

NUER: FEUD & VIOLENCE

1. Strength and weakness of anthropology: Anthropologists are often swayed by a single key case
 - a. Weakness in that this is an obviously inadequate sample. No way of knowing if typical or how typical.
 - b. Strength in that rich analysis, really can tell you a lot.
2. As said before, ethnography of E.E. Evans-Pritchard (EP) is problem-oriented
 - a. Zande cognition: question of mentality of natives.
 - i. argued that they were rational
 - ii. but systems of rationality were culture-specific, bounded
3. Nuer political system was seemingly anarchy
 - a. No chiefs. No coercive power.
 - b. Very aggressive, warlike.
 - c. EP argued that nonetheless was order, system, not chaotic.
4. EP's Answers: Why there was "order in the feud"
 - a. Nesting hierarchy of groups. From tribe down to local sections.
 - b. No one of them got absolute loyalty, but relative loyalties.
 - c. Also nesting hierarchy of patrilineal kinship.
 - i. Clans divided into subclans divided into maximal lineages divided into minor lineages
 - d. Relative loyalties: brothers, close cousins, distant,
 - i. These loyalties were not identical with tribal.
 - ii. This got messy. Dominant lineage in section, but then others attached.
5. EP noted that gradations existed with their actions. Hutchinson discusses:
 - i. Gradation of violence:
 1. Clubs instead of spears when fighting people who are fairly close.
 2. Rape and plunder and drive off only with non-Nuer.
 3. The Dinka are a marginal case.
 - ii. Gradation of readiness to resolve the conflict
6. So there is some peace in feud.
 - a. Violence is not total or constant.
 - b. There are checks and limits.
 - i. What imposes the limits?
 1. Environment.
 - a. Mauss wrote about seasonal variations among Inuit or Eskimo, probably influenced EP

- i. Certain times of year people could come together in larger groups. Intensification of social life, practice religious rituals.
 - 2. EP noted that the Nuer had seasonal variations, with dry and wet seasons.
 - a. During the flood seasons, they end up crammed onto little islands.
 - b. Then in the dry season, they disperse to cattle camps.
- 7. So there are real incentives to resolve killing fast, especially when they take place within the same or neighboring settlements.
 - a. This tapers off in conflict with more distant peoples in part because almost they never meet, and the conflict doesn't disrupt subsistence
 - b. Also because patrilineal kinship is not airtight. Cross-cutting ties.
 - i. Have maternal relatives
 - ii. Have others with whom one might be tied
- 8. There are mechanisms to resolve conflict, even without authoritative control.
 - a. Bloodwealth.
 - b. Compensation.
 - i. Seen throughout European history. Celtic countries, including Britain, France & Germany.
 - ii. Practice called: "Wergild"
 - 1. not foolproof. Someone might eventually seek revenge even if compensation has been accepted.
 - 2. but not totally random and chaotic either
 - c. Figures to mediate.
 - i. Leopard skin chiefs are the go-betweens, the mediators.
 - ii. We now recognize lots in own society:
 - 1. When there's a strike, occasionally resolved by Presidential order, but much more often through negotiation or binding arbitration, meaning negotiation with sanctions
 - iii. Leopard skin chiefs have some ritual sanctions
 - d. Beliefs also mediate feuds
 - i. There is pollution by killing.
 - ii. Hutchinson discusses that the people involved in the conflict can't eat with others involved.
 - iii. One can't hide from the pollution either because will find you out.
 - iv. This encourages acknowledging and resolving conflict.
 - e. Restraint also plays a role, though EP didn't mention it.
 - i. Sonny Barger writes about prison,
 - 1. sees civility when know consequences of incivility.
 - ii. The Nuer are touchy and aggressive, but probably in carefully controlled way. Just as community cannot tolerate hostility against itself, so too are individuals intolerant of it.
- 9. EP emphasizing stability, system, and order. Hutchinson portrays a much more messy and fluid life.

