Introduction

Emanuel Marx

In his doctoral thesis Emrys Peters (1951) studied the Bedouin of Cyrenaica on the eve of national independence under Sanusi rule. His teacher, Sir E. E. Evans-Pritchard, had two years earlier published *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949), a historical account of the political ascent of the Sanusi sect, that relied mainly on books and documents. As an officer of the Military Administration of Cyrenaica, Evans-Pritchard had, of course, been in touch with the Bedouin population but, as he himself admitted, 'could not conduct any serious anthropological research' among them (Evans-Pritchard 1973: 21). His long-standing intention to study the Bedouin population of Cyrenaica was never to be realised. This task devolved on his student. Peters was well aware of the message of *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, that the so-called 'simple' societies, just like Western ones, are shaped by powerful historical forces and must therefore be studied in the widest political and economic context. Yet in his thesis the contextual analysis is incidental to the detailed description of Bedouin society. The thesis does not deal explicitly with the impact of Italian occupation and colonisation, the relations between the Bedouin and the British military administration, the growing influence of the Sanusi religious brotherhood which was just one year later to lead the new state of Libya, or with the market forces that were affecting pastoralism. It was devoted to another, though related, theoretical issue. It challenged the view that the Bedouin were a tribal society, an acephalous segmentary political system. Evans-Pritchard himself, of course, had given credence to this essentially non-contextual view of society in *The Nuer* (1940) and elsewhere and, quite inconsistently, adhered to it in his discussion of the Libyan Bedouin. In the Sanusi book he devoted just one chapter to the Bedouin (1949: chapter 2), in which he treated them as a distinct tribal population that was hardly affected by the policies and activities of its alien rulers, and could perhaps generate

sufficient political power to resist the Italian rulers but not enough to run its own affairs. He believed that the Bedouin were incapable of establishing an orderly and regular government of their own, or that they could really be ruled by the Italian colonial administration. His position is subsumed in the statement that in this Bedouin society 'the fundamental principle of tribal structure is opposition between its segments, and in such segmentary systems there is no state and no government as we understand these institutions . . . [a chief's] social position is unformalized and . . . he must in no sense be regarded as a ruler or administrator' (1949: 59).

Peters argued for an altogether more complex picture of Bedouin society. He showed that Bedouin establish networks of relationships extending far beyond their corporate group and tribe, in order to safeguard their livelihood; that corporate groups congregate around leaders, who forge a variety of political links and alliances and generate a great deal of power; that membership of groups, though initially conferred as a birthright, is really voluntary and is retained as long as it serves members' interests, and therefore cannot derive from kinship ties; and that feuding between Bedouin groups is about the control of resources and cannot be explained by a mechanical model of fission and fusion. The concept of a segmentary political system could only develop in a functionalist paradigm, which viewed societies as homogeneous and stable closed systems almost impervious to external influences. For this reason the attack on the notion that the Bedouin were a segmentary society was eventually to lead Peters to question the validity of the functionalist paradigm and, in this roundabout manner, finally to return to Evans-Pritchard's book. He was no longer concerned with its treatment of Bedouin society, but rather with its major theme, the historical analysis of the Sanusi. While accepting his teacher's general approach, Peters reached independent conclusions which eventually led him to revise Evans-Pritchard's analysis of the Sanusi as the moral guides of the Bedouin and as mediators between their warring factions. Instead, he gave analytical preference to their control of long-distance trade which brought them wealth and influence over the Bedouin. Problems such as these engaged Peters' attention for many years, so that Libya remained his major research area through all that country's vicissitudes.

