Functionalist interpretations of primitive warfare.

[1973]

C. R. Hallpike

Warfare has never received the attention from anthropologists which is its due. One can only suppose that its obvious characteristics of death, chaos, and destruction are a theoretical embarrassment to a discipline which has tended to believe that human societies are functionally integrated systems, well adapted to their environments. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that when anthropologists have had to explain warfare, they have expended considerable ingenuity in demonstrating that, contrary to appearances, warfare may indeed be socially beneficial. I have elsewhere (Hallpike 1972:331) described this belief as similar to the assertion that dry-rot is structurally beneficial to a house because it induces the owner to repair it. It is therefore the object of this article to examine the validity of functionalist explanations of primitive warfare.

The functionalist analysis of warfare has been given new prominence by the work of ecological theorists such as Vayda. Vayda defines the 'function' of anything as 'the contribution that it makes to keeping or restoring some property or variable of a system within a certain range of states or values' (Vayda 1968a:102). Collins amplifies the nature of what he calls functional systems as follows 'A functional system is characterized by what are known, in popular engineering terminology, as "feedback" mechanisms' (Collins 1965:273). And he goes on to say that 'Biological phenomena, of course, abound in systems that exemplify relations such as those described above' (Collins 1965:273) and he lists the temperature-maintaining system of the human body, and the systems which maintain the blood-sugar level, and the red blood-cell level. Vayda and Leeds, moreover, in their preface to the book in which Collins's paper appears talk of the 'possibility and. also the fruitfulness of functionalist analyses concerned not only with the interrelation of sociological variables but also with the operation of mechanisms maintaining environmental variables at values *conducive to the survival or expansion of human populations'* (Leeds & Vayda 1965: iv; my emphasis).

So far, then, this seems to be the traditional functionalist recipe for the explanation of cultural traits, but which includes the extra item of 'environmental variables'. It turns

out, however, that this new type of functionalism claims that it is not really trying to explain the existence of traits such as warfare at all, but merely how, having come into existence, they operate. 'In short, functional analysis as here conceived explains behaviour, or the operation of systems, not the presence of traits' (Collins 1965:277), and he continues ' For example, although Sweet is certainly concerned to provide an accurate description of the Bedouin institution of camel raiding, she makes no effort to explain its presence in the Bedouin cultural repertory' (Collins 1965:277). Vayda has also stated that in his view the purpose of functional analysis is not to explain the presence of traits, but to show how systems work, e.g. in his Foreword to Rappaport's *Pigs for the Ancestors* he states that the object of the analysis is a 'demonstration of how things work rather than an explanation of why they exist or how they have come to be' (Vayda 1968b: x).

The kind of functionalist analysis proposed by Vayda and the other ecological functionalists seems therefore to be trapped between two equally uncomfortable alternatives. The first is to analyse the actual working of interrelated systems of variables within a society, without any claim that this either explains their existence, or has any predictive value about their possible development. This procedure, while no doubt of academic interest to cybernetic specialists will be, in relation to our primary task of explaining social institutions, pretty trivial stuff even though it will be immune to the usual arguments against functionalism. The other alternative is to take the view that these functional systems are indeed likely to be relevant to the survival of societies, because the mechanisms concerned maintain 'environmental variables at values conducive to the survival or expansion of human populations'. Once it is conceded, however, that functional systems such as warfare have environmental consequences relevant to the society's survival, it is obvious that natural selection may be responsible for their presence. If this is so, then the ecological theorists will be able to claim that their analyses *do* have explanatory power but their claims will then become vulnerable to the usual arguments against functionalism. In this article I have therefore thought it profitable to see whether it can be shown that the kinds of ecological effects claimed by Vayda do in fact result from warfare, and, if so, if these consequences have any capacity to explain warfare.

Our enquiry is further confused by the ambiguity which sometimes exists between the concepts of 'function' and 'adaptation'. Ideally, we might be in-

clined to distinguish a 'functional' custom as one which helped to maintain some system of relationships within a society, and an 'adaptive' custom as one which contributed to the survival of the society in its natural or human environments. Thus, a custom which was functional, in so far as it contributed to the maintenance of a system of relationships within a society, could also be maladaptive, and contrarily, an adaptive custom might be dysfunctional. A good example of the contribution of warfare to the maintenance of a social system is provided by Krapf-Askari's analysis of the Nzakara, the immediate neighbours of the Azande.

