

# WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL RELATIONS THAT MAKE A SET OF HUMAN GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS A SOCIETY?

• MAURICE GODELIER •

Before beginning, I would like to thank Dr. Minna Ruckenstein and Professor Jukka Siikala as well as the Finnish Anthropological Society for having done me the honor of inviting me to give this lecture.

The question I am going to try to answer today concerns all of the social sciences at once. It is:

*What are the social relations, of whatever kind they may be—political, religious, economic, kinship, etc.—that have the capacity to bring together and to weld into an all-encompassing whole and to endow with an additional, global and shared identity a number of human groups and individuals who thereby form a 'society' with borders that are known if not recognized by their neighbor societies?*

The human groups to which individuals belong can be of a great variety of natures: lineages, 'houses', clans, orders, castes, classes, local or religious communities, etc.; and an individual usually belongs to several of these groups, each of which provides him or her with one or several particular, specific identities. It is to these identities that is added the global shared identity attaching to all individuals, whatever their particular identity, by the fact of belonging to the same 'society', to the same Whole.

A society is generally known by a 'big name' by which it designates itself. We talk about Athenians, Spartans, French, Turks, Baruya, Uzbeks; and these names globally designate a set of human groups that exercises some form of sovereignty over a territory. Once again, the form of sovereignty exercised over a territory varies with the historical and sociological context. In Ancient Greece, we will be dealing with city-states such as Athens; in New Guinea before the Europeans arrived, with tribes or chiefdoms; in Europe, with nation-states, which appeared at the end of the Middle Ages, or, as in the case of the Turkish state, resulted from the disappearance of the Ottoman Empire at the start of the twentieth century.

The question is not only central for the social sciences, it also stands at the middle of the world political and economic stage today. For everyone is presently asking themselves what is to become of specific local or national social identities, the legacy of a remote or closer past, in a world where, for the first time in the history of humankind, all states, all local societies see their economy and the conditions of their material existence, but also their political power, becoming increasingly and more fully integrated into a single system known as the world capitalist system of production and circulation of commodities. Since the collapse of the so-called socialist system, the capitalist system covers the planet earth, with the exception of a few pockets of resistance such as Cuba and North Korea. The new, global fact, then, is that all societies big and small can henceforth reproduce their material means of existence only by increasingly participating in this system.

Confronted with this global situation and, for us Europeans, with the initial consequences of the growth of the European Community, many are wondering if the borders between the different states and the different cultures inherited from the past are not in the process of yielding to what will be tomorrow an immense swamp of evermore hybrid cultures and societies. However, these predictions notwithstanding, one has only to observe the nationalistic tensions between China and Japan, or between India and Pakistan, or the increasingly imperialistic nationalism of the United States to understand that we are not there yet and probably never will be.

In an attempt to answer the question I have just asked, I will examine, using concrete examples, some of the answers that have already been given by different thinkers at different times, certain of which have almost acquired the status of obvious 'philosophical' or 'scientific' facts. I will first look to see whether the family and, more broadly, *kinship relations and groups* can be the basis of a society and even of society in general. That is a very old opinion already expressed in the West in the fourth century before Christ, by Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and in the East by Confucius (551–479 BCE) in the sixth century before our era. This thesis has since been reiterated by diverse conservative religious and philosophical currents. But it has also become an anthropological 'truth', even an axiom when it comes to societies without castes, orders or states, recently still known as 'primitive societies' and usually defined in anthropology textbooks as 'kin-based societies'.

Next I will look into whether *economic relations* can engender between social groups a common basis that has the capacity to bring them together into a whole and make them into a society. This will lead me to deconstruct two different ways such a role has been ascribed to the economic activities and the social relations that organize them: the thesis propounded by Marx and the economists who espouse his ideas, and the thesis advanced by Walras, Pareto and the liberal economists who take their inspiration from them. For Marx, the material and social relations that bind individuals and groups together in the production and redistribution of their material means of existence give rise to all the other social, political, religious and kin relations. The different modes of production—slavery, feudalism, capitalism—are the foundations upon which various sorts of superstructures (*Überbau*) are edified; they are attached to these foundations by laws of structural correspondence (*Entsprechungsgesetze*). For free-market economists, the capitalist market economy, hailed as the only fully rational economic system, is capable, providing societies are rid of all of the institutions and customs that keep the market from developing freely, of distributing the goods and services produced for the market in an optimum manner and assuring societies of a harmonious and durable development. In short, when these purportedly obvious philosophical or scientific facts have been deconstructed, if I have shown that neither kinship relations nor economic relations are capable of explaining how a society comes about, we will be confronted with the question of what other social relations possess this capacity.

