

Short Biographical Note

Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard was born in Crowborough, Sussex, England in 1902. He died September 11, 1973 in Oxford. One of England's foremost social anthropologists, he was known for his investigations into African cultures. His undergraduate degree was taken at Oxford in modern history. As a graduate student, he studied anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, following which he did fieldwork among the Azande and Nuer peoples of the southern Sudan. The books which resulted, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937) and *The Nuer* (1940) established his reputation.

He was a prolific writer, especially on the subjects of kinship, religion and the history of anthropology. He also wrote extensively on theoretical subjects and the relations between anthropology and other social sciences. Although it was often the case that his work was controversial, the depth of his scholarship was never questioned. He was Professor (i.e. chairman) of social anthropology at Oxford and a fellow of All Souls College from 1946 to 1970. Knighted in 1971, his influence as a teacher is difficult to overestimate. Throughout his career, he attracted graduate students from Africa and elsewhere, which bestowed upon the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford its international character and reputation.⁶ The following text is a reproduction, with minor changes, of Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1928. *The Dance*. *Africa* 1(1): 446-462. [N.B. some footnotes, all photographic plates and the French language summary have been deleted].

• • •

The Dance (Azande) - 1928

In ethnological accounts the dance is usually given a place quite unworthy of its social importance. It is often viewed as an independent activity and is described without reference to its contextual setting in native life. Such treatment leaves out many problems as to the composition and organization of the dance and hides from view its sociological function.

A short analysis of an African dance will show that its structure is quite different from modern European dancing. Also when the dance is only a small one, and much more so when several hundreds of persons are taking part in it, it requires a stereotyped form, a prescribed mode of performance, concerted activities, recognized leadership and elaborate organization and regulation. If these problems are not in the mind of the observer he will give us an interesting description perhaps, but not a detailed account of great value to the theoretical worker.

The dance also has physiological and psychological functions revealed only by a full and accurate description. It is essentially a joint and not an individual activity and we must therefore explain it in terms of social function, that is to say *we must determine what is its social value* [italics added]. Here again the untrained observer of [an indigenous] dance, even if his outlook is not distorted and pejorative, is so little accustomed to look upon all institutions and customs in the light of their functional value that he often neglects to give the theorist the occasion of dancing which alone can enable him to estimate its significance.

⁶ In 1969, he encouraged me to take degrees in social anthropology after receiving my letter commending the work he had done in his essay on Azande dancing, "in spite of the fact he wasn't a dancer." Evans-Pritchard was one of a rare few non-dancers who saw movement as an integral part of the expression of human intentions, insisting, "there is more in the action than meets the eye" (1956: 231).

In this paper I shall make a condensed analysis of one dance of the Azande nation along the lines suggested above. The Azande⁷ come under the rule of three European administrations. Most of them live in the northern districts of the Belgian Congo but they are found also in the Bahr-el-Ghazal and Mongalla Provinces of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and in the Ubangi-Shari Province of French Equatorial Africa. The Azande of whom I shall speak in this paper live in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

There are a large number of Zande dances. Some of these are regional, others are now no longer performed but are remembered by the older men and can be reconstructed on request. There are dances which accompany the drums, dances which accompany the xylophone, dances which accompany a stringed instrument, and dances which are unaccompanied by musical instruments. There are some dances special to circumcision ceremonies, others special to the various secret societies, others special to the sons of chiefs, others restricted to women, or, e.g. to funeral ceremonies and others performed only as an accompaniment to economic work. I have not the space in so short a paper to make a classification of the many different forms of dance found amongst the Azande; I will therefore restrict myself to an analysis of the main features of one type of dance, which is accompanied by drums and is known as *gbere buda* (beer dance).

Music

The component elements of the *gbere buda* are music, song, and muscular movement. Any of these elements without the others would be inconceivable in this dance, but it is difficult to understand the manner in which they are concerted.

