

erton's description of the Hiri (contained in Seligman's "Melanesians").

A summary of the research done on Primitive Economics, showing, incidentally, how little real, sound work has been accomplished, will be found in Pater W. Pöppel's "Die Ethnologische Wirtschaftsforschung" in *Anthropos*, X-XI, 1915-16, pp. 611-651, and 971-1079. The article is very useful, where the author summarises the views of others.

Professor C. G. Seligman, op. cit., p. 93, states that m-shells, *toea*, as they are called by the Motu, are traded from the Port Moresby district westward to the Gulf of Papua. Among the Motu and Koita, near Port Moresby, they are highly valued, and nowadays attain very high prices, up to £30, much more than is paid for the same article among the Massim.

This and the following quotations are from the Author's preliminary article on the Kula in *Man*, July, 1920. Article number 51, p. 100.

<sup>d</sup>In order not to be guilty of inconsistency in using loosely the word "ceremonial" I shall define it briefly. I shall call an action ceremonial, if it is (1) public; (2) carried on under observance of definite formalities; (3) if it has sociological, religious, or magical import, and it carries with it obligations.

<sup>e</sup>This is not a fanciful construction of what an erroneous opinion might be, for I could give actual examples proving that such opinions have been set forth, but as I am not giving here a criticism of existing theories of Primitive Economics, I do not want to overload this chapter with quotations.

<sup>f</sup>It is hardly necessary perhaps to make it quite clear that all questions of origins of development or history of the institutions have been rigorously ruled out of this work. The mixing up of speculative or hypothetical views with an account of facts is, in my opinion an unpardonable sin against ethnographic method.

## 14. On Joking Relationships<sup>a</sup>

A. R. RADCLIFFE-BROWN (1881-1955)

THE PUBLICATION OF Mr. F. J. Pedler's note<sup>b</sup> on what are called "joking relationships", following on two other papers on the same subject by Professor Henri Labouret<sup>c</sup> and Mademoiselle Denise Paulme,<sup>d</sup> suggests that some general theoretical discussion of the nature of these relationships may be of interest to readers of *Africa*<sup>e,1</sup>

(1940)

What is meant by the term "joking relationship" is a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence. It is important to distinguish two main varieties. In one the relation is symmetrical; each of the two persons teases or makes fun of the other. In

Radcliffe-Brown begins his essay, which first appeared in the journal *Africa* by mentioning several other anthropologists of his era. F. J. Pedler (1908-1991), later Sir Frederick Pedler, was a colonial administrator and diplomat who became the director of the United Africa Company and wrote several books on Africa. In the note referenced here, Pedler reports on a legal case involving a joking relationship called *utani*. We will return to that case below. Henri Labouret (1878-1959) was a soldier, colonial administrator, linguist, and ethnographer who played a critical role in West African ethnography in the early twentieth century. Denise Paulme (1909-1998) was a student of Marcel Mauss who became one of the leading French Africanist

scholars. Her book *Femmes d'Afrique Noire* (1960), a volume of essays about African women written entirely by female anthropologists, is an early classic of feminist anthropology. All of the work cited by Radcliffe-Brown, as well as this essay itself, appeared in the journal *Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute*. National traditions in anthropology tended to be located in specific places. Much American anthropology was done among Native American groups in the United States or among people living on American controlled territories, particularly in the Pacific Islands. British and French anthropology tended to focus on Africa or Southeast Asia, where these nations had colonial possessions.

the other variety the relation is asymmetrical; A jokes at the expense of B and B accepts the teasing good humouredly but without retaliating; or A teases B as much as he pleases and B in return teases A only a little. There are many varieties in the form of this relationship in different societies. In some instances the joking or teasing is only verbal, in others it includes horse-play; in some the joking includes elements of obscenity, in others not.

Standardized social relationships of this kind are extremely widespread, not only in Africa but also in Asia, Oceania and North America. To arrive at a scientific understanding of the phenomenon it is necessary to make a wide comparative study. Some material for this now exists in anthropological literature, though by no means all that could be desired, since it is unfortunately still only rarely that such relationships are observed and described as exactly as they might be.<sup>2</sup>

The joking relationship is a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism. The behavior is such that in any other social context it would express and arouse hostility; but it is not meant seriously and must not be taken seriously. There is a pretence of hostility and a real friendliness. To put it in another way, the relationship is one of permitted disrespect. Thus any complete theory of it must be part of, or consistent with, a theory of the place of respect in social relations and in social life generally. But this is a very wide and very important sociological problem; for it is evident that the whole maintenance of a social order depends upon the appropriate kind and degree of respect being shown towards certain persons, things and ideas or symbols.<sup>3</sup>

Examples of joking relationships between relatives by marriage are very commonly found in Africa and in other parts of the world. Thus Mademoiselle Paulme<sup>f</sup> records that among the

Dogon a man stands in a joking relationship to his wife's sisters and their daughters. Frequently the relationship holds between a man and both the brothers and sisters of his wife. But in some instances there is a distinction whereby a man is on joking terms with his wife's younger brothers and sisters but not with those who are older than she is. This joking with the wife's brothers and sisters is usually associated with a custom requiring extreme respect, often partial or complete avoidance, between a son-in-law and his wife's parents.<sup>8</sup>

