Chapter 08: Kinship patterns, and other anthropological aspects of family and gender Law

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Chapter 8: Kinship patterns, and other anthropological aspects of family and gender Law

In kinship anthropology, up-to-date economic and demographic reasons for the existing six kin terminology systems are given, and implemented by new insights in cross cousin marriage and fear of incest. The rest of the Chapter is devoted to polygamy and gender issues.

I. Shorthand Kin Identification

As a rule, the identification of a kin relationship, starts from an ego, i. e., from a person whose view on others furnishes the relevant perspective. This characterizes kin relationships as basically social, not societal (see Chapter 3 II.). On the other hand, kin groups may and often will be societal components of a society, but then ego plays no role.

The shorthand symbols of social kin relationship are (cf. Pospisil 2004, 255 f.):

Fa = father, Mo = mother, Br = brother, Si = sister, So = son, and Da = daughter.

The prefixed genitive is used to identify a relationship: Fa Br is father’s brother, the paternal uncle. Mo Br is mother’s brother, the maternal uncle. Mo Si So is ego’s cousin, Si So is ego’s nephew, and Mo Br So So is ego’s cousin once removed; etc.

But who is ego’s father in this shorthand system? In some kinship systems the biological father is not counted as family. It seems to be a generally accepted ethnocentrism that in what is called here the shorthand system Fa = father is the biological father. Thus, emic understandings of family relationships do not seem to affect the shorthand expressions listed above. The matter has not yet been clarified.

II. Concepts of Kinship

The following sketch tries to define the most frequently used concepts of kinship. This is necessary because there is no generally accepted terminology of kinship relationships in anthropology. However, disputes about terminology are avoided. Often, they are only boring. To a large extent, the terminology used here follows widespread practice. Exceptions and meaningful issues are marked when necessary.

1. Genealogical Table and Pedigree

A table that shows the descendents of a person, the person usually placed on top, is called a genealogical table – the top is narrow, the bottom broad (Stammbaum, family tree). A table starting from ego at the bottom and telling the persons from whom ego descends is a pedigree – the bottom narrow, the top broad (Ahnentafel). The English usage is flexible.

1. Two Assistance communities: Orientation and procreation, Nuclear and extended
2. Family, Kindred

Every person belongs to two assistance communities (Norbert Bischof: Beistandsgemeinschaften), one descendency community and one procreation community. The descendency communities are also called tradition or orientation community. Typically, both communities (descendency and procreation) are nuclear families, and the assistance given is direct and immediate in order to meet daily needs, so that is has not to be expressly claimed:

Together, several descendency and procreation families form the extended family or kindred, die Verwandtschaft, the mishpoke.

3. Procreation community

Typically, a person begins to exist by procreation through mother and father. The parents will give her child immediate assistance to enter life, by feeding, clothing, sheltering, etc. A nuclear procreation unit can be pictured as follows:

Follows graph showing kindred

Procreation generates a very strong force of belonging and care. This can be demonstrated by legal rules governing the establishment of an artificial nuclear family: In most legal systems, modern adoption laws, inside and outside of “patch-work families”, involve an elaborate procedure including visits, reports, and well-reasoned decisions by public counsellors, psychologists, legal advocates and judges. Even after a lengthy and careful screening process, it is not sure whether an adoption will be granted. Compared with cumbersome and double-checked adoption, the recognition of a child as legal descendent of a natural mother or father – leading to the same legal status as adoption – almost goes as a matter of course. Procreation establishes a factual presumption of good parenthood. The difference from adoption is striking.

4. Descendency (or: tradition, or orientation) communities

The counterpiece to a procreation community is a descendency (or tradition, or orientation) community. In the first line, their purpose is not to give a person immediate help such as food or rearing. Rather, descendency communities explain who descends from whom and what follows from such tracing one’s ancestry. One of the consequences of descendency may also be the granting of personal or economic assistance (“nepotism”), but assistance will often have to be claimed. Descendency communities can always point to a common tradition. Therefore, they are also called tradition communities (Norbert Bischof: Traditionsgemeinschaften).

A picture in which procreation and descendency community may be illustrated in the following graph. Combined they show a kindred:

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For the following, see Norbert Bischof, Das Rätsel Ödipus: Die biologischen Wurzeln des Urkonflikts von Intimität und Autonomie, Munich 1985: Piper. I am grateful for Norbert Bischof’s permission to use his graphs for this Chapter.
Here follow 10 graphs: lineage, matriline, patriline, Eskimo, Hawaii, Irokese, Crow, Omaha, Sudan; bitte einsetzen, wo Text es ansagt!

