

that in Polynesia, where ambilineal groups constitute more or less enduring corporations called 'ramages' (Firth 1957), it has but little consequence in the definition of landownership or membership of distinguishable units.

Another mixed system is 'double descent'. People may trace their descent in different ways depending on what is transmitted or different people may trace descent in different ways. Such is the case among the Mundugumor of Papua New Guinea, where girls and boys do not follow the same rule, girls belonging to their father's group and boys to their mother's. In other societies, such as the Apinayé of Brazil, descent lines are gender-specific: women trace descent matrilineally, men patrilineally (see Holy 1996: 121ff. for a discussion of double descent systems).

The systems at work in the real world are rarely as straightforward and easily identifiable as theory would like them to be. Local descent ideologies are often combinations of different systems, just as was the case with terminologies. More importantly, what we need to concentrate on is the substance of these local systems and the answer to the complex question: What is transmitted or inherited, how is this done and expressed, and what are the reasons (ideologies, representations, symbols ...) accompanying it? Two complementary investigations are necessary in this respect. Certain elements can be answered and analysed through observation, interviews, and discussions. Who has access to certain resources, on particular land, and not to others? Who constitutes a residential group or a regional group, and which people or families live close to each other or establish particular networks? Who shares what, with whom, and in what circumstances? Who systematically offers goods as presents to whom and what is expected in return? Who looks after each other's children? Which people join together in conflict situations? What happens to a person's body and belongings after death?

The second approach is a more in-depth and systematic way of recording and analysing the semantics and structure of discourse, in which the fieldworker investigates in a semi-directive manner the symbols and representations that constitute the local descent ideology. This investigation should ideally be simultaneous with the recording of genealogies. I will return to this question in the next section, but let me here underline that what is at stake is presenting and analysing indigenous discourses about the constitution of human beings and their environment. These discourses will often, if not always, invoke some principle of inheritance and transmission as a justifying factor of existence in general and of the interlocutor's existence in particular. Within this realm, typical questions the fieldworker may ask are the following. What are the elements that constitute the human body? Which substances of the body have which function or purpose? What is conception of a baby and how does it happen? What happens to the human body once it is lifeless? What, other than flesh and bones, constitutes the human being? How do these other elements penetrate the body? What does the individual share with siblings, parents, neighbours, etc.? How can one see and understand that a person belongs to such and such a group or family? What substances are inherited from one generation to the other? And so on.

These questions may show that certain elements are transmitted through the male line, such as ownership of or access to land, but that others have a different destiny. In many societies, a person's blood, for example, is thought to come from the mother alone and constitutes an element of the individual's identity that diverges from the patrilineal principle of landownership transmission. In such cases, it is useful to distinguish 'descent' from 'filiation'. Descent describes the principles inherent in the transmission of material and immaterial things, rights and duties, over generations. Filiation, on the other hand, is the principle which links a person to his or her immediate parents only. On many occasions, filiation and descent produce similar effects, such as in our example of the transmission of landownership through the patriline. In many other cases however there are additional criteria that establish a relationship to a parent in a different way, without constituting a corporate group, such as is the case with blood inherited from the mother in our example. Fortes (1959) has coined the expression 'complementary filiation' to describe these additional factors and mechanisms.