

# Chapter III

## Kinship, Marriage, and Domestic Social Organisation

In this chapter, I describe the kinship system of the Palokhi Karen and its role in the formation, existence and interrelationships of domestic groups which are the cornerstone of social organisation in the community. Kinship, marriage, and domestic social organisation, however, do not exist merely in relation to one another. They are linked to a system of naming individuals, and a system of sex differentiation. Furthermore, the ritual life of domestic groups includes a ritual, 'au' ma xae, which is an integral part of the religious system of the Palokhi Karen, a system that is inextricably bound to agriculture.

I therefore propose to examine kinship, marriage, and domestic social organisation as well as ritual from several perspectives suggested by the occurrence of the systems of naming individuals and sex differentiation in relation to the kinship system. I also explore the implications of the relationships amongst these systems, and 'au' ma xae, a full description of which may be found in Appendix A. It is my contention that these implications are of critical importance for an understanding of Palokhi Karen social organisation, agriculture and religion. More specifically, I argue that these systems are structurally unified within an overarching indigenous symbolic and ideological system. The unity of these systems at symbolic and ideological levels may be found in a paradigm which may well be described as a "procreative model" of society in Palokhi. The elements of this paradigm in the context of kinship, domestic social organisation, and marriage and domestic rituals are central to the major theme of this study, that is, the reproduction of a cultural ideology and the maintenance of identity in Palokhi.

### Kinship Terminology

When Lewis Henry Morgan first described and classified Karen kinship on the basis of Sgaw, Pwo and "Karen" kin terms provided by the Reverends Mason, Wade and Van Meter respectively (1871:441ff.; 518), he categorically labelled them as "classificatory" systems. Morgan, however, acknowledged that they also shared in some of the features which he took as the hallmarks of "descriptive" systems. Morgan's classification of kinship systems has, of course, since undergone considerable re-evaluation and many of the systems which he called "descriptive" have now come to be known as "cognatic" systems.

Following these changes and more particularly following Murdock's assessment of Southeast Asian kinship (1960), the systems of the Sgaw and Pwo are now paradoxically recognised as "cognatic" or "bilateral" (Lebar, Hickey and Musgrave [1964:61]; Hinton [1975:44]; Hamilton [1976:93]; Marlowe [1979: 177–78]; Mischung [1980:97]; Madha [1980:60–1]). It is clear from the lists of kin terms provided by Mason, Wade and Van Meter and those available in the contemporary ethnography of the Karen that these terminological systems are remarkably similar, despite the fact that they have been drawn from communities widely separated in time and space. Palokhi Karen kinship terms are no exception to this apparent general stability in Karen terminological systems; specifically, they resemble the Sgaw systems of Mason, Madha and Marshall (1922:135–6). Although the inventories of terms provided by these writers are somewhat abbreviated where affinal terms are concerned, the overall concordance in consanguineal and the few affinal terms between these inventories and Palokhi kin terms is sufficient to demonstrate the existence of fundamental similarities. I present below a list of Palokhi Karen kin terms, in Table 3.1, and some observations on their general applications in address and reference.

A number of these terms are modified in order to specify more precisely who is being addressed or to whom reference is being made. Thus, the term **phy** may be modified by **phado'** ("big", "great") to refer to, or address, male lineal kin traced bilaterally in the third ascending generation as there is no specific term for these categories of kin. The term **phi** is similarly modified for female kin in these generations. The terms **phy** and **phi** are also applied to collateral kin and non-kin in the second ascending generation, but only in direct address. When referred to, they are identified teknonymously where the terms **phy** and **phi** are prefixed by the names of their eldest grandchildren if they have grandchildren; if they only have children and no grandchildren, then they are referred to teknonymously where the terms **pa** and **mo** are prefixed by the names of their eldest children. Teknonymy in either of these forms may also be used in address but this is associated with a certain degree of formality which is rare in Palokhi. In the same way, collateral kin and non-kin in the first ascending generation are addressed by the terms **phati** or **mygha**, depending on their sex, and referred to teknonymously in which case the referential terms would take the form **pa** and **mo** prefixed by the names of their eldest children. As a general rule, then, kin and non-kin in ascending generations are usually never referred to, much less addressed, by their own names.