For more than thirty years Peters worked in and wrote about Libya, always concentrating on the Bedouin pastoralists and cultivators. During those years, he developed a contextualised analysis of the society. This volume includes most of the mature work of Emrys Peters on the Bedouin of Cyrenaica. Nearly all the themes can be traced back to his Oxford D. Phil. thesis. For the completion of the thesis marked the beginning of his

lifelong efforts to understand human behaviour through his intimate knowledge of the Bedouin. He was dissatisfied with the theoretical conception underlying his analysis of the Cyrenaican Bedouin. His articles became a battleground on which he tried first to revise Evans-Pritchard's views on the Bedouin and then to overcome his own functionalist training. The latter was a continuous struggle, which never ended in a decisive victory. In this sense, he was a good representative of his generation. There were a number of social anthropologists who discussed the relevance of the functionalist paradigm for their day and age. Many of them realised that functionalism was outmoded; the literature abounds with statements to that effect. Thus Boissevain (1973: xi–xii) argues that 'What is badly needed is a real alternative to structural-functionalism. This last has been discredited, but it has not yet been displaced' (or see Kuper 1983: chapter 9). But many scholars continued to write in the functionalist manner, perhaps because they knew of no alternatives. Other scholars, in Britain and elsewhere, took up new modes of analysis, such as neo-Marxism, structuralism, symbolic interaction and so forth, thus enlarging the scope of the subject and adding to our understanding of human behaviour. One ought to add, though, that much of the work done in these modes of analysis kept well within the functionalist paradigm.

Some members of the circle that had formed around the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Livingstone (Zambia) and the Department of Social Anthropology in Manchester – sometimes referred to as the 'Manchester school' – sought to break out of the closed functionalist paradigm. Thus the Wilsons tried to understand conflict and change (Wilson and Wilson 1945), but failed because they looked at social process through functionalist eyes. And Gluckman (1958) attempted to show that the Zulu 'tribe' was part of South African society, by examining a situation in which both tribesmen and outsiders participated. While he succeeded in bringing the wider social context into the discussion of local affairs, he did not really escape from a functionalist perspective; he only enlarged the scope of the analysis from local community to state. These efforts were only partially successful because of the absence of an alternative analytical framework. But their cumulative effect was to point the way to new methods of fieldwork and analysis. The 'extended case' (Gluckman 1967) and 'situational analysis' (Van Velsen 1967) were harbingers of things to come. Peters was a senior member of the Manchester school and influenced by the work done in Central Africa. He knew the shortcomings of the functionalist paradigm and, like many others, he sought to revise it. For him, however, this became a major and long-term concern, second only to his unceasing efforts to make good theory out of his Bedouin material.

Peters set high standards for himself. He wanted theory to flow out of his field data, to explain the variance in his material, and to firmly marry data and their interpretation. So he set about rewriting his thesis, chapter by chapter, problem by problem and to preparing it for publication in a series of papers. These he planned to weld into a monograph on power relations among the Bedouin. He therefore constantly consulted the thesis and was loath to give students access to it. Progress was very slow, perhaps because he was a perfectionist: he needed time to move toward a progressively intricate interpretation of data. He would take up a problem, such as 'what are the genealogies for?' (as in chapter 5), or 'why do Bedouin think of killings as part of a series?' (chapter 4). When considering the full range of details, he would conclude that he was dealing with a series of interrelated problems and, accordingly, develop a complex and contextualised sociological model. The reader was allowed to follow the stages of growth of this model. He became a spectator who watched Peters battle with his problem, steadily gaining ground and finally obtaining hard-won new insights. He worked on persistently until, in the end, he had completely rethought and worked out most of the ideas in his thesis. Part of this work was published during his lifetime, and as each chapter appeared it was recognised as a major advance. Such are chapters 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 of the present volume. These papers address sociological problems, and provide ethnographic data only to the extent needed to prove his argument. Going by these papers only, the reader could never be aware of the quality and quantity of information Peters gathered in his long years of fieldwork.

Peters was an ethnographers' ethnographer. He had at his fingertips the countless details that go into the making of a paper. He could instantly recall a situation that happened perhaps twenty or thirty years earlier, in order to support an argument or to point out the weak points in an opponent's thesis. Many of these incidents were never used in his writings. The four chapters that are here published for the first time give some indication of the rich information that Peters collected and which, as his colleagues and students well knew, he had readily available. Two of these chapters (1 and 2) set out the political and ecological background of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica. The two others deal at length with two problems that occupied a central place in Peters' thinking: the nature of power, and the establishment and maintenance of relationships. The former is specifically discussed in the chapter on the Bedouin shaikh (chapter 6); the latter is illustrated by the chapter on debt relationships among the Bedouin (chapter 7). Like most of his other work, these essays developed over many years. They were, if possible, written at an even more leisurely pace. They were the result of long periods of reflection, followed by spurts of rapid and

intensive writing. They show the breadth of Peters' scholarship, the intimate acquaintance with the ethnography and, to boot, many instances of his sharp wit. They too continue the reinterpretation of the Bedouin material, and seek to theorise it. While they are longer and more discursive than his earlier work, they are no less thoughtful and convincing.