Music is made by large wooden gongs and by leather-topped wooden drums. The large wooden gong has the appearance of a buffalo, with legs, tail, head, and horns. When the wind blows into its hollowed body it lows like a buffalo. These gongs vary considerably in size, some standing four or five feet from the ground. Each one is cut from a single tree trunk and may take two or three months to complete. Along its back or top is cut a narrow slit and the two sides are hollowed out unequally from this slit. The player sits on the tail end of the gong and beats it with sticks, the ends of which are bound round with strips of leather forming a knob, so as to protect the woodwork. He holds a stick in each hand and strikes the gong with either short or long beats. He may bring both sticks together simultaneously on to the gong or he may use them alternately. The volume of sound can be regulated (a) by beating on one side rather than upon the other since they are hollowed out to an unequal depth; (b) by the distance from the slit at which the gong is struck; (c) by placing one leg over the slit; the leg being raised by bending the knee or lowered by straightening the knee, thus opening or closing the aperture to the extent desired; (d) by the force with which the gong is struck.

The leather-topped drums stand some three or four feet from the ground. A log of wood is hollowed out and the skin of an animal is stretched tightly over each end. The end which is struck is wider than the end which stands upon the ground, the drum tapering slightly from top to base. The drum is often held between the legs slantwise and it is beaten with the flat of the hands in long and short raps. The use of these two musical instruments means at the outset a twofold division of labour in the dance. There must be one man for the *gugu* (gong) and one man for the *gaza* (drum with membrane).

⁷ For general accounts of the Azande see Lagae, *Les Azande ou Niam-Niam*, 1926, and Larken, 'An Account of the Zande' in *Sudan Notes and Records*, July 1926.

Song

Besides the music of gong and drum there is the music of the human voice. As I was without a phonograph and have little knowledge of music I shall refer to song in a very general way. For our purposes the song may be divided into two, or more strictly three aspects, the melody or succession of notes in a rhythmic sequence, the meaning or phonetic values in their contextual setting, and the condition of the singer, which includes the timbre of the voice and a variety of muscular movements.

For the reason already given I shall not enter far into the question of melody. In any Zande melody there is only a small range of steps [i.e. musical tones]. To an untrained ear African melodies seem to have very little variation, which is undoubtedly not the case, and one estimates the difference between melodies by the degree in which they approximate to European tunes. Under these circumstances phonograph records are the only accurate data. Melodies are transitory, few lasting more than a season or two, after which they lose their popularity and become totally lost creations. Or it may be that it is only the songs which are transient whereas the melodies always exist in combination with different themes.

All these songs have meaning but the degree of meaning varies. Their meaning is not doubtful in their context in their creator's mind, for they refer to persons or events known to him. The meaning conveyed to those who sing and hear them depends upon the degree to which they are acquainted with the persons or happenings referred to. I have not found that there was any difficulty in getting the author to give me a clear commentary but I have often found that other people, thought they knew and sang the songs, had only a very vague idea as to their meaning. Meaning in both its qualities of sound and sense undergoes many phonetic and grammatical changes. Generally speaking we can say that it is the melody and not the sense which matter, or, as we say in common parlance, it is the tune which matters and not the words.⁸

However we must not forget that the song is often a weapon of some power. A clever and popular creator of songs is much respected both for his talent and for his ability to lampoon his enemies. It serves also as an organ of law, in the wide sense of the word as a body of binding sanctions, in that it chastises the man who has offended public opinion, praises those who have distinguished themselves and lauds the chiefs.

We have considered melody and meaning and it only remains to draw attention to the condition of the performer. The singer produces the melody through his hands as we hold them when we wish to call someone at a distance and he accompanies his performance with a variety of muscular movements which are quite different from the stereotyped movements of the dance. Any singing whether in a dance or not is inconceivable without correlated muscular reactions. They are just as much a part of the melody as are the words.

Now these beer-dance songs have a special structure. Like most African songs they are antiphonal, that is to say they are sung by a soloist and a chorus. Actually in the songs of the Zande beer-dance we shall have to distinguish between two choruses, but I will explain this later. Every song has an opening verse by the soloist (*undu*)

⁸ E.M. von Hornbostel (1928) has drawn attention to the writing of African words to European hymn tunes by missionaries. The result is invariably unsatisfactory. European musical forms, like Arabic, are quite incongruous to an African ear. The Natives always sing the hymns out of tune. It is impossible to translate the words of a hymn into an African language without making a stupid parody of their meaning. Finally, correlated muscular movements which are an essential accompaniment of all African singing are left out of hymn-singing.

and a chorus (*bangwa*). If there are several verses then the soloist begins the next *undu* while the chorus is still finishing the *bangwa*. This overlapping is a common feature of all such songs. I will give one example of a song to show the division into chorus and solo:⁹

