it creates and sustains political and social alliances across islands that would otherwise have no peaceful relations; it enables and protects the utilitarian trade that rides along with it, moving needed goods between islands of different resources; it distributes prestige and organises rank; and it integrates a wide region into a single moral and political community without any central authority. It is the classic demonstration that exchange in such societies is embedded, not economic in the market sense.
- The Kula is also the standing refutation of the formalist reading: a man labours and voyages at real risk to give away objects he cannot use and gains no material profit. Only an embedded, substantivist account, exchange as the creation of relationship, prestige and alliance, makes the institution intelligible, which is why it appears in every treatment of the formalist-substantivist debate.

## KEY TERMS

**Kula** — The Massim inter-island ceremonial exchange in which shell valuables circulate in fixed opposite directions, creating alliance and prestige (Malinowski).

**Soulava and mwali** — The Kula valuables: red-shell necklaces moving clockwise and white-shell armshells moving anticlockwise.

**Gimwali** — The ordinary utilitarian barter that accompanies Kula voyages, sharply distinguished from the ceremonial exchange.

## The Potlatch

The Potlatch is the paired case to the Kula and the textbook example of competitive redistribution. Locate it precisely (the Northwest Coast, especially the Kwakiutl), describe the giving and destruction of wealth, and be ready with the several theoretical readings, since UPSC likes the interpretive contrast.

- The Potlatch is the ceremonial feast of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast of North America, above all the Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw), described by Franz Boas, at which a host validates or claims rank by lavishly giving away, and sometimes ostentatiously destroying, accumulated wealth, blankets, coppers, canoes, food, before assembled guests who must later reciprocate on a grander scale or lose face.
- The organising principle is that status is won by giving, not by keeping. A chief raises his and his group's rank by out-giving rivals; the guests are placed in debt and must return a larger Potlatch to recover honour. It is therefore agonistic total prestation in Mauss's sense and competitive redistribution in Polanyi's, a rivalry conducted with property rather than weapons, which Helen Codere aptly titled 'fighting with property' (1950).
- The interpretations are the examinable content, because the Potlatch has been read four different ways. Boas treated it as a system of credit, rank validation and investment. Mauss read it as the extreme agonistic form of the gift, obligation and honour driving escalating generosity. Ruth Benedict (Patterns of Culture, 1934) read it culturally-psychologically, calling Kwakiutl culture Dionysian and megalomaniac, an interpretation later criticised for overstatement. Marvin Harris and the cultural materialists read it functionally as an ecological levelling mechanism, redistributing surplus from richer to poorer groups and evening out local shortages, so that destruction and giving buffer an unpredictable resource base.
- The historical context sharpens the case and is worth a line: the scale of Potlatch giving and destruction escalated sharply after European contact, when the fur trade and epidemics flooded the economy with trade goods (blankets) and left many titles vacant, intensifying competition for rank. The Canadian government banned the Potlatch from 1885 to 1951 precisely because it saw the giving away of wealth as irrational and an obstacle to accumulation, which is itself a comment on the clash between a redistributive and a market logic.
- Contrast the Kula and Potlatch cleanly, since they are the paired cases. Both are total prestations that convert wealth into prestige, but the Kula circulates valuables endlessly and non-competitively at the level of the objects (peaceful inter-island alliance), whereas the Potlatch consumes and destroys wealth competitively to establish rank within and between groups. Kula builds horizontal alliance; Potlatch builds vertical hierarchy.

Kula and Potlatch compared

| Feature         | Kula (Malinowski)                      | Potlatch (Boas)                 |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Region / people | Massim, Trobriand Islands              | Northwest Coast, Kwakiutl       |
| What moves      | Shell valuables circulate endlessly    | Wealth given away and destroyed |
| Logic           | Alliance and prestige, non-destructive | Rank validation by out-giving   |
| Mode (Polanyi)  | Reciprocity across islands             | Competitive redistribution      |
| Social effect   | Horizontal inter-island alliance       | Vertical rank and hierarchy     |

#### KEY TERMS

**Potlatch** — The Northwest Coast feast in which rank is claimed by lavishly giving away or destroying wealth before guests obliged to reciprocate.

**Fighting with property** — Codere's phrase for Potlatch rivalry conducted through competitive giving and destruction rather than warfare.

**Levelling mechanism** — The cultural-materialist (Harris) reading of the Potlatch as a redistribution that buffers an unpredictable resource base.

## Political Organization — Service's Evolutionary Typology

The syllabus lists band, tribe, chiefdom, kingdom and state, which is essentially Elman Service's typology. It is a classification of political integration by scale and centralisation, and the marks lie in tying each type to its economy, its leadership and a case, and in flagging that these are ideal types, not a rigid ladder.

