THE LINEAGE SYSTEM

There are always more villages than tertiary segments in a tribe and more tertiary segments than secondary segments, and so on, so that, since each territorial unit is associated with a lineage, the narrowing of such units from the multitude of villages to the single unit of the tribe must be reflected in the conceptual structure of the lineage system, there being a multitude of minimal lineages, fewer minor lineages, and so forth, till the single unit of the clan is reached. If this suggestion is accepted it is evident that the lineages are in number and structural position strictly limited and controlled by the system of territorial segmentation. The two systems may thus be represented diagrammatically by the same figure, though the correspondence is not exact.

CHAPTER VI

THE AGE-SET SYSTEM

All male Nuer are initiated from boyhood to manhood by a very severe operation (gar). Their brows are cut to the bone with a small knife, in six long cuts from ear to ear. The scars remain for life, and it is said that marks can be detected on the skulls of dead men. They are particularly clear in Plates XXVI(b), XXVII, and XXVIII. The ceremonial of initiation is more complex, and the age-set system has greater social importance among the Nuer than among other Sudan Nilotes.

We have described, and others have described, elsewhere the ritual of initiation. Though we have since collected further information on the details of the rites, we consider that to transcribe it here would be out of accord with the plan of this book. The barest facts are related. Boys are now usually initiated between the ages of 14 and 16; in the old days at a somewhat later age, perhaps from 16 to 18. Whether a boy is initiated in one year or in another year may depend on the milk and millet supply. A boy must obtain his father's consent to the operation, but it cannot well be refused, for the boy would then run away to the home of a kinsman and the father would be humiliated. He afterwards goes to a member of his father's age-set who performs a rite to give him the blessing of the set. A member of the clan likewise gives him its blessing, and his father and maternal uncle bless him. The boys make their own arrangements with the operator and each presents him with a fishing spear. The operator is any man who has learnt the art.

Several boys are initiated at the same time, for it is thought that were a boy to be initiated by himself he would be lonely and might die. Also, it is easier to cater for the boys and to give them the care and attention they require during convalescence if they are initiated in batches. Usually some four to a dozen boys pass through the rites together. Initiation can take place at any season, but it almost invariably takes place at the end of the rains, when there is plenty of food and the north wind blows and cicatrizes the wounds. Each village acts independently.
in arranging for its boys to be initiated. After the operation the boys live in partial seclusion and are subject to various taboos. This is a time of mild licence and they pass out of it by a special rite. On the day of the cutting, and on the day of the passing out of seclusion, sacrifices are made and there is festivity, which includes licentious horseplay and the singing of lewd songs. Only age-mates of the father of the initiate in whose homestead the feasting takes place attend it; others keep at a distance lest they see the nakedness of their kinswomen and mothers-in-law.

II

All boys initiated during a number of successive years belong to a single age-set (ric). There has, till recently, been a four-year interval between the end of one such set and the commencement of the next. These four years are known as the time 'when the knife is hung up', and at the end of that period it is said 'the knife is brought out' and boys may then be initiated again. A certain wul ghok, 'Man of the Cattle', is, in each tribe, responsible for opening and closing the initiation periods and thereby dividing the sets. He performs the appropriate rite in his district, and when the news goes round other districts begin or cease initiation. He derives prestige from his functions, but they are ritual and give him no political authority. Sometimes, in Western Nuerland, they are performed by a prophet, but it is possible that in these cases the prophet is also a Man of the Cattle. The age-sets are organized independently in each tribe, at any rate in the larger tribes, but it often happens that when a new set has been started in one tribe an adjacent tribe will follow its lead, so that the names and periods of sets in neighbouring tribes are frequently the same. Also, though in different parts of Nuerland the names of the sets are different and the open and closed periods do not coincide, it is easy for a man who moves from one part to another to perceive in which set he would have been initiated had he been brought up in that part of the country.

To-day there are no closed periods and boys are initiated every year. The Man of the Cattle announces every few years that he is about to cut the sets and performs a ceremony by which all youths initiated up to that year fall into one set and all youths initiated after that year fall into a junior set. The number of years during which a set runs before being cut is variable, and this has probably always been the case. We conclude on the evidence that ten years may be regarded as an average period between the commencement of one set and the commencement of the next. It was found that generally two sets, but occasionally one, intervened between the set of a man and that of his eldest son. In the case of younger sons two or three sets usually intervene. It may be accepted that on an average the generations of grandfather—father—son cover six sets.

