

Australian Aboriginal Kinship

**An introductory handbook
with particular emphasis on the Western Desert**

Laurent Dousset

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Les manuels du Credo

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Les manuels du Credo (The Credo Handbooks)

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To H. Kumarnarra Giles

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Figure 1: Geographical map

- ACT Australian Capital Territory
- NSW New South Wales
- NT Northern Territory
- QLD Queensland
- SA South Australia
- TAS Tasmania
- VIC Victoria
- WA Western Australia



Figure 2: Map of approximate location of cited languages and tribes (also see the map of Figure 6 on page 38 for the location of more Western Desert dialectal groups)

Introduction: the purpose of this book and how to read it

Everyone familiar with Australian Aboriginal communities understands how very important kinship is in daily interaction. Some anthropologists have claimed that the concept of kinship, and thus kinship studies, are ethnocentric and biased, if not useless. They suggest that centring social phenomena on kinship is a particularity of the Western world and see kinship studies as a domain invented in Western academic circles. Although it may well be true in philosophical and epistemological terms, such a viewpoint neglects the fact that life in Aboriginal societies is structured around what social scientists label 'kinship'. This handbook draws attention to this important social domain and explains how such 'kinship' systems work; it also offers an accessible introduction to this fascinating field. Far from those academic discourses that attempt to deconstruct a field that Aboriginal people themselves value, this book is directed towards those who are, or may soon be, living and working in Australian indigenous communities.

Since 1994 I have worked as a researcher in Aboriginal Australian communities, in particular in the Western Desert. I have always been astonished by the lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture, and especially of kinship, shown by non-indigenous students and staff who live and work in these communities, to say nothing of in Australian society generally. Throughout these years I met many teachers, shop managers, community advisers, nurses, mechanics, PhD students, but most lacked any understanding of kinship principles and structure or indeed of much of Aboriginal culture in general. Most interpreted their encounters with Aboriginal people in terms of their own cultural background and often resorted to erroneous analogies. Some displayed a rather dogmatic fascination for an intellectual exoticism that seemed to exist only in their minds. In this view, Aboriginal people are given a passive role in which they are enduring a threatening modernity, while simultaneously possessing esoteric powers that enable them to reconcile humanity, nature and the spiritual dimension: they are the people of the Dreaming. I found this 'forwards to the origins' attitude, which clearly derives from Rousseau and pleads for a return of the latter's idealistic views, far more disturbing than their ignorance and lack of understanding. It was difficult to respond to this ideology with anything other than ideology.

This book is meant for the former category of readers: those who do not know, who are struggling to understand structure and behaviour in Aboriginal communities and seeking insights into a different way of perceiving the world and human relationships but who are not guided solely by ideological or philosophical considerations. It is also for those who believe they know and understand but admit that additional examples and opinions may assist them. Since this book is an introduction to the principles of kinship and Australian Aboriginal kinship in general, as well as to the Western Desert culture in particular, it is also aimed at undergraduate and, to some extent, postgraduate students.

Importantly, this work is also written for the Western Desert Aborigines themselves. After a meeting in Warburton in 1995, where I submitted my project to study kinship and social categories in a desert community to a Ngaanyatjarra Council General Meeting, some people approached me, asking whether I thought it would be possible to produce a little booklet about Western Desert kinship that could be of use to children and students, among others. This work is a belated response to these initial requests, which, I should add, were not prompted by any kind of anxiousness to record a disappearing culture or out of fear that knowledge about kinship and its use as a tool to organise indigenous processes might soon be lost forever. Indeed, relatedness (the sense of being somehow related to others and of sharing something with them) is a very important feature of Western Desert culture as an underlying motive for action and thought; kinship, as we outsiders call it, is its dominant structuring vehicle, involved in most, if not all, social processes. The request was in fact an expression of Aboriginal people's understanding of what the global system in which they are embedded is about: functioning with the 'written word' as the dominant medium for permanence and power. Indigenous people have learned and understood that what has been written down is evidence and what has not is volatile and even non-existent. Taking into account the imposed necessity to 'write things down', Aborigines have had to learn to deal with and accept the difficult and intangible notion of the anonymous: the complete unpredictability of the interpretations made by readers of books about them. The idea of communicating, in this case writing, without knowing who the reader will be is perhaps one of the most bizarre consequences of Gutenberg's revolution.

All of the above entail important ethical and methodological problems. Why would an outsider want to describe what Aboriginal persons use and apply every day? How will analysts (in this case, me) ensure they are not blinded by dogmatic ideologies similar to those described above? I do not claim to know better or to fully understand Australian Aboriginal kinship systems, but my training as an anthropologist provides me with the tools to explicate differences and similarities between cultural systems and thus shed light on cultural patterns. Although I am not in the best position to explain Western Desert kinship, I can compare the European system with those of Aboriginal Australia and thus identify some possible confusions. One condition for successful comparison is the systematic use of identical tools and concepts. Let us take the example of measuring and comparing distances. The definition of how long a unit of distance will be (for example a meter) and the cross-cultural application of this is an ethnocentric process. However, once the definition is accepted, we can use it in other contexts to compare rather than to define distances.

This book places a great deal of importance on comparing and contrasting European and Aboriginal Australian kinship systems in order to demonstrate how difficult and ephemeral unsophisticated cultural analogies can be. It will provide the tools and concepts required to undertake such comparisons. Another necessary step will be to describe how Australian Aboriginal kinship systems have been analysed and presented at various stages of anthropology's evolution as a discipline. We will progress through several steps, each of which should be taken only after the previous one has been fully assimilated. It is therefore essential to read this book in the order it is presented.

The text is organised into four parts:

1. A discussion of general ideas surrounding the notions of *culture* and *hunter-gatherer society*, in which ethnographic material from the Australian Western Desert cultural bloc will be presented since most examples and discussions will be based on material drawn from this area.

2. In this more technical but also crucial chapter, some of the most important notions in the realm of kinship are introduced. Definitions of *marriage*, *descent* and *terminology* will be outlined. There will also be a general discussion of the major differences between the various kinship systems. This will be rather complex and includes some specific terminology, all of which is defined and explained.

3. Here the concepts explained in Part 2 are applied to the ethnography of the Western Desert. We shall examine key elements: *family*, *domestic group* and *household*. Western Desert kinship terminology is discussed and I elaborate on the ways people find a spouse and marry.

4. This section addresses another complex domain of Australian Aboriginal kinship: *social categories*. Here theory and ethnography are defined and the concepts of *generational moieties*, *sections* and *subsections* as well as *patri-* and *matrimoieties* are explained. Part 4 concludes with an elaboration on the dynamics of these social category systems and shows how such systems have diffused and how groups have adopted them.

While the intention here is to provide elementary anthropological tools and knowledge for understanding Aboriginal Australian kinship, please note however that this book is not about recent and historical transformations of kinship systems, which are in some cases considerable, and it does not deal with many of the uses of kinship in everyday life. These topics are planned to become the subject of other introductory handbooks.

How to read this book

Since this is an introduction to the basic concepts used to understand the complexity of Australian Aboriginal kinship systems, I have endeavoured throughout to explain concepts and ideas clearly so as to make them understandable even for non-anthropologists. Simultaneously, I have provided opportunities for additional enquiry for those interested in pursuing the subject further. First, however, I need to explain a few conventions that are used throughout this work.

Each part is followed by a summary and a further reading section. The summary repeats the most important elements of the chapter. A reader who does not understand the summary should reread the chapter before moving on to the next one. The further reading sections list books that ought to be available in public libraries. References quoted in the text and listed at the end of the book are additional literature the interested reader may want to consult.

Part of the information provided in this book was collected during my research in the Western Desert, in Alice Springs and in other parts of Australia. The remaining information

comes from reading the work of other researchers. If this is the case, the reference is indicated in the following way: Tonkinson (1991:52). You will find the full reference at the end of the book, under the title *References cited*. The reference reads as follows: *Tonkinson* is the surname of the author (look under *Tonkinson* in *References cited*); between brackets is the year of publication. Sometimes, if a specific page of this publication is referred to, a colon followed by the page number is added. In some cases, the reference is indicated as follows: Lévi-Strauss (1967 [1947]). This means that the original edition was printed in 1947, but the edition I have been using was printed in 1967. This additional information is particularly useful if we are using old references that have been reprinted, since we need to know the date of first publication.

Texts inside a box such as this one provide additional information on the discussed topic. It is not necessary to understand the content of the boxed text to read the book. If you feel that something in the boxed material is too challenging, just skip it.

Words between quotes such as 'this' mean that the concept or idea has to be taken with some caution or is under discussion. Either I am not happy with the word but could not find a more appropriate one, or it represents an idea that is generally used for something that I think needs to be approached carefully. The context of the phrase should usually make the reasons for adding quotes around a word self-evident.

Words printed in **bold** are key concepts. The most important ones are defined in boxes next to the text. All of these bold concepts are additionally explained in the glossary at the end of the book. They are in bold only on their first usage. These concepts should be kept in mind while reading on. Footnotes contain explanations or definitions of words which are not included in the glossary since they may, for some readers, be difficult to understand but are not anthropological concepts.



Part one

A historical and ethnographic overview

While I will be discussing issues and concepts that are applicable to Aboriginal Australia more widely, it is always good practice to clarify the context from which most examples illustrating the explanations are drawn; in this case, it is the Western Desert culture area. What is known as the ‘Western Desert’ comprises the Gibson Desert, the Great Sandy Desert and the Victoria Desert and stretches from approximately Port Augusta in South Australia across the continent to Jigalong in Western Australia.

Since the 1930s, the many Western Desert peoples and groups have been described by anthropologists and linguists as being culturally very similar, as speaking dialects of the same language, and as having the same type of kinship system. Professor Elkin (for example Elkin 1931 and 1938-40), a well-known anthropologist who had been working for decades amongst Aboriginal peoples, called the Western Desert people and their kinship system the **Aluridja**. In 1959, another well-known anthropologist, Ronald Berndt (The University of Western Australia), labelled the area the Western Desert **cultural bloc**, comprising some 40 dialectal groups.

➤ **Aluridja**: The name of the Western Desert kinship system as given by Elkin (1931). **Aluridja** is really an Aranda (*Arrente*) word stemming from *luridja*, which means ‘foreigners’. The word **Aluridja** is not used by Western Desert people themselves.

Because the Western Desert has been defined in terms of the many cultural features that are shared across a huge region covering one sixth of the continent, we shall first need to examine more closely the notion of ‘culture’ and how it has been defined and used in anthropology and beyond.

We will then consider characteristics used to define and describe Australian Aboriginal societies. In a third step, I outline a general history of the Western Desert, mentioning archaeological work undertaken in it and then summarise some of the more important recent events that have occurred there. The fourth part deals with issues surrounding the language and its many dialects spoken in the Western Desert. A common language and similarities between dialects are among the most tangible elements that justify the Western Desert being defined as a cultural bloc. Seen from an Aboriginal perspective, members of this culture area often speak in terms of being ‘one people’ having ‘one Law’ (which will be discussed later).

The notion of culture

The meaning of the Indo-European word ‘culture’ in English (*culture* in French, *Kultur* in German, *cultura* in Italian, *Kulttuuri* in Finish, etc.) is not as straightforward as it may appear, so it is certainly necessary to discuss this concept before applying it, especially since it does not have identical counterparts in many of the world’s languages. In the following pages, I discuss some general aspects of the concept of ‘culture’ while keeping in mind the Australian context.

First, it is important to note that in its Latin origins *cultura* was used in the context of ‘agriculture’ in the sense of caring for and guarding land. In English, it is only since the 16th century that it has been extended to include the care (cultivation) of education, and only from the beginning of the 19th century has it been applied in contexts describing the intellectual dimension of a civilization. From the mid 19th century onwards, its use shifted to mean the collective customs of a people. This understanding of ‘culture’ is anthropology’s gift to the world.

When Captain Cook landed in Botany Bay in 1770, and later when the first settlers arrived at nearby Sydney Cove in 1788, it was immediately evident that Australia was already inhabited. The instructions of the English Crown were unambiguous: occupy uninhabited land in the name of King George III or, if the future colony was already inhabited, take possession of suitable portions of land with the approval of the relevant indigenous groups. Despite these instructions, Cook did not consult indigenous groups before declaring all the eastern Australian coast a British colony, the property of the English Crown. Australia was to be understood as *terra nullius*, an uninhabited land. How did this lie come about? Why did Cook declare Australia a colony without any sort of negotiation while in New Zealand, for example, there was some consideration of indigenous peoples and later important treaties?

One reason, which goes back to the notion of ‘culture’ as described above, was that in the European conception of the times, an uncultivated piece of land was seen as unoccupied, in the sense of unappropriated (see also Reynolds 1992 [1987]). Working the land, as farmers do, was conceived as the unique and absolute way to designate ownership over it. The fences surrounding animals and the limits of crops established boundaries in space, distinguishing ‘wild nature’ from ‘domesticated nature’ and reflecting the underlying notion that domestication was the fundamental requirement for the recognition of land ownership. This conception induced a practical problem for the Englishman of the time: if land is not cultivated, with whom is one going to negotiate?

As already mentioned, this problem relates directly to the word ‘culture’ itself, which still causes much confusion today. There is a widespread incapacity to differentiate between ‘culture’ as a form of acquired ownership, whether of land, knowledge or goods, and ‘culture’ in its social meanings: the sharing of acquired or learnt features, ways of thinking and of behaving among groups of people. Both meanings have the same etymological¹ background. The second meaning is the more recent: the acquisition of knowledge, especially religious knowledge. Cultivating one’s mind was seen as analogous to cultivating and transforming one’s plot of land. The domestication of land came to refer to the domestication of the mind. It is much later, and after Cook arrived in Australia, that the meaning was extended to other features of ‘civilisation’, while still keeping its original usage as well. A ‘culture’ was to become what people share, the way things should be done and thought.

1. ‘Etymology’ is the science that deals with the history of the spelling and meaning of words.

▶ **Hunter-gatherers:** A mode of human adaptation typically identified by nomadism, the absence of agriculture and domesticated animals, low demographic densities, and an egalitarian political system. Australia is the only continent that was entirely occupied by hunter-gatherer societies. On other continents, hunter-gatherers coexist or co-existed alongside horticulturalists (societies that predominantly grow crops) and pastoralists (societies that live largely from herding), with whom they often entertained commercial relations.

As a matter of fact, the development of at least two interwoven meanings of the word ‘culture’ — one first agricultural then religious producing the basis from which ‘civilisation’ was believed to have emerged, the other social or sociological — is not so much a confusion but a subtle overlapping and the extension of Western ideologies to the understanding of social structure: both became the temporal and spatial signature for civilisation (see also Attwood, 1996). How was Cook to negotiate with people who did not cultivate land, that is did not practise what Europeans thought of as the foundation of civilisation? In 18th century thought, Australian Aborigines did not exist as a group, as a civilisation, because they did not have what was considered to be a ‘culture’ since their form of ‘culture’ did not in any way reflect established western categories of thinking of the period. Indeed, Australian Aborigines were not farmers and did not cultivate the land but were what is called **hunter-gatherers**. In this mode of human adaptation, people do not domesticate animals for food or grow crops and therefore do not delimit space with boundaries reflecting agricultural activity. For the moment, let us simply note that 18th century Europeans could not conceive hunting and gathering as having anything to do with ‘civilisation’.

The misunderstanding (or non-understanding) of the hunter-gatherer mode of social existence was justified in the scholarly writings of the era when Cook landed and was therefore part of an explicit government policy. William Blackstone, an authority on law in England during the 18th century, wrote in his book *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1823 [1766]) that two kinds of land for colonisation must be distinguished: ‘un-cultivated’ land in its agricultural sense, which immediately becomes the property of the Crown, and ‘cultivated’ land, which has to be acquired through negotiation or conquest. Only in the second case does the author recognise ‘indigenous laws’, and hence a ‘civilisation’, which, he writes, remain in force until the King decides to replace them with British law (see Kirk 1986; Reynolds 1987).

Given what has been alluded to so far, a discussion of the notion of ‘culture’ is essential, since it entails both a Western ethnocentric² history and a view of what a society is or should be. Anthropologists have, however, formulated new understandings and definitions of the concept, some of which are particularly useful for understanding what the expression ‘Western Desert cultural bloc’ means.

The first anthropologists to make extensive use of the notion of ‘culture’ were those of the *Culturalism* school of thought, also called *Culture and Personality*, which began in the 1930s. These researchers centred their studies on a distinction between the ‘natural’ and

2. ‘Ethnocentric’ refers to a very human view or world-view that is heavily biased by the personal history and background of those who share it and becomes the basis for moral judgments made by one group’s members about peoples, cultures and behaviours different from their own.

the ‘cultural’ parts of a human being. The natural was considered everything that is inherited and cannot be changed (the fact that humans usually have two hands, for example); the cultural everything that is acquired through learning and copying. A baby is not born with clothes, food habits or preferences, religion, language and so on, even though some linguists have argued that there is an underlying universal language or grammar and that every child is born with a specific capacity for language. A child is considered to be born as a *tabula rasa*, a blank sheet of paper or board (as the Greek philosopher Aristotle termed it) on which society and culture inevitably inscribe their beliefs, values and customs on individuals over time. This process is termed **socialisation** and the **internalisation** of cultural rules and norms. Generally speaking, *norms and rules* are ways of doing and of thinking (Durkheim 1999 [1984]) and *cultural norms* are the ways of doing and thinking that are particular to a society or group. Culture, not just language, is what makes people understand each other when they communicate since words have different meanings depending on ones experience when learning them.

The so-called culturalists emphasised the process of acquisition or learning of ‘culture’ in their studies. These researchers and scholars tried to analyse how mothering, fathering and other forms of education are the means through which different cultures transmit different norms and values. Subsequently, they defined culture as the sum of attitudes, ideas and behaviour shared by members of a society.

The distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ mentioned earlier was important in other early anthropological schools. Researchers either tried to crystallise the universal features of human cultures or to conceptualise how the transition from ‘nature’ to ‘culture’ operated in evolutionary terms. In other words, they sought answers to these questions: what distinguishes humans from animals and how did human society come to be?

The Culturalist School

The best-known and most important culturalists were Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Ralph Linton, and Abram Kardiner. Margaret Mead (1935), for example, studied gender relationships in three societies in the Pacific (the Arapesh, the Mundugumor and the Chambuli) and compared the attitudes towards gender differentiation. She concluded that gender is defined by cultural norms and not by ‘biological’ difference. Personality is dependent on the systems of social roles imposed by the cultural

model or pattern rather than by the biological sex of a person.

Culturalist anthropology gave rise to other approaches and schools that continue to be influential. Clifford Geertz (also see Ortner 1999), for example, describes culture as a web of meaning in which individuals are suspended, and Mary Douglas (2002 [1966]), known for her work on the notion of ‘pollution’, defines society on the basis of *shared symbols*.

Numerous books and scientific papers have addressed these questions. Leslie White (1969:22ff), for example, explains that all human behaviour originates in the use of symbols³ and that the ability to use 'symbols' transformed our ancestors into human beings. Indeed, few kinds of animal can use differentiating symbols. The fact that in some cultures people believe in the world being created by one God while others do not, or that snails have souls, or that animals can speak to them, are the result of our human capacity to elaborate on symbols and invest them with a range of meanings. To quote White's example: no chimpanzee or laboratory rat can appreciate the difference between holy water and distilled water. It is this capacity to manipulate symbols whose meanings are, at least to some extent, shared among a group of people that differentiates human beings from animals, or 'nature' from 'culture'.

➤ **Prohibition of incest:**

A fundamental rule, not identical in every society, but every society possesses one. This rule prohibits sexual relationships and marriage between particular persons. In Euro-American as well as in Aboriginal Australian societies, marriage between a son and his mother is prohibited because considered incestuous.

➤ **Exogamy:** The obligation to marry or practice of marrying outside ones family, group or tribe. Exogamy can be genealogical (marrying outside of ones family or group) or geographical (marrying outside ones residential area, land of affiliation etc.). Exogamy is the opposite of endogamy and is a result of the incest prohibition.

One explanation of the distinction between 'nature' and 'culture' that had far-reaching influence a few decades ago was proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1967 [1947]), who pushed these questions and his conclusions almost to their logical limits. While some of his other ideas will be discussed later, here I summarise Lévi-Strauss' distinction between animal and human societies. The difference, he explains, lies in the human recognition of kinship. In human societies, kinship follows rules not instinct. The transition from nature to culture takes place via the **prohibition of incest**, which is universal in human societies: all of them have rules that allow or prohibit some types of sexual relations and marriages. In Aboriginal Australia, as in European societies, marriage and intercourse with a brother and sister is prohibited, and in all human societies some types of marriage are forbidden. In most cases, the prohibition is against the marriage of a man with his mother, sister or daughter and the marriage of a woman with her father, brother or son. The direct consequence of the universality of some sort of incest prohibition is that all cultures define rules of **exogamy**. These rules state that a man or woman has to marry somebody from outside his or her own group. Taken in its most limited sense, the rule of exogamy proclaims that because a man is not allowed to marry his mother, daughter or sister, he must find a spouse in another family. From Lévi-Strauss' point of view, this also means that every man marries the sister, daughter or mother of another man and that these two men engage in some sort of relationship of exchange: both give each other's sister or daughter in marriage. This exchange relationship

3. Generally speaking, a symbol is something that stands for something else, especially an idea or a value. For example, in European culture black is a symbol for death, while in Aboriginal Australia it is usually white that does this. Common examples are to consider the lion to be a symbol for courage, the cross that for Christianity and so on. The existence and understanding of symbols requires complex thinking that goes beyond instinct.

is a consequence of exogamy, which in turn stems from the prohibition of incest that produces human society or culture as opposed to an animal group. Exchange of words (communication and language), exchange of goods (economy), and exchange of human beings (marriage) are the foundations of human society.

Lévi-Strauss was not the first to underline the prohibition of incest as being the hinge between nature and culture. Indeed, Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, saw the origin of human society as the consequence of the murder of the 'original' father and the subsequent establishment of the incest prohibition. Freud (1989 [1913]) thought that, in early stages of human social forms, people must have lived in large family groups in which one man, the father, controlled all women, including his own daughters. His sons, thus deprived of partners, killed the father and split into several groups. To ensure this situation would not happen again, these sons decided that henceforth men could not have sexual relations with their own offspring and their sons must marry women from other groups (exogamy).

Alongside these general and very hypothetical theories about the origins of human societies, other more applicable and concrete ideas have been advanced. Searching for universal features of 'culture' was hence sometimes described as the search for what is 'natural in culture'. Indeed, if some feature appears in every cultural system, then the temptation is to consider it to be a natural rather than cultural fact. The concepts of 'nature' and 'culture' do not reflect meanings as such but are themselves products of culturally specific interpretations of the world. Thus the distinction between 'nature' and 'culture' is not as straightforward as one might expect. Philippe Descola (2010) quotes illustrative examples in which, as he explains, many more things belong in some intermediary space rather than wholly to 'nature' or to 'culture'. Does a house pet belong to 'nature' or to 'culture'? During a walk alongside a hedge composed of wild plants, one could say that this is a 'natural' hedge, unlike the wooden fence enclosing the nearby field. But this hedge has also been fitted, trimmed and maintained by humans; it is therefore the product of a technical, that is to say 'cultural', activity. Is this hedge therefore 'natural' or 'cultural'?

Other examples could readily be quoted with respect to Australian Aboriginal cultures. As we shall see, Aboriginal people did not grow crops but collected seeds, fruit and vegetables that grew wild. However, in some groups, people often threw a few seeds on the ground before grinding the rest into flour to make sure these would grow again and in different places from where they were originally collected. Groups would then move on, more or less abandoning the seeds or seedlings, which received neither care nor water from those who left them behind. Nonetheless, since a human hand sowed these plants and since such sowing is not simply a natural human action that people do anywhere automatically and without thinking, the question remains: is this a 'natural' or a 'cultural' phenomenon? What results from my brief discussion of 'nature' and 'culture' is that these

➤ **Endogamy:** The obligation to marry or practice of marrying within ones family, group or tribe. While endogamy is the opposite of exogamy, both are usually combined in some way. For example, you may have a rule of genealogical exogamy, forcing people to marry outside their close family, combined with a rule of tribal endogamy, where you are nevertheless supposed to marry someone within the range of the tribal group.

▶ **Tjukurrpa:** This is the indigenous word for the *Dreamtime* or *Dreaming* in Western Desert dialects. This concept includes the mythical journeys of the *Dreamtime* beings, the laws and rules that were created by these beings as well as the sacred sites linked to these myths. Often translated in English as 'the Law', Tjukurrpa also includes every action or belief that is somehow related or justified by the *Dreamtime* and thus has a sacred and often secret character.

▶ **Mularrpa:** In Western Desert languages, Mularrpa is the 'here and now' and is contrasted to the Tjukurrpa (*Dreamtime*). Actual people live in the Mularrpa, but are linked to concepts and realities that were created during the *Dreamtime*.

concepts are themselves cultural. In the Western Desert, I have not encountered such a distinction. What comes closest to it is that between **Tjukurrpa**, the *Dreamtime*, and **Mularrpa**, the 'real world here and now', a distinction to which I return later.

An interesting analysis of these problems was proposed by Serge Moscovici (1977). He analysed European understandings and uses of the notions of 'culture' and 'nature', explaining that both concepts reveal specific social and cultural values working as stereotyped contradictions. The idea of 'culture' is associated with 'orthodoxy', reflecting images of sedentarism, domestication and distance from animality, with values such as hierarchy, perfection and progress. Additionally, the idea of 'nature' is associated in European culture with 'heterodoxy', which reflects images of nomadism and restlessness, spontaneity, sensitivity, enjoyment and confusion with animality. We now better understand the mechanisms at work during the negation of indigenous peoples' presence in Australia. Cook and his fellows considered themselves 'orthodox' people of culture, but viewed Aborigines as 'heterodox' people of nature.

Up to this point, we have encountered three meanings of the notion of 'culture'. The first reflected its European etymological origin and its representations in history: culture is the result of a specific type of transformation of land or nature and of mind or soul. Culture is seen as a domestication of

the wild, pagan world in order to form civilisation.

The second definition of culture, which again is based on its conceptual distinction from 'nature', conveys the idea that groups within human societies exchange people for marriage, words for communication (and thus have a language), and goods for a living. According to this understanding, 'culture' is a means of distinguishing human social organisation from animal social organisation. However, it can also be extrapolated to distinctions among human organisations themselves by stating that the modes and principles of exchanging people, words and goods divide human society into various, diverse cultures.

The third and most sophisticated definition, which is in fact complementary to the second one, sees culture as a set of people who share common symbols, ways of thinking and of acting. Social norms and rules are acquired in each group through learning processes called socialisation. This understanding of 'culture' does not impose an ethnocentric and evolutionary interpretation. A specific culture is not better or worse, older or younger, more or less 'natural', but is the sharing of common symbols and identical or similar understandings thereof by a group of people.

Let us now return to the Western Desert, bearing in mind the above definitions and understanding culture as the aggregate of shared attitudes, beliefs, actions and symbols — ways of acting and of thinking — that are embedded in and organise the human

Culture and Society

It is necessary to underline the fact that 'culture' defined on the basis of shared symbols is not sufficient to describe human social forms. Indeed, it is not enough that symbols are shared; people must also adhere to these symbols, explicitly or implicitly, and they must be effectively applied and used. Richard Rorty (1991: 30-1, 192, 199-200, quoted in Antonio 1998: 37-8) wrote that the moral self is a web of shared beliefs and feelings that has no centre, and he defines *ethnos* as the circle of believers. Indeed, if 'culture' is a set of symbols, people who share and enact these symbols

may be called an ethnic group or society. In this work, I shall use the words culture and society in a slightly different way and follow Godelier's proposition (2009) that culture comprises norms, values and symbols, whereas society is a political unit constituted by people who adhere to these shared norms, values and symbols. Importantly, culture and society are not coextensive since it is possible to state in certain cases that two Australian tribes have similar if not identical cultures and wish this to be recognised but are not the same society.

necessity to exchange and engage in social relationships. Groups and families of the Western Desert thus qualify as a 'cultural bloc'. Although hundreds and sometimes thousands of kilometres apart, people share many common symbols and beliefs and a set of known principles that underlie the exchange of people, words and goods. Their kinship systems, which constitute the domain of people exchange, are in many respects very similar, their dialects are mutually intelligible, and their economic systems are in most respects homogeneous and rely on extensive material and non-material cooperation. This is my view, an *etic*⁴ one (seen from the outside), regarding the validity of defining the Western Desert as a cultural bloc.

But there also is an *emic*, or insider's, point of view which testifies to the accuracy of calling 40 or more dialectal groups, scattered across some 600,000 square kilometres, a cultural bloc. Although the word 'culture' does not exist as a literal translation in many languages of the world, it is nevertheless defined by way of the indigenous person's self-recognition. Western Desert people use expressions such as 'we are one mob' or 'we are all the same' to express the existence of and their belonging to a community that shares a cultural domain and to differentiate this community from groups and tribes outside the cultural bloc (also see Glowczewski 1998). We now examine the nature of this Western Desert culture and community, starting with some basic definitions, in particular that of 'hunter-gatherer society'.

4. By the term 'etic' one understands the point of view or explanation of a feature as proposed by somebody who is outside the culture in question, whereas the 'emic' point of view is that seen from the inside, that is, by a member of the society itself.

What are hunter-gatherer societies?

Social scientists categorise the Aborigines of Australia as 'hunter-gatherers'. As the name given to these societies indicates, it primarily relates to a society's mode of extracting goods such as food and other raw material from their environment. The same typology proposes other categories, of course, such as 'horticulturalists', 'pastoralists' and 'industrial' modes of extraction and production. Horticulturalists are for example New Guinean and other Pacific Islanders who use hand tools, grow crops in gardens and raise animals such as pigs and chickens. Pastoralist societies entail the keeping of herds of domesticated animals and a heavy reliance on the products of these animals (milk, cheese, hides), which are typically consumed or exchanged for the products of nearby settled peoples. Examples are the Nuer in Sudan or the Bedouins in Arabia and Yemen.

Hunter-gatherers were or are represented in many parts of the world, typically but not exclusively in areas not suitable for agriculture, horticulture or pastoralism: in Asia (examples are the Agta of the Philippines or the Ainu in Japan); in the Americas with the Great Plain Indians or the Guarani in South America; in Africa, in particular the !Kung, also called Bushmen, in the Kalahari desert, the Mbuti people in Central Africa or the Hadza in Tanzania and so on. In the northern polar region, many northern Siberian societies are hunter-gatherers, the best known being probably the Inuit people of Canada and Alaska. Australia is unique in this respect, being the only continent in modern times to be populated by people following a single mode of adaptation (hunting, gathering, and fishing where possible).

Anthropologists usually associate the hunter-gatherer type of society or culture with a number of features. The extent and intensity of these features vary from region to region and continent to continent but are generally speaking considered to apply. We now briefly examine each of these features.

Food production and storage. As the name of this type of society suggests, hunter-gatherers do not usually raise animals for food, or cultivate crops in gardens, but hunt, fish and collect wild vegetables and fruit. They also have what is called an immediate-return type of economic production and exchange system (Woodburn 1982), meaning that hunter-gatherers do not usually produce (hunt or forage for) more food than is immediately needed or shared among the group. Food storage is not a significant element of most hunter-gatherer societies in which fresh food is much preferred.

It has, however, been demonstrated that hunter-gatherer societies are often what one could call 'indirect horticulturalists'. These societies, and Australian Aborigines are to be included here, intervene in natural processes of animal and plant reproduction. For example, parts of tubers are left in the soil so that a plant can regain its full strength, or people ensure that seeds fall into the appropriate soil (see, for example, Goodale 1986 [1982]: 203, Campbell 1965: 206-207, and Kimber 1976 for Australian examples). Aboriginal Australians have also been called 'fire-stick farmers' (Jones 1969) since the organised burning off of certain areas of land is a strategy for regenerating food sources

by destroying weeds and other plants that may hinder their growth and productivity. Additionally, the ashes produced by fires favour certain plant species' growth.

Political system. The vast majority of hunter-gatherer societies are egalitarian in spirit, having no chiefs or hereditary leaders but what anthropologists call 'situational' leadership, where those in charge are different according to the particular circumstances and kinship is the key to understanding who does what to whom, when, where, and to what effect. Some researchers, such as Alain Testart (1979), have demonstrated a relationship between the absence of food storage and an egalitarian social organisation. Testart claims that storage, which may in some cases be the consequence of seasonal variation because of the necessity to store food for periods of scarcity, may be the basis for individually or collectively owned wealth and thus also give rise to inequalities.

Here again, we need to enquire into the definitions of 'political system' and 'power'. If one understands by the notion of 'power' the capacity to take decisions in the name of a group, then indeed there are many fewer such opportunities in Aboriginal Australian societies than in European societies, with their institutionalised political systems embracing local, regional and national power structures. Conversely, Thomson (2003, but see also Burbank and Chisholm 1989; Keen 1982 and 1994) reported that one Arnhem Land elder possessed twenty-two wives. This man was obviously not poor, considering that such multiple marriages placed him at the centre of multiple networks of mutual obligation and exchange with brothers-in-law, sons-in-law, fathers-in-law etc.

