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A Problem in Kinship Terminology

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DR LESLIE A. WHITE, in his paper on *A Problem in Kinship Terminology*,¹ settles the problem to his own satisfaction with the following formulation concerning certain types of kinship systems (p. 569):

The type which violates the generation principle is an outgrowth of the type which does not, and is due to the influence of a fully mature, influential clan system. When the clan system is young and weak the kinship system will be of the Dakota-Iroquois type, regardless of the sex in which descent is reckoned. As the clan system develops, however, and comes to exert its influence more and more upon the social life of the tribe, the Dakota-Iroquois terminology will be transformed into the Crow type in a matrilineal society and into the Omaha type in a patrilineal society.

The exceptions to this dictum as to the process of evolution in these kinship types are explained in part by Dr White by the "additional factor" of diffusion (p. 570).

"The systems of terminology which 'override the generation principle' do so because the clan predominates over the family as the agency which determines how the relative shall be designated at those points where the generation principle is violated" (p. 568). It is not clear to me whether Dr White means to embrace moiety also in his use of the word "clan." He proceeds to ask the question: "Why is it that in some tribes with clans the generation principle is violated while in other tribes with clans it is not?" This is an oversimplification of the problem, for the converse of this question should also be asked: "Why is it that in some tribes *without* clans the generation principle is violated while in other tribes with clans it is not?" No doubt the prompt answer to this second question will be: "Diffusion." In such case the burden of proof lies with the answerer.

Family and kinship system are universal to mankind and belong in that underlying stratum of social phenomena which Professor Kroeber has aptly called "basic pattern."² Obviously, clans and moieties, with their limited distribution would fall under the caption of "secondary pattern." Viewed in this light, Dr White's problem becomes part of a more general one, to wit: The manner and extent in which secondary patterns of social structure and basic patterns of social structure interact upon one another. That the

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¹ American Anthropologist, N.S., Vol. 41, pp. 566-573, 1939.

² A. L. Kroeber, *Basic and Secondary Patterns of Social Structure* (Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. 68, 1938), pp. 299-309.

two patterns do affect one another would seem indubitable, but that the case is always so simple as Dr White posits for his limited problem is unlikely.

It seems to me that the situation may be precisely the reverse of that set forth by Dr White and that "overriding the generation principle" in the Omaha and Crow types of kinship systems may be regarded as one of the several basic patterns of kinship terminology. In some groups where the secondary pattern of clan organization has come into existence, "overriding the generation principle" fits in with unilineal reckoning, which is a fundamental of clanship. Indeed, it might be conceived of as a factor in fostering the growth of clan organization, rather than that clan organization is the cause of "overriding the generation principle."

As case material to substantiate my remarks I present some examples, all from western North America and all from groups investigated by the writer in various connections. These limitations are purposeful, but not necessary, for numerous other examples of equal diversity can be culled from the literature. The reason the limitations are purposeful is that the examples are ample to establish my points: (1) that clans are associated with types of kinship systems other than the three that Dr White mentions (Dakota-Iroquois, Omaha, Crow); (2) that all types of kinship systems (including Crow and Omaha) enumerated by Professor Leslie Spier³ occur in tribes without clans; (3) that certain types of kinship systems besides Dakota-Iroquois occur among tribes with both patrilineal and matrilineal clans; these types are Yuman and Mackenzie Basin.

The following listings are taken from, or based upon, Professor Spier's classification of kinship systems.

Omaha Type Kinship Systems.—Ten north central Californian groups without clans or moieties and six south central Californian groups with patrilineal moieties have kinship systems of this type. Are we to assume that the kinship system is due to moieties and that it spread from the groups with moieties to those without? I fail to see why such an assumption is necessary or even valid when it is noted that patrilineal moieties are found among the Southern Californian Shoshoneans and the Piman peoples who have kinship systems of totally different type.

The north central Californian groups without clans or moieties are Northern Wintun (Wintu), Central Wintun (Wintun), Southeastern Wintun (River Patwin), Southwestern Wintun (Hill Patwin), Coast Miwok, Lake Miwok, Northern Pomo, Central Pomo, Eastern Pomo, Southeastern Pomo.

³ Leslie Spier, *The Distribution of Kinship Systems in North America* (University of Washington Publications in Anthropology, Vol. 1, 1925), pp. 69-78.

The south central Californian groups with patrilineal moieties are Tachi Yokuts, Gashowu Yokuts, Chukchansi Yokuts, Southern Miwok, Central Miwok, Northern Miwok.

