

'Kinship and Credit among the Nuer' (*Africa*, October 1971, pp. 306–19).
A Comment by J. Y. Okamura, with Rejoinder by Maurice Glickman.

I WOULD like to comment on the argument advanced by M. Glickman in his article 'Kinship and Credit Among the Nuer' (*Africa*, xli, 306–19). Mr. Glickman proposes viewing the Nuer kinship system from what he characterizes as the 'economic point of view' (*ibid.* 306) as opposed to Evans-Pritchard's analysis which Glickman contends is based 'on the theme that many of their institutions can only be understood in terms of patrilineal principles and the existence of lineages of the agnatic type' (*ibid.*). The economic institution he chooses to focus on is that of bridewealth, and it is Glickman's contention that 'bridewealth debt . . . rather than an ideological patriliney is the linchpin of the social organization' (*ibid.* 313). He attempts to substantiate this claim by noting that debts for bridewealth rather than full payment upon marriage are the numerical norm. The credit thus extended is such that a man's cattle claims are distributed widely. This state of affairs, it is argued, serves as a measure of security against the depletion of one's herd by disease or by raid.

Glickman sees these bridewealth debts at the core of the feud. In support of this claim he 'cites' E-P., paraphrasing him as follows, 'the only quarrels over cattle that take place within a village are those concerned with debts intrinsic to the marriage system' (*ibid.* 314). However, the page he refers to says in actuality, 'The only quarrels within a village or camp about ownership of cattle that I have witnessed have concerned obligations of kinship or affinity' (E-P., *The Nuer*, 1940a, 165, *underlining mine*). He also takes note of E-P.'s statements that '. . . fights most frequently occur within a village or between neighbouring villages or camps' (*ibid.* 159) and that the feud is waged only when there are 'social relations of some kind which can be broken off or resumed' (*ibid.*). Glickman then concludes that, 'it is misleading to treat feuding as based on the premise of segmentary balanced opposition between (fictional) agnatic collaterals rather than in terms of affinal relations' (Glickman, 1971, 315). He proposes instead the existence of a 'hierarchical relationship whereby a dominant lineage exacts bridewealth, and sometimes bloodwealth, from attached lineages' (*ibid.*).

Firstly, the notion that bridewealth debt serves in any exclusive way as the 'linchpin of the social organization' is completely unfounded. Marriage occurs at a very low level of social organization linking people who live in different villages of the same district (E-P., 1940a, 226). Hence, bridewealth debt as an organizing principle is extremely limited in scope and can indicate very little of the nature of relations among tertiary, secondary, and primary sections of a tribe.

Secondly, Glickman's interpretation of the feud is much more limited than E-P.'s description. Fighting can arise not only over bridewealth debts, but for a number of other reasons; 'a cow or goat eats a man's millet and he strikes it, a man strikes another's little son, adultery, watering rights in the dry season, pasturage rights, a man borrows an object, particularly a dance ornament, without asking its owner's permission' (E-P., 1940a, 151). Furthermore, his suggestion that we should perceive the feud in terms of a hierarchical relationship in which the dominant lineage exacts bridewealth from attached lineages (Glickman, 1971, 315) is clearly erroneous. There is no evidence for such an ordered hierarchical marriage arrangement among the Nuer in the sense of an asymmetrical relationship. Attached lineages could, and I suppose in fact do, obtain bridewealth payments from the dominant lineage. Bridewealth exchange can also occur between attached lineages without involving the dominant lineage. Also, according to E-P., the feud as a political institution operates at much higher levels of social organization as well as between villages (E-P., 1940a, 160). To construe the feud solely in terms of affinal relations severely misrepresents the extent of its functions.

Glickman cites as an inconsistency in the agnatic principle the assertion that 'descent does not determine marriage restrictions' (Glickman, 1971, 308). This claim follows from his understanding of descent. He sees descent, specifically, 'patrilineal descent as a pattern of social relations' (ibid. 307) as rendering a 'framework for social relations, such as in co-residence, exogamy, distribution of bridewealth shares, duty of vengeance, cult organization, etc.' (ibid.). I would argue that such a cognition of descent as an all-pervasive and exclusive organizing principle does not make allowance for the operation of other significant factors contingent in social relations. Because he adheres to such an exaggerated and absolute view of patrilineal principles, Glickman is bound to interpret inconsistencies within 'patrilineal descent as a pattern of social relations' as manifest violations of or deviations from the agnatic principle. The problem lies in Glickman's interpretation, not in E-P.'s description.

