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E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Colonialist, Imperialist, Spy? A Defence.

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Abstract

The reputation of the academic field of Anthropology has for some people been tarnished ever since Franz Boas' letter to *The Nation* in 1919 in which he claimed that four anthropologists had acted as spies for the United States Government, using their field research as a camouflage for what they were really doing. From this specific accusation there has somehow developed an argument that all anthropologists carrying out fieldwork might actually be spies. This general misconception was not helped by the fact that in some cases that was essentially what they were doing, operating under the cover of their fieldwork as government agents. Unfortunately, many genuine researchers carrying out academic study have been tarred with the same brush. This article deals with one such anthropologist who researched during colonial rule and who, it is argued here, was most certainly not a spy. This should also be seen as a defence for the many others whose intentions were simply to carry out academic anthropological fieldwork.

***Keywords*:** Evans-Pritchard, Colonialism, fieldwork, Azande, Nuer.

Introduction

E. E. Evans-Pritchard (E-P, as referred to by many) carried out his fieldwork in what is now South Sudan between 1926 and 1936, with his major studies focused on the Azande and the Nuer. All of this work was done whilst Sudan was administered by the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, a colonial enterprise. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that some have called Evans-Pritchard a supporter of colonialism and even of imperialism. This article argues that this was far from the motivation that inspired his anthropological fieldwork studies.

The case for anthropological spies

Why, though, should he or any anthropologist carrying out fieldwork be thought of as a spy, or of colluding with the administration?

The Oxford Dictionary defines a spy as '*A person employed to collect and report secret information on an enemy or competitor*'.

This was certainly the kind of definition that Boas had in mind when he wrote his letter to *The Nation*. Although he used the term 'scientist' he went on to state clearly at the end of his letter that he was referring to anthropologists.

> "A person, however, who uses science as a cover for political spying, who demeans himself to pose before a foreign government as an investigator and asks for assistance in his alleged researches in order to carry on, under this cloak, his political machinations, prostitutes science in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classed as a scientist."[1]

[1] From Boas' letter to *The Nation*, Dec 20th, 1919.

Boas was insisting that the sole objective of anthropologists in the field should be that of academic study.

It cannot be denied that there were some cases of fieldwork that were carried out in the past with the express purpose of undercover work for specific governments. Today that is even more common. David Price has given examples of these in a number of publications including, ironically, the November 20th 2000 issue of *The Nation*. In this publication, *Anthropologists as Spies*, Price concludes:

> "In the following decades there were numerous private and public interactions between anthropologists and the intelligence community. Some anthropologists applied their skills at the CIA after its inception in 1947 and may still be doing so today." (p. 3).

Carole McGranahan in reviewing Price's book *Cold War Anthropology*[2] wrote:

> "Respected figures are cast in dim light. Deceased scholars are brought back to life as villains. Some are witting and some unwitting, to use David Price's terms, but all are complicit in some sense." (p. 441).

David Price is one of many who argue that anthropologists should be focusing on academic research and not getting entangled in government work. Montgomery McFate in contrast encourages the use of anthropological research as part of government and especially the military. McFate argues in *Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious*

[2] Price, D. 2016. *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Relationship, that anthropology developed because of colonialism and its use to aid the military objectives of colonialism.

> "Once called 'the handmaiden of colonialism,' anthropology has had a long, fruitful relationship with various elements of national power." (p. 24) and "Anthropology actually evolved as an intellectual tool to consolidate imperial power at the margins of empire. In Britain the development and growth of anthropology was deeply connected to colonial administration." (p. 28).

It is perhaps apposite to consider what this phrase implies for anthropologists. One meaning of 'handmaiden' (from the Collins dictionary) is '*the first thing helps the second or makes it possible'* or, in the case of colonialism, anthropology as a discipline only came into existence because of colonialism. A second meaning (as in the Merriam-Webster dictionary) is of something or someone '*whose essential function is to serve or assist*.' Both meanings were in McFate's mind when she used the term.

For Maximillian Forte, as expressed in his article *Anthropology: The Empire on which the Sun Never Sets*, the impact of anthropology's connection to imperialism could endanger the subject itself.

