Mara Moieties - A Reply
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The argument (Maddock, 1969, Heath, 1978, Maddock, 1979) has concerned whether the Mara (Northern Territory), who have named semimoieties (PQRS), also have or had one or more moiety systems: PQ/RS (patrilineal or exogamous moieties), PS/QR (necrophagous moieties), and PR/QS (ceremonial moieties). My position in 1978 and now is that there is no evidence for the latter two, that the alleged named patrilineal moieties are spurious, and that unnamed patrilineal moieties are present but weakly developed in Mara ritual.

Mara-Dalabon Comparability
The Mara were concentrated around the mouth of the Limmen Bight River, not that of the Roper River (Maddock, 1979:68), though Mara clans owned estates almost to the mouth of the Roper. The Mara were certainly not contiguous to the Ngalakan, and would have had to cross at least two other ethnolinguistic groups to reach the Dalabon (e.g., Alawa and Ngalakan). A straight-line distance from Mara to Dalabon centres would be about 150 miles, depending on how we choose the centres, and of course the travelling distance would be much greater because of the circuitry of Aboriginal travelling routes (Biernoff, 1978). It is unlikely that any regular social or ritual relationships existed linking the Mara and Dalabon directly until recent times.

The Mara and Dalabon share several important rituals and the junggayi 'manager' system by which a man is junggayi to his mother's (and secondarily his FaMo's) clan and semimoieties. However, the junggayi system and some of the rituals are widely distributed and do not correlate with specific systems of social classification. Claims about the Mara based on comparisons with the Dalabon are inappropriate unless supported by direct testimony.

Among the Mara, as among the neighbouring Anyula (Reay, 1962), the semimoieties are patrilineal, although the recent intrusion of subsection systems into communities in which present Mara live has caused difficulties in maintaining this system. The Dalabon have subsections and indirect matrilineal semimoieties (as well as direct matrilineal clans and moieties not present for the Mara). Obviously, claims that the Mara and Dalabon have similar moiety structures despite these differences are suspect from the beginning.

Necrophagous moieties
Maddock's 1969 paper was mainly about PS/QR moieties who he thought formerly consumed the flesh of each other (PS eating flesh of deceased Q or R, etc.). The basis for this was a paragraph in Spencer (1914: 254). In my paper I showed that Spencer's statement that deceased Q was eaten by P and S was based on his explicit assumption that Q's MoBrs were S. I reconstructed the passage, arguing that the correct generalization should be that deceased Ego was eaten by the semimoieties of his Mo and MoMo, so some Q were eaten by P (MoMo) and R (Mo), others by P (MoMo) and R (Mo), and so forth.

Maddock (1979) does not discuss the inconsistency in Spencer and does not challenge my reconstruction of the external facts, so in one sense there is no need for further commentary by me. However, Maddock argues that even with this reconstruction it is possible to detect the presence of four moieties. There are eight possible combinations of semimoieties of Mo and

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I would begin by observing that accepting my reconstruction of the facts, and adopting the two-egocentric-set (four-moiety) analysis, would negate the theoretical point of Maddock's 1969 paper. It was crucial to his argument that there be a single sociocentric set of necrophagous moieties, PS/QR and PR/QS: 'Thus necrophagous moieties did exist, and the only question is whether there were two egocentric sets or one sociocentric set' (Maddock, 1979:68).

Moreover, even in 1969 Maddock recognized that the consumption of flesh was, at bottom, part of an exchange system by which the deceased's matrifiliative ancestors and their semimoiety mates reincorporated his flesh. But since Maddock thought that the rules for necrophagy (PS eats QR and vice versa) corresponded only partly to matrifiliative relations, he concluded that the Mara are conveying their message through the medium of the semi-moiety system, the structure of which interferes with the message. As the units of the system are semi-moieties, it is impossible consistently to represent Mara necrophagy as a delayed return for mothers. Maddock, 1969:102, italics added)

Of course, if the rule is simply that deceased Ego is eaten by the semimoieties of his Mo and MoMo, it is both possible and necessary to represent Mara necrophagy as a return for mothers (I would prefer to say: for flesh), the semimoiety system does not interfere at all with the message, and the theoretical point in Maddock (1969) vanishes.

