

5 LOCAL ORGANISATION

The people who live in any society may be unaware, or only dimly aware, that it has a structure. It is the task of the social anthropologist to reveal it.

— *E.E. Evans-Pritchard*

Anthropology obtains much of its empirical material through studies of local communities. Most classic anthropological analyses are based on detailed descriptions of culture and social organisation in a delineated system, which could be a village or an urban environment. Anthropology has in recent decades developed in a variety of new, specialised directions, and it has become increasingly clear that it is often necessary to consult sources which cannot be obtained through fieldwork (historical sources, statistics, media, etc.). Still, the holistic study of social life – the exploration of interrelationships between different aspects of social and symbolic systems through participant observation – remains a central concern, although the setting today is rarely an isolated village.

Two factors could be mentioned as partial explanations for the traditional anthropological stress on studies of small-scale localities. First, local communities are methodologically manageable units which can easily be studied through participant observation. In a village or a relatively bounded local environment, most inhabitants know each other personally; they participate in, and reproduce, a social system characterised by face-to-face contact. In this kind of setting, it is possible for the anthropologist to become acquainted with most of the locality's inhabitants in the course of fieldwork. He or she can map out, without insuperable methodological difficulties, which actors find themselves in which relationships to which other actors, and can thus develop a comprehensive picture of the patterns of interaction that make up the local community.

Second, local communities may be studied as though they were self-sustaining (although, in practice, this is almost never the case). Most of the activities of the inhabitants take place locally, many of their needs are satisfied locally and the local community is being reproduced – maintained – through a period of time. It is thereby possible, using the methodological tools of anthropology, to study the interrelationships between different social institutions within the framework of local communities.

It must be stressed, however, that in fact virtually no local community is completely self-sustaining and unchanging through time. Furthermore, a

large and growing number of anthropologists are concerned with the study of social systems of a staggering scale (nations, cities, regions ...), or systems with unclear boundaries and flux of personnel, such as hospitals, large sports events or Internet communities. However, the methods and logic of inquiry applied to large-scale and fluctuating systems are by and large the same as the methods used in small-scale systems, although they must frequently be supplemented by methods other than participant observation. This chapter draws most of its material from small-scale societies of the kind typical of classic anthropological studies, where basic tenets of the discipline were developed.

The previous chapter concentrated on persons and interpersonal relationships. This chapter, on the contrary, presents different levels of social organisation which it may be useful to distinguish between in anthropological research – whether one's unit of study is a San homestead, a nation-state or the global network of Manchester United supporters. Whereas the previous chapter saw social life from the viewpoint of the individual, this chapter sees it from the viewpoint of society. In the next chapter, the relationship between individual and society is dealt with theoretically.

NORMS AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Every social system requires the existence of rules stating what is permitted and what is not. Such rules, whether they are stated openly or are simply followed by tacit consent, are called norms. They are activated in all fields of life; some are extremely important, whereas others have a marginal importance. A key norm in many societies is the rule 'You shall not steal.' A rather less important norm, which is limited in scope to certain environments in modern societies, is 'You shall always wear a tie at work.' Some norms concern all members of society, others concern only small groups, while still others, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are generally considered to be valid for all humanity.

The existence of norms does not imply that there is total agreement on them or total obedience towards them in any society. For instance, there may very well be a rule about virilocality (that a newly wed couple should move in with the groom's family; see Chapter 8) without it being followed by all members of society.

All norms have in common that they are connected with sanctions. In principle, both positive and negative sanctions exist. A positive sanction involves a reward for following the norms, while a negative one entails punishment for breaching the rules. However, the term 'sanction' is usually used about negative sanctions – mild and severe forms of punishment.

The ability to impose sanctions, whether punishments or rewards, represents a main source of power in all societies. It is therefore important to study the system of norms and sanctions in any social system. The norms

reflect the basic values of society, while the kinds of sanctions applied to different norm-breaking activities give an indication of the relative importance of different values and reveal power discrepancies. For example, in some societies sexual unfaithfulness is considered more serious, and is punished more severely, than theft; in other societies, the situation may be the opposite.

The system of sanctions applied when norms are violated can be called social control. Social institutions such as the family, the village council, the police, the judicial system or the school system have social control as one of their appointed tasks: they aim to prevent the violation of social norms, and are endowed with power to apply appropriate punishment when such breaches happen.

