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**Descent and alliance in an endogamous society:
A structural analysis of Arab kinship ***

Numerous arguments relating to the distinction between "descent" and "alliance" models in the study of social organization have focused upon the relative importance of a rule of exogamy as against that of a "positive" marriage rule in the interpretation of the relations among kinship units. Buchler and Selby (1968, p. 114) observe that in "the context of descent theory, alliance between groups (affinal ties) is brought about by the negative application of the incest taboo", or, in other words, by a rule of exogamy. Likewise they (1968, p. 114) note that for alliance theorists it "is of great importance (in simplified language) where the women come from", or, in other terms, who is designated to give wives to whom. The descent model in essence treats marriage as a negative phenomenon characterized in terms of "whom one should *not* marry". The alliance model, on the other hand, in a more positive vein assumes the question of "whom one should marry" of central importance in either "creating" or "expressing" alliance between groups.

Schneider (1965, pp. 57-58) prefers to view this difference as relating to two "systems". In one system alliance between two groups is *created* by marriage where it did not exist before. In such a system the possibility of the occurrence of a marriage is limited *only* by a rule of exogamy. In a system in which a positive marriage rule is operative, alliance between groups is not created by marriage because it is already there, the groups "are necessarily related in a particular way" (Schneider, 1965, p. 58). In such a system actual marriage simply *expresses* an already established (or presumed) relationship, one for which *both* exogamy and the marriage rule are of significance. Schneider (1965, p. 58) writes:

"In one kind of system, therefore, marriage plays one kind of role in the maintenance of the segment, in its definition of within-unit and between-unit relations. In the other kind of system — and this is the crux of one of the matters — it is not marriage so much as exogamy which maintains the definition of the segment, and of its within-unit and between-unit relations

For such a segment it is only exogamy which is necessary; for segments where a marriage rule obtains, it is both exogamy *and* marriage which are crucial elements in the system."

In both systems then exogamy is a necessary component, the principal difference between them being the presence or absence of a positive marriage rule. In this paper, we examine a system, Arab (Bedouin) society, in which *endogamy* rather than exogamy is a necessary element, a system in which a positive marriage rule, as Murphy and Kasdan (1959; 1967) have convincingly shown, plays a central role in the maintenance of the segment and in the definition of "within-unit" relations, and, in addition — but not so clearly developed by the latter authors — is centrally important in the system's definition of "between-unit" relations.

Thus far, the debate centering upon descent and alliance models has almost exclusively dealt with problems emerging in the analysis of exogamy and cross cousin-marriage. The alliance point of view, for instance, derives directly from Lévi-Strauss's *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949) whose bulk is concerned almost exclusively with the custom of marriage of cross cousins. Adopting what is essentially an alliance view of Arab Bedouin kinship, Murphy and Kasdan (1967, p. 2) "turn their interests to endogamy and parallel cousin marriage in the rather Lévi-Straussian belief that one may derive greater theoretical insight into a phenomenon from the study of its opposite".

Murphy and Kasdan (1959; 1967) focus their attention on the theoretical significance of preferential endogamy in Arab Bedouin society. They (1967, p. 2) see "endogamy, as epitomized by the custom of preferential patrilineal parallel cousin marriage, to be functionally congruent with the capacity of Bedouin society for massive fusion and fission of lineages". They write:

"... parallel cousin marriage contributes to the extreme fission of agnatic lines in Arab society, and, through inmarriage, encysts the patrilineal segments. Under these circumstances, integration of larger social units is accomplished vertically, through genealogical reckoning to common ancestors, and not horizontally, through affinal bonds" (1959, p. 27).

Thus, parallel cousin-marriage in their terms plays little, if any, role in the integration or fusion of units, "genealogical reckoning to common ancestors" primarily serving to define "positive" between-unit relations. Murphy and Kasdan offer no *direct* explanation of how preferential endogamy accounts for such relations. In this paper we go one step beyond Murphy and Kasdan's theoretical account of Arab kinship showing the *direct* implications of patrilineal parallel cousin-marriage for "positive" between-unit relations. We do this through derivation of an idealized representation of the symmetric exchange system implied in Arab preferential endogamy.

Descent and alliance approaches

By alliance theory we follow Schneider (1965, p. 72) in referring to only what Lévi-Strauss, Leach, Needham, or Dumont have said, and by descent theory only to what Fortes, Goody, Gough, or Gluckman have said. As Schneider (1965, p. 72) notes, certainly not all is "peace and harmony" within the ranks of these two groups. It is not, however, our purpose to sort through internal differences of each camp, but rather to point to aspects of each approach which seem pertinent to the system analyzed.

Generally, descent theory can be characterized as treating social structure by setting up *contrast* levels of societal units and using these to arrive at a total picture of a society (Buchler and Selby, 1968, pp. 129-130). Consequently it emphasizes the junctures at which units, such as descent groups, are distinguished, rather than how they are linked (1968, p. 130). On the other hand, alliance theory focuses upon the manner in which groups or segments are joined and in this regard accepts exchange of women through marriage as the natural and fundamental articulatory mechanism.

