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Age, category, and descent

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AGE, CATEGORY, AND DESCENT

To Professor Raymond Firth

The topic of this essay is the influence of relative age on the employment of categories of relationship and in the analysis of them. The investigation originated in plain empirical observations among small groups of forest nomads in the interior of Borneo, but the issues raised seem to have a wide theoretical significance for social anthropology.¹

I

Introduction

"All words necessarily classify according to certain principles", as Kroeber wrote, and there must be general agreement with his contention, although it has been largely neglected in practice, that there is "no conceivable reason why terms of relationship should be an exception, and no evidence that they are" (Kroeber, 1917, p. 390). This characteristically clear-sighted view of the great American scholar was much later developed by Radcliffe-Brown into what was rather grandiosely called a "theory of type relationships" (1941, p. 16), which means simply that "For all the relatives who are denoted by one term, there is normally some element of attitude or behavior that is

¹ The first draft of this paper, based on the same field researches and making essentially the identical argument, was presented to a seminar conducted by Professor Dr. C. von Fürer-Haimendorf at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in October 1955. A generous but unauthorised notice of it, evidently based on a copy of a summary which was circulated to members of the seminar, has been published anonymously, under the title "Relative Age and Kinship Categories", in the *Eastern Anthropologist*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1956, p. 68.

In addition to more recent published ethnography, the present version has been augmented particularly by reference to an article by Professor Raymond Firth (1930) which I had not read earlier but which is by far the most useful single contribution to the study of the problem of relative age. I am happy to offer Professor Firth this essay as a token of recognition of his perceptive and pioneering enquiries into this topic in Tikopian society.

regarded as appropriate to them and not to others" (1941, p. 8). This formulation was given its final expression as follows:

...The classificatory terminology... is used as a method of dividing relatives into categories which determine or influence social relations as exhibited in conduct. The general rule is that the inclusion of two relatives in the same terminological category implies that there is some significant similarity in the customary behaviour due to both of them, or in the social relation in which one stands to each of them, while inversely the placing of two relatives in different categories implies some significant difference in customary behaviour or social relations. Some anthropologists make a great point of real or supposed exceptions to this rule, but they seem to forget that there can only be an exception when there is a general rule to which it is an exception (Radcliffe-Brown, 1950, p. 9).

Exceptions or not, "within a category there may be and always are important distinctions: "There are distinctions... between nearer and more distant relatives. There is sometimes an important distinction between relatives of a certain category who belong to other clans. There are other distinctions that are made in different particular systems" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1941, p. 8).

Thus a relationship terminology defines a set of categories which compose a classification of persons, but certain factors create "distinctions" or "complications" in the employment of these categories.

Barton similarly recognises that the degree of obligation to a kinsman in Ifugao society varies with genealogical distance, but he goes much further in listing other "inherent contradictions in kinship organization" which also modify one's duties to relatives, viz., personality, wealth, prestige, influence, reputation, and co-operation (Barton, 1949, p. 69). Radcliffe-Brown maintains that there are "necessarily" distinctions between near and distant relatives included in the same category (1950, p. 9), but it is not clear what logical or ethnographic justification he could claim for this assertion, while Barton's other "contradictions" are clearly contingent to particular social circumstances. These and other distinctions are all, of course, highly likely and expectable in any kind of society; they are factors commonly to be taken into account, but they are not ineluctable, and it is difficult to conceive a general formulation about any one of them which would apply to all types of "kinship system".

There is, however, another kind of distinction or complication which is in fact necessary, completely general, and a common source of real contradiction in the regulation of social life. This is the factor of relative age. It appears to be universally the case that some regard

is paid to relative age in social relations; age is usually taken to imply greater experience and a respectable maturity which commands deference from juniors.² Terminological recognition of difference of age within a category is to be seen in the common distinction between F and FeB, or between eB and yB, and in the extreme case of the Wikmunkan terminology, which makes such categorical differentiation to an unparalleled degree (cf. Needham, 1962a), but what I have in mind is a more radical feature than this.

Given a disparity of ages between siblings, between the dates at which they marry, and between the ages of their spouses, the possibility is entailed that (1) individuals of the same age will belong to different categories, and (2) individuals of different ages will belong to the same category. Social relations may therefore be ordered either by category or by relative age. If age is sometimes the dominant criterion of classification, then in such instances it is to some extent incorrect to regard the relationship terms as denoting distinct classes of persons. Any society has to choose, as it were, in the course of its evolution, which of the two logically possible criteria of classification it is to employ: category, or relative age.

Our first task is to establish empirically that this formal possibility of confusion or contradiction, between category and age, is indeed reported in the ethnographic literature; and our second task will be to try to discover in what circumstances each of these criteria is preponderant.

There are two points to be made before assessing the evidence, one concerning method and the other the matter of appropriate analytical terms. On the former count, we have to confine ourselves to the consideration of absolutely determined categories of relationship, and exclude those situations in which relationship terms are applied to individuals outside the range of jural relatives on the very basis of relative age. One such case are the Nuer, among whom "the terminology of address of the age-sets may cut across that of kinship. For example, a man may be to another a classificatory paternal uncle or grandfather genealogically, but if he is of the same generation he is his 'brother' and would so address him and be addressed by him" (Evans-Pritchard, 1951, p. 175). The second point is that it is necessary to distinguish

² It is a commonplace observation that in our own society a worn and world-weary countenance may of itself procure an instant and unearned respect, and that an unmarked or youthful appearance may encourage a disregard which has to be countered by special effort.

between a "generation" as commonly understood in English, i.e., as a body of individuals born about the same period and also the time covered by the lives of these (S.O.E.D.), and a "generation" as constituted by those individuals who fall into one level in a genealogy. We shall call the latter means of definition a "genealogical level" (cf. Needham, 1962a, pp. 240-2).³

Let us now make a brief survey of certain ethnographic reports, in order of publication, which show that the factor of relative age introduces real contradictions which are socially recognised and have to be dealt with.

Mota. "It sometimes happens that a boy is... 'father' [*tamai*] to one old enough to be his natural father, or 'grandfather', *tupui*, to one of his own age. When it is so the formal relationship is practically merged in the general *tasu*, brotherhood" (Codrington, 1891, p. 39, n. 1). *Tasu* is the younger brother or male parallel cousin.

Kariera. "It may happen that a man B is by genealogy the 'father' of a man A, but is younger than A. In such a case A calls B not 'father' but 'son', and B calls A 'father', although by genealogy he is his 'son'. The same thing may occur in the case of a *kaga* [MB], a *nganga* [M], or a *toa* [BS]. In one case I found three men, A, B, and C, aged about 65, 63, and 60, respectively. The father of A and C, who were brothers, was the 'elder brother' of B, and therefore, both A and C were, by genealogy, the 'sons' of B. He called C his 'son', but as A was older than himself, he called him not 'son', but 'father', thus reversing the genealogical relation" (Brown, 1913, p. 154).

Andaman Islanders. "The duties that one person owes to another are determined much less by their relation to one another by consanguinity and marriage, than by their respective ages and social status" (Brown, 1922, p. 81).