\* \* \*

For my analysis of these problems, I am going to call on my own experience, on the facts I observed and the information I gathered while working as a field anthropologist in Papua New Guinea for a total of over seven years between 1966 and 1981. The group with whom

I lived and worked, the Baruya, provides us with particularly interesting material for answering our questions.

The Baruya live in the central highlands of New Guinea. They were 'discovered' in 1951 by a young Australian patrol officer named Jim Sinclair. The region came under the military and administrative control of Australia in 1960 and was declared to be 'pacified' in 1965. I arrived in 1966, thus a few years after the first contacts with 'White people', and I rapidly saw that this society had neither castes nor classes, only clans: kin groups that divided the tribe's territory among themselves. I thus concluded that I was dealing with a 'kin-based society', with a real 'primitive society', like those I had read about in books and learned about in my classes. Little by little I uncovered a whole set of facts that troubled me, for they contradicted some of the 'obvious truths' I had learned from books. The first was the fact that this society, the Baruya, had not existed two centuries earlier and that it must have formed, according to my calculations, around the end of the eighteenth century in the following circumstances: Of the fifteen clans that make up the tribe, eight descend from clans that, a few centuries earlier, belonged to another tribe, the Yoyue, a few days walk from the mountains where the Baruya live today. Following a violent conflict among the Yoyue, some of the members of these eight clans were massacred, and the survivors fled and found refuge with the Andje, another tribe, one of whose clans, the Ndelie, took the refugees under their protection and gave them parcels of land. A few generations later, the descendants of the refugees got together with their host clan and together they invited the other Andje clans to a ceremony, during which they in turn massacred a large number of their guests. The Andje fled, abandoning part of their territory to their aggressors. It was at that time that a new society, in the form of a new tribe, appeared; it was composed this time of the eight clans of the descendants of the victorious refugees plus the Ndelie clan, which were later joined by six other autochthonous clans that had been conquered or had rallied to their cause. The tribe took a 'big name', 'the Baruya', from the name of one of the invading clans, which possessed sacred objects and knowledge used to initiate boys into manhood and make them into warriors fit to govern their society, to the exclusion of the women and the young uninitiated boys.

Let us now look at the role kinship and economic relations played in uniting these fifteen alien and autochthonous clans, and making them into a society with borders secured by warfare and known if not recognized by their neighboring friends and enemies. Apparently kinship relations and the human groups they engender, clans, should be enough to explain the formation of this society. Among the Baruya, the descent rule is patrilineal. Everyone, men and women, who descends through men from a same founding ancestor belongs to the same clan and, in accordance with the genealogical position of their ancestors, elder or younger, form different lineages. These lineages are composed of a certain number of families founded by the men of the lineage when they marry. But a family does not reproduce itself as a family. Its existence supposes that of other families from other clans with whom it will be able to contract alliances in order to reproduce itself. For the Baruya, these alliances are governed by the principle of the direct exchange of women between lineages (*Ginamare*). This principle is completed by another, whose application might, a priori, seem capable of binding all of the clans into a single Whole. This is the prohibition on two brothers marrying into the same clan or on marrying a woman from their mother's lineage, in short, on reproducing their father's marriage.

The consequence of the implementation of these rules is that each lineage must both multiply and diversify its alliances. These alliances are the *raison d'être* of many reciprocal exchanges of goods and services between intermarried lineages, and these exchanges go on for several generations. One might therefore think that kinship relations would be enough to create ties of dependence between all the Baruya clans, linking them into a circle that would cause them to exist as parts of a whole that they reproduce and which reproduces them: in short, cause them to exist as a society.

This is not the case, however, and for two reasons. First of all, at no point in its existence is a Baruya clan connected by marriage to all of the other clans; it is allied with only a certain number of them, even if one adds up all of the alliances contracted over several generations, let us say between three and four, for the Baruya never try to remember further back. The reciprocal dependency ties created by kinship relations never extend, for a lineage and even less for an individual, to all other lineages and therefore to all other members of the society so that, for the Baruya, relations of kinship, consanguinity and marriage do not engender a common basis that links all clans and all families together. Furthermore, for political and economic reasons, Baruya lineages from time to time exchange women with neighboring friendly tribes, and their kinship ties then reach beyond the borders of their society and therefore do not close it in upon itself. Exeunt therefore the family and kinship relations as the foundation of the Baruya society.

