

WORLD VIEWS, JOKING AND  
LIBERATED WOMEN - SOME  
REFLECTIONS ON THE  
APPLICATION OF KINSHIP  
THEORY.

BY

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GRAHAMSTOWN  
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WORLD VIEW & CULTURE  
THEIR IMPACT ON WOMEN  
A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS  
THEIR IMPACT

Edited by  
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## **WORLD VIEWS, JOKING AND LIBERATED WOMEN — SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE APPLICATION OF KINSHIP THEORY**

If sociology can be defined as the science of making the self-evident incomprehensible, then social anthropology can be defined as the art of making the culturally incomprehensible self-evident. It is the second part of that aphorism which I seek to demonstrate this evening with three examples taken from experiences with which I hope you may identify in some way at least. I have chosen to do it through kinship theory as that remains the one aspect of anthropology which has not been pillaged by our more trendy cognates in Political Science, Economics and Religious Studies. Further, kinship theory seems abstract, complex and obscure, — one topic guaranteed to drive our students from the lecture hall, and hence presents the most intriguing problems of exposition.

My method of exposition tonight harks back to one of the roots of anthropology — if we see that concept to mean man's efforts to understand mankind. It is the classical method of parable and exegesis — or, to use the modern term, the extended case study.

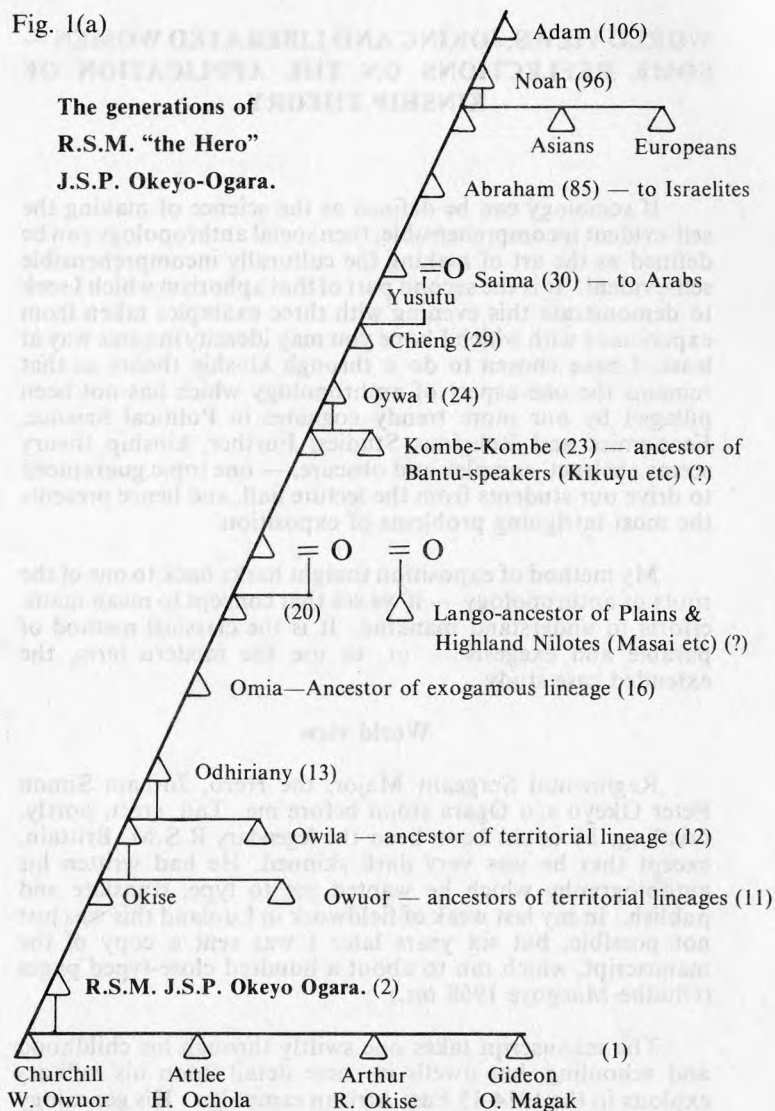
### **World view**

Regimental Sergeant Major, the Hero, Jotham Simon Peter Okeyo s/o Ogara stood before me. Tall, erect, portly, bristling, he could have been the legendary R.S.M. Brittain, except that he was very dark skinned. He had written his autobiography which he wanted me to type, translate and publish. In my last week of fieldwork in Luoland this was just not possible, but six years later I was sent a copy of the manuscript, which ran to about a hundred close-typed pages (Oludhe-Macgoye 1968 ms.)