Wikmunkan. "In the Wik-munkan and allied tribes the 'classificatory' system entirely obliterates age distinctions. It is quite a common thing to find children playing together who are *Kattha* [M] and *Nenka* [eS] to one another, or children who are *Naitia*... (grandparents) to older men and women" (McConnel, 1934, p. 351).

Tikopia. "Where there are several lines from which a person may select his kinship to another, the basis of selection is one of comparative age and rank, coupled with personal interest... The marriage of people of approximately the same age but of disparate kinship grades tends to level out such discrepancies in terminology. Cases of union between 'father' and 'daughter', 'son' and 'mother' 'nephew' and 'father's sister', all in the classificatory sense, are by no means uncommon in Tikopia... The terminology of a classificatory kinship system is the servant, not the master, of the social relationships which it portrays" (Firth, 1936, p. 267).

³ Professor Firth has already made this distinction, under the terms "generation" and "kinship grade", describing the former as biological and the latter as sociological (Firth, 1936, p. 248).

Nuer. The passage quoted earlier shows that there may well be, in this society also, a disparity between age and category, though "contradiction... is avoided" by the application of terms according to relative age. It is not, however, stated in the source (Evans-Pritchard, 1951) at what point of recognised genealogical remove, if at any, the classification of relative age would have to give way to one by category; e.g., if a first cousin were of the age of one's father, the question remains whether he would still be addressed accordingly as "father" in the way that a more distantly related individual evidently is.

Pul Eliya. "Because woman begin to bear children soon after puberty, while middle-aged men often marry very young wives, a line of descent traced exclusively through females may quickly become chronologically out of step with a similar line traced through males... Discrepancies of this sort are probably quite common but are not easily noticed. The Sinhalese rule is that a man should marry a *nānā* — that is a girl of his own generation. Even if the rule is broken, terminology tends to disguise the error. 'My sister's husband' is always my *massinā* (cousin) even when, according to strict genealogy, he might properly be addressed as *māmā* (uncle) or *bānā* (nephew)" (Leach, 1961, pp. 203-4).

Maṣuche. "A man tends to marry women of roughly his own age or younger, although these may be genealogically on his father's generation. Depending on how many generations descent is traced back in time, a man could have marriageable women of the genealogical grandparental, great-grandparental, etc., generations" (Faron, 1961, p. 195).

Murinbata. "... Age is not a decisive factor in the use of kinship terms. A person can, for example, use kinship terms of the first or second ascending generation for men or women of his own age or younger. Thus a Murin'bata will call the son or daughter of *tamoin* (mother's father) and *kawu* (mother's mother), *kaka* (mother's brother) and *kal:e* (mother) respectively, even though they may all be the same age. As a rule, however, the kinship terms express the relative age difference between ego and other individuals. The actual age is not expressed by the kinship terminology but by special age-grade terms (Falkenberg, 1962, pp. 175-6).

Busama. "In many families the father and mother share certain relatives, and the children in consequence can choose some of their kinship ties. Indeed, because of other marriages besides that of the parents, it is frequently possible to refer to a kinsman by three or four different terms ... The different genealogical paths provide a way out when two fairly close relatives are the wrong age for their kinship status--a classificatory younger brother, for instance, who is old enough to be his 'elder brother's' father. They deliberately abandon the direct route in favour of one that gives a more seemly result" (Hogbin, 1963, pp. 49-50, cf. p. 90).

These examples⁴ all clearly show that the formal possibility of conflict between the classificatory criteria of relative age and category of rela-

⁴ It is by no means claimed that they constitute an exhaustive or representative collection. They are merely cases which happen to have been encountered in the course of reading directed to other ends, and I should be grateful to learn of any other reports.

tionship is in fact empirically manifested in the social life of societies of very different kinds and in widely separated parts of the world. We appear therefore to be dealing indeed with a highly general structural phenomenon. But although these accounts contain valuable explanatory clues, their authors have not attempted to formulate in a general fashion the issues raised by their observations, or to draw any theoretical conclusions. Moreover, the reports are practically all brief and incidental, and what we need are cases recorded in more precise and useful detail. Let us now proceed, therefore, to the narrower consideration of three societies in Southeast Asia: the Penan, the Siwang, and the Kodi.

II

Penan

The Penan⁵ are a people of north-central Borneo, traditionally and for the most part still in fact forest nomads. They number about 2600 and are divided into two tribes, which have been distinguished as Eastern Penan and Western Penan, differing in dialect and to some degree in custom. They live in small groups containing a mean of about 32 individuals of all ages. By preference they marry within the group, though the Western Penan prohibition on marriage with a first cousin makes this more difficult for them than it is for the Eastern Penan.

The Penan employ only a cognatic mode of reckoning relationship. The terms, in the Western dialect, are:

1. <i>tepun</i>	grandparent
2. <i>tamen</i>	father
3. <i>tinen</i>	mother
4. <i>vi</i>	uncle, aunt
5. <i>padi</i>	sibling
(<i>padi</i>) <i>tuken</i>	elder sibling
(<i>padi</i>) <i>tadin</i>	younger sibling
6. <i>padi pēsak</i>	cousin
7. <i>anak</i>	child
8. <i>aong</i>	nephew, niece

⁵ My researches among the Penan were carried out in 1951-52 with a Senior Studentship awarded by the Treasury ("Scarborough") Committee for Studentships in Foreign Languages and Cultures, and in 1958 with a Research Fellowship awarded under the Cultural Relations Program of S.E.A.T.O. I am deeply indebted to both bodies, and to the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford, for sponsorship in the former instance.

9. <i>ayam</i>	grandchild
10. <i>kivan</i>	spouse's parent, child's spouse
11. <i>banen</i>	husband
12. <i>rēdu</i>	wife
13. <i>sabai</i>	spouse's brother, sibling's husband
14. <i>langu</i>	spouse's sister, sibling's wife
15. <i>ruai</i>	spouse of 13 or 14.

All Penan are addressed by these terms. Degree of relationship, where this is relevant and can be traced, is denoted by removes; the closest member genealogically of each category (except *tamen* and *tinen*, which are singular) is referred to as a "true" relative, e.g., the father's father is a "true grandparent", *tepun muun*.

Fig. 1

Relationships between Vang and Rimau.

(Rimau is represented twice; Abok is the husband of Jengin.)

Where close intermarriage is commonly practised there is bound to be a large number of different genealogical connexions by which individuals may trace relationships to each other, and in certain circumstances these multifarious links will allocate individuals to more than one genealogical level. Let us take a Western Penan example (Fig. 1). Vang and Rimau are very young children of about the same age. If their relationship is traced through Vang's father, Gani, and Rimau's father, Abok, then Rimau is Vang's "uncle", *vi*; but if the relationship is traced through Rimau's mother, Jengin, then he is Vang's "cousin", *padi pēsak*. There are other possible connexions in this instance, and most of them make the relationship one of cousins. This is a usual situation among the Penan, and it often happens that they will state or claim one relationship in one situation and another

in a different situation. In the present example, the relationship would normally be traced, initially at least, through the fathers, making it one between "niece" and "uncle", but the alternative statuses are equally valid.

