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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Excursions in Siouan Sociology

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5vg7s33h>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 9(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Publication Date

1985-03-01

DOI

10.17953

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Review Essay

Excursions in Siouan Sociology

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Two Crows Denies It: A History of Controversy in Omaha Sociology. By R. H. Barnes. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. 272 pp. \$24.95 Cloth.

The categorization of the social organization of unilineal societies is often indicated by tribal typifications representing "Omaha" for patrilineal descent, or "Crow" for the opposite principle in societies with matrilineal descent. R. H. Barnes offers his historical interpretations of the scholarship about Omaha-like peoples and contrasts the extant descriptions with theoretical insights generated from the ethnological studies of the Omaha people. Because there has been so much discussion throughout the rise of the discipline of anthropology about unilineal societies, the debate about the functions and nature of patrilineal descent has resulted in many subsequent interpretations of Omaha ethnography.

Barnes attempts to write a history of specifically Omaha sociology and the developing sociologies of knowledge. Trained as a social anthropologist, Barnes takes a particularly critical stance, advocating an almost Boasian historical particularist view of Omaha society. He suggests throughout this work that the generally accepted ethnological representation of "Omaha" as a term for societies encompassing patrilineal descent groups is more atypical than typical, and simply no longer warranted in anthropological parlance.

Barnes comes to this discussion with a background in the analysis of unilineal societies in other cultural areas. In the opening paragraphs to an article that he wrote in 1976, Barnes notes Claude Lévi-Strauss's call in *The Savage Mind* (1966) for an understanding of the regulatory prohibitions operating in Crow-Omaha kinship and his suggestion that, once these elementary

or intermediate forms are better understood, progress could be made in answering questions about more complex societies. Accepting this intellectual call to arms, Barnes has focused his interest upon unilineal societies in North America, particularly on the Plains—an extension of his work in Indonesia investigating the descent systems of the Kedang.

As part of the efforts to decipher prescriptive systems in unilineal societies, Barnes has been fascinated by the role of personal names in relation to terms of address characteristic of positions in clan membership, and in any social reality for such naming systems within the structure of social organization. Additionally, Barnes has penned an introduction to the reprint of the early monograph by the legal theorist Josef Kohler, *On the Prehistory of Marriage: Totemism, Group Marriage, Mother Right* (1975). Barnes has also been interested in the applicability of Kohler's ideas to contemporary ethnological discussions of unilineal societies.

Most recently, Barnes has been critiquing the interpretations of both Claude Lévi-Strauss ("Alliance Theory," the idea that men exchange sisters and daughters in a pattern, creating structural alliances), and Robert McKinley (the theory of dispersed alliance based on the structured relationship of affines to clan members). Barnes is in favor of deductive descriptions—not superimposing classifications upon social order but rather expecting the order to reveal itself through the system of terminologies, the symmetry of clans, and the distribution of reciprocal responsibilities throughout the society. Barnes is not primarily concerned with the ideology of representation (meanings) being based on the adjustment of systems of relationship to the demands for negotiated compromise or pragmatic change. By reconstructing a sociology of Omaha society, Barnes believes that an operational representation of a functioning society can be imagined; that alliance theories detract from, rather than contribute to, the understanding of unilineal societies because more exceptions than steadfast rules are found in such societies.

Clearly distressed by what he considers to be a series of confusions in previous analyses of unilineal societies, Barnes opens his work by outlining the studies done by his predecessors, who have also been fascinated by the eccentricities of Omaha sociology. Acknowledging the thoroughness of James Owen Dorsey, Barnes later bemoans the gaps which he perceives in Dorsey's

Omaha descriptions. Barnes at one point calls Dorsey's lack of theorizing about his discoveries "lame" for failing to address questions formulated only in recent times among contemporary ethnologists. Much of Barnes's criticism is directed at the asymmetrical nature of many of Dorsey's descriptions of clans, revealing Barnes's own set of presentist biases. He ignores his own observation, for example, that in the case of Dorsey's genealogy of the Buffalo Head sub-clan of the On the Left Side Clan, rodents had eaten away many of the names of this sub-group and left a significant gap in the historical record.