I challenge even the view that egocentric moieties are involved; I consider them to be figments of the structuralist imagination. The suggestion that there is an opposition, in a given instance, between a flesh-consuming moiety (e.g., PS) and a non-flesh-consuming moiety (e.g., QR) is arbitrary; instead, we have an obvious opposition between a flesh-consuming group (here PS) and a bone-consuming group (here Q, i.e., the deceased's own semimoiety). Maddock himself spoke of necrophagy as 'a technique for separating flesh and bone' (1969:102), spoke of 'the problem of separating flesh, bone, and spirit' (1969:102), described how the Dalabon (in the Gunabibi ritual) have actors swallowed by a serpent representing the MoMo relationship 'and then vomited as bone, that is, vomited without flesh' (1969:99), and argued for the appropriateness of returning the flesh and spirit to the mother and father, respectively (1969:99). In view of these quotations, Maddock's (1979:68) charge that I misrepresented him as alluding to the bone (patrilineal) versus flesh (matrilineal) division seems absurd to me, though it is true that he did not fully describe the significance of bones.

My position is thus that the sociocentric PS/QR necrophagous moieties are an error due to careless writing by Spencer, who I think must have realized that the system was egocentric.1 The alternative is the even less charitable conclusion that Spencer did not realize how his assumption (that Q had MoBrs in S) distorted his presentation of the necrophagous rules.

Named Patrilineal (Exogamous) Moieties There are two distinct questions. First, we have argued about the authenticity of moiety terms given in Spencer and Gillen (1904) and Spencer (1914), which Maddock accepts as genuine and which I reject. Secondly, there is the question whether the structure of Mara ritual involves unnamed moieties. I argued (Heath, 1978) that such unnamed categories could be discerned but were very weakly developed. Maddock (1979) has juxtaposed quotations from my discussions of these two issues in a manner suggesting inconsistency; to avoid a repetition of this I treat the two issues here in separate sections.
The Spencer and Gillen (1904:119) PQ/RS moiety terms *Urku* and *Ua* were dropped by Spencer (1914) after further fieldwork and are certainly spurious. *Ua* may be *wu-wa* 'give it to him!', and *Urku* also looks like a truncated transcription of a verb form (cf. prefix *wurgu-* in my transcription). No one else has obtained such moiety terms.

Spencer (1914) replaces these terms with *Muluri* (PQ) and *Wumbana* (RS). I pointed out (Heath, 1978:469-70) that both of these were really kin terms and that Spencer had misunderstood his informants.

Maddock acknowledges that *muluri* and *wumbana* are today kin terms, and admits that Warner (1933), from fieldwork in the late 1920’s, supports me on this point. Surprisingly, however, Maddock suggests that these may have been sociocentric moiety terms as late as 1911, and became ego-centric kin terms shortly thereafter. The argument is implausible on its face and no parallel cases of this development are provided. Maddock’s philological argument for his position is that the list of Mara kin terms in Spencer and Gillen (1904:87-8, and since this conflicts with his 124-30) does not contain *muluri* ‘*WiMoBr*’ other position (that Spencer’s were or *wumbana* ‘Br-in-law’, and in their place originally sociocentric moiety terms involving the notion ‘shame’ for Wal- younger Br-in-law’). As for *Tjumalunga*, it appears to be my *narjalanga* ‘*WiMoBr*’. Mara kin terms form complex paradigms with suppletive stems determined by propositus and address-vs.-reference. Both *muluri* and *narjalanga* are stems in the ‘*WiMoBr*’ paradigm; *muluri* is chiefly vocative. The occurrence of *Tjumalunga* in the Spencer and Gillen (1904) list does not mean that *muluri* was not also a kin term for ‘*WiMoBr*’.

