In previous chapters the State has been taken for granted as the necessary setting for government and politics. In this section we look at the way government and politics take place without the State.

There are a number of non-industrial societies, both in the past and the present, which have functioned without the institution of the State. Though the detailed way in which this works varies from society to society, the basic principle is the same: the functions of politics and government are, in one sense at least, performed by other institutions than the formal machinery of the State.

The Tiv of Northern Nigeria are one example of a stateless society. They not only have no state machinery; in addition they have no formal leaders or officials, so that their society is marked by ‘the absence of offices and office-holders’. But nevertheless they do have a kind of politics and government. Through the political units known as ‘lineages’ the function of a political system is fulfilled, in Bohannan’s words, ‘to control law and warfare – the exercise of power – within a territorial framework’.

This is paralleled in industrial societies with fully developed state political institutions. Social control and decision-making can take place without involving the formal machinery of the central state or state-like machinery at local level. In the American shopping centre the group functions like a ‘little community’ on its own, in which unwritten laws and personal relationships are used to resolve conflict and preserve social relations in a way akin to the ‘law of primitive communities’. In the queue, a miniature political system can be detected which regulates behaviour and controls conflict.

**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF THE TIV**

*Paul Bohannan*

**SOCIAL ORGANISATION**

*The lineage system*

The social organisation of the Tiv is simple. It is, in fact, so simple that it is difficult to understand. It utilises a single principle of organisation – the agnatic lineage structure, based on the principle of segmentary opposition. The meaning of these terms will become clear as the exposition proceeds. The family has at its core the agnatic lineage, the compound also has at its core the agnatic lineage, and the lineage is fundamental to the political and religious institutions.

A lineage is a group of people who are descended from a common ancestor or ancestress. An agnatic or patrilineal lineage is a group of people descended from a common ancestor through males only. It is a ubiquitous group among the Tiv. The matri-
form an inclusive lineage in the name of their common ‘father’, as opposed to lineages descended from more distant kinsmen. Thus, as Fig. 26.1 shows, all Tiv can be placed on a single agnatic genealogical chart and at every generation back in time a new and inclusive lineage is formed. Ultimately, all Tiv form a single lineage, descended from the original ancestor, ‘Tiv’.

The principle of segmental opposition is expressed in Tiv terms by saying, ‘Would I take something away from my full brother when I can get it from my half-brother?’ In scientific terms we explain it by saying that two segments of any lineage, whether those segments be individual people or smaller lineages within larger lineages, are completely equal in all things. Two lineages opposed in one context may join forces in another as a single lineage against an external lineage or against foreigners.

To take an example, Fig. 26.1 represents a genealogy in which only the males have been shown. Each symbol can represent either a living individual or a lineage of agnatically related individuals. Thus, if $c$ were to argue with $d$, the two, be they lineages or individuals, are equivalent to one another; no one else is concerned in their dispute. However, if $c$ were to have his dispute with $b$, then $c$ and $b$ are themselves not equivalent. Therefore, $d$ is obliged to come to the assistance of $c$, and $a$ is obliged to come to the assistance of $b$. In effect, the dispute then becomes one between the descendants of $1$ and the descendants of $2$. At that level, $1$ and $2$ are equivalent, and no one else is concerned. In the same way, if $c$ were to be in dispute with $f$, $c$ is part of Lineage $2$, which is itself part of Lineage $A$, whereas $f$ is a member of $B$. Therefore the dispute would be carried to the level of the opposed equivalents: Lineage $A$ and Lineage $B$. In an ordinary situation, all the members of the two lineages would be opposed to one another over any dispute between their members. It is obvious that this principle can be carried all the way to the top of the genealogy, no matter how great its genealogical depth: the members of Lineage I are opposed to those of Lineage II, and so on.

The genealogies that support the Tiv lineage system are about seventeen generations in depth, and go back to a single ancestor. Every member of the tribal group can trace his descent, real or putative, from the founder of the entire group. He does so by tracing the relationship through males only.

This means of linking lineages into systems is remarkable in that it is such a simple mode of organising the system at the same time that it disallows a highly developed institutionalised authority. If one person is given more authority than another, the lineage system ultimately breaks down and will not work: its segments are no longer equivalent. If authority is vested in a man from Lineage $A$, all others can ultimately dissociate themselves by invoking the fissions built into the system.

Such a lineage system forms the basis of the family and the household system of Tivland; it also forms the basis for the settlement pattern and the political system. We shall take these matters up in that order. Such a lineage system must occasionally be subverted, and we shall examine some of the recognised means for doing so.

The lineage among the Tiv forms the basis for all local groups. Tiv are largely patrilocal – a man lives with his father. In three samples taken from widely different parts of Tivland, 83 per cent of males were living with their lineages. Some, however, did live with their mother’s agnatic lineages, a few with their mother’s mother’s or father’s mother’s agnatic lineages, and 2 per cent were in areas where they were considered ‘strangers’ – areas to whose lineages they could trace no kinship at all. But residence is uncompromisingly virilocal. I discovered only three men who were uxorilocally, and of these one was in the record of a murder trial of a man who had killed the person who taunted him for living uxorilocally.

The exogamic group is a lineage containing four or five hundred people. It is sometimes possible for Tiv to take lovers within this group so long as they do not contravene their society’s definition of incest: anyone who shares a single grandparent is forbidden. There is another lineage, more inclusive than the first, beyond which it is possible to take a senior wife or one who can ritually be more fully honoured (though she is no more legitimate) . . . .

**POLITICAL ORGANISATION**

The lineage system is the basis not only of the family system but also of the geographical and political organisation. The geographical organisation is a simple one. At one level in the lineage structure there is associated with each lineage a territory within