Let me start by saying, somewhat defensively, that if you’ve taken this course to hear about (a) Aboriginal Australian sexual practices, (b) Aboriginal Australian drug-taking habits, and/or (c) how Aboriginal Australians have been hurt by White people, you’re in the wrong class. I’ll have only a little to say about the first topic, and nothing at all to say about the second. As for the third, well, I’ll deal a fair bit with how Aboriginal Australians have been affected by contact with Europeans and others, but not from the melodramatic perspective that commentator George Will has called “the victim sweepstakes.” This is itself a sort of primitivism that I deal with early in the course, and it deserves analysis. But if you want to play the sweepstakes in earnest, try (say) Women’s Studies rather than a class of mine.

What I do want to deal with are Aboriginal Australian religion and kinship – including how anthropologists have thought about these things, the conclusions they’ve reached, and the evidence for and/or against these conclusions. You need to be advised here that, although you may find Aboriginal religion of interest, you will almost certainly find Aboriginal kinship intellectually intimidating.

The main texts for this course are Robert Tonkinson, *The Mardu Aborigines* (hereafter rendered simply as Tonkinson); my own *Social organization in Aboriginal Australia* (hereafter Shapiro); and Donald Williams, *Exploring Aboriginal kinship* (hereafter Williams). Tonkinson is available at New Jersey Books. Shapiro and Williams have been reprinted at my request and are part of a course packet that includes several other readings. These are available either at NJ Books or from University Publishing Solutions (732-220-1211).

Your course grade will depend on two multiple-choice open-book exams, plus an optional essay. If you choose to do only the exams, each will count for 50% of your grade. If you choose the essay as well, it will count for 50%, with each of the exams counting for 25%. Note that the essay can thus either raise or lower your course grade. I encourage student participation in class and will “up” the grade of people who participate regularly – usually by a notch (e.g. B to B+). There is also an attendance requirement. You are entitled to three unexplained absences, after which your course grade drops a notch for each unexplained absence.

I’ll be in my office at least an hour and a half before each class meeting. It’s in the Ruth Adams Building, Rm 312. I can also be reached via email at Ws1369@aol.com

1. Introduction

(1) Shapiro, pp 1-7

(2) Tonkinson, pp 1-9
2. “Ethnic units” and social fields

(3) Tonkinson, pp 10-18

(4) Shapiro, pp 8-20

(5) Francesca Merlan, “Land, language, and social identity in Aboriginal Australia” (reader)

3. Aboriginal attachment to land

(6) David Lewis, “Observations on route finding and spatial orientation among the Aboriginal peoples of the Western Desert region of Australia” (reader)

(7) Williams, pp 84-93

(8) Tonkinson, pp 19-56, 65-72

(9) Nancy Munn, “The transformation of subjects into objects in Walbiri and Pitjantjatjara myth” (reader)

(10) Anthony Redmond, “Places that move” (reader)

(11) John Morton, “Singing subjects and sacred objects” (reader)

4. Aboriginal ritual: general considerations

(12) Tonkinson, pp 79-142

(13) Warren Shapiro, “Ritual kinship, ritual incorporation, and the denial of death” (reader)

(14) Warren Shapiro, “The quest for purity in anthropological inquiry” (reader)

(15) Nancy Munn, “The spatial representation of cosmic order in Walbiri iconography” (reader)

(16) Valda Blundell, “Symbolic systems and cultural continuity in northwest Australia” (reader)

5. Aboriginal ritual: male initiation

(17) Lester Hiatt, “Swallowing and regurgitation in Australian myth and rite” (reader)
(18) Nancy Munn, “The effectiveness of symbols in Murungin rite and myth” (reader)

(19) John Morton, “Totemism now and then” (reader)

6. The microsociology of everyday life

(20) Shapiro, pp 21-26

(21) Tonkinson, pp 143-59

(22) John Haviland, “Guugu Yimidhirr brother-in-law language” (reader)

