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Evolving Perspectives on Aboriginal Social Organisation: From Mutual Misrecognition to the Kinship Renaissance

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One of the distinguishing features of Australian social organisation is its so-named classificatory system of kinship, whereby a given term may extend to other people, including genealogically distant kin and even strangers. For example, a father's father's brother's son's son may be called 'brother'. By extending the kinship terms through regular principles, everybody in the social universe becomes kin of some kind, an arrangement called 'universal kinship'. So-called skin systems build on classificatory kinship by adding an extra dimension in which a category name is applied to divisions of people, and specific kinship relationships obtain between these social categories. In contrast, kinship terms in Europe are applied only to members of one's immediate family, with fewer terminological distinctions made as genealogical distance increases. The disjunction between these two social models has been a source of misunderstanding ever since outsiders from Europe began visiting and settling on the continent. In this chapter, we plot the history of settler perspectives on Aboriginal social organisation with special attention given to the rise of comparative kinship as an object of scholarly interest in the West. Although Western scholars in the second half of the nineteenth century became increasingly aware of the global diversity of kinship systems, cross-cultural comparisons of kin systems would also

give rise to overreaching and wrong-headed theories of unilinear human 'progress'. The misanalysis of ethnographic descriptions from Australia laid the foundations for social evolutionist dogmas; however, as we will show, better documentation and analysis of Australian kinship systems would later help to undermine these same ideologies. The twentieth century saw a round rejection of social evolutionism within kinship studies, eventually leading to new diachronic insights that took into account diffusion and transformation. In turn, the 'new kinship' of the late twentieth century began to recognise the enduring power of kinship to express and define collective Indigenous identities.

Social Evolutionism in Australia

For much of the period of colonial contact, European observers in Australia paid scant attention to Aboriginal social organisation. Many considered Aboriginal sociality in terms of a perceived absence of law and structured relationships. For others, Aboriginal systems of kinship, governance and land tenure were noticed only to the extent that they were perceived to coincide with Western counterparts. The very earliest recorded encounters between Indigenous Australians and visitors reveal attitudes that would persist throughout the period of colonial expansion. After being beached for several months in 1687 and 1688 in the Kimberley, William Dampier barely showed any curiosity about the social dynamics of the local inhabitants, remarking: 'Whether they cohabit one Man to one Woman, or promiscuously, I know not: but they do live in Companies, 20 or 30 Men, Women and Children together' (Dampier 1699 [1688], p. 465). In turn, the locals may well have assumed that the foreign visitors were not fully human, on one occasion fleeing and shouting 'Gurry, Gurry' (Dampier 1699 [1688], p. 469); the term has since been reconstituted as the Bardi word *ngaarri* meaning 'devil' or 'spirit' (Metcalf 1979, p. 197).

This kind of mutual misrecognition of social roles and organisation continued to play out in the centuries that followed. On a second visit to the Kimberley in 1699, Dampier (1699 [1688]) identified an Indigenous man as a 'chief' and 'a kind of prince or captain'. En route to Australia, Captain James Cook (1821, p. 90) elicited Tahitian words for 'king', 'baron', 'vassal' and 'villain', but would deny any sociality to the people he subsequently encountered in Botany Bay who 'did not appear ... to live in societies, but, like other animals, were scattered about along the coast, and in the woods'. As he journeyed north, the appearance of an

outrigger canoe at Cape Conway—a technological improvement, in Cook's estimation, on the bark canoes further south—encouraged him to believe 'the people here had made some farther advances beyond mere animal life than those that we had seen before' (Cook 1821, p. 120).

