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CHAPTER

## 9 Understanding Human Relations (Kinship Systems)

Laurent Dousset

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### Abstract

This article provides an overview on a few central concepts and processes that are required in the investigation of human kinship. The most classic and better-defined examples for the kinds of groups or categories that constitute a social organization are clans and lineages. A society, tribe, or ethnic group may be divided into a number of groups that are called ‘clans’ if their apical ancestor is mythical or ‘lineages’ if genealogical memory traces ancestry backs to one single human being. The membership of these clans or lineages is determined by explicit rules that belong to the realm of kinship. The clan and lineages are widespread and important types of social groupings but they are only two among the many other types of categories that belong to the domain of social organization. Some constitute actual and visible corporations of people and families, while others are limited to the domain of discourse and representation but are nevertheless significant in structuring social space and practice. ‘Patrimoiety’ or ‘matrimoiety’ are other quite common category systems. They divide society into two global entities that stand to each other in a relationship of distinction and exchange. In a patrimoiety system, belonging to one or the other moiety is defined through ‘patrification’, while in a matrimoiety membership is defined through the female line. A moiety may encapsulate clans, which may encapsulate lineages.

**Keywords:** [human kinship](#), [social organization](#), [clans](#), [lineages](#), [patrimoiety](#), [matrimoiety](#)

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## 9.1 Introduction

*Kungkankatja*, *minalinkatja* was the answer of an elderly man to my question, ‘How come you call your cousins as if they were your siblings?’, when I expected to hear different words, one for sibling and one for cousin. This episode occurred at a very early moment of my initial fieldwork in the Australian Western Desert; certainly early enough to set the stage for some investigations into the complex nature of people's own (emic) views of the idea of human relationships, while considering them against the structure of universal (etic) typologies of the human family. *Kungkankatja*, *minalinkatja*, literally ‘from a woman, from a man’, meant in the context of my question that the children of a woman and those of her brother are to be considered identical. Although I shall not go into the analytical details of this particular example (see Dousset 2003; 2005), it will nevertheless provide us here with some elementary guidelines for the conducting of linguistic investigations into the structure of those human relationships anthropologists call kinship and social organization. As we shall see later in this chapter, such short phrases have the capacity to flatten out pieces of intertwined and complex semantics.

‘Kinship and marriage are about the basic facts of life,’ Fox once wrote (1996[1967]:27). ‘They are about “birth, and conception, and death”, the eternal round that seemed to depress the poet but which excites, among others, the anthropologist.’ ‘Kinship is a system of social relationships that are expressed in a biological idiom ... It is best visualised as a mass of networks of relatedness, no two of which are identical, that radiate from each individual,’ as another scholar wrote (Tonkinson 1991[1978]: 57). Kinship also appears as a ‘huge field of social and mental realities stretching between two poles. One is highly abstract: it concerns kinship terminologies and the marriage principles or rules they implicitly contain or that are associated with them. The other is highly concrete: it concerns individuals and their bodies, bodies marked by the position of the individual in kinship relations’ (Godelier 1998: 387).

While many anthropologists would agree today that there are no so-called kin-based societies (Godelier 2004; Dousset 2007)—societies in which kinship provides the overarching ideological domain for social structure and behaviour—they would also argue that in many, if not in most, societies it is an important vehicle of social structure, behaviour, and moral order. Be it landownership and its transmission, behavioural codes, role distribution in ritual contexts, status attribution and its political and economic consequences, etc., the domain of kinship is often involved with considerable effects. The fact that in Euro-American systems of law children usually inherit property from their father and mother is a matter of kinship. The analysis of the domain of human relationships thus involves multiple and intertwined levels of social reality—from the human body to the social and moral order, and from spheres of practice to the domain of the symbolic.

This chapter is limited to pointing out a few central concepts and processes that are elementary in the investigation of human kinship. It is strongly recommended that the reader consult some further readings that are particularly useful, such as Carsten's *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship* (2000), Schweitzer's *Dividends of Kinship* (2000), or Stone's *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship* (2001), for contemporary discussions on the kinds of research interesting students of kinship nowadays. Above all, however, I recommend Holy's *Anthropological Perspectives on Kinship* (1996), which is the most comprehensive and open-minded piece of work on the topic I have come across.

For the sake of organizing data collection and analysis, it is useful to split the complexities of kinship into its various constituents from which in-depth analysis can proceed. The chapter is thus divided into three parts. In the first, we will discuss the concept of social organization as distinct from but related to kinship itself. The next part will introduce the reader to the constitutive domains of the study of kinship, which are called ‘kinship terminologies’. The use of jargon has been kept to a minimum, but avoiding all of these special terms is neither possible nor helpful. At the first use of each of these terms, their meaning will be

briefly explained. The last and shortest part will include some avenues for tying kinship to other and more symbolic and bodily aspects of social reality.

## 9.2 Social Organization and Kinship: Two Distinct but Complementary Domains

The expression 'social organization', as used by anthropologists, may produce some misunderstanding. It does not cover all that is social and organized. The social universe is indeed organized, since reactions to individual behaviour would otherwise be unpredictable and 'living together' difficult. What the expression 'social organization' covers, generally speaking, are those elements that organize people into locally recognized groups, categories, or classes dividing the social body into more or less distinct entities.

One could have started describing social organization by discussing the notion of the 'family'. The family however, as it is understood in its Euro-American meaning, is neither universal nor inevitable. Among the Na of the Yongning region in China, to quote an extreme example, a mother lives with her brother, both raising the children of the genitor (note that I avoid using the term 'father' here), who himself lives with his own sister. Children most often don't even seem to know who their actual genitor is (Hua 2000).

Instead, the most classic and better-defined examples for the kinds of groups or categories that constitute a social organization are clans and lineages. The Baruya of the Papua New Guinea highlands, counting over 2,000 people living in 17 villages, for example, are organized in 15 clans. One of these clans gave the name to the entire society, the Baruya, which is also the name of an insect the Baruya clan members are not allowed to kill. The red wings of this insect are associated to the 'road of fire' the apical ancestor of the clan took in mythical times when he was sent by the sun down to earth to unite people and to establish the clan. Similar myths exist for each clan whose members recognize a link of kinship to their apical ancestor and each such clan is divided into several 'brother lineages' that refer to the same ancestral origins. Since members of one and the same clan share the same ancestor, it is considered incestuous to marry a spouse from within the clan. The clans of the Baruya society are thus linked to each other through ties of marriage (Godelier 1982; 2004).

p. 212 A society, tribe, or ethnic group may be divided into a number of groups that are called 'clans' if their apical ancestor is mythical, or 'lineages' if genealogical ↳ memory traces ancestry back to one single human being. In many cases, as with the Baruya, the clan with its mythical ancestor is itself divided into several lineages each with their human ancestor. These human ancestors themselves, however, link back to one and the same mythical ancestor. They are brother or sister lineages.