The kind of structural situation in which the associated customs of joking and avoidance are found may be described as follows. A marriage involves a readjustment of the social structure whereby the woman's relations with her family are greatly modified and she enters into a new and very close relation with her husband. The latter is at the same time brought into a special relation with his wife's family, to which, however, he is an outsider. For the sake of brevity, though at the risk of over-simplification, we will consider only the husband's relation to his wife's family. The relation can be described as involving both attachment and separation, both social conjunction and social disjunction, if I may use the terms. The man has his own definite position in the social structure, determined for him by his birth into a certain family, lineage or clan. The great body of his rights and duties and the interests and activities that he shares with others are the result of his position. Before the marriage his wife's family are outsiders for him as he is an outsider for them. This constitutes a social disjunction which is not destroyed by the marriage. The social conjunction results from the continuance, though in altered form, of the wife's relation to her family, their continued interest in her and in her children. If the wife were really bought

<sup>2</sup> Note that Radcliffe-Brown says his goal is to provide a scientific understanding of joking relationships. He hoped to make anthropology a science and believed that it was possible to discover universal laws and principles underlying the structure of human society. These laws were to be discovered through the comparative analysis of social structure.

<sup>3</sup> Following Durkheim, and using the concept of the organic analogy developed by Spencer, Radcliffe-Brown's key concern was the maintenance of social order. He understood society as composed of a series of institutions, each of which could be understood in terms of its function (hence functionalism). Its function was the role it played in maintaining social order.

and paid for, as ignorant persons say that she is in Africa, there would be no place for any permanent close relation of a man with his wife's family. But though slaves can be bought, wives cannot.<sup>4</sup>

Social disjunction implies divergence of interests and therefore the possibility of conflict and hostility, while conjunction requires the avoidance of strife. How can a relation which combines the two be given a stable, ordered form? There are two ways of doing this. One is to maintain between two persons so related an extreme mutual respect and a limitation of direct personal contact. This is exhibited in the very formal relations that are, in so many societies, characteristic of the behavior of a son-in-law on the one side and his wife's father and mother on the other. In its most extreme form there is complete avoidance of any social contact between a man and his mother-in-law.

This avoidance must not be mistaken for a sign of hostility. One does, of course, if one is wise, avoid having too much to do with one's enemies, but that is quite a different matter. I once asked an Australian native why he had to avoid his mother-in-law, and his reply was, "Because she is my best friend in the world; she has given me my wife". The mutual respect between son-in-law and parents-in-law is a mode of friendship. It prevents conflict that might arise through divergence of interest.

The alternative to this relation of extreme mutual respect and restraint is the joking relationship, one, that is, of mutual disrespect and licence. Any serious hostility is prevented by the playful antagonism of teasing, and this in its regular repetition is a constant expression or reminder of that social disjunction which is one of the essential components of the relation, while the social conjunction is maintained by the friendliness that takes no offence at insult.<sup>5</sup>

The discrimination within the wife's family between those who have to be treated with extreme respect and those with whom it is a duty to be disrespectful is made on the basis of generation and sometimes of seniority within the generation. The usual respected relatives are those of the first ascending generation, the wife's mother and her sisters, the wife's father and his brothers, sometimes the wife's mother's brother. The joking relatives are those of a person's own generation; but very frequently a distinction of seniority within the generation is made; a wife's older sister or brother may be respected while those younger will be teased.

In certain societies a man may be said to have relatives by marriage long before he marries and indeed as soon as he is born into the world. This is provided by the institution of the required or preferential marriage. We will, for the sake of brevity, consider only one kind of such organisations. In many societies it is regarded as preferable that a man should marry the daughter of his mother's brother; this is a form of the custom known as cross-cousin marriage. Thus his female cousins of this kind, or all those women whom by the classificatory system he classifies as such, are potential wives for him, and their brothers are his potential brothers-in-law. Among the Ojibwa Indians of North America, the Chiga of Uganda, and in Fiji and New Caledonia, as well as elsewhere, this form of marriage is found and is accompanied by a joking relationship between a man and the sons and daughters of his mother's brother. To quote one instance of these, the following is recorded for the Ojibwa. "When cross-cousins meet they must try to embarrass one another. They 'joke' one another, making the most vulgar allegations, by their standards as well as ours. But being 'kind' relations, no one can take offence. Cross-cousins who do not joke in this

<sup>4</sup> Radcliffe-Brown sees a critical contradiction at the core of marriage. A husband does not become part of his wife's family but neither is he entirely separate from them. A wife does not become part of her husband's family, and her family of origin continues to have interest in her and her children. This contradiction creates the preconditions for conflict between the two families. For society to function

smoothly there must be an institution to resolve this conflict.

<sup>5</sup> Thus, society functions smoothly because the contradiction between husband and wife's family is resolved either by avoidance or joking. Radcliffe-Brown shows that these are two related phenomena.

way are considered boorish, as not playing the social game."<sup>h</sup>

The joking relationship here is of fundamentally the same kind as that already discussed. It is established before marriage and is continued, after marriage, with the brothers- and sisters-in-law.

