

Christian Sigrist: Segmentary Societies: The Evolution and Actual Relevance of an Interdisciplinary Conception.

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Segmentary Societies: The Evolution and Actual Relevance of an Interdisciplinary Conception*

Christian Sigrist

1. The evolution of the conception in a colonial context and its sociological and anthropological roots

In the first year of the Second World War Meyer Fortes and Edward Evans-Pritchard published a reader on *African Political Systems (APS)* as an attempt to bring into focus one of the major problems of “*African sociology*” (1940: VII): This epistemic designation appears to be remarkable. The editors could have named it as well: African ethnology. The deviation from academic routine corresponded on the one hand to the epistemological orientation of the “British School” of social anthropology. On the other hand, it ostentatively elevated African societies on the same cognitive level as “advanced” industrial societies paying tribute to rising sensitivity among African intellectuals. And thirdly, the title reflects acute political concerns of colonial policy, particularly in the field of indirect rule. The authors drew attention to the contradictory results of British interventions in the domain of indirect rule in different types of societies. Whereas non-centralised societies were exposed to a process of centralisation by the introduction of chieftainship, in the centralised ones the power of traditional chiefs was diminished.

The editors establish two groups of political systems: Stateless societies and primitive states. The second group is analytically subdivided first into small-scale societies, bands, where the political structure and kinship organisation are completely fused. This type is left outside the scope of *APS*. Instead the authors concentrate on societies with a “segmentary system of

permanent, unilateral descent groups,¹ which we call the lineage system. Only the latter establish corporate units with political functions” (6).

Societies corresponding to these criteria have been labelled by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard as segmentary. Here I see a crucial problem of sociological terminology which is evident if we return to the start of the evolution of this conception. The concept of the segmentary society was coined by Emile Durkheim in 1893, in his first opus magnum *De la division du travail social*. After having established two major forms of solidarity, “mécanique” and “organique” in an evolutionist sequence he identified the social type marked by the first form of solidarité as “société segmentaire”. The protoplasme social of this evolution is the “horde”, the spring of all types (149).

The combination of hordes is called clans by Durkheim; the term *société segmentaire* is attributed to the *association de clans*:

“Nous disons de ces sociétés qu’elles sont segmentaires, pour indiquer qu’elles sont formées par la répétition d’agrégats semblables entre eux, analogues aux anneaux de l’annelé, et de cet agrégat élémentaire qu’il est un clan, parce que ce mot en exprime bien la nature mixte, à la fois familiale et politique” (150).

In this context Durkheim uses the term “organisation politico-familiale” (151). It is obvious that the editors of *APS* are excluding exactly the original “segmentary society” from their conception.

Before continuing my focal argument I have to mention the specification of the notion which Durkheim developed 1894/95 in the *Règles de la méthode sociologique*. Classifying the isolated horde as a theoretical construct he identifies the reunion of hordes as a clan (*ibid.*, 83), which constitutes the segment of an inclusive society, the clan being prior to the formation of families. On this base he differentiates “sociétés polysegmentaires simples” constituted by the mere alignment of clans, indicating as examples: some Iroquois groups and the Australians. On the next evolutionary level emerge the “sociétés polysegmentaires simplement composées”, exemplified by the “confédération iroquoise”.

* Korrigierte Fassung.

¹ In the following text abbreviated as UDG. – There have been written many critical comments or even refutations of the *APS* conception. Since I treated most of them, already in my *Regulierte Anarchie* in 1967 and in the third edition of my book I concentrate my criticism on the problem of the missing adequate reference to Durkheim.

The next type is labelled “sociétés polysegmentaires doublement composées qui résultent de la juxtaposition ou fusion de plusieurs sociétés polysegmentaires simplement composées. Telles sont la cité, agrégat de tribus qui sont elles-mêmes des agrégats de curias qui à leur tour se résolvent en gentes ou clans et la tribu germanique...” (84).

It is obvious that Durkheim follows the evolutionist theory of Lewis H. Morgan. Marcel Mauss used Durkheim’s segmentary terminology only rarely, and then mainly in the variant “polysegmentaires”. It is astonishing that Meyer Fortes and Evans-Pritchard do not make any reference to this classic foundation of sociological theory. Can we just explain this by a shortage of paper allotments during war time? I think rather that they did not want to be associated with Durkheim’s evolutionist bias. Only in 1956 Evans-Pritchard mentions Durkheim twice in his *Nuer Religion*. But it remains highly problematic that their use of the term segmentary society misses profoundly the intention of its original creator.

It is evident, that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard utilised the term segmentary society on the foundations laid by Durkheim but not obeying his rather pedantic classification. It is not because of the historical priority that I try this epistemological regression. The organisational patterns of segmentary society play a focal role in Durkheim’s sociological theory. First, in the evolutionary perspective: as “protoplasm social”, the basic pattern of sociality, as a spring of different social types. The kind of solidarity attached to the segmentary society does not totally vanish in the course of history though its importance is shrinking in favour of organic solidarity as an effect of the growing division of labour. Nevertheless, segmentary patterns like the emboîtements (interlockings) of homogeneous territorial segments in hierarchical pyramids endure until today. Those territorial patterns have not only an integrative function as in the case of subdivisions of a state, they may have a divisive one as in the case of “internal” or external frontiers.

The conception of mechanical solidarity exhibits a certain affinity to Ibn Khaldun’s *‘asabîyah* analysed in his *muqaddima*² though I should say that Ibn Khaldun is arguing much more sociologically, whereas Durkheim’s understanding of mechanical solidarity is obscured by prejudicial

² Ibn Chaldun, *muqaddima*.

psychological assumptions on “primitive man”. The affinity exists too concerning the corresponding social types. The rural population, particularly the nomads, are segmentary whereas the city is defined as a network of divided economic tasks which of course does not exclude the division of labour between city and country side.

I do not want to elaborate my criticism too largely but I cannot but hint to the astonishing fact that neither in *APS* nor in the corresponding monographs published by the editors any bibliographical annotation is made paying tribute to Durkheim’s theoretical foundation. This gap can only partially be explained by Evans-Pritchard’s later harsh and even scornful criticism of the “Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse” which is on the other side mitigated by his article on the Durkheimian³ school of the *Année Sociologique*.

