

## NEW GUINEA MODELS IN THE AFRICAN SAVANNAH

IVAN KARP

I

FOURTEEN years have passed since J. A. Barnes published his short article on 'African models in the New Guinea Highlands' (1962). In it Barnes raised the question of whether the concepts used to analyse systems of descent in African societies were applicable to descent systems in New Guinea that appeared at first glance to be similar. This article signalled the beginning of a debate over the nature of descent and kinship in New Guinea and the advisability of using concepts and results derived from field research in another continent and in a different context. The very status of social anthropology as a comparative and generalizing science is called into question by the debate initiated by Barnes, for if African research has no relevance for New Guinea research, then neither cross-cultural typologies nor generalizations about social behavior are possible. Hence, the New Guinea literature has more than just an area specialist's significance.

Since the appearance of Barnes' article, the debate has moved, perhaps raced is a better word, in two directions. On the one hand, field anthropologists starting with Paula Brown in her classic article 'Non agnates among the patrilineal Chimbu' (1962) have provided more refined descriptions of the actual operations of specific New Guinea descent systems. On the other hand, Barnes' article has been rethought and criticized in a variety of contexts.<sup>1</sup> The resulting confusion may be seen by comparing two articles that appear back-to-back in the recent *Festschrift* for Meyer Fortes, *The Character of Kinship* (Goody 1973). Andrew Strathern and Jean La Fontaine both review the same material in order to arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions regarding identical phenomena, all the while claiming to use the same analytical framework. Strathern concludes that anthropologists need to investigate the symbolic and metaphorical usages of kinship, while La Fontaine stresses the irreducible components of kinship and descent (where it exists) in social life.

The problem which all of these authors address is a relatively simple one. The relationship between dogmas of descent and social action is not consistent in the New Guinea societies that have been investigated. By this I mean that actors in New Guinea societies behave in ways that are contradictory to their explanations of their behavior and neither the explanations nor the behavior are consistent from society to society. The source of inconsistent behavior may be found in one of two places. First, there may be contradictions in the social life of the peoples involved, and secondly, the constructs that anthropologists use to describe behavior may not be refined enough to provide adequately comparable units. Both these problems have been seen as the source of the difficulties with the New Guinea material. I do not propose in this paper to play the role of honest Africanist broker among the New Guineanists, a pose for which I have neither the competence nor the inclination. Instead, I think that more light can be shed by returning to African materials and analysing descent in an African society in terms of the lessons that have been learned since Barnes' article.

I will lay out very briefly what the New Guinea analyses may be seen to have taught social anthropologists about descent systems. Then I will analyse the descent system of the Iteso of Kenya in terms that will make it more applicable to descriptions of New Guinea descent systems. I hope to accomplish two purposes with this exercise. First, I wish to provide material that will begin to show that the ideological dimensions of descent systems are relatively similar in any part of the world. Secondly, I wish to show that the task of comparison can be accomplished only if the analytical framework used by social anthropologists carefully discriminates among the ideological, jural, and behavioral dimensions of social fields (Moore 1969).

## II

A major advance in the analysis of descent in African societies was the demonstration that descent principles could provide a charter for relations among local groups in some societies. This demonstration was all the more striking in that societies in which descent articulates with respect to territoriality in very different ways, such as the Nuer and the Tallensi, were shown to be able to constitute local groups on descent principles. The assumption that descent operated in this way in acephalous societies became problematical when investigated in New Guinea. Scheffler (1966) clarifies the issue by distinguishing descent ideologies from processes of group affiliation, succession, and inheritance. One conclusion that may be derived from Scheffler's discussion is that only in some cases are rules derived from descent ideologies used to legitimize or organize group processes. A similar approach is advocated by Keesing in his article 'Descent, residence, and cultural codes' (1971). If I understand him correctly, he is asserting that a variety of relationships may exist at any given time between descent ideologies and local group formation. Hence, in some cases, descent ideologies are utilized to make claims to local group membership and, in other cases, they are not. For Keesing, the organizing factor is time. The relationship between descent and local group organization can only be understood as a process that works out over time, much as the developmental cycle in domestic groups can only be understood by taking account of the time factor (Fortes 1970; Goody 1958). Keesing's primary interest, however, is in culture and he focuses upon ideology rather than examining situational factors involved in the choice to select a culturally available dogma of descent as a legitimation for action. In a recent article (1973), Strathern concludes that there is no invariant or necessary relationship between descent and locality in New Guinea societies. Hence, in some cases, descent may regulate local group organization; in other cases, it may provide the legitimation for behaviour based on other principles; and, in a few cases, there may be no relationship between descent and local group organization at all.

What significance does all this have for the Africanist? The lessons are largely negative ones. First, the assumption must be made that New Guinea is not a special case. Then, when all the contingent relationships are wiped away, the minimal or remaining definition of descent systems is that they are based on ideology; that is, sets of ideas about the nature of the world that posit a relationship among a group or category of persons based on the assumption of shared substance transmitted through a parent of one sex, in the case of patrilineal descent systems, the male parent. In this sense, it is not possible to have a 'strong' or 'weak' descent system, *pace* Lewis (1965). Conceived as ideology, descent cannot entail degrees of relationship.<sup>2</sup> Recent studies of descent dogmas in New Guinea societies by Wagner (1967) and Strathern (1972) bear this out.

The second lesson to be learned is that the ideology of descent does not necessarily specify a set of rules in terms of which behavior may be articulated nor does a descent ideology necessarily determine or constrain patterns of choice. That there are cases in the New Guinea Highlands where direct causal connections exist among the ideological, jural, and behavioral dimensions of descent systems is beyond doubt. The Mae-Enga are probably the best described example of this (Meggitt 1965). Other factors also intervene, however, to produce the close homology among these three dimensions of the descent system. Meggitt has suggested, for the Mae-Enga, that a high population density and a scarcity of land have resulted in the emphasis on patriliney that characterizes their social system.