In some parts of Africa there are joking relationships that have nothing to do with marriage. Mr. Pedler's note, mentioned above, refers to a joking relationship between two distinct tribes, the Sukuma and the Zaramu, and in the evidence it was stated that there was a similar relation between the Sukuma and the Zigua and between the Ngoni and the Bemba. The woman's evidence suggests that this custom of rough teasing exists in the Sukuma tribe between persons related by marriage, as it does in so many other African tribes.<sup>i,6</sup>

While a joking relationship between two tribes is apparently rare, and certainly deserves, as Mr. Pedler suggests, to be carefully investigated, a similar relationship between clans has been observed in other parts of Africa. It is described by Professor Labouret and Mademoiselle Paulme in the articles previously mentioned, and amongst the Tallensi it has been studied by Dr. Fortes, who will deal with it in a forthcoming publication.<sup>j,7</sup>

The two clans are not, in these instances, specially connected by intermarriage. The relation between them is an alliance involving real friend-

liness and mutual aid combined with an appearance of hostility.

The general structural situation in these instances seems to be as follows. The individual is a member of a certain defined group, a clan, for example, within which his relations to others are defined by a complex set of rights and duties, referring to all the major aspects of social life, and supported by definite sanctions. There may be another group outside his own which is so linked with his as to be the field of extension of jural and moral relations of the same general kind. Thus, in East Africa, as we learn from Mr. Pedler's note, the Zigua and the Zaramu do not joke with one another because a yet closer bond exists between them since they are ndugu (brothers). But beyond the field within which social relations are thus defined there lie other groups with which, since they are outsiders to the individual's own group, the relation involves possible or actual hostility. In any fixed relations between the members of two such groups the separateness of the groups must be recognised. It is precisely this separateness which is not merely recognised but emphasised when a joking relationship is established. The show of hostility, the perpetual disrespect, is a continual expression of that social disjunction which is an essential part of the whole structural situation, but over which, without destroying or even weakening it, there is

<sup>6</sup> Be sure to read Radcliffe-Brown's original footnote here. Pedler had reported a court case involving a joking relationship. Radcliffe-Brown uses this as a springboard to argue that anthropology should be involved in colonial administration. He had been a colonial administrator himself (director of education in Tonga from 1916 to 1920) and like other functionalists, saw service to the colonial administrations as one aim of their work. Malinowski argued, in an article entitled "Practical Anthropology" (1929a), that such service should be a key goal. Then (as today) access to funding was an important reason for stressing the applied aspects of anthropological research: Much of the money that funded research projects came from the Colonial Social Science Research Council. In general, functionalists did not question the basic fact of colonization or the subservient position of the colonized. Both paternalism and social evolutionism were implied in their writings. They believed that benev-

olent colonialism offered native societies the chance for progress. On the other hand, they considered themselves friends of those they studied and argued on their behalf before colonial administrations. Colonial administrations, for their part, were deeply suspicious of anthropologists, considering them too liberal and too close to the natives (Goody 1995). The same Malinowski who authored "Practical Anthropology" also authored the preface to Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu* (1979 [1938]). Kenyatta, a student of Malinowski, is better remembered as a leader of Kenya's fight for independence and that nation's first president.

<sup>7</sup> Fortes (1906–1983) was a member of the group of students who gathered around Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in the years between World War I and II. He is discussed more fully in the next essay in this volume.

provided the social conjunction of friendliness and mutual aid.

The theory that is here put forward, therefore, is that both the joking relationship which constitutes an alliance between clans or tribes, and that between relatives by marriage, are modes of organising a definite and stable system of social behaviour in which conjunctive and disjunctive components, as I have called them, are maintained and combined.<sup>8</sup>

To provide the full evidence for this theory by following out its implications and examining in detail its application to different instances would take a book rather than a short article. But some confirmation can perhaps be offered by a consideration of the way in which respect and disrespect appear in various kinship relations, even though nothing more can be attempted than a very brief indication of a few significant points.<sup>9</sup>

In studying a kinship system it is possible to distinguish the different relatives by reference to the kind and degree of respect that is paid to them.<sup>k</sup> Although kinship systems vary very much in their details there are certain principles which are found to be very widespread. One of them is that by which a person is required to show a marked respect to relatives belonging to the generation immediately preceding his own. In a majority of societies the father is a relative to whom marked respect must be shown. This is so even in many so-called matrilineal societies, i.e. those which are organised into matrilineal clans or lineages. One can very frequently observe a tendency to extend this attitude of respect to all

relatives of the first ascending generation and, further, to persons who are not relatives. Thus in those tribes of East Africa that are organised into age-sets a man is required to show special respect to all men of his father's age-set and to their wives.<sup>10</sup>

The social function of this is obvious. The social tradition is handed down from one generation to the next. For the tradition to be maintained it must have authority behind it. The authority is therefore normally recognised as possessed by members of the preceding generation and it is they who exercise discipline. As a result of this the relation between persons of the two generations usually contains an element of inequality, the parents and those of their generation being in a position of superiority over the children who are subordinate to them. The unequal relation between a father and his son is maintained by requiring the latter to show respect to the former. The relation is asymmetrical.

When we turn to the relation of an individual to his grandparents and their brothers and sisters we find that in the majority of human societies relatives of the second ascending generation are treated with very much less respect than those of the first ascending generation, and instead of a marked inequality there is a tendency to approximate to a friendly equality.