At the time of my inquiry into the age-set system there were members of six sets alive, but there were only a few survivors of the senior set and the members of the next senior were very infirm. Sets with no living members are not recorded in the lists below. Their names are irrelevant to an understanding of the system and their order is so ill-remembered that the statements of two informants on the matter are seldom in entire agreement. It should be noted, however, that as far back as Nuer recitation carries us the names are not uniform for the whole of Nuerland and that they are not repeated. There is no cycle of names such as we find in many parts of East Africa. The Lou and the Eastern Jikany tend to have common names; also the tribes of western Nuerland; while the tribes of the Zerat have some names in common with the Sobat river tribes and some with the tribes to the west of the Nile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lou tribe</th>
<th>Eastern Jikany tribe</th>
<th>Lak tribe</th>
<th>Western Jikany and Lou tribes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thut</td>
<td>Thut</td>
<td>Thut</td>
<td>Liyango</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boiloc</td>
<td>Boiloc</td>
<td>Boiloc</td>
<td>Ruob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maker</td>
<td>Maker</td>
<td>Ruob</td>
<td>Wondel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dangunga</td>
<td>Dangunga</td>
<td>Wangdel</td>
<td>Tangkwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luac</td>
<td>Carbo</td>
<td>Wooni</td>
<td>Rot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lihgac</td>
<td>Lihgac</td>
<td>Kec</td>
<td>Juong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rialmac</td>
<td>Rialmac</td>
<td>Pilual</td>
<td>Bildeang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each age-set has two or three subdivisions. Each year in the initiation period may receive a separate name and constitute a division though probably two years often have the same name and the divisions are usually two-year periods. But though a set is thus stratified internally and the divisions are called by different...
names, all members of the set are known by the name of the first division, and this common name persists while the others eventually fall into disuse. Thus today one seldom hears of Maker indit and Ngwek, but only of Maker, under which title both divisions are included. Likewise one hears small mention of Gwong indit, Carbob, and Nyamnyam, and reference is normally to Dangungu (Gwong), which term covers all three divisions. The senior division is called indit, the greater, and when the segmentary names are dropped the indit is dropped also, since its purpose is to distinguish the primary division from the later ones. Hence we have Thut indit, Maker indit, and Boiloe indit, the elder Thut, the elder Maker, and the elder Boiloe, but the indit ending in these names is eventually dropped and the complete sets become known as Thut, Maker, and Boiloe.

In recent years the matter has become somewhat complicated by the absence of well-defined closed and open initiation periods. Thus in my earlier visits to Lou and Eastern Gaajok I heard people speak of Lieth indit, Lieth incar (Lieth intot), Caiyat (Pilual), and Rialmae (Rialdang) as four divisions of the Lithgae age-set, but this was because there had been no declaration by the Man of the Cattle separating them into different age-sets. On a later expedition I found that the Lieth indit, the Lieth incar, and Caiyat had been declared to be a single age-set, and the Rialmae to start a new age-set, a second division of which, the Kwekoryoammi, has since been initiated. Similarly among the Western Jikany and Leek the Bildeang age-set has recently been declared separate from the Juong. At one time in Eastern Gaajok the Lithgae were cut off from the Rialmac, while in the adjacent country of the Eastern Gaajak they had not yet been separated and remained for the time being a single set. It may thus happen that, in modern times, a sub-division may for a time be regarded as the junior segment of one set and later become the senior segment of the next set. Below are given the sub-divisions of the age-sets in the Lou and Western Jikany tribes:

### Lou
- Thut
  - Muothjaang
  - Lilnyang
- Maker
  - Ngwek
- Boiloe
  - Golyangkaat
  - Laibwau

### Western Jikany
- Gwong
  - Carbob
  - Nyamnyam
- Luac
  - Karam
  - Camthoari
- Lithgae
  - Lieth indit (intot)
  - Caiyat (Pilual)
- Rialmac
  - Rialmae (Rialdang)

