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Excerpt

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Introduction

It is received wisdom that matrilineal systems are more liable to change than patrilineal ones when they are affected by modern economic development through absorption into the capitalist market system (Gough 1961; Nakane 1967: 143). The argument usually put forward suggests that a change from production for subsistence to production for exchange is accompanied by the advent of competition for scarce resources, which militates against the wide distribution characteristic of matrilineality (Douglas 1969); this inevitably leads to the emergence of the individual family 'as the key kinship group with respect to residence, economic cooperation, legal responsibility and socialization' (Gough 1961: 631). When wealth comes to be produced and controlled by the male head of an individual family, and when his own children contribute considerably to its production, it also tends to be passed on to them instead of to those outside the productive group, as would be the case under matrilineal inheritance. Although this account has not been immune to criticism (cf. Fuller 1976: 143ff.), it has, on the whole, been accepted as an adequate explanation of the demise of matrilineality in the modern world.

Assumption underlying the explanation of the decline of matrilineality

Matrilineality is, of course, more than the matrilineal system of inheritance. According to Poewe, it is 'a total system and consists of the combination of matrilineal ideology and those social actions and relations which are meaningfully informed by it' (Poewe 1981: 55). The matrilineal ideology itself is 'a folk-cultural theory of politics and economics' (ibid.: 54) and 'consists analytically of three ideational phenomena:

- (1) kinship and descent principles,
- (2) kin categories, and
- (3) associated norms and values' (ibid.: 53–4).

Transmission of property through inheritance is the practice most obviously informed by, or embodying, matrilineal ideology in that it equates those who have a right to one another's property with those who share

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common substance. In view of this fact, it is readily understandable why, when the justice of matrilineal inheritance starts to be questioned by those whose economic interests are threatened by its provisions, it becomes the 'symbolic keystone' of matriliney, as it did in Luapula (*ibid.*: 121). But the defining feature of matriliney is not a single social practice meaningfully informed by matrilineal ideology, but that ideology itself, i.e. the expressed kinship and descent principles, the kin categories which are recognised, and their accompanying norms and values. Analytically speaking, then, the defining feature of matriliney is the assignment of individuals to culturally recognised categories whose membership is defined by descent traced through females (Aberle 1961: 656; Douglas 1969: 124). It must follow that any explanation of the decline or demise of matriliney as such is adequate only if it accounts satisfactorily for the weakening or disappearance of the notion of matrilineal descent itself.

The explanation outlined above has been generally accepted to provide such an account; that is, it has been taken as accounting not only for the change in the transmission of property through inheritance but also for the general decline or demise of matriliney as a total system. In other words, it has been read as an explanation of the disappearance of matrilineal ideology or, more specifically, of the tracing of descent exclusively through females. We may ask what makes such a reading possible.

The answer to this question would seem to lie in the acceptance of a range of assumptions or presuppositions about the nature of social reality, facilitated by the fact that most of them have never been explicitly formulated but only tacitly entertained, and by the fact that in analysis they have frequently been treated not only as assumptions, which have a merely heuristic value, but as generalisations of empirical fact. One such specific assumption is that the regulation of economic relations is universally the most important function of a descent group. The outlined explanation can be construed as adequate only when this is accepted as a valid generalisation of empirical fact. If, however, it is relegated from its status as an empirical generalisation to its proper status as an assumption, the validity of the explanation needs to be questioned, for there is no logical reason to assume that a change in the system of inheritance has invariably to be accompanied by a change in the conceptualisation of descent. Why can men not inherit property from their fathers while considering themselves members of a category of people who are descended in the matrilineal line from a common ancestress? After all, among the Tonga, Nayar and Minangkabau, the practice of the transmission of individually earned property to one's own children has not affected the tracing of descent in the matrilineal line (Colson 1980; Fuller 1976; Kato 1982).

