Warfare, Military Organization, and the Evolution of Society

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In this highly preliminary consideration of the relation bet-
ween warfare and the evolution of human society, I will try to
develop a few general theses in the context of a developmental
scheme already presented in another publication (Fried 1960).
The major theses can be presented succinctly:

First: The evolution of complex politically organized society
has entailed two major and generally distinct steps prior to the
invention or emergence of the state considered as a political
mechanism. In this evolution the development of ranking tends
to precede the development of stratification but it is possible,
at least theoretically, for both to develop concomitantly.

Second: Warfare serves to institutionalize rank differences
only when these are already manifest, or at least implicit, in the
society in question. I do not believe that pristine developments
in the formalization of rank can be normally attributed to even
grave military necessity.

Third: Warfare serves to institutionalize stratification only
when the social orders of one or more parties to the warfare have
already become stratified.

Fourth: The state can be precipitated by warfare but only
in the presence of certain conditions. One possibility is that
two stratified but non-state-organized societies clash and remain
in active contact after the period of violence. Another possibility
is that a non-state-organized society is conquered by a state
society and either appended to or absorbed by the victorious
state; it is also possible that the victorious society will withdraw
but having left behind a stimulus that impells the defeated society

to crystallize its own state apparatus. A similar stimulus may also be mediated from centers of complex organization to less highly developed areas through more or less peaceful trade and other extensions of the more complex economy into the area of a simpler culture and the lives of its denizens. These stimuli are essentially of two kinds: one is the intensification of processes of ranking and stratification, the other is the supplying of a model and often a number of concrete details of organization to the emerging state.

It is necessary to define certain words and briefly elaborate a few key concepts. *Ranking* is a sociocultural activity which assigns different statuses to different individuals who are members of a common social system. The pattern of these statuses is so structured that there are generally availlable fewer highly valued statuses than individuals competent to fill them on the basis of personal talent. The opposite of ranking is egality; an egalitarian system has pattern of valued statuses such that their number is always equivalent to the number of individuals competent to fill them. In such a society the criteria of status are general and minimally exclusive; most common of the status criteria are age and sex and certain variable individual traits such as strength, skill or beauty. On the other hand, a ranked society, though probably using some or all of these criteria, adds a number of more specific and more exclusive criteria so as to restrict qualifications for valued status without any necessary commensurate narrowing of competence. The commonest technique of narrowing is associated with genealogical succession and is formalized in rules of primogeniture or ultimo-geniture.

Stratification is also an opposite of egalitarianism but it differs from ranking as well. It is difficult to conceive of stratification without ranking, but ranking can certainly exist without stratification — at least as I define these terms. A stratified society, by my definition, is distinguished by the differential relationships between various members of the society and the strategic resources of the society. [Strategic resources are those things which, given the technological base and environmental setting of the culture, maintain subsistence.] Thus, in a stratified

society persons of the same age, sex, and competence are economically differentiated, some having unrestricted access to strategic resources, others having various impediments in their access to the same kind of resources.

To these concepts I should like to add one other before raising the particular question of the relevance of warfare to the evolution of ranking, stratification and the state. It is a canon of method among paleontologists that comparative anatomy be used to flesh out the austere relics that comprise most fossils and to supply much of the theory that links these fossils in structure and function and to explain their developmental relationships. Yet the competent paleontologist always remains aware of differences between a fossil species and its contemporary representatives. Similarly, the evolutionary anthropologist must never forget that similar kinds of differences distinguish contemporary cultures from comparable cultures of the past. One of the most important differences lies in the complex area of process: the egalitarian society which develops ranking in the absence of any contact with a culture already ranked, the society which develops stratification through its own internal growth, the civilizations which invented the state, did so through processes which must have differed greatly from those which attended the development of these phenomena as the result of reactions to a milieu changed by the prior existence of these very institutions. Accordingly, I distinguish pristine from secondary developments with reference to the evolution of ranking, stratification and the state. This distinction, certainly not a novel one, has immediate implications for the question of warfare. One of the most familiar of sociological positions is that known as the "conquest theory" of the origin of the state; indeed, Harry Elmer Barnes several times wrote that it was "the sociological theory of political origins and development" (Barnes 1924a: 52; 1924b: 368; 1940: 653). As developed by Gumplowicz and Oppenheimer the theory has many facets and may be commended to contemporary students; however, the main force of the arguments is considerably reduced when it is realized that the discussion is almost entirely concerned with what I would call secondary states. As a matter of fact, concern with secondary states is not confined to conquest theorists but has figured

significantly in such works as those of Morgan, Spencer, Marx and Engels, etc., in each of which the transition from tribal society to state among the Greeks, the Romans or the Germans, was considered as an adequate source of data on the evolution of the state.

