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Ambrym and other class systems: A further note on symmetry and asymmetry

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AMBRYM AND OTHER CLASS SYSTEMS:

A FURTHER NOTE ON SYMMETRY AND ASYMMETRY *)

The theme of the present paper is the relationship between symmetrical and asymmetrical connubial systems, such as are represented in their simplest forms by sister-exchange and matrilineal cross-cousin marriage respectively. It may well seem over-ambitious to try and discuss so complex a topic in one brief article, the more so in view of the considerable number of recent publications on it; for this reason I shall narrow it down to one society in particular, the Ambrym. This choice is obvious, as Ambrym with its six-class system immediately presents us with the main problems we shall try to discuss: are the symmetrical and the asymmetrical principles in contrast with one another? Are there combinations between them? And are there transitions?

If the theme is to be: symmetry and asymmetry, and the focus is to be on Ambrym, I should add that my aim is to demonstrate that it is possible to free the Ambrym kinship and marriage structure from its stigma of being in many ways a freak system — and my plea will be for greater simplicity at our present stage in structural studies, and, if I may say so, an appeal against letting ourselves get bogged down by details when we have not yet got the broad outlines clear.

At the end of this paper, one may perhaps feel that I have been grossly oversimplifying the Ambrym and other situations — but then, at present, in my opinion, the discussion on these topics has often been made needlessly complex, or at least it has often plunged headlong into complexities before there was a reasonable measure of agreement about the simpler fundamentals. No wonder, then, that even Lévi-Strauss shied away, as it were, from Ambrym in his *Structures Élémentaires*, and limited himself to a brief synopsis of

* This paper is a somewhat revised version of a contribution to a Seminar conducted by E. R. Leach at King's College, Cambridge, in February 1963.

Deacon's description and his own comment that the Ambrym system is "un des plus complexes actuellement connus" and suffers from "difficultés extrêmes d'application".¹

As I myself was drawn to the question of symmetry versus asymmetry through studying Indonesian cultures, I would like to begin by briefly referring to the position in that area.

In the study of Indonesian societies, as early as 1935 a fundamental distinction was made between what was called symmetrical connubium, i.e. reciprocal exchange between intermarrying groups, which in its simplest form results in sister-exchange, and involves two groups, and on the other hand asymmetrical connubium, which results particularly clearly from MBD marriage, and always involves three or more intermarrying groups. The participants in such a system often idealize the asymmetrical connubial chain as a circle. The resulting closed system may then be called circulating connubium.

In Indonesia, as elsewhere, kinship is not an isolated mechanism that keeps on working away in vacuo, but it is linked of course with such matters as land tenure, inheritance, succession, *and* with a symbol system of broad ramification. The dyadic aspect is linked with the type of dualistic classification one also finds elsewhere in the world: it opposes upper and underworld, day and night, strong and weak, etc. The triadic or asymmetrical relationship is often symbolized as a river, flowing from the upstream or superior group, the bride-givers, to the downstream or inferior group of bride-receivers.

The symbol system in its turn also has its influence on mundane matters, and in fact on a wide variety of them: on the goods given as bridewealth and as brideprice; on the organization of the royal progress of a ruler through his kingdom; on the style of housebuilding — and so forth.

For the very reason that the dyadic and the triadic principles of kinship and marriage are so completely embedded in the culture as a whole, it is interesting to consider the modalities of their combination. The triadic relationship between ego's own group, his bride-giving and his bride-taking group may be conceptualized as a dyadic one, for the simple reason that each individual marriage is an affair concerning two groups, and two alone. It *may* always be conceptualized thus, but this is not always done. Further study is required here.

There are other such points. What happens in a system with asym-

¹ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris 1949), p. 162 and 576.

metrical connubium when the woman (superior in her quality of member of the bride-giving group) marries a man of the superior moiety? The two ranking orders are obviously separable, but what accommodation between them is made? Strange to say, we do not know. Nor do we know what are the effects on the symbol system and its concomitants when the ideal marriage, with matrilateral cross-cousin, comes to be practised side by side with no less frequent patrilateral cross-cousin marriages.

