

The Nuer

1. The Nuer
 - a. Famous in anthropology long before Hutchinson's book
 - i. The Nuer were pacified by the British colonial forces
 1. After their pacification anthropologists could study them
 2. Much of early anthropology was caught up in colonialism
 - b. Studied by many, but there can't be a definitive book on their culture or any other
 - i. All ethnographies are "partial and limited"
 1. all anthropologists have a point of view
 2. There is so much to say about every culture
 3. i.e. More than 100 people have written about the Kuna in the 20th century
 - ii. Anthropologists come to a culture with questions they want to answer
 2. Evans-Pritchard's Questions
 - a. Had questions on "primitive thinking"
 - i. Prevailing belief at the time was that "Primitives thought in primitive ways"

- ii. 19th century anthropologists Tyler and Frazer explained an evolution from magic to religion to science in terms of slowly improving rationality:
 - 1. Magic – man is omnipotent and can control nature to his will
 - 2. Religion – man is impotent and must look to gods for power
 - 3. Science – the ultimate method of thought
- iii. Levy-Bruhl said that people get wrapped up in their collective ways of thinking such they they can no longer think rationally
- b. Studied the Azande for answers
 - i. EP went in thinking about these notions of thought
 - 1. Found Azande rationality was understandable
 - 2. Thinking was only limited by starting assumptions
- c. Another Big Question: How can there be a system of order in life without centralized authority?
 - i. Many philosophers worried about this
 - 1. Hobbes – primitives were completely disorganized
 - 2. Rousseau – people had a basic intuitive organization
 - 3. EP wanted to see if there was an order
- d. EP's second question: What's with the cows?
 - i. Environmental anthropology asks:
 - 1. What is the interaction with the environment?

2. How do environmental variables affect a people's way of life?

3. Environmental determinism was an off shoot of this

- ii. For EP, much of it came from Mauss

1. Mauss had an essay on the Eskimo

2. You could say a lot about Eskimo social life based on the season of the year

3. Groups expanded and contracted with the season

3. The Cow Problem

- a. Problem in development of non-western people

- i. Many people on the east coast of Africa are cattle herders

1. Seem to be using cows in economically irrational ways:

- a. Why do people hoard the cows? Why not eat them?

- b. Why are the cows so bony?

2. Similar criticism of non-western agriculturalists.

- a. e.g. Why do they grow such small ears of corn?

- b. Colonists felt the need to correct these people's irrational practices

- i. Their reactions to the economic practices of these people were very strong

- ii. Example: English settlers in the Americas were similarly offended by the Indians because the Indians:

1. Didn't put up fences

2. Didn't plant in rows

3. Women took care of the agriculture

4. Men went deer hunting

a. This last practices offended the middle class settlers
because deer hunting was seen as an aristocratic
sport

c. Cows have a close identification with the people among the Nuer

i. A man takes the name of his favorite ox

ii. Nuer had elaborate color pattern distinctions for their cows

iii. They live right alongside the people

iv. Social life is expressed, managed and dealt with through cows

d. The Nuer raise millet and fish – have a mixed economy

e. But how much can you get out of one study in one place?

i. Need to make comparisons before you can draw conclusions

ii. Masai and Zulu are bands of East African herders. They are big
tourist draws and also have cows

4. The Logic of the Pastoralism

a. If you map out the cattle people in Africa onto a climate map, there is a
close correlation.

i. Areas of low rainfall or irregular rainfall have lots of cows

ii. If you had settled agriculture, it would be disastrous

iii. In areas of regular rainfall, settled agriculture dominates

b. The scrawny cows are actually highly adapted for living in these
conditions

- c. Small corn is similarly adapted to these conditions
 - d. Why don't the Nuer eat the cows more often?
 - i. They milk them and bleed them, use their dung as the only source of fuel
 - ii. They eat them at festivals because cows are too big for one family to eat on it's own
 - e. They support big herds for milk and for periodic losses due to catastrophe
 - f. It can be argued that cattle herders strip the land, the cows eat the grass down to the ground
 - g. The Nuer use cows in an economically rational way
5. If we have a pastoral economy, do other qualities follow?
- a. Pastoral societies are almost always patrilineal and patrilocal
 - i. Groups of men taking care of herd and defending the herds
 - b. Regularities in personality? Touchy subject. Anthropologists no longer like the idea, but:
 - i. Certain economies are thought to encourage certain personalities
 - ii. Robert Edgerton – studied 4 east African peoples
 - 1. Within each culture, some of the groups were pastoral and some were agriculturalist
 - a. Framers – value hard work, more cooperative, suspicious of one another and hostile
 - b. Herders – individualistic, less likely to suspect others of witch craft, more open and direct

- iii. Pastoral peoples were lined with war. Raiding is common
- iv. Sometimes very successful nomadic peoples take over land and settle, becoming agriculturalists
- v. How do people who are notoriously warlike deal?
 - 1. There is peace within the feud.