One cannot expect all members of society to follow the norms. However, even when they are violated they are important, since they demarcate what is and what is not socially acceptable. Generally, people who violate norms will of course try to do so without being 'found out' and subjected to sanctions. Further, norms change through time as society changes; some vanish, some are replaced by others, others are reinterpreted, and yet others remain but are accorded reduced importance. Blasphemy, for example, is still considered a violation of a norm in many Christian societies, but it is by no means as serious as it was a few hundred years ago. The social power of the Church and the symbolic power of Christian dogma have been reduced.

One should keep in mind that although norms and sanctions give a clue as to the basic values and modes of thought and behaviour in a society, they cannot explain fully why people act the way they do. This is due to the obvious fact that people do not always 'follow the rules', but also to the fact that norms, like role scripts, are rarely sufficiently detailed to specify exact instructions as to how to behave. In real life, people always have to improvise and take decisions for themselves, but in doing so, they refer to a culturally learnt system of 'oughts' and 'ought-nots'; that is, norms.

SOCIALISATION

Many anthropologists have studied child-raising, or socialisation, in a comparative perspective. Socialisation is the process whereby one becomes a fully competent member of society – where one acquires the knowledge and abilities required to function as a member of society. In many societies, the family has the main responsibility for socialisation. In societies with a complex division of labour, however, the responsibility is in practice divided between different institutions; for instance, the family, school, leisure clubs, sports associations, television, and so on. All societies nevertheless accord great importance to the socialisation of children and adolescents. Children not only have to learn the categories of language, they also have to learn when and how to use it. In addition, they have to acquire thousands of little

bits and pieces of knowledge – manners and rules of conduct, whom to respect and whom to worship, and how eventually to manage on their own and lead a good life in accordance with the values of society. Socialisation is the chief way in which cultural categories are transferred from one generation to the next; in other words, it secures a certain cultural continuity.

Many anthropologists who have studied socialisation have emphasised that examination of child-raising may reveal how a society gradually shapes forms of behaviour and thought in its members. It is, obviously, in the formative stages of life that cultural competence is acquired. Among social psychologists and anthropologists in the 1940s, it was a widespread view that the presumed authoritarian German method of socialisation was an important contributing factor to the Second World War. However, studies of socialisation in 'exotic' societies have been far more widespread in anthropology than comparative studies of 'modern' societies, and they have chiefly aimed at accounting for the interrelationship between patterns of socialisation and social organisation and culture in general. Some anthropologists have also investigated the possibility of cross-cultural invariants, or constants, in socialisation.

A classic study of socialisation, which also draws parallels with the author's own society, is Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (Mead 1978 [1928]). In this book, Mead describes how the personality of girls and young women is shaped in a cultural environment very different from our own, in a Polynesian island. Among other things, Mead shows how the girls are socialised into a more relaxed and flexible view of sexuality than those she compares them to, namely middle-class girls in the USA. Further, she stresses that the absence of strong individual competition makes it easier for Samoans than for Americans to reconcile themselves with their lives and be at peace with the world. The problems of quotidian life are easy to understand and grasp, and they usually have a simple solution, she says. She also writes that adolescence in Samoa is not characterised by personal crises and confusion:

[Adolescence] represented no period of crisis or stress, but was instead an orderly developing of a set of slowly maturing interests and activities. The girls' minds were perplexed by no conflicts, troubled by no philosophical queries, beset by no remote ambitions. To live as a girl with many lovers as long as possible and then to marry in one's own village, near one's relatives, and to have many children, these were uniform and satisfying ambitions. (Mead 1978, p. 129)

In her comparison with the North American society she was familiar with, Mead argued that socialisation in Samoa created more harmonious and balanced personalities than the American system was capable of. Her general theoretical (and political) point was that important aspects of the personalities of humans, far from being inborn, are created through the dynamic interplay between individual and society. Since societies are different, they create persons differently.

It needs to be added that Mead's research has met severe criticism from several quarters; it is not the general theoretical framework, but the validity of her substantial findings that has been challenged. Derek Freeman, who did research in Samoa for many years, has been her sharpest critic (Freeman 1983). His image of Samoa differs sharply from the idyllic society presented by Mead, where children are taught love and friendliness and where social harmony prevails. Freeman presents a picture of a society where the pressure to conform is extremely strong, and where deviants and 'dropouts' of different kinds develop profound personal problems. He shows that the suicide rate is unusually high, and that certain mental disorders are quite widespread among persons who fail to conform. He even intimates that several of Mead's informants lied systematically to her.

