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RODNEY NEEDHAM

CLASSIFICATION AND ALLIANCE AMONG THE KARO: AN APPRECIATION

"In [Karo] rechten ... is er om zoo te zeggen geen enkel individu, maar heeft men steeds met deze triniteit te maken."

M. Joustra (1902)

I

No one ever does fieldwork with an open mind, writes José Cutileiro, and the difference between the ethnography of a native member of a society and that of an outsider is not that the former has preconceptions whereas the latter has not, but that they have different preconceptions. Those of the native affect his research in a deep and ramified way, and they confer advantages in the selection of important points and in the mastery of information that the outsider only slowly and imperfectly acquires. The native will be quicker and more perceptive mainly with regard to details or isolated instances, yet a grave problem remains: "It will require a much bigger effort from him than from an outsider (ultimately perhaps even an impossible one) to be able to form an integral conception of a society of which, at least at some levels of experience, he is himself a part" (Cutileiro 1971: viii).

These trenchant and hard-won observations, by a Portuguese social anthropologist writing about his own highly professional study of rural society in Portugal, make an authoritative preface to the present paper and they clearly indicate the premises from which I shall develop my argument. The contrast to be drawn here is that between the interpretation of Karo Batak society, as reported by a native Karo, Dr. Masri Singarimbun, in a very commendable monograph (Singarimbun 1975), and by myself as an outsider, a social anthropologist with certain theoretical interests but with no direct acquaintance with Karo life. The differences between Dr. Singarimbun and myself do not in general relate, therefore, to the factual accuracy of what he has published; indeed, in what follows I shall rely almost exclusively (with only

parenthetical references to any other source)¹ on the admirably telling data that he, with his pre-eminent authority as a native ethnographer, has placed on record. In these regards I much admire Dr. Singarimbun's work and I have no intention to controvert it: that is why my analysis is exactly subtitled as an appreciation. But Dr. Singarimbun has expounded his privileged understanding of Karo social forms within a certain theoretical framework, and he has been swayed (deleteriously, in my view) by certain academic preconceptions. These have led, demonstrably, to a peculiar interpretation of Karo social classification and affinal alliance. I think the prejudices in question are unsound, and it seems to me that they have distorted what, otherwise interpreted, is structurally an easily recognisable and simple form of social life and collective representations. There are also some difficulties of a more technical kind, and to look into these from a formal standpoint may prove helpful to the ethnographer in an eventual reconsideration of his findings.

II

The Karo, one of the peoples grouped together under the generic name Batak, occupy about 5000 square kilometres in northern Sumatra. They number more than 300,000 and are divided into five dispersed patrilineal clans (*merga*); the membership of each clan may range from 40,000 to 70,000 individuals; traditionally they were not subject to any centralised government, and a common phrase by which they refer to themselves is *merga si lima*, "the five clans" (Singarimbun 1975: 71, 72).²

The clan is not a corporate group; it has no chief or communal property or ritual centre, it is never assembled as a group, and it does not act as a unity. It is however exogamous, at any rate in principle (73). Each clan is divided into a number (between thirteen and eighteen)³ of named sub-clans. The members of a sub-clan are said to be descended from a common ancestor, they observe certain food prohibitions, and they are distinguished also by the employment of a pair of nicknames (one for boys, the other for girls) that are given to children; but sub-clans are not corporate groups (81). The sub-clan, in its turn, is divided into lineages, each associated with a village said to have been established by the lineage founder; most lineage genealogies are from six to eight generations deep. The lineage is not an exclusively local group, and many men live in villages other than their village of origin (82); its members are not jurally responsible for one another (85).

The socially significant descent groups are unnamed segments of the lineages. The *sada nini*, "one grandfather," segment consists of the families of married agnatic cousins; these co-operate in everyday activities, and commonly render economic assistance to one another, "but they do not act together as a group" (86). Within this segment there is distinguished the "lineage segment" referred to as *sada bapa*, "one father," and consisting of the domestic families of married brothers; the solidarity of this group is connected especially with the parental family estate so long as this is undivided; and this segment is also a religious group, subject to the same guardian spirits and making communal offerings (86).

The Karo, from the exogamous clan with perhaps 70,000 members down to the one-father segment, are universally classified in a segmentary system defined by agnatic descent. The consequences of this rule of relative incorporation are intrinsically fissive, but the segments thus constituted are fused by a complementary mode of classification, that of affinal alliance.

There is no single designation for relatives by marriage. These are divided into two reciprocal categories: *kalimbubu* and *anakberu*. The etymological analysis of *kalimbubu* is not clear: "the *-mbubu* in *kalimbubu* probably derives from a common Indonesian root meaning skull . . ., and Neumann suggests that *kalimbubu* refers primarily to the crown or rearmost part of the human head" (113). The term *anakberu* is "a compound of the two roots *anak*, child or person, and *beru*, woman or female"; it can be glossed as "people of the woman," "the woman's people," or "one's daughter's (or sister's) family" (113). Although Singarimbun has misgivings on this score (111-12), it is convenient and need not be misleading to render *kalimbubu* as "wife-givers" and *anakberu* as "wife-takers."

Between wife-givers and wife-takers there is a marked disparity of status and attributes. The term *kalimbubu* has "connotations of great respect and entitlement to jural and ritual superiority" (113); the *anakberu*, i.e. wife-takers, "are jurally inferior to the *kalimbubu* in certain respects" (53). The "asymmetry" between wife-givers and wife-takers "pervades almost every aspect of their social relations and is deeply rooted in Karo religion" (106). The practical duties of wife-takers towards their wife-givers are very numerous, as the list that follows will show.

When a man is performing a ritual or ceremony, his sister and her husband are obliged to fetch the betel, catch and kill the pigs for the

feast, do the cooking, and serve the food (53). In seeking revenge for a homicide, the victim's brother asks assistance from his sister's husband (his closest *anakberu*), who is obliged to give his help (85). When an introduction among strangers is needed, one's wife-takers stand warrant for the visitor (119). For an oath to be valid, an accused must be accompanied by a wife-taker who also drinks the potion (119). In the past, almost every contract made by an individual had to be witnessed by a wife-taker as well as by an agnatic kinsman (123). At weddings the wife-takers of each party sit in front so that the givers of the feast are separated by their wife-takers (124). Wife-takers are called in to mediate disputes between agnates; they must always "stand in the middle" and not take sides with one of the disputants (127). A family or lineage segment is sometimes judged according to the feasts they have given (127); the organisation of a feast is exclusively the responsibility of the wife-takers of the host, and whether or not a feast is successful depends largely on them; in this context their role as "servants" of their wife-givers is both put to the test and also finds its fullest expression; they have a great many tasks to perform and, in short, "they do everything" (129).

At times of crisis the wife-takers are similarly indispensable. When a villager falls sick the organisation of a party to carry him to hospital is the responsibility of his wife-takers (130). They are the most important sources of economic assistance (134). A traveller in a strange village where he has no clansmen will ask if there is someone who stands in the relationship of wife-taker to him, and if so the latter will give him hospitality (137). In case of elopement, the usual procedure is for the abductor to take the girl to the house of one of his wife-takers (164); and the pursuers who will try to recapture her will be wife-takers of her parents (165). At a regular marriage the wife-takers of the parents of both the bride and the groom take part in reaching an agreement on the marriage payment and the date of the wedding ceremony (167). At the wedding itself, in the party of the groom and in that of the bride, the wife-takers occupy a distinct area to the left and the wife-givers to the right. Each part of the marriage payment is handed over by one of the groom's agnates to one of his wife-takers, who then passes it on to a wife-taker of the bride, who in turn hands it over to the intended recipient (174-5). The marriage contract is signed by the fathers of the bride and groom, and also by one each of their respective wife-takers (176). If a woman desires a divorce, she should by tradition lodge her complaints with a wife-taker (HF, HFZ, etc.) and when she

deserts her husband she should stay with these wife-takers. In practice, she usually goes to her parents, who report her action to a close wife-taker of the husband, and the wife-takers will then organise a family meeting (186).

The services rendered by wife-takers (*anakberu*) to wife-givers (*kalimbubu*) are indeed very diverse and pervasive, as Singarimbun writes (115), and to such an extent that the Karo say: "You cannot do anything without *anakberu*."