Although he did several years of fieldwork in Lebanon, Peters wrote only two major articles that were specifically concerned with Lebanese society. He used some of the Lebanese material in comparative studies (as in chapter 10) or to underscore theoretical points in articles dealing chiefly with the Bedouin of Cyrenaica. The Lebanese material was thus often subordinated to his major regional and theoretical interests. The double focus on Libyan ethnography and on a small number of theoretical themes gave his professional career and his writing a consistency and purpose that, in retrospect, almost looks like a life plan.

His numerous graduate students derived the full benefit of this deep immersion in a clearly demarcated set of problems and in one culture region. They were trained to study situations within their social context, to examine the intricacies of power relations, to view ritual as an aspect of all social intercourse, to look primarily at the praxis of social life and to view ideologies, norms and values as emerging out of it. In short, they were given the benefit of Peters' thinking and at the same time encouraged to pursue their own line of interest. Their writings are no longer concerned with the paradigmatic issues that exercised his mind; they explore a variety of sociological problems, often without realising what effort was required to pave the way for them. Thus Abner Cohen begins his study of *Arab Border-Villages in Israel* by examining the impact on local society of changes in the national economy and of the shift from indirect absolute rule by a military government to direct administration by numerous agencies of the state (1965: 2). This allows him to explain the revival of the patronymic descent group (*hamula*) as a response to new conditions, and not as a reversion to tradition. Another student notes that Peters inspired him to view nomadism among the Hima of Uganda as an expression of conflict between the nomads and their rulers, and not as a purely ecological adaptation (Elam 1979: 157). Again, when I began to analyse my material on the Bedouin of the Negev, the first point Peters bade me to keep in mind was that these people were 'authentic Bedouin' pastoralists and cultivators largely because economic alternatives were closed to them by a restrictive military government (Marx 1967). From that point onward I treated the Bedouin as members of the Israeli polity and economy. Consequently the structure of households, corporate groups, chiefship and the tribe, all began to make sociological sense. Even the annual migratory cycle of the pastoralists

turned out to be affected as much by patterns of political control and of land ownership as by the pastures available at various seasons.

In place of functionalism, Peters provides a preview of a new, as yet incomplete, paradigm. He deals at length with three of its elements: relationships, and the techniques for establishing and maintaining them (chapter 7); the accumulation of resources and their transformation into power (chapter 6); and the nature of political organisation (chapters 4 and 5). Another element that he greatly emphasised was situations, and their largely negotiated order, though he never made a detailed theoretical statement about them.

All his life Peters sought to understand power. It became a central interest, pervading all his work. In his thinking, power results from the efforts made by individuals and groups to control their social environment and to improve their lives. These efforts are made continuously and thus are embedded in all human interaction. People are not so much concerned with gaining an advantage over an opponent, as with obtaining the best possible terms of interaction, while preserving their relationships and conserving their resources. Peters was aware that the desire for power is the mainspring of some of the noblest actions of human beings, but that it also inspires aggressive and manipulative behaviour.