According to Freeman, anomie is a major problem in Samoa. Anomie, a concept developed by Durkheim, refers to that feeling of alienation which is caused by inability to believe in, or to live up to, the values of society. Such an inability leads to exclusion and may be extremely painful. Durkheim believed that anomie would be most common in urban societies, but later anthropological research has shown that it can well exist in apparently tightly integrated 'traditional' village societies – which are tightly integrated only for those members of society who fully master and are faithful to its basic values, not for the powerless and marginalised. Freeman's position was underpinned by a view of nature based on evolutionary biology, a perspective that Mead (who died in 1978 and was therefore unable to respond) had devoted a large part of her professional life, and perhaps particular her study of Samoa, to questioning. The debate following Freeman's book was unusually acrimonious and framed within the classic nature/nurture controversy (see Hellman 1998). Most of the contributors to the debate had never been to Samoa; however, Samoan specialist Lowell D. Holmes concluded, in defence of Mead, that 'the validity of her Samoan research was remarkably high' – considering her young age and sketchy training in ethnography (Holmes 1987).

Whether ultimately founded in society or nature, the goal of socialisation is to ensure that the actor internalises the values, norms and forms of behaviour society is founded upon. When a norm is internalised, it is literally turned into something 'inner'; it becomes a personality trait. The norm 'Thou shalt not kill' is internalised among most of us: it is a matter of course that we normally do not kill other humans. Our language is also internalised: we speak English, French, Arabic or whatever is our vernacular, without reflecting that this is actually what we do. This also goes for elementary table manners and a number of other cultural customs. As mentioned earlier, it is perhaps chiefly through comparison with other societies that we can hope to discover such traits in our own: like all members of societies, we have a general tendency to take them for granted. This means that we have internalised central aspects of the culture where we grew up, and that perhaps we need the view from afar provided by anthropology in order to discover

them. This 'view from afar' can then be brought back home, as in Alison James's important studies of English children (James 1993), which, among other things, shows an extremely strong pressure to conform among children, a tendency which facilitates the internalisation of norms.

LIFE-STAGES AND RITES OF PASSAGE

Many people hold that they are 'the same person' throughout their existence. In this way, identity appears as something unchangeable; as a constant core in an otherwise changing world. This issue is ultimately a philosophic one, but central aspects of it can be explored anthropologically. In later chapters, it will be shown how class, gender, age and ethnicity contribute to shaping the identity of actors in a multitude of ways in different situations; for now, we simply deal briefly with one way in which a person's identity changes through time.

All societies distinguish between life-stages in the lives of their inhabitants (see also Chapter 9). Everywhere adults have rights and duties that differ from those of children, whose rights and duties are not the same as those of old people. Many societies distinguish between a greater number of stages than these; in modern European and North American societies, for example, the period known as 'youth' or 'adolescence' has eventually been recognised as a 'natural' stage in one's life, while among the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania, a young boy passes through several phases before being accepted as a fully developed *moran* or warrior.

All societies must also solve the problem of transition from one stage to the next. How can one with certainty tell that a girl has become a woman or that an adult has become an elder? The solution is usually to be found in rites of passage. These rites are strongly dramatised public events whereby an individual or an entire age cohort moves from one status to another. The most important are usually those that mark the transition from child or adolescent to adult man or woman.

Rites of passage are frequently characterised by temporary suffering, trials and deprivation among the participants. In many of the societies anthropologists have studied, circumcision of the genitals or body tattoos function as visible signs indicating that one is to be regarded as an adult person. The rite of passage can thus be seen as an endurance test forcing the candidates to show that they deserve full responsibilities and rights as adults. They also frequently acquire important knowledge relevant for adult life during the phase of transition, which transforms them into a new kind of social person. Common forms of rites of passage in modern societies are confirmation, bar mitzvah or first communion, marriage and funeral, all of which mark stages in a person's development as a social being. Such rites are dealt with in greater detail later (Chapters 9 and 14). At this stage, it will suffice to note that actors who are in a phase of transition are frequently surrounded by