A primary distinction, as mentioned earlier, concerns the negative conception of marriage of the descent theorists associated with a rule of exogamy and the positive conception of the alliance theorists associated with a positive marriage rule. This distinction, however, is not to be regarded as pertaining to a rigid dichotomy (*i.e.*, rule of exogamy/positive marriage rule) because in terms of "systems", as Schneider (1965, p. 58) points out, exogamy must pertain to both those societies which possess and do not possess a positive marriage rule. Schneider's understanding may be viewed as something of a compromise of descent and alliance positions. The following quotation is indicative of his interrelation in one model of aspects of social structure of significance to theorists of both camps (*cf.* Wagner, 1967, p. 230):

"... To take marriage apart from the classification of kinsmen, or the mode of descent apart from the relationship between segments, or the 'corporateness' of the segments apart from the way in which they are related to each other is simply to distort and to deny their meaning" (Schneider, 1965, pp. 57-58).

Buchler and Selby reach a conclusion similar to Schneider's:

"... two 'kinds of social order' or 'two ways of viewing social organization' — descent *and* alliance — can be seen to be complementary. To stress one as against the other is to lead to confusion. To set both points of view in dialectical relation is [...] to bring order and understanding" (1968, p. 148).

Buchler and Selby's (1968, p. 134) argument is that each "school" (descent and alliance theories) is intellectually committed to a "type of society" and, consequently, neither school has *eo ipso* greater efficacy and productivity in

the analysis of *all* ethnographic examples. They note that Leach seems to agree when he writes:

“I suspect that, in the end, we may have to distinguish two entirely different categories of unilineal descent systems. There is the category into which most of the African lineage systems seem to fall and which would include the non-exogamous lineages of Islamic Western Asia. In this case the ongoing structure is defined by descent alone, and marriage serves merely to create a ‘complex scheme of individuation’ within that structure. In contrast, there is the category of those societies in which unilineal descent is linked with a strongly defined rule of ‘preferred marriage’ ” (Leach, 1961, p. 123).

While we are inclined to agree with the general understanding developed by Schneider, Buchler and Selby, and Leach, we find it curious that Leach should characterize “the non-exogamous lineages of Islamic Western Asia” as belonging to the same society type as the African lineage systems. While “agnatic” lineages appear to pertain to Islamic societies of both Western Asia and North Africa, unlike those of many African societies, the former units *are* closely linked with a “strongly defined rule of preferred marriage”, *i.e.*, one instructing patrilineal parallel cousin-marriage. Furthermore, this rule, rather than creating a “complex scheme of individuation”, appears to be considerably more important than descent in defining the “ongoing” Arab social structure.

Some fundamental problems in Arab kinship

Schneider (1965, p. 47) observes, “... it is only descent rules — more precisely, unilineal descent rules or rigid endogamy — which dispose the whole man to one or another segment of society”. Presumably, in most cases it is clear as to which mechanism, either unilineal descent or endogamy, is primary in the disposition of individuals to specific kinship units. The literature, however, suggests that this is *not* so clear in the Arab case, and that it is not even certain that so-called “agnatic” units (*cf.* Peters, 1960) really pertain to Arab society.

Murphy and Kasdan, for instance, observe that the kinship units of Arab (Bedouin) society “correspond more closely to the bilateral kindred than to the patrilineage” (1959, p. 25). Patai (1965) in substantive disagreement argues that the patrilineage is the fundamental unit of Arab society. Certain structural implications of Arab endogamy described by Murphy and Kasdan (1959) suggest that the basic unit is neither the bilateral kindred nor the patrilineage, but rather what we prefer to call an *ambilineage*. The latter term, derived from “ambilineal”, is used by us to signify a kinship group structured by somewhat different principles than those pertaining to nonuni-

linear descent groups involving ambilineal reckoning of descent (*cf.* Buchler and Selby, 1968, p. 90; Ember and Ember, 1973, p. 351, pp. 364-365; Hobel, 1972, p. 689; Kottak, 1974, p. 489; Taylor, 1973, pp. 283-284). We define "ambilineage" presently and discuss the manner in which such a unit is defined through endogamy and how it differs from nonunilinear descent groups based upon so-called "ambilineal" descent.

Structural implications of Arab endogamy and parallel cousin-marriage also account for a fundamental between-unit relation realized in the Arab practice of temporarily fusing and then fissuring segments, a feature described as early as 1885 by W. Robertson Smith (1966, pp. 62-64, 68-70). This practice, we suggest, bears little, if any, relationship to a rule of unilineal descent, which in Arab society is ostensibly a patrilineal one.

Structural principles and structural analysis

As mentioned earlier, the alliance point of view derives directly from Lévi-Strauss' *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949). Perhaps even more important than the basic theoretical outline presented in that work, is its shift of anthropological attention away from the concrete legal and materialistic aspects of the social group to dealing with kinship on a conceptual and symbolic level (Wagner, 1974, p. 101). According to Schneider (1965, pp. 73-74), one major difficulty with the descent theory approach is its failure to isolate the social group as a *conceptual* phenomenon rather than as a concrete, material entity in the system. Schneider, recognizing a distinct advantage to alliance theory's concern with the conceptual and symbolic, writes:

"... Alliance theory as a theory is capable of dealing with the symbol system as a system apart from, yet related to, the network of social relations. It has a way of dealing with problems of meaning which the descent theory of Radcliffe-Brown and Fortes does not have. Alliance theory, in the footsteps of Durkheim here as elsewhere, is cognizant of the importance of how the actor conceptualizes the structure ('how the natives think' perhaps) and the difference between this conceptualization and an outsider's analytic construct of the system as a system" (1965, p. 78).

