

# **RECIPROCITY AND ANCIENT EGYPT: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON POLAYNIAN SUBSTANTIVISM, THE STATE AND KINSHIP**

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## **Abstract**

The theses of Polanyi on the forms of integration in pre-capitalist societies, reciprocity and redistribution, continue to be subject of debates in the historiography on the economies and societies of the ancient world. This study aims to investigate the reciprocity before and after the advent of the Egyptian State, seeking to realize its permanence and changes in both the domestic sphere as well as the public sector, considering the articulation of kinship relations with the state logic and the nature of the Egyptian State.

## **Keywords**

Ancient Egypt; Karl Polanyi; Reciprocity.

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## **Resumo**

As teses de Polanyi sobre as formas de integração nas sociedades pré-capitalistas, reciprocidade e redistribuição, continuam sendo tema de debates na historiografia sobre as economias e sociedades do mundo antigo. O objetivo deste trabalho é investigar a reciprocidade antes e depois do advento do Estado Egípcio, procurando perceber suas permanências e modificações tanto na esfera doméstica quanto no setor público, levando em consideração a articulação das relações de parentesco com a lógica estatal e a natureza do Estado egípcio.

## **Palavras-chave**

Egito Antigo; Karl Polanyi; Reciprocidade.

## Perspectives of the Polanyian substantivism

The reflections of the Hungarian Karl Polanyi (1886 – 1964) on economic sociology are within a strand of thought called “institutionalist”, one of holistic nature, with a long and complex history, supported by empirical studies of the institutional aspects of economy as a social process. In the ancient economy debate, this school of thought finds in Max Weber one of its precursors, who, by choosing the institutional grounds, highlighted the very own characteristics of the role played by economy in the ancient classical society.

Another strong feature of institutionalism, bonding it to the Marxism, despite the divergence concerning few evolutionist aspects, is the emphasis in the peculiarity of modern society. The rupture with the post-modern societies is present in the Marx (2011), Weber (2004) and Polanyi (1977) analyses, as well as in those of the historical school of economics, whose most illustrious representatives of the debate on ancient economy are Karl Rodbertus (1908) and Karl Bücher (1901), protagonists of the *oikos* debate by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, representing the primitivist and the opposition to the modernists<sup>2</sup>. It is in this intellectual stream that the Polanyian substantivism comes to life, a perspective seeking to show the specific differences in the social-historical organization of each economic system from the past.

The Polanyian substantivist perspective was opposed to those of the *formalists*, who credited to the economic anthropology the studies of a variety of human behaviors, which consist in combining certain scarce means in order to meet specific ends. This school of thought, in line with the neoclassical, defends its principles for all societies. Still, Polanyi and his signatories understood a society's economy to be the social forms and structures of production, distribution and moving of goods, which characterizes said society in a given time of its existence. The substantivists refuse to apply to all economic systems theoretical empirical categories, and they believed their use to be restricted to the market economy analysis, such as wage as a price of labor, being it one production factor among others. The Polanyian model has as a huge merit the assumption that economic processes presented in societies are not independent from culture nor universal, but rather embedded within the social and political context into which the economy exists. By turning his primary interest towards the interactions among men and the main organizations

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<sup>2</sup> For a better understanding of the *oikos* debate see Carvalho (2007, 2011).

regulating the people's lives in a given context, Polanyi deepened the institutionalist perspective argued by Weber (2004), Mauss (2003) and, in the Anthropology field, Malinowski (1984) and Thurnwald (1932)<sup>3</sup>. From these works on, Polanyi considered the primitive societies in formulating his anti-market alternative and concluded that, in general, an immersion into social relations exists in the men's economy.

However, his thoughts were different from the Orthodox Marxism by his emphasis on subjectivity, a common characteristic among the founders of Western Marxism. Polanyi's concern with the Socialist issues, to a certain extent, relates to the post-War world context, where, in addition to Russia, Socialist parties occupying influent positions in Eastern and Central Europe. Austria, where Polanyi lived then, was in the forefront of the Socialist progress, holding propositions independent from both the Russian Bolshevism and the social democracy.

According to Stanfield (1986, p. 6), Polanyi's Socialism was not exactly a matter of political action, but rather, the belief in a moral superiority and quality of social life posed by the Socialism in comparison to Capitalism. He believed that only the Socialism could overcome the demoralizing atmosphere of the capitalist society, with its unrooted economy, and allow the subordination of economy to meet the ends of the human community. Nafissi (2004, p. 13) shares this perspective, believing that Polanyi's Socialism and Primitivism were two sides of the same argument. Socialism, however, was a modern form of redistributive (and reciprocal) formations that, in his view, were ubiquitous throughout History. Against the determinism of those who argued that social reality and circumstances were to determine the course of History, Polanyi argued that human economy was a set of moral relationships that had to be studied by people moving within such relations. His war experience and contact with English workers reinforced his conviction that human existence in an industrial society could only be assured by a cultural revolution that would enable the