taboos, prohibitions and strict rules of conduct. In some societies, they are kept in isolation for weeks. One reason for this strictness may be that the rites of passage themselves, although they are necessary for society, can be seen as a threat to the social order and to the dominant power relations in society. When one is a child, one represents no threat: one has a secure and unquestionable social status as a child; as an adult, one normally has an equally well-defined place in society. When one is wedged halfway between the two stages, however, it may seem as if 'anything might happen' (Turner 1967). During a rite of initiation, which may last for weeks, one is in a certain sense located *outside* of society; one is neither child nor adult. Anomie is a real threat, as the candidates are for the first time able to see themselves – and society – from the outside, and perhaps reflect critically on it. Perhaps, indeed, the extended adolescence typical of contemporary modern societies may fruitfully be seen as a very long rite of passage.

So far, the development of the social person has been described as an interplay between individual and society. We now move a step further and turn towards the social organisation of communities, looking at who does what with whom, and how societies are maintained (and change) through time. A central concept in this regard is the social institution. This could be defined as a custom, a system of social relationships, including power relations, or a set of rules for conduct which endures through a long period and which, in a certain sense, exists independently of the persons enacting it. When, say, a nuclear family is dissolved because of death, divorce or the children's departure, the institution of the nuclear family is not affected. When a king dies and his son replaces him, this usually has little effect on the institution of monarchy.

Society exists through its institutions; when they cease to function, society changes in sometimes fundamental ways. After the French Revolution, monarchy was replaced by a new institutional arrangement in the domain of politics, namely the republic. And when aboriginal Australian societies have been subjected to genocide, displacement or the enforced introduction of waged work and a monetary economy, so that formerly important institutions have ceased to function, those societies have either been dramatically transformed or have vanished from the face of the earth. In other words, social institutions may be a highly relevant focus for the study of change as well as continuity.

THE HOUSEHOLD

The smallest building-block in social anthropology is, as already noted, not the isolated actor but a relationship between two actors. The smallest social system is thus the dyadic relationship. There are few systems of this modest compass in the world; and there are relatively few social activities which take place within the framework of a system this narrow. When the fieldworker

arrives in a locality, therefore, he or she will usually soon find out that the smallest and most easily accessible social system where intensive and important interaction takes place is the household. In many cases, the anthropologist will actually be a guest in a household during fieldwork. Therefore, and because households (although they differ in their composition) exist in every society, it seems reasonable to begin an empirical study by exploring this social system.

A household usually, but not always, consists of people who are relatives; it also frequently, but not always, consists of people who live under the same roof. The most common definition of a household is as follows: a household includes those persons who regularly eat their main meals together. The reason that a shared domicile does not form the chief criterion is simply the fact that many peoples have living arrangements whereby men, women and youths live in different huts.

The following examples, one from West Africa and one from the Caribbean, reveal important differences between household structures and may hint at the significance of such variation for other differences and similarities between societies.

The Fulani (French: *peul*) are cattle nomads who live in most of the Sahel region in West Africa from Senegal to Chad (Stenning 1962). The Fulani household usually consists of a nuclear family (husband, wife and children) or a compound family (husband, wives and children). The cattle herds are owned by the man. The household is an economic unit and has collective responsibility for animal husbandry. It is also responsible for the socialisation and economic support of the children until they marry and form new households. When all the children have married, the household eventually dissolves.

There are two things to be noticed here. First, the household changes, or evolves, according to an established pattern; it goes through a developmental cycle. Second, the Fulani household is flexible and can change its composition if this is required for economic or other reasons.

Let us first look at the developmental cycle of the household. The life of the nuclear family begins, by definition, when the first child is born. If it is a son, he receives his first calf on the same day as he is named, seven days after his birth. When he is between seven and ten years old, he is circumcised. At this stage he is old enough to work as a shepherd; he is also given several animals from his father, as the foundation of his own herd. A few years later the boy is introduced to his bride-to-be, who has been selected by the two pairs of parents. She moves in with him and stays there until she becomes pregnant. She then moves back to her own family and stays there for about two years. When she finally returns with the child, the couple form their own household.