Considerations of space forbid any full discussion of this feature of social structure, which is one of very great importance. There are many instances in which the grandparents and their grandchildren are grouped together in the social

<sup>8</sup> Thus, that which is true within a group, is also true between groups. Just as the potential conflicts between husband's and wife's families are resolved by avoidance and joking, so too potential conflicts between related tribes may be resolved by avoidance or joking.

<sup>9</sup> Passages such as this are very typical of Radcliffe-Brown's work. He frequently claims that the idea he wishes to demonstrate or the theory he wishes to prove would require a substantial body of work, but he never provides that work. Radcliffe-Brown constructs his arguments based almost exclusively on his reading of the ethnographic reports of others. His own fieldwork is rarely mentioned. He had done fieldwork among the Andaman Islanders and among the Kariëra in Australia but he was

not known for his ethnographic talents and had little interest in writing ethnography. Almost the whole of his work consists of relatively brief essays such as this one, and addresses. He published one full-length ethnography *The Andaman Islanders*, his account of his 1906-1908 fieldwork, but even this was not published until 1922, well over a decade after his return from the field.

<sup>10</sup> Much of Radcliffe-Brown's work focused on kinship. He was guided in this in part by his mentor, W. H. R. Rivers. Rivers, a medical doctor who had joined the 1898 Torres Straits expedition, devised what he called the "genealogical method." He suggested that a truly scientific anthropology could be achieved through the study of kinship (Rivers 1910).

structure in opposition to their children and parents. An important clue to the understanding of the subject is the fact that in the flow of social life through time, in which men are born, become mature and die, the grandchildren replace their grandparents.

In many societies there is an actual joking relationship, usually of a relatively mild kind, between relatives of alternate generations. Grandchildren make fun of their grandparents and of those who are called grandfather and grandmother by the classificatory system of terminology, and these reply in kind.

Grandparents and grandchildren are united by kinship; they are separated by age and by the social difference that results from the fact that as the grandchildren are in process of entering into full participation in the social life of the community the grandparents are gradually retiring from it. Important duties towards his relatives in his own and even more in his parents' generation impose upon an individual many restraints; but with those of the second ascending generation, his grandparents and collateral relatives, there can be, and usually is, established a relationship of simple friendliness relatively free from restraint. In this instance also, it is suggested, the joking relationship is a method of ordering a relation which combines social conjunction and disjunction.

This thesis could, I believe, be strongly supported if not demonstrated by considering the details of these relationships. There is space for only one illustrative point. A very common form of joke in this connection is for the grandchild to pretend that he wishes to marry the grandfather's wife, or that he intends to do so when his grandfather dies, or to treat her as already being his wife. Alternatively the grandfather may pretend that the wife of his grandchild is, or might be, his wife.<sup>1</sup> The point of the joke is the pretence at

ignoring the difference of age between the grandparent and the grandchild.<sup>11</sup>

In various parts of the world there are societies in which a sister's son teases and otherwise behaves disrespectfully towards his mother's brother. In these instances the joking relationship seems generally to be asymmetrical. For example the nephew may take his uncle's property but not vice versa; or, as amongst the Nama Hotentots, the nephew may take a fine beast from his uncle's herd and the uncle in return takes a wretched beast from that of the nephew.<sup>m</sup>

The kind of social structure in which this custom of privileged disrespect to the mother's brother occurs in its most marked forms, for example the Thonga of South-East Africa, Fiji and Tonga in the Pacific, and the Central Siouan tribes of North America, is characterised by emphasis on patrilineal lineage and a marked distinction between relatives through the father and relatives through the mother.

In a former publication<sup>n</sup> I offered an interpretation of this custom of privileged familiarity towards the mother's brother. Briefly it is as follows. For the continuance of a social system children require to be cared for and to be trained. Their care demands affectionate and unselfish devotion; their training requires that they shall be subjected to discipline. In the societies with which we are concerned there is something of a division of function between the parents and other relatives on the two sides. The control and discipline are exercised chiefly by the father and his brothers and generally also by his sisters; these are relatives who must be respected and obeyed. It is the mother who is primarily responsible for the affectionate care; the mother and her brothers and sisters are therefore relatives who can be looked to for assistance and indulgence. The mother's brother is called "male

<sup>11</sup> Once again, Radcliffe-Brown alludes to evidence but fails to present anything more than anecdote. At this point, his thesis seems to be that joking is found in relationships where there is conjuncture and disjuncture. As with in-laws and in his examples of other groups, grandchildren are conjoined to their grandparents by being members of the same family but disjoined because they are separated

by the generation of parents. This may be true but raises a problem: because we are all individuals, no two human beings have exactly the same interests. Therefore, couldn't any two individuals be said to have both conjoined and disjoined interests? The question highlights the difficulties in trying to explain the behavior of groups of individuals through abstract and generalized theoretical constructs.

mother" in Tonga and in some South African tribes.<sup>12</sup>

I believe that this interpretation of the special position of the mother's brother in these societies has been confirmed by further field work since I wrote the article referred to. But I was quite aware at the time it was written that the discussion and interpretation needed to be supplemented so as to bring them into line with a general theory of the social functions of respect and disrespect.