**Table 3.1. Palokhi Karen Kin Terms**

G + 2	phy	: FF, MF (address and reference); FFB, FMB, MFB, MMB, etc. (address); other male collaterals and non-kin of same generation (address).
	phi	: FM, MM (address and reference); FMZ, FFZ, MMZ, MFZ, etc. (address); other female collaterals and non-kin of same generation (address).
G + 1	pa	: F (address and reference); also term of address for spouse's F.
	mo	: M (address and reference); also term of address for spouse's M.
	phati	: FB, MB, FZH, MZH (address, sometimes reference); other male collaterals and non-kin of same generation (address).
	mygha	: FZ, MZ, FBW, MBW (address, sometimes reference); other female collaterals and non-kin of same generation (address).
	mipgha	: Spouse's F and M (reference).
G O	waecau'	: Elder male sibling (address and reference); parents' elder siblings' male children (address); elder female sibling's spouse (address); spouse's elder male sibling (address).
	waenau	: Elder female sibling (address and reference); parents' siblings' female children (address); elder male sibling's spouse (reference and address); spouse's elder female sibling (reference and address).
	waeko'	: Eldest sibling (reference).
	wae	: WeB, HeB (reference); elder female sibling's spouse (reference).
	py	: Younger sibling (address and reference); parents' younger siblings' children (address).
	pysoeda	: Youngest sibling (reference).
	pyde	: WyB, WyZ, HyB, HyZ (address and reference).
	ca'li	: yZH, HyZH, WyZH (address and reference).
	demy	: yBW, WyBW, HyBW (address and reference).
	tappgha	: Spouse (general reference).
	phau'khwapgha	: H (general reference).
	phau'mypgha	: W (general reference).
	pghaghane	: Spouse (reference only, by spouses).
	wa	: H (general reference, also address by spouse).
	ma	: W (general reference, also address by spouse).
	G-1	phokhwa
phomy		: D (address and reference); SW (address).
phoko'		: Eldest child (reference).
ma'		: DH (reference).
dae'		: SW (reference).
phodo'		: Siblings' children (address and reference); other collaterals and non-kin of same generation (address).
G-2	li	: Children's children (address and reference); other collaterals and non-kin of same generation (address).
G-3	lo	: Children's children's children (address and reference); other collaterals and non-kin of same generation.
G-4	la	: Children's children's children's children (address and reference); other collaterals and non-kin of same generation (address).

In contrast to the terms for kin in ascending generations (and in descending generations), there are comparatively far more terms for kin within ego's own generation and this is a feature common to virtually all terminological systems whether cognatic or non-cognatic. These terms deserve special attention because together with associated generic kin terms they denote certain classes of kin which are an important consideration in the way that the Palokhi Karen formulate their marriage rules.

As with other Sgaw Karen, the Palokhi Karen have a term which specifically distinguishes the members of a sibling set from all other kin, **dau'pywae**. It is a compound term derived from the terms for elder male and female sibling, **waecau'** and **waenau**, reduced to **wae**, and the single term for younger sibling, **py**, which does not make a distinction between the sexes as do the terms **waecau'** and **waenau**. The term **dau'** is a grammatical conjunction meaning "and", "together" or "with". When it occurs preposed before two nouns, the compound term so formed denotes a group or set whose attributes are defined by the postposed categories. The term **dau'pywae** means "elder and younger siblings".<sup>1</sup> It does not include the parents of the siblings. Indeed there is no term for the nuclear or stem family although the members of a household are collectively called **doe' pho**, **xau' pho** which literally means "children of the house, children of the steps", where "steps" is a common synecdoche in Karen for house and household. Where it has been reported, the term **dau'pywae** has generally been glossed as "siblings" or "brothers and sisters" (Hamilton [1976:98]; Marlowe [1979:169]; Madha [1980:202]), but Iijima (1970:31) states that the "**Dopuweh** ... is almost identical with a family although it is based on a matrilineage" (see also Iijima [1979:107]). This very singular interpretation which Iijima places on the term **dau'pywae** is supported neither in other accounts of Karen kinship (Mischung [1980:97 n. 47]; Madha [1980:203–4]) nor, indeed, by my informants.