Here warfare was the source of female captives, given as wives by the ruling clan to maintain its dominant position.

The Bandia [the ruling clan], having entered Nzakara society as a small group of foreign conquerors, felt the need on the morrow of their conquest to reward the southern clans who had supported them in their campaigns, as well to make themselves popular with the bulk of the population. (de Dampierre 1967:294). In order to do this, they took over the old lineage head's role of wife-givers: not wife-givers to their own Bandia clan alone, but to the population at large…For, in their new role of universal wife-givers, the Bandia of course needed very much larger 'hands' of women than the old lineage heads had done. The solution was to acquire women elsewhere by capture (ibid., 294); and Dampierre notes that commoner Nzakara appear to have fulfilled their military obligations willingly enough: the supply of wives depended on the frequency and success of raids on neighbouring people…Once instituted, the system became self perpetuating…(Krapf-Askari 1972:26-7).

Whether such warfare could meaningfully be said to be adaptive for Nzakara society as such is another matter, however. In the course of this article it will therefore be necessary to use the word 'function' in a very general sense, to include the notions of 'beneficial' and 'adaptive'.

<div align="center">*   *   *   *   *</div>

Functional theories of warfare make some or all of the following assumptions about human society and its relations with the natural and the human environments.

1. Societies are unambiguously definable in extent.

2. They are integrated systems which have needs or basic conditions for successful functioning, and these can be objectively specified so that one can define the minimum requirements of social harmony.

3. Societies compete with one another, and with the natural environment.

4. There will thus be a tendency for every society to be in a state of adaptation to its natural and human environment.

Let us consider these assumptions in turn. First of all, is it true that societies are

unambiguously definable in extent ? (We may refer to this as 'the Boundary Problem').

To define a 'society' is very much harder than defining the rabbit population of a particular warren – and even biologists, if I am correct, have problems in specifying the particular animal populations they are studying. My recent fieldwork among the Tauade of Papua showed clearly that while they spoke mutually intelligible dialects of the same language, had similar social organisation, and had most customs in common, they did not thereby feel any special unity over against other groups with different languages and customs, such as the Fuyughe and Kunimaipa, and never faced these groups collectively in battle. Indeed, on the borders of these groups much peaceful intermarriage and social intercourse took place. In such a situation one local group overlaps another in composition of members, and this next group overlaps another, and so on, so that a chaining effect is produced, and over distance the nature of the society slowly changes in language and customs so that it has no clear boundary.

In what respect therefore are we justified in calling the Tauade speakers a 'society'? In so far as there is high mobility between each local tribe (numbering about 150-250 on average) and its neighbours, much intermarriage between these local tribes, and many mutual invitations to dances and feasts, we would be immediately inclined to say that they did form a society, even though it is fuzzy about the edges. But this does not imply that inter-tribal relations were traditionally friendly. Warfare was endemic, alliances fluctuated between friendship and enmity, and cannibalism and mutilation were favourite devices for dishonouring the bodies of enemy dead. If we are to accept that a normal state of friendship between groups defines them as a single society, then clearly the Tauade do not constitute a single society. Yet among the Tauade even tribes are split by violence and disputes, which sometimes have a higher incidence *within* tribes than between them. Nor are they in any way unique, and are comparable to the Nuer, Somali, and many other peoples whose feuding and internal violence is described in the literature. In such situations, therefore, we must either conclude that they have no society, or that they have a very anarchical one, which besides being anarchical, has no clear boundaries, either in terms of social interaction, or on the ground.

It is the vague and anarchical character of societies such as the Tauade which provides fertile ground for one of the most common, and most specious, devices in

functionalist analyses of warfare. Such arguments depend upon the arbitrary selection of a particular organisational level, or group, in the society, with reference to which warfare or any other practice can then be said to be functional. By shifting one's definition of the group for which violence is said to be advantageous to suit the case, one can, of course, always prove that it is advantageous for some-one, ending with the extreme case of the functional value of murder for the killer, because it removes his inner tensions, and makes him feel that he is a fine fellow.

