

CONTRIBUTION OF STATUS LINEAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE

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OUTLINE

- Goals
- Inferring social structures in pre-history
- Collective action
- Status lineage structure dynamics
- Summary

Goals

- To infer social structures and link them in an evolutionary sequence
- To find whether the kin-based chiefdom contains the 'seeds of its own destruction'
 - such that its influence structure evolves into a power structure
 - leading to the rise of the state

WHAT ARE CHIEFDOMS?

- Different definitions of chiefdoms:
 - “Chiefdoms are normally characterized as kin-based societies, meaning that a person’s place in the kinship system determines his or her social status and political position” (Earle 1997:5).
 - “I would define a chiefdom as an autonomous political unit comprising a number of villages under the permanent control of a paramount chief” (Carneiro 1981:45 [italics removed]).
- While *not* referring to the same kind of society, the two definitions may refer to the beginning and end of an evolutionary process.
- Nevertheless, neither definition describes the chiefdom’s social structure.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF PREHISTORIC SOCIETIES

- Social Structures of Pre-modern Societies produced influence and/or power
 - but cannot be observed
- nevertheless, they can be inferred
 - by using experimentally tested sociological theory to explain how social structures operate in the field

In influence relations

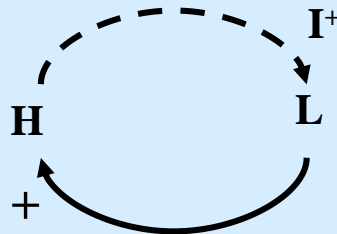
- Status differences generate influence

High-status actor persuades Low-status actor that H is right according to L's own interests

- e.g. in a hunting & gathering society, the best hunter may persuade a hunting party to follow his lead

H: High-status actor

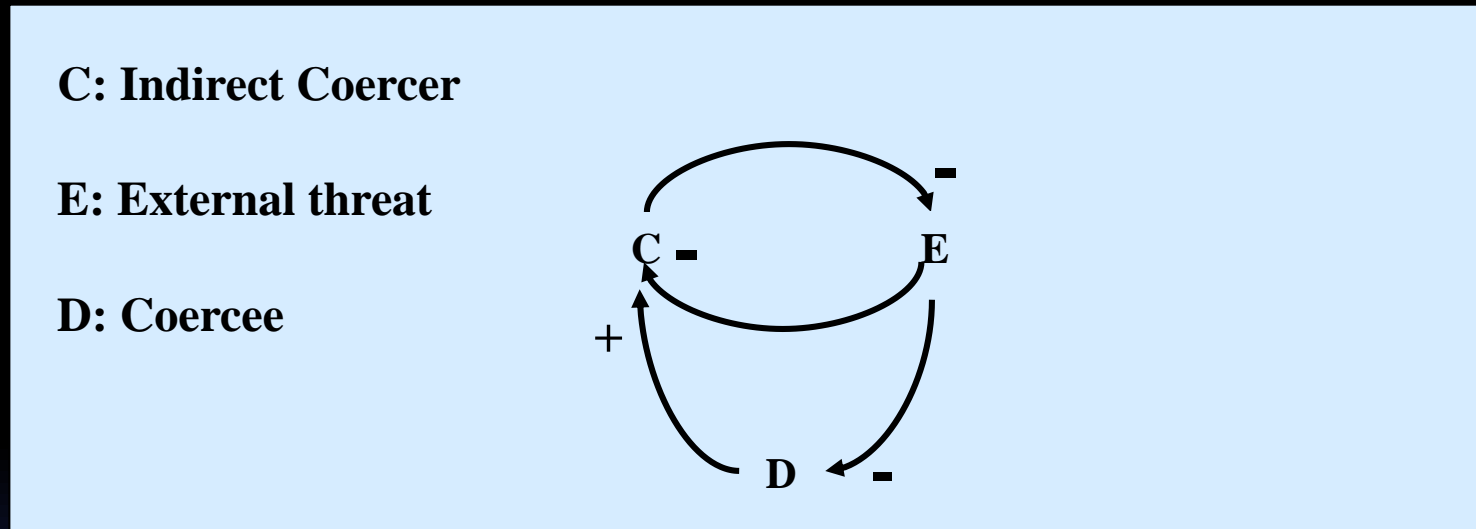
L: Low-status actor



Influence relation (based on Willer and Anderson 1981:34)

In Indirect Coercion relations

- The Coercer extracts value from D via an external threat E
 - e.g., when a USA President demands new laws and higher taxes to defend against terrorists