By use of the expression "structural principles" we follow Brown (1974), Schneider (1965; 1968; 1972), Schneider and Smith (1973), and Wagner (1967; 1974) in referring to a people's definitions, conceptions, and beliefs pertaining to such matters as marriage, kinship, religion, etc., and to the meanings and symbols connected with them. In this regard our general orientation is more in line with the alliance approach and less like the descent one.

A structural analysis, as intended here, entails more than a simple enumeration of the structural principles pertaining to Arab kinship. We regard

a structural analysis as the working out of the logical implications of structural principles. Murphy (1967, p. 170) summarizes what is in essence our point of view:

“... [An] analysis [is] an effort to find a deeper order behind a very untidy façade. For all the attention that we have given to kinship in anthropology, we really have not gone much beyond Morgan and Rivers. Our main strength in this pursuit, however, is our conviction that there is more to kinship than meets the eye, and I am only suggesting that we go beyond the eye of strict empiricism and reach into structure, not as provided by our informants but as derived from research and analysis.”

Structural implications worked out in this paper, which take Arab kinship “beyond the eye of strict empiricism”, are included in the category of logical facts Wallace (1969, p. 416) refers to as the “tautological or extensional equivalents, or implications, of sets of culturally accepted propositions about ‘reality’”. “Culturally accepted propositions” are similar to mathematical axioms and theorems which constitute the logical bases upon which mathematicians undertake the derivation of new proofs. Just as mathematicians strive to work out the implications of axioms and theorems, *i.e.*, to derive new proofs, anthropologists should approach the tautologies established in structural principles with an eye to realizing most, if not all, of their implications for a kinship system — even if they are not explicitly mentioned nor directly recognized by informants. One important payoff of such an approach has been suggested by Wallace (1969, p. 417):

“... Structural models which reveal certain logical or functional implications for his behavior and for the sociocultural system, of which the informant may be unaware, may provide the ethnographer with convenient heuristic devices for teaching himself or his readers to make useful predictions about peoples’ behavior, and may yield clues as to likely and unlikely directions of past or future cultural change, including the production or elimination of inconsistencies.”

It is in part with the belief that just such a payoff is a reasonable expectation that we have undertaken the following structural analysis of Arab kinship.

Arab parallel cousin-marriage

Structural principles rarely, if ever, are isomorphic with behavioral aspects of culture. While normative behavior in some instances appears to reflect structural principles, rarely, if ever, does it correspond exactly, or in some instances even closely, to a set of beliefs concerning how a society is orga-

nized. Patai illustrates this lack of correspondence in a discussion of Arab marriage:

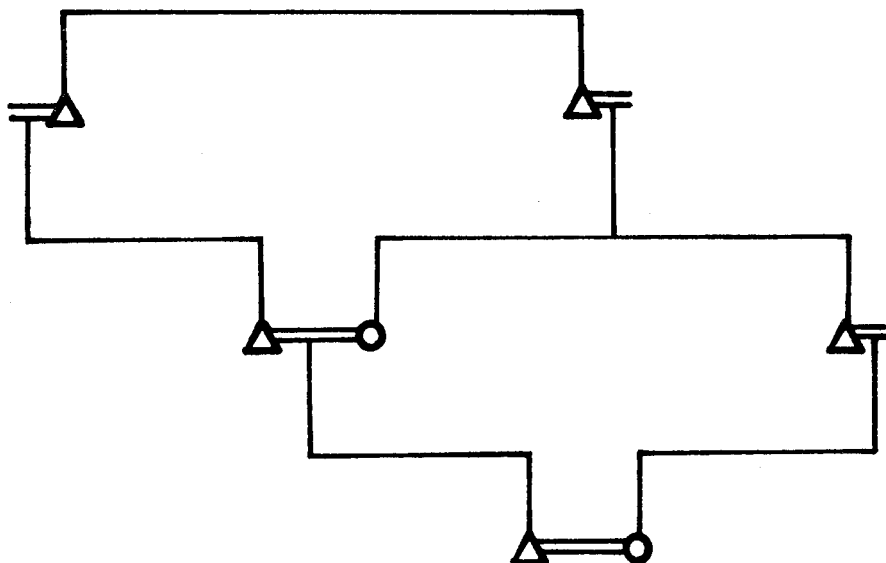
“... while FaBrDa marriage is the *ideal* choice throughout the Middle East, among Arabs and non-Arabs, Moslems and non-Moslems alike, in *practice* only a relatively small percentage of men actually marry (or did marry in the past) their FaBrDa” (1965, p. 333).

Patai raises this point in objection to Murphy and Kasdan’s characterization of the basic Arab kinship unit as a “bilateral kindred”. He finds their argument too grounded in the ideal: “What we are concerned with is Bedouin society as it actually operates” (Patai, 1965, p. 334). Ideally, explain Murphy and Kasdan (1959, p. 22), patrilineal parallel cousin-marriage maintained over two or more generations results in the fusing of maternal and paternal lines of ascent; these in effect become one and the same (Figure 3 illustrates this implication of FaBrDa marriage). Structurally or ideally then, insofar as genealogical reckoning goes, the basic Arab unit is neither patrilineal nor matrilineal but rather *both at once*. It is in part this structural implication of FaBrDa marriage that leads Murphy and Kasdan to conclude that Arab kinship units “correspond more closely to the bilateral kindred than to the patrilineage” (1959, p. 25).