Division of labour. Hunter-gatherers typically do not have a strong, general division of labour. Every adult man and woman will possess the range of skills appropriate to each their gender and can make all the tools and weapons they need to forage, hunt, or defend themselves with, whereas in other types of societies specialists are usually important figures (e.g., potters, blacksmiths, carpenters). The hunter-gatherer division of labour is based heavily on gender, that is women usually forage for plant foods and fish and collect small game, whereas men generally hunt or fish for large game. This division, however, is not always as clear-cut as some writers suggest. In the Western Desert, men will also forage while out hunting and women own hunting dogs that can bring down large game such as kangaroos. A strict gender division exists though in certain domains of ritual and other religious activity. Although the bulk of religious life is in the hands of mature men, women also have religious hierarchies and sacred paraphernalia, and certain rituals from which all men are excluded. Women play essential support roles in men's ritual lives, especially during large gatherings devoted principally to rituals, and senior men and women exercise control over their younger counterparts and are active in organising and carrying out ritual activities, both separately from and in the presence of the other gender.

Residence and demography. Nomadism and the scattered nature of their everyday social groups characterize the hunter-gatherer mode of adaptation. Because hunter-gatherers are nomadic, they do not have permanent settlements; they also usually live in

regions with low population densities. The absence of intensive production of food resources means that people move between natural resources and that the capacity of a given area to sustain people, something which has been called the *carrying capacity*, has been described as being less with hunter-gathering than it is with horticulture, for example.

However, as was the case with the division of labour, the reality is not always as straightforward as text-books might indicate, and the notion of *carrying capacity* must be qualified. Some hunter-gatherer groups, such as in tropical Arnhem Land (Northern Territory) and Cape York (Queensland) or along the large rivers of New South Wales in Australia, do not have to move far because of their food-rich environment. Lourandos (1980), for example, showed that Arnhem Land hunter-gatherers have a greater demographic density than some horticulturalists in nearby Papua New Guinea. Chase and Sutton (1987), who worked with groups in Cape York, Queensland, noted that ranges of movement in search of foods are quite small in these well-resourced areas. Jones (1980) explains for the Rittarrngu people of Arnhem Land that the range of movement is little more than 15 kilometres a year in an area of fourteen square kilometres. In contrast, desert areas make very large ranges of movement necessary. In the Western Desert, families often walked 20 kilometres a day over extended periods of time, in an area of extremely low demographic densities. In the case of one such group, the Ngaatjatjarra, for which I have good estimates, prior to the coming of Europeans about 500 people occupied an area of some 100,000 square kilometres. This yields a population density of about 0.005 person per square kilometre, or 200 square kilometres per person.

The variability among so-called hunter-gatherer societies has led some scholars, for example Arcand (1988) and Kelly (1995), to reconsider the typology defining societies as 'hunter-gatherers', 'horticulturalists', 'pastoralists' etc. Given the differences in the extent of nomadic practices, as well as those observed in residential and demographic patterns, it may not be correct, according to Arcand, to characterise societies using these variables. Kelly argues similarly and even more strongly but nevertheless retains the term 'hunter-gatherer' for what he calls pedagogic reasons.

Kin-based societies. Hunter-gatherers have also often been called 'kin-based' societies in which relationships of kinship are fundamental in the organisation of daily activities, economic exchange and decision-making. Although Godelier (2004) and I, myself, (Dousset 2007) have heavily criticised the notion of 'kin-based societies', its importance in Aboriginal Australia in particular is beyond doubt. Aboriginal kinship is embedded in all aspects of social life and, as we shall see, every member of a given society or region is related to all the others by the web of kinship.



The Ngaatjatjarra

I now illustrate some of the features mentioned above in relation to a specific Western Desert group, the Ngaatjatjarra. However, what is explained here is equally applicable to almost all the groups in this region. People had a highly nomadic way of life, travelling usually in small family groups of one or more **nuclear families** through their hunting and gathering grounds and uniting into larger congregations only for particular circumstances, such as initiation ceremonies, and when favourable ecological conditions made it possible for a large number of people to remain at one spot over an extended period of time.

The extent of the land these families regularly visited during their travels could amount to walking-distances of two to three hundred kilometres. Nomadism can take three forms which are sometimes combined: it can be circular, radial or linear. In circular nomadism, as the word explains, people never travel through the same place twice in the course of making a full cycle. In radial nomadism, people regularly come back to a centre point, which may be an important religious site or a permanent waterhole. In linear nomadism, people move back and forth over a chain of sites.

► **Nuclear family:** A father (or husband) and mother (or wife) and their children. In the case of polygamous families, there may be several husbands or wives. The nuclear family is not necessarily the founding stone of social organisation. Maurice Godelier (1977:138), for example, explained that a nuclear family is not able to survive on its own over generations and that it needs cooperation with other families. The nuclear family has to be distinguished from what Lévi-Strauss (1967) called the 'atom of kinship', which comprises a mother, her children, and the mother's brother. The atom of kinship is for Lévi-Strauss the founding stone on which kinship develops.

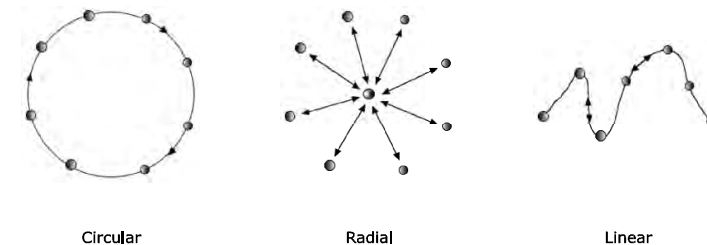


Figure 3: Types of nomadism (the small circles represent watering places or campsites)

While the nomadic adaptation of the Western Desert people in general, and Ngaatjatjarra people in particular, includes all three types of nomadism, radial nomadism is generally the most popular form. Circular nomadism was used mainly by families living in flatland country, travelling through sand dunes between watering sites and areas with denser vegetation. Linear nomadism, on the other hand, was often followed by people living along hilly outcrops. Hills offer many places of shade and rocky ground where water persists

over longer periods of time than in dune country. Radial nomadism was employed in two different and contrasting situations. First, during periods of severe drought, when people had to return regularly to a more permanent water resource while travelling out from it in search of game and bush foods. It was also used during periods of relative abundance, in which case semi-permanent camps were established at the centre point and people would move out to other locations, on trips of one to several days, to hunt and forage.

Men would generally hunt large game, such as kangaroos or emus, while women and children would collect vegetables, fruit and grass-seeds and gather small game such as lizards, snakes, grubs and so on. Food was shared among people who travelled together, especially larger game, which was cut up following strict rules and distributed according to kinship relations.

Carrying some of their belongings and very small children, families would sometimes travel 30 or more kilometres a day, then build a windbreak (*yuu*) or a shelter (*wiltja*) in the evening around a few fires. Indeed, the Western Desert is one of the harshest environments ever inhabited by human beings before the industrial revolution (Gould 1969). The unpredictability of the amount and location of rainfall is one of the reasons for the rather specific social and territorial organisation, including low demographic densities and shared access to and responsibilities for sites and areas in the landscape.

Meggitt (1986 [1962]: 32) estimated a demographic density of one person per 35 square kilometres among the Warlpiri in the Central Desert, north-west of Alice Springs, a region already well known for its sparse resources compared to, say, Arnhem Land or Cape York. Long (1971) indicates a density of one person per 200 square kilometres in the Western Desert in general. Cane (1990:151) calculates for an area in the Great Sandy Desert a density of one person per 170 square kilometres. Compare these figures to one person per 200 square kilometres for the Ngaatjatjarra.

Catherine and Ronald Berndt (1992 [1964]: 26 and Berndt 1959: 86) described the Western Desert as covering some 670,000 square kilometres, with a population of 3,200 persons in the 1960s (about one person per 200 square kilometres). Their estimate for the time immediately prior to the establishment of settlements and missions on the fringes of the desert is about five times higher. However, this figure seems highly improbable since food would have been scarce during droughts, a regular occurrence given the very low population density. Hence, accepting a mean Western Desert population density of one person per 140 square kilometres, a compromise estimate between the harsher areas in the centre and the slightly more abundant areas on the desert fringes, we can estimate a total population for the Western Desert of about 4,800 persons.

Another interesting figure is the mean distance between family groups. Among the Ngaatjatjarra, a camp, composed of one to two nuclear families, was situated on average about 50 kilometres away from the next camp. This number sheds some light on the territorial and social organisation of Western Desert people, providing an image of rather small groups scattered throughout the desert and travelling from water place to hunting grounds and important

religious sites for which they had the responsibility of carrying out the necessary ceremonies. Strictly delimited land ownership with tribal boundaries, such as other Aboriginal societies apply, especially in the more abundant parts of the continent, would have been a difficult and even a dangerous strategy to sustain. The unpredictability of rainfall and solidarity and mutual access to resources between families was bound to have had an influence on the formal aspects of landownership, which is here not defined in terms of boundaries and exclusive ownership but of shared responsibility and privileged though not exclusive access. It was and is possible for members of a family group to have ownership of and responsibility for sites that were or are outside the area through which they would usually travel and forage.

I use the word 'responsibility' rather than 'ownership' with respect to land and I believe the former word is more accurate for the Western Desert case. The idea of ownership involves the right to exclude others from accessing resources (Barnard and Woodburn 1988: 13-14). This is not the value underpinning Western Desert culture, in which the maximisation of inclusion rather than exclusion is a dominant value, reinforced by the nature of the kinship system (Tonkinson & Tonkinson 2010), as we will see below. Responsibility for land and sites is an idea that directly stems from Aboriginal religion.

Australian religious systems are termed in English, and today by many Aboriginal peoples themselves, the 'Dreaming', a word originally forged by Francis J. Gillen who accompanied Baldwin Spencer during his scientific journeys among the Aranda (Arrernte) people in the Central Desert at the end of the 19th century. The 'Dreaming', or Tjukurrpa as it is commonly called in the Western Desert, has various important parallel meanings, even though the definitions are not identical for all Australian societies. Firstly, it is the time in which everything, including people and society, was created. Secondly, it also names the creative beings or mythical heroes of that momentous time, who created and shaped the landscape through their journeys on, above and below the surface of the earth and waters. These journeys are enacted by people through rituals, dances, songs and paintings. Thirdly, it is also used to denote the 'Law', as Western Desert people term it in English. It defines the code of conduct: how people should behave, what they should do and, conversely, what is not appropriate or is forbidden. Fourthly, Tjukurrpa also means the enactment of the law in the present. Tjukurrpa has no definite beginning or end; it is not only about ancestral times but is always here and present, always relevant to human affairs. The esteemed Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner (1979: 24) captured this idea perfectly with the expression 'the everywhen': something that is everywhere and eternal.

In the Western Desert, another concept closely linked to the Tjukurrpa is Mularrpa, which denotes reality as immediately recognisable by humans, the here and now, the tangible. Tjukurrpa and Mularrpa are complementary; they are two sides of the same coin. While Tjukurrpa defines the essence of things, of all that exists, Mularrpa represents the existence of what Tjukurrpa has defined: the things themselves and the enactment of the Tjukurrpa. Both worlds interact with permanence and intimacy; both are necessary and fundamental. Humans share a responsibility to care for the landforms and places created and defined during the Tjukurrpa. If they neglect these responsibilities, people believe that the worlds of both Tjukurrpa and Mularrpa are endangered.

An important aspect of Western Desert land tenure and territorial organisation is that responsibility to care for sites is, strictly speaking, not inherited but must be acquired through the demonstration of shared cultural values and behaviours. Responsibility over land is thus expressed in the form of an accumulation of criteria that legitimate the privilege or right to speak for a specific site or area. The place where a person was thought to have been conceived or born, where their umbilical cord dried and fell off, where he or she lived for extended periods of time, are just as important as all the sites with which a person's parents and grandparents are affiliated.

Coming into being

One important criterion establishing an unalienable link between a person and a site in space is birth. Not so long ago, until the 1970s and 1980s, expectant mothers withdrew from the group, accompanied by other women, to give birth to their babies. The link to birthplace, *ngurrara*, as well as to the place where the umbilical cord falls off when it dries, called *ngurra nyuntjinatja*, is strongly felt. *Ngurra* generally means 'home' or 'homeland', and when the suffix *-ra* ('coming from') is added, such as in *ngurrara*, it means the 'place of origin'. *Nyuntjin(pa)* is the umbilical cord but also the centre of the circular and central ceremonial design (see also Hansen and Hansen 1992: 94). Most babies are now born in hospitals, with the result that many children have identical birthplaces. In many cases, the community in which the pregnant mother lived just before giving birth is today considered to be the child's homeland.

People have rights to visit and the duty to look after their birthplace as well as the place where their umbilical cord fell off. They are bound to these sites through a personal relationship. Birth, however, is not the starting point of a person's existence. Indeed, the site and event of conception that prefigures life establish the individual as part of a network of people and places.

What is conception? Western Desert people believe that every person is the outgrowth of a spirit-child. These spirit-children, called *tjijikarrkalypa* by the Mardu speakers on the western side of the desert (Tonkinson 1991:79), were left behind by the Dreaming beings, they are everywhere, waiting to embody themselves first in an animal, or less frequently a plant, and then to enter the body of their mother as a tiny humanoid being. Once in the womb, they will soon be born as a human being (Tonkinson 1978). Ngaatjatjarra people of the central Western Desert talk of this phase of their existence using the expression *parkangka ngaralanta* ('when I was sitting among the leaves of a tree'). All spirit-children came from the original creative beings of the Tjukurrpa. The Mularrpa form in which the spirit-child appears before entering the body of the mother thus provides some understanding about which mythical being is intended to become the baby's conception totem, called *tjuma* among the Ngaatjatjarra (*nyuka* among the Mardu). This totem is itself again linked to particular sites in space for which the person-to-be will have particular responsibilities; it is their *tjuma ngurra*, their 'totem place'.

While every person derives from a spirit-substance, and is directly linked to a being of the Tjukurrpa, it may not be immediately obvious to the parents which spirit-child has entered

the mother. Once a woman realises she is pregnant, she and her partner need to be able to recall unusual recent events or behaviour by elements of the natural world. They need to identify the event and place where conception occurred, where the spirit-child is believed to have entered the mother's body. In this way, they can identify the *tjuma* of their child.

Spirit-children always communicate, in one form or another, their intention to enter their chosen mother, so human beings must listen to and understand such communication. These messages are quite diverse: for example, strange encounters with animals, feeling ill after eating an animal or plant, or a dream. Below I give two examples of such encounters as reported to me. Note, to further illustrate the examples, that the word *tjuma* means birthmark as well as totem.

A woman was walking with her son among mulga (acacia) trees when she encountered an echidna, an animal similar to a porcupine. She attempted to turn the animal over onto its back, so as to pick it up, kill and cook it. After many unsuccessful attempts, she grabbed a bigger stick and tried even harder and with more force, but the animal resisted, displaying unusual strength. She pushed and pushed with the stick on the back of the animal and finally succeeded in turning it over and picking it up. She fully understood that this was an unusual encounter, and that it could indicate her pregnancy. This was later confirmed since her second son was born with a birthmark on his back, exactly there where his mother had pushed the animal with the stick.

A man, known to be a skilled hunter who never missed his quarry, often brought home kangaroos that he had shot with his rifle and shared them with his family and parents-in-law. One day, however, he encountered a kangaroo that he was sure his shot had killed. However, the fallen animal suddenly stood up again, stared at him, and then hopped away. Surprised, he ran after the animal on a long pursuit, which eventually tired him. Suddenly, the kangaroo stopped, turned to face him and then stood firm, as if offering his chest to the hunter. The man aimed his gun and shot the kangaroo through its heart. His son, born a few months later, had a birthmark on his chest, right over his heart, and everybody understood that the kangaroo was the boy's conception totem.

Because a spirit-child has always been left behind by a Tjukurrpa being, the myth of this being and all the places, not just the conception site, visited by the being during the Tjukurrpa become significant elements of a person's relationship with the landscape.

Birth and conception-place are the most important criteria establishing a strong bond between a person and a place. But they are accumulative with other criteria, such as the parents' and grandparents' birthplaces or the place where a person spent most of their life. Moreover, marriage may also play a role in the distribution of privileges of access to sites, as we shall see in other chapters. The more criteria a person accumulates for a specific place or region, the stronger is his or her claim to privilege over this site and the more compulsory are his or her responsibilities for looking after it, such as cleaning the site, organising the ceremonies linked to it etc.

The absence of strict territorial boundaries in the Western Desert may at first glance appear as a lack of a tangible territorial organisation. It is certainly true that the type of organisation prevalent in this region of the continent is not defined by non-negotiable boundaries but by way of dynamic mechanisms of affiliation to particular religiously important sites that allow for flexibility if needed. A boundary-based territorial organisation, in which land is divided up into clearly demarcated stretches owned exclusively by identifiable people or groups of people, would be difficult to imagine in this area. It was and is important to develop solidarity with regard to responsibility and to allow mutual rights of access when drought may drive people out of their own territories. In this harsh and unpredictable environment, the sparseness and unpredictability of rainfall encouraged inclusive rather than exclusive cultural adaptations. The central question is not 'are there exclusive rights to access and use a site or region?', but 'who has more rights and responsibilities than others to do certain things in certain places?' Allowing access to sites to people, even if they cannot always demonstrate strong connections, results in an expectation that the host group can expect to exercise the same rights. This type of non-exclusive territorial organisation ensures that families and groups throughout the desert have rights of mutual access and reciprocity.

Nescience

Some have argued that the belief in spirit-children's entry into their mother in order to produce human beings is an example of *nescience*. Nescience is the lack of knowledge or awareness; in this case it concerns the reproductive mechanisms of human beings. According to early writers such as Frazer (1898), Malinowski (1937) and Ashley-Montagu (1937 and 1960), Aboriginal people allegedly did not know that sexual intercourse is necessary to produce children, and so they explain human reproduction through ideas about spirit-children and totemic as-

sociations between people and the things of nature.

Others, like Lang (1905) and Roheim (1938), considered that totemic and spirit-children explanations are simply another level in the description of coming into being and that Aborigines consider that physical intercourse is not sufficient to explain all that happens (see Merlan 1986 for an overview of the literature). Godelier (2004) shows that in most, if not all, human societies, elements other than sexual intercourse are believed to be relevant to procreation.

A historical perspective

You now know that the Western Desert region is characterised by widely shared symbols and world views, such as the concept of Tjukurrpa and explanations of coming into being, as well as by similar principles governing affiliation to both land and territorial organisation. The most explicit similarity, however, lies in their common language: all groups of the Western Desert speak different dialects of a common, shared language, so they should be labelled 'dialectal groups' rather than 'tribes'.

Because of the homogeneity of the Western Desert language, the similarity between the dialects spoken, linguists such as McConvell (1996) have argued that expansion of the language in the Western Desert is relatively recent, about 1000 to 2000 years ago. This of course does not mean that human beings did not previously occupy the Western Desert. Indeed, archaeologists have suggested that the Western Desert region has been inhabited for 22,000 to 25,000 years at least (Flood 1995:102-4 and Veth 2000), though possibly not continuously. Archaeological sites such as Allen's Cave, on the southern fringes of the Western Desert, have been dated to at least 40,000 years ago. What may have happened is that, about 2000 years ago, either the language spoken by people inhabiting the Western Desert was replaced by a new language, or other people, speaking a different language, moved into the Western Desert and amalgamated with the local population.

The linguistic unity of the Western Desert can be partly explained in ecological terms. After a phase of climatic amelioration and the occupation of marginal and ecologically difficult areas between 5,000 to 1,500 years ago, the people occupying the Western Desert established regional exchange and information networks (Veth 2000: 15). During this period the Western Desert language would have expanded into and across the desert. The establishment of vast networks over large areas between groups and families can take place in very difficult periods as well as in times of abundance. During droughts, people rely on both cultural conventions and their connections with other groups and families to maintain access to territories that have been favoured by some rainfall. During good periods, such as after heavy rains, people are able to meet up with visitors and neighbouring groups and then remain together for longer periods when food resources remain plentiful. These networks encourage people to intensify feelings of friendship and mutual solidarity. They exchange religious and ritual knowledge. They intermarry and thus increase the strength and efficacy of the network even further.

Human occupation in the Western Desert spans a history of at least 25,000 years. With the spread of Europeans to the far reaches of the globe, however, most hunter-gatherers abandoned their traditional mode of subsistence in the wake of colonisation, settlement policies, loss of traditional lands and the adoption of new cultural elements. A change in mode of subsistence does not though lead inevitably to a systematic change in all other cultural features. In the Western Desert, as elsewhere in Australia, hunting and gathering are no longer the dominant subsistence strategy and people today rely heavily on com-

mercially acquired food and other goods, even though they still go on regular hunting and foraging trips. Nevertheless, in varying degrees, Australia's indigenous cultures still reflect 'traditional' elements of kinship, language and culture. This is particularly true in what is often called 'remote Australia', in the interior and north of the continent and particularly in the vast and sparsely populated Western Desert.

Culture, the ways of thinking, acting and feeling shared by a group of people, is essentially dynamic, with change of some kind as a constant. Change however is not the opposite of continuity or tradition. Many Western pioneers and government officials believed in the early days that the adoption of elements of European material culture would cause indigenous culture to disappear. These same people would today be surprised to observe the continuing strength of commitment to elements of Aboriginal culture and to realise that this culture is flexible and able to readily accept and integrate certain foreign elements while resisting others. The above-mentioned case of the discovery of a child's totem is a good example. The man concerned was hunting with a gun, which in the eyes of some ill-informed observers would have been seen as non-traditional and somehow inappropriate. But this man recognised the kangaroo as communicating through spiritual means and as involved in the process of human procreation. This clearly has little to do with any European belief system. Using a gun, driving a four-wheel-drive, even speaking English, should not be taken to mean that these Aboriginal people have 'lost their culture'.

Obviously, contact between radically different societies, such as hunter-gatherers and capitalists, leads to more rapid and often painful change than in cases of sustained exchange between people following the same mode of adaptation. This difference is not solely a result of the huge contrast between these different adaptations and systems of production; it is also because of very different symbolic systems and world views which attribute different values and meanings to different things.

Where Europeans successfully colonised new land, cattle were in most cases the driving factor. The Western Desert of Australia, however, is so arid and difficult for survival that it was not invaded by Europeans; the few early explorers who did manage to survive their ordeal warned loudly against its aridity and lack of water supplies. Many parts of the area did not therefore experience direct, sustained contact with Western missions and authorities until the 1920s at the earliest. Hermannsburg Mission, on the eastern limit of the desert, had been established long before, in 1877, just a year after Ernest Giles, the explorer, became the first European to cross the Western Desert. However, Mt. Margaret Mission, in the western part of the desert, was established by the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) only in 1921, Jigalong in 1946, Balgo Mission in 1939 and Warburton Mission, in the very heart of the Western Desert, in 1934. Cundeelee was founded as a ration depot in 1939 but became a mission in the 1950s. Missionaries were the first to surround and then penetrate the desert in just 25 years, from the 1920s onward (Central Reserves Committee 1965; Stanton 1979; Harris, 1994).

Soon after, from the late 1940s onwards, Australian authorities made their appearance in the region with the Weapons Research Establishment (WRE) in Maralinga (Victoria Desert) and later with a meteorological and radar station at Giles in the Rawlinson Ranges,

Gibson Desert. The WRE would become responsible for making the last 'first contacts' with indigenous peoples in the area. From 1952 onwards, the WRE aimed to test atomic explosions and later fired ballistic rockets across the entire Western Desert. These military experiments were the reasons for the grading of tracks throughout the desert and for the meteorological station in the Rawlinsons in 1956. Indeed, the control of the rockets was difficult and their trajectories somewhat unpredictable, but most crashed in the Great Sandy Desert. The presence of Giles meant that government officials, such as patrol officers, would visit and establish themselves in the Western Desert. The existence of graded tracks facilitated the transport of many nomadic families to missions and settlements, such as Haasts Bluff and Papunya in the Northern Territory and Warburton Mission in Western Australia, but not at Giles, since patrol officers were instructed to keep everyone other than WRE staff away from there (see Dousset 2002 and 2011).

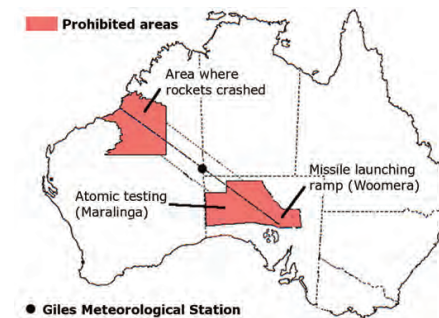


Figure 4: Map of the areas of the Weapons Research Establishment's activities

Simultaneously, certain areas in the Western Desert were declared 'native' or 'natural' reserves. In the Northern Territory, the Petermann reserve was established in 1920, the Haast Bluff reserve in 1940 and the lake Mackay reserve in 1957. In South Australia, the North-West reserve was created in 1921. In Western Australia, the Central reserve was established in 1918 and expanded in 1934 to include Warburton. Another expansion occurred in 1958 to the north of the existing reserved area. Later, Balgo (Balwina), Kiwirrkurra and the North Central Reserves were added. Reserve n° 17614 in the Western Australian part of the Victoria Desert, what is called Spinifex Country, was declared in 1920 even though no Westerner had visited the area by this time. The general understanding was that these reserves should preserve what officials believed to be a vanishing indigenous culture until the means to assimilate the remaining people into Australian society in general were arranged.

Western Desert people reacted to these intrusions over time by moving, group by group, from their desert heartlands to various missions and ration depots. In 1976, a meeting of the Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra peoples resulted in the creation of the Pitjantjatjara Council Incorporated, whose task was primarily to fight for Aboriginal land rights (see Toyne and Vachon 1984). Because Aboriginal lands lay within three different European domains — two states, Western Australia and South Australia, and the Northern Territory, administered by Canberra — the council was advised to prepare three more or less independent land claims. The claimed area in the Northern Territory was successfully handed back within the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act (NT)* of 1976, which was the first legal framework recognising Aboriginal people as traditional landowners but limited to the Northern Territory. Claims in South Australia were recognised with the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act (SA)* of 1981, which is similar to the Northern Territory Land Rights Act but is limited to the state of South Australia. In the State of Western Australia, on the other hand, gaining control over land took much longer. Only recently has the State agreed to meet with the Ngaanyatjarra council to discuss and consent to the restitution of the last part of the old Central Reserves. In 2000, the southern part was handed back to the Spinifex people (Cane 2002), in 2001 the northern part was returned to the Kiwirrkurra people and finally, in 2005, the remaining central areas were handed back to the traditional owners under the name *Ngaanyatjarra lands*, including Warburton and Giles.

Language, the unifying criterion

Western Desert people are represented by various local indigenous organisations, even though the Ngaanyatjarra Council has recently become the recognised representative body for a large section of the area in Native Title matters. The *Native Title Act* of 1992 is a legal framework that recognises indigenous peoples as being the first landowners of the continent. In contrast with the Land Rights Act mentioned above, the Native Title Act is a federal law and has thus continent-wide validity. These regional organisations are often the consequence of and response to local conditions and national or state policies, and they do not always systematically express distinguishable ethnic identities of groups and families. Despite these political organisations, the establishment of distinct communities and, in some cases, conflicting relationships between groups and families, the homogeneity in culture that all the Western Desert recognises is a major unifying factor.

A dialect is a regional variety of a language and several such varieties are considered dialects of the same language if they are sufficiently similar to each other. Most if not all dialects in the Western Desert are mutually intelligible and most Western Desert people speak at least two dialects. The regional linguistic varieties of the Western Desert constitute a dialect chain. Linguistic aspects of a culture are particularly important in kinship studies since it is through words and their meaning that people express and describe their relationships. We thus need to discuss some aspects of linguistic similarities and differences across the region.

The Western Desert language does not have any indigenous name but is called the Wati language by linguists. This name was chosen because in many of the dialects, the word

wati designates an initiated, adult man. In most dialects only since in Jigalong, for example, among the Mardu, the word is *martu* and in the Kalgoorlie and the Mount Margaret area, the word is *puntu* (see Douglas 1977: 3). Note that the Wati language is itself not spoken as such, only dialects are in use. Wati is thus a reconstructed language.

The Wati language shows some grammatical and morphological similarities with other languages around the Western Desert and linguists group them into sub-groups, groups and families of languages. The general group in which Wati is included is called Nyungic. The latter is close enough to other similar groups to include them in a family of languages which is called Pama-Nyungan, covering about two thirds of the continent. All languages of the Pama-Nyungan family have similar features and can be traced back to a common origin. Languages within this family, and even within the Nyungic group, are not mutually intelligible: speakers of one Pama-Nyungan language do not understand speakers of another Pama-Nyungan language unless they have learned that particular language.

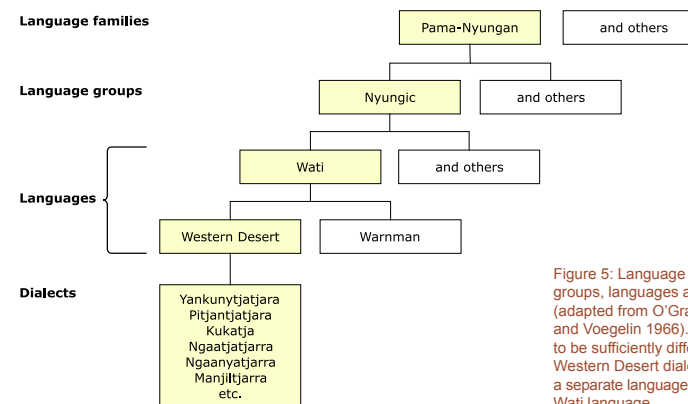


Figure 5: Language family, language groups, languages and dialects (adapted from O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin 1966). Warnman seems to be sufficiently different from Western Desert dialects to justify it as a separate language within the general Wati language.

The Wati or Western Desert language contains some 40 and more dialects, including Ngaatjatjarra, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Manytjilytjarra, Kukatja, Luritja, Pintupi, Yulparitja and Kiyatjarra. The differences between these dialects are sometimes very minor, as is the case between Pitjantjatjara and Ngaatjatjarra. Others, however, have a significant number of divergent words and expressions, like Pitjantjatjara and the various

dialects spoken by the Martu in the Jigalong area, although these various dialects are mutually intelligible. To illustrate such differences, the table below reproduces a word as pronounced in several areas (Douglas 1977:3).

Region	word for 'this/that'
Ooldea to Ernabella	<i>nyangatja</i>
Cundeelee to Mount Margaret	<i>nyanganya</i>
Warburton region to Jigalong	<i>ngaanya</i>
East of Warburton to the Rawlinson Ranges	<i>ngaatja</i>

Another example: Pitjantjatjara-speaking people say *pitjantja* for 'went', such as in 'he went away', while Yankunytjatjara-speaking people say *yankuntja*. Note that the words I have used to show the differences between dialects are also those used to label the dialects themselves. For example, Ngaanyatjarra, the name of the dialectal group in the Warburton area, is composed of *ngaanya*, meaning 'this', and the suffix *-tjarra*, meaning 'with'. The name of the Ngaanyatjarra dialectal group can therefore be translated as 'the people who say *ngaanya* for this'. The same is valid for Ngaatjatjarra or Nyangatjatjarra. Dialectal names hence express idiosyncrasies⁵ between groups from certain viewpoints but may be irrelevant from others. The Ngaatjatjarra and the Ngaanyatjarra are neighbours and distinguish themselves through the use of *ngaatja* and *ngaanya* respectively. However, the Pitjantjatjara and the Ngaatjatjarra are also neighbours, and the idiosyncrasies of the two of them are not able to distinguish these groups since both use *ngaatja* for 'this' and *pitjantja* for 'went'.

West	Ngaanyatjarra	Ngaatjatjarra	Pitjantjatjara	Yankunytjatjara	East
this	<i>ngaanya</i>	<i>ngaatja</i>	<i>ngaatja</i>	<i>ngaatja</i>	
went	<i>pitjantja</i>	<i>pitjantja</i>	<i>pitjantja</i>	<i>yankuntja</i>	

5. An 'idiosyncrasy' is not simply a difference, but is a characteristic that defines something.

We will see that it is necessary to consider dialectal distinctions in the study of kinship. Some words used to express kin relationships differ from one region to another while other words are identical but do not have the same meaning and do not denote the same persons. Regional variations in the use of kinship terms are an interesting and important aspect of this type of study because they express regional and local differences and similarities in modes of recognising relatedness. I devote a larger chapter to this subject later in the book.

Indigenous peoples of the Western Desert say that language was put onto country by the Tjukurrpa beings and that dialects are therefore linked to specific areas and not necessarily to people themselves (see Hamilton 1982 and Rumsey 1989). Because these dialects are localised, there has been some discussion among anthropologists on whether they also constitute **tribes**.