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<sup>3</sup> Polanyi's approach on the economy and the Market grants a special meaning to the "institutions". According to Maucourant (2007, p. 4), the institution is what grants stability to individual behaviors, a particular arrangement of the parties in relation to the whole society and refers to psychological, social and economic factors. Under this understanding, the institution is closer to the "total social fact" developed by Mauss, since in the institutions it is possible to understand the modes of social reproduction. The works by Thurnwald and Malinowsky sought to show that economic relations blended with the kinship or political relationships in the primitive societies.

subordination of economy to the human community (Stanfield, 1986, p. 15-16).

Such perspective fed his democratic commitment and his leaning towards Anthropology, in which he found a non-essentialist tradition, where experience could be expressed through a method based on empirical knowledge. The economic and extra-economic elements allowed him to work with interpersonal symbols and men's actions in any given group. To Stanfield, such interest in precapitalist societies did not conflict with Polanyi's Socialism, given that, if Socialism was the subordination of economy to the human community, the precapitalist societies, with their economies embedded within the whole context of the human group, were the most fertile field to understand that subordination (Stanfield, 1986, p. 15-17).

### **The debate among substantivists, formalists and Marxists on the integration forms in Ancient Egypt**

In 1924, Marcel Mauss considered, in his *Essay sur le don, forme et raison de l'échange dans la sociétés archaïques*, reciprocity a whole social fact in which institutional phenomena of religious, legal, moral, political and economic nature are expressed. Under the umbrella of voluntary gift exchanges, that were actually an obligation, Mauss unveils the process of reciprocity, through which individuals are bond by obligations – a gift and a counter gift – that, if not fulfilled, set them apart from social life (Mauss, 1971, 157-177).

From empirical observation, Polanyi shows that the main integration forms are reciprocity, redistribution and exchange, all of them relatively independent from the governments' objectives and characters.

Reciprocity assumes movements between correlational points of symmetric clusters; redistribution encompasses appropriation movements towards the center first, and then, from this center out again. The exchange implicates reciprocal movements as those performed by the "individuals" in a market system. Polanyi emphasizes that the mere aggregates of individual conducts are not enough to produce structures. The reciprocity carried out among individuals only integrate economy if symmetrical organized structures are already in place, such as the symmetrical systems of clusters bond by kinship. Likewise, redistribution assumes a center to

where the community resources go. Lastly, the Exchange acts on the individual levels only produce prices if are classified into a system of markets who create prices, a structure that does not suggest, in any way, random exchange acts (Polanyi, 1976, p. 296-297).

Reciprocity means that the right person, symmetrically positioned, at the right moment, must resend a certain type of object. The proper behavior is that of equity and consideration. According to Polanyi, in a society who prefers equity for whatever reason, this preference tends to discourage manifestations of economic self-interest – of bargain – in the relationships of gift and counter-gift (Polanyi, 1977, p. 40). The substantivist Egyptologist J. J. Jansen in two articles, *Gift-Giving in Ancient Egypt as an Economic Feature* (1982) and *Debts and Credit in the New Kingdom* (1994), investigated gift and counter-gift and debit and credit and Ancient Egypt. The author presents two relevant examples of the Egyptian society about reciprocity in the core of society, from numerous *ostracos* coming from Der el-Medina. The first example is the presence of lists of names, followed by the mention of food or small objects daily used in several *ostracos*. The sources report that a man received the entire food during an engagement party in his family, and probably consumed at the event. The handling of gifts in special occasions is no surprise, yet the notes made by the receiver on the names of people who were handling them gifts, without these notes being legal documents, nor effective contracts, tell us that the goals of the notes was to refresh the receiver's memory, given that, at some point, they would have the obligation to repay a similar gift in a future occasion. Because of it, they had the need to note down each name followed by a food record (Jansen, 1982, p. 254-258). The second example, in which Jansen analyzed another *ostracos* clusters, reveals a system of open credit, where the purchasing of cattle, for example, was paid with numerous objects. The seller would demand several goods for the selling of the cattle and the buyer who did not own the demanded goods would asked their family members, friends and neighbors for the goods, which, in general, were given to the buyer, making the goods donor the buyer's creditor, who should soon also demand goods or services from the buyer's. Once again, both buyer and creditor would note it all down on the *ostracos* (Jansen, 1994, p. 129-136).

As a result, all community members could be debtors and creditors of several other people, under a strict social control. Jansen called this model *generalized reciprocity*, in which the exchange relationships are submitted to the maintenance of good relationships rather than short-term gains. Despite affirming that this model does not mean that everyone acts in a

generous manner and that self-interests were present in this society, Jansen emphasizes the social control as a restraint to excessive selfishness and impossibility of gains (Jansen, 1994, p. 136). His analysis points towards the permanence of reciprocity with little State interference and as opposition to market exchanges, given that donations were supported by substitutive equivalences, when a good may be replaced by another holding the same value, validated by the customs.