Fig. 2(a)

Fig. 2(b)

The relationship of Sebuang and Maréng.

Let us take another example, concentrating this time not on alternative categories but on relative age. Sebuang is a small boy, about three years old, and he numbers among his cousins not only children of more or less his own age but also young adults in their early twenties, such as Kilau. Maréng, the little son of Kilau, is roughly the same age as Sebuang, but they stand in the relationship of nephew and uncle, *aong* and *vi*. This situation is represented conventionally in the genealogy in Fig. 2(a), but let us introduce at this point a simple methodological device which displays and contrasts the same situation when ordered by relative age. In Fig. 2(b), namely, the individuals in question are disposed not by genealogical level but by age alone (Needham, 1953, pp. 226-7).

A more striking case, though admittedly of a rarer sort, is that in which individuals of the same age stand in the relationship of grandparent (*tepun*) and grandchild (*ayam*). Payang is the eldest

Fig. 3(a)

Fig. 3(b)

The relationship of Mia and Payang (schematic).

of the five children of Kalang, and Mia is the youngest of the five daughters of Talan (Fig. 3(a)). Payang is perhaps two or three years older than Mia, yet genealogically he is her "grandson" (Fig. 3(b)).

It is clear enough, then, that among the Penan individuals of the same age belong to different categories, and that individuals of the same category are of different ages. With this we are brought to the significance of the categories, the relative application of which has already been brought out. Penan do not formulate what the relations between categories of persons should be with the readiness or precision that is found in certain other simple societies, and to the observer there is in fact little such consistency of behaviour to be found. Where the Penan do speak of what a certain relationship should be like, they refer not to an ideal mode of behaviour that is looked for between all members of the categories in question but primarily to what they regard as "true" relatives, i.e., the closest genealogical referents of the terms. When, for example, they are asked what behaviour is expected of a *tepun* Penan will always understand one to be speaking of a *tepun muun*, a "true grandparent", not of all members of the category irrespective of age or remove. There are recognised jural attributes of such close relationships, but the Penan clearly and repeatedly declare that where the relative ages are not appropriate to the categories these rights and duties are not required or expected. They define and justify authority first of all by reference to age, and a "true grandparent" is said by them to command respect "because he is old", but a junior member of the category has no such claim to deference or regard. It is true (and demonstrable) that the terms carry something of the connotations which they bear in their application to "true" relatives, and that where there is a choice between two applicable terms (as there often is) a Penan may well choose to employ that which is the more appropriate to the age of the person addressed; but the category of the relationship can never override the importance of age. While Penan say that a grandparent (by implication only a "true grandparent") should be obeyed, they vigorously deny that one should obey a "grandparent" (or any other genealogically senior relative) who it not considerably older: "It is not possible for one to command the other; they are of the same age".

One specially prominent indication of the significance of categories of relationship is, of course, marriage. Among the Penan, marriage is permitted between members of any categories other than parent and child; otherwise, only the degree of relationship, and not the category,

determines whether a marriage is permissible. In one group of Western Penan, for instance, marriages had been contracted as follows: one between *tepun* and *ayam*, nine between *vi* and *aong*, and thirteen between *padi pēsak*. Nearly half of the extant marriages, therefore, took place between genealogical levels. Similarly, in an equally typical Eastern Penan group, out of seventeen marriages five were between *vé* and *ahong*, and twelve were between *padé patah* (these being the Eastern terms), nearly one-third of the marriages thus being contracted between individuals of different genealogical levels. Such proportions of marriages between genealogical levels are not exceptional, but are common to the generality of groups in both Penan tribes. Such marriages, and the alternative links available in tracing relationship, result in the phenomenon of ambiguous status touched on above. On the other hand, it is relative age that is the strictest limitation on the choice of a marriage partner. Penan regard with great distaste the idea of a man marrying someone either much older or much younger than himself. That people should marry across the genealogical levels is of no importance: what does matter is that the partners should be of roughly the same age, and the categories are no sure guide to this.

Among the Penan, therefore, the postulated contradictions between category and age are characteristically found, and status is predominantly determined not by category but by relative age.

III

Siwang

The Siwang⁶ of central Malaya, formerly forest nomads, are hunters and gatherers and shifting cultivators living in isolation in the high forests of Gunong Benom, Pahang. Certain ethnographic notes on them have already been published (Needham, 1956). The information on this people was gained by simple enquiry and over an extremely brief period, but it is nevertheless consistent and precise enough to be taken into consideration.

The Siwang number about 140 individuals of all ages, and they marry practically exclusively and by preference among themselves.

⁶ This section is based on enquiries made in May, 1955, when two Siwang men acted as my trackers in a search for Negritos in the Gunong Tahan area. I owe my presence in Malaya at that time to the Treasury Committee for Studentships in Foreign Languages and Cultures, and my investigations in Pahang to facilities provided by the Operations Research Unit, General Headquarters, Far Eastern Land Forces.

They live in widely scattered and very small settlements, four of which contain respectively eight, twelve, seven, and eight adults. Relationship is reckoned cognatically. The terms are:⁷

1. <i>moyet</i>	great-grandfather, great-grandchild
2. <i>coen</i>	great-grandmother
3. <i>ta</i>	grandfather
4. <i>yak</i>	grandmother
5. <i>bap</i>	father
6. <i>moi</i>	mother
7. <i>kesya</i>	uncle (older than parent)
8. <i>bah</i>	uncle (younger than parent)
9. <i>baha</i>	aunt (older than parent)
10. <i>déh</i>	aunt (younger than parent)
11. <i>to</i>	elder sibling or cousin
12. <i>adi</i>	younger sibling or cousin
13. <i>wogn</i>	child
14. <i>anég</i>	nephew, niece
15. <i>cu</i>	grandchild
16. <i>té</i>	husband
17. <i>je</i>	wife
18. <i>keleg</i>	parent-in-law
19. <i>lah</i>	sibling-in-law
20. <i>biras</i>	spouse of 19
21. <i>besén</i>	child-in-law, spouse of nephew or niece.

A cousin is known as *to* or as *adi* according to his own age relative to that of the subject, not according to the age of the parent relative to that of the subject's parent.

Figure 4 shows in conventional form some of the genealogical connexions between the 34 Siwang in the four groups mentioned above, excluding a solitary stranger (a Bi Ja) who is married into one of them. Spouses are linked not by the usual equation sign but by numbers, these running serially from left to right, males first, wives then being assigned the numbers of their husbands.

Figure 5, which should be compared with this, shows the same Siwang individuals when ordered by relative age instead of by the

⁷ The orthography adopted here differs slightly from that employed in "Ethnographic Notes on the Siwang" (Needham, 1956, p. 59), and the method of presentation has been improved.

usual genealogical levels. Not all of the upper genealogical connexions in Fig. 4 are reproduced in Fig. 5 because the ages of the deceased links could not be ascertained. The vertical lines at the right give a first diagrammatic indication of the range of ages covered by different categories and of the extent of overlap.

Fig. 6, finally shows the numbers of individuals in the categories concerned, their distribution by age, and the numerical extent of overlap between category and age.