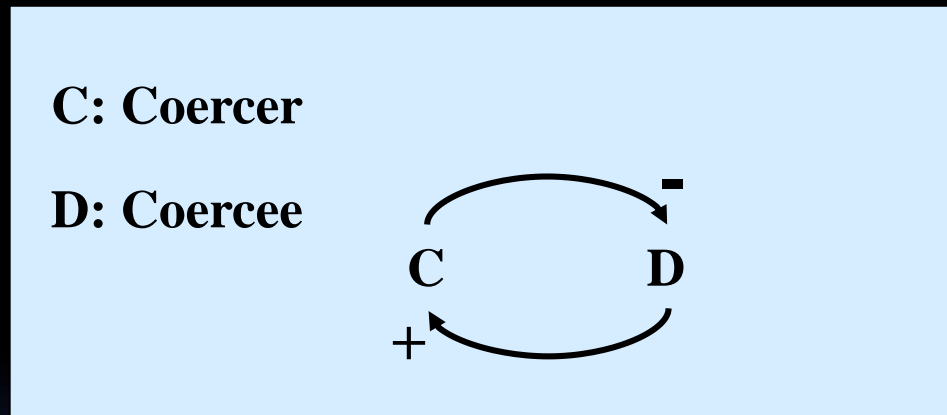


Indirect coercion relation (based on Willer et al. 2013).

- Experimental studies show that external threats such as intergroup conflict motivate group cohesion and self-sacrifice for the group (Barclay and Benard 2013).

In power relations

- The Coercer deploys sanctions to affect D's behavior
 - e.g. a thief declares: "Your money or your life!"



Coercive relation (based on Willer and Anderson 1981)

- As violence is increasingly controlled, the ability to exercise coercive power increases



Solutions to Collective Action Problems

COLLECTIVE ACTION

- **Collective action**
 - occurs when a number of individuals are organized such that they can jointly attain their individual or collective goals (Hardin 1982)
- **Examples of collective action**
 - in a hunting party, individuals benefit
 - in warfare, the community benefits from actions of warriors

COLLECTIVE ACTION (cont.)

- The start-up problem
 - Actors' reluctance to make early contributions toward the collective action (Marwell and Oliver 1993)
- Free riding
 - Actors often choose to free-ride

SOLUTIONS TO COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEMS

- **Achieved** status and the start-up problem (R. Willer 2009)
 - status systems are organized incentive systems that can solve the start-up problem when:
 - contributors **gain** higher status
 - free riders are **assigned** lower status
 - or **both**
 - The organization of status is effectively costless

SOLUTIONS TO COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEMS (cont.)

Ascribed status and status-lineage structures (Simpson et al. 2012)

- Status structures (such as status-lineages) solve collective action problems
 - through **influence relations**
 - Status differentiation serves as an “endogamous solution to the start-up problem in collective action” (Simpson et al. 2012:155)



Status Lineage Structures

Status Lineage Structures

■ Lineage

- a descent group whose members can trace or remember genealogical ties to a specific ancestor.
- A lineage can be traced from the male line (patrilineal), the female line (matrilineal), or by choosing either the male or the female line (ambilineal).

■ Status

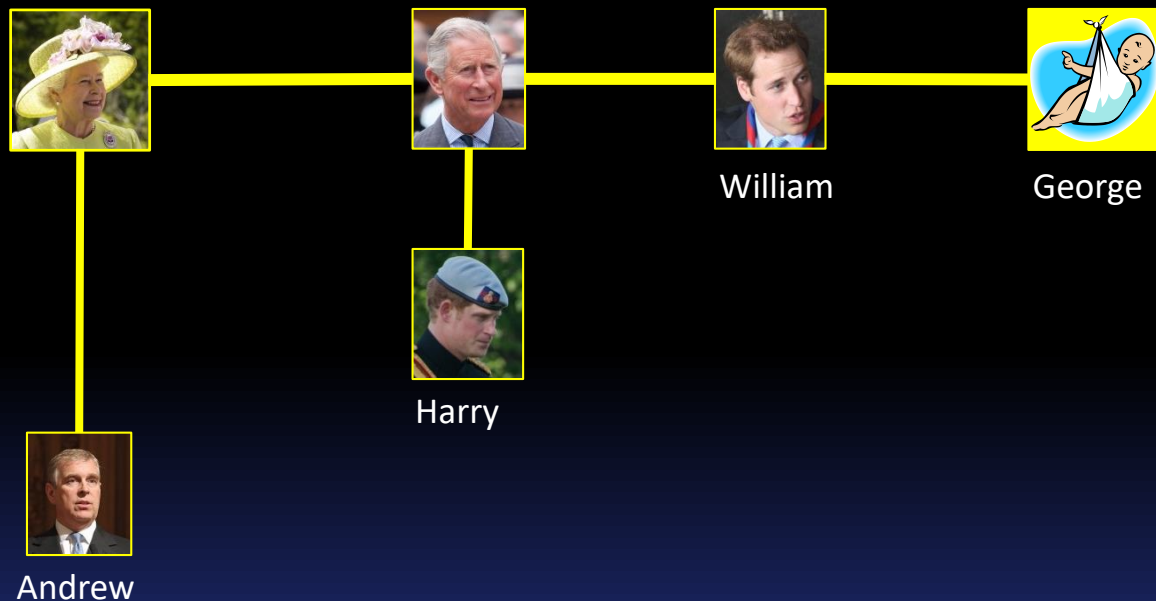
- An individual's standing in a group based on the prestige, honor, and deference rendered by other members (Lovaglia and Houser 1996)
- Status lineage structures are ubiquitous (Sahlins 1968; Service 1985)
- So, what is so special about this type of structure?

