

**CROSS - COMMENT ON
“ON THE STRUCTURE OF DRAVIDIAN RELATIONSHIP SYSTEMS”
BY MAURO WILLIAM BARBOSA DE ALMEIDA**

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SUBMITTED: MAY 5, 2010 ACCEPTED: MAY 5, 2010

**MATHEMATICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND CULTURAL THEORY:
AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
ISSN 1544-5879**

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The Comment of Dwight Read also expresses much of my own view on this paper. I agree in particular with the views of Read, that "the formal properties of the analysis should have ethnographic validity". But there is something more from my point of view: Read says a good deal here about the problem with rewrite rules and their equivalent in the present paper. But what he does not make explicit is what I've written and said many times [cf.]. Namely, that "the structure" of the genealogical space cannot be given by the organization of kin-type strings! I shall not rehash the demonstration of this here. Genealogical space has a structure (not unrelated to the algebraic structure of kin terminologies in Read's work [Lehman and Witz 1974, Lehman 2000] having to do with up/down, etc., namely ascent/descent, lineality/non-lineality (not identical with the usual sense of "collaterality"), generation and the like; and therewith, the way individual are placed into this structure necessarily imports into it the basic idea of sex and (noting also Read's comments on Dravidian) relative age! The latter is left out by our author precisely because it cannot be made to follow from kin-type string organization

All this having been said, I need to add, maybe contra Read and Leaf, that I see nothing wrong with such typological terminology as "Dravidian", especially in the sense of Douglas White [see now White's comments to Barbosa and references therein] and my work. That is, it seems fair to claim that what, ethnographically, most of the terminologies of Dravidian-speaking peoples of S. India have in common critically is the way in which sidedness (in White's sense) is calculated. That is, one, as it were, counts upward to a B-Z pair and then down; but how far one counts 'up' is arbitrary, and so determines arbitrarily sidedness in the present and subsequent generations! To say this is neither to violate ethnographical reality nor to throw out the importance of relative age. Furthermore, in those Tamil instances where, to cross-cousin marriage is added uncle-niece cross-marriage, relative age is complicated in its effect by the results of sidedness, obviously. I doubt Trautmann [cf., e.g. Trautmann 1981] would disagree here, and the matter is certainly recognized by Dumont. We do not intend, by "Dravidian" a terminology, but a family of distinct terminologies that seem to share, diacritically (yes, in this instance as contrasted with Iroquoisan!) this sidedness matter. (Here, see now also recent work on Australian Aboriginal cross-generational marriage in a quasi-Dravidian structural framework, Denham nd.)

Now, in this last connection, there is a feature in the rewrite-type algebra of the present paper that seems to relate to this sidedness complexity. Fairly early on one sees this, not surprisingly because the idea of "counting up" is a fundamentally genealogical process. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of his pages 10-12 one has at least the possibility of seeing the arbitrary generational ascent-point from which the 'inverse symmetry' is calculated. However, one has to look hard and do the work oneself; it is never made clear and certainly not explicit or commented upon. It's as if Doug White's work did not exist, as in Barbosa's References it does not! Also, clearly, The sidedness complication has to do with not the algebraic structure of the terminological space but, rather with the way a set of persons is fed into that structure- or, let us say, the way the structure is fit onto such a set - the old matrix-translation problem.

I much appreciated Barbosa's fine work years ago in *Current Anthropology* [Barbosa de Almeida, 1990] where he did such a lovely job of demonstrating the proposition that Lévi-Strauss's love-affair with mathematical jargon was underlain by an absence of mathematical comprehension. So, how then does Barbosa end up basing the present paper solely upon Weyl-type representations of Lévi-Strauss's stuff - i.e., group-theoretic representations of kin-type string calculations upon sets of persons? Possibly, his apparent like of the elegance of Tjon Sie Fat's work, causes our author to ignore Tjon Sie Fat's roots in the Dutch Structuralist school, as, say, represented by P. E. de Josselin de Jong's use of Lévi-Strauss.

Note that I here agree with Leaf, on the distinction between a terminological structure as a conceptual system, and the set of persons that Leaf is concerned with under the heading of the notion of basing a conceptual system on "denotation"! This is a serious issue in cognitive theory: were we to accept the old Behaviourist/Truth-functional idea of 'meaning' as being reduced to use/reference (*Bedeutung*), with Sense (*Sinn*) relegated, Fregeanly, to being merely a "pointer"? The author should make explicit the assumptions such as ones about kin-system structure on which the paper is based.

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