Let us now see whether, among the Baruya, the economic relations between individuals and lineages can engender a common social foundation that would cause them to exist as a whole, as a society distinct from the neighboring societies. Their economic relations are of several kinds. There are relations engendered by the fact that lineages and clans own a fraction of the territory so as to grow gardens and hunt. These pieces of land are owned in common by the lineages and are cultivated by the men of these lineages and their wives, either separately or in cooperation with other families: those of certain of their affines, brothers-in-law for example, or those of friends or co-initiates of the man who cleared a new garden in his piece of forest in the first place. Before the Europeans arrived, each lineage produced the bulk of the material resources needed for its social existence. In addition, the Baruya were reputed in their region for the salt they made from the ashes of a plant, and they used this salt to barter for stone tools, weapons, feather ornaments, in short, for the means of production or destruction, but also for the means of social reproduction (ornaments for the initiates, the warriors, the shamans) they did not produce themselves. Within the tribe salt circulated as a gift between members of the same lineage and between affines but did not function as a commodity, whereas between tribes it circulated not only as a commodity but as a commodity-currency.

Thus each lineage produced surpluses so as to acquire from outside the tribe whatever it did not produce itself. The Baruya economy was therefore not autarkical but was a part of a regional economy that operated as an overarching structure integrating some ten tribes, as local groups, into an exchange network that enabled each group to reproduce itself separately. Relations between *global* and *local* levels existed there as everywhere, but obviously not on the same scale as those that reign in today's 'globalized' economy. In short, the social relations that allowed the Baruya to reproduce their material conditions of existence did not make each of them socially and materially dependent on all the others either. Each lineage, as we have seen, cooperated with a few others, usually affines or neighbors, in

order to produce what they consumed and what they exchanged. Economic activities created a real but limited dependence between these associated lineages but it could never extend to the whole society. To be sure, these relations would engender a common basis, but one that was narrower than their society; furthermore, as soon as it came to exchanging a surplus with the neighboring tribes, these exchanges reached outside the borders of their society. We are therefore forced to conclude that the economic relations between Baruya were no more capable than their kinship relations of binding them into an all-encompassing Whole which linked the one to the others and caused them to exist as a society distinct from the societies around them.

*So what social relations did provide the foundations on which the Baruya formed a society?* Several facts interlinked consistently are going to put us on the trail of the answer.

First of all the fact that every three or four years all of the lineages and all of the villages spend several months producing enough food and new clothing, and collecting shells and feather ornaments in preparation for initiating their boys and young men. For they must feed and clothe the initiates and fittingly entertain the hundreds of visitors from the neighboring friendly or hostile tribes invited to attend the ceremonies and discover the number and the strength of the young warriors with whom they will do battle tomorrow as allies or enemies. This surplus of labor and products was therefore not destined this time to reproduce the lineages and families but to reproduce the tribe as such: as a whole united in the face of the neighboring friendly or hostile tribes. In effect, all feuding and warfare is suspended during initiations.

But what do these male initiations signify?<sup>1</sup> These are special times in the life of individuals and of the tribe which, while marking their passage from childhood to adulthood, make boys into warriors or shamans capable of defending, by means of material or immaterial powers, the Baruya's territory and their lives, and make the little girls into hardworking women capable of giving their husband's lineage many strong, healthy children. In short, the initiations are a spectacular time in the workings of those social relations that in the West today we call political-religious, in other words those relations which, among the Baruya, legitimize the fact that only the men govern the society and represent it in relations with neighboring tribes, and that they have assumed a near monopoly in the relations humans entertain with nature spirits and the gods.

Political-religious relations are therefore the only relations that truly unite all Baruya men and women, whatever their lineage and village, and whatever their age. The Baruya are symbolized by the *Tsimia*, the big house in which many of the rites take place, away from the women's eyes and under the protection of the Sun, considered to be the 'Father' of all the Baruya, who, for the space of the ritual, draws close to human beings. The Baruya call this *Tsimia* the 'body' of the tribe, and each of its posts represents a young initiate. Lastly and above all, the master of the ceremonies, the key man in the performance of the rites, belongs to the Baruya clan, the clan that gave its name to the new tribe formed after the Yoyue refugees and their accomplices, the Ndelie, had massacred part of the Andje tribe, their hosts. The Baruya clan legitimates its dominant position by evoking the fact that the Sun himself, in the beginning, had given their ancestor Djivaamakwe the sacred objects and the secret formulas that enable them to initiate their warriors. That is why, they say, the name 'Baruya' became the 'big name' of the tribe, and why the masters of the initiations do not fight on the battlefield. Indeed, if the masters of the initiations were to

be killed before having transmitted the sacred objects and the secret formulas to one of their descendants, the whole tribe would lose its strength and be doomed to disappear.