We may conclude from all this that the relationships among the ideological, jural, and behavioral dimensions of descent systems are not necessarily homologous or corresponding. If so, there are no predictable connections among these different aspects of descent systems. This does not mean that there is no connection at all among them; it does mean, however, that the kind of connection or interrelation that exists cannot be discovered by prediction from theory or knowledge of other descent systems and must be discovered through examination of each case.

This can be put another way. We may say that studies of descent systems in New Guinea have taught us that relationships among different aspects of descent systems are not necessary but contingent. The question then arises, contingent upon what? The New Guinea cases provide a variety of answers. That local groups are formed of co-residents who belong to the same descent group is an ideal which may be achieved only under optimal conditions. In other cases, warfare or political competition are more important motives for residential affiliation; perhaps even the ritual regulation of the environment will prove to have something to do with local group formation. In many cases, it would appear that the political or ecological dimensions of New Guinea societies affect their descent systems more than vice versa. Hence, we may conclude that the organization of descent is contingent upon its relationships with other fields of social relations in a given society. It is probable that the interaction of descent with other social fields also affects those other fields in some yet unspecified ways, but the New Guinea evidence is inconclusive on that score.

The careful reader of Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940) may find little surprising in what I have written. In his observation that the lineage system of the Nuer takes a segmentary shape and form because of its association with the political system and not vice versa (1940: 246-8), we are presented with an analysis which could have emerged from the lessons of New Guinea thirty-five years before the fact.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, a consideration of the New Guinea material forces upon the Africanist social anthropologist an awareness of the inadequacy of analyses that take for granted the relationships among the ideological, jural, and behavioral dimensions of descent systems. These sorts of analyses assume what in fact has to be discovered and, once discovered, explained.

I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Karp forthcoming) why the error of assuming that which is to be discovered has so often been made in the study of social systems. Briefly, social anthropologists frequently fail to distinguish between analytical theory and explanatory theory. Analytical theory relates to the process of concept formation. Constructs derived from analytical theory enable us to discover the phenomena we wish to investigate and the relations among those phenomena. Concepts such as 'field' and 'domain', as used by Fortes (1969), or social and cultural system, as used by Parsons (1951), are analytical constructs. By themselves they explain nothing. Instead they are guides that allow us to discover what is to be explained. Without them we would be unable to explain any interrelationships

among phenomena, since the phenomena would not be available to us to explain.

This is by no means the same as explanatory theory. As Falding, from whom this discussion is derived, put it:

A common mistake is to think that assembling analytical concepts is tantamount to having a *theory* in the explanatory meaning of the word . . . It involves no contradiction, surely, to acknowledge that explanatory theory is the ultimate goal of our science and to insist that we come to it by stages . . . (1968: 24-5).

Explanatory theory, as opposed to analytical theory, specifies the conditions under which a given phenomenon emerges. An example from the New Guinea material would be Meggitt's argument that descent rules structure local group relationships under conditions of high population density (1965). The relationship between local group structure and descent would not have to be explained if it were not known that descent did not structure local group relations in all cases. It was only after dissatisfaction was expressed with constructs for the study of descent that finer distinctions between different aspects of the systems were made. A parallel process of refinement of distinctions can be seen in the study of alliance systems. After all the debate over the notion of 'prescription', the problems were only resolved when Needham was able to explain that 'prescription' was a term that accounted for characteristics of collective representations rather than the jural or behavioral dimension of systems of alliance (1974). In the study of alliance systems, also, the relationships among alliance as ideology, as a set of rules and as a pattern of choices has come to be seen as a question of contingency rather than necessity.

Only after the range of variation in relationships among the ideological, jural, and behavioral dimensions of descent systems has been discovered can propositions that serve to explain all or even a portion of the cases be developed. Hence, I see explanatory theory as proceeding in two stages. In the first stage, lower level explanations are developed that can account for the circumstances of a particular case. In the second stage, generalizations of broader utility can be developed that will explain a range of relationships. In social anthropology we have rarely, if ever, reached the second stage of explanation, which also involves the deductive testing of hypotheses derived from first level explanatory theory.<sup>4</sup>

Studies of New Guinea descent systems have taught us the need in the study of descent in Africa for an analytical framework that distinguishes among the ideological, jural, and behavioral aspects or dimensions of descent systems and seeks to discover the relationships of those aspects with each other. That this is becoming increasingly recognized can be seen from the recent work of Fortes (1969), Needham (1974), and Moore (1969), as well as Scheffler (1966), to name only a few social anthropologists of diverse orientations.

In the remainder of this paper, I will use the framework that I have described above to give an account of the descent system of the Iteso of Kenya that will make it more comparable to the New Guinea material.

### III

The Iteso are a Central Paraniotic-speaking people living across the Kenya-Uganda border just north of Lake Victoria and South of Mt Elgon. Surrounded by Bantu and southern Nilotic-speaking peoples, they are a linguistic and cultural minority. They have a mixed agricultural-pastoral economy and currently derive about 30%

of total household income from cash crops, primarily cotton and maize. Their traditional political system was based on territorial corporations which I call sections, which were composed of sub-sections, each of which was organized around a dominant exogamous clan. These sections recognized an internal rule of law and organized their members for predation and defense. The various sections were stratified into two age groups. The senior group was composed of a group of initiated elders, whom I call a retirement set, who mediated between the rest of the Iteso and the Iteso High God. Prior to retirement and entry into the retirement set, the adult married men of the section were responsible for the adjudication of disputes and the organization of work and warfare under the direction of a leader chosen from the dominant or founding clan.<sup>5</sup>