Put in Arabic terms, the ideal form of marriage for a male is with his *bint ?mm* or “daughter (*bint*) of paternal uncle (*?mm*)”. Patrilineal parallel cousin-marriage, Murphy and Kasdan (1959, p. 22) observe, inasmuch as it is the dominant preference, implies marriage with a matrilineal parallel cousin (Figure 3 illustrates this implication). The structural implication is that a *bint ?mm* will be a man’s “ambilateral parallel cousin”, *i.e.*, simultaneously his FaBrDa and MoSiDa (*cf.* Brown, 1973, p. 263).

Lacking a *bint ?mm*, insofar as Arab society is inclined towards endogamy, the preference is for marriage with the closest parallel or cross female cousin (Murphy and Kasdan, 1959, p. 22). Where cross cousins marry, marriage is structured by parallel cousin-marriage, cross cousins ideally being second degree parallel kin (see Figure 1). Murphy and Kasdan (1959, p. 22) “venture to hypothesize that the Bedouin would interpret the relationship in the latter way”.

By interpreting a cross relationship in terms of a second or higher degree parallel relationship, the Bedouin would be, in our jargon, “parallelizing” cross relatives, in essence making them parallel conceptually. The phenomenon of “parallelization” may also be reflected in the fact that wives, be they actual cousins or not, are addressed by their husbands as *bint ?mm*. As we note presently, “parallelization” of cross kin is a phenomenon which may extend as well to the definition of positive between-unit relations in Arab society.

Figure 1. *Cross cousin-marriage structured by parallel cousin-marriage*

Source: Murphy and Kasdan 1959: 23.

Arab descent groups: within-unit relations

A patrilineal bias exists in the Arab system. In Arab society descent is traced through males and only rarely, if ever, through females. Patai (1965, p. 335) assumes a descent theory view of Arab kinship describing patrilineal reckoning of descent as a "mechanism for delineation" of the patrilineage:

"... Descent is important in the Middle East for establishing the ascribed status of an individual, for providing him with the basis of his claim to position, occupation, property, a girl's hand, economic help, armed support, social, legal, or religious functions, a seat in council, membership in larger social units, etc. In all this, and in many more respects or purposes, a man's patrilineal descent counts for everything; his matriline counts for nothing."

Murphy and Kasdan (1959, p. 25) plainly do not claim that the basic Arab unit *is* a bilateral kindred, only that it more closely corresponds to the latter than to the patrilineage: "Bedouin society does not, of course, have bilateral kindreds in the narrowest definition of the term, for parallel cousin marriage

must operate within a somewhat different system" (1959, p. 26). Parallel cousin-marriage converges father's and mother's lines of descent at ascending levels and merges affinal kin with consanguineal collateral relatives (*cf.* Brown, 1973). This makes for multiple links between a limited number of relatives rather than linking kin together in an ever expanding system. These effects of parallel cousin-marriage are stated in Bedouin sentiment: " 'Marry your paternal cousins and both your paternal and maternal relatives will be one' " (Peters, 1960, p. 44).

The principal structural implication of parallel cousin-marriage is the convergence of father's and mother's lines of descent at ascending levels. If descent is traced patrilineally for the purpose of determining descent group affiliation in Arab society, then it is traced simultaneously through both the matri- and patriline, *i.e.*, through *both* lines at once. Given this, it would not alter Arab kinship significantly, if at all, were descent reckoned through the maternal line instead of the paternal. Structurally, one who reckons descent matrilineally has the same claims to position, occupation, property, armed support, membership in larger social units, etc., as one who counts it patrilineally because the legitimacy of these claims resides in the fact of membership in a descent group in which both lines are one.

Inasmuch as both lines are important the basic Arab descent group resembles the unit Davenport (1959, p. 562) calls a "sept". A sept is a corporate descent group of nonunilinear character, membership obtained through either parent according to circumstance. More recently the term "sept" has been supplanted by expressions employing the word "ambilineal", for instance, "ambilineal descent group" (Buchler and Selby, 1968, p. 90; Ember and Ember, 1973, pp. 364-365; Hobel, 1972, p. 689; Kottak, 1974, p. 489; Taylor, 1973, pp. 283-284). Definitionally these expressions all encompass the idea of a group in which one's affiliation is established in terms of descent reckoned *either* through males or females. We find this usage curious given that, as Buchler and Selby (1968, p. 90) note, *ambi-* is derived from the Latin *ambo* meaning "both" rather than "either". Buchler and Selby (1968, p. 90) justify their own use of "ambilineal" in this connection pointing out that "members can activate lines of descent through *both* males and females" (emphasis supplied). We find this turn of words needlessly confusing and suggest the term "sept" be retained for referring to descent groups in which membership is obtained through *either* parent and the use of "ambilineal" restricted to the original sense of its combining form, applying it only in cases in which descent is traced through *both* maternal and paternal lines simultaneously.

We employ the word "ambilineage", derived from "ambilineal", in its above stated restricted sense, to refer to the structurally implied Arab descent unit. An ambilineage is a descent group of nonunilinear character, membership obtained through both parents simultaneously. The significant factor structuring the Arab ambilineage does not pertain to patrilineal reckoning

of descent but rather to parallel cousin-marriage and endogamy. These features bind a limited number of relatives through multiple links and perpetuate a virtually self-contained and encysted descent group over time. Marriage then is the centrally important element establishing and maintaining within-unit relations in Arab society.