A more general assumption underlying the acceptance of the received explanation of the decline of matriliney is the notion of the socio-cultural

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reality as a system of functionally or logically interrelated parts. On analysis, the interrelation of the parts of the system (of which the most important ones in this context are the matrilineal ideology or the notion of descent and the practice of the transmission of property through inheritance) is treated as non-problematic precisely because the nature of their interrelationship is already presupposed in the assumption of their functional or logical fit. On this view, the change in one constituent part of the system leads inevitably and logically to changes in, or adjustments of, other parts. This analytical treatment is, furthermore, made possible by conceptualising matrilineity not only as a total system, but as a system ridden with structural contradictions which it perpetually tries to resolve and overcome: such as the contradiction between the individual family and the matrilineal descent group, or that between marriage and sibling cohesion (Lévi-Strauss 1949: 149–50; Schneider 1961: 16–23; Nakane 1967: 143), the contradiction in the allocation of authority resulting in the ‘matrilineal puzzle’ (Richards 1950), which rests on the division of a man’s loyalties between his children and the members of his descent group,¹ or, more generally, that between productive individualism and distributive communalism (Poewe 1981). These contradictions make matrilineity vulnerable in the face of modern economic development and the capitalist market system. Matrilineity’s inherent inability, upon entry into the capitalist market system, to resolve these contradictions in favour of the matrilineal descent group and its distributive communalism, is ultimately seen as the cause of its demise in the modern world.

Just as the logical articulation of matrilineity as a system is seen as non-problematic, so, too, is the process of its change or decline. The only problem to be dealt with is the identification of the impetus for change and the reasons for it. Once this is done, the rest logically follows. The elucidation of the process of change has been effectively ruled out by the notion of a system and its inherent contradictions. Since, for example, the structural contradiction between the individual family and the descent group has been posited as a characteristic feature of matrilineity, the reasons for the weakening of the notion of matrilineal descent are already logically contained in the reasons for the strengthening of the individual family. The reasons for the increased importance of the individual family and for the strengthening of the ties between husband and wife and father and children, then become explanations for the decline in the importance of the matrilineal descent group and the weakening of ties among its members. As the ties between the members of the individual family strengthen and gain in importance, the notion of matrilineal descent, through which the unity of the descent group is ideologically expressed, is automatically affected in a negative way. There is no need to explain the process through which the notion of descent is affected upon the strengthening of the individual family.

Although every anthropologist would subscribe to the view that change

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is a process, the need to treat it as such at the level of analytical practice is effectively removed. Change is assumed to be adequately accounted for when its original impetus has been located and the reasons for its occurrence explained.

Alternative assumptions

As indicated above, the failure to treat change as a process in analytical and explanatory practice derives ultimately from adopting assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the parts of the system, instead of making this relationship itself the object of analysis. If we want to grasp change as a process, we have to abandon the belief that we know how the parts of the system hang together, and treat their relationship as problematic. Instead of presupposing the exact nature of the relationship between the relevant constituent components or realms of the socio-cultural reality, we have only to assume that there are relevant components or realms and that a relationship between them is open to investigation.

The basic assumption underlying the analysis presented here is that the socio-cultural reality consists of two qualitatively different realms or domains of phenomena: those that constitute the knowledge or notions of the members of the society and those that constitute the actions which they perform or the social processes in which they are engaged. The distinction between these two domains is underpinned by the differences in their epistemological and existential status.

The existential status of the interactions in which people engage is given by the fact that actions are performed in order to make a visible impact on the physical and social world, that is, to change or maintain the existing state of affairs. By their nature, actions are unique and unrepeatable since each action has its specific location in time and space; once performed, actions cease to exist. But they also form a continuous flow of existence in space and time such that the state of affairs precipitated by an action continues after the action has been completed.

For social life to exist, people's actions must be meaningful to others. This presupposes that the criteria for ascribing meanings to actions and the ways of interpreting them must be known and shared by them. The fact that people share criteria, or, more generally, knowledge of how to behave and how to interpret actions, entails the existence of the actions at another level: as models, plans, 'blueprints' or schemata for actions in the minds of the people. The existence of these models is perduring: people hold them regardless of whether or not the corresponding action is at the moment being performed; they are related not to any particular action located in space and time, but to classes of actions.

Performed actions and models for actions (or, more generally, notions about actions) have different epistemological statuses. While actions are, to

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some extent, available to others through observation (for fuller discussion of the concept of observation, see Holy and Stuchlik 1981: 2–3; 1983: 33–7), models for actions are in no acceptable sense of the word observable. Neither the anthropologist nor the actors can ‘witness’ them in the sense that they can ‘witness’ actions; they have to be told of their existence or to infer it. Actions and models for actions also have different existential statuses: through their actions people make a direct impact on the world, through holding a model of action people do not directly maintain or change the existing state of affairs. By themselves, models for actions do not ‘do’ anything; they form part of an individual’s knowledge and are part of social life only to the extent that they are shared. On both existential and epistemic grounds they form a realm or domain of reality different from that formed by actions.