Chagnon's hypothesis on the functional features of Yanomamo warfare is a good example of this ambiguity in the definition of the group for whom warfare is advantageous:

The hypothesis I put forward here is that a militant ideology and the warfare it entails function to preserve the sovereignty of independent villages in a milieu of chronic warfare (Chagnon 1967: 112).

Yet it is plain from his ethnographic description of the Yanomamo (Chagnon 1967; 1968) that social interaction takes place between a *number* of autonomous villages, and that there are forms of alliance varying from trade, to feasting, the exchange of women and the giving of refuge to allies worsted in battle, and that the villages are all integral parts of a larger social system. Moreover, even the auto-nomous villages can split (or 'fission', as Chagnon inelegantly terms it) and that if one of the groups so produced is too small to be viable by itself (below about forty individuals) it will have to take refuge with a host group, and will lose its auto-nomy permanently. Thus, while it can be argued that it is adaptive for any *one* village to engage in warfare, and be generally ferocious, in a situation where everyone else is equally ferocious, it does not follow that it is adaptive for that *group* of villages to engage in constant raiding and feuding among themselves – they would be much better off in terms of material prosperity if they lived at peace. Chagnon's hypothesis is therefore only plausible because of the conceptual sleight-of-hand which persuades us that the real group for which the behaviour pattern in question is adaptive is the village, when it is plain that the Yanomamo village is part of a larger society for whom warfare can no more be claimed to be adaptive than it can for the Tauade. His hypothesis is also entirely circular, and amounts to no more than the statement that a military ideology functions to maintain warfare, which functions to maintain a militant ideology, but that is by the way.

The Yanomamo, like the Tauade, and other acephalous societies, engage in warfare because among other reasons they cannot stop, not because they necessarily as a culture derive any benefit from fighting. In the absence of any central authority they are condemned to fight for ever, other conditions remaining the same, since for any one group to cease defending itself would be suicidal. In some cases of this type the people have no real desire to continue fighting, and may welcome outside pacification. We should recognise that there are likely to be many situations, not necessarily involving warfare, where the society in question is caught in a vicious circle – as we may be in the circle of economic growth – and that, while the society may not be wiped out, the institution may be perpetuated because there is no way to stop it, not because it is performing some vital function for that society.

It seems to me therefore that the conceptual difficulties involved in the definition of the boundaries of a particular society, and the consequent latitude for anthropologists to choose whatever group in society suits their theory as the reference group lie at the root of many bogus functionalist arguments.

Let us now consider the assumption that societies are integrated systems which have needs, which can be objectively defined so that one can specify the minimum criteria of social harmony. In the first place, we should note that the concept of social harmony, or social cohesion, is frequently confused with that of equilibrium. It is perfectly proper for us, as anthropologists, to have measures of social harmony – such as rates for homicide, fist fights, exchanges of verbal abuse and so on – and to apply these to any society we choose. We may then conclude that the Tauade are very anarchical or socially disharmonious, but this does not imply that their society is not in equilibrium, since the people themselves may accept this level of violence as normal, and make no effort to reduce it. When anthropologists talk about the function of a custom in maintaining social cohesion or harmony therefore, what they should often be saying is that it helps to maintain equilibrium, which is a very different thing. Vengeance is the principal means of maintaining equilibrium between Tauade tribes, but by its very nature it produces *disharmony*. There is, of course, no such quality as 'social harmony' in the abstract, in the sense of fixed characteristics of social interaction which are necessary for the existence of all societies, analogous to the health of a biological organism.

*   *   *   *   *

As we shall see, it is the absence of any universally valid criteria of the 'health' or, conversely, the anomie of societies in general which allows anthropologists in many cases to invent their own ideas of the needs of any particular society, in the satisfaction of which needs a particular institution is then said to be functional.