After the imposition of colonial rule the territorial section system collapsed totally. In its place the Iteso developed a series of neighborhoods founded by important and wealthy men who provided bridewealth, support and protection for their followers who moved to reside near the leaders. These followers were composed of combinations of the neighborhood founder's agnates, affines, and real and classificatory sisters' children. The neighborhood system was supported by a very high rate of household mobility as the Iteso moved frequently to find security in the uncertain period that followed their pacification, but before any sort of colonial rule of law could be established. At present the high rate of household mobility has declined and neighborhoods have become vaguely bounded according to the individual definitions of household heads. There are clusters of households that exhibit a tendency to claim each other as neighbors more than other, equally contiguous households. Although there is no absolute agreement among the members, I have chosen to call these clusters 'neighborhoods'. Each household head's group of other households that he calls his 'neighbors' is frequently composed of a mixture of agnates, affines, maternal and uterine kin and unrelated neighbors. When two persons who call each other *opaduk* (neighbor) interact, they may do so either in their capacity as neighbors or as kinsmen, if indeed they are kinsmen. Neighbor and kinsman are identities derived from mutually exclusive definitions of the situations. Persons do not interact with each other as kin and neighbors. The only exception to this rule is that the etiquette of kinship governs the relationship of members of adjacent generations on all occasions, particularly in the relationship of father and son. Affinal, agnatic, and maternal kin relationships are not recognized as relevant during neighborly situations. The account given above describes the social context in which Iteso descent system operates.<sup>6</sup>

The Iteso are patrilineal. According to the minimal definition of descent as ideology, which was given in Section II above, this signifies that certain members of web of kinsmen recognize themselves as belonging to the same category on the basis of descent from a common ancestor and/or by linkage only through males. The Iteso universe of kinsmen is divided into two major categories. The first category, *ipajanatin*, consists of all persons who claim a relationship with each other on the basis of sharing a common substance, blood or semen, on the basis of an act of procreation that occurred in the past. The second category, that of *ikamerak*, or affines, includes all those persons who do not share common substance but are linked by a marital bond between two persons. The dominant symbol of marriage is sexual intercourse. This can be observed in the reciprocal terms by which some affines call each other, and in the first of the domestic rituals that inaugurate a marriage.<sup>7</sup> In this particular ritual, a bride undergoes a symbolic act of intercourse and birth in the course of changing her status from unmarried to married woman.

The relationship between affinity and cognation, relations of blood, is clear to Iteso. Over time and with the birth of children, affines become cognates. Hence, maternal kin occupy an ambiguous status to individual Iteso. A person's mother's brother is both a relative, someone with whom he or she shares 'blood', and an affine, someone to whom he or she is related by marriage through a member of an agnatic category to which he or she belongs. The problem is resolved situationally: there are some circumstances in which a maternal kinsman is treated as an affine and other circumstances in which he is treated as a cognate. Put in another way, the birth of children creates filiation out of some, but not all, affinal relationships.

There is no special term by which Iteso distinguish their patrilineal kinsmen, their agnates, from the more general category of cognates. Some idea of the differences between the two, however, emerges from considering Iteso beliefs about procreation. Iteso believe that an act of intercourse is necessary for the creation of a foetus. The foetus is formed from the father's semen, which contributes the hard, boney parts and the mother's blood, which is the primary agent of nourishment for the foetus. At birth the 'bag of waters' (amniotic sac) that breaks is thought to be composed of the old semen of the father. The primary nourishing role is played by the mother, although the father also contributes.<sup>8</sup> This is a 'classic patrilineal ideology', as Leach (1961) calls it. It distinguishes between two kinds of shared natural substance and the functions of each. The father is assigned the primary role of contributing form and the mother the primary nurturing role. This, in fact, parallels the way Iteso conceive of the role of the sexes in child rearing. Rights over children repose in the father and his lineage, while the mother is seen as the source of love.

There is some evidence that the Iteso think of semen as a substance analogous to blood. The polite word for semen is *aokot*, 'blood', rather than the literal *adua*. This caused much confusion early in this research, and it was only when Iteso women in particular trusted my wife that they would use the proper, but impolite, word. We may conclude from this discussion that agnates are differentiated from other cognates by the belief that they share a common substance that has contributed to the shaping of their form, rather than only to their growth. This concept fits well with the belief that members of clans share mystical attributes and abilities that are inherited (see below).

This discussion of ideas about procreation indicates that, from the Iteso point of view, agnates form a 'natural' category; that is, they are persons who may be grouped together because of what they share, and what they share is the result of the biological processes of birth, growth, and the inheritance of characteristics from parents. From an external point of view, the concept of agnation among the Iteso is a cultural phenomenon in the sense that it is derived from their ideas about the world and about natural processes. From the Iteso point of view, agnation is a concept that is firmly rooted in nature and may be taken by them as given and unquestionable. I could never convince any Iteso that there were no clans in America, and they regarded my descriptions of matrilineal descent systems in central Africa as absurd fabrication. Such types of kinship system were options that were simply not available to the Iteso. In the discussion so far, I have tried to indicate that, in order to understand the logic of categories among the Iteso, it is necessary to examine shared beliefs about nature. This form of cultural analysis may be pushed further in order to examine how ideas about nature and kinship deal with puzzles about the world, as Michael Jackson shows in his analysis of clanship among the Kuranko (1974). That is not the purpose of this paper, however. The concern here is with

interrelationships among different aspects of the descent system and not with descent ideology.

The Iteso belief that agnates are persons who share natural substances and inheritance through the male line does not necessarily generate the belief that there are different degrees of sharing of substance or different types of agnatic relationship. It is a fact, though, that, in many unilineal systems with beliefs about descent similar to the Iteso, there are a wide variety of levels in the descent system. Segmentary lineage systems are the classic example. In almost all those descent systems that specify more than one type of possible relationship among co-descendants, it is believed that persons who share a common ancestor are more closely related when that ancestor is closer to them in time. This is consistent with a belief that the relationship of descent is the result of shared common substance. I cannot see, however, that the closeness of relationship as determined by temporal distance from an ancestor is entailed by the logic of beliefs. Rather, I suggest it is a subsidiary belief which reconciles the facts of a variety of kinds of agnatic relationships with the belief that agnates are persons who share a common substance. In any case, there is nothing in Iteso beliefs about procreation that leads to the conclusion that there should be different levels in their descent system or that different types of agnates should be characterized by different sets of rights and duties. The cause of the fragmentation of the Iteso descent system into different levels must be sought in aspects of social life other than the logic of cultural beliefs. In what follows, I will show that the concept of agnation is refracted into subcategories among the Iteso by the relationship of beliefs about descent to other fields of activity. I will also show that the subsidiary principle of descent that I have described, relative distance of relationship determined by the sharing of an ancestor more or less remote in time, is used by Iteso to explain differing expectations they have *vis-à-vis* different types of agnate.