The manuscript takes one swiftly through his childhood and schooling, but dwells in some detail upon his military exploits in the 1914-15 East African campaign. His genealogy follows (Fig. 1a). The line is strictly patrilineal, but he records the wife of each ancestor, together with the name of her father and lineage. In some cases he remarks where interesting lines divide from his own, and where the ancestor lived or moved to

Fig. 1(a)

**The generations of  
R.S.M. "the Hero"  
J.S.P. Okeyo-Ogara.**



Numbers in brackets indicate the number of generations in the genealogy.

in the course of the migration southwards from the Sudan. Ten generations back we find one eponymous ancestor whose name defines a territorially based and exogamous lineage. Five more generations back there is another, whose name defines the maximal exogamous lineage group. Over the next twelve generations we are taken on a northward ethnographic trek, as the ancestors married into, or lived among, various ethnic groups ranging from south-east Uganda to Egypt. The links include relationships with what were known as the Nilo-Hamites in colonial ethnography but who are now designated plains or highland Nilotes (Ogot 1974 : 83) and with the Bantu-speaking negroids. The twenty-eighth ancestor is Chieng, the last of the obviously African names in the genealogy, a not uncommon Luo name meaning "Light". The father of Chieng is Yusufu, which is Swahili for Joseph. From there the genealogy follows the generations of Jesus as recorded in St. Luke's gospel (Ch.3 vv.23-38) via Shem to Noah, "this is where we are linked with the Europeans and Indians", and hence to "Adam, on behalf of all men, son of the Lord God, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, who is the creator of heaven and earth". (p.101).

In the course of the manuscript he repeats this genealogy, either for himself or for others, no less than six times. For an old man who writes slowly, this was no small labour and, as he put it "Those words stated above are the witness of a person who has walked on foot looking into those matters in different countries. He is R.S.M. J.S.P.O. Ogara". (p102c).

What is expressed here is a world view, a way of relating into a single conceptual framework all the people whom he has encountered during his long military career. Not for him the tortuous measurements and evaluations of linguists, physical anthropologists and archaeologists in order to determine the social, cultural and physical distances between people — the ideology of patriliney solves all such problems. With the aid of his own genealogy he can identify whether he should be involved in any form of conflict and if so which is his own side, who are his allies and who his opponents. Since he has met a very wide variety of peoples in a military career spanning the two world wars, it is necessary to take the genealogy back to the beginning.

But he is saying rather more than that. He is also affirming a unity which transcends the divisions. For him, the process of segmentation does not end in an apex at the level of the clan, or the tribe or even the race. It continues on to the final triumphal assertion of his religious faith which unites all mankind.<sup>1</sup>

The segmentary model is one which we all carry about in our heads, but it is complicated by all sorts of cross-cutting ties — affinal ties, religious affiliations, professional or class affiliations, each tending to have its own internal segmentary structure. But its application in the broad social field where the R.S.M. applies it, has analogies and lessons for the South African word views.

The segmentary structure of South Africa is enshrined in various pieces of legislation and revealed in a great deal of political games-playing. (Fig. 1b) The law defines who shall play in each game at certain levels of segmentation, but at the national or wider regional level, it is one game with the rules less well defined and often disputed.

By law, the whites are one group, legally segmented into citizens and non-citizens — the latter being permitted a limited political role. The citizens are segmented into ethnic folk-categories, different levels of segmentation being reified into substantive groups by political manipulators seeking advantage. Such manipulation provides interest to peripheral observers and frustration to those who find themselves manoeuvred into minority at every stage.

In white politics, the ethnic game is played on one side by calls for a united Afrikanerdom alternating with appeals for “national” unity. The opposition is faced with the dilemma of responding with ethnic politics which are demographically doomed, or with abandoning (or suspending), its ideological position in order to unite with the governing group and, perhaps, divide it from within. The game has gone on so long that the masses seem convinced by it, while the leaders play it or fight it according to their own lights and interests.

