Intertribal Hostilities

Warfare among East African Herders. Papers from a symposium, Osaka, Japan, Sept. 1977. KATSUYOSHI FUKUI and DAVID TURTON, Eds. National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 1979. xiv, 230 pp., illus. Paper, $15.05. Senri Ethnological Studies, No. 3.

Despite the fact that warfare is a topic of both practical significance and theoretical interest, there is a paucity of ethnographic information about intergroup hostilities among small-scale, nonliterate societies. Most of the information that is available is from New Guinea and South America. In an attempt to fill this gap in anthropological knowledge and in order to signal the continuing interest of Japanese social scientists in pastoral peoples and their growing interest in research in East Africa, the National Museum of Ethnology of Osaka organized a symposium on warfare among East African herders.

The organizers of the symposium sought to avoid the problem in defining "warfare" as an analytic category by limiting the discussion to culturally and economically similar groups inhabiting roughly contiguous territories. Unfortunately, the narrow geographical focus of the papers does not, as the organizers assumed, mean that the phenomena discussed are sufficiently similar to have made preliminary analytic distinctions unnecessary. Nor do the papers use a common framework for data collection and analysis or have a common time frame.

Some authors studied pastoral groups which, although occasionally engaged in individual cattle raiding, no longer make frequent raids or wage large-scale, organized wars. Their discussions therefore utilize ethnohistorical data (Jacobs, Tomikawa) or infer functional relationships from social institutions and cultural norms (Baxter, Fratkin). Jacobs discusses how Maasai cultural categories are useful in understanding intergroup relations in historic times, and from his historical examination of intergroup relations he concludes that, despite their reputation for being aggressive and warlike, the Maasai are not unusually ferocious. Tomikawa presents a historical overview of Maasai-Datoga interactions and shows how pressures exerted by the Maasai led to migrations of the Datoga and changes in "subtribal affiliations" (ethnic identities). Baxter suggests that the rigorous life of Boran herders in the camps provides "on the job training" to be a warrior, accentuating valor and aggressive virility, fostering stamina, self-reliance, self-knowledge, and bush skills, and forming social bonds through shared tasks, hardships, and dangers. Fratkin concludes that ecological influences on political and social organization result in the Maasai's being more suited for offensive warfare, whereas the Samburu are mostly on the defensive.

The other authors deal with intergroup relations in the area of southwestern Ethiopia, northwestern Kenya, and the southeastern Sudan, where raiding and warfare continue to the present day (as evidenced by the photograph of a burned hut with the skeleton of a woman killed in a 1973 raid, p. 107). Two of these papers do not include ethnographic accounts of actual fights. Almagor discusses the functional relationship between warfare and the social institutions of the Dassanetch, in particular their age-set system. He uses a mode of analysis very similar to that used by Baxter in his discussion of the Boran. Fukui suggests that cultural norms lead Bodi men to participate in raids when their name ox becomes ill or dies and that this is "a primary factor in the killing of members of neighbouring groups" (p. 175). However, he fails to note that, although cultural norms may be a proximate cause of intergroup killing, other accounts in this volume clearly suggest that competition over scarce resources is the ultimate cause of hostilities in this area.

The three papers that I found most stimulating (those by Tornay, Turton, and Todd) present vivid accounts of intergroup fighting and killing from the late 1960's through 1976 and try to relate these episodes to ecological, historical, and social phenomena. Tornay's account reveals the multiplicity of factors affecting intergroup hostilities. Rivalries in southwestern Ethiopia have been exacerbated by British and Ethiopian imperialism, for example by the exclusion of the Dassanetch from their dry-season grazing grounds in northwestern Kenya. The 1962–1965 rise in the level of Lake Turkana, which flooded 300 square kilometers of agricultural and grazing land essential to the Dassanetch, led them to try to regain the land in Kenya. Their relations with their neighbors were influenced less by cognitive categories of who was "enemy" and who was "friend" than by pragmatic considerations. The Dassanetch began to expand northward and fought with their "friends" the Nyangatom because they were blocked from regaining their former grazing grounds by "overwhelmingly superior modern armed forces" (p. 113). In 1970, a year of excellent harvest, there was peace between the Nyangatom and the Dassanetch. But food shortages due to the low rainfall in 1971 led to raiding with killing and cattle thefts between the Nyangatom and all their neighbors. The Nyangatom lost their 1972 sorghum crop not through drought but because they had to abandon their fields at harvesttime to avoid the hyenas attracted by the corpses of people killed in raids and birds, warthogs, and antelope destroyed the crop. The Nyangatom, a group of only 5000 people, had no peaceful relations with any close neighbors between 1971 and 1976 and experienced losses of 400 to 500 people in that period. Tornay concludes that factors inherent in the social structure were not responsible for these events. The problems in intertribal relations reflected the more general one of ecology and subsistence.

Turton emphasizes that war is part of a continuing relationship between two groups and that war (that is, times of fighting) and peace (that is, times of social contacts that preclude hostilities) are connected parts of a continuing process. His account, which clearly documents the disruptive effects of raiding, should help to cast doubt on the widely accepted view that raiding is "ecologically adaptive" because it results in reciprocal distribution of economic goods between societies (see L. Sweet, *Am. Anthropol.* **67**, 1132 [1965]). Turton found that when Hamar raiding became intense during the 1969–1970 dry season the Mursi congregated in communal settlements along the Omo River, where grazing was poor and tsetse prevalent but where barriers of thick bush traversed only by one or two narrow paths provided them with opportunities to recover stolen cattle. The people clearly recognized that this huddling together was bad both for humans and for cattle. But they moved

away from the communal settlements only after the Mogo River rose and reduced the danger of Hamar raiding.