The Iteso recognize three types of agnatic relationship, or three levels of patrilineal category. The first and least inclusive level I have called the lineage. Lineage members are related to each other through common descent from an apical ancestor of one to two generations removed from the current genealogically senior generation. In some cases, the effective lineage is more inclusive and the number of generations may be as many as five. I never encountered a lineage that had a founding ancestor further back than five generations from the senior living generation. Members of a lineage recognize a common obligation to help each other on ritual occasions, especially during domestic and funerary ritual. Iteso refer to the members of one lineage as 'those who bury each other'. The wives of the members of one lineage form a corporation for the performance of rituals designed to ensure fertility and the continuation of the households of the lineage. Lineage membership also confers the right on male members to inherit the wives of deceased lineage mates. If a woman refuses to be inherited within the lineage and remarries, the lineage of her first husband must be compensated for the loss of a wife, especially if the woman is of child-bearing age. The amount of compensation varies according to the number of children born by the woman. If no children have been born and the final rituals of incorporation have not been performed, then the husband's lineage is ideally entitled to the return of full bridewealth. In practice it is very difficult to obtain the return of the bridewealth from either the woman's natal family or the family of her new husband. One interesting fact of lineage organization among the Iteso is that the marrying units are lineages, but the bridewealth paying and receiving

units are households.<sup>9</sup> The neighborhood, or any other non-kinship group, is rarely a ritual unit.

The next most inclusive level of segmentation is that which I have called the clan or exogamous clan. Iteso recognize rules of exogamy such that a marriage may not take place between a person and a member of his or her own or his or her mother's exogamous clan. As a result, two persons who are sisters' children (*icenin*) to the same clan may not marry. This is for Iteso the limiting case. Most marriages that do violate Iteso rules of exogamy occur between sisters' grandchildren of the same clan and are said to be the result of ignorance on the part of the persons marrying. Rules of exogamy hold for the two generations succeeding a marriage. Hence a person is regarded as a sister's child not only of his mother's clan but also of both of his grandmothers' clans. Only in the third generation succeeding the initial marriage may another marriage take place. Thus, rules of exogamy have the same time span as most Iteso genealogies; that is, three generations.<sup>10</sup>

Exogamous clansmen attend each other's funeral rituals and are bound by ties of sentiment. It is not unknown, for example, for exogamous clansmen to raise money in order to send a bright young clan member overseas. However, they fully expect that young member to use his success in order to help other young members of his clan. So, it represents something of an investment. The major sphere of activity in which exogamous clanship operates, however, is ritual. Exogamous clan mates provide a pool of possible resources that may be used in the absence of lineage members. Sometimes when all of a household head's lineage mates have died or moved away or become, for some reason or other, permanently inaccessible, the household will align itself with another lineage of the exogamous clan. It is impossible for a household to operate in the field of ritual activities without the support and aid of other households of the lineage to which it belongs. In the absence of lineage mates, members of an exogamous clan may be substituted.

Exogamous clans frequently divide and the Iteso both recognize and deplore this process. The reasons they give for the splits never relate to non-cultural factors such as unwieldy size or distance from other groups of exogamous clansmen. Instead, the myths about such splits give reasons in terms of the behavior of clansmen to each other. One such myth relates how, during a famine, one clansman hid some peas that he had cooked from his brothers who surprised him as he was about to eat them. The man hid the peas under his mud headdress and the heat of the peas burned his head and forced him to cry out. He was so ashamed at being discovered that he went off and hid from his clan mates for the rest of his life, thus originating a separate clan.<sup>11</sup> This myth also gives some idea of the quality of social relations that are supposed by Iteso to characterize relations among clansmen. The clan in the myth split because of a failure on the part of one clansman to recognize the obligation to share a scarce resource under difficult conditions. Iteso regard exogamous clansmen as being involved in social relations that are characterized by generalized reciprocity (Sahlins 1965). Their opinion is that, with respect to certain ritual and kinship obligations, members of the same exogamous clan have the right to expect aid from their fellow clansmen. Thus, behavior is transacted or believed to be transacted among exogamous clansmen without regard for gain. In practice, this means without regard for short term gain. This does not mean that Iteso exhibit an extraordinary degree of morality and adherence to values. Rather, they conform to norms of exogamous clanship because they are constrained by the force of diffuse sanctions such as public opinion or in the expectation of building up a pool of resources that may be called upon in the future. This is clearly reflected in the

tension they experience between maximising relations with affines or with their agnatic kin. Iteso have frequent conflicts with their agnatic kinsmen over access to scarce resources such as cattle and land. Agnates, especially close agnates, are often accused of poisoning each other. Affines, on the other hand, are seen as persons who willingly give of themselves to each other because of the close personal relations they have. On the other hand, affinal relations are under no obligation to help each other. Hence, while they are often willing to give aid, they cannot be relied upon in a crisis.

One instance may illustrate the tensions that Iteso experience with respect to different types of kin. One of my best informants, an ambitious young man, had been complaining to me about his half-brothers, with whom he had a dispute over the inheritance of land. Earlier he had talked to me about moving away from his close agnates, both as a result of this dispute and in order to be physically removed from what he saw as the inescapable demands of his senior agnates on his meagre store of time and resources. One day I was asked to convey the body of a small girl who had died of snakebite from her mother's brother's home where she had been staying to her natal home. My friend helped me. When we arrived at the home of the dead girl's father, all the people of the neighborhood hid in their houses and refused to help move the body or aid in the funeral arrangements. Later I discovered that they believed that the girl had died of sorcery and did not want to antagonize the sorcerers by helping the girl's father. My friend was appalled. This was the result of living with affines, he told me. If the girl's father had been living with his agnates, he would not have had these difficulties. When I pointed out to him that he was thinking of moving to live with his affines under the same circumstances, he had no answer. This was simply not a problem that he was able to resolve to his satisfaction. He won his dispute and, as a result, remained where he was. If he had lost the dispute, he would have moved. Neither solution was a very happy one for him.<sup>12</sup>