Implicit in these remarks was the emergent progressivist or social evolutionist view that all human societies underwent successive stages of progress from a condition of savagery and barbarism to a state of civilisation, and that innovations in technology corresponded *pari passu* to advances in social organisation. Progressivist ideologies were to define European attitudes to Indigenous people for the next century, and as long as Australian Aboriginals were seen to lack the presumed advancements of the 'civilised' world, there was little hope of discovering anything of value in their social systems. Indeed, colonisers responded to the imagined deficit in Aboriginal social organisation by following Dampier's impulse and projecting titles onto favoured elders. A succession of 'chiefs' and 'kings' with their attendant 'queens' was proclaimed by local administrators, from King Boongarie 'Supreme Chief of the Sydney Tribe' (d. 1830) to King Jemmy 'last King of the Dabee blacks' (d. 1880) (Smith 1992). Gifted with brass 'king plates' in acknowledgement of their declared rank, the Indigenous monarchs were rarely, if ever, accepted as 'kings' by their own communities, a fact conceded to a greater or lesser extent by settlers (see Lang 1861, p. 337; Troy 1993).

By the second half of the century, a subtle but significant assumption had solidified in progressivist thinking: not only were human societies understood to progress through incremental stages of development, but these stages were universal, unilinear and predictable, even if they evolved at different rates for different communities. Although a deterministic (and Lamarckian) model of social evolution underpinned progressivist thinking in this period, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) were to suggest another plausible mechanism, in the form of natural selection, for progressive change over long periods.¹ Significantly, descriptions

1 Influenced by social evolutionists such as E. B. Tylor (1878 [1865]), John McLennan (1865) and John Lubbock (1871 [1870]), Darwin would occasionally defer to racialist hierarchies wherein Africans and Aboriginal Australians were situated somewhat in advance of the apes but lower than Caucasians. 'At some future period', Darwin wrote in 1871, 'the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes ... will no doubt be exterminated. The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in some more civilised state ... than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as at present between the negro or Australian and the gorilla' (Darwin 1871, p. 201).

of 'primitive' communities surviving into the contemporary era were understood as an accurate reflection of European prehistory. Global ethnography now had a new impetus. If, according to the prevailing view, indigenous peoples and cultures were destined to die out or assimilate upon contact with a 'superior' civilisation, the social organisation, languages and technologies of the doomed races needed to be described as a matter of scientific urgency.

Early Documentation and Analysis of Australian Social Categories

Perhaps due to the extraordinary dominance of the social evolutionist discourse in the nineteenth century, observers were slow to document and recognise the complex dynamics of Australian social category systems. However, a handful of settlers deserve acknowledgement for having recorded such systems in the areas they visited. Scott Nind took pains to describe the essential nature of the Nyungar phratries of the Albany region of Western Australia in 1826–29 and reported his findings to the Royal Geographical Society (Nind 1831).² Nind listed 'classes' of the Albany area as Erniung, Taa man or Tem, Moncalon, Torndirrup, Obberup, Cambien and Mahnur, and plotted their structural relationship to each other, making him the earliest outsider to both record and comprehend (to some extent) an Australian Indigenous social category system.³ It is also worth noting that the sailor Captain Barker documented two subsection terms on the Cobourg Peninsula in 1828, but without the kind of understanding Nind displayed of the system involved (see Chapter 9).

By the middle of the century, further examples of Aboriginal social organisation systems in Australia came to the attention of the settler population, and amateur anthropologists put their minds to analysing them, complex and baffling as they were. However, the intricate connections between land, language and kin were not to be easily untangled. The missionary and administrator Edward Stone Parker delivered a lecture in 1854 in which he attempted to plot these complicated relationships,

2 With thanks to Peter Sutton for information about Scott Nind.

3 Phratries occupy the middle ground between social categories and descent groups. They descend in a lineal fashion and were probably groupings of clans, so in these respects they resemble descent groups. However, some of them have marriage rules between them, like social categories. The Nyungar phratries have been analysed as semi-moieties, and do not appear to be linked to territories, at least where Nind collected information, placing them closer to the social categories.