As power is an integral part of every social relationship, it cannot be treated without taking account of other components of the relationship, such as the social environment in which it occurs and the relevant interests, ideologies and values of the participants. It is not simply the capacity to impose one's will on others, even against resistance, as Weber would have us believe. For Peters, power is always tempered by the need for social approval. A person's power thus depends on the support he or she can marshall, and that has to be built up carefully over a long period. In Peters' scheme there are no powerless people; every person has potential power in relation to his partners in interaction. And only in interaction can that power be realised. A person's power depends on his ability and willingness to use the resources available to him and is always relative to the power of the other participants in interaction. They may support him and augment his power, but they may also withhold their support or oppose him. The more resources they range against him, the weaker he becomes. Resources, of course, are used in a variety of situations and in different combinations. Therefore, they do not have a stable value; they obtain and change value in interaction. It follows that resources such as money, the command of men, or physical prowess have no intrinsic value. While they may be valuable in some situations, they may have little value in others or may even cause harm. Under the colonial regime, for instance, men who

were thought to possess such resources were liable to be persecuted. In certain conditions, traits that are generally considered undesirable may have their uses. One only has to think of the widow and her daughter who moved from one camp to the next and were fed by their hosts *because* they were so poor (p. 146).

The Libyans of Peters' times shunned violence. They had had more than enough of it during the Italian occupation; a generation of men had been killed or exiled. Now the new generation, and those who remained of the older one, hoped to establish a peaceful existence, and employed wealth and manipulative skills, rather than violence, to achieve their ends. Thus they unwittingly helped Peters to develop a more than usually complex view about the nature of power.

Peters' Bedouin material led him to argue that some relationships, especially among kin, may be very strong and enduring, and yet fraught with conflict. The father-son relationship is a good case in point (see chapter 8): until his marriage a son is utterly dependent on his father, who controls the major means of production, land and herds, with the full support of the agnatic corporation. The father tries to delay the handing over of land and herds, in order to enjoy the fruits of the son's labour for as long as he can. No wonder that a son may long for his father's death which would set him free. Eventually the agnates urge him to allow the son to marry and thus attain manhood and join the ranks of fighters. At that point, the father is obliged not only to arrange and finance the son's wedding, but also to hand over to him land and herds. But while he tries to slow down the son's progress toward economic independence, the father seeks to promote the son's position in society. He does so not only because he wants to be proud of him, but also because as a respected member of the community the son comes under the stricter scrutiny of his fellows, who will see to it that he fulfils his social obligations. The father of such a son can expect to be treated well in his old age.

Evidently, Peters does not attach much importance to kinship as such. He views the father-son relationship as a field of complex and changing forces, in which both are caught up, much as he would treat any other intimate and multiplex relationship. But people are never held so tightly by their ties as to lose their freedom of manoeuvre. If they are clever enough to see where their advantage lies and to use their resources efficiently, they may gradually alter their position. Peters thus views society as structured, in response to relatively stable ecological and political conditions. Even in this relatively rigid framework an enterprising person can achieve a great deal, to the point of subjecting and bending the social environment to his will.

This heroic view of men as political entrepreneurs is very pronounced in the analysis of chiefship (chapter 6). Chiefs provide a core around which people congregate. They also articulate the political frameworks by their and their adherents' movements and by the manipulation of their often far-flung networks of relationships. Marriage links play a major role in these operations, and chiefs marry more wives than most other people, partly in order to extend the span of their networks of relationships. Chiefs, then, are 'big men', in the sense employed in recent anthropological studies of New Guinea Highland peoples (for instance, A. Strathern 1971). But Peters extends this view to all Bedouin men; everyone seeks to enhance his position in society and to become a chief, if only of a camp. A society where all men strive and compete for power and position develops a close-knit hierarchical network of leaders. In ordinary daily life these men alternately collaborate and compete with one another and frequently change allegiances. But once they perceive a compelling joint interest or, as was the case under Italian colonial rule, a challenge to their very existence, the leadership is capable of uniting and becoming a nucleus around which men may readily rally, and which may mount concerted activities for long periods. Such a viewpoint helps towards a better understanding of how a 'segmented' and presumably divided society was capable of waging a long and determined battle against the Italian colonial regime.

Finally, a few editorial notes. One of Emrys Peters' perennial theoretical interests was the interplay between corporate and individual power. We felt that by arranging the chapters in a way that would give these themes salience, the book would become a monograph and not simply a collection of articles. The chapters do not therefore follow a chronological order, and this arrangement somewhat obscures the development of Peters' views over the years.