Arab lineage segmentation: between-unit relations

All Arabs ideally belong to a single super-lineage whose apical ancestral figure is the prophet Abraham. This super-lineage is bifurcated into two great maximal lineages whose memberships are constituted respectively by the present day Northern Arabs and the Yemenites. Divisions of the two maximal lineages are represented by the general political units, *e.g.*, states, chieftains, tribal groups, etc., which are identical in structure with those of kinship (Murphy and Kasdan, 1959, p. 19).

Kinship units below the political level are recognizably descent groups, but whose hierarchical relationship to one another is not always immediately apparent. Peters (1960) discusses the hierarchical relationship of so-called "agnatic" sections of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica. He notes that there is no rule of thumb for determining which of two or more sections constitute parts of larger sections or lineages at any one time.

When compared with the often clearly defined unilinear descent systems described for many societies of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab kinship situation appears quite flexible, especially with regard to the relationship of descent groups to one another. Murphy and Kasdan's (1959, p. 21) description of the situation in Arab Bedouin society is illustrative:

"Arab Bedouin society is characterized by the potentiality for massive aggregation of its agnatic units, on one hand, and atomistic individualism, on the other. Cohesive relations between and within sections do not have an enduring, continuing quality, but are situational and opportunistic."

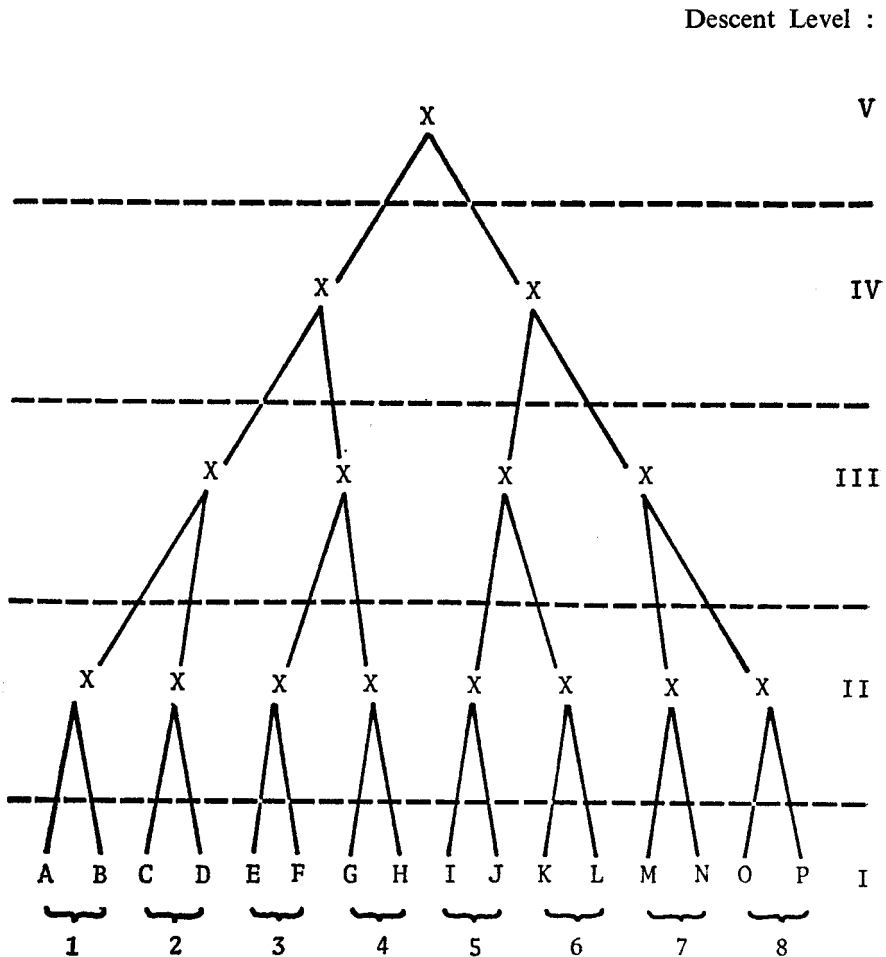
As these authors (1959, p. 27) observe, the beauty of the Arab situation is that descent groups can coalesce when necessary. Agnatic sections usually aggregate and take corporate action only when conflict or danger arises from outside and alliances are needed (Patai, 1965, p. 345; Murphy and Kasdan, 1959, p. 19). The advantage of the Arab kinship situation is its flexibility.

When Arab kinship units coalesce, they do so according to the principle of segmentary opposition. This principle is illustrated in Figure 2. In Figure 2 eight distinct descent groups are represented at Descent Level I. If individual A of Group 1 is threatened or wronged by any member of Group 2, B will take action against members of Group 2 on A's behalf. If A or B is wronged by any member of Groups 3 or 4, Groups 1 and 2 coalesce forming

an alliance against Groups 3 and 4 which have themselves coalesced. If any one member of any one of these four groups comes into conflict with some member or members of Groups 5 through 8, both sets of four groups coalesce forming two major opposing factions. The principle of segmentary opposition is succinctly expressed in the Arab proverb: "Myself against my brother; my brother and I against my cousin; my cousin, my brother and I against the outsider" (Murphy and Kasdan, 1959, p. 20).