For example, it is sometimes argued that warfare satisfies economic needs. A very clear statement of this point of view is made by Newcomb (1950). He defines war as:

> a type of armed conflict between societies, meeting in competition for anything which is valued by the groups involved, usually consisting of territory or certain products of this territory, such as good hunting grounds, oil-producing or agricultural lands…The particular forms which war may take are of course varied, but warfare everywhere and at all times is alike in one respect; it is motivated by economic need, and the biological competition of societies, real or imagined, basic or otherwise [whatever that may mean]. (Newcomb 1950: 317-18).

Now the claim that all warfare is always motivated by economic need is, in terms of the consensus of ethnographic facts, merely ridiculous, and needs no special refutation here. It turns out, however, that what Newcomb means by 'motivated' is not what most people would take the word to mean. For he is following the lead of Lesie White, whom he quotes as saying 'Warfare is a struggle between systems, not individuals. Its explanation is therefore social or cultural, not psychological' (White1947:691). In this way Newcomb can dismiss all the evidence of ethnographers of Plains Indian warfare upon the reasons why the Indians valued warfare so highly, on the grounds that 'The motivation of the individual is not the cause of warfare, it is rather the method by which a cultural irritation or need is satisfied' (Newcomb 1958:320).

One feels inclined to ask at this point if a culture can scratch itself. He and White are both in a philosophical muddle, which leads them to suppose that a social system can have needs, motives and frustrations unknown to its members. When Newcomb claims therefore that 'all warfare is economically motivated', he means that the motives of real people are irrelevant, and that warfare is

> a function of socio-cultural systems, and individuals are … no more than the means through which these systems attain their ends. (Necomb 1950: 317) and,
> … it does not matter for what reason the individual thinks he is fighting, and dying, as long as he is satisfying the needs and imperatives of his culture. (ibid., 329).

In objecting to the type of theory which Newcomb is advancing, one would not

wish to deny that cultures may have a cognitive orientation which the people themselves are unable to articulate, or that processes of institutional logic may operate in ways that the members of society do not understand. But to claim that a culture is an integrated kind of Being with distinct needs which have to be satisfied is to indulge in fantasy.

Newcomb argues that the introduction of the horse in North America made possible a highly specialised nomadic hunting culture dependent on the bison herds. As he correctly observes, this kind of specialisation has disadvantages as well as advantages, for when the herds were exhausted the cultures based on them collapsed also. It should be noted that a contributory factor to this process was the extreme improvidence of the Indians in their consumption of the bison and deer, since they would only eat the best cuts of fat and meat, and left the rest to rot, so that two or three days after a very successful hunt all the edible meat would be gone, and the Indians had to start hunting again. We are not told if this obviously maladaptive behaviour was the fault of the culture. But before the herds were exhausted, when contact was first made with European settlers in the region of the Great Lakes, some Indian tribes acquired firearms. In fights over hunting grounds population pressures were set up towards the south and west, in which displaced tribes pushed out their neighbours. This apparently set up a chain reaction in which warfare was greatly exacerbated in the continuing struggle over hunting grounds.

But, even if we accept this general picture of Plains Indian warfare as true (and I am not sufficiently familiar with the ethnography to dispute its accuracy) Newcomb's conclusions do not follow. For example, he refers to a series of battles between the Chippewa and the Sioux in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ending with the battle of Cross Lake in 1800, and comments:

These were not boyish raids for adventure or glory; they constituted serious warfare, fought by men defending their homes and families against invaders seeking to escape from their own ravaged and overrun homes to the east (Newcomb 1950: 323).

It seems implausible, however, that people in such a situation *would* have thought that they were only having boyish games for fun and adventure, not realising that their hunting grounds were being taken, and that their homes were being destroyed around them. To suggest that only the culture was aware of these profound econ-omic truths, while individuals went their deluded way pursuing honour and

glory, is a parody of social analysis.

While it seems that here, despite Newcomb's claims that only cultural needs were involved, individuals often did fight in terms of genuine human needs, ecological theorists talk in terms of the needs or characteristics of ecosystems which are unlikely to have much relevance to actual human behaviour. For example, Vayda argues that warfare may have the function, among others, of

the spacing out of relatively stable populations within finite territories . . ., and the prevention of population increase so great as to lead to an over exploitation and deterioration of resources (Vayda 1961: 347).