The redistribution emerges within a cluster when the distribution of goods (including lands and natural resources) is centralized and performed in accordance to customs, laws or decision. Sometimes, it consists of the physical collection of the good, followed by storage and redistribution; sometimes, the collection is not physical, but rather legal, as such is the case of rights on the physical location of goods. The redistribution may be present both in primitive tribes as in civilizations of expanded storage systems, such as those in Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, and Peru (Polanyi, 1976, P. 299). Ethnographic research projects show that, in certain tribes, an intermediary existed in the person of the chief or another prominent member of the group, who was in charge for receiving and distributing the supplies, especially if there was a need for storage. An influent family or important individual, a dominant aristocracy or a group of bureaucrats could do the redistribution. In all these situations, the social sectors tried to increase their political power through redistribution of goods. An important role of the chief was to collect and distribute valuables in festivals, religious ceremonies, death rites, State visits, crops and other celebrations. The physical or dispositional redistribution would only happen through the movement towards the center and the following movement in the opposite direction with a central organization not only political, but also economic. In reality, the economic system is a mere function of the social organization.

Jansen (1982) and Bleiberg (1996), Egyptologists close to the Polanyi's perspectives, reaffirm that the economic structure of the Ancient Egypt was organized on the redistribution principle, being the surplus produced by the peasant households, collected by the State and Templar authorities and later redistributed to the Necropolis workers. Jansen argues that the cities would be a superstructure over a peasant society, composed of households, mostly self-sufficient in regards to necessity goods. The goods not produced by the households or that did not reach them through redistribution were acquired through exchanging or in the market, which represented a marginal share of the exchange system (Janssen, 1982, p.

253). According to Bleiberg, the *inw*, official gift, a transaction that expresses a socioeconomic relationship among the king and other individuals or institutions was a part of the redistributive process and of an entire system (Bleiberg, 1996, p. 117).

The Exchange, as an integration manner, requires a market system creating prices, in which three exchange categories exists: the purely physical movement of a “place exchange” among subjects (operational exchange); the appropriative movement of exchange at a fixed equivalence (agreed exchange); and the appropriative movements of exchange at a bargained rate (integrative exchange). When the exchange has its basis on a fixed equivalence, the economy is not integrated through the market, but rather for the factors fixing the equivalence. The exchange based on a bargained equivalence was marked by the presence of bargaining, in which, for the exchange to be integrative, the conduct of the parties must be oriented towards producing a price to best favor each one of the parties. The bargain is not a result of human fragility, but rather a behavior pattern logically demanded by the market mechanism. The exchange at floating rates, unlike the fixed price exchange, has as its goal a gain that can only be achieved through a clear antagonist attitude among interested parties, hence the prohibition in the ancient societies of transactions motivated by gains, especially concerning necessity goods (Polanyi, 1976, p. 300-301). As much as reciprocity, the redistribution or even the domesticity (household), the exchange principle may occur in a society without occupying the main place, in a society where other principles are ascending (Polanyi, 2000, p. 76).

Moris Silver, an “Orthodox” formalist, a strong critic of Polanyi, argues that private ownership, as well as the selling and the leasing of lands happen throughout the entire Egyptian History, belying the perspective that redistribution dominates the Egyptian economy. Besides, the letter of a farmer dating back to 2000 BEC refers to selling of wheat and grain loans mentioning interest. Grain loans made by Egyptian marketers (*šwtj*) in favor of “peasants” are in the Lansing Papyrus, which dates back to the end of the second millennium (Silver, 1983, p.801). Barry Kemp (1996, a formalist Egyptologist, in a most moderate manner than Silver, opposes the odds of a system dominated by the redistribution system in Ancient Egypt, arguing that the public sphere is unable to satisfy all needs presented by the society. The manifestations in written sources of economic activities of private nature, whose market activities would be the answers to such needs, most seen in intermediary periods, would be a



proof of the weakening of the public sphere to the detriment of the private sphere (Kemp, 1996, p. 327-330). The self-regulated market would be an illusion; given that the market modern mechanisms are intricate in the public sector of administration, where a share of the tasks is carried out. Thus, the State did not explicitly regulated prices and measures, fixed by themselves in an irregular pattern (Kemp, 1996, p. 301-330). David Warburton (1998) argues for the presence of markets in the Ancient Egypt and uses Keynes's General Theory as a model for explaining the Egyptian economy, given that it approaches a macroeconomics theory, setting aside microeconomics matters, such as trade and exchange mechanisms. The Keynesian interpretation of the Ancient Egypt economy, according to Warburton, brings light to specific characteristics of the Egyptian economy, leaving aside irrelevant economic speculations, given the Ancient Egypt conditions, which he attributes to the Polanyi's perspective, aimed towards microeconomic matters that do not explain the most general aspects of the Egyptian economy (Warburton, 1998, p. 144-152).

In spite of being critical to the formalist standing, the Marxist anthropologist Maurice Godelier (1976) criticizes the empirical focus by Polanyi, for its abstracts, formal concepts, privileging the apparent similarities but not the differences. Godelier (1984) criticizes Polanyi for not searching for what is behind the institutions, taking his views closer to the formalists'. The fundamentals of the reciprocity compatibility relations among certain forms of economy and certain types of social relationships are only found in the *properties* of these *social relationships*. It is not enough to take inventory of societies and discover in each of them the institution that dominates it, in order to learn which are the importance and the role of economy. The "role" played by the economic relationships and their "effects" over the functioning and the evolution of societies must be realized. For is, the *specific causality of all* types of social relations on the *reproduction* of the systems to which they belong must be analyzed, that is, on the reproduction of different ways of life. The study of the maintenance of unit and stability of social systems can only be comprehended through its History, as not all levels and forms of social practice hold the same importance to the reproduction of a social system, for its maintenance, its transformation and its disappearance. This hierarchy of the effects of social practice forms reveals the existence of a differential causality in these levels and forms of social practice. A hierarchy of social organization levels. Thus, we must find out which are the first causes of this hierarchy and the relationships determinant to the reproduction (functioning and evolution) of the social systems (Godelier, 1984).

Ciro Cardoso, a Marxist Egyptologist, agreeing with the political economy, believes that the conditions and forms of production, Exchange, and social distribution of wealth are intimately connected to each other, in an historical perspective. Through this definition, radically historic, the economical is perceived in a broader view in relation to the markets or the scarcity, with many variables that, currently, would be considered extra-economic. Thus, for this author, the Ancient Egypt was not modern nor Western, and an analysis of the Egypt back in the Pharaoh's time should prioritize the production relations, observing the social structures and hierarchies, the extremely unequal access to the available resources by the different social groups and the production social relations (Cardoso, mimeograph, p. 65-76).

Despite these Marxist critics, Polanyi and Marx have common grounds. According to Cangiani (2012) Polanyi emphasizes, just as Marx, the peculiarity of modern society and the transformation of most goods into commodities in a specific mode of production, the capitalism. In addition, In addition, the Marxist perspective goes closer as the primary object of institutional analysis: "the matter of the social-historical organization of each economic system, considered as a whole" (Cangiani, 2012, p. 17). Thus, the Marxist criticism of the capitalism that finds its foundation in the distinction of capitalism from all preceding societies is also the foundation of the institutional and comparative analysis of the economic and social systems argued by Polanyi.

### **Primitive societies and the emergence of economic transactions**

According to Karl Polanyi, the economic transactions in the primitive societies are not safeguarded by institutions specifically institutions; they were imbricated in the sphere of the kinship, the State and the religion, generators of the *status* system, from which the economic transactions tend to drift. The emergence of the State was a dividing landmark between the tribal and the ancient societies. The gradual emergence of economy, of its engraving in the social fabric, in terms of "way of live" and "status", happens only if economic activities are differentiated from the general processes of life, if land change hands, regardless of the position of people involved in the negotiation and if honor is no longer identified with wealth and wealth identified with honor. In this sense, the emergence of economic transactions in the core of the social fabric in the ancient societies is not enough to characterize the economic as a distinct aspect of the broader

social unit, but rather already presents differences in relation to the tribal society. The war and the trade, contributing elements to the formation of the State, demand means, such as men, cattle and materials, which result in new institutions.

Thus, according to Polanyi, the emergence of economic transactions in the ancient states did not rupture with tribal solidarity, nor with its redistributive mechanisms, given that the status transactions remain bond to the economical ones, in spite of such emergence allowing individuals to have more freedom in using the economic resources available. Therefore, these economic transactions infiltrate the social fabric differently of these first societies in their political and economic development, although it keeps the demands of solidarity and equivalence of the equalitarian societies.

To Polanyi, the Ancient Egypt is no exception to this rule, being the economic transactions subordinated to an enhancement in the methods of direction of redistributive economy (Polanyi, 1977, p. 57-59). In this article, we develop the hypothesis, based on the Polanyian theoretical referential, that the Pharaonic State advent do no transform, abruptly, the provision system dominant in the tribal society, but rather appropriates it in favor of a dominant class. Thus, the redistribution in the Egyptian State is a superposition of the reciprocity provision system of the tribal society, supported by the kinship logic, within the context of State logic.

### **The permanence of pre-State structure in the core of the Egypt State logic**

The resulting changes of the State emergence, circa 3100 BCE, promoted in the center of the peasant community, throughout the Egyptian history, have a relevant role in the understanding of the transformation of the kinship logic and its reciprocity forms. The councils and the labor organization are two elements into consideration.