The joking relationship with the mother's brother seems to fit well with the general theory of such relationships here outlined. A person's most important duties and rights attach him to his paternal relatives, living and dead. It is to his patrilineal lineage or clan that he belongs. For the members of his mother's lineage he is an outsider, though one in whom they have a very special and tender interest. Thus here again there is a relation in which there is both attachment, or conjunction, and separation, or disjunction, between the two persons concerned.

But let us remember that in this instance the relation is asymmetrical.<sup>o</sup> The nephew is disrespectful and the uncle accepts the disrespect. There is inequality and the nephew is the superior. This is recognised by the natives themselves. Thus in Tonga it is said that the sister's son is a "chief" (eiki) to his mother's brother, and Junod<sup>P</sup> quotes a Thonga native as saying "The uterine nephew is a chief! He takes any liberty he likes with his maternal uncle". Thus the joking relationship with the uncle does not merely annul the usual relation between the two generations, it reverses it. But while the superiority of the father and the father's sister is exhibited in the respect that is shown to them the nephew's superiority to

his mother's brother takes the opposite form of permitted disrespect.

It has been mentioned that there is a widespread tendency to feel that a man should show respect towards, and treat as social superiors, his relatives in the generation preceding his own, and the custom of joking with, and at the expense of, the maternal uncle clearly conflicts with this tendency. This conflict between principles of behaviour helps us to understand what seems at first sight a very extraordinary feature of the kinship terminology of the Thonga tribe and the VaNdau tribe in South-East Africa. Amongst the Thonga, although there is a term *malume* (= male mother) for the mother's brother, this relative is also, and perhaps more frequently, referred to as a grandfather (*kokwana*) and he refers to his sister's son as his grandchild (*ntukulu*). In the VaNdau tribe the mother's brother and also the mother's brother's son are called "grandfather" (*tetekulu*, literally "great father") and their wives are called "grandmother" (*mbyiya*), while the sister's son and the father's sister's son are called "grandchild" (*muzukulu*).

This apparently fantastic way of classifying relatives can be interpreted as a sort of legal fiction whereby the male relatives of the mother's lineage are grouped together as all standing towards an individual in the same general relation. Since this relation is one of privileged familiarity on the one side, and solicitude and indulgence on the other, it is conceived as being basically the one appropriate for a grandchild and a grandfather. This is indeed in the majority of human societies the relationship in which this pattern of behaviour most frequently occurs. By this legal fiction the mother's brother ceases to belong to the first ascending generation, of which it is felt that the members ought to be respected.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The former publication is "Mother's Brother in South Africa," found in the earlier editions of this book. In that essay, in addition to making the point he just described, Radcliffe-Brown argues that matrilineal kinship systems are not survivals of earlier stages of human evolution (as Morgan, Junod, and Bachofen had argued) but a fully functioning part of current-day societies. In the present essay he attempts to place "Mother's Brother" in a more general theory of kin relations.

<sup>13</sup> Keep in mind that in kinship studies (particularly those by functionalist authors) kin names such as "grandfather" or "male mother" refer primarily to behavioral expectations rather than biological linkages. So, if a Thonga youth calls his mother's brother "grandfather," he behaves to him as he behaves to his father's father (whom he also calls "grandfather").

It may be worth while to justify this interpretation by considering another of the legal fictions of the VaNdau terminology. In all these south-eastern Bantu tribes both the father's sister and the sister, particularly the elder sister, are persons who must be treated with great respect. They are also both of them members of a man's own patrilineal lineage. Amongst the VaNdau the father's sister is called "female father" (tetadji) and so also is the sister.<sup>14</sup> Thus by the fiction of terminological classification the sister is placed in the father's generation, the one that appropriately includes persons to whom one must exhibit marked respect.

In the south-eastern Bantu tribes there is assimilation of two kinds of joking relatives, the grandfather and the mother's brother. It may help our understanding of this to consider an example in which the grandfather and the brother-in-law are similarly grouped together. The Cherokee Indians of North America probably numbering at one time about 20,000, were divided into seven matrilineal clans.<sup>5</sup> A man could not marry a woman of his own clan or of his father's clan. Common membership of the same clan connects him with his brothers and his mother's brothers. Towards his father and all his relatives in his father's clan of his own or his father's generation he is required by custom to show a marked respect. He applies the kinship term for "father" not only to his father's brothers but also to the sons of his father's sisters. Here is another example of the same kind of fiction as described above; the relatives of his own generation whom he is required to respect and who belong to his father's matrilineal lineage are spoken of as though they belonged to the generation of his parents. The body of his immediate kindred is included in these two clans, that of his mother and his father. To the other clans of the tribe he is in a sense an outsider. But with two of them he is connected, namely with the clans of his two grandfathers, his father's father and his mother's father. He speaks of all the members of these two clans, of whatever age, as

"grandfathers" and "grandmothers". He stands in a joking relationship with all of them. When a man marries he must respect his wife's parents but jokes with her brothers and sisters.