These facts and our analysis show that, *in the Baruya case, it is only the social relations which we in the West call political-religious relations* that have proven capable of creating ties of generalized mutual dependence between all individuals and all clans which endow them with a common shared identity: that of being Baruya, sons and daughters of the Sun. This identity is added to their own particular clan and lineage identity, and is the primary identity by which the neighboring tribes know them. Their generalized mutual dependence is rooted in what are for us imaginary reasons, and draws its strength from the belief that the Sun had, in primordial times, presented Djivaamakwe, the Baruya clan ancestor, with the objects and formulas that give Baruya men and women their strength and their life. For the Baruya, as in most societies of yesterday and today, political power was thus associated, if not actually mingled, with religious beliefs. At the theoretical level, this leads us to acknowledge the presence of cores of (what are for outside observers) 'imaginary representations' at the center of the political-religious relations that unite into the whole that makes a society out of a certain number of human groups and the individuals that comprise them. These cores of imaginary representations are the product of the mind, which is the only source of their existence. But they are transformed into visible, concrete realities and made effective by the implementation of symbolic practices (initiation rituals, investiture ceremonies, etc.), which testify at once to their existence and (for believers) to their truth.

But the Baruya example is interesting in terms of theory for yet another reason, because the Baruya speak the same language, have the same social organization and worship the same gods as the neighboring tribes, the Wantekia or the Youwarrounatche. This shows us that the fact that people share the same language, traditions and culture with others does not automatically make them all members of the same society. In Europe, among other examples, this is the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, two countries that speak practically the same language and have a partially shared history.

\* \* \*

But let us come back to the analysis of political-religious relations. To say that, in the case of the Baruya, these have proven capable of making a society is still a vague statement, for it does not clearly explain why such relations have this capacity. I therefore needed to take a closer look at these relations, and this examination led me to conclude that:

*It is only when these relations establish and legitimize the sovereignty of a certain number of social groups—and therefore of the individuals that comprise them—over the same territory, the resources of which they can then exploit separately or as a group, that they have the capacity to make these groups into a society.*

A territory can be conquered by force or inherited from ancestors, who may themselves have conquered it or appropriated it without a fight if they happened to settle in a region devoid of other human groups. The territorial borders must be known if not recognized by the neighboring societies that occupy and exploit the nearby spaces. In all cases, however, a territory must always be defended by force, armed force, but also the force of the spirits and the invisible powers which the rites that accompany a war or prepare for it invite to weaken or annihilate the enemy.



It is therefore not the religious relations between humans and the gods, that is to say the beliefs and rites that involve the cooperation of the groups and individuals, that automatically have the capacity to produce societies. It is *only* when certain elements of a religion are called upon, used to establish and legitimize the sovereignty of a certain number of human groups over a territory and its resources that there is *verification of the hypothesis* that it is the so-called political-religious relations that have the capacity to make a society. An a contrario proof of this is the incapacity of the major universal religions like Christianity, Islam and Buddhism to prevent societies or states that share a same faith from making war on each other. If we were in need of examples, European history could provide us with a great number. For instance, the Catholic religion shared by the French and the Spanish did not stop Napoleon Bonaparte from invading Spain and perpetrating massacres and acts of violence illustrated and denounced by the famous series of paintings by Goya.

That having been established, we can now draw a few theoretical conclusions from these facts and their analysis while underscoring the limits the facts in turn impose on the analysis. First of all, the relations between the political and the economic spheres are clarified, since we have seen that the social relations which establish the sovereignty of certain human groups over a territory are not of an economic nature and therefore do not directly determine the way the territory's resources will be socially and materially appropriated, controlled, exploited and redistributed before being consumed or exchanged. These ways can differ widely according to the epoch, the nature of the territory, the resources that can be exploited using existing techniques, or whether these are arable lands, hunting grounds, large areas appropriate for nomadic herding, etc. In short, there is no direct causal link between relations of sovereignty and what Marxist economists call a 'mode of production' and non-Marxists call an economic system of production of goods and services.