In seeking to understand how membership of an age-set determines a man's behaviour we have first to realize that there is no purposive education or moral training in the procedure of initiation. Also, many of the characteristic features of the age-set system in Kenya, where it is most highly developed, are absent in the Nuer variation. There are not three distinct age-grades of boys, warriors, and elders through which the sets pass, for a boy who is initiated into manhood remains in this grade for the rest of his life. Warriors are not prohibited from marrying and they neither enjoy privileges nor suffer restrictions different from those of other male adults. The sets have no administrative, juridical, or other specific political functions and the country is not handed over to their care. The sets have no definite military functions. Indeed, we are of the opinion that the Nuer age-set system ought not to be described as a military organization, though some writers give it this character. Youths who have recently been initiated are anxious for their first raid, and consider that they ought to earn for their set a reputation for valour, and it is likely that raids were generally conducted in the main by men of the most junior set. However, there is no grade of warriorhood through which the age-sets pass nor a grade of elderhood into which they enter. Were boys and old men to take part in warfare against other Nuer they would probably be killed, and it is understandable that raids are the occupation of the strongest and fleetest,
though many middle-aged men accompany the expeditions and always have their share in inter-tribal fighting and local disputes.

The age-set system of a tribe is in no way its military organization. Men fight by villages and by tribal sections and not by sets. The war companies are local units and not age-set units, and within a company men of different sets fight side by side, though, especially in raids, most of the warriors would be members of the two most junior sets. Kinship and local ties determine a man's place in the ranks. Hence the age-sets are not regiments, though wars and raids are often spoken of as the actions of a certain set because they took place during the initiation period of this set and its members took the most prominent part in them, since skill in arms, love of adventure, and desire for booty are the privileges of youth.

It is in more general social relations, chiefly of a domestic and kinship order, and not in political relations that behaviour is specifically determined by the positions of persons in age-set structure. When a boy passes into the grade of manhood his domestic duties and privileges are radically altered. His change of status is epitomized in the taboo on milking which comes into force on the day of his initiation and continues for the rest of his life, but it is expressed also in other domestic tasks, in habits of eating, and so forth. At initiation a youth receives from his father or uncle a spear and becomes a warrior. He is also given an ox, from which he takes an ox-name, and becomes a herdsman. From now on, till he is a husband and father, his chief interests are dancing and love-making. Then he becomes 'a true man': 'he has fought in war and not run away; he has duelled with his age-mates; he has cultivated his gardens; he has married a wife'.

There is a sudden and great change in status from boyhood to manhood, but the modes of behaviour which differentiate these two grades do not distinguish one set from another, for the privileges of manhood are enjoyed by members of all the sets equally. Nevertheless, the sets are stratified by seniority and there are well-defined relationships between them. Before summarizing these patterns of inter-set behaviour we touch on some general characteristics of the whole system.

The age-set system is a further exemplification of the segmentary principle which we have seen to be so evident a quality of social structure. Tribes segment into sections and their sections further segment, so that any local group is a balanced relation between opposed segments. Clans segment into lineages and their lineages further segment, so that any lineage group is a balanced relation between opposed segments. Likewise the institution based on age is highly segmentary, being stratified into sets which are opposed groups, and these sets are further stratified into successive sections. We may therefore speak of structural distance in this new dimension. Just as the distance between political segments varies according to their positions in the political structure, and the distance between lineage segments varies according to their positions in the lineage structure, so the distances between age-set segments varies according to their positions in the age-set structure. The structural distance between any two sets is the social relation between those sets and the determinant of behaviour between their members.