It was only in 1954 that J. Barnes made a reference to Durkheim’s terminology: “The published studies of segmentary political systems have taken a long way on from Durkheim’s first introduction of the term ‘segmentaire’ some fifty years ago” (1954: 211). This annex to his *Politics in a Changing Society*, a book devoted to a centralised society, discerned “Seven Types of Segmentation” and observed: “It is now clear that segmentation is a social process occurring widely both in primitive states and in stateless societies” (*ibid.*). In the same year Edmund R. Leach wrote on the “regrouping of segmentary elements” among the Kachin (1954: 87). In 1956, Aidan W. Southall in his famous monograph *Alur Society* not only quoted Durkheim’s definition of “segmentary society” (*id.*, 86 n. 19) but developed his own conception of “segmentary structure” and “segmentary system”.

Finally in 1958, the editors of *Tribes without Rulers*, Middleton and Tait make a reference to Durkheim’s book of 1893 in a foot note (8 n. 1) where they try to stress the difference of their usage of “segmentary”. But this is indicated, in a way which is not convincing; the more so since they do not consider Durkheim’s precisions in the “*Règles*”.

It is understandable that the editors of *APS* did not want to use Durkheim’s circumstantial terminology which would have obliged them to use the term of polysegmentary societies. The problem is not the formal simplification of the term but the restriction of its meaning.

³ Cf. Evans-Pritchard, *History of Anthropological Thought*.

Adam Kuper pronounced in 1973 a decisive ethnographic as well as political implication of the *APS* typology: “The editors particularly emphasized the segmentary lineage system, one effect of African Political Systems was to divert attention from the many stateless political systems in Africa which were not organised in terms of kinship or lineage” (1973: 109).

The typology of *APS* cannot be maintained. But this statement does not deny the validity of the classical studies. We are neither obliged to follow slavishly Durkheim’s specifications. So we should continue to label societies like Tallensi, Nuer and Tiv as segmentary societies or more precisely as segmentary lineage societies according to the terminology proposed by Middleton and Tait in *Tribes without Rulers* (1958).

My proposal does not change the established however disputed terminological labelling of societies like Nuer and Tallensi. But it enlarges the content of the core concept. That means we have to reopen the conception “downwards”, including societies not framed by UDG and even to the low integrative level of bands. We should remember that Lewis Henry Morgan analysed the processes of composition and decomposition of social units among the Iroquois by using the term of bands. I do not think that it is advisable to limit the term segmentary society to a certain “stage” of production.

By this proposition we follow the critical option for the de-regionalisation of the *APS*-conception. It is only logical that by this decision we can include the anthropological analysis of Lewis Henry Morgan, of course without adopting his falsified evolutionist hypotheses. Since his paradigmatic North America example, the Iroquois “nations”, have been marked by an emphasis on gender equivalence/ equality of the sexes this “opening” strengthens the emphasis on the egalitarian profile of segmentary societies which in the *APS* sample is rather weak in this respect.

The decisive criterion in defining segmentary societies is the absence of a political centre which we define by executive power commanding the use of physical power by way of delegation.⁴ So segmentary society must not be confounded even with “inchoate states” (Claessen and Skálnik).

⁴ Cf. Weber, „Zentralgewalt“, in: *id.*, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 613f., and Geiger, „Zentralinstanz“, in: *id.*, *Vorstudien zu einer Soziologie des Rechts, passim*.

In his contribution to *APS* Evans-Pritchard wrote a remarkable sentence on the Nuer: “their construction is representative of East-Africa and (...) it provides us with an extreme political type” (1940: 271). He sharpens this profile by using the term of “anarchic kinship state” (*ibid.*).

These quotations may illustrate the degree of consciousness of the political implications of the analysis that he and Meyer Fortes realised.

As a typical specimen of the conception of segmentary societies I might present Fortes’ short structural analysis of the Tallensi in his *Dynamics of clanship among the Tallensi* (1945): “Among the Tallensi there is no single person or body of persons vested with supreme executive and administrative authority over the whole of Taleland. Government is laterally distributed amongst all the corporate units that make up the society, instead of being vertically distributed as in pyramidal societies. All the corporate units are (...) politically equal; all are segments of the same structural order” (231). This conception includes further implications: “the corporate units that compose Tale society are not a casual agglomerate of discrete bodies, but are socially articulated and interconnected with one another; and they are thus interrelated in a segmentary series.” (*ibid.*)

The actual interest in the UDG based segmentary society was founded in the identification of societies which were comparable in territorial and demographic size to “primitive states” which were submitted to indirect rule.

The *APS*-editors’ intention was to demonstrate the integrative capacities of chiefless, noncentralised structures, essentially framed by UDG which were correlated directly or by crosscutting-mechanisms to territorial segments.

The internal order of these societies is regulated by the principle of equivalence of genealogical segments. Structural equivalence implies political equality. This structural order should be adequately appreciated by the colonial administration by avoiding the uniform treatment of centralised and segmentary societies.

It is inherent in the constituent structures and the functional mechanisms that this social order can best be demonstrated by the complex of processes subsumed under the conceptions of segmentation and segmentary dynamics.

The editors of *APS* analyse segmentary societies under two linked aspects: as social structures and as social processes, we can even say as segmentary processes.

Social structures are conceived as genealogical charters and as corporate groups. These social structures are reproduced by segmentary processes, i.e. segmentation by ramification, fusion and fission.

As I remarked in my “*Regulierte Anarchie*” (1967) it is crucial to identify the absence of a central power which might stop or divert segmentation.

Middleton and Tait resumed in 1958 the specific traits of segmentary societies:

“The term ‘segmentary’ has been used in reference to several types of social systems, but the essential features are the ‘nesting’ attribute of segmentary series and the characteristic of being in a state of continual segmentation and complementary opposition.” (1958: 7)

Social cooperation as social conflict are determined to a large extent by the genealogical status of individuals as members of corporate groups. Segmentary opposition of genealogical segments is determined by the genealogical distance of the individuals involved. The range of jural and political conflicts is regulated by the principle of structural equivalence: in the end there is a confrontation of two blocks of equal strength. Under particular circumstances there arises a constellation where a genealogical group can act as go-between.