Our analysis also allows us to clarify the difference that exists between a 'community' and a 'society'. It is essential not to confuse either the two concepts or the distinct social and historical realities they refer to. There is an example that will show clearly what distinguishes them. It is that of the difference between the Jews of the Diaspora and the Jews who live in Israel. The Jews living in London, New York, Paris or Amsterdam form communities within these different societies and states—Great Britain, The United States, France, Holland, etc. We could make the list even longer by mentioning the Jews of Argentina, Morocco, etc. But that would not add anything because these Jewish communities are not societies. They live side by side with other communities of Turks, Armenians, Ukrainians, etc. within the different societies which, each time, encompass them all and subject them to their laws and their constitution, giving or refusing them the same rights and duties as they do to members of the society that constitute the state's dominant group—Orthodox Greeks in Greece, Catholic Poles in Poland, etc. On the other hand, the Jews of the Diaspora who left these countries to go and live in Israel brought about a new society in the Middle East, represented and governed by a state; henceforth they claim as their own a territory that they have conquered by armed force and whose borders they want to see definitively recognized by the neighboring populations and states. Furthermore, that is also what the Palestinians are demanding: a territory and a state.

This also sheds some light on what it means for a society, with or without a state, to be 'colonized'. For this society or this state, it means immediately losing sovereignty over its

territory; this sovereignty is then transferred and appropriated by the colonizing power. To be colonized means at the same time losing all autonomy as far as one's social and cultural development are concerned. Thus it was that in 1960 the Baruya suddenly lost sovereignty over their territory when an Australian patrol led by Jim Sinclair 'discovered' them and immediately imposed the 'white man's peace' and the laws of a colonial state of whose existence they had been unaware until that time. From that day on, the subsequent development of their society and their culture was dependent on the interventions of a colonial state power initially established by England and later administered by Australia. And their religion and their initiations were directly subjected to the criticism and the pressures of European or American missionaries from various Protestant denominations who had made the long journey to convert them to the only true religion, theirs, the one founded by Jesus of Nazareth two thousand years ago.

In December 1975, Papua New Guinea became an independent country; but that does not mean the Baruya recovered their former sovereignty over their territory. As citizens of an independent state and an emerging nation, without having demanded or wished as much, they had of course acquired new rights and new duties, but they did not recover the right to settle their own disputes or to attack their neighbors and seize their territory. Their society has not disappeared; and its population has even grown. But from the autonomous society it had been before the Europeans arrived, it has ended up as a 'local tribal group' that is part of a broader 'ethnic' group, the Anga, who are listed among the hundreds of linguistic and ethnic groups living in Papua New Guinea which will now have to turn themselves into a 'nation'. Upon losing forever sovereignty over their mountains and their rivers, but also over their own persons, the Baruya ceased to be a society. Their tribe turned into a local 'tribal community', under the power of a state, an institution totally alien to their history and to their ways of thinking and acting. Moreover, this state was created after the First World War by the fusion, under a single authority, that of Australia, of two European colonies: 'British Papua' in the southern part of the island and German 'Neue Guinea' in the north.

It would be easy to find, in Oceania, Africa, Asia a host of examples to show, as with the Baruya, that it is neither kinship relations nor economic relations that bind a certain number of human groups and individuals of different origins into a Whole that makes a society. I will choose only one: the society of the Island of Tikopia, a Polynesian society that was made famous by the remarkably rich and rigorous work of the anthropologist Raymond Firth (1901–2001).

But beforehand, I would like to dispel a confusion that can arise concerning the question I am asking myself. *My question has nothing to do with the question philosophers and other specialists of general ideas are fond of asking themselves, namely, the question of the foundations of human society and social ties.* This question, in my opinion, has little meaning, for all human activities, all of the kinds of relations people produce and will produce among themselves constitute both the content and the foundations of their social existence, of their life in society. Humans are naturally social animals. They did not need a contract or any other convention to begin living in society. But humans are not content with merely living in society; they produce new forms of social existence, of society, in order to go on living.

Let us now come back to our questions and to the Tikopians. In 1928, when Firth first went into the field, the island's old political and religious organization was still nearly



intact, for the arrival of a missionary in 1924 had not yet had much impact. The society was divided into four non-exogamous clans, ranked according to their role in the cycle of rites that ensured the fertility of the land, the sea and the people; the Kafika clan and its chief, the *Te Ariki Kafika* ranked highest. By these rites, the clans, through the intermediary of their chiefs, participated in what they called 'the work of the gods', who granted or refused them plentiful harvests, abundant fish catches or numerous sturdy children.

However this organization did not exist a few centuries before Firth's arrival. The four clans actually descend from human groups that occupied the island at different times and came from different islands: Pukapuka, Anuta, Rotuma, etc. These groups first fought with each other before spreading out and taking their place in the political-religious hierarchy linked to the 'work of the gods' under the ultimate authority of the *Te Ariki Kafika*. Why are he and his clan at the summit of this hierarchy? A myth—which one can compare to the story of how the Baruya got the sacred objects and secret formulas that made it possible to initiate their men and thus assigns each clan a role in these initiations—recounts that the ancestor of the Kafika clan was an exceptional being who had given the different groups living in the island the principles and rules for organizing a shared life, a society. He was murdered by a jealous rival, but when he got to heaven, the most important of the heavenly gods breathed a 'mana' into him which made him an *atua*, a god, and gave him authority over all the island's gods. This is what gave his descendants, the chiefs of the Kafika clan, primacy over the other chiefs.