Within the **dau'pywae**, the two principal features of the kin terms used by siblings are, first, a distinction in relative age and, second, a sex distinction in the terms for elder siblings and an absence of such a distinction in the terms for younger siblings. Younger siblings, regardless of sex, are called **py**, although where it is necessary to indicate the sex of younger siblings, the term **py** may then be qualified by the sex categories **phau'khwa** ("male") and **phau'my** ("female"). The terms **waecau'**, **waenau** and **py** are used in reference and address although it is not uncommon to hear siblings using their names in addressing, or referring to each other. There are two other terms, in addition to these, which distinguish first and last born siblings, and these are **waeko'** and **pysoeda**.<sup>2</sup> The terms **ko'** and **soeda** are also used by parents to refer to their eldest and youngest children in which case the respective terms are **phoko'** and **phosoeda**.<sup>3</sup>

The Palokhi Karen also have a term, **dau'takhwa**, which defines groups of consanguines consisting of related **dau'pywae**, that is, groups of parallel or cross cousins.<sup>4</sup> This term is applied bilaterally. The general term **dau'takhwa** is usually modified by an ordinal number which indicates the degree of removal between ego and his, or her, cousins, for example **toetakhwa** ("first cousins"), **khitakhwa** ("second cousins") and **soe'takhwa** ("third cousins"). It is rare, however, for the Palokhi Karen to indicate degrees of removal beyond that of third cousins (although in theory this system of indicating degrees of removal could be extended indefinitely), thus suggesting that for all practical purposes

this is the “cut-off” point in the recognition of cousinship. The terms of address for ego’s **dau’takhwa**, of whatever degree, are the same as the terms used within the **dau’pywae**, except that the use of the appropriate terms (**waecau’/waenau** or **py**, that is, elder or younger) depends — at least in theory — not on the relative ages of the persons concerned, but on the relative ages of their respective parents or grandparents. In practice, however, relative age more often than not overrides what in theory is the generational basis on which the address system for **dau’takhwa** rests. Thus, those of “senior” or “elder” **dau’takhwa** will often be addressed by name or even the term **py** if they are younger than ego. Nevertheless, as with members of a **dau’pywae**, ego is as likely to refer to members of his, or her, **dau’takhwa** by name as he or she is likely to do so by kin terms.

I come now to affinal kin terms in Palokhi kinship nomenclature. Affines in general are termed **do’** or **dau’do’** (see also Marshall [1922:315]), but there are also specific terms for certain categories of affinal kin just as there are for consanguineal kin. As the list of kin terms shows, there are two general terms for “spouse” and a set of specific terms for “husband” and for “wife”. The differentiation or elaboration in spouse terms, including those for “husband” and “wife” are striking, to say the least, when compared with all other kin terms which do not show such elaboration. The two paired terms **phau’mypgha** and **phau’khwapgha** are terms which denote the married status of women and men, and as such they contrast with the paired terms **mykoe’nau** and **phau’khwa** which mean “unmarried” women and men. **Pgha** in both terms (and in the generic term **tapypgha**) means “mature” or “old” and it is the same lexeme in the term for “to marry”, **thau pgha**. **Thau**, itself, means “to rise”, “to ascend” or “to raise up”; it also has a specific connotation of “to grow” and is invariably used to refer to the growth of rice and other swidden crops in agricultural ritual texts. The term **thau pgha** and the various spouse terms containing **pgha**, therefore, mean rather more than “to marry” or “married”. These terms imply the achievement of adult status at marriage or, perhaps, even a “growing” into this status through marriage. The terms **phau’mypgha** and **phau’khwapgha**, thus, are not merely kin terms. They are also terms which encode the idea of a socially recognised adult status. These two terms are used as general terms of reference. The terms **ma** and **wa**, on the other hand, are both terms of address and reference. **Pghaghane**, however, is a term of reference that is said to be used in a very specific context — when one’s spouse is present. It literally means “that person”.