Despite the huge debate surrounding the autonomy of peasant communities throughout the entire State period, we can affirm that assignments related to artificial irrigation and justice administration remained under the community's purview. The local government kept its autonomy regarding these matters, as the pharaonic power takes interest in the peasant as part of a global unit for the payment of taxes and rather

than as a single individual (Campagno, 2006, p. 28). Thus, the tax practices invoke the kinship logic, as the development of collective work of hydraulic works is within the context of reciprocity provisions in the tribe's core. The State will use the *philé*, a rotating work crew, originated in expanded families or local clusters, established on kinship lines<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the tribal reciprocity supports the work organization for tax ends, overlapping the parental and tribal logic, with the State elite using the kinship articulator ability and its integration forms.

Yet another element worth mentioning is the role of councils and local chefs as a way of political organization in the villages across the pre- and post-State period. The councils, in their origins, play an important role in the managing of water. After the emergence of the State, the councils undertake subaltern roles in the political State, and the term identifying the council members, "magistrates", "great" or "tycoons", *wrw*, despite not being bound to any State position, goes on to designate, over time, a category of employees from the central administration (Frizzo, 2016, p. 103-107).

The formalist Christopher Eyre wrote an article in 2016 called "Reciprocity, retribution and feud", in which he builds on the premise that the standard text record ideology deliberately excludes the non-hierarchy or anti-hierarchy behavior and do not reflect the dynamics of relationships that are not infiltrated by the government, or that are outside the social hierarchic structures, given that social relationships lie on the reciprocity expectation, expressed by the ideology of reciprocal loyalty, as the central premise of hierarchy. Eyre works to show that motivations for revenges, vendetta, legal legal self-help and dispute were deeply indecorous, related

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<sup>4</sup> The Egyptian called it *sau* and the Greek translated it as *phylé*. It is a system of labor organization in teams, with temporal connotation: teams that work taking turns. The evolution of the *phylé* as an institution occurred in parallel to the State development. "Emerging from its original character as a totemic system of clusters that served to identify and regulate the personal and family loyalties that are the basis of a primitive society, developed itself as a bureaucratic mechanism that organized numerous people for assignments as distinct as building pyramids or washing and dressing up the statue of a dead king. During its development, the system lost something of its primitive complexity and its associations to the king (...); Therefore, there are everlasting elements suggesting that the pre-historical roots of primitive social institutions were fundamental for the sophisticated Egyptian society of the Ancient Egypt than it seemed." ROTH, Ann Macy. *Egyptian philes in the Old Kingdom: The evolution of a system of social organization*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1991, p. 216

to personal identity models, centered in the individual competency, self-confidence and social resistance, irregularly appearing in the old sources, in counterpoint to the ideological texts, in which the gods, the king and the wealthy man play a role of patronage in the social and hierarchical structure, identifying the social prominence with a protection relation towards the socially weakened. Thus, the formalist Egyptologist emphasizes, through the gaps in text documentation, that Egyptians were not encouraged to go to the State courts to solve their disputes, but should, in the first place, go to a strong local protector or to the local councils for mediation. He outlines the absence of a State's institutionalized justice system or a State's court system open in the teaching by Ankhsheshonqi (8, 11): "Do not go to a court against your superior if you are not protected (*nḥt.t*)". Thus, appealing to a court was not the first action by an Egyptian who suffered harm; not being recommended or encouraged as a line of action in the scholarly literature. Appealing to the hierarchical authority was a resource for the weak man and not for the strict man (Eyre, 2016, p. 163-179).

Thus, the author argues that the weakness of a central authority in charge of the law and of an effective inspection centrally controlled will necessarily be in pair with self-help attitudes and strategy. The local patronage structures and social hierarchies were, therefore, central for the social organization of the lowest strata in the pharaonic Egypt. The penetration of the State, idealized as an impersonal patronage in the actions of employees and the impersonal appeal had a limited and irregular effect (Eyre, 2016, p. 178-179). Such conclusion, coming from a formalist, cannot blur our vision about the role and characteristics of the Egypt State in relation to its fragility or ability of intervening in the domestic sphere. According to Frizzo (2016, 94), we cannot see the aspects of the State's fragmentation as a fragility of power, but, from the decentralization principle, we must understand that the central power is carried out through the local power, which is strengthened by representing the central power. Thus, disagreeing with Eyre, the peasant strategies for self-help, patronage and local councils are not opposed to the State logic, with their impersonal councils and bureaucrats, but are rather components of the State power, even distant from these, as they do not present, at any time, a logic opposed to the State, being complementary instead. In this sense, the self-help and solidarity strategies in the private sphere are not antagonistic to the State logic, yet they do not attenuate the conflicts and traditions in the system core, which rest in the workers strike for food or conflicts in the interior of the State elite and the court.

