Exercise walk-through

4.2
HL: theory applied to ethnography

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Social and Cultural Anthropology · HL

Evaluating material with theory

- **Mauss**: a gift makes the receiver a debtor and gives the giver prestige. This explains exchanges between equals, where gifts are carefully returned.
- **Political economy / practice theory**: gifts follow and reproduce rank. This explains what Mauss cannot: villagers give to cadres without return, and the receiver's status rises, not falls.
- **Judgement**: Mauss fits the gifts between equals; the **power** reading fits the gifts up the hierarchy. The material shows that one theory rarely explains everything; the best answers say where each theory works and where it fails.

Key terms

- **Functionalism**: the theory that each institution has a job that keeps society stable.
- **Structuralism**: the theory that culture is built on pairs of opposites in the human mind.
- **Interpretive anthropology**: the approach that sees culture as a web of meanings to be interpreted through thick description.

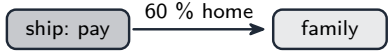
Check yourself

- 1.
- Match each to a theory: "What job does this custom do?"; "What does it mean to the people involved?"; "Who gains wealth and **power** from it?" 2.
- What did Annette Weiner see in the Trobriand Islands that Malinowski had missed, and why? 3.
- Read Yan's upward gifts through Mauss and through a power reading.

Exercises 2.1·2.2

2.1 Explain what a **functionalist** would say about the larger boat-blessing festival. [2]

2.2 A sailor earns US$1,200 a month for nine months and sends home 60 % of his pay. Calculate how much he sends in a year, and explain how a **political-economy** approach would interpret this flow of money. [3]



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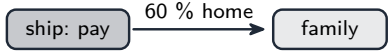
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2.1

the festival has a function: it brings the community together and strengthens belonging; this is needed more when many men are absent, which explains why it has grown

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2.2

$1200 \times 9 \times 0.6 = \mathbf{US\$6{,}480}$; the village depends on global shipping and wage labour; local life is shaped by the world economy; low wages in shipping and lack of local jobs show unequal power between global companies and villages

Exercises 2.3·2.4

2.3 Explain how a **feminist** approach would study the village. [4]

2.4 Compare what an **interpretive** approach and a **political-economy** approach each **reveal** and **hide** about the village. [6]

Exercises 2.3·2.4

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it asks how gender roles change when men are absent; women may take over boats, money and ritual; it would interview and observe women, whose voices earlier studies might leave out; it asks who gains and who carries extra work or risk

2.4 Compare what an **interpretive** approach and a **political-economy** approach each **reveal** and **hide** about the village. [6]

2.4

interpretive reveals: what the houses and festival mean to people, e.g. success, belonging; hides: the global causes of migration; political economy reveals: why men leave: wages, global shipping; hides: local meanings and choices; comparison: the two are complementary; a judgement on which explains more for a given question

Exercise 3.1

3.1 *(Paper 3 style.)* Compare and contrast how **two** theoretical approaches explain **change** in a community. Refer to ethnographic material. [15]



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3.1

Mark with the markbands: [13-15] clearly focused on the question, key concepts used accurately, ethnographic material in detail (author, place, group), different perspectives and theories evaluated, well-developed critical analysis, different perspectives evaluated, a reasoned conclusion; [10-12] focused, mostly accurate knowledge, analysis with some evaluation; [7-9] some focus, relevant knowledge, mostly narrative or description with limited analysis; [4-6] little focus, limited knowledge, mostly narrative; [1-3] little understanding of the question. Points that may be included: concept of change explained; theory 1 explained; theory 2 explained; ethnographic material for theory 1 in detail; ethnographic material for theory 2 in detail; similarities explained; differences explained: causes vs meanings, structure vs agency; what each reveals and hides; evaluation: which explains change better and when; a reasoned conclusion