

21A.460J – Medicine, Religion and Politics in the African Diaspora
3/29/05

Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande

How the Azande concerns for witchcraft, sorcery, etc., do not reflect logical capacity of Africans compared to Europeans. Need to look at with relative perspective. No, we're not dealing with new species, but can understand these logics. (But these beliefs are still wrong)

John Janzen:

Illness, Healing, kinship relationships

Background:

Research in lower Zaire

Same field area as Fabian, Nancy Rose Hunt

How project of exploration is one that 'created history'

Mapped territories, etc. and how they perceived fetishism, religious beliefs carries from first readings

How knowledge is created reflects culture.

Explorers need to try and cultivate state of 'ecstasis'

Keep context in mind – King Leopold had complete control, sought to exploit resources, forced inhabitants to various forms of labor

How did forms of knowledge and created ideas influenced policies and political thought
Belgians not reproducing enough, so policies were concerned with keeping birthrate, social hygiene, 'health of the family'

Simultaneously, Congolese population decreasing rapidly, so colonial policies tried to keep rates up so labor force would not decrease

Rose Hunt, story more than anthropology: there has to be more personal engagement, more personal involvement, knowledge can't be created from a distance

Those promoting reproductive policies tried to co-opt natives to spread reproductive policies

Through these books we see how different people are writing about these experiences, how knowledge is being created, their methodologies, preconceived beliefs that carried over into how they interacted with natives and the knowledge created

Power errs on side of colonists, but there is attempt to bring natives into western rationality, coopt their support

Evans-Pritchard: trying to see it from their point of view

Janzen: going even further than other books to discuss methodology of how we can know others across cultural and other boundaries:

What is decision-making process (therapy management group) to determine sources of illness in individual?

'Alternative' medical traditions have their own logic and own validity.

Western medicine can be seen as a set of 'beliefs' as well that people 'believe' in.

Need to get closer to people

Discuss examples concretely

Shift in discipline – how to approach learning about the other

Still dated in its discussion of fetishism, witchcraft, etc.

Value: situating context between colonialism and post-colonialism

Belgians relinquished control of Congo – Zaire. Revival of traditional practices

Rose Hunt: Missionaries' civilizing mission went hand in hand with efforts to save the natives' health.

But traditional ideas about women's bodies (description of different substances in woman's body and possible danger) didn't go away.

According to who holds power in the area, some accounts may have more precedence than others.

Concerted effort to suppress work of traditional healers immediately after independence

International politics plays a role in local politics

Janzen: what are smallest units of analysis among Congolese. Kinship and lineage in addition to larger colonial problems

Region is part of matrilineal belt: descent goes through woman's line. There are different ways of reckoning who holds power, property

Gender division of labor a major part of power relations: women primarily in staple crops

Certain people can own the property and profit from it – those who do not have a right cannot

Can cause tension in society – where you sit in family line can determine power relations

Western: bilateral inheritance

Groups in matriline tend to live together: *belo, vata* of more than one community descended from common ancestor

Matrifocality: residence in woman's line

Disturbances in lineage can cause afflictions physically.

Relations to ancestors, etc other ways to determine self (Lock and Scheper-Hughes's three bodies)

Person is located in larger social group

Disruptions in any of these spheres can cause illness

Prophet movements: Simon Kimbangu

Influence of Christian movement to suppress traditional African practices still led to resurgence of some practices, such as emerging prophets

Syncretism: using cover of Christianity, resurging of traditional practices
Different ways of grouping people, systems of governance

What is witchcraft?

Psychological control, power

Evans-Pritchard

Witchcraft of the unknown: evidence of witchcraft is everyday afflictions that don't seem to have known causes

Idea of the fetish emerges: power is actualized in material form that can be placed in different places to affect individuals, usually to do harm

Different from witchcraft: less tangible than fetish, a spirituality that can influence other people, can be determined through divination

Western beliefs: that there is a distinct individual, a soul, separate from everyone else

There are other aspects to a person that are non-corporeal

Tensions between relatives of witchcraft

Not as evident or as obvious as fetish

Example: Haiti ferryboat sank

Why did the disaster occur? Many people believed there to be witchcraft for so many people to have lost their lives. It was a new boat.

One of the owners of the other boat contracted someone to engage a sorcerer to use leveling magic to inhibit functioning of new boat

Accusations of witchcraft

Underneath concerns about why this disaster had occurred

Western medicine asks why's physiologically, not moral why's

Does disaster come from natural causes or from God, etc.?

Belgians tried to control who could practice traditional medicine. After independence, local chiefs would cultivate sorcerers

Religion and politics: religion and religious leaders can be co-opted to further increase government's control over the populace

Another form of biopolitics: using what happens to individuals and their bodies as a means to secure political power

Haitian Vodou: Lwa – spirits.

Oungan – religious adept consulted to solve clients' problems. System is not for them to do good or evil, but to solve a problem

Murders could have had religious background to them – 'sacrifices'

Religious practices could be in line with powerful politics: Duvaliers cultivated priests to control broader population that 'believes in' Vodou.

Belief system still influences how people view power on a day-to-day basis

Used to manipulate threat

Movie: *Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard: Strange Beliefs*

Accepted/rejected notions of witchcraft among Azande

“In a kind of way I believed them”

Studying ‘irrational’ ideas

Anthropology still considered to be a science, focused on examining systems of government

Evans-Pritchard dealt with mental processes of other people

Where students went to study mainly reflected colonial interests

Not sensitive to native culture

Students had difficulties getting close to natives, since they often represented colonial, missionary, religious interests the natives were being colonized by

Anthropology not a matter of simply visiting – it involved living with the people, speaking their language

Wrote about topics that the Azande found important

What are motives of behavior? Notions of reality? How are they expressed in custom?

Trying to create a description more than a mere record of fact

Does different = inferior?

Power of witchcraft and magic viewed as ‘primitive’ by Europeans.

E-P argued that Azande notions were logical enough, their assumptions were just departures from western systems of thought

Unexplained causes for disaster could be from witchcraft

Witches can injure due to an inner quality

An act of witchcraft is a psychic act

By magic, they can guard themselves against witchcraft and destroy it

Priest can see evil intentions of others, can eliminate witchcraft

Not invalidated by findings any more than Christianity, Marxism, etc.

What standards of rationality can be used?

We’re not as rational as our ancestors believed we were.

Before Evans-Pritchard, no study of African religions. Only fetishism, mythology, superstition

African beliefs not treated with the same seriousness as the doctrines of major religions

Primitive mentality

History of human thought

Discussion:

Ideas of witchcraft: revealed in a process, after the fact

Magic involves taking concrete action using physical objects

John Janzen: dealing with different forces, there are powers in community

Different sources of causality

Is it becoming clear that the ways knowledge is created/ascertained is fundamentally different in these perspectives?

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21A.460J / WGS.620J Medicine, Religion and Politics in Africa and the African Diaspora
Spring 2005

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