Definitions of the notion of 'tribe' abound in anthropological literature. Generally speaking, a tribe is seen as a group of persons who are politically independent, unless they are controlled by a nation-state, occupy a delimited tract of land (the tribal territory), share a common language or dialect, recognise a common bond or relationship and a common name, usually marry among themselves (endogamy) and perform ceremonies that are different from those of other tribes (see for example Elkin 1967 [1954]; Howitt 1996 [1904]: 41; Tindale 1974: 33; Berndt 1959; Godelier 1973: 188; Sahlin 1961: 325 and Fried 1975). As Berndt (1959) shows, almost none of these criteria apply to Western Desert dialectal groups. While dialects are associated with regions and places, people move from one dialectal area to another. Moreover, because people know how to speak different dialects and sometimes even different languages, they use the speech (*wangka*) associated with the area in which they are located.

It would be a mistake to speak of tribal territory, as I have already pointed out. Residential groups, consisting of one or more nuclear families, young men's camps and widows' and widowers' camps, living and foraging in a certain area and performing ceremonies as defined by the Tjukurrpa on this land, usually satisfy a certain number of criteria giving them privileged access to these particular sites. Nowhere, however, is this access exclusive and non-negotiable. These families or groups can be considered to be the principal landholding or landowning units, but they are not endogamous and rarely speak only one dialect; nor would they systematically attempt to exclude others from coming into their area.

Every Western Desert group performs ceremonies that may in some respects differ from the ceremonies of neighbouring groups. However, these ceremonies are inscribed in a pan-regional and even pan-Western Desert complex of religious and ceremonial structures and to interpret these local differences as 'tribal' markers would be an unsustainable overstatement. It would also neglect the profound ritual solidarity and interdependence between desert groups, one recognised by anthropologists long ago (for example Elkin 1967: 214; Testart 1987: 180-1).

► **Tribes:** The concept of the tribe has been much debated in anthropology and there are probably as many definitions as there are anthropologists. Generally speaking, a tribe can be understood as a group of people who occupy a specific territory, who marry predominantly among themselves, who speak a particular language or dialect, who recognise themselves as a political unit, and who express a feeling of shared belonging and ways of acting and thinking.

Western Desert people perform a type of ritual that anthropologists call ‘increase ceremonies’. These rituals are necessary to ensure the procreation and existence of natural species of fauna and flora. They ensure that Tjukurrpa and Mularrpa are still coherent and in communication with each other. Every site in which these rituals are performed is associated with one specific natural species, but not every region contains a site for every natural species necessitating increase ceremonies. Hence, every residential group depends on the ‘good performance’ of similar rituals in other regions. If one region, let us call it A, contains an increase site for kangaroo increase ceremonies and region B has a site for bush tomatoes, the group living in region A performs the kangaroo ritual to ‘bring up’ lots of kangaroos for the wider region, including region B. And the group living in region B will do the same for tomatoes from its site. This is another example of wider unities and inter-dependencies across the entire Western Desert.

There is another reason why dialectal groups cannot be considered ‘tribes’: people do not consider themselves significantly different from members of neighbouring dialectal groups. They stress unity and describe the Western Desert as being populated by ‘one people’. There are local differences and it would be a mistake to overstress the harmonious coexistence of all constituent families and groups. Yet regional affiliations and distinctions do not diminish the feelings of relatedness explicitly expressed by Western Desert people.

Western Desert dialects

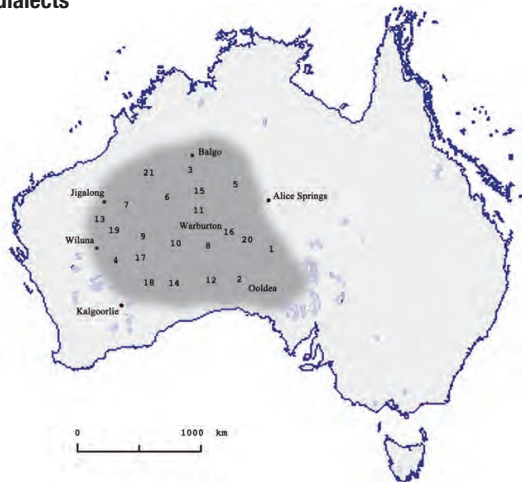


Figure 6: Map of approximate location of dialectal groups in the Western Desert; the table below summarises dialectal appellations

Below I list these various dialectal groups. Figure 6 only shows the approximate locations of these dialects. Also note that the names vary according to the speaker and the recorder. The table below reproduces these dialectal names, including some spellings and alternative names found in the literature on the Western Desert. These alternative names are not necessarily correct and may not even be recognised by the people themselves. However, since they are found in the literature, they have been appended here as additional information in case the reader is searching for publications related to these groups.

	Dialectal names used	EAA	AIATSIS
1.	Antakarinja, Antakerinya, Unterreggerie	Antakarinja	C.05
2.	Kokatha, Kokata, Kukatha, Kukata, Cocotha, Kookata, Marduwonga, Kukataja	Kokatha	C.03
3.	Kukatja, Kokatja, Nambulatji, Gogadja, Gugudja	Kukatja	A.68
4.	Kuwarra, Koara, Goara, Kuwara Guwara, Konindja	Kuwarra	A.16
5.	Luritja, Kukatja – Loritja, Kukadja, Kukacha, Gugadja, Gugada, Loritja, Loritja, Aluridja	Luritja	A.68
6.	Manytjilytjara, Manjiljara, Mandjiltjara	Mardu	A.33
7.	Mardu, comprising several dialects: - Potidjara, Potitjara, Putitjara, Budidjara, Partutu - Keiadjara, Keiatara, Kiyajara - Kartudjara, Katudjara, Kardudjara, Gadudjara, Kartujarra	Mardu	A.25 A.51
8.	Wanudjara, Nakako, Nakaku, Nangako, Nangakopitja	Nakako	A.32
9.	Nana, Pini, Piniiri, Piniiridjara, Biniridjara, Madutjara, Birni, Buranudjara, Nangaritjara	Nana	A.25
10.	Ngaanyatjarra, Nganadjara, Nona, Nganawanga	Ngaanyatjarra	A.37
11.	Ngaatjatjarra, Ngadadjara, Ngada, Warara	Ngatatjara	A.43
12.	(Spinifex People), Ngalea, Ngalia, Ngaliawongga, Wirangu, Wirrongu, Wirrung, Wirangga, Tidni	Ngalea Wirangu	C.01

	Dialectal names used	EAA	AIATSIS
13.	Ngarlawangka, Ngalawongga, Ninanu, Ngaunmardi, Yinhawangka, Inawongga, Inawangga	Ngarlawangka Yinhawangka	A.48
14.	Nyanganyatjara, Murumidja, Nangadadjara - Murunitja, Murnidja, Mara, Nangatadjara, Kogara - Nangatadjara, Nanggatha, Nangandjara, Wangata	Nyanganyatjara	A.o8 A.17
15.	Pintupi, Pintubi, Bindubi, Pindu, Pindubu, Kalgonei, Loritja, Luridja, Luritja	Pintupi	C.10
16.	Pitjantjatjara, Pitjandjara, Pitjandjadjara, Bidjandjara, Wongapitjira, Wongapitja Pitjintjitjira, Pitkindjara	Pitjantjatjara	C.o6
17.	Tjalkanti, Dialgandi, Tjalkadjara, Talkumara, Tjalkakari, Wordako, Tjalkani, (Erlistoun tribe)	Tjalkanti	A.26
18.	Wangkathaa, Wanggatha, comprising various dialects: - Ngurlu, Nata, Ngulutjara, Nguludjara, Kurutjara, - Tjeraridjal - Walyan, Waljen, Waula, Wangkai, Koara - Maduwongga, Jindi, Yindi, Maduwonga, Wangkatja	Wangkathaa	A.10 A.12 A.11 A.o6
19.	Wawula (Wawula), comprising various dialects: - Wardal, Tjitijamba, Waula, Wajariy, Tjitijamba - Wirdinja, Wirdinya, Woordinya, Jabura	Wawula	A.29 A.49
20.	Yankunytjatjara, Jangkundjara, Jangkundjadjara, Jangundjara, (Everard Range Tribe), Alinjera	Yankuntjatjara	C.o4
21.	Yulparitja, Yulbaridya, Julbaritja, Njangadjara	Yulparitja	A.67

EAA: the name according to Horton (1994) in his *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* published by the AIATSIS.

AIATSIS: language/dialect code as used by the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* in Canberra.

In the sound system of the Western Desert language, stress on the differences of some sounds is not identical to that of English. For example, the distinction between ‘d’ and ‘t’ or between ‘g’ and ‘k’ is not relevant even though they may distinguish eastern dialects, which have ‘softer’ sounds using ‘d’ and ‘g’, from western dialects, which use ‘harder’ sounds such as ‘t’ and ‘k’. For example, the dialectal name ‘Ngaatjatjarra’ can be pronounced

‘Ngaadadjara’ and would still be recognised as being the same word. The distinction of the two words ‘town’ and ‘down’ or ‘bag’ and ‘back’ is significant in English but is not so in the Western Desert and is therefore difficult to hear for indigenous peoples of this area.

On the other hand, Western Desert dialects use sounds that are not distinguished in English, and are therefore difficult to hear and pronounce for a native English speaker. Below is a table summarising some of the particularities of the Western Desert language. You may, however, want to consult *An Introduction to Western Desert Language* by Douglas (1977) or the *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary* by Goddard (1992) for more information on spelling.

To transcribe the sounds of languages, linguists use a phonetic alphabet. Only those sounds that are non-existent in English or difficult to pronounce have been reproduced here. The first column represents how these sounds are usually written by linguists and anthropologists. Retroflex sounds are difficult to pronounce for English speakers. The retroflex ‘l’, for example, written ‘rl’, is an ‘l’ with the tongue tip turned backwards and touching the palate. One should be especially careful with the following sounds.

Written	Sound type	Pronunciation
rt (or ɽ)	retroflex plosive	no equivalent in English.
rn (or ɳ)	retroflex nasal	no equivalent in English.
rl (or ɭ)	retroflex lateral	no equivalent in English.
r (or ɾ)	retroflex flap	no equivalent in English.
rr	alveolar trill	rolled ‘r’ as the Scottish ‘r’
ny	nasal palatal	similar to ‘ny’ in canyon
tj	palatal affricate plosive	similar to ‘j’ in jam
ng	velar nasal	similar to ‘ng’ in sing

In this work I will consistently use the first version of the first column above throughout. Hence, the retroflex plosive on the first line is written ‘rt’. If you encounter ‘rt’ in a word, you should understand that it represents a single sound: a retroflex ‘t’.

Written	Pronounced as in	and not as in
a	After	Angel
i	Radio	Iron
u	Put	Under

Summary and conclusion of Part One

In this chapter, I have discussed some issues relevant to Aboriginal Australia in general and to the Western Desert region in particular. Since many examples and discussions in this book are drawn from Western Desert materials, it was necessary to set the stage for what will follow. It was also necessary to briefly discuss the complex notion of culture itself, which was originally a Western concept constructed around two contexts. Firstly, it has evolved from an agricultural to an educational and religious meaning, finally signifying the ways of thought and action of a people, the web of symbols in which people are enmeshed. Secondly, culture is distinguished from nature, but this is not always a clear distinction since many features and relationships cannot be placed unambiguously into one or the other register. I also stressed that these two contexts of the understanding of 'culture' had important consequences for how Aboriginal societies were interpreted within the colonial framework.

I then used ethnographic material to elaborate on the basic characteristics employed to define hunter-gatherer societies in general and thus Aboriginal societies in particular. Major features of these societies include hunting and foraging, the absence of food storage and plant domestication, a markedly egalitarian world view but with men's interests typically favoured above those of women, a gender-based division of labour, a nomadic adaptation, low population densities, and kinship as vital to the regulation of everyday social relationships. It should, however, be clear by now that most of these characteristics are not absolutes, so in many cases they need to be modified in particular circumstances.

One such case was discussed in the following section, concerning the Ngaatjatjara dialectal group. Forms of nomadism were explained as adaptations to environmental and ecological conditions, and this led to a discussion of concepts of ownership and responsibility in relation to land. It was stressed that, given the accumulative way of defining responsibility over land, it was not reasonable to use expressions such as 'ownership' since this word typically entails the possibility that people could exclude others from gaining access to resources. Instead, the ethos of inclusiveness has been stressed as a dominant feature of Western Desert world views. In discussing the various criteria used to justify responsibility over land, special stress was placed on 'conception totemism', an institution in which the triangular relationship between a person, mythical ancestors and sites in the landscape is made explicit.

Having defined the Western Desert as a 'cultural bloc', discussion then turned to pre- and post-contact history in the region and stressed how recent confrontation with the invading Europeans has been. Language was then shown to be one of the most unifying features in the cultural bloc. Despite great linguistic similarities, desert people underline significant local particularities and differences at the same time as they affirm the unity of the Western Desert as 'one family'; yet the two elements are not contradictory.

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Part Two
Some basic concepts of kinship

This chapter will present and discuss the basic concepts and tools used and needed to understand kinship in any culture, not just in Australian Aboriginal societies. However, we will be careful to regularly use Australian examples and progressively lead the reader to Chapter Three, which will present in a more particularistic way the system in use in the Western Desert and elsewhere in Australia.

What is kinship?

Kinship and marriage are about the basic facts of life. They are about 'birth, and conception, and death', the eternal round that seemed to depress the poet but which excites, among others, the anthropologist. [...]

Man is an animal, but he puts the basic facts of life to work for himself in ways that no other animal does or can (Fox, 1996 [1967]: 27).

Everybody has some understanding of what kinship is. The most common conception, at least among European people, is that of a person who is born into a family, with parents who are married or live together as a couple, grows up and marries a person and will have children and grandchildren. The situation may, however, become blurred and complicated when scholars attempt to define the notion of kinship and to describe its characteristics and implications for other social domains.

We can approach kinship by dividing this large concept into several sub-domains (terminology, descent, marriage and relatedness), which themselves reflect the evolution of the discipline of anthropology and the ways in which social scientists have attempted to analyse elements of kinship. Each academic school tends to stress different ethnographic realities and theoretical conclusions, but over time all have in some way helped us to understand better what kinship is and does.

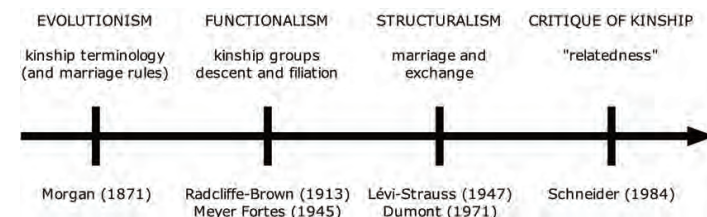


Figure 7: Schematic view of the domains of kinship and the evolution of anthropology

The first domain studied was kinship **terminology** which became prominent after Morgan had put forward his evolutionary theory. Every language has a set of specific words that belong to the domain of kinship. In English, these are ‘mother’, ‘mum’, ‘father’, ‘dad’, ‘son’ and so on. Each term describes and reflects a particular relationship: a mother is usually the person who gave birth to the speaker; the father is typically the husband of the speaker’s mother and so on. The words themselves, the persons referred to via these words and the underlying or overarching definitions that accompany these words constitute what is called a ‘kinship terminology’.

Unilineal evolution

Lewis Henry Morgan published two major books. The first was *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871), to which we will return later since he defined in this work an important typology of terminological systems. The second was *Ancient Society* (1877). It is in this second book that he expounded his theory of unilineal evolution. While he was not the only intellectual to put forward such a theory (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Edward B. Tylor, Auguste Comte or Herbert Spencer are some of the other scholars who advocated such a theory), he was one of the major representatives of this movement. In this work, he attempted to link kinship systems with economic, technological and political structure and endeavoured to demonstrate that the various forms of societies, for which we have records from the past and which we observe in the present, each represent a particular step in the evolution of social forms. According to Morgan, human society evolves through three such stages: savagery, barbarism and civilisation. He associated the invention of the bow and of pottery with

the first stage, agriculture with the second stage, and writing with the third. Democracy as a political system is yet another characteristic of the third stage. The kinship systems of societies similarly evolve from what he called ‘group marriage’ (a group of women marrying a group of men, with children belonging to the entire group) through various other forms to reach the nuclear family of Euro-American societies. According to Morgan, Australian Aborigines were in the lowest stage of social evolution while European society was in the most advanced state of civilisation.

Evolutionary theory has been highly criticised and is today completely abandoned. It reflects a Eurocentric and ethnocentric point of view that does not take into account the particularities of human adaptations and the diversity of value systems. Some researchers, such as Julian Steward (1972), have suggested the concept of *multilineal evolution* which sees each culture evolving through its own adaptations to ecological and economic environments.

Following this phase of kinship studies came a group of British anthropologists, whose theoretical approach to the study of human societies became known as ‘structural-functionalism’. Their attention was centred on kinship groups, such as **clans** and **lineages**, and on the processes of **descent** and **filiation** that constitute such groups. Around the same time, some French scholars developed a structuralist approach which focused mainly on **marriage** and exchange. They attempted to discover and formalise universal rules defining marriage patterns around the world.

Finally, these rather formal approaches were overtaken, beginning around the 1970s, by new ones that added an emphasis on the dynamics of kinship and on its negotiability; for convenience, I label these ‘**relatedness**’ studies. Later, we will return to each of these domains and discuss the particular concepts that scholars employed. It is most important that these schools and approaches should not be interpreted as paradigms, as theories that replaced each other, but as innovative additional elements, all of which should be taken into account when attempting to understand local kinship structures. First though, we need to examine some general conventions.

Symbols, abbreviations and conventions

Anthropologists and other genealogy specialists usually use a simple set of symbols to represent persons and connections. These symbols were largely inherited from the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations in 1932 by the Sociological Research Committee of the Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain (see the journal *Man* 1932, vol. 32: 120-121) in a paper that was termed *The Standardization of Pedigree Charts*. Since then, symbols and rules have in some respects changed, and individual researchers use their own particular set of symbols appropriate to the conditions in which they work. However, the symbols discussed below are widely accepted. Since we will be making recurrent use of these in later chapters, some detailed discussion is necessary.

Two types of symbols are distinguished: the first type represents individuals and the second indicates the relationship between individuals (these are called ‘connections’). There are three basic individuals: a female, a male, and a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. This last symbol is rarely used but can be applied to represent, for example, the English word *cousin* since this word applies both to a male and a female. A male is represented by a triangle, a female by a circle and the unknown or irrelevant gender by a square.

○	△	□	● or ∅	▲ or △
a female (woman or girl)	a male (man or boy)	male and female or unknown	a deceased female	a deceased male

Figure 8: The basic symbols representing individuals in genealogies

Additionally, it may be necessary to indicate if a particular person is living or deceased. The above symbols represent living persons. In the case of deceased persons, the figures are either coloured in with black or crossed out with a slanting line.

These symbols representing individuals do not convey much information, so we need to add some more showing how these individuals are connected to one another. Here again, three basic conventions are used: one (actually, there are two from which to choose) indicates marriage, one indicates siblings (brotherhood and sisterhood) and a third represents filiation or descent.

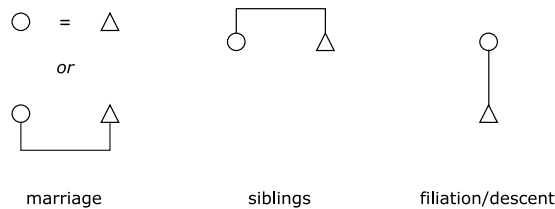


Figure 9: Basic conventions representing relationships.

These connections sound complicated as described in the paragraph above, but do not worry about this because they are very easily understood when depicted on a chart (see below). A marriage connection, also called an alliance in certain cases, is represented as a line that goes from below one person to below another person. Some scholars use an 'equals' sign (=) to represent the marriage relationship. A sibling connection is represented as a horizontal line above the children and from it vertical lines drop to the siblings depicted. A filiation (parent-children relationship) is represented as a line that goes from below a person down vertically to indicate a single person or to a horizontal bar from which two or more siblings will be depicted. Additionally, you may want to represent adoptions in genealogies. This connection is usually represented as a filiation, using either a dotted or broken line.

These symbols and connection types are based on a first, important rule to remember in kinship studies and genealogical representations: the **rule of economy**. Graphic or logical representations, as well as verbal descriptions of kin relationships, should always use the shortest and most efficient link and symbol to describe a relationship, unless other ways and symbols add information that substantially change the understanding of the relationship. This rule will become self-explanatory once you see how the symbols are applied to represent real-world kinship patterns.

These connections and symbols are then combined into what is called a **genealogy** or a genealogical grid, in which every person represented is linked to one or several other

persons through the connection types. In Western societies, these are commonly called 'family trees'. The figure below shows a nuclear family: mother, father, their daughter and son.

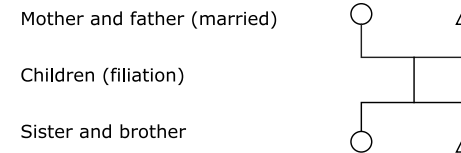


Figure 10: Graphic representation of a nuclear family

This leads us to the second rule, that of **multiple connectedness**. To make genealogies informative, the aim is to connect each person to at least one other person and, if possible, to two or more other persons using distinct types of connections. In the above example, the daughter is connected to her brother, as well as to her parents. In fact, she is connected through one line of filiation to her mother and through another one to her father, but these two connections are represented following the same path and thus form one line only. The daughter is thus multiply connected, in this case in three different ways.

Before we move on to the second set of conventions used in kinship studies, it is crucially important to understand a distinction that has not been sufficiently marked, even by the most prominent scholars such as Lévi-Strauss. This is the distinction between a genealogical system and a terminological system. The symbols presented above are sometimes confusingly used to represent two quite different facts. First, they can be used to represent relationships between actual people, between David, Margaret, their daughter Annie and their son Henry. This is a genealogical usage of the symbols within a genealogical grid, whereas the second use is part of the domain of terminology and is general (not specific) and abstract (not concrete). They can be used to represent kinship words, rather than individuals, and stand for 'father', 'mother', 'son' and 'daughter'. In the case of a nuclear family, confusing David with 'father' is not a big problem. But, as we shall see in the case of complex kinship systems such as those of Australian Aboriginal people, these two domains need to be clearly separated since in many cases the word 'father' is used for someone who is not necessarily a genitor, a (actual or biological) father. In this book, we shall seldom encounter genealogical usages of the symbols mentioned above, so you need to think of these as abstract and generic individuals rather than as real individuals.

Genealogy: In popular terms, a 'family tree'. It is a chart that reconstructs an individual's total known kin relationships to ancestors, contemporaries and descendants. While the charts and symbols used are the same, a genealogical chart must be clearly distinguished from a terminological chart. The genealogical chart represents actual people and elements of their life-history (who married who, who has how many children etc.). A terminological chart represents abstract positions of unknown people and what these positions call each other in a particular language. In this book, I most often use terminological charts.

Moving on to the second set of conventions, we note that, besides the graphical representation of terminologies, anthropologists and linguists also use abbreviations to describe persons and relationships. I avoid making intensive use of these abbreviations in this book because, although straightforward, they seem to confuse some beginners rather than help them. You will see that most of the books indicated in the further reading sections use these abbreviations, so it will be useful for you to familiarise yourselves with them.

The driving idea behind these conventions is the fact that some kinship terms cannot easily be translated from one society to another; for example, the English word *uncle* does not have any exact equivalent in Australian Aboriginal languages. In English, an *uncle* is your mother's, as well as your father's, brother. In the Western Desert, however, these two persons are identified using different words and are quite different types of relatives. Anthropologists therefore use abbreviations that are descriptive, that is they are not a translation of a specific kin term (*uncle*) but are based on primary or immediate relationships (such as mother or brother, for example) in order to reduce ambiguities. The table below summarises these conventions and the corresponding relationship.

Abbreviation	Specific	General
F	Father	any person's father
M	Mother	any person's mother
B	Brother	any person's brother
Z	Sister	any person's sister ('Z' is used for sister in order to avoid confusion with Son)
S	Son	any person's son
D	Daughter	any person's daughter
H	Husband	any person's husband (the person speaking can obviously only be a female, with the exception of cases of homosexual marriages)
W	Wife	any person's wife (the person speaking can obviously only be a male, with the exception of cases of homosexual marriages)
Sp	Spouse	husband and/or wife
Additional abbreviations		
e	elder	e.g., eB signifies an elder Brother
y	younger	e.g., yB signifies a younger Brother
f	female speaking	e.g., fZ signifies a woman's sister

m	male speaking	e.g., mZ signifies a man's sister
Ego	The person speaking	Ego (not an abbreviation) comes from Latin, meaning 'I' (the first person singular). Ego simply denotes from whose point of view we are speaking.

As was the case with the graphic symbols, these abbreviations are combined so as to describe every possible individual or position in the grid. Hence, an English *uncle* is an MB (mother's brother) or an FB (father's brother). The combination of these abbreviations can sometimes become rather complex. For example, one of your second cousins would be labelled MMBDS: your mother's mother's brother's daughter's son, where your mother's mother is obviously one of your grandmothers.

As already noted, important differences exist between kinship systems and terminologies across different languages and cultures: what an English-speaking person calls an *uncle* is not simply an *uncle* in the same way everywhere. Exactly how important and significant these differences are is an interesting question for those with an interest in kinship studies. We now examine the domain that was the first to be investigated by anthropologists and has remained significant for understanding cultural differences: kinship terminology.

Kinship terminology

When we speak of kinship, we are dealing with cultural features, rules and words pertaining to a number of important domains: kinship terms, kinship groups, descent and filiation, marriage, and relatedness. Yet when anthropologists speak of a 'kinship system' they very often limit the field of investigation to kinship terminology alone. Terminology has indeed remained one of the central aspects of kinship studies. Words connected to kinship are part of language, which is taken to represent cultural differences and similarities and to provide a first approach to how people think and feel in different cultural contexts. For instance, the way colours are conceived of, differentiated, expressed and talked about in different societies and cultural contexts is a good illustration of the power of language to articulate differences.

Harold Conklin (1955) is a well known anthropologist interested in studying how people perceive the world around them. He is particularly interested in the way languages classify and name colours and has investigated these questions among the Hanunóo people of the Philippines. Conklin concluded that the Hanunóo way of naming and classifying colours or seeing colour was completely different from the way Americans differentiate the colour spectrum. They describe and name hundreds of different colours, many more than the English language does. Additionally, factors such as texture, moisture and shine provide different names that distinguish colours. These colours are grouped and classified according to specific criteria, which Conklin summarises as lightness, darkness, wetness or freshness

and dryness. His study is an excellent example of the necessity of breaking down cultural features into locally meaningful elements by investigating the differences that make sense in a particular cultural context.

Componential Analysis and Markedness

An important study in colour was carried out by Berlin and Kay (1970). The approach Conklin and others used is called *componential analysis*, a method that was primarily developed to investigate kinship and its terminologies (Goodenough 1956). The basic idea is that words of kinship are organised. The elements or components that remain once descriptions have been broken down into their constituting elements relate to each other in a systemic way. Just as alphabets can be combined in certain ways to produce written words, the components of kinship terminologies produce a *kinship system* since they are systemic and produce patterns of cultural significance. The above-mentioned abbreviations used in kinship studies are the first vital steps in componential analysis as they do not involve culturally predefined values. Componential analysis does, however, add other criteria in order to distinguish relationships. We shall return to these when discussing terminologies and investigating Australian social organisation. For now, we note that in Aboriginal Australia the most important components are generation, 'crossness' and gender. In some cases, relative age also plays a role.

Componential analysis was inspired by the work of people such as Kroeber

(1909), who suggested analysing kinship terminology with reference to eight categories: generation, lineal versus collateral, age difference in one generation, gender of the relative and connecting relative, sex of the speaker, consanguinal versus affinal, and the condition of the connecting relative, all of which later became the bases for componential analysis. Greenberg (1990 [1980], 1966:72-87) later added the criterion of 'markedness' to the analysis of universal aspects of terminologies. As noted by Scheffler (1987:203), this term was first applied by Trubetzkoy and R. Jakobson in the 1930s to 'the asymmetrical and hierarchical relationship between the two poles of any opposition' (Vaugh 1982:229). Scheffler is a kinship studies specialist who used componential analysis. As an example, the English word *man* can designate a male but can also designate human beings in general, whereas *woman* designates only a female human being. In a common context, the two words *man* and *woman* are in an opposition which, however, is not equivalent but hierarchical since *man* may also mean human being in general, ignoring the gender attribute. According to the markedness theory, the word *woman* is considered marked against the word *man* as the former is also in some contexts included in the latter.

Kinship, as Tonkinson (1991) puts it, is a mass of networks of relatedness which radiate from each individual, and this network is expressed in a biological idiom⁶. This idiom is a set of words or expressions — a terminology — that is attributed via what Fox (1996 [1967]) terms the 'basic facts of life: conception and birth'. 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 an Ego, the male or female we take as our starting point.

The number of elements in this network of words is culturally ascribed and unique, yet also follows certain universal rules. Not in all languages is each possible position of a relative distinguished from the others, as we have seen for the term *uncle* in English where it designates both the father's and the mother's brother. Those positions that are distinguished from the others are meaningful and labelled 'categories' or 'classes'. In English, the distinction between mother's brother and father's brother is not meaningful but that between *aunt* and *uncle*, on the other hand, is meaningful and is based on the distinction of gender. All such kinship categories of a culture or language constitute a terminological map, or kinship system. These terminological maps can be compared from one society to another and have been typified. What is of particular interest is that human societies draw on only a limited number of such terminological types to construct their local kinship system. Indeed, identical or near identical terminological systems are found in societies as far apart as lowland Amazonia, India, China, North America and Australia. The existence of a limited number of types of terminological systems makes some prediction possible and renders systems, and thus cultures, comparable in the domain of kinship, although this always needs to be carefully confirmed.

As already explained, terminological systems were the first elements of kinship systems to attract anthropologists' attention, starting with Morgan's book *Systems of Affinity and Consanguinity of the Human Family* (1997 [1871]). Morgan collected terminological systems through corresponding with people from different parts of the world, such as with A.W. Howitt in Australia, and concluded that, despite the diversity in the ways cultures and languages describe a person's genealogical environment, there are important similarities that seem to be systemic. Morgan and other early social scientists were not only interested in terminologies but also studied marriage patterns and filiation. However, their legacy is principally crystallised in their systemic analysis of kinship terminologies from different societies. Hence, Morgan produced a first typology of these systems that

⇒ **Consanguinal terms:** kinship relationships that exist for a person before marriage. In English, *mother, father, brother etc.* are consanguinal terms, while *wife, brother-in-law, mother-in-law etc.* are affinal terms.

⇒ **Affinal terms:** kinship relationships that come into being when marriage is envisaged or has occurred. Affinal relationships and terms include all *in-laws*. Affinal terms and consanguinal terms together constitute the entire terminological system.

6. An 'idiom' is a special way of speaking that is considered 'natural' to a speaker of a particular language.

has since been amended many times by various anthropologists (for example Murdock 1949), yet is still widely used today.

We shall now examine some of these system types since understanding their mechanisms is important for understanding Australian Aboriginal kinship systems. Our particular focus is on what is called the Eskimo system, in use among English speakers, and the Dravidian system, which is predominantly used in Aboriginal Australia. I will however also rapidly mention other systems such as the Crow-Omaha, which is in use in some Australian societies, or the Sudanese system, which is not used in Australia but which can be considered as standing opposite the Australian-Dravidian system. I refer the reader interested in systemic discussions and definitions of Dravidian and Crow-Omaha to a paper written by Trautmann and Barnes (1998).

➤ **Extension of range:** The range of people towards whom kinship terms can or must be applied, which in some classificatory systems can be extended indefinitely. In Euro-American kinship systems, the extension of range is very limited and only genealogically very close relatives can be addressed or referred to by a kinship term. In many other societies, the extension of range is much larger and the kinship terminology can be applied to entire groups and even tribes. Aboriginal Australia is particular in this respect since in all Australian societies the extension of range is in principle unlimited: every human being can be addressed using a kinship term.

The Eskimo system

As the name indicates, this system is found among the populations of the northern polar regions, particularly in Canada. Note however that, while the name has been retained to denote the kinship system, these people are called Inuit today; they consider the word 'Eskimo' to be a negative or pejorative term. The Eskimo system is also that found among the !Kung people in Africa and is predominant in Europe. Major characteristics include its emphasis on the nuclear family and its very limited **extension of range**, meaning that the use of kinship terms is limited to genealogically very close persons and that others are grouped into large categories. For example, the English word *cousin* which includes all of one's parents' siblings' children. Also, in the Eskimo system there is no connection between **consanguinal** and **affinal** terms. Affinal terms are those that name relatives by marriage ('in-laws'), whereas consanguinal terms denote all other relatives. Indeed, in this system there is no kinship term for a spouse before marriage and marriage takes place between persons not 'biologically' related. Another characteristic is that **bifurcation** does not occur. We will revisit this term when considering the Dravidian system, but for now simply note that there is no terminological difference between mother's brother and father's brother or between mother's sister and father's sister. This can also be expressed in a more general way by stating that

there is no structural difference between **matrilineal** or matrilineal kin (kin on the mother's side) and **patrilineal** or patrilineal kin (kin on the father's side).