Fig. 6

Before we proceed, it may be as well (particularly in this uncertain ethnographic setting) to offer a note of explanation on how the ages were determined. Since only two Siwang individuals were actually met, the ages of the other people could not even be estimated by sight, and all the ages given here were elicited by questioning. Begng, the chief informant, was about 40 years old, and it was he who estimated the ages of his relatives. Now the Siwang take no more interest in keeping precise account of age than do the Penan, but there are fixed historical points by reference to which ages could be approximately established. The most prominent of these events are: the great influenza epidemic of 1918, in which some two-thirds of the Siwang are thought to have died (Ogilvie, 1949, p. 13); the great flood of 1926, in which the Pahang river rose by 53 feet and caused wide devastation (Winstedt, 1927); and the Japanese invasion and occupation in 1942. There were also a number of recent events which could be dated, some connected with the Communist insurrection,

others with governmental appointments, etc., which made it possible to arrive at a probable estimate of each individual's date of birth. On the whole, the ages indicated in Figs. 5 and 6 are, I think, not gravely unreliable. In any case, they would have to be surprisingly wrong to invalidate the central conclusions which emerge from the figures.

The main considerations are that among the Siwang individuals of the same age belong to different categories, and that individuals of very different ages belong to the same category. In other words, in this society also there is in fact a significant degree of overlap between category and age. This "overlap" is best seen in Fig. 6, which shows the numbers of individuals in the categories concerned, their distribution by age, and the numerical extent of the overlap between individuals as classified by genealogical level and by age. The degree of overlap can be given a numerical index. There are 34 individuals involved, and 15 of them fall into the zone of overlap. If this proportion is represented as a percentage of the total ⁸ the index of overlap, between the two proximate genealogical levels affected in this case, is 44.1.

This index poses in a fairly precise fashion the question of what is the significance of the categories, or of the genealogical levels which they compose. When asked, the informants declared without hesitation or qualification that relative age is generally more important than category. This is best borne out by the regulation of marriage, which is governed in the main by genealogical distance rather than by category. A man may not marry his mother (in this instance, a singular designation, *moi*, not employed in a classificatory sense), father's sister, mother's sister, sister, sibling's daughter, or any first cousin. Marriage with a second cousin is also severely disapproved, and although it is possible there is no surviving marriage with a relative closer than third cousin in the genealogy obtained. Marriage is specifically asserted to be permitted with an aunt (*baha*, *déh*), niece (*anég*), or even granddaughter (*cu*) of the appropriate age, so long as the relationship is at the second or more distant remove (Needham, 1956, p. 63). In fact, of the 18 marriages between Siwang recorded here (i.e.,

⁸ It would be possible to represent the degree of overlap by relating simply the numbers of years spanned by each category or genealogical level, i.e., by a numerical expression of the relations between the vertical lines to the right in Fig. 5, but this would give no idea of the numbers of people affected by the contradictions and would thus be no indication of the degree of possible confusion in the conduct of social life.

excluding the one marriage with the Bi Ja man) one is of a man with his aunt, 13 are with a cousin, and 4 are with a niece.

This practice of marriage between genealogical levels results in the possibility, which the Siwang recognise, of alternative status according to how the genealogical connexions are traced (Needham, 1956, p. 61). This means, of course, that the genealogy given here is not an absolute representation of statuses, but it is nevertheless characteristic. There is a marked patrilineal emphasis in Siwang institutions, and unless some particular advantage may be gained otherwise Siwang normally trace relationship in the first place through the father and determine a category through masculine connexions. The genealogy therefore serves as a disinterested Siwang representation of the recognised relationships between the individuals involved.

Among the Siwang, we may conclude, the contradiction between category and age is once more clearly exhibited, and it is resolved in this society also by making age rather than category determinative in social relations.

IV

Kodi

The Kodi⁹ of Sumba, in eastern Indonesia, are settled people living in large and substantial villages centred on megalithic ancestral tombs. They live by the cultivation of rice and maize, tending large herds of horses and cattle, and some fishing. They number about 27,000. Like the Penan and the Siwang, they lack any indigenous centralised government, but by contrast they have a bilineal descent system (cf. van Wouden, 1956): there are five territorial patrilineal clans, and 85 dispersed matrilineal clans. The essential relationship terminology¹⁰ is as follows:

1. <i>ambu</i>	grandparent, grandchild
2. <i>bapa</i>	F, FB
3. <i>inya</i>	M, MZ
4. <i>loka</i>	MB
5. <i>kiyo</i>	FZ
6. <i>ghagha</i>	eB, FBSe, MZSe

⁹ Research on Sumba was carried out in 1954-55 with a Senior Studentship awarded under the auspices of the University of Oxford by the Treasury Committee for Studentships in Foreign Languages and Cultures.

¹⁰ Certain other terms are not directly relevant to the present topic and are not discussed.

7. <i>ari</i>	yB, FBSy, MZSy
8. <i>lavinye</i>	Z, FBD, MZD
9. <i>anguleba</i>	MBC, FZC
10. <i>ana</i>	C
11. <i>ana kabinye</i>	ZC
12. <i>laghi</i>	H
13. <i>arivyeyo</i>	W
14. <i>ghera</i>	WF, WM, WB
15. <i>laghiya</i>	ZH, DH
16. <i>angulaghiya</i>	WZ
17. <i>mayia</i>	SW.

Relations between Kodi are determined in the first place by patriclan and by matriclan, and then by category. The Kodi distinguish between direct and important relationships (those that are genealogically very close, for example, or with affines), which we may refer to as the range of jural relatives, and those which are of less consequence. Among the former, the character of a relationship is strictly determined by category, to the extent that a youth will be accorded formal deference by a far older man if the latter belongs to a junior category. Among the latter kind, even in the case of recognised relatives, if there is no connexion such as the Kodi regard as "close" the genealogically determined category is displaced by one appropriate to the individual's age.

Typically, direct relationships governed by category are recognised in the first place within a man's local patrilineage; here there is no question that category is predominant and that the consideration of relative age is not. Fig. 7 presents a conventional (and slightly simplified) genealogy of the older male members of one such patrilineage, selected at random from among my notes: Mahendak, clan Mbala-gharo. The living members are represented in solid black.¹¹ Fig. 8, next, represents the same individuals disposed according to their ages in 1954; once more, the vertical lines at the right give a preliminary indication of the extent of overlap between category and age. The open masculine signs indicate deceased members of the lineage; these are included in order to mark the nearer genealogical connexions and

¹¹ It is of particular importance in an argument of this kind to emphasise that the genealogical levels of the individuals in the third descent line from the left are not mistaken; they were carefully checked in the field, especially so since they appear dubious, and they are correct.

MAHENDAK (Kodi, Sumba)

Fig. 7

MAHENDAK (Kodi, Sumba)

Fig. 8

to make it easier to relate the diagram to Fig. 7; their positions do not indicate their ages. The numerical aspect is given in Fig. 9.

Fig. 9.

These figures show that among the 33 living individuals represented there is a clear and very considerable overlap affecting all categories.