(23) Kenneth Liberman, “The organization of talk in Aboriginal community decision-making” (reader)

7. Matriliny, moiety systems, and egocentric kin-classes

(24) Williams, pp 14-29, 32-47, 50-63

(25) Tonkinson, pp 57-65

(26) Shapiro, pp 27-58

8. More elaborate kinds of sociocentric kin-classes

(27) Shapiro, pp 59-82

(28) Tonkinson, pp 72-78

(29) Williams, pp 102-19

9. Getting, keeping, and losing wives and husbands

(30) Shapiro, pp 83-116

(31) Williams, pp 66-81

10. Synthesis and the present scene

(32) Fred Myers, “The cultural basis of politics in Pintupi life” (reader)

(33) Shapiro, pp 117-18

(34) Tonkinson, pp 160-82
(35) Lester Hiatt, “Traditional land tenure and contemporary land claims” (reader)

(36) Basil Sansom, *The camp at Wallaby Cross*, ch 1 (reader)

INTRODUCTION

“ladder” and “mosaic” perspectives on Aboriginal Australians

primitivism and progressivism: “evolution” as a morality play

progressivism in Colonial America: the denigration of Native Americans as “unstable” hunters; Manifest Destiny

humanity vs animality

ontogeny and phylogeny: “the childhood of the race,” etc.

Lewis Henry Morgan’s progressivist scheme (1877)

1. “primeval promiscuity” and generational kin-classification (see below); absence of incest tabus and the nuclear family, communal property

2. “group marriage” and bifurcate merging kin-classification; still communal property and absence of the nuclear family, but …

a. matriclans and the establishment of mother/son and brother/sister incest tabus

b. patriclans and the establishment of father/daughter incest tabus; the importance of increasing paternal certainty

3. the emergence of the nuclear family and private property; lineal kin-classification (see below)

I need to take time out to consider some systems of kin-classification. This will be brief and superficial, and I intend to go into considerably more detail later in the course. But for many people even a brief and superficial consideration in this area can be difficult. To ease the pain, let me suggest you try to forget about such English kin-categories as “aunt,” “uncle,” and “cousin,” and think in terms of what anthropologists call “primary kin-categories” – those designated in English by the terms “mother,” “father,” “son,” “daughter,” “brother,” “sister,” “wife,” and “husband.” One reason for this is that other English kin-categories can be expressed as combinations of these primary categories. Thus e.g. an aunt can be a mother’s sister, or a father’s sister, or a mother’s brother’s wife, or a father’s brother’s wife. A second reason is that the ways in which these
various kinship positions are classified is very different for Aboriginal Australians as compared to (I take it) most or all of us. This being so, it behooves us in a course such as this to try to get into Aboriginal heads, so to say – i.e. to attempt to understand the principles by which Aboriginal people see the world. This is of course a third reason. A fourth and final reason is this: however arcane all this may seem, a thick history of anthropology can be written consisting exclusively of the arguments scholars have put forward to make sense of Aboriginal and similar systems of kin-classification. So here goes:

Our own English system, as well as those of most other Indo-European languages, is sometimes called “lineal,” because it separates “direct line” or lineal (or primary) kin from other (collateral) kin. By contrast, the most common system of kin-classification in the “tribal” world – and one which is probably universal in Aboriginal Australia – is based on the distinction between parallel-sex and cross-sex siblings. If you’re male your parallel-sex sibling is your brother, your cross-sex sibling your sister. If you’re female the situation is reversed. The parallel-sex siblings of your parents – your father’s brother and your mother’s sister – are called by the same term as the linking parents. In other words, your father’s brother is called by the same term as your father, your mother’s sister by the same term as your mother. The cross-sex siblings of your parents – your father’s sister and your mother’s brother – are called by separate terms. This sort of system thus bifurcates what for us is a single kin-class (AUNT or UNCLE), and it merges parents’ parallel-sex siblings with parents. It is thus often called “bifurcate merging.” The number of languages with bifurcate merging kin-classification almost certainly exceeds the number with lineal kin-classification.