The figure below depicts the generic Eskimo system, using the English terminology. Note that only two generations are shown: Ego's generation (called by convention G-0) and Ego's parents' generation (called by convention G+1). The terminology shown below is thus not complete. You should note, however, that these two generations are the most important ones when distinguishing systems of terminology. With other generations, such

as those of the grandparents, there are so many variations and so much overlapping that systematising these is impossible and, in fact, not relevant. We will return to some of these issues when we encounter concrete Australian examples.

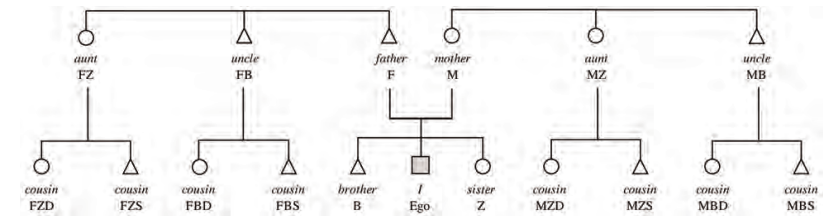


Figure 11: The Eskimo system (example of the English terminology)

Several identical categories, or what are called equivalences, are apparent. In Ego's parents' generation, uncles and aunts constitute two such generic groupings and are distinguished from mother and father. The equivalences are expressed using the equal sign, while differences are expressed through the unequal sign.

$$G+1: \quad M \neq MZ = FZ \quad \text{and} \quad F \neq FB = MB$$

The above line is necessary and sufficient to fully define an Eskimo system at the G+1 generational level: mother is not equivalent to mother's sister but mother's sister is equivalent to father's sister; father is not equivalent to father's brother but father's brother is equivalent to mother's brother. We will see that the equivalences in other systems are different. The line reads as follows: in the generation above Ego (Ego's parents' generation), a mother is not the same as a mother's sister, but the latter is equal to a father's sister (*aunt*); a father is not the same as a father's brother, but the latter is equal to a mother's brother (*uncle*). The same exercise can be done for Ego's generation:

$$G-0: \quad B \neq MBS = MZS = FBS = FZS \quad \text{and} \quad Z \neq MBD = MZD = FBD = FZD$$

In both these lines, we have assumed that gender is always distinguished, which is not the case in every system. If we wanted to be as complete as possible, we would write the first line as follows:

$$G+1: \quad M \neq MZ = FZ \neq F \neq FB = MB$$

➤ **Patrilineal:** Relatives on ones father's side and principles relating to descent in which males are the central point of reference. For example, a patrilineal descent principle of landownership means that landownership is passed down from father to son, to son's son etc.

➤ **Matrilineal:** Like patrilineal, but on the mother's side: those relatives or principles that are on ones mother's side or that follow the female's line.

The Dravidian system

➤ **Bifurcate merging:** One of the particularities of Dravidian terminologies. Bifurcate merging creates the distinction between cross-cousins and parallel cousins (see below). Mother's brothers are distinguished from the father and from the father's brothers and father's sisters are distinguished from the mother and mother's sisters. Mother's brothers and father's sisters are spouses and their offspring are affines.

Named after a people in India, this is a very widespread system, found on all continents and among the most diverse cultures, though it is typically associated with small-scale societies. At some level or other, this system is identifiable in all Australian Aboriginal kinship terminologies. Variations and adaptations occur, but they are overlays of a general schema that is Dravidian.

First identified by Floyd Lounsbury (1964), who distinguished it from the Iroquois system, it was later followed by descriptions of many variants and has been the object of numerous discussions about its canonical⁷ definition. We shall not go into these details since those features that interest us here are generally accepted.

The main feature of this system is what is called **bifurcate merging**, which means that categories are separated one generation above Ego (at G+1) according to gender: mother and mother's sister are merged, father and father's brother are merged; but mother is distinguished from father's sister and father is distinguished from mother's brother. Their children are merged back again in Ego's generation (at G-0) in particular ways, as we shall see. 'Bifurcation' means change of gender with respect to Ego's parents. Bifurcate merging is a straightforward procedure that distinguishes fathers, mothers, uncles and aunts but according to a different principle from that underlying the Eskimo system.

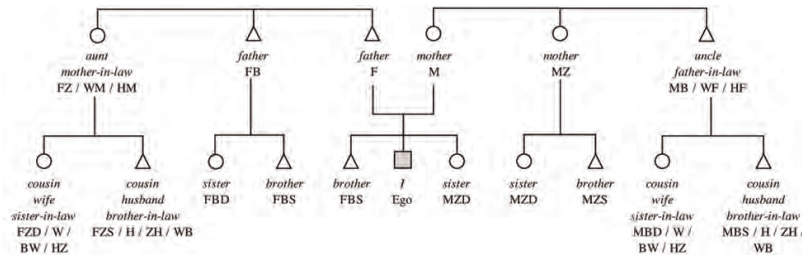


Figure 12: The Dravidian system, using English words. Only very close kin are charted above, but it must be remembered that Dravidian terminologies are usually extended (see below). Also, this figure depicts only the generations of Ego (the speaker) and of his or her parents.

7. 'Canonical', in mathematics, means something that is reduced to its most basic and simplest possible expression but remains valid. A 'canonical' expression is a rule or a definition that is considered valid wherever it is applicable.

Terms distinguish Ego's 'father' from his 'mother'. The father's brother, being the same gender as the father, is also called 'father'. Similarly, Ego's mother's sister, being female, is also called 'mother'. The father's sister, on the other hand, is of a different gender from Ego's father and is called 'aunt' (or FZ, father's sister). Similarly, the mother's brother 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 others are derived in Dravidian systems. The Dravidian equations at Ego's parents' generation can be written as follows (the Eskimo equations are also added to underline the differences):

Dravidian:	G+1:	M = MZ ≠ FZ	and	F = FB ≠ MB
Eskimo:	G+1:	M ≠ MZ = FZ	and	F ≠ FB = MB

The equations and distinctions produced in G+1 have direct consequences on the way people are classified in Ego's generation. Since one's mother's sister is called *mother* and since a mother's daughter is a *sister*, one's mother's sister's daughter is a *sister* as well. Or, to put it (wrongly) in English: if you call your aunt *mother*, then you will call your aunt's daughter a *sister*, since your 'mother' can only give birth to girls who are your sisters. This leads us to the second line of equations in the Dravidian system:

G-0: B = FBS = MZS ≠ MBS = FZS and Z = MZD = FBD ≠ FZD = MBD

Anthropologists therefore use specific terms to identify and label different types of cousins. Thus, children of FB (father's brother) and MZ (mother's sister) are called **parallel cousins**. In a Dravidian system, they will be called **brothers** and **sisters**. Bifurcation, meaning change of gender with respect to Ego's parents, has not occurred. On the other hand, when bifurcation does happen, that is your father's sister's children and your mother's brother children are called by the same term which is different from that used for your parallel cousins, then they are called **cross-cousins**. Thus, bifurcation simply means that the difference is created when gender changes in the generation above Ego. This merging (remember the 'bifurcate merging' concept mentioned earlier) means two things: first, the fact that children of both your MZ and your FB are merged into the parallel cousin category. More importantly, it also means that children of your MB and of your FZ are themselves brothers and sisters and that their parents are therefore married. But to fully understand this, we need first to explain a few other things.

Dravidian terminologies are often — and this is certainly the case in Aboriginal Australia — 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

➤ **Cross-cousins:** One's father's sister's children and one's mother's brother's children. Cross-cousins are relevant in systems with *bifurcate-merging*, such as *Dravidian* systems. In the latter, cross-cousins are potential spouses and are distinguished from *parallel cousins*.

➤ **Parallel cousins:** One's father's brother's children and one's mother's sister's children. In Dravidian systems, parallel cousins are called 'brother' and 'sister'.

than close genealogical relatives follows this precise way of calculation we call 'bifurcate merging'. I provide some examples below. My mother's mother's sister is a mother's mother, but my father's father's sister is in a different category. You may remember that one of the particularities of the Eskimo system is that it does not contain a kinship term for a spouse whom you have not yet married. This is not the case in other systems. In a Dravidian system, since everyone is or can be addressed by a kinship term, your future spouse must also be addressable.

What is important to know at this stage is that all the terms available to name all these people are listed in Figure 12 above. In the generation of Ego's parents, these terms are mother, mother's brother, father and father's sister. All persons of G+1 must be called or referred to using one of these four basic categories. Similarly, all the persons belonging to Ego's generation must be called or referred to using one of the available terms, which are sister, brother, female cross-cousin (MBD, FZD) or male cross-cousin (MBS, FZS). We conclude from this that one's future spouse must be a cross-cousin since you are not permitted to marry someone you call brother or sister. In principle then, your cross-cousins' parents are also your parents-in-law and they themselves are married. Since the only terms available at G+1 are M, F, MB and FZ and since you cannot marry someone who is the offspring of a F or a M, it means that your parents-in-law must be a MB and a FZ; it also means that MB is the husband of FZ. It does not mean that a person's actual mother's brother is married to a person's actual father's sister, but it means that someone you call father's sister is the spouse of someone you call mother's brother. Remember that, as I have mentioned earlier and as I will show below, in Dravidian systems, kinship terms can be extended to include people who are genealogically very distant and even unrelated. There are, thus, actual father's sisters and distant father's sisters. This is the second part of the merging: your FZ is split away from your F and FB but reunited on the other side with your MB. We have the following schematic representation of these relationships: FZ is married to a MB, and their daughter is Ego's spouse.

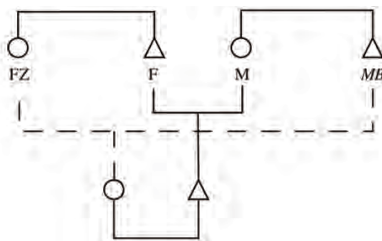


Figure 13: Bifurcate merging in a Dravidian system (example of marriages)

You should now understand more clearly why I stressed earlier the importance of distinguishing the use of these symbols and their analysis in a terminological context from their use in a genealogical context. In this chapter, we are talking about a terminological context: it is the terms people use for each other that lead us to establish the particular links displayed in Figure 13. It is rarely the case that an actual mother's brother marries an actual father's sister; it is also rare for a person to marry an actual first cross-cousin. This, however, is how people should address each other, whether they are closely related or not. You may be reassured to learn that even some of the most prominent scholars, among them Lévi-Strauss and Dumont, have consistently confused these two levels of social reality.

Now that you know there is no limitation to the extension of range, that is all members of a group or society must be addressable through a kinship term and that the attribution of a kinship term to a person is not random but follows formalised rules, it is necessary to explain how people who are very distant relatives, and from a European point of view are not related, still nonetheless know how they should call or refer to each other. The underlying principle is that bifurcate merging is in a sense inherited over generations and generations. Let us take an example of two sisters.

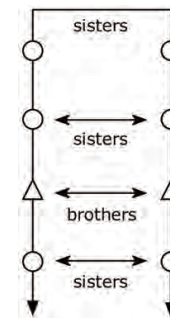


Figure 14: Transmission of the bifurcate merging calculation without bifurcation

Each of the original two sisters depicted above has a daughter (their husbands are not represented). Because these offspring are children of sisters (same gender, no bifurcation), they call each other's mother *mother*, and they therefore call each other *sister*. In the next generation, these sisters have boys. The boys call each other *brother* because they call each other's mother *mother*. These brothers have children as well. Their daughters call each other *sister* because their fathers call each other *brother*. This may go on over hundreds of generations and although in time people would no longer know how they are genealogically linked, since, in Australia in particular, genealogical memory is usually quite shallow, they know how they are linked through the kinship terminology. The character of their

relationship is passed on from generation to generation. Australian Aboriginal and other Dravidian-like kinship systems are structured in such a way that, from a formal point of view, society in theory descends from an original group of two brothers and two sisters in which each brother married the other's sister. Thereafter the system 'remembers' how all descendants are linked to these original two couples. The same principle described for brothers and sisters is valid for all types of relationships and kin categories. The following figure adds some complexity to the picture by adding cross-cousins to the descendants.

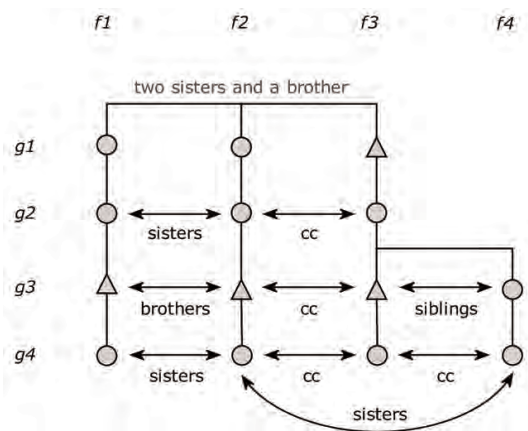


Figure 15: Transmission of the bifurcate merging calculation with bifurcation (cc: cross-cousins; siblings: brother-sister)

Columns are numbered from f1 to f4 (f stands for filiation; remember that a filiation is a parent-child relation). Rows are numbered from g1 to g4 (g stands for generation). This will make for easier reference. For example, the first woman top left is in filiation 1 and in generation 1. We call her f1-g1. The last woman bottom right is f4-g4.

The figure shows that, from generation 2 onwards, the relationships between filiation 2 and filiation 3 are of the cross-cousin type. This is because f3-g1 is the brother of f2-g1 (change of gender) and the children of each become cross-cousins (marked cc in the figure). The father of f3-g2 is the mother's brother of f2-g2. We have seen that mother's brothers and father's sisters are the parents of cross-cousins and not of siblings (brothers and sisters). This is where bifurcation takes place: lines of filiation bifurcate, or divide, because there is a change of gender.

Even if you could follow up this genealogy for hundreds of generations, f2 and f3 would always stay in a cross-cousin relationship unless there was a change of gender.

There is no need to know how these people are connected or how distant their genealogical links to each other are: the children of every person I call father's sister (FZ) I will call cross-cousin.

The woman f3-g2 had a boy and a girl (f3-g3 and f4-g3). The girl (f4-g3) has a girl herself (f4-g4). Because f3-g3 and f4-g3 are of different gender (they are siblings of opposite sex), bifurcation takes place again. The man f3-g3 is a mother's brother for f4-g4, and the former's children are therefore the latter's cross-cousin.

Another interesting feature is that the relation between f2-g4 and f4-g4 is not a cross-cousin relation, but a sibling (in this case sister) relation, because two bifurcations took place, one in filiation 2, the other in filiation 4. One happened in generation 1, the other in generation 3. A double bifurcation cancels itself out: the cross-cousin of my cross-cousin is my sister or brother. Again, you could go on and on: a triple bifurcation changes the relationship back into cross-cousins, a quadruple bifurcation into siblings, and so on.

After hundreds of generations, people become very distant 'relatives', in theory just as distant as two European persons who are unknown to each other. Nevertheless, through the transmission of the bifurcate-merging principle in this **classificatory system**, Aborigines know that they are related; they know in what type of relationship they stand to everyone else. A classificatory system with no limitation to the extension of the range of persons to whom kinship terms can be applied means that the terms are not limited to close kin but can be extended to all known persons and, theoretically, to humankind.

The examples discussed above are formal illustrations of the working principles that lie beneath the Dravidian system. Reality is more complicated in some cases and more straightforward in others. Indeed, in real life, people usually have more children than in our illustration and they also have children of both genders, so that bifurcation takes place in every generation and filiation. The patterns of real genealogies considerably increase the complexities illustrated in our formal model, not forgetting that we should add marriage to our figures, a problem to which we shall return shortly.

In real life, one does not have to memorise every person's position within the bifurcate merging model or remember every person's relation and position in the system. A complete overview of the genealogical grid, including generations of genealogical memory, is not necessary for the system to work and for people to live with it. In fact, what I have called the relational triangle (Dousset 2008) is sufficient for every person to know how he or she stands with regard to every other person. Let us take a look at this relational triangle, and show how Aboriginal people actually determine their relationships.

► **Classificatory (terms):**

Kinship labels that can be used for a whole category of persons.

The English word *cousin* is a classificatory term since it covers all mother's and father's siblings' children, irrespective of whether they are male or female and of whether they are on one's father's or mother's side. Most systems have both classificatory and descriptive terms.

► **Descriptive (terms):**

Kinship words that can be used for one particular person only (the opposite of *classificatory*).

The English word *brother* is a descriptive term since it covers only one class of persons: the male descendants of your mother and father.

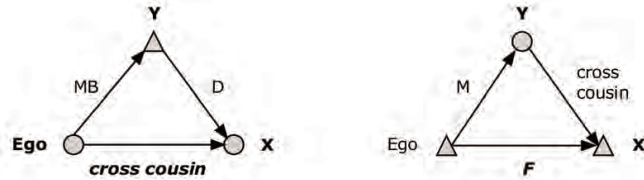


Figure 16: The relational triangle

The figure above illustrates two examples of relational triangles. In the first example, let us suppose two women meet. The first woman is Ego (you), the second is X. They need to find out their relationship to each other but because they are genealogically very distant there is no way they can trace it. What they will do therefore is find a third person both of them know their relationship to. This third person in our example is Y, a man. Let us suppose Ego's relationship to Y is MB (a mother's brother; not an actual MB, as you understand now, but a distant or classificatory one). The woman X's relationship to this same man Y is of the daughter-type, that is X is a classificatory daughter of Y. Let us recapitulate: Ego calls Y *mother's brother*, and Y calls X *daughter*. Ego and X therefore now know that they stand in a cross-cousin relationship to each other because a mother's brother's daughter is a cross-cousin, and the problem is solved.

The second example is a little more complicated. Ego calls Y *mother* and this mother calls the man X *cross-cousin*. Because a person can only marry cross-cousins and not siblings, X's cross-cousin Y is also a potential spouse and one's mother's spouse is obviously one's father. Ego would therefore call the man X *father*.

We will often return to features that have been explained in this chapter, in particular when discussing marriage and describing Aboriginal Australian kinship systems. Before then, some further comments are warranted on the other major kinship types recognised by kinship scholars.

Crow-Omaha, Sudanese and Hawaiian systems

It should now be obvious why I have focused most closely on the Eskimo and Dravidian systems. The Eskimo system is understood by people of Euro-American background working in Aboriginal communities; and the Dravidian system is heavily represented in Aboriginal Australia. Since the most likely readers of this book are Aboriginal people and others interested in Aboriginal culture, the choice was obvious. However, some of the other systems are found in one form or another in Australia, so it is necessary to briefly refer to them here.

The Sudanese system is the most descriptive. As far as I know, this system is not represented in Australia. It is however, in some respects, nearly an opposite example of the Dravidian system. Mentioning it briefly here will contribute to our understanding of the distinction between descriptive and classificatory systems or terms. Anthropologists, starting way back with one of their ancestors, Lewis Henry Morgan, make this distinction between classificatory and descriptive terminologies. Classificatory terminologies denote with a single term several categories or classes of people (such as *uncle* in the English terminology) while descriptive systems have the characteristic of naming every category of kin differently. The term for cross-cousin in a Dravidian system is typically a classificatory term, while that for MB is a descriptive term. 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 discussed above, for example, was long considered to be a descriptive system, but in fact it has classificatory terms since the word *cousin*, for example, covers four categories of people: matrilineal cross-cousins (MBD and MBS), matrilineal parallel cousins (MZD and MZS), patrilineal cross-cousins (FZD and FZS), and patrilineal parallel cousins (FBD and FBS). 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. If this were to be applied to the English terminology, then the uncle on the mother's side and the uncle on the father's side would be distinguished.

The Hawaiian system, also called a generational system, is in some respects the simplest because it distinguishes very few categories of kin. As we shall see, it is present in Australia in certain contexts. However, it is predominantly used among Polynesian societies of the Pacific. In this system, in Ego's parents' generation all women are called *mother* and all men are called *father*. Thus, all people of one's own generation who are children of people one calls *mother* or *father* are brothers and sisters. It is important to note that Hawaiian systems can be further subdivided into two sub-system types. Because in a Hawaiian system Ego only finds brothers and sisters among persons of his own generation and because he or she is supposed to marry someone from this generation, possible spouses for Ego need to be distinguished other 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). This solution limits the extension of range of the kinship terminology. The other solution, when the terminology is used even among genealogically distant kin, is to somehow differentiate the categories of cross-cousins and of siblings as in a Dravidian system, even though before marriage they are all designated using the sibling terminology. In the latter solution, the terminology is of the Hawaiian type but the underlying system and the marriage rules follow the Dravidian type where cross-cousins are potentially also spouses. The Hawaiian terminology should not be seen as an independent system but as an overlay of a system that is fundamentally Dravidian. This is the case in the Western Desert of Australia where in some situations people use a Hawaiian type of classification while in others they use a Dravidian type. The

distinction between pre-marriage terminology and post-marriage terminology is relevant here. I shall return to this point when discussing Western Desert systems.

➤ **Skewing:** A particularity of Omaha and Crow systems of kinship reckoning. Persons from different generational levels are conflated (skewed) into one category only. Some anthropologists, such as Lévi-Strauss (1967) or Héritier (see Héritier-Augé and Copet-Rougier 1990), believe Omaha and Crow systems to be actual kinship systems. Others, such as Kronenfeld (1973), McConvell (nd), Rumsey (1981) and myself (Dousset nd.a), are convinced that skewing is in most cases, at least in Australia, an overlay of a Dravidian type of system and that skewing is only applied in particular contexts.

Crow and Omaha are sometimes considered distinct systems. However, in Australia at least, in most cases they are more likely to be interpreted as variations of the Dravidian system (Godelier 2004; Needham 1971). As Kronenfeld (1973, 1991) shows for the Fanti people of Africa and Rumsey (1981) for the Ngarinyin of north-west Australia, Crow and Omaha features are particular terminologies used in particular contexts. In other, more 'usual' contexts, a Dravidian system is used. For Australia, McConvell (nd) identifies Crow-Omaha features among a few groups in the northern part of the Kimberley (Ngarinyin people), in south-east Arnhem Land (Nungubuyu and others), in Central Australia (among the Gurindji and Warumungu), in the Gulf of Carpentaria among the McArthur River people (such as the Yanyuwa), and in the Cape York Peninsula (Gugu Yimidhirr and Ayabadhju). Refer to Figure 2 to locate these groups on a map.

The particularities of the Crow and Omaha systems are that they operate what is called **skewing**. In certain contexts, cross-cousins are called by the same term as a person from another generation, as if, for example, you called one of your cross-cousins 'uncle' in English. In other words, two persons of two different generations are skewed into one and the same kin category.

The equations that can be constructed for these systems are no longer generational, but cross over several generations (note that not all equations are used systematically):

Omaha: MZ=MBD=MBSD and/or MF=MB=MBS
 Crow: FM=FZ=FZD=FZDD and/or F=FMB=FZS=FZSS

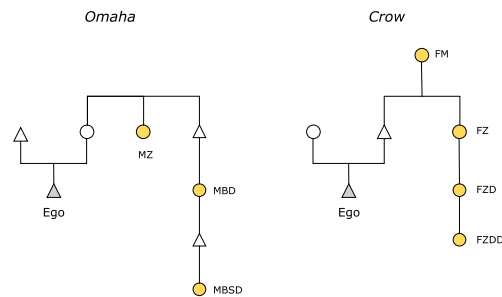


Figure 17: Examples of possible Omaha and Crow skewing. The persons marked in yellow in each figure are called or referred to by Ego using the same word

Note that in these systems, skewing is either on the father's side (Crow) or on the mother's (Omaha), never on both. Marriage still occurs with a cross-cousin, as in a Dravidian system. However, since one of the cross-cousins is skewed, they disappear as a potential partner. In other words, in Crow systems with patrilineal skewing, the potential spouse must be matrilineal; in the Omaha system with matrilineal skewing, the potential spouse must be patrilineal. This marriage pattern is called asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage, which is one of the features of Crow-Omaha systems. As we will see below when discussing marriage, these systems are also called semi-complex or indirect exchange systems.

Other conventions concerning kinship terms

As we have seen, kinship always comes with a specific terminology. A terminology is the collection of words used to address or refer to persons considered to be kin. Each term typically refers to a specific type or category of kin. Anthropologists distinguish between **terms of address** and **terms of reference**. *Father* is a term of reference, *dad* a term of address. It is only in particular contexts that one addresses ones father as *father*; generally, ones father is addressed as *dad*, but referred to as *father*. The sentence 'I call my father dad' makes sense because, while the terms refer to the same person, they really mean something slightly different. Many kinship terms are address and reference terms at the same time, such as the English *cousin* or *uncle*. This is the case in the Australian Western Desert where most terms are both terms of address and reference.

➤ **Terms of address:** Words that people use when directly addressing other kin (for example 'dad' in English).

➤ **Terms of reference:** Words that people use to refer to kin (for example 'father' in English).

➤ **Self-reciprocal (terms):** Terms of address or reference that are identical between two persons (for example 'cousin' in English).

Another qualifying distinction made for words of kinship is whether they are **self-reciprocal** or not. A self-reciprocal term is a term applied by both persons, the one who is being addressed and the one who does the addressing; for example, the word *cousin*, which does not distinguish gender, age, or type of cousin. The English *brother* is another such self-reciprocal term, but only in the case of two men so related who are talking to each other. The word does not, for example, distinguish if one brother is older than the other. On the other hand, the English *mother* is not self-reciprocal since the person who calls someone *mother* will be addressed or referred to by this 'mother' with another word: daughter.

Finally, anthropologists distinguish between descriptive and classificatory terms (and even systems), as we have seen. When the use of kinship terms is limited to very few people, that is when the kinship terminology is not extended to distant or unrelated people, as in the Eskimo system and European languages, or when every possible kin category has its own specific term, such as in the Sudanese system, the terminology is called descriptive. Every word describes one very specific relationship and one person only: a mother can only be the person who gave birth to you. The word *mother* therefore defines a relationship as well as a specific person. Terminology and genealogy are here

identical. *Mother* is therefore, in the Eskimo system, considered a descriptive term of reference. *Mum* is a descriptive term of address.

This is not the case in Australian kinship systems nor in fact in most systems of the world. These systems are classificatory or have many classificatory terms because kinship terms are not limited to close kin but can be extended to all known persons and, theoretically to humankind. The word for 'mother' may be applied to persons other than ones birth mother. In a Dravidian system, as we have seen, your mother, mother's sisters, mother's parallel cousins and any other person your mother calls *sister* are in the 'mother' category and can or should be named *mother*. Hence, *mother* is a classificatory term because it places a certain number of persons in the same class or category of kin. The most important distinction between descriptive and classificatory terminologies and systems is that in a descriptive system terms usually *describe a person*, whereas in a classificatory system terms *describe a type of relationship*.

Researchers did not always agree on the concepts of descriptive and classificatory types of kinship, particularly those who suggested that classificatory systems were older or 'primitive' while descriptive systems were thought to be more modern and 'advanced'. These theoretical positions, held in the 19th century by scholars such as Lewis Henry Morgan, soon became untenable. I shall not discuss the moral and scientific grounds on which certain systems came to be considered 'primitive' or others 'advanced' since there is little evidence to support either category. What made the distinction between descriptive and classificatory systems shaky was that, as Alfred Kroeber (1909), for example, showed, all systems have both classificatory and descriptive features, as we have already seen.

Australian kinship systems, which are supposed to be classificatory systems, have a significant number of descriptive features. In the Western Desert, for example, the word for 'brother-in-law' is usually applied to ones actual brother-in-law only and cannot be applied to another person. So although the notion of classificatory and descriptive terms is useful since it allows us to distinguish terms that are applicable to various persons from terms that are closely related to ones genealogy, we cannot talk of classificatory or descriptive systems since most if not all kinship terminologies have simultaneously descriptive and classificatory terms.

Filiation and descent

After discussing some general aspects of kinship terminologies, we now move on to the second stage of acquiring the necessary concepts for understanding kinship: filiation and descent.

While terminologies are among the most important elements one needs for comprehension in the field, they are not the only aspects that concern the network of relatedness. The emergence of the British structural-functionalist school early in the 20th century, with scholars such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes, Evans-Pritchard and others, resulted in an increasing concentration of research 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, were recognised as important to an understanding of human societies.

Anthropologists became particularly interested in notions such as **lineage** or **clan**, which are both so-called **descent groups**. Early on, researchers recognised that, in both kinds of descent groups, the main mode of recruiting people (that is of selecting who can or must be part of a lineage or clan), was the control of descent and the transmission of membership from one generation to the next. As with terminological systems, anthropologists identified several kinds of such modes of transmission. I quickly explain each of these here, but first we need to recall what we understand by 'filiation' and 'descent'. Filiation is the relationship between a parent and his or her child. However, it does not mean this relationship alone but includes the values associated with the relationship. For example, in some societies a child's blood is believed to be inherited from the mother while the bones are considered to be inherited from the father. We thus have a

➤ **Clan:** A group of people, or a number of lineages, whose members claim to be descendants of a distant ancestor who is usually mythical.

➤ **Lineage:** A group of people who can trace their descent back to a single known, and in most cases named, human ancestor.

➤ **Descent group:** A group of people who consider themselves to be identical in some respects because they are descendants from one real or mythical individual. Clan and lineages constitute descent groups.

The British structural-functionalist school

This school of thought emerged in the 1930s in opposition to the theory of unilineal evolution advocated by Henry L. Morgan and others. One of the major changes it brought to anthropology was the insistence on the necessity of long term fieldwork. This was particularly advocated by Bronislaw Malinowski who forged the expression 'participant observation' and who had done fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders in the Pacific (Malinowski 1932, for example). Besides Malinowski, one of the most prevalent structural-functionalist scholars was Alfred Radcliffe-Brown who had worked in the Andaman Islands and Australia. He was particularly interested in kinship and its relationship with social organisation and land tenure. Meyer Fortes (1945 for example), who had worked among the Tallensi and Ashanti in Ghana, Africa, was an important figure in defining the methodologies

for comparative anthropology. He also coined the expression 'complementary filiation' to indicate that even in unilineal systems (see below) there are characteristics which complement this unilineality. Another prominent figure was Edward E. Evans-Pritchard. His work on the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1937 and 1940, for example) is still today considered among the most important monographs in anthropology.

Structural-functionalists approached society in a holistic way and thus followed the French scholar Emile Durkheim's approach in this respect: society is an integrated and more or less self-contained system which reproduces itself in time and space. Social institutions, such as kinship, technology, religion etc. constitute structural elements that function together to build a coherent ensemble: society.

double filiation in this case: blood from the mother, or matrilineal; and bones from the father, or patrilineal. Descent is when these principles of filiation are extended over generations and when, to take the same example, a man considers himself to have the same bones as his father, his father's father and so on. In many instances, this group of men, including all of their actual brothers, are considered to be a descent group and thus constitute a corporation, in the form of either a lineage or a clan. Obviously, the same would be the case for female members. Of course, descent ramifies so that brothers or sisters constitute their own descent group, each with their separate descent line.

Three general types of descent systems have been identified: **unilineal**, **non-unilineal** and **mixed descent** systems. As the name indicates, *unilineal systems* trace the process of incorporation, inheritance and transmission through a single line: the father's or the mother's line, but not both. In a patrilineal descent system, the Baruya of Papua New Guinea 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, the Navajo of North America for example, 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, the matrilineal uncle (the mother's brother) usually plays a very important educational role for his sister's children and marriage bonds are usually quite weak. Unilineal systems are most often associated with clans and lineages. A lineage is a group of people who descend from a single known human ancestor while a clan is a group of people, or a group of lineages, who claim descent from one mythical ancestor. Lineages and clans are often landowning units. As I have already stressed, there are no clans or lineages in the Western Desert and no landowning kin groups as such.

Among *non-unilineal systems*, the most representative is the **cognatic descent system**. Some anthropologists interpret all non-unilineal systems as being cognatic and differentiate within cognatic systems the **bilateral** and the **ambilineal system**. Others, such as myself, talk of bilateral systems and of cognatic systems as being two words for the same thing but differentiate the ambilineal system (see below). We do not need to go into these discussions here, simply to note that non-unilineal systems are generally considered unable to sustain enduring corporate groups such as lineages or clans. Indeed, in a bilateral system, children belong indistinguishably to their mother's group or family as well as to their father's group or family and inherit rights and property indistinguishably from their father's and their mother's side. In practice, societies with cognatic descent systems can constitute enduring corporate groups through other mechanisms. In certain parts of eastern Europe, where the bilateral 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, a land-based enduring group. He in turn would transmit 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 by people as being central and the other peripheral, as we shall soon see with the concept of complementary filiation and double descent.

Among the *mixed systems*, the **ambilineal** system is probably the most difficult to identify, but it is also very interesting since it is open to political and economic contextualisation and strategies. In an ambilineal system, a person may choose to follow the mother's or the father's line, depending on opportunities or social pressure. However, once he or she chooses to link up to one or the other side, this decision may not be changed later in life; a person is expected to stand by the group or family from which she or he claims inheritance. In the Australian Western Desert it is possible to speak of an ambilineal system (Layton 1983) but, unlike that in Polynesia where ambilineal groups constitute more or less enduring corporations called 'ramages' (Firth 1957), this is of little consequence for defining 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 belong 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: 121 and following pages for a discussion of double descent systems).