<i>undu</i> (solo)	<i>wili Bagurunga ke ja mi na di li mi dua kina nderugi li angba ti li ni lengo du a du tamamu ka wira kina na Kwamba</i>
<i>bangwa</i> (chorus)	<i>nina ooo ooo ako ooo ooo mi bi pai mbataija gbaria tunotuno gbariai ni gbunga ba</i>
<i>undu</i>	The son of Bagurunga said I will marry, I will build a grass hut. Indeed I love her, oh very much indeed. She is really very like mother Kwamba.
<i>bangwa</i>	Mother ooo ooo alas ooo ooo I see something ahead the government settlement is far far away the government settlement is so long.

From the solo (*undu*) and the chorus (*bangwa*) the Azande distinguish the *sima*. At present I am not certain to what part of a song *sima* generally refers but at least sometimes it refers to the solo repeated as a chorus. Thus in the above song if the soloist sings from *wili* to *Kwamba* and the whole is then repeated by the chorus, or he sings the verse in parts each part being repeated by the chorus after him, this part of the song would then be the *sima*. Some songs are thus divided into three parts, *undu*, *sima*, and *bangwa*.

The song I have given above can also be arranged metrically. If we wrote it so that the end of each line represented a pause in the singing it would read thus:

*wili Bagurunga
ke ja mi na di li
mi dua kina nderugi
li angba ti li ni lengo
du a du tamamu
ka wira kina na Kwamba*

Muscular Movement

We have tried to formulate some of the problems of music and song and we now come to the third essential component of the dance, muscular movement.¹⁰ The African dances with his whole body. He not only makes movements with his feet to the music, but holds out his arms bent at the elbow and moves hands and arms up and down, shakes his head backwards and forwards, leans from side to side, lifts and lowers his shoulders, and exercises the abdominal muscles. All the muscles of the body seem to be in action and the skin looks as though it accommodated a multitude of snakes.

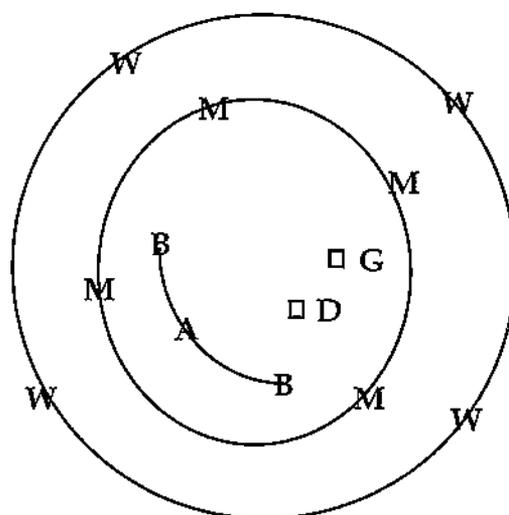
⁹ As the melody is not written I have given the words in their phonetic values in everyday speech not as they are sung.

¹⁰ I sharply criticized E.P.'s usage of "muscular movement" in this context, arguing that such separations of body and mind contradicted the unities he tried to achieve in his definition(s) of "social function." He agreed, saying that it was an error in his youthful ideas of 'objectivity', remarking that it was part of my task to provide alternative conceptions.

Considerable latitude is allowed in variation of movement. Not everyone makes the same movements but they are all made to the same rhythm. There are, however, stereotyped steps with the feet which are made by all the dancers, and this conformity is sometimes necessary as will be seen when I describe the action of the dance. These steps appear like the songs to have a vogue and then to be replaced by others. I do not think that there is any specific correlation between a type of step and a type of melody.

Pattern of the Dance

It is obvious that unless there is to be complete confusion resulting from the activities of individuals in a dance it must have a set form. The static form of the Zande beer dance can best be shown by means of a diagram.



G = gong	B B	= inner chorus
D = drum	M M M	= male dancers and chorus
A = soloist	W W W	= women dancers

The male dancers form a complete circle, standing close to one another facing the drum and gong. Outside this circle dance the women in twos and threes or sections of more. Normally the men dance in the same spot, but every now and again they turn sideways and circle slowly round till each comes to the place from which he started and they then all turn again and face the drum. The women, always on the outside of the men, circle round and round with slow steps, the women of each section with their arms round the breasts of the woman in front. Here again a certain degree of latitude is allowed. Youths anxious to display themselves will leave the circle and execute a *pas seul* towards the drum or sometimes a section of the circle will move up to the drum and then back again to their places. Small children jump and run about very much as and where they please.

Also in a big dance there is insufficient space for one complete circle so that two or three successive circles are formed and the women will often dance round between the circles. In very big dances another and different type of dance is occasionally performed at the same time as the main beer dance.

Leadership in the Dance

In any joint gathering, especially at a dance where the rules of social life are to some extent relaxed and people enjoy themselves without stint, there is always a danger of disruption and disintegration through egotistical tendencies. Some one may overstep the bounds of sexual freedom, the desire of youths to display themselves on the drums in the sight of the girls may lead to nasty quarrels. The wish of several persons to act as soloist may lead to confusion and disputes, men heated with beer and the excitement of the dance and armed with weapons may commence fighting, and there is the same danger from the victim of a lampoon in the songs.

These dangers are largely overcome by regulations and by the principle of leadership. Firstly, we have seen in the diagram above that there is a complete division of the sexes. Men and women never dance together but always with other members of their sex. This segregation of the sexes is a safeguard and although, as we shall see later, there is a considerable amount of free love at these dances, it is never open or provocative. The Zande beer dance is a well-disciplined affair. The traveller who enters their country from the Sudan, from the north or east, will always comment on the discipline of the Azande compared with other tribes and one of his evidences for this comparison will be the dance. The dances of the Moro, Mundu, Baka, and Bongo appear to be far more boisterous and high spirited than the Zande dance, and they never maintain the same degree of form and order.

Paramount chiefs consider it as beneath their dignity to take part in a public dance, but there will often be a chief's son present, and even when he is no more than a boy his decision in any dispute or quarrel will be final. But leadership of the chiefs is extraneous to the structure of the dance, which has its own specific leadership. Song-leaders are called *baiango*. Generally there are not more than two or three of these men with a wide reputation in a tribe. A man who wishes eventually to become a *baiango* or song-leader will first have to serve an apprenticeship with one of these men, to whom he will act as *suali*. A song-leader's *suali* come to the dances at which he is singing and they stand opposite to him or at his side and back up the choruses. These *suali* soon get to know all their leaders' songs and when he is not present they take his place. Precedence is given to the chief *suali* of a noted song-leader and today they are sometimes denoted by Arabic terms referring to ranks in the government police -- sergeant, corporal, and lance-corporal.

A song-leader or one of his chief followers will also have sufficient authority to decide, in case of dispute, who is to beat the gong, which is an envied job. There is always rivalry about who shall beat the leather-topped drum at a dance, as the young man who does so knows that the eyes of the girls are upon him. Next to the song-leadership this is the most envied post in the dance, and a short skirmish will often take place when it is unoccupied and there is no one of outstanding qualifications to fill it. However, if there is a master drum-beater (*ba ta gaza*) present no one will dispute his claims. A follower of a song-leader or of a master drum-beater will make his chief small presents from time to time.

The dance, like all joint activities, necessarily generates leadership, the function of which is to organize the activity. The problem of the allotment of roles in the dance is solved by the introduction of status. In the event of quarrels it is the song-leader who arbitrates. When food or beer is provided it is given to him for distribution. Whilst it must not be thought that the song-leader is invested with great power or that his rank is highly developed, he has considerable prestige and reputation and a definite social role to perform in this activity.

The leader's prestige is of course conditioned by his ability in composing and singing songs, but this ability in the eyes of the Azande is due to the possession of the right magic. No man who had not the correct magic could be a good author and singer of songs. In return for small presents, sometimes as much as a spear-head, the song-leader will give magic to his followers. The eating of the magic acts in two ways. Firstly, it gives a man confidence to enable him to compose and to sing his songs and attract *suali* or followers. Secondly, it gives him a diploma, a right to take the most prominent place in a dance. One man, in my service, used sometimes to have quarrels when we were travelling in a strange district, since he considered himself a good soloist and tried to monopolize this role. People used to ask him from whom he had got his magic and the fact that he was able to tell them that he had it from a famous song-leader to some extent disarmed criticism.