The complementary prestations due from wife-givers to wife-takers are of a very different quality but they are no less crucially important. "The Karo say that harmonious relations with one's *kalimbubu* bring happiness and prosperity, but if the *kalimbubu* feels neglected or injured by his *anakberu*, this may bring mystically-inflicted misfortune to the *anakberu*" (106). The occasion of such misfortune is the "frustration" ⁴ felt by the wife-giver (106-7). The healing of a disturbed relationship of the kind may have "a curative or a preventative potency," and a man's *kalimbubu* must participate in a rite of divination for which the former is the patient (107). A wife-giver (e.g. WM, MBW) performs divination also when a site for a traditional house is to be chosen (67). "Everything good in life" comes from two powers: the mediating influence of the familial guardian spirits, and the "metaphysical influence (*tuah*)" ⁵ of the wife-givers by birth on their wife-takers among the living (139). This source of metaphysical influence is strikingly recognised in the custom that "every Karo child is taught from infancy to regard his *kalimbubu* as a 'visible god,' *dibata niidah*" (137).⁶ Similarly, there is "an asymmetrical metaphysical relationship between brother and sister" and more widely between a married woman and her agnatic kin in general; a harmonious relationship brings happiness to her, but if social relations are poor and her kin become annoyed with her she may be "supernaturally punished by bad luck in economic affairs, sickness, or even infertility" (53-4).

The three categories of agnates (*senina*; particularly *sembuyak*, members of the same sub-clan), wife-givers (*kalimbubu*), and wife-takers (*anakberu*) together make up what the Karo speak of as *sangkep si telu*, "the three complete" (97) or "the three intact" (191); and these three categories are described as "the foundation of their adat (custom)" (191). The comprehensive nature of this set of relationships is well brought out by a standard "identification procedure" in which two persons take turns in asking about each other's identity. This consists in establishing their relationship as *senina-senina* or *anakberu-kalimbubu*.

First the clan (*merga*) is determined; then the *beréberé*, ZC and other relatives in wife-taking groups; third the *binuang*, father's mother's agnates, i.e. *kalimbubu*; and lastly the *soler*, wife-givers of wife-givers (108). When a stranger sleeps the night in a village where he has no known relatives, he tries to find "someone to whom he may claim to be related": first he seeks a fellow clansmen (*senina*); failing such, his next enquiry is whether there is someone who stands as *anakberu* to him; and if he has no *anakberu* in the village, he tries to locate a *kalimbubu* (137). Similarly, when two or more Karo who have not hitherto had much to do with each other are thrown together, "the first thing they do is determine whether they are *senina* or *kalimbubu-anakberu*" (147). In general, it is possible "to fit any Karo into one of the three major categories of relationship" (104). As for the individual, not only is a man born into a patrilineal clan but he also enters, when only one month old in the womb, an *anakberu-kalimbubu* relationship with his mother's agnates; and such relationships are indeed "integral and inalienable aspects of a person's social identity" (103-4).

The "three complete" categories are given a spatial recognition in the constitution of the village. According to customary law a single agnatic group, no matter how large, may not found a village; for a settlement to be regarded as "structurally complete" it must be occupied not only by the ruling lineage but by members of at least three other lineages as well, viz. by that lineage's *anakberu*, *kalimbubu*, and *senina* (23). Within the village, also, the traditional house is occupied ideally by the three major categories of relatives: agnates, wife-takers, and wife-givers (63). A further instance of the spatial symbolisation of these categories is seen in the seating of the parties at a wedding ceremony: the groom's party and the bride's sit facing each other, and each party consists of the *senina* in the middle flanked by *kalimbubu* to the right and *anakberu* to the left; the right is associated with superiority, the left with inferiority (169).

It is through marriage, self-evidently, that the three categories of persons are articulated into a systematic social classification: women are "the links between families and ultimately the several descent groups to which these families belong" (113). "The Karo practice matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and they regard each and every marriage, whether or not it is between cross-cousins, as establishing . . . a relationship they call *anakberu-kalimbubu* . . . This asymmetrical social relationship is perpetual; it endures in subsequent generations . . ." (xvi). Matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is regarded as a good thing because it "renews and

perpetuates" established affinal relationships, but it is regarded also as good "in and of itself ... because it conforms to the natural order of Things" (156).

Accordingly, one of the duties of a woman to her brother is to do her best to see to it that one of her sons marries one of his daughters (54; cf. 155). If a young man is willing to marry a MBD (*impal*), however, he is not free to choose but must marry the eldest one (155-6); and when one of a set of brothers has married a mother's brother's daughter the others may not do so, even though the sisters of their brother's wife are in the correct category (154). This is one of the reasons that marriage with the mother's brother's daughter is relatively infrequent (98); but marriage with the MFBSD is regarded as "nearly as effective." Only these two kinds of marriage are regarded as "proper *impal*" marriages (154).

Conversely, marriage is forbidden with the FZD and also with her first and second agnatic parallel cousins (ego's FZHBD and FZHFBSD); more generally, it is sometimes said that it is not good to marry a woman of the same sub-clan as the father's sister's daughter, but such marriages are not in fact uncommon (150). It is not strictly forbidden to marry a woman who belongs to the same lineage as the FZD; Singarimbun reports one instance of marriage with the FZHFBSSD, and two with the FFBSDHZ; in none of these cases did the marriage result in conflicting affinal statuses among the men of one "one grandfather" segment (152). In general, a proposal to marry a female *anakberu* who is a third or more distant cousin "will not meet strong objections" (193). As for marriage with the MZD, i.e. between a couple who are classificatory siblings (*turang sepemerén*) through their mothers, the proposal of marriage between persons whose mothers were lineage "sisters" would meet strong resistance, and Singarimbun reports that there were no such cases. Marriage is forbidden, strictly speaking, between a couple whose mothers belong to the same sub-clan, though it does take place. When the mothers belong merely to the same clan, marriage is permitted (149).

Irregular marriage, or "incest" (*sumbang*), is associated with drought (148-9) and with other forms of catastrophe. In a myth a brother and sister fall in love with each other; their mother tells them that their behaviour is incestuous and will bring about a long dry season, the crops will die, the cattle will be struck down by thirst and mankind by thirst and hunger; when the children do not heed this warning there is a long drought and then other calamities: cows become deer, buffalo become elephants, domestic pigs become wild pigs (51).

Divorce is strongly stigmatised and there are no set rules regarding permissible grounds for divorce. It terminates not only the jural relationship of husband and wife, but also the *anakberu-kalimbubu* relationship that was established by the marriage (187). Although divorces do occur, especially in the early years of marriage (185-6), the general rate seems to be very low: Karo court records for the year 1959 contain a total of only 58 divorces for a population of about 140,000 (186 n. 1).

Finally, in this descriptive section, let us briefly note the extent of the contractual relations consequent upon marriage. Beyond the range of the one-grandfather segment, agnatic kin are "not greatly implicated" in one another's affairs (105), but connexions by marriage go quite far all the same: the *kalimbubu* of one's *kalimbubu* are also *kalimbubu*, namely *puang kalimbubu*; and conversely the *anakberu* of one's *anakberu* are also *anakberu*, namely *anakberu menteri* (107). In addition, there is a portion of the marriage payment that is especially reserved for agnatic kin of the bride's mother's mother, who are *kalimbubu* by birth of the groom's *puang kalimbubu* by marriage (109). Since "receipt of a share of the marriage payment signifies acceptance of certain rights and duties" (175), it is evident that the jural claims of affinity are widely dispersed. Moreover, "any marriage contracted by an agnatic relative may add to the range of one's *kalimbubu-anakberu* relationships" (109), which multiplies the connexions very considerably. Ultimately, as we have seen, the classification is applied beyond the range of contractual obligations so universally as to embrace the entirety of Karo society.

III

The summary review just made of certain of Singarimbun's main findings gives an idea, although much has had to be omitted, of the admirably comprehensive character of his ethnography and also of the integrating features of Karo society. In particular, it has become clear to what an extent "an understanding of the Karo system of social relations between kin and relatives by marriage is the necessary starting point for an understanding of most other aspects of Karo culture and society" (xv-xvi).