The segmentary relativity of conflict may best be illustrated by a Pashtun poem: “It is the highest delight in a man’s life to lie side by side with his cousin (*tr bur*) with whom he has had much trouble, in the same bunker and to snipe at the common enemy.” This view is not restricted to individuals but extends to the segmentary cooperation and confrontation of whole segments and even peoples.

2. A short note on the relevance of Morgan’s contribution

Already in 1878 in *Ancient Society*, Louis Henry Morgan had applied the term “segmentation” on American Indians: “The large number of independent tribes into which they had fallen by the natural process of segmentation, is the striking characteristic of their condition” (*id.*, 102). On the following page he speaks of “perpetual segmentation”. In his *Division du travail social* (1893) Durkheim refers himself particularly to the pages 62–

122 of *Ancient Society*, where the term segmentation has been used (1893: 150 n. 1). To me a direct terminological influence appears as evident.

It was unfortunate that Lewis Henry Morgan's contribution to political anthropology⁵ was neglected by Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes because of his evolutionist dogmatism.⁶ Otherwise the agnatic bias could have been avoided and the theories of egalitarianism in segmentary societies much better illustrated because of gender equality among tribes like the Iroquois. Those Iroquois societies studied by Morgan should be considered as the matrilinear counterparts of the patrilinear UDG based societies which were presented as prototypes of segmentary societies in *APS*.

Morgan's characterisation of the social system and the basic values of the Iroquois corresponds closely to the profile of the segmentary societies presented in *APS*. This assertion can be demonstrated by the perception of Iroquois "gentile institutions" in Morgan's *Ancient Society*: "Their governments were essentially democratic because the principles on which the gens, phratry and tribe were organised were democratical. This last proportion, though contrary to received opinions, is historically important" (1878: 67).

These institutions were based on principles which had been realised many epochs ago before they were proclaimed as principles of the *révolution des citoyens*:

"All the members of an Iroquois gens were personally free, and they were equal in privileges and in personal rights, the sachem and chiefs claiming no superiority; and they were a brotherhood bound by the ties of kin. Liberty, equality and fraternity, though never formulated, were cardinal principles of the gens." (*ibid.*, 85)

Morgan underlines the absence of permanent central authorities which must not be obscured by aspects of titulations notwithstanding the representation of some Iroquois tribes by their sachems:

"In the language of some of the early writers they have been designated as kings, which is simply a caricature. The Indian tribes had not advanced far enough in a knowledge of government to develop the idea of a chief

⁵ I am well conscious of the paradox to apply this term in the context of Morgan's Iroquois studies.

⁶ This statement is valid notwithstanding Fortes' later publication *Kinship and the social order. The Legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan*. It is important to note that his Morgan Lectures treat primarily kinship and not political organisation. On the other hand, it seems significant that Evans-Pritchard did not devote a chapter to Morgan in his *History of Anthropological Thought*.

executive magistrate. The Iroquois tribe recognised no head – chief, and the confederacy no executive officer. The elective tenure of the office of chief and the liability of the person to disposition, settle the character of the office.” (*ibid.*, 119)

To resume this part on the origin and evolution of the conception of segmentary societies we should subscribe to this “negative distinction” of non-centralised societies. Grosso modo we have two main types of societies: segmentary and centralised societies.

The solution proposed by *APS* to subsume segmentary societies of their definition with other non-centralised societies under the term of acephalous societies is not recommendable due to the colonial bias of this term: early assertions by missionaries and other writers that the African continent was populated by literally “acephalous” beings should exclude the analytic use of this word. A valid typology of segmentary societies is yet missing.⁷

Returning to Morgan’s evaluation of the Iroquois political system I am obliged to hint at the above mentioned evolutionist bias of this important researcher. First he claims: “Political society was still impossible from want of advancement” (*ibid.*, 120). This quotation demonstrates the merging of the terms of evolution and progress.

Analytically Morgan’s terminology is based on a restricted meaning of “politics”:

“It is impossible to found a political society or a state upon gentes. A state must rest upon territory and not upon persons, upon township as the unit of a political system, and not upon the gens which is the unit of a social system.” (121) Thomas Wagner’s dissertation *Irokesen und Demokratie* (2003) shows to the contrary that the Iroquois “nations” deployed high political competence in their “forest diplomacy” with the white settlers’ organisations; beyond this their discussions with important “politicians” had a considerable impact on the debates of the Constitution of the United States to be created.

At least, Morgan does not base his statement on racist prejudices: “The Iroquois were a rigorous and intelligent people, with a brain approaching in volume the Aryan average.” (149)

⁷ As a consequence I myself negate my own typology of acephalous societies which follows Eisenstadt’s proposal (Sigrist, *Regulierte Anarchie*, 59).

Nevertheless, in spite of his open-mindedness concerning the virtues of the Iroquois, Morgan was convinced that the Iroquois had no alternative option than the assimilation to the dominant society. Philanthropic engagement was just aiming at alleviating this painful process.

3. The emergence of centralised societies

In contrast to Morgan's evolutionist conception of "political society" Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes do not deny the political quality of segmentary societies thereby contributing essentially to the evolution of comparative political anthropology.

They differ from Morgan by their criticism of the evolutionist alleged incapability of segmentary societies to evolve centralised political institutions. Their line of argumentation is functionalist: segmentary societies do not evolve hierarchical political institutions because they do not "need" them. At the same time they are documenting the mechanisms preventing the centralisation of "anarchic" societies which in 1999 the German sociologists Haude and Wagner⁸ have subsumed under the term of "inhibiting and preventing institutions".

Certainly, Evans-Pritchard's and Meyer Fortes' studies on anarchic societies are not an anarchist project to verify political value fixations. For this you do not need so much empirical field work.

On the contrary: By the insights the monographs are providing we get a better understanding of the fundamental change inherent to political centralisation. Ex negativo we obtain essential contributions to theories on the state. Segmentary societies of the *APS* type have arrived on the emergence line of state. This is demonstrated e. g. by Southall's analysis of the segmentary state: a chiefly organised society like the Alur agglomerates a segmentary state by personal bonds with other ethnic groups.