Crow Type Kinship Systems.—The writer has worked with only three peoples with kinship systems of this type; the Hopi with matrilineal clans, and the Southern Pomo and Wappo without clans or moieties. The Navaho neighbors of the Hopi have matrilineal clans coupled with a kinship system of Iroquois type. Will the kinship evolution of Dr White's hypothesis, hastened by diffusion from the Hopi, ultimately transform the Navaho kinship system into one of the Crow type?

Yuman Type Kinship Systems.—Peoples with this type of kinship system exhibit a great diversity of social organization. Some are without clans or moieties, some have patrilineal moieties, some have patrilineal clans, and some matrilineal clans. What social law will account for such diversity of "cause" and uniformity of "effect"?

Without clans or moieties are the Luiseño, Kawaiisu, Tübatulabal, Southwestern Pomo, Western Yavapai, and Northeastern Yavapai.

Without clans or moieties, but possessing patrilineal lineages or hordes are the Kamia, Southern Diegueño, and Northern Diegueño.

With patrilineal moieties are the Desert Cahuilla, Cupeño, Serrano, Pima, and Papago.

With patrilineal clans are the Mohave, Yuma, Cocopa.

With matrilineal clans are the Southeastern Yavapai.

Mackenzie Basin Type Kinship Systems.—Again, this type of kinship system cannot be correlated with a single type of social organization.

Californian groups without clans or moieties and having this type of kinship system are Hupa, Whilkut, Yuki, Huchnom, Coast Yuki, Lutuami, Achomawi, Atsugewi, Washo, Southern Maidu, Northern Paiute, Eastern Mono (Owens Valley Paiute), Paleuyami Yokuts, Yaudanchi Yokuts, Yauelmani Yokuts, and Karok.

One Californian people, the Western Mono have this type of kinship system coupled with patrilineal moieties. The Zuñi have it coupled with matrilineal clans. Who will say whether the Zuñi or the Hopi matrilineal clan system is the older? From Dr White's viewpoint the Hopi system should be the older because it is accompanied by the Crow type of kinship system.

Iroquois Type Kinship System.—In California the tribes with this type of kinship system, unlike Dr White's Iroquois example, lack clans, thus evoking the question of just why this type should be regarded at all as a manifestation of the presence of clan organization.

The Californian groups are the Tolowa, Lassik, Wailaki, Kato, Shasta, Northern Yana, Yahi, Northeastern Maidu, and Northwestern Maidu. The Athabascan Navaho, unlike the above mentioned Californian Athabascans, have the type coupled with a matrilineal clan organization. According to Dr White's statement the Navaho kinship system should in due time change to the Crow type system of their Hopi neighbors.

With matrilineal clans connected with three types of kinship systems other than the Crow, and patrilineal clans and moieties connected with two types other than the Omaha, it becomes difficult to believe that all of these kinship systems would in time change to Crow and Omaha types, respectively, under the influence of clan organization.

To my mind, the types of kinship systems associated with clan organization and its absence are too numerous to leave any degree of plausibility for Dr White's explanation of how the Crow and Omaha types of kinship systems came into existence. Kinship systems being in the basic pattern of social structure and clans being in the secondary pattern, it seems likely that kinship might more frequently mold clans than the reverse. However, the associations of kinship types and different forms of social organization are so heterogeneous that I should hesitate to advance even this as an hypothesis.

Even exogamy, the classic attribute of clandom, is but a derivative of the basic pattern of social organization. Not only does one refrain from marriage into his mother's clan in a matrilineal tribe but also normally⁴ into his father's clan. Both prohibitions are nothing more than slight extensions of the prohibited degrees of clanless society. Their bilateral and essentially non-clan, original character is often neglected by authors because of interest in portraying in sharp relief the clan organization of the group described.

The search for one hundred percent correlations between kinship features and social organization or customs is apparently a chase of a will-o'-the-wisp, which to date has eluded our grasp and presumably never will be attained. Always there are exceptions which must be explained away by "additional factors." Even so simple a correlation as that between levirate and the equating of father's brother to father fails us.

May not the cause of the incomplete correlations lie in the fact that kinship systems are first of all linguistic phenomena, as Professor Kroeber long ago suggested, and only secondarily social phenomena? As such they belong to, and reflect primarily, the basic pattern of social structure, and as such they constitute an archaic and highly refractory nucleus, which yields un-

⁴ Cross-cousin marriage would be an exception.

evenly only here and there to influences from the secondary pattern of social structure.

This criticism has the demerit of being destructive, and offering no precise substitute for that which it seeks to destroy. It is alike applicable to the specific and limited cause-effect plea advanced by Dr White and to the functional panacea for kinship problems offered by Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, in the latter's statement that "*it can be shown that there is a very thorough functional correlation between the kinship terminology of any tribe and the social organization of that tribe as it exists at present.*"⁵

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⁵ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (Oceania, vol. 1, 1931), p. 427. Italics mine.