With this example, we once again find ourselves before the same sociological and historical process: it is the political-religious relations that integrate human groups from different origins into a whole and ensure the reproduction of this whole. And at the heart of these relations, we once again find cores of imaginary representations, foundation myths whose function is to legitimize the power relations and the place of the groups in the social hierarchy by attributing some with a divine origin. And these (for us) imaginary representations have been transformed into real social relations by the implementation of the symbolic practices that formed the annual cycle of fertility rites.

The Tikopia example will allow us to show and surpass the limits the Baruya example set on our analysis. With the exception of making salt money, the only division of labor among the Baruya was that between the sexes. For a man to be the representative of his clan and play an important role in initiating the warriors or shamans gave him prestige and a certain degree of authority, but nothing more. Once the ceremonies were over, the masters of the initiations reverted to doing the same as all the other Baruya. They cut down trees to clear gardens in the forest, went hunting, built their own houses, etc. The only thing they did not do in this warrior society was to fight on the battlefield for fear that they would be killed and take with them the secret formulas that instilled their powers into the sacred objects, the *Kwaimatnie*, used in the initiations.

This was not the case in Tikopia. The chiefs, who were responsible for the rituals, were treated with great respect. Their person was surrounded with taboos. They cultivated their gardens, but were spared the heaviest work. But above all, they held rights on the land and it was they who gave the families permission to work it. At harvest time, they were offered the first fruits. Furthermore, the chiefs, and the *Te Ariki Kafika* in particular, by imposing and removing taboos, exercised control over the productive activities of the whole population, opening and closing the cycle of agricultural work and fishing, which were thereby slotted

into the cycle of rituals performed by the chiefs, who worked with the gods so that these activities might be successful.

Compared with the Baruya, we see here a fundamental change in the Tikopia society. It is no longer divided only into clans but also into two social groups that cut across the clans: the group comprising the chiefs and their descendants, and the group comprising the commoners. As Firth commented, the difference between the two groups, in terms of political and religious organization, was irreducible because it was based on the proximity of one group to, and the distance of the other from, divinized ancestors, whereas in the economic sphere of material wealth and subsistence the inequalities between the two groups were a question of degree only.

Keeping to Polynesia, even more radical changes going in the same direction, had occurred in the great 'chiefdoms' of Tonga, Samoa and Tahiti, well before the Europeans arrived. In Hawaii around the sixteenth century A.D., a sort of state even grew up in the wake of the chiefdoms that had been vying for control of these islands. These societies were no longer divided, as in Tikopia, only between chiefs and their families, and commoners; they were divided, for example in Tonga, between a sort of aristocracy including men and women, the *eiki*, and the rest of the population. In Tonga, as in Tikopia, an absolute barrier separated the noble men and women from the rest of society, for they alone possessed *mana*, the powers that testified to their proximity to the gods; and the *Tu'i Tonga*, the paramount chief of Tonga, and his sister the *Tu'i Tonga Fefine*, claimed to descend directly from the highest god in the Polynesian pantheon, Tangaloa.

Unlike the Tikopia chiefs, though, the Tongan *eiki* wielded almost absolute power over the person, the labor and the goods of the commoners who lived on their lands and belonged to their *Kainga* ('estate', 'house'). But these lands and this power of life and death were always delegated to the chiefs by the *Tu'i Tonga*, the paramount chief. Each year he received from the *Kainga* heads the first fruits of their harvests or the best fish that had been caught. This is no longer Tikopia, where the chiefs continued to take part in the various productive tasks that produced the material conditions of their social existence. In Tonga, the *eiki*, the noble men and women, do not work. They make war or assist alongside the *Tu'i Tonga* in the complex rites addressed to the gods; and they wield over all other groups political-religious powers that bring them together into a whole, which they govern and reproduce under the sovereignty of the *Tu'i Tonga*.

With the examples of Tikopia and Tonga, we can shake off the limits the Baruya example set on our analysis. In Tonga not only is there a sexual division of labor between men's work and women's work, as among the Baruya. Tongan society is also divided between the majority of its members who produce, for themselves but also for the group of nobles, the material conditions of their social existence, and the group of nobles who do not turn a hand to any productive material labor but devote their lives to performing rites, to making war and to pursuing leisure.