Briefly put, a pristine phenomenon is one which develops out of indignenous conditions in an environment that does not already include a more highly developed form of the pheno- menon in question. A secondary phenomenon is one which grows as the result of interaction between the developing society and another society which has already moved across the water- shed of complexity with reference to the institution in question. The words "pristine" and "secondary" are particularly useful in distinguishing from all others the handful of states which seem to have emerged *sui generis,* out of a background devoid of states. Lastly, there is a possibility that warfare, too, may vary if its setting, technology or organization is primary or secondary in this sense.

Warfare and military organization
in egalitarian societies

The orientation of this paper requires a definition of war- fare sufficiently broad as to avoid *a priori* elimination of simple societies from consideration. If we err, therefore, it will be in the direction of including all instances of inter-group violence without considering, for example, the tactics, command and con- trol, multiple attack, motive, or logistics of the conflict, all of these being conditions which Turney-High has identified as "necessary for true war" (Turney-High 1949: 30). A suitable definition for our purposes is available if we delete one word from a statement by Quincy Wright: "War will be considered the ...*condition* which *equally* permits two or more *hostile groups* to carry on a conflict by armed force" (Wright 1941: I, 8; his emphasis). (The omitted word is *legal* and precedes the word condition in the citation; "legal" would involve us in a lengthier definitional wrangle than does "war.") Use of such a definition is fairly common, as by Hobhouse in a statement which serves to set the stage for this portion of our discussion:

> The old view that the original state of mankind was one of per-
> petual warfare has been rightly abandoned, but has given place to
> the opposite opinion, based largely on the tribes that we are examin-
> ing, that it was one of perfect peace. The evidence that we have
> reviewed does not support this conclusion. If indeed war means an
> organized system of campaigns and pitched battles it would be true,
> but almost meaningless to deny it of these people in their primitive
> condition, because they have no such organization. But in several
> cases fighting occurs between groups, or between members of different
> groups, on questions of trespass and personal injury (Hobhouse 1956:
> 112).

Hobhouse was considering manifestations of warfare among
fourteen peoples: Aëta, Alakaluf, Andaman, Batwa, Botocudo,
Bushman (Kalihari), Kuba, Ona, Punan, Sakai, Semang, Tas-
manian, Vedda, and Yahgan. Though these societies represent
only a portion of the much larger sample used in the classic
work Hobhouse did earlier with Wheeler and Ginsburg, there
is nothing in the larger work that discredits this later, more
summary and generalizing statement.

There apparently are some societies in which the incidence
of inter-personal physical violence is so low as to be insignificant.
The evidence is somewhat conflicting but Kubu, Sakai, Semang
and Vedda have been claimed to represent this condition. Most
simple societies, however, do have patterns of organized violence.
My own breakdown of Hobhouse's materials shows that of his
sample of 14, seven have feuds, and four have hit and run attacks,
ambushes and night attaks.

While serious consideration of this topic demands a new
and broader assault on primary sources, our present purposes
are adequately served by this simple indication of the prevalence
of warfare in societies I classify as egalitarian. ("The fundamen-
tal social unit [in these societies] is the little group moving about
on friendly terms but without political union, among similar
groups. ... The land over which the groups roam is common,
either to the group exclusively, or to the tribe as a whole, or to
both in different ways. Food is in large measure obtained co-
operatively, and shared by custom at least among all present.
Whatever ownership there may be makes no distinction of
wealth or rank. They are societies of equals" [Hobhouse 1956:

114]). We may now entertain the problem of the relations between these manifestations of warfare and the social structure in which they appear.

There is a widespread hypothesis that is encountered in many varieties, ranging from instances cited below to other examples that might be drawn, e.g., from psychology. E.R. Leach has put the hypothesis this way: "I consider it necessary and justifiable to assume that a conscious or unconscious wish to gain power is a very general motive in human affairs" (Leach 1954: 10). Andrzejewski takes, if possible, an even stronger position:

> The most general assumption, on which the whole theoretical framework of this study rests, is the recognition of the fact that the struggle for wealth, power and prestige... is the constant feature of the life of humanity... Whether we like it or not the fact is that no society, no group however small has ever been heard of where such a struggle would be altogether absent.