Descent describes the principles inherent in the transmission of material and non-material things, rights and duties over generations. Filiation, on the other hand, is the principle that links a person to his or her immediate parents only. On many occasions, filiation and descent produce similar effects, such as in the case of the transmission of landownership through the patriline. In many other cases though, there are additional criteria that establish a relationship to a parent in a different way, without constituting a corporate group. Fortes (1959) has coined the expression **complementary filiation** to describe these additional factors and mechanisms. All of these concepts will be revisited when we discuss actual examples of Aboriginal Australian kinship pattern and behaviour.

Marriage and marriage alliances

We now turn to the last formal, theoretical domain that requires elaboration before moving on to more ethnographic data: marriage. The central concept when discussing marriage is that of exogamy: the obligation to marry outside of a family, a group, a clan, a tribe and so on. The importance of marriage and exogamy was recognised by anthropologists even before the word 'exogamy' itself had been proposed by McLennan (1970 [1865]). Indeed, Tylor (1889: 267), recognising the political aspects of marriage, summarised them in a well-

► **Complementary filiation:**
In unilineal systems, people inherit one major characteristic from either their mother's or their father's side but may inherit complementary elements from the other side. For example, among the North African Touareg, belonging to lineages as well as the house or tent is inherited through the female's line, but the animal herd is inherited from the father.

known formula according to which 'tribes must have had before them the simple practical alternative between marrying out or being killed-out'. Establishing links with other groups, in particular through marriage, and thus introducing the crucial notion of the exchange of human beings between groups was seen by Tylor and many of his successors as a vitally important means of reproducing society as a whole in time and space and not just human beings. The exogamy of one group supposes the exogamy of another and thus links these two groups in terms not only of political alliance but also of shared genealogical and thus ancestral history.

➤ **Prescriptive marriage rule:** This rule is different from society to society. It describes the obligation to marry certain categories of persons. In many cases, prescriptive rules are structural, that is they are inherent to the terminological system: if a cross-cousin of the opposite sex can be called 'spouse', then the cross-cousin is the prescribed marriage category.

➤ **Proscriptive marriage rule:** This rule describes the interdiction to marry a certain category of persons. In the Western Desert, it is proscribed to marry a cross-cousin but it is proscribed to marry a genealogically close cross-cousin.

Marriage is intimately related in several ways to the two domains discussed above: terminologies and principles of descent. In particular, we must assume that everywhere, in each society or cultural background, marriage follows certain rules and norms. Put negatively, nowhere can people marry just anyone they like. There are always restrictions on marriage with certain persons; these we call **proscriptive marriage rules**. There are also in many cases preferences, and even obligations, to marry particular categories of persons; these we call **prescriptive marriage rules**, which can be jural (Leach 1965) or structural (Needham 1973).

By 'jural' we mean that there are explicit rules and norms that define obligations of marriage. 'Structural' means that these rules flow from the kinship terminology itself; for example, in cases where particular persons are called spouse in the terminology and where it is obviously not possible to marry someone from another category. In most cases, jural and structural rules overlap since the structural obligation to marry into a particular kinship category is usually also associated with explicit discourses and explanations. This is the case in Aboriginal Australia.

Proscriptive and, to some extent, prescriptive marriage rules are related to the prohibition of incest and to the notion of exogamy. We now discuss these concepts and their relationship to terminologies and descent.

Anthropologists have always been very interested in marriage because it is about bonding individuals, families and groups and reflects the dynamics of social strategy, interaction and structure. The birth of structuralism in anthropology under Claude Lévi-Strauss led to it being theorised as one of the leverages of a new theoretical proposition. 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 (1967 [1947]) claimed that three types of exchange characterise the human social realm: exchange of words (language), exchange of goods (the economic domain) and exchange of human beings (marriage and kinship). Only when these three principles of exchange are systematised and functional in a group of human beings does the latter constitute a society with shared cultural codes. Alliance theorists, as the name indicates, together with Lévi-Strauss and many other anthropologists, concentrated their research efforts on marriage, the

domain in which the exchange of human beings occurs. Marriage becomes a system of exchange if it is associated with exogamy (the obligation to marry someone from 'outside' your family or group). In these terms, brothers and sisters who, over generations, marry each other will not constitute a society. To do so, Lévi-Strauss argues, we need an incest prohibition, which compels people to obtain their spouses from other families. In his view, this prohibition allows the passage of a group of people from a state of nature to a state of culture.

What is the difference between 'alliance' and 'marriage'? Dumont (1968 [1957]), another alliance theorist, who in some respects disagreed with Lévi-Strauss, has conceptualised the difference in the most systematic way. He speaks of **alliance** (or marriage alliance) when he observes and analyses the repetition of identical marriage types over generations or among people of the same generation level. In theory, this repetition occurs in Dravidian systems. Thus, marriage is the individual event occurring in a particular place with particular people in a particular context; it brings together two people (and families) with the aim of uniting them as spouses and future parents. Alliance as a system reveals patterns of regularity in the choice of suitable spouses and describes repetitions of identical marriage types over generations.

Lévi-Strauss (1967 [1947]) and other alliance theorists distinguish three basic types of marriages: **direct exchange**, the most basic or elementary system; **indirect exchange**; and **complex** systems. In the direct exchange system, marriages place people and groups in a symmetrical 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. Most often, direct exchange systems are found where the terminology is of the Dravidian type. As we have seen, a mother's brother (MB) marries a father's sister (FZ) and their offspring are cross-cousins who are also potential spouses. Thus, if we combine this with patrilineal descent groups as mentioned above, we see that your father and your mother's brother are in different groups that exchange their sisters or daughters. Let us illustrate this over two generations.

➤ **Alliance (of marriage):** The reproduction over time and generations of identical marriages; that is, for example, brothers exchanging their sisters and their sons again exchanging their sisters etc. Alliance of marriage or marriage alliance occurs in theory in Dravidian systems. In practice, repetitions of identical marriages only occur rarely and what is called 'shifting webs', that is the diversification of marriages, is much more frequent.

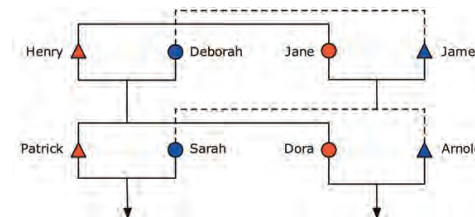


Figure 18: Direct exchange model

For example, let us say that Henry and his sister Jane are members of the *black crow* clan (orange in the figure) and that James and his sister Deborah are in the *white cockatoo* clan (blue in the figure). People of the *black crow* cannot marry other people of the *black crow* (proscriptive rule) since they are brothers and sisters, so they need to marry people from another clan (exogamy), in this case the *white cockatoos* (prescriptive rule). The same is true for people of the *white cockatoo* clan. They marry people from the *black crow* clan. Thus, Jane marries James and Deborah marries Henry. In the eyes of alliance theorists, Henry and James have exchanged sisters.

Henry and Deborah have a son Patrick and a daughter Dora. Both are of the *black crow* clan because in our case descent is patrilineal so children inherit their clan membership from their father. James and Jane also have two children: Arnold and Sarah. Both are of the *white cockatoo* clan, the same as that of their father, James. Patrick and Dora must marry people from another clan (exogamy), in this case the *white cockatoos*. The same is true of Arnold and Sarah. Thus, Dora marries Arnold and Sarah marries Patrick. Again, we see that Patrick and Arnold have exchanged sisters (or equally, that Sarah and Dora have exchanged brothers). We could follow such exchanges over generations, but the principle that operates always remains the same: in a direct exchange system, people marry a cross-cousin. When cross-cousins consistently marry, whether they are actual cross-cousins or genealogically distant cousins, in this repetition of structurally similar marriages we see marriage alliance working as defined above. Thus, alliance does not just operate between two groups but is iterated.

The second marriage type is 'indirect exchange', also called a semi-complex system, which is found in Crow and Omaha terminological systems (see above). Marriage in these cases is either patrilineal or matrilineal, meaning that a person can marry a cross-cousin from either the father's or the mother's side, but not from both. This is so because the cross-cousin on one side is related to you as your mother's brother or father's sister and you would not marry someone you call *aunt* or *uncle*. This means that you always marry 'on the same side', and, in terms of clans or descent groups, it also means that there are at least three exchanging units. The marriage pattern occurring in these systems is also called asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage. Figure 19 illustrates a simplified version of indirect exchange: women of the *white cockatoo* clan (orange) marry men of the *black crows* (blue); women of the *black crows* marry men of the *brown eagles* (yellow); and women of the *brown eagles* (yellow) marry men of the *white cockatoos* (orange).

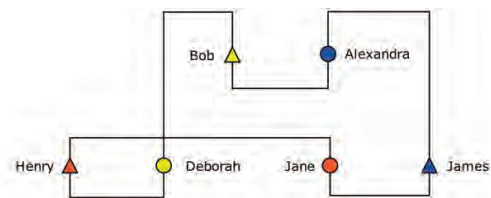


Figure 19:
Indirect exchange system

The least systemic exchange system is called the 'complex system'. It is usually associated with Eskimo kinship terminologies. Marriage is here no longer a system of exchange on its own but merges into other types of exchanges, social structures and ideologies. The class of marriageable persons is not defined in complex systems, except as non-kin (with the exception of some cousins being marriageable in certain complex systems). This is why it is called 'complex': kinship alone is not sufficient to understand the rules of marriage. An example of such a system is contemporary European marriage, where alliances (repetitions of identical marriages) are very rare since children of a single family may marry in different ways and into the most diverse family backgrounds. Here, there is only a proscriptive marriage rule, which is concerned with the incest prohibition, but there are no formalised prescriptive rules. Statistically, of course, there are some regularities even among complex systems, but 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 land ownership over time.

Summary and Conclusion of Part Two

Rather than defining kinship in absolute terms, which would be a complex enterprise as anthropologists may have a wide variety of definitions, I have presented and discussed the principal domains of investigation in kinship studies, gradually defining what kinship is all about. After the presentation of the usual abbreviations, symbols and conventions used, three major domains have been illustrated: terminology, descent and marriage. These three aspects of kinship have continued to attract considerable attention throughout the history of anthropology.

Every language and culture has a kinship terminology, that is words that belong to the particular domain of addressing or referring to relatives using a biological idiom. However, while there is considerable diversity in terminologies, they can also be categorised in ways that offer significant insights into how people interact in particular societies or groups. The Eskimo and the Dravidian systems have been discussed with some depth since the former is the European type of system while the latter is that generally found in Aboriginal Australia. There are clear differences between these two system types with regard to how kin relationships are calculated and to the extension of the applicability of kinship terms. In Aboriginal Australian Dravidian systems, there is no limitation to the extension of range and there are systematic ways of calculating everyone's relationship to everyone else. What is crucial to remember for Dravidian systems is that they define potential spouses as being in the cross-cousin category while the Eskimo system does not define any category of persons who can become a spouse. However, while the Dravidian terminology defines these spouses, it is important to remember that a cross-cousin is not necessarily a close relative but can be genealogically distant. The cross-cousin position can be determined through the relational triangle. Terminology and genealogy are two different domains that need to be clearly distinguished.

We then briefly discussed the notions of filiation and descent. Filiation is the relationship between parents and their children while descent is the systematisation of principles of filiation over generations. In many cases, rules of descent create groups of people who share certain characteristics, such as common substance or history. These principles can be of various kinds: patrilineal (or patrilineal), matrilineal (or matrilineal), ambilineal, cognatic and double descent. In Aboriginal Australia, patrilineal and matrilineal descent systems are the most common although the Western Desert system is best seen as an ambilineal system.

Terminology and descent are closely linked to marriage. Despite issues of personal affinities and choices, all societies have marriage conventions or rules. The basic proscriptive marriage rule is the incest prohibition, forcing people to marry out of their own family or group. In most societies there are also prescriptive marriage rules: Ego is supposed to marry into a certain category of persons. In the Australian Dravidian system, these prescriptive marriage rules are usually jural and structural: they are what people expect you to do, but they can also be deduced from the kinship terminology itself, where only certain people can be labelled spouses.

Marriage is also understandable as a form of exchange of people between groups. Three basic types of exchange have been discussed: direct exchange, that which in most cases is applicable in Australia; indirect exchange, which is applicable for example in Crow-Omaha (or skewed) terminologies; and complex exchanges where marriage is tied to other social domains such as politics, economical conditions and social class.

Further Reading

To learn more on the history and particularity of kinship studies

FOX, Robin 1996. *Kinship and Marriage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1967].

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SCHWEITZER, Peter P. (ed.) 2000. *Dividends of Kinship*. London and New York: Routledge, European Association of Social Anthropologists.

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Part Three

Western Desert kinship ethnography

Western Desert kinship terminology

Western Desert terminology (also known as Aluridja terminology, since Elkin's descriptions in the 1930s) has raised issues that are significant for anthropologists. Franklin Tjon Sie Fat notes that:

Some of the most intriguing descriptions of anomalous or inconsistent terminological systems combining a variety of Dravidian, Iroquois, and 'Hawaiian' or generational features with a range of affinal terms and extensive marriage prohibitions pertain to the Western Desert peoples of Australia (Tjon Sie Fat, 1998:78).

Indeed, since the publication of A.P. Elkin's *Kinship in South Australia* (1938-40), Aluridja systems have been characterised by their inability to distinguish siblings (brothers and sisters) from cross-cousins, which is very unusual for Australia, the allowing of marriage between parallel cousins, and the absence of sections, subsections and exogamous moieties (see Part 4 below). To take the most debated example, Lévi-Strauss (1967 [1947]:231, 251 and Figure 56, page 249) had obvious problems with the incompatibility between the Aluridja and other Australian systems, so he labelled this system 'aberrant'. Another example is Scheffler's (1978) work, also an important contribution to our understanding of Australian kinship systems and semantics. Scheffler discusses the Pitjantjatjara terminology — considered an Aluridja type — as consisting of characteristics similar to those mentioned by Elkin. Indeed, while he confirms that a MB marries a FZ and that the cross-parallel distinction is therefore introduced in Ego's parents' generation, he nevertheless gives as the English gloss for the term *watjirra* (a cross-cousin) the expression 'distant sibling'.

Testart (1996), a French scholar, believes that the Aluridja system is guided only by an elementary incest prohibition, thus lacking all the systematics that theorists writing on Aboriginal Australia have glorified. The absence of what he calls objective or totemic patrilineal or matrilineal groups (1996:300) that could exchange spouses in accordance with some principle of exogamy is interpreted as the reason for the total absence of marriage rules.

Recently, both Tjon Sie Fat (1998) and Trautmann and Barnes (1998) have briefly tackled Aluridja kinship. While Tjon Sie Fat recalls the problems that this system poses for formal analysis, Trautmann and Barnes categorise it as a variation of what they call the type B crossness, while we would generally expect for Australia what they call a type A crossness (Dravidian).

These problems have found their way into the literature because Elkin's original ethnography was flawed and because he did not recognise some important differences that exist in Western Desert culture: notably, that which exists between sociological and ego-centric contexts for the use of kinship terms (see Dousset 2003 and 2005).

Rather than reproduce Elkin's errors, I shall now describe how Western Desert people use kinship words in particular contexts. The first, which I call 'egological', is the classic approach to terminologies. This terminology is based on an Ego who addresses or refers to kin people around him or her. The second context, which I will describe below, is one in which general social distinctions are the focus of discussion and practice.

In the **egological context**, Western Desert people have a terminology that distinguishes cross from parallel cousins, but they also have specific affinal terms for potential or actual in-laws. The following figure present these terms. Note that these are the terms used in the central parts of the Western Desert, among Ngaatjatjarra, Ngaanyatjarra, Pintupi and to some extent Pitjantjatjara people. For the eastern terms, you may want to check Goddard (1985 and 1992) for example, or for the western terms, Tonkinson (1991).

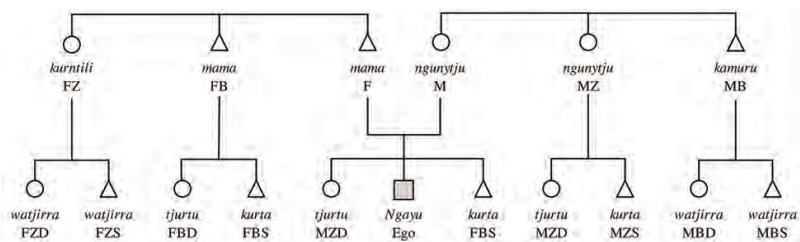


Figure 20: Western Desert terminology: Ego's and Ego's parents' generations

As expected, the terminological system is of the Dravidian type. Unlike the Eskimo (European) system, MB is distinguished from FB, and FZ from MZ. Bifurcation takes place in G+1. Moreover, FZ's and MB's children are distinguished from brothers and sisters, who are in the same category as parallel cousins. The figure is not complete since there is a further distinction between brothers and sisters. Older brothers are called *kurta* and older sisters are called *tjurtu*, but both younger brothers and sisters are all called *marlany* or *marlanypa*, irrespective of their gender. Additionally, the word *nyarrumpa* designates all siblings and parallel cousins of opposite gender to the speaker, irrespective of his or her own gender.

Another interesting distinction is birth order between siblings. To indicate birth order, people use the following expression, in which A is the oldest and D the youngest sibling:

- A-lu pakarnu pimirnu B-nya. A has grown with B on his/her shoulders.
- B-lu pakarnu pimirnu C-nya. B has grown with C on his/her shoulders.
- C-lulta pakarnu marlankatjanya pimirnu. Finally, C has grown with D on his/her shoulders (marlankatjanya is the last one, and thus stands for D).

Moreover, among parallel cousins, birth order does not follow chronological age but the age of their parents. For example, all children of ones mother's younger sister are called *marlanypa* (younger sibling), irrespective of whether they are older or younger, and all children of ones mother's elder sister are called *kurta* and *tjurtu*, irrespective of whether they are older or younger. It is the relative age of the parents that is taken into account. Similarly, a younger brother of ones father may be called *mama marlankatja*, a 'father who comes behind'. This expression is also used for the second husband of ones mother. *Ngunyju marlankatja* is the equivalent for mother's younger sisters or for the father's second wife.

As in all Dravidian systems, the mother's brother (*kamuru*) is in the same category as ones father-in-law (*waputju*, see below when I discuss the affinal terminology), and the father's sister (*kurntili*) is in the same category as ones mother-in-law (*yumari*, see below). However, ones actual MB or FZ are never potential in-laws. To distinguish those *kamuru* that can become *waputju* from those that cannot because they are genealogically too close and to distinguish those *kurntili* that can become *yumari* from those that cannot because they are also genealogically too close, the adjective *tjiwangkatja* is added. *Kamuru tjiwangkatja* and *kurntili tjiwangkatja* mean a 'distant uncle' and a 'distant aunt' respectively.

If they are close, and even more so if they are Ego's actual MB and FZ, *kamuru* and *kurntili* have considerable responsibility for Ego's education. Along with the parents, an aunt and an uncle will have a say in the ways a child should be educated, in the choice of an adoptive family should this happen, in the planning of a boy's initiation and a child's marriage in general. In many cases, I have observed that the relationship between a child and their uncle and aunt is closer than that with their parents, towards whom the child must show respect while maintaining a measure of physical and emotional distance.

Watjirra, cross-cousin, also requires further discussion since its use is different from one dialectal group to another, even within the central parts of the desert, and because there are other words to denote persons of the same category (some of which are further explained below). The following table summarises the words and usages for cross-cousins:

Word	Category	Remarks
<i>watjirra</i>	FZS, FZD, MBS, MBD	Used in the northern part of the central Western Desert
<i>yumparna</i>	Like <i>watjirra</i>	Alternative word used in the northern part of the Western Desert
<i>tjamirti</i>	Like <i>watjirra</i>	Word used in the western part of the Western Desert
<i>katjama</i>	Like <i>watjirra</i>	Word used around the Rawlinson Ranges

Word	Category	Remarks
<i>kurta</i>	eB, eFZS, eMBS	In the southern part of the Western Desert, people call cross-cousins by the word for 'brother' before marriage. This changes after marriage when the in-law (affinal) terminology is used.
<i>tjurtu</i>	eZ, eFZD, eMBD	In the southern part of the Western Desert, people call cross-cousins by the word for 'sister' before marriage. This changes after marriage when the in-law (affinal) terminology is used.
<i>marlanypa</i>	yB, yFZS, yMBS, yZ, yFZD, yMBD	In the southern part of the Western Desert, people call cross-cousins by the word for 'younger sister/brother' before marriage. This changes after marriage when the in-law (affinal) terminology is used.
<i>marutju</i>	mZH, WB	Descriptive term, actual brother-in-law
<i>makurlta</i>	Like <i>marutju</i>	Descriptive term, actual brother-in-law
<i>maritji</i>	Like <i>marutju</i>	Descriptive term, actual brother-in-law
<i>tjuwari</i>	wBW, HZ	Brother's wife, used only once brothers are married.
<i>kurri</i>	W, H, mFZD, mMBD, wFZS, wMBS, mFM, wMF, mDD, wDS	Husband and wife in general terms. Can be used for all opposite sex cross-cousins and for some persons of the grandparent and grandchildren generations as well. If the person is not ones actual spouse, it is considered somewhat insulting if not used in a joking relationship.
<i>yamatji</i>	Like <i>kurri</i>	Generally meaning companion, lover (see <i>kurri</i>)
<i>yinkarni</i>	Like <i>kurri</i>	Respectful towards a person who is a potential spouse but who is already married.

Conversely to what Elkin and his successors claimed, the Aluridja system distinguishes cross-cousins from brothers, sisters and parallel cousins. In the southern and eastern parts of the central desert, cross-cousins are in some instances addressed as siblings, but this is only the case so long as marriage is not envisaged; that is, as long as these cross-cousins are not of marriageable age. The underlying structure, terminology and way of classifying people clearly follow the bifurcate merging pattern of Dravidian terminologies. We now examine the terminology used for the remaining generations.

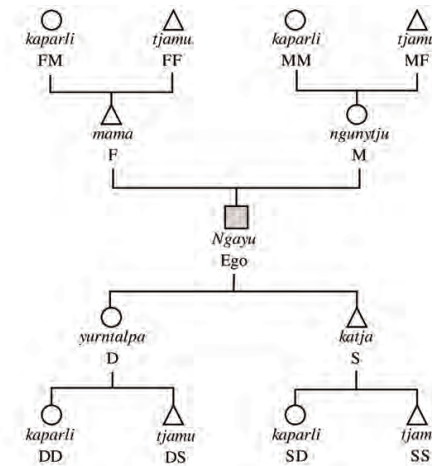


Figure 21: Western Desert terminology: Ego's grandparents', children's and grandchildren's generations

Most notable here is that in the generations of grandparents and grandchildren, only gender is distinguished: *kaparli* for females and *tjamu* for males. Note also that these terms are self-reciprocal if the interlocutors are of the same gender. A female Ego will call her grandmothers and her granddaughters *kaparli*, and they will call her *kaparli* in return. The same is true for *tjamu*. Not all groups have self-reciprocal terms in these generations, however. The Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people, for example, call their grandfathers *tjamu* while they call their grandsons *pakali*. The grandmothers are called *kami* and the granddaughters *puliri* (Goddard 1985: 153).

The generations G+2 (grandparents) and G-2 (grandchildren) are thus not Dravidian but Hawaiian or generational. They do not introduce any distinctions between cross and parallel, and the terminology does not reflect any particular lines of descent. Irrespective of whether they are on the father's or on the mother's side, the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is one of equity and equality, of reciprocity and closeness.

The grandparent and grandchildren terminologies are also the vertical limits of the terminology. There is no equivalent to something like 'great-grandmother'. In fact, the terminology of the Western Desert is cyclical. The son of a son's son (SSS) is again classified as a father and the father of a father's father (FFF) is classified as a son. I have encountered a case where an old man called a two-year old boy *kamuru* (MB). The boy

was his actual WZSDS (wife's sister's son's daughter's son) and thus a classificatory SDS (son's daughter's son). A son's daughter's son, for whom there is no term, is a MB according to a cyclical Dravidian type of calculation. It was with some amusement that the old man claimed that, according to the rules, this boy will have to give him his daughter as a wife.

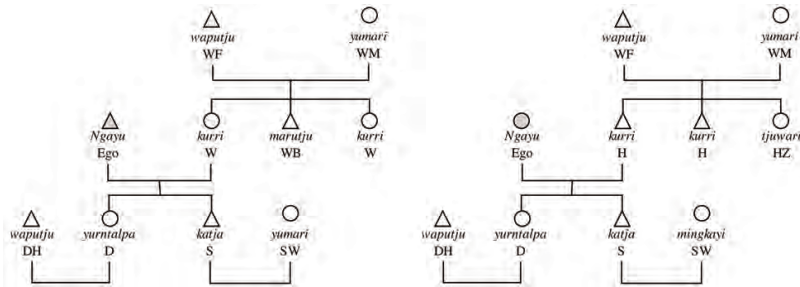


Figure 22: Western Desert terminology: affinal terms (left: male Ego; right: female Ego)

Affinal terms are used from the time that Ego's marriage is envisaged, discussed and negotiated or has actually occurred. Men are able to envisage marriage once they have completed the first few stages of initiation, when they become *wati* (adult men as opposed to boys). Women are marriageable after they have had their first menstruation and their breasts have started to grow. Girls will also have to proceed through various steps of ceremonial initiations before becoming senior women.

During and after male initiation, the main initiator has a very important role. I return to marriage later, but note for now that the word used to designate this initiator is *waputju*, the same as the word for father-in-law, and in fact, the initiator typically promises one of his daughters, actual or classificatory, to the young man as a spouse in response to his having ritually 'killed' the boy, who is later symbolically 'reborn' as a man. *Waputju* is married to *yumari*, the mother-in-law. Both are cross relatives: a *waputju* is a MB (*kamuru*), and a *yumari* is a FZ (*kurntili*) who are of some genealogical and spatial distance apart. Before marriage was envisaged, the boy and the girl would call their 'future' parents-in-law 'aunt' and 'uncle'.

Waputju is again self-reciprocal, since it is applicable to the father-in-law and the son-in-law. However *yumari*, who is a person Ego needs to avoid completely and who can only refer to her and never address her, is only self-reciprocal for a male Ego. A female Ego will refer to her daughter-in-law as *mingkayi*.

Other interesting terms are *marutju* and *tjuwari*. The former designates a man's sister's husband, as well as a man's wife's brother, and corresponds well to the English understanding of brother-in-law. The same is true for *tjuwari*: it designates a woman's brother's wife and a woman's husband's sister. All cross-cousins are allowed to have a relaxed and close relationship, joking and sharing without restraint, even when they are of different gender. This is even more so the case between men who call each other *marutju* and females who call each other *tjuwari*, in particular if they are actual brothers and sisters-in-law.

Having considered the ecological context, we now turn to the **sociological context**, in which the terminology is much more limited. Such sociological contexts are, for example, ceremonies where each generation has particular tasks or a context in which people discuss general rules and relationships rather than individual relationships. In these cases, it is possible for Western Desert people to temporarily ignore the underlying Dravidian system and to switch to a Hawaiian system. We have seen that the Hawaiian system is already in use in the grandparent and grandchildren generations. In these sociological contexts, this principle is extrapolated to all generations so that all females of the parents' generation are called *ngunyntju* (M), irrespective of whether they are FZ or M, and all males of the parents' generation are called *mama* (F), irrespective of whether they are F or MB. The same is true for Ego's generation, where all females are called sister (*tjurtu*) and all males are called brother (*kurta*). Temporarily calling a cross-cousin 'brother' does not however transform this man permanently into a brother or parallel cousin. It is usually only a temporary and contextual label. There are, though, particular situations in which this transformation is more permanent; for example, in the context of marriage, to which we now turn.

Finding a spouse

As explained in Part 2, there are proscriptive and prescriptive marriage rules. Every society has proscriptive rules: you cannot marry so-and-so because it would be considered incestuous. Most people also know prescriptive marriage rules that flow from either obvious and explicit norms and discourses or from the terminology's systemic properties. Calling parallel cousins 'brother' and 'sister' is such a systemic property, since it extends the proscriptive rule (the prohibition to marry actual brothers and sisters) to other, genealogically distant or even unrelated persons.

In the Western Desert, the proscriptive rule is not limited to a genealogical factor alone but is extended to include a spatial factor as well. In other words, incestuous marriages are considered to be those involving a category of persons other than cross-cousins but also those including persons who are genealogically and geographically close. Very rarely are actual cross-cousins allowed to marry, and only very exceptionally may spouses be affiliated to identical territorial sites in the landscape. There is much variation in relation to these rules across the Western Desert, so we concentrate here on two similar cases: the Ngaatjatjarra and the Ngaanyatjarra dialectal groups. With both, there are explicit, somewhat strict rules that bring together a combination of several proscriptive and prescriptive elements.

1) **The first rule concerns the formal aspects of the kinship system.** You may not marry someone who is a brother or sister, or who is in an adjacent generation (e.g., mother, daughter, uncle, son) to you. Your spouse must therefore be a cross-cousin or a grandchild or grandparent who is of the cross category. A FM or a DD for a male Ego, and a MF or a SS for a female Ego, can be considered acceptable as spouses on occasion, but such relatives would be reclassified as cross-cousins, which is perfectly compatible with the Dravidian system and does not alter other relationships.

2) **The second rule concerns genealogical distance.** You may not marry someone genealogically close or anyone for whom you can identify known, named identical ancestors. Put in prescriptive terms, you should marry someone at least three generations removed (third cross-cousins). In other words, you are encouraged to conform to a strong genealogical exogamy.

3) **The third rule concerns spatial distance.** You may not marry someone with whom you share too much spatial identity; that is those conceived or born on the same site, or who have lived for prolonged periods of time in the same area or community as you. Put in prescriptive terms, you should conform to this strong spatial exogamy by finding your spouse in a distant and different place. The rule of spatial and social distance is so important that, in cases recorded by Tonkinson (1975) among the Mardu and by me among the Ngaatjatjarra, some persons who potentially fit into the spouse category, being cross-cousins, are renamed *brothers* and *sisters*. This can happen with people who are either geographically close or who should not become affines for a range of other emotional, social, political or economic reasons. Through the 'reclassification' of these persons as siblings, the possibility of a marriage is annulled since it would now be considered incestuous.

A marriage that ignores these rules is *yinyurrpa*, which is considered incestuous. Interestingly, this word also means 'the other generational moiety', a social grouping discussed below (Part 4) which includes people of adjacent generations (those of parents and children), with whom marriage and sexual relationships are forbidden. Applying all of these rules rigorously has nowadays become difficult. While the formal rule and the rule of genealogical distance are frequently adhered to, that of geographic exogamy has become increasingly difficult to maintain in large, settled communities, where intracommunity marriages are now common and accepted. The ideal of an extreme geographical exogamy, also called 'local exogamy' in anthropology, is nevertheless still strong in people's discourses and alliance strategies. The various reasons for this include the influence of exogamy on the creation of wide-ranging networks of solidarity and exchange.

How then does a person find a spouse? Here again there are several mechanisms or institutions that work in parallel (Dousset 1999): the ceremonial promise (*pikarta*), the non-ceremonial promise (*karlkurnu*) and the elopement (*warnngirnu*). Before going into the details of each of these possibilities, it is important to note that actual marriage patterns

do not reflect what alliance theorists would expect to be the case. You may recall that in Part 2 there was a discussion of one of the marriage systems theorised by Lévi-Strauss (1967 [1947]), which he called 'direct' or 'symmetrical' exchange. This type of marriage was allegedly found in Dravidian terminological systems where a mother's brother is also the father-in-law and where the father's sister is a mother-in-law. I have repeatedly underlined the necessity to distinguish genealogical from terminological aspects: it is not because one may call a mother-in-law *father's sister* that this mother-in-law is one's actual father's sister. She may well be someone who stands in the same category but who is genealogically, socially and spatially removed. The Ngaatjatjarra marriage patterns confirm this hypothesis. Among the 282 marriages I analysed with respect to this question, only eight can be considered direct exchanges and only four of these reflect the ideal form of sister exchange between two future brothers-in-law (the others being a different form of exchange involving close parallel cousins).

If direct exchange is rarely followed in practice, even though people may explain marriage as a direct exchange between two brothers, this is because other values are followed. I have already, but indirectly, alluded to these several times; for example, the necessity for people to increase their capacity to rely on the resources of others in difficult times. The archaeologist Richard Gould (1969: 273) suggests that

Compared to the Kalahari people, the Western Desert people must subsist on significantly less water, game, and plant foods. [...] Western Desert Aborigines have managed to survive in the harshest physical environment on earth ever inhabited by man before the Industrial Revolution.

And Tonkinson (1991: 15) noted that, 'Coping with the desert is hard work, especially during the seven or eight months of the hot season. You soon develop immense admiration and respect for the Aborigines who have conquered it and made it their own'.

