FEUDING AND WARFARE

Selected Works of Keith F. Otterbein

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To My Wife

Contents

OVERVIEWS

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The *War and Society* book series fosters studies of organized violence and its consequences in all forms of society, from deep in the past until the present. It encourages different intellectual traditions from different disciplines. Its goal is to expand theoretical understanding of the causes and effects of war, thereby to provide intellectual tools for constructing a more peaceful world.

FOREWORD

Keith Otterbein may not have invented the anthropology of war, but he did name it, in the title of his 1973 review article (chapter 10). That article was a milestone. Previously, war had been a fringe topic within anthropology, little investigated and not important enough to merit a section in most introductory texts. That began to change in the 1960s, responding to changing theoretical concerns and the reality of war in southeast Asia. Otterbein's survey demonstrated that the anthropology of war was developing into a field of study.

Otterbein's early and sustained interest in this topic is without parallel. The articles included here span a quarter century, and he is still going strong. Even more remarkable than his persistence, however, is his breadth of interests. He is most widely known for cross-cultural statistical investigations of feuding, fraternal interest groups, and the evolution of war, but the reader will find much more than that here. His cross-cultural investigations have been complemented by case studies of Iroquois, Zulu, and Higi, the latter based on his own fieldwork. In these and other works he is concerned with strategy and tactics, an interest which connects him to military studies, and which distinguishes him from many anthropological writers who discuss war as disembodied cultural patterns. Otterbein has continued to review theoretical developments, extended fraternal interest group theory to the study of rape and capital punishment, and commented on the relevance of his findings to the problem of disarmament in the modern world. His latest topic is socialization for war, and we can expect to hear more about that in the future.

Otterbein's interests are not confined to one or a few points, but make up a structure, a house with many rooms. In his preface to this volume, we see the epistemological underpinnings of this broad interest. Most interesting to me is his 1962 "Model for Analyzing Intersocietal and Intrasocietal Relations," based in general systems theory. These days systems theory is out of vogue, unless it is to talk about "chaos." That is too bad. Otterbein's model shows how useful systems theory can be as a tool for organizing concepts and theorizing about complex phenomena, providing an abstract "blueprint" showing how to go from topic A to topic Z without

getting hopelessly lost. Systems theory also underlies two fundamental elements in Otterbein's general perspective: to look at societies and other social groups in interaction rather than as isolates, with internal and external developments linked; and to see causal relations as reciprocating, with aspects of war being both cause and effect of social transformations.

For the last quarter century, anthropology's interest in war has fluctuated, usually in response to levels of international tensions. Thus, ironically, the Reagan years were good for the anthropology of war. In the second half of the 1980s, new studies began to appear at an accelerated pace, and at present it is almost impossible to keep abreast of anthropological publications on the subject. Sadly, events around the world seem to assure that a better understanding of war will continue to be a pressing need. Much remains to be learned. But given the gravity of the subject matter, it is vital that anthropologists newly come to the study of war have an understanding of what has already been accomplished. For those who wish to come to grips with this curse of humankind, the present volume offers both an introduction to the anthropology of war, and a useful map of the theoretical terrain.

R. Brian Ferguson
Rutgers University

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"Why the Iroquois Won: An Analysis of Iroquois Military Tactics" originally appeared in *Ethnohistory* 11:56–63 (1964); "Huron vs. Iroquois: A Case Study in Inter-Tribal Warfare" originally appeared in *Ethnohistory* 26:141–152 (1979). They are reprinted here with permission of Duke University Press.

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PREFACE

Although war has been one of the paramount concerns of man, its study has been largely undertaken by the warrior, rather than the social scientist. In nearly all the social sciences, including anthropology, only a handful of practitioners have devoted a substantial amount of scholarly activity to studying warfare. From 1961 to the present I have undertaken a number of studies, the purpose of which was to create a greater understanding of warfare, whether the warfare was between hunting and gathering bands or 20th-century states. To this end I have undertaken field, ethnohistorical, and cross-cultural studies. The topics considered range from weapons and tactics to strategy in the modern world. Since 1980 I have expanded my interests to include capital punishment, weapons control, and socialization for war. Theories tested, as well as developed, span the gamut from evolutionary theories to fraternal interest group theory. These diverse studies, which of course stand alone, have a relationship to each other. Thus, the intent of this collection is not only to place many of these publications in one source, but to show the relationship of the selections to one another. As described below most of the studies were conceived as part of an overall research strategy. This collection will show how each study fits into the overall design.

Among the earliest tasks I needed to perform were a literature review, the differentiation of feuding from warfare, the specification of a theoretical framework (specifically, an intergroup relations approach), and the development of a set of concepts for analyzing feuding and different types of warfare. Specific studies followed, including field research in the Mandara Mountains of Northeast Nigeria. As my research progressed I undertook several tasks. I expanded the scope of specific theories. For example, fraternal interest group theory, which was first used to explain feuding and internal warfare (1968a), was later utilized to explain rape (1979) and capital punishment in tribal societies (1986). From time to time I attempted to summarize and synthesize the growing literature on warfare. This task, while not easy, became simplified because many researchers have utilized the concepts and variables that I developed in the 1960s. That is, there is a shared vocabulary. Recently

I realized that many researchers of warfare are utilizing the same theoretical framework. This framework is described in "Convergence in the Anthropological Study of Warfare." I have applied my knowledge of warfare to international problems. In 1980 I wrote a brief essay for a newsletter. I later expanded it for a volume on war and peace (1989a). Since I believe that armed combat is learned behavior, I recently initiated studies of how this behavior is learned (1989c). Is it taught through formal instruction after conscription has occurred or is it the by-product of having learned to use weapons to kill animals (Otterbein and Otterbein n.d.)? And most recently I have related this socialization for war to weapons control (n.d.).

My intent, as stated above, has been to understand warfare. Understanding to me is both description and interpretation. Theoretical studies by myself and others have shown warfare to be related to a number of important variables, including level of sociopolitical complexity, migration history, demography, and social structure (1977b). Because I believe the topic is of great importance — theoretically as well as practically — I have been an advocate for warfare studies. Compared with other major cultural practices, such as the family or religion, the social science literature on war has been scant. Through my publications and personal contacts I have tried to encourage others to study warfare. It is difficult to know to what extent I have been successful, and I will not attempt to ascertain the extent. A major purpose in assembling this volume is to continue this propaganda effort. I would like readers to realize that warfare is an important, vastly complex topic that deserves their attention.

The relationship of the selections to each other and to an overall research strategy can be shown in two ways. Although there is great diversity to the articles and sections from books, there are a number of common threads that run through them. In the next part of this preface, five major threads or themes are identified. These themes are to be found in the earliest selections as well as in the most recent. The selections, furthermore, can be grouped by topic. Under a topic those studies most closely related are found adjacent to each other. The ordering is largely chronological. The topics under which the selections are grouped are the evolution of war, fraternal interest group theory, and overviews. In the last part of this preface, commentaries are provided for each selection; they highlight the central idea in the selection as well as indicate its relationship to the other selections in that grouping.

MAJOR THEMES IN MY STUDIES OF FEUDING AND WARFARE

In 1961 I selected warfare and related forms of violence, such as feuding, as a topical area for specialization.[1] I developed what philosophers of science call a "research program." It was my intention to make the study of warfare one of my two major research areas. (The other area was Caribbean family organization and the Bahamas.) In the years that have followed, I have seen myself as working from a "blueprint." Other anthropologists, such as Leslie A. White and George Peter Murdock, have done the same (Otterbein 1987, p. 140). My research program has contained at least five major themes. Readers may identify more. The themes, each of which is discussed below, are as follows: (1) Intergroup relations approach; (2) Conceptual apparatus which distinguished between types of armed combat; (3) Developmental or evolutionary framework; (4) A focus on weapons and tactics, a view drawn from military analysts; (5) Methodology employing both case studies and comparative studies.

My research on feuding and warfare, since its inception, has been guided by a theoretical approach which focuses on intergroup relations. In the simplest terms this means that I do not select a single entity for study, such as a kinship group or a political unit, but rather select two or more entities and the relationships between or among them for study. This is an approach which I developed to use in the study of primitive warfare. In other words I first selected the topical area, and then I sought an approach, drawing from sociology and political science, which I thought would lead to productive results when applied to the study of warfare in primitive societies.

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[1] The following passage describes how I, while still a graduate student, came to select warfare as a topical area for specialization (Otterbein 1977b, p. 706): "In 1960 Newcombe could write that 'few anthropologists in recent years have shown more than a passing interest in the causes underlying war.' In a footnote he continues (Newcombe 1960, p. 317): 'Since 1950 the *American Anthropologist* has published only one paper which dealt specifically with war [I would add Murphy's 1957 article to the one by Newcombe (1950)]... The first twelve volumes of the *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* have a slightly better record, having published four articles.' It was the reading of this footnote in August 1961 which led me to first realize that my interest in military history, which dated from an early age, could be combined with my interest in cultural anthropology."