So with the drums. A youth travelling outside his district will ask permission to beat the leather-topped drum and will explain that he is the pupil of such and such a master drum-beater and has received magic from him.

When the song-leader gives magic to one of his followers he takes the root of a plant and cooks it in oil over a fire. Meanwhile he stirs the ingredients and utters a spell over them, saying:

You are medicine of songs. I will cook you. Don't you bring bad luck on me. I have sung very many songs. Don't let songs go bad with me. We go to sing songs with song-leaders. They sing the chorus of my songs well. I will go to sing my songs. The older men all get ready to go to the dance. Don't let me get bad in singing. Indeed I will continue singing for a long time. I will grow very old and sing songs always. All my followers, men follow me very much in singing. All my followers came with presents for me. You are song medicine; if you are proper song medicine you boil well like water, because you are Andegi's medicine [a noted song-leader]. I did not steal you. I stayed with him [Andegi] very much for many years. Andegi saw that I was well with him. He went to show the place of all my medicine to me and my song magic all over the country. Don't let song-leaders be angry with me about songs.

This is a very free translation of the spell uttered. Sometimes also a man will have a magic whistle, partly hollowed out at one end. He addresses the whistle and then blows it before going to sing his songs at a dance. When addressing the whistle he says:

You are a whistle of song. I am going to sing my songs. Men back up my songs very much. Don't let people remain silent during my songs. May my songs not fall flat. I will sing my songs to people, women and old women, and old men and all men. Don't let them stay at home. They go to sing all my songs. Don't let song-leader spoil my songs. It is thus, I will blow my whistle of songs which is you. Because I did not just take you but I bought you. Thus I will blow my whistle. I blow it *fia*.

I have given these two spells as examples of the type of magical rites and spells which are used in reference to songs. There are other types of magic used to give success in song singing and there are probably as many medicines used to give success in beating the leather-topped drums. I will not give any spells to illustrate this last type of magic. They are similar in form to the spells given although their sense is different, being adapted to the different purpose of the magic.

Social Function of the Dance

We have examined the component elements of the Zande dance, *viz.* music, song, and muscular movement. We have described the pattern of the dance and have shown its need of organization and leadership and how this need is satisfied. Throughout our discussion we have posed concrete questions to which we have often an inadequate answer. The formulation of these questions will enable us to return to the facts with a better chance of obtaining definite answers.

We shall now pass on to the question which must always be uppermost in the mind of the ethnologist: What is the value of the dance in primitive society, what needs does it satisfy, what role does it play in native life? The usual accounts of dancing amongst primitive peoples give us so little information about the sociology of the dance that we are unable to answer these queries.¹¹

We shall restrict ourselves here to showing along what lines these problems must receive attention from the observer, by describing the Zande beer dance from several aspects. The *gbere buda* is a local activity. Only those who live within a few hours' walk of the homestead in which the dance is being held will attend it. These people are all known to one another, they have grown up together as children, have played, worked and fought side by side. Many will be bound to each other by ties of blood-relationship or by other social ties such as those created by marriage, blood-brotherhood, circumcision, magic associations, and so on. All are members of the same political group of the tribe and owe allegiance to the same chief. It is of some importance to bear in mind that the dance is a social activity carried on by persons amongst whom there is a bond of common association and experience based upon propinquity of residence, and that this bond is reinforced by feelings of kinship and other socializing forces.

People come to the dance in small parties, and friends and relatives will dance together in the same section of the ring of dancers. People come from all directions to meet their friends, lovers, relatives, to dance, gossip, and banter. Mothers bring their babies and the dance is the earliest occasion on which the individual is introduced into a far wider society than the small family group. When infants are able to walk they run and jump about outside the dance or near the drums in the centre, completely carried away by the rhythm. The dance plays a great part in broadening the outlook of childhood and in modifying the exclusive sentiments towards the parents built up in the family in babyhood and infancy.