However, simple models of actions form only a small part of the notional domain of reality. People perform their actions in concrete physical and social environments, situations and circumstances. They have to know all these conditions to be able to perform their actions effectively and in a way acceptable to and understandable to others. Their notions about all these conditions are again mental constructs, just as models of actions are, but they differ from the latter in that they are not simple descriptions of actions, but more complex models of relations between actions, representations of parts of the physical and social world, notions about the way things are or should be, etc. In their totality these models, representations and notions constitute what, in the broadest possible sense, could be described as people’s knowledge of their natural and social world.

This knowledge is never made available to other actors or to the observer simply as a multitude of separate bits of information. It is always presented in an organised form, as more or less coherent structures of differing generality. It is not intended here to discuss the organising principles of presented knowledge in any detail; they should follow from the research rather than be defined *a priori*. It is, however, necessary to point out that organised sets of notions, be they called structures, systems or models, are differently related to the natural and social world, and on the basis of that difference it is possible to make a useful distinction between two types of model.

In the last instance, whatever people know about their world and however they think about it is relevant for their actions. Nevertheless, there is a basic difference between knowledge concerning the existing state of affairs, what they are, why they are so, how the social world is constituted, etc., and knowledge of what to do and how to do it. Probably the best formulation of this difference is that drawn by Caws:

Among the mental structures belonging to the members of a given social group, then, will be some that model various features of the physical and social world in which the group lives . . . These structures will have been formed by experience and education

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and will determine the individual's conception of his world as well as his behaviour in it ... I therefore introduce a first distinction between 'operational models' and 'representational models'; the representational model corresponds to the way the individual thinks things are, the operational model to the way he practically responds or acts (Caws 1974: 3).

Irrespective of some conceptual problems of Caws's scheme discussed elsewhere (Holy and Stuchlik 1981: 19–20; Jenkins 1981: 97–101; Holy and Stuchlik 1983: 100–2), it appears to me that the knowing subject must be capable of at least two conceptual operations, or, put differently, that his knowledge must fulfil two ideally separate functions, of which one is that of reflection on the nature of things and the other a practical, task-oriented application. It seems heuristically useful to refer to them as two separate models and to retain Caws's terminology for their designation. People's perception and representation of their natural and physical world as a more or less stable structure and a more or less lasting distribution of people, tasks, resources, products, physical objects, rights and duties, etc., can be called their representational model. Such a model does not contain notions about what to do and how to go about doing it; it is informative rather than instructive and it stipulates only the limiting conditions within which people have to decide on the most appropriate courses of action. The rules or norms which stipulate what these courses are, differ from the representational notions in that they are not predominantly informative but instructive; as such they form part of what can appropriately be called operational models.

The relationship between these two analytically distinguishable models is not a conceptual question but an empirical one which can be answered only through concrete research. Particular attention is paid to it in Chapters 1 and 9.

The distinction between the conceptual or cognitive world of the actors, and the realm of events and transactions in which they engage, is not a novel one. It parallels to a certain extent the linguists' distinction between language and speech. In one form or another, some version of it has repeatedly been used by many scholars. In the field of anthropological and sociological studies, it has usually been expressed as a distinction between an ideational system or 'culture' and a system of interactions or 'social structure' (Kroeber and Parsons 1958; Kay 1965; Goodenough 1964, 1970; Geertz 1966; Keesing 1971, 1975). Nevertheless, even when it has been made, the analytical and explanatory consequences of the distinction have not always been fully explored. Very often, the distinction has led to an unrealistic oversteering of one domain over the other: one of the domains carries the full research and explanatory load, while the other is simply attached to it. The accepted explanation of the demise of matriliney invariably locates the cause of this change in the domain of events and transactions in which the actors engage; the changes in their notions follow non-problematically from

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changes which have occurred in the domain of their interactions. On the other hand, various analytical approaches that conceptualise culture as a system of symbols and meanings, which is then treated as an autonomous entity endowed with its own logic, ascribe to it a determining effect on the social and economic processes and on events and transactions in which its members engage; in this case the behavioural reality is assumed non-problematically to follow from the notions themselves.