Outside the Indonesian area, anthropologists have been devoting increasing attention to the combination of the at first sight mutually exclusive principles of symmetry and asymmetry. Barbara Lane recently studied the interdependence of the at first sight mutually exclusive principles in one and the same society, and called her article "Structural contrasts between symmetric and asymmetric marriage systems: a fallacy".² More than ten years before that, Lévi-Strauss wrote of *échange restreint* — what we have been calling symmetrical connubium — that it is "jamais pur", and added: "même en Australie, il est noyé dans un contexte de systèmes matrilatéraux ou patrilatéraux".³ This being so, we may also expect transitions from (predominantly) asymmetrical to (predominantly) symmetrical systems, and perhaps vice versa; and in fact Elkin has noted that the asymmetrical Karadjeri pass into the symmetrical Nyul-Nyul system "with remarkably little dislocation of their own system".⁴

In sum, the symmetrical and the asymmetrical exchange types prove not to be mutually incompatible. There are combinations, borderline cases, and transitions. Now if one wants to study these traits d'union in some detail cross-culturally, the obvious society to start with would seem to be Ambrym, which has always enjoyed more than its share of the affections of students of kinship on account of its six-class system. Six, 2×3 , would appear to be the perfect combination of the symmetric and the asymmetric. I begin a rather more detailed study of this society by briefly recalling what this type of organization looked like as it first appeared in Deacon's description of 1927.⁵

The first informants, in South Ambrym, told Deacon that a man

² *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 17 (1961).

³ Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 574.

⁴ A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines* (Sydney, 3d. ed., repr. 1956), p. 79.

⁵ A. B. Deacon, "The Regulation of Marriage in Ambrym". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 57 (1927).

was permitted to marry in his MM "tribe", but not in his MM "line". Further conversation elicited the information that there were three "tribes", or *bwelem*, which proved to be patrilineal descent groups, and that the so-called "lines" comprised alternating generations in each tribe or *bwelem*.

Things became clearer in the North Ambrym village of Ranon, for there a third concept was introduced by Deacon's informants: the *batatun*, which were matrilineal, and of which there were two only. This, of course, explained the "lines" of alternating generations in each patrilineal descent group: each such group, or "tribe" as the informants called it, was bisected by the matrimoieties, the *batatun*:

From the statement that one may not marry into one's MM line it is easy to deduce that the lines, and therefore the matrimoieties, are exogamous (lines link alternate generations — MM line is own line; one may not marry into MM line — one may not marry into own line, QED). As for the "tribes", the Ambrym themselves had diagrammed the marital exchange relations in a way that clearly demonstrated a kind of asymmetrical connubium, by means of pebbles A, B, C: girl A marries man C, her daughter C marries man B, etc.

Combining all these data, Deacon drew up the following diagram, of the type later to be familiarized by Radcliffe-Brown in his publications on Australia:

So here A and B represent the two *batatun*, which we may also call *matri-moieties*; 1, 2, and 3 are the three "tribes", or *bwulim* in the *Ranon* language. Henceforth we shall call them *patri-lines*, or *bwulim*.

Within each *patriline*, e.g. within *bwulim* 1, there is an obvious bipartition between 1A and 1B. These two pieces were called "lines" by the original informants (*wor* in the vernacular). We shall not have much to say about these particles within each *bwulim* in future, but shall concentrate on an aspect that was not apparently conceptualized as such by the *Ambrym* themselves: 1A and B, 2A and B, and 3A and B form six marriage classes.

In the course of the present publication I shall consistently use numbers to refer to *patri-groups* and letters for referring to *matri-groups*; and I shall reserve the term "classes" or "marriage classes" for bilineally defined units — this in distinction to more inclusive usages.

So far, 'it has been plain sailing. The problems begin to arise as soon as we consider what actual marriages can take place under this system. The only specific piece of information about what was actually observed comes from Radcliffe-Brown,⁶ who reports having received a letter from Deacon, in which the latter writes that of the 60 marriages he had studied, only 12 were with traceable relatives. The remarkable thing is that of these 12, only 3 were with women of ego's generation, viz. 2 marriages with FMBSD and one with FFZSD. The largest single group of marriages was 5 with MMBD; the remaining 4 were with women one generation younger than ego. All twelve traceable marriages, however, were within the correct marriage class (in *Ambrym* terms: within the correct *bwulim* and *wor*).