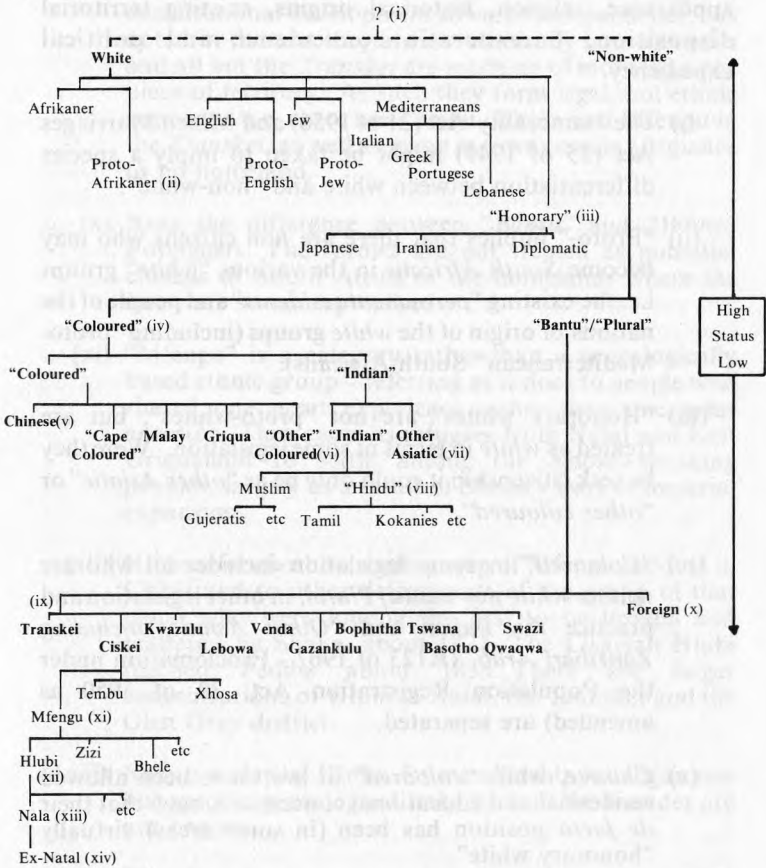
In the “homelands”, the segmentary game is much more complicated, and the existence of the homelands at all is a triumph of ideology and power<sup>2</sup> over traditional segmentary structure.

If we begin with the major cultural and linguistic divisions of South Africa we would expect to find a Tsonga or Shangaan homeland, a Venda homeland, perhaps three Sotho homelands and probably three Nguni homelands. The Sotho could be divided — if they wanted to be divided at all — into the northern group around the Pedi in the Northern Transvaal, the western group around the Tswana in the western Transvaal and Botswana, and the southern group in the eastern Free State and Lesotho. The Nguni could be divided between the Xhosa and

Fig 1(b)

**The structure of South Africa.**

Notes. Names in **bold type** are legal categories





## NOTES FOR FIG. 1(b)

**Notes.** Names italicized are legal categories.

In general the socio-legal status of each named segment is reflected by its position on the chart. The segments are variously defined on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, appearance, religion, historical origins, existing territorial disposition, bureaucratic convenience and political expediency.

- (i) The Immorality Act (21 of 1950) and Mixed Marriages Act (55 of 1949) might be taken to imply a species differentiation between white and "non-white".
- (ii) "Proto-" implies that there are non citizens who may become *South Africans* in the various "white" groups i.e. the existing "*permanent residents*" and people of the nations of origin of the *white* groups (including "proto-Mediterranean" South Africans).
- (iii) "Honorary whites" are not "proto-whites", but are treated as *white* in terms of some legislation. Were they to seek citizenship it could only be as "*other Asiatic*" or "*other coloured*".
- (iv) "*Coloured*" in some legislation includes all who are neither *white* nor *Bantu/Plural*, in other legislation and practice the *Indian* and "*Other Asiatic, including Zanzibari Arab*" (R123 of 1967 - Proclamation under the Population Registration Act, 30 of 1950 as amended) are separated.
- (v) *Chinese*, while "*coloured*" in law, have been allowed residential and educational concessions, such that their *de facto* position has been (in some areas) virtually "honorary white".
- (vi) "*Other coloured*" are negatively defined as a residual category — neither *white*, nor *Bantu*, nor any other designated *coloured/Indian* group.
- (vii) "*Other Asiatic*" a residual category, usually treated as "*Indian*" under Group Areas proclamations.

- (viii) "Hindu" — in practice, some people of Hindu ancestry are now christian. The "*Indian*" population can be divided into several generally endogamous groups on the basis of religion and ethnic origins, only some of which are indicated here.
- (ix) The nine homelands (including the independent *Bophuthatswana* and *Transkei*) are in various stages of constitutional development towards independence. As noted in the text they are not ethnically homogeneous and all but the *Transkei* are made up of more than one piece of territory. As such they form legal, not ethnic segments, e.g. there are Tembu, Xhosa and Mfengu in the *Transkei*, as well as many in towns owing allegiance to no homeland.
- (x) Note the difference between "*Bantu*" and "*White*" Foreigners. The former are not treated as potential citizens of South Africa or the homelands where the latter are so conceptualised.
- (xi) "Mfengu" is a category rather than a genealogically based ethnic group—referring as it does to people who shared one great experience rather than one great ancestor. They came as refugees from Natal and East Griqualand to settle among the Xhosa-speaking peoples, largely as a result of Shaka's wars of imperial expansion.
- (xii) Hlubi refers both to a sub-group of Mfengu resident in Ciskei and to other descendants of the group of that name who were among the first to be broken and scattered by Shaka, about 1822. The Ciskeian Hlubi reached Peddie about 1835. There are larger concentrations of Hlubi in Natal, the Transkei and the Glen Gray district.
- (xiii) Nala is a clan of Hlubi. Its membership is exogamous but specific genealogical links back to the founder are not known.
- (xiv) The founding ancestors of the territorially based lineages came from Natal about five generations back from the present adult generation. (Sources. Horrell 1973; Hammond Tooke (ed.) 1974; Manona, C. personal communication).