The Fulani are Muslims and the men can have up to four wives. A household may, in other words, be comparatively large at the zenith of its cycle. Then it 'peels off' as the children begin to move out with their animals,

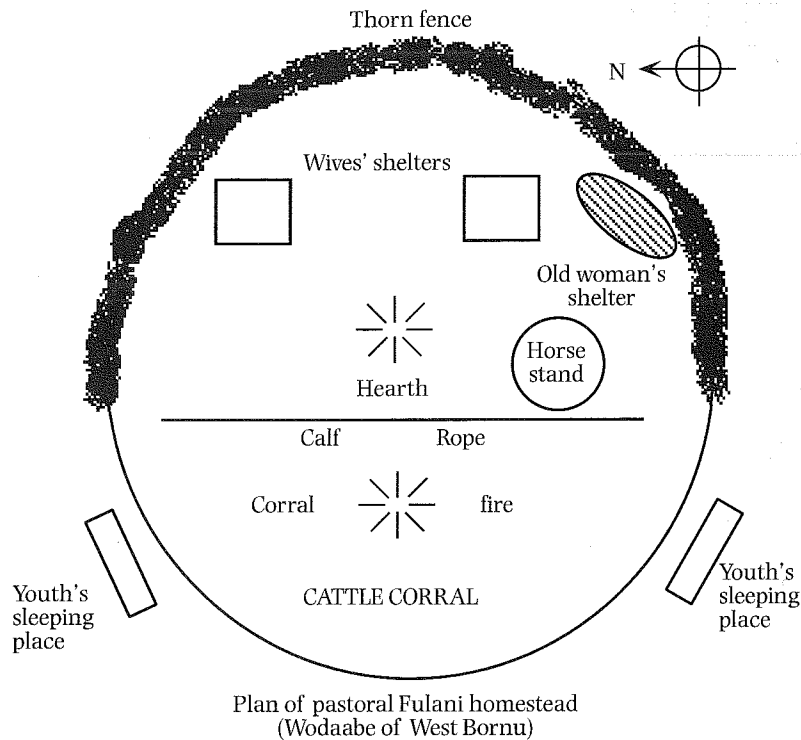


Figure 5.1 A typical Fulani household (Stenning 1962)

eventually shrinking to comprise just the original, old couple. The kind of physical continuity witnessed in the households of many settled agricultural peoples, where the same dwelling house and the same fields may have belonged to many consecutive generations, does not exist among nomads. Yet it is obvious that the household, seen as a social system, has a constant structure and that the changes are cyclical and not irreversible. We may therefore talk of it as a social institution, which reproduces itself through several generations.

The Fulani household and the cattle herd are intimately related to each other. Ideally, the herd ought to grow at the same rate as the family; each time a son is old enough to herd, the herd itself ought to grow accordingly. However, this does not always work in practice and there are several factors which may disturb the viability of the household. Some are climatic and environmental; others are related to the organisational features of the household.

A minimum of cattle is required for survival. Stenning estimates this as 21 cows and one bull for a couple with no children, but it is extremely demanding for a couple to herd them alone, in addition to carrying out all other tasks. At the early stage of the developmental cycle of the nuclear

family, the household is thus only barely viable. Frequently such a household will temporarily merge with that of the man's father, until his oldest son is able to work as a shepherd. Such an alliance with the husband's father's household can be especially important during the dry season. During this period, the Fulani are scattered over a large area; during the rainy season, they live in larger kin groups and can more easily share the work.

The situation for the new household improves as the sons grow up and can contribute their labour. In other words, the viability of the household depends on the relationship between two factors: labour power and other economic resources, notably cattle and available pastures. From this it follows that the size of the herd is decisive in a man's ability to have several wives (and, to some extent, vice versa). Further, a man is permitted to divorce a wife who has few or no children, since he needs labour power for his growing herd. The position of the woman in the Fulani household is thus much more uncertain than that of the man. He alone owns everything they have of value, namely the cattle herd.

The herd should not grow too large either. There are limits as to how many animals a limited number of persons can herd, and moreover the land is impoverished if there are too many animals in an area.

Marriage among the Fulani is more of an economic institution than it is in industrialised societies. The spouses have mutual obligations in that the man is obliged to ensure that the herd grows and is in good health, while the woman is obliged to give birth and socialise children. If either of them neglects their duties, the other party is entitled to divorce.

The Fulani household is a self-sufficient economic unit which passes through specified, standardised stages of varying degrees of viability. The difficult art of sustaining this kind of household consists of keeping the labour-cattle relationship above the lower limit, even at difficult times of drought or disease. If food is scarce, the woman may divorce; if labour (that is, healthy children) is scarce, the man may divorce.