- a. But EP knew there was mess.
- b. But EP saw the mess in the assumed chaos.

10. Problem of Violence and War - Simple “primitive” societies are often seen as key to understanding war in general.

- a. Understanding it is very messy. What are the criteria?
 - i. How violent?
 - ii. How many killed?
 - iii. How often wars take place?
- b. This is a question of great concern because the answers are taken to say something about human nature in general.
 - i. If people in small-scale traditional societies are more peaceful, then maybe war and killing is not ingrained,
 - 1. If this is true, then there may be a chance that if we can work out mess of modern civilization, then maybe can control war
 - ii. If the Nuer and all the rest are constantly killing each other, then maybe war is inevitable, and we can only work to limit and control it
- c. War is hard to study.
 - i. e.g. EP: arrives right after huge changes so there was good reason to think that Nuer warlike before he got there.
 - 1. They had just been forcibly pacified with machine guns, bombs.
 - 2. so are they killing each other more or less than before?
 - a. It could be that it was not much less, or it could be that these changes stirred people up and EP saw unnaturally more killings.
- d. Also hard to be dispassionate about the subject.
 - i. Basic disagreement about human nature, influences how interpret data.
 - ii. As noted before:
 - 1. Hobbes said: savages are nasty, brutish, and short. Man naturally violent, bad, and must be kept in check, controlled.
 - 2. Rousseau said: Man is naturally good. It's society that distorts.
- e. Partly, this is a question of how much is programmed by "human nature"? Partly this is a question of if we're programmed for violence, how nasty are we?
- f. So studies of war, right away transfer assumption to all humanity.
 - i. Yanomami, “our ancestors”.
 - ii. But why are they more representative than someone else? Is it just because they are notorious?
- g. There are always exceptions to our rules

- i. even chimps, wolves have been seen as object lessons regarding violence.
 - 1. Both portrayed as nice guys. “Never Cry Wolf.”
 - 2. But this is sadly disillusioned.
 - 3. Dolphins act like males sexist pigs, herd females around.
- 11. If studies of war aren’t drawing conclusions about humanity in general, then they make Us and Them claims.
 - a. History of colonial expansion is one of violence. How do we interpret these interactions?
 - i. In the US: Indians were savage, scalpers, and defilers or seen as natural sweeties who only defended themselves
 - 1. There’s a myth that they didn't even scalp before whites taught. (Not true)
 - 2. Extraordinarily touchy subject.
 - a. Film, *Black Robe*: in many ways very sympathetic, but also violence.
 - 3. Iroquois museum. Iroquois notable warriors, and dominated other tribes. They were very effective and tough. But the museum portrays them as wimps, sweeties. Turned other cheek
 - b. Prof. Howe’s take on subject:
 - i. great ceremonial element: Line up and shoot, dodge.
 - 1. For the Nuer and Iroquois it was a chance for individual showing off
 - a. less as matter of policy, less land grabbing. But happened sometimes.
 - b. not totally uncontrolled. peace in feud.
 - c. but very very few really nonviolent people.
 - ii. There was always feud, war, personal violence but it was aggravated by colonialism.
 - 1. Iroquois, and other Northeast Indians competed for who could get guns first.
 - 2. Also competition for furs.
 - 3. Also epidemics wiped out populations, desperate attempt to keep up through adoption
 - c. Can also look at differences among prestate societies.
 - i. nomadic societies everywhere are famed as warriors.