Comparison of this ethnographic and historical information concerning a certain number of societies in Melanesia and Polynesia has thus brought us face to face with two fundamental changes that occurred in relations between the chiefs and their direct descendants, and the rest of the populations, changes which deeply altered the both social and material economic relations that existed between these two groups. These two changes were directly linked, although they worked in opposite directions.

We see that, by the same sociological and historical process, the chiefs and their descendants detached themselves, first partially and then completely, from performing the productive activities that ensured the material conditions of their own social existence and that of their family line. But at the same time, as they progressively detached themselves from the concrete process of labor, they attached to their own person and functions the access rights of the rest of the population to the land and to the resources of the sea, the use of their labor and the disposal of the products of that labor. Ultimately the whole material basis of the society came to be placed under the control of the nobles and at their service, since it was henceforth oriented first and foremost toward the production of their conditions of existence and the material means of performing their social functions and fulfilling the duties of their rank. Henceforth, unlike what happened with the Baruya, the economic relations between all the groups comprising a society provide a material and social foundation that binds them all one to the other. Does this mean that, in these societies, it is economic relations, the mode of production and redistribution of goods and services and not political-religious relations that unite all of the social groups and make them into a society? I am going to show that this is not the case, and it is by this demonstration that I will conclude my study of what produces not society but *a* society.

*What then are the causes that brought about this twofold transformation and with it the appearance of new forms of social organization, dividing the society this time not only into clans and lineages but into social groups with distinct functions that give them distinct rights and duties, and a different place within a hierarchy at the top of which are one or several groups that govern and dominate the rest of society?*

In the history of European thought, depending on the period and the realities being described, various words have been used to designate these groups of men and women who occupied different positions in a hierarchy wherein the ones governed and the others were governed. In Rome and in the Middle Ages, people spoke of separate 'orders', later 'estates' such as the 'third estate' in France. In the eighteenth century and with the changes induced by the twin agricultural and industrial revolutions, inspired by the Physiocrate François Quesnay in France and Adam Smith in England, people began talking about 'classes'. But before that, when Europe discovered India, the talk was of 'castes', groups that performed distinct and mutually exclusive tasks and were ranked according to the degree of purity or impurity these activities entailed for those who did them. Castes are not classes because they reproduce themselves by kinship relations, by the obligation to marry within one's own caste. However the words 'orders', 'classes', 'castes' matter less than understanding the social realities they designate and are used to think.

In short, our ethnographic visit has led us to confront the question that is classic in the social sciences, that of the origin of orders and classes. Of course this question should lead to another one, which I will not attempt to answer here: that of the origin of an institution which is found precisely only in societies that are divided into orders or classes and which is the instrument whereby some of them exercise their sovereignty: the state, an institution that only a short time ago was unknown in hundreds of societies of Africa, Asia, Oceania and part of Pre-Colombian America.

Yet the answer to this question was already there, under our nose. What profoundly transformed certain societies and altered the course of their history was the appearance, in different places and at different times, of human groups that began to devote their entire

existence and time to the performance of social functions which legitimized, in the eyes of the other groups that together with them made up the society, on the one hand, their right to no longer produce their concrete conditions of existence themselves and, on the other hand, the right to control the access of the other members of the society to the very conditions of production of the material means of their own social existence and, lastly, their right to appropriate the use of the others' labor as well as part of the goods and services they produced.

What, then, are these social functions whose exercise came to legitimize the inequalities between groups and individuals unknown in tribal societies devoid of classes or a state? The answer is clear: they are religious and political functions. Religious functions entail the celebration of rites and sacrifices designed to cooperate with the gods and ancestors in the well-being of humankind. Political functions have to do with governing the society, maintaining a social order represented as grounded in the natural and cosmic order, but also with defending the sovereignty of the society over its territory against neighboring groups that would like to annihilate it or, alternatively, extending this sovereignty to neighboring groups that would then oppose such a claim with armed force. In short, political relations are always associated with the right to exercise violence inside or outside the society; and this need has sometimes given rise to groups specialized in the exercise of this violence, to warriors.

Here we find ourselves on common ground familiar to ethnologists, historians and archeologists. Need I mention the organization of Indian society in Vedic times into four overarching categories, the four *varna*, at the head of which were the *Brahmans*, specialists in sacrifices to the gods and the ancestors. Just below them were the *Kshatrya*, the warriors whose function it was to spill human blood. Alone among the warriors, the Raja, King, could both participate in certain rites performed by the Brahman and take part in combat on the battlefield. Lower still were the *Vaishyas*, those who worked the land and fed all the castes. And below them were the *Shudras*, the 'last of men', who were at the greatest conceivable distance from the Brahman, sometimes called 'gods living on earth'. Between these two extremes was a multitude of castes (*jati*), each specialized in a task that endowed them with a specific degree of purity or impurity, which separated them, excluded them and ranked them with respect to the other castes.