It is the predominance of what we may call inter-generational marriages that has always struck anthropologists as the peculiar and possibly significant feature about the *Ambrym* system, because these marriages are stated to be with actual, traceable individuals: they do not refer to categories — Deacon himself clearly makes this distinction. This intergenerational feature gains relief by the fact that one cannot arrive at an intragenerational marriage with a closer relative than those just mentioned, i.e. FMBSD and FFZSD.

In their recent articles in the *SWJA*, Robert and Barbara Lane,

⁶ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Regulation of Marriage in *Ambrym*". *J.R.A.I.*, Vol. 57 (1927). p. 347.

too, are worried by *this* characteristic rather than by the paucity of marriages with traceable kin or categories of kin. That leads to the first complicating factor in the Ambrym discussion: one gets a most involved theory about the intergenerational marriages before the basic character of the system has been made clear.

In their article of 1956⁷ the Lanes try to reduce the anomalous feature to slighter proportions by reasoning of great ingenuity, which need not be rendered here in full detail. It rather closely resembles T. Theodor Webb's interpretation of the Murngin system.⁸ In brief, it is as follows: the most frequent single Ambrym marriage type, as we saw, was with MMBD; in addition, sister-exchange is practised: this is expressly stated by Deacon, and anyhow it follows from the diagram (b). Now if two men effect exchange of sisters, and one man marries his MMBD, this means that the other man will necessarily marry his MBDD. Now if one assumes that fathers and sons alternately marry their MMBD and their MBDD respectively, the result will be that 2 out of every 3 marriages will be within the same generation. We need not now follow the Lanes' demonstration that led to this conclusion, but rather look for a moment at the result, diagrammed with use of the same letter and figure symbols we applied earlier:

Diag. c

⁷ R. & B. Lane, "A Re-interpretation of the 'anomalous' six-section marriage system of Ambrym". S.W.J.A., Vol. 12 (1956).

⁸ "Tribal Organization in Eastern Arnhem Land". *Oceania*, Vol. 3 (1933).

The Lanes go even further, and also prove that if two brothers also always make alternate marriages, of a different type, the result will be that 5 out of every 6 marriages will be within the same generation — what we have just been calling intra-generational marriages. This is demonstrated by a diagram, derived from Layard,⁹ which is very pleasing to the eye, but is again too complex to be discussed once more at present. Anyhow, it is clear that what the Lanes aim at demonstrating is that the Ambrym system is not as anomalous as it appears, and that it can live on a diet of intra-generational marriages, so to speak.

I should say at once that I am in sympathy with every attempt to make sense of a seemingly incoherent set of rules, preferences and practices by relating them to a structural model, and also that I found the Lanes' article both ingenious and stimulating. Yet it leaves me unsatisfied — why? I will not go so far as to say it is too clever by half — but at least it is too ingenious. It is understood that a structural model is not simply a reproduction of observed reality on a reduced scale, but even so I feel that *too* many gratuitous assumptions have to be made in order to make this model applicable to the recorded facts. Also, the model has a professed aim, viz. to minimize the inter-generational character of the recorded marriages, and I see no reason for doing so.

Rather than say that by adroit manipulation we can reduce the number of intergenerational marriages to 1/6 of the total number of marriages contracted, I would suggest we should try to find one or more causes in the society as it functions. The two reasons that spring to mind as obviously possible are, first: lack of marriageable girls of one's own generation and, presumably, age; and secondly, gerontocracy.

To take gerontocracy first, the situations that marriages with women of both older and younger generations are frequent could be a direct result of a gerontocratic situation as recently described for the Tiwi by Hart & Pilling¹⁰ and for the Groote Eylandt aborigines by Rose,¹¹ viz. that old men marry young girls — younger both in age and generation — for reasons that need not concern us here; the older husband will generally die before his wife, and his widow

⁹ J. Layard, *Stone Men of Malekula* (London 1942), p. 115 ff.

¹⁰ *The Tiwi of North Australia*. New York 1961.

¹¹ *Classification of Kin, Age Structure and Marriage amongst the Groote Eylandt Aborigines*. Berlin 1960.

will (perhaps after one or more intervening marriages) attach herself to a much younger man who cannot get a bride of his own generation and roughly his own age. However, there is no reason for concluding that this is also the situation on Ambrym, or was in Deacon's time. To be sure, there is a chapter titled "Melanesian gerontocracy" in Rivers' *History of Melanesian Society*, but this deals with "... the evidence which suggests that at one stage in Melanesian history the old men had sufficient power...", etc.¹² I found no hint in any modern ethnography of Tiwi-type gerontocracy prevailing in the New Hebrides area.