The transformation of segmentary lineage societies can be realised in four steps:

First: internal centralisation, the formation of an executive power, a permanent chief.

Second: the integration of adjacent segmentary societies.

⁸ Haude/Wagner, *Herrschaftsfreie Institutionen*.

Third: the territorial expansion by military means leading to subjugation of other ethnic groups by ethnic superposition.

Fourth: the inclusion of cities into the dominated area.

Certainly, this is only one scheme of state formation. A complex theory has to analyse above all the emergence of cities and their growth into hegemonial symmachies or veritable territorial states like Assyria. But at least for the early Greek cities of the 'dark centuries' we can assume that they were founded by phyle or federated phratries (Funke, 1992), sometimes forcing villagers into the *synoikismos* (Burckhardt, 2002: 43).

According to Harald Haarmann (2002) urbanisation took place in the regions north of the Black Sea without changing the egalitarian structures of the ethnic groups living there. What is even more interesting is the fact that scriptures evolved in the Danubian civilisations and can be dated around 5500 B.C. This implicates not only a revision of chronology, but also a fundamental break with the conventional identification of the origins of scriptures with centralised societies in Mesopotamia and in Egypt. At the same time these historical facts document the potential of segmentary societies even before they cross the centralisation line.

On the base of this analysis of segmentary societies the history of the last six thousand years appears as a "progressive" increase in the scale of centralisation. The breakdown of states and particularly of empires does not constitute a definite end of this process. Reductions of the degree of centralisation do occur, but up to now the total amount of centralisation has increased.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not totally abolish, only change the class character of economic centralisation; the centralisation of the republics constituting the former Soviet Union has been increasing. Above all the decay of economic and military power of the Russian core state has left only one super power on the globe. Without doubt this constitutes an enormous step in the hegemonical global centralisation. But there remain questions concerning the limits of this power expansion. At any rate, it is not adequate to label the precarious hegemony as an "Imperium". A parallel process goes on in the domain of capital which Karl Marx had labelled as the concentration and centralisation of capital; under the constellation of globalisation strong economic decision centres are absorbing and subordinating the less potent ones.

4. *Concluding comments*

My own contribution to the subject has been the critical reception of the studies on segmentary societies and of their theoretical approach and the presentation of the results to the German ethnologists and sociologists. Since nearly all schools of “Völkerkunde” and “Ethnologie” were tainted by colonialist and racist tendencies during the Third Reich the restauration of these disciplines was impregnated by naive or affected distance to politically relevant themes.⁹ So it incumbered to me, by formation a historian and sociologist, to try the ambitious project to present the results of the “British School” of social anthropology to the German scientific community. Having had no field research experience I could realise the project only due to the high quality of the monographs on segmentary societies.¹⁰

The authors of the basic monographs had started with motivational research orientations as I myself did later: explaining the “functioning” of anarchical societies and the origin of the state. But in the logic of their research process they objectivated their original interests to a large intent. The emphasis of research projects changed from comparative political anthropology to highly specialised debates on filiation, descent and genealogical structures.

For myself the elaboration of politically relevant mental attitudes and rituals became more important than the functionalist explanations. So it was not by chance that I published my book under the title *Regulierte Anarchie*¹¹ in the intention to use the discoveries of political anthropology as a potential for a non-Eurocentric theory of democracy.

Concluding this theoretical part, I should indicate a new perspective opened by Rüdiger Haude’s proposition to analyse segmentary societies as fractal societies. Self-similarity, iteration and scale-invariance are particular traits of segmentary societies which not only permit the analytical reproduction of genealogies, but too of segmentation and segmentary dynamics (Haude/ Wagner 1999: 71–82). Wagner’s contribution on anarchic patterns of settlement and architecture follows the same conception.

⁹ As exceptions I might mention W. E. Mühlmann, who unfortunately was hampered by his project of founding a sociological theory of race, but who analysed historical and actual nativistic and chiliastic movements and the younger members of the Institut für Soziologie and Ethnologie at Heidelberg (E. W. Müller, Lorenz Löffler e. g.).

¹⁰ Only later, in 1966/67, I did realise my own field researches in Afghanistan, particularly in the province of Paktia. After several short stages in Guiné-Bissau I directed in the years 1986–1989 an empirical project on different agrarian societies in the province of Quinara (Guiné-Bissau).

¹¹ A term created by Max Weber and later used by Evans-Pritchard.

Finally, segmentary societies constitute an excellent basis for studies on the functioning of autopoietic systems.

5. The non-disappearance and the actual relevance of segmentary societies

The speculations that segmentary societies will completely disappear in favour of more “progressive” ones have been refuted by the course of history. In a general way, we have to state that segmentary societies continue to function according to their structural principles even if they are juridically and administratively integrated in a colonial or post-colonial state. This statement does not underestimate the high vulnerability of these societies and the historical fact of multiple geno- or at least ethnocides, particularly in the Americas.

But on the other side we can prove that ignorance of the cultures of segmentary societies has paved the way to doom for many seemingly strong powers.

5.1 The case of Guiné-Bissau

The Guinean Coast was the first object of early European expansion. The Portuguese established their first “factory” in Cacheu and later at other easily accessible places of what finally was labelled as Guinea Portuguesa. The coast and its hinterland was among the most important slave hunting grounds and trading markets which formed the basis of the triangle trade.

The scientific exploration of Guiné-Bissau by Portuguese colonial writers was at a minimum level. On the cooperating ethnic groups, centralized societies like the Fula or Mandinga, there were at least published some monographs. But the main ethnic group, the Balante, a segmentary society, was not empirically studied by Portuguese scholars. It was just the Austrian Hugo Bernatzik who gave some ethnographic details on Balante in his *Aethiopien des Westens* (1933). The Balante together with peoples of the Bijagos Islands had maintained their resistance against the Portuguese up to the thirties of the last century. Even today access to Balante culture is highly difficult. There exists e. g. a lethal ban on the divulgation of the secrets of male initiation rites. This is all the more important as age-classes constitute the focal structure in the division of labour and attribution of social authority.