A much rarer system simply lumps all kin of the parental generation under single terms, differentiated by sex (and sometimes by age). In other words, there’s a single term for father, father’s brother, and mother’s brother, and another for mother, mother’s sister, and father’s sister. Because it lumps people in a single generation, it is sometimes called “generational.” In Morgan’s grand scheme, the classic example of a generational system of kin-classification is that of the Hawaiian Islanders prior to extensive White contact.

Morgan’s sociological explanations of differences in systems of kin-classification

his utter misreading of the Hawaiian data

his inability to see the near-universal bilaterality of human kinship

his obsession with “moral evolution”

the definitive demolition of Morgan’s evolutionary scheme by Robert Lowie in his book *Primitive society* (1920), one of the great works in post-Victorian anthropology
But Morgan Lives! – his co-opting by Marxist theory (see Frederick Engels, *The origin of the family, private property, and the state, according to the researches of Lewis Henry Morgan*, 1884)

his appeal to feminist ideas re the oppression of women and the nuclear family, and feminist ideas about “matrilineal kinship”

his enduring legacy in kinship studies

evolutionary psychology and certainty of paternity

primitivism as the central orientation of 20th – and 21st – century anthropology

history as a contaminant of a “pure” (constructed) “past”

Mircea Eliade on “the prestige of origins” (“the prestige of the beginning”) in mythology

Barbara Sproul on prototypes vs archetypes: “origins” and “essences”

back-to-nature and related movements neopaganism

feminist fantasies about “primeval matriarchy” Afrocentrism

terrorist fantasies about the restoration of the Caliphate

“traditionalists” vs “revisionists” in the Bushman Debate: the enduring fantasy of the Tribe That Time Forgot

your (possible) reasons for taking this course

“ETHNIC UNITS” AND SOCIAL FIELDS

the real world: world system theory

regional systems: “Miwuyt” and “Balamumu” in Arnhem Land (but compare Nunggubuyu)

Indonesian and Japanese contact in Arnhem Land and the Cape York Peninsula

the coming of Europeans as a “moment” – but *not* the apocalyptic moment – in Aboriginal history
ABORIGINAL ATTACHMENT TO LAND

problems with the word “clan”

“clans” as collectivities of people

Aboriginal “clans” as “perennial sacramental corporations” (W.E.H. Stanner)

hence the expression ritual lodges

subject/object transformation (or subject/object/subject … transformation – SOST) and Aboriginal “totemism”

the “nature worship” theory and modern primitivism

transformation from animal to human and back in myth

anthropomorphic animals in myth

the analogy theory (Alexander Goldenweiser and Claude Levi-Strauss)

compare American sports teams

the consubstantiality theory (Nancy Munn and John Morton)

compare the Doctrine of Consubstantiality in the Roman Catholic Mass

a combination of the analogy and consubstantiality theories

SOST as sacrifice … as anti-sex … as spiritual regeneration

as a pseudo-parent/child tie: compare “mother country,” “fatherland,” etc.

comparisons with Western religions, especially Roman Catholicism

Aboriginal primitivism

the Indonesian mast in eastern Arnhem Land

personal names and “following up the Dreaming” Dreaming Djapirru

recreation of lodge estates and their positioning
innovation and its denial in Aboriginal religion: see esp Redmond’s “Places that move”

paths and circles in Aboriginal art: the significance of moving and stopping

their importance in interlodge links

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown’s influential (but absurd) model of Aboriginal “local organization” (1931)