Importantly, membership of these clans or lineages is not determined by ambiguous criteria. It is not a club that you can join or leave as you wish. Membership is determined by explicit rules that belong to the realm of kinship. We may talk of 'patrilineal' clans or lineages if membership is defined through the male line, as is the case with the Baruya. In this case, a father, his sons, his sons' sons, etc. belong to the same clan or lineage. A man's daughter belongs to this clan as well, but since she will marry a man from another clan, her children will follow her husband's line of membership.

Less frequent are so-called 'matrilineal' clans or lineages. In this case, membership follows the female line. A well-known example are the Navajo of North America, who think of kinship in terms of *k'é*. 'My relatives', or *shik'éi*, are the particular ones with whom one shares intense enduring relationships: they are relatives through what is called clans. Birth affiliates a child with her or his mother and the mother's clan, those who came out of the same womb. Birth and clanship are located in space, and clan names derived most likely from place names. While Navajo clans do not hold property in common, members often visit and help each

other. 'K'é and clan relationships are the primary way in which the Navajo people locate themselves in the social universe' (Lamphere 2001: 39).

Summarizing, we can say that a clan or lineage claims a common mythical or historical ancestor, and usually recognizes some shared substance, shared memory, or any other shared background which is used to justify the social body as a corporation. Landownership, residential composition, conflict and its resolution, roles in ritual, and so on are in many cases articulated around membership of such categories and around the opposition or distinction of various such categories within a society or ethnic group.

These groupings (clans or lineages) abide by rules that organize their internal structure and establish the relationships between all the clans of a society (usually marriage rules, as we shall see). Additionally, these clans may be organized around local typologies and representations that need to be understood in order to understand the social structure. The Maisin of Papua New Guinea, studied by Barker (e.g. 2005), know two types of clans, *Kawo* and *Sabu*. They stand in an asymmetrical relationship to each other: the former host so-called Great Men, who are leaders and have the role of taking responsibility in other clans, and the latter do not have such Great Men and so are expected to listen to the advice formulated by the former. In other cases, such as in many Australian Aboriginal or lowland Amazonian groups, clans stand in a more symmetrical relationship to each other. They all claim some shared relationship to history, language, and land and thus constitute together a larger unity (a society, tribe, or ethnic group), but each clan also claims to be descended from one particular ancestral being, has the responsibility for particular sites or stretches of land, and in some cases addresses the others using particular speech etiquettes that mark clan distinction. All clans, on the other hand, are related to each other through the exchange of human beings, since women and men of one clan will marry women and men of other clans. They are linked through the responsibility of performing the necessary ceremonies that will reproduce the shared cosmic and social order, through the exchange of goods, and, sharing a common language, through the exchange of words. Relationships between clans and lineages are relationships of distinctions between groups of people; at the same time, relationships of similitude and exchange, unifying these distinctions within a global social entity such as the ethnic group, the tribe, or the society. The same is true for any other type of social category system.

Indeed, while clan and lineages are widespread and important types of social groupings, they are only two among the many other types of categories that belong to the domain of social organization. Some constitute actual and visible corporations of people and families, while others are limited to the domain of discourse and representation but are nevertheless significant in structuring social space and practice. Importantly, these various category systems are not exclusive of one another, but are in many occasions piled on top of each other or encapsulated, thus building up for every individual several layers of membership (or identity) and several contexts of relational speech etiquettes. 'Patrimoieties' or 'matrimoieties' are other quite common category systems. They divide society into two global entities that stand to each other in a relationship of distinction and exchange as well. In a patrimoiety system, belonging to one or the other moiety is defined through 'patrification' (children belong to their father's group), while in a matrimoiety membership is defined through the female line. In certain contexts, speakers may refer to their moiety, in others to their clan, and in yet others to their lineage, organized around what is called a 'segmentary system', as described for example by Evans-Pritchard (1940) for the Nuer or by Riches (1978) for the Tiv. A moiety may encapsulate clans, which may encapsulate lineages. This system is most visible in conflict situations. Imagine two patrimoieties, each composed of several clans and each clan composed of several lineages. When two people within a lineage are in conflict, only immediate family members may get involved in conflict resolution. However, when two people belonging to different lineages of the same clan are in conflict, then all members of each lineage may get involved. When two members of lineages belonging to different clans but to the same moiety are in conflict, then the entire clan may get involved. Even further, if members of two clans belonging to different patrimoieties are in conflict, all members of the patrimoieties may get involved in conflict resolution. In other words, social categories are mobilized

with respect to the difference or level of opposition they involve (level of the lineage, clan, or moiety) in particular contexts and calls for solidarity among their members. What looks quite obvious in conflict resolution ↳ points to the existence of more confidential structural differences, such as variations and versions in the mythical narratives between levels of social categories.

In Australia, for example, and where clan or moiety structures exist, each owns a portion of a shared mythical narrative. These narratives, known as songlines belonging to the Dreamtime (the name given to the Australian Aboriginal cosmology), depict the story of mythical figures that were travelling in mythical times over the country, covering often enormous distances across clan and tribal territory, and sometimes even across language groups. These figures shaped the landscape through their travels and are at the origin of natural species and established social rules and laws. Singing the songs, telling the stories, and performing the rituals that link back to these mythical figures is crucial, but can only be undertaken by those people that are responsible for—not necessarily the owner of—the stretch of land on which a particular episode of the mythical story occurred, handing the responsibility for other episodes to neighbouring groups. In these cases, recording the mythical narrative is only possible if the researcher has understood the clan or moiety structure of a society and is thus able to identify the owners, and is thereafter able to reconstruct the songline in its entirety (see also Nash and Simpson, Chapter 17 below).

Moieties themselves may, as in some cases in Aboriginal Australia and lowland Amazonia (Dreyfus 1993), be divided into social categories other than clans and lineages, such as sub-moieties, also called sections. These sections may themselves again be divided into subsections. Sections and subsections divide moiety up in different ways than clans do, but in some cases, such as among certain Northern Australian groups, they may in fact coexist. Sections and subsections reflect the distribution of genealogical relationships between people, in some cases linked to ritual roles. The crucial difference between sections or subsections and clans or lineages is that the former do not reflect visible corporate groups. They are rather abstract divisions of society into nevertheless meaningful entities without people belonging to the same category actually living together, owning land together, or mobilizing systems of conflict resolution. In Central Australia, subsection names are gendered, and are used as terms of address and reference, and sometimes even as personal names. In English, a term of address is *dad* or *daddy*, while its term of reference is *father*. The Pintupi people, for example, use eight root terms to group their people into eight categories, but add a gendered marker to distinguish female from male members of subsections. For example, one of these subsections is *kamarra*; another one is *paltjarri*. As such, however, these words are never used. People use *Tjakamarra* and *Tjapaltjarri* for males and *Nakamarra* and *Napaltjarri* for females. These subsections stand in particular relationships to each other, so that *Tjakamarra* is always the husband of a *Napaltjarri* woman and a *Nakamarra* is the wife of a *Tjapaltjarri* man.