12. VIOLENCE IS NOT THE ONLY POLITICAL QUESTIONS:

- 13. In 1940, same year as *The Nuer* came out, first real anthropological book on politics was published, *African Political Systems*, EP and Meyer Fortes (name not hyphenated)
 - a. This book set the agenda for anthropological study of African politics, challenging old views

- i. 19th century views came from explorers like Livingston, Stanley, Richard Burton, Speke,
 - ii. Even more than stateless, they saw the typical African system as despotic, violent, savage kingdoms
 - iii. We now know there were great kingdoms in Africa's past, many good sized ones in 19th
- b. EP and MF took pains to correct this stereotype.
 - i. Claimed there were actually checks and balances in African kingdoms.
 - 1. Not like judicial review, but regular rebellion or fighting among potential heirs.
 - 2. Also strength of ritual in controlling king.
 - ii. said African politics were much like England, with controls, checks
 - 1. Went so far as to say that overall, ruled by consent
 - 2. We would now say they overstated case, but it was important that they took this corrective stance

14. Another point to correct:

- a. There's a long-standing idea that political centralization is linked to population density
 - i. Goes back to 18th century but there are famous 19th century versions, Comte, others
 - ii. Beginning 20th century, Durkheim & Mauss
 - 1. Durkheim claimed, in Division of Labor in Society, that control is a function of pop growth
 - iii. Durkheim and Mauss, though, into 20th century, were evolutionists
 - 1. As in "The Gift", Mauss traces growth of society from earliest beginnings to modern complexity
 - 2. The idea of social evolution was one of the great ideas of 19th century anthropology
 - a. It was the notion that surviving "primitives" representatives of diff stages of human evolution
 - iv. Boas reacted against evolution, especially because it was tied with racism and prejudice
- b. EP not nearly so political, but also part of reaction to evolution
 - i. So in the intro to African political systems, he said there was no correlation between population density and political centralization
 - ii. Looked at societies treated in chapters of that volume.
 - 1. In acephalous, headless societies, population density was higher than those of states.
 - 2. Not only did this not confirm the hypothesis, turned it upside down.
 - a. States: people per sq mile
 - i. Zulu, 3.5
 - ii. Ngwato 2.5
 - iii. Bemba 3.75

- b. Acephelous
- | | |
|--------------|-----|
| i. Nuer | 7 |
| ii. Tallensi | 171 |
| iii. Logoli | 391 |
- c. This was pretty devastating. It destroyed an accepted idea, but turns out to be illusion. Reanalyzed by a scholar named Stevenson
- i. Partly matter of difficulty of estimating pop:
 1. Conqueror comes, looks around, gives guess off the top of his head, and says so many thousand people.
 2. It is difficult to estimate crowds at demonstrations, e.g. Red Sox parade
 - ii. Also a question of when you count.
 1. e.g. The Pilgrims arrived right after smallpox from fishermen decimated the native population. They found the place emptied. This is not typical of past.
 - iii. Systems are also a function of when you look
 1. De Soto, early explorer of south, saw centralized chiefdoms, maybe states in south, but left smallpox etc behind. By the time real colonial settlement arrived, not only had there been a great population reduction but great chiefdoms had mostly collapsed
- d. Means of organization must see in terms of historical changes.
- i. A society may now be acephalous because a kingdom collapsed or because it is an outgrowth or colony of a kingdom.
 - ii. So if we readjust their figures and cases, you can rearrange the data to look like this: People – Population – Type of Political System

1. Nuer	7	acephalous
2. Ngwato	15-20	chieftanship
3. Zulu	20	small state
4. Bemba	15-20	small state
5. Logoli	50-70	borders of state
 - iii. There is no perfect correlation, because population density is not the only cause of political centralization
 1. but figures now make more sense
 2. They make even more sense if we add other cases at each end of really small acephalous societies: foragers. They are much lower density than Nuer, and also high density huge kingdoms at other end
 - a. foragers:
 - i. bushmen .25
 - ii. pygmies .66
 - b. great states:

i. Hausa-Fulani	100
ii. Ruanda-Burundi	187
iii. Bunyoro	766

- e. If we're going to make comparisons and draw wide causal conclusions, we have to do it seriously. We need to control our sample as well as data.
- f. This is not something that EP ever did. He was a great ethnographer but not much at making comparisons.