In a colony gravely neglected by the colonial power, the Balante, though being the most numerous ethnic group, were the most neglected. It was a creole agrarian engineer, Amilcar Cabral,¹² who discovered the high resistance potential of the chiefless Balante after having tried in vain to come to terms with the arrogant Fula chiefs. Cabral gained the confidence of the Balantes' allies, the Beafada. They are a matrilinear ethnic group who have been islamised by Mandinga imams. The Portuguese classified them as cooperative; but the Beafada turned the rifles handed over by the Portuguese against the colonial government (Febr. 1963). The Portuguese had not understood that the corvées imposed on the Beafadas were resented as a great humiliation by them; the labourers who were forced to construct a road had to organise food and beverage by their own families: a tremendous negligence which was so strongly resented that it can be interpreted as one of the important motivations to wage the armed struggle in 1963.

Amilcar Cabral was one of the few African leaders and at any rate the most important to use the insights achieved by the British anthropologists. In his analysis of the Guinean social structure (1975) he follows the sharp differentiation between chiefless and centralised societies which he equates with two different political types of societies: horizontal and vertical societies.

Cabral based his political and military strategy on this focal distinction. After first having been deceived by the selfish pretensions of chiefs ruling centralised and islamic societies he identified a higher degree of commitment to the cause of liberation from colonial rule among the chiefless segmentary societies. Particularly the Balante had already strongly resisted the slave raids in the early colonial phase; even among those who were captured there were many who preferred suicide to deportation; for this reason the prices paid for Balante slaves were particularly low.

That high resistance capacity joined with the technical and organisational qualifications of the urban cadres of the PAIGC was the basis of the victory over the Portuguese army, though the colonialists were heavily backed by Nato and South Africa, which finally led to the "pink revo-

¹² Amilcar Cabral (1924–1973) was the son of a Capverdian teacher and a Guinean mother. Though he accomplished his high school and university studies first in Cabo Verde and afterwards in Lisbon, he returned to his Guinean origins, first as an agronomist in the colonial service, finally breaking with the inflexible colonial power and turning himself into the founder of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guiné and Cabo Verde).

lution” of 1974 and the total breakdown of Portuguese colonial domination in Africa and beyond this contributed to accelerate the doom of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

In spite of their historical achievement the Balante continued to be “neglected” after the PAIGC’s final victory.¹³ The creole cadres monopolised state power whereas the Balante who had been the main “physical force” (Amilcar Cabral) of the guerilla struggle had nearly no access to power positions; the development projects offered to them were failures; and above all the planned economy had nothing to offer to these highly productive paddy cultivators.¹⁴

In November 1980 there was a reaction to the mismanagement of the urban elite: the military hero of the anticolonial struggle, Bernardo “Nino” Vieira deposed President Luis Cabral and proclaimed himself President.¹⁵ He based his power mainly on an alliance with Mandinga and Fula officers and politicians. At the same time he prosecuted the protest movement among the Balante and insisted in 1986 on the execution of Paulo Correia, the most prominent Balante representative.

In 1998 President “Nino” Vieira whose popularity had considerably diminished was ousted by General Ansumane Mané who was able to repel the intervening Senegalese army who tried to reinstate their ally “Nino”. In 2000 Kumba Yala, the leader of the Balante protest movement, was elected President. This excentric politician enforced a “balantisation” of the army and the administration in general, in the end to the detriment of the Balante cause. The Balante have been following an ethnicist policy as compensation for their long lasting exclusion, which had undermined the hitherto achieved foundation of national unity and risking by this way a reversal by an alliance of the urban milieus and ethnic groups. This shows the negative effects of a lack of political experience at the state level. In 2003 Kumba Yala was deposed and the quarrels among the military are continuing.

This short account shows on the one hand the historical role segmentary societies can play and on the other hand their disadvantage in earning the fruits of their engagement.

¹³ The murder of Amilcar Cabral in 1973 certainly contributed to this fatal tendency.

¹⁴ Cf. Schiefer, *Guinea-Bissau*.

¹⁵ The resentments against the Capeverdean cadres was one of the potent motives, underlying this coup d’Etat.

Another highly interesting process in the milieu of segmentary societies occurred in this country. The already mentioned Beafada had made their peace with the Portuguese at the end of the colonial penetration of Guiné and in consequence the go-between the ethnic groups and the colonial administration, a traditional “regulo” gained political power. The ambivalent treatment which the Portuguese accorded to him was one reason for his family’s alienation from the colonialists. Finally the regulo’s sons turned the guns furnished by the Portuguese against them. The regulo, Bula Djassi, was held in great esteem by his tribesmen. But after his death in 1989, the assembly of the Beafada *homens grandes* decided, in accordance with his own close relatives, not to prolongate the institution of a regulo with attributes of central authority – an exemplary case of the reduction of power.¹⁶

5.2 *The case of the Pashtuns*

At least since Fredrik Barth’s famous publication on *Political leadership among Swat Pathans* (1959) it has been demonstrated that the theory of segmentary societies has been definitely deregionalised from its original ethno-geographic context. This holds true though those Yusufzai-Pashtuns who had migrated from the Kandahar region to the Swat Valley had superseded an autochthonous population who had to work for them on occupied lands.

The Pashtuns can be estimated to be among the numerically strongest segmentary societies in the world (about 8 Mio living in Afghanistan, considerably more in Pakistan) who have maintained their ethnic coherence inspite of the Durand Line imposed in 1893 by the British, a fateful act of ethnotomy.

The ethnogenesis of this macro-ethnic group has not been clarified. The same holds true of the division between nomads and sedentary peasants.

Suffice it to say, that a tribe formerly living mainly as nomads like the Ghilzai have been forced to turn more and more to a sedentary mode of

¹⁶ Besides the already mentioned Bernatzik’s Travel Report there are to be consulted: Cabral, *L’arme de la théorie*; Rudebeck, *Guiné-Bissau*; Sigrist, “Sistemas políticos acéfalos e libertação nacional”; Handem Lima, *Nature et fonctionnement du pouvoir chez les balanta brassa*; Schiefer, *Guinea-Bissau*.

living.¹⁷ But even today the same tribe follows the two modes of rural life. Professional endogamous groups like the Dom are castes, which Durkheim had interpreted as a form of transition from the segmentary order to a functional order determined by the division of labour.