As children grow up into boys and girls they will never miss a dance. To both sexes it is a means of display which becomes intensified at puberty. The dance is one of those cultural milieux in which sexual display takes place and selection is encouraged. The sexual situations of the dance are not very obvious to the observer. Boys and girls come to the dance to flirt, and flirtation often leads to sexual connexion, but society insists that neither the one nor the other shall be indulged in blatantly. At the same time society permits these sexual incidents so long as they occur with discretion and moderate concealment. A boy who openly approached a girl would be reprimanded and abused, but if he catches her attention whilst she is dancing with her friends, gives her a little nudge perhaps, and when he sees that his advances are reciprocated says *mu je gude* (come on kid!) no one will interfere. They go quietly into the bush or into a neighbouring hut and have intercourse. It is a different matter with married women. Their husbands are always jealous of them going to dances and generally accompany them. Men are also frightened to flirt with married women since they will have to pay heavy compensation to the husbands and in the past risked the severe punishment of mutilation.

The dance therefore also belongs to that group of social institutions which allow sexual play to a moderate and discreet extent, the functions of which are to canalize

¹¹ The only exception to this statement is that the dance is held on visits by European officials. Among the Azande who have been concentrated by the government associations into settlements there is, I believe, a growing tendency for the dance to be held as a play activity without any ritual.

the forces of sex into socially harmless channels, and by doing so to assist the processes of selection and to protect the institutions of marriage and the family.

To grown-up men and women the dance does not offer the same attraction as a means of flirtation as it does to younger people. To them, as indeed to every one who goes to a dance, it is the dancing which is the chief attraction. But the grown-ups show less inclination to be drawn into distractions and they give their whole attention to the rhythm of the dance. Old people do not normally take part in dancing.

We have mentioned a few important aspects of the *gbere buda* but we cannot here enter into the many other interesting problems which arise from observation of dancing. To do this we should have to give a complete and detailed description of every aspect of the whole activity.

We would, however, ask the general question, what is the social function of dancing? Such a question will give us a general statement which covers all dancing in all communities as distinct from the different specific functions of dances in different communities and on different occasions. We cannot do better than to summarize the excellent treatment of the problem by Professor Radcliffe Brown. We cannot give his opinions in full, but any one may read them in Chapter V of his *Andaman Islanders*.

1. The dance is a community activity in which the whole individual personality of the dancer is involved by the innervation of all the muscles of the body, by the concentration of attention required and by the action of the personal sentiments.
2. In the dance this whole personality of the individual submits to the action upon him by the community. He is constrained by the effect of the rhythm as well as by custom to take part in the collective activity and he is required to conform his actions to its needs.
3. The elation, energy, and self-esteem of the individual dancer are in harmony with the feelings of his fellow-dancers, and this harmonious concert of individual feelings and actions produces a maximum unity and concord of the community which is intensely felt by every member.

In the main our observations on the Zande beer dance are in agreement with Radcliffe Brown's analysis of dancing amongst the Andaman Islanders. The dance brings into play the whole muscular system of the dancer, it requires the activities of sight and hearing and it produces a feeling of vanity in the performer. All these experiences are heightened by their being expressed collectively. Certainly rhythm and custom influence the individual towards taking part in the dance. To some degree the dancer is compelled to co-ordinate his actions with the actions of the other dancers and this constrained co-ordination is pleasurable. There is also a tendency for the dance to increase goodwill and to produce a feeling of concord.

Radcliffe Brown's analysis provides a basis and stimulus for investigation and *we should like to make further observations before committing ourselves to complete agreement. On the observations which we have already made on the Zande beer dance we wish to make some suggestions which would modify or refine these views* (italics added).

The constraint exercised by rhythm and custom is not so much emphasized amongst the Azande. One frequently sees able-bodied Azande who take no part in the dancing. They are not compelled by custom to take any part in the activity nor do they show any discomfort at not responding to the rhythm of drums and melody. Some people do not like dancing and prefer to remain at home when a dance is in

progress. It is true that these are persons who have passed the period of youth and probably there is a considerable difference in the influence of rhythm upon persons of different ages, its effect being more compulsive in the case of children than in the case of adults. Also conformity to the actions of other dancers allows considerable latitude to the individual. Individuals often wander about independently. Here again there is a correlation with age, adults keeping strictly to their place in the order of the dance while the actions of small children are often quite outside the organization of the main activity. We must also remark that whilst the general feeling of the dance is one of good-fellowship, nevertheless such gatherings create dangers disruptive to the unity and concord of the ceremony. Some of these dangers we have already mentioned—slanderous songs, sexual indiscretions, drunkenness, competition (for self-display is essentially aggressive when thwarted) and so on—and we have tried to show that there is social 'machinery' to prevent these disorders. Men also like to air their grievances at such a public gathering. Anyone who watched several beer dances would see quarrels and could not subscribe to the statement that the dance was always an activity of perfect concord in which individual vanity and passions were completely socialized by the constraining forces of the community. *Radcliffe Brown has not recognized the complexity of motives in the dance* (italics added).