> ...We can safely predict that some kind of struggle will always go on in human societies because prestige, as well as power, is relative and, therefore, there can never be enough of it for everybody (Andrzejewski 1954: 7, 10).

Without pausing to investigate the obvious disparity between the quoted remarks of Andrzejewski and Hobhouse, I note two bodies of work in which extensions of this theme of power struggle are made the basis of a theory of the origin of stratification. The first example is the work of Herbert Spencer who saw military prowess as a primary characteristic of emergent chieftains: "As bodily vigour is a cause of predominance within the tribe on occasions daily occurring, still more on occasions of war is it, when joined with courage, a cause of predominance" (Spencer 1898: 336). A more current example is furnished by the work of Irving Goldman (1955), who asserts that the major causal factor in the evolution of stratification in Polynesia was status rivalry, often involving warfare.

I will not dicuss the causes of warfare; the results, however, do not seem to have any necessary connection with an irrepressible drive to establish what I have defined as ranking. Curiously, Spencer had difficulty at this very point; he wrote

that, "how command of a wider kind follows military command, we cannot readily see in societies which have no records: we can infer that along with increased power of coercion which the successful head-warrior gains, naturally goes the exercise of a stronger rule in civil affairs" (Spencer 1898: 337). Logical as this inference may be, we remain unconvinced. Indeed, Professor Turney-High has stated the opposite: "The comparative ethnography and tradition of Indian America tend to show that strong military patterns *followed* the strengthening of the social controls into rudimentary political bodies or states" (Turney-High 1949: 238). Accuracy compels me to state that Turney-High follows this remark with the assertion that "in Africa one finds a different situation" (*Ibid.*). His analysis at this point is brief but of great interest. Of greatest moment to me is his consideration and rejection of what I would call the "secondary" aspects of the situation. On the one hand, it is evident that some of the Indians were within the range, at the very least, of stimulus-diffusions from more highly organized societies. On the other hand, he introduces the specific case of the Moru of the Sudan who failed to respond to pressure from the more highly organized Azande. Though the further discussion lacks depth and sharpness, Turney-High seems to think that more fundamental causal factors are to be sought in socio-economic parameters. With this I would agree, noting that my own assertion, as such, does nothing to validate the argument. In the absence of an extensive cross-cultural analysis, however, it may be suggested that validation appears in crude form through the observation that while increments of increasing socio-economic complexity appear in the absence of increments of military activity and efficiency, increase in the latter are invariably associated with the former.

In sum, patterns of warfare found among egalitarian societies show such weakness of development that some theorists have denied that "real" warfare exists on this level. As Turney-High has pointed out, this is not to be laid to the absence of a technology which can be turned to military use, but to the absence of specific traits of organization which would enable such a society to perform the coordinated activities on which the most elementary tactical situations depend. The presence in egalitarian societies of individuals of great fighting prowess

does not lead to a higher degree of "civil" organization. In the final analysis, an egalitarian society has as many prime warriors as it has persons competent to serve as such. (Compare Andrze-jewski, who, like Spencer, sees that "MPR" is total in such a society.)

Warfare and military organization
in rank societies

Whereas claims of total peacefulness are made for some egalitarian societies, few rank societies are thought to have lacked relatively regular warfare. Before going further, however, I think it necessary to make a few remarks about rank society as a category. Among the approaches of anthropologists who have tended to view a society as something rather more com-plicated than a simple equilibrium equation, that of E.R. Leach is particularly stimulating. In dealing with varieties of Kachin social structure, for example, Leach has emphasized the dynamic aspects of the society and he explicitly regards the models he constructs as merely static representations of shifting networks of behavior and relationships. Understanding this, I neverthe-less have had great difficulty, until recently, in comprehending Leach's assertion that, within a general context of mobile rather than static social structures, ranking social structure (i.e., Leach's *gumsa*) is less stable and more subject to disequilibrium than either egalitarian (*gumlao*) or stratified society (Shan) (Leach 1954: 9, 197ff.). The point, as far as we are presently concerned, is that the category of rank society includes a broad range of types. In some rank societies, such as Tikopia, the distinctions which separate such a society from an egalitarian society are few and simply developed; on the other hand, there are rank societies whose differential statuses have a high degree of economic significance, despite the absence of specific institutions closely associated with stratification. Classifying such societies as ranking rather than stratifying is somewhat arbitrary. Military differences exist between these types but not to the degree that might be expected.