A less specific factor conducive to intergenerational marriages may however be deduced from the population figures given by Jean Guiart in an article of 1951.¹³ He gives the population of northern Ambrym (with which we are concerned) as 1,500, dispersed over 50 villages — making an average of 30 per village; the average population of typically pagan villages is about 50. The unit within which marriages are contracted is not the village, but a cluster of villages. Guiart gives a map showing such village clusters, and on the average there apparently are about 4 villages to a cluster. So the endogamous group averages 120 to 200 individuals. It is clear that in such a small unit, the choice of a suitable spouse is limited, and recourse to intergenerational marriages may well be frequent — that is to say, as long as the Ambrym stand fast by their demand that marriages should be "correct", and this they apparently do — always excepting the cases when a man marries quite outside the cluster, and the wife becomes ethnographically "untraceable". For example, Deacon gives the genealogy of his informant Torere. Not all the 58 people occurring in it can be genealogically traced (no wonder, in the given situation), but all but one of the 25 marriages are "correct".¹⁴ And Guiart, 25 years later, speaks of strict taboos surrounding the village of one FM, "for that is the village whence one shall fetch one's wife".¹⁵ This too agrees with the class system.

For all this, we still can only surmise the reason for the frequency of intergenerational marriage; but at any rate, and partly for this

¹² W. H. R. Rivers, *The History of Melanesian Society Vol. II* (London 1914), p. 67, 68.

¹³ "Société, rituel et mythes du Nord Ambrym". *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, Vol. 8 (1951), p. 8.

¹⁴ Deacon, *op. cit.*, p. 336, 337.

¹⁵ Guiart, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

Diag. d

very reason, I do not think we would be justified in taking such a marriage as the normal or type marriage in designing a formal model of the Ambrym kinship and marriage system. Therefore, I prefer one which is based on the closest possible intra-generational marriage, i.e. with FFZSD. It is as in Diag. d.

It is not unduly complex (it is rather like the Aranda model), and certainly simpler than the Lanes', in which the chain of affinal relationships spirals down a conical surface. It involves no assumptions except the one that always underlies such diagrams, viz. that all marriages are of the same type. In actual practice wives are taken from anywhere along the same vertical column as ego's wife in this diagram. It is a disadvantage of this diagram compared with the one by R. & B. Lane that the most frequent marriage, with MMBD, can only be derived from this picture in a roundabout way; but at the same time this may suggest another feature making for intergenerational marriage, namely that the closest "correct" wife in ego's own generation is such an oddity as FFZSD, who diagrammatically, although probably hardly ever in practice, equals FMBSD. In this respect the Ambrym system certainly is anomalous.

We can now leave this subject for a while, and turn to a closely related theme, viz. the kinship terminology of Ambrym. This will lead us to the "other class systems" mentioned in the title of this essay.

On the kinship terminology, too, there is an article by Robert & Barbara Lane,¹⁶ One of the points they lay special stress on in that article is a discrepancy between on the one hand: the general rule, given by Deacon on the strength of explicit statements by informants, of sister-exchange, and on the other hand the terminological distinction between FZ children (*mavyug*) and MB children (*tivyug*). The Lanes' hypothesis for explaining this paradoxical situation is an earlier system, also of six classes, but without sister-exchange. It could be like this:

where the arrows point from the wife to the husband.

¹⁶ R. & B. Lane, "The Evolution of Ambrym Kinship". S.W.J.A., Vol. 14 (1958).

This diagram is employed by the Lanes in their article. On the basis of it, one can distribute various relatives over the six sections. For instance, if ego is in 1B, his wife is obviously in 3A, etc. However, this is cumbersome when it comes to less close kinsfolk and affines, so we shall try to devise a genealogical diagram to fit this one. The only one that meets with all requirements, i.e. that comprises all the same data as the Lanes' diagram (d), is the following one:

Diag. f

In this system we see that MB children and FZ children belong to different patri-lines; so, according to Lane, the terminological distinction between the two cross-cousins in modern Ambrym is a relic of the stage depicted here. R. & B. Lane describe this hypothetical earlier system as one of "three patri-sibs intersected by two matrimoieties", that is to say, as a six-class system. But the striking thing about this diagram is that it does not represent a six-class system at all, for the simple reason that there are not 3, but 6 "patri-sibs" involved: the patrilineal lines here numbered as 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, actually are not related to each other in any such way that requires us to number them like that. There is not the slightest objection to numbering them consecutively from 1 to 6.