With peaks as high as 45 degrees Celsius during the day in summer, the temperature can drop at night to below freezing in winter. Rainfall is scarce throughout the year, with a slight increase during the winter months. Riverbeds are dry most of the time and are filled with water for only a few days after heavy rain since it soon disappears into the sand. The demographic density is extremely low but, as noted earlier, a key factor is not simply the scarcity of rainfall but its unpredictability. It may thus rain abundantly in one localised area while just a few kilometres away no rain has fallen for many years. Managing this uncertainty has led Western Desert people to develop a dynamic and flexible system of landownership. However, it was also vital to create and reproduce exchanges, partnerships, a sense of closeness and obligations of reciprocity with other families and groups living in neighbouring areas. Being in a close relationship with other people, in particular through the institution of marriage, provides a sense of security in the event of hardship and drought. In times of drought, it allowed people to visit and exploit resources located outside their traditional foraging area. There is no other way human society could have survived and thrived in this environment so long ago.

Although direct exchange can be considered a formal prescription and is explained by people (particularly men) as the most appropriate way to marry, as an adaptive strategy it does not conform to ecological and economic imperatives. A far more adaptive system of marriage would be one in which each individual, family and group diversifies its network of relationships. Keen (2002) calls these multiple links 'shifting webs'. Indeed, if two men 'exchange' sisters, they have only each other to rely on during times of hardship. However, if one of them gives his sister in marriage to another man and then marries the sister of a third man, he enlarges his network. The strategic goal here is the diversification of alliance.

There is also a parallel here with the process of obtaining a first wife for a young man during initiation. When a boy is old enough to be initiated, any time after the age of 15, his immediate family, and in particular his actual aunt (FZ) and uncle (MB), discuss and negotiate the place and time of the ceremony amongst themselves and with potential host families and communities. Initiation rarely occurs in the boy's own residential community but ideally takes place among other, distant families. The central role is that of *waputju*, his initiator and future, or at least potential, father-in-law. His *waputju* will be chosen from a distant family, if possible one with whom the boy's family has yet few or no sustained relationships. Indeed, as we have seen, the *waputju* must promise the boy his daughter, or a close 'daughter', in marriage. This girl will be called *pikarta*, 'the one obtained through pain'. At the same time, however, a potential mother-in-law, called *pampurlpa* during the ceremony, will promise her daughter or one of her close 'daughters'. *Pampurlpa* is usually not *waputju*'s wife, but another classificatory aunt (FZ). After the initiation ceremony, the boy will thus already have two potential wives who are usually from distinct geographical (and sometimes cultural) communities. His network has already started to expand.

Here, we need to go further: the boy will only rarely marry one of these two girls but will become involved with yet another woman and her family through other social processes. Even though he does not marry the promised girls, the promise itself has already established an affinal relationship on which he can count. Additionally, all the boys who are initiated simultaneously constitute a group called *ngalunku* and henceforth become close friends and allies, bound by mutual friendship and obligations of care and reciprocity.

Most marriages are indeed consequences of either *karlkurnu* or *warnngirnu*. The first kind is a promise between a potential son-in-law and his potential parents-in-law. In former times, when people were still nomadic hunter-gatherers, the man would follow his family-in-law and hunt and provide food and gifts for them until the parents-in-law agreed to give him their daughter. Today, offerings of money, a car or other material goods are expected by the girl's parents.

The second form, *warnngirnu*, is elopement. If two young people fall in love but both have already been promised to others in marriage or if parents reject the idea of marriage for other reasons, the young couple may simply run away. The elopement is sometimes ritualised. The family and community pretend to be following the couple in order to bring them home and separate them, but the pursuers make sure that the couple escape, thus acknowledging the marriage. In cases where there is anger and the marriage is vehemently

opposed, the hunting party will do its utmost to stop the elopement. To avoid this, the young couple will travel to a distant area and return only after they have a child, which in most cases will ratify the marriage. Whichever situation, *karlkurnu* or *warnngirnu*, has led to the marriage, it is evident that each man has at least three potential or actual wives. He has established relationships with at least three families: two promises during initiation and one through actual marriage outside the ceremonial context. In addition, while still relatively young, he has enlarged his network through strong relationships with his co-initiates.

On the family and related issues

As we know, marriage is also about establishing a family, not just a network. In the Western Desert, the words *walytja* or *yungarra marri* are those that seem to equate with the English word 'family'. However, we need to be cautious because 'family' has a culturally specific meaning and is the result of hundreds of years of social evolution and change, as Goody (1999) has shown.

The historic and social background of this word also implies a kinship system, a way of recognising 'who or what' is part of this unit. The fact that by the term 'family' Europeans understand a limited group of people is directly linked to the 'Eskimo' kinship terminology and to the limitation of the extension of range in such systems. It may therefore be appropriate to translate the English 'family' into the French 'famille', the Italian 'famiglia', or the German 'Familie', because these terms have a similar historic origin and mean something comparable, if not identical, in all these languages: a wife, a husband, their children; included are sometimes grandparents and grandchildren, brothers and sisters of the parents and their children, even though they may not in all cases, or even in many cases, actually live together. In the English meaning of 'family', the idea of 'common blood' or consanguinity is implied: children are of the same blood as or share some genetic material with their parents.

Another idea usually associated with the notion of family is the **household**. A family usually lives as a united group in a distinguishable shelter: they are co-residents. In anthropology, however, the (nuclear) 'family', as a group constituted by marriage and offspring, is sharply distinguished from the notion of household — those who live together — as well as from the **domestic group**. The latter defines the smallest economic unit of production and consumption. These distinctions are necessary because not all societies equate family, household and domestic group. In the Euro-American families of today, grandparents do not often live in the same household as the parents and their children and do not always take part in the household's production and consumption activities but are nevertheless considered to be part of the family. Another example is the cohabitation of students in one apartment or house. They constitute a household and may even be a domestic group because they perhaps share their earnings and goods, but they are not considered a family in the traditional European sense.

Before illustrating in more detail why the word 'family' cannot be directly applied in the Western Desert or in Aboriginal Australia in general, we must first take a small historical detour to see how the notion has been applied and understood by anthropologists.

➤ **Polygamy:** Having several simultaneous spouses.

➤ **Polyandry:** A form of polygamy. A woman who is married to more than one husband at the same time.

➤ **Polygyny:** A form of polygamy. A man who has more than one wife simultaneously.

➤ **Monogamy:** A kind of marriage involving one woman or man and her or his unique spouse. A monogamous family comprises a man, a woman and their children.

➤ **Group marriage:** Early anthropologists, such as H.L. Morgan, thought that in some societies, such as in Aboriginal Australian groups, individual marriages were neither practiced nor recognised and that it was a group of men (or brothers) who collectively married a group of women (or sisters), all of them having collective children that belonged to the entire group of mothers/fathers. Group marriage did not exist in Aboriginal Australia.

The first definition of 'family' in a systematic and serious anthropological work appeared in one of the first books ever published in 'modern' anthropology and already proposed a dynamic and cross-culturally informed understanding of the 'family'. You may recall my earlier mention of Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871) when discussing kinship terminologies, as well as of his *Ancient Society* (1877). Many anthropologists consider these two books to mark the birth of anthropology as a science in its own right, as well as the starting point of systematic kinship studies in human cultures. Morgan compared what he called 'systems of relationship' — what anthropologists call 'kinship systems' — and investigated what he termed the 'forms of consanguinity and affinity' of various cultures. From his own journeys among American Indian people and from correspondents all over the world, he obtained data on kinship terms, marriage rules and other elements of social organisation.

Comparing these various cultural features, he elaborated a picture of the evolution of the human family. We know today that his evolutionary ideas, which were a prevalent ideological background of academic discourse in his period, are largely erroneous. Nevertheless, we owe to Morgan many of the most important concepts used in kinship studies and, more importantly, the ability to conceive of the 'family' as a concept that could change meaning in history and in cultural space. He also understood, as the title of his first book clearly indicates, that words such as 'consanguinity' and 'affinity' do not have absolute meanings but that their use and importance depend on the culture studied. That the family comprises people who share a common blood is more of a 'cultural' or 'social' statement than a truly biological one. Proof of Morgan's understanding of 'family' as a dynamic feature of human societies lies in some of the titles and phrasing used in his book. The third part of his *Ancient Society*, for example, has as its title *The development of the idea of family*.

Nevertheless, at times Morgan could not detach himself from what he believed to be the 'end product' of human social evolution: the European-type **monogamous** family comprising a man, a woman and their children. He was heavily influenced by his own ethnocentrism, that is an inability to accept cultural constructions other than his own as 'natural'. He understood the various appearances of the family in different human cultures to represent different stages in a unique social evolution, one that he described as starting from a culture where promiscuous intercourse or **group marriage** was allowed and developing towards the monogamous family of European societies through various stages such as the Hawaiian customs, barbarian phases, **polygamy** and **polyandry**, the patriarchal family and finally the 'civilised' family.

His mistaken idea that the monogamous European family was the form towards which human societies 'naturally' tend leads us to the second step in the analysis of the utility of

the notion of family. This second step occurred decades later, during what would become known as the **nature-nurture debate**. In 1913, Bronislaw Malinowski, an anthropologist who subsequently became renowned for his research in and writings about the Trobriand Islanders, wrote *The Family among the Australian Aborigines*, a book that challenged some of the conceptions of the cultural evolutionists. In Malinowski's opinion, the nuclear family is a human universal, whatever the kinship system, because it answers a human being's primary needs: to be nurtured and reared. Much later, in a discussion with the historian Robert Briffault, broadcast on the BBC and published by Ashley Montagu (1956), he went even further and explained the following:

The science teaches us that marriage and the family are rooted in the deepest needs of human nature and society; that they are associated with progress, spiritual and material. The real task of anthropology consists in giving us insight into the essentials of marriage and the family, as well as the understanding of their value for society.

[...] the most fundamental point of the debate [is] that marriage and family are based on the need of the male to face his responsibility and to take his share in the process of reproduction and of the continuity of culture.

What did Malinowski mean? First, that various types of kinship systems and social units in which people live and work exist but that the family is the universal minimal social unit because it is rooted in the deepest needs of human nature. Marriage and the family are institutions that make possible such elementary things as being fed, looked after and cherished, feeling secure and so on. This view of the family is deeply rooted in Malinowski's general conception of culture. In his so-called functionalist approach, every social institution and every cultural feature satisfies particular functions that contribute to the integration of society as a whole. Social institutions and structures are like organs in a living body, each having a particular task. The nuclear family is one of these 'organs'.

Malinowski adds another point that reflects even more deeply his view of the family as a human fundamental. One could imagine 'families' in which the father takes no part in the bringing up of children and may not even live with them. Such families have since been observed in China, among the Na people, where the mother lives with her own mother, her sisters and her brothers and where the father is, according to Hua (2000), absent and often even unknown. These are 'families' where males would only be anonymous donors of semen. Similar features are nowadays observed in Western families where monoparental families, in which one parent alone educates his or her children, are increasingly frequent. Why then is the (nuclear) family universal according to Malinowski? He explains it as a consequence of power relationships: men (or culture) 'force' woman and children into families in order to make sure they are included in the reproduction of society and to ensure that males are not solely anonymous semen-givers but actively involved in decisions and action involving children's education.

➤ **Nature-nurture debate:** A long-running argument over how to explain human behaviour, customs, etc. Are they caused by genetics, 'instinct', etc. or by being raised in a society? In other words, how much in a human being's behaviour, thinking and practice is culturally determined and how much is biologically determined? The two influences are so inextricably linked that attempts to separate them out and apply some kind of quotient would be impossible and pointless.

These two points addressed by Malinowski deserve our attention. First, he believes that the (nuclear) family is a necessity, a cultural or social universal response to natural needs: a human baby, unlike some animals, requires feeding and rearing. Simultaneously, the 'family' (and kinship in general) is where power relationships are expressed and applied. Malinowski's second thesis, according to which the family is a consequence of males' apprehension about being excluded from the reproduction of society, is difficult to defend. However, we can agree with him that the family, and kinship in general, is an important nexus of local politics. It is about who rightfully does what, to whom and why. This is particularly true in Australian kinship systems.

While many anthropologists, such as Radcliffe-Brown (1941:2), have followed Malinowski in his definition of the minimal social unit as being formed by parents and their children, others have challenged this conception. Meyer Fortes (1978:21), for example, notes that the mother-child couple, excluding the father, is 'the unique and irreducible source of all human existence'. Other researchers, such as Bohannan (1963:73) and Goodenough (1970:18), define the 'nuclear family' as universally comprising only a mother and her children.

The nuclear family, it is now acknowledged, is neither universal nor inevitable (see Holy 1996: 33). Indeed, having such a preconceived conception of the nuclear family as a building block could result in erroneous accounts of cultural systems. As Godelier (1977:138) explains, a family cannot survive on its own but is embedded in larger networks of exchanges and mutual support. We shall not venture further into the question of how and why anthropologists attempted to define the family (or the basic social unit) and its origins. Hérítier summarises these endeavours and suggests that these authors try to answer '[...] what the family is there for [...] without being able to produce a definition which is universally correct, which is not somehow tautological'⁸ (Hérítier 1991: 274).

Domestic group, household and adoption among the Ngaatjatjarra

We now examine a local case. As I have noted, the English word *family* does not correspond exactly to any indigenous category in the Western Desert or in most of the rest of the continent. Rather than conveying that the relationship between children and their parents is not recognised or unimportant, I simply imply that the definition of the minimal social unit rests on criteria other than those usually associated with the notion of family.

There are two ways of approaching the question in the Western Desert. The first is to consider the parent-child relationship as a starting point and to describe the types of social mechanisms that relate to or emerge from this relationship. This approach takes as its

8. 'Tautological' is a definition that is a repetition of the thing that has to be defined. For example to say a circle is round is tautological because the word 'round' does not explain what a circle is.

starting point a biological or genealogical fact (being the child of) and endeavours to explain social phenomena that may either diverge from expected principles or reflect them. Another approach is to define how the minimal social unit is conceived emically (that is, from people's own point of view) and to extrapolate from this understanding by considering other observable social units. This second approach is a sociological one — rather than the genealogical approach mentioned before — as it first describes social mechanisms and, in a further step, correlates these to possible biological relationships. The notion of 'meaning', that is the culturally specific interpretation of genealogical or other links, is of primary interest in this second approach.

These two approaches reflect the two principal (and to some extent conflicting) approaches adopted by anthropologists in their study of human kinship. The genealogical approach is also the method used by former functionalist and structuralist anthropologists who, comparing cultural specificities construed upon the genealogical grid, elaborated generalities and typologies of kinship systems. The second approach is more like that of 'cultural studies'. Many anthropologists were dissatisfied with former methods, contending that these were based on an Euro-American conception of kinship, considered to be based on cultural interpretations of the natural facts of procreation. The 'cultural studies' approach they proposed, which is interested in **relatedness** in general terms, seeks to understand local cultural processes and meanings in relation to a relationship's constituents. I now endeavour to combine these two approaches, since both produce insights and are complementary even if distinctive in their interpretative nature. I intend to use structural notions and concepts but shall attempt to demonstrate that these concepts have cultural equivalences that are meaningful in the Western Desert.

A first step in this endeavour is to clearly differentiate the family as a unit of kinship from both the household as a residential unit and the domestic group as an economic unit. The aim is to elaborate a definition, even if narrative, of the minimal recognised social unit in Western Desert culture: the smallest unit that 'makes sense' in Aboriginal Australia. This is an important preliminary question in the study of a kinship system since it is the building block on which social structure is based.

During anthropological fieldwork in a Western Desert community, the researcher soon develops an intuition that the minimal or elementary social unit is something similar to the nuclear family, is somehow linked to a household or camp and also reflects an economic entity. However, intuitions are not always right and scientific rigour demands that we construct the argument necessary to discover and demonstrate the local substance or essence that justifies this unit and organises its character and meaning.

The starting point must be one in which the nuclear family based on genealogical (and affinal or marital) ties, the domestic group and the household, a notion that is widely used especially in the anthropology of Eastern Europe, are independent. What we then need to consider are the multidimensional interrelations between social units constituted by genealogical links, production and consumption activities and residence. This particular study is based on a specific community in the Western Desert, about which I first need to present some general historical and social facts.

The community in question was established in 1976 as an outstation or country camp of a larger community. Outstations are small settlements which emerge around a larger community that have a few important facilities, such as a shop and a school. These outstations were established in response to the desire of desert peoples to live closer to or on their traditional lands yet still benefit from the advantages of a settlement with its infrastructural resources, such as a water bore, an electricity generator and a store. Outstations sometimes grow and become 'independent' communities themselves. They are thus incorporated under Australian federal law and usually obtain the right to run a school and obtain governmental financial assistance. In this particular case, people gave two main reasons for developing an independent community: being closer to their old homelands (having been nomadic hunter-gatherers until the 1950s) and, secondly, having had a family member die in the community where they had settled. Many Aboriginal cultures avoid the place where a person dies, just as they do not pronounce their name for a year or more. People whose names are identical to that of a deceased person are, after the death, called *Kumarnarra*, no-name. Because this person died in the settlement, they felt that the time had come to relocate.

The newly established community initially had only a bore and a couple of corrugated iron sheds. Other relatives soon moved in and the community later incorporated, built more houses and sank a second water bore. A shop, clinic, school and community office were erected, and by 1995 the community was a well organised and independent settlement comprising some 120 people. In 1996, of these 120 people, 93 could be considered permanent Aboriginal residents, living in 20 out of the 28 available houses in the community, with an average of five persons per dwelling. Not all houses were or are in good condition (see Tonkinson and Tonkinson 2010 on desert values and attitudes to property). Many are built of corrugated iron and become infernal ovens in summer or lack the most basic facilities such as water and electricity. In many cases, people prefer to live outside, choosing to camp between the houses where fires burn and where swags are used as beds. There are various reasons why people in many cases prefer camping to living in houses, among them the fact that houses considerably diminish the capacity to adapt the residential structure to social relationships. It is important to be able to alter the distance between families as well as the orientation of their camps with respect to affinities and expected behavioural norms (see White 1977 and Dousset nd.b).

The composition of these **households** is diverse; we consider here a household as people usually living together in or around one identifiably separate dwelling. Eight of the occupied dwellings hosted nuclear families (parents and their children); another eight were occupied by nuclear families, plus at least one other person, such as a married child with his or her children or another close relative. Two sheds were occupied by widowers and widows with their unmarried children. Widows' camps are called *yarlukuru*, widowers' camps *tawarra*. Two other households consisted of persons not closely related to one another. It is clear that, although the nuclear family plays a certain role in many if not most households, there is certainly no strict overlap between these two notions in a demographic sense.

➤ **Domestic group:** An economic unit. The smallest unit of people that produce and consume material goods in common.

➤ **Household:** A residential unit. People who live together in the same abode or camp.

The **domestic group** is often difficult to delimit. You will remember that a domestic group is the smallest economic unit that collectively consumes and produces material goods. The most elementary economic relationships among the Ngaatjatjarra are those between a woman, her husband and her brother. Indeed, if we measure the domestic group as the result of economic cooperation, then this group must be considered as the most basic unit. Information on wealth and availability of resources flows freely among these people and reciprocity is not a matter of demanding or **demand-sharing** (see Peterson 1993). An adult daughter no longer living in the family household would ask before helping herself to food from a meal prepared by her mother. A husband and his wife's brother, on the other hand, would not hesitate to just help themselves. Similarly, a woman would not hesitate to help herself from food prepared by her brother or her *tjuwari* (brother's wife). As another example, a brother visiting his sister would not need to ask permission when entering the private area of her camp (the area reserved for sleeping and eating), even when no one was present. This is not the case with other relatives or community members. They would not enter the camp area if the owners were absent, and when it was occupied they would not enter it without manifesting their presence and receiving some words or gestures of invitation.

This domestic unit hardly ever constitutes a residential entity. Every man is in principle involved in at least two domestic units: one with his wife, and another with his sister and her husband. Similarly, every woman is involved in two domestic groups: those of her husband and her brother.

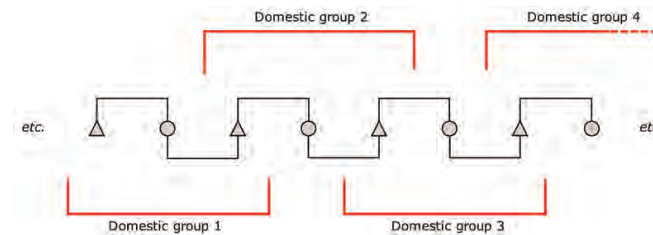


Figure 23: Overlap of domestic units among the Ngaatjatjarra

As the above figure shows, domestic groups are interconnected in such a way that each person has a double belonging, both through brother/sisterhood (consanguinity) as a brother or sister on one side, and through marriage (affinity) as a husband or wife on the

other. Domestic groups are hence not bounded entities but constitute a chain of people linked through their positions in each of the two domestic groups. If this is to be considered the minimal economic unit, it calls into question the notion of the 'domestic unit' itself since its extent is in fact endless.

I have not chosen a female Ego to be the centre of the domestic group, and thus the axis in the figure, but wife and sister occupy an important place in these relationships. The 'nuclear family' and the 'domestic group' never completely overlap, but these relationships are articulated around the woman. To investigate this articulation and analyse the meaning constructed around a genealogical connection, we can draw information from an interesting test case: that of adoption.

Adoption is indeed the most 'cultural' or 'social' event of what could be considered a 'natural' process, which we can call 'engendering'. It is the most 'cultural' aspect of a 'natural' process, and the most 'natural' aspect of a 'cultural' process. Adoption creates links that look or are made to look 'biological' yet are social. It is in the local understanding and explanation of adoption that we can discern whether there is an interpretation of genealogical connectedness and what form it will take.

Adoption is very common among Ngaatjatjarra people and fosterage, the temporary caring for children, even more so. There are numerous reasons why children are claimed or given away for adoption. In most cases, however, it is the result of deceased parents or when an unmarried mother is considered unable to care adequately for her offspring. The children leave their natal family camp or house to settle in the new household. The expression used to describe adoption is particularly interesting:

<i>Nyuyurlpa</i>	<i>kutjupankatja</i>	<i>mantjinu</i>	<i>kanyinu</i>	<i>purlkanu</i> .
The adoptive mother	from another one	took[,]	kept	[and] raised

According to the expression, the position of being an adopter can only be occupied by a woman, which is an interesting fact in itself. As far as I know, it is impossible to express adoption in masculine terms. The second interesting point is that *nyuyurlpa* (the adoptive women, or the verb 'to adopt') also means 'to add timber to the fire'. This is not a linguistic reconstruction or a hypothetical reconciliation between the meanings of two words. The identity between these two words is explicit and conscious. We may thus rewrite the expression as follows: 'the one (feminine) who keeps the fire alive took the child from another one, kept it and raised it'. It is also useful to understand what else this fire is about, in addition to it being something in the centre of a residential community that is personalised through a woman.

Fire has a strong metaphorical and symbolic value in the Western Desert. Parents who have lost a child are called *purrkutjarra* (literally 'with coals'), because they coat their faces with charcoal from an extinguished (dead) fire. Another example is the ritual that follows a child's birth: women hold the baby in the smoke of a burning (living) fire and give it its first (secret) name. Also, after initiation, the youth is massaged by a classificatory mother-

in-law in the smoke of a fire, confirming his rebirth as a man. A more common example is the following: the smoke of a distant fire signals the presence of other human beings in an immense desert. Traditionally groups would announce their planned arrival by lighting smoke fires as they were approaching. Fire is also used to burn out weeds and shrubs so that the grass can regenerate and attract animals.

The importance of fire as a metaphor for life, birth and rebirth is unquestionable. Moreover, the fire of a camp is associated with a woman, who is keeping it alive, perhaps in a camp where an adopted child is settling. It is difficult to define the underpinning substance or essence of the basic social unit among the Ngaatjatjarra, but the study of adoption has produced some new understandings: the central genealogical connection of the household is the woman, her material counterpart, the fire (household), and her relationships with her brother and husband (domestic unit).

Summary and Conclusion of Part Three

This section is clearly the most ethnographic one because in it I attempt to apply the concepts developed earlier to a specific region, the Western Desert. I began by summarising previous analyses of this region's kinship system in order to highlight a few errors and misconceptions. The major one was to consider that people use only a single type of terminology, applicable in all situations and by all persons in the same way. The ethnography shows that, within a single language area and group, several terminological systems can coexist and be deployed. I have called these contexts *sociological* and *egological*. In the latter, a Dravidian-type terminology is used, one in which cross-cousins are clearly distinguished from parallel cousins and individual relationships are relevant. In the sociological context, however, the general social structure is relevant; a social structure in which generational moieties, which we address below, are relevant. Here, cross-cousins can be called by the terms for brothers and sisters and a Hawaiian-like terminology is applied.

We then considered affinal terminology: the ways of addressing and referring to in-laws, whether actual or potential. This led us to consider how people find spouses and marry, how marriage rules are applied and how marriage, real or potential, leads to the establishment of social networks. I have stressed that every person has several alliance relationships regardless of whether marriage actually occurred. In an ecological situation in which networking is an important adaptive strategy, marriage is a means to assure reciprocity and solidarity between families that are often separated by long distances.

Marriage typically creates a family, but the notion of 'family' is not straightforward so three types of entities were enumerated and discussed: the family as a genealogical unit, the domestic group as an economic unit and the household as a residential unit. Particular attention must be paid to the ways they interact. I showed that studying processes which lie on the border between a 'naturalistic' and a 'cultural' local view of kinship can prove useful. Adoption and the way it is handled and interpreted constitute one of these processes.

Further Reading

Concept of the family, household and domestic group

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Part Four

Social category systems

In the previous chapter, I used ethnographic examples to show how kinship is articulated in an Aboriginal Australian society. However, in the Western Desert, as in many Australian societies, there is a further important layer in this domain: social categories. These social categories are compatible with kinship but must be distinguished from it since they lie at a different level of abstraction from the nature of a relationship. They constitute abstract or normative groups of people with identical features but, unlike lineages or clans, do not generate enduring corporations. They work as a superstructure above kinship and are a useful device for labelling people in generic ways, by making the identification of kin categories simpler, and by facilitating relationships and exchanges among different groups, 'tribes' or dialects. Well known to anthropologists, they constitute to some degree an Australian particularity. They are called 'sections', 'subsections', 'semi-moieties' and 'moieties'.

To fully understand these social categories and distinguish them from kinship, some general theoretical background is necessary. Kinship in general is an **egocentric** recognition of relationships inside the web of relatedness built on filiation and marriage. 'Egocentric' means that whenever one needs to apply or understand terminology, behaviour, classification of relatives and so on, a person has to be defined as Ego, the speaker or point of reference. In contrast, social categories are **sociocentric**: it is not necessary to have an individual's point of view to establish and understand these categories since they are generally applicable, even though, as we shall see, they really become useful when, within these sociocentric groups or categories, we adopt an egocentric point of view. We need to spend some time discussing the notion of category since it will help us to better understand the social categories we are talking about here.

What is a category?

A category is a collection of things that have some characteristics in common. In the natural world, for example, a set of trees could be seen as one category of plants, TREES, even though there are different types of trees. The word TREE thus becomes a category along with the category BUSH, GRASS, VEGETABLES or whatever types of plants a culture and language distinguish from other types. **The first important point is that categories are made out of choices since there are many possible ways to group things.** Even so-called 'scientific' categories are in fact arbitrary since there is no fundamentally objective reason to group together animal species, for example, in certain ways rather than in others. Rather than having REPTILES, BIRDS, MAMMALS etc.,

➤ **Egocentric and sociocentric terms:** A distinction coined by Service (1960), egocentric indicates terms and relationships as seen or defined by a particular individual while sociocentric terms are defined or seen by a social group. Social category systems, such as sections, typically have sociocentric terms as we shall see while kinship terms are typically egocentric.

➤ **Absolute and relative terms:** Another distinction, which is close to that of egocentric and sociocentric but not exactly identical, is that between absolute and relative terms. Absolute terms are invariable names (such a group has this name, whoever the speaker is) while relative terms depend on the speaker (I call myself X and the other person Y, and the other person calls itself X and call me Y).

we could have categories such as ANIMALS THAT FLY (birds, flying foxes, bats, insects, etc.), ANIMALS THAT SWIM and so on.

Categories are relative and depend on a culture and language. Remember, for example, the colour classification among the Hanunóo of the Philippines discussed earlier. Imagine there is a pack of black and white dogs and a pack of black and white cats. You could quite well organise your categories according to colour, and not distinguish dogs and cats. You could define the two categories as 'black domestic animals' and 'white domestic animals', for example. In either case, you eliminate certain criteria in favour of others. In the black-white classification you eliminate the fact that dogs bark and cats do not; in the dog-cat classification you eliminate the colour. **Categories thus favour certain features or aspects over others.** They are a simplification of the world.

This leads us to the third important point. Categories may have subcategories, and subcategories within a category share common features but distinguish themselves from other subcategories through other features. I call this the **rule of inheritance between categories**: a subcategory inherits the fundamental features of its mother category. Both GRASS and TREES inherit the fact that they belong to plants and share features that every plant shares. However, TREES, as opposed to GRASS, have stems and branches. The structural principle of categories is hierarchical. The organising principles are inclusion, contrast and even opposition.

Since categories are arbitrary and thus relative to particular cultural contexts and languages, the criteria or features which are inherited from category to subcategory and that contrast categories and subcategories are culturally meaningful. They are related to other social values and structures. If living beings are classed together according to colour, for example, we may expect 'colour' to have a specific cultural meaning and importance.

Some argue against this proposition, claiming that there are objective criteria available to define categories that do not necessarily have a specific cultural meaning or value (but see Sahlins 1977 who contrasts this conclusion). If we return to the dog-cat/black-white example, it could be objected that dogs never mate with cats and that a dog, whether white or black, will never produce a cat. We may indeed conclude that the world around us proposes a certain number of criteria that could potentially be applied in category-making, but again there is no absolute 'objective' reason why we should privilege mating over colour or reproduction over certain morphological aspects. These problems and questions apply to Australian Aboriginal social categories as well.

Like 'categories' in general, a **social category** is a set of individuals who have something in common and who contrast with other people. There are social subcategories, and some of the features of each such subcategory are inherited from its mother category. Besides the characteristics indicated for categories in general, note that two other important features must be added to Australian social categories: firstly, they are dual or binary in that a social category never appears on its own but always with its counterpart(s) or fellow categories. Together, they constitute what is called a *social category system*. Secondly, a social category system is encompassing, that is every member of a group or society is born into

one of the categories according to rules defined by the system. No exception is made to this inflexible rule.

There are several types of social category systems in Australia: generational moieties, moieties, semi-moieties, sections and subsections. Semi-moieties are rare, limited to the Gulf of Carpentaria and perhaps existing formerly in the southwest of Western Australia, and quite complex to understand so I will not describe the workings of this system. We now turn to the other systems.

Generational moieties: general principles

Generational moieties divide society into two categories. Remember that generation and age are different concepts. The age of a person depends on date of birth, whereas the generation is the place of a person in a series of filiations. To understand this, I discuss a situation in which there are only very few people and follow them through their generations.

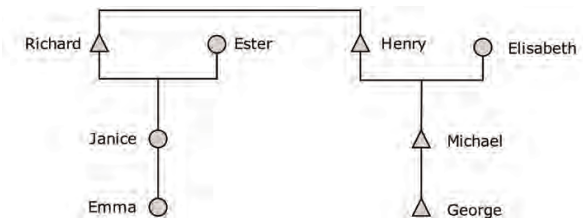


Figure 24: Age and generation

Richard and Henry are brothers. Both married at the same time. Richard married Ester and Henry married Elisabeth. Both had children. Richard and Ester had a girl called Janice. Henry and Elisabeth had a boy called Michael. Janice married when she was 20 years old and she had a girl called Emma. But Michael married only when he was 40 years old and he had a boy called George. Emma is thus at least 20 years older than George because her mother had her when she was 20. Therefore, if you take only age into account, Emma could be George's mother. Emma and George however have something in common, some shared feature. Despite their age difference, they are both grandchildren of brothers: they are on the same generational level.

Generational moieties are built around these generational levels, distributing all people of a society and beyond into two categories. Richard, Ester and their granddaughter Emma, as well as Henry, Elisabeth and their grandson George, are of the first generational

moiety while Janice and Michael are in the second generational moiety. Generational moieties include members of alternate generational levels: a person is always in the same generational moiety as his brothers, sisters and cousins, his grandparents and his grandchildren. A person's children and parents, on the other hand, are always in the other generational moiety. This is why they are sometimes called 'alternate generational moieties'. We will examine this concept in some detail since the principles at work in generational moieties are also at work in section and subsection systems.

We draw a square in which, say, all the people of a society are included. For the sake of making the demonstration easier, let us say that there is only one family in this society, composed by parents and their children.

Inside the square, we draw a line separating the family into two halves. In the upper square M1 we assemble the parents, in the lower half M2 we regroup the children. We call M1 and M2 the two generational moieties because they divide the family (society) into two parts according to generational level membership.

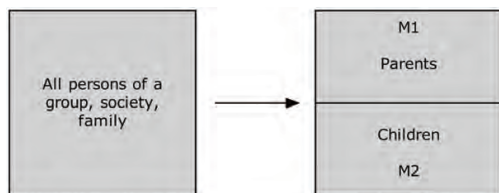


Figure 25: Generational moieties: splitting into two groups

We now decide on the following three rules:

- 1) Parents and children will never be in the same moiety.
- 2) There are only two moieties in the society.
- 3) All the people of a society have to be in one of these moieties.