Returning to Glickman's contention that descent does not determine the rules of marriage, it is more reasonable to say that descent is not the *sole* determinant of marriage restrictions. The rules of exogamy prohibit marriage with certain cognatic relations, with close neighbours, as well as with anyone bearing the same spear name. Hence descent does determine marriage restrictions to a certain degree, operating in conjunction with other principles. But to claim inconsistency with the patrilineal principle simply because descent is not the sole determinant of the rules of marriage is to detract from the ultimate complex import that descent has.

On the basis of Nuer residence patterns, Glickman argues that blood vengeance might be exercised against individuals not belonging to the lineage proper of the slayer. This situation he perceives as another incongruity within the patrilineal social system. However, this reasoning follows from his understanding that E-P. described descent as functioning as a unique and absolute principle. But E-P. did not. What Glickman fails to recognize is that E-P. made it perfectly clear that the feud proceeds not only according to patrilineal principles but also co-residence.

Glickman offers as another violation of the agnatic principle the tracing of descent through women. But E-P. himself points out that patrilineal descent is not the critical factor here, but rather the tracing of any kinship relation to establish grounds for residence in a village. E-P. has indicated 'a stranger's need to establish in one way or another a kinship link with someone in the community . . . lacking which he would not join the community' (E-P., 1950, 382).

As he misrepresented E-P., Glickman does the same for Gluckman with regard to the feud. He asserts that, 'according to Gluckman, the failure of feuds to continue for long periods is brought about by the convenient rule of mutual aid between agnates in a society in which such kin need not live in the same locality' (Glickman, 1971, 311). Glickman also contends that Gluckman has proposed 'the hypothesis that the geographical dispersion of agnates reduced conflict' (ibid.). However, in truth, what Gluckman said is that customary allegiances of kinship, affinity, and community create conflicts which hinder the expansion of dispute, particularly in the lowest, local levels of social organization. As Gluckman states, 'A man's several loyalties strike at the strength of his loyalty to any one group or set of relationships, which is thus divided' (Gluckman, 'The Peace in the Feud', in *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, 1955, 19-20). Gluckman also makes it quite explicit that he is not claiming that conflicting loyalties will always prevent a dispute from arising.

I may have given the impression that I am arguing that vengeance is never taken and the feud is never waged. I don't want to do this. Feud is waged and vengeance taken when the parties live sufficiently far apart, or are too weakly related by diverse ties. Even when they are close together, hot-headedness and desire for prestige may lead to vengeance and constant fighting (ibid.).

I would say that Glickman has extended Gluckman's theory of cross-cutting ties to a

degree that Gluckman never proposed. He has drawn an extremely simplified conclusion from a multi-faceted theoretical argument.

Much in the same manner that Glickman misconstrued Gluckman, so has he also emphasized the patrilineal principle to a measure that E-P. never intended. The interest in *The Nuer* lies in the complex relationship between patrilineal ideology and a set of territorial, affinal, and cognatic allegiances. Bridewealth debt is no more capable of unfolding the whole of Nuer society any more than the agnatic principle alone can.

J. Y. OKAMURA

I would like to thank Mr. Okamura for sending me a copy of his comments and I am pleased to accept the editor's offer of an opportunity to reply. I will respond to the criticisms in the order they occur.

Okamura first implies that in not making a distinction at the village level between 'marriage system' and 'kinship' I misrepresented Professor Evans-Pritchard. He may recall, however, that 'Kinship is customarily defined by reference to these payments, being most clearly pointed at marriage, when movements of cattle from kraal to kraal are equivalent to lines in a genealogical chart' (E-P., 1940, 17-18: see also 1951, 49). It may also be noted that in support of my claim about the connection between the marriage system and quarrels I made a second citation (E-P., 1951, 91), which Okamura fails to mention but which actually employs the words 'system of marriages'.