But there are many cases where the inhabitants of a territory *have* degraded it and caused its resources to deteriorate, at every level of civilisation. The Tauade did it to their forest cover, and much of the Aibala valley is now sterile grassland. In the United States in the nineteenth century the passenger pigeon and the bison were exterminated, and the dust bowl of Oklahoma was created.

Not only may a population ruin their environment, they may be quite indifferent to the consequences, either thinking that they will be able to move elsewhere, or that they will be able to put things right, or that it will only become a problem long after they are dead. Consequently, the statement that such-and-such a practice has certain beneficial ecological consequences will not explain this practice if the people are ignorant of or indifferent to these results, and in such case will have no predictive value concerning the people's future behaviour. There is no particular reason to assume that ecological benefits—if they are benefits—such as the spacing out of population are due to anything other than chance. Vayda's attempt to show that warfare among the Marings of the Madang and Western Highlands Districts of New Guinea might have the function of maintaining the existing level of population in relation to land resources is not even supported by his own data. He writes:

…the available evidence gives no indication that the offences had a cumulative effect in provoking war or that their commission correlated with the pressure of particular Maring groups upon their land. (Vayda 1971: 4), and

The fact is, however, that when we were doing our field work in the 1960's we could find no clear evidence of such [population] pressure anywhere in the Maring region except in the Kauwatyi and Kundagai territory, where there were tracts of permanent grassland and degraded secondary forest (Vayda 1971: 20).

Nor do we find that there was any significant relationship between aggression and land shortage, according to Vayda himself:

Some of the smallest Simbai Valley clan populations, living at the edge of a vast expanse of

unoccupied forest extending eastwards along the Bismarck Range, fought as often as did some of the large clan cluster populations of the Central Maring area, where there are not only higher population densities, but also such other indications of greater pressure on resources as shorter fallow periods for garden plots . . . (Vayda 1971: 6).

When people were actually driven out of their territory, the casualties do not seem to have been very heavy,

When some 300 Tyenda were routed following the Kauwatyi's surprise raid, 14 Tyenda men, 6 women and 3 children were killed. The 600 Manamban lost only 8 men and 3 women in the course of being routed by the combined forces of the Kauwatyi and Tukemenga (although there had been 20 other Manamban deaths at the fight ground previously). If these figures indicate the heavest mortality suffered in Maring wars, it may be questioned whether routs in general were effective in decisively affecting the capacity of groups to defend and use land (Vayda 1971: 13).

Nor does the normal result of routing appear to have been generally to deprive the losers of their territory more than temporarily at most:

I have accounts of 21 routs. In seven of these the groups did not even leave their own territory and took refuge in portions of it at some distance from the borderlands where the enemy had engaged them. Among the 14 other cases the members of some routed groups fled across the Bismarck Range or the major rivers, but there were others when they remained closer and, indeed, sometimes continued to maintain a claim to their territory by going to it for food (Vayda 1971: 13).

In 13 of these 14 cases, the defeated groups returned to their territory. The only group which failed to do so was the now extinct Woraiu 'that had been living on the south side of the Jimi River, where it had been attacked by an alliance of the Mindyi and Kumom clans'. (Vayda 1971:11).

When some groups returned to their territory after being routed, they re-established their prosperity, made appropriate sacrifices to the ancestor spirits, and they replanted the boundary stakes to signify that they would not relinquish any land. Not all groups did this, and by not replanting the stakes would leave some territory vacant to be annexed. It is significant that Vayda adds, however, 'Informants stated this as a possibility, but were unable to cite any recent examples' (Vayda 1971:17). They did cite, however, a gift of land by the Tyenda to their allies the Bokapai and Tsuwenkai of about 30-40 per cent, of Tyenda land. But this was clearly not the result of conquest, and the circumstances suggest that it was land which the donors felt able to part with.

Vayda summarises the facts of land redistribution as follows ' The fact remains that most groups in recent decades have held on to their own lands after warfare' (Vayda 1971:19). It also seems to have been the case that the majority of fights, of

differing degrees of severity, led to peace without any territorial conquest at all (Vayda 1971:19-20). The obvious fact that warfare among the Maring patently did not have any noticeable effect in redistributing land drives Vayda to state that even so, their system of warfare might have had such effects if things had been different.