If these rules are followed, we must then ask: what happens with the children of M2, the children of the children? We cannot subdivide again since this would go against rule number two, and we cannot put them into M2 since this would contradict rule number one. The solution is of course to put the children of M2 back into M1 since this is the only way to follow all three of the rules. Hence, the children of M1 are M2 and the children of M2 are M1.

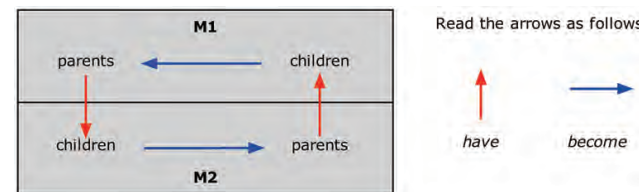


Figure 26: Generational moieties: parents and children

Let us begin again. First, we have parents in M1 whose children are in M2. These children become parents themselves (horizontal arrow) and have children who must be in M1. These children become parents themselves and have children who will be in M2 and so on. If you follow this circle over a few generations, you see that a person is always in the same moiety as his grandparents and grandchildren while his or her parents, children, great-grandchildren and great-grandparents will be in the opposite moiety. As we have seen when discussing terminologies, two important types of categories underpin Australian Aboriginal kinship systems: generations and gender. Generational moieties are organised around the former. Sections and subsections, as we shall see, add gender categories to the system.

Generational moieties in the Western Desert

Without doubt, generational moieties are the most important category system in the Western Desert and many other Australian languages. They are usually named, but the recognition of such generational levels, whether named or not, is a structural feature of all Australian social category systems since they intrinsically underlie the kinship system. This characteristic was recognised by some of the earliest writers, among them Mathews (1903-1904:61; see Lawrence 1969 [1937]), who presumably coined the expression 'alternating generations' later adopted by Radcliffe-Brown (1930-31:443), albeit without acknowledgement. It is safe to hypothesise that generational moieties have been known in the Western Desert for much longer than other category systems, such as sections and subsections, because they are found throughout the desert and because their names are very similar, if not identical, from one group to another. This hypothesis is based on the general assumption that common words among dialects are older than words that are not shared, and thus point to the original language from which the dialects evolved.

Western Desert people sometimes refer to persons of the same moiety as *mobs*, indicating a certain unity or identity. It is this unity or identity among people of the same generational level that may have led Elkin and others to misinterpret the Aluridja kinship system. From a sociological point of view, persons of the same generational moiety consider each other

as brothers and sisters, as opposed to their fathers and mothers and their daughters and sons, who are in the opposite moiety. This principle is extrapolated to terminological usage. While a cross-cousin is always distinguished from a parallel cousin, these cross-cousins can also be considered as brothers and sisters and called by the same terms because they are co-generational.

Alternate generational levels penetrate deeply into everyday social practice. Expectations of sharing in accordance with social rules and norms are stronger between persons of opposite moieties, where the relationship typically includes at least some restraint or even avoidance, than between persons of the same moiety. The unity or identity between persons of the same moiety, on the other hand, leads to behaviour that does not usually reflect relations of hierarchy or of opposition, but rather of reciprocity and identity. Laughren (1982:77) reports for the Warlpiri of Central Australia that 'men's sporting teams were formed according to this division'. Tonkinson (1991:75-76) notes for the Mardu that the alternate generational divisions are important in ceremonial activities as well, where 'the two groups sit a short distance apart, and throughout the proceedings their members joust verbally with each other in loud and light-hearted fashion'. Stanton (1984:168) similarly explains for the Mount Margaret area that it 'is the division of alternating generation levels which is of greatest significance in ritual activities'. As Ronald and Catherine Berndt formulated it,

Within a person's own generation level are to be found, to some extent at least, 'equals': brothers and sisters, cross-cousins, age-mates and so on. The generation level above him includes those with some authority over him, directly or indirectly: father, mother, father's sister, father's sister's husband, mother's brother, mother's brother's wife, perhaps mother-in-law, father-in-law and so on. Deference, and in some cases avoidance, are relevant here (Berndt & Berndt 1992 [1964]: 87).

In the Western Desert, these generational moieties are given two kinds of names: the first type is **relative**, the second type is **absolute**. Absolute names remain identical regardless of the position of the speaker. Relative names, on the other hand, depend on the speaker's position. Among the Ngaatjatjarra, the names are as follows:

Relative terms for generational moieties		
Term	<i>nganantarka</i>	<i>tjanamiltyan</i>
English gloss	us, we bone, we group	them, they flesh, they group

Absolute terms for generational moieties		
Term	<i>Tjintultukultul</i>	<i>Ngumpaluru</i>
English gloss	Sun side	Shade side

According to the absolute terminology, a person is born into one of the two moieties, for example *Tjintultukultul* (Sun side), and his or her membership of this moiety will never change. With the relative terminology, however, a person is always *nganantarka* ('us') for himself, but his or her parents consider themselves *nganantarka* as well. A person's parents and children are in the *tjanamiltyan* moiety ('them'), but they themselves will consider this person to be in *tjanamiltyan* from their point of view. In other words, relative terms work reciprocally: I call myself Y and the other person X, and the other person does the same thing. The tables and maps below show the distribution of absolute (Figure 27) and relative (Figure 28) terms across the Western Desert. They are reproduced from Dousset (2005).

Group / source	ABSOLUTE TERMS	
	Moiety name 1 (translation as in source)	Moiety name 2 (translation as in source)
Kukatja (Balgo) White 1981	Maru	Libi (Nyilga)
Mt Margaret Stanton 1984:169	Ngumpulurutja (Shade)	Tjinturtawakulpa (Sun)
Ngaanyatjarra Douglas 1977	Tjintultukultu (Sun side)	Ngumpaluru (Shade side)
Ngaatjatjarra Dousset DATE?; Tindale 1963:39 (according to Tindale the terms are identical in Warburton and in Laverton)	Tjintultukultul / Tjindulakalanguru (Sun side, sections Karimarra and Purungu)	Ngumpaluru / Wiltjalanguru (Shade side, sections Tjarurru and Panaka)
Pitjantjatjara (at Uluru) Harney 1960:63-4	Djindarlagul	Wumbularu
Pitjantjatjara (at Yalata) White 1981	Biranba (White-light)	Maru (Black-dark)
Wiluna Sackett 1978. Mainly Mandjildjara people	Djirndulu (Sun side)	Ngumbaluru (Shade side)

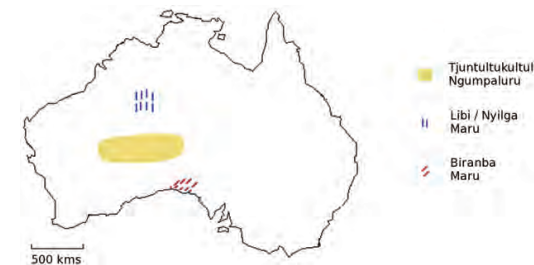


Figure 27: Distribution of absolute terms of generational moieties in the Western Desert

Group / source	Own moiety as in source	Other moiety as in source
Antakarinja Tindale 1965:48	Nganandarka	Jianamiltjan
Kokatha (SA) Tindale (1965:45)	Nganantarka	Tarbula / Tanamiltjan
Kukatja (Balgo) White (1981, following pers. comm. Peile)	Maringara	Yinyarungura
Mardu (Jigalong) Tonkinson (1991)	Marirra	Yinara
Mt Margaret Stanton (1984:168-9)	Nganataraka	Tarputa
Ngaatjatjarra Gould (1969:106)	Nganataraka	Inyurpa / Tarputa
Ngalea (Nullarbor Plain) Tindale (1965:31)	Nganandaraka	Tjanamiltjan (Tarbudu)
Pindiini / Wonggai Tindale (1965:70)	Nganataraka	Tanaamiltjan
Pintupi Myers (1986)	Nganarnitja	Yinyurpa
Pitjantjatjara Goddard (1992), Elkin (1938-40:213) and White (1981) for Yalata	Nganantarka	Tjanamilytjan
Tjalkadjara (north of Laverton) Tindale (1965:91)	Nganataruka	Tjanamiltjan
Yankunytjatjara Goddard (1985)	Nganantarka	Tjanamilytjan

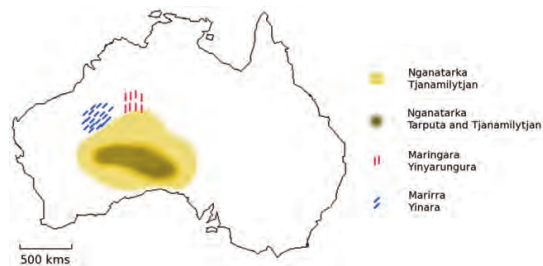


Figure 28: Distribution of relative terms of generational moieties in the Western Desert

Patrilineal and matrilineal moieties

When anthropologists talk of ‘moieties’ and not ‘generational moieties’, they understand something different from what we have discussed above. We have seen that ‘generational moieties’ divide society into two horizontal categories. They are horizontal because they cut across families and groups to unite people at the same genealogical level. ‘Moieties’,

however, are understood to divide society into vertical categories, grouping lines of people following descent and filiation. There are two types of such moieties: patrilineal and matrilineal. The former is found in societies where patrilineal is of importance, the latter where matrilineal is dominant. We have seen that generational moieties have a close relationship with kinship terminology and with behaviour towards relatives. We will now see that patrilineal and matrilineal moieties have a close relationship with principles of descent and of inheritance.

The working principle of moieties is that belonging to a moiety is inherited from generation to generation via descent. In the case of patrilineal moieties, children belong to the moiety of their father but only the father’s sons transmit the patrilineality to their own children. In the case of matrilineal moieties, children belong to the moiety of their mother but only the mother’s daughters transmit the matrilineality to their own children. Another important distinction between generational moieties and other moieties is that the former are endogamous while the latter are exogamous. This simply means that a person has to find a spouse within his or her own generational moiety since one cannot marry a person who is classified as one’s mother, father, aunt, uncle, son or daughter. In patrilineal or matrilineal moieties, people of the same moiety are considered to share a substance or essence that is inherited from generation to generation. In other words, people of the same moiety are alike, and they cannot marry another alike person. Members of a patrilineal or a matrilineal moiety must therefore marry a member of the other patrilineal or matrilineal moiety.

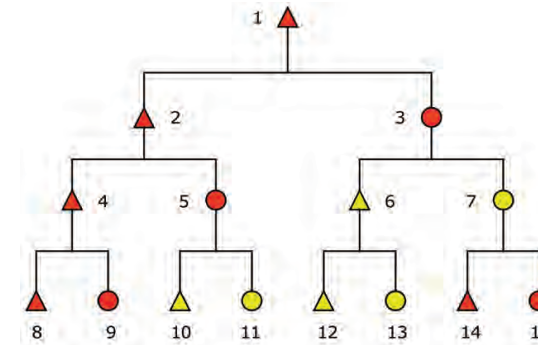


Figure 29: Patrilineal moieties in a genealogy

We have two patrilineal moieties: the red moiety and the yellow moiety. In a patrilineal system, moiety membership is inherited through the male line. Members of a patrilineal moiety choose a spouse from the other patrilineal moiety. Thus, members of the red moiety marry people from the yellow moiety and vice versa. We begin reading the figure with man Number 1. He is considered to be the oldest known male ancestor of the red moiety and as such

is the ancestor of the red moiety. He has married a woman from the yellow moiety. This woman, like other wives and husbands, is not represented in the figure to avoid too much complexity. You need to imagine each person's spouse. Because inheritance here goes through the males' line, the children (2 and 3) of man 1 are of the red moiety. Let us follow the boys' line: number 2 has a son number 4, who has a son himself, number 8. They all belong to the red moiety, of course. Number 2 also has a daughter, number 5. This daughter will have to marry a man from the yellow moiety. Her children, 10 and 11, will inherit their membership from their father, who is of the yellow moiety.

We now move back up to the sister of number 2, who is number 3. She is of the red moiety, but her husband belongs to the yellow moiety. Again, since belonging is inherited through the males' line, the children of number 3 are of the yellow moiety. Understandably, the children of number 6 are of the yellow moiety. The children of number 7, on the other hand, since she will have to marry a person from the red moiety, will be of the red moiety as well.

The figure below represents the same principles as they operate in a matrimoiety system. We could have changed the figure so as to have a woman as the ancestor of the moiety. However, to facilitate comparison between patrimoiety and matrimoiety, I have taken the same genealogical structure and simply recoloured people according to their membership of a matrimoiety.

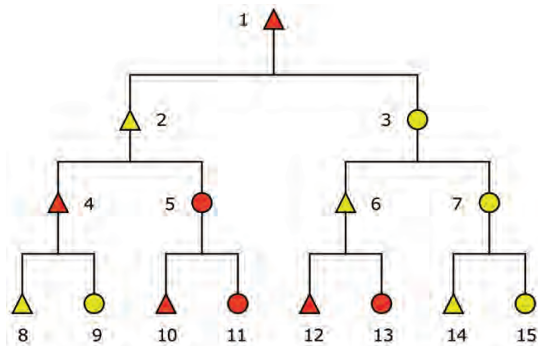


Figure 30:
Matrimoiety in a genealogy

No detailed discussion is necessary here since by now you should understand the working principles of moieties. Let me just mention a few steps: the children of number 1 are yellow because number 1's wife is yellow and she is the one transmitting membership to the couple's children; number 4 is red again since number 2's wife is red; number 8 is yellow again since his father, number 4, married a yellow woman and so on.

To conclude these short explanations on moieties, let us recall some of the rules that structure them:

- 1) Moieties divide society into two halves.
- 2) Membership is genealogically inherited. In the case of patrimoiety, membership is inherited from one's father; in the case of matrimoiety, membership is inherited from one's mother.
- 3) Moieties are always exogamous. Marrying someone of the same moiety as oneself is considered incestuous.

Patrimoiety and matrimoiety are well represented in Australia. Matrimoiety is found in the Perth area, in Arnhem Land and in South Australia. Patrimoiety is found in Arnhem Land, in Cape York, in southern West Australia, in the Kimberleys and so on. Many groups combine patrilineal and matrilineal features. The Dieri people, for example, have matrilineal and patrilineal units called *madu* and *bindara*. A person has a special relationship with the patrilineal totem of his or her mother and the matrilineal totem of his or her father (Berndt and Berndt 1992:53). When discussing sections and subsections, which are widespread in Aboriginal Australia, we shall see that they are a combination of the principles and rules present in generational moieties, patrimoiety and matrimoiety at the same time.

These moieties are inherent in Australian social organisation as a structural feature. But they also have concrete applications. Moieties are not well distributed in the Western Desert, with the exception of the Pintupi at the central eastern edge of the desert who have most probably inherited them from their Warlpiri neighbours quite recently (see Meggitt 1986) and the Mardu at the north-western edge of the desert. The Pintupi, according to Myers (1986), use two unnamed patrimoiety. Although unnamed they distribute people according to role and responsibility. For every site in space, there are owners (*yarriki* or *kirta*) and managers (*kurtungurlu*). Owners have primary rights while managers have secondary rights to sites in space. Managers have the duty to clear the grounds and paint the dancers, who are the owners, before ritual activity on a particular site. Managers and owners are of opposite patrimoiety, and they have a shared responsibility over the land. Members of both moieties have rights over these sites and over rituals, but they have different responsibilities during the rituals concerning a particular site in space. Similarly, according to Tonkinson (1991:75-77), the Mardu recognise two patrimoiety which play different roles in some rituals and that have influences in camping arrangements. They are egocentrically termed as *mandiyarra* ('my own patrimoiety') and *yarigirra* ('the other patrimoiety').

Sections: a formal presentation

The last type of social organization we are going to discuss here are sections and subsections, as anthropologists name them, but often referred to in English as *skin names* by Aboriginal people themselves. I shall use the word sections and subsections because these better represent what they are really about. Indeed, you can think of a section as a part of

a cake. In the case of sections, the cake has been cut into four equally sized pieces. In the case of subsections, it has been cut into eight equally sized pieces. Putting the pieces back together reconstructs the entire cake. We will have a detailed look at sections first. Subsections can be considered as a variety, or as a refinement, of sections subdividing each piece into two according to a few rules.

Sections and subsections are widespread in Australia and are used nowadays in an increasing number of languages. In the Western Desert, sections have spread widely as well within the last few hundred years. Western Desert people call them *skin name* in English, but more appropriately *yinni* (also meaning 'name'), *miri* (also meaning 'skin', 'skin colour') and *yara* (also meaning 'symbol' or 'metaphor').

Like generational moieties and moieties, sections are social categories: every person belongs to a specific section and all the people in the same section have something in common. You will easily understand sections if you understood generational moieties as they are a subdivision of them, as well as patrimoieties and matrimoieties since they are a combination of these: if one divides a society into two patrimoieties and two matrimoieties at the same time, the result are four pieces or sections. One valid hypothesis is to think that section systems emerged in areas where neighbouring groups had patrimoieties and matrimoieties and where these groups started exchanging and intermarrying.

Let us have a look again at what we explained for generational moieties. All the people of a community, dialect or tribe are represented in one large square. This square is divided into two generational moieties M1 and M2, where M1 are the parents and children of M2 and M2 the parents and children of M1. So far, this reflects exactly what we have seen for generational moieties.

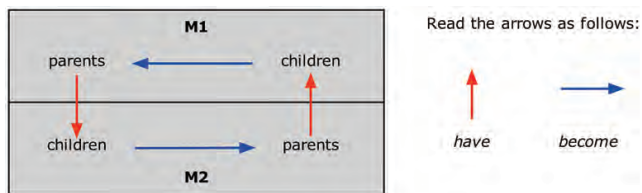


Figure 31: Generational moieties again

We have seen that generational level is one of the central characteristics of Australian Aboriginal kinship systems. When we discussed terminologies as well as patrimoieties and matrimoieties, we saw that the other central characteristic is gender: bifurcation and merging which is gender-based in terminologies, and membership to a moiety with respect to transmission by gender. We now need to combine generation and gender to construct the section system.

Inside each generational moiety, we begin by distinguishing fathers from mothers. Following the basic rule of incest prohibition, people who marry each other should not be identical; they should be distinguished. But what happens with their children? Should they be distinguished according to gender? In principle they could be, but let us recall that these children, who are in M2, will themselves become parents of M1. This means that if we want to distinguish fathers from mothers in M2 just as we did in M1, then we need to group brothers and sisters and distinguish them from their spouses.

M1a	M1b
Mothers	Fathers
Children	Children's spouses
M2a	M2b

Figure 32: Generational moieties: distinguishing fathers from mothers

Now, since brothers and sisters are considered identical (in our case they are in M2a) and if we want to make this applicable to all elements of the system, then we need to add to the mother's part (M1a) her brother, and to the father's part (M1b) his sister. The result is that M2b, the son's wife and the daughter's husband are themselves brothers and sisters, which is something we would have expected, having understood the Dravidian terminology and the direct exchange system that underpins marriage in such a system. We have now constructed a section system.

M1a	M1b
Mother Mother's Brother	Fathers Father's sister
Son Daughter	Son's wife Daughter's husband
M2a	M2b

Figure 33: The section system

If we read this figure in a different way, I as Ego am in M2a, so my brothers and sisters must also be in M2a. My spouse and cross-cousins will be in M2b, my mother will be in M1a and my father in M1b. Since my spouse's parents are classificatory mother's brothers and father's sisters, my father-in-law belongs in the same category as my mother, M1a, and my mother-in-law is in the same category as my father, M1b.

However, as was the case with generational moieties, the figure and the section system itself work without any specific Ego, because they are sociocentric. Indeed, M2 are also parents of M1. We can thus reread the figure in the following way:

- Any M1a person marries an M1b person, and any M2a person marries a M2b person.
- Any child of an M1a mother will be M2a, and any child of an M2a mother will be M1a.
- Any child of a M1b mother will be M2b, and any child of an M2b mother will be M1b.
- Any child of an M1a father will be M2b, and any child of an M2b father will be M1a.
- Any child of an M1a father will be M2a, and any child of an M2a father will be M1b.

The system is so perfect that it is also compatible with patrimoiety and matrimoiety, as I had already foreshadowed. Using patrimoiety and matrimoiety to number and represent sections makes them even clearer. If we ignore the M1 and M2 labelling, which we drew from generational moieties, we can reframe the section system using patrimoiety and matrimoiety without changing its internal structure. Let us say there are two matrimoiety called A and B and two patrimoiety called 1 and 2. Each individual is a member of one matrimoiety as well as one patrimoiety. For example, a person is A1, meaning that he or she belongs to the matrimoiety A and to the patrimoiety 1. Remember that people cannot marry within their moieties. This means that a person A must marry a person B and that a person 1 must marry a person 2. However, since every individual is now a combination of letters and numbers (A1, A2 etc.) because every person is member of both a patrimoiety and a matrimoiety, people need to be exogamous to both moiety types. In other words, an individual A1 must marry an individual B2: change from A to B and from 1 to 2.

Also, we now know that one inherits membership of the matrimoiety from ones mother, and membership of the patrimoiety from ones father. Children of A are A, of B are B, of 1 are 1 and of 2 are 2. Again, if we combine this, since each person has a letter and a number, we can see that children of an A1 woman, who is married to a B2 man, are A2: they inherit the letter from the mother and the number from the father.

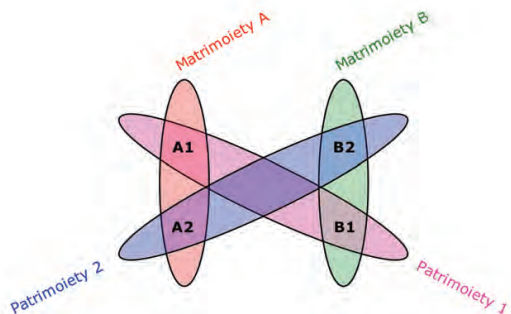


Figure 34: Matrimoiety and patrimoiety in section systems

Each individual is thus at the intersection of two overlapping categories: a matrimoiety and a patrimoiety. Each spouse of each individual also has the combination of the two contrasting categories. Each individual has inherited one category from the mother and one from the father. The diagonal lines represent the relationship of filiation between fathers and their children; the vertical lines represent the relationship of filiation between mothers and their children. What is important to understand is that these matrimoiety and patrimoiety may actually not be named or recognized by languages and groups, but the principle that underpins them is implicit in the section system.

The usual figurative representation of these relationships in section systems is symbolised below. The equal sign between sections mean that they intermarry. I have also added on the right side of the figure the section names used by the Ngaatjatjarra to illustrate that they are not merely abstract constructs but have real counterparts (the father-child diagonal arrow has been omitted, as is usually the case in these figures).

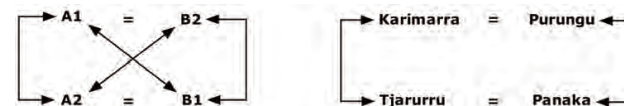


Figure 35: Formal and actual representation of the Ngaatjatjarra's section system.

Sections in the Western Desert

As is the case with generational moieties, sections have names, which are frequently used where this system is in place. Among some tribes, such as the Warlpiri or the Arrernte of Central Australia, section names are used systematically to call or name a person (Glowczewski 1991). Below is a table with the section names used by some dialectal groups of the Western Desert. The table is to be read as follows: Column 1 is the mother of 2 or the father of 4. Column 2 is the mother of 1 or the father of 3. Column 3 is the mother of 4 or the father of 2. Column 4 is the mother of 3 or the father of 1. Note that Pintupi people use subsections today. Their section names in the table were recorded in 1932 by Fry (1934), before the Pintupi adopted the subsection system.

	1	2	3	4
Ngaatjatjarra	Karimarra or Milangka	Tjarurru	Purungu	Panaka or Yiparka
Ngaanyatjarra	Karimarra or Milangka	Tjarurru	Purungu	Panaka or Yiparka
Ooldea	Garimara or Milanga	Dararu	Burong	Banaga or Ibaga
Pintupi	Purukula	Tararu	Purunga	Panaka or Yiparka
Mardu	Garimara	Milanga	Banaga	Burungu

Misinterpretations of sections and subsections?

Sections and subsections have been labelled ‘marriage classes’ by former anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss (1967) because they obviously conform to (some of) the marriage rules at work. Today, scholars regard this conception of sections as erroneous. Sections are not marriage classes and thus cannot be taken as the sole element determining marriage partners; nor do they embed and express marriage rules, but they are a useful general guides to expected behaviour towards kin. Those who are potential spouses will be in the appropriate section.

A woman or girl always has the same section as her mother’s mother, and a man or boy always has the same section as his father’s father. This has sometimes been labelled *indirect filiation* or *indirect descent*. Remember that filiation is the relation a person has with his or her mother and father and descent is the sum of these filiations over generations.

We need to be careful with the notion of indirect filiation or descent in Australia since filiation and descent are associated with the transmission of rights and obligations. This may not always be the case in Australia and is certainly not the case with sections. Thus section systems should not be interpreted as governing, organising or structuring social elements such as marriage, filiation and descent.

Von Brandenstein (1970, 1972, 1978) suggests that sections reflect an emic and universal conception of classifying and transmitting humours or temperaments and that rules between sections in fact reflect universal genetic-like rules.

In fact, though, sections are simply a metaphoric overlay on the kinship system. They are a higher-level abstraction over the kinship terminology. In this context, it is notable that the proper name for the section system among the Ngaatjatjarra is *yara*, meaning ‘symbol’ or ‘metaphor’.

Most Western Desert groups, in contrast to Warlpiri or Arnernte people and their subsection system, do not use section names in daily interaction. However, people use them to narrow down kinship relationships in cases where the application of the relational triangle, which we discussed earlier, is difficult or impossible. In other words, the section system is not used within a community, where everyone knows each other, but in contexts in which individuals from different communities, or even different languages, meet. Sections are a ready and easy reference guide for kinship classification, as Fry (1933: 267) explained. The applicability of the section system in contexts where ‘foreigners’ meet is one reason for its rapid diffusion throughout the desert.

What now follows is an example with a difficult genealogical relationship, which shows how the section system is applicable in such situations to narrow down actual kinship rela-

tionships. We will use the Ngaatjatjarra section terms, illustrated in Figure 35 above. We use abbreviations in the figure to make reading easier.

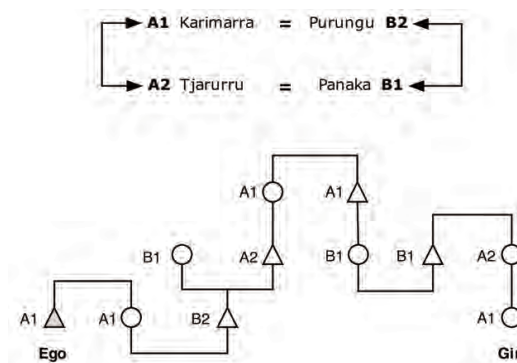


Figure 36: Example of the application of the section system to a genealogical grid

A man, indicated as Ego in this figure, encounters a girl (far right). They do not know how they are connected in genealogical terms, and you can see that the genealogy is quite complex: she is Ego’s sister’s husband’s father’s female cross-cousin’s husband’s sister’s daughter. Also, imagine they do not know a common third person to whom they could apply the relational triangle. Ego, however, immediately knows that the girl is a sister, a parallel cousin, a mother’s mother or a daughter’s daughter, a grandmother or a granddaughter. He knows that she is not a mother-in-law, which would have been problematic because he would have had to avoid her; he also knows that she is not a cross-cousin and thus a potential partner. Ego knows all this because he is of the *Karimarra* section and, meeting the girl, he asks what section she is in. The girl answers that she is *Karimarra* as well. The figure above retraces the section name for each genealogical position so that you can follow how this can be verified using the section schemas of Figures 34 and 35, as well as the schema above the genealogy of Figure 36. Remember that vertical lines connect mothers to their children, that the equal signs means marriage and that sections that stand diagonally connect the father with his children. Ego is A1 and thus his sister is as well. A1 marries B2. The mother of B2 is a B1, and her husband is A2. The mother of A2 is A1 and so on. Had the girl said she was in the *Purungu* section, he would have known that she was a cross-cousin. Had she said *Tjarurru*, he would have known she was a mother or a sister’s daughter. Had she said *Panaka*, he would have known she was a father’s sister.

Subsection systems

Subsection systems are not widespread in the Western Desert, being limited to its eastern edges among the Pintupi and the Luritja people. However, it is strongly represented among Central Australian groups such as the Warlpiri and the Arrernte, as well as further north towards Darwin. While based on rules identical to those of the section systems, the subsection system adds a further distinction between **first cross-cousins** and **second cross-cousins**.

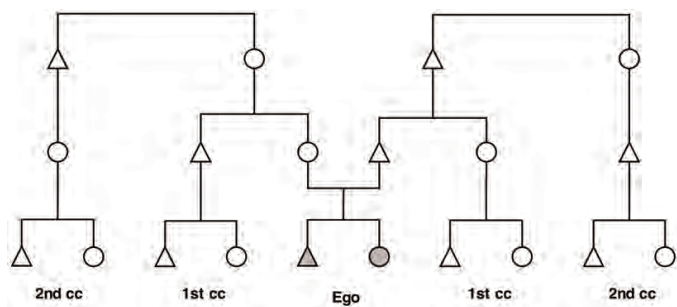


Figure 37: First and some second cross-cousins (1st cc designates first cross-cousins; 2nd cc designates second cross-cousins)

Basically, with first cross-cousins the genealogical link is in the first generation above the cousins, while with second cross-cousins the link is two generations above. Figure 37 shows that, predictably, first cross-cousins are your mother's brother's children and your father's sister's children. Second cross-cousins are your mother's mother's brother's daughter's children (MMBDS, MMBDD) and your father's father's sister's son's children (FFZSS, FFZSD). It is important to understand that the figure represents only actual cross-cousins but that this principle is extrapolated to include classificatory cross-cousins as well. Indeed, any first parallel cousin of my second cross-cousin is a first cross-cousin for me and any second parallel cousin of my second cross-cousin is also a second cross-cousin for me, and so on. This reckoning becomes highly complex after a few steps, so subsections are useful in such cases.

The rules of subsection allocation are such that the subdivision of sections into subsections produces a single integrated system rather than two parallel section systems. Rules of subsection allocation are somewhat different and certainly more complicated than is the case with the section system. However, it is not absolutely necessary to fully understand the functioning of subsection systems in order to apply these principles in the field, and

even Aboriginal people themselves at times have difficulties explaining exactly what is happening. What you need to remember is how the different subsections are connected to one another. Relationships then flow automatically.

The basic idea is as follows: because first and second cross-cousins are distinguished, their mothers and fathers have to be distinguished too. The mother of a second cross-cousin is your mother's first parallel cousin's brother's child. Therefore, what in a section system is your mother's and mother's brother section will, in a subsection system, be divided into your mother, mother's sister and mother's brother as a first half, and as a second half, your mother's first parallel cousin and her brother. The children of the first half are your first cross-cousins while the children of the second half are your second cross-cousins. In a formal subsection system (theoretically, at least, because in reality there are often some variants of the following rule), you may only marry persons of your second cross-cousins category but no first cross-cousins. In reality, though, while second cross-cousins are the preferred choice, first cross-cousins are an acceptable alternative.

mother, mother's brother	mother's 1st parallel cousins	father, father's sister	father's first parallel cousins
EGO , brothers and sisters, first parallel cousins	second parallel cousins	first cross cousins	second cross cousin

Figure 38: Distribution of relatives within the eight subsections

Just as was the case with sections and moieties, subsections have names, and the way of representing subsection systems follows the ideas defined for the section system: the equal sign links intermarrying subsections and vertical arrows link a mother's subsection to her children's subsection. The names of subsections are additionally distinguished by gender. For each subsection there is a masculine and a feminine name. For example, in the case of the Pintupi, Luritja and Warlpiri subsection system, *Tjakamarra* and *Nakamarra* are two names for the same subsection, with *Tjakamarra* designating a male and *Nakamarra* a female. In reality then a subsection system has sixteen rather than eight names.

Because the division of a section system does not produce two independent section systems, but a complete new system, the link between a mother and her child is no longer reciprocal. This means that the arrow does not go back from the daughter to the mother but goes first through other subsections before coming back in the fourth generation to the starting point.

Cycles in subsection systems

Subsection systems have two matricycles of four generations each and four patricycles of two generations each. You can easily verify this by drawing a little genealogy, giving Ego any subsection name as a starting point, then using the schema of Figure 39 below. In the following steps, you attribute to each person the corresponding subsection using the same schema. You will see that it takes two generations to find a person in direct line to Ego with the same subsection as Ego's father, and four generations to find Ego's mother.



Figure 39: Subsection names of the Pintupi and Luritja people

Figure 39 has to be read as follows. Say, for example, that you are a *Nakamarra* woman. You would marry a *Tjapaltjarri* man. Your children would be *Nungurrayi* and *Tjungurrayi*, and they would marry *Nangala* women and *Tjangala* men. Their children would be *Nampitjinpa/Tjampitjinpa* if their mother is *Nungurrayi* and *Napaltjarri/Tjapaltjarri* if their mother is *Nangala*.