It is of interest, if only in the way of an example, that Pukapuka, rated by both Sahlins (1958: 12, 92ff.) and Goldman

(1955: 682) as among the least stratified (in their meanings) of Polynesian cultures, is one of few Polynesian cultures whose participants definitely assert that warfare was practically unknown in aboriginal times (Beaglehole 1938: 373). The Beagleholes, however, indicate that, while "the fighting that occurred rarely rose above the level of brawling," there were regular patterns of defense against attack from the seas. Equally important, the structure of the fighting force that met such an attack was based upon the existing patrilineage structure (*Ibid.*: 374).

Returning to the thesis of this paper, I find that one of its essential themes has already been stated quite clearly by Vayda (1956), who has contrasted the military patterns of the Maori, by my standards a relatively simple type of rank society, and those of the Hawaiian and Society Islands, which represent a more complex and stratified type. Relative to the latter, Vayda found Maori warfare to be characterized by "smallness in the scale and shortness in duration of active hostilities, the poor development of command and discipline, the great reliance upon surprise attacks, and the importance of the village community or local group in the organization of war parties" (*Ibid.*: 2; cf. *Ibid.*: 222ff.; Vayda 1960). In general, the position taken by Vayda seems to apply quite broadly to the whole of Polynesia. If we return to Sahlins' classification of fourteen Polynesian cultures under four rubrics of relative stratification, we note that there are gross correlations between the position of these cultures on the scale of stratification and features of warfare mentioned by Vayda.

The present paper is too confined to permit fuller analysis but it may be suggested that similar overlapping gradients can be described elsewhere. For example, the Northwest Coast and adjoining areas seem to show increasing ranking as one moves in any direction towards the climax area occupied by such cultures as the Kwakiutl and the Nootka. This, in turn, is related to an increasing military sophistication, the Nootka having warfare so well developed that Drucker proclaims that it was "real war by Turney-High's definition" (Drucker 1951: 335). Often motivated by explicitly economic goals Nootka warfare frequently resulted in the expansion of one group and the reduction or

even elimination of another. There was a most interesting tac-
tical repetory and some degree of specialization in the role of
commander-in-chief, in the division of command for flanking
operations, and the extensive use of sentinels and scouts. There
is, however, another side to the picture and it may be given
in Drucker's words:

> Yet the complex had serious deficiencies too. One of the most
> noteworthy was the poor discipline and the lack of succession of
> command that caused attacking forces to withdraw when on the verge
> of victory because of the loss of their commander. It was not cus-
> tomary to give up readily at the first casualty [as did so many egal-
> itarian societies (mhf)] ...but the death of the leading war chief tended
> to demoralize the force... Poor discipline was also responsible for the
> careless watch stood by the sentinels (*Ibid.:* 341).

If we turn, finally, to the relationship between wartime roles
and statuses and those of peacetime, we note a range of pos-
sibilities rather than a single uniform pattern. At the risk of a
loss of significant detail, a summary statement can be offered
in order to focus on essentials. The most usual relationship bet-
ween civil and military status takes form on the basis of
(a) the use of available kin structuring patterns as the armature
of military organization , and (b) a generally universal military
participation ratio. Thus we frequently find that military forces
are composed of all males of certain ages. When it is necessary
to expand the fighting force, there seem to be two different ways
of accomplishing this, each associated with a somewhat dif-
ferent task. For defensive purposes expansion occurs by cross-
ing age and sex lines so that, ultimately, every physically mobile
individual is a combatant. For offensive purposes, locality boun-
daries and the distinctions between discrete kin groups are elided;
when this happens, the available descent lines and affinal lines
become the avenues of confederation. The latter is always a
delicate and difficult business. Individuals may become involved
who are completely ambivalent with regard to the major parties
of the engagement. In such cases their value as additions to a
striking force are compromised by the possibility that they will
inform the enemy of the hostile plan.