The Pashtuns perceive themselves as one *qaum* divided into several big patrilineal tribal groupings, linked by more or less fictitious genealogical ties which in general reflect at least topographical nearness. In principle, the tribes were not centralised, but represented by khans whereas the essential decisions were taken by *jirgahs*.

The normative code, the Pashtunwali, is based on the central value of *namuz*, honour, which is focussed on defending the honour of the women who at the same time are subjugated by a rigid patriarchal regime, which requires from men a high performance of *ghaighat*, bravery, to defend women, houses and land. At the same time the position of women among herdsmen is much better; they even use guns to protect the herds.

We have to consider Afghanistan as an “*espace politique*” (Jean-Louis Amselle, 1990). Considered in this perspective the segmentary societies constitute parts of a segmentary ensemble which includes cities, particularly a capital, peasants and herdsmen. Pashtun and Baluch are no isolated nomads but linked to other ethnic groups like Usbeks and Turkmen, whereas the Tajik do not constitute an ethnic entity but a highly heterogeneous language community favouring the trade centres. The nomads in turn, not only sell their products to urban and peasant populations but are among the main trading groups. Particularly, after the loss of large parts of their herds they changed to modern transportation vehicles (lorries, busses, taxis).

The Pashtuns share the egalitarian attitudes of segmentary societies. The levelling effects of envy can be illustrated by the concerns formulated by a teacher at the German Gewerbeschule at Khost. Having confirmed that at marriage ceremonies up to 200 persons are assembling and that the cooking activities rotate among several families he added that he himself could not participate in those meals because he feared being poisoned. Why?

¹⁷ The controversy on the Afghan claim of a Free Pashtunistan across the Durand Line as well as the modernisation project of the Afghan State have decisively contributed to this decline of nomadism.

“People are saying that he is our *tr bur*, he started as our peer, but now he is elevating himself above us.”¹⁸

Another more general phenomena of normative egalitarianism can be demonstrated by the architectonic norms: the walls of neighbouring kalas (peasant ‘castles’) must conform to a general height limit. Neighbouring kalas belong in general to cousins; an attempt to construct higher walls is considered as a “declaration of war”.

One of the major problem of Pashtun identity is the creeping process of loss of usage of Pashtu, particularly in the cities. This had led to confusing constellations during the royal era: on the one hand the Pashtun dynasty proclaimed a policy of promotion of the Pashtu language and culture; on the other hand the urbanised Pashtuns of the second generation had a rather bad Pashtu competence. It was well known that even the royal family conversed in Dari if they did not prefer to speak French.

In the end, Dari-speaking non-Pashtuns complained of Pashtun dominance whereas the tribal Pashtuns conceived themselves as neglected rurals.

In a broader context it seems to be useful to hint at a small but instructive article by Fredrik Barth (1972) in which he compares the sociopolitical patterns of Baluch with that of the Pashtuns. Whereas for these the model for the whole system is the group of brothers (*ibid.*, 460), for the Baluch the relationship between a father and his son is the dominant model. Barth exposes the structural guidelines of Pashtun politics as follows:

There exists “equality between council members” (*ibid.*, 461). Barth continues: “Pathan tribes are well able to act strongly in defence of shared, short-term interests or basic values or in the pursuit of gain, but generally fail to pursue more long-term strategies, or to reach agreement on compromises requiring joint-action” (*ibid.*).

These “egalitarian lineage councils” (*jirgahs*) correspond to a “tribal growth pattern... [which] might be called vegetative, based on natural increase (with a certain loss through individual emigration) and tending toward a ramifying, branching form where local growth is associated with rapid segmentation.” (*ibid.*, 461f.)

¹⁸ The interview was conducted in 1967.

The problem of individual Pashtuns is that they can belong to this social system only as long as they can maintain their fighting qualities, respectively that of other male members of their family. Among the Baluch there a hierarchy of chiefs up to sardars has evolved which permits belonging to the system without the continuous struggle for an honourable status. By this difference Barth tends to explain why in the "Pathan-Baluch boundary" Baluch tribes are able to absorb many Pashtuns who no longer can fulfil their male status obligations.

The paradox of Pashtuns is conditioned by their refusal to be commanded; but this does not exclude their readiness to command others. Pashtuns had already founded in earlier centuries empires in India, though of short duration. Finally, in the 18th century, first the Ghilzai were to found an Afghan monarchy under Mirwais Khan. After the Ghilzai's defeat against the Persian conqueror Nadir Shah, it was the Abdali who crowned Ahmed Shah Durrani in 1747 at Kandahar. He could extend his reign until Delhi. But this did not change the segmentary structures of the Afghan tribes included. The Durrani monarchy was in the tribal belt only a segmentary state.

The segmentary tension inside the Durrani dynasty which exceeded considerably normal family troubles in combination with the striving for independent policies by the Pashtun tribes were the final cause of the doom of the Empire founded by Ahmed Shah Durrani.

The British were aware of these internal segmentary processes. Using first the Sikh to destroy the Afghan monarchy in the Indus plains they afterwards even tried to annex the remaining Afghan emirate of Kabul to their Indian crown colony. After having even occupied the city of Kabul they suffered a horrible defeat in 1841/42. After the second Afghan-British war in 1878/79 they were able to establish a protectorate which was ended by the third war in 1919 successfully conducted by Shah Amanullah.

Amanullah's ambitious project of modernising Afghanistan by moulding it on European (Kemalist) patterns, became a failure: the violation of patriarchal traditions, the attempt to transform Afghanistan into a centralised state involving heavy expenditures and menacing the autonomy of the segmentary societies forced him in 1929 to flee from Kandahar into a permanent exile. It is true, that British agents supported the combined attacks of a Tajik band leader, mullahs and revolting tribes. But the "king-bandit" Bacha-e-Saquo was eliminated in his turn by the Durrani Nader

supported by the Pashtun tribes. These episodes demonstrate the force of the centripetal tribal forces and their military potential.