Warren Shapiro’s refutation (1973)

the composition of actual residence groups on the mission station and in the bush

the conception (quickening) affiliations of older men

A.P. Elkin’s theory on patrifiliation vs conception filiation

“full” and “half” lodge membership in northeast Arnhem Land

ties to the mother’s and mother’s mother’s lodges (and those of other close kin) in northeast and northcentral Arnhem Land

principles of lodge affiliation in the Western Desert (from Fred Myers, *Pintupi country, Pintupi self: sentiment, place, and politics among Western Desert Aborigines*, pp 129-30). Assume a place named A. Affiliation to A is based on one or more of the following:

1. conception at the place A
2. conception at the place B made by and/or identified with the same Dreaming as A
3. conception at the place B whose Dreaming is associated mythologically with the Dreaming at A (the story lines cross)
4. initiation at A (for a male)
5. birth at A
6. father conceived at A or conditions 2-5 true for father
7. mother conceived at A or conditions 2, 3, or 5 true for mother
8. grandparents conceived at A or conditions 2-5 true
9. residence around A
10. death of close relative at or near A

Note from all this that it’s an utter distortion to speak of Aboriginal ritual lodges as “patrilineal” and leave it at that. Note also Robert Murphy’s distinction (referring to Amazonian notions of descent but also applicable to Aboriginal Australia) between detailed genealogical chains (such as we find in the Bible) and “a kind of descent that
incorporates within itself qualities of timelessness.” Note also the importance of close kin generally, not only the father, and of actual or mythical place in Western Desert lodge affiliation. To a lesser extent this is true elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia.

ABORIGINAL RITUAL: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

“ignorance of physical paternity” and its role in Victorian social theory (recall Morgan’s scheme)

object/subject transformation: the ideology of ‘finding’

sex vs ‘finding’ (or, Ya Don’t Read the Bible on the Crapper!)

‘to come out of a woman’ vs ‘to conceptualize a sacred site’ in northeast Arnhem Land

calculate storks, cabbage patches, and the Immaculate Conception

the organ of ‘finding’ and ‘conceptualizing’ and the orifice of entry (or, Is This Ignorance of Physical Maternity?)

calculate the notion of the maternal incubator in Christian theory and more widely in folk embryologies

Mary’s impregnation through the ear; Jesus as the Word

the denial of sexual significance in Central Australian increase rites

parallels between Aboriginal art and sacrifice

the denial of individual creativity in Aboriginal art as an example of reification

anthropological ideas about “culture” (and “society”) as another example

paths and circles in Aboriginal art

ABORIGINAL RITUAL: MALE INITIATION

the emotional logic of male initiation

Nancy Chodorow on dis-identification (compare the situation for girls)

Geza Roheim on the transfer of affection from the mother to the father and other males
Hence the structural parallels between male initiation and spiritualization more generally:

inherently sinful >>>>>>> conversion >>>>>>> acceptance of religion

inherently unmanly >>>>>>> masculinization >>>>>>> reconciliation with father and other male elders

(adapted from Mark Carnes, *Secret ritual and manhood in Victorian America*)

why female initiation provides only a weak model of this sort.

All this being so, one can appreciate better why Aboriginal ritual is mostly concerned with “following up the Dreaming” *coupled with* male initiation. I suppose this will strike some as “sexist,” because it violates the precept espoused by some that there are no behavioral differences between the sexes that are not put there by “culture.” If you believe this, you might consider why the overwhelming majority of violent crime is perpetrated by young males, why almost all known Muslim terrorists are young males etc. And you might consider the validity of today’s “wisdoms” that boys (and girls too, for that matter) don’t really need to have their fathers around, that men need to find “the feminine part” of themselves, and that “higher” education should cater to the needs of women more than men, or to both sexes equally. Consider also the utter social irresponsibility of the relentless assault in advertising on traditional family values and on masculinity. If there’s one single lesson you learn in this course about Aboriginal people, let it be the importance of the family, including the father/child tie, and kinship in general. In this regard, Aboriginal Australians are very considerably more sensitive than the Marxists and the “radical” feminists, and far more socially responsible than the advertising pimps and whores.