## Reciprocity in the State and religious context: reappropriation and transmutations

As we said before, the parental and State logic articulate themselves in several spheres. If, in the household context, we see an autonomy of the private sector, along with the maintenance of reciprocity practices coming from the pre-State period, in the public context, the transformations coming from the State role are more evident through redistribution practices, yet they do not extinguish some pre-State practices, especially those related to equivalences. In the case of Ancient Egypt, the redistribution with the emergence of the Pharaonic State do not represent an abrupt rupture with pre-State practices and traditions, but rather a resignification of these, which can be understood as a form of reciprocity of vertical nature, given that it does not occur among pairs, but among a privileged class instead, as is the case of the several reciprocity forms within the State elite and between the State elite and the rest of society, who lived in relative poverty, being its material culture slightly different from the Neolithic times.

The Egyptian elite, part of the State apparatus, involved in coercion practices originated in the State monopoly, also organized itself based on rights and duties prior to the State logic. The local chiefs, with the emergence of the central power, move on to a sub-elite position and, as mediators, represent the State power in face of the communities (Frizzo, 2016, p. 103), being the marriage alliances a key element in the strengthen of the hegemony by the dominant sector. The pharaoh compensates the top employees with lands, gives them Templar lands, gold, gems or promotion in the descendants condition, even offering his daughter for marriage.

The *inw*, the official gift, studied by Bleiberg (1996), throughout several periods in the history of Ancient Egypt, is a transaction that expresses a socioeconomic relationship between the king and others. According to Bleiberg, the Egyptians named the economic transactions in accordance to the social states of the parties in the transaction and to the transaction's institutional group, especially if involved institutions were royal or divine. Hence, the same goods be exchanged under the designations *inw e bAkw(t)* in the Tutomeses records: *inw* are the transactions between the king and another individual and *bAkw(t)*, during the New Kingdom, are exchanges between two institutions, usually a temple and a foreign country. Based on this premise, the shortest path to achieve status, wealth and power if the

royal favor. Men achieve prestige when the king compliments them, and are compensated in several ways, from equipment to tombs to useful gifts to be used in life (Bleiberg, 1996, p. 4-28). The *inw* also translates as a tax or donation, a private pharaoh resource and should be used to meet the king's personal needs, and directed to the donation of gifts to the gods, the foreigner chefs, to maintain the royal family and pay workers. The "compensation ceremonies" in the palace took place in special occasions, in which the pharaoh would give gifts to his officers and bureaucrats, and royal family members, the *imakhu* (the privileged), compensated by their loyalty and good services (Pellini, 2000, p. 147).

The *Inw* was also composed by several consumer or luxury goods sent by neighboring areas, under domination or not, directly to the pharaoh. In an article about the gifts and counter-gifts among governors at the peak of Bronze Age, written in 2004, Ciro Flamarion Cardoso analyzes the letters exchanged between the Egyptian pharaohs and the kings of Babylon, Assyria, Mitanni, Hittites and Cyprus. In these letters, they treat each other as brothers and, in this capacity, exchange gifts among themselves. Each kingdom is a "house" (household) and the kingdom members are the "family" (wives, children, nobles, troops, horses, war cars). This is the ideological frame involving huge amounts of gifts fueling the different kingdoms with raw materials and luxury goods (Cardoso, 2004, p. 95-100). All the content underlined in the letters - which close deals on political and military alliances - determine with who each king has reciprocity relationships, creating the conditions of complementing the supply of distinct productive areas, supported in a parental logic. Their relationship as brothers and the characterization of gifts and counter-gifts translate this logic, even if, for his kingdom, the pharaoh would translate these gifts into tributes, showing power to his people. This is a demonstration of how the redistributive logic was transmuted into a logic of providing gifts to achieve State goals, and consequently, redistributive.

The idea in several pre-State societies that political and hierarchical relationships between men and women are legitimated by relationships to the supernatural world is supported by the belief that supernatural forces came up with the cosmic order and handled it to the their ancestors, leading men to preserve and reproduce it. In the Ancient Egypt, the creational myths, although not convergent, are variations of a common uniform concept of universe creation, which lies on the premise that the entire existence came from an original source, whose creation moment is characterized by the transformation of the unit by the creation god into

multiple forms of life around the world. However, before creation, a state of non-existence was in place, characterized by a full darkness and limited waters, in which the creator emerged and created the universe. Thus, the creation does not obliterate the state of non-existence, which remains within the boundaries of the created world (David, 2002, p. 118-119).