The principle of segmentary opposition in a patrilineal society would appear to be based upon the possibility of establishing descent group alliances by determining ever more remote common patrilineal ancestors as links between

Figure 2. Diagram illustrating segmentary opposition



groups (Murphy and Kasdan, 1959, p. 24). Accordingly, X's occurring at Descent Levels II-V in Figure 2 should all be regarded as cover symbols for male ancestors. Given this, lineage segmentation or proliferation of agnatic sections is in terms of brothers who become apical ancestors of new descent groups (*cf.* Murphy and Kasdan, 1959, p. 18). Such an understanding is frequently part of the mythology concerned with the founding of major political units. The Bedouin of Cyrenaica, for example, are descended from two brothers who are considered to be the founding ancestors of the two largest groups of tribes in Cyrenaica (Peters, 1960, p. 29).

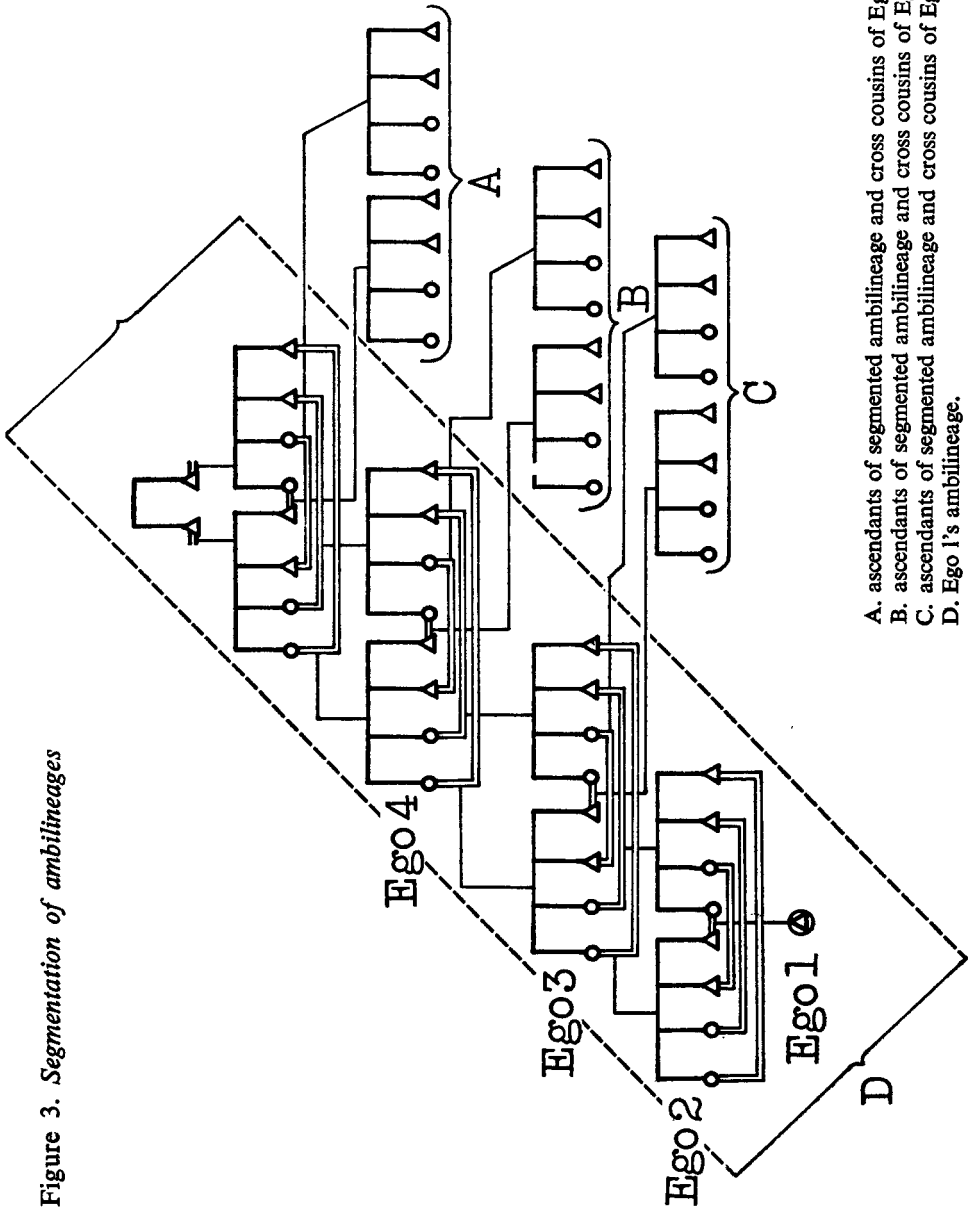
Given that segmentation is based upon brothers, the first degree link between any two descent groups in segmentary opposition is *parallel* rather than cross. But in a society in which the structural principle is ambilateral parallel cousin-marriage and in which the basic kinship unit is the ambilineage, the *impossibility* that lineage segmentation is based upon a first degree parallel link is structurally implied. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 is an idealized (and simplified) representation of a system of symmetric exchange. A symmetric exchange system is derived in terms of a positive marriage rule and endogamy in which wife-givers take wives directly from those to whom they give them¹. Figure 3, which in essence works out the structural implications of parallel cousin-marriage, clearly shows that the definition of the within-unit, *i.e.*, any Ego's ambilineage, is in terms of relationships established principally through marriage (symmetric exchange of female parallel cousins) rather than through descent. In this type of system collateral members of a unit (*i.e.*, ambilineage) from the perspective of a member Ego are his *parallel* kin to the total exclusion of cross relatives.