the Zulu, with the Swazi linked to their independent cousins and the Transvaal Ndebele a mini-group alone. To segment the Bantu-speakers in this way is equivalent to segmenting the whites between Afrikaner, English, Portugese, Jewish, Greek (and doubtless the inevitable "other and honorary" category). What has actually emerged, of course, is a combination of political expediency and bureaucratic convenience. The Xhosa form two groups, with the Tembu and "true" Xhosa<sup>3</sup> divided between them. The Transkei includes over 80,000 Sotho speakers. To make BophuthaTswana "ethnically homogeneous", nearly half the population would have to move out. (Horrell 1973 : 38).

The segmentation process does not stop at the point at which parliament fixes political boundaries, be they ethnic or geographical. It is clear that in the Transkei ethnic politics is played between the Tembu and the Mpondo, each with its own segmentary allies. In the Ciskei it has been played between the "true" Xhosa and the mFengu. (Manona, C. 1978). If the homelands were to be re-divided into smaller units we might predict that Mpondo and Mpondomise leaders would succumb to the same temptations to beat the ethnic drum when an advantage could be gained.

What I am saying is this, and the R.S.M.'s genealogy with its hundred points of potential segmentation only dramatises the issue; the segmentary structure is a world view built into our minds, just as it is built into the mind of the R.S.M. As articulated, his was pure ideology, uncomplicated by the day-to-day problems of friends, in-laws and matrilateral kin. What I am also saying, and this has relevance for our country, is that the levels of segmentation, identified by the masses and manipulated by their leaders, are not eternal verities, but intellectual constructs associated with appropriate and powerful symbols. As such they can be emphasised or played down, or even, as the R.S.M. suggests, be transcended by an assertion of ultimate unity and despatched to the archives for the delectation of antiquarians and academics. Of this last happening one can offer little hope — the spoils are too great for the strategem to be neglected. If hope is to be sought, and found, in this analysis, it is in the shifts that can take place in the levels to be emphasised or legislated.<sup>4</sup>

My second story brings us from the generalities of national politics to the intimacy of close personal relationships.

### Joking

Charles, a fresh faced young man, sat in my study. He had a problem. He had been courting a very charming young lady for several months and the relationships seemed to be on a matrimonial course. On several occasions when he had visited her flat he had met her unmarried brothers who lived nearby. They were charming lads — definitely brother-in-law material. So, he invited them all to his flat for dinner, which Jean helped him to cook. To his surprise they behaved rather badly. They were loud, seemed determined to drink him dry and were not at all as they had been at their sister's flat. What had gone wrong? In Charles' experience youths had tended to be better behaved away from home than when on home territory.

Charles, of course, was not an anthropologist, so was not aware how widespread is the practice which he had experienced. We call it "joking" in the literature, but that is perhaps too cheerful a term for behaviour which expresses hostility and familiarity simultaneously. The behaviour, which takes such forms as wild levity at a funeral, is associated with relationships which are, at root, conflicting and hence potentially hostile. At the same time there are powerful social constraints against the overt expression of that hostility — violence is not permitted. The hostility is then expressed through the "joking" behaviour whereby one side insults the other and the recipient must take it in good part. Where there is some inequality in the relationship — and wife-givers generally see themselves as doing wife-receivers a great favour — the joking is likely to be rather one-sided. In what may appear paradoxical, when the relationship is clearly one of inequality (such as between generations) then avoidance rather than joking seems to be the more common way of coping with the repressed hostility (Fig.2).

The models for behaviour of this sort stem from relationships with in-laws rather than from relationships with blood kin. Marriage brings people outside the family into the circle, yet not wholly into it. For example, there is no term in English with which to describe the relationship between a person and the parents of his child's spouse — they meet on opposite sides of the church at the wedding, comparing outfits, but there is no verbal symbol to guide subsequent behaviour. Further, it is the girl who is being "given in

marriage” according to our semantic code, not the man. The father and brothers who defended her honour in the past are being discharged from duty, but aspects of the obligation linger on. There is a residue of suspicion, resentment and fear which should not be expressed to the husband. Avoidance between a man and his parents-in-law and likewise between a woman and her parents-in-law is a widespread phenomenon, often formally institutionalised and ritually expressed. Joking may then be the form between the brothers-in-law.