When the lines of descendency run vertically, indicating who descends from whom, one can speak of a “linear” descendency group. Linear descendencies ("lineages", also called “sibs”) are, in anthropology, either “agnatic” (= “patrilineal”) or “uterine” (= “matrilineal”). Agnatic (or patrilineal) descendency exists between a father and his children, grandchildren, etc. Uterine (or matrilineal) descendency links a mother and her children, grandchildren, etc. (Bohannan 1992, 94 f.)

The anthropological use of the terms “agnate” or “agnatic” should not be confused with the agnate form of relationship in Roman law where these terms originate. In Roman law, agnation means to belong to that group of persons which is under the patria potestas of its holder, the male family head. These are indeed the persons connected to him by the patrilineage. In Roman law, the opposite concept is cognation, whereby a cognate relationship refers to a vertical or horizontal blood relationship, e.g., between father and his children or between brothers, sisters, or brothers and sisters. Therefore, all agnates are cognates, but not all cognates are agnates. In anthropology, cognation may be used for “blood related kin”, but the term is of no great importance.

The agnatic relationship in anthropology, that is, the patrilineage, is a core concept in the identification of a lineage (see illustration below). In legal history, the patrilineage is important for succession of offices and inheritance. In Old German law, the agnates form the “feste Sippe” (steadfast sib). For anthropological usage, matrilineages are an alternative to patrilineages. A Roman law term is missing. Therefore, the term “uterine” has come into use for the identification of a matrilineage. In this book, patrilineage and matrilineage will be used more often than “agnatic” and “uterine” relationship. Both lineages are of central importance for the anthropological understanding of kinship, and for many other anthropological findings and teachings.

When kinship terminology includes statements of descendency that include a connection by marriage, “kin” or “kindred” may be used, implying that blood relationship and marriage ties may be fused. In German legal history, there is talk of “wechselnde Sippe” (changing sib), in contrast to feste Sippe (= steadfast sib). Modern terminology speaks of “marriage-related kin” (Schwägerschaft).

Because of their all-pervading importance for anthropology, two kinds of descendency (or tradition) communities merit closer attention: lineages (5.) and clans (6.). Clan can best be understood by first defining lineage.

5. Lineage
A lineage (German: Linie, often also lineage with English pronunciation, sometimes lineage with French pronunciation; French spelling however: lignage) is a relationship based on descendency that in the minds of the members of that lineage is traceable to an identifiable human progenitor or progenitrix, for example a greatgreatgrandmother. This is called “demonstrated descent”, and the progenitor or the progenitrix are “demonstrated apical ancestors” (apex = Latin for top). When visiting a tribe and starting a conversation with a tribal member, frequently she or he says: “We are matrilineal, you should know”, or: “We are patrilineal and have been since time immemorial”. Everyone in the tribe, literate or illiterate, know the tribe’s linearity type. Making it explicit is part of introducing oneself because family relationships make persons identifiable. In many tribes it is good custom to talk a while about relatives before the older conversation partner turns to the intended subject matter of the exchange.

A branched-off lineage is sometimes called a ramage.

A lineage may be sketched as follows:

A matrilineage may look like:

And a patrilineage appears below:
Hunters, gatherers and fishers are predominantly patrilineal (because the main foodstock is contributed by the hunting men), horticulturalists and early farmers tend to be matrilineal (because the soil, “mother earth”, is often deemed to be female, and earth and fertility spirits, demons, gods, saints are mostly female). After the urban revolution, many matrilineal societies turned to patrilearity. Today matrilineal cultures form a minority, albeit sizeable, among all existing cultures. Examples are the Navajo nation in New Mexico and Arizona (about 240,000 members), several Pueblo Nations in New Mexico, e.g. Taos Pueblo, Zuni Pueblo, the Hopi Nation in Arizona (>10,000 members), and many nations north of Angola along the West African Atlantic coast.

Patri- or matrilinearity is *a* decisive factor for many family matters. The most important are tribal membership and its corollaries such as leasing rights for housing and agriculture, the right to be initiated to tribal ceremonies (and other attributes of tribal standing), personal and family names, the right to claim divorce or separation, custody for children, marital property, and inheritage. When a man from matrilineal Taos Pueblo marries a girl from patrilineal Santa Clara Pueblo and lives with her in Santa Clara, some fifty miles away, “he is in bad shape” because in neither place he is of influential status (fieldnote, communication by tribal members). *Also in politics linearity may play an important role. In Rwanda, Hutu and Tussi were bitter enemies. The Hutu are matrilinear farmers and land owners, while the Tussi were hunters with a patrilinearity of a type fitting for pre-neolithic cultures. Unlike the Tewa of New Mexico, Hutu and Tussi did not succeed in pacifying neolithic-revolution forager-farmer conflict by institutionalizing tensions through a moiety dualism (see Ch. 3 above). The Rwandans solved their problem in an – also institutional (!) - different way: The present parliament of the state of Rwanda is composed 50% of women. This high fraction of women understands itself as a “bridge” between the Hutu and the Tussi and takes care of still needed pacification (Bavarian Broadcast Report on Rwanda Sept. 2008).*

Paul Bohannan (1992, 86 – 100) provides a rather complete picture of kinship terms and their practical meaning for behavior and activities (loc. cit. 90 f.). “Kinship terms are language tags for referring to and addressing kinfolk. Each tag lumps some kinfolk together and separates them from allo others”(loc.cit 88). Bohannan also stresses the fact that the patterns emerging from different modes of reckoning kinship terms are often linked with religious, economic or other schemata. For avoiding grave ethnographic errors these different cultural meanings of kinship designations should always be kept in mind when studying and comparing groups.