- Elman Service (Primitive Social Organization, 1962) arranged societies in a fourfold sequence of increasing political integration: band, tribe, chiefdom and state. The scheme is neo-evolutionary, ordering forms by complexity, and it maps closely onto subsistence and onto Fried's parallel scheme, so hold the two together.
- The band is the smallest and simplest political unit: a small, kin-based, mobile group of foragers (hunter-gatherers), egalitarian, without formal or permanent leadership, decisions taken by consensus, disputes settled by mediation or by fission (the group splits). Leadership is situational and based on skill or age, not office. Cases: the !Kung San, the Hadza, the Inuit, the Andamanese. Economy: generalised reciprocity, no surplus, no stratification.
- The tribe is a larger, settled or semi-settled society of horticulturalists or pastoralists, integrated by pan-tribal institutions, sodalities, age-sets, clans, secret societies, that cross-cut local groups, but still without centralised, permanent authority. Leadership is by influence rather than command: the classic figure is Sahlins's Melanesian big-man, who builds a following by generosity and oratory and whose power is personal, unstable and non-hereditary. The Nuer segmentary lineage system is the standard tribal case of order without government.
- The chiefdom is the decisive step to permanent, centralised and hereditary authority. It is a ranked society (in Fried's term) with a chief who occupies an inherited office, stands at the centre of a redistributive economy (tribute flows in and is feasted out), and enjoys prestige and religious sanction but usually lacks a monopoly of force or a bureaucracy. Cases: Polynesia (Hawaii, Tonga), the Trobriand paramount chief, the Northwest Coast, and many pre-colonial African and Indian tribal polities. Redistribution is the diagnostic economic mode.
- The state (and its dynastic form, the kingdom) is a centralised, stratified political organisation with a government that claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of force over a territory, a bureaucracy, formal law

and courts, taxation, and social classes with differential access to basic resources. The kingdom is simply the pre-modern, dynastic, personally-ruled variant of the state. Cases: the early states of Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus, and pre-colonial African kingdoms such as the Zulu and the Ashanti.

- State the standard caveats, because they lift the answer above rote reproduction. The typology is a set of ideal types, not a universal ladder every society must climb; real societies are often intermediate; the sequence is a tendency, not a law, and evolution can stall or reverse. African Political Systems (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940) had already made the more basic cut that this refines: between stateless societies with government dispersed through the lineage system (acephalous, like the Nuer and Tallensi) and state societies with centralised authority and administrative machinery (the Zulu, the Ngwato).
- Distinguish power, authority and legitimacy, which the syllabus names and which underpin the whole typology. Power, in the Weberian sense, is the ability to impose one's will on others even against resistance. Authority is legitimate power, power that the ruled accept as rightful. Legitimacy is the belief that makes power into authority, and Weber's three pure types of legitimate domination are the reference: traditional (sanctified by custom and inheritance, the chief and the king), charismatic (resting on the extraordinary personal gifts of a leader, the prophet or the big-man at his height), and rational-legal (resting on impersonal rules and office, the modern state). Bands and tribes run largely on influence and diffuse consensus; chiefdoms add traditional authority; states add rational-legal authority and the monopoly of coercion.

Service's political typology

| Type            | Economy / subsistence                   | Leadership and integration                                             | Case                                  |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Band            | Foraging, generalised reciprocity       | Egalitarian, informal, consensus; fission settles disputes             | !Kung, Hadza, Inuit, Andamanese       |
| Tribe           | Horticulture, pastoralism               | Big-man / segmentary lineage; pan-tribal sodalities; no central office | Nuer, Melanesian big-man societies    |
| Chiefdom        | Redistribution around a centre          | Hereditary chief, ranked, prestige, no monopoly of force               | Polynesia, Trobriand, Northwest Coast |
| State / kingdom | Agriculture, tribute, taxation, markets | Bureaucracy, monopoly of legitimate force, class stratification        | Mesopotamia, Egypt, Zulu, Ashanti     |

KEY TERMS

**Band** — A small, mobile, egalitarian foraging group without permanent leadership; the simplest political unit.

**Big-man** — Sahlins's Melanesian tribal leader whose power is personal, built on generosity and oratory, and non-hereditary, unlike the chief.

**Chiefdom** — A ranked society with a hereditary chief at the centre of a redistributive economy, but usually without a monopoly of force.

**Legitimacy** — The belief that converts power into rightful authority; Weber's types are traditional, charismatic and rational-legal.