The relativity of values which we noted in discussing the political and lineage systems may also be seen in the age-set system. We have noted that a set which is seen as an unsegmented whole by members of other sets is internally segmented, and that members of each of its segments see themselves as exclusive units in relation to the others, though these divisions close as the set becomes more senior and has a new position in relation to sets, since created, below it. Also, there is a tendency for members of two successive sets, adjacent segments of the structure, to fuse in relation to a third in feelings and in ceremonial actions. A Royege youth said: 'We and the Lheyac are about the same age and we can be free in speaking to them, but we must show respect to an older man, even if he is not of our fathers' age-set.' Although there are six sets with living members there are very few survivors of the two senior sets, and from the point of view of a young man they are merged with the one that follows them. Only four sets count, and, seen by individuals, they merge into two generation groups of equals and brothers, and seniors and fathers or juniors and sons. To a Lheyac son of a Maker father all members of the Maker age-set
are his fathers, and the Lithgac and the Luac tend to see themselves as a single group in relation to the Maker, having a like attitude of respect towards them. But in relation to the Dangunga and to the Lithgac, the Luac identify themselves with the one or the other according to the direction of attention, and this is determined by the social situation. Any set tends to see the set senior to it as equals in relation to junior sets and the set junior to it as equals in relation to senior sets. It is possibly this contradiction which creates segmentation in any set. Thus, at sacrificial feasts men eat according to their position in the age-set structure, but which sets sit and eat together depends on the set of the owner of the feast and on the number of sets present at it. If a Dangunga kills an ox and there are Maker present, but not Boiloc, then Dangunga eat with Maker and Luac with Lithgac and the Rialmac by themselves; but if there are Boiloc present then the Maker eat with them and the Dangunga with the Luac, and the Lithgac with the Rialmac. The Dangunga would not eat with the Boiloc because they are the set of their fathers or fathers-in-law; and for the same reason the Luac must eat with the Lithgac if the Dangunga go with the Maker.

The age-set system differs from the territorial and lineage systems in one important respect. Whereas the people of a territorial segment remain, or most of them remain, in the same structural relation to other territorial segments for their whole lives, and whereas the members of a lineage have a fixed relationship to other lineages, an age-set group changes its position in relation to the whole system, passing through points of relative juniority and seniority. This mobility of age-set groups is peculiar to the system and is a necessary characteristic of it, for it is an institution based on the succession of generations. Probably, for oecological reasons, the actual political configuration remains very much the same from generation to generation. People pass through the political system without their structural position in it changing to any extent during their passage. It is the same with the lineage system. Nevertheless the mobility of groups through the age-set structure and their changing position in it should not be allowed to obscure the constancy of its structural form. There have pro-
bably always been the same number of sets in existence at any
time and these sets always have the same relative positions to
each other in the system, regardless of actual groups of men
composing them.

It is significant that among the Nuer, as among other East
African peoples, the age-set system is the first institution to
undergo rapid and great modification under European rule and
that the other social systems do not appear to be affected by
the changes in its constitution. This tends to confirm the opinion
we have earlier expressed, that whilst the age-set system is
combined with the territorial and lineage systems in the same
social cadre and is consistent with them, the consistency is not
an interdependence.

IV

Within the age-set system the position of every male Nuer
is structurally defined in relation to every other male Nuer and
his status to them is one of seniority, equality, or juniority. It
is difficult to describe these statuses in terms of behaviour,
because the attitudes they impose are often of a very general
nature. The following points may, however, be noted. (1) There
are certain ritual observances and avoidances, chiefly between
members of the same set, but also between sets. The most
important of these are the segregation of the sets at sacrificial
feasts, to which we have referred, and the stringent prohibition
on members of a set burying an age-mate or partaking of the
meat of beasts sacrificed at his mortuary ceremony; but there
are a number of other ritual injunctions. (2) A man may not
marry, or have sexual relations with, the daughter of an age­
mate, for she is his ‘daughter’ and he is her ‘father’. Also,
while a man may always have sexual relations with the daughter
of one of his father’s age-mates he ought not to marry her
unless either his father, or her father, is dead, and then only
after the parties to the marriage have exchanged beasts in
atonement to the age-set of the fathers. (3) Members of the
same age-set are on terms of entire equality. A man does not
stand on ceremony with his age-mates, but jokes, plays, and eats
with them at his ease. Age-mates associate in work, war, and
in all the pursuits of leisure. They are expected to offer one
another hospitality and to share their possessions. Fighting is considered an appropriate mode of behaviour between age-mates, but a man ought not to fight a man of a senior set. The comradeship between age-mates springs from a recognition of a mystical union between them, linking their fortunes, which derives from an almost physical bond, analogous to that of true kinship, for they have shed their blood together. (4) Members of a set are expected to show respect to members of senior sets, and their deference to them can be seen in discussions, in etiquette, in distribution of food, and so forth. Whenever there is a question about the propriety of speech or action it is judged by reference to the relative positions of the persons concerned in the age-set structure, if kinship status is not also involved.