But there is a question about precisely how this system is best to be understood. The institutions described compose a remarkably familiar picture of a certain form of society: matrilineal cross-cousin marriage; supreme importance of affinal alliance; superiority of wife-givers to wife-takers; reversal of affinal alliance after a set degree; separation

and complementarity of jural and mystical governance. This is all very reminiscent of the organisation of Toba Batak society as described by Vergouwen (1933; cf. Needham 1966b: 1267), and so it is more generally of the systems of "circulating connubium" in Indonesia to which Dutch anthropologists of the nineteen-thirties paid such fruitful attention. Nowadays it is customary to characterise a society of this kind as a system of asymmetric prescriptive alliance — yet this is precisely what Singarimbun deliberately and repeatedly says Karo society is not. In his preface he says indeed that he hopes to show that Karo society is "precisely the opposite" of what he understands as a system of asymmetric prescriptive alliance (xvii), and in his closing summary of his findings he concludes that "Needham's model of 'asymmetric prescriptive alliance systems' is a factitious type which has no counterpart in ethnographic fact . . . at least among the Batak" (195).

Singarimbun arrives at this opinion on four main argumentative grounds:

(1) That in Karo society marriage does not effect an alliance between lineal descent groups as jural corporations.

He refers in this connexion to "the mistaken anthropological theory that categories of relationship of the sort described here [sc. *anakberu*, *kalimbubu*] are primarily or fundamentally intergroup relations" (100). The expression "asymmetric prescriptive alliance systems" refers, he assumes, to "a social order based on a division of the society into three kinds of lineal descent groups which are engaged, prescriptively, in the unidirectional exchange of women in marriage" (111). Marriage in Karo society, however, "does not entail an alliance between the lineage segments, lineages, subclans, or clans of the principals"; these groupings "are not corporate groups and they cannot enter into alliances as wholes" (147).⁷ Hence, Singarimbun thinks, Karo society cannot properly be seen as a system of asymmetric prescriptive alliance.

This contention rests on a misunderstanding of what Singarimbun takes to be "alliance theory." It is no part of my own views, at any rate, on prescriptive systems that these require either the presence of lineal descent groups or the transfer of women among such groups acting as jural corporations. Since the issue is one of definition, it can be settled with a few quotations from published articles on prescriptive systems over a number of years past. "The focus of studies of prescriptive alliance is the notion of category," and the prime aim is "the understanding of categories of social classification"; "the categories order relations, but what the terms denote is indeterminate and cannot be

inferred from the classification"; "asymmetric alliance [does] not require descent groups of any kind"; "there is no necessity that any kind of descent group shall correspond to the descent lines" (Needham 1963: 236, 237, 238). "The type of relationship terminology is not necessarily correlated with any type of social grouping"; "the categories of the terminology compose a definite formal order, but they do not entail any specific kind of social order" (Needham 1966a: 142). Prescriptive alliance "is defined by the terminology, and the terminology is constituted by the regularity of a constant relation that articulates lines and categories"; "it is by reference to this relational abstraction — not to lineages, groups, offices, and other such institutions — that effective comparisons can be initiated" (Needham 1971: 32; cf. 1974: 70-71). These passages, and others that could also be cited, make it plain that descent groups are certainly not supposed to be essential to prescriptive alliance. The absence of such alliance groups from Karo society does not in the least prevent it being regarded as a prescriptive system.

(2) That choice of spouse among the Karo "is not restricted to any one category of kinswoman or kinsman" (153); "the Karo do not prescribe or enjoin MBD or classificatory *impal* marriage" (193).

A prescriptive system is recognised in the first place by the structure of the relationship terminology, and the defining prescription is "a formal property of a system of categories of social classification" (Needham 1973: 174). The possibility is left open that marriages may be contracted between persons who are not already mutually classified by the terminology, and that only after marriage may they and their respective relatives be assigned to statuses in the classification. As for the Karo, the extent to which they qualify the categorical prescription, or else marry outside it (153), is a contingent matter of fact and not to be argued over. It is in any case a well known fact that categorical injunctions are often manipulated or evaded, and also that there may be a systematic discordance between a prescription and the regulation of marriage, e.g. between the symmetric prescription of Endeh and the asymmetric contraction of alliances (Needham 1968). In other words, the structure of the terminology, from which the "prescription" is abstracted, stands in no necessary or constant correlation with the choice of marriage partners.

(3) That "there are no positive rules that enjoin marriage between persons solely on the basis of their respective descent group affiliations and the established *kalimbubu-anakberu* relations between those groups" (196-7).

As a matter of analytical practice, again, prescriptive systems are best not defined by rules of marriage, since a jural definition of prescription does not correlate with the structure of the social classification or with the type of society (Needham 1973: 172-3). It is in any case not part of the definition of prescriptive alliance that the rules shall enjoin marriage solely on the basis of descent groups and their prior relationships.

(4) That the "primary ranges" of the terms *kalimbubu* and *anakberu* are "so narrow ... that it is hardly appropriate to describe them in terms of 'descent' and 'alliance' " (196).

In this society, "ultimately every Karo should in principle be able to trace a *senina*, *kalimbubu* or *anakberu* relationship with every other Karo" (192). The first term, translatable as "same-sex sibling" (72), is employed among all members of the same clan and can therefore be glossed as defined by descent. The other two terms are those governing affinal relations, and they can therefore be said to be defined by alliance. The allusion to "primary ranges" of terms is a restriction traced by Singarimbun and is meant apparently to reflect the extent of jural commitment accepted by implication in a marriage (cf. 175); it does not reduce the universal application within Karo society of these three major categories. The standard procedure of identification (described in sec. II above) demonstrates that the status of any individual is defined literally in terms of descent and alliance. Correspondingly, the system as a whole can be defined in the same terms. The objection to the word "alliance" rests here on Singarimbun's statement that "the *kalimbubu-anakberu* relationship is primarily between domestic families, not between descent groups of any scale" (196);⁸ but the question of scale is irrelevant to the mode of relation, and the presence or absence of descent groups is irrelevant to the definition of the system as prescriptive.

In the light of these considerations I think it can fairly be concluded, and without contesting any of the ethnographic reports, that when Singarimbun asserts that Karo society is not a system of asymmetric alliance this is because he has been misled about what constitutes "alliance theory."⁹ It is only by ignoring or mistaking the analytical usages which have been explicitly formulated in the comparative study of prescriptive alliance, over what is now a long series of empirical cases taken from many parts of the world in addition to Indonesia, that he can represent Karo society as not being ordered by asymmetric prescriptive alliance. To the very contrary, indeed, it is in my view an excellent

accomplishment on Singarimbun's part that he has so clearly reported the holistic character, in Karo society, of what appears (so far as we have examined the ethnographic evidence) to be just such a system.¹⁰

In arguing against a certain interpretation of Karo society, Singarimbun attempts at the same time to make a contrary interpretation. When he says that the actual state of affairs in Karo society is "precisely the opposite" of a prescriptive system (xvii), what he contends is that the supposed alliance theory "reverses the actual structural priorities between the Batak kinship and descent systems" (xix). I do not understand what exactly he means by "structural priorities", but his theoretical comments in the course of the monograph show that he intends to argue for a particular conception of "kinship" and for the fundamental importance of such kinship in Karo life.

According to this view, the relationship terms primarily and properly denote only close relatives, and they are then merely "extended" to more distantly related individuals. The clans, for instance, "serve to extend relations of agnatic kinship ... throughout the whole of the society" (75-6). The exogamy of the clan (a group which, it will be remembered, may number between 40,000 and 70,000 people, dispersed all over Karo territory) is said to be "logically consistent with the extension of sibling-like social relationships to clan mates" (149). In the same way, *kalimbubu-anakberu* relationships are "structurally derivative" from particular individual marriages (111). "Marriage establishes an alliance between two families and (by extension) their respective agnatic kin" (170). "By extension the agnatic kin of persons so related [i.e. as wife-givers and wife-takers] stand also in *kalimbubu-anakberu* relationships" (100; original emphasis). It is "only by extension" that a married woman "regards the rest of her father's lineage, etc., as her *kalimbubu* and that they regard her ... as their *anakberu*" (96). So when Karo "speak of intergroup *kalimbubu-anakberu* relations, this is merely an abbreviated and convenient way of expressing the extension along agnatic lines of relationships created by individual marriages" (112). In general, Karo "kin categories and terms are extended beyond their foci," and so also are "the sexual and marital regulations associated with membership of the designated categories" (148-9). "By this means, the moral order associated with relations of close genealogical connection is widely extended and is used to order social relations between persons whose genealogical relationships are greatly attenuated, if they exist at all" (105). In the final analysis, Singarimbun states, "social relations based on nothing more than common clan affiliation, or on extensions of

anakberu-kalimbubu relationships to distantly related or unrelated members of other clans, are highly attenuated versions of social relationships based on close genealogical or marital connections" (76).