The effect of large-scale political events on intergroup relations is clearly shown in the paper by Todd. At the time of the Emperor Menelik, the Dime, a wealthy agricultural tribe in the highlands of southern Ethiopia, were subjugated by Amhara invaders, who sold weapons to the Bodi in the arid lowlands and encouraged them to provide the Amhara with the products of big-game hunting. With the help of the police and government officials, the few Amhara remaining in Dimam after the Italian-Ethiopian war and the abolition of slavery continued to deny the Dime access to firearms, while continuing to provide the Bodi with weapons. Thus the Dime could not effectively resist Bodi cattle thefts and raiding. During the 1968–1971 war, the Bodi stole an estimated 3000 Dime cattle, 700 to 1000 Dime were killed, and many people left Dimam altogether. Bodi attacks on Dime ceased in 1971, in part as a result of the intervention of the central government, but also because the Mursi attacked and the Bodi had to turn their attention to defending their southern boundary.

Some useful generalizations about East African pastoralists emerge from this volume. It is clear that, despite their reputation, East African herders are not highly militaristic societies, probably because the demands of intensive livestock husbandry in East African pastoral systems do not allow men to be full-time warriors. Intergroup hostilities are common and seem to take two distinct forms (although they may represent extremes of a continuum)—raiding, which is relatively common, and warfare, which is rare. Sometimes the primary aim of raiding is to acquire cattle, sometimes to kill people, including women and children as well as young men. (When we expressed horror at the intentional killing of women and children, our Karimojong friends explained: "Women give birth to enemies; children grow up into enemies who will kill us.") Raids—small-scale, surprise attacks—are often carried out without the knowledge or approval of the elders, and although individual raiders may gain prestige, cattle, or both, the group may suffer from the social disruption of retaliatory raids. In contrast, warfare involves large numbers of men moving in organized formations, and the major tactic is numbers, not surprise. Decisions about warfare are made by the elders and by ritual specialists.

The final important point that is made several times in this volume is that territorial conquest does not appear to be the objective of fighting. "Territorial conquest, in fact, is characteristic of sedentary people. For nomads, or semi-nomads, gaining free access to a place is more important than occupying it" (Tornay, p. 150). This conclusion fits well with current evolutionary and ecological theory, that animals only defend territories that can be defended economically, where the benefits of defense outweigh the costs. An individual, or a group, is unlikely to be territorial if resources are sparse, dispersed, and unpredictable (R. Dyson-Hudson and E. A. Smith, *Am. Anthropol.* **80**, 21 [1978]).

Many of the essays in this volume illustrate the unsatisfactory state of "explanation" in anthropology. The failure to distinguish between proximate and ultimate causes is exemplified by Fukui's "explanation" of Bodi raiding. There is also a very general tendency among social anthropologists to reify social institutions so that culture rather than the experiences of the people is considered as causal. This misplaced causality is exemplified by Turton's "explanation" of boundary changes between the Mursi, Bodi, and Hamar. The Mursi and Hamar, who are separated by a wide expanse of uninhabited bush and the Mogo River, which acts as a barrier during the rains, have continuous and unregulated hostilities. In contrast, the Mursi and the Bodi, who have no physical features acting as a boundary between them, have periods of regulated hostility alternating with periods of socially regulated peace. Because there have been no shifts in territorial boundaries between the Mursi and Hamar but the boundary between the Mursi and the Bodi has shifted northward, Turton hypothesizes that rules cause territorial shifts: that "the more rule governed hostilities between two local groups are, the more likely it is that these hostilities will be part of a long term process of change in group boundaries, both territorial and conceptual" (p. 201). He fails to explore the more obvious explanation that the lack of a physical boundary makes it difficult to defend a boundary militarily and therefore people respond by setting up rules to regulate social interactions. And he fails to take into account Todd's study, which suggests that the Dime, the Bodi's northern neighbors, have been so weakened by Amhara oppression that it is easier for the Bodi to move northward under Mursi pressure than to defend their southern boundary.

A failure clearly to conceptualize cause and effect is very general in anthropological accounts. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of this symposium is that it does present enough information about a relatively circumscribed area to enable the reader to compare the explanatory modes of the authors and to develop alternative hypotheses.

RADA DYSON-HUDSON
Department of Anthropology,
Cornell University,
Ithaca, New York 14853

A Maya Site

Excavations at Altun Ha, Belize, 1964–1970. Vol. 1. DAVID M. PENDERGAST. Architectural drawings by H. Stanley Loten. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 1979. xii, 226 pp., illus., + loose map and figures. Boxed, $30. Royal Ontario Museum Publications in Archaeology.

Belize has traditionally been viewed as something of a cultural backwater during the thousand-year history of lowland Maya civilization. The Classic-period site of Altun Ha is quite literally situated in a swampy backwater near the coast north of Belize City. It is about as far as one can get from the enormous Maya centers of El Peten, Guatemala, such as Tikal, and still be in the southern lowlands of the Yucatan peninsula. Research carried out at Altun Ha by David Pendergast, the author of this volume, has revealed that the imperatives of geography have been misunderstood by Mayanists. The modest public buildings of this center housed, in tombs and cached offerings, an extraordinary wealth of carved jade and other exotic materials that rival those found in the most magnificent centers of the interior jungles. Why the Maya of this desolate location were so rich and why they chose to invest their wealth and power in movable goods rather than in massive public architecture are questions that must be answered gradually in the course of this monograph series. This initial volume sets the stage by presenting overviews of the ecology and settlement organization at Altun Ha and reporting the monumental architecture of Group A, one of two groups forming the center of the community, in detail.

The settlement at Altun Ha is in itself a source of some surprises. Although the community evidently never housed more than about 2000 residents, it is spatially quite compact when compared to some major Maya communities, such as Tikal.