> "What we are talking about then is the actual or potential end of anthropology… the end as a professionalized and institutionalized discipline created in the late nineteenth-century European university system, where Anthropology arose not as a mere 'handmaiden' of imperialism but as one of its very children, and it served the knowledge-gathering, planning and ideological purposes of the imperial fatherland." (p. 198).

It is also clear that the colonial legacy still exercises the concerns of the discipline of anthropology as is evidenced by Simone Abram (Chair of the ASA[3]) in her essay *Social Anthropology in the UK: An Update*.

> "Social anthropologists have had many discussions of the colonial legacy of the discipline, but only very slowly has the Academy confronted the depths to which colonial approaches and assumptions continue to shape the subject, its approaches, debates and methods." (p. 22).

The reappraisal of the anthropology of colonial times started in earnest in the late 1960s and escalated through the 1970s and 1980s with many publications accepting the negative aspects of anthropologists being involved in colonialism. The question, therefore, needs to be asked as to why there was, and still is, such a readiness to condemn these 'colonial anthropologists' and the whole discipline of that period.

The most obvious answer is that colonialism itself was frequently present primarily for the exploitation of those who were colonised, and in so doing it undermined, destabilised and often destroyed the native societies that had existed. The argument followed that if anthropologists formed any part of that they were, *per se*, supporters of the principle of colonialism.

A further explanation arises from what has been described as 'patricide' – the killing of one's father, or in this case, anthropology's predecessors. As Richard Brown observed in his chapter *Anthropology and Colonial Rule: The case of Godfrey Wilson and the Rhodes-*

[3] (ASA) Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK.

Livingstone Institute, Northern Rhodesia, in many universities the response was not to try to find the positives of earlier research but to find fault with it and reject both earlier studies and those who carried them out.

> "This work (highly critical by authors Goddard, Banaji and Kathleen Gough in *New Left Review*) seems to show this scholarly advance… (and) requires a form of patricide: each generation, it appears, must murder its immediate ancestors. In this case not just the ideas, but also the academic morality of the scholarly ancestors is assaulted when it is claimed that the colonial anthropologist was simply the handmaiden of imperialism." (P. 173).

These are arguments that have led to an atmosphere in which it is ever more difficult to see what actually took place within the realm of so-called 'colonial anthropology'. That observation is not meant to excuse the injustices of colonialism itself but to plead for a more nuanced examination of what the anthropologist actually did. As Herbert S. Lewis noted in his article (1998) :

> "As a result, an atmosphere of intolerance and generalized condemnation of anthropology and anthropologists has become more than fashionable: indeed, it is virtually obligatory, both among anthropologists themselves as well as among a widening group of critics outside the field. For example, the general complicity of anthropology and anthropologists with "the project of colonialism" seems now to be accepted as a fact rather than as a question requiring investigation and demonstration." (p. 717).

From the general to the specific.

As some possibly valid criticisms of anthropological fieldwork in colonial times were aired they have had the effect that individual anthropologists of that era are often judged without any real examination as to what they actually did, wrote, or thought. Their integrity as academic researchers and as ethical responsible people is questioned and their work and personalities challenged.

As Clifford Geertz considers E-P in his chapter 'Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies' in *Works and Lives, The Anthropologist as Author*, he remarks

> "I do this not to be perverse or cute, nor to unmask him as possessed (as he certainly was, and even defiantly) of a colonial mentality." (p. 50).

Jerry Moore equated E-P's work directly with colonialism and imperialism, but did not go as far as to accuse him of being a spy.

> "Evans-Pritchard's life and work were shaped by the British Empire… the Anglo-Egyptian government was paying for this ethnographic survey (and most of Evans-Pritchard's subsequent research) because the government had a serious objective. The goal was empire. The British government wanted to assert imperial control over African peoples like the Azande and Nuer living in the watershed between the Nile and Congo rivers… Much of Evans-Pritchard's work was conducted under government auspices and was frequently written to inform British administrators." (pp. 153-155).

In *The State of Anthropology in the Sudan* Abdel Ghafar M. Ahmed asserts that:

> "The Sudan government engaged Evans-Pritchard in 1930 specifically to study the Nuer with the purpose of getting the information needed for their pacification and the establishment of administration among them." (p. 25).