If we number the genealogical levels in order of seniority the indices of overlap are:

I + II:	6 individuals, no overlap
I + III:	14, overlap 9 = index 64.2
II + III:	14, overlap 3 = index 21.4
II + IV:	19, overlap 16 = index 84.2
III + IV:	25, overlap 16 = index 64.0

Taking all the genealogical levels together, there is a total overlap affecting 29 out of the 33 individuals, giving an overall index of 87.8.

Another local patrilineage, Maghamba (clan Mbalagharo), also taken at random, shows by contrast no overlap at all; the twenty men composing the group, although of fairly different ages, happen to be neatly divided both by category and by age. But this does not controvert the Mahendak case or diminish the effect of the indices discovered there; I am not trying to characterise Kodi society on the basis of one patrilineage but to show that the confusion between category and age exists in this society also, and that it presents to the Kodi a problem in social classification which has had to be dealt with. They have done so, within certain limits of direct social concern,

by making category predominant even where it glaringly conflicts with relative age.

V

Rose's argument

These three cases conclude the demonstration that the social problem discerned in the ethnographic literature is indeed general and that it receives very different cultural answers. Before we continue, however, with a further comparative investigation of the conditions correlated with one answer and with the other, we ought to pay brief attention to the only argument in recent anthropological writing which has stressed the importance of relative age in the operation of a descent system. This is Rose's work on the Groote Eylandt aborigines (1960).

The people studied are the Wanindiljaugwa; at the time of investigation they numbered between 300 and 350 individuals and were organised into eleven localised patrilineal clans, these being grouped into unnamed exogamous moieties. The major argument of Rose's work is that "gerontocracy" (the practice of marrying young girls to considerably older men) leads to the abandonment of the general rule of bilateral cross-cousin marriage, and thence to the adoption of a matrilineal rule. The author thinks to demonstrate this by assessing the ages of individuals and by then relating the age-distribution by sex to possible rules of marriage. Patrilineal cross-cousins are terminologically distinguished (as *dabura*) from matrilineal (*denda*), and Rose shows that there is an average difference of fifteen years between "full cross-cousins" (p. 124), the patrilineal being the older. It is therefore argued that under gerontocracy this relative (FZD) could not be married, so that neither patrilineal nor bilateral cross-cousin marriage is possible in this society.

But this conclusion relates only to first cousins, whereas typically in a lineal descent system it is more extensive classes of relatives that are denoted by the terms and governed by the marriage regulations. We have therefore to consider that what is important is not the ages of "full cross-cousins" alone but those of all the members of the indigenous categories concerned, and the situation is then very different. The case of individual No. 6 in Rose's tables, for example, selected solely according to sex (male) and age (23), gives the following results: seven female patrilineal cross-cousins, average age 37; fifteen matrilineal, average age 36. There is thus no necessary disparity

between the ages of the patrilineal and the matrilineal cross-cousins, and there is no reason to think that this case is not typical. Moreover, De Josselin de Jong has carried out the same test for three other individuals and has come to the same conclusion: for individual No. 22 the average age of his female patrilineal cross-cousins is 30.5, of his matrilineal cross-cousins 28.5; No. 104, patrilineal 36, matrilineal 39; No. 191, patrilineal 37.5, matrilineal 30.5 (De Josselin de Jong, 1962, p. 54 n. 20). The constant and gross disparity of age between patrilineal and matrilineal cross-cousins, postulated by Rose and taken as the very foundation of his argument, appears therefore simply not to exist. What has happened, evidently, is that Rose has posed the problem in the idiom of European kinship, defining the statuses concerned genealogically instead of by the indigenous categories which it is the task of the social anthropologist to understand (cf. Needham, 1962a). This has prejudiced his argument and has led to results which seem to be inconsistent with Wanindiljaugwa ideology.

As De Josselin de Jong has written, this test "seems to demolish Rose's whole theory", but he himself goes on to argue that

it is not as devastating as may seem, because the term *denda* includes M as well as MBD, and the term *dabura* includes ZD as well as FZD (m.s.). This terminological situation will of course raise the average age of *denda* above that of actual MBD and depress that of *dabura* below that of actual FZD. The average difference in age between actual MBD and actual FZD is the significant one of 11.4 years (Table 40, p. 125...), and it is with this that we are concerned (De Josselin de Jong, 1962, p. 54).

Yet this defence must surely fail for the same reason that invalidates Rose's own argument. We have no justification to assume that the Wanindiljaugwa conceive their society in terms of "actual" and other members of certain categories, but we have instead to take it that they do so in terms of these categories themselves. If we follow them in this and try to understand their social classification in its own terms, instead of abstracting from it those relatives which Europeans would regard as "full" or "actual" cousins and then concentrating on these alone, we see that there is still no sign of the postulated disparity of ages.

We should be in a better position to assess this situation if we had a proper understanding of the society, but unfortunately the general analysis to which the "gerontocratic" argument is intended to contribute is unsatisfactory. I have elsewhere maintained that it is not possible to establish the precise features of the actual system on

which the ethnographer has provided such copious data, and that the reported rule of marriage cannot be reconciled with the system that is apparently framed by the terminology (Needham, 1961). De Josselin de Jong has also written, "I do not see what kind of connubial system can result from the primary marriages as he [viz., Rose] describes them", and he concludes that "we cannot really understand how the system works". By an ingenious argument, indeed, De Josselin de Jong actually succeeds in showing that "the preferred Groote Eylandt marriage is with FZD", the very cross-cousin whom supposedly a man cannot marry because she is too old (De Josselin de Jong, 1962, pp. 55, 64, 59-60).

Nevertheless, for all its deficiencies Rose's monograph makes a very considerable contribution in that he (a) records the ages of the members of the society studied, and (b) argues that the factor of relative age must be taken into account when trying to see how descent systems, or, more particularly, systems of prescriptive alliance (cf. De Josselin de Jong, 1962, pp. 64-66),¹² really work.

VI

Comparative considerations

Our next task, obviously, is to seek correlations with the predominance of age or of category respectively, and the initial feature of interest is the mode of reckoning descent. This is brought out by the Penan and the Siwang, both of which are cognatic societies and in both of which age prevails; whereas the Kodi have a lineal descent

¹² It may be remembered, however, that it was Malinowski, as long ago as 1913, who first emphasised that "disparity of age in marriage seems to be quite a universal feature in Australia", and who pointed out the connexion with "modes of obtaining wives" such as "exchange of a daughter for a wife" (Malinowski, 1913, pp. 259-60).

Professor De Josselin de Jong says especially that "The 'gerontocratic approach' is of course directly relevant for the study of patrilineal systems... It offers an explanation why this system hardly ever occurs in a 'pure form' that differs from Rodney Needham's in 'The Formal Analysis of Prescriptive Patrilineal Cross-cousin Marriage'" (de Josselin de Jong, 1962, p. 66 n. 31). I should readily agree that the marriage of men to younger women is potentially an important factor in the analysis of symmetric alliance; but perhaps I may point out that the first argument I advanced in the paper cited, against the feasibility of the necessary alternation in a patrilineal system, was: "This alternation could not be ensured by the simple rule that a man must marry a FZD, because of the variation in the ages of siblings and the dates at which members of the same genealogical level may marry" (Needham, 1958, p. 208).

system in which categories prevail. Let us try to pursue these indications among the other societies that we first touched upon.