Rather than accepting that the interpretation of historical processes must necessarily be predicated on the incompleteness of records, Barnes chafes against the limits of the present and the surviving information about the Omaha. Instead of accepting the limits of the data, Barnes is often unwilling to acknowledge that the information base itself is a product of the very conditions under which Dorsey and the others created it, and the data reveal a structure based on what the fieldworkers recorded and how they went about it. The observer's perspective is always that of an outsider learning the degree of information shared and the structures of individuation characteristic of the society within its particular set of historical circumstances.

Here enters the Omaha individual, Two Crows, who visited Washington with Joseph La Flesche in 1882, and whom Dorsey interviewed to verify information for his manuscript "Omaha Society" (subsequently published in 1884). Barnes makes the point that Dorsey appears to have relied too much upon the opinions of Two Crows in the creation of the final work, allowing a single perspective to distort the representation made of clans and statuses. Throughout, Dorsey notes the difference in opinion on particular questions, indicating that "Two Crows denies it." Most of Dorsey's previous information had come from Francis La Flesche and his own fieldwork. Recording differences of opinion gives insights into the importance of particular vantage points (each informant's view) and of understanding that members of any society reflect individual experience and socialization, and therefore do not share all knowledge or all perspectives. The questions asked by Dorsey, Alice Fletcher, and those first interested in the way in which Omaha society functioned, demanded in their questions to their informants a reflective view of the society and often an expression of opinion. Not all of the

information solicited about families and lines of descent was free from opinion or fully verifiable. Social "facts" remained elusive, just as they do for any contemporary field worker.

In the first section of his study, Barnes focuses on a description of the social order. The opening chapter concentrates upon what is known historically about leadership in Omaha society. Barnes demonstrates that the acephalous appearance of the society to outsiders really constituted an entirely misconceptualized social structure. He suggests that while historical sources reveal some information about leadership patterns in Omaha society, much remains a mystery. Then, he turns to the symmetrical abilities of the social structure to balance itself in a discussion he calls "the tribal circle." Barnes lays out what is known about each clan and its sub-clans, and the responsibilities of each (as much as this is recorded anywhere in the ethnographic record for the Omaha). His survey of the known information results in a picture that is more asymmetrical, based on his catalogue of responsibilities. Barnes's discussion of the descent groups and the pattern of statuses demonstrates how "empirically the systems are jumbled together." He points to the lack of any "overarching unity" emerging to tie all of the clans in to a balanced tribal entity. He states that the multiplicity of competing means of group classification, imperfectly carried through, may be "the natural situation where classifications correspond to diverse needs and are propounded by many persons or groups, rather than by a single individual or centralized authority" (p. 102).

The second part of the book turns to an analysis of naming systems. In an attempt to evaluate the patterns of personal names, Barnes counters what he says is Lévi-Strauss's "detotalization" and disregard, on a surface level, for associations between kinds of names and clan membership. The degree of metaphorical association was of interest to Dorsey, but underdeveloped in terms of any concrete conclusions. Barnes contends that "Omaha names establish a metaphorical relation between the bearer and the nominal subject; and they can be said to be relationship terms in a different sense than terms of 'kinship'" (p. 119). But he then contends that symbolic identity of the kind represented in names is not a real identity between the person and the "object, natural process, or animal" represented by a name; rather, the categorization of names and social categories embodies the organizing principle. Like many other Siouan groups, Omaha have multiple

names among males and single names among females, and in the case of males, each name has a context. Clan owned names, especially those given for acts of valor, often represent offices or ranked levels of status. In practice many names were not used, probably because of strict rules of the etiquette of respect, leaving kinship terms of address as the primary nomenclature of referral in social interactions.