In *Nuer Dilemmas, Coping with Money, War, and the State*, Sharon Hutchinson states:

> "… Evans-Pritchard was profoundly aware of "the colonial encounter" and was, in fact, part of it." (p. 30).

It is these kinds of aspersions, with no detailed analytical supporting evidence, that lead others reading about E-P's work in the Sudan not only to take the accusations as gospel, but to elaborate and even fantasise as to their implications, not just for him but also for other fieldworkers.

Arguments for and against E-P being a colonialist, a spy, an imperialist.

There are numerous points put forward by those who argue that the anthropologists who carried out their research in colonial times must also have supported the objectives of colonialism, and, because of that, the objectives of imperialism and, therefore, may have acted as colonialist and imperialist spies as they collected data.

These arguments are set against what E-P actually did as he carried out his field studies and what his motivations were.

a) Carried out studies in countries under colonial rule

When E-P carried out his studies in 1927 and 1930, the Azande were already a colony established by imperialism. The Nuer, in contrast, were one of the last of the Nilotic tribes to be brought under administrative control by the Anglo-Egyptian government. So, for both of E-P's

major fieldwork studies, colonial rule had either subdued or was in the process of subduing the colonies it wanted to control.

The fact that E-P carried out his studies in regions under colonial control cannot be disputed but that did not mean that he supported the colonial objectives. The question can, however, be justifiably asked as to why he chose to work where he did.

The answer is simple. His supervisor at The London School of Economics (LSE) was Charles Seligman. Seligman had been carrying out studies in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan but was unable to carry on with those studies because of illness. He had been employed for those studies by the colonial government, who paid for his research there and, when unable to continue his work, he recommended E-P to take his place.

> "I studied anthropology under Professor C. G Seligman, and it was at his suggestion that I continued the ethnological investigations made in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan by Mrs Seligman and himself… They initiated me into my Sudan research, raised funds for my expeditions, and gave me constant assistance, advice, and friendship throughout my labours." (p. vii) E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 1937.

The choice of his first major study, with the Azande, was E-P's own. It was not until the Sudan administration insisted that he make a study of the Nuer that he was directly instructed to carry out any specific research for the administration and E-P only carried out that research under protest as he wanted to continue his research with the Azande.

So yes, his major research was carried out in areas under colonial rule, but it would have been impossible for him to continue Seligman's work unless he was there. And for him to do that research he needed the approval of the Government, and was appointed by them.

b) Was told by the government administration what to study

The original advice, perhaps even, instruction, on what to study would have come from E-P's tutor Seligman.

In the preface to his 1937 book, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, he wrote:

> "Though I was working on behalf of the Government and mainly at their expense I was given a free hand and allowed to go where I pleased, to stay in one place as long as I thought fit, and to leave the country whenever I found it convenient to do so." (p. vii).

E-P's *Witchcraft* book was published in 1937, so it was written not only after his study of the Azande but also after his work with the Nuer. As far as he was concerned, it was he who decided what and where to study, not the Government. This was very true of his research in Zandeland, but less true of his research with the Nuer.

In his contribution to Talal Asad's *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* Abdel Ghaffar M Ahmed suggested that E-P had been given very clear instructions from MacMichael (Civil Secretary) as to what he should be studying.

The list, created in 1926, outlines the kinds of data that the anthropologist would be expected to research. The full list is given on pages 268-269 of Ahmed's chapter. They include the following:

1. Name of tribe.
2. Habitat and boundaries.
3. Language.

4. Divisions, political and social.

5. Chiefs, political and religious.

6. Economic life.

7. Weapons for war, hunting and fishing.

8. Distinguishing customs, birth, marriage, death, initiation, etc.

9. Religious beliefs.

The list shows what would be expected as the objectives of any anthropological fieldworker and were not those simply of a colonial administration trying to dominate the 'natives'. These were also very much in keeping with what E-P would have studied, and indeed did study. As he wrote in his book *Social Anthropology*:

> "The social anthropologist studies societies as wholes. He studies their oecologies, their economics, the legal and political institutions, their family and kinship organisations, their religions, their technologies, their arts, etc., as parts of general social systems." (p.11).