The prejudicial notion that certain social categories primarily denote immediate kin, and that wider or more "classificatory" applications are simply extensions, is a long-standing source of ethnographic misinterpretation and analytical confusion. Forty years ago Hocart laid cogent grounds for the presumption that, on the contrary, "classificatory terms are not due to extension" (1937; 1970: 183), and numerous analyses since then have only strengthened his argument. The conjoined premise that there is in general a real and distinct compartment of human life that is "kinship" properly speaking has also been subjected to much criticism (e.g. Needham 1974a: 40-42) and it is at least very hard to sustain. Yet both of these ideas have retained their force in some anthropological quarters, and it is under this obdurate influence that Singarimbun appears to have fallen (xxi).

To set out a thorough critique of the theory of kinship extensions would be too lengthy a matter for the present place, and in any case I do not think that it is necessary to press the argument so far in order to assess Singarimbun's interpretation of the Karo system. There are three main reasons to reject his resort to extensionism. (1) In the first place, Singarimbun presents no formal justification of his premise that "kinship" categories, when set against other forms of classification, have a distinct character such that their range and articulation necessitate recourse to the process of extension.¹¹ Since moreover relationship terminologies can be consistently analysed by other criteria, there is no logical necessity to introduce the additional factor of extension, and to do so is an offence against Ockham's Razor. As there is no formal occasion to accept this factor, it calls instead for a substantive defence. (2) Singarimbun presents no empirical argument in support of his theoretical premise, and his case relies on the repeated assertion that extension simply is the explanation of the range of classificatory relationships. The closest he gets to what seems an implicit argument is when he states that *kalimbubu-anakberu* relationships are "structurally derivative" from individual marriages; but as he does not explain the structural considerations he has in mind, in the instance of affinal extension at any rate, the extensionist premise still lacks an argued justification. (3) Lastly, Singarimbun supplies no ethnographic evidence from Karo social life such as could bear out his contention that the process of extension is an effective institution among the Karo. For that matter, it is

doubtful in the extreme that the idea of kinship extension could ever be proved empirically, and my own inclination is to think that it cannot be.¹² However, it is not for me to propound a counter-argument: it is for the proponent of extensionism to make the argument for it, and until that is done there is nothing to counter.

In the present instance, Singarimbun has not provided a formal or a substantive or an ethnographic argument in favour of his extensionist premise, and there is hence no reason to accept it in the interpretation of Karo social classification.

IV

At this point we may take up the crucial task of analysing the Karo terminology. Singarimbun himself does not do so, yet in the study of categories and action it is imperative to make a formal analysis that can be set against the jural and other institutions of the form of social life under consideration. Fortunately, in the Karo case we are well provided by the ethnographer with a detailed list of terms and genealogical specifications. These are collected in an appendix — an expository recourse that in itself is rather revealing — under the heading “Karo Kin Classification,” with some pages of glosses on the employment of the terms (201-11). The specifications are separated into “focus” (e.g. F) and “other denotata” (e.g. FB, FFBS, etc.), and the former specifications are said to be “structurally primary denotata” (201), but this extensionist lay-out presents no hindrance to analysis.

In this undertaking we shall have two main questions in mind: whether or not the Karo classification is prescriptive; and, if it is, whether it is symmetric or asymmetric (but cf. Needham 1968: 332-3). It is true that a review of Karo institutions discovers a remarkable asymmetry,¹³ but comparative studies (e.g. Needham 1966a) have established that even a strictly asymmetric contraction of marriages can be governed by a symmetric prescriptive terminology. Moreover, there have been published certain indications (to be cited below) that a symmetric aspect to the Karo terminology may have to be taken into account. Beyond these problematical considerations we need only stipulate that the analysis shall aim at systematic consistency and categorical economy. I shall try to establish a classificatory matrix in which each structural locus is denoted by the smallest number of terms (at the limit, though this is by no means a requirement, by only one term) and in which the distribution of any term shall not conflict with or be redundant to the allocation of other terms.

Table 1. *Karo Terminology*

1. <i>nini</i>	PP, all relatives of second ascending genealogical level
2. <i>bapa</i>	F, FB, FFBS, FMZS, MFZS, MH, MZH, HMB, WFZH, FZSWF
3. <i>nandé</i>	M, FW, FBW, HMBW, FMZSW, FZSWM
4. <i>bibi</i>	MZ, FZ, MFBD, MMZD, FMBD, FFBD, FMZD, MFZD, FFZD, WFZ, HFZ, HM, HMZ, HFBW
5. <i>bengkila</i>	FZH, FFZS, FFZDH, HF, HFB, HFZH, HMZH, ZHF, FZDHF
6. <i>mama</i>	MB, MFBS, MMZS, MMBS, FMBS, WF, WFB, WMB, WMZH, WMMBS, WMMBDH
7. <i>mami</i>	MBW, MMBD, WM, WMZ, WFBW, WMBW, MMBSW, WMMBD, WMMBSW
8. <i>senina</i>	B, Z(w.s.), FS(m.s.), MS(m.s.), FD(w.s.), MD(w.s.), FBS(m.s.), MZS(m.s.), FBD(w.s.), MZD(w.s.), FMBDS(m.s.), FMBDD(w.s.), MFZSS(m.s.), MFZSD(w.s.), MMZDS(m.s.), FFBS(m.s.), MMZDD(w.s.), FFBSD(w.s.), WFZS, HMBD, MBDH(m.s.), FZSW(w.s.)
<i>senina sepemerén</i>	MZS(m.s.), MZD(w.s.), FMBDS(m.s.), FMBDD(w.s.)
<i>senina siparibanen</i>	WZH, H of any clan "sister" of W
9. <i>turang</i>	Z(m.s.), B(w.s.), FD(m.s.), MD(w.s.), FS(w.s.), MS(w.s.), FBD(m.s.), MZD(m.s.), FBS(w.s.), MZS(w.s.), FMBDD(m.s.), MFZSD(m.s.), FMBDS(w.s.), MFZSS(w.s.), MFBDD(m.s.), MFBDS(w.s.), FFBSD(m.s.), WFZD, HMBS, MBDH(m.s.), FZSW(w.s.)
<i>turang sepemerén</i>	MZD(m.s.), MZS(w.s.), FMBDD(m.s.), FMBDS(w.s.)
<i>turang impal</i>	FZD(m.s.), MBS(w.s.)

10. *impal* MBC, FZC, MFBSC, FFBDC, MMZSC, FMZDC, MMBSS, FFZDC, FMBSC, FFZSC, WZ, WB, WFBC, WMZC, HZ, HB, HFBC, HMZC, HFZD, WMBS
11. *anak* C, BC(m.s.), MZSC(m.s.), FBSC(m.s.), MBDC(m.s.), ZSW(m.s.), WZC, WBDH, ZC(w.s.), MZDC(w.s.), FBDC(w.s.), FZSC(w.s.), HBC, HZSW
12. *beréberé* ZC(m.s.), MZDC(m.s.), FBDC(m.s.), FZDC(m.s.), FZSC(m.s.), FZDC(m.s.), DH, BDH(m.s.), ZDH(w.s.), WZDH, HZC, HZDH, HBDH
13. *permain* SW(m.s.), BSW(m.s.), MZSSW(m.s.), FBSSW(m.s.), WZSW, SWBW(m.s.)
14. *kéla* DH, ZDH(w.s.), HZDH, WZDH
15. *kempu* CC, all relatives of second descending genealogical level
16. *silangen* W, BW(m.s.), W of any "brother" of Ego's clan (m.s.)
17. *silih* WB, ZH(m.s.), WFBS, WMBS, FBDH(m.s.), FZDH(m.s.)
18. *turangku* WBW, HZH, WMBD, HFZS, DHF(w.s.), SWM(m.s.), DBWBD(w.s.), FZHZS(m.s.), MMBSD(m.s.)
19. *perbulangen* H, HB, HFBS
20. *beru* HZ, HFBD, HFZD, HMZD, DHM(w.s.)
21. *éda* BW(w.s.), FBSW(w.s.), MBSW(w.s.), MZSW(w.s.), SWM(w.s.)
22. *permén* BC(w.s.), FBSC(w.s.), MZSC(w.s.), MBSC(m.s.), SW(w.s.), WBC, WBSW, WZSW, HBSW, BSW(w.s.), SW(m.s.)
23. *cimbang* HBW, W of any clan "brother" of H
24. *ajinta* HF
25. *semetua* HM

The terminology is set out in the present Table 1. The order in which the terms are listed has been rearranged from that adopted by Singarimbun (201-4) in order to facilitate comparison with the terminologies in other analyses that I cite. All of the genealogical specifications are reproduced; the sex of the speaker is indicated by "(m.s.)" for man speaking, "(w.s.)" for woman speaking; the order in which the specifications of each term are given is that of Singarimbun's table; a few additional specifications have been taken from Singarimbun's Figure 14 (206), and these are given last.