masculinization as feminization

the Rainbow Serpent and other swallowers/regurgitators

submission to male authority: Aboriginal “gerontocracy”

compare the authority structure of this class

the importance of student ordeals (or, Why Feelgood Education is No Education)

circumcision, subincision, and other forms of pseudo-menstruation

the position of post-menopausal women
“the man with a vagina” vs the bifid kangaroo penis: John Cawte’s theory (1967)

the native cat’s bifid penis: John Morton’s solution of the dilemma: Aboriginal intergroup communication as a game of “telephone”

parallels closer to home: Jonah and the Great Fish Jesus in the Tomb

Jesus as Mother

“matriarchal” myths and the rhythms of male ontogeny: Roheim again

representations of femaleness vs the disempowerment of Aboriginal women (or, Why *Playboy* Is Not Matriarchal)

see also (e.g.) Lotte Motz, *The faces of the Goddess*

the second-class status of women’s sacred rites in the Western Desert

the “two bodies” in northeast Arnhem Land male initiation (or, Why Masculinization is Like Spiritualization – Again!)

compare the following gleaned from a televangelist: “You’re born from a woman and you’re doomed. You’re reborn from the Cross and you’re saved!

everyday men become Dreaming Men: heroic logic and the distancing from sexual and parental connection

compare Superman, Batman, Jesus, Moses, etc.

the female life-cycle: increasing immersion into the life of childbirth and early childcare, followed by becoming, with menopause, honorary males

domination by male ritual knowledge

the painting of women’s bodies the mortuary cleansing of women

women’s sacred rituals – modeled on male rituals and controlled by men

THE MICROSOCIOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Kenneth Liberman on the *active* achievement of consensus in Aboriginal life

the logic of the pronominal plural in northeast Arnhem Land
compare “the royal we” address in the third person

maleness and ritualized personal relationships

‘intestinal brothers’ in northeast Arnhem Land

boys circumcised together in northeast Arnhem Land

trading partners in Arnhem Land

joking relationships in northeast Arnhem Land

‘owners’ and ‘managers’ in ritual throughout Aboriginal Australia

‘ritual guardians’/initiates throughout Aboriginal Australia

MATRILINY, MOIETY SYSTEMS, AND EGOCENTRIC KIN-CLASSES

In considering this section, you might review your notes in connection with the course Introduction. Even with them, you’re likely to find this section and the next difficult. Without them, well … you may as well forget it! I should also add here that the comments on focality in my book are a little dated. Focus on what I say here:

universal kin-categorization and “universal kinship”

*gurratuminri mala* in northeast Arnhem Land

parallels in the Western Desert and elsewhere

the equivalence of siblings in applying kin-terms

Thus (e.g.) anyone my father calls ‘brother’ (not just his actual brother) I can call ‘father.’

the fundamental Aboriginal system of kin-classification

‘father’s father’/‘mother’s mother’

‘father’/‘father’s sister’

‘sibling’

‘man’s child’

‘man’s son’s child’

‘mother’s father’/‘father’s mother’

‘mother’/‘mother’s brother’

‘cross-cousin’ (‘spouse’) 

‘woman’s child’

‘woman’s son’s child’
Note that (1) nearly all known Aboriginal languages distinguish paternal and maternal grandparents; (2) that husband and wife have separate terms for their children; (3) that these terms are applied by *all* siblings of the connecting parent, so that a group of siblings is a terminological unity in kin-classification; (4) that ‘cross-cousin’ is the spouse category; (5) that ‘mother’s brother’ is the ‘father-in-law’ category; and (6) that ‘father’s sister’ is the ‘mother-in-law’ category. It should help if you can see this as a system divided into patri-moieties, though these may or may not exist in a particular Aboriginal community. Bifurcate merging systems outside Australia nearly always lack features 1-3 – which is to say that, despite an enormous amount of anthropological theorizing beginning with Morgan, they have nothing structurally to do with a system of exogamous moieties or “clans.”