as he had observed them in his role as Assistant Protector of Aboriginals in the Port Phillip District. In Parker's account, each Aboriginal family in Victoria had rights to a 'locality': an area of land inherited from father to son. In turn, a group of families that were 'nearly or remotely related to each other' comprised a 'tribe' occupying a given 'district'. Ten or 12 such tribes formed a 'petty nation' whose members inhabited a bounded territory and spoke the same language (Parker 1854, pp. 11–12; see also Chapter 4). Yet, there was nothing in Parker's model to throw light on the dynamics of the posited 'family' itself in terms of marriage rules or kinship terminologies. At the very least, however, his outline provided a precedent for mapping social and linguistic geographies in Australia, even if systems of land tenure remained a blind spot for settlers well into the 1970s and the era of land rights (an enduring legacy of the evolutionist paradigm was the assumption that hunter-gatherers could not own land).⁴

Two years after Parker's address, the missionary William Ridley (1856) published a short paper on the 'Kamilaroi tribe of Australians' that introduced a new and problematic social dimension to Parker's diagram of land, language and family. This concerned a type of system that did not exist in Victoria, but was found in a large part of New South Wales and, as further information was discovered, in large parts of Queensland and Western Australia. Ridley (1856, p. 288) wrote:

Among many tribes, including those who speak several languages, there are four classes distinguished by their names.

In one family all the sons are called 'ippai' the daughters 'ippātā'. In a second family, all the sons are called 'mūrri', the daughters 'mātā'. In a third family, all the sons are called 'kūbbī', the daughters 'kāpōtā'. In a fourth family, all the sons are called 'kūmbō', the daughters 'būtā'.

By some tribes the name 'baiā' is used instead of 'mūrri'. The following rules are strictly enforced:

- I. An 'ippai' may marry either an 'ippātā' (of another family) or a 'kāpōtā'.
- II. A 'mūrri' or 'baiā' may marry only a 'būtā'.
- III. A 'kūbbī' may marry only an 'ippātā'.
- IV. A 'kūmbō' may marry only a 'mātā'.

⁴ Some decades later, Howitt would produce a relatively sophisticated description of local groups in Gippsland (see Fison & Howitt 1880), while Howitt and Fison (1889) developed concepts of local organisation in contradistinction to social organisation in a series of articles in the 1880s.

Evidently, what Ridley had documented was a system of social categories for modelling marriage preference: a system that, importantly, did not need to rely on overarching ideas such as ‘tribe’ or ‘language’ at all. Even ‘family’ in Ridley’s usage did not presuppose genealogical proximity, and he switched to other imperfect labels such as ‘caste’ and ‘class’ point to the difficulty of finding a suitable semantic fit in English. As is well known, the popular term today is ‘skin’, and the particular schema involving four named skins (as used by the Kamilaroi and others) is now referred to as a section system, a term later introduced by Radcliffe-Brown in 1913. However, it was Ridley’s text and the spreading of the news of sections by Lorimer Fison and A. W. Howitt (1880) that would captivate scholars both in Australia and abroad.

Systematic attention to kinship and social categories in Australia on a wider comparative scale began in the 1860s and continued into the 1880s, coinciding with the era in which progressivist ideology was at the peak of its influence. Social evolutionist theory gave impetus to documentation efforts, especially through the work of Lewis H. Morgan, an American lawyer who organised a massive survey of kinship terminologies across the globe. Although his long kinship questionnaire, or ‘schedule’, has been criticised for both its reductionism and its unnecessary complexities, it was innovative to the extent that it was to be filled out in the language of the local expert, demanding a close and careful collaboration. Further, mechanisms for detecting inconsistencies were built into the structure of the schedule itself. As McConvell and Gardner (2013, p. 3) put it: ‘No other investigation of the period demanded this deep linguistic engagement that confirmed the alterity of the culture under investigation, yet challenged any simplistic analysis of it’.