Sometimes a tribal nation has both types of linearity. Some bands are patrilineal, some matrilineal. These nations are called ambilineal. An example are the Apache in the US-American Southwest. Originally, the Apache were no homogenous tribe or nation but a loose conglomerate of independent bands, some patri-, some matrilineal. When forced by the US government to form “a tribe” the family traditions subsided. This is of legal importance: When an Apache family judge has to provide for custody for minors (orphans, children of divorced parents, etc.) she or he will assign custody to relatives of the patriline when the child comes from a patrilineal family, but to a relative of the matriline when the child comes from a matrilineal family, and follow state law analogy when the family “lives modern”. In all situations, however, according to Apache law, the welfare of the child will prevail over tests of

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2 For V. Gordon Childe’s two revolutions, and their use in this book, see Chapter 5 II. 2. above.
linearity or state law analogy.\textsuperscript{3}

Ambilinearity is to be distinguished from bilinearity. Bilineal relations are descendencies when the person derives its descent from both sides, mother and father. Industrial states such as Sweden, Spain and Germany are bilineal, and the laws of family names express this in various ways.

6. Clans

As stated, the “demonstrated apical ancestor” of the lineage holds the highest position in the descendency group called a lineage. When this highest position is attributed to a non-human or mythical entity such as an animal (bear, raven, eagle, butterfly, wolf, etc.) or by the sun, the sun forhead, the moon, a star, a cloud, a tree, a mountain, a river, a well, a plant such as chamiso or corn, etc. one speaks of a clan. Clan members derive their status from a “stipulated apical ancestor”. A clan is therefore, etically speaking, no descendency group. Emically, however, the clan members believe in their common ancestor as their progenitor, be it a bear, a cloud, or the sun. By this in fact enlarged criterion of belonging, the clan is comparable to a large artificial family, it is a family metaphor. Therefore, usually clans count more members than lineages, and often several lineages form one clan.

*Often what in popular usage is called a “clan” in reality is a lineage. Most Scottish clans claim to be lineages, not clans. Also, clans are not infrequently mistaken for what in reality is a kindred, just a big, branched out, extended family (see Ch.3 above). Media sometimes speak of clans in the meaning of tribal subunits or just smaller groups of people. For example, in reports about Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan etc. it may be said that it is necessary to speak to “clan leaders” and not merely to the government. This categorization may be misleading. More often than not the “clan leaders” are lineage heads, deriving their position from demonstrated apical ancestors. Or they are still living respected leaders of a lineage. A test for finding out what these groups and their leaders are is to ask for their names. If the name indicates descent from a spiritual entity such as the sun, mountain of any other spirited being, clan is the correct guess. If not, lineage may the better assumption. Frequently, a village or town is populated by a strong and leading lineage, but there are less influential side lines (ramages). These animist structures , clan and lineage, may have been more or less “secularized” by Islamic mission, with more or less strong effects upon close-knit societal ties. Analyses along these lines are no dry theory but help to identify dependency structures, and these are important to know for dealing with issues such as military assistance, poppy cropping, nepotism, loyalties to be expected, or any other alliance.*

In German, there is no generally accepted translation of the word clan. Some translators use Sippe. But Sippe may also mean kindred or extended family. Sippenhaft is collective guilt as opposed to individual guilt. Sippe could also lead to mistaking clans for a kind of sib, a term from which the English terms sibling (= sister or brother) or siblings (Geschwister) are derived.. Therefore, in the following text, clan is both a German and an English word.

