

30. Is hunter-gatherer kinship special and (how) does it change? Perspectives from anthropology, linguistics, history and beyond

- nr. of Abstracts: 11

16144 - Network, Collectivity and Culture in the Transition from Primate to Human Kinship

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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How much of human kinship is (1) inherited from the common ancestors we share with other primates? How much developed as (2) a pan-human cognitive adaptation in the course of specifically human evolution? And how much is (3) cultural? Chapais (2008) presents an interesting argument about the connections between these levels – modifying the earlier thesis of Lévi-Strauss – which this paper will attempt to further modify and extend. Regarding (1), Chapais argues that our primate heritage has given us the capacity to think of kinship (with its implications of solidarity and incest avoidance) at two distinct levels (a) a personal network of genealogical connections (which in other primates is traced matrilineally but in humans is bilateral) and (b) a collective kinship identification which, in our nearest primate relatives, operates at the level of patrilocal bands. Regarding (2) he argues that the human capacity for pair bonding enables us to trace personal kinship connections through both male and female descent, and also through marriage. Combined with the preference for exogamous mating, these bilateral network connections create a sense of inter-group connectedness through marriage which pacifies the relationships between rival bands, making it possible for human societies to operate on a far larger scale than those of any other primates. For Chapais, culture (3) is something of an after-thought – accounting for the variability of human kinship but not affecting the fundamental mechanism described above. In contrast to this, I argue that the mechanism would not be sustainable without cultural intervention to deal with a fundamental problem. The problem is a cognitive tension between the sense of intergroup connectedness promoted by bilateral network ties, and the continuing sense of intergroup separateness required by the preference for collective-level exogamy. If connectedness and distinctness are both thought of in kinship terms there is a dilemma: either promote universal kinship, and so rule out marriage and reproduction; or maintain intergroup separateness and forgo the wider unity associated with the sense of shared kinship. This dilemma is resolved culturally by creating a distinction between the whole-society level at which connectedness is stressed, and a within-society level at which conspicuous efforts are made to maintain spatial and social distinctions between kin and affines, thus permitting reproduction to continue. This dilemma, and the means for resolving it, are shared by all humanity but appear with particular clarity in small scale societies. Theoretically there is a double irony in that Lévi-Strauss, whose early Bororo

ethnography showed this two-level cultural system at work, ignored it in the Elementary Structures; while Chapais, who also ignores it, nevertheless provides the cognitive analysis that demonstrates its necessity.

16093 - The Proto-Indo-European kinship terms in *-ter as relics of primordial initiation statuses.

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Five reconstructed Proto-Indo-European (PIE) kinship terms in *-ter (in English they are attested as father, mother, daughter, and brother, the fifth word denoting 'husband's brother's wife' is attested, e.g., as Old Indic yatar-) is a prominent lexical group set in the centre of the PIE kinship terminology and well-attested in most IE branches. Linguists agree that these five words belong to the most ancient layer of the PIE kinship terminology and the PIE vocabulary as a whole. However, no one can give a plausible explanation why exactly these words and notions were of special importance for ancestors of the Indo-Europeans.

The hypothesis I am developing in my PhD thesis and would like to present at the conference states that this lexical group originally denoted social (or rather maturity/ initiation) statuses: mature members of a clan, precisely, the people who have passed through initiations. Relics of (Pre-)PIE initiatory rites could be, e.g., the Indian ritual upanayana and Männerbünde attested in some IE traditions. Of course, these words must have been reinterpreted into kinship terms already in (Late) PIE; otherwise, they would not designate the same relatives in almost all IE branches. It might have happened because of changes in social and family structure.

Such a system of designations could only be formed in a fairly egalitarian society without distinct social stratification, in which the social status of a person was not inherited but gained in an initiation or a series of those. Taking into consideration that egalitarianism is usually a salient feature of hunter-gatherer communities, I suppose that the kinship terms in *-ter were most likely coined in the pre-agrarian/-pastoral epoch when the (Pre-)PIE people were hunter-gatherers.

In my talk I would like to present the etymology of these five kinship terms from the point of view of my hypothesis and, possibly, to give examples of a similar semantic change (initiation status > kinship term) from attested kinship terminologies of hunter-gatherers.

16056 - Alternate Generation Merging in the Absence of Marriage Classes: Some Observations on the Chronotope as a Dimension of Kinship among Hunter-Gatherers

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Alternate Generation Merging is a structural and terminological phenomenon in the systems of kinship terminologies. While it is observed on all continents, it is most frequently found geographically in the New World and the Sahul and economically among hunter-gatherers. The strength of expression of Alternate Generation Merging in the systems of kinship terminologies (the number of intergenerational kin relations designated by self-reciprocal terms) also varies widely but tends to be stronger in the geographic areas where the phenomenon is most widely attested. In some areas it seems to be logically correlated with the social institute of «marriage classes».