It was largely from evidence provided in completed and partially completed schedules that Morgan wrote his wideranging work of comparative kinship *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871)—the first study of its kind to propose global typologies of social organisation. While Morgan’s higher-level analysis of the data in this work betrayed an allegiance to social evolutionism, the main methods and typological work was relatively free of such bias. *Systems of Consanguinity* did not include any data from Australia, but Morgan was confident that he had covered over 80 per cent of the ‘human family’ and that it was unlikely that anything significantly new would turn up among the ‘inferior nations’ (Morgan 1871, pp. vii, 467). Nonetheless, he was to include an appendix on Fijian and Tongan kinship, provided by his

correspondent in Fiji, the missionary Fison. Extraordinarily, Fison's data showed that the 'inferior' Fijians and Tongans had a Dravidian kinship system, a fact that directly challenged Morgan's hierarchy of global social organisation and ultimately caused the Dravidian type to be demoted to a lower rung of the ladder.

Australians Fison and Howitt were to collaborate with Morgan and follow his methods and theories in the study of Australia and the Pacific. They collected evidence from correspondents in a number of regions in southern Australia during the 1870s, culminating in their influential work *Kamilaroi and Kurnai: Group-Marriage and Relationship, and Marriage by Elopement* (1880). However, the tide of social evolutionist thought, particularly from Europe, left its mark on Fison and Howitt's thinking, even if they were to remain cautious about its grander claims. While Morgan had dismissed the value of Australian kinship evidence in *Systems of Consanguinity*, his subsequent bestseller *Ancient Society* (1877) was to rely heavily on distorted conceptualisations of Kamilaroi kinship and social organisation to sustain a progressivist argument. For Morgan, the inferred phases of 'savagery' and 'barbarism' could each be further subdivided into a notional lower status, middle status and upper status. These tiers amounted to both a value-based hierarchy and diachronic projection, and in Morgan's view the model was so robust that only one case study for each phase was necessary to sustain a complete picture of human prehistory. Even the fact that no societies in the 'lower status of savagery'—presumed to have lacked fire and fishing technologies—had survived into the contemporary era was no impediment, since this phase could be reconstructed from later ones, specifically those occupied by Australian Aboriginals. Progress through each phase was marked, to some extent, by changes in subsistence and technology; however, it was the systems of social organisation, in Morgan's view, that overwhelmingly determined how far a community had advanced towards civilisation. Accordingly, Morgan proposed a scalar model of family structures that corresponded to his phases of human development. Savage society was organised solely by gender and was characterised by the 'consanguine family' involving marriage between genealogical siblings, while the slightly more advanced 'Punaluan family' was defined by group marriage of brothers or genealogically close males to each other's wives. Admission to the phase of barbarism required the adoption of the 'Syndyasmian family' or the non-exclusive pairing of a male and female with equal rights to divorce, while civilisation was eventually reached via the

‘Patriarchal family’ in which one man had several wives, and ultimately the ‘Monogamian family’ or ‘one man with one woman, with an exclusive cohabitation’ (Morgan 1877, p. 28).

Morgan (1877, pp. 48–9) suggested that Indigenous Australians were authentic exemplars of the lowest surviving rung of humanity (the ‘middle status of savagery’), and that the Kamilaroi kinship system specifically was ‘the most primitive form of society hitherto discovered’ representing ‘a striking phase of the ancient social history of our race’. Morgan noticed that Kamilaroi totems were matrilineal, while the four ‘classes’ (i.e. sections) were further subdivided and named by gender. Moreover, according to evidence supplied by the clergyman John Dunmore Lang, a man and a woman who had not met and were from different tribes would address one another as *goleer* (Kamilaroi: *guliirr*, ‘spouse’) and be accepted as husband and wife, provided they were of the compatible marriageable class. For Morgan, all this corroborated the existence of earlier obsolete kinship systems organised on the basis of gender, ‘group marriage’ and matrilineal descent.

Challenges to Social Evolutionism

It is worth emphasising that Ridley, whose short ethnographic observations had convinced Morgan of the primitiveness of Aboriginal kinship, was not himself persuaded by the same view. While Morgan regarded sections and related systems to be of scholarly interest only to the extent that they exemplified savagery, Ridley (1855, cited in Lang 1861) reflected that the Kamilaroi section system must have been ‘the invention of sagacious and comparatively civilised men’. Later, he was to express the view that Aboriginal kinship represented one of ‘two monuments of ancient civilization’, the other monument being ‘the highly elaborate and symmetrical structure of their language’ (cited in Lang 1861, p. 382). Unusual for his time, Ridley’s appreciation for the unique ‘genius’ of Indigenous languages and kinship systems prefigured the more intellectually generous approaches that would come to prominence in the twentieth century.