Clans are, like lineages, important structural elements in the build-up of a tribe or tradition-conscious nation. Often, clans are the carriers and agents of the ongoing events, and the points of reference of tribal life. Clan members assist each other while non-clan members may be

\textsuperscript{3} Cf., Cooter & Fikentscher (1998) 544 f.
excluded from help. The Middle German Broadcasting Company (MDR) reported on July 8, 2007 (at 1.30h) about heavy flood in the Brahmaputra delta in Bangladesh, and that help to flood victims depended on clan membership: When an island sinks, the inhabitants move to clan members who live on safer ground, which again may be an island. People living on the river banks are helpless because they have moved there from other places and may have no clan members in the neighborhood. In New Mexico, citizens of many Pueblos (other than Tewa speaking) almost invariably belong to clans. If a Pueblo clan member belongs, for example, to the Squash clan of his own town and, while traveling, comes to another Pueblo and needs help there, the clan member may ask for assistance from the members of the Squash clan in that foreign Pueblo if there is such a clan. From this custom, some Pueblo elders have concluded that the clans are older than the Pueblo towns. However, this seems to be misunderstanding, based on a misjudgment of what clans anthropologically are. The reason for the hospitality is not the older age of the clans compared to the age of the towns and a later diffusion, but the stipulated nature of the apical ancestor: There is only one mythical squash plant, or chamiso bush, or bear, or sun forehead, etc., and of course that mythical being exists independently from geographical locations. Thus, the artificial “family” relationship extends to other Pueblos provided there happens to be a like-named clan.

*Some tribes have subclans.* They are comparable to the rambages as branched-off lineages. Clusters of clans are possible but have no general ethnological designation. When in a tribe or nation clans cluster together to form two half tribes (in order to approach a tribal structure similar to moieties), the clusters are called phratries (for example: Santa Ana Pueblo in New Mexico), as already mentioned. In theory, three or four clan clusters may compose a tribe, and one could speak of three or four phratries. I could not find examples of this type.

The working and importance of clans in everyday life is brilliantly depicted by Bohannan (1992), with examples from Navajo society (246 – 248) and Hopi society (155 – 157).

7. Patterns of Residence

If the wife moves to the husband’s place, the ethnological term is virilocality (vir = Latin for man). The opposite is uxorilocality (uxor = wife). If the young couple moves to live in the husband’s or wife’s father’s place, it is called patrilocality. The opposite, moving to the husband’s or wife’s mother’s place, is matrilocality. Moving to an uncle’s place is covered under avunculocality.

Patrilinearity does not necessarily imply patrilocality, nor matrilinearity matrilocality. Rules of linearity and rules of residence may criss-cross.

8. Patriarchy and matriarchy, Motherright.

Since J. J. Bachofen’s pathbreaking book “Mutterrecht” (motherright, 1861), one of the founding books of cultural anthropology, ethnological study has distinguished patriarchy and

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4 see Chapter 3 VI, above
matriarchy. The distinction is to indicate whether males or females play the socially dominant roles in a society. Today, this terminology has been almost totally discarded because too many qualifications would have to be made in attempting to assign a given culture to the one or the other side. Whenever used, it should only be done so in a non-technical sense. Under 6. above it is said that matrilineal does not mean matrilocal, for example. This was one of the reasons for giving up the dichotomy. Following Bachofen’s terminology, Bronislaw Malinowski in “Crime and Custom” (1926) speaks of “fatherright”, written in one word.

9. Incest

An ethnological theme in the present context is incest. Culturally, incest is closely connected with the concepts of nuclear family, extended family, lineage, and clan. So far as one can see, every culture has rules concerning incest because norms concerning incest, leadership, and contact supranatural forces exist in every culture. Other cultural norms will be added, of course, making cultures many-faceted and flexible. The contents of these norms vary widely.

Also the concept of incest varies. It may mean the fact of sexual intercourse, or socially or legally formalized conditions for it such as engagement or marriage. The warning against, or the prohibition of, incest may refer to persons of the same nuclear or extended family, of the same lineage, the same clan, or the same moiety (or phratrie). Even if a clan comprises thousands of people, when tribal custom or law disapprove of clan incest there may be sanctions against the parents and ridicule against the child. “Talking clans” in Navajo may indicate her or his interest in getting to know the other a bit better. So when “talking clans” continues, the flirt may turn serious.

There are several etic theories on why there is a universal tendency towards incest avoidance. The four prominent theories are the following:

(1) A medical theory is based on observations from medical history that since immemorable time mankind believed that incest may lead to bodily or mentally impaired offspring. This belief is sometimes expressed in stories and ceremonies of indigenous peoples. For example, many pueblo nations in New Mexico, Arizona, and the state of Mexico have sodalities, in English called clown societies. On feast days, certain members of clown societies, dressed in black-and-white striped costumes perform their antics to onlooking tribal members and, whenever admitted, guests, If a clown climbs down a ladder head down and feet up, it is to demonstrate what may happen to a person born from clan incest. There is evidence that human inbreeding is perceived to cause corporeal defects. Six fingers on one hand is a phenomenon found among the Amish, a religious group that disfavors marriages with non-Amish. On the other hand, marriages between siblings among Ancient Egyptian royalty were common, again for reasons of purity, in this case the purity of the royal bloodline.