I realize of course that the classes are a method of categorizing used by the "natives" themselves, and therefore that if the situation of diag. f ever existed, it is quite well possible that the Ambrym themselves did conceptualize that system as a six-class system, and that the numbering 1, 2, 3 and no further would correspond, at that

period as well as now, to their own way of considering their social organization. The point I want to make, though, is that, whatever the native participants' view of their social systems was and is, the construction of what the Lanes call a "system of *three* patri-sibs intersected by *two* matrisibs without sister-exchange marriage" is like squaring the circle: it is structurally impossible. In this case, the three patrisibs are a reduction of six, and the six-class system is a reduction of a 12-class system. We can even say that it is a reduction of a yet more fundamental system, viz. a 36-class system, for the two matrisibs (in the Lanes' phrase) are a reduction of six underlying matriline (which, I may repeat, need never have been conceptualized as such by the participants in such a system). But the basic and to my mind important conclusion remains that a six-class system without sister-exchange, i.e. that is asymmetrical, can only be diagrammed structurally as one with 6 patriline automatically involving 6 submerged matriline or vice versa.

Before proceeding from here, I would like to make a terminological distinction which may prove to be useful for the development of the argument. I would propose that, during this discussion at least, we distinguish between moieties, which are halves of a social structure which immediately emerge from the system, which are inescapable, as it were, as are the moieties A and B in diag. d. Where such true moieties occur, symmetrical connubium (which may at times be realized as classificatory or even actual sister exchange) must follow. As against those true moieties, we can come across halves which I propose to call phratries. These are halves which are exogamous, but in other respects are the result of an arbitrary reduction of a greater number of units, which have been grouped together so that only two remain. In diag. f the six structurally present matriline have thus been reduced to two matrilineal (not moieties, but) phratries. The six patriline have been reduced to three (by Robert & Barbara Lane, if not by the Ambrym themselves), but they could have been reduced to two patrilineal phratries (3, 2, 1 and 1, 3, 2).

After this terminological digression we can return to the diagram with the six patrilineal descent lines. We saw that for the Lanes it represents an hypothetical earlier stage of the Ambrym 6-class system for the reason that it accounts for the distinction made in Ambrym kinship terminology between patrilineal and matrilineal cross-cousins. Although I am reluctant to accept their *analysis* of the

Ambrym system as given in their earlier article and discussed in the first part of the present paper, I think that we should agree with the argument of their diachronic study that the occurrence of unilateral cousin terms in a bilateral system does present a problem, and that their proposed solution of it is at any rate worthy of consideration, as it offers a simple and sufficient explanation. Whether it is a necessary explanation is another matter. I feel that recourse to a hypothetical earlier stage is a *pis aller*, certainly if there is no additional evidence in support of the reconstruction.

Because we have so far been discussing kinship systems at a fairly abstract level I think I owe it to myself to state explicitly that a supposed transition in the past would gain in plausibility if a specific feature in daily life were to point in the same direction, such as (to take some actual examples from other societies) changes in land tenure, population density, or economic self-sufficiency. *Or else* a change in the classification system to which, in some cultures, the kinship organization corresponds. We gave some Indonesian examples at the very beginning of this paper, and it seems quite likely that field-work in Ambrym might show a similar correspondence there. Recently Métais has demonstrated at length — at very great length — the parallelism between symmetrical connubium and a dualistic world view in New Caledonia,¹⁷ and it seems reasonable to suppose that something similar might be encountered in the New Hebrides. May there not, for example, be significance in the myths which Tattevin collected in southern Pentecost, the island immediately north of Ambrym? Two of these are origin myths, and in both the primeval ancestors are six brothers¹⁸ — may we compare this with the six patrilineal of the Lanes' reconstruction?

This question is all the more relevant because of a fact which seems to have escaped the attention of the Lanes as well as of their critic Löffler:¹⁹ the Lanes' hypothetical earlier Ambrym system with its six unilineal descent groups in asymmetrical connubium would have been no other than the Pentecost system as described by Seligman,²⁰

¹⁷ P. Métais, *Mariage et équilibre social dans les sociétés primitives*. Paris 1956, Première Partie.