Since every man has a known age-relationship to every other man in Nuerland with whom he is likely to come into contact, their social attitude to him, and his social attitude to them, is determined in advance by the distances between them in age-set structure, unless kinship takes precedence. Although it is possible for a man to avenge a breach of these patterns of behaviour by a curse, if it is a very serious breach, the ordinary sanctions of conduct are a man's conscience and desire for approval.

It will have been noted that the relations between the sets are defined in the idiom of family relationships. The members of a man's father's age-set are his 'fathers' and the members of his father's brothers' 'age-sets' are, in a less precise sense, also his 'fathers'. The sons of a man's set are his 'sons', and they may fall into several sets. The wives of members of a man's father's set are his 'mothers', and the wives of members of his sons' sets are his 'daughters'. All members of a man's own set are likewise 'brothers', though here the analogy is seldom expressed because the comradeship between age-mates is strongly affirmed in the idiom of the system, for they are all ric, age-mates, to one another. As, in any case, a man commonly addresses all persons much senior to himself as 'father' and 'mother', all persons much junior to himself as 'son' and 'daughter', and all persons of about the same age as himself as 'brother' and 'sister', the terminology of address between different sets is not a differentiating one and it cannot be said how far it is determined by specific age-set relationships. When speaking about sets senior to his own, but not that of his father or the set immediately senior to his own, a Nuer sometimes speaks about them collectively as though all their members were his fathers-in-law and their wives his mothers-in-law, for he is courting their daughters and is likely to marry one of them and so is circumspect in his dealings with their parents. Thus a Lithgac son of a Maker father regards members of the Dangungu set and their wives as potential fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law.

The age-set system thus influences persons through a kinship idiom and on the pattern of kinship. The sets never act corporately, but they function locally between individuals and, in ceremonial situations, between small aggregates of persons who live near to one another, for a man only has frequent contacts with those members of his set and of other sets who live in his district. No doubt relative positions in age-set structure to some extent determine behaviour between neighbours, and it can sometimes be observed that they determine it, but it is difficult to say to what extent, for men who live near one another are not only members of the same age-set or of different age-sets but are also kinsmen or affines. The age-set patterns of behaviour are, except in specific rites, of so general a nature that they cannot be isolated in a community where everyone is related in a number of different ways to everybody else. We have noted how persons who live together are always able to express their relations to one another in the language of kinship and how, when they are not actual kinsmen, they are recognized as equivalent to such by adoption or through some traditional, or mythological, connexion. The age-set stratification of all men, and by analogy all women, into groups whose interrelations are on the pattern of family relationships is one of the ways by which community relations are expressed in kinship patterns and is comparable to the classificatory system of kinship nomenclature in its assimilation of social relations to a few elementary types. Age-relations are part of the general social ties of a kinship type which unite all persons living in a community. The members of a local group have group relations only with other groups of the same kind and it is these relations...
which we call political. They also have manifold contacts with one another—economic, ceremonial, food, play, and so forth—and political relations may be viewed as a specific organization of the texture of social ties, which control these contacts, in certain situations. It is this action of the age-set system, in establishing ties between members of local communities and in giving them a kinship value, that we chiefly stress in a political context rather than its indication of leadership, for outside small kinship and domestic groups the authority derived from seniority is negligible, and the sets lack leadership and administrative and judicial functions.

The age-set system has been briefly treated because of this action and also because, in the larger tribes at any rate, it is a tribal institution. It segments the male population of a tribe into stratified groups which stand in a definite relationship to one another and it cuts across territorial divisions, giving identity of status where there is political disparity and differentiating status where there is political identity. However, the political system and the age-set system do not seem to be interdependent. Both are consistent in themselves and to some extent overlap and influence one another, but it is easy to conceive of the political system existing without an age-set organization. There is evidence in East Africa that political development produces atrophy of the age-set organization. In conclusion we would again emphasize that adjacent tribes co-ordinate their sets and that the sets of any tribe are easily translated into the sets of another tribe. Initiation rites, more than anything save language, distinguish Nuer culture and give Nuer that sense of superiority which is so conspicuous a trait of their character. Only in the sense that age-sets are organized tribally and are common to all tribes can there be said to be a correspondence between the age-set system and the political system. There is no positive structural correspondence of the kind we have noted between the lineage system of dominant clans and tribal segmentation. It may be said, therefore, that whereas the political system and the lineage system of dominant clans are interdependent, the political system and the age-set systems are only a combination, in Nuer society. We may add that the common assumption that an age-set system merely by
of the dominant clans is a function of structural distance in the tribal systems and that there is no comparable interdependence between age-set structure and political structure.