6 See Chapter 3 VI. 4.


8 W. Scheidel, Brother-sister Marriage in Roman Egypt, 29:33 Journal of Biosocial Science
a. (2) Another theory argues psychologically, basing its argument on what is called “instinctive horror”. Children – including non-siblings - who know each other from playground or come of age together in daily contact tend to show little sexual interest in each other. They know the friend too well to be interested in her or him as marriage or sex partner.9

b. (3) The disruption theory, a third proposal to explain incest avoidance, points to the undeniable importance of the family, nuclear and extended, and reliance on kin relationship for early societies. Incestuous relations within that family or kin may have disruptive effect because normal family or kin ties collide with ties that are typical of sexual partners.10

(4) A psychoanalytic theory, called Oedipal theory, has been brought forward by Sigmund Freud:11 In the early days of mankind, the father, a strongman, had a harem. One day, his sons kill him and inherit his wives. In order to avoid the same fate as the father, the sons agree not to commit incest.

To decide which of the theories holds more scientific water, deeper investigations are needed than are possible in the present context. The medical theory has the merits of being able to point to medical facts. The instinctive horror theory sounds plausible for many imaginable situations, but could also be turned around: Kids growing up together may like each other for marriage. The disruption theory has one important advantage: it explains why incest between the generations is felt as much repulsive as between siblings. Freud’s Oedipal theory stands against results coming from biological anthropology against it: harem holding mammals (such sea elephants and lions) show much greater dimorphism (= bodily differences between the sexes in size and appearance) than early man so that monogamy with marginal exceptions is the most probable form of partnership among the ancestors of humankind.12

III. The Six Terminological Forms of Family Relationship: Eskimo, Sudanese, Hawaiian, Iroquois, Crow, and Omaha

One of the unsolved issues of the foregoing considerations of kin concepts is the question


9  Francis Galton, Studies in Eugenics, 11/1 American Journal of Sociology 11 – 25 (1905)
10 E.g., Gerhard Kubik, Zur ontogenetischen Basis der Inzestscheu, Berlin 2003: Reimer (incest taboo as society-political strategy).
whether the starting point for any classification of kin relationship is the etic point of view of
the outside observer or the emic ascription of relationship in the minds of the participants. In
order to make generalized statements of kin relationships at all, above we chose the etic
stance. Now we have to leave the etic view aside and change to emic conceptions of who
belongs to whom: When an Inuit, a Hawaiian, an Iroquois and a Navajo says “this is my
father”, the statement may have very different meanings. Using such emic perspectives, we
can count no more than six types of family designations in the world.

This is a surprise in more than one respect. Why do ten thousand cultures use only six types
of kinship terminology, why not more, and why not less? In defining the six types we will see,
at least in part, that circumstances of life style, economic considerations, and generalized
cultural feelings of belonging may be responsible for the number of six. At least several of the
six family types are deducible from one another. Ethnological literature on these deductions is
scarce, and the views proposed below may be criticized as being rather speculative. At the
very least, they illustrate the six types and explain their existence and form.

The names for these six types of family systems are more or less haphazardly chosen. Usually
the ethnographic discovery of a system as being practiced by a certain tribe or nation led to
the name.

1. The Eskimo System

The Inuit do not like to be called Eskimo. The latter word means “raw meat eater” and is
given as a nick name at best, by Indian tribes settling farther south where there is more fire
wood to roast meat on. For Inuit people, wood is a precious item, and drift wood is
distinguished from other wood. Inuit simply means “man”, “human being”. But the word
“Eskimo” remains, without any pejorative connotation, as part of a designation of a certain
type of family system, the “Eskimo system”, and an ethnological family definition.

In the Eskimo system, the family is determined by a father, a mother, and their children. It is
the small, nuclear family which is used not only in Inuit society but also in most Western
industrialized societies, and which by the participants of these societies is often regarded as
the only one existing. But statistically, in relation to the number of cultures in history and
presence, the Eskimo type of family is an exception.

Why do hunters, gatherers, and early fishing societies and modern industrialized societies use
the small, nuclear family as their standard? Firstly, the hunting of individual prey, gathering
and fishing can be achieved by a small group such as the nuclear family, and the modern
industrialized society also gets along best through these small units because of a high degree
division of labor. Secondly, there is no need for large collective efforts such as slash-and-
burn farming, irrigation, net-hunting, or nomadism. Thirdly, there is an almost even mortality
rate of men and women, so that no significant inequilibrium of males and females necessitates
forms of collectivity, nor exists significant warfare to enslave needed males of females.
Fourthly, there is no preference of certain categories of marriage partners such as, in other
family systems, between cross-cousins. These four reasons explain why the Eskimo system is
the best-fitting form of family for both northern foragers and modern industrialized societies.