Morgan’s (1877, p. 49) contrary insistence that Kamilaroi kinship was rudimentary and primitive could not be reconciled with what he referred to as its ‘bewildering complications’, possibly a reference, in part at least, to the totemic marriage rules that applied in addition to the section rules.

Whatever these may have been—and Morgan did not specify—new field research was to raise plenty of difficulties for nineteenth-century models of ‘savage’ kinship. A key stumbling block was the presumed existence in Australia of ‘group marriage’, or at least a powerful vestige of it. Holding to the theory that the ‘Punaluan family’—in which brothers shared one another’s wives—was a necessary stage of human social development, Morgan overgeneralised from reports of ‘wife lending’, resorted to monosemic interpretations of polysemous terms (assuming, for example, that a marriageable partner was equivalent to an actual ‘spouse’) and failed to grasp the classificatory aspect of social category systems. ‘Under the conjugal system thus brought to light’, Morgan (1877, p. 53) wrote, ‘one-quarter of all the males are united in marriage with one-quarter of all the females of the Kamilaroi tribes’. Morgan (1880, p. 9) put forward the notion that the primordial marriage divisions were a four-term section system in which each section was naturally divided by gender. In this way, group marriageability became incrementally restricted in its evolution towards an eventual state of ‘civilised’ monogamy.

Conversely, Ridley was personally well acquainted with the communities in question and gave no credence to the idea of group marriage. As is clear from their private correspondence, Fison and Howitt also rejected this notion, although they did maintain a facade of support for it in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*. Indeed, much debate in this period between ethnologists (notably the differing opinions of Morgan and Fison) tended to be sterile, based on questionable assumptions for which there was no solid evidence. For instance, Morgan (1872, p. 419) assumed that sections historically preceded moieties and Fison (1872, according to his annotations in Morgan 1872, pp. 424–50) raised the possibility that ‘invaders’ brought in totems and moieties. On other occasions, Fison and Howitt insisted that sections must have been ancient, dating from the time of humans first occupying and spreading out across Australia (Gardner & McConvell 2015).

These and similar misconceptions stem from an evolutionary perspective on history that fails to account for cultural diffusion. Diffusion was almost certainly the mechanism by which sections spread in the first instance and continued to spread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the theoretical arsenal available to Australianists at this time could not admit to that possibility. It was not until the turn of the century that diffusion would come to occupy a more central explanatory role, helping to demonstrate the likelihood that moieties existed prior to sections.

The Dravidian structure of Fijian and Tongan kinship terminologies was not the only challenge to Morgan's model that Fison presented. When Fison returned to Australia in 1871, he continued sourcing kinship data for the schedule, further discovering Dravidian and Iroquois type congruences (McConvell & Gardner 2013, p. 6). The 'inferior nations' would prove to be an increasing problem for Morgan's unilinear scheme, and yet Fison was reluctant to dismiss Morgan's model altogether.

Eventually collaborating with Howitt, Fison maintained a regular correspondence with Morgan and went on to co-author a volume on two south-eastern Australian systems with Howitt, published in 1880 as *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (see Gardner and McConvell 2015 for details of the background to this book and the research that went into it). Morgan, himself, provided an introduction to the work in which he reiterated his theory of group marriage as an early form of primitive social organisation. Nonetheless, in the same volume, Fison attenuated Morgan's strong claim of literal group marriage among the Kamilaroi, while doing his best to salvage the theory as a whole. For Fison, the Kamilaroi section system was only 'theoretically communal' (Fison & Howitt 1880, p. 50), a mere echo of an earlier Punaluan family that was no longer in existence. Of greater interest to Fison were the real-world implications of such hypothetical group marriages in terms of extended relationships between individuals, communities and territories:

Australian marriage—taking into account, for the present, those tribes only which have the Kamilaroi organization—is something more than the marriage of group to group, within a tribe. It is an arrangement, extending across a continent, which divides many widely-scattered tribes into intermarrying classes, and gives a man of one class marital rights over women of another class in a tribe a thousand miles away, and speaking a language other than his own. It seems to be strong evidence of the common origin of all the Australian tribes among whom it prevails; and it is a striking illustration of how custom remains fixed while language changes. (Fison & Howitt 1880, p. 54)

In other words, the system of 'marital rights', as opposed to outright marriage, transcended—or cut across—the bounded and interlocking groupings plotted by the likes of Parker (1854) for Victoria. Moreover, this universalist model encouraged broader-reaching reconstructions of prehistory that might not be readily achieved via language alone—a methodological insight reached earlier by Morgan (1871, p. 3) in a different context.

As for the account of Kurnai social organisation, contributed by Howitt, this too presented uncomfortable revelations for progressivist theory that the writers struggled to accommodate. For one thing, Howitt observed that the Kurnai did not recognise the Eaglehawk and Crow moiety system of their neighbours, but this was not the only evidence of 'progress'. Howitt wrote:

The family of the Kurnai is a far advance upon that of other Australian tribes; for example, the Kamilaroi. In it has been established a strongly-marked form of the Syndyasmian, or pairing family; there is the power of selection by the woman of her husband, and there is descent through the father, although as yet incompletely recognized ... Where we find such a surprising social advance in a tribe which has existed in such isolation, we must, I think, believe that the forces which produced this advance acted from within and not from without. (Fison & Howitt 1880, pp. 234–5)

What follows is a contorted justification for the presumed 'advance' involving speculations about migrations and cultural diffusions.

As descriptions of Australian kinship are more extensive now than they were in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it appears extraordinary that so much hay was made from so little evidence.⁵ To justify the ambitious global schema of Morgan, the relatively meagre accounts of Kamilaroi kinship from Ridley and Fison served as a foundation for an entire phase of global human prehistory. Meanwhile, Fison and Howitt's *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (1880) became wildly influential at an international level, impacting social theorists in anthropology, political science, economics and sociology. It was to be cited in works as disparate as James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1911 [1890]), the sociologist William I. Thomas's *Sex and Society* (1907) and Frederick Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1902 [1891]).

The Twentieth Century

The end of the nineteenth century saw different currents arising in the new discipline of anthropology that virtually swept away the once-dominant social evolutionism. Apart from the diffusionism already mentioned, the German historical school had an impact, especially on

⁵ In fact, Fison and Howitt had amassed much more evidence bearing on these questions, but did not use it in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (McConvell & Gardner 2016).

the new anthropology in America under Franz Boas. Known as 'historical particularism', the focus was no longer on grand evolutionist schemes but on particular histories of sociocultural institutions in regions. Australia, firmly under the banner of the British Empire and its scholars (apart from the brief aberration in the partnership between Morgan and Fison and Howitt), was drawn into a different style of anthropology: the functionalism of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. This would lead to a more radical departure from not only social evolutionism but also, in practice, nearly all forms of diachronic research, as Radcliffe-Brown's (1952, p. 50) ban on 'conjectural history' extended to almost all forms of historical reconstruction not based on written records.

Conversely, in stepping away from speculation, the new twentieth-century anthropology embraced ethnographic fieldwork with single groups. This too was pioneered in Australia around the turn of the century by another two-man team: Spencer and Gillen. Their detailed description of the Aranda (Arrernte) society in Central Australia (Spencer & Gillen 1899) was hailed throughout the world and inspired major figures such as Émile Durkheim, much as Fison and Howitt had fed the appetites of the social-evolutionists of the previous generation.