In modern societies as well, household viability can be a useful concept. When a European household is dissolved because the breadwinners are unable to pay the mortgage, we are actually witnessing a household which falls below the lower limit of viability.

A CONTRADICTION-RIDDEN HOUSEHOLD

In all known societies, the household structure is fairly constant through a period of time, although different household forms may coexist in the same society and important structural changes may also entail changes in the household composition. When the household structure changes dramatically, this is usually an indication of other changes in the social organisation. In European societies, the shift from extended families to nuclear families in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was generally accompanied by a shift

from agrarian to industrial production. In some societies, for example among the San hunters and gatherers of southern Africa, the household structure changes periodically in response to climatic and economic changes. During dry periods they are small and flexible; during wet periods they join together in larger bands. The kind of household to be considered now is flexible in a different way. Put bluntly, it is extremely difficult to keep it together.

The Lesser Antilles of the West Indies are tropical islands largely populated by the descendants of slaves brought there from Africa to work on plantations. They are Christian (mostly Catholic), and the typical household structure is the nuclear family (see R.T. Smith 1956; P.J. Wilson 1978). In many of the villages of this area the inhabitants get their livelihood from a combination of agriculture and fishing – both for subsistence and for marketing – as well as miscellaneous forms of waged work and petty trade. The rates of migration from the West Indies to the USA, Canada and Western Europe have been very high since the Second World War, and more than half the families in many of the islands have relatives living abroad temporarily or permanently.

Although the nuclear family is considered the ideal in the Caribbean, few in Providencia, the island studied by Peter J. Wilson (1978), live in stable nuclear families. The strongest social bond is that between mother and son, and many sons are reluctant to leave their mother. Moreover, many couples live together without marrying, many married men have mistresses and women frequently have children with several men. It is far from uncommon for a woman to remain in her natal household after having children.

The problems associated with household stability can be summed up as follows. A woman has strong moral commitments towards the household she lives in, to her own children and to the men she is regularly in contact with. Usually women till the land. A man, on his part, has strong commitments to his mother, his wife, his children, his male friends, the mother(s) of his children and possibly his mistress(es). With so many obligations in different directions, it is practically impossible for a man to fulfil all of them satisfactorily. The most common domestic conflict arising in this kind of society is directly caused by the strong normative pressure on the man to spend his money outside of the household in which he lives: on his male friends, on his mother and on his mistress.

Women are also entitled to become dissatisfied with their adult sons, since they depend strongly on their economic contributions to the household, given that their menfolk are unreliable. It is quite common for close relationships between men and women, and between men and their children, to be severed. This is not due to some 'irresponsible mentality' among male West Indians, but is rather related to structural contradictions. Both men and women are faced with irreconcilable expectations.

The relationship between the household and the kin group is frequently conflict-ridden. In the West Indian example, this contradiction is expressed as a conflict between the husband-wife and the mother-son bond, but it is

nearly always the case that actors have obligations to relatives outside the household. Many live in households dominated by persons who are not their relatives (frequently they are relatives by marriage, in-married or affines). If a woman lives with her husband's relatives, she is often entitled to move 'home' to her parents if she feels mistreated. A man, for on his part, can use great resources to take care of his mother at the expense of his wife and children. We will return to this problem in Chapters 7 and 8.

THE VILLAGE

Virtually no household is entirely self-sufficient. There are always a number of problems which must be solved outside the household – concerning politics, religion, economy, children's marriage and other central aspects of existence. Even the relatively autonomous Fulani household depends on other Fulanis in matters of politics, religion and marriage, and it depends on non-Fulanis for trade. In complex modern societies, characterised by strong institutional differentiation, comparatively few needs are taken care of in the household. From Internet groups to the job market and the cafe on the corner, members of such societies are participants in many social networks of varying scale; some small and tight, some vast and dispersed. The household is nevertheless always related to other households and to social institutions existing at a higher systemic level, such as a local community or a state. At this stage, we shall focus on the village as a social system at a higher level of scale than the household.

The Dogon live on the dry savannah in south-eastern Mali, near the border with Burkina Faso (Beaudoin 1984), in an area where nomadic Fulani also live. They are sedentary farmers and cultivate millet, fruit and vegetables. They live in villages which traditionally make up independent political entities. These villages are in many ways self-sufficient, with their own farmers, political leaders, craftsmen, fields and public rituals. The autonomy of the villages is evident through the fact that political conflicts in the area are frequently conflicts between villages, caused by disagreements over land rights or disputes at the market-place, where inhabitants from different villages meet.