In this study, I follow an analytical and explanatory procedure which stresses neither actions nor notions, but focuses instead on the relationship between the two domains constituted by them. This relationship is not prejudged to be one of entailment or automatic congruence but is taken to be problematic and hence the main object of analysis. Having taken this approach, I am not concerned with the organising principles of actors' knowledge as such, but rather with its organisation in relation to actions.

Anthropological approaches which have explicitly rejected the assumption that the conceptual or cognitive realm and that of events and transactions are isomorphic, and which treat the relationship between them as problematic, have considerably enhanced our understanding of the processes through which the actors' cultural notions enter into the events and transactions in which they engage. Several excellent studies have amply demonstrated that cultural notions do not pattern behaviour by themselves, but do so by being brought into the situation as one of the possible relevant factors on which the actors base decisions about the course of their actions (Pospisil 1958; Scheffler 1965; Keesing 1967; Stuchlik 1977b). If we abandon the assumption that people's notions have a compelling force on their actions, and instead consider the relationship between notions and actions as problematic, we obviously need to stipulate some mediating motivational mechanism through which they can be brought to bear upon actions, either summoning them or restraining them. In other words, we need to employ in our analyses some bridging concept which would relate them to actions. I consider the goal of an action to be such a concept.

The goal of an action indicates some future state of affairs to whose attainment the action is oriented. It obviously presupposes the existence of an agent, who needs to be a particular individual. Treating the relationship between notions and actions as problematic thus not only makes it necessary to account for actions by the goals they are intended to attain, it also entails conceiving of people as agents behaving purposively so as to attain goals. Although it is only specific agents that have goals, an individual can have as his goal not only his own particular future state but a future state for his group. In the discussion of the succession to headmanship in Chapter 1, I argue that the choice to invoke one of two alternative norms depends basically on the way in which the future state of the village is defined.

The assumption that people have goals and behave purposively so as to

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attain them has in itself specific consequences for the conceptualisation of the relationship between notions and actions. We have to realise that to invoke or disregard a notion (e.g. a specific norm), within the course of an interaction, is an action in itself and must be seen as having a specific purpose. It is not the notion which has been invoked or disregarded in the action, but the purpose of the action which gives it its meaning. I pay specific attention to this problem in Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 10.

Explaining people's behaviour in terms of its goal orientation or purposiveness calls for the construction of a different explanatory model from the normative model of social structure. An important aspect of the latter is that it treats social actors as occupants of statuses and sees the collection of rights and duties comprising each actor's status, or the norm of behaviour pertaining to it, as determining the interpersonal relations and alignments or, in short, the structure of the society. The structure so conceived is then an abstraction which does not necessarily reflect the actual social relations and alignments, but merely the norms which are ideally supposed to shape them and give them their form. Following Leach, I regard social structure not as a reflection of the jural and moral rules which form part of the actors' conceptual realm, or of their culture, but as the outcome of their choices (Leach 1960: 124).

On this view, 'structure' is not something that lies behind the recurrent pattern of activities; it emerges from them and is created and changed by them. When social structure is conceptualised in this way and when the question of its generation is answered in terms of the reasons, intentions and purposes of the people who create it through their actions, then concrete activities enter into research procedures not only at the descriptive level, but also at the analytical and explanatory level. They are not only something that has to be drawn upon to explain how the structure is generated; their actual, as opposed to their ideal or normative, pattern has also to become the object of explanation.

Chapter 2 is, among other things, specifically concerned with showing that the observable ploughing teams and their perpetual change cannot be explained by the normative model of their composition, which could easily be formulated on the basis of the Toka's elucidation of the relevant norms. Similarly, the actual composition of particular meetings at which the successor to the deceased is chosen cannot be contained in a normative model of such meetings, which it would again be possible to formulate and which the Toka indeed do formulate; again, the actual division of any particular estate cannot be fully accounted for by invoking the normative model of inheritance. It is for this reason that Chapters 7 and 8, which deal with succession and inheritance, provide a detailed description of actual 'cases', although the methodological point made in Chapter 2 is not reiterated in them. It is not only these chapters which may be seen as burdened with such

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excessive 'ethnographic detail', and those who subscribe to the view that anthropology should aim at formulating normative models of social structure will probably find the description of actual residence alignments and the accounts of actual actions of specific individuals unnecessary and superfluous. It is only hoped that this view will not be shared by those who believe that the anthropologist's task is to explain how the structure of the society is created, sustained and gradually changed in the process of its ongoing re-creation, and that the way in which the normative model relates to the observable social processes and alignments is an important problem for investigation. Such investigation is grounded in the assumption that, although the actors' choices are not directly determined by their cultural notions, they are made within the context of these notions; in this sense cultural notions impinge on social processes by defining a set of constraints within which these processes occur. This point is again further elaborated in Chapter 2.