Fig. (2) Joking

<i>Kin</i>	<i>Affine</i>	<i>Stranger</i>
<i>Respect</i>	<i>Avoid</i>	
≠ <i>Adjacent generations (parents, children)</i>		<i>No relationship so no rule for</i>
= <i>Charles' generation &amp; alternate generation (grandparents and grandchildren)</i>	<i>Joke</i>	<i>behaviour - "usual courtesies"</i>
<i>Familiarity</i>		
Near	Us	Them
		Far

*Kin* = kin example

*Joke* = behaviour

us = general principle

(Original source. E.R. Leach—lectures to Cambridge undergraduates)

What Charles had experienced was joking behaviour — not consciously on either side, which adds to the interest of the case. It also suggests an explanation of the origin of the institutionalised and formal joking observed in small scale societies. But why did they “joke” at his place and not at hers?

Another set of symbols is involved here, symbols which, like joking, seem rooted in our culture at a barely conscious level. When a visitor comes to our home, our women cook for him, but they cook as our women and we supply the food (symbolically at least). But when one of our women goes to cook for a man, that is a different sort of statement. There is a common association of cooking, and particularly serving hot food, with domesticity and sexual activity. By going to cook

for him, and even more by being a party to her brothers' presence at his home, Jean was making a symbolic statement to her brothers about her relationship with Charles. And they reacted precisely according to the predictions of fairly old-fashioned kinship theory. Old-fashioned, I say, because not only is the theory quite elderly (Radcliffe Brown, A.R. 1952 : 90ff) but it seems to be applicable to fairly conservative people.

Charles was grateful for my analysis and, to the best of my knowledge, married and lived happily ever after. I have stressed the kinship manifestations of the joking phenomenon because it is in the inescapable bonds of kinship that it is most clearly understood, but analogous situations crop up in everyday life — particularly, I would suggest, in relationships between university staff and their students.

The relationships are, in one sense, analogous to those of adjacent generations in which there is a substantial degree of denied hostility. "*In loco parentis*" can be mistranslated in practice as "parent-in-law". As such, forms of "avoidance" rather than "respect" might be anticipated. This traditional teacher/pupil relationship conflicts with the academic ideal of a community of scholars sharing in a common quest. Status in academe should be achieved not ascribed and arguments judged on their intrinsic merits rather than by reference to the status of their author. The outcome, a relationship which the senior party variously signals as equal and unequal, co-operative and hierarchical, is predictably within the ambiguous category which expresses itself in avoidance and joking behaviour. Such behaviour is often displayed at the "informal get-togethers" to which dons feel obliged to invite their pupils and which the students feel obliged to attend.

To understand the structure of such situations and relationships is to come closer to transcending some of the barriers which so easily arise and retard the learning process.

### **Liberated women**

I said just now that our observations about joking relationships referred to old-fashioned theory about old-fashioned people. By that I did not intend to be derogatory — the theory was appropriate to the context, and that is what theory is all about.

What I want to consider now is a slightly more technical issue, although such a vast amount of bilge-water has passed



under the bridge since the liberation of women first became a fashionable cause, that it is hard to appear technical.

Again, a real problem begins our analysis. Teaching loyally from the classical ethnographies, we have told our students that the Bantu-speaking people of South Africa are patrilineal and patrilocal in their social organization. Descent is measured, as the R.S.M. measured it, through the male line, rights and property are transmitted from father to sons. At marriage a woman goes to live with the husband's people and becomes a part of his household.

When our students returned from interviewing elderly and middle-aged African women in Cape Town, they reported a different phenomenon — not common yet, but clearly growing. A young woman would aim to get married, but only for a short time if she could assure herself of accommodation either as a tenant in a township house or as a living-in employee. She would then get divorced and remain single thereafter, entertaining men friends as she chose, but beholden to none. As one woman put it, "if your friend comes to your house rather drunk, you can shut the door and tell him to go away — but if he is your husband you cannot send him away".<sup>5</sup> Patriliney might be the traditional rule, but the modern unit is increasingly a woman and her children with visiting men. The consequence of migrant labour perhaps? A manifestation of the breakdown of traditional morality and family life in the face of white exploitation? We could almost see the tear-jerking liberal reflex in explanation of this apparent reversal of the traditional pattern.