We need not drag out a long demonstration that the Karo terminology is lineal, in the sense that it is constituted by three descent lines: the terms *mama*, *bapa*, and *bengkila*, with their distinctive specifications and the sets of terms that they head respectively, make a sufficient case. Granted so much, let us try to work out the articulation of the terminology.

The solitary term *nini* for the second ascending genealogical level suggests nothing positive, but preliminary indications of a possible structure are provided by: *mama*, MB = WF $\neq$ FZH; *mami*, MBW = WM $\neq$ FZ; *turang impal*, FZD = (Z) $\neq$ MBD; *beréberé*, FZDS = ZS = DH $\neq$ MBSS. The three medial levels thus display, in these respects, a systematic asymmetry. There is an immediate obstacle to this characterisation in the symmetric specifications of *impal* (MBC, FZC) and *silih* (ZH, WB), but let us just the same order the terms according to asymmetric prescriptive alliance (Table 2) and see what is to be made of them in that arrangement. I shall enter in the matrix those terms that fall, as determined by their genealogical specifications, within a scheme based on three descent lines. Certain specifications disperse some of the terms beyond this range, others lead to inconsistent allocations, and some are in other ways questionable. These initial difficulties will be examined individually, in the order in which the terms and their specifications occur in Table 1.

(1) *bibi*, FFZD. This specification locates the term in the wife-taking line as well as in the line of reference; it also makes *bibi* into Z of *bengkila* in addition to W. However, *bibi* is also specified as MZ and is thus assigned to the wife-giving line as well as to the line of reference (as FZ).

(2) *bengkila*, FFZDH, FZDHF. The former specification is consistent with (1); the latter locates the term also as wife-taker of wife-taker, and in this position *bengkila* is again H to *bibi*.

Table 2. *Karo Terms ordered by Asymmetric Prescription*

←		←		←		←	
f.	m.	f.	m.	f.	m.	f.	
			nini	nini	nini	nini	
bibi	bengkila	bibi	bapa	nandé (M) bibi (MZ)	mama	mami	
impal	impal	turang	senina	impal	impal	turangku	
turang impal (FZD)	silih (ZH)	(Z)	(B)	silih (WB)			
beréberé	beréberé kéla (DH)	anak	anak	permain permén	permain permén	permain permén	
kempu	kempu	kempu	kempu				

NOTE: The distribution of terms that are dispersed beyond the three descent lines is not shown.

(3) *mama*, MMBS. This assigns the term to a second line, viz. to that of wife-givers of wife-givers; it also makes *mami*, W of *mama*, into Z of *mama* as well.

WMB: consistent with MMBS.

WMMBS: this carries the term outwards yet one more line, viz. to that of wife-givers of wife-givers of wife-givers.

WMMBDH: = WMB.

(4) *mami*, WMBW. Consistent with (3), *mama* = WMB.

WMMBD: consistent with (3).

WMMBSW: consistent with (3), *mama* = WMMBS.

(5) *turang*, MBDH(m.s.). Wrong by sex of speaker; sc. (w.s.).

FZSW(w.s.): wrong by sex of speaker; sc. (m.s.).

(6) *impal*, MMBSS. This assigns the term to the line of wife-givers of wife-givers in addition to that of wife-givers.

FFZDC: assigns the term to wife-takers of wife-takers as well as to wife-takers.

(7) *beréberé*, FZDC(m.s.). This specification occurs twice in Singarimbun's table (204, no. 23); this may be an inadvertent repetition, or the second occurrence may be a mistake for some other specification.

HZDH: assigns the term to the line of wife-takers of wife-takers.

(8) *permain*, SWBW. Assigns the term not only to the wife-giving line (SW) but also to that of wife-givers of wife-givers.

(9) *silih*, WMBS. Assigns the term not only to the wife-giving line (WB) but also to that of wife-givers of wife-givers.

FZDH(m.s.): assigns the term to wife-takers of wife-takers.

(10) *turangku*, DBWBD(w.s.). Wrong by sex of speaker; cf. DHF(w.s.), sc. (m.s.). Also mistakenly constructed (DB = S) and culminating in an inconsistent genealogical level.

(11) *permén*, WBSW. Term assigned to two adjacent lines, viz. wife-givers and wife-givers of wife-givers.

SW(m.s.), WZSW: specifications identical with *permain* as SW(m.s.), WZSW.

(12) *kéla*, HZDH. Term assigned to two adjacent lines, viz. wife-takers and wife-takers of wife-takers.

Viewed systematically, the distribution of the terms as represented in Table 2 is not very satisfactory. In particular, the outward scattering of most of the terms that we have just considered makes a puzzling impression. These allocations are made on the strength of only a few genealogical specifications, and they are not by any means so convincingly attested as is the assignment of the terms in question to the three descent lines that I have taken to be basic. Empirically, a possible interpretation is that the outlying denotations reflect the facts that the *kalimbubu* of *kalimbubu* are also *kalimbubu*, so that for instance the

wife-givers of Ego's *mama* may also be *mama*, and conversely that the *anakberu* of *anakberu* are also *anakberu*, so that for instance the wife-takers of Ego's *bengkila* may also be *bengkila*. Comparatively, however, it should be noted that this form of classification is at least unusual. The outlying terms do not constitute integral descent lines, but are only sporadically distributed. Moreover, the outward repetition of terms from within the three central lines is hard to replicate in other terminologies. The Kachin classification, for example, which has five lines, distinguishes two integral descent lines in addition to the three central lines, and by means of terms that are proper to them (Leach 1954: 305, table II). The Karo classification does not compose a five-line terminology in this clear and systematic fashion. A possible inference is that the sporadic distribution of certain terms is not strictly part of the system of jural categories, but that the isolated specifications in question represent civil usage, especially perhaps in response to queries about how individuals in genealogies might be referred to. This is a familiar situation, and I shall propose to leave the dispersed and apparently unintegrated specifications out of account in arriving at a structural definition of the system.

A graver difficulty subsists, however, in the task of discerning the principles of classification in force, especially with regard to the terms for certain crucial statuses.

(13) The distribution of *bibi* (MZ, FZ) in both the line of reference and the wife-giving line is consistently established by eleven specifications: seven matrilineal, four patrilineal. This is not formally concordant with an asymmetric scheme, but presumably it has a local significance that might explain it.

Joustra translates the word as: "father's sister; also mother's sister; mother-in-law of the wife; general term of address towards a woman whom one does not know and with whom *ertutur* [the procedure of identification] has not yet taken place"; *terbibi-bibi*, said of a young woman, means to be sick with desire to marry (1907: 71), i.e. with the son of her father's sister. These particulars clearly give an asymmetric cast to the term, and specifically one diagnostic of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, but they do not illuminate the application to MZ.

(14) The bilateral distribution of *impal*, in both the wife-giving and the wife-taking line, poses a critical problem. In particular, the specifications MBC and FZC, as given by Singarimbun, preclude a characterisation of the terminology as resting, without qualification, on prescrip-

tive alliance with the *impal* in the sense of matrilateral cross-cousin.