The settlements in the Dogon villages are divided according to lineage membership. Each lineage has rights to cultivate specific fields and lives in a delineated part of the village. Political power is distributed among the lineages so that a member of each belongs to the council of elders, which is the highest political authority. Its leader is called the *hogon*. He is judge and chairman, and also exerts religious authority. The council of elders meets almost daily to discuss village problems ranging from land disputes, inheritance cases, to crimes or conflicts with neighbouring villages, as well as planning upcoming religious festivities.

The village council and the hogon traditionally have exerted political authority over problems above the level of the individual household. (Today

state institutions are gradually taking over many of their traditional tasks.) They are entitled to receive presents from the inhabitants, but are also committed to paying compensation to inhabitants who have suffered various damages. The hogon has many of the same kinds of power as the state in modern societies. He measures out punishment when the law is broken, he is 'prime minister' and 'archbishop' and he is responsible for redistribution. The presents he receives from the members of the community can be seen as taxes, and he is obliged to redistribute them for the common good. Such mechanisms for redistribution, which exist in most societies (see Chapter 12), ensure that households which are not in themselves viable may still survive.

The Dogon villages are also integrated along lines other than purely political and judicial ones. The religious cults, in which all adult men participate, are significant. It is considered important to establish and nurture a sense of continuity with the past, and all lineages of a village can refer to a distant ancestor who allegedly founded their current settlement. The soil is spoken of as ancestral land and it cannot be sold. In this way, the Dogon villages become very stable. In- and out-migration have traditionally been uncommon. This pattern has been widespread among many African agricultural peoples, but during the twentieth century, and particularly since the Second World War, it has changed, largely due to colonialism and the growth of a state educational system and a capitalist labour market.

FLEXIBILITY AND FISSION

The Yanomamö, who live in the forest area near the border between Brazil and Venezuela, represent a different pattern regarding village organisation (Chagnon 1983; Lizot 1984). They are horticulturalists, which means they practise a simple form of agriculture with neither draught animals nor plough, and their most important working tool is the digging stick. Their form of production can also be labelled 'swidden agriculture', meaning that people burn off the vegetation in an area before planting it. A swidden plot of land may be used for a few years before the soil is temporarily so impoverished that people have to move on to a new area. Swidden agriculture is particularly widespread in the Amazonas region, in south-east Asia and in Melanesia.

Because of the danger of war, the Yanomamö villages are moved relatively often, frequently quite long distances. In addition, they move short distances in order to be near the gardens currently under cultivation. Among the Yanomamö, a garden has a lifespan of four to five years. In other words, their villages are much less permanent as physical structures than those of the Dogon.

The Yanomamö villages are, materially speaking, composed of a *shabono*, a single, large communal hut which may shelter up to 200 persons. Most of the inhabitants are relatives. They practise a system of marriage that we

would call bilateral cross-cousin marriage (see Chapter 8), which means that a young woman must marry a man who is recognised as her mother's brother's son and her father's sister's son. Their kin terminology is classificatory; in other words, they use kin terms to describe whole categories of persons whom they are not necessarily biologically related to (see Chapters 7 and 11).

The Yanomamö have a less complex division of labour than the Dogon; it generally follows gender and age. The youngest and the oldest are entitled not to work, while the women are mainly responsible for agricultural activities, and only the men go hunting.

The village headman and the shaman are the highest authorities in the villages. Neither of these offices is hereditary; they are achieved through outstanding personal qualities and through successfully competing for power with others.

Since the division of labour is rather simple, it might be thought an advantage for each household to run its own business independently. However, there are sound reasons for the Yanomamö to stick together in larger groups. First, there are necessary tasks which have to be done collectively, such as hunting and rituals. Second, the Yanomamö are periodically involved in feuds with their neighbours, and naturally there is both strength and security in numbers when they are regularly faced with this kind of situation. Just how warlike the Yanomamö are, is a matter of intense dispute among anthropologists (Lizot 1994); the present description is chiefly based on Napoleon Chagnon's controversial, but very thorough research.