But as I looked around my peer group, I observed a remarkably similar phenomenon. Middle-class young women, unaffected by the demographic imbalances of migrant labour, are also deciding to rear their families without the presence of husbands. Some have chosen to be single after a divorce, others to start and keep their family without the benefit of clergy or any resident male. The liberal explanation did not seem to apply here, so we turn once more to kinship theory to assist us.

Where-ever we look in the ethnographic literature we find what is commonly called the "matrifocal cell" made up of a woman and her children. This is the natural unit, biologically inescapable in the absence of artificial breeding or surrogate nurturing systems. In polygynous societies, a homestead is commonly made up of several independent dwellings each occupied by a woman and her dependent children — the

R.S.M. had such an establishment, but one need not go as far afield as Kenya to see it. In those homesteads the husband visits each house in turn — and in Luoland if he could not face the prospect could sleep with the goats in a little house beside the byre. If we look at the typical household in our society today, the man is away for most of his waking hours, leaving the woman to look after the children — a *de facto* matrifocal cell with a man who visits after work and pays the bills. Even if she works as well, the responsibility for the maintenance of the household still tends to devolve heavily on her as a part of her “feminine role”. Biologically the male has to contribute very little time or energy to the procreation and fostering of a family, provided that there is some way in which the woman can feed herself and her dependent children.

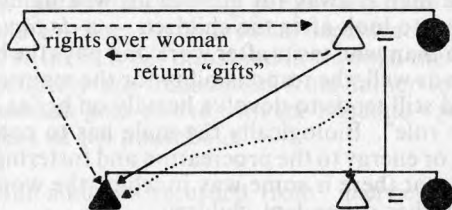
Of course, it is that provision which lets the males into the picture in a big way, and women in general have been perceived by men (and by themselves) as the property of men. We noted as much in our observations on joking just now. For the sake of simplicity we can consider the development of the family as a process in which one man cedes certain rights over his sister to another man — the crucial one being the right to procreate with her, which is brought into being by the marriage itself. But the rights transferred vary greatly, as do the other details of the transaction. We can distinguish three broad categories here. If the husband gains full rights over his wife’s offspring and they depend upon him for their sustenance and inheritance, we speak of patriliney. If the husband gains rights only to his wife and not to her children we call it matriliney although that term is misleading since it is not the mother, but her male kinsman (her brother) who provides the inheritance at least — the woman remains a chattel, not a property owner. If the woman is seen as having a share in the patrimony in a basically patrilineal society, then “her” share of the inheritance is passed to her husband when she marries, to be held in trust for her children. This we call cognatic or bilateral descent. In each case we may note that the matrifocal cell, and particularly the woman, is conceptualised as an item in the transaction, not an active party to it. (Fig.3).

That of course, is an oversimplification and women have rarely sustained the role of passive object very adequately. They have generally had some recourse to the courts on their own behalf, or been able to refuse to enter into a marriage contract drawn up for them by the men. They have even been able to terminate such contracts on their own initiative, though not without substantial cost to their esteem in the eyes of the community and loss of their “resale”



value. Second-hand wives, like second-hand cars, come relatively cheap in most societies, including our own.

Fig. 3



N.B. All transactions are between males

↔ = Marriage exchanges.      - - - - - = Matriliney  
 → = Patriliney      ..... = Cognatic descent (dowry)

I might add, in parentheses, that the semantic contortions performed by an earlier generation of anthropologists about an appropriate English translation of "*lobola*" (the economic transactions which surround a marriage) in order to remove all taint of "selling women", seem comic and curious today. The exercises were inspired by the pious Victorian attitudes of colonial administrators and missionaries who had struggled to stamp out slavery, only to find something apparently identical rooted in "pagan" cultures. The defence of those cultures by the anthropologists was generally less in terms of "we do it our way, let them do it theirs" (c.f. Malinowski 1922:464-5) than in terms of a denial of the whole idea that the woman is a component of a largely economic transaction between male property owners.<sup>6</sup> But I digress.

What is common in the situation of my professional women friends and the African women who decline the joys of legal connubium, is a major shift in the balance of their domestic economy. Their parents' support may have equipped them for their careers but is not necessary to their continued economic survival. Their principal source of income is their own labour and initiative, and that is enough, within the range of customary expectations, to enable them to live. They may obtain some financial assistance from the fathers of their children, either voluntarily or as a result of a court order in divorce or paternity proceedings, but they are not dependent on it. In short, the adult male, regardless of his self-image, is economically superfluous in a small but growing proportion of families at certain points on the economic spectrum.