## Fried on Political Evolution; Power, Authority and Legitimacy

Morton Fried's scheme is the alternative to Service and is examined alongside it, so learn the contrast. Fried classifies by access to resources and status rather than by integrative institutions, which gives a sharper account of how inequality arises. Set the two typologies side by side and note what each explains better.

- Morton Fried (The Evolution of Political Society, 1967) proposed a fourfold scheme keyed not to institutions of integration but to how a society distributes access to valued positions and resources: egalitarian, rank, stratified and state societies. The criterion is inequality, which makes Fried's the more analytical typology and Service's the more descriptive.
- An egalitarian society is one in which there are as many positions of prestige as there are persons able to fill them, so no one is denied status by structure; differences of skill, age and sex exist but confer no permanent advantage in resources. This corresponds to Service's band and simple tribe.
- A rank society is one in which positions of valued status are limited, fewer than the persons capable of filling them, so status is scarce and competed for, typically through hereditary rank and a chief, but access to basic subsistence resources remains open to all. This corresponds to the chiefdom: prestige is unequal, but no one starves for lack of land. Redistribution is the mechanism that both funds the rank and disguises the inequality.
- A stratified society is Fried's decisive threshold: members of the same sex and age have unequal access to the basic resources of life, land, water and the means of production. Once some are structurally denied access to subsistence, permanent classes exist, and this economic stratification is, for Fried, what generates the state, which arises to manage and enforce the resulting inequality. The state is the political apparatus that maintains stratification and monopolises legitimate force.
- The contrast to state in an answer: Service classifies by degree of political integration and centralised leadership (how the society is held together), while Fried classifies by degree of inequality in access to status and resources (how the society is divided). They largely correlate, band-egalitarian, tribe-egalitarian/rank, chiefdom-rank, state-stratified, but Fried better explains the origin of inequality and the state, whereas Service better describes the machinery of integration.
- Fasten the concepts of power, authority and legitimacy onto the schemes. Power is the capacity to compel; authority is power recognised as rightful; legitimacy is the ground of that recognition. In egalitarian and rank societies authority is thin and rests on influence, generosity, kinship, seniority and charisma, which is why leadership there is fragile and must be constantly renewed by giving; in stratified state societies authority becomes institutional and coercive, backed by a standing apparatus and by rational-legal or traditional legitimation. The evolutionary story is, in one line, the transformation of influence into institutionalised, coercive, legitimated power.
- Two refinements worth carrying: leadership in acephalous societies is achieved and reversible (the big-man can fall, the band headman only advises), whereas in chiefdoms and states it is ascribed and permanent (the office outlives the man); and legitimacy is what spares a ruler the constant use of force, so the more legitimate the authority, the less naked power it needs to display, which is why the study of legitimacy is central to political anthropology and not a mere adjunct to it.

Service and Fried aligned

| Service (integration) | Fried (inequality)     | Basis of Fried's category                      |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Band                  | Egalitarian            | As many status positions as capable persons    |
| Tribe                 | Egalitarian / rank     | Status open; incipient ranking                 |
| Chiefdom              | Rank                   | Status positions limited; resources still open |
| State / kingdom       | Stratified, then state | Unequal access to basic resources; classes     |

## KEY TERMS

**Rank society** — Fried's type with limited positions of prestige but open access to subsistence resources; the chiefdom.

**Stratified society** — Fried's threshold at which members of the same age and sex have unequal access to basic resources, generating classes and the state.

**Power vs authority** — Power is the capacity to compel; authority is power accepted as rightful; legitimacy is the ground of that acceptance.

**Acephalous society** — A headless, stateless society in which political function is dispersed through the lineage system (Nuer, Tallensi).

## Social Control, Law and Justice in Simple Societies

The final theme asks how order is maintained where there are no police, courts or written statutes. The answer runs from diffuse social control to formal law, and the marks come from attributing each position to the right anthropologist and from resolving the old debate about whether stateless societies have law at all.

- Social control is the whole set of mechanisms by which a society secures conformity to its norms, and it runs on a spectrum from the informal and diffuse to the formal and institutional. Informal controls, gossip, ridicule, praise, ostracism, witchcraft accusation, supernatural sanction and public opinion, do most of the work in small societies, where everyone is known and reputation is inescapable. Formal controls, law, courts and specialised enforcement, appear as societies centralise.
- Bronislaw Malinowski (*Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, 1926) launched the modern debate by attacking the view that 'primitive' people obey custom automatically and blindly. He argued that order in the Trobriands rests on reciprocity and self-interest: rules are kept because social and economic life is a web of mutual obligations, and to break faith is to lose the returns one depends on. His broad definition treats law as the binding obligations of reciprocal relationships, which usefully locates order in social structure but is so wide that critics said it dissolves law into custom generally.
- A.R. Radcliffe-Brown supplied the analytic apparatus of sanctions. A sanction is a society's reaction to conduct approved or disapproved. He distinguished organised (legal) sanctions, applied by a constituted authority through a regular procedure, from diffuse sanctions, the spontaneous reactions of the community, moral approval and disapproval, ridicule, avoidance. On this view law proper, defined as social control through the organised, systematic application of the force of a politically organised society, exists only where there is such an authority, so fully stateless societies have social control but not, strictly, law.
- E. Adamson Hoebel (*The Law of Primitive Man*, 1954), building on his work with the jurist Karl Llewellyn (*The Cheyenne Way*, 1941), gave the influential positivist definition and the method to apply it. A social norm is legal, he wrote, if its neglect or breach is regularly met by the application, or threat, of physical force by an individual or group possessing the socially recognised privilege of so acting. His method was the trouble-case (case of dispute), studying actual conflicts and their settlement rather than stated rules, which let him find genuine law even among the Eskimo and the Cheyenne who had no courts. Leopold Pospisil (Kapauku Papuans) added four attributes of law: authority, intention of universal application, obligatio (the rights and duties between the parties), and sanction.
- Max Gluckman's study of the Barotse, that is the Lozi of Barotseland in what was Northern Rhodesia (*The Judicial Process among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia*, 1955), is the case the syllabus points to and shows that stateless-to-centralising African societies had sophisticated law and courts. Gluckman's central concept is the reasonable man: Lozi judges (the kuta) decided cases by measuring a litigant's conduct against the standard of the reasonable incumbent of a social position, the reasonable husband, headman or son, a

flexible standard that let customary norms be applied to novel disputes much as the common law does. His finding that African judicial reasoning uses precedent, cross-examination and general legal principles refuted the idea that such law was merely arbitrary or purely religious.

- Paul Bohannon (Justice and Judgment among the Tiv, 1957) offered the concept of the double institutionalisation of law: custom becomes law when the norms of everyday social institutions are restated, or re-institutionalised, in a second, legal institution that can enforce them. He also insisted on studying each people's own folk system of jural concepts rather than imposing Western categories, which set up his well-known debate with Gluckman over how far Western legal terms (contract, tort, the reasonable man) can travel.
- The classic ethnographic illustration of law without a state is the feud and the segmentary system. Among the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard), a killing is met not by a court but by the threat of retaliation between lineages, mediated by the ritual specialist known as the leopard-skin chief, who offers sanctuary and negotiates the blood-cattle compensation that settles the feud. Order is produced by the balanced opposition of groups and the threat of self-help, which is social control performing the work of law.
- Resolve the debate rather than leaving it open. Whether one says simple societies have law depends on the definition: a narrow, coercion-and-authority definition (Radcliffe-Brown, Hoebel in his strict form) finds full law only with centralised authority, while a broader, functional definition (Malinowski, and Hoebel's method in practice) finds law wherever disputes are settled by socially recognised procedures and sanctions. The examiner-safe conclusion is that all societies have social control and mechanisms of dispute settlement and justice, while formal law in the strict sense emerges with political centralisation.

Positions on law in simple societies

| Thinker         | Key concept                                       | Claim about law without a state                                           |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Malinowski      | Reciprocity and mutual obligation                 | Order rests on self-interest and exchange, not blind custom; law is broad |
| Radcliffe-Brown | Organised vs diffuse sanctions                    | Law proper needs a politically organised authority                        |
| Hoebel          | Legitimate physical coercion; trouble-case method | Finds law even among Eskimo and Cheyenne via disputes                     |
| Gluckman        | The reasonable man (Barotse/Lozi)                 | Stateless-to-centralising societies had sophisticated courts and law      |
| Bohannon        | Double institutionalisation; folk systems         | Custom becomes law when re-institutionalised in an enforcing body         |

## KEY TERMS

**Sanction** — A society's organised (legal) or diffuse (moral) reaction to approved or disapproved conduct (Radcliffe-Brown).

**Trouble-case method** — Llewellyn and Hoebel's technique of studying actual disputes and their settlement rather than stated rules to locate law.

**Reasonable man** — Gluckman's standard by which Barotse (Lozi) courts judged conduct against the expected behaviour of a reasonable incumbent of a social role.