‘Generational moiety’, also called ‘alternate generational levels’, are yet another important type of social category system. In many societies, these moiety or levels ↳ cut across other social groupings such as clans, lineages, or sections. In such generational moiety, a person's co-generational (siblings, cousins, etc.), his or her grandparents’ co-generational, and his or her grandchildren's co-generational are included in one moiety, while a person's parents’ co-generational and his or her children's co-generational are members of the other moiety. These generational moiety usually have considerable influence on everyday behaviour as well as on ritual activities. People of the same generational moiety are usually behaviourally close and occupy similar roles during ceremonies, while relationships between members of different generational moiety are rather those of avoidance or at least respect. In the Australian Western Desert, these moiety have either relative names or absolute names, and sometimes both. Among the Ngaatjatjarra peoples of the Western Desert, *Ngumpaluru* (‘shadeside’) and *Tjintultukultul* (‘sunsides’) are the absolute names of these moiety; and *nganantarka* (‘us bone’) and *tjanamiltjan* (‘they flesh’) are the relative terms. A person is either *Ngumpaluru* or *Tjintultukultul*, and he considers himself and his co-generational as being *nganantarka*, while members of the opposite moiety he refers to as

*tjanamiltjan*. This person would show some restraint and even avoidance towards members of the other moiety, while generally entertaining relaxed and close relationships with those of his own generational moiety.

Let me sum up the general aspects of social organization before moving on to the domain of kinship itself. Social organization describes the structure which divides a society into distinctive 'sociocentric' and multilayered entities that are at the basis of a multilayered definition of individual social membership. Sociocentric here means that, with the exception of generational moieties, a social category is not the consequence of individual relationships but exists irrespective of people's situation. These entities constitute the sociological contexts of speech, of shared responsibilities, of behavioural patterns, and of ownership and sometimes residence. Depending on the level of the entity people use as their context of speech, they may refer to one and the same person as a brother or sister, as a cousin or as a rival, or even as an enemy. It is common that a person refers to a cousin as a 'brother' when the context of speech is a discourse about clans, since he may conceive the person he refers to to be a member of a 'brother-lineage'.

Membership of these entities is defined by rules of descent, i.e. inheritance through generations following particular rules. These rules, as we shall see, are the foundation of the relationship of distinction between social categories. Bonding these social categories back into a global social unity is generally defined in terms of exchanges, in particular marriage, as will be seen. Both descent and marriage may be considered to belong to the domain of kinship, even though some authors argue that it rather reflects social organization. These discussions are irrelevant in the context of this chapter.

p. 216 While 'social organization' describes the structure of general social distinctions and is sociocentric, kinship is of the realm of the relationships between particular individuals and is thus 'egocentric'. Kinship and social organization must be distinguished as fields of investigation, since they concern separately observable social realities. However, in most cases, the rules that organize egocentric relationships are de facto constitutive of the more general entities which are the categories of social organization. The remaining part of this chapter will discuss kinship rather than social organization; but let us keep in mind the relationship that exists between the individual aspects of belonging to a group of people through the links of kinship and membership of a social group through the principles of inheritance or descent.

During fieldwork the researcher should pay particular attention to the following issues with regard to social organization:

1. Societies are often divided into social groups who own different and complementary aspects of mythological narratives, for example. It is important to understand what these social groups are and how they relate to each other in order to be able to record complete narratives.
2. Social organization constitutes contexts of speech that may change the semantic value of words, for example calling a cousin 'brother' or an aunt 'mother' if the person is member of a particular social category.
3. The names of these social categories are often significant, and etymological work on these names needs to be undertaken, as the Baruya case illustrates. They may be placenames, names of species, of mythical figures, etc., or they may be gendered (as the Australian case illustrates), or include aspects of relatedness, such as with the Navajo.
4. Sometimes these social categories and their names are important for reconstructing the local history. Historical linguistics is relevant here. Names of social categories can often be reconstructed to their proto-forms in a regional scope and provide some perspectives on diffusion, migration, and loan. For example, the central Australian subsection name *Tjakamarra* can be traced back to the section name *Karimarra* used by other groups hundreds of kilometres to the west.

## 9.3 The Basics of Kinship

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Investigation into kinship again means distinguishing different fields of interconnected social realities. These may be summed up as follows: terminological systems; systems of descent and filiation (as already seen); marriage rules; and a connected domain, discussions on shared and transmitted bodily substances. I will discuss each of these individually, since they also reflect the evolution of ↴ anthropological investigations into the domain of kinship itself. It is, however, crucial to understand that the separation of these domains is an epistemological artefact and that in social interaction all four play combined roles. Let me start by investigating terminological systems—usually also the first step that the researcher in the domain of kinship studies undertakes in the field.

As we have seen in the introduction to this chapter, kinship is a mass of networks of relatedness which radiate from each individual, and this network expresses itself in a biological idiom (Tonkinson 1991[1978]). The biological idiom we are talking about is a set of words or expressions—kinship terms—that are largely attributed through what Fox (1996) called the basic facts of life: conception and birth. What is meant here is that whatever the local term that stands for ‘mother’ may be and whatever other relationships or things may be expressed by this term, at its very basis it describes the unique relationship between a person and a woman from whose womb he or she was born. Every language and, in some cases, even every dialect has its own set of such words that distribute the network of relationships around the individual we take as our starting point (called Ego): mother, father, uncle, brother, sister, cousin, and so on. However, the structure of this network or terminological map (the list of categories) is culturally ascribed and unique while also following a few universal rules. ‘Categories’ of people, sometimes also called ‘classes’, mean here all possible genealogical positions around Ego. For example, in English, the word ‘uncle’ designates in fact four categories and not just one: one's mother's brother, one's father's brother, one's mother's sister's husband, and one's father's sister's husband. In other languages and cultures, this may be very different. The terminological map—the list of categories that are locally distinguished—constitutes a terminological system. The number of such basic terminological systems invented by human societies is limited. Indeed, identical or very similar such terminological systems are found in societies as far apart as lowland Amazonia, India, China, Australia, or North America; others are of the same type, as among the Inuit peoples of Northern Canada and the European continent. The existence of a limited number of types of terminological systems makes some prediction possible, though this always needs to be carefully confirmed. It is because of the (incorrect) prediction I made that the sentence *Kungkankatja, minalinkatja* became relevant: they were calling each other brother and sister where, because of some systemic rules derived from these universal terminological systems, I was expecting a term for cousin. Let me now move on to those universal rules and systems.

### 9.3.1 Kinship terminologies

p. 218 Terminological systems were the first elements of kinship systems to attract anthropologists' attention, starting with Lewis Morgan's *Systems of Affinity and Consanguinity of the Human Family* (1997[1871]) as one of the major starting blocks for a new discipline. Morgan, who collected terminological systems through corresponding with people from different parts of the world, concluded that despite the diversity in the ways cultures and languages describe a person's genealogical environment, there are important structural similarities that seem to be systemic. He produced a first typology that has since been amended many times by various anthropologist (e.g. Murdock 1949), but that remains widely in use today. What this typology does is present a few basic ways—today one would say algorithms—of mapping the genealogical grid into classes and terms. Nowadays, anthropologists distinguish five such basic systems they call—unsatisfactorily but explicably from a historical point of view—by the names of the groups in which these systems are supposed to be found: Dravidian, Iroquois, Hawaiian, Sudanese, and Eskimo, with some further subtypes such as Crow, Omaha, Aluridja, etc. I shall now, in a very summary way, present particular features of each of these systems.

The **Dravidian** is a very widespread system. It is found on all continents and among the most diverse cultures, even though it is usually associated with small-scale societies. The main feature of this system is what is called 'bifurcate merging'. Bifurcate merging means that categories are bifurcated one generation above Ego (his or her parent's generation) according to gender, but their children are merged again in Ego's generation. What may here sound complex is in fact a very straightforward procedure of distinguishing fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts following a different principle from that we find in Euro-American terminologies. Ego (the speaker) distinguishes the 'father' from the 'mother', for which one uses two distinct terms. The father's brother, however, since he is of the same gender as the father, is called 'father' as well. The mother's sister, since she is of the same gender as the mother, is called 'mother'. The father's sister, on the other hand, since she is of a different gender from the speaker's father, is called 'aunt' (or FZ, father's sister). Similarly, the mother's brother, since he is of a different gender from the speaker's mother, is called 'uncle' (or MB, mother's brother). In other words, only the mother's brother is an 'uncle' and only the father's sister is an 'aunt' if we use the English words. This is the basic feature from which all other features are derived in so-called Dravidian systems.

Dravidian terminologies are usually extended in such a way that every person with whom one has a relationship of any kind needs to be addressed or referred to by a kinship term. This extension to people other than close genealogical relations follows a very precise algorithm, always according to the principle of bifurcate merging mentioned above. My mother's mother's sister is a mother's mother, but my father's father's sister is of a distinct class.

p. 219 The number of classes available to designate all the people in a group, tribe, etc. is obviously limited. For example, in Ego's parents' generation, there are usually only four terms available ('mother', 'father', 'father's sister', and 'mother's brother'), which means that each individual knows many people he or she calls 'mother', 'father', etc. Since your 'mothers' marry people you call 'father', fathers' sisters (FZ) obviously marry mothers' brothers (MB). And since all children of people you call 'mother' or 'father' are obviously your siblings, all children of people you call FZ or MB must be called differently, 'cousins' or, as anthropologists say in this case, cross-cousins. The terms for siblings and for cross-cousins are, in a Dravidian system, all that are available to name people of the same generation as yourself. Since one needs to marry someone of the same generation, and since everyone needs to be positioned in a kin category, and since you cannot marry a sibling for reasons of incest prohibition (see below), all you have left as partners are obviously people from the cross-cousin category, i.e. children of people you call 'uncle' and 'aunt'. Once you understand these principles, you can easily extend them to any other person of the society. If I call someone cross-cousin and this person calls someone else cross-cousin as well, I know that this other person is a sibling of mine: the cross-cousin of a cross-cousin is a sibling, while the cross-cousin of a sibling is a

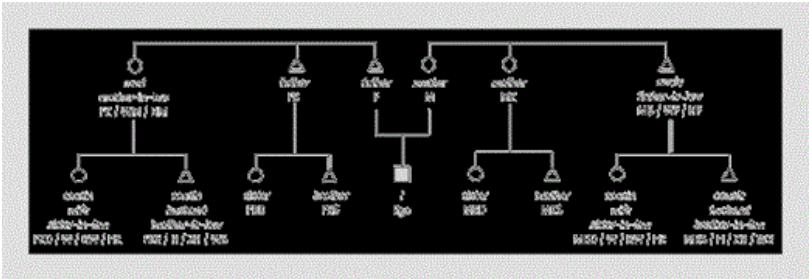


cross-cousin. In other words, Dravidian systems distinguish members of a group, tribe, or society as constituting two egocentric entities: first those that are ‘affines’, comprising all the people who are potentially or actually in-laws (MB, FZ, cross-cousins etc.) and the rest, whom we may called ‘consanguines’. Fig. 9.1 displays a Dravidian system using, for pedagogic reasons, the English terminology. Of course, one needs to replace these words with those used in local languages and dialects.

The **Iroquois** system is a variation of the Dravidian-type terminology. While the Dravidian system is a universal system in the sense that the rules of bifurcation and merging operate in the same way in each generation and at each genealogical distance, and thus allow people to know how they stand to each other without even knowing their actual genealogical relationship (see Dousset 2008), the Iroquois systems limits the automatic extension to close kin only. Again, it is not possible here to go into the details of this system and I refer the reader to Godelier, Trautmann, and Tjon Sie Fat (1998). Let us simply underline the fact that in a Dravidian system cross-cousins of cross-cousins are brothers and sisters for Ego, while in an Iroquois system they remain cross-cousins.

The **Hawaiian** system, also called the generational system, is in some respects the simplest since it distinguishes very few categories. In Ego's parents' generation, all women are called ‘mother’, and all men are called ‘father’. Consequently, all co-generationals, i.e. all the children of people called ‘mother’ or ‘father’, are brothers and sisters. It is important to note that Hawaiian systems can again be subdivided into two subsystems, largely because of the universal rule of incest prohibition between brothers and sisters. Because in a Hawaiian system Ego only finds brothers and sisters among co-generationals, and because of this incest prohibition rule, possible spouses for Ego need to be distinguished otherwise than by terminology alone. There are two solutions. The first is to limit the use of terminology to very close kin and to apply a strict rule of exogamy (the necessity to marry out into genealogically or spatially distant families). The other solution, when the terminology is used even among genealogically distant kin, is to differentiate the categories of cross-cousins and of siblings as in a Dravidian system, even though before marriage they are all called using the sibling terminology. In the latter solution, the terminology is of the Hawaiian type but marriage rules follow the Dravidian type where cross-cousins are potentially also spouses. The distinction between pre-marriage terminology and post-marriage terminology is relevant here. I will return to this point.

**Figure 9.1.**



A Dravidian system filled with English kin terms. Only very close kin are given in this figure, but it must be remembered that Dravidian terminologies are extended. Triangles stand for males, circles for females. Vertical lines stand for filiation/descent, horizontal lines for sibship. The line uniting Ego's parents below their figure means they are married. The usual abbreviations used are B (brother), Z (sister), F (father), M (mother), D (daughter), S (son), H (husband) and W (wife). All other kin categories are combinations of these elements. For example, MB (mother's brother) is a matrilineal ‘uncle’; his daughter, MBD (mother's brother's daughter), is a matrilineal cross-cousin. Additional abbreviations used by anthropologists are ‘y’ for younger, such as in yB (younger brother), ‘e’ for elder, ‘m’ for a male speaker and ‘f’ for a female speaker. Older ethnographies often write ‘m.s.’ for male speaking and ‘f.s.’ for female speaking.

