

Conflict and violence at the local level: a world-system perspective

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Abstract. World-system theory has become the major paradigm for evaluating the influence of global economic and political linkages on preindustrial societies. The position within one of the zones of the world-system is assumed to explain internal phenomena of these societies. While this should apply to the explanation of warfare as well, it is shown in this article, that variations in patterns of warfare are not explained by world-system position, this being too coarse of a grid. Rather the interaction of particular external influences, as for example the introduction of cash crop economy, with internal features, such as the specific subsistence strategies found in a society, jointly influence patterns of conflict and violence.

Introduction

In this article¹ I explore the possibilities of applying a world system perspective for the explanation of conflict and violent conflict management in small-scale preindustrial societies.

Anthropologists are increasingly challenging the view of the small-scale preindustrial societies as being static and without a history of their own. Recent reviews by Nash (1981) and Vincent (1986) give evidence of the growing concern with the embeddedness of local communities within larger political and economic networks. Eric Wolf reminds us of the fact, that anthropology itself is the offspring of European and American encounter with the "supposed bearers of a pristine past" Wolf (1982: 18) and calls for an integration of ethnohistorical findings about the interrelationships "at work in separate cases" (19) within a larger theoretical framework, which in turn will change the perspective in empirical studies as well. This has first been done in peasant studies of the 1950's, acknowledging the link of peasant villages to wider economic and political networks. It is reflected by Redfield's terminology of the "great" and "little traditions", implying the existence of a world beyond the local community which does have an influence on the life of the peasants and consequently needs to be understood by anthropologists (Roseberry 1989: 109). In the 70's a new paradigm was introduced

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