the focality issue

We’ve already seen that in Aboriginal communities the fact that everyone is included in the system of kin-classification does *not* mean that an individual regards everyone as kin. But can we go further into the issue of focality? Consider the following:

the meaning of *ngama* in northeast Arnhem Land

\[ ngamani = \text{‘milk’} \quad \text{ngama’ngama’yun} = \text{‘to create’} \]

\[ \text{nguy-ngamatirri} = \text{‘to love’} \]

bodypart symbolism

the structure of responses to the question, ‘Who is your *ngama*?’

use of expressions of the kind ‘X’s *ngama*’ to refer to a recently deceased woman

Similar considerations apply to the word *bapa*. Thus one’s own ritual lodge is called one’s *baparru*. The bodypart corresponding to *bapa* in spoken language is the shoulder, and informants readily noted that fathers routinely carry older children on their shoulders when they go hunting.

George Peter Murdock (1959) on the phonology of parental kin-terms (or, Why *ngama* and *bapa* Sound Like “Mama” and “Papa”)

fuzziness in the use of the adjectives ‘full’ and ‘partial’

All this, I hope, has obvious relevance to Marxist and feminist fantasies about communal kinship and “group marriage.” It’s not that Aboriginal people don’t have similar fantasies: universal kin-categorization indicates that they do. What
it suggests, I think, is that they see them as fantasies, useful in certain contexts but not in others. Compare “Brother, can you spare some change?,” or the Judeo-Christian notion that we’re all Children of God.

Note that the kin-term system outlined above can be represented as two patrilines of terms. The commonest system in Aboriginal Australia is a four-line system, in which each of the categories in the two-line system is bipartitioned. This is sometimes called an “Aranda system,” because one of the earliest accounts of it pertains to a Central Australian ethnic category once called “Aranda” (now usually rendered “Arrernte”). There are indications that this system is spreading historically at the expense of the two-line one (and others). I found a version of it in the Arnhem Land Interior in 1975. It can be represented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four-line Terms</th>
<th>Two-line Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘father’s father’</td>
<td>‘mother’s father’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘father’/’father’s sister’</td>
<td>‘mother’/’mother’s brother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘sibling’</td>
<td>‘cross-cousin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘man’s child’</td>
<td>‘mother’/’mother’s brother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘man’s son’s child’</td>
<td>‘cross-cousin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘mother’s mother’</td>
<td>‘father’s mother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘mother-in-law’</td>
<td>‘father-in-law’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘mother’s mother’</td>
<td>‘spouse’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘mother-in-law’</td>
<td>‘father-in-law’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘mother’s mother’</td>
<td>‘spouse’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What’s happened here, again, is that each of the categories in the two-line system has become two categories, such that (1) each of the four grandparents is located on a separate patri-sequence of terms; (2) ‘father’s sister’ is no longer the ‘mother-in-law’ category; (3) ‘mother’s brother’ is no longer the ‘father-in-law’ category; and (4) ‘cross-cousin’ is no longer the ‘spouse’ category. Note also that in three of the four patri-sequences of terms (all except the ‘father’s father’ one) there is an alternation of generations, such that every other generation gets lumped into the same category. This idea is a very general one in Aboriginal thought. For example in northeast Arnhem Land a man cannot take his father’s name but is supposed (if possible) to take the name of his father’s father – or his mother’s mother’s brother.

