



The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Fieldwork

Nicholas Thieberger (ed.)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199571888.001.0001>

Published: 2011

Online ISBN: 9780191744112

Print ISBN: 9780199571888

CHAPTER

9 Understanding Human Relations (Kinship Systems)

Laurent Dousset

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199571888.013.0010> Pages 209–234

Published: 18 September 2012

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](#)

Subject: [Linguistic Anthropology](#), [Semantics](#), [Linguistics](#)

Series: [Oxford Handbooks](#)

Collection: [Oxford Handbooks Online](#)