Age and status tend to influence the strategy with respect to kin. Elderly and senior Iteso rely on their more junior agnates from whom they can demand support, especially in the form of labor. Junior household heads try to minimize their interaction with agnates in order to escape the demands that their elders put on them. They recognize, however, that their agnates are necessary if they are to maintain a viable household, particularly in the sphere of ritual activities. Ritual, then, becomes an interest that serves to bind agnates together, particularly at the level of the lineage and clan. Another factor that binds agnates together is the interdependence of persons of different ages. Lineages usually divide when the members of the founding generation have all passed away. The Iteso recognize this as inevitable, but unfortunate, as it violates the norms of reciprocity expected among agnates. By the time that the last surviving member of the founding generation has died, disputes and accusations of sorcery have usually reached the point where reconciliation is no longer possible. The question may be asked, then, why senior members of a lineage, among whom most of the disputes have occurred, would want to keep the lineage together. The answer is that they are the ones most in need of labor in order to maintain the independence of their households. They are also the ones least able to reciprocate within the neighborhood, which functions as a labor cooperative. They use their authority as senior agnates to extract labor from their juniors. Many lineage histories that I collected record the interesting phenomenon of the senior members of a lineage resolving difficulties among themselves as their sons reach marriageable age. Interaction among the senior agnates of a lineage increases and they exert moral pressure on their children to conform to the norms of lineage solidarity and to 'respect' their elders.

One important conclusion of this discussion is that membership in a clan or lineage involves the expectation of generalized reciprocity. The demands of membership fall unevenly on agnates according to age but no member of a clan fails to benefit in some way. The benefits are often of a non-material form, as in ritual support, but are none the less real. The ideology of generalized reciprocity can be seen to operate at both the jural and behavioral levels of the descent system, but its obligations do not fall uniformly on all members of a clan at the same time. For an individual the expectation of generalized reciprocity means that aid and support are given to someone else not in the expectation that that person will reciprocate, but in the expectation that some other member of the same category will. The time at which such benefits may accrue is, however, affected by factors of age and status. For junior members of lineages, the expectation of long term gain is of little consolation in the conduct of their everyday affairs. A more important incentive for them to help and aid their lineage and clan mates is their present need for aid in ritual activities. Without lineage and clan members to form a congregation the members of a household cannot perform rituals. For the Iteso this means that they have no means of either preventing future misfortunes or of alleviating the effects of misfortunes that have already struck. In addition, no doubt the fundamental values of kinship that promote 'respect' for senior agnates play a part in inducing Iteso to conform to the norms of reciprocity. Certainly that is how Iteso explain actions that appear to violate self-interest.

Another interesting aspect of the Iteso descent system is the extension of the ideology of generalized reciprocity among clansmen to the field of politics. Iteso believe that exogamous clan members act corporately with respect to national politics. They describe the offices of appointed officials as having been 'captured' by this or that exogamous clan. It is true that until independence there had been a tendency for the chiefship of the two Iteso locations to remain in the hands of two lineages. Even now these lineages exercise considerable influence. In addition, incumbents of a government office on occasion provide patronage to their clan mates. This is because they fear loss of support if they do not reciprocate efforts made on their behalf. The patronage, however, is given reluctantly in most cases because an office holder requires support from a variety of members of the coalition that keeps him in power. Certainly there is no evidence that Iteso office holders overwhelmingly favor their clan mates, contrary to Iteso belief. This distinction between political ideology and actuality can be seen in parliamentary elections. Iteso believe that important members of exogamous clans make alliances with a particular candidate and induce their exogamous clan to vote according to those alliances. During a by-election in 1970, I was able to obtain information from major advisors for both of the main candidates. Strategies were predicated by the candidates on the assumption that exogamous clans would vote in blocs. The returns for each of the different subchiefdoms of the constituency indicated that one important variable was the candidate that the subchief supported. I also interviewed a number of voters in an area where one exogamous clan is numerically preponderant. In that area the votes for the two candidates tended to divide by age rather than by clan membership and, in addition, the members of the numerically dominant exogamous clan voted overwhelmingly for the candidate with whom they were not supposed to be aligned. Individual clan members were convinced that most of their fellow clan mates had voted as they were supposed to and that they themselves were, for one reason or another, breaking ranks. When I drew the fact that the election results falsified their conception of clan politics to the attention of politically sophisticated Iteso,

they explained the discrepancies between expected and actual political behavior as the results of the treachery of key clansmen who took rewards and did not deliver the votes. My own data indicate that the power brokers were as surprised at the election results as anyone else because they, in common with most Iteso, believed that they controlled loyalties that, in fact, they did not control. I conclude that the ideological dimension of exogamous clanship extends into the field of political behavior among the Iteso and affects strategic considerations. This does not mean, however, that descent has any significant jural or behavioral significance for contemporary Iteso politics; patently, it does not.<sup>13</sup>

The final and most inclusive level of segmentation in the patrilineal descent system I have called nominal clanship. Nominal clans are characterized by the sharing of a common name and are divided into a number of exogamous clans, usually three or four. They are not and never have been exogamous units, according to Iteso informants. (A few of the numerically smaller nominal clans are not divided into discrete exogamous clans but operate at both levels.) Members of the same nominal clan may marry each other. As a result, members of the nominal clan may be related to each other in a variety of ways— as affinal or maternal or uterine kin— in addition to having a relationship based on nominal clanship. Ties of affinal, maternal or uterine kinship are regarded as being more important than nominal clanship, and two persons will usually reckon their relationship in some way other than nominal clanship if they are able, unless they wish to deny the closeness of their relationship. One case illustrates this very well. An informant told me that he was a uterine kinsman of the woman whose household we lived in. When I mentioned this to the woman, she suggested that this informant was trying to curry favor with me. His mother was a nominal clan mate of the woman and this established a very tenuous basis for claims of a relationship. As she said, *'Mam'ong k'ajeji nesi'*: 'I have no relationship with him' (literally, 'I do not know him'). I have no doubt that she would have claimed him as a kinsman on the basis of ties through nominal clanship if it had suited her purposes to do so. She felt able, however, to deny any relationship that was based only on nominal clanship. This indicates that the ideology of generalized reciprocity that characterizes the social relations of persons who define themselves as agnates has only the barest claim at the level of nominal clanship.