The Palokhi Karen say that they do not use the names of their spouses, or spouse terms, in reference or address (although names are used when courting) if others are present because they feel “embarrassed” or “ashamed” (**mae’chgha’**) to do so, and that they therefore use the term **pghaghane**. In general, however, it appears to be used by newly married spouses who may, indeed, be embarrassed

to use proper spouse terms in public, at least initially, while the use of proper names (by which they are known to others) seems to be inappropriate or incongruous in the context of marriage. It is worth noting that the term **pghaghane** is not the third person singular pronoun which is 'oe'wae in Sgaw Karen (see also Jones [1961:18]); it is a fully deictic term. **Pgha** (tonally different from **pgha**, "old", "mature") means "people" in a generic sense and **gha** refers to "person" of indefinite number, while **ne** is the locative "there". It would appear, therefore, that the use of the deictic **pghaghane** represents a means of interposing a certain distance between newly-wed spouses in public situations before they have become accustomed to, or comfortable with, behaving as a "couple" according to social expectations.

If indeed newly-wed spouses are concerned with maintaining a certain "social distance" in public, as a result of an ambivalence experienced in the transition between unmarried to married statuses and roles, then the use of the term **pghaghane** as part of a particular repertoire in sociolinguistic behaviour is entirely appropriate. Quite apart from the social expectations attaching to the condition of being unmarried or married, the logic of the kinship system and its terminology, as I argue later, in fact stresses as it were the conjunctiveness of the conjugal bond in opposition to other kin ties and social relationships. The term **pghaghane**, from this perspective, may well be regarded therefore as a linguistic solution to an ambivalence in the transitional situation experienced by newly married spouses.

When a child is born, however, spouses then refer to each other in one of two ways. The first is by referring to each other as "male child's mother" (**phokhwa mo**), "male child's father" (**phokhwa pa**) or "female child's mother" (**phomy mo**), "female child's father" (**phomy pa**), according to the sex of the child. This form of teknonymy also constitutes the form of address used by spouses and, thus, supersedes those used prior to the birth of a child, that is **ma** and **wa**. Alternatively, spouses may refer to each other teknonymously through the use of the name of the child. The basis of teknonymous reference (which is also used by others with respect to the two spouses) in this form is always the name of the eldest surviving child. If there is only one child, and the child dies, then the referential and addressive system employed by spouses reverts back to that used before the child was born. Where others are concerned, the spouses would then be addressed and referred to by their proper names.

The term for the parents of both spouses is **mipgha** and this is used only in reference. The terms of address for the parents of one's spouse are **pa** and **mo**, the same terms used for one's own parents. The reciprocals of the referential term, **mipgha**, are **ma'** (daughter's husband or "son-in-law") and **dae'** (son's wife or "daughter-in-law"). The corresponding terms of address are **phokhwa** and **phomy** (or, more generally, **pho**) which are also used for one's own children.

Perhaps the most interesting set of kin terms, apart from spouse terms, are the terms for affines within ego's generation. These terms may be categorised according to whether the kin they describe are related to ego by an affinal link (the marital tie) and a consanguineal link, in that order (that is, working outwards from an ego-centric point of view), or by a consanguineal link followed by an affinal link.

In the first category are the siblings of one's spouse. This category of affines is not fully distinguished, terminologically, from ego's own siblings and it follows the set of sibling terms in the distinction that is drawn between the sexes for elder siblings but not for younger siblings. Thus, the referential term for a spouse's elder male sibling is *wae*, as against *waecau'* for one's own elder male sibling. However, the terms of address for both are the same, that is *waecau'*. In the case of one's spouse's elder female sibling, the referential and addressive terms are identical to that for one's own elder female sibling, namely, *waenau*. Younger siblings of one's spouse, regardless of sex, are called *pyde* in reference and address. As with the term for younger siblings, this term may be modified to indicate the sex of the younger sibling of one's spouse, in which case the terms would be *pydekhwa* and *pydemy*. There is, however, one important difference between the use of these terms as affinal and consanguineal kin terms. Whereas their use as consanguineal terms hinges upon the fact of relative age differences between siblings, their use as affinal terms over-rides these very differences between ego and ego's spouse's siblings. Thus, if a man were older than his wife's elder siblings, he would use the terms *waecau'* and *waenau* in address; similarly, even if he were younger than the siblings of his wife, he would address them by the term *pyde*.