In earlier publications on the Karo language, however, there is repeated evidence that tends towards an alternative interpretation. Joustra defines *impal* as: "child (girl) of mother's brother (*mama*), child (boy) of father's sister (*bibi*); and since those who are each other's *impal* may marry, and this as a rule [*veelal*] does happen, fiancé(e), prospective spouse, bride or bridegroom" (1907: 22). Similarly, Neumann defines *impal* as: "cousin [male and female], child (girl) of mother's brother (*mama*), child (boy) of father's sister; since a son must marry (*rimpal*) the mother's brother's daughter, also: betrothed, prospective spouse, bridegroom" (1951: 127). These definite statements give a decidedly asymmetric cast to the assignment of *impal*, and of course they agree entirely with the asymmetric mode of affinal alliance. There is a question, nevertheless, about the designation of patrilateral cross-cousins, whom as FZC (203) Singarimbun terms *impal*. Accepting this term as a general designation for cousins, it is unclear by what means the asymmetric denotations reported by Joustra and Neumann are made, but there is no uncertainty about the significance of their reports.

(15) The overall asymmetry of the classification is confirmed by the term *turang impal*, specified as FZD, MBS(w.s.). This is to be glossed, by reference to the former specification, as Z, *turang*, qualified by the attribute of cousin, *impal*. Singarimbun says that FZD "is classified as *impal*, the same as MBD, but she is in addition *turang impal*, the cousin who is like a sister, because like a sister she is not marriageable" (150); and at another place he refers to her "sister-like status" (197). The meaning of the term, therefore, is something like "cousin-sister." For a woman, conversely, the male *impal* is "cousin-brother." Whatever the application of *impal* as a general term for cousin, the fact is crucially important that the cross-cousins who are forbidden to marry are categorical siblings; also, to give due stress to the point, that a man's patrilateral cross-cousin (FZD) is singled out from the class of cousins as a kind of "sister."

Dictionary confirmation of the denotation is supplied by Joustra, who defines *turang impal* as: "male (or female) cousin, viz. the relationship between mother's brother's son and father's sister's daughter" (1907: 234 s.v. *impal*). The entry in Neumann reads: "child (boy) of mother's brother, and child (girl) of father's sister; marriage between them is forbidden" (1951: 127-8 s.v. *impal*).

(16) The bilateral distribution of *silih*, as ZH and WB, presents a difficulty that on the face of it is harder to resolve. The specifications of this term, taken in isolation, go clean against an asymmetric interpretation of the terminology at this level and could be taken as an indication of symmetric alliance. The fact that *silih* is an affinal term, moreover, makes the apparent contradiction still more serious.

The monograph does not respond to the point, but once again the dictionaries do. Joustra defines *silih* as: "brother-in-law (viz. husband of someone's sister); also, though in this case figuratively [*oneigenlijk*]: wife's brother . . . ; generally in address, friend, on the part of a man towards a stranger with whom the *ertutur* [procedure of identification] has not yet taken place" (1907: 202). Neumann's definition (1951: 282) reads identically. These authorities thus make it appear that in some respect *silih* should be taken strictly to denote ZH, and that the application to WB is "metaphorical" or "niet datgene zijnde wat de naam aanduidt" (Koenen and Endepols). This would mean that just as FZD is isolated from the class of *impal* as *turang* (*impal*), so may be FZS as *silih*, thus completing for both sexes an asymmetric categorisation in this genealogical level.

(17) *Kéla*, DH is supported by the consistent specifications ZDH (w.s.) and WZDH, so its exclusively asymmetric assignation is not in question, but three points about this term call for notice. First, although it is characteristic of prescriptive terminologies that cognatic and affinal specifications are conflated, in the Karo case this is already effected in the term *beréberé* by the equivalent specifications Z(S) = DH, etc. Second, *kéla* is redundant to *beréberé* in that it shares with the latter term a number of affinal specifications, viz. DH, ZDH(w.s.), HZDH, WZDH. Third, as we have noted above in the first list of terminological difficulties (no. 12), the specification HZDH carries *kéla* out from the line of wife-takers to that of wife-takers of wife-takers.

The dictionaries yield no enlightenment. Joustra defines *kéla* simply as *schoonzoon*, "son-in-law" (1907: 49). Neumann also has "son-in-law" (1951: 142). In addition, however, Neumann glosses the term with *kekéla*, "to stay and work with prospective parents-in-law", referring presumably to bride-service performed by the future son-in-law. This may imply that *kéla* is distinguished from the class of *beréberé* as denoting a man who is actually, rather than just potentially, married (or betrothed) to Ego's daughter.¹⁴ This is made the more probable by the fact that all of the specifications of this term are affinal.

(18) *Permain* SW, (m.s.) in itself presents no difficulty, with the exception of the assignment (by the specification SWBW) to the line of wife-givers of wife-givers, as already noted in the list above (no. 8). Otherwise, all of the specifications converge on the same position.

Joustra, however, in rendering the term as "daughter-in-law," defines the relationship as "the child of someone's *silih* (*kalimbubu*) and *turangku* [WBW]" (1907: 87). This would mean that *silih* was assigned without qualification to the wife-giving line, which does not agree with Joustra's statement that this denotation is merely figurative. The word itself is said to originate from the Toba Batak *parumaen*, though "in Karo the derivation is not felt, and the word has apparently been adopted."¹⁵ Neumann also renders the term, which he too derives from Toba Batak, as "daughter-in-law," and similarly he defines the relationship as "child of someone's *silih* (*kalimbubu*)" (1951: 232), without mentioning the "oneigenlijk" usage that he elsewhere finds in the usage of applying the term *silih* to a wife-giver (*kalimbubu*).

(19) *Permén*, BC, etc. (w.s.), is puzzling in that its specifications assign it to the same positions as *permain*. The reason for this distribution is not simply that *permain* is used only by a man, leaving *permén* as the term to be used by a woman, since five of the specifications of *permén* are m.s.; in particular, both terms are applied by a man to SW (204, 206 fig. 14) and to WZSW.

The dictionaries give no assistance in this case, since neither (a fact which may be significant) contains an entry for *permén*. This situation is open to the conjecture therefore that *permain* and *permén* may be phonetic variants of one and the same term. The idea is not quite convincing, however, because (a) all of the specifications of *permain* are m.s., and (b) the majority of the specifications of *permén*, in spite of the m.s. exceptions, happen to be w.s. Nevertheless, the identical application of both terms to SW(m.s.) and WZSW leaves the analyst wondering what exactly is the difference, if any, between the phonetically similar forms. It is at this point again that the absence of *permén* from the dictionaries of both Joustra and Neumann, separated in dates of publication by forty-four years, adds force to the conjecture. The matter is made the more unsure, finally, by the derivation of *permain* from Toba Batak: this raises the questions what need there was to import an alien term for SW(m.s.), whether the term was adopted as the m.s. complement to a previously existing Karo term *permén*, and other queries of the kind.

Problems of this order, however, are subsidiary to the ultimate task, so far as formal analysis is concerned, of determining the structure of the Karo terminology taken as an integral form of classification. In spite of the reiterated proofs and indications of asymmetric features, as individual terms and relationships are scanned, there remains to be investigated the possibility of interpreting the terminology as one of symmetric alliance with asymmetric aspects.¹⁶

In order to assess this alternative we have to revert to some of the symmetric aspects that we have already been inclined to put at a discount. Before we do that, however, it should be remarked that the terminological difficulties in the way of an asymmetric construction, taken up above as nos. 1-12, all appear again as difficulties, and by virtue of the same genealogical specifications, in a matrix of symmetric alliance also. I need not take the room to demonstrate as much, point by point, but shall proceed to represent the terminology in a symmetric arrangement as in Table 3. Diagrammatically, a chief difference from Table 2

Table 3. *Karo terms ordered by symmetric prescription*

<i>A</i>		<i>b</i>		<i>a</i>		<i>B</i>
m.	←	f.		f.	→	m.
<i>nini</i>		<i>nini</i>		<i>nini</i>		<i>nini</i>
<i>bengkila</i>		<i>bibi</i>		<i>bibi</i>		<i>bengkila</i>
<i>bapa</i>		<i>nandé</i>		<i>mami</i>		<i>mama</i>
<i>mama</i>		<i>mami</i>				
<i>silih</i>						
<i>senina</i>		<i>impal</i>		<i>turang</i>		<i>impal</i>
<i>impal</i>		<i>turang impal</i>		<i>turangku</i>		<i>silih</i>
		<i>permén</i>		<i>permén</i>		<i>permén</i>
<i>anak</i>		<i>permain</i>		<i>anak</i>		<i>kéla</i>
<i>beréberé</i>		<i>beréberé</i>		<i>permain</i>		<i>beréberé</i>
				<i>beréberé</i>		
<i>kempu</i>		<i>kempu</i>		<i>kempu</i>		<i>kempu</i>

is that the problematical specifications, instead of dispersing the terms affected outwards into apparently superfluous descent lines, cramp them back inwards within the two constituent lines of the symmetric scheme. The consequent distribution creates further obstacles, in addition to the positive indications in favour of asymmetry, to a symmetric construction.