While parallel relatives are grouped together in an ambilineage which persists intact over time, at each new generation *cross* relatives who are parallel cousins among themselves are segmented from an Ego's ambilineage and constitute their own encysted descent unit. Consequently, it is impossible structurally for lineage segmentation to be based upon a first degree parallel link, rather it is clearly based upon a first degree *cross* bond. Thus a disjunctive kind of between-unit relation is established principally as a consequence of a certain type of marriage.

Considering the Arab conception of the ideal form of marriage, it is not surprising to learn of the achievement of lineage segmentation in terms of a cross rather than parallel link. Parallel kin are preferred above all others as marriage partners; it is the parallel link that first and foremost structures a marriage. Wives who may be only affinally related to or cross cousins of their husbands are addressed by the kinship expression for parallel cousin. If a man marries his cross cousin, the marriage is structured by a parallel link at the second degree (see Figure 1). Murphy and Kasdan (1959, p. 22) hypothesize that the Bedouin would interpret the relationship in terms of the higher degree bond. In Arab society the parallel link unifies; it does not segment.

Figure 3. Segmentation of ambilineages



- A. ascendants of segmented ambilineage and cross cousins of Egos 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- B. ascendants of segmented ambilineage and cross cousins of Egos 1, 2, and 3.
- C. ascendants of segmented ambilineage and cross cousins of Egos 1 and 2.
- D. Ego 1's ambilineage.

Given the significance of the parallel bond as a point of reference for cohesiveness, one could predict a lack of lineage segmentation in Arab society if that link were not offset by a disjunctive cross one.

Figure 3 shows that ambilineages related at a first degree through cross siblings (siblings of the opposite sex) *are related at a second degree through parallel siblings* (siblings of the same sex). The first degree cross link, however, is the bond that ordinarily structures relationships among genealogically connected descent groups and these relationships are apparently ordinarily disjunctive. This is observed by the manner in which heads of "agnatic" descent groups exercise authority and direction. An example raised by Murphy and Kasdan is particularly instructive:

'... A *shaikh* may be merely a family head who in turn acknowledges the leadership of another shaikh, who is the head of the agnatic line, as defined by descent from some common ancestor. The latter shaikh may acknowledge the position of still another chieftain, who bears the same title and is leader of a more comprehensive patrilineal group. Each leader has an active role at a certain level of segmentation as given in the genealogies. But under *normal circumstances*, he exercises authority and direction only when his unit becomes involved in joint action. That is, his duties lie mainly in the representation and leadership of the unit in relations, usually of conflict, with other units of approximately the same scope. Though an influential and prestigious figure, he does not exert direct authority over the internal affairs of his unit. *For the most part, he is the leader of a family-household group*' (1959, p. 19) (emphasis supplied).

Thus it is only in times of conflict and threat that minimal descent groups coalesce, that the leader of a potentially larger descent group exercises the authority invested in that position. In normal, less stringent times descent group disjunctiveness is the rule. Paralleling this structurally is the first degree disjunctive cross bond through which descent groups are immediately connected, or perhaps better put, disconnected.

The coalescing of descent groups, on the other hand, is structurally justifiable with reference to the second degree parallel link. Whether or not Arabs actually justify such unions in such terms is moot, but, of course, the structural implication is clear enough. The possibility of this justification parallels a possibility mentioned in connection with marriage earlier, *i.e.*, that of "parallelizing" cross kin who are spouses or potential spouses by interpreting their relationship in terms of a second degree parallel bond. Through parallelization of cross kin who are members of other related ambilineages, Arabs could conceptually establish those kin as members of their own ambilineage, which structurally, of course, consists in parallel kin alone. This has interesting implications for alliance theory for it suggests a case in which marriage is *analogically* rather than specifically referred to as positively articulating and allying disjunctive segments.

While parallelization may be a structural means for uniting disjunctive descent groups or ambilineages, it is, at best, only a temporary measure. When conflicts subside, descent group aggregations literally fall apart, authority invested in leaders of such groups no longer being exercised. Normalcy then is equated with descent group disjunctiveness, and not with amalgamation. This is understood with regard to the primacy of the first degree cross link. Members of other ambilineages are first of all cross kin, reference to their special status as second degree parallel kin being made only under extraordinary circumstances.

Conclusion

Descent group fusion and fission in Arab society is congruent with a parallel/cross distinction and bears little, if any, relationship in this congruence to patrilineal descent described by Patai (1965) as the significant factor structuring Arab kinship. Inasmuch as the parallel/cross distinction exists as a consequence of a particular kind of positive marriage rule, marriage is the necessary component in the definition of between-unit relations.