The **Sudanese** system is the most descriptive system. Anthropologists, starting with Morgan, have distinguished classificatory terminologies from descriptive terminologies. Classificatory terminologies denominate with one term several categories or classes of people (such as 'uncle' in the English terminology), while descriptive systems have the characteristic of naming differently every category of kin. The term for cross-cousin in a Dravidian system is typically a classificatory term, while that for MB is a descriptive term (see Fig. 9.1). In fact, it is not possible to distinguish entire systems as being either descriptive or classificatory, since all have some elements of description and some elements of classification. The Eskimo system (and the English terminology is of this type) discussed below, for example, was long considered to be a descriptive system. In fact it has classificatory terms, ↵ since the word 'cousin', for example, actually covers four categories of people: matrilineal cross-cousins (MBD/S), matrilineal parallel cousins (MZD/S), patrilineal cross-cousins (FZD/S), and patrilineal parallel cousins (FBD/S). The Sudanese system, though, is one of the most descriptive systems, if not a totally descriptive one. Every single kin category is named using a distinct term.

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The **Eskimo** system is found in Europe and, as its name indicates, among the Inuit peoples. Marriage is between genealogically unrelated people, meaning that there is no direct connection between consanguinal and affinal terminology, at least before marriage. The complex distinction between consanguinity and affinity will need to be discussed in more precise ways below. Another characteristic of the Eskimo system is that bifurcation does not occur. 'Uncles' can be found on the father's side as well as on the mother's side.

**Crow** and **Omaha** are sometimes considered distinct systems. They are, however, more likely to be interpreted as specific variations of the Dravidian system (see Kronenfeld 1991). The particularities of Crow and Omaha systems is that they operate what is called skewing. In certain contexts, a matrilineal cross-cousin is called by the same term as a FZ, and a patrilineal cross-cousin like a MB. In other words, two generations are skewed into one and the same term.

The general system of terminology and its pragmatic usages (and adaptations) in a particular language or dialect can only be determined if the researcher actually records kin terms and their contextualized usages. Besides simply listening to conversations, there exist two basic methods for recording these terminologies. The first is the genealogical method, the second the tabular method. In the genealogical method, the researcher prepares a genealogical sheet (see Fig. 9.1 above) in which are drawn all possible categories starting from an Ego (the speaker): his younger brother, his younger sister, his older brother, his older sister, his father, his mother, his mother's older sister, his mother's younger sister, his mother's older brother, etc. The sheet needs to cover at least five generations: Ego's, his parents', his parent's parent's, his children's, and his children's children's. It is however advised, if possible, to go beyond these five generations. The researcher then sits with an individual, notes the name, the place and date/time of recording, as well as the gender, age, place of residence, social role, etc. of the speaker. It is also useful to write down who else is sitting around and listening, and perhaps contributing to the conversation.

This needs to be undertaken separately with several people, establishing a representative sample covering various characteristics of the speaker: age, gender, social position and role, residence, member of a social category, etc. At least four questions need to be asked of each such person for each of the individual categories drawn on the genealogical sheet: (1) How do you call that person? (2) How do you refer to this person when you talk to someone else? (3) How does this person call you? and (4) How does this person refer to you when talking to another person? Questions 3 and 4 will record what are called the 'reciprocals'.

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In English, if you are ↵ a male, the reciprocal of 'father' is 'son', since this is how your father will call or refer to you.

In some cases it may be difficult to ask direct questions unless one already knows a good deal about the society. In these cases, one needs to use artifice to ask the question. A useful indirect way for obtaining the terms for each position is to work through the genealogical sheet, taking women as the pivotal point. You

then ask the following types of questions: What do you call the person from whose womb you came? What do you call another person that came out of the same womb after you and that is a male (younger brother)? You then use the 'marriage' link to get the affinal males: what do you call the man that married (or is living with) the person out of whose womb you came? And so on.

While the genealogical method is a necessary first step, it also has its limits, since it tackles only more or less close kin (those drawn on the genealogical sheet). To extend the analysis of the usage of terminology beyond close kin, the tabular method can be applied. With the tabular method, you prepare one card for each person you interview. Ideally you attach a photograph of the person to the card, since this will greatly enhance the discussions with other people. These cards are numbered so that you can refer to a person through its number. Showing the photographs, you then ask each person how he or she calls and refers to each other person. The results need to be noted in a tabular way: number 5 calls number 93 'younger brother', number 54 calls number 12 'father', etc. You may at a later stage check the reciprocals, as well as elucidate what I call relational triangles (Dousset 2008). They will help to identify which system is at work or to identify situations in which the expected term is not applied: if person A calls person B 'brother', and if person A calls person C 'mother', then person 'B' should be calling person C 'mother' as well, to take the most simple example. If person B does not call person C 'mother', then you need to find out why and in which situations.

What do we need to remember from this brief overview of terminological systems? Here are a few guidelines to help in the recording of terminologies, which is considered to be one of the first steps of inquiry into human social organization and kinship.

1. Recording the kinship terminology and trying to establish which type the researcher is confronted with is one of the first steps. There are several complementary methods for achieving this. One is to use the genealogical method, drawing genealogies and asking what each consultant calls them, and how they refer to them, making sure one works with consultants of both genders, of different ages, status, etc. The second method is the tabular method that allows you to go beyond close kin. Another important method that follows from the two previous ones is contextual observation and recording of how people call or refer to each other in various social situations (among the family, with other clan members, among ritual comrades, etc.). In some cultures, however, people hardly use kinship terms in everyday interaction; drawing genealogies is sometimes the only means to obtain the terminologies.

It should be noted that real-world systems are never as neat as the theoretical types described in this chapter. Confronting real-world terminologies with ideal typical terminologies provides important insights into local representations and strategies, as our example of *minalinkatja*, *kungankatja* demonstrates. It is not sufficient to record all the words believed to belong to the realm of kinship. It is necessary to record terms with respect to the categories they designate as mapped against a chart of possible genealogical positions. It is also necessary to distinguish descriptive terms (those that designate one category only) from those which are classificatory (designating several categories). For example, there may be a general category for cross-cousins, but once marriage has occurred with such a cross-cousin, his or her actual brother may be called differently. In the Western Desert, cross-cousins are called *watjirra* (classificatory). The actual brother-in-law however, while still a *watjirra*, is also called *marutju* (descriptive).

2. It is thus necessary to record and distinguish kinship terms used between people before marriage and after marriage. The same category of people may be called differently once marriage is envisaged or has occurred. For example, in the Australian Western Desert again, a mother's brother is called *kamuru*, but once he is envisaged as a real or potential father-in-law, he will be referred to as *waputju* (wife's father, initiator), since *kamuru* denotes a proximity that is not appropriate in the case of in-laws.