¹⁸ E. Tattevin, "Mythes et légendes du Sud de l'île Pentecôte". *Anthropos*, Vol. 24 (1929), p. 984.

¹⁹ L. G. Löffler, "The Development of the Ambrym and Pentecost Kinship Systems". *S.W.J.A.*, Vol. 16 (1960).

²⁰ B. Z. Seligman, *Asymmetry in Descent, with Special Reference to Pentecost*. *J.R.A.I.*, Vol. 58 (1928).

were it not that the Pentecost lines are matrilineal. An important difference of course, but not so great as to prohibit comparison — if only because both systems can be rendered schematically by the same diagram.

Once we see this, the Lanes' hypothetical system ceases to be merely an intellectual construct, but it comes down to earth, as it were, and offers possibilities for actual further research, in the library and in the field. For example, it makes it necessary for us to know whether the Pentecost origin myth is also known in Ambrym, and makes us want to know much more about contacts between these two islands. If further field research is to be done, that research would have to employ the vernacular. So far, pidgin English seems to have been the medium for field studies in Ambrym, but this makeshift language, which has to resort to such phrases as "bibì he go all about" (this is an actual specimen) is surely unsuitable for the more subtle distinctions involved here.

After this digression on Ambrym social symbolism, let us return to the last diagram (f). We see that it represents 6 patrilineal lines linked by asymmetric connubium. Given these six patrilineal lines, six matrilineal lines automatically become implicit in the diagram, whether or not they are made explicit in any actual system. In the Lanes' representation of the hypothetical earlier Ambrym system, they were grouped three by three, so that two matrilineal phratries resulted, which naturally stand in symmetric connubial relation to each other. We said in passing that the patrilineal lines in the diagram are in principle liable to the same reduction; the result would then be the Kariera system. So the remarkable feature about this diagram is that it can illustrate both symmetrical and asymmetrical systems. Is this a characteristic or simply a property of the six-line system? It is noteworthy that the four-line system shows rather similar features: (see Diag. g).

Here, the four patrilineal lines are in asymmetrical connubium; it also implies four matrilineal lines, also asymmetrically linked. (In passing we may note that if in this system only two matrilineal lines are actually recognized, we have the Murngin system as interpreted by Lloyd Warner).²¹ Now here, too, it would be possible to group together

²¹ W. Lloyd Warner, "The Murngin Type of Kinship". *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 32 & 33 (1930 & 1931) Cp. W. Lloyd Warner, *A Black Civilization*, (Revised Ed. 1958). p. 56 ff.

Diag. g

lines 1 and 3 versus 2 and 4, and the result would be two phratries, necessarily in a symmetrical relationship.

So far, the manifestly 4-line or latently 16-class system resembles our 6-line system. But the latter has the distinguishing feature that, while the 4-line system can only be reduced to a symmetrical one, the 6-line system can, even after reduction, appear either in a symmetrical form: 3 patri- and 2 matriline, for example, *or* in an asymmetrical form: 3 patri- and 3 matriline. In this respect the 6-line system both in its hypothetical Ambrym and in its actual Pentecost form, is unquestionably unique, and it does occupy the position of a simple and credible trait d'union between symmetrical and asymmetrical connubia. I am not yet convinced that it was once the Ambrym system (neither is Lorenz Löffler), but its pivotal character, at least in its Pentecost form, may clarify the relationship between the present-day societies as observed and described.

Before passing on to my final argument, I would like to add three footnotes to the present topic.

In the first place, all this talk about "reduction" may seem very remote from reality. However, it may well be an actual process. Either decrease in population or a desire for what Lévi-Strauss calls "shortening the cycle" of connubial relationships may cause a society to reduce the length of the connubial chain.²²

²² Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.* p. 562.