In the second category of affines, the spouses of one's younger siblings are sex distinguished. The husband of a younger sister is called *ca'li*, and the wife of a younger brother is called *demy*. The reciprocals of these terms are, of course, *wae* and *waenau* in reference, and *waecau'* and *waenau* in address as I have already described above. It is worth noting that ego's spouse refers to, and addresses, this second category of affines by the same terms as ego. That is, terminologically, ego's spouse's affines are equated with ego's own affines in this category.

Sociologically, however, there are no significant differences in the relations that exist between a person and his, or her, affines in both categories and those between his, or her, spouse's affines — beyond that which is conditioned by residential arrangements, which I discuss in the section on marriage and residential patterns. The significance of this feature of affinal kin terms, therefore, lies not so much in what is revealed about affinal relations but, rather, in what is revealed about the conjugal bond within the Palokhi kinship system.

The homology between the terms for siblings-in-law and the terms for siblings is not an altogether unusual feature of cognatic systems. In the Palokhi system, this homology in itself is not necessarily significant however. What is significant is the congruence in the use of affinal kin terms by spouses on the basis of this homology. The use of affinal kin terms rather than names (which contrasts with the more open choice between the use of names and kin terms within the **dau'pywae**) for siblings-in-law, the fact that the use of these terms overrides relative age differences, and the equation of spouse's affines with own affines all point to the "assimilation" of spouses to each other's position *vis-a-vis* their respective **dau'pywae** and affines. This "assimilation" of spouses in fact is no other than what Burling has called "zero degree genealogical distance" in discussing the nature of the marital tie in the context of English kinship terminology (1970:29). Alternatively, we may say that the terminological system for affines of both categories, which turns on ego's spouse's position relative to ego's spouse's siblings and affines "marks" out the distinctiveness of the conjugal bond in opposition to all other kin links in the kinship system.

While the evidence from the terminological system is sufficient, in itself, to warrant this conclusion, nevertheless, we shall see that the naming system and teknonymy in Palokhi lend further support to this conclusion.

### **The Naming System: "Event" Names and Teknonymy**

The essential feature of the naming system in Palokhi is a fortuitous event which occurs in the village and which usually (though not always) concerns the conjugal family or stem family if one or both of the parents of the wife are still alive at, or close to, the time a new-born infant is given its name. This takes place when the stub of the baby's umbilical cord drops off after it has been ligatured at birth.<sup>5</sup> These events are drawn upon in a variety of ways to form the names of children.

These names, therefore, may well be regarded as "event" names. The names which parents give to their children, on the basis of such events, may be nouns, adjectives or verbs, or compounds of these. For example, the name **Mi' Zo** is a compound of the Thai word **miit**, "knife", (though not a loan word) and **zo** the Karen word for Northern Thai and Shan or, as Marlowe (1979:196) suggests, for all Tai speakers. This name was given to a boy when some Northern Thai came to Palokhi and asked the boy's father, the blacksmith-cum-gunsmith in the village, to repair some bush knives. Another name, **Khae' By**, is a compound of two terms: **khae'**, a loan word from the Thai **khæk** ("stranger", "guest", "foreigner") which the Karen use ethnonymically to designate non-Karen and non-Thai as in **Khae' Lisau** (the Lisu) and **Khae' Hau** (Haw or Yunnanese Chinese); **by**, on the other hand, is the generic term in Karen for "rice". This name was given to a girl because some Lisu from Ban Lum had come to buy rice

in Palokhi.<sup>6</sup> A further example is Ty We, where **ty** means “to arrive” and **we** means “town”, possibly derived from the Northern Thai **wiang** which means the same thing although its original meaning was “fortified city” (but cf. Jones [1961:26]). This name was given to a girl when her father was accidentally shot by his eldest son and had to be sent to Chiang Mai for medical treatment.

While these examples serve to describe the essential aