

Aslaug Falkenburg and Johannes Falkenburg. *The Affinal Relationship System of the Australian Aborigines in the Port Keats District.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1981. Pp. 224. \$23.00.

The "New Approach" in the title alludes to the fact that this book represents a considerable departure from Johannes Falkenburg's approach to some of the same material in an earlier monograph (Johannes Falkenburg, *Kin and Totem* [Oslo: Oslo Univ. Press, 1962]). Both books are based on fieldwork done in 1950 in the Port Keats district, about 150 miles south of Darwin. The earlier work provided what is still one of the most detailed published accounts of the structure and composition of totemic clans, and a somewhat briefer description of the "kinship systems" of the Maringar, Maridjabin-Marijadi, and Murinbata "tribes." The account of clans and "kinship" in that work is strongly influenced by the views of Radcliffe-Brown. "Horde" territories are described as integral and non-overlapping, each providing a homeland for a single patrilineal horde who traditionally led a fairly isolated life within its boundaries. The "kinship system" is described as an all-embracing set of genealogically-defined categories within which people are classified by "lines of descent" as determined by the number of types of kinsmen distinguished in the grand-parental generation. Among these genealogically-defined categories, certain of the "cross-cousin" ones are those in which ego finds his prescribed spouse.

From the authors' present perspective, it appears that:

A general reluctance not to be in harmony with Radcliffe-Brown's theories caused us [sic] to present a somewhat distorted picture of the kinship system and the local organization among the Aborigines at Port Keats. Thus, the borders between the horde territories were not so strictly closed as indicated in *Kin and Totem*. Furthermore, we did not mention the fact that before the foundation of the mission station, two or more hordes might occasionally live together for economic or ceremonial purposes, thus forming a larger social community (p. 68).

But since this work is primarily concerned with “kinship” and marriage rather than with local organization *per se*, the Radcliffe-Brownian (Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., *The Social Organization of the Australian Tribes, Oceania* Monographs No. 1, 1930-31 [reprinted from *Oceania* 1:34-63, 206-46, 322-41, 426-56] theses against which it develops the most sustained attack are as follows: 1) his claim that the criteria for the assignment of “kin” terms are primarily or exclusively genealogical, the categories being extended to include distant kinsmen by the principles of equivalence of same-sex siblings and of agnates in alternate generations; 2) his claim that marriage is “regulated” by rules specifying the particular genealogical relationships which must hold between a man and his legitimate spouse(s).

Against 1), the authors cite at least four kinds of evidence:

A. Although the Port Keats people know perfectly well which “kinship” term to apply to anyone in their social universe, their knowledge of actual genealogical links to most of those people is scanty or nil (p. 107).

B. Many pairs of Port Keats people who call each other “brother” or “sister” (including some pairs of full siblings) stand in different relationships to certain other people. This is subject to change within the course of an individual’s lifetime, depending mainly on who marries whom. For instance:

Originally, Nawurop from Idiji referred to Tjana and his brother Pwlangatji as *tamoin* [“mother’s father”]. But when Tjana married aljerk from Kultjil, to whom Nawurop is closely (if not genealogically) related and whom he calls *kal:e* [“mother”], Nawurop started to address Tjana as *il:e* (*kal:e*’s husband) [i.e., “father”]. In other words, Nawurop’s kinship relations with Tjana were from now on, determined by the fact that Tjana was the ‘husband of Nawurop’s *kal:e*, but Nawurop continued to refer to Pwlangatji as *tamoin* (p. 115).

One need only think about the possible effects of this reclassification upon Nawurop’s status as a linking relative (between, e.g., Tjana’s children and Nawurop’s) to appreciate the extent to which the actual usage of kin terms can deviate from the principles of (“classificatory”) genealogical “recognition” inherited from Morgan by Radcliffe-Brown.