(20) The neat distribution of *nini*, although it looks typical of a two-line terminology, has no such value as an indicator of symmetry, since diagnostic specifications are lacking.

(21) In the first ascending level both *mama*, as MMBS, WMB, and WMMBDH, and *bengkila*, as FFZDH and FZDHF, are assigned to the same location as *bapa*, i.e. to the line of reference (A) as well as to the affinal line (B).

(22) Both *bibi*, as MZ, FMBD, FFZD and WFZ, and *mami*, as WMBW, MMBSW, and WMMBD, are assigned to the same location as *nandé*, i.e. to the feminine side (b) of the affinal line (B) as well as to the feminine side (a) of the line of reference (A).

(23) *Impal*, as MMBSS and FFZDC, falls into the same location as *senina*, B, i.e. in the line of reference in addition to the affinal line.

(24) *Silih*, as WMBS and FZDH, is in the same location as *senina*.

(25) *Turang impal* (FZD), although in the same location as *impal* (MBD) and thus consistently with symmetric alliance in this topographical respect, is a *turang* (Z), qualified by *impal* (cousin), which is inconsistent with affinal symmetry. This terminological distinction of FZD from MBD tends to call into question the equivalence $WB = ZH$ for *silih*. It also supports the statement, by Joustra and by Neumann, that the denotation of *silih* is ZH, and that only figuratively does the term denote WB.

(26) The distinction of *turangku* as a separate category in the location occupied by *turang* (Z) is formally redundant to the hypothetical symmetry. On the other hand, the specifications of *turangku* as WBW, WMBD, SWM(m.s.), and MMBSD(m.s.) all converge on an asymmetric location of *turangku* as wife of the *impal* who is both MBS and WB. The equivalence $MBS = WB$, moreover, makes the specification WB for *silih* seem redundant, and especially in the light of the fact that ZH is not listed among the specifications of *impal*. In other words, by these specifications also it seems that the term *silih* as a jural category should

denote ZH and not WB. This is contrary to symmetric alliance in itself, and it explains the distinction $Z \neq WBW$ as made by *turangku*.

(27) In the first descending level, the location of *beréberé* in the line of reference (*A*), under the specification FZDC(m.s.), is redundant to *anak* (*C*) on the hypothesis of affinal symmetry; it draws attention to the fact that *beréberé* is not also listed as MBDC, which in a consistently symmetric scheme would be the case; and it assigns the term both to the affinal line and to the line of reference.

In the asymmetric scheme, however, the specification FZDC is coherent with ZC, MZDC, FBDC, FZSC, DH, and WZDH in converging unilaterally on to wife-taking locations. Of course, these latter six specifications (ZC, . . . , WZDH) are consistent with symmetric alliance, but it is significant that *beréberé* lacks such specifications as MBDC, MBSC, and WBC, which in a terminology of symmetric alliance would complement the specifications that are actually listed.

HZDH, which in the asymmetric scheme carried *beréberé* outside the wife-taking line, here agrees with FZD(S) (m.s.) in coinciding with *anak* (*S*), but this fact does not reduce the difficulties occasioned by the specification in question.

(28) The specifications of *permain* agree in assigning this term to the location of SW, and they are consistent with a symmetric scheme, with the exception of SWBW, which assigns the term to the line of reference as well as to the affinal line. In this location also it is redundant, on the hypothesis of symmetric alliance, to *anak* (*D*).

(29) The distribution of *permén* is suspect in that it is assigned both to the line of reference (*a*) and to the affinal line (*B, b*). As WBSW it is redundant, by the hypothesis of symmetric alliance, to *anak* (*D*), *permain* (SWBW), and *beréberé* (FZDD). As MBSS it is similarly redundant to *beréberé* (*ZS*), even if we can accept the discrimination of *kéla* as actual daughter's husband that has been proposed above (no. 17). As SW it is particularly redundant to *permain*, since one of the specifications of this term is also SW; and the same is the case with WZSW. In short, *permén* is no less puzzling in a symmetric scheme than we have already found it to be (above, no. 19) in an asymmetric. If anything, it causes more difficulty still in an arrangement premised on symmetry.

(30) The definition of *kempu* lacks specifications that might indicate either symmetric or asymmetric alliance.

In the face of so many obstacles, the conclusion must be that the Karo terminology of social classification is not one of symmetric alliance with asymmetric features, but that it is a classification of asymmetric prescriptive alliance with one clear symmetric feature (viz. the distribution of *impal*) and that there are a number of uncertainties in the ethnography.

It is conceivable, as was stated at the outset of this formal analysis, that the Karo, who contract marriages asymmetrically, might none the less have a symmetric terminology. A real case of the kind is presented by the Garo system (Needham 1966a). But what the Karo actually have is asymmetric affinal alliance and a modified form of asymmetric prescriptive terminology. Construed in the light of the above critique, the classification may be represented as in Table 4. This is organised in

Table 4. *Karo classification constructed by principles*

←		←		←		
f.	m.	f.	m.	f.	m.	f.
			<i>nini</i>	<i>nini</i>	<i>nini</i>	<i>nini</i>
	<i>bengkila</i>	<i>bibi</i>	<i>bapa</i>	<i>nandé</i>	<i>mama</i>	<i>mami</i>
<i>turang</i> <i>impal</i>	<i>impal</i> <i>silih</i>	<i>turang</i>	<i>senina</i>	<i>impal</i>	<i>impal</i>	<i>turangku</i>
<i>beréberé</i>	<i>beréberé</i> <i>kéla</i>	<i>anak</i>	<i>anak</i>	<i>permain</i>		
<i>kempu</i>	<i>kempu</i>	<i>kempu</i>	<i>kempu</i>			

accordance with the principles that seem to prevail, and contestable allocations are omitted. It is literally a construction, intended to exemplify principles of absolute classification and to serve as a framework

for the scrutiny of Karo social forms. It is not presented as a corrected version of the ethnographic evidence, though it could perhaps lead to certain corrections on the part of the ethnographer.

An obvious possibility suggested by Table 4 is that the Karo terminology has changed from a consistently asymmetric structure. In the first place, the discrepancies between Joustra's reports and Singarimbun's monograph, sources that are separated by nearly fifty years, indicate a greater degree of conformity in the past with a regular asymmetric prescription. Second, the preponderance of asymmetric features in the modern form of the terminology gives no reason to think that the Karo mode of classification was previously symmetric and that the asymmetric aspects are signs of a gradual transformation in the direction of asymmetry. Third, although the modern terminology is, to judge by Singarimbun's account, a workable form of social classification, wherever we meet a terminology that contains inconsistencies with what in other sectors of the classification are general principles there is special occasion to consider an explanation in the possibility of categorical change. Fourth, there is a particular interest in the fact that in the hypothetical evolution of Karo classification it is terms in the central (ego's) genealogical level that are inconsistent. This accords with the isolation by Rivers (1926: 59-60) of a widely found class of lineal terminologies in which distinctions by descent line are lacking from precisely this level; and such terminologies can be seen as instants in a general process of evolution among forms of social classification (Needham 1974: 36-8). Fifth, to assimilate the Karo terminology, in this last respect, to the class of transformations identified by Rivers makes a further point against the hypothesis of a preceding stage of symmetric alliance among the Karo. When we encounter a bilateral distribution of a term, such as that of *impal*, this is not self-evidently a sign or a relic of symmetric alliance. It may be such, but in that case the argument needs to be made by reference to symmetric features elsewhere in the terminology, or at least by the testimony of convergent specifications, for the term or terms in question, that are diagnostic of symmetric alliance. In the Karo case the evidences fall considerably short of this degree of proof, so that pending more convincing supplementary reports we are left with the alternative interpretation of the bilateral distribution: namely, that the symmetry of *impal* is the result of the (partial) abandonment, in this genealogical level, of the principle of asymmetry which in other sectors characterises the Karo terminology. On these grounds I incline to the opinion that the Karo classification was more consistently asymmetric

in the past than it is reported currently to be in Singarimbun's ethnography.

V

This appreciation of Singarimbun's commendable monograph, a work that abundantly repays such extended attention, has for the most part been limited to the demonstration of a correlation between the main jurial institutions of Karo society and the prescriptive principle that articulates the terminology of social classification. The conclusion arrived at is that the Karo exemplify a system of asymmetric prescriptive alliance. This is not a matter of arbitrary definition, nor is it arrived at by any tendentious manipulation or controversion of the ethnographic evidence, but it represents the structure of Karo society as displayed in its modes of classification and alliance.

I hope the analysis will have brought out, from a different perspective than that of Singarimbun, how it is that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage among the Karo can be regarded as conforming to "the natural order" of things (156). Also, one can see the better, in this light, the values and governing ideas that lie behind the practice of ritual cross-cousin marriage, "which is supposed to have both curative and protective powers" (157), so that the premonition of misfortune can be averted by symbolically contracting a *marriage* of the right and proper kind. More generally, I suggest, the multifarious facets of Karo life can now be apprehended in a more holistic fashion that responds directly to the distinctive features of the society.

Of course, a great many matters remain untreated, and I cannot pretend that this has been a total structural analysis in the style that has proved practicable and revealing in other cases. And there are individual usages, clearly connected with the themes of this analysis, which remain especially puzzling. An outstanding instance is that the term *nandé*, mother, has the metaphorical meaning of "sweetheart" or "beloved" (47). In certain tales, it means "girl" and "cousin" (Neumann 1951: 197), so that an approachable woman is addressed by the term for the very woman who is sexually the least approachable.¹⁷ Singarimbun says that the maternal connotations of "love and affection" account for the term's metaphorical use in this way; but when the practice makes an affront to the values of asymmetry that inspire the social order, and since the love of mother and of mistress are in any case quite opposed, the reason must lie far deeper. Here, as characteristically in this investigation, we are dealing with social factors that have little

to do with the prejudicial observations about descent groups and extensions and alliance theory that so much disrupt what is otherwise an excellent contribution to Indonesian ethnography and to the comparative study of absolute classification.

In the attempt to arrive at a coherent interpretation of the ethnographic reports, we have in other respects encountered many difficulties and uncertainties. These are not products of Singarimbun's controversial premises, badly misguided though I think these to be, but they have to do with professional considerations in the practice of social anthropology. Some of the obstacles to analysis are of a formal or quasi-technical kind; others are semantic and call for a better explication of Karo words. None of them is factitious, but each raises a problem that in principle is open to an eventual resolution. So long as these problems remain unsettled, on empirical grounds and by an analyst with the necessary authority as an expert on Batak civilisation, even Singarimbun's ethnographic achievement will leave us short of a systematic understanding of Karo society.

In such respects Singarimbun should, I trust, find himself better placed now to carry the analysis further, but the point I wish to stress finally (and reverting to my introductory remarks in section I above) is that even his unchallenged standing as a Karo ethnographer of the Karo has not obviated many problems that to an outsider appear inescapable. That they can be formulated as problems is largely the result of over a century of scientific progress (reviewed in Needham 1971: lx-lxvi) in the study of prescriptive alliance.¹⁸ There was a time when Dr. Singarimbun took this tradition seriously as the basis for renewed work on the comparative study of asymmetric systems in Indonesia (Singarimbun 1959b); and his early account of Karo society (Singarimbun 1959a) had then an uncontentious fidelity to the comprehension of Karo life which I have tried to emulate in the present appreciation.

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NOTES

- ¹ I am much indebted to Dr. Mark Hobart, of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, for the kind service of making photographic copies from Neumann's dictionary (1951).
- ² Succeeding references to Dr. Singarimbun's monograph will be by page only within parentheses, e.g. "(71)".
- ³ Three of the clans, viz. Karo-Karo, Perangin-angin, and Sembiring, are divided each into precisely 18 sub-clans (74, table 7). This is arresting, but no indication is given to a possible significance (cf. 78).

- ⁴ Karo *menek*: to be annoyed, to take something amiss; especially in the case of a relative, particularly a *kalimbubu*, who feels insufficiently respected (Joustra 1907: 154; cf. Neumann 1951: 191).
- ⁵ *Tuah*: blessing, prosperity, good fortune (Joustra 1907: 181 s.v. *toewah*). Neumann, who compares it with the Polynesian idea of *mana*, supplies glosses making a special connexion with the possession of children; e.g. *ertoeah*, to have children, *djoempah toeah*, to be pregnant (1951: 332 s.v. *toeah*).
- ⁶ *Dibata*: God, the gods, the world of the gods; impregnated womb; *i dibatana*, to be yet unborn (Joustra 1907: 133; cf. Neumann 1951: 75). Dr. Singarimbun has not, however, heard the word used to refer to the womb (138).
- ⁷ Further assertions to the same effect are to be found throughout the monograph, e.g. at pages 96, 153, 159, 189, 196-7.
- ⁸ I am not suggesting that the word "alliance", as a technical term, is immune to objection. Actually, it can lead to confusion comparable with that occasioned by "prescription", and ideally it too might better be replaced with some more formal construct (Needham 1973: 177).
- ⁹ "It is this failure to come to grips with alliance theory in general which leads to shortcomings in the analysis of the ethnography presented in this volume" (Stirrat 1975).
- ¹⁰ Given the definitive importance attached to the structure of the categories of social classification, it will be understood that the Karo system cannot be characterised decisively as prescriptive until the Karo terminology has been analysed. (See section IV below.)
- ¹¹ To make sure of the point, perhaps I ought to state explicitly that this mode of "extension" is a suppositious procedure by which is intended to be explained the range of employment of "kinship" categories. This must be clearly distinguished from the use of the word in formal logic, i.e. the range of a term as measured by the number of objects to which it applies, or in other words its denotation.
- ¹² Kipp and Kipp have declared that "Singarimbun's thesis is essentially correct: our own research in Karoland indicates that the Karo do recognise the concept of genealogical extension, and that this idea explains the organization of much kinship behavior" (1976). They could not be expected to do as much in a short review, but they do not make the required argument. It is no more than expectable that Karo should apply relationship terms to previously unclassified persons (assuming this is what the Kipps mean), and that in doing so they should be guided where possible by genealogical considerations. We know in fact that something of the kind is done in the identification procedure, though Singarimbun states that "it is not necessary... for two distantly related persons to know exactly how they are related" (147). But this does not make the case for interpreting the classificatory range of terms, let alone their articulation, as derivative from primary foci or denotata.
- ¹³ "The asymmetric social relationship [sc. of affinal alliance]... defines, in fact, the Karo conception of society" (Barnes 1975).
- ¹⁴ Cf. *Purum maksa* (Needham 1962: 90-92).
- ¹⁵ Cf. "daughter-in-law, ... *parumaen*" (Vergouwen 1964: 185 et passim; see index).
- ¹⁶ Cf. "Some obscurities concerning relatives who are permitted or prohibited to marry might be illuminated by reference to symmetric features in this terminology" (Barnes 1975); "the Karo Batak... have a symmetric prescriptive terminology with asymmetric features" (Barnes 1976: 389). For examples elsewhere of symmetric terminologies with asymmetric features, see the analyses of the Manggarai and Endeh systems (Needham 1966, 1968, 1970).

- ¹⁷ Cf. the Kachin parallel: "It is interesting that pre-marital intercourse between *khri* [ZD, in this context] and *tsa* [MB] is not a serious offence. A man and a woman, if strangers, presume themselves to be in this relationship, but so also do lovers who, in formal flirtations poetry, invariably address one another as *hkri* and *tsa*" (Leach 1961: 46 n. 1); "It is an ancient tradition that lovers should address one another in poetry by the 'illicit relationship' terms *tsa* and *hkri* . . . ; in post-war journalism . . . the words have now come to mean 'boy friend' and 'girl friend' respectively" (29).
- ¹⁸ With reference to the Batak, see especially Van Ossenbruggen (1935); on the "singular *anakberu-senina* system" of the Karo, see his pages 78-9.

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