13 On etic and emic see above Chapter 2 I, and text near note 477.

14 Estimates are that in history and presence about ten thousand cultures existed and exist.
A sketch of the Eskimo system looks as follows. (The circles are the females, the triangles the males; the black symbols designate the “ego(s)”):

**Here illustration of Eskimo system**

2. The Sudanese System

The Sudan system is not dissimilar to an Eskimo system. However, it avoids mergers, prefers bifurcations, and its family type may numerically include more people than a nuclear Eskimo type family. The Sudanese system is found in Near East and Northern Africa. Books on legal anthropology often do not mention the Sudanese System, only the other five systems. Norbert Rouland (1992, at 193) indicates that because of its high degree of bifurcations the Sudanese system has different designations for cross- and parallel cousins, and in addition distinguishes between matrilateral cross-cousins (Mo Br Da/So) and patrilateral cross-cousins (Fa Si Da/So). Thus it is understandable that Rouland’s order of presentation is Eskimo, Hawaii, Iroquois, Crow, Omaha, and Sudanese, because at first sight the Sudanese system looks like a Crow or Omaha system further developed. However, when the Sudanese system distinguishes between cross- and parallel cousins it does not so for reasons of overcoming incest avoidance by peace-seeking (see below VI.). This may indirectly be concluded from the Old Testament that does not refer to a conflict between peace-seeking and incest avoidance in the early Near Eastern societies it mentions, and is indiscriminately (mildly) opposed to incest (cf. Genesis 28.6-9: Esau marries Malahath, his parallel cousin; Genesis 38: Judah and Tamar; Leviticus 18. 6-18; 20. 11; Deuteronomy 23. 1; 2 Samuel 13:: Amnon and Tamar). More sources still have to be studied. Therefore as of now, in the Sudabese system the reason for cross- and parallel cousin distinction is not pacification but fragmented designation through far-going bifurcation. As a result, one may assume that the Sudanese system is closer to the Eskimo system that to a system of the Hawaii-, Iroquois, Crow-, and Omaha group. A sketch of the Sudanese system follows:

**Follows illustration Sudanese system**

3. The Hawaiian System

The Hawaii system can be found in societies that practice slash-and-burn, among horticulturalists, early farmers, and in other societies that require collective efforts such as irrigation or cattle herding for their livelihood. Large families are needed to produce the daily supply. The Hawaii system is also a solution to the need for a child of having several fathers and mothers because warfare or diseases take a high toll among the parent generation. In Hawaii type society, children of several mothers grow up together.
The Hawaii system is called generational because it neatly separates the generations, of the grandparents, the parents, and the children. Each ego child says "mother" to all the females within the next higher generation, and "brother" and "sister" to each child within its own generation. In the highest "cloud", all females are called "grandmother", and all males "grandfather".

Follows ill. Hawaii system

4. The Iroquois System

The following remarks are to prepare the understanding of the third type of family, the Iroquois system. It is, as are the remaining family patterns (the Crow, Omaha, and Sudan, discussed below, a "Hawaii plus" system. Something is added to the Hawaii system, and this "something" leads to a new identification. This means that there are really only two radically different family types: Eskimo – the small family -, and Hawaii – the large generational family. Iroquois, Crow, Omaha, and Sudan can be developed from Hawaii by adding certain elements.

Also, the following remarks are to introduce two opposite concepts of family designations that are in use to identify characteristics of family systems as well as other ethnographic findings. The opposite concepts are “bifurcation” and “merger”. They could be discussed in an abstract introduction to basic ethnological conceptuality. But it is easier for introductory understanding to put them in place in the derivation of the Iroquois system from the Hawaii system:

Arbitrarily, and as a theory, somebody could take the Hawaii system and, instead of calling both grandfathers equally “grandfather”, and both grandmothers equally “grandmother”, give the grandparents on mother’s side, and the grandparents on father’s side, different names. Or, somebody would prefer, independently from any system, the idea of calling father’s brothers with names different from mother’s brothers, instead of calling them all “uncles”. The Swiss, for example, do this for aunts: Father’s sister is Tante, mother’s sister is Muhme. Or any cousins may be distinguished in a similar manner: cousins born from same-sex siblings, of father or mother, are called “parallel cousins”, whereas cousins born from different-sex siblings, of father or mother, are dubbed “cross cousins”.

Such differentiations, as described in the preceding lines, are called bifurcations (furca = Latin for fork). The opposite concept is merger. To distinguish parallel and cross cousins means to apply a bifurcation. In modern Western society, father’s and mother’s brothers are called uncle, thus, here, uncle is a merged term. Bifurcation and merger can be combined to bifurcate merging: All cousins born from all sisters of a father, and all cousins born from all brothers of a mother, are called cross cousins. All cousins born from all sisters of a mother, and all cousins born from all brothers of a father, are called parallel cousins. In this example, the word all indicates the mergers, and the distinction of cross and parallel cousins indicates the bifurcation.