Status Lineage Dynamics

- Key characteristic:
 - **downward mobility** and the status rivalry (internal competition) that it fosters

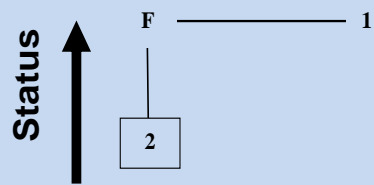
STATUS LINEAGE STRUCTURES pt. 2

- Downward mobility and status rivalry
 - the European peerage example

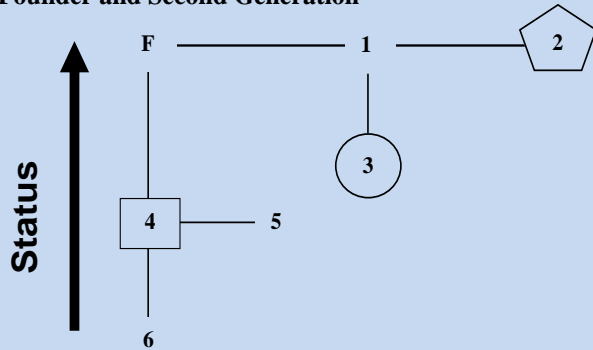


Status Lineage Over Generations

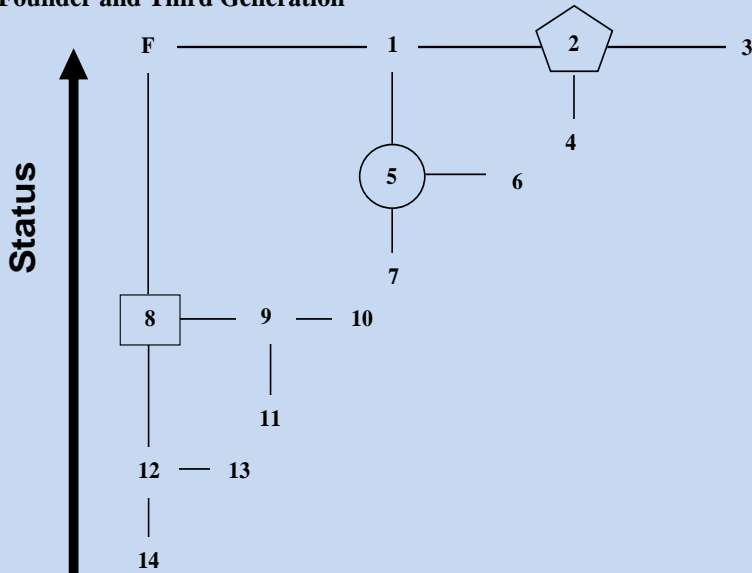
Founder and First Generation



Founder and Second Generation



Founder and Third Generation

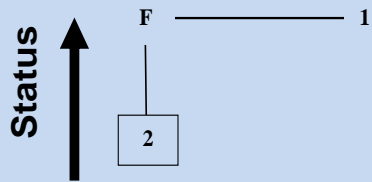


- The lineage's founder (F) holds the highest position in the structure, followed by his first and second sons.
- As lineages grow, all the nodes on all the lines, other than the senior line, are downwardly mobile
- By the third generation, the position of the founder's second son has declined.