If Maddock is serious in using Reay (1962:98) as evidence for named Mara moieties, he should explain how moiety terms in 1911 became kin terms in the 1920s, reverted to moiety terms for Reay, and again became kin terms in the 1970s. Reay studied the Anyula, not the Mara, and was presumably alluding to the alleged moiety terms of Spencer (1914).

Finally we can dispose of the view that *muluri* ‘*WiMoBr*’ (=*MoMoBr*So, etc.) and *wumbana* ‘elder Br-in-law’ (=elder *MoMoBr*DaSo, etc.) had extended meanings ‘my patrimoieties’ and ‘opposite (e.g. *Mo*’s patri-moieties’ (Maddock, 1979:64). Maddock argues that for alliance theorists it is natural to represent patrimoieties egocentrically as affinal units: Ego’s own moiety includes his potential *WiMoBr*s (who bestow his *Wi* on him) and is represented as collective ‘*WiMoBr*’; the other moiety includes men like Br-in-law who yield his *Wi* to him and it is represented as collective ‘Br-in-law’. Maddock presents no supporting examples of moiety extensions of affinal kin terms, and since this theory conflicts with his other position (that Spencer’s terms were originally sociocentric moiety terms) I doubt that he believes in it strongly. I think that it is unlikely that ‘Br-in-law’ would be a suitable prototype for ‘opposite patrilineal moiety’ (as opposed to *Mo, MoBr, SiCh*, etc.), and that taking the avoidance relationship ‘*WiMoBr*’ as a prototype for one’s own patrilineal moiety verges on the preposterous. I would add that the forms *muluri* and *wumbana* without suffixes are vocative (address) forms, and it is difficult to see how they could function in extended senses as collective moiety designations.

Maddock’s typological parallels are from the Walbiri (Warlpiri). He cites egocentric terms involving the notion ‘shame’ for Walbiri matrilineal moieties; these are irrelevant since they are not kin terms and since it is much more natural to represent matrilineal or matrillitative sequences in secular and affinal terms than it is to represent patrilineal categories in this way, for the Walbiri, Mara, and Dalabon (Meggitt, 1962; Peterson, 1969, etc.).
Maddock also, more pertinently, cites Walbiri egocentric patrilineal moiety terms from Meggitt (1962:203). The term for ‘my patrilineal moiety’ is glossed as ‘the fathers and sons’, and that for ‘opposite patrilineal moiety’ as ‘those who give arm-blood for ritual decorations’ by the Phillip Creek Walbiri (and as ‘those who may not act in a particular ritual’ by other Walbiri). Because arm-blood in ritual is associated with affinal relationships, Maddock (1979:64-5) believes that we have a parallel to the putative extension of ‘Br-in-law’ as ‘opposite patrilineal moiety’ for the Mara.

Maddock does not mention that the Phillip Creek Walbiri were a modern splinter group of Walbiri living in a dominantly Warramunga community; nor does he mention Meggitt’s argument that the Phillip Creek group may well have reinterpreted the term for ‘opposite patrilineal moiety’ due to the fortuitous homophony of guruquulu and guru-vulu, in the concept of their attempts to assimilate unfamiliar aspects of Warramunga ritual structure. As it happens, the linguist David Nash (1980) has recently re-examined the question in the context of land rights, and points out that the forms in question are not truly homophonous. It seems probable that Meggitt (who treated the two forms as homophones) either misunderstood his informants from Phillip Creek or confused them by mispronouncing the terms in question. At any rate, Nash argues that the term for opposite patrilineal moiety his Kurdungurlu is actually related etymologically to a kin term meaning SiCh, while that for ‘my patrilineal moiety’ is related to the term for Fa. If this is correct, it is evidence against (not for) Maddock’s alliance-theory perspective on patrilineal moieties. Finally, Meggitt says of the Walbiri terms: ‘These are not terms of address’ (1962:203); recall that Mara wumbana and muluri are vocative in form.

The Mara are not the only Northern Territory societies for which Spencer reported spurious patrilineal moiety terms. In the very passage in Meggitt’s work cited by Maddock, Spencer’s alleged Walbiri moiety terms are challenged (Meggitt, 1962:203). In Elkin (1961), also cited by Maddock, we find this:

Incidentally, Spencer gives names for Mangarai moieties; I found that his two names meant ‘one’ and ‘poor fellow me’ respectively. The informant did his best, but got worried. Spencer rarely made this sort of mistake, but he felt that named moieties should always be present (Elkin, 1961:175fn.).

Unnamed Patrilineal (Exogamous) Moieties
I have not disputed the existence of PQ/RS groupings in the organization of Mara ritual, notably in the more advanced rituals Gunabibi and Yabuduruwa. I did not discuss the matter in great detail in my earlier paper, but stressed that the primary units even of these rituals were semimoieties, not moieties. I will here emphasize again that Maddock’s discussion of these moieties is overblown and that the moiety groupings are weakly developed unnamed associations. They are not found in traditional circumcision or mortuary rituals and have very limited function in Gunabibi and Yabuduruwa. Maddock (1979) argues that Elkin (1971) supports his position, so I will focus on that publication with secondary reference to Bern (1979).

The 1965 Yabuduruwa at Roper R. (now Ngukurr) described in Elkin (1971) was organized by men of the S (guyal) semi-moiety and by men who were junggayi to S. It was S men ‘on which responsibility rested for the two main roles in this Yabuduruwa, namely, Nagaran and Wadamamar (plum-tree bird)’ (Elkin, 1971:119). The third major figure was sandridge goana, also of the S semimoieties, though in one particular goanna rite an R man (Paddy) was permitted to act as headman (Elkin, 1971:139). As a general comment, we can say that acting roles in the various Yabuduruwa rites, and the totemic beings represented, are allocated to specific semimoieties (and clans). There are, to be sure, other versions of the Yabuduruwa including versions controlled by R (not S) men and focusing on R totems like plains kangaroo (i.e. antelopine kangaroo) (Bern, 1979), but this simply reinforces my point.

The evidence for merger of R and S into an undifferentiated ‘owner’ moiety, and of P and Q into an undifferentiated ‘manager’ junggayi moiety, is as follows (Mad-
dock, 1979:66): behaviour of R and S women in the camp as gongs are heard; restrictions on use of kapok or bird-down ‘paint’ on the bodies of junggayi a sacred object is exhibited to R and S men; gonging is performed by the junggayi; R and S men together perform the honey bee rite. We may add that massed dances involving R and S, or (separately) P and Q, occur at the opening and closing of the ritual (Bern, 1979). I would comment simply that these are small parts of the highly complex series of rites which may last several months, that they do not involve the central structural features of the Yabuduruwa, and that they appear not to include mergers of semimoiety totemic beings. The ‘honey bee rite’ consists simply of all-night humming and beating tapsticks as dawn is awaited (Elkin, 1971:140), and Bern (1979:49) states that in the 1970 Yabuduruwa he observed men of both moieties engaged in this humming and tapping sticks.

Instead of looking at these as sociocentric moieties, I feel it is more productive to focus on the owner/manager system. I agree that this is a dualism and that it is of profound significance. It is, however, an egocentric system based on kinship relations; the whole thrust of my criticism of Maddock has involved his overemphasis on sociocentric systems. I would simply stress that the owner/manager relationship is conceptualized chiefly in terms of clans and semimoieties. I am junggayi to my Mo’s clan and semimoiety; in a weaker sense I am junggayi to my FaMo’s clan and semimoiety. Similarly, the ‘owner’ relationship (several terms are in use) applies mainly to my own clan and semimoiety, but can be loosely extended to those of my MoMo. Even in the extended senses, the concepts involve specific genealogical links rather than abstract ‘membership’ in sociocentric moieties.