One of the main reasons for feuding is the quest for women. Villages which are successful in military terms thus tend to grow. When the Yanomamö village has reached a certain size, however, it is split as one or several lineages moves out and builds its own *shabono* elsewhere. There is always a conflict prior to this kind of village fission, but Chagnon (1983) argues that conflicts do not lead to fission before the village has reached at least 200 inhabitants. There must therefore be another reason for the fission apart from the conflict itself. In this context, Chagnon argues that only a limited number of people can be organised politically on kinship principles when the division of labour is as limited as in this case. His argument is strengthened by the fact that villages where the inhabitants are closely related prove to be more stable than those where the internal kin cohesion is weaker. In the stable villages people tend to be related to each other in several ways simultaneously, because the same lineages have exchanged women for generations and therefore have stronger moral obligations vis-à-vis each other than is the case in less stable villages.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN VILLAGES

In all of the societies discussed so far, kinship has a privileged place in the social organisation. Among the Fulani, the father-son relationship forms

the very spine of the social organisation, since the fathers are responsible for the sons acquiring their own herds. In Providencia, the mother-son relationship is such a strong bond that it affects life in the nuclear family adversely. The Dogon are physically organised along kinship lines; both place of settlement and land rights follow the lineage, each lineage has a political representative, and the distribution of political power follows kinship lines. Finally, among the Yanomamö kinship is the main principle of loyalty and belonging, and the power-holders in this society draw on support from their kin to maintain their position. Kinship is thus a fundamental organising principle in these (and other) societies.

The role of the village council and hogon of the Dogon, or the headman of the Yanomamö, often consists of mediating between kin groups with opposing interests. However, they are also responsible for 'foreign policy'. There is no legitimate authority outside of the village, and each village is thus an independent political unit. To the villagers, the village is the centre of the universe. Family, livelihood, childhood memories, physical protection and future all lie there. (Here we should keep in mind that the tense is the ethnographic present. Neither the Dogon nor the Yanomamö are today unaffected by the state and world capitalism.)

One may thus ask why the Fulani do not live in villages. The answer is that the pattern of settlement in any society depends on a number of factors. The Fulani live in an area where there has traditionally been little competition over land rights. The savannah between the Sahara and the more humid coastal areas of Western Africa has always been thinly populated. The Fulani have had no competitors, there has been no imminent threat of war and they have depended on large grazing areas per household. They have also been flexible enough to unite in larger entities when required; the wet season has been a period for intensive ritual activities. In fact, it can be ecologically disastrous to enforce village organisation among cattle nomads, as some colonial and postcolonial regimes have tried in African countries. In Chapter 11, we shall nevertheless see how dispersed nomadic peoples may merge into larger entities when threatened by an external enemy.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Richard Fardon, ed.: *Localizing Strategies*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press 1990.
Margaret Mead: *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1978 [1928].
Colin Turnbull: *The Human Cycle*. New York: Simon & Schuster 1983.

6 PERSON AND SOCIETY

To say that societies function is trivial, but to say that everything in a society is functional, is absurd.

— Claude Lévi-Strauss

The person is a social product, but society is created by acting persons. In earlier chapters, this apparent paradox has been illustrated in several ways. It has also been made clear that there will always be some aspects of society which change and some aspects which remain the same, if we look at the whole system through a certain period of time. In this chapter, we draw some theoretical lessons from these themes, and also propose a model of the relationship between person and society on the one hand, and the relationship between structure and process on the other. These two dichotomies are fundamental components of the analytical framework of this book.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The totality of social institutions and status relationships makes up the social structure of society. It has been common to assume that this structure, in a certain sense, exists independently of the individuals who at any point in time happen to fill particular positions. Radcliffe-Brown expressed it like this in a famous statement:

The actual relations of Tom, Dick and Harry or the behaviour of Jack and Jill may go down in our field note-books and may provide illustrations for a general description. But what we need for scientific purposes is an account of the form of the structure. (1952, p. 192)

Social structure may thus be perceived as the matrix of society, emptied of humans; the totality of duties, rights, division of labour, norms, social control, etc., abstracted from ongoing social life. The point of this kind of conceptualisation is to develop an abstract model of a society which brings out its essential characteristics without unnecessary details and which may be used comparatively. A principal concern of Radcliffe-Brown and his contemporaries was to point out the functions of social institutions, to show how they supported and contributed to the maintenance of society as a whole. The general function of religion, for example, was held to lie in its ability to create solidarity and a sense of community, and to legitimate power