**Double institutionalisation** — Bohannan's idea that custom becomes law when the norms of social institutions are restated in a distinct legal institution.

**Leopard-skin chief** — The Nuer ritual mediator who offers sanctuary and negotiates blood-cattle compensation to settle a feud without a court.

## Last-mile revision

- Economic anthropology turns on the formalist-substantivist debate. Formalists (Firth, Herskovits, Cook): economising logic is universal. Substantivists (Polanyi, Dalton): the economy is embedded and the market model fits only market society.
- Polanyi's three modes of integration: reciprocity (symmetry, band societies), redistribution (centricity, chiefdoms and the state), market exchange (a self-regulating price-making market, modern societies). Every economy mixes them; the question is which dominates.
- Sahlins's reciprocity continuum keyed to social distance: generalised (close kin, no timed return), balanced (equivalent, timed), negative (getting something for nothing). Exchange maps the moral geography of the society.
- Mauss's *The Gift*: the gift is never free. Three obligations, to give, receive, reciprocate; the *hau* compels return; prestation and total prestation; gift (inalienable) versus commodity (alienable).
- Kula (Malinowski, Trobriand): *soulava* necklaces clockwise, *mwali* armshells anticlockwise, never haggled, separate from *gimwali* barter; builds inter-island alliance and prestige. The standing refutation of formalism.
- Potlatch (Boas, Kwakiutl): status by giving away and destroying wealth; competitive redistribution and agonistic total prestation ('fighting with property', Codere); read as credit (Boas), gift (Mauss), Dionysian (Benedict) or ecological levelling (Harris).
- Service's typology by integration: band, tribe, chiefdom, state/kingdom, tied to foraging, horticulture, redistribution and taxation respectively. Ideal types, not a rigid ladder. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's prior cut: acephalous versus centralised societies.
- Fried's typology by inequality: egalitarian, rank, stratified, state. Stratification (unequal access to basic resources) is the threshold that generates the state. Service describes integration; Fried explains inequality.
- Power (capacity to compel) versus authority (rightful power) versus legitimacy (its ground). Weber's traditional, charismatic, rational-legal domination. Influence in bands and tribes; institutional coercion in states.
- Law without a state: Malinowski (reciprocity), Radcliffe-Brown (organised vs diffuse sanctions), Hoebel (legitimate coercion, trouble-case method), Gluckman (the reasonable man among the Barotse/Lozi), Bohannan (double institutionalisation). The Nuer feud and leopard-skin chief show social control doing the work of law.

### Common errors to avoid

- Reducing the formalist-substantivist debate to 'do tribal people trade or not'. It is about whether the maximising, scarcity-and-choice model of Western economics applies to embedded, non-market economies. Attribute the camps: Firth and Herskovits formalist, Polanyi and Dalton substantivist.
- Treating Polanyi's three modes as evolutionary stages that replace one another. They coexist; societies differ in which mode is dominant, and a modern economy is market-dominant yet still reciprocal in the family and redistributive through the state.
- Crediting reciprocity or prestation to Malinowski rather than Mauss, or the reciprocity continuum to Mauss rather than Sahlins. Mauss wrote *The Gift* (prestation, hau); Sahlins graded reciprocity into generalised, balanced and negative.
- Describing the Kula as barter, or merging it with gimwali. The Kula is non-utilitarian ceremonial exchange of useless valuables for prestige and alliance; the utilitarian barter runs alongside it and is sharply distinguished.
- Presenting the Potlatch as mere wasteful destruction. It is competitive redistribution and rank validation; give at least two of the readings (Boas, Mauss, Benedict, Harris) rather than a single flat description.
- Confusing Service's typology with Fried's, or listing either without a case and an economy. Service classifies by integration (band, tribe, chiefdom, state); Fried by inequality (egalitarian, rank, stratified, state). Tie each type to subsistence and a society.
- Confusing the big-man with the chief. The big-man's power is personal, achieved and non-hereditary (tribe); the chief holds an inherited office at the centre of a redistributive economy (chiefdom).
- Using power, authority and legitimacy interchangeably. Power is the capacity to compel, authority is power accepted as rightful, legitimacy is what makes the difference; bring in Weber's three types of legitimate domination.
- Asserting flatly that simple societies have no law. Whether they do depends on the definition: Radcliffe-Brown and strict Hoebel require organised authority, while Malinowski and Hoebel's method find law in dispute settlement. All societies have social control; formal law emerges with centralisation.
- Attributing the reasonable man concept to the wrong scholar or people. It is Gluckman's, from the Barotse (Lozi) of Barotseland, and it shows that African customary courts reasoned with precedent and principle.