In the context of this contribution it would lead too far to give even an outline of the following political stagnation and the new attempt of modernisation under prince Daud, followed by the failure of the constitutional reforms under Premier Yussuf. But in view of actual relevance of segmentary societies it is focal to emphasise the enormous resistance potential which the Afghans as a nation deployed first against the usurpators of the so-called Saur-Revolution of 27th April 1978 and with even more energy and readiness of sacrifice after the Soviet invasion (27th December 1979). In this national liberation struggle all the ethnic groups engaged themselves.¹⁹

The Afghans, particularly the Pashtuns and the Panjiri, were the first since World War II to inflict decisive defeats to the Soviet Army and so to destroy the image of superiority of the Soviet military. It is not just by chance that the retreat of the Soviet “contingent” and the fall of the Berlin Wall occurred in the same year of 1989.

In order to avoid misunderstandings it is important to note that many urban people emigrated and considerable parts joined the antisoviet resistance in the country. But the main burden of struggle was imposed on the rural populations whose villages were in some regions totally devastated whereas Kabul was only destroyed by the rivalry of the Mujaheddin parties after 1992.

For the role played by Pashtuns in the establishment of the Taliban regime and the ensuing developments which lead to the attacks of 11th September 2001 and the “war against terrorism” I am obliged to Ahmed Rashid *Taliban* (2000) refer to Said Musa Samimy’s book *Afghanistan – Tragödie ohne Ende?* (2003).²⁰

¹⁹ Some restrictions in this respect could be noted among the Baluch, whereas the nomads because of the vulnerability of their herds tried to keep themselves out of the conflict.

²⁰ This part includes a lot of personal observations. On the Pashtunwali I wrote a concise empirical study in 1967 which was reprinted several times. Concerning the Pashtuns of the Pakistan side of the Durand Line consult besides Barth, *Political leadership; ibid.*, “Ethnic Processes”; Caroé, *Pathans*. For historical and general information on Afghanistan: Elphinstone, *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*; Klimburg, *Afghanistan*; Bucherer-Dietschi/ Jentsch, *Afghanistan*.

6. “Restudies” as important actualisations of classical monographs

Volker Riehl’s three and a half years field work among the Tallensi in the 1980 and Sharon Hutchinson’s several field stages among the Nuer in the 1980 and 1990 can be conceived as convincing validations of the “original” studies undertaken by Meyer Fortes respectively by Evans-Pritchard, at the same time completing ethnographic knowledge and analysing the changes undergone by the “prototype” segmentary societies during the last decades.

6.1 *The Tallensi*

Riehl integrated himself completely into a Tale family, actively participating in rites as well as in agricultural activities, and validated Meyer-Fortes’ analysis in general, refuting the unfounded criticism of Jean-Louis Amselle²¹ by proving that the Paramount Chieftainship of the Namoo had been imposed on them by the British administration and that its ritual competences had been eliminated by the “Real Tale” after independence. In this respect he refutes Meyer Fortes’ rather mystifying interpretation of the ritual complementarity of Paramount Chief and Earth Priest. The most valuable contribution of his dissertation on the Tallensi consists of a detailed analysis of the Great Festival (*golib*), including the first transcription and translation of the accompanying prayers and chants. This festival has become a great regional event at the same time reinforcing the consciousness of the Tallensi ethnic identity.

In a recently published concise article Riehl (2003) has elaborated the importance of amphyktionies like the *golib* for peaceful conflict regulation and fruitful cohesion.

He starts with a general commentary: “A lot of scholarly work has been done on the issue of misled ethnicity being the fatal starting point of the ‘new conflicts’ that have erupted over the past ten years, especially in many areas in Africa. However, it must also be recognized that the overwhelming majority of present intra- and interethnic relationships are of a peaceful and integrative nature. The ‘appealing sensation of brutality’ of the present day does at times alienate us from the ‘tedious normality’ of existing institutional techniques that constantly guarantee a renewal of peaceful integration. We will see that this dynamic procedure is more

²¹ Amselle, *Logiques métisses*, 106.

revolutionary than many of the picturesque pseudo-revolutionary names the contemporary ‘freedom fighters’ have embraced, be it ‘Revolutionary Fronts’ in Sierra Leone, ‘Rally of Democratic Forces’ in the D. R. Congo, and various ‘Liberation Armies’ in South Sudan... The centralised state and other similarly structured political institutions are war-producing agencies” (*ibid.*, 207f.).

For the Tallensi he can resume: “There has never been an extra-ethnic war in order to defeat, subordinate, or occupy a territory that lies outside their ancestral land” (*ibid.*, 208). Against the construction of academic literature on the “fatal impact ethnicity has on the recent escalation of warfare in the marginalised regions of the world” (*ibid.*, 209) he maintained that in reality “by far the majority of ethnic groups in Africa are not engaged in ethnic clashes and violent encounters” (*ibid.*). He continues: “the software for protected peace is founded in the practice of the semi-annual Great Festivals of the Tallensi... The social capital configured in the *golib* operates as ‘glue’ to strengthen the appeasing role of socially active participations even more effectively for sustainable conflict prevention” (*ibid.*). But he has to add: “The ‘ethnic hardware’, their acephalous political system and segmentary social structure may possibly be misused” (*ibid.*).

Riehl has to concede: “Ethnicity as such is *per se* never peaceful or conflict preventable because they react to external forces such as economic injustice and political pressures” (*ibid.*). This fact became evident in the “Northern Ghana Conflicts” of the 1980 and 1990 with some 20000 casualties. He tries to explain these conflicts by the fact that “all the violent Konkomba²² encounters with other ethnic groups since 1981 have been (with the exception of those against the acephalous B’moba) against so-called ‘majority tribes’ with colonially introduced chiefdoms vested with political powers and centralised land ownership” (*ibid.*).

Another case of the misuse of a segmentary society are the Acholi in Northern Uganda who after interventions of Paramount Chiefs were activated as a “war machine” by the “Holy Spirit Movement” under Alice Lakwena (*ibid.*, 217).

Riehl summarises: “It is not absence, but rather a weak formation of state institutions (‘bad governance’) – or even failed states – that lead to

²² A segmentary society not living far away from the Tallensi.

misuse of traditional techniques for violent encounters between ethnic groups or states” (*ibid.*).

The above mentioned disruptive interventions of Paramount Chiefs who represent continuing colonial institutions verify the importance of Evans-Pritchard’s and Meyer Fortes’ analysis of the paradoxical results of indirect rule in two different types of societies, referred at the beginning of my article.

6.2 *The Nuer*

Hutchinson’s monograph *Nuer Dilemmas* presents a manifold and profound analysis of the deep changes the Nuer have undergone since Evans-Pritchard’s field research in the 1930 which was restrained by the shortness of stage (11 months) and the considerably precarious situation under British rule. But Hutchinson’s fascinating monograph demonstrates the validity of the basic results of Evans-Pritchard’s monographs which facilitated their actualisation in reconstructing the dramatic changes after 1956, particularly aggravated during the war periods in Southern Sudan.

She opens her “orientations” with an unambiguous statement “The enduring disciplinary fame of the Nuer of Southern Sudan derives directly from the intellectual virtuosity of their original ethnographer, Sir Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973)” (1996: 21).

The high esteem expressed by Hutchinson for Evans-Pritchard’s research does not mean not to rectify evident errors as for instance his underestimated number of Nuer of that epoch whose population now accounts about 800 000 to 1 million (26).

One of her “principal objectives is to call into question the very idea of the Nuer as a unified ethnic identity” (*ibid.*, 29). In this context “one of the book’s more general aims is to round out the excessively viricentric accounts of Evans-Pritchard in which the point of view of Nuer women was rarely considered or even inquired about” (*ibid.*).

Hutchinson particularly stresses the narrow basis of Evans-Pritchard’s vision of social life among the Nuer which focussed particularly on senior members of aristocratic lineages. “Indeed, Evans-Pritchard’s vision of Nuer life appears at time so unified as to preclude the possibility of ideological struggle among groups within it.” (*ibid.*, 31)

These internal divisions aggravated by the regional wars are one of the guiding themes of this study which elaborates different political options and a high political sensibilisation among the Nuer.

The monograph deals with the various migrations leading to border countries like Eritrea on the one hand, work migration of Nuer men to construction sites at Khartoum on the other.

The author of *Nuer Dilemmas* elaborates a general frame for interpretation of the actual constellation of segmentary societies: vulnerability and resilience. The patterns of adaptation to the changing political systems are highly variable. They range from entering the ranks of administration and even of the armed executive of the Sudan government to those of the Southern rebellion government (SPLA).

Flight migrations, guerrilla warfare and changing alliances constitute a complex survival kit. In a large chapter on “Guns, warfare and the State” the researcher delivers a detailed overview of the changes following the generalised distribution of guns, particularly concerning homicides and the weakening of the position of the earth-chief on the one hand and the doubling of blood compensation for gun-homicides by the SPLA authorities.

It would lead too far to reproduce the richness of socio-economic analyses elaborated by Hutchinson in the second chapter on “Blood, Earth, and Cash: the Commodification of Nuer values” which investigates the far-reaching consequences of the growing importance of money and markets. In difference to the Turkana (cf. Best 1991) the Nuer are selling a part of their cattle to the slaughter house at Khartoum. Another but highly diversified impact on Nuer values and social careers has been exercised by the missions and the growing integration into educational institutions. Among the consequences the partial avoidance of male initiation rites and changes in leadership careers are of particular relevance.

In spite of growing christianisation the importance of prophets who had a leading role in the anti-colonial rebellions is enduring. Irrespective of social differentiation the ancient egalitarian values remain valid, as is documented by one of her interviews with one Juba politician: “We think that everyone should be equal...” (*ibid.*, 283).

At the end, the author complains not only about the deepening “culture of violence” (*ibid.*, 355) but also the fact that the emigrant Nuer have been reduced to “complete dependence on UN food distributions” (*ibid.*, 351).

Since it is impossible to exhaust the richness of this monograph which demonstrates the possibility to use the basic structural interpretation as a valid base for actualising sociological analysis I conclude this paragraph with Sharon Hutchinson’s dedication: “To all ‘black peoples’ of Sudan. May your continuing struggles for justice and equality unite and strengthen you.”

7. Amen

This contribution will be concluded by a short reference to a historically important case: pre-monarchical Israel. Since the end of the 1970 there have been published several books and articles subsuming the Jewish population of the pre-centralised phase under the concept of segmentary societies. Particularly German specialists of the Ancient Testament, Frank Crüsemann (1978) and Rainer Neu (1992), are to be mentioned here. Crüsemann’s *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum. Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat* combined Max Weber’s Study *Das antike Judentum* (1963) with my own reception of the concept of segmentary society and arrived at the conclusion that the ethnogenesis of the Jewish people evolved in the structural forms of patrilinear segmentary societies. Let’s remind that already in 1893 Durkheim in his *Division du travail social* characterized the Jewish tribes as segmentary societies (1978, 154 n. 1). Rainer Albertz speaks of an “antiautoritäre Jahwe-Tradition” (1992: 175).

Moreover Crüsemann analysed in detail the egalitarian and anticentralistic mentality prevailing in these societies. The establishment of a permanent executive power was strongly rejected. And even during the monarchical era of David and Salomo there were strong criticisms and opposition movements which, advocated by prophets, cause aggravation during the rule of the following kings after the separation of the North (Israel) from the South (Juda). Recent analyses suggest even that David’s “kingdom” was no more than a military chieftainship controlling several villages around Jerusalem and that the elaborate picture of the magnificent palaces of Salomo’s monarchy praised in the first Book of Kings has been falsified by recent archaeological researches. This holds true even if one does not

follow the radical interpretation of the “minimalists” who even deny the historical existence of David and Salomo.²³

The egalitarian and antiauthoritarian traditions were founded in the “segmentary period” of the Jewish ethnogenesis and have persisted during the periods of exile.

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²³ Cf. Finkelstein/ Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*.

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