3. It is necessary to distinguish terms of reference from terms of address. *Mum* is typically a term of address, while *mother* is a term of reference that only in certain contexts or certain languages is used as a form of address as well. In English, if you address your mother as *Mother*, it does imply a contextual connotation that needs to be analysed (emotional distance, aristocracy, not taking the mother seriously, astonishment, and so on). Many languages have only one term for both reference and address. Additionally, some languages have tri-relational terms (cf. Merlan and Heath 1982), for example two people talking together about a third related person (myself and my cousin talking about another third person), or one person talking about a couple of people (myself talking about the couple formed by my grandfather and father).
4. Social, geographical, and discursive contexts of speech may have considerable influence on the terms and categories designated. Depending on which social category interlocutors stand in with regard to each other and on the social context in which they speak or refer to each other, they may use different terms or use the same terms differently. In the Australian Western Desert, which has a variant of a Dravidian system, for example, people may call each other 'brother' (*kurta*) and 'sister' (*tjurtu*) even though they are cross-cousins when the context of speech is that of opposing generational moieties, such as during funerals, which are organized around generational role distribution. In other and more egocentric contexts, however, these same people will call each other 'cross-cousins' (*watjirra*).
5. With the recording of kinship terms and the corresponding categories, there is also the need to record the expected normative behaviour that accompanies the terms. In many languages, the term for 'mother-in-law' is for reference only, since people are not allowed to talk to their mother-in-law. Anthropologists usually distinguish several general types of such normative behaviour: the joking relationship (people are close to each other and may even make sexual allusions or jokes), the avoidance relationship (people are not allowed to talk to each other), the respect relationship (people are allowed to talk to each other but the relationship is asymmetrical, i.e. one gives orders, the other listens; one receives goods, the other gives goods, etc.), and the relationship of reciprocity (people have a symmetrical/equal type of relationship but not as close as that of the joking relationship).
6. Terminologies, as was the case with the names used in social organization, are important in the domain of historical linguistics. Kinship terms are considered relatively stable, and reconstructing proto-words, and through these proto-systems (what was the terminological system in use by the ancestors of the group?), may provide important information on the local and regional history. Kinship terminologies may also be borrowed from neighbouring groups, revealing aspects of intercultural relationships.

### 9.3.2 Descent and filiation

While terminologies are among the most important elements researchers need to record in the domain of kinship studies, they are not the only aspects concerning the network of relatedness based on a biological idiom. With the emergence of the British structural-functionalist school at the beginning of the twentieth century with scholars such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes, and Evans-Pritchard, research increasingly concentrated on the relationship between kinship and political and economic systems. How people were recruited into corporate groups and how these groups also become landowners or land users, for example, became an important aspect of research. Anthropologists were particularly interested in the relationship between social organization as discussed above and kinship, and it was during this period that the notions of lineage and clan received their most comprehensive definitions and articulations. Early on, researchers recognized that these categories' principal mode of recruiting people was the control of descent and the transmission of membership and ownership from one generation to the next. As with systems of terminologies, anthropologists have identified a ↴ certain number of types of such modes of transmission which the researcher needs to understand before tackling their linguistic aspects.

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Three general types of descent systems have been identified: unilineal, non-unilineal, and mixed systems. In the field, the most visible type is the unilineal system. As the name indicates, unilineal systems trace the process of corporation, inheritance, and transmission through a single line: the father's line or the mother's line. In a patrilineal descent system (the Baruya, for example), membership of a group is inherited through the male line. Children belong to the same group as their father, but to a different group from their mother. In a matrilineal descent system, such as the Navajo, membership of a group is inherited through the female line and children belong to the same group as their mother, but to a different group from their father. In the latter system, the matrilineal uncle (the mother's brother) usually has a very important educational role for his sister's children, and marriage bonds are usually quite weak. It should be evident by now that unilineal systems are those most often found in clans and lineages, and are often also associated with terminologies which distinguish a group of consanguines (one's own lineage) from a group of affines. But this needs to be meticulously investigated, since it is not usually as clear-cut as theory would like to have it.

Among the non-unilineal systems, the most representative is the cognatic descent system. Non-unilineal systems, and in particular cognatic systems, are considered unable to sustain enduring corporate groups. Indeed, in a cognatic descent system, children belong indistinguishably to their mother's group or family and to their father's group or family, or inherit rights and property indistinguishably from their father's side and their mother's side. Hence the general principle of inheritance and transmission does not make it possible to create enduring distinctions between descent groups, since at every generation families or groups are conflated in the children's generation. In practice, however, societies that have a cognatic descent system are able to constitute enduring corporate groups through other mechanisms. In certain parts of Europe, where the cognatic system is the rule, the norm of primogeniture also existed, according to which the first-born male would inherit landownership and constitute, with his close and enlarged family (*kindred*), a land-based enduring group, he himself transmitting landownership to his eldest son and so on. Younger brothers had to leave the family group or work under the authority of the older brother without ever becoming an owner. Thus, while in theory and in discourses children inherit goods and rights from both their parents' sides, in practice one side may be considered central and the other peripheral, as we shall see below with the concept of 'complementary filiation' and 'double descent'.

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Among the mixed systems, the 'ambilineal' one is probably the most difficult to identify, but also very interesting, since it is open to political and economic contextualization and strategies. In an ambilineal system, a person may choose to follow the mother's line or the father's line, depending on opportunities or social pressure. But once he or she has chosen to link up to one or the other side, this ↴ choice may not be changed later in life: one is expected to stand by the group or family from which one claims inheritance. In the Australian Western Desert, again, the system at work is very similar to an ambilineal system but, unlike

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.

What do we need to remember from this again too brief overview of systems of descent and filiation? Here are a few guidelines to help in the recording of data.

1. Any social, ethnic, tribal etc. group shares at least three things: a spatial location (even if it is a virtual one as with internet communities), a way of identifying and recruiting its members, and a shared history or memory. Terminologies, as we have seen, structure the social field within the group from an egocentric (a speaker's) point of view. They reflect certain aspects of organization, role distribution, and the circulation of people. Descent and filiation, on the other hand, touch upon the three above-mentioned conditions of social being. They answer questions on how spatial organization is reproduced over generations. They answer questions on how people become and are members of the group and its subgroups, and they are associated to the group's collective history and memory. Very often, patrilineal descent is linked to the existence of clans who each have their own myth of origins.
2. Some aspects of descent and filiation are visible and straightforward; others are hidden, unconscious, and only identifiable through the careful analysis of discourses, symbolism, and ideology with regard to the constitution and composition of the human and the social body.
3. Human beings and, by extension, social groups are made up of substances, be they material or immaterial. The genealogy of these substances, the way they circulate among human beings and groups, the way they are transmitted from one generation to the next or are destroyed, constitute important aspects in the understanding of the system of descent and filiation in particular, and of the entire group's organization and structure in general. These substances' existence is most often limited to the domain of language and speech, and only rarely and sporadically surfaces in the domain of actual practice.