The between-unit relations defined by marriage include, of course, the phenomenon of fusion of ambilineages (*i.e.*, positive between-unit relations) as well as that of fission. We regard fusion as best understood through reference to the second degree parallel link as a point of cohesion. Recall that Murphy and Kasdan (1959, p. 27) attribute the integration of social units to genealogical reckoning to common ancestors. But if this reckoning is through the patriline — and it must be in an “agnatic” society — in terms of the type of segmentary opposition implied in symmetric exchange (Figure 3), it is only possible to establish common ancestors at a *third* degree level between any two coordinate ambilineages. On the other hand, coordinate ambilineages are related at a *first* degree through a cross bond and at a *second* degree through a parallel link. It is important to note that these relationships are the more immediate bonds and they do *not* pertain to patrilineal reckoning of descent — this also suggesting the lack of structural significance of patrilineal descent and the importance of marriage in defining the ongoing Arab system. By making this observation we are simply carrying Murphy and Kasdan’s theoretical account one step further, working out logical implications of Arab endogamy and parallel cousin-marriage to which their argument might have taken them if they had pursued it.

Clearly parallel cousin-marriage is the most important element in the definition of both within-unit and between-unit relations in the Arab system, and clearly endogamy rather than unilineal descent disposes “the whole man” to one or another ambilineage (*cf.* Schneider, 1965, p. 47). In this regard “the non-exogamous lineages” of Arab society should not be characterized, as Leach (1961, p. 123) suggests, as belonging to the same society type as the

African lineage systems; rather Arab society should be included in Leach's second category in which unilineal descent is linked with a strongly defined rule of "preferred marriage", the Arab situation differing from that of others belonging to the same category only in that endogamy rather than exogamy is pertinent.

And what of patrilineal descent in Arab society? When descent is reckoned, it is always through males, and we can believe that descent is traced for precisely the reasons outlined by Patai (1965, p. 335), *e.g.* for determining ascribed status, for providing one with a basis for making certain claims, and so on. Patrilineal reckoning of descent, however, does not function as a "mechanism for delineation" of lineages in the broadest sense, because the definition of the ambilineage, of within-unit and between-unit relations, is established primarily in terms of a positive marriage rule and endogamy. Rather patrilineal descent and the genealogical "reality" connected with it provide the explicit context within which endogamy and the positive marriage rule implicitly operate. It is the positive marriage rule, however, that defines the total structure and the explicit context, *i.e.*, patrilineality, might just as well be something else — for example, matrilineality².

Finally, the fact that descent *is* reckoned while marriage functions as the fundamental structuring mechanism suggests another manner in which the descent and alliance positions are complementary. Schneider (1965, p. 74) criticizes descent theory for its failure to distinguish kinship units as conceptual units from their concrete, physical aspects in the total system. The reckoning of descent in Arab society, as described by Patai, involves matters of practical, concrete concern; Arabs trace descent in order to get something done, to resolve specific problems (Patai, 1965, p. 335). The fact that Arabs do participate in such activities *is* important and *should be* researched and analyzed. It does not distract in any way from the principal concern with beliefs and concepts, with symbols and meanings, of alliance theory because it pertains to a different level of analysis, *i.e.*, to the explicit context. But it *does* pertain to one level of analysis among perhaps several making up a "total" analytical domain. Inasmuch as descent and alliance theories treat different levels of abstraction, each possessing its own singular significance for the total analysis, they are and should be regarded as complementary.

Postscript

In 1885 in *Kinship and marriage in early Arabia*, W. Robertson Smith undertook the demonstration that "kinship through the mother alone was originally the universal rule of Arabia" (1966, p. 178). Smith presented an extraordinary array of reasons, mostly anchored in etymological interpretation, for believing Arabian society to have passed through a female priority stage immediately before developing a patrilineal bias.

We do not want to suggest either the validity or lack of it of Smith's thesis, but rather that implications of structural principles relating to Arab kinship as described by Murphy and Kasdan (1959; 1967) and in this paper do not preclude the possibility of a fairly easy transformation from matrilineality to patrilineality. Arab society could direct emphasis upon the father's line of descent to the mother's without disturbing in any manner fundamental features of Arab kinship, and this is conversely true if such features pertained to an ancient Arab society with a matrilineal focus. These features, the ambilineage and the segmentary opposition associated with it, are imperious to all changes except those involving the positive marriage rule and endogamy.

The senior author, Cecil H. Brown (born 1944), is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA. Publications: Wittgenstenian linguistics (1974); "Psychological, semantic, and structural aspects of American English kinship terms", American ethnologist, 1974; "Unique beginners and covert categories in folk biological taxonomy", American anthropologist, 1974; "Some general principles of biological and non-biological folk classification", American ethnologist, 1976 (with J. Kolar, B.J. Torrey, T. Truong-Quang, and P. Volkman); "Semantic components, meaning, and use in ethnosemantics", Philosophy of science, 1976; "General principles of human anatomical partonomy and speculations on the growth of patronomic nomenclature", American ethnologist, 1976; "An explanation of color nomenclature universals", American anthropologist, 1977 (with S. Witkowski). Saad Sowayan, a native Arabian, received his Masters of Art degree (in Anthropology) from Northern Illinois University in 1974.

Notes

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1. Thus far, the debate focusing upon descent and alliance models has generally dealt with problems emerging in the analysis of asymmetric rather than symmetric exchange systems in which cross cousins belonging to different descent groups marry and in which wife giving and wife taking groups maintain these statuses perpetually. Both exogamy and a positive marriage rule are necessary components of asymmetric exchange. Buchler and Selby (1968, p. 115) present an "idealized, simplified representation of a system of asymmetric exchange" in their Figure 5-4.

2. I am indebted to Roy Wagner for the specific framing of this idea.

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