1. Andaman Islanders: cognatic; age dominant, marriage apparently permitted between genealogical levels (Brown, 1922, p. 71).
2. Kariera: lineal; category dominant, marriage prescribed by category within own genealogical level. Radcliffe-Brown does indeed report changes in terms of address in accordance with relative age, and one can easily conceive that outside relations of direct jural concern this might well take place, but the nature of this society (a four-section system) entails that in marriage and in other such fundamental relations category must prevail.
3. Mapuche: patrilineal; marriage with a woman of a certain relative age rather than of a particular genealogical level.
4. Murinbata: lineal; marriage at least governed by (prescriptive) category, not by relative age.
5. Nuer: lineal; predominant feature unclear for close relatives.
6. Pul Eliya: lineal; categories apparently regulative in general.
7. Tikopia: cognatic with very marked patrilineal emphasis; marriage between genealogical levels governed by age.
8. Wikmunkan: lineal; category dominant, prescriptive marriage within own genealogical level.

This is far from being a satisfactory survey, especially since it is so very summary, but the ethnographic literature on most of these societies does not, understandably, provide decisive evidence on the problem. Nevertheless, there appears to be a general correlation between linearity and the predominance of category whereas in cognatic societies it is relative age that is determinative (see Table).

The Busama might seem to controvert this correlation, in that, although they are matrilineal, the categories are manipulated precisely in order to make them accord with the relative ages of the individuals involved. But the contradiction is only apparent, for age is determinative where there are *alternative* statuses; it is not reported that the category of a person for whom there was no alternative status could be arbitrarily changed in order to agree better with his age. We know

that the Busama recognise contradictions between category and age, and it is not to be wondered at therefore that they should employ a more "seemly" term where there is the possibility to do so. This

TABLE

	<i>linearity</i>	<i>category</i>
1. Andaman Islanders	—	—
2. Kariera	+	+
3. Kodi	+	+
4. Mapuche	+	(—)
5. Murinbata	+	+
6. Nuer	+	?
7. Penan	—	—
8. Pul Eliya	+	+
9. Siwang	—	—
10. Tikopia	—	—
11. Wikmunkan	+	+

The columns of signs indicate in a schematic manner the relations between a lineal (+) or non-lineal (—) system and the predominance of category (+) or of its opposed term, age (—). The suggested correlation obtains where the features are of the same sign.

very expedient, indeed, indicates that the categories possess distinctive social connotations which it is thought desirable to preserve.

Another apparent exception, from outside the sample, concerns the peninsular Malays. Malay society in general is cognatic, but it is said that among royalty there is a stricter conformity to the hierarchy of genealogical levels than there is among the common people, so that a youth might well command deference from a nephew of the same age as himself. Among ordinary Malays in the countryside, however, deference is paid on the basis of relative age, not category: "We do not honour an uncle just because he is an 'uncle' when he is younger than we are".¹³ But here again there is no real contradiction, for Malay royal families place a far greater stress on patrilineal connexions (outside Negri Sembilan) than do commoners, particularly

¹³ I have heard this from a number of Malay acquaintances; this particular observation, taken from my notes (May, 1956), is due to Mr. Abdul Rahman, then of Kuala Tahan, Pahang, Malaya. I have no genealogies or censuses, with details of ages, from any Malay community or class, but I trust that the point may be confirmed by others more familiar with Malay society than I.

in matters of succession and inheritance, and among them the normal masculine emphasis of Malay kinship is developed to the point that effectively they might be regarded as patrilineal. Although there is a shared cognatic terminology, that is, there is not one cognatic society, uniformly characterised by identical social forms; instead there is a quasi-lineal section of Malay society which ascribes first importance to category, and there is the cognatic commonalty which by contrast overrides category in favour of relative age. Malay society, in these two contrasted aspects, thus supports the correlation.

There is, however, one more certain exception to be reported.¹⁴ The Ngaju of south Borneo are cognatic, but marriage is forbidden as incestuous between parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, uncle and niece, and aunt and nephew (Schärer, 1963, p. 106). This makes it appear that persons who are in these categories may not be married even if they are of appropriate ages, as we must suppose some of them to be, and therefore that in this crucial context of marriage it is category, contrary to the hypothesis, that predominates in this cognatic society. There is the possibility that the prohibitions apply only to immediate relatives and not in a classificatory sense, but Mallinckrodt makes it quite clear that the terms are indeed employed in a wide classificatory fashion such that, as he writes, all "uncles" and "aunts" are called "fathers" and "mothers", and that marriage is actually preferred with a cousin (Mallinckrodt, 1925, p. 85). It is true that Mallinckrodt and Schärer are not writing about exactly the same lot of people, but the practical identity of the terms of relationship reported by both, and the incestuous degrees, makes it seem nevertheless that this is a flat exception.

On the other hand there are types of lineal descent system which preclude any test of the hypothesis but which do so by means which are entirely consistent with it. These are societies with terminologies making lineal equations, and they may conveniently be regarded as falling into four types. (1) Societies with Crow-Omaha terminologies, making lineal terminological equations such that in certain lines all the component persons of the same sex belong to one category, whatever their ages or genealogical levels. (2) Societies, such as the

¹⁴ The example is one that merely happens to be particularly familiar to me, and there is no intention to claim that there are not numerous other exceptions to be found. It is included partly to exemplify the fact of exception, and partly to illustrate the criteria by which a case is taken to be exceptional.

Ungarinyin or the Yaralde, which employ terminologies distinct from the Crow-Omaha type but which similarly make extensive lineal equations in certain lines. (3) Asymmetric alliance systems, with prescriptive terminologies of the well-known form (Fig. 10) which make both lineal and generational equations, primarily for men, more extensive even than the preceding types. (4) Societies such as the Kuma, Nambikwara, and Trío, with terminologies making limited lineal equations, usually identifying two genealogical levels only.

In such systems there is, where such lineal equations are effected by the terminology, no contradiction between category and age; the terminologies, indeed, within these limits, actually obviate the possibility of the contradiction with which the hypothesis deals.^{14a} Since, however, this terminological feature occurs only in lineal descent systems these types of society are nevertheless consistent with

the hypothesis, and it might even be suggested that in a sense they confirm it, for in a striking fashion they ensure that the category shall be clearly predominant over the factor of relative age. But these considerations do not apply to the complete terminologies, for in each type there are lines in which contradiction is still possible, and it remains a matter for empirical enquiry to determine how the contradiction is resolved in these instances.

Fig. 10

Asymmetric alliance: terminological opposition of male affines. (Roman numerals indicate genealogical levels.)

VII

Theoretical points

The first general issue to be considered is that raised by Firth, in a Tikopian context, of how it comes about that such wide disparities between category and age over even two or three generations do not lead to quite unmanageable differences of the kind in a longer period

^{14a} In this connexion I am indebted to Professor Dr. A. Köbben, University of Amsterdam, for the following field observation made by himself: "*Bete* (patrilineal). Ego addresses his FZS as *naju*, which means 'child' (Omaha terminology), unless his FZS is much older than he is himself, in which case he terms him 'father'."

of time. Since a terminological gap of one genealogical level can so easily occur in one generation, it may as easily occur in the next and produce a disparity of two levels, and so on until the descendants of the original pair of relatives, although of the same age, might be separated categorically by as many genealogical levels as generations have elapsed. Yet this seems not happen, and the question is why it does not.