However, in a global perspective, a number of other social and cultural traits are found in association with Alternate Generation Merging, including intergenerational name transmission («Khoisan»), reincarnation beliefs (South Asia, the Northwest Coast Native Americans), joking relationships (West Africa), age-grade systems (East Africa, Melanesia), etc. Among some hunter-gatherers with strong forms of Alternate Generation Merging (e.g., Shoshone Indians in North America and, more broadly, Uto-Aztecan speakers) these do not seem to be correlated with any social institutions or belief systems.

In line with the recent ontological turn in anthropology and kinship studies, we propose to re-purpose Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of a chronotope (culturally constructed notions of time and space treated as an interconnected whole) as a new dimension of kinship analysis. Concepts of ecological time, interpersonal reciprocity, the practices of recurrent exploitation of natural resources and the associated patterns of group mobility influenced the totality of social relations and belief systems as well as lexical, grammatical and anthroponymic forms of language and imparted them with reciprocal, cyclical and relational qualities.

As human populations transitioned from ancient foraging economies to the historically attested forms of hunting-and-gathering, agriculture and pastoralism, the original chronotope generated a number of stable social institutions. Inherently cyclical social institutions historically preceded and were phased out by social institutions based on linear logic.

15974 - The dangers of mathematical beauty: are 'pure forms' of Australian hunter-gatherer kinship systems really old?

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Dousset, Laurent (EHESS (CREDO), Geyssans, France)*

In explicit or implicit terms, anthropologists often relate purity of kinship forms and relationships with the idea of precedence. Nick Allen's tetradic theory, or Lévi-Strauss' direct exchange model are probably the best-known elaborations in this respect. Algorithmic, self-explanatory and self-regulatory models of social category systems or of terminologies, depicted by Lévi-Strauss for Australia as being of "crystalline beauty", are thought to reflect the elementary (and thus primordial) forms for institutionalising relationships on the basis of biological idioms.

Correlating mathematic aesthetics with historical ancestry however remains largely an unproven proposition. Combining approaches from behavioural ecology with kinship studies in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea, this paper will attempt to demonstrate that one could as well inverse the statements and claim that the so-called features or layers such as cross-parallel neutralization or Crow-Omaha skewing reflect far better early and contemporary environmental adaptation than the 'classic' Dravidian-type structures can. Indeed, models depicting early colonization of Sahul, research in historical and contemporary Australian hunter-gatherer societies, as well as the anthropology of Papua New Guinean riverine systems seem to indicate that a network-based model is far more appropriate to elucidate social structure and interdependence than binary models can.

15943 - Can hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies have the same type of kinship system: Tlingit and Trobriand societies compared

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Rubel, Paula (Barnard College, Columbia University, New York City, USA); Rosman, Abraham (Barnard College, Columbia University, New York City, USA)*

All of the hunter-gatherer societies of the Northwest Coast had potlatching as an important component of their social organization, not typical of other hunter-gatherer societies. The Tlingit had a kinship system which included matrilineal descent, Crow kinship terminology, etc. We will show that Trobriand society, based upon sweet potato horticulture, had the same type of kinship system and feasting system, potlatch-like, which was identical to that of the Tlingit.

15933 - Extending your family across Australia: mapping pragmatic equivalence of sections and subsections

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): McConvell, Patrick, McConvell, William (ANU, Canberra, Australia)

The two authors of this paper are *ngaji-rlang* 'father and son' in Gurindji. Pat is of *jampijina* subsection ('skin') and Billy *jangala*. Pat was given skin names in 8-subsection and 4-section systems in various other parts of Australia based on this initial assignment by Gurindji hosts. This kind of system of 'pragmatic equivalence' remains active in many regions over very long distances for Indigenous (and some non-Indigenous) people: an almost limitless 'universal kinship categorisation'. 'Pragmatic equivalence' refers to which social category terms are used as equivalents between different language groups. Sometimes the pragmatic equivalents are also related in form, which means normally that diffusion of the forms occurred without permutation. In some areas however related forms occupy different positions – this has been caused by permutation during diffusion, such as the various variants of subsections in Arnhem Land (McConvell 1985). In other cases, particularly in Eastern Australia, the terminological systems of sections are often unrelated to each other in form in different areas, but we know the pragmatic equivalences between them because they were recorded by observers like R.H.Mathews. This paper will map the majority of pragmatic equivalences between sections and subsections across the whole of Australia. This will be presented initially in three parts:

(1) Western Australian sections and Northern Territory subsections; (2) Queensland and New South Wales sections. (3) To complete the picture it is necessary to make the link between the westernmost subsections of (1) and the Western Queensland sections of (2). Here Breen (2002) provides assistance especially on Warluwarric. Once pragmatic equivalences are revealed between these and other Western Queensland systems, equivalences fall into place with the neighbouring and widespread Queensland General Sections and other eastern systems. The mapping will be available on a website linked to the AustKin kinship and social category project and promises new insights into how the section and subsection systems diffused and why permutations occurred.

15928 - Kinship and naming practices among the !Xun of north-central Namibia

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Researchers have recognized kinship and naming practices as the center of Ju (also known as !Kung) socio-cultural organization. However, it is less well-known that the majority of studies on Ju societies have been primarily carried out in only a small number of similar locations. Recently, linguists have distinguished between 11 to 15 Ju sub-branches. Among them, the !Xun of north-central Namibia merit particular attention. Although people who seem to be !Xun appear in studies by revisionists, the distinction between these people and the famous Ju|'hoan has been vague in such studies. In contrast to the Ju|'hoan, about whom there has been heated debate concerning the extent of interaction with neighboring peoples, the !Xun have clearly had a historical relationship with various 'others', such as the #Akhoe (another group of San), the Owambo (a neighboring Bantu agro-pastoral people), colonial governments, missionary organizations, the Namibian government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations. In this talk, I will discuss the role of kinship and naming practices in !Xun society in the hope of encouraging an intensive regional structural comparison of Ju societies.

My study reveals that, although several cognate kinship terms are recognized among the !Xun and Ju|'hoan, their kinship and naming practices are also characterized by the following considerable differences: (1) Instead of the homonymous method, a practice that was prevalent among the Ju|'hoan, the standard generational method predominates in the use of !Xun kinship terms. (2) The !Xun categorize both cross and parallel cousins as classificatory siblings, while Ju|'hoan cousin terms are different from their sibling terms. (3) The !Xun terms for the father's siblings differ from those for the mother's siblings, while the Ju|'hoan employ one term for both the father's brothers and mother's brothers, and another term for both the father's sisters and mother's sisters. (4) The !Xun have a surname called ll 'honi, which is passed on by cross-descent, whereas the Ju|'hoan have no such name. (5) Most !Xun individuals have multiple names, such as the !Xun name, surname, teknonym, nurse name, #Akhoe name, Owambo name, and Christian name. Based on these findings, I will discuss how the kinship and naming practices of the !Xun not only reflect the history of relationships between the !Xun and 'others' in north-central Namibia but have also provided a basis for establishing such relationships.

15891 - Beyond universal kinship categorisation in hunter-gatherer research

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Boden, Gertrud (Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany)

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McConvell, Patrick (Australian National University)

The concept of 'universal kinship categorisation' has been introduced and employed in several of Barnard's publications. It means that everyone in the socio-environment is classified as a member of one or another kin category. Barnard considered it to be a fundamental feature of early and modern hunter-gatherer societies and the foraging mode of thought. It has been linked to an ideology and practice of sharing among hunter-gatherers, supposedly different from that of peoples with other subsistence modes. The concept has been criticized as othering hunter-gatherer societies. The paper will challenge the notion of universal kinship categorisation in theoretical and empirical terms. By looking at different strategies and degrees of including people into kinship categories (e.g. namesakes, sections, etc.) we discuss whether universal kinship categorisation is best explained as a relic of the distant hunter-gatherer past or as a more recent product of diffusion and contact among hunter-gatherer groups..

15876 - The Changing Face of Penan Nomenclature

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Sercombe, Peter (Newcastle University, Bishop Auckland, Great Britain)

Among the Eastern Penan of Borneo, over the last twenty-five years, there has been an increasing application of personal names from other (often 'neighbouring') languages, e.g. Iban or Malay. Traditionally, three categories of Penan name have been documented: ngaran usah an 'autonym', or a given personal name; 'teknonym', a kinship name particularly in relation to parents (tamen 'father', or tinen 'mother', followed by the name of the eldest child);¹ and ngaran lumo' a 'necronym' (a death name designating one's relationship to the immediate kin member most recently deceased). However, there appears to be ongoing attrition across these name categories; in a number of community settings, only necronyms, uyau ('deceased father') and ilun ('deceased uncle' or 'aunt'), are still known, and then only by those above a certain age. There is also ngaran ai, a 'friendship name,' (Needham 1971: 206), given to an other by a close friend in memory of a shared experience. Some younger Penan report never having used ngaran ai, although they are aware of its use by other Penan. Needham (1954 & 1965) argued that the Penan system of death-names is an important indicator of group solidarity, erosion of which was tantamount to the evanescence of Penan identity, suggesting a correlation between decline of necronym usage and assimilation to wider society, with the loss of Penan autochthonous values-system. This paper proposes that changes in Penan nomenclature do not necessarily indicate a loss of solidarity, rather they suggest wider patterns of reconfiguration that reflect changes in what it means to be Penan, as opposed to no longer being Penan.

References

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¹ Teknonyms also occur in other Austronesian languages of Borneo, but not to the same level of complexity as in Penan.