Barnes's address against Lévi-Strauss's notions of alliance and McKinley's subsequent delineations of alliance theory is necessitated by the examples of exceptions to rules. Barnes concludes that rules exist for performing every social interaction, no matter how complex the social structure. Lévi-Strauss explains that, by analyzing unilineal descent societies and seeking basic structural principles in their operation, the social parts are in themselves not of particular significance. Rather, it is the configuration and relationship of pieces to one another that provides meaningful association. A theory of alliances pictured as a continuum of exchanged females is, of course, based on the perspective of men who are arranging and influencing such exchanges. By suggesting that alliance creation is the organizing principle of societies with "elementary" forms of social organization and kinship systems, especially in terms of descent, Lévi-Strauss is not so much concerned with the exactitude of operation in each of these societies, but with the balance of societal structures and the relationship created one to another. Barnes asserts that Lévi-Strauss has never delivered a detailed ethnographic description of a unilineal society or several societies to prove his theoretical schema.

Barnes chooses to adhere instead to the advances of Tax and Eggan. He perceives the strengths inherent in reconstructing the changing operation of social systems in previous historical periods by examining the operability of a society, based on the extant information about terminological systems of kinship, and then extrapolating an interpretation of the supposed operation of terms as one-to-one representation of narrowly defined relationships. Barnes discusses clearly the contribution made by Tax's article "Some Problems of Social Organization" (1937). In it, Tax put forth seven "rules of succession," as Coult has since characterized them, based on describing the unilineal characteristics of Fox society, most notably the rule of uniform reciprocals (i.e., the pairing of terms for complementarity of particular rela-

tionships). Barnes correctly asserts that Tax reformulated Kroeber's eight principles concerning societies with classificatory kinship terminologies (1909). Barnes contends that, in the end, neither Tax nor Kroeber discusses anything that distinctly represents Omaha society only, or defines Omaha-like descent categorizations that could then be extrapolated to characterize other patrilineal societies. Turning to Lévi-Strauss and McKinley, Barnes sees the stereotype simply being resurrected in a new incarnation, which he contends continues to distort the nature of Omaha sociology. Barnes bases this view on his own reconstruction and resynthesis of the ethnographic data assembled by Dorsey, Fletcher (working with La Flesche), and the genealogies collected by Paul E. Brill in the early 1960s while he was employed as a BIA claims clerk.

Nowhere does Barnes consider the "cultural meaning" of Omaha kinship categories. By attempting to delineate the system of social interactions based only upon terminology, the context of usage and the idea of what constitutes relatives appear to be of little importance to his discussion. Barnes notes that Dorsey has delineated four classes of Omaha kinship: blood kinship, marriage kinship, *weawan* kinship (connected with the Calumet dance and the "creation" of relatives), and intergentile kinship (meaning relationships between members of gentes within the tribal circle). Barnes recognizes that no precise equivalent exists in the Omaha language for the phrase "blood kinship." He also recognizes that Dorsey's distinction between consanguinal and affinal relatives is not entirely clear cut terminologically as two categories in Omaha. Barnes fails to consider, however, the importance of the cultural system of relative as opposed to non-relative (i.e., enemy) as the contiguous identification with being Omaha. He sidesteps the reflective qualities of Omaha kinship and comparison with the work done on the kinship systems of other Siouan peoples. He ends his chapter on relationship terminology with the conclusion that an Omaha male makes unilineal equations in nine separate terminological lines. Unfortunately, this mechanical observation, when contrasted with the restrictions on affinal relatives, ignores any discussion of complementary affiliation and its place in Omaha social relations.

After considering personal names and the terminology of categories both affinally and consanguinially, Barnes moves into the third segment of his discussion. In two short chapters, he dis-

cusses what is known about patterns of marriage and residence, kinship obligations and the reconstructed patterns of marriage between and within the moieties of Omaha society. Based on the assembled genealogical sources, Barnes is able to offer a number of important observations. First, Omaha moieties were not exogamous (41 percent married within their moiety while 59 percent married into an opposite moiety). Second, prohibitions for marriage appear to be symmetrically structured to cover "only a small field of traceable kin" (p. 193). Consequently, Barnes questions the cultural significance of patterns of direct exchange between larger-group marriages.