The interesting and critical feature is that it is regarded as particularly appropriate that a man should marry a woman whom he calls "grandmother", i.e. a member of his father's father's clan or his mother's father's clan. If this happens his wife's brothers and sisters, whom he continues to tease, are amongst those whom he previously teased as his "grandfathers" and "grandmothers". This is analogous to the widely spread organisation in which a man has a joking relationship with the children of his mother's brother and is expected to marry one of the daughters.<sup>14</sup>

It ought perhaps to be mentioned that the Cherokee also have a one-sided joking relationship in which a man teases his father's sister's husband. The same custom is found in Mota of the Bank Islands. In both instances we have a society organised on a matrilineal basis in which the mother's brother is respected, the father's sister's son is called "father" (so that the father's sister's husband is the father of a "father"), and there is a special term for the father's sister's husband. Further observation of the societies in which this custom occurs is required before we can be sure of its interpretation. I do not remember that it has been reported from any part of Africa.

What has been attempted in this paper is to define in the most general and abstract terms the kind of structural situation in which we may expect to find well-marked joking relationships. We have been dealing with societies in which the basic social structure is provided by kinship. By reason of his birth or adoption into a certain position in the social structure an individual is connected with a large number of other persons. With some of them he finds himself in a definite and specific jurial relation, i.e. one which can be denned in terms of rights and duties. Who these persons will be and what will be the rights and duties

<sup>14</sup> In other words, in this example, a man jokes with his potential marriage partners and their families. He continues to joke with their families after his marriage.



depend on the form taken by the social structure. As an example of such a specific jural relation we may take that which normally exists between a father and son, or an elder brother and a younger brother. Relations of the same general type may be extended over a considerable range to all the members of a lineage or a clan or an age-set. Besides these specific jural relations which are defined not only negatively but also positively, i.e. in terms of things that must be done as well as things that must not there are general jural relations which are expressed almost entirely in terms of prohibitions and which extend throughout the whole political society. It is forbidden to kill or wound other persons or to take or destroy their property. Besides these two classes of social relations there is another, including many very diverse varieties, which can perhaps be called relations of alliance or consociation. For example, there is a form of alliance of very great importance in many societies, in which two persons or two groups are connected by an exchange of gifts or services.<sup>5</sup> Another example is provided by the institution of blood-brotherhood which is so widespread in Africa.

The argument of this paper has been intended to show that the joking relationship is one special form of alliance in this sense. An alliance by exchange of goods and services may be associated with a joking relationship, as in the instance recorded by Professor Labouret.<sup>4</sup> Or it may be combined with the custom of avoidance. Thus in the Andaman Islands the parents of a man and the parents of his wife avoid all contact with each other and do not speak; at the same time it is the custom that they should frequently exchange presents through the medium of the younger married couple.<sup>15</sup>

But the exchange of gifts may also exist without either joking or avoidance, as in Samoa, in the exchange of gifts between the family of a man and the family of the woman he marries or the very similar exchange between a chief and his "talking chief".

So also in an alliance by blood-brotherhood there may be a joking relationship as amongst the Zande;<sup>6</sup> and in the somewhat similar alliance formed by exchange of names there may also be mutual teasing. But in alliances of this kind there may be a relation of extreme respect and even of avoidance. Thus in the Yaralde and neighbouring tribes of South Australia two boys belonging to communities distant from one another, and therefore more or less hostile, are brought into an alliance by the exchange of their respective umbilical cords. The relationship thus established is a sacred one; the two boys may never speak to one another. But when they grow up they enter upon a regular exchange of gifts, which provides the machinery for a sort of commerce between the two groups to which they belong.

Thus the four modes of alliance or consociation, (1) through intermarriage, (2) by exchange of goods or services, (3) by blood-brotherhood or exchanges of names or sacra, and (4) by the joking relationship, may exist separately or combined in several different ways. The comparative study of these combinations presents a number of interesting but complex problems. The facts recorded from West Africa by Professor Labouret and Mademoiselle Paulme afford us valuable material. But a good deal more intensive field research is needed before these problems of social structure can be satisfactorily dealt with.

What I have called relations by alliance need to be compared with true contractual relations.

<sup>15</sup> Radcliffe-Brown was very deeply influenced by his reading of Durkheim and Durkheim's followers. This is evident in many ways in this essay. First, Radcliffe-Brown makes very heavy use of the ideas of Marcel Mauss and Mauss' student, Paulme. Beyond this, his overriding concern is the same as Durkheim's. Durkheim was particularly concerned with the ways in which social solidarity is developed and maintained. In other words, he focused on the mechanisms that held societies together. He found these in notions of the collective conscience, social facts, and collective represen-

tations. Radcliffe-Brown has similar concerns. For him, kinship is the critical institution holding societies together (and this is consistent with his mentor Rivers' ideas as well as a general concern within Anglo-American anthropology). Within kinship, the relations of law and alliance that he discusses here function to hold society together and maintain it. Notice that the system is very neat: Where there are possibilities of disjuncture and rupture, society creates institutions such as joking and avoidance relationships to smooth the disjunctures over and avoid conflict.

The latter are specific jural relations entered into by two persons or two groups, in which either party has definite positive obligations towards the other, and failure to carry out the obligations is subject to a legal sanction. In an alliance by blood-brotherhood there are general obligations of mutual aid, and the sanction for the carrying out of these, as shown by Dr. Evans-Pritchard, is of a kind that can be called magical or ritual. In the alliance by exchange of gifts failure to fulfil the obligation to make an equivalent return for a gift received breaks the alliance and substitutes a state of hostility and may also cause a loss of prestige for the defaulting party. Professor Mauss<sup>7</sup> has argued that in this kind of alliance also there is a magical sanction, but it is very doubtful if such is always present, and even when it is it may often be of secondary importance.