For E-P's research with the Azande what was studied was very much the choice of E-P, as was emphasised by John Burton in his article *The Ghost of Malinowski in the Southern Sudan: Evans-Pritchard and Ethnographic Fieldwork.*

> "The district commissioner of Zande country gave Evans-Pritchard absolute freedom to work in the district, at his leisure, and with license to investigate whatever he chose." (p. 279).

When E-P was studying the Azande, indirect rule had already been established there. In Nuerland that had not yet been achieved, due mainly to the resistance to this by the Nuer themselves.

E-P's own words from his chapter *The Nuer of the Southern Sudan*, in *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard) echo the punitive impact of the administration on the Nuer and also emphasise the Nuer's reluctance to give in to foreign rule.

> "The Nuer likewise treated British rule with open disrespect till, as a result of lengthy military operations between 1928 and 1930, their opposition was broken and they were brought under effective administration. With the exception of this last episode in their history, the Nuer may be said to have reached in the foreign relations a state of equilibrium and of mutual hostility which was expressed from time to time in fighting." (p. 281).

E-P explained in his article *Genesis of a Social Anthropologist, An Autobiographical Note*, Jan 1973, why he accepted the request to study the Nuer.

> "McMichael said I could do anything I liked, he chose the man, not the plan. Then I was asked to make a study of the Nuer, at the time very hostile to the Government of the Sudan. I did not want to do this and I twice refused; then came a personal appeal from McMichael to which I could not say no." (p. 19).

This reluctance is also echoed by Mary Douglas in her book *Evans-Pritchard*.

> "His next fieldwork (with the Nuer) was no choice of his… He says that he only agreed after hesitation and misgivings… However, Evans-Pritchard felt he had a

> responsibility as an anthropologist, because there was the risk that unless some trusted means of communication could be established, the Nuer would fight until they were destroyed." (p. 43).

c) Data collected was used by the administration

In his Radcliffe-Brown lecture, 1972, Raymond Firth made the general comment about anthropological research that it was not carried out primarily for the benefit of the colonial government.

> "While it has seemed to make sense to advocate that knowledge of the structure and functioning of African and other alien institutions was preferable to ignorance, this knowledge has been regarded by anthropologists primarily as a means to securing more respect for peoples' own values, not as a means of controlling them more effectively." (p. 26).

It would be hoped that those administrating the Nuer felt likewise, and some may have taken note of his wider ethnographic reports, but in terms of what the administration wanted to find out when they insisted E-P make a study of the Nuer, primarily to identify which 'chiefs' might be used to control the Nuer, his research provided very limited useful information. His conclusion that the Nuer was an acephalous society meant that there would be no specific chiefs for the administration to recruit. This made it difficult for the administration to identify any particular leader to act as a native administrator, and so E-P's research on that subject was of no use to the colonial authorities.

Henrika Kuklick points out, in *The Savage Within*:

> "F. D. Corfield, a district commissioner in the Sudan … concluded that Evans-Pritchard's analysis was correct .... the Nuer had never had a centralized tribal organization that might be reconstructed for administrative use." (p. 225).

E-P's article in *Applied Anthropology*, 1946, indicated how he and other anthropologists felt about the usefulness of their research to administrators.

> "Mr. Sol Tax remarks that although he had spent ten years in research into the social anthropology of the Chiapas and Guatemala Indians no one had ever asked his technical assistance in solving the social problems of the region. Other anthropologists have experienced the same thing. Professor Seligman once told me that in all the years he had worked in the Sudan or on Sudanese problems he was never once asked his advice and that the only time he volunteered it, in connexion with the rain-makers of the Nuba Hills, it was not taken. During the fifteen years in which I worked on sociological problems in the same region I was never once asked my advice on any question." (p. 97).

E-P stressed very much the same point, but specifically about the Sudan administration in his BBC Third Programme lectures, (see *Social Anthropology*, 1951).

> "The Sudan Government has… for a long time and very generously supported anthropological research. In doing so it has allowed anthropologists to study pretty well where, what, and how they liked. They have chosen the man and let him choose the plan. I think that they have been wise enough to do this because they have never been under the illusion that anything the anthropologist discovered was likely to have any great practical importance." (p. 121).

d) Did not acknowledge colonial influence

David Goddard in his article *Limits of British Anthropology* accused most British anthropologists of ignoring colonial influences as they carried out their fieldwork.