The process is being accelerated by a number of factors not so directly associated with the domestic economy but impinging substantially upon it. Inflation is one factor, since one effect of this phenomenon is to reduce the real value of inherited wealth in relation to one's earnings in regular employment. At the upper end of the economic scale, death duties have a similar effect. To coin a cliché, paternal power is a function of the proportion of income generated by patrimony as against work. To be disinherited for moral turpitude or by virtue of illegitimacy is a minor sanction if there is nothing much to inherit anyway.

A second factor is related to the first and concerns the size of families. Family size is a matter of economics and fashion (as the wags put it, the election of Robert Kennedy to the Presidency of the United States of America would have been an ecological disaster). A family of two children with an economically active mother is a viable unit; it also falls well within the fashionable range for the professional class<sup>7</sup> and increasingly within the acceptable range for African women, although the latter generally express a preference for more. The tradition of the "quiver full" (Psalm 127,v.5) is far from dead in even urban African communities, but our informants suggest that it is the men rather than the women who are responsible for sustaining it. The easy availability of effective contraception for women is obviously significant in enabling them to choose the number and spacing of their children.

A third set of factors relate to what we may call the social infrastructure. Since it is now socially acceptable, even desirable, for women with infants to work, whether they have husbands or not, facilities are developing to accommodate them. "Granny" remains an ubiquitous feature of stable and relatively poor communities around the world, both rural and urban, and the relative longevity of women has been attributed in part to the fact that they perceive themselves as socially valuable until they are inescapably bedridden. Grandpa however tends to be superfluous after he has retired from productive work and his socially undesirable habits are more obtrusive (Young & Wilmott 1957, Townsend 1957). But day-care centres, creches and nursery schools are mushrooming and are seen as being better for the child than maternal care, not merely an economic desirability or necessity. About eight years ago some staff wives at the University of Cape Town sought the support of the Council to start a nursery school on University property and were rebuffed. Today the student mothers are organising day care for their infants on the premises, albeit informally.

Finally, a growing proportion of women no longer perceive the state of matrimony as either their inevitable destiny or their ultimate dream. The proportion of unmarried women in their late twenties has risen markedly in the U.S.A. in the past decade and it has been estimated that, in the future, up to 30% of American women will choose not to marry at all (Smith 1978). They will participate in a culture increasingly orientated to the needs and interests of single women, with or without children. I see no reason why South Africa should not follow the same trend.

*O Tempora, O Mores* — but this is a revolution with which we are coming to terms, whose end lies beyond our modest vision. As a distinguished predecessor of mine in this chair has recently put it, in prose more eloquent and with evidence more telling than mine:

“the real revolution going on around us, both here in South Africa and throughout the world, is not a change in the forms of government but a change in relationships between generations and between men and women” (Wilson M. 1978)

It is a revolution which has been made possible by a shift in the balance of economic power within the domestic unit, and it is only through an understanding of the dynamics of kinship that we can hope to comprehend it. Until we understand it, we should be wary of judging it in terms of our own received morality. I would go further. To impose a moral judgement from a male-dominated tradition is to invite a more vigorous reaction on the part of those whose actions and lifestyle bring into question the universal validity of that very tradition. You will have observed, however, that I have not cited the evangelical liberationist literature. In part this is because much of it cannot be cited in South Africa — a fact which, as an academic, I deplore. But that is not the only reason I have ignored it, for while I accept the view that a revolution must have its ideological superstructure, and that the pace of change may be modified by the effectiveness of the ideological appeal, my purpose tonight has been to explore the economics of domestic relations, free from ideological obfuscation or flag-waving.

I do not argue that such a revolution is desirable, nor that it will transform all domestic units into matrifocal cells with drone-like males in barely tolerated attendance. I do assert that the emergence of the matrifocal cell as an economically viable independent unit, together with a validating ideological stance, creates an option which, in itself, presents a fundamental challenge to the traditional order of society.

## Conclusion

An inaugural lecture attempts to encompass many things, since it is the one occasion in a professor's career that he can reasonably expect a sympathetic hearing from his colleagues in other disciplines. It also encompasses several more things, which may not be intended at all.

It indicates where the interests of the new person lie. I have tried this evening, through the stories which preceded my exegeses, to convey my enthusiasm for the oft-excoriated domain of kinship studies. In so doing I must acknowledge my debt to a great South African anthropologist and my father in academe, Meyer Fortes. But that is a professional obsession with which I can neither expect you to sympathise nor identify — despite its responsibility for your presence here tonight.

I have also tried to convey, oh hateful term, the "relevance" of the insights provided by our attention to kinship theory. Segmentation as a worldview, symbolised as it is by the biological processes at the very dawn of life, as well as in social structures, is a paradigm which provides both understanding and hope in a strife-torn society and world, reminding us of the relativity and ephemeral nature of apparently bedrock categories. Joking and avoidance theory helps us to recognise the pervasive influence of society upon us, even when we do not quite get the jokes that society plays. Of the liberation of women, I need say no more, except that, like joking and avoidance, through our understanding of the phenomenon we can come to terms with it, even if we cannot love it. And, who knows, men may even, like the proverbial slaves, come to love their impotence.

