

**AN INTRODUCTION TO VLADIMIR A. POPOV'S  
"TOWARD A HISTORICAL TYPOLOGY OF  
KINSHIP-TERM SYSTEMS:  
THE CROW AND OMAHA TYPES"  
TRANSLATED BY ANASTASIA KALYUTA**

Peter M. Whiteley  
Curator of North American Ethnology  
Division of Anthropology  
American Museum of Natural History  
New York City, NY 10024  
USA  
Email: whiteley@amnh.org

**Abstract:** *This is the first English translation of Vladimir A. Popov's important 1977 article on Crow-Omaha kinship systems. Popov's global comparison proposes an historical typology of these systems covariant with socio-evolutionary stages. His six subtypes are configured by the variable operation of bifurcation and linearity among G+1 and G0 kin-terms, with Popov suggesting three possible evolutionary trajectories. While directly addressing contemporary Western kinship theory, Popov simultaneously engages a robust Soviet tradition little known to Western scholars. Of special note, Popov deploys the "Levin code," a logically elegant formalist notation that commands comparison with other componential systems. Broader attention to Popov's perspectives on the Crow-Omaha problem is long overdue.*

Vladimir A. Popov's article on Crow-Omaha systems first appeared in the journal *Soviet Ethnography* (Советская этнография/Sovetskaya ètnografiya) in 1977. Its currency reflected the contemporary vitality of systematic kinship research in Soviet ethnology. Popov's wide-ranging survey of KTS ("Kinship Terminology Systems") was anchored in, but by no means limited to, G.P. Murdock's (1957) *World Ethnographic Sample*. His engagement with global ethnography and kinship studies in the West was comprehensive. Moreover, Popov's proposal for an historical typology of Crow-Omaha systems covariant with socio-evolutionary stages retains much value, especially apropos the "renaissance" of kinship in Western anthropology over the last two decades. His framing of Crow-Omaha subtypes via the relative presence or absence, and combinations, of bifurcation and linearity in G+1 and G0 kin-term structures remains heuristic for the

“Crow-Omaha problem,” i.e., why these terminologies skew oblique lineal kin-terms intergenerationally. And his proposal for a new typology based on structural features rather than ethnonymic designations resonates with several later arguments (e.g., Trautmann and Barnes 1998; Read 2013). Reawakened interest in Crow-Omaha systems (e.g., Trautmann and Whiteley 2012; Read 2018; Trautmann and Whiteley 2018; Parkin 2019; Whiteley and McConvell forthcoming) has much to gain from Popov’s argument, whether or not evolutionary irreversibility of stage transformations is accepted as a general matter (for arguments con and pro, see, e.g., Trautmann 2001 and Godelier 2011, respectively).

While directly addressing Western kinship theory, Popov simultaneously engaged a robust Soviet tradition, comprising several perspectives—formalist and empiricist, linguistic and ethnographic—and including the works of M.V. Kryukov, L.V. Markova, N.M. Girenko, M.A. Chlenov, S.A. Tokarev, D.A. Olderogge, N.V. Bikbulatov, N.A. Butinov, V.M. Misyugin, and K.I. Vavra (for references see the article’s footnotes). Anglophone scholars, it may safely be assumed, are mostly unaware of this work, except, if at all, via recent summary discussions by Kryukov (1998), Dziebel (2007), and Popov and Dziebel (2016). While Soviet scholars were conversant with Western anthropology, the reverse was not the case: in effect, a self-imposed “iron curtain” closed off Western anthropology from Soviet and Russian argument, impeding dialectical advance of scientific knowledge. And while, thanks to Dwight Read’s invitation, the opportunity to publish Dr. Anastasia Kalyuta’s excellent translation of Popov’s article is most welcome, it must be hoped this is just the beginning: a brief glance at Popov’s footnotes shows that further translations of this dynamic tradition of kinship studies—which did not end in 1977—are very much needed.

I first became aware of Popov’s article at a 2016 conference “Kinship, Cognition and Practice” at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle. My paper (Whiteley n.d.) focused on a global survey of Crow-Omaha systems, including Murdock’s revised *Ethnographic Atlas* (a development of his *World Ethnographic Sample*). At the next break, Prof. Popov and German Dziebel, his former student, approached me with the 1977 article. Although I do not read Russian, both the figures and the explanations Popov and Dziebel provided orally made it clear the article was directly precedent, although my approach was sociological and distributional rather than typological. I vowed to have the article translated. Museum duties intervened, however, and my intentions lay dormant until Dziebel’s review of *Crow-Omaha* (Trautmann and Whiteley 2012) for the present issue of *Kinship*, which specifically points out our omission of Popov’s argument. That criticism is justified: hence the translation herewith by Kalyuta, also a former student of Popov. Kalyuta’s translation of some intricate kinship concepts and ethnographic details is deft, and she deserves much credit for bringing this work to an Anglophone audience.

Two other issues are worth mentioning. The first concerns Popov’s typology and its relationship to *crossness* (bifurcate: see Trautmann and Whiteley’s response to Dziebel, this issue). The skewing of some cross-kin categories is diagnostically present for all six of his Crow-Omaha variants in G0: thus, crossness inheres in Crow-Omaha systems (cf. Trautmann 2012). By contrast, it is systematic variations in the accompanying G+1 equations and distinctions—including presence or absence of crossness and mixtures of generational and lineal features—that lead to Popov’s six-fold typology, in accordance with his developmentalist premise that “the differ-

ences in grouping of relatives in G+1 and G0 have critical importance for the historical typology” of kinship systems. The six variants are as follows (following the sequence at p. 52 of the original article; the sequence in figure 4 [p. 48] differs, so concordances are given here in parentheses):

- Variant I: Bifurcate (figure 4 Variant III)—characterized by G+1 crossness (i.e. as with Dravidian and Iroquois systems):  $[F = FB] \neq MB$ ;  $[M = MZ] \neq FZ$
- Variant II: Bifurcate-lineal (figure 4 Variant V)—crossness absent in G+1, “Sudanese” distinctions present:  $F \neq FB \neq MB$ ;  $M \neq MZ \neq FZ$
- Variant III: Generational (figure 4 Variant VII)—G+1 crossness “neutralized” (see, e.g., Dousset 2012):  $[F = FB = MB]$ ;  $[M = MZ = FZ]$
- Variant IV: Bifurcate—Bifurcate-lineal (figure 4 Variant IV)—mixed features of Variant I and Variant II
- Variant V: Bifurcate—Generational (figure 4 Variant VI)—mixed features of Variant I and Variant III
- Variant VI: Bifurcate-lineal—Generational (figure 4 Variant VIII)—mixed features of Variant II and Variant III.

Popov suggests three possible evolutionary trajectories: Bifurcate  $\rightarrow$  Generational; Bifurcate  $\rightarrow$  Bifurcate—Bifurcate-lineal  $\rightarrow$  Bifurcate-lineal; and Bifurcate-lineal  $\rightarrow$  Generational. Each stage in each trajectory (variably) retains crossness and skewing. Crossness is neither deleted nor added but is inherent in all six types.

Secondly, Popov uses the formalist notation of Yuri Levin (1970: see outline in Translation footnote 1). This “P-C” (parent-child) system in Cyrillic characters will be unfamiliar to most Anglophone readers (standard Western notation equivalents are provided) but commands comparison with other componential systems. Symbol sequences flow from alter to Ego rather than the reverse, so may initially seem puzzling. But Levin’s code is notable for its logical elegance, and interested readers may easily substitute the Cyrillic characters (P parent, Д child, м male, ж female) with Roman equivalents (P, C, m, f).

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