We must also face the consequences of the difference between Mara direct patrilineal semimoieties and Dalabon indirect matrilineal ones. In the Dalabon system, each patriclan contains two subsets assigned to different semimoieties predictable from those of their Mos. Some clans are P and Q, others R and S. Even the clan totems are divided into two sets accordingly. Thus the effect of having named PQ and RS moieties is to unite the two subdivisions of each clan in a higher category; Maddock’s term ‘patrilineal moieties’ is apt since this is the only true patrilineal classificatory system which the Dalabon have. On the other hand, Mara semimoieties are already patrilineal, so a higher-order patrilineal system is largely redundant.

Elkin (1961:174) reports that the Dalabon (= Ngalgbun) PQ/RS patrilineal moiety terms are a recent borrowing from the northeast; hence the point just made may have to be reformulated as an attempt to explain why the Dalabon (but not Mara) have readily accepted intrusive moiety terms and have integrated them into their cultural system.

Maddock (1969:101fn.) emphasized the distinction between patrilineal (clan-based) and indirect matrilineal (subsection-based) semimoieties, and took Sapiro to task for using the term ‘semimoiety’ in the former case. Maddock shows no sign of having appreciated the pertinence of this point to the comparison of Mara and Dalabon.

**Ceremonial Moieties**

By piecing together the fragmentary information in Maddock’s two papers we can describe the PR/QS ‘ceremonial moieties’ as follows: (1) PR and QS men form contrasting sets of dancers in certain Yabuduruwa rites; (2) these sets represent R and S culture heroes, respectively; (3) some P and Q men remain behind in their normal junggayi roles (Maddock, 1969:101, 1979:67). Maddock had no evidence (1969:96) for this system in the Mara area, but now argues (1979) that Elkin (1971) vindicates his guesswork. I disagree; there is nothing in Elkin’s report which describes, or suggests the existence of, this system.

There is no space here for a complete discussion; I will simply direct readers’ attention to Elkin (1971) and make a few comments. The PR/QS moieties occur for the Dalabon in the goanna fat and Milky Way rite of the Yabuduruwa. Elkin’s earlier (1961:182-3) account of this rite in a Yabuduruwa in Dalabon country indeed does distinguish one group of actors wearing goanna fat designs from another set of
dancers with distinct designs: these presumably correspond to the PR/QS moieties identified by Maddock from his Dalabon fieldwork. However, Elkin (1971:139), describing the same rite at Roper R. (near the Mara area), states that all nine actors wear goanna fat designs and they obviously represent goanna (S semimoiety). A tenth man is the headman but of course cannot be considered an opposed set of dancers and is not joined by men of the other patrilineal moiety. Milky Way is represented by the trench, not by dancers. Elkin describes an opposition between the actors and nine novices, and a concluding opposition between men from north and south of the Roper R., but these features do not correspond to the PR/QS ceremonial moieties. (I have been referring to Elkin’s session 8, scene 1.)

In the other two goanna-related scenes cited by Maddock (Elkin’s session 1, scene 1 and session 7, scene 1), I am again unable to find indications of opposed sets of PR and QS actors representing distinct totemic beings. It is true that in some or all of these goanna rites, men who normally act as junggayi join with the dancers, but this is insufficient to create an alternative dual structure.

The remaining rite is that of brown chickenhawk and rain (session 8, scene 4, repeated as session 9, scene 3, Elkin 1971:140). Although Maddock does not connect this rite to a Dalabon rite involving PR/QS, it is more promising than the goanna scenes since this hawk is listed as S while rain is listed as R (Elkin 1971:116). In describing this rite, Elkin distinguishes ‘eight actors’ from four junggayi, and if I follow Elkin correctly it is the eight actors (R and S) who form contrasting sets representing distinct beings. In the crucial earlier footnote cited by Maddock (Elkin 1971:116 fn.), Elkin confuses the issue by speaking of ‘12 actors’ in this rite, but proceeds to describe the role of the four junggayi as merely that of ‘assistants’. For this to qualify as comparable to the Dalabon system, we need not only distinct R and S dancing sets, but must also have some P men joining R and some Q men joining S, and such mergers do not seem to be present.