This leads to an issue of importance in the social uses to which the Iteso put their descent system. Iteso do not distinguish among the various levels of patrilineal descent by the designation of a separate term for each level. Instead, they have two terms for agnatic grouping: *ekek* and *ekitekere*. The primary meaning of the word *ekek* is 'door'. This is a clue to the meaning the Iteso give the term in reference to their descent system. A door is a boundary between two different worlds in the sense that different standards of behavior are expected whether a person is inside or outside a door.<sup>14</sup> Generally a door is the boundary between a house and a courtyard. In the terminology of Iteso kinship the *etogo*, 'house', stands for the most solidary group in Iteso society, a mother and her children. Hence, the term *ekek* represents a boundary between a world of solidary relationships and a world of less solidary relationships. When used in reference to an agnatic kin group, the word *ekek* always stands in at least implicit contrast to the word *ekitekere*, which is an agnatic grouping more inclusive than an *ekek* and less solidary. The Iteso use of these terms is relative and situational. Any of the effective levels of agnatic groups may be referred to as *ekek* or *ekitekere*. In practice, the term *ekek* is used to refer to the levels of lineage and exogamous clan and the term *ekitekere* is used to refer to the levels of the exogamous clan and the nominal clan. By use of these terms, Iteso can

make statements about their feelings towards other persons, their intentions to honor obligations and their expectations of other people; in other words, to describe relative distance or intimacy of relationship. Iteso believe that the closer the relationship, the greater the obligation toward generalized reciprocity among agnates. As a result of this belief, attempts to define a relationship as one between members of an *ekek*, and thus characterized by a high degree of generalized reciprocity, do not always succeed. There is a pervasive element of negotiation in Iteso definitions of the various levels of clanship.

The institution of nominal clanship is not only found among the Iteso but also in some of the other ethnic groups of the Karamojong cluster. Because of its persistence in these culturally similar societies, it may be useful to ask a question which smacks of old-fashioned functionalism. Why has an institution without political, economic or ritual significance persisted?<sup>15</sup> I believe that there are two or three aspects to the answer. First, and this has already been alluded to, nominal clanship has some minimal behavioral significance for the Iteso in that it provides the basis for the establishment of a relationship where no other exists. In this it is like some of the forms of metaphorical kinship so ably discussed by Bloch (1971). In a very fluid social system, such as that of the Iteso, nominal clanship provides a wide range of choice for partners to transact. That it is a tenuous basis on which to predicate mutual action may be seen by the efforts Iteso make to develop sets of norms with which to articulate their relationships. another explanation for the persistence of nominal clanship is that it provides a set of ideas about the nature and character of persons. Nominal clans are social categories membership of which implies definite attributes of character and behavior: one clan are reputed to be great sorcerers, another are mean, a third thieves, and so on.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that nominal clanship is the rural analogue for the type of social relations that Mitchell describes as 'categorical' (1965), that emerge in situations in which persons have no control over the other persons in their environment. Like the phenomenon of ethnic categories in the United States, placing a person in a nominal clan may give a sense of security because that person's behavior is then believed to be predictable and at least potentially controllable.<sup>17</sup>

The three levels of agnatic organization that I have described, the lineage, the exogamous clan, and the nominal clan, constitute the descent system of the Iteso of Kenya. In and of themselves they cannot and never were able to be explained primarily in isolation, by facts drawn entirely from the descent system itself. On the other hand, the descent system is not entirely determined by the other fields of activity. Nor has the relationship between descent and other fields remained constant over time. In the immediate pre-colonial period, for example, feuds among the Iteso were articulated in terms of rules derived from the descent system. Obligations and responsibilities with respect to homicide and its compensation were described to me by informants in terms of identities derived from place in the descent system. This is, of course, a classic and well described relationship between descent and jural status. Cases that I collected, however, indicate that actual behavior with respect to feuds was more complicated because of the composite quality of Iteso settlements (Karp forthcoming).

Currently, the Iteso descent system may be said to be connected to territoriality in an indirect sense. Choice of residence is not governed by rules derived from status in a descent group, but support from codescendants is an important factor in determining choice. As the shortage of land among the Iteso becomes severe, choice of residence will be severely limited in any case, and I suspect that descent will become

even more important in making claims to rights in land. The descent system itself is fragmented in terms of the relationship of different levels in the field of ritual and in terms of marriage regulations. At the behavioral level, where patterns of choice and different strategies are examined, we have seen that descent constitutes an important interest in the maintenance of a viable and independent household. Both because of the expectations that Iteso have towards codescendants and the rights and duties they exercise towards each other, relationships derived from the descent system are an important, if not wholly unambiguous, source of support. Iteso, of course, are not always comfortable about the support given by agnates as support engenders both obligations and conflict. Finally, I have attempted to show why the ideological dimension of the descent system should not be underestimated. There are two reasons why descent ideology plays an important role in Iteso social life. First, Iteso believe that common descent creates a mutual-aid society out of codescendants and they predicate their patterns of behavior towards other Iteso on the basis of that belief. The extension of the ideology of descent into the sphere of parliamentary politics provides a good example of this first aspect of the ideology of descent because political behavior does not correspond to the Iteso conception of it. Secondly, codescendants supply a pool of human resources available to Iteso in difficult circumstances. This is particularly true for senior members of descent groups, but may very well equally be an expectation of junior members. It has not been my experience that junior members of descent groups generally derive material benefits from their membership in descent groups. They believe, however, that sharing descent group membership with an important or wealthy person has a potential benefit. At the level of lineage organization this may be true. Wealth and power are sometimes used to benefit more promising younger lineage mates in the form of school fees, loans, and political support. However, in far more cases this is not true. Nevertheless examples provide hope to ambitious young men. That most Iteso household heads pursue a strategy of turning to both their agnatic and non-agnatic kin for support in times of difficulty should not be surprising in view of the previous discussion. A mix of both generalized and specific reciprocity is more useful than complete dependence on relations of one or the other sort. The proportions of the mix depend among other things, on factors of age and status.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV

The Iteso descent system is a relatively simple one to describe. Any difficulty in its analysis arises not in delineating the form of the groups or categories encompassed by the system or in listing the rights and duties associated with membership in descent groups. The complications are related to the association of descent with other fields of social relations among the Iteso. These relationships form a complex pattern that may not be delineated on an *a priori* basis. Only through the separation of the ideological, jural, and behavioral dimensions of descent from each other have I been able to conceptualize the relationships of the descent system to activities such as politics or religion. The difficulty in the analysis of descent results from the absence of a particular pattern among the Iteso. The descent system does not provide a charter for relations among territorial groups in this acephalous society. Hence, the interrelations of descent and politics and religion have to be worked out without benefit of the results of the classic studies of Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, to name the best. This is precisely the problem that faced the ethnographers of the

1950s and 1960s in New Guinea. I seriously doubt that Evans-Pritchard and Fortes meant us to take the social structure of the Nuer and Tallensi as universals. The forms of analysis, as opposed to the types of societies which they studied, continue to prove useful. From Fortes and Evans-Pritchard social anthropologists have learned that fields of social relations, such as descent, must be analysed and explained in terms of their extension into other fields of social relations and the extension of those of other fields into the field of descent.

Under the impetus of the mode of cultural analysis championed by Schneider (1967), we are discovering that the significant symbols that define descent and filiation may very well be near-universals. If blood, semen, and sexual intercourse do prove to be virtual universal symbols of descent, filiation, and affinity, then what will make descent systems different from one another will be the pattern of development they exhibit, particularly in regard to their interrelationships with other social fields. The only means of discovering these patterns of development will be to distinguish among the ideological, jurial, and behavioral aspects of descent as they change over time. This article is conceived as a beginning in just this sort of historical analysis. By building up a body of cases of the sort represented here, it will be possible to discover conditions favorable to the emergence of particular patterns of interrelationships.

#### NOTES

The fieldwork on which this article is based was carried out in Western Kenya between 1969 and 1971, and was made possible by a predoctoral research grant and fellowship from the United States National Institute of Mental Health. An earlier draft of this paper was read at the 1976 meeting of the Northeast Anthropological Association in Middletown, Connecticut. I have benefited from discussions of the research with Professors E. H. Winter, W. Watson, Charles Kaut, Jack Alexander, W. Arens, Dan F. Bauer, and Dr David Rheubottom. Earlier drafts were read and commented on by P. Karp, Dr Mary Bufwack, Dr Steven Wild, and Dr David Kettell. I wish to acknowledge the generous efforts they have made on my behalf. I also gratefully acknowledge a grant in support of publication from the President's Council on International Programs at Indiana University.

<sup>1</sup> See Strathern (1968) for a very clear account of the relevant literature.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Winter has made this point forcefully in conversation. 'Being "weakly patrilineal",' he said, 'is rather like being a little bit pregnant.'

<sup>3</sup> This point has also been made by Kaberry (1967). Evans-Pritchard says quite explicitly, 'We have suggested that the depth of lineages is a function of counting agnation on an existential plane, and we now further suggest that the range of counting agnation is largely determined by its organizing role in the political structure' (1940: 246).

<sup>4</sup> Readers will find a similarity between my distinction of analytical from explanatory theory and Fortes' (1970) distinction of description from

analysis in social anthropology. One difference is that Fortes' use of the term 'description' implies that it is empirically derived, whereas I want to insist that analytical concepts are theoretically derived. Anton Blok's short essay on varieties of patronage (1969) is an excellent example of second level explanatory theory.

<sup>5</sup> A good account of the political system of a culturally similar group is Dyson-Hudson (1966) on the Karimojong.

<sup>6</sup> A fuller account of Iteso political organization and social change is given in Karp 1976, and in Karp forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> The parents of a married couple call each other *ejamu*, 'hide', in reference to the sleeping hide on which the marital act of intercourse occurs. Acts of intercourse between persons who are not married to each other are said by Iteso to occur in the 'bush'. In other words, persons engaging in non- or extra-marital acts of intercourse are believed to act like animals.

<sup>8</sup> Iteso beliefs about sex, birth, and procreation are dealt with in greater detail in I. and P. Karp 1973.

<sup>9</sup> When a widow is inherited by a member of her husband's lineage, it is not necessary to re-perform the marriage ceremony. This is further evidence that the lineage are regarded by the Iteso as the marrying unit.

<sup>10</sup> There exists among grandparents and grandchildren of the opposite sex a mild form of joking related to exogamy regulations. The grandparent jokes that he or she can marry the grandchild. And, of course, the grandparent can. The grandchild, however, as a result of his or her parents'

marriage, is unable to marry the grandparent. This indicates the effect of prohibitions regarding marriage. A marriage that produces children sets up prohibitions for the succeeding generation, but not for the same or preceding generations.

<sup>11</sup> This myth is given in greater detail in Karp forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> This case and the complexities of different strategies of utilizing kin are examined in greater detail in Karp forthcoming, ch. 7.

<sup>13</sup> In the precolonial Iteso polity, the feud was waged in territorial terms. However, it was articulated in terms of membership in or attachment to exogamous clans. Even though clans were territorially dispersed, they were the compensation paying and avenging groups. Political rights and duties with respect to the feud were defined by the jural aspect of the descent system. See Karp 1976 for a fuller account.

<sup>14</sup> Boundaries and the distinction between inside and outside worlds are significant in both the ritual and kinship systems of the Iteso. The term *ekitekere* has no other designation than an agnostic kin group or, by extension, an ethnic group or nation. Dr David Parkin has observed that the metaphor of 'door' used to designate a minimal kin group is commonly found in Bantu and Nilotic languages, as well as having a distribution throughout the rest of the world. The use of a two term system to designate relative degrees of solidarity in social

relationships is characteristic of many African lineage systems and was first described by Evans-Pritchard (1940).

<sup>15</sup> First posed to me by Professor P. H. Gulliver.

<sup>16</sup> In addition, many nominal clans have ritual attributes. Members of certain nominal clans are the only persons who may perform certain ceremonies or eat the first fruits of certain trees. This is discussed more fully in Karp forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> I do not have evidence to support this suggestion. In any case, nominal clanship does tend to operate more in the 'thought in' order of Iteso life than in the 'lived in' order. See Jackson (1974) for an excellent analysis of a clan system in Africa whose significance is primarily ideological. Also see Jacobson (1971) for an account of problems of control of other persons in urban situations.

<sup>18</sup> This analysis has not considered the consequences of recent economic and political changes on the descent system of the Iteso. As the result of the integration of the Iteso into the world economy through the development of cash crops, there appears to be emerging a new class whose power and economic strength is based on control of access to national markets. Whether they represent a group that is perpetuating itself or not remains to be discovered. At this juncture, however, the emergence of an entrepreneurial class has not caused significant alterations in the descent system.

#### REFERENCES

- Barnes, J. A. 1962 'African models in the New Guinea Highlands,' *Man* 62: 5-9.
- Bloch, Maurice 1971 'The moral and tactical meaning of kinship terms,' *Man* (NS) 6: 468-73.
- Blok, Anton 1969 'Variations in patronage,' *Sociologische Gids* 16: 365-78.
- Brown, Paula 1962 'Non-agnates among the patrilineal Chimbu,' *J. Polynesian Society* 71:57-69.
- Dyson-Hudson, Neville 1966 *Karimojong Politics*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1940 *The Nuer*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Falding, Harold 1968 *The Sociological Task*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Fortes, Meyer 1969 *Kinship and the Social Order*. Chicago: Aldine.
- 1970 *Time and Social Structure and Other Essays*. London: Athlone Press.
- Goody, Jack (ed.) 1958 *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- 1973 *The Character of Kinship*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, Michael 1974 'The structure and significance of Kuranko clanship,' *Africa* XLIV: 397-416.
- Jacobson, David 1971 'Mobility, continuity, and urban social organization,' *Man* (NS) 6: 630-45.
- Kaberry, Phyllis 1967 'The plasticity of New Guinea kinship,' in Maurice Freedman (ed.) *Social Organization: Essays Presented to Raymond Firth*. London: Athlone Press.
- Karp, Ivan 1976 'The Iteso response to political domination,' in W. Arens (ed.) *A century of Change in East and Central Africa*. The Hague: Mouton & Co.
- forthcoming *Fields of Change among the Iteso of Kenya*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, International Library of Anthropology.

- Karp, Ivan and Patricia 1973 'The Southern Iteso: beliefs and practices,' in A. Molnos (ed.) *Cultural Source Materials For Population Planning in East Africa*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Keesing, Roger 1971 'Descent, residence, and cultural codes,' in L. R. Hiatt and C. Jayawardena (eds.) *Anthropology in Oceania*. Sydney: University of Sydney Press.
- Leach, E. R. 1961 *Rethinking Anthropology*. London: Athlone Press.
- Lewis, I. M. 1965 'Problems in the comparative study of unilineal descent,' in M. Banton (ed.) *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*. London: Tavistock.
- Meggitt, M. J. 1965 *The Lineage System of the Mae-engga*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd.
- Mitchell, J. Clyde 1965 'Theoretical orientations in African urban studies,' in M. Banton (ed.) *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*. ASA Monographs 4. London: Tavistock.
- Moore, Sally Falk 1969 'Descent and legal position,' in L. Nader (ed.) *Law in Culture and Society*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Needham, Rodney 1974 'Prescription,' *Oceania* 43: 166-81.
- Parsons, Talcott 1951 *The Social System*. Glenco: The Free Press.
- Sahlins, Marshall D. 1965 'On the sociology of primitive exchange,' in M. Banton (ed.) *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*. ASA Monographs 1. London: Tavistock.
- Scheffler, H. W. 1966 'Ancestor worship in anthropology: or observations on descent and descent groups,' *Current Anthropology* 7:541-51.
- Schneider, David 1967 'Kinship and culture: descent and filiation as cultural constructs,' *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 23: 65-73.
- Strathern, Andrew 1968 'Descent and alliance in the New Guinea Highlands: some problems of comparison,' *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute for 1968*. 37-53.
- 1972 *One Father, One Blood*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- 1973 'Kinship, descent, and locality: some New Guinea examples,' in J. Goody (ed.) *The Character of Kinship*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Wagner, Roy 1967 *The Curse of Souw*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### Résumé

#### MODÈLES DE NOUVELLE GUINÉE DANS LA SAVANNE AFRICAINE

DEPUIS le début des années 1960, les études des systèmes de descendance parmi les sociétés des hautes terres de la Nouvelle Guinée ont fait surgir la question suivante: dans quelle mesure les modèles fournis par l'analyse de la descendance dans la société africaine sont-ils applicables? On se propose ici de voir si les progrès qui ont marqué les analyses de la descendance en Nouvelle Guinée pourront être appliqués à l'étude du système de descendance des Iteso du Kenya. On pose ici la nécessité d'une distinction entre trois dimensions du système de descendance, à savoir l'idéologie, l'aspect juridique et le comportement. La qualité et le type des rapports qui lient ces trois aspects d'un système de descendance dépendent de domaines sociaux qui n'entrent pas dans le cadre de la descendance. Ainsi, toute analyse du système de descendance d'une société donnée devra tenir compte des domaines d'action politique, domestique et rituelle dans son explication de la structure de ce système. On distingue chez les Iteso trois niveaux de descendance que l'auteur appelle le clan nominal, le clan exogame et la lignée. L'examen des croyances Iteso relatives à l'hérédité, la gestation et la descendance démontre que la logique des conceptions des Iteso sur ces sujets mettent en jeu une croyance à la descendance patrilinéaire. Cependant ces mêmes croyances n'entraînent pas l'existence de divers niveaux d'organisation patrilinéaire: ces niveaux (on le montre ici), sont le résultat du prolongement des domaines politique, domestique et rituel dans le domaine de la descendance, si bien que ce dernier est déformé par ses rapports avec les autres domaines sociaux.