By the spring of 1962 I had completed a document titled "A Model for Analyzing Intersocietal and Intrasocietal Relations." The first and fourth sections were published as an abstract in the Spring 1984 *Society for Cross-Cultural Research Newsletter* (12(1):16). The entire document is reprinted below:

A Model for Analyzing Intersocietal and Intrasocietal Relationships

1. This model conceives of the intersocietal scene as a system composed of subsystems, between which there exist various types of relationships. The relationships within any subsystem depend in part upon the relationships that the subsystem has with other subsystems.

   1.1. Within this frame of reference, societies are considered to be subsystems.

   1.2. Intersocietal relations correspond to the relationships between subsystems.

   1.3. Internal affairs or intrasocietal relations correspond to the relationships within a given subsystem.

2. At an initial time certain types of relationships and problems exist between societies.

   2.1. Relationships can range from the type that exists between kindred peoples, that one would not think of going to war with, to the type which exists between time immemorial enemies, whom one attempts to annihilate. The various types of relationships are culturally defined and have to be ascertained through empirical investigation. The various types can be arranged along a continuum, points on which can be labeled: kindred peoples, traditional allies, potential allies, neutrals, potential enemies, mortal enemies.

   2.2. Assume two societies, each with a goal. If the goals are the same, they may be shared (in which case a relationship of cooperation exists) or not shared (in which case a relationship of competition exists). If the goals are different, they may be compatible (in which case a relationship of assistance exists) or incompatible (in which case a relationship of hindrance exists). Problems arise if societal goals are not shared or are incompatible.

2.3. The various problems which periodically arise in intersocietal relations are met with particular means (e.g., diplomacy, war) depending upon the type of relationship which exists between the societies. If there are no means for meeting the problem, new means will be devised or disturbances in intersocietal relations will arise, which may lead to a change in the relationship.

3. The relationships between societies change over time.

3.1. One or both societies may redefine goals and thereby change the problems.

3.2. The means used may consist of the societies trying to change each other's goals or of trying to change each other's society.

3.3. The means by which problems are resolved may result in changes in intersocietal relationships.

4. The response which the society makes to intersocietal problems will change certain internal relationships.

4.1. As changes in intersocietal or external relationships occur, changes occur in internal relationships.

4.2. Changes will occur in the following aspects of internal relations: shifts in power structure; changes in the allocation of resources.

4.3. Changes in internal relationships will affect the manner in which intersocietal problems are resolved.

4.4. Changes over time occur in both external and internal relationships and have an interdependent influence on each other.

The model became immediately useful for studying feuding and warfare. All that was required was to equate the subsystems of the model with political communities — the maximal politically independent territorial unit. An additional step in research was to view these subsystems/political communities as being in many instances composed of fraternal interest groups — localized groups of related males. This allowed the model to be used to study simultaneously both feuding and warfare, by defining warfare as armed combat between the political communities and feuding as armed combat

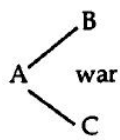
between the fraternal interest groups within a political community. Thus an intergroup relations approach can be used to study feuding and warfare.

The approach includes elements drawn from several other theoretical approaches. **Social structure**: the distinguishing of social units is basic to any structural analysis, whether it be British social anthropology headed by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown or the Yale school headed by George P. Murdock. The basic unit in the intergroup relations approach is the political community, and nearly as important is the fraternal interest group. **Functionalism**: of the many functional approaches, the one embodied in the intergroup relations approach is the idea that groups and individuals struggle for survival. Carneiro's foreword to *The Evolution of War* states the approach well (1970, pp. xi–xii): "in war the test of fitness is applied, not just to military practices, but to *societies themselves*. The ultimate test of fitness, of course, is survival." **Ecological**: the superorganic environment in which a political community competes is of paramount importance. The notion that a political community's neighbors constitute as important a part of its environment as does the territory it occupies is taken from Service (1962, pp. 7, 29). This version of the ecological approach offers an opportunity to study ideas and objects which have diffused from other political communities. This builds in a time dimension and opens the way to studying short-term rapid change or long-term evolutionary change. While obvious, it should be mentioned that the physical environment provides resources and thus gives political communities, fraternal interest groups, and other social units something to fight over. (Of course, they can and often do fight for survival and for non-material things, such as status and prestige.) The two main resources are sustenance and sites for habitations.