Okamura then attempts to diminish the importance of bridewealth debt by asserting that marriage occurs at a very low level of social organization. Unfortunately, this low level is the most important for most social purposes, for '. . . it is the small local group with its dominant lineage which strikes us as the real political unit and not the tribe. This small local and kinship group is also the cattle unit and the revenge unit' (E-P., 1935, 87).

Okamura then seeks to reduce the significance of the connection between bridewealth debt and feuding by means of a list of other circumstances in which men may fight. My purpose, however, was to point out that 'physical sanctions at the command of the creditor functioned . . . to enforce payment of debt' (Glickman, 1971, 314) and not to argue that every act of violence can be attributed to questions of bridewealth. Nevertheless fighting is generally over claims to bridewealth, as Evans-Pritchard clearly indicates (E-P., 1937, 210-12). I would also point out that, while it has not been accorded sharp theoretical emphasis, the use of force as a means of 'cancelling a debt' (Fortes, 1969, 247) for bridewealth is by no means unfamiliar in reports on kinship systems of African peoples who have the institution of bride cattle.

Okamura regards my suggestion of a hierarchical relationship between dominant and attached lineages as 'clearly erroneous'. He says in apparent support of this claim 'Attached lineages could, and I suppose in fact do, obtain bridewealth payments from the dominant lineage.' This may be the case, though, as Professor Gough has recently pointed out (1971, 96-9), members of a dominant lineage in fact normally try to avoid marrying women of their own attached lineages, from whose marriages they obtain rights to bridewealth. In any event, in my paper I was concerned with the sociological implications not of payment as such but rather of debt. One would expect the members of a dominant group to be better equipped to actually pay their wives' kin (whether or not they choose to marry women from their attached lineages). Their position, however, rests not only on their ability to make payments but also on the indebtedness of the poorer attached lineages. In what I wrote about Nuer society I said that no sharp class division obtains. Nor, it may be added, is indebtedness as institutionally elaborated as in a number of other East African cattle economies (Schneider, 1957). But neither of these facts should deter us from exploring hierarchy and indebtedness in societies where these institutions are weakly articulated.

Legal institutions in Nuer society do not occur in a very discrete form, yet Dr. Howell (1954) has written a detailed monograph on the subject. I see no reason why equal attention should not be given to social stratification and credit.

Okamura is right when he indicates that I confined my discussion of feuding to its occurrence between neighbouring villages and affines. However, it seems to me that feuding at higher levels, though relatively infrequent and though hitherto presented mainly in terms of its patrilineal ideology, should also be looked at from the point of view of ecology and economy.

Okamura takes me to task for saying that descent does not determine marriage restrictions and other forms of social behaviour. My position is in fact that descent for the Nuer is not a determinant but rather a matter of making genealogical adjustments when necessary to the 'significant factors contingent in social relations' to which Okamura alludes.

I see no evidence for Okamura's position that descent is one (among other) determinants of social behaviour. Such, however, was certainly Professor Gluckman's assumption when he based his theory of 'The Peace in the Feud' on the idea that 'The most important tie among the Nuer is that of agnatic kinship—kinship by blood through males' (Gluckman, 1955, 10). But, as Dr. I. Mayer (1965) has pointed out, people everywhere tend to forget who their 'real' kinsmen are beyond the range of second cousins, while in his discussion of the obligations of 'real' (*pany*) kin Evans-Pritchard (1951, 154-5) makes no particular distinction between kinship through males and through females. Gluckman's claim that cross-cutting ties of kinship and locality limit fighting remains an important but as yet unsubstantiated hypothesis. It would seem that for it to be made more viable prominence would have to be removed from the patrilineal principle or, alternatively, the latter would have to be understood in an ideological sense.

I do not think anyone would disagree with Okamura's final sentence. On the other hand, and in summary, I am unable to accept that I misconstrued the sources in the ways he alleges. I would still claim that the data are consistent with the hypotheses that in Nuerland credit places groups in a position of dominance over more numerous groups which are attached to them through marriages; that bridewealth claims are the normal occasion for conflict; and that patriliney is not a significant social arrangement but rather plays the ideological role of signifying (restricted) co-operation in communal herding and collective aggression and defence.

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