> *"* Anthropological studies in Britain grew up in the context of European, and especially British, colonialism as a *part* of the colonial situation. Anthropologists for the most part did not question the colonial situation and the fact that they participated in it by investigating subjugated peoples." (p. 79).

Andreas Heinz, 1997, made the same assertion about E-P, focusing on E-P's study of the Azande.

> "Evans-Pritchard belonged to a new generation of anthropologists who tried to explain their change of paradigm by pointing to their direct encounter with "primitive" men. However, the barely mentioned background of this experience is set by different patterns of colonial rule, interacting with the produced anthropological discourse." (p. 165) and "However, the possible influence of colonial politics on the examined phenomena was neither included in his research agenda nor mentioned at all." (p. 166).

It is difficult to understand how anyone could accuse E-P of not acknowledging and indeed highlighting the effects of colonial rule at the time he was doing his research. He made frequent references to the impact of colonialism and government regulation and to military incursions on those he studied, as is shown in his PhD thesis and his many articles in *Sudan Notes and Records*.

E-P's PhD submission in 1928, *The Social Organisation of the Azande of the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province,* dealt with a wide range of ethnographic and cultural details about the Azande and there are many references to the effects of colonial rule.

> "Owing to sleeping sickness regulations the district is cut off from other districts around it as well as from the Belgian Congo, no native being allowed to travel into these areas." (p. 2).

> "In the concentrated villages, which cover the greater part of Zandeland under British rule and in which the natives are compelled to live, they have no opportunity to make their normal homesteads of the straggling type." (p. 5).

There are a great number of other specific references to the effects of colonial rule as shown, for example, on pages 7, 8, 12, 58 and 103, and in Book 2 on page 3 and 8.

In his *Witchcraft* book the focus was on one aspect of Azande life so there was no need to repeat for the reader the wider effects of the colonial position on those he had studied, but he does stress the restricting effect on his study as on pages 15 and 18.

In papers E-P presented and compiled together in *Essays in Social Anthropology,* 1969, he also acknowledged the influence of colonialism on the social structures of those he studied, for example, on pages 67, 87-89, 91, 120, and 155.

When it came to the Nuer there are again direct accusations that E-P did not acknowledge the effects of colonialisation on the people, such as that made by John W. Burton in *The Ghost of Malinowski in the Southern Sudan: Evans-Pritchard and Ethnographic Fieldwork.*

> "He (E-P) hardly mentioned the effect of colonial government on the Nuer, a stance which parallels Malinowski's tendency to romanticise the character of the native life." (p. 280).

Peter Forster in his chapter in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Asad, T. (Ed) notes Perry Anderson's criticism[4] of E-Ps work.

> "Anderson is critical of Evans-Pritchard for his lack of attention in *The Nuer* to the colonial situation." (p. 25).

Anderson, Forster, and other critics, seems not to have read what E-P actually wrote as is shown by E-P's many comments in *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (1940).

> "When the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan asked me to make a study of the Nuer I accepted after hesitation and with misgivings. I was anxious to complete my study of the Azande before embarking on a new task. I also knew that a study of the Nuer would be extremely difficult…. I have always considered, and still consider, that an adequate sociological study of the Nuer was impossible in the circumstances in which most of my work was done." (pp. 7-9).

E-P then gives details of the conditions he faced on arriving in Nuerland in 1930 and the effects of what the colonial government was doing, for example:

> "A Government force surrounded our camp one morning at sunrise, searching for two prophets who had been leaders in a recent revolt, took hostages, and threatened to

[4] P. Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", *New Left Review*, No. 50 (1968) pp. 3-57.

> take many more if the prophets were not handed over…. It would at any time have been difficult to do research among the Nuer, and at the period of my visit they were unusually hostile, for their recent defeat by Government forces and the measures taken to ensure their final submission had occasioned deep resentment." (p. 11).

It also seems that Anderson did not read, or wish to take notice of the frequent comments made about the administration and colonial rule, and their effects, in E-P's many publications in SNR, (see volumes 10 to 20).

For E-P the role of the anthropologist was academic study, not supporting colonialism or imperialism, which is why the impact of colonialism was not constantly referred to by him in his academic writings, nor by many other anthropologists of the time, as noted in *African Political Systems*, 1940, by himself and M Fortes.