The joking relationship is in some ways the exact opposite of a contractual relation. Instead of specific duties to be fulfilled there is privileged disrespect and freedom or even licence, and the only obligation is not to take offence at the disrespect so long as it is kept within certain bounds defined by custom, and not to go beyond those bounds. Any default in the relationship is like a breach of the rules of etiquette; the person concerned is regarded as not knowing how to behave himself.

In a true contractual relationship the two parties are conjoined by a definite common interest in reference to which each of them accepts specific obligations. It makes no difference that in other matters their interests may be divergent. In the joking relationship and in some avoidance relationships, such as that between a man and his wife's mother, one basic determinant is that the

social structure separates them in such a way as to make many of their interests divergent, so that conflict or hostility might result. The alliance by extreme respect, by partial or complete avoidance, prevents such conflict but keeps the parties conjoined. The alliance by joking does the same thing in a different way.

All that has been, or could be, attempted in this paper is to show the place of the joking relationship in a general comparative study of social structure. What I have called, provisionally, relations of consociation or alliance are distinguished from the relations set up by common membership of a political society which are defined in terms of general obligations, of etiquette, or morals, or of law. They are distinguished also from true contractual relations, defined by some specific obligation for each contracting party, into which the individual enters of his own volition. They are further to be distinguished from the relations set up by common membership of a domestic group, a lineage or a clan, each of which has to be defined in terms of a whole set of socially recognised rights and duties. Relations of consociation can only exist between individuals or groups which are in some way socially separated.<sup>16</sup>

This paper deals only with formalised or standardised joking relations. Teasing or making fun of other persons is of course a common mode of behaviour in any human society. It tends to occur in certain kinds of social situations. Thus I have observed in certain classes in English-speaking countries the occurrence of horse-play between young men and women as a preliminary to courtship, very similar to the way in which a Cherokee Indian jokes with his "grandmothers". Certainly these

<sup>16</sup> Radcliffe-Brown's goal was to create a science of society. He proposes that this essay is a step toward a science of social structure. Functionalism in general (and Radcliffe-Brown in particular) were scathingly critiqued by American anthropologists for their failure (so the Americans believed) to effectively do this. In 1951 George Peter Murdock wrote an essay cataloging the sins of functionalism. Of Radcliffe-Brown's attempts at scientific theorizing, he says:

Radcliffe-Brown is responsible for two serious distortions of scientific method from which his followers

have never freed themselves, namely (1) the notion that universal "laws" are discoverable from the intensive study of a very few societies without reference to their representativeness and (2) the misconception that such laws can be adequately expressed by verbal statements which do not specify the concomitant behavior of variables (1951:469).

Later in the same essay, he accuses functionalist anthropologists of having a "predilection" for "sociologistic" verbalisms as a substitute for scientific laws" (1951:472).

unformalised modes of behaviour need to be studied by the sociologist. For the purpose of this paper it is sufficient to note that teasing is always a compound of friendliness and antagonism.

The scientific explanation of the institution in the particular form in which it occurs in a given society can only be reached by an intensive study which enables us to see it as a particular example of a widespread phenomenon of a definite class. This means that the whole social structure has to be thoroughly examined in order that the particular form and incidence of joking relationships can be understood as part of a consistent system. If it be asked why that society has the structure that it does have, the only possible answer would lie in its history. When the history is unrecorded, as it is for the native societies of Africa, we can only indulge in conjecture, and conjecture gives us neither scientific nor historical knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>a</sup>Reprinted from *Africa*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, 1940, pp. 195–210.

<sup>b</sup>"Joking Relationships in East Africa", *Africa*, Vol. XIII, p. 170.

<sup>c</sup>"La Parenté à Plaisanteries en Afrique Occidentale", *Africa*, Vol. II, p. 244.

<sup>d</sup>"Parenté à Plaisanteries et Alliance par le Sang en Afrique Occidentale", *Africa*, Vol. XII, p. 433.

<sup>e</sup>Professor Marcel Mauss has published a brief theoretical discussion of the subject in the *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences religieuses*, 1927–8. It is also dealt with by Dr. F. Eggan in *Social Anthropology of North American Tribes*, 1937, pp. 75–81.

<sup>f</sup>*Africa*, Vol. XII, p. 438.

<sup>g</sup>Those who are not familiar with these widespread customs will find descriptions in Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, Neuchatel, Vol. I, pp. 220–37, and in *Social Anthropology of North American Tribes*, edited by F. Eggan, Chicago, 1937, pp. 55–7.

<sup>h</sup>Ruth Landes in Mead, *Co-operation and Competition among Primitive Peoples*, 1937, p. 103.

<sup>i</sup>Incidentally it may be said that it was hardly satisfactory for the magistrate to establish a precedent whereby the man, who was observing what was a permitted and may even have been an obligatory custom, was declared guilty of common assault, even with extenuating circumstances. It seems quite possible that the man may have committed a breach of etiquette in teasing the woman in the presence of her mother's brother, for in many parts of the world it is regarded as improper for two persons in a joking relationship to tease one another (particularly if any obscenity is involved) in the presence of certain relatives of either of them. But the breach of etiquette would still not make it an assault. A little knowledge of anthropology would have enabled the magistrate, by putting the appropriate questions to the witnesses, to have obtained a fuller understanding of the case and all that was involved in it.