In several “pre-State” societies, origins remain as a fundament of the social and cosmic order, co-present in the present. The origin is a foundation that transcends time and that, in a cycling perspective, continuously repeats itself. The social relationships legitimize themselves in an immutable and sacred order, which finds its roots in extra-human relationships. As for the Ancient Egypt, the official relationship was structured based on Rá and Osiris, emphasizing the continuous renovation as an ideological impulse of a long-term tradition. Thus, the transformations taking place in the political context during change of an equalitarian society to a strata society did not emphasize the role of the king as someone who was rupturing with traditions, but rather giving continuity to them. The priests put effort into presenting an image that no fundamental thing was changing, when, in fact, everything concerning social organization was changing. Ever since the Neolithic times, the control of nature is within the context of supernatural forces. The priest class converts this control to the gods’ purview, who are facing hostile forces, which can only be alleviated through rituals and offerings under the responsibility of the priests and of the pharaoh.

To this point, no relevant differences in comparison to many other societies organized under single leadership or States in the ancient world exist. However, in the Ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh monopolizes the imaginary and real means of life production, concentrating in his hands all powers that, in other societies, could be separated. As a god living among men, he was responsible for the lives of all living beings; his divine essence, his *Kâ* was a source of vitality giving life to all living creatures. Thus, all authority came from the pharaoh, as his power was cosmogenic; his actions would extend to the natural, divine and human levels. According to Godelier (2001, p. 289), men owe everything to him. This permanent debt of the men to the pharaoh leads them to a voluntary submission, being its consent most powerful than the violence perpetrated by the monarch, by the monopoly of State power. This does not mean that this original debt of humans to the gods, especially the pharaoh, has obliterated the coercion, the use and the monopoly of force and violence by the State, however this debt could not be paid in any given time, as no counter-gift could repay or compensate



what the pharaoh, or the living god was giving: the life, the cosmos, the crops, the godsent Nile. In this sense, religion provided the paradigm for “some to exercise the monopoly of imaginary conditions for reproducing life” (Godelier, 2001, p. 290).

The reciprocity of the living towards the death and corpses of the tribal period, which ensured protection or stimulated fertility, was reappropriated by the dominant classes by solidifying the idea that superhuman beings, connected to the humans by the pharaoh, needed prayers, offerings, sacrifices, but also obedience and respect. A reciprocity of vertical nature way deeper than the horizontal reciprocity of the pre-dynastic period, without replacing equivalences, as all work developed through the work devoted to the king, and no taxing in currency was enough for repaying what the pharaoh was offering. It is this very reappropriation of tribal reciprocity that creates the concrete and ideological conditions for the redistribution and the strata society. The religion role here provides a power model and legitimates the different position of the pharaohs in society through the difference in their origin, creating an obligation of full provision among unequal ones. This is peculiar to the Ancient Egypt, as religion is the ideological frame that enables redistribution carried out by the State order, in which the monopoly of the imaginary (for us) and real means of producing life by the pharaoh, characterizing its power as cosmogenic, as only the cosmos could be balanced through its existence.

Along with this reappropriation, the Egyptian State organization also explains the redistributive system, managed under the principle of “decentralization”, which effectively appropriates the forms of reciprocity rooted in the tribal system. An overlapping of traditions that dated back to the pre-State period supported the State “decentralization”. Besides, we should not forget that a strong continuity exists among the peasant from the pre-Dynastic period and their pairs in the Dynastic period, with few technological innovations. The pharaonic Egypt remained, for the most part, an agrarian society of peasant base, without considerable changes up until the major technical and social transformations set off by the growth in the contact of Egyptians with the Hyksos (17<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century BC). Yet, in the New Kingdom (16<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> century BC), in the oldest communitarian structures – specially the councils that ran in the villages and settlements in Egypt -, women and men engaged fairly equally in the management of common matters (Cardoso, 2007, p. 29-30).

## Some considerations on the public and the private spheres

In face of the Egyptian society's characterizes, the goods circulating in the private sphere are restricted, as not everyone had access to the available resources and to the results of social production. When we reaffirm that the State logic was based on the "decentralization" principle, in which the antitheses between centrality and fragmentation is overcome by the logic that the central power strengthens itself through the local powers, we believe to overcome the questioning by the "formalists" such as Barry Kemp (1996) who transfers to the Ancient Egypt a questioning from the functioning of modern societies, whose the kind of concern between public and private was not present in the Ancient Egypt. As we said before, the Egyptian State logic supported and articulated by the kinship logic. In a dialectics relation, the central power would materialize through the local powers, while the other way around also held true (Frizzo, 2016, 100). The antagonism proposed by Kemp does not fit the State social organization logic.

In this pattern, the presence of street markets (*mryt*) in the Egyptian society, evidenced by iconographic and text sources, in which exchange of homemade goods manufactured by women was portrayed, along with farmers trading vegetables, fruits, fish, fabric, bread, beer; services as hair cutting; artisanal goods, such as sandals; is compatible with the redistributive model, given that these forms of exchanges, carried out in the street markets, kept the existing social relations and values. The equivalences between units of different goods were a result of conditions already existing in the society and followed the fair and reasonable price logic. Hence, the income and gains would come from status and standards of living were within the equivalences.