In contrast to the ethnographically rather minor distinctions on grandparents’ and parents’
levels (such as distinguishing *Tante* and *Muhme*), the distinction between parallel and cross cousins are anthropologically very important. Much of family and incest law, and the family systems under discussion below, depend on this differentiation.

For example, let us take the Hawaiian system and add to it the distinction of parallel and cross cousins. Such a “Hawaiian” system qualified by the distinction between cross and parallel cousins is no longer a Hawaiian system, it is called the *Iroquois system*. The drawing of the Iroquois system looks as follows (The third cloud from the top contains the cross cousins. The fourth cloud from the top contains the egos and the parallel cousins):

**Illustration Iroquois system**

Thus, the Iroquois system is the Hawaii system plus the distinction between cross and parallel cousins. What is the practical purpose of this combination? It is striking that in many societies cross cousins are preferred marriage partners while a marriage with a parallel cousin is considered incestuous. There is a reason for these seemingly contradictory rules:

Let us assume a village of hunters and slash-and-burn horticulturalists. At a certain distance there is another similar village. Other villages are farther away. There may be conflicts, maybe wars, between the villages for deer or usable soil. A good basis for avoiding such conflicts is to get marriage partners (as many as possible women or as many as possible men, depending on patrilinearity or matrilinearity of the villagers) from the other village. These marriage partners will oppose waging war against the neighboring village. For a patrilineal village A this means that its young men will marry girls from the neighboring village B, and the young men of village B will marry girls from village A. Village A “marries out” its girls to B, and vice versa. Then, in the next generation, the boys from village A again will try to get girls from village B. These girls often may be those boys’ cross cousins because the girls’ mothers are the sisters of the boys’ fathers. For the boys from village B the situation is reverse. Their female cross cousins from village A are, for pacificatory aims, preferred marriage partners.

In matrilineal societies, village A will “marry out” its boys to village B, and in the next generation for the girls of village B the ideal marriage partners will be their male cross cousins in village A.

In reality, cross cousin marriage is frequently practiced not only between two villages, but between three, four, five or more villages. Ethnographers report of veritable circles of villages that practice cross cousin marriage in a kind of round-about. But the principle remains: Cross cousin marriage is common because it promotes peace.

On the other hand, parallel cousins are cousins from one’s own village because they are defined by the same sex of the relevant parents. In village A, two brothers or two sisters may be married to other partners and have children, that is, boys and girls who grow up together. According to the incest theory of *instinctive horror* (see II. 8. (2) above), adolescents who know each other from playground do not show much interest in one another for marriage. *Disruption* of family or close kin ties (II. 8. (3) above) may be feared so that negative medical
experiences (II. 8. (1) above) will be remembered. No possible pacificatory effects are in sight, rather the opposite may occur for family or kin relationships within the village. The societal consequence of this is that these parallel cousins should not marry. Again, the Iroquois system can be defined as a Hawaii system which is supplemented by the distinction between cross and parallel cousins.

5. The Crow System

The Hawaii system can be expanded by adding even more factors to the Iroquois qualification of distinguishing between cross and parallel cousins. Let us assume, the society in question is characterized by three circumstances: (1) Cross cousins and parallel cousins are distinguished, and cross cousins are preferred marriage partners, as under the Iroquois system; (2) in addition, marriage partners are preferably chosen from one and the same other family, lineage, or clan; (3) furthermore, for economic, health, political (e. g., warfare) or other reasons, there is a significant want of males, females, or children because of a high mortality rate. Two family systems answer to these needs, the Crow and the Omaha system, with the distinction that one society is matrilineal (Crow), the other patrilineal (Omaha).

The Crow system is based on matrilinearity. Women are in positions of authority. Theirs is the family tradition, the family property (parental custody of the children, house, trailer, bank account, horse, car, etc.). A high mortality rate among the male population (warfare, hunting, etc.) leads to the probability that the widow will marry again. The new husband will enter the matrilineal family, lineage, clan, etc. The children of the wife’s first husband need protection against the weight of their mother’s family. A representative is needed and to be taken from the deceased father’s side to offer that protection. For this, the number of fathers is being expanded to replace the deceased father. More “fathers” are needed, for example in a sequence of seniority. They are taken from the deceased mother’s sisters’ sons. If there are no such sons, but sons of the sons (=grandsons), the oldest grandson on mother’s side becomes the replaced “father”. He may even be younger than the children which are to be protected against the pressure from mother’s family, lineage, or clan. Still, he is the father of these children. In this way, a high male mortality rate is being counteracted by replaced fathers in disregard of the generation barrier.