Six out of the ten chapters have been previously published; they are widely known and used by social anthropologists and are reprinted with only minor revisions. The four previously unpublished items take up nearly half the book. They consist of an analysis of the Sanusi order and its relations with the Bedouin of Cyrenaica (chapter 1); sections from the first chapter of Peters' D. Phil. thesis dealing with the daily life of the Bedouin, with land and water, herding and cultivation, the annual round of migration and pilgrimage (chapter 2); the geographical background is treated only in passing, because it has been examined in great detail by Johnson (1973) and Behnke (1980), both of whom put Peters' work to good account; and analysis of the power of shaikhs (chapter 6); and a discussion of debt and other relationships (chapter 7). These chapters required a certain amount of editorial work: the author's handwritten notes

and corrections in the manuscripts were incorporated in the text; some passages were edited, and a few were deleted in order to avoid repetition; and references, as well as transliterations from Arabic, completed and checked. Our aim has been to follow Peters' text and to retain the flavour of his vivid style. Those chapters which have previously appeared include the following:

Chapter 3 is from 'The Tied and the Free: An Account of a Type of Patron-Client Relationship Among the Bedouin Pastoralists of Cyrenaica.' In *Contributions to Mediterranean Sociology: Mediterranean Rural Communities and Social Change*, J.G. Peristiany, ed., Paris: Mouton, 1968, pp. 167–88.
Chapter 4 is from 'Some Structural Aspects of the Feud Among the Camel-Herding Bedouin of Cyrenaica.' *Africa* (Journal of the International African Institute) 37 (3), July 1967: 261–82.
Chapter 5 is from 'The Proliferation of Segments in the Lineage of the Bedouin in Cyrenaica.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 90 (1), 1960: 29–53. (Reproduced by permission of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.)
Chapter 8 is from 'Aspects of the Family Among the Bedouin of Cyrenaica.' In *Comparative Family Systems*, M.F. Nimkoff ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965, pp. 121–46.
Chapter 9 is from 'Aspects of Bridewealth Among the Bedouin of Cyrenaica.' In *The Meaning of Marriage Payments*, J.L. Comaroff ed., London; Academic Press, 1980, pp. 125–60. Copyright © 1980 by Academic Press Limited.
Chapter 10 is from 'The Status of Women in Four Middle East Communities.' In *Women in the Muslim World*. L. Beck and N. Keddie, eds., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978, pp. 311–50. Copyright © 1978 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

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1

The Sanusi order and the Bedouin

'One of the few genuinely historical books written by an anthropologist *de carrière* is my own book *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*' (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 184).[1] The purpose here is to examine the way in which one of our foremost social anthropologists, whose initial training, at Oxford, was as historian, attempted to write the developmental history of the transformation of a religious fraternity into a political organisation. Throughout the book a consistent argument is pursued which, as I understand it, is woven around nine main issues. In this chapter, these will be summarised; then the theoretical premises on which the argument rests will be discussed critically, and an alternative view will be put forward.

First, when the founder of the Sanusi Order, Sayyid Muhammad ibn 'Ali as-Sanusi (hereafter referred to as the Grand Sanusi, a title often given him), went to reside on the plateau area of Cyrenaica, near the classical site of Cyrene, driven there by the ill winds of circumstance, he found there already existed a tradition of veneration for holy men. The Marabtin bi'l-Baraka (clients with divine blessing), who, until now, live in small groups among the tribes, had long lived in the country. The Grand Sanusi and his disciples were, like them, Sunni Muslims, of Arabic speech, grown accustomed to Bedouin ways during their extensive travels across the deserts of North Africa,[2] and accredited with saintliness of sorts, by virtue of their descent from the Prophet (Evans-Pritchard 1944), their teachings and their habits. The concern of the Grand Sanusi was with the regeneration of the spirit, and to achieve this he advocated a return to primitive Islam, the society of the Prophet, and to his teachings, divested of the excrescences which had grown around them over the centuries. With these aims in mind, he forbade alcohol and snuff, decried smoking, and excluded music, dancing and singing.[3] He exhorted his followers to work hard at their agricultural tasks, and set an example in the erstwhile