An intergroup relations approach not only lends itself to the study of conflict between political communities, but also to cooperation between political communities. The following discussion of alliances is taken from the preface to the second edition of *The Evolution of War* (1985, pp. xx–xxi in original):

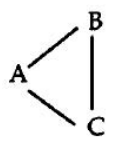
> Although information on alliance formation is often absent from ethnographic accounts, making cross-cultural research on the topic difficult, the existence of a few accounts indicates that this is a fascinating research area. Alliances are usually entered into for defensive reasons, yet alliance systems themselves generate conflict. Two types of alliance systems can be identified: an unbalanced or Yanomamö type and a balanced or Dani type. In the former, the lack

of balance or instability is created by triadic, interpolitical community relationships with the following form:



Political community A is allied with political communities B and C, which are at war with each other. Conflict is generated when political community B attempts to get political community A to break its alliance with political community C by making a surprise attack; political community C is likely to attempt the same strategy. Alliance systems of this type, as illustrated by the Yanomamö, are composed of many sets of triadic relationships, with each political community usually being a member of several sets of triadic relationships.

Balanced alliance systems are composed of triadic relationships with the following form:



An alliance relationship exists between each pair of members of the triad. (Such a balanced "triad" may have more than three members.) The alliances themselves are at war with each other. Thus a balance exists within and between alliances. But it is only a temporary balance. Although in balanced alliance systems, political communities usually join alliances for defensive purposes, membership in an alliance does not necessarily reduce the need for military forces. In a "world" of alliances, each major member of an alliance may believe that it must be as strong as the strongest member of an opposing alliance and preferably as strong as the entire opposing alliance. Furthermore, if it is not the strongest member of its own alliance, it may attempt to become so. If an alliance becomes militarily stronger than another alliance, it is likely to defeat it in war. The winning alliance itself may then break up, with the strongest political community within the former alliance forming alliances with the remnants of the loser. Twentieth-century European warfare has taken this form. If three or more alliances compose the system, as is the case with the Dani, the strongest alliances may briefly combine to destroy the weakest, contrary to what game theory would predict. (This is my interpretation of the Dani data.) The Dani also illustrate a second kind of situation that can end in the destruction of an alliance. A political community in one alliance secretly joins with the political communities of another alliance and assists that alliance in defeating its own former partners. Internal alliance rivalry is likely to lead to this situation (Heider 1979, pp. 103–105).

With the assistance of Alan LaFlamme I have developed a universe of neighboring societies (Otterbein and LaFlamme 1987). The universe of 736 neighboring pairs of societies is based upon the 862 societies contained in the *Ethnographic Atlas* (Murdock 1967).

The major purpose for deriving such a universe "is to obtain a universe of pairs of neighboring societies that can be used in cross-cultural studies of intersocietal relations and warfare. Several specific problems can profitably be studied with such a universe, such as the following: Under what conditions does a society expand geographically at the expense of its neighbors? When two societies are in contact, which cultural traits diffuse and which ones do not? Under what conditions do intersocietal marriages occur? What types of diplomatic negotiations occur, and with what types of pairs of societies are they found? What is the effect of different environments upon societies that were at one time the same society (i.e., neighboring societies that stem from the same ancestral society through fission)?" (Otterbein and LaFlamme 1987, p. 142).

My research on feuding and warfare employs a conceptual apparatus that distinguishes between types of armed combat. This development of a set of related concepts occurred early in my research and has been retained to the present. Thus, the conceptual apparatus remains the same over time and appears in a number of publications. Although this creates some redundancy, it has not been removed from any of the selections in this collection. (The reason for not removing the conceptual apparatus from any of the publications is so that each selection can be read singly.) The most explicit presentation of the conceptual apparatus appears in "Cross-Cultural Studies of Armed Combat" (1968a, p. 100 below). There the types of armed combat are listed in a Glossary of Terms and a Diagram of Major Concepts is presented.

My research is placed in a developmental (in the sense of change) or evolutionary framework. The case studies of the Iroquois (1964a) and Zulu (1964b) explicitly take into account changes over time, changes that in part came about due to the diffusion of military technology. The comparative studies of feuding, warfare, and capital punishment utilize evolutionary typologies. The differences in military practices among bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states are always examined. I see changes in sociopolitical organization as occurring because of new military practices, and in turn I see the emergence of more complex sociopolitical organization as a stimulus to the acquiring or development of military technology.

Because of my early interest in military history, I have frequently focused on weapons and tactics, or perhaps because of my interest in weapons and tactics I became interested in military history. Battle maps have always fascinated me (for one that I created, see chapter 2, "Huron vs. Iroquois," p. 16). Military historians are often military