Having marshaled his evidence about Omaha society, Barnes presses his frontal attack upon the alliance theories of Lévi-Strauss and McKinley. Throughout his discussion, Barnes also alludes to the work of Alfred Gell among the Umedas of New Guinea, Françoise Hertier's studies of the Samos of Upper Volta, and Ross Bowden's analysis of the Kwomas of New Guinea. Each was inspired by the assertions of Lévi-Strauss about alliance in unilineal society, and each describes differently the social relations of these peoples. Barnes presents more of his conclusions based on Omaha ethnography and examples of comparable data from other unilineal societies to demonstrate the falseness of prescriptive assertions about Crow-Omaha societies. Barnes notes of the ten major descent groups in Omaha society that there are five in each moiety, but they are, for purposes of marriage, of unequal standing. Each is exogamous, but on the level of sub-clans the division is eleven in the first moiety and twelve in the second. Family connections along a number of independent lines also play a decisive role in relationships.

Barnes pursues Robert McKinley with the same intensity. McKinley's notion of dispersed affinal alliance is based on Crow-Omaha societies' having kinship terminologies that provide "some significant ideological advantage." McKinley identified four elements of the "Omaha complex," which included exogamous descent groups, dispersed affinal alliances, a strong emphasis on maintaining alliances between groups once linked by marriages, and a concept of tribal completeness (p. 128). Barnes quotes McKinley's definition:

The pattern which I call dispersed alliance might be expressed by a prohibition against marrying into one's

mother's descent group in a patrilineal society or by a prohibition against marrying into one's father's descent group in a matrilineal society (p. 219).

Barnes counters that not all prescriptive societies have lineal descent groups, and suggests that lineal descent groups are not a precondition for prescriptive alliances. In suggesting that these operating principles are independent variables, Barnes notes that Omaha members of descent groups enter into marriage after considering a variety of criteria. Finally, the prediction of prescription from terminological systems must be coupled with ideologically defined relationships that then single out some purpose for affinal alliances, but not the other way around. Marriage, Barnes points out, is only one property of alliances.

Barnes comes to a number of conclusions, among them that a controlled comparison of Omaha with other cultures/societies demands consideration within a restricted geographic area of shared historical and ethnological linkages, as in Eggan and Evans-Pritchard; and that much of the ethnographic record for Siouan groups needs resynthesis, in light of a number of misinterpretations (e.g., the misunderstanding about Dakota "clans" due to the erroneous first edition of Jonathan Carver's journals. This was plagiarized by the publisher from Algonquian sources, especially in the reconstruction of proto-Siouan terminological systems). Finally, Barnes sees a need for a "comprehensive demonstration of the existence of symmetric prescriptive systems in North America" to contribute to understanding the differences between generational principles (as are known among the Dakota) and lineal principles (as are found among the Omaha) in the social organization of peoples within the same or adjacent language families.

Barnes admits to having no working knowledge of the Omaha language, but suggests this has not been necessary for the kind of analysis he has performed; nor does he feel that his approach is the only one which could emerge from a restudy of the Omaha ethnographic literature. The major contribution of this study is the convincing argument, based on the evidence presented, that Omaha society is sufficiently unique not to be the template for understanding all patrilineal societies, and that the understanding of unilineal societies is an area for ethnographic inquiry, presenting opportunities for considerable research and interpretation.

This is an important contribution to the anthropological literature of American Indian social systems, but unfortunately for the general reader, the language of the discussion is heavily laden with anthropological terminology. A background in the history of the study of American Indian social systems is almost a prerequisite for understanding this debate. A committed reader is encouraged to pursue much of the literature presented in the book's bibliography as a background or context for Barnes's discussion.

Barnes performs his tasks as a social anthropologist but at times seems to fit the characterization which Lévi-Strauss once made of the British-trained American anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis:

[a] structuralist in Radcliffe-Brown's terms in that he believes the structure to be at the level of empirical reality and to be a part of it. . . . To him, social structure is a kind of jigsaw puzzle, and everything is achieved when one has discovered how the pieces fit together. (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology II*, 1976: 79)

In his discussion, Barnes is so often preoccupied with the fit of the pieces that he distracts the reader from the central discussion of his monograph. The symbolic purpose of the title is born out in the course of the book as the author denies first the typology of Omaha-like societies and then various theories of interpretation that have been offered about unilineal societies: R. H. Barnes denies it.