In a more general, and perhaps subliminal way, I have tried to communicate my vision of my discipline and my own role in it. Social Anthropologists have become accustomed to the charge of the new left and the liberated colonial academics (overlapping but by no means identical categories) that we have been in the handmaids<sup>8</sup> of colonialism (Asad 1973, Magubane 1971, 1973, P'Bitek 1970). Some of the attacks have been unscholarly and unfair, and, of course, there is no clearer vision than hindsight through the telescopic lens of ideological commitment. But it is hard to deny the charge for the generation whose leader wrote:

"To a very limited extent [the inevitable process of change] can be controlled by the colonial administration, and it is obvious that the effectiveness of any action taken by an administration is dependant upon the knowledge

they have at their disposal about the native society. ....A wise anthropologist will not try to tell an administrator what he ought to do; it is his special task to provide the scientifically collected and analysed knowledge that the administrator can use if he likes (Radcliffe Brown 1951:85)

In a sense, the anthropologists of that generation had little choice if they were to publish the truth as they perceived it. Once in print, their material was available to all, and those who possessed political power were in the best position to use the material to sustain their hegemony. At the same time, the generation of anthropologists, with whom I would include my distinguished predecessors, acted as advocates of the politically weak and inarticulate in the courts of the colonial powers, quietly, courageously and sometimes effectively.

My own vision of anthropology is not limited to "comparative savagery" — comparing the pre-colonial Tiv of Nigeria with the Nuer of the Sudan, for example (Sahlins 1961) — although only a fool would dismiss the insights into man gained by the scholars who do such things. My vision includes you and me, our students and our neighbours of all language groups and cultural traditions, but is rooted firmly in the theoretical and methodological foundations of social anthropology. It remains dominated by participant observation as a method of study, time-consuming though that may be. It remains comparative — reaching understanding through comparing R.S.M.Okeyo with the architects of apartheid, or the middle-class "madams" with their middle-aged "maids". Finally, it is problem orientated. Anthropological theory was a mongrel born out of pure philosophical reason, religious speculation and very personal experience in the field. It has gained a pedigree long enough to give it the respectability of the royal patronage in its British learned society, but like the palamino horse, it depends upon regular infusions from its parental stocks to maintain its distinctive colour and virility. The problem — be it that of a confused nation, a confused student, or a confused sex — provides the focus for that fruitful interaction.

I have said enough for one night. My ethnographic reading into the phenomenon of rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960) assures me that once the initiand has completed his ordeal, a libation is offered to the spirits, generally in the form of liquids conducive to transformed states of consciousness. Fermentation rather than infusion is the favoured method of producing those liquids, but if the final libation does not follow shortly, I fear that torpor will overwhelm you and the rite of passage remain incomplete.

## FOOTNOTES

1. This theme was common in sermons preached in Luo churches when whites were present — primarily through exegeses of the story of Noah and his sons (Whisson 1964: 166).
2. Power, as defined by De Crespigny (1968: 192) “that which an actor possesses insofar as he is able to move or alter the will of others so as to produce results in conformity with his own will”.
3. By “true” Xhosa we mean the *Gcaleka* and *Rarabe*, together with the *Gqunukhwebe* and some other associated groups, as distinct from the much larger Xhosa linguistic group.
4. I am indebted to Bailey, F.G. 1969 and Boissevain, J. 1974 for the theory and style of much of the foregoing analysis.
5. Mrs. van der Vliet of Rhodes University has collected much corroborative evidence of this phenomenon in the Grahamstown area. (personal communication). Pauw (1963 pp 150, 147) noted the existence of families developing around an unmarried mother but does not suggest that this is a matter of deliberate choice. Preston-Whyte (1978) in a more detailed discussion of “Families without marriage” implies that such families develop more by force of circumstance than by individual choice.
6. Gray (1960) should have laid the ethnographic ghost to rest, but it continues to haunt the literature. c.f. Hammond Tooke (ed.) 1974 in which Sansom (P.160 ff), while specifically dealing with the economic significance of “bridewealth”, does not incorporate the women themselves as material elements in the transaction. Preston-Whyte (p.187 ff) likewise avoids reference to the economic evaluation of the woman herself in the discussion of the transfer of rights over her, although she is clearly objectified by the legal transactions.
7. More than half the children in Britain are members of families with one or two children. Smith (1978).
8. Note the sexist innuendo.



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