> "Several contributors have described the changes in the political systems they investigated which have taken place as a result of European conquest and rule. If we do not emphasise this side of the subject it is because all contributors are more interested in anthropological than in administrative problems." (p. 1).

E-P's insistence that anthropological fieldwork should be primarily academic and ethnographical explains his negative view of applied anthropology as expressed in *Social Anthropology: Past and Present* (The Marett Lecture, 1950).

> "In recent times the natural science approach has consistently stressed the application of its findings to affairs, the emphasis in England being on colonial problems and in America on political and industrial problems. Its more cautious advocates have held that there can only be applied anthropology when the science is much more advanced

> than it is today, but the less cautious have made far-reaching claims for the immediate application of anthropological knowledge in social planning: though whether more or less cautious, both have justified anthropology by appeal to utility. Needless to say, I do not share their enthusiasm and regard the attitude that gives rise to it as naïve." (p. 27), (see *Essays in Social Anthropology*).

e) Funding

Without funding, anthropological research was impossible in the 1920s and 1930s unless one was wealthy, as E-P pointed out in his 1973 article *Some Reflections on Fieldwork in the Twenties*.

> "One of our problems, and not the least of them, was financial. There were almost no posts in anthropology or ethnography in the universities of what was then our empire, so our prospects were not encouraging. One might even say that they were gloomy. Then, it was not easy, indeed it was very difficult to get money for field research. I did not suffer as much as some of my colleagues in this respect because I had a small private income – £300 a year – and this was supplemented by £400 from the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and £200 from the Royal Society (in those days we came under the wings of the Society)." (p. 236).

The argument that funding for the research came from the colonial government and therefore created an obligation for the researcher to work on its behalf was, among others, made by Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmad in his article *Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard and the Sudan* (SNR) when referring to the list of questions MacMichael had provided E-P.

> "Such questions were given to avoid any possibility of having him involved in matters of purely academic interest and forgetting the immediate needs of the administration. Thus the financial help and support that Evans-Pritchard got was never a free grant." (p 168).

What these comments imply is that because E-P was funded by the colonial administration he was simply doing their work. That is far too simplistic a view, as is argued below.

E-P himself was quite open about the sources of finance he received. For example, in the preface to *Witchcraft Among the Azande* he wrote:

> "From 1926 to 1930 I made three expeditions to Zandeland, where in all I resided about twenty months. The cost of these expeditions was mainly born by the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, at whose invitation they were carried out, and I received additional support from the Trustees of the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, to all of whom I make grateful acknowledgement. With great generosity the Sudan Government has contributed £200 towards the publication of this book." (p. vii).

It was only funding from the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan that came with specific requirements that the results of the study should be provided to the administration and, as has been stated earlier, E-P's data on the Nuer provided very little information to the administration that they could use to control the Nuer.

The need for the anthropologist to appear to co-operate with the administration was emphasised by Wendy James in her chapter *The Anthropologist as Reluctant Imperialist*, in Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter.

> "But he was nevertheless dependent upon colonial authorities for permission to carry out his studies, and sometimes for material support…appearance of co-operation had to be kept up." (p. 42).

It would have been very ungracious of E-P, and possibly foolish if he wanted future funding, for him to have been openly critical of the colonial administration, not just for the monies he was provided with but also for the logistical support he received from some of the district commissioners. But that is not the same as saying he supported colonialism or the way in which it was sometimes administered. He made it very clear that he did not approve of the way the Nuer were being treated and argued that they should be left alone and allowed to continue unmolested by punitive military interventions.

f) The other

The meaning of 'the other' as applied to anthropological studies has often been set in fairly extreme terms, and ones that question the intentions of the anthropologist. The possible extents of those extremes are set out by Sundar Sarukkai in his article *The 'Other' in Anthropology and Philosophy*.

> "The anthropological other, based on difference, has forsaken the responsibility of the subject towards the other. This anthropological other makes animals out of humans, if not worse." (p. 1046),

Comments such as 'this anthropological other makes animals out of humans' implies extraordinary insensitivity, which here is directed towards the anthropologist himself.

In his presentation, *Deconstructing anthropology: First Annual Stephen F. Gudeman Lecture*, Adam Kuper outlined how anthropologists used to think of those they studied.