There is a second disregard of the generation barrier in the Crow system: The mortality rate of children may be exceedingly high. Ego may have lost her or his children. But also children can be “replaced”. They can be taken from mother’s side, to wit, from the children of mother’s brother. Thus, mother’s brother’s children are being counted as ego’s children. The Crow system can be sketched as follows:

III. Crow system

Often, the Crow system is found not in the pure form described above, but subject to variations. One of the many variations is “little father” in Navajo. The Navajo are a matrilineal society. “Little father” is the oldest maternal uncle. Traditionally, he has to take care of his sister’s children in case of need.

6. The Omaha System
Turn the Crow around to become a patrilinear family formation, and you have the Omaha system: (1) Cross cousins and parallel cousins are distinguished, and cross cousins are preferred marriage partners, as under the Iroquois system.

2) In addition, marriage partners are preferably chosen from one and the same other family, lineage, or clan, or village.

(3) Now the want has to be imagined on the other side, on the side of the mothers. The Omaha system is based on patrilinearity. This means, the men are in positions of authority. Theirs is the family tradition, the family property (parental custody of the children, house, trailer, bank account, horse, car, etc.). A high mortality rate among the female population (childbed fever, malnutrition, etc.) may lead to the probability that the widower will marry again. The new wife will enter the patrilineal family, lineage, clan, etc. The children of the widower’s first wife need protection against the weight of their father’s family. A representative is needed and to be taken from the deceased mother’s side to offer that protection. For this, the number of mothers is being expanded to replace the deceased mother. More “mothers” are needed, for example in a sequence of seniority. They are taken from the deceased mother’s sisters’ daughters. If there are no such daughters, but daughters of the daughters (=granddaughters), the oldest granddaughter on mother’s side is the replaced “mother”. She may even be younger than the children which are to be protected against the pressure from father’s family, lineage, or clan, but still is the mother of these children. In this way, a high female mortality rate is being counteracted by replaced mothers again in disregard of the generation barrier.

The second disregard of the generation barrier applies as it does in the Crow system: The mortality rate of children may be exceedingly high. Ego may have lost her or his children. But also children may be “replaced”. They can be taken from father’s side, to wit, from the children of father’s brother. Thus, father’s brother’s children are being counted as ego’s children. The Omaha system can be sketched as follows:

III. Omaha system

A basic and universal human sense for balance and reciprocity can be found in many family relationships, and especially visibly in Crow and Omaha: In Crow, the weight of matrilinearity is balanced by quasi-fathers, in Omaha the pressure of patrilinearity is tentatively neutralized by quasi-mothers. Again, there are both pure and modified forms of the Omaha system. Statistically, the Omaha system seems to be less common than the Crow system; the latter is particularly frequent in the Northamerican Southwest.

7. An ethnographic test (an illustration, here not included)

IV. A comparative summary (a discussion, here not included)
V. The impact of polygamy on the family systems. Sororate and levirate (a definition of polygamy, some consequences, both here not included)

VI. The conflict between peace-seeking and incest avoidance

In this chapter, under III. 3., in connection with the Iroquois system, the reasons for a preference of cross-cousin marriage are explained. The main reason is peace-seeking with one or more neighboring villages. However, genetically, cross-cousin marriages are just as incestuous as are parallel-cousin marriages. The medical risks are the same and they may be observed by the villagers who participate in the exchanges of marriage partners, becoming more visible the longer the exchanges last. Thus, there may develop a conflict between peace-seeking and incest avoidance, growing over time. If so, one day, the negative reaction to incest will get stronger than the positive desire for peace, and the village alliances will break up (N. Bischof 1985, 67 – 69). This may have been the tragic fate of many early society, and the often so inexplicable disappearances of early civilizations may have one of their reasons here, e.g., Chaco and San Lazaro in New Mexico, Son Fornes near Montuiri on Mallorca. Norbert Bischof compares the phenomenon of the increasing incest menace to the Tower of Pisa: it still stands, but one day it will fall. More research may produce a better understanding of rise and fall of pre-urban- and pre-axial-age-revolutions societies.

VII. Bibliography


Fox, Robin (1967). The Keresan Bridge. London: London School of Economics Monographs in Social Anthropology No. 35


15 For the following, see Norbert Bischof op. cit. 67 – 78. See also D. Eyde & P. Postal, Avunculocality and Incest: The Development of Unilateral Cross-Cousin Marriage and Crow-Omaha Kinship Systems, 63 American Anthropologist 747 – 771 (1961); W.J. Schull & J.V. Neel, The Effects of Inbreeding in Japanese Children, New York 1965: Harper & Row; quantitative material cannot be given here; besides the issue of peace-seeking vs. incest taboo avoidance, more factors must be taken into account, such as degree of isolation, conquest by outsiders, climate changes, number of participating villages and persons, etc. It seems noteworthy that both the Chaco and the Son Fornes culture with their comparable kiva structures “flourished” about 300 years.