C. The Murinbata kin categories do not link up to form “lines of descent”: some of ego’s *nat:an* (“brothers”), *munmak* (“sisters”), and *wakal* (“children”) are descended from his *kangul* (“father’s father”) and other people within the same categories are descended from his *kawu* (mother’s mother’s brother”) (cf. the “superclass” analysis of this and other Austra-

lian systems in H. Scheffler, *Australian Kin Classification* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978] which, although genealogically based, makes no use of the concept of "descent lines"). Furthermore, in cases of marriage to someone other than a prescribed spouse, a woman's children are often assigned to kin classes in a way which does not reflect their "actual" patrilineal descent (148).

D. Within any given "terminological line" (i.e., Radcliffe-Brownian "descent line"), the division into alternate generation sets is not based on relative age, but rather on the nature of the marriage rules (pp. 156-63).

All of the above can also be taken as arguments against Radcliffe-Brownian thesis #2, since the latter presupposes genealogically specifiable "spouse" classes. Marriage between people who are known to be genealogically related is extremely rare among the Port Keats people (176 et passim). Rather than being an all-encompassing genealogical classification system by which a limited group of people are picked out as potential affines, the "kinship" system, Falkenburg and Falkenburg argue, is better understood as a system for the egocentric classification of everyone in the society (which of course includes all of ego's known genealogical relations) according to their various statuses as potential affines. Thus, for example, *kal:e* "refers" not to "mother" as such, but to "sister of potential father-in-law" (p. 199), mother's brother's daughter being a "potential wife" category.

Falkenburg and Falkenburg's argument on this point is far from convincing. Of the affinally-based definitions which they give for all Murinbata relationship terms (pp. 198-99), some, such as the one for *kal:e* above, are valid only where ego is male. This can be remedied only by regarding *kal:e*, for example as designating an entirely distinct set of relations when ego is female, whereas the unitary gloss "mother," however "extended," is indifferent to sex of ego.

A more fundamental problem with Falkenburg and Falkenburg's argument here is that even as specified by their own account, thirty-eight of the forty Murinbata relationship classes are not purely "affinal" but also implicate "genealogical" features. The two that do not are *purima* "own or potential wife" and *pugali* "potential wife." Given these two categories as links between ego and all the other classes, distinctions among the latter depend on relationships of "sisterhood," "fatherhood," etc., between those people and ego's (potential) spouse (as in the *kal:e* example above).

Based on my own field results (A. Rumsey, "Kinship and context among the Ngarinyin," *Oceania* 51:181-92. A. Rumsey, "Gun-Gunma . . .," in J. Heath, et al., eds. *The Languages of Kinship in Aboriginal Australia, Oceania* Linguistic Monographs No. 24, [Sydney: Oceania Pub-

lications, 1982]), I for one concur in Falkenburg and Falkenburg's claims that not all relationship classes are definable in purely genealogical terms, and that the highly negotiable factor of "marriageability" is sometimes more determining of "kin" classification than it is determined by it. But to claim instead that the system is a purely "affinal" one is to perpetuate a dichotomy which is useless for understanding Australian relationship systems, which interweave relations of "consanguinity" and "affinity" (and a good deal of what we would call "cosmology" as well) into a single, seamless, all-enveloping web.

Given these defects in it, it is unfortunate that Falkenburg and Falkenburg chose to present the "affinal relationship" argument as the central one in the book--the more so if this should allow the book's considerable strengths to go unnoticed. Whereas all too much of the published literature leaves one with the impression that Aborigines are perfectly programmed automata, dutifully marrying their cross-cousins, joking with their fathers' fathers, and avoiding their mothers-in-law, the present work abounds in examples of contextual variability such as the one quoted in B above. The book contains more thorough coverage of the actual use of kin terms than any other I can think of. It also presents one of the fullest and most satisfactory accounts to date of the forms which "marriage" takes in an Aboriginal community (pp. 61-105). These parts of the book alone are enough to establish it as a major contribution to Australian literature.

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