The answer clearly provided by Firth is:

... The natural tendency of man to seek a mate in a woman of equivalent age, that is, soon after both have attained maturity, renders it inevitable that where such differences of kinship grade [i.e., genealogical level] occur with no great disparity of age, marriage in many cases will eventuate, and the discrepancies in the kinship grading disappear. Age and status are once more reduced to a level of equality. Nature herself tends to correct in the sphere of marriage the balance of the social mechanism which was originally displaced by her own operations in the field of birth (1930, p. 267).

There is a minor qualification to be registered before assessing this answer. There is no "natural tendency" for a man to seek a wife of roughly the same age as himself; the general Australian practice, remarked by Malinowski and stressed by Rose, is the chief refutation of this assumption, and a marital or sexual preference for a much younger woman is by no means limited to aborigines. Nevertheless, even though in most societies the husband seems to be rather older than his wife, in general it appears to be true that commonly men do marry women from roughly the same generation as themselves. Certainly the Penan, the Siwang, and the Kodi all do so, and Firth has clearly given us what is essentially the right solution, or at rate the right one in certain circumstances.

McConnel also writes, of the Wikmunkan:

The comprehensive nature of the classificatory system is atoned for by the junior sororate and levirate, which tend to ensure that the eligible women are younger than the men. Then again, the element of choice enters to counteract the differences in age brought about by the classificatory system. Parents prefer, as a rule, to give their daughters to eligible young men, rather than to older ones, who, however, are tenacious of their rights under the formal system and ready to assert their claims ... Similarly, older women are not as a rule given to younger men. Those of close relationship are passed [*sc. over*] in favour of more distant claims by suitors of the right age (McConnel, 1934, p. 352).

McConnel's views on the "junior sororate" are not readily acceptable (cf. Needham 1962a), but her case is clearly enough that it is

marriage by age that tends to level out the disparities between category and age. Leach reports to the same effect from Pul Eliya (1961, p. 204), as we have seen in section I above.

The resolution of discrepancies by means of marriage between genealogical levels will only be effective, however, in the case of marriage between relatives as in Tikopia or Pul Eliya. It would not change the statuses of the members of a descent group such as the patrilineage of Mahendak; within such a group the Kodi categories retain their distinctive connotations, and since the lineage is exogamous they are unaffected by marriage. Even if there are no exogamous descent groups (as in Pul Eliya, even though it has a lineal terminology) there will nevertheless be a range of kindred within which marriage is forbidden, and the statuses of individuals within this range will still be subject to the effects of the disparities of their ages with the categories to which they belong. Firth's solution does not apply to such situations, and they also remain matters for empirical investigation in order to see what particular societies do about them.¹⁵

Another aspect of marriage between genealogical levels which deserves mention is the possibility that constant marriage between categories of different levels may tend to blur or preclude social distinctions between them. The changes of status entailed by such marriages (e.g., "nephew" becomes "wife's brother", "aunt" becomes "wife", "grandfather" becomes "father-in-law") would seem likely to undermine any formal jural attributes of the categories. This is the case among the Penan and (so far as can be judged from statements) the Siwang; among the former, behaviour conforms to the minimal jural categorisation recognised by the Penan only with respect to persons within the non-marriageable kindred, a range, moreover, within which there is a rather closer correspondence of age with category. This consideration leads to the corollary that where status is determined by category, marriage will either be to individuals outside the range of jural relatives, or will be confined to the subject's own genealogical level. This is what is generally found among the Kodi.

Now when Firth examines the problem of relative age in Tikopia he is concerned with "a community where . . . kinship is counted with almost equal strength through both the male and the female lines"

¹⁵ This lends force to the assertion by my friend Professor E. H. Winter, in discussing this issue, an assertion which has the value of an overstatement of an essential truth, that "*All genealogies are cooked*". Indeed, it appears that the genealogy of a descent group must be. Cf. McLennan, 1896.

(1930, p. 266) — i.e. with a cognatic society — and one in which limited numbers lead to such frequent intermarriage as to create alternative kinship statuses. These conditions are reproduced in the cases of the Penan and the Siwang, for both of these societies are cognatic and in both of them interlinked genealogical connexions between small numbers of people define statuses in a non-absolute and ambiguous fashion. This brings us back to the contrast between lineal and cognatic societies. Why is there (as there appears to be) this general difference in the importance attached to categories? Obviously it is not because of any differential effect of relative age in the respective types of society, for Mahendak, in a bilineal system, is worse off in this respect (i.e., there is greater overlap between category and age) than are the cognatic Siwang. The issue therefore concerns the characteristics of cognatic societies, as contrasted with lineal descent systems.

There have recently been numerous typological investigations attempting to bring into the comparative study of cognatic societies the kind of theoretical order which lineal descent systems have fairly easily permitted, but it is a question whether such efforts are not fundamentally misdirected. Whereas it is usefully possible to deal with lineal descent systems as a class of societies possessing a common principle of organisation, namely a rule of descent, and common or comparable features of classification, it is probably not useful to assume that cognatic societies must characteristically have some special forms or principles of social organisation in common. It is at least arguable that cognatic societies are classed together primarily because of what they *lack*, and that they may be effectively incomparable in those other and often disparate features which actually govern the social life of each. In other words, cognatic societies constitute a negatively defined class, and are thus recalcitrant to any comparative investigation into what positively typifies them (cf. Needham, 1962b, p. 661).

The categories in lineal descent terminologies have absolute, systematic, and distinctive social connotations such that however different lineal societies may be, politically, economically, or in any other institutional respect, they are nevertheless essentially comparable by reference to the principles of order which they embody. The categories of a cognatic society, by contrast, represent a contingent means for the recognition of relatives, i.e., they mark a social boundary for the individual, ancillary and subordinate to institutions and corporations which provide the effective social classification; merely as such,

they may be comparable, but they do not in general define social types or permit systematic and integral comparison of the societies in which they are employed. The cognatic recognition of relatives is common to all societies and characteristic of none. It is not that there are two opposed and mutually exclusive modes of organisation — lineal descent and cognation — for lineal descent systems also recognise cognation. The “kinship” features of lineal descent systems are not at all of the same kind as this cognatic recognition, but are quite distinct social phenomena. Those societies which lack the rule of lineal descent are necessarily left with only the universal feature of cognation.

Since cognation is not in itself a mode of social organisation, in that it does not permit the formation of enduring corporate descent groups or the definition of absolute statuses, but provides merely a contingent jural nexus focussed on the individual,¹⁶ it is not to be expected that category should have the same distinctive importance as it typically possesses in a lineal descent system. In its place there remains, as the first available means of social differentiation, the principle of relative age. A lineal descent system, on the other hand, may or may not accord a predominance to category, either generally or in particular circumstances, rather than to age; but since such societies possess a simple and effective means of social classification and incorporation it is not to be wondered at that they should typically employ this means rather than resort to the less useful criterion (*viz.*, relative age) which is the chief recourse for societies which lack this institution. The factor of relative age may, as we have seen, affect the employment of the categories, and at a certain remove or in certain conditions may actually supersede them, but the terminology remains fundamentally an absolute and systematic jural classification. The terminology of a cognatic society is not so much a jural classification as a means to the genealogical recognition of an individual's kindred; status defined by category is more a matter of degree, and its content in any particular case is contingent upon the consideration of relative age.

To say that in cognatic societies age prevails over category is not to typify them in a positive fashion, and does not therefore contradict the assertion that cognatic societies constitute a negatively defined class; for disparity of age between individuals is a necessary universal,

¹⁶ For what I should judge the best ethnographic study of a society recognising only cognatic relationship, with particular reference to these negative features, see Campbell (1964).

not typical of cognatic societies as such, so that by relying on this elementary and contingent means of classification, rather than on category, cognatic societies are still distinguished merely by what they lack.

VIII

Conclusions

It is perhaps over-ambitious to look for definite conclusions to an exploratory and tentative investigation such as this, and one based on such a restricted sample, but certain points which may merit further consideration have emerged.

(1) The first is that we have effected a limited demonstration to ethnographers of the necessity not only to compile — and to publish (cf. Rivers, 1906; Leach, 1961) — extensive and representative genealogies, but also to record the ages or apparent ages of the individuals to whom they relate. The factor of relative age is clearly of general importance in the sociological analysis of simple societies, but little secure theoretical interpretation will be feasible until we possess such indispensable records.

(2) A simple technique for representing and analysing such evidence on categories and age has been worked out and applied.¹⁷ This technique demonstrates a confusion of category with age, both in lineal descent systems and in cognatic societies, such as leads inevitably to problems in the conduct of social life.

There is a particular implication for the study of genealogies. These are not only manipulated, as is common knowledge, in order to agree with current social alignments or with a certain view of the past, but they are continually and unavoidably subject to a pressure to change brought about by the contradictions between generation and genealogical level. It has been well enough recognised, that is, that genealogies may be altered on occasion, but not that the factor of age-disparities in relation to categories actually makes constant changes essential if relationship terminologies are to operate effectively as means of social classification.

(3) A generalisation on the significance of relative age in connexion with different types of relationship terminologies has been

¹⁷ The technique has recently been employed by Dr. P. G. Rivière in his study (1963/64) of the Trio Indians of Surinam, working on populations of 150 and 220, and has proved to be of singular analytical value in this case.

provisionally proposed and is offered for further testing.¹⁸ Very briefly, it is that in a lineal descent system categories will be preponderant, whereas in a cognatic society there will be a lesser emphasis on categories in favour of social distinctions based most generally on relative age.

We have seen that in practice the situation is not quite so clear-cut as this typological opposition seems to imply; it is not an either/or issue such that, for example, category is entirely disregarded in favour of age. There is always a parallelogram of forces, as it were, so that the question in any particular case is to determine which factor in the resultant is definitive. Such an enquiry may have to take into account, furthermore, such considerations as whether choice between alternative statuses is possible, whether or not there are exogamous descent groups in conjunction with a lineal terminology, the incidence and effect of marriage between genealogical levels, the influence of degree of remove in any relationship, the variations within any type of relationship according to the individuals involved and the circumstances in which they find themselves, and so on. But, even with all these qualifications, it still seems that there is something in the proposition worth working on.

(4) More generally, there is now added reason to maintain that "kinship" is a thoroughly misleading term, and a false criterion in sociological comparison. It is indefensible to group together types of social organisation so fundamentally different as lineal descent systems and cognatic societies, regarding them as different forms of "kinship system". They are defined respectively by the presence and by the plain absence of the feature which governs and distinguishes the former type of organisation, and this lack of positive connexion provides no ground for analysis in terms of shared characteristics.

¹⁸ The generalisation was initially propounded as part of the argument of a doctoral thesis (Needham, 1953, pp. 354-8), and was actually first publicly offered for consideration in 1955 (cf. note 1 above). It appeared in print in 1956 in the form: "In unilineal societies the preponderant emphasis is on kinship category, while in ambilineal society it is on relative age" (cf. Anon., 1956), and has since been discussed in tutorials and lecture courses at the University of Oxford and in the United States and Canada, but to my knowledge no one has yet published any work on it. Students who have worked with me at Oxford have, however, paid special attention in recent years to the issue of category and relative age in their field researches in various parts of the world, and it is to be expected that there will soon be considerable advances along this line of investigation. Dr. Peter Rivière, in particular, is preparing an article on the topic, and his future monograph on the Trio will further demonstrate its significance in ethnographic research.

(Similar considerations apply, *a fortiori*, to prescriptive alliance; this is a distinctive feature which is unambiguously either present or absent, and a prescriptive terminology or society is accordingly not simply a variety of lineal descent system — one characterised by a degree of “preference” for a certain kind of marriage — but is different in kind.)

One reason that anthropologists have assumed that such different modes of organisation were social facts of the same kind may be that the preliminary means of defining and analysing them, viz., relationship terms and their genealogical specifications, are the same. These identical defining features have, it seems, been taken to mean that the systems to which they relate are directly comparable; but things are distinguished by their characteristic properties, not by the means of determining these properties. The mere technical employment of terms such as “mother’s brother”, “father’s sister’s daughter”, etc., is no reason to ascribe a common character to forms of social organisation the properties of which may be distinct to the point of incomparability.

The issue of relative age now provides us, I suggest, with a further reason not to associate disparate facts under the old-fashioned and obfuscating rubric of “kinship”. Correspondingly, one cannot say that a social anthropologist is “good at kinship”; what he is good at is analysis.

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POSTSCRIPTUM. What appears to be the first ethnographical recognition of the factor of relative age in a descent system is to be found in Lafitau, discussing the matrilineal system of the Iroquois: “Communément... les Sauvages ne s’entendent pas volontiers nommer par le nom qui leur est affecté, & la demande qu’on leur en feroit, est une espece d’affront qui les feroit rougir. En se parlant les uns aux autres, ils se donnent tous des noms de parenté, de frere, de soeur, d’oncle, de neveu, &c. observant exactement les degrez de subordination & toutes les proportions de l’âge, à moins qu’il n’y ait une parenté réelle par le sang ou par l’adoption; car alors un enfant se trouvera quelquefois le grand-pere de ceux, qui selon l’ordre de la nature, pourroient être facilement le sien” (Joseph François Lafitau, *Moeurs des Sauvages*

Ameriquains, Comparées aux Moeurs des Premier Temps, 4 vols., Paris 1724; vol. I, p. 70, italics supplied).

Here we see relative age determining the application of relationship terms as general means of social classification; the conflict between categories defined by relative age and those defined genealogically (the distinction between generation and genealogical level); and the existence of a range of what we have referred to above as "jural relatives", defined by strict and known genealogical connexion ("a real relationship by blood or by adoption"), among whom category must prevail over relative age.

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