2. By social structure we mean relations between groups which have a high degree of consistency and constancy. The groups remain the same irrespective of their specific content of individuals at any particular moment, so that generation after generation of people pass through them. Men are born into them, or enter into them later in life, and move out of them at death; the structure endures. In this definition of structure the family is not considered a structural group, because families have no consistent and constant interrelations as groups and they disappear at the death of their members. New families come into being, but the old for ever vanish. We do not suggest that the family is for this reason of less importance than structural groups; it is essential for the preservation of the structure, for it is the means by which new persons are born into its segments and the system is maintained. Nor do we suggest that the relations we consider structural are between groups that do not in any way vary. Territorial, lineage, and age-set systems change, but more slowly, and there is always the same kind of interrelationship between their segments. We do not, however, insist on this limiting definition of structure and our description and analysis do not depend on it.

3. Structural relations are relations between groups which form a system. By structure we therefore further mean an organized combination of groups. The territorial distribution of a Nuer tribe is not a haphazard aggregate of residential units, but every local group is segmental and the segments are fused in relation to other groups, so that each unit can only be defined in terms of the whole system. Similarly a lineage or age-set can only be defined in terms of the systems of which they form part. We have tried to show this in our account.

4. By structure we mean relations between groups of persons within a system of groups. We stress that it is a relation between groups, for relations between individuals may also be arranged on a regular plan, e.g., kinship relationships may be spoken of as a kinship system. By 'group' we mean persons who regard themselves as a distinct unit in relation to other units, are so regarded by members of these other units, and who all have reciprocal obligations in virtue of their membership of it. In this sense a tribal segment, a lineage, and an age-set are groups, but a man's kindred are not a group. A kinship relationship is a category and the kinship system a co-ordination of categories in relation to an individual. In our opinion strangers and Dinka ought to be described as persons of certain categories rather than as members of social groups and that the relations between them and aristocrats are not, strictly speaking, to be described as structural relations.

5. The social structure of a people is a system of separate but interrelated structures. This book deals mainly with the political structure. Faced with the initial difficulty of defining what is political we decided to regard the relations between territorial groups as such, taking the village as our smallest unit, for though a village is a network of kinship ties it is not a kinship group, but a group definable only by common residence and sentiment. We found that the complementary tendencies towards fission and fusion, which we have called the segmentary principle, is a very evident characteristic of Nuer political structure. The lines of political cleavage are determined chiefly by oecology and culture. Harsh environment together with dominant pastoral interests cause low density and wide gaps in the distribution of local communities. Cultural differences between the Nuer and their neighbours also cause varying degrees of political distance. Oecological and cultural relations often combine to produce fission. In Nuerland itself culture is homogeneous, and it is oecological relations that chiefly determine the size and distribution of segments.

6. These tendencies in, or principles of, political structure control actual behaviour between persons through values. These values appear contradictory. They are only seen to be consistent when we view structure as sets of relations defined by reference to specific social situations. By political values we mean the common feeling and acknowledgement of members of local communities that they are an exclusive group distinct from, and opposed to, other communities of the same order, and that they ought to act together in certain circumstances and to observe certain conventions among themselves. It does not follow that
behaviour always accords with values and it may often be found to be in conflict with them, but it always tends to conform to them.