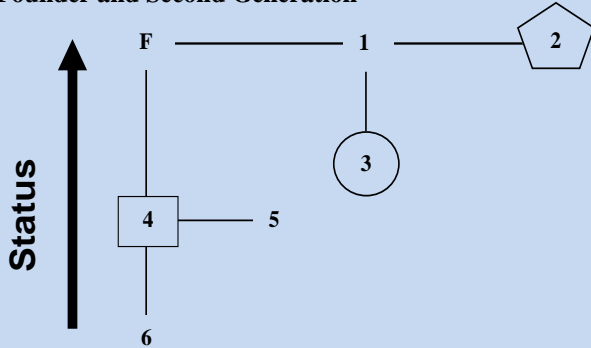
Social Structure of Status Based Chiefdoms

- Status lineages produce relations of influence
 - ascribed status
- Well-ordered influence relations
 - joint activity is coordinated and carried out
 - collective action
- Though status lineages solve coordination problems, they contain structural instability:
 - all but the senior line are downwardly mobile

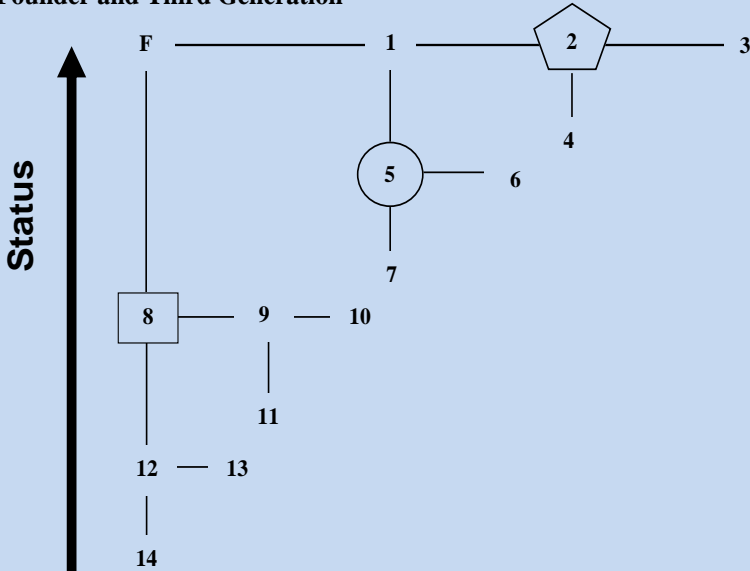
Founder and First Generation



Founder and Second Generation



Founder and Third Generation



FROM STATUS – INFLUENCE TO STATUS RIVALRIES

In any status lineage structure, at any one point in time:

- status is ordered without reversals, thus
- influence can solve collective action problems

But across time:

- downward mobility creates rivalries
- setting cadet lines against the senior line
- destabilizing the lineage and lines of influence

ESCAPE VS. WARFARE?

Escape

- Those who flee will replicate the status lineage system
- No changes in the socio-political organization

Warfare

- Fighting abilities offer lower status actors a pathway for upper social mobility
- Thus changing the internal dynamics of the socio-political system

WHY DO CHIEFDOMS FIGHT?

- War stabilizes the chiefdom by sequentially substituting power relations for influence relations
 - External enemies allow the chief to exercise *indirect* coercion
 - Constant warfare differentiates the chiefdom into warrior caste and commoners

THE COERCIVE CHIEFDOM

- No chief can coerce alone
- The chief *and* a loyal warrior caste can and will coerce the commoner caste
- By increasingly gaining control of the ***means of violence***, the chief and the warrior caste take control of the ***means of production***
- It is **not** control over the means of production that gives power to leaders
- Resulting in a paramount chiefdom

IS THE PATH FROM CHIEFDOM TO STATE UNILINEAR OR DOES IT BRANCH?

- Perhaps a single path from paramount chiefdoms to hegemonic empires?
- If they branch, then where does the path branch?
- What about city-states?
 - Do chiefdoms evolve directly into city-states?
- What about maritime polities?

Summary

- The increasing instability inherent in chiefdoms is significant for social theory
- A chiefdom's status-based influence system is built on a principle of status assignment that increasingly destabilizes the structure
- Chiefdoms initially derive their organizational capabilities from patterns of influence that flow from their status structures
- When rivalries truncate the paths through which influence flows, the chiefdom becomes unstable
- Attempts to solve that instability result in increasing conflict, indirect coercion, and then, direct coercion
- These **internal** dynamics lead to the breakdown of the influence structure and the rise of the power structure characteristic of the state

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