Radcliffe-Brown, an Englishman, carried out fieldwork in the Pilbara of Western Australia in 1913, and returned to Australia in 1926 as the inaugural professor of anthropology at the University of Sydney. He left his stamp on the department under A. P. Elkin, and on anthropology in Australia. Radcliffe-Brown was particularly devoted to the study of kinship and social organisation. The school of anthropology that he founded was called 'structural functionalism' and the 'structure' in this formulation alluded to the kinship organisation—the core of society in his view—especially among Australian Aboriginals.

After doing further fieldwork in New South Wales, Radcliffe-Brown published his landmark typology of Australian kinship and social organisation systems, *The Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (1931). Rather than a comprehensive catalogue of all terminologies, the volume listed a number of ideal types, having regard to kinship systems, marriage rules and social categories. While taking account of many minor variations, the main structural types he stressed were Kariera and Aranda. Both these names, and those other types, were the names of Australian ethnic groups or 'tribes'. In this respect, he followed the lead of the American

anthropologists who created typologies based on names of ethnic groups, most often those of Native American groups. He did not follow Fison and Howitt in linking Australian kinship patterns to Dravidian.

Radcliffe-Brown's scheme proved effective and it is still generally used today in discussions of social organisation types in Australia. He codified terminology of the field, some of which was very confused for many years, and his standardisation, too, has largely survived. In respect to social categories, he was the first to use the terms 'section' and 'subsection' in his Pilbara work (Radcliffe-Brown 1918, p. 222) and incorporated them into his 1931 work. He also introduced diagrammatic representation and alphanumeric coding of sections and subsections that are still commonly, but not universally, used today (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Kariyarra (Kariera) section terms.

Code	Terms		Terms	Code
A	Panaka	marry	Purungu	B
	mother/child of		mother/child of	
C	Karimarra	marry	Palyarri	D

Source: AustKin, austkin.net.

Table 2: Warlpiri subsection system.

Code	Terms		Code	Terms
A1m A1f	Japanangka Napanangka	marry	B1m B1f	Jupurrurla Napurrurla
A2m A2f	Jungarrayi Nungarrayi	marry	B2m B2f	Jangala Nangala
C1m C1f	Jakamarra Nakamarra	marry	D1m D1f	Japaljarri Napaljarri
C2m C2f	Jampijinpa Nampijinpa	marry	D2m D2f	Japangardi Napangardi

Source: AustKin, austkin.net.

Ethnographic studies in Australia in the early twentieth century began to paint a more detailed picture of kinship and social organisation. Although Elkin, who took over from Radcliffe-Brown at the University of Sydney, had a background in diffusionist anthropology from his London training, he rarely indulged in hypotheses about prehistoric origins of social institutions. The American Boasian school was not encouraged to pry into Australia. One notable intruder was Daniel Davidson who carried out

fieldwork in the Pilbara, not far from where Radcliffe-Brown had worked, and produced *The Chronological Aspects of Certain Australian Institutions as Inferred from Geographical Distribution* (1928)—a topic evidently out of tune with the dominant ahistoricity in Australian anthropology. It dealt prominently with the social categories (e.g. moieties, sections and subsections), reconstructing their history on the basis of their geographical distribution.

The next scholar who brought a revolution in anthropology and thrust Australia back into the spotlight of world attention was Claude Lévi-Strauss, a Frenchman who had done fieldwork in South America. His masterwork was *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, published in 1949 in French but not translated into English until 1967. The focus was on types of marriage across the world. The ‘elementary’ forms of the title refer to marriage between specific classificatory relations, such as cross-cousins, forming an alliance between groups. This practice is found in many parts of the world, and in one form or another was ubiquitous among Australian Aboriginals. At the opposite extreme is ‘complex’ marriage in which an individual can marry anyone as long as they are not of a prohibited degree of closeness considered to constitute incest, such as generally practised in Europe. Australian ethnographic case studies were mined for examples of ‘elementary alliance’. Lévi-Strauss distinguished between two types of elementary alliance: restricted and generalised exchange. Restricted is direct or bilateral exchange of cross-cousins; generalised is indirect or asymmetrical, whereby, for instance, a man may only marry one kind of cross-cousin, and in many cases the MBD or matrilineal cross-cousin. Generalised asymmetrical marriage is well known from parts of Asia where ‘wife givers’ and ‘wife takers’ are distinguished; however, Lévi-Strauss also pointed it out among the Yolngu (Murngin) in north-east Arnhem Land. This asymmetry is also reflected in the Yolngu kinship terminology whereby the matrilineal cross-cousin or wife *galay* is distinguished from the patrilineal cross-cousin or husband *dhuway*.