I put the foregoing in historical language (“has become”) because there’s pretty good evidence that four-line systems have come about through the transformation of two-line ones. Thus for example in the Arnhem Land Interior the term someone applies to his or her mother’s mother (and her brother) is mari, whereas the one applied to the father’s father is mari’mu – i.e. the two categories are obviously cognate, with the latter derived from the former (which is therefore focal). One can thus ask why this change has occurred. The most common answer is that it results in the prohibition of close-kin marriage. Thus in the two-line system it’s possible to marry a first
cousin, but this is impossible in the four-line system. This is not a particularly good answer, for two reasons. First, it provides no particular dynamic for the change other than the idea that people tend not to want to mate with close kin, whereas first cousin marriage is extremely common around the world. Second, in most Aborigi-
nal communities, whether they work in terms of a two-line system, a four-line sys-
tem, or some other system, close kin in marriageable categories cannot be married anyway. In 1970 I suggested that the key dynamic in all this is the desire for a man to get his mother-in-law from a ritual lodge other than his own – which of course explains the separation of ‘father’s sister’ and ‘mother-in-law’ categories. The sig-
nificance of where a man gets his mother-in-law will emerge later. But for now one could ask what evidence is there that this separation – rather than, say, the separa-
tion of ‘mother’s brother’ and ‘father-in-law’ categories – comes first. Well, the evidence is that we know of systems in which the ‘mother’s brother’ category is (still) the ‘father-in-law category, but the ‘father’s sister’ is not (or no longer) the ‘mother-in-law’ category, but there is absolutely no known Aboriginal system of kin-classification in which the reverse is true. Also pertinent – and to be discussed later – is that Aboriginal men get a lot more worked up about their mothers-in-law than their fathers-in-law. It’s as if the key dynamic is the wish to render the mother-
in-law/son-in-law relationship as if it were a relationship between ritual lodges (it is in fact nothing of the kind). Then, in the course of doing this, Aboriginal thinking has come to the conclusion that, to make things look neat, the rest of the system of kin-classification should be bipartitioned as well. There is no evidence that this sort of thinking ever took place – at least not consciously or verbally.

the Last (?) Straw: the development of Omaha-type systems

This label comes from the fact that, in the system of kin-classification of the Omaha Indians of the Great Plains, all descendants of one’s own mother’s brother are called by the ‘mother’s brother’ term – in other words, there is no alternation of generations here such as we find in the four-line system. So for example I found among the Nunggubuyu of east-central Arnhem Land that all men of the mother’s ritual lodge (other than the mother’s father) are called ‘mother’s brother,’ all women (other than the mother’s father’s sister) ‘mother.’ Otherwise, the four-line logic is in place. It’s as if people wish not to be able to mate with anyone in the mother’s ritual lodge and therefore call people in it by terms focally applied to close kin. This is yet another remarkable exemplification of the Aboriginal desire to avoid confounding marrying too close, and to avoid confounding in-law relation-
ships with close blood ones.

But this is not all. In the Kimberley Mountains in northwest Australia Omaha-type logic is applied more widely – not just to the mother’s ritual lodge but to the lodge of any close kinsperson -, and mates have to be selected from well outside the sphere of close kin. There is circumstantial evidence that, just as four-line systems have developed from two-line systems, so those of the Kimberleys have deve-
loped from four-line ones. I know this fascinates everyone, and that you’ll all want immediately to go out and see the evidence for yourself. It’s in a paper of mine published in a journal called Man – journals could have names like this in pre-PC days – in 1971.

the distinction between kin-class and behavioral class

This is an important distinction, because one finds repeatedly in textbook and more advanced discussions of universal systems of kin-categorization that people regard everyone in a particular kin-class as equally members of that class and behave in much the same way with each of them. The first assertion goes against everything we know about focality and can be shown to be false by the sort of information presented above concerning ngama and bapa in northeast Arnhem Land. The second is one of the sustaining fantasies of the Marxists and here too – to put it politely – they’re off the mark. Consider the following:

Nicolas Peterson on hunter-gatherer demand sharing

‘taboo’ (rumaru) vs ‘joking’ (wakal) members of categories in northeast Arnhem Land