Secondly, we should note once more that in any asymmetrical system, two phratries may be recognized; but this does not make the system symmetrical. Even so, it is a useful concept. When B. Lane in an article of 1961 tried to demonstrate that the distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical systems was fallacious, she did so by fallacious reasoning which, there being no real moieties in her test case, overlooked the phratries.²³

Finally a word about the system of 3 lines in asymmetrical consubium, which we mentioned in passing. It is always potentially a 9-class system, but I think we can safely say that it will never be realized as such. For, if a system with three patriline were also to recognize the three inherent matriline, this would mean that ego would be equated with his great-grandfather and his great-grandson. It is hard to see what useful purpose would be served by such an equation. Berndt's latest analysis of the Murngin system leads to the same conclusion.²⁴ However, I said at the beginning that my plea would be for simplicity and a concern with fundamentals, and at present I am neglecting my own precepts. Therefore, back to reality and to a final consideration of the Ambrym system, and particularly kinship terminology, in relation to other class systems.

We have so far been dealing with some diagrams which were mainly concerned with elements in social structure, such as descent lines and marriage classes; and throughout we associated these with consubial types, thereby tacitly assuming some kind of association between the two. This association has, of course, been questioned by several anthropologists, notably Radcliffe-Brown and Lloyd Warner. At one point, Radcliffe-Brown describes the Kariëra marriage without any reference to the sections, but by saying: "A man may marry a woman to whom he applies the term of relationship that he does to his own MBD";²⁵ and Warner says concisely of the Murngin: "the section and sub-section system does not regulate marriage".²⁶ Although Lévi-Strauss has recently warned against the more extreme consequences of this point of view,²⁷ I would not like to pass it by entirely. So to wind up, may I briefly indicate how we again are

²³ B. S. Lane, "Structural Contrasts between Symmetric and Asymmetric Marriage Systems: A Fallacy". S.W.J.A., Vol. 17 (1961).

²⁴ R. Berndt, "Murngin (Wulamba) Social Organization", A.A., Vol. 57 (1955).

²⁵ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Social Organization of Australian Tribes" *Oceania*, Vol. I (1930) p. 48 (-but cp. p. 38).

²⁶ W. Lloyd Warner, *A Black Civilization*, p. 123.

²⁷ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui* (Paris 1962) p. 73.

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} MBD= \\ MMBDD= \\ FMBSD \end{array} \right\} \text{m.c.c.m.}$$

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} MBD= \\ FZD= \\ MMBDD= \\ FMBSD= \\ FFZSD \end{array} \right\} 4 \text{ class}$$

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} MMBDD= \\ FMBSD= \\ FFZSD= \\ MFZDD \end{array} \right\} 8 \text{ class}$$

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} FMBSD= \\ FFZSD \end{array} \right\} 6 \text{ class (3patri-l)}$$

$$MMBDD \quad \left. \right\} 6 \text{ class (3matri-l)}$$

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} FZD= \\ MMBDD= \\ FMBSD \end{array} \right\} \text{p.c.c.m.}$$

Diag. h

struck by the smooth and easy transitions from symmetrical to asymmetrical connubial types (and v.v.) when we describe them in genealogical terms. This has been done incidentally before, e.g. in a discussion between Robert Lane and Rodney Needham,²⁸ but the picture becomes clearest if we set out the whole range of "elementary structures" as consistently and as fully as possible. The result is not one pivotal system, as we have been discussing on p. 77-8 above, but a whole series of linked similarities, also between actually recorded types of connubium. It is as given in Diag. h.

In the left hand column are set out the marriage types (with MBD, etc) such are *usually associated with* the connubial types of the right hand column, namely: asymmetrical matrilateral cross-cousin marriage (m.c.c.m.), involving an unspecified number of participating groups; the symmetrical four and eight-class systems; the six-class systems we have just been discussing; and the alternately asymmetrical patrilateral cross-cousin marriage (p.c.c.m.).

The striking thing to emerge from this diagram is that certain "type marriages" turn up both in symmetrical and in asymmetrical contexts.

All this is no more than a brief and sketchy outline. On the other hand, I hope it may serve to place borderline cases between symmetry and asymmetry in a wider perspective than has been done so far, without, however, making it purely an exercise in mock algebra. Also, it points to the numerous interconnections between different systems, which would make transitions much easier, and even reduce them to almost imperceptible changes. Of the paradoxical situation that this point of view tends to undermine the usefulness of the structural models by which I arrived at it, I am well aware.

P. E. DE JOSSELIN DE JONG

²⁸ In particular: R. B. Lane, "Patrilateral Cross-Cousin Marriage: Structural Analysis and Ethnographic Cases". *Ethnology*, Vol. I (1962).