With the caste-based Indian society, we are dealing with a society in which every social group depends, materially and socially, on castes engaged in agricultural and crafts production in order to reproduce themselves. But here too, whereas economic relations create a material basis shared by all of the social groups, which was not the case of the Baruya or even in Tikopia, it was not the economic relations that engendered the caste system, it was the castes, in other words a political and religious organization of the society, that gave economic activities both their material content and their social and religious form and dimension.

Need I accumulate more examples? Mention Pharaoh, a God living among men, born from the union of two gods, Isis and Osiris, a brother and a sister, who reproduced this union by marrying his own sister. The Pharaoh, whose breath, *Khâ*, was believed to give life to all living beings down to the smallest gnat and who each year sailed his sacred boat up the Nile to ask the river god to bring back the silt-rich waters to fertilize the peasants' fields and guarantee them bountiful harvests. Or should I convoke the Emperor of China,

the *Wang*, 'the Unique man' who alone was qualified to perform the rites that connect the Earth to the Sky and who had received the Heavenly mandate that authorized and obliged him to govern the earth and its inhabitants, both human and non-human. The Emperor was the pillar of China and China, the center of the Universe.

We will stop here. The exercise of these religious and political functions appeared in the course of history and in many societies as a much more important activity for *all* members of a society than those lesser activities with clearly visible results, the various activities that produce the material conditions of people's social existence: agriculture, fishing, hunting, etc. After all, was not the 'work with the gods' performed by the chiefs and priests supposed to bring prosperity to all and protect against misfortune? It is for these fundamental reasons that the commoners, who were neither priests nor powerful, felt themselves to be irrevocably indebted to those who ensured them the favors of the gods and governed them: indebted for their existence, their subsistence, the survival of their children. So deeply indebted that in turn they gave their labor, their goods, their very life to those who governed them (gifts that appear to us today as 'forced labor', 'tribute', in short 'acts of violence') because they believed themselves incapable of ever being the equivalent of what they had received and would continue to receive if they knew their place and fulfilled their obligations. This is the paradox of unequal social relations between human groups, orders or classes, where it is the dominant groups who appear to give much more than what is given in turn by those they dominate in the shape of their labor, their goods and their very lives.

Our analysis leads me to conclude that the emergence of classes and castes was a sociological and historical process that involved *at the same time* consent and resistance on the part of those whom the formation of these new dominant social groups little by little caused to lose their former status and be pushed to the 'bottom' of the society and the cosmic order. Consent because sharing the same world of imaginary representations of the forces that govern the universe could foster hope for the prosperity and protection of all thanks to the ritual activities and governance of a minority henceforth completely separated from any form of material activity. Resistance because the price to pay was, for the majority, the progressive loss of control of the very conditions of their existence and of their own persons. And when their resistance prevented any form of consent, the process of class formation ground to a halt or continued but this time through recourse to violence on the part of the dominant governing groups in order to crush the resistance. Consent and violence, then, are the two forces at work in the emergence and development of orders, castes and classes; and of the two, consent must often have outweighed violence.

In the end, I believe I have shown that, of all the social relations that exist and make up the historical content of our social existence, only the relations that we in the West call political-religious relations have the capacity to make societies insofar as they bring together and cause to live together under a single form of sovereignty a certain number of human groups and individuals who will exploit, separately or together, the resources of the territory over which this sovereignty is exercised. Neither kinship relations nor economic relations in themselves have this capacity. But what is new today is that, with the globalization of the capitalist economic system, no society, large or small, can produce its material conditions of existence unless every day it becomes more a part of the world capitalist system. All societies henceforth depend materially on each other to reproduce themselves. But the global conditions of reproduction of this world system are beyond the control any local

AUTUMN LECTURE

society can exert over the market, however powerful the society may be. It is this confrontation between local and global, between the political and the economic, that all societies are henceforth obliged to come to terms with.

MAURICE GODELIER  
DIRECTEUR D'ÉTUDES À L'EHESS  
maurice.godelier@ehess.fr

*Translated by Nora Scott*

NOTES

.....  
<sup>1</sup> The Baruya also have female initiations which bring together, several times a year and for several days and nights, hundreds of women from all the lineages and villages in a valley. These rites are performed each time a certain number of girls have their first period.