People who live in areas where section and subsection systems co-exist, such as in the north-east and central eastern part of the Western Desert, use both systems and terminologies. One section simply corresponds and is equivalent to two subsections. Below is a table summarising these correspondences between the eastern section system (Ngaatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra) and the Pintupi and Luritja subsection system. As you can see, there are sometimes even linguistic similarities between the names, such as *Karimarra* and *Tjakamarra* or *Nakamarra*, testifying to a common historical origin.

Sections	Subsections (male)	Subsections (female)
Karimarra, Milangka	Tjakamarra Tjampitjinpa	Nakamarra Nampitjinpa
Tjarurru	Tjungurrayi	Nungurrayi
	Tjapanangka	Napanangka
Purungu	Tjapaltjarri Tjapangarti	Napaltjarri Napangarti
Panaka, Yiparrka	Tjupurrula Tjangala	Napurrula Nangala

A few concluding remarks about subsections are necessary. I have already stressed that sections are little used within a community where members know one another. Sections are not precise enough to distinguish kinship categories sufficiently to make them an everyday tool for behaviour. The situation is somewhat different with subsections, where eight categories become sixteen when gender-marked names are counted. Because of the subsection system's greater capacity for precision in the classification of relatives, it is used frequently for terms of address and reference, as well as to replace personal names, even among members of the same community, in particular among Warlpiri, Arrernte, Luritja and Pintupi people.

Where did sections originate?

The diffusion of section systems into the eastern Western Desert region is relatively recent and reached completion in the 1930s or 1940s. It superimposed itself onto a social organisation that up until then had been dominated by generational moieties only. According to Tindale (1988 [1972]: 254), the Pitjantjatjara only became familiar with the section system in 1933 and even today, although Pitjantjatjara people know how to use section systems, they are certainly less familiar with them than their immediate neighbours to the west, the Ngaatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra. Berndt and Berndt (1992 [1964]: 47) report that sections diffused through the southern part of the Western Desert in the 1940s.

A notable characteristic is that the names of the sections (and subsections) are not identical among the groups possessing this form of social categories. So, although the structural principles, the way the system works, is known and has diffused over thousands of kilometres, the terminology associated with it has not always been adopted and, in some cases, it has been considerably modified. What this means is that just because you know the names and relationships between names for a section system found in one group, you cannot automatically apply it to another group. You first need to check if the section names are organised in the same way and, if not, you must discover the equivalence rules between the section names used by different groups. It may well be that, as a result

of the system's diffusion, the *Karimarra* section in group A became *Purungu* in group B and vice versa.

I have undertaken an extensive study of these routes of diffusion and of the transformations that have occurred in the section system from one group to another (Dousset 2005). It is a complex study, so I confine this discussion to a few summary remarks and conclusions.

The section system seems to have followed two major routes of diffusion into the Western Desert. One route began in the Pilbara where the section names *Karimarra*, *Panaka*, *Paljeri*, *Purungu* were used and, to the south of it, *Milangka*. The other route was from the south-west of Western Australia, where *Tjarurru* and *Yiparrka* possibly originated, into the Western Desert. The south-west is also the possible origin of the western section system (McConvell 1990, 1996), a system that must have moved northwards initially and then in a north-easterly direction into the desert at a later stage.

The north-western or Pilbara-Kimberley system followed two diffusion routes, one parallel to the coast and southwards along the desert, the other south-eastwards to the Yulparija and the Pintupi peoples. The south-western system went straight into the desert along with elements of the north-western system. Before penetrating the Western Desert itself, the north-western or Kimberley-Pilbara terms moved along the coast to a point in the south where they encountered new terms or another system. This meeting may have enforced the system's diffusional capacity and given it new strength, probably because of migratory movements and cultural affinities. The section system then moved into the desert.

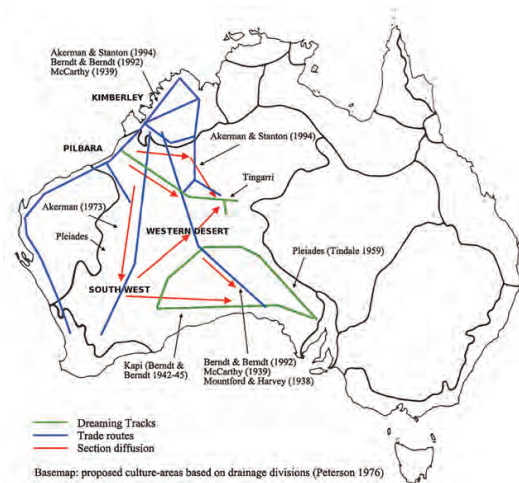
The diffusion routes of the section system have been summarised here to show the dynamics of Aboriginal kinship and culture in general. Languages and dialects had in the past, and still have today, the capacity to adapt to new contexts, new organisational models and new kinship terms and categories. Kinship and social organisation are dynamic domains because they are among the vital enablers of human interaction. If the section system diffused over such large areas, it means that groups and languages are not isolated from one another but in constant interaction and exchange. Cultural diffusion with the section systems as an object can be linked to the existence of wider exchange systems, comprising three major constituents: trade routes, mythological tracks of the Tjukurrpa (Dreaming) and migrational patterns. While this exchange system criss-crosses and covers all areas of the Western Desert, some branches are clearly dominant, being the major arteries for the flow of goods and ideas, if not people. These branches lead to important entry points at the desert's edges which are, clockwise, the region south-west of Kalgoorlie, Anna Plains and surrounding areas in the Pilbara, the area of Balgo south of the Kimberleys, the Rawlinson-Musgrave axis in the east and Ooldea in the south-east. An additional portal of entry with a Kintore-Papunya axis must have operated from the 1930s onwards at least, following Pintupi people's eastwards drift and their adoption of subsections. These portals can, with reasonable probability, be considered as constituting the principal entry points of ideas, goods and elements of social organisation, including sections. Coincidentally, they are situated along some of the limits determined by Peterson's (1976) drainage basin model.

This historical dimension has implications for our understanding of the 'Western Desert cultural bloc', a question I began to address in Part 1 of this book. What was a debatable concept when Berndt (1959) proposed it and has since then been taken for granted by Western Desert specialists has now benefited from additional evidence: the cultural bloc is a dynamic ensemble of groups with local identities but situated within a larger entity, which is not solely an anthropological artefact but is also ethnographically proved and historically grounded. Western Desert culture emerges from the dialectic between local identity and global similarity or embeddedness, a dialectic that simultaneously promotes vast networks and exchange systems and facilitates the incorporation of goods and ideas travelling along these systems into local social structures and cultures.

Summary of Part Four and concluding remarks

In this chapter we have considered another important aspect of the domain of kinship in Aboriginal Australia, social categories, which, along with categories in general, reflect a world view, a way of classification, as seen from a particular cultural perspective. Social categories divide society into an even number of units (two, four or eight), each with certain characteristics that generate the principle of social classification. In Aboriginal Australia, all the various types of social category systems are based on identical factors that are or are not deployed in any given category system: gender and generation, which when combined produce a third factor, 'crossness', which is the result of bifurcate merging.

Figure 40: General view of the overlap of trade routes and cultural diffusion in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Western Desert regions



Generational moieties, the first social category system described, divide society into two halves. The first half, or moiety, includes a person and his or her close or classificatory brothers, sisters, cousins, grandparents and grandchildren with their brothers, sisters and cousins. The other moiety includes a person's parents and children, along with all their close or distant brothers, sisters and cousins. Generational moieties organise elements of everyday and religious life; more than this, though, they are the key to understanding Western Desert kinship.

Moieties, in particular patrimoiety and matrimoiety, are particularly important for our understanding of the other system types, sections and subsections, because they latently or overtly structure these systems. Moieties, which divide society into two halves, are organised around a principle of descent. Membership of a moiety is determined either by the mother's (matrimoiety) or father's (patrimoiety) membership.

Where social category systems exist, every person is born into a section or a subsection, just as every person is in a generational moiety. Relations between sections or subsections are organised around rules of marriage (cross-cousin marriage) and of filiation (both, matrilineal and patrilineal). A person's membership derives from the memberships of his or her parents. Subsections, which divide society into eight categories, or sixteen if one considers the gender difference indicated in each subsection name, are frequently used within communities to address and refer to other individuals and are even used as personal names. This is far less the case with sections. There are possibly two reasons for this situation: the first is that sections are not precise enough to delimit actual kinship relationships between two individuals. There are about 20 categories in the kinship terminology, which are narrowed down into four categories only in the context of sections. This is problematic for an individual since kinship categories are a guide to appropriate behaviour between people. The second reason is the positive consequence of the first: if sections are not prominent within a community, yet are nevertheless used and appreciated, it must be because their utility becomes clear when different communities meet. In these cases, where visitors or people who rarely meet encounter one another, sections are a good enough approximation of the general type of expected behaviour between individuals. Sections can be considered a vehicle, a means for inter-community and inter-language communication. The analysis of the diffusion of the section system has confirmed these assertions: section systems are, in the first place, a tool for interaction between neighbouring and distant groups and indicate the existence of extensive social networks.



Further reading

Some general books on social organisation

BARTH, Fredrik (ed.) 1969. *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Books.

BOHANNAN, Paul and John MIDDLETON (eds) 1968. *Kinship and Social Organization*. Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press.

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Conclusion

The concept of relatedness

This handbook has described the foundations of kinship studies and explained their common vocabulary. You now know how to draw genealogies and label kin positions and categories, and how to understand social divisions used in everyday life by Aboriginal and other societies. Though formal in some of its aspects, this shared vocabulary is a necessary step to understanding on-the-ground practices, mechanisms and strategies that are still utilised as part of everyday life in many Australian Aboriginal communities. I have endeavoured throughout to keep the discussion centred around the essentials, the basic building blocks, and have avoided less 'mechanical' aspects of kinship. I have not entered into detailed discussion about some of the other dynamic characteristics and contexts in which kinship also operates. Notions such as *relatedness*, *consubstantiality*, *proximity* and *distance*, *inclusion* and *exclusion*, *process* and *agency* have been evoked here and there but have not been fully developed because interested readers can pursue these more complex issues as they wish. However, here in the concluding chapter I discuss a few lines of interrogation in these domains. This discussion will entail the extension of the notion of *kinship* to that of *relatedness*. This concluding chapter, which you should consider as 'optional reading', does not provide answers or present ethnographic examples. Instead, though, in somewhat theoretical language, it will point to some of the possibilities offered by modern kinship studies.

A critique of kinship studies

Parallel to a general critique of the whole field of anthropology in the 1970s, which can be summarised as the demand that we turn away from models and focus instead on the investigation of process, practice and agency, the field of kinship studies was challenged by a leading American kinship scholar, David Schneider. His critique is still widely considered to be a turning point in the anthropology of kinship. In *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), Schneider challenged kinship studies on three major points. First, he emphasised that kinship is not an independent social domain and cannot therefore be investigated without taking into account the social and cultural contexts in which it is embedded. This point is today generally accepted as a valid critique of the domain of kinship. Formerly, terminologies were studied as such, for their internal structure and coherence. Today, anthropologists adopt a much more embedded approach and attempt to understand kinship within other social processes. For example, understanding marriage rules and practices within ecological and economic conditions, as they have been discussed in this handbook, is a consequence of this critique and the necessity to take kinship beyond mere formalism. The fact that I have described kinship as being embedded in social structure and practice, rather than as being encompassing, is an example of the changes of conceptualisation that have occurred since the 1970s. The fact that Godelier (2004), for example, has turned his back to the idea of 'kinship-based societies' and that he instead underlines how kinship

is a vehicle for social organisation, rather than an underlying structure as it was sometimes seen before, is yet another example of the important shifts that have occurred in anthropological theory.

Schneider's second critique concerned the universality of the idea of kinship. He challenged the view that everywhere kinship is an important socially recognised domain, and he questioned the very constituents of kinship itself. For example, he shows that the Western way of examining kinship, based on the distinction between consanguinity and affinity, is coherent with other Western social domains such as the notion of 'nationality' and thus is the product of a Euro-American cultural background (Schneider 1969). I have addressed this critique in various parts of this handbook to show that, indeed, kinship studies may be largely a product of the Western world, but this problem is eliminated as soon as one adopts a comparative point of view. I have mentioned the metric system: whether we use metres or feet to measure distances does not matter as long as we systematically use the same system when comparing distances.

Schneider's strong negation of kinship, however, gives rise to another problem: in Aboriginal communities, whether in the Western Desert or western Sydney, kinship is an indispensable social institution. It provides in many cases and contexts points of reference for individual and collective identification and, therefore, also for action. Kinship is, among others, an important means of creating similarity and difference and, therefore, a sense of the collective and a means for membership: similarity within kin-groups, difference between non-kin. How kinship is locally conceptualised, how similarity and difference is defined, is a matter of ethnography not theory and, therefore, does not invalidate kinship studies as such. Eliminating kinship from the anthropological agenda could have serious implications for considerations of Aboriginal culture generally.

The third critique addressed by Schneider involved what he calls the three assumptions made by kinship specialists, in particular Goodenough, Scheffler and Lounsbury, researchers whose materials I have quoted from in this handbook. These assumptions are that kinship is a building block of society, that kinship is the consequence of biological facts, and that every society recognises genealogies. Of these three assumptions, only the first can be considered unproblematic. Indeed, considering kinship as the building block of society becomes difficult because we accept the idea that kinship is not an independent domain; it is embedded in other social processes that may involve economic, political and religious considerations. The notion of 'kin-based society' has indeed been heavily criticised, as I have already explained.

The critique of the other two assumptions however needs to be taken seriously. At least some of the biological facts of procreation are universal, even if interpretations differ: women give birth to new human beings, and every such woman is identifiable, whether we call her 'mother' or something else. Cultures and languages have names, descriptions, and interpretations for this elementary biological fact, which is integrated into every society's world view. Kinship begins with this fundamental truth which can have many cultural and semantic consequences. The other assumption criticised by Schneider concerns the recognition of genealogy which he believes is not universal but ethno-

centric. Some societies, including those of the Western Desert, favour a lack of emphasis on genealogical depth. As a result of this element of their world view, only two or three generations are remembered. Taboos on saying the names of dead people are a strong indication of this preference. Beyond the very recent generations, ancestors are no longer individually named, being grouped within sets of brothers and sisters. However, even when genealogical memory is shallow, it of course exists as people remember their deceased close relatives. Emphasising, as Schneider did, that genealogy is not an important aspect of people's lives would result in stating that people are unwilling or unable to distinguish their actual mothers from classificatory mothers or their actual grandparents from the distant grandparents. Whether it is emphasised (as in many Polynesian societies) or not (as in Western Desert societies), genealogy constitutes, at some stage at least, an underlying and recognised grid.

So not all of Schneider's critique of kinship studies is valid but, as a result of the many questions he raised, researchers have become more careful about the words and concepts they use and have had to rethink some of their vocabulary and methodologies. After Schneider's criticisms, formal kinship studies were broadened to include research about *relatedness* in general. Kinship is not simply a grid of relationships but is concerned with the meanings underlying relationships.

From consanguinity to consubstantiality

One important step in this endeavour was to broaden the notion of 'consanguinity'. It is obvious that this word, which literally means 'sharing blood', cannot be applied to every cultural context. The notion of 'sharing' is less problematic than the word 'blood', so why should blood be the substance that defines a group, a family, descent or whatever? In many cultures, blood has a completely different meaning and historical background than that of Euro-American societies, in which 'consanguinity' is evoked frequently and in various contexts. Recognising the problem, Julian Pitt-Rivers (1973) proposed an alternative: the idea of *consubstantiality*. Used as an investigative concept, it prepared the way for an alternative mode of thinking about relationships, including those based on kinship.

There are traces of consubstantiality as an elucidatory mechanism in the early anthropological literature (see Jones 1986). The objective in much of this literature is to explain religious phenomena as mechanisms or products of consubstantial conceptions: people consider themselves to be sharing some sort of substance with religious forces and this sharing constitutes their essence and person. Totemism, for example, was sometimes explained as a mechanism in which consubstantiality is involved. Lévi-Bruhl spoke of 'the mystic consubstantiality in which the individual, the ancestral being living again in him and the animal or plant species that forms his totem are all mingled' (see Bullock 1931:185). Yet this usage has not evolved from an understanding of consubstantiality as a mythical and religious concept, and it does not address the question of relatedness as an interaction among human beings.

An alternative and more constructive use of the notion was proposed by Pitt-Rivers (1973:92) when he defined it as 'the prime nexus between individuals for the extension of self'. Consubstantiality, which literally means 'sharing of substance' (in general and not just blood) is thus a way through which individuals can place and extend themselves within their social environment. Sharing something, be it a substance, a language, an idea or an emotion, is the basis for social being and interaction. In the Western Desert, people who have been living together in the same camp for extended periods, who have eaten the same food and shared their campfire, are considered to have become closely related — too close to be marriage partners. Since they are unmarriageable, they cannot be affines either so are considered as consanguineal kin. Expressed in more neutral terms, they are consubstantial. They share so much experience, substance and memory that they have become close kin or are regarded in the same way as close kin.

Despite Pitt-Rivers' progressive definition of the use of the notion of consubstantiality, he did not actually apply it. To further develop the concept of consubstantiality, we need to link it to other notions, such as those developed by Kenneth Burke (1969a, 1969b) who proposed an existential signification of consubstantiality (also see Dousset 2005). Burke explains that substance is used to define what a thing is but that it derives from something that this thing is not, as the decomposition of the word into sub (below) and stance (stand) makes clear. 'The word, in its etymological origins would refer to an attribute of the thing's context' (Burke 1969a: 23). This gives us some clues as to how an existential understanding of consubstantiality takes form: it is an identity of things based on a common context but not necessarily on a common substance. If we translate this into the context of kinship, we may theorise that kinship is as much the actual relationships between people and the way these relationships are formally calculated as the context in which these relationships take on a particular meaning. For example, a woman does not always have and express the same relationship to her mother. It will adapt and change depending on the context in which she interacts with her mother: in the company of her siblings, eating with in-laws, attending the family's Christmas celebration and so on. The context will invest the word or idea 'mother' with particular meanings. The interaction is as much produced by the kinship relationship (mother-daughter) as by the context in which this relationship is expressed.

Moreover, the contexts that produce these meanings or in which actions have a meaning may not be limited to kinship but are conveyed through other social institutions. I may have a similar relationship with my boss and with my father in certain contexts, and the definition of 'father' not only changes according to context but is also conveyed through other institutions such as the employment relationship. This seeming complexity really boils down to an acceptance of the idea that relationships similar to those produced in kinship can be found in domains other than what we traditionally conceive of as being kinship. These domains go beyond genealogy and category. They are about relatedness: people share certain things in a particular context and these things, the substance, create bonds: people are related not just kin.

From model to process

Through the complex aspects of consubstantiality as a vehicle for the construction of relatedness, we have also moved from a model-based approach to kinship towards kinship conceived as a process of interaction with others in particular contexts. What we have called the ‘mechanical aspects’ of kinship (and indeed most elements of this book, which have detailed the formalism and algebra underpinning kinship and social categories in Aboriginal Australia, particularly the Western Desert) now need some reframing.

The general concepts defined allowed for the establishment of typologies of kinship systems and the comparative study of kinship. Questions such as ‘Are there relationships between particular kinship systems and economic or technological systems?’ could be asked because a common vocabulary had been developed and more or less accepted. These questions were mainly addressed by Marxist anthropologists, such as Godelier (e.g. 1977), but were later dropped by them: there is no simple relation between mode of production (economics), for example, and kinship system types. Compare the Inuit people, hunter-gatherers of the polar region, with the capitalist system of central Europe. Their economies and technologies are completely different yet their kinship system is very similar, both terminologies being of the Eskimo type.

One important task has been to reintegrate kinship into other social domains, such as political organisation and religion, and to understand how relatedness as a sharing of substances (read ‘contexts’ following Burke) creates kinship-like structures. In my own work, the notion of individual and collective strategies has become essential. Understanding marriage patterns and practices, and even marriage rules, in terms of their integration in traditional as well as contemporary economic networks of exchange and reciprocity led me to consider promises of marriages as identical to marriages themselves, if what is understood by marriage is a process of relatedness-construction. There is no rational reason to distinguish the simple promise of a wife via initiation from the actual marriage when the strategies in which the two processes are involved have similar if not identical aims and when the meaning of the relationships established with the initiator is of a similar, if not identical, nature to the meaning of the relationship with an actual father-in-law.

Hence, what kinship studies do today is analyse processes, meanings and local concepts that flow from kinship-like relationships or that produce kinship-like relationships. The inclusion of the context of practice and discourse in the analysis has become prevalent. I have defined the *sociological* and the *egological* contexts which I believe are relevant for Western Desert society, but there are many more that need to be identified and described. Kinship is not just algebra; it is not just triangles and circles linked through lines, complex equation rules, systemic typologies and so on. It is also real people practising these rules and typologies, bending and adapting them to their conditions and changing world views. However, understanding the common vocabulary that is the foundation stone for these exciting new studies is essential, and this is what this handbook has tried to convey to the reader.

Glossary

Absolute terms	Terms and relationships that do not depend on the speaker and that work like names. Absolute names are in use in moieties or sections where each moiety or section has its specific and invariable name (also see <i>Relative terms</i>).
Affinal	Kinship relationships that come into being when marriage is envisaged or has occurred. Affinal relationships and terms include all in-laws. Affinal terms and <i>consanguinal</i> terms together constitute the entire terminological system.
Alliance (of marriage)	The reproduction over time and generations of identical marriages; that is, for example, brothers exchanging their sisters and their sons again exchanging their sisters etc. Alliance of marriage or marriage alliance occurs in theory in Dravidian systems. In practice, repetitions of identical marriages only rarely occur and what is called ‘shifting webs’, that is the diversification of marriages, is much more frequent.
Aluridja	The name of the Western Desert kinship system as given by Elkin (1931). Aluridja really is an Aranda (Arrernte) word stemming from <i>luritja</i> , which means ‘foreigners’. The word Aluridja is not used by Western Desert people themselves.
Ambilineal	A kind of unilineal system (see below) in which the individual can choose which side (that of the mother or the father) he or she wants to belong to. Once the choice has been made (either by the persons themselves or imposed by others), it cannot be changed.
Bifurcation	A particularity of kinship terminologies that denotes the differentiation between maternal and paternal relatives and which takes gender difference into account.
Bifurcate merging	One of the particularities of Dravidian terminologies (see <i>bifurcation</i>). Bifurcate merging creates the distinction between cross-cousins and parallel cousins (see <i>cross</i> and <i>parallel cousins</i>). A mother’s brother is distinguished from the father and from the father’s brother, and a father’s sister is distinguished from the mother and mother’s sister. A mother’s brother and a father’s sister are spouses and their offspring are affines.

Clan	A group of people, or a number of lineages, whose members claim to be descendants of a distant ancestor, who is usually mythical (also see <i>lineage</i>).
Classificatory (terms)	Kinship labels that can be used for a whole category of persons (see <i>descriptive</i>). The English word <i>cousin</i> is a classificatory term since it covers all mother's and father's siblings' children, irrespective of whether they are male or female or of whether they are on ones father's or mother's side. Most systems have both classificatory and descriptive terms.
Cognatic descent	In cognatic descent, people consider they are descended from both their mother's and their father's side (also see <i>mixed descent</i>).
Complementary filiation	In unilineal systems, people inherit one major characteristic from either their mother's or their father's side, but may inherit complementary elements from the other side. For example, among the North African Touareg belonging to lineages as well as the house or tent is inherited through the female's line, but the animal herd is inherited from the father.
Complex exchange	A marriage system in which there are no prescriptive marriage rules (see <i>prescriptive rule</i>). This is the marriage system at work in Euro-American societies. In these societies, it is not the kinship system itself that determines potential partners but rather other characteristics such as belonging to the same social class.
Consanguinal	The kinship relationships that exist for a person before marriage (see <i>affinal</i>). In English, <i>mother</i> , <i>father</i> , <i>brother</i> etc. are consanguinal terms while <i>wife</i> , <i>brother-in-law</i> , <i>mother-in-law</i> etc. are affinal terms.
Cross-cousins	Ones father's sister's children and ones mother's brother's children. Cross-cousins are relevant in systems with <i>bifurcate merging</i> , such as in <i>Dravidian</i> systems. In the later systems, cross-cousins are potential spouses. Cross-cousins are distinguished from parallel cousins.
Cultural bloc	A group of 'tribes', linguistic groups or societies that share a common cultural background.
Demand-sharing	Occurs when a person demands something from another on the basis of their kinship link and the obligations and responsibilities that this relationship entails.

Descent	The systemisation of certain principles of filiation (see <i>filiation</i>).
Descent group	A group of people who consider themselves to be identical in some respects because they are descendants from one real or mythical individual (also see <i>lineage</i> and <i>clan</i>).
Descriptive (terms)	Kinship words that can be used for one particular person only (opposite of <i>classificatory</i>). The English word <i>brother</i> is a descriptive term since it covers only one class of persons: the male descendants of your mother and father.
Direct exchange	Two men or women marrying each other's sisters or brothers. This exchange is linked to Dravidian-type terminologies and is reproduced over time, resulting in an <i>alliance of marriage</i> .
Domestic group	An economic unit. The smallest unit of people that produce and consume material goods in common.
Double descent	In double descent systems, people inherit their belonging or substances from both the mother's and the father's side, but they do not inherit the same things from each.
Dreaming / Dreamtime	See <i>Tjukurrpa</i> .
Egocentric:	A term or relationship that indicates an individual's point of view (see <i>Sociocentric</i>).
Egological (context)	A situation in which personal interrelationships determine which terminology or behaviour to adopt (see the <i>sociological context</i>).
Endogamy	The obligation to marry or practice of marrying within one's family, group or tribe. While endogamy is the opposite of <i>exogamy</i> , both are usually combined in some way. For example, you may have a rule of genealogical exogamy, forcing people to marry outside their close family, combined with a rule of tribal endogamy, where you are nevertheless supposed to marry someone within the range of the tribal group.
Ethnocentrism	A worldview, heavily biased by the personal history and background of those who express it, that judges other societies or peoples negatively in comparison with ones own. It reflects an incapacity to accept and understand difference and otherness on their own terms.

Exogamy	The obligation to marry or practice of marrying outside ones family, group or tribe. Exogamy can be genealogical (marrying outside ones family or group) or geographical (marrying outside ones residential area, land of affiliation etc.). Exogamy is the opposite of endogamy and is a result of the incest prohibition.
Extension of range	The range of people towards whom kinship terms can or must be applied, which in some classificatory systems can be extended indefinitely.
Filiation	The particular relationship between children and parents who may share particular substances, rights or duties.
First cross-cousins	This is a synonym for cross-cousins but is distinguished from second cross-cousins.
Functionalist approach	This theoretical approach understands a society as comprising interdependent parts that contribute to the working of the society as a whole. The society can be understood metaphorically as a body and its institutions as the body's organs.
Genealogy	In popular terms, a 'family tree'. It is a chart that reconstructs an individual's total known kin relationships to ancestors, contemporaries and descendants.
Group marriage	A marriage between a group of brothers and a group of sisters. This mistaken notion was used by evolutionists to imply that in 'primitive' societies mating was indiscriminate among groups of people, thus children would not know who their biological parents were. No such society exists.
Household	A residential unit. People who live together in the same abode or camp.
Hunter-gatherers	A mode of human adaptation typically identified by nomadism, the absence of agriculture and domesticated animals, low demographic densities and an egalitarian political system. Australia is the only continent that was entirely occupied by hunter-gatherer societies. On other continents, hunter-gatherers coexist alongside horticulturalists (societies that predominantly grow crops) and pastoralists (societies that extensively live from herding), with whom they often entertained commercial relations.

Indirect exchange	A complex version of direct exchange (see <i>direct exchange</i>) where at least three groups need to exchange women or men for marriage. This system is found in Crow-Omaha terminologies.
Internalisation	In this process of socialisation, the individual comes to regard what has been inculcated as normal and natural.
Lineage	A group of people who can trace their descent back to a single known and, in most cases, named human ancestor.
Marriage	The union of two individuals, which brings together two families or groups. Marriage is always subject to rules and has to be distinguished from sexuality (also see <i>Prescriptive</i> and <i>Proscriptive rules</i>)
Matrilineal/matrifiliation	Those relatives or principles that are on ones mother's side.
Mixed descent	A descent group (also see <i>descent group</i> , the opposite is ' <i>unilineal</i> ') that draws its origins from both the mother's and the father's side.
Monogamy	A kind of marriage involving one woman or man and her or his spouse. A monogamous family comprises a man, a woman and their children (also see <i>Polygamy</i> , <i>Polygyny</i> and <i>Polyandry</i>).
Mularrpa	In Western Desert languages, Mularrpa is the 'here and now' and is contrasted to the Tjukurrpa (<i>Dreamtime</i>). Actual people life in the Mularrpa, but are linked to concepts and realities that were created during the Dreamtime (also see <i>Tjukurrpa</i>).
Multiple connectedness	In order to be meaningful in anthropological terms, every kin category or every person in a genealogy needs to be linked to at least two other persons.
Nature-nurture debate	A long-running argument over how to explain human behaviour, customs, etc. Are they caused by genetics, 'instinct', etc. or by being raised in a society? In other words, how much in a human being's behaviour, thinking and practice is culturally determined and how much is biologically determined? The two influences are so inextricably linked that attempts to separate them out and apply some kind of quotient would be impossible and pointless.
Nuclear family	A father (or husband) and mother (or wife) and their children.

Parallel cousins	Ones father's brother's children and ones mother's sister's children.
Patrilineal/patrifiliation	Relatives on ones father's side, and principles relating to descent in which males are the central point of reference.
Polygamy	Having several simultaneous spouses.
Polyandry	A form of polygamy. A woman who is married to more than one husband at the same time.
Polygyny	A form of polygamy. A man who has more than one wife simultaneously.
Prescriptive rule	The obligation to marry certain categories of persons (see <i>Proscriptive rule</i>).
Prohibition of incest	A fundamental rule, not identical in every society, but every society possesses one. This rule prohibits sexual relationships and marriage between particular persons. In Euro-American as well as in Aboriginal Australian societies, marriage between a son and his mother is prohibited because considered incestuous.
Proscriptive rule	The interdiction to marry a certain category of persons (see <i>Prescriptive rule</i>).
Relatedness	The feeling and practice of having or establishing connections with other people through various means; it produces relationships similar to kinship.
Relational triangle	A method used by Aboriginal people to calculate their relationships.
Relative terms	A term or name that depends and varies on the speaker. Examples are relative generational moiety names: moiety A calls itself X and calls the other moiety Y, and moiety B calls itself X and the other moiety Y (also see <i>Absolute terms</i>).
Rule of economy	In many domains, in particular language, this rule reflects the fact that social processes and structures tend to strive towards the elimination of redundancy.
Second cross-cousin	A type of cross-cousin relationship in which Ego and his/her cross-cousin are two generations removed; e.g., a MMBDD is a second cross-cousin.

Self-reciprocal (terms)	Terms of address or reference between two persons who are structurally identical (e.g. 'cousin' in English).
Skewing	A particularity of Omaha and Crow systems of kinship reckoning. Persons from different generational levels are conflated (skewed) into one category only.
Social category:	A way of classifying people in some form or another into distinct groups. The expression is usually applied to Australian Aboriginal sections, subsections, moieties and generational moieties. Each of these category systems divides society into an even number of complementary classes based on kinship relationships.
Socialisation	The process of learning cultural symbols and ways of thinking and behaving.
Sociocentric	A term or relationship seen from a social or sociological point of view (see <i>Egocentric</i>).
Sociological (context)	A situation in which the relationship between general social categories determines the terminology and behaviour to adopt (see <i>egological context</i>).
Structuralism	According to this approach or 'school' of anthropology, social meaning and structure are organised around binary but interconnected oppositions in such a way that if you change one element of social structure, it will also change the other corresponding elements.
Terminology (kinship)	A set of words used to address or refer to people with whom one is related through a biological idiom.
Terms of address	Words that people use when directly addressing other kin (e.g., 'dad') (see <i>Terms of reference</i>).
Terms of reference	Words that people use to refer to kin (e.g., 'father') (see <i>Terms of address</i>)
Tjukurrpa	This is the indigenous word for the <i>Dreamtime</i> or <i>Dreaming</i> in Western Desert dialects. This concept includes the mythical journeys of the Dreamtime beings, the laws and rules that were created by these beings as well as the sacred sites linked to these myths. Often translated in English as 'the Law', Tjukurrpa also includes

every action or belief that is somehow related or justified by the Dreamtime and thus has a sacred and often secret character (also see *Murlarrpa*).

Tribe

The concept of the tribe has been much debated in anthropology, and there are probably as many definitions as there are anthropologists. Generally speaking, a tribe is understood as a group of people who occupy a specified stretch of land, who predominantly marry amongst themselves, who speak a particular language or dialect, who recognise themselves as a political unit, and who express a feeling of shared belonging and ways of doing and of thinking.

Unilineal

A descent principle or group (see *descent group*) in which descent is in one line only, through the mother or the father. Also see *matrilineal* and *patrilineal*.



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