

Edward Evans-Pritchard

Strange Beliefs – Azande and Nuer People

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q9HyONL_10

Who, When, Why

- Social Anthropologist – also a soldier in WWII, scholar, historian, professor, author of classic *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*.
- Born 21 Sept 1902 – Died 11 Sept 1973 (71 yrs old), converted to Roman Catholicism in 1944. Received a Knighthood for his anthropology work.
- Fieldwork began in 1926 with the Azande tribe, 1930 he started new project with Nuer people.
- This was postgraduate work, he had an interest in religious beliefs and excited by the adventure involved in studying ‘exotic cultures.’
- To find a better understanding and explanation of ‘irrational behaviour and ideas.’ He was interested to see if they formed a coherent system of belief and how it compared to the Western system. Interested in history of ideas and ‘primitive thinking’ and participant observation.

Pros & Cons of Methodology/Fieldwork

- Cons – not always sensitive to culture, usually public school boys who had a superiority complex. Tribal people being suspicious of the researchers – are they ‘true friends.’ Even if living with the tribe still an outsider, therefore information shared maybe censored/altered. Researcher solitude, isolation, bias and interpretation issues.
- Pros – fieldwork is not just observation but living with the people becoming an insider, participating, sharing daily life, language and culture. By living among the people, he was able to write down their thoughts, ideas and beliefs in their language. Studied case histories for depth and understanding. Immersing yourself into another culture, gaining trust. Interpreter and translator of culture, rather than a scientist. First hand evidence. Objective, make correlations, study tribe in their entirety.

Ways in which views & observations were affected by chronological context & background

- There was a large colonial presence in Africa at the time of research and this could have tainted observations, findings from both sides.
- Sudan was chosen by anthropologists because it was a colony of the British Empire.
- In 1926 was the first detailed study of African people by a trained anthropologist. Spent around 20 months among Azande people. Description v's fact.
- In 1930 went to research Nuer people as they were causing issues for the Anglo-Egyptian government.
- 1935 – he joined Sudan auxiliary, his tribal knowledge helped.
- Aware of religious, gender and cultural bias.
- Took 7 weeks to get to the tribe, by ship, train and foot, not easy to get to or leave!