Jerome Maucourant (2008), when analyzing the monetary practices and individualism in the Ancient Egypt, under an intuitionist perspective, considers money to be a social obligation. Despite accepting the existence of decentralized exchanges, the author argues for the presence of a "double circuit" of the pharaonic economy, especially in Deir El-Medina, in which the State grants interest-free loans to the community, strengthening its distribution network and ignoring profits. The second system, which is in a perfect parallel with the previous one, is the wage distribution, although not subjected to the "law of markets". The hypothesis that a "double circuit" structures the pharaonic economy has an important consequence for the theoretical point of view. Maucourant sees in this circuit the presence of a "micro power", whose principle is what bonds the debtor

and the creditor. Thus, the multiplicity of contracts among individuals, the systematic willing to write of the State writers, all of it accounts for a monetary system into motion, product of the fiscal demands of counting men, codifying the relationship of the human community and divinity manifestations. The monetary abstraction considers the possible equivalence between things. A general movement of individualization caused waves of exchange among institutions, and among men themselves since the Old Kingdom, outside the State circuit, which founds the emergence of a civil society that, if on one side truly limits the central power, on another, does not take the currency to find its own logic in itself (Maucourant, 2008, p. 172-189).

Thus, in the Ancient Egypt, along with the gift and social exchanges, a more “neutral” exchange form, more utilitarian, individual and impersonal was present. However, even if something close to depersonalization exists, the market is an encounter between people and not between two functions, which does not is a counterpoint to the reciprocity logic, but complements it instead, as it is just one space more for exchanging goods that were circulating in the private sphere without affecting the general structure of the system.

It is true that the State did not meet all demands of the private sector, but here is the question: for the maintenance of the State, – supported by the inflow of a significant amount of surplus – would these sorts of exchanges weaken it? The answer is no, as the relationship between the public and the private sector in the pharaonic state society was not absolutely obliterated by one another, but rater by the subsuming of the private by the public sector.

The State hegemony, with all its entangling of relationships in the elite core, is supported by the ideological frame – religion – that nothing has changed in comparison to the social order of the tribal period, when, in fact, there was a transmutation of this new order in favor of the public sector. Thus, redistribution was, in Ancient Egypt, a form of vertical reciprocity, supported by equivalences, in which material and symbolic aspects of pre-State reciprocity are reappropriated in favor of the State apparatus, composed of a dominant class that effectively uses the elements of the tribal reciprocity. Appropriation and resignification do not mean this vertical reciprocity – redistribution – to be outlined by harmony. The pharaonic state uses the reciprocity logic, both in the State interior, as in front of the population and in foreign affairs to ensure its hegemony and reproduction, using the violence monopoly. Concomitantly, this system

presents its internal contradictions, given that the peasant communities also present conflicts, disputes, referring to the patronage and local courts and ambitions of the local chefs, who intent to increase their power, sometimes in contradiction with the central power, yet not putting all the State system as a whole at stake.

## Conclusion

This article reveals how the emergence of economic transactions in the Ancient Egypt holds affinity with and deepens the substantivist perspectives by associating the redistribution with the emergence of economic activities, supported by equivalences, as a vertical reciprocity. When investigating the reciprocity and the exchanges in the long-term context, we sought to question the articulation of sociability types present in the pre-Dynastic and Statal Egypt, to show that precapitalist societies present a great diversity of exchanges, with numerous characteristics.

Polanyi emphasizes that forms of integration do not represent development stages, given that they do not imply any order of succession in time. Along with the dominant form, several subordinated forms may emerge, subjecting the dominant form to eclipses and reappearances (Polanyi, 1976, p. 301). The Polanyian model has been greatly criticized by the ahistorical nature of his theory, which is intrinsically related to the trend, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of approximating Anthropology with the natural sciences and his little contact with History. His belief that reciprocity and redistribution were conceived as harmonious entities (or eternities) immune to historical changes confirms this trend (Nafissi, 2005, p. 166-167).

However, the ideological aspects of his model, especially his Socialist influence, also led him to exaggerations, leading him to affirm that, in pre-industrial societies, the resource allocation would only happen through distribution and reciprocity, being the exchanges carried out in markets where the demand and supply laws, which did not exist and were dominant from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on only. Recent research projects have showed the existence of markets in the ancient world, even with price flotation characteristics, impersonality, and a mentality turned to calculation. However, this does not mean to classify these ancient societies as mercantile in the modern sense of the word, because the level of integration of their markets and the cultural character attributed to their

exchange activities, articulated with their mode of production, are different.

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*Heródoto*, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.5, n.1 - 2020.1. p. 20-41

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