Many were entranced by the boldness of Lévi-Strauss’s explanatory model. In some ways, it recapitulated evolutionism in placing elementary forms at the beginning followed by transitional forms leading to the complex forms associated with Europe. Others readers were sceptical or downright hostile, mainly reacting to the abstract nature of the schemes and Lévi-Strauss’s perceived failure to identify clearly which groups were involved in the ‘exchange’ or ‘alliances’. Anthropologists dedicated to ethnographic rigour such as Les Hiatt, an Australian working in Arnhem Land west of

the Yolngu, offered a more detailed picture of how kinship and social and local organisation played out on the ground, whereby groups and alliances were not mechanically driven by set structures, but rather flexible and responsive to local political conditions and agency (Hiatt 1965). Lévi-Strauss replied with a dismissive critique of British-Australian empiricism, which was failing to understand the more abstract structures.

Harold Scheffler returned to the task of an Australia-wide kinship typology after working with Lounsbury's (1964) extensionist 'reduction rules' formalism. This approach provides the ability to make formal generalisations over a wider set of kinship terms in single languages and comparatively across languages. Scheffler's (1978) book on Australian kinship is a work of insight and careful scholarship that amends Radcliffe-Brown's and Elkin's models and reinterprets them in terms of reduction rules and another concept of superclasses.

Post-Structuralism and the Kinship Renaissance

In the 1970s, there was a reaction against structuralism. In kinship studies, this was particularly strong—led by David Schneider (1968) who disavowed the universality of the basic components of kinship in favour of a 'cultural' approach, emphasising the local emic and symbolic. The impact of Schneider and like-minded colleagues was not so much to bring a new theory and method to the anthropology of kinship as to undermine existing methods and in some areas banish the dominant structural approaches, whether those of Lévi-Strauss, Radcliffe-Brown or others, from the academy. In some ways, this was a revival of the anti-structuralism of Malinowski (1930), who had complained about 'kinship algebra'. This position found ready allies among students who often found the structuralist approaches too abstract and too divorced from real human interaction. The 'new kinship' and 'relatedness studies' that drew on Schneider also joined forces with the upsurge in gender studies and the general mood that anthropology had been too wedded to models built on Western ideology, such as the emphasis on 'blood ties' and the neglect of other types of relationship that can underly kinship-like relationships. Researchers also expected the rapid transformation of societies to have lasting effects on the applicability of conceptions and networks based on kinship. Today, we realise that exactly the opposite

has occurred. Indigenous groups are relying heavily on kinship and social systems for the definition of their collective identities and to emphasise their cultural and historical uniqueness. The renaissance in kinship research during the last 15 years (e.g. Allen et al. 2008; Godelier et al. 1998; Kronenfeld 2009) encompasses both structuralist work and its cultural critique, recognising the surviving strength of kinship systems and exploring their transformations and histories.

This debate, allied to the old arguments concerning the extent to which social phenomena have a biological or cultural basis, rumbles on today (Sahlins 2013). There are hopeful signs that we will not keep repeating this holding pattern, but instead come in to land and think of ways in which culture and biology can be integrated in kinship, which is a prime candidate for such a solution. In Australia, 'new kinship' has been less influential than elsewhere. The effect of the hesitancy around classic kinship in recent times has led to the neglect of solid work in the area rather than the adoption of new paradigms. This volume certainly demonstrates the continuing usefulness of classic approaches, but we are also looking for signs that we are moving on.

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