In other words, even if territorial conquests had been only an infrequent rather than a regular aftermath of Maring warfare for a considerable time, the warfare remained the kind that could, through an already institutionalized systemic process, lead again to the adjustment of man/resource ratios whenever demographic and ecological conditions changed sufficiently to make it appropriate for this to happen (Vayda 1971: 22-3).

And he appends the note ' When, if ever, such conditions obtained throughout the Maring area is problematic.' All that Vayda establishes in this paper is that in some cases warfare may be the means by which groups which are short of primary forest for new gardens may acquire other people's. No one would suggest that, in some cases, people may not fight over land, or anything else which they fancy and which is in short supply, but this does not explain why the Marings fought.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

When one reads such vain attempts to explain primitive warfare by appeals to its ecological effects or functions, one realises that 'function' has frequently the covert significance of 'What a twentieth-century materialist rationalist intellectual from Europe or America thinks is a sensible allocation of labour and resources'. When such a person encounters primitive societies, he is baffled by their indifference to *his* criteria of what is sensible, and therefore casts about for some hidden reason which will be the *real* explanation for their behaviour. This is especially likely to be the case with that form of behaviour which particularly horrifies intellectuals – warfare. In consequence, many such functionalist explanations of warfare have a strongly ethnocentric bias.

A good example of this ethnocentrism can be found in Rappaport's *Pigs for the ancestors*. After a detailed analysis of the amount of energy which the Tsembaga expend in pig rearing, compared with the energy which is obtained from eating them, he remarks 'We could only be mystified by a prolonged and laborious procedure, such as Tsembaga pig raising, which resulted in the return of somewhat less energy than was actually invested'. (Rappaport 1968: 63).

By parity of reasoning, one can imagine an ethnographer being puzzled by the

fact that the members of the Bongo-Bongo tribe have sexual intercourse 271 times for each pregnancy, an obvious disparity of energy expenditure in relation to the benefits accruing to the group by the possible acquisition of a new member. 'Obviously,' he will conclude, 'this mysterious behaviour can be explained only when we realise that the function of sexual intercourse is the strengthening of the marital bond, and hence group solidarity in general.' In fact, it will come as no surprise to anyone who understands human beings to be told that people copulate because they think it is pleasant; if intercourse were as disagreeable as being poked in the eye with a burnt stick we should have much less of it, whatever its putative consequences for social solidarity.

Because sexual gratification, love of prestige and power over others, and envy of those who have these advantages, are some of the strongest forces in human nature, men enjoy killing other men. The human race has evolved few more definitive means of proving one's superiority over an enemy than by battering him to death and eating him, or by burning his house, ravaging his crops and raping his wife. The tortuous explanations advanced by academics for the prevalence of violence in primitive societies in some cases disclose their lack of knowledge of human nature.

Another familiar functionalist argument, which has more plausibility than the ecological variety which we have just considered, is that warfare is beneficial because it reinforces the solidarity of the group. Camilla Wedgwood (1930) proposes an argument of this type. She prefaces her analysis with a classic statement of the functionalist position.

The more we study the culture of people both 'savage' and 'civilised', the more it becomes apparent that no social institution comes into being and continues to flourish unless it has a definite function to fulfil in the culture of which it forms a part. This is as true of war as of any other institution, and, though the immediate causes of war are diverse and there are different forms which it may take, yet, as I hope to show from the following analysis of warfare in Melanesia, one of its constant functions is to strengthen the bonds of union between individuals of the fighting community and make them increasingly conscious that they are members of the same unit (Wedgwood 1930:6).