In short, while the cultural analysis of Roper R. Yabuduruwa performances is still highly incomplete, it is absurd for Maddock to claim that Elkin (1971) supports his position, especially in view of the significant discrepancies between Elkin’s descriptions of the goanna fat and Milky Way rite in the two locations. Maddock is saying, in effect, that had Elkin’s description of the Roper R. rites been fuller it is likely that he would have identified PR/QS moieties. Yet Elkin, for Roper R. (though not for the earlier rite at Tandandjal), had the benefit of films and a native commentator, and it is hard to see how he could have missed opposed PR and QS dancing sets similar to opposed sets he had already described in his earlier report. Of course, if Maddock wishes to charge Elkin with poor ethnography and/or careless writing, that is his privilege, but in that event he should be plain about this.

There is also some question as to whether the Dalabon PR/QS groups constitute moieties. Maddock (1979) acknowledges that some P and Q men remain as junggayi, hence the system is (PR/QS)/PQ. I prefer (P1,R/Q1,S)/P2,Q2 since P and Q have been split up. The ‘ceremonial moieties’ occur only inside the parentheses; they are defective compositionally since only certain P and Q men are involved; and they are internally asymmetrical in that P1 and R both represent R totems while Q1 and S both represent S totems.

Obviously, then, the usual fourfold structure (R, S, manager of R, manager of S) of the Yabuduruwa is retained here, though there has been a transfer of individuals into R and S. Maddock’s account is so perfunctory that I can go no farther. We do not even know whether P1 and Q1 consist of men who are managers to the semimoieties whose men they join with (e.g. some P men are junggayi to R, some to S). We are not told which totemic beings are represented (though goanna in S semimoity is presumably one of them); we are given no mythological background; we are not told whether the Dalabon conceptualize the transfers of P1 and Q1 as debt-creating transaction in one direction or the other. We are told that there is an idealized endogamy between P and R and between
Q and S (does this involve all of P and Q or just P₁ and Q₁?) but the nature of this counterfactual ideal is not adequately discussed. Perhaps Maddock could clarify these matters.

**Conclusion**

My criticism of Maddock is partly due to disagreement with his excessive concern with sociocentric classifications in general and with dual organization in particular. I believe that semimoieties (not moieties) are the central sociocentric system for the Mara, and that egocentric systems such as kinship and the owner/manager system are even more significant.

In addition, I question the wisdom of erecting theoretical edifices of any type on such a skimpy and unreliable ethnographic data base as that available for the Mara (and their immediate neighbours). It is this very skimpiness which has permitted Maddock to give free rein to his prodigious powers of imagination. The result is an artistic, but not scientific, success. Spencer left much to be desired as an ethnographer, but he too had an instinctive distrust of dramatic claims based on second-hand data:

> When one has been told the many extraordinary things which I have, and all in good faith by intelligent men, concerning the natives, you begin to trust no one unless he has made a special study of the subject . . . (Marett and Penniman, 1932:80, letter dated 1903).

**Notes**

1 For Spencer's admission of his own sloppiness in writing and proofreading, see his 1903 letter to Frazer in Marrell and Penniman (1932:90).

2 Roper R. rituals described by Elkin and Bern can be used with caution in elucidating Mara ritual structures. Mara were not dominant in the ritual performances described but some Mara were present at least in Elkin's. Bern (1979) describes an earlier shift in ritual predominance from a southern bloc including the Mara to a northern bloc including Ngandi, Ngalakan, Nunggubuyu, and Nunggubuyu-ized Warndarang. The head owners and *junggeyi* for Elkin's and Bern's performances were from the northern bloc. Mara were close ritual associates of Warndarang and for this reason we may cautiously admit the Roper R. material in evidence.

**Bibliography**