A crucial question still remains and we must ask if military
prowess appears with significant frequency as the source of per-

manent peacetime status. I think that the major portion of the available answer is implicit in the foregoing discussion: the military organization in most societies of this type utilizes the pre-existing structure of kinship groups and the ties between these groups. Thus, if a direction is to be given, it would seem that permanent military status derives from previous kin status. What then of the strong and the brave who do not already hold such status? The evidence I have seen indicates that in many rank societies this is treated as a personal attribute, much as strength and agility is treated in egalitarian society. That is, the society has as many great warriors as indeed there are persons of proven ability of this kind, but these statuses do not then intrude upon the normal peacetime operation of the social system. No single ethnographic example can prove something of this kind but the case of the Nootka is again instructive. Drucker tells us that:

> everything about [Nootkan warfare] runs counter to the attitudes esteemed in ordinary intragroup social life... Among the Nootkans the two fields of activity [i.e., peace and war (mhf)] and the attitudes and values that went with them were sharply compartmented off from each other. There were only slight overlaps: The fact that the war chiefs retained their identity and functioned ceremonially at feasts and Shaman's Dances was one of these. Yet it is worth noting that the war chiefs seldom carried their traditional savagery and brutality over into intragroup social contacts... They did not use their strength nor their reputations as killers to bully their fellows (*Ibid.*: 343).

There is certainly more to the problem than this. Sahlins has remarked on the role of warfare in altering ramage[1] structure, but his analysis indicates that warfare did not establish ranking in any Polynesian society he has studied, though it did establish "superstratification." Actually, the point is a simple one. There is no evidence that warfare makes chieftains of individuals of exclusively military renown; instead, warfare brings new kin-units to the fore and may establish the legitimate and pre-existing head of such a kin group as the new chief or paramount chief.

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[1] Sahlins' "ramage" is an "internally ranked, segmentary unilineal kin group" (Sahlins 1958: xi-xii) not to be confused with Firth's subsequent redefinition emphasizing nonunilineality (FIRTH 1957).

Recognizing that the problem requires infinitely more work before sound conclusions can be presented, I do think that some basis has been indicated upon which I may rest one of the hypotheses with which this paper began: warfare serves to institutionalize rank differences only when these are already manifest, or at least implicit, in the society in question.

Warfare in the development of stratification and the state

With the evolution of stratification and the state, warfare assumes utmost importance in the development of social structure. Yet, for the very reason that the materials become more profuse and more significant, it will be impossible to go into them in the space allotted. I should, therefore, like to make the briefest statement on these problems, stressing the logic of my position and not seeking to illustrate it with ethnographic and historical data.

Starting with the definitions of ranking and stratification given earlier, I would note my expectation that warfare should be found with much greater frequency and severity in stratified than in ranking societies and that this should hold even more pronouncedly for state organized societies. Though, as we have seen in the case of the Nootka, rank societies can engage in war for the purpose of expansion, it would seem that pressure to engage in such warfare should normally be considerably less in a ranking than in a stratified society. My reasoning goes like this: since, by definition, people in ranking societies suffer no impediments in their access to strategic resources, the actual economy is likely to show a high degree of uniformity with regard to the consumption of subsistence goods. Under such circumstances the *economic* motive for warfare (not to deny other motives) is not eliminated but given rather low intensity dependent upon the whole demographic and ecological situation in which the society is found. Contrast this with the structure of stratified (and state) societies which involves differential access to productive property thereby creating, at least potentially, a class of individuals whose subsistence can be

marginal even when the others in the society are consuming far above subsistence levels. Such societies can be made to feel the need for expansion long before a ranked society under similar environmental circumstances.

My paradigm, of course, is simple to the point of naiveté; many complicating factors intrude in any real situation. To be sure, a variety of complications may appear in rank society: hostilities may be engendered by desire for revenge, religious and ceremonial beliefs and needs, or status-seeking. Yet, as we have seen, there are limitations on the latter in rank society and each of the former, growing not out of a random situation but out of a whole social matrix, may also occur with less frequency. On the other hand, stratified societies, the absence of complex market institutions notwithstanding, quickly develop appetites for larger resource areas and larger labor forces.

Even here, however, I still believe that the role of warfare in essentially a following rather than leading one: It serves to formalize, elaborate, and rigidify what was already there. If I am not abusing Sahlins' thought, I will agree with his implication that warfare serves a primary role in the development of superstratification. To the extent that the political organization of a stratified economy *is* the state, I think that warfare must have played an essential role in the process of its emergence. I should also like to add that this superstratification might appear, in a military context, through the necessity of organizing the defence of an already stratified community against invaders whose own organization was much simpler. History seems to indicate, however, that only invaders who themselves have previously had complex ranking or even stratified systems, have been able to make real inroads against a defending state organized society. The history of China's borders, north and south, illustrate this point quite well.

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