In dealing with the conflict between groups which are normally friendly, such as different clans within the same tribe, for example, she argues that where a member of one clan violates a rule of conduct:

the loyalty of his fellow clansmen to the community as a whole demands that they look askance at him; their loyalty to him as a member of their clan demands that they put them-

selves for his sake in opposition to the rest of the community. The social structure of Melanesia is for the most part one in which the clan is all important, a man's loyalty to his clan must outweigh other loyalties, and the recognized practice of clansmen joining in defence of a fellow member serves to reaffirm and thereby strengthen the bonds which exist between them. At the same time, in order that such conflicts, while strengthening the clan, may not prove disruptive to the larger unit, these are regulated and controlled, and no acts of vindictive hostility such as cannibalism are permitted. The wider unity is never lost sight of, while the strength of the bonds of kinship is intensified (Wedgwood 1930: 32).

Now, on the surface, all this looks very plausible, until, that is, we stop and think for a minute, and ask ourselves if such societies, based upon strong clans which nevertheless owe allegiance to a wider society, need necessarily have organised themselves in the way that Wedgwood describes. The answer is clearly 'No'. There are many instances in the ethnographic literature of similar societies which have developed forms of mediation to settle conflicts between component groups, and where, indeed, individuals who risk plunging the clan or comparable group into unwanted warfare may be disciplined by their fellow group members. The Konso of Ethiopia, for example, told me that before the Amhara conquest, if a man from one town stole a goat, say, from a man of another town, the injured party could usually obtain redress from the offending town. The elders would oblige the thief to pay compensation, and would not consider themselves obliged to go to war just to defend one of their number who had done wrong.

While it cannot be disputed that warfare does indeed strengthen the internal solidarity of the group which engages in it, it does not follow, as we have seen, that the whole society is so strengthened. It is all very well for Wedgwood to insist that' the wider unity is never lost sight of, but it is hard to see that the total society is actually *strengthened* by the fact that the clans restrain themselves from eating each other. (Wedgwood has here reversed the true explanation for the prohibition on cannibalism, which is that because the people feel that they are really members of the same society, they feel repugnance at the idea of eating each other, which is usually reserved for true enemies.)

Wedgwood has in fact committed the basic error of assuming that 'whatever is, is necessary', rather than the result of a local concatenation of circumstances which are the product of a particular culture, and not of the working of some universal law. Wedgwood also argues that warfare is functional because it dissipates the anger of the group:

Wars were not undertaken without some cause, such as murder, by physical or magical

means, insult to an important person, damage to gardens etc. They were in fact entered upon when the community had in some way suffered and needed some other people on whom to vent its anger for the injury which it had received. The expression of this anger, in fighting, relieved it; the discomfort and irritation which was disquieting the community was brought to an end, and thus a sense of well-being was restored (Wedgwood 1930: 33).

While it is true that such provocations are frequently the cause of warfare in primitive societies, as they were among the Tauade, to identify a cause is not to demonstrate a function, either for the immediate group or for the larger society. Undoubtedly, after killing one of the members of the tribe responsible for such a provocation, the victorious group would feel a sense of well-being, but it was likely to be short-lived, and replaced by a very different sense when the other group raided them in turn, killed their pigs, burnt their houses, ravaged their gardens, took away a few corpses to eat, and perhaps even drove them temporarily out of their land altogether. In the war 'game' which the Tauade played with each other, their obsession with vengeance merely meant that *everyone* was angry *all* the time.

Vayda advances a somewhat similar theory, and believes that primitive warfare may be functional in the regulation of what he calls 'socio-political variables'.

We can say that the hypothesis is that when some such variable as the number, frequency, or magnitude of the offences committed against a group exceeds a certain value, then the group goes to war, and thereafter, at least temporarily, the number, frequency or magnitude of offences committed declines (Vayda 1967b: 135).

But, as in the case of Wedgwood's theory, Vayda's hypothesis is inherently incapable of explaining warfare when vengeance is the norm. Among the Tauade, a tribe which provoked another would not be chastened by the retaliation into offending no more, but, on the contrary, would be infused with rage and hatred, and meditate on the first opportunity for 'pay-back'. Nor would strict reciprocity be observed, and if they could kill several people for one of their own, so much the better.

*   *   *   *   *

A more sophisticated theory of conflict argues that there is a general tendency in society for cross-cutting ties both to produce disputes and violence, but also to bring about their resolution and the re-establishment of social cohesion. This type of theory is, of course, closely associated with the work of Gluckman. The basic theme of Gluckman's theory of social conflict is that

...men quarrel in terms of certain of their customary allegiances, but are restrained from

violence through other conflicting allegiances which are also enjoined on them by custom. The result is that conflicts in one set of relationships over a wide range of society or through a longer period of time, lead to the re-establishment of social cohesion (Gluckman 1963:2)

and

The critical results of their [anthropologists'] analysis is to show that these societies are so organized into a series of groups and relationships, that people who are friends on one basis are enemies on another (Gluckman 1963: 4).

As an example of such a process he quotes Colson's study of the Tonga of Northern Rhodesia. In this case, a man of clan A kills a man of clan B. The two clans break off relations, and apparently in days before colonial rule the men of B residing in A's territory would flee home, and *vice versa.* Women of clan A married to men of B are threatened and insulted by men of B, which upsets their husbands, and disposes them to accept the compensation which is offered through the offices of affines of both clans, and peace is made.

Now, as Gluckman says, this is a very generally valid principle of human relations, which has long been recognised by many scholars, and with which no-one who has reflected at all on human society would wish to disagree. The objection which one would wish to make is that Gluckman seems to think that it is a universal law of human society, instead of simply a special case. Indeed, his whole book *Custom and Conflict in Africa* is organised around the theme that cross-cutting ties, while dividing men, ultimately bind them together. Yet his examples are not really paradigmatic, but only illustrative.

In the case of the Konso, they have evolved a group of autonomous towns numbering about 1,500 souls on average which, apart from very small clusters of two to three towns, which I call nuclear alliances, have almost no cross-cutting ties. The result has been, predictably, chronic warfare, which even the regional peacemakers and priests have been largely powerless to prevent. It is therefore quite possible for societies to exist where cross-cutting ties are largely inoperative, where political anarchy is the result, and yet where life goes on from one generation to another in a perfectly viable manner.

It might be objected, however, that even if such societies as the Konso exist, at least they show that the absence of cross-cutting ties will produce large amounts of conflict which are difficult to resolve, and that this at least negatively validates Gluckman's thesis. This is true enough. But as in the case of the Tauade it is possible to show that the multiplicity of cross-cutting ties in certain conditions can

actually *maximize* conflict.

A possible relationship between tribes in a society similar to the Tauade can be shown diagramatically, as in Figure 1 (in the diagram, broken lines denote hostility, connected lines denote friendship). Tribes I, II and III are each divided into kin groups (reckoned cognatically) designated by a letter. A man in kin group D has relatives in groups G and J. Let us suppose that a man of B kills a person of G. Now this man of D may be very angry and upset about this, so he kills a person of B in vengeance. He may then be under threat of retaliation in his own tribe I, but because B have relations in E of II, the man of D may be able to flee to his relatives of J in III.

In other words, because tribes are fragmented within themselves into kin groups, which are too loose to provide effective control over their members' acts, yet in terms of which vengeance is taken, and because these kin groups spill over into other tribes, a killing of a person in another tribe by a man in one's own tribe may be revenged *within* the tribe of the killer, and the retaliator has also the chance to use other kin ties to find refuge in a third tribe. It is the capacity of men to flee to relatives in other tribes which undoubtedly contributed to the high rate of homicide among the Tauade. In the tribe where I lived during field work, the homicide rate over a fifty-year period was of the order 1/180 *per annum.*
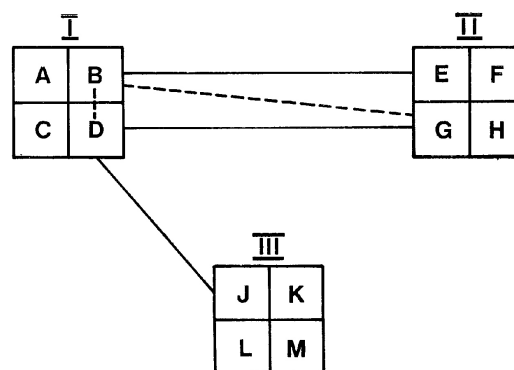

FIGURE I.

```
ERROR: undefined
OFFENDING COMMAND: 'N

STACK:
```