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### 9.3.3 Alliance and marriage

At the height of descent theory and the interest in descent systems as the constituents of social groups during the first half of the twentieth century, with Lévi-Strauss' work (1967[1947]) a new and complementary investigation into the complexities of human kinship emerged: alliance theory. According to this structuralist theory, society is not (or not solely) made up of principles of belonging (descent and groups), but primarily of principles of exchange. Lévi-Strauss claimed that three types of exchanges characterize the human social realm: exchange of words (language), exchange of goods (the economic domain), and exchange of human beings (marriage). It is only when these three principles of exchange are systematized and functional in a group of human beings that the latter actually constitutes a society with its shared cultural codes. Alliance theorists, as the name indicates, and with them Lévi-Strauss and many other anthropologists, concentrated their research efforts on the domain of the exchange of human beings: marriage. And marriage becomes a system of exchange if it is associated with the obligation of exogamy, i.e. marrying someone from 'outside' your family or group. Brothers and sisters who over generations marry each other will not constitute a society. To do so, Lévi-Strauss explains, we need an incest prohibition which forces people to obtain their spouses from other families.

Before going further, it is necessary to explain the distinction between 'alliance' and 'marriage'. Dumont (1957), another alliance theorist albeit in some respects in disagreement with Lévi-Strauss, has conceptualized the difference in the most systematic way. He talks of alliance (or 'alliance of marriage') when he observes and analyses the repetition of identical marriage types over generations or among co-generational. Thus marriage is the individual event that happens in a particular place with particular people in a particular context, bringing two people (and families) together with the aim of joining them as spouses and usually future parents. Alliance is the system which reflects a certain regularity in the choice of suitable spouses and describes repetitions of identical marriage types.

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Alliance theory distinguishes three of these basic types of marriages. The most basic is called 'direct exchange' or the 'elementary system'. The second type is 'indirect exchange', and the third type is called the 'complex system'. In the direct exchange system, marriages place people and groups in a symmetric relationship. ♀ Females of group A, for example a clan, marry males of group B and females of group B marry males of group A. Group A thus exchanges women or men with group B in a direct and reciprocal way. This exchange system can be linked to the terminological systems mentioned earlier in this chapter. Most often, direct exchange systems occur where the terminology is of the Dravidian or Iroquois type. Let me detail the principles, asking the reader to go back to Fig. 9.1 if necessary, and combine terminology, descent system, and alliance theory in one fictitious example.

Let us say that the descent system is patrilineal and that we have two clans, A and B. Clan A is composed of my father, my father's brother, my father's sister, and other people related through the male line. Clan B is composed of my mother, my mother's brother, my mother's sister, etc. My father, who is from clan A, married my mother from clan B (exogamy). His children thus belong to clan A. In exchange, my mother's brother, who is from clan B, can marry my father's sister, who is from clan A. Their children belong to clan B. Since I can only marry people from clan B (exogamy), I call these children cross-cousins or wife, and not sibling. My children will be of clan A and will marry people from clan B, and so on. What results from direct exchange systems is that a person marries someone he or she calls cross-cousin, and the spouse's sibling is also the sister's or brother's spouse. In practice, as we will see, people only rarely marry their actual cross-cousin but do nevertheless marry a person of the same category.

The second type is the indirect exchange system, which is found in, but is not exclusive to, Crow and Omaha terminologies. Marriage in these cases is either patrilateral or matrilateral: a person can marry a cross-cousin from either the father's side or the mother's side respectively, but not from both. In terms of clans or descent groups, it means that there are at least three exchanging units: clan A marries into clan B, who marries into clan C, who marries back into clan A. The exchange is no longer direct but indirect.

The last and least systemic exchange system is called the complex system. Marriage is here no longer a system of exchange on its own, but merges into other types of exchanges, social structures, and ideologies. An example of a complex system is the modern European system where alliances (repetitions of identical marriages) are very rare, since children of the same family may marry in different ways into the most diverse family backgrounds. Statistically, of course, there are some regularities even among complex systems, but, as already mentioned, they are relevant for social factors other than rules of marriage alone. For example, people of a certain social class tend to marry into the same social class, and people in rural areas tend to marry following strategies that retain the coherence of landownership over time. Complex marriage systems are usually associated with limited, not extensive, terminologies, in which kinship terms are only applied to close or very close kin.

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The theories of descent and alliance do not need to be understood as exclusive paradigms but are in fact complementary aspects of similar social and cultural characteristics and practices. Marriage and marriage rules are needed to create more or less stable structures, of which clans and lineages are examples; and clans and lineages are needed if marriage is to be exogamous and link people of different ascent. Descent differentiates and distinguishes people as groups within a society, while marriage upholds the connection between these groups. Data in this respect needs to take into account two distinct explanatory sources: first, actual marriage practices and the choice of partners, and second, discourses about marriage rules. In some cases, practices and discourses may overlap (people actually doing what they say they are supposed to do). In other cases, discourses rather reflect an ideal type of practice which does not happen very often, if at all. Let us look briefly at the main constituents of discourses about marriage rules.

Two types of rules can be expressed in discourses about marriage rules. The first type defines prescriptive practices, the second describes proscriptive marriages. Prescriptive rules are rules that express what one is



ordered or supposed to do. They can be characterized as being jural (Leach 1965) or structural (Needham 1973). In a Dravidian terminology with exogamous lineages or clans, the prescription would be to marry a cross-cousin, as we have seen. From Leach's point of view, it is this obligation which creates the clan structure. For Needham, on the other hand, it is the structure of the terminology and of the clan system which, in order to be viable, imposes the prescriptive rule. While I have greatly simplified Leach's and Needham's points of view here, we may nevertheless conclude that this polemic is largely a chicken-and-egg question. In fact, to be operational, a rule needs some collective acceptance (jural) in order to have and to be of structural significance. Obviously, prescriptive rules are not tied merely to terminology and kinship. Consider, for example, India, where one of the prescriptive rules is to marry someone of the same caste. In contrast with proscriptive marriage rules, prescriptive rules point to a class of particular people who are acceptable for marriage. Spouses are prescribed, predefined, and predetermined by their structural position in the system. In addition to prescriptive rules, and particularly in complex systems, proscriptive rules have an important function.

p. 231 A proscriptive rule defines who cannot be a spouse; it formulates an interdiction. It proceeds by layering these interdictions so as to crystallize what class of people are ideal or acceptable partners. The most elementary proscriptive rule is that of incest prohibition: siblings, parents, and children are in the great majority of cases proscribed as spouses, even though some exceptions of close kin endogamy seem to have existed, such as among European royal families, or even brother–sister marriages among Egyptian pharaohs. The basic incest prohibition rule is frequently extended to other classes of people. We have seen that, in Dravidian or Iroquois systems, parallel cousins (mother's sister's son, for example) are called by the terms denoting one's siblings. They are hence classified in the same category as oneself and are thus considered to be consanguines and not affines. The fact that it is the actual local words for 'brother' and 'sister' that may be applied to them indeed recalls a process of extending the incest prohibition rule to people other than actual and closely related kin.