MORE ELABORATE KINDS OF SOCIOCENTRIC KIN-CLASSES

Systems of kin-classification are usually egocentric – your uncle is very unlikely to be my uncle. By contrast, both of us can be described by labels such as “citizen of the USA” or “somebody who does a lot of reading.” Categories of the latter sort are sociocentric – they apply to somebody irrespective of his or her position. Kin-classes can be sociocentric: we’ve already seen one sort – moiety systems – that’s very common in the Tribal World. Aboriginal Australians (and a few other “tribal” people) have developed this idea much further than what we’re accustomed to. Nothing in this section – and I mean nothing! – should be particularly difficult if you’ve been able to master the material in the preceding section – by which I mean, everything here is based upon the same logic. Specifically, both four- and eight-class systems employ notion that alternate generations are merged; and semi-moieties organization is based upon exactly the same structure as the four-line system of kin-classification. This said, it needs to be added that the two structures – two-line and four-line – can operate in the same community. There are reported instances of two-line systems of kin-classification operating with semi-moieties and/or eight classes, though none in which four-line terminologies occur with only four classes. For more particulars, read the reading assigned for this section and bring in questions – which, really, holds for any other section of this course.

GETTING, KEEPING, AND LOSING WIVES AND HUSBANDS
Aboriginal marriage and in-law relationships have to be treated after kin-classification for the very good reason that the choice of mates and in-laws in Aboriginal Australia is everywhere partly dependent on kin-categorization, or at least is reflected in kin-categorization. This is so much so that in northeast Arnhem Land, for example, a man who marries a woman of a kin-class other than the ‘cross-cousin’ one begins to refer to her as his ‘cross-cousin.’ Sometimes – not always – he reclassifies her mother as well. Similarly, when a man wishes to have an extra-marital affair, he is supposed to choose a woman of the ‘cross-cousin’ class. In fact the label for this class is so saturated with sexual significance that it’s considered improper for a man to address a woman of this class as ‘cross-cousin’ unless he’s actually married to her.

Victorian attempts to read “group marriage” into the Aboriginal data

*pirrauru vs tippa-malku* in southeast Australia

N.W. Thomas’ deconstruction (1906)

compare the *mangutji* relationship in northeast Arnhem Land

feathered string and dilly-bag

food and sex as an exchange and metaphorical pair

the *mangutji* relationship as a counter-culture

Levi-Strauss and the Second Coming of Group Marriage

counter-argument by L.R. Hiatt (1965) and myself

Hiatt on sister’s daughter exchange in northcentral Arnhem Land

Warren Shapiro (1968) on sister’s daughter’s daughter exchange in northeast Arnhem Land (see also my book *Miwuyt marriage: the cultural anthropology of affinity in northeast Arnhem Land*)

the importance of ‘squaring back’ in Aboriginal thought

Aboriginal attempts to play Levi-Strauss’ game: labeling marriage and other events in northeast Arnhem Land

residential grouping and Levi-Strauss’ theory

mother-in-law/son-in-law avoidance in northeast Arnhem Land
indirection: reference in the extreme plural

displacement: the ‘navel’ metaphor

euphemism: the ‘taboo’ vocabulary (compare Haviland)

eye and tactile aversion

‘avoidance’ (rumaru) matrilines

Aboriginal marriage and brideservice

the semantics of suffixing in northeast Arnhem Land

‘father-in-law’ and ‘wife’s mother’s brother’ as circumciser/subinciser categories in Central Australia

Victoria Burbank’s findings on changing patterns of Nunggubuyu bestowal

SYNTHESIS AND THE PRESENT SCENE

Aboriginal “gerontocracy” and the politics of male initiation

notions of ritual indebtedness and shame

compare indebtedness and shame with the wife’s mother etc.

this class as an initiatory ordeal – without subincision (dammit!)

compare Dostoyevsky: “Suffering is the sole origin of human consciousness”

Warren Shapiro
Professor of Anthropology
the disjunction between kin class and behavior class
the separation of FZ and WM as the motivator behind Aranda-ization