We have mentioned a few of the points on which more observation is to be desired. All these details are important. We want cinematographic pictures of dances in their full social setting.

Role of the Dance in Religious Ceremonies

Above all, it is necessary to know on what occasions dances are held and, if they form part of some ceremonial complex, what role, if any, do the dancers take in the performance of the rites. It is quite possible that Zande beer dances are held on a variety of occasions, but amongst the Azande of the bush I have only come across their performance in connexion with the cycle of mourning and mortuary feasts.

The Zande beer dance takes place at feasts in honour of the spirits of the dead. It is a sacred obligation on the part of the relatives of a dead person to erect a monument of a heap of stones over his or her grave. This may take place from a year to five years after burial.

About a year before the mortuary feast there is an economic and religious ceremony at which a number of women thresh the millet which is needed to make beer for the occasion of the feast. From this time what we may call the feast cycle begins and continues till the concluding ceremonies about a year hence. During this period from time to time dances are held, the object of which appears to be to mark the time till the mortuary feast, to remind the locality that preparations for the oncoming festivity are in progress.

You are sitting round the fire in the evening when you hear the distant beating of drums and you ask [your Zande companions] what this signifies. They tell you that it is a *pumbwe* (feast). You walk in the cool of the night through the tall wet grasses to attend the ceremony and you are disappointed to find that it is only a small affair, with some forty to fifty persons dancing, and that there is no beer provided by the master of the homestead. It is customary to give such dances now and again between the threshing of the millet and the main ceremony in honour of the dead.

On this last occasion the dance is a very big affair and may be attended by some hundreds of persons. I have seen quite five or six hundred persons attending one of

these dances and was told by [informants] that often there were many more. This feast dance closes the cycle and there are no more dances in the homestead.

We must therefore not think of the dance simply as a play activity, (italics added) but as forming part of an important social undertaking associated with religious ceremonial.

This does not mean that the dancers take any part in the ceremonial relating to the spirits of the dead. These intimate functions are carried out by the kindred of the dead and by other persons bound to them by close social ties. The relatives do not take part in the festivities. Their activities are quite distinct from those of the friends and neighbours who have come to dance. These latter have come to enjoy themselves. The dance is an important local affair to them and no young person of either sex would care to miss it. They come in holiday mood. But the activities which form part of the intimate ritual of the spirits and the ceremonial exchange between relatives-in-law are not unrelated to the more boisterous and profane activities of the dance. Even if the emotions of the dead man's relatives and the emotions of the dancers are different, nevertheless the dance must be regarded as part of the whole ceremonial complex.

The beating of the drums attracts large numbers of neighbours to the homestead of the man who has made himself responsible for the carrying out of ritual duties to the dead. This crowd gives a background against which the rites are performed. Not only does it flatter the giver of the feast that a large number of persons should attend it, but their presence gives support to the more serious events of the occasion. The crowd gives social recognition to the carrying out of a sacred duty towards the dead and to the obligations of ceremonial exchange between the master of the feast and his relatives-in-law. A crowd makes the banal and unpleasant labour of carrying stones to the grave, the indecent wrangling over the number of spears and amount of beer which are exchanged, an impressive and memorable occasion. It raises the unwelcome labour in preparing for the feast and the irksome obligations of relatives into a dignified ceremony in honour of the spirits of the dead. Such I think is the function of the dance as part of the complex of [Azande] religious ceremonial.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Review of the Azande essay

Given my background and the years-long, privately conducted search with reference to writings about the dance, it is easy to see why the first paragraph of E.P.'s essay was impressive:

In ethnological accounts the dance is usually given a place quite unworthy of its social importance. It is often viewed as an independent activity and is described without reference to its contextual setting in native life.¹² Such treatment leaves out many problems as to the composition and organization of the dance and hides from view its sociological function (p. 112).

Here was a writer who thought that dances were important to the study of social life. E.P. told me he had never seen dances solely as 'entertainments'. He

¹² The important theoretical statement in the paragraph is the independent activity/context statement.