Proscriptive marriage rules may also affect criteria other than those of class membership or terminological distinctions. The obligation of exogamy can in fact be applied or interpreted in different ways. It can be genealogical (prohibition from marrying close kin whatever their kin category), terminological (prohibition from marry people whom one calls by certain terms), spatial (e.g. prohibition from marrying people who live in the same village), or social (prohibition from marrying people from certain families, religions, roles, etc.).

In addition to the recording of discourses about marriage and marriage rules, the second source of information lies in marriage practices themselves: who marries whom, in what context, and for what obvious and less obvious reasons? Who organizes the marriage and decides on the suitability of marriage partners? Marriage practice is a far more complex matter to study than are discourses about marriage rules, because it often diverges from discourses for complex and often hidden or obscure reasons. Let me take an example from the Ngaatjatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra people of the Australian Western Desert to illustrate what is meant here.

While their prescriptive marriage rule is a cross-cousin one, there are many proscriptive rules involved as well: spatial exogamy (do not marry someone with whom you live or have lived) and genealogical exogamy (do not marry someone who is genealogically close even if the person is a cross-cousin) are at work. Ideally, the combination of the prescriptive and proscriptive rule could be formulated as follows: people marry a cross-cousin who is at least of the third degree (for example a MMMBDDD) and who is geographically distant. Ngaatjatjarra people also stress the necessity of exchange. It is, in principle at least, an elementary system where a man marries a woman whose brother is also the husband of that man's sister.

Observation and genealogies show, however, that marriages are very rarely an actual exchange of people and that the system cannot be considered to be an elementary one. Each man has several potential partners

and ways to find a wife, each of them having particular terms and processes associated with it. First of all, during initiation, the initiator will promise a man his daughter whom Ego will call *pikarta*. This is, according to discourse, the ideal spouse. *Pikarta* is also ideally the sister of the man's sister's husband. In fact, while the man will have a relationship with *pikarta* and her family which resembles that following actual marriage, including the obligations of sharing and hosting etc., he will only very rarely marry this woman.

p. 232 He will in fact be promised a second wife, this time by a ♀ potential mother-in-law, just after initiation. This potential wife is called *pampurlpa*'s daughter. But, here again, even though he should marry and engage in an exchange and provide that family with his sister, this will happen only very rarely. Another way of finding a wife is the process called *karlkurnu*. The man provides his potential parents-in-law with presents until they agree to give him their daughter. Many marriages are of this type. The last type, very frequent as well, is called *warngirnu* and is elopement. The young couple simply runs away, not waiting for the parents' approval, and returns to the community once they have a child. Ninety-five per cent of couples are constituted through *karlkurnu* or *warngirnu*, i.e. processes that do not involve the formal exchange of people. One may argue that this shows a weak coincidence between discourse and practice—something that is indeed quite frequent in anthropological studies. In the present case, however, the problem is slightly more complex. It must be remembered that *pikarta* and *pampurlpa*'s daughter involve obligations and solidarity between people as if the marriage had actually occurred. Thus, there is no need to actually marry these women: the benefits of alliances are already provided simply through the promise. In marrying someone other than the promised and prescribed partners, the man diversifies his network of relatedness, socially and spatially speaking, and hence secures his position in the network of social and economic obligations and exchange.

What do we need to remember from this again brief overview of marriage and alliance? Here are a few guidelines for recording these elements.

1. Marriages are one of the major ways of maintaining relatedness between families and groups of families. They are regulated by social organization and social strategies in addition to personal affinities. They are an institutionalized way of creating enduring relationships and sometimes corporations. How these particular relationships are enacted in a group or society may in some cases be obscure, in some obvious.
2. Marriage needs to be distinguished from sexual relations. While both are usually structured by some incest prohibitions (which need to be described and documented), they do not respond to the same social impetus. Sexual relations are temporary practices that have no influence on social organization. Marriages, particularly alliances of marriage, on the other hand, create and maintain social corporations.
3. Relationships through marriage—affinal relationships—are not limited to actual marriage. All facets of the various procedures of relatedness creation need to be investigated. These facets may be economic, political, spatial, religious, etc. In most cases they involve particular vocabularies and speech etiquettes. ♀

## 9.4 Structure and Substance

Let us now come back to the example quoted at the beginning of this chapter in order to formulate a few concluding remarks. *Kungkankatja*, *minalinkatja*, literally ‘from a woman, from a man’, meant, in the context of the question asked, that the children of a woman and those of her brother are to be considered identical. Let us also recall that this happened in a context in which the researcher expected a Dravidian-like terminology, because he had recorded direct exchange-type discourses about the marriage system and because he had constructed terminologies through the genealogical method. Structurally, children from a brother and his sister are cross-cousins, not brothers and sisters. They are what anthropologists call affines (potential or real in-laws), not consanguines. But the definition of consanguinity is cultural. We have seen that there are some universal rules of incest prohibition that denote what kind of people are everywhere (more or less so) considered too close to have sexual relationships or to marry—parents, siblings, and children are among them. However, humans expand the biological idiom of this basic kinship nucleus to include other relatives: aunts, uncles, and their children etc., depending on local rules and norms. Who in this lot is a consanguine, and cannot be married, or not, is a question of local definition according to a local semantic system.

A brother and a sister are, in the example quoted above, locally thought to give birth to children that are identical, that are thus themselves brothers and sisters, and not cross-cousins. They are identical because they are thought to share too many substances. They may have eaten at the same place and of the same food, they may have played together as children and have an extensive shared memory, they were looked after and raised by the same people, they lived at the same places, in the same region, they sat around the same fires. What they share is not so much blood itself, as the term ‘consanguine’ suggests, but other material and immaterial substances: memory, bodily substances, experiences. Pitt-Rivers (1973) therefore proposed using the term ‘consubstantiality’ rather than ‘consanguinity’. Everywhere people believe they share things—their body, their spirit, or whatever—with other people. The distinction between those with whom one shares something and those with whom one does not is significant and needs to be described. The expressions and explanations that are given for this consubstantiality are crucial in the understanding of social organization, local ideologies, and religious beliefs of the social body in general.

## 9.5 Conclusion

The study of kinship is a study of language, and of a language as it reflects the deep representations that lie beneath a local system of human and social reproduction. This language is made up of rules and norms, of a grammar, made up of rules of descent that define and determine membership and rules of marriage that define exchanges and the network between groups. This language also has a vocabulary made up of kinship terms that are themselves systemic, and of complex nomenclatures of social organization. This language is applied, but often contextually adapted: economic, political, or religious factors play important roles. Bodily substances, experiences, and prerogatives are spelled out in the realm of kinship in ways which, far from appearing to be rules, seem rather an integrated body of social practices and beliefs. It is the researcher's task to identify its elementary constituents and to understand their interaction and interrelation.