

More On The Nuer

1. Ghost Marriage: a woman is married to a dead man
 - a. Among the Nuer, this kind of marriage is almost as frequent as marriage to a living man
 - b. A living man is found to physically father a child for the dead man. TO understand this, one must distinguish between:
 - i. The Genitor – biological father
 - ii. The Pater – legal father
 - c. This often takes place when a man is killed in a feud. Bloodwealth payments are used to pay the brideprice for the dead man's marriage.
 - i. The point is to fulfill the dead man's lineage
 - ii. The children of the dead man may eventually avenge him, despite the payment of bloodwealth
 - d. In this way, bride wealth and blood wealth are fluid and tied together in a cycle.
 - e. Sudan is not the only place where this happens. In France, if a man and woman are engaged, but the man dies, the woman can still legally marry him and have the legal benefits of the union
2. Woman Marriage: if a woman is barren, she may assume the legal role of a man. She will marry a woman and use a genitor to father children
3. So kinship is constructed, not simply natural.

- a. This system is imposed on seemingly natural patterns
- b. Despite their patrilineal descents, the Nuer see maternal kinship as much more natural
 - i. The father has to overcome his children's natural connections to their mother
 - ii. A man uses payments of cattle to his wife's lineage to establish his connection with and rights in his children
- c. In the US we are hung up on genetic connection. We see it as completely natural.
 - i. New reproductive technologies are changing our ideas of relations and kinship

4. Struggles Within Kinship Systems

- a. For the Nuer:
 - i. To be a full man you must have cattle to exchange or sacrifice
 - 1. Initiation makes a man out of a boy
 - 2. symbolically breaks his connection with his mother
 - ii. To be a woman, you must have children to manipulate the system
- b. Men struggle with their wives because the system creates "normal" problems
 - i. If a man can marry two wives, those children are natural competitors
 - ii. King Lear – classic story of children struggling with parents over inheritance and power

c. In America, we tend to think of children as a fulfillment of parents dreams

i. All sorts of ambivalence in this, as we saw in Number Our Days

ii. Power though degrees and earning potential

5. Struggle Within the Larger Group

a. Spears: EP noticed that this material objects had great meaning

i. It's an everyday tool, everyman has one

ii. Nuer men never go anywhere without their spear

iii. It's an extension of the person

iv. It's always held in the right hand

1. Essay by Hertz, a student of Mauss, on the difference

between left and right hands, called "The Right Hand"

2. The right side has significance to the Nuer: they deform the

horns of their ox to the left, they often tie up their left arm

for months so that is not used as much as the right hand

3. Symbolic and moral distinctions between left and right

sides seem to be a universal

v. Nuer spears are individually owned

vi. Every lineage has a spear name

vii. The Spear is often used to sacrifice animals

1. an ox sacrifice is the best, a goat is next best, and a

cucumber may stand in during lean times

2. Four steps:

a. Tie up the animal

b. Consecrate it with ashes

c. Recite an invocation

d. Kill the animal

b. Sacrifice is a huge symbolic act

i. Often used to:

1. get rid of danger

2. fend off intrusion by the spirit world

3. repay for homicide

4. fight off an illness

ii. sacrifice is not used to increase crops or cattle

iii. The ritual of killing an animal empowers all sorts of things in social life. It's an all-purpose symbol, can be varied according to circumstance.

1. In a case of incest, where someone marries a person too closely related, an ox is sacrificed and cut in half to symbolically separate the familial bond between the two people

2. This is also done at funerals to separate the ghost from its earthly life

3. To end a feud, all males involved attack the ox and cut it apart

4. To appease the crocodile spirit, the animal is sacrificed at the river

- iv. Animals also function in place of people
- v. It's important to use an ox, a castrated male, rather than a bull
 - 1. An ox is symbolic of being a full Nuer male
 - 2. the castration of the ox symbolizes being a socialized, moral male
 - 3. Uninitiated males are called "bull boys"
- vi. Almost every ox is destined for sacrifice
 - 1. it is thought that an ox will be angry if it is not sacrificed
- vii. Every male can, and is expected to, make a sacrifice – very egalitarian

6. EP and Nuer Religion

- a. EP's book on Nuer religion reflects heavily on what was going on in EP's own spiritual life
 - i. EP had converted to Catholicism, like a number of Oxford professors
 - ii. Part of a very intellectual form of Catholicism
- b. The book was an attempt to show the existence of religion in the absence of a church or organizing body
 - i. Radcliffe-Brown saw religion as some kind of support for society
 - 1. saw religion as a kind of failure of thought, moving away from science
 - 2. Other 20th century British anthropologists analyzed religion in terms of its function

- ii. EP showed that Nuer religion worked like any other religion
 - 1. had a high religious sensibility
 - 2. many spirits were all variations on God as a whole (very much in line with Catholic beliefs)
 - 3. implicitly counters the idea that this kind of thinking is primitive
 - a. Example: The Nuer often call twins “birds”. It seems silly at first, but there is a theological conception at work. Birds have multiple eggs and are very closely connected with the spirit world. It is actually a very sophisticated metaphor.