If actions are continually re-creating the world about which knowledge is held, this knowledge itself has to be viewed as being continually re-created. This means that we have to view particular bits of knowledge or specific cultural notions as being continually organised, reorganised and changed, both to take into account the existing state of affairs and to make possible their future state. Without trying to assign any explanatory priority either to people's notions or to their actions, we may say that, on the one hand, their behaviour derives from their knowledge and therefore can be understood only by being related to it, or, more exactly, behaviour can be accounted for as rational or purposive only in the context of the world known to the actors; and, on the other hand, people's notions derive from their cognitive (theoretical) and practical activities in the world known to them. On this view, the relationship between the cultural realm of held notions and the realm of social transactional order is characteristically dialectical. We may assume that in circumstances of accelerated change the two realms may markedly diverge. Although this has been theoretically recognised (Keesing 1971: 126), the recognition has not had a sufficient impact on existing analytical practice. I have mentioned above that, until now, anthropological studies which made use of the analytical distinction between notions and actions have been mainly concerned to investigate the process whereby people's notions or their knowledge affect or shape their actions. Only a few studies have so far paid specific analytical attention to the process whereby the social transactions in which the actors engage affect the cultural notions which they hold (Leach 1961; Stuchlik 1977a; Holy 1979). After considering, in Chapter 2, the process whereby the actor's notions enter into their transactions, in Chapters 3 and 5 I change my analytical focus and concentrate on the process whereby their interactions affect the notions which they hold.

Dissatisfaction has been expressed above with explanations claiming the

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demise of descent in the matrilineal line to be implicated in the demise of the practice of matrilineal inheritance, or non-problematically to follow from it. Instead of seeing the change from matrilineal inheritance to inheritance by sons as the cause of the demise of matrilineal descent, it is suggested that the change in the system of inheritance and the change in the mode of tracing descent are better viewed as two parallel processes. The former is analysed in Chapter 3, the latter in Chapter 5. Although they are triggered off by the same factors (described in Chapter 2), they do not causally affect one another. Unlike the change in the inheritance system, the change in the mode of tracing descent is not so much a direct result of the restructuring of the relations of production (described in Chapter 2), as a response to the changed structure of local groups (described in Chapter 4). No doubt the two processes, which are treated analytically as separate, reinforce and mutually affect one another and, in doing so, they facilitate the overall adjustment of existing notions about categories of people, the criteria by which their members are recruited and the normative rights, entitlements and duties which ensue from their membership. This adjustment is discussed in the latter part of the book.

It is in terms of the adjustment of the various cultural notions to one another and to the actual social transactions in which the actors are continuously engaged that the process of change which has occurred in Toka society over the past few decades can best be described. In analytical terms, this historical process can be envisaged as the process of the declining importance of Toka matriliney. Anthropologists who see descent as the main principle of social organisation necessarily conceptualise the demise of matriliney as a major revolutionary change in the society's organisation. In contrast to this view, for the Toka themselves, the change in their system of inheritance and succession and in their mode of descent-reckoning was natural, smooth, gradual and almost imperceptible; it certainly was not traumatic and revolutionary. The reason for this is that the changed practices, while necessarily accompanied by specific changes in the Toka operational model, did not alter significantly the Toka's representational model of their society. The description and analysis of change, which is the main topic of the book, is at the same time inevitably a description and analysis of the underlying continuity.

The Toka

Linguistically, the Toka form part of the Tonga-speaking peoples who inhabit much of the Southern Province of Zambia. The Tonga speakers do not form a unity either politically or culturally. They inhabit four districts of the Southern Province and consequently they are nowadays administered by four different rural councils. The people who, for administrative purposes, are referred to as the Plateau Tonga live in the Mazabuka and Choma