7. Not only can we speak of the relations between territorial groups as a political system, the relations between lineages as a lineage system, the relations between age-sets as an age-set system, and so forth, but also in a society there is always some relationship between these systems in the whole social structure, though it is not easy to determine what this relationship is. We have shown that there is interdependence of a kind between the Nuer lineage system and their political system. This does not mean a functional relationship between clan groups and territorial groups, although they have a certain association, for clans, and even their lineages have no corporate life. Nor does it mean that when a man behaves in a certain way to a fellow clansman and in a different way to a fellow tribesman that there is a functional relationship between these two modes of behaviour. Nor, again, does it mean that there is a functional relationship between those members of a dominant clan who live in a tribe and the tribe of which they form part. But it means that there is structural consistency between the two systems—a consistency between abstractions. We are unable to show a similar interdependence between the age-set system and the political system.

8. Can we speak of political behaviour as a distinct type of social behaviour? We have assumed that certain activities, such as war and feuds, may be called political, but we do not consider that much is gained by so designating them. It is only on the more abstract plane of structural relations that a specific sphere of political relations can be demarcated. The behaviour of persons to one another is determined by a series of attachments, to family, joint family, lineage, clan, age-set, &c., and by kinship relationships, ritual ties, and so forth. These strands of relationships give to every man his sphere of social contacts. His field of actual contacts is limited; his field of potential contacts is unlimited. We distinguish a man's social sphere in this sense from structural space, the distance between social segments, which are groups of people who compose units in a system. We do not therefore say that a man is acting politically or otherwise, but that between local groups there are relations of a structural order that can be called political.

9. We do not describe the different social ties which exist between persons living in the same district, but we may say that, in our view, the relations between this network of individual relationships, that together make up a community, and political structure, the relations that exist between territorial segments, present a problem of considerable importance, and we make some comments on it. (a) Social relationships are ordered by the political structure, so that a man's social sphere, and the joint social sphere of a number of persons living in the same village, tend always to be limited by the extension of their political groups. (b) Local communities, relations between which constitute the political structure, are only groups because of these many and varied relationships between the individuals who compose them. But it is the organization of these relationships into groups standing in a certain relation to one another within a system that interests us in our present discussion and we only study them in this organized form; just as one can, for certain purposes, study the relation between organs of the body without studying the interrelation of the cells that compose the organs. (c) In our view the territorial system of the Nuer is always the dominant variable in its relation to the other social systems. Among the Nuer, relationships are generally expressed in kinship terms, and these terms have great emotional content, but living together counts more than kinship and, as we have seen, community ties are always in one way or another turned into, or assimilated to, kinship ties, and the lineage system is twisted into the form of the territorial system within which it functions.

10. We have defined structure by what amounts to the presence of group segmentation and have discussed some Nuer systems from this point of view. We again emphasize that we do not insist on our definition and that we recognize that structure can be otherwise defined. But having so defined it, frequent allusion to a principle of contradiction in it was forced on us. To avoid misunderstanding, however, we would remark that the contradiction we have alluded to is on the abstract plane of structural relations and emerges from a systematization of
values by sociological analysis. It is not to be supposed that we mean that behaviour is contradictory or that groups stand in contradiction to one another. It is the relations of groups within a system that constitutes and exemplifies the principle. There may sometimes be conflict of values in the consciousness of an individual, but it is structural tension to which we refer. Likewise when we refer to the relativity of the structure we do not mean that a group is anything than an actual mass of people who can be seen and counted and plotted in space and time. We mean that on the plane of structural relations its position in a system is relative to the functioning of the system in changing situations.

II. Besides making a contribution to the ethnology of the Nilotes we have attempted in this book a short excursion into sociological theory, but we can only make a theoretical analysis up to a certain point, beyond which we perceive vaguely how further analysis might be made. Our experience in research and in writing this essay has intimated the lines of more extensive treatment. Social anthropology deals at present in crude concepts, tribe, clan, age-set, &c., representing social masses and a supposed relation between these masses. The science will make little progress on this low level of abstraction, if it be considered abstraction at all, and it is necessary for further advance to use the concepts to denote relations, defined in terms of social situations, and relations between these relations. The task of exploring new country is particularly difficult in the discipline of politics where so little work has been done and so little is known. We feel like an explorer in the desert whose supplies have run short. He sees vast stretches of country before him, and perceives how he would try to traverse them; but he must return and console himself with the hope that perhaps the little knowledge he has gained will enable another to make a more successful journey.