

# Chapter 8

## Political Anthropology

Early anthropologists were surprised to find the presence social order in nearly all societies. The influence of their culture made it seem like the only way to have social order was through the use of power.

### Power

Early anthropologists thought you had to have a state to have true social order. The state is an independent political entity that controls a geographical territory with clear boundaries and defends itself from external threats with an army and internal disorder with police

The state would hold and control the power thus social order would exist

Over time political anthropology developed because the growing understanding of other cultures show this may not be the only way to wield power

Politics is the ways in which power relations affect human social affairs

The primary focus for political anthropologists has been:

1. how public decisions are made that affect the group as a whole
2. why people of the group criticize or reject the decisions
3. how is leadership understood and exercised
4. how competition is regulated
5. how disputes are settled

Anthropologists see power as a generalized capacity to transform

The two types being:

1. coercive power - physical force
2. persuasive power - power put forth by others in the group

The idea of free will and determinism still are used but anthropologists prefer the term agency. The primary part of agency is the ability to take action to pursue goals of their own choosing

## **Political Ecology and Political Economy**

It is important to consider how people interact with their environment (ecology)

At first cultural ecology developed then political ecology came about as the anthropologists began to see the role of resource control within the environment

Examples: Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania, Ju'/hosani in the Kalahari, Bedouin of the Sinai

Political economy focuses on the political creation (and consequences) of the division of labor

## **Disputes and Dispute Resolution**

How do groups handle relations with their neighbors?

There are a variety of conflicts:

1. raiding – a short term use of force with a limited goal
2. feuding – an ongoing, chronic hostilities between groups of neighbors or kin feuding in left unchecked to lead to a bloodbath thus sometimes a mediator will be called in to negotiate a settlement

Gacaca (ga-CHA-cha) courts in South Africa and Rwanda

Bloodwealth is a payment of some amount of material wealth to settle the feud

3. Warfare – violent conflict on a significant scale

## **Forms of Political Organization**

1. Band
2. Tribe
3. Chiefdom
4. State

## **Social Stratification**

The two main types are

1. caste
2. social

Social stratification often involve the control of wealth and prestige

How did groups move from egalitarian to stratified societies? One idea relates to prime movers

Of course there is issue of seeing the raise to the state level as one way being better than the other

## **Forms of Political Activity**

There has been debate about seeing bands and tribes as lacking certain aspects such as a head of state. This has made them seem inferior though this is not the case.

Consensus is the common ways to deal with disputes in bands and tribes. Persuasion is a the power that is used in consensus

People who are good at persuasion may become a headman who is looked to deal with ambiguous or threatening situations. Headmen though have no coercive power

A similar role is a person call a big man. This person may use persuasion to arrange complex regional public events that involve kin and neighbors.

## **Social Control and Law**

States work because of a formalize bureaucracy

The bureaucracy helps set and maintain rights and responsibilities

States formalize sanctions

In chiefdoms social conduct is enforced by more informal means

States often will have laws including:

1. substantive law – laws that have a universal scope
2. procedural law – how accused are to be treated

3. civil law - breaking this law only affects one or a few individuals
4. criminal law - regulates attacks against society or the state

Courts developed to deal with state level law

In recent times new concepts of rights have developed such as human rights, cultural rights and even indigenous rights

### **Nationalism and Hegemony**

As the world has become more globalized anthropologists have begun to look at how global processes shape local political expression

How do nation-states affect groups of people?

People begin to develop imagined communities Why do people in other Jeeps wave at me!

How do groups invent traditions?

If a leader cannot use coercive power than hegemony might be used

Sometimes leaders develop ideologies as a source of power