<sup>j</sup>Fortes, M., *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*. Oxford University Press, 1945.

<sup>k</sup>See, for example, the kinship systems described in *Social Anthropology of North American Tribes*, edited by Fred Eggan, University of Chicago Press, 1937; and Margaret Mead, "Kinship in the Admiralty Islands", *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. XXXIV, pp. 243–56.

<sup>l</sup>For examples see Labouret, *Les Tribus du Rameau Lobi*, 1931, p. 248 and Sarat Chandra Roy, *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur*, Ranchi, 1915, pp. 352–4.

<sup>m</sup>A. Winifred Hoernle, "Social Organisation of the Nama Hottentot", *American Anthropologist*, N.s., Vol. XXVII, 1925, pp. 1–24.

<sup>n</sup>"The Mother's Brother in South Africa", *South African Journal of Science*, Vol. XXI, 1924. See Chapter I.

<sup>o</sup>There are some societies in which the relation between a mother's brother and a sister's son is approximately symmetrical, and therefore one of equality. This seems to be so in the Western Islands of Torres Straits, but we have no information as to any teasing or joking, though it is said that each of the two relatives may take the property of the other.

<sup>17</sup>In this last paragraph, Radcliffe-Brown attacks Boasian anthropologists. The Boasians insisted that societies were the *sui generis* results of their own historical development. They had a strong distaste for general theories of society. Radcliffe-Brown argues that the histories of nonliterate societies are unknowable (and therefore, Boasian anthropology essentially groundless). Earlier, he had written that those who hold that laws of human society do not exist (i.e., Boas and his

followers) must hold that "in the field of social phenomena, in contradistinction to physical and biological phenomena, any attempt at the systematic testing of existing generalizations or toward the discovery and verification of new ones is, for some unexplained reason, futile, or as Dr. Radin puts it, 'crying for the moon'" (1965b [1935]:187). He viewed this as a clearly irrational belief and suggested that arguing against such lack of logic was a waste of time.

<sup>p</sup>*Life of a South African Tribe*, Vol. I, p. 255.

<sup>q</sup>For the kinship terminology of the VaNdau see Boas, "Das Verwandtschafts system der Vandau", in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*. 1922, pp. 41–51.

<sup>r</sup>For an account of the Cherokee see Gilbert, in *Social Anthropology of North American Tribes*, pp. 285–338.

<sup>s</sup>See Mauss, "Essai sur le Don", *Année Sociologique*, Nouvelle Série, tome I, pp. 30–186.

<sup>t</sup>*Africa*. Vol. II, p. 245.

<sup>u</sup>Evans-Pritchard, "Zande Blood-brotherhood", *Africa*, Vol. VI, 1933, pp. 369–401.

<sup>v</sup>"Essai sur le Don".

<sup>w</sup>The general theory outlined in this paper is one that I have presented in lectures at various universities since 1909 as part of the general study of the forms of social structure. In arriving at the present formulation of it I have been helped by discussions with Dr. Meyer Fortes.

## 15. *The Licence in Ritual*

MAX GLUCKMAN (1911–1975)

IN CERTAIN ARMED services at Christmas, and at Christmas only, the officers wait at table on the men. This kind of reversal of role is well-known in ceremonial and ritual. It was one of the problems which lay at the heart of Sir James Frazer's monumental study, *The Golden Bough*. In his attempt to interpret the situation of the Roman priest-king who had to defend his life against his would-be successor, Frazer went on to consider ceremonies in which people of lower social categories are made temporary kings, in which women act as men and men act as women, and so forth.<sup>1</sup> These rites of reversal obviously include a protest against the established order. Yet

they are intended to preserve and even to strengthen the established order; and in many rituals their performance is believed to achieve success and prosperity for the group which practices them. Therefore they fall squarely within the general problem which I am discussing in this series of lectures—the problem of how custom in Africa emphasizes conflicts in certain ranges of social relationship and yet establishes cohesion in the wider society or over a longer period of time. It is with this problem in mind that I am going to try to interpret ceremonies in which women don men's clothing and do things normally prohibited to them, such as herding cattle, and also to

*Custom and Conflict in Africa* (1956)

<sup>1</sup> Gluckman begins this essay with a brief example of a custom from the British military to prepare his readers for his discussion of comparable rituals in the African societies that are the subject of his essay. This was a common technique of many functionalists who looked for universal cultural patterns or laws that were true for any society. Another technique of these anthropologists was to make customs that appear strange more familiar by comparing them with customs of British society (for example, in essay 13 Malinowski compares kula items with the crown jewels of Scotland).

This opening paragraph mentions Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941), a towering figure in British anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. Frazer was a key influence on British anthropologists of Gluckman's generation. He is best known for his comparative study of religion and folklore, *The Golden Bough* (1890). The purpose of this book was to trace the evolutionary development of thought from magical to religious thinking to the rational/scientific thought of civilized societies. Frazer's evolutionary thinking was soon replaced by diffusionist and functionalist theories, but his work synthesized a huge volume of cross-cultural material that influenced the work of later generations of anthropologists. For example, Gluckman here refers to Frazer's work on the rituals of divine kingships in African societies.