> "Classical theories invoked a kind of person as the subject of anthropology. He was the savage, the tribal, the indigenous. More recently he became simply The Other. Always, he was our mirror opposite, ourselves turned upside down in a fairground mirror." (p. 10) (Abstract).

In explaining to his audience what 'social anthropology' was at the start of his first BBC Third Programme lecture in 1950 (see *Social anthropology*, 1951) E-P addressed, and dismissed, similar misunderstandings that people might have had about the scope of social anthropology.

> "The words seem to arouse vague associations of either apes and skulls or strange rites of savages and curious superstitions. I do not think that I shall have any difficulty in convincing you that these associations are misplaced." (p. 1).

E-P did not see the people he studied as lesser humans than himself. He was studying their culture in part in the recognition that it was being changed and if he did not record it now it would be gone, but that was done with huge respect for the way the Azande and Nuer lived.

It is also important to recognise that E-P was fundamentally interested in the study of the people from the point of view of academic anthropology, not for the administrators unless it was to help them understand the people.

He explained the use of the term 'primitive' clearly in his first BBC lecture (see *Social Anthropology* 1951).

> "The word 'primitive' in the sense in which it has become established in anthropological literature does not mean that the societies it qualifies are either earlier in time or inferior to other kinds of societies. As far as we know, primitive societies have just as long a history as our own, and while they are less developed than our society in some respects they are often more developed in others." (p. 7).

These are not thoughts and aspirations that chime with believing that the people he studied and lived among were lesser. He felt himself to be part of what they were and indeed saw that as vital for any anthropologist to understand and empathise with the people being studied. He made this point very clearly in his BBC Third Programme lectures (see *Social Anthropology*, 1951).

> "However, even given unlimited time for his research, the anthropologist will not produce a good account of the people he is studying unless he can put himself in a position which enables him to establish ties of intimacy with them, and to observe their daily activities from within, and not from without, their community life. He must live as far as possible in their villages and camps, where he is, again as far as possible, physically and morally part of the community. He then not only sees and hears what goes on in the normal everyday life of the people as well as less common events, such as ceremonies and legal cases, but by taking part in those activities in which he can appropriately engage, he learns through action as well as by ear and eye what goes on around him." (p. 78).

E-P concluded his comment with "…by living among the natives as far as he can like one of themselves the anthropologist puts himself on a level with them." And this was how he thought

about those he studied – ‘other’ in terms of being part of a different society to his, but never lesser.

Conclusion

There can be no disputing that E-P’s main periods of fieldwork took place when there was colonial rule in Sudan, nor that part of his funding came from the Sudan Government. What has been argued above is that this did not mean that he worked on behalf of the government or administration but chose what and where to study primarily himself. It is also true that he was requested to study the Nuer but his study of the Nuer was very similar to that which he carried out with the Azande, both being what was essentially academic anthropological fieldwork.

Charges that he sympathised with the objectives of colonialism or imperialism because he did not acknowledge the impact of colonial rule are patently nonsense because he frequently cited the effects of administrative and military actions on the peoples he studied.

His choice of where and what to study came from Seligman. For E-P himself there was also a feeling of the need to capture something that was about to disappear, as he expressed in his BBC lectures.

> “Another, and very cogent, reason for studying primitive societies at the present time is that they are rapidly being transformed and must be studied soon or never.” (p. 9).

This observation by E-P is a very poignant expression of what he actually felt about his, and other anthropologists’, studies. In his fieldwork he was recording something that was about to disappear and, as we look at it now, most certainly did disappear. What is today left of the Southern Sudan tribes he lived among and their culture?

But, finally, one must return to original assertions that were made: that E-P, and the other 'colonial anthropologists' were spies, colonialists and imperialists. At no point has E-P promoted in his writings any support or advocacy for the objectives of colonialism or imperialism.

As for being a 'spy', the accusation shows both a very poor understanding of what E-P was actually doing, recording academic anthropological information, and how this was done. It was not by any undercover operation, but by being as open as he could be with those he was studying and supporting their way of life rather than what either the administration, or others, such as the missionaries, might have wanted.

This article was not written just to defend against academic attacks on E-P but also to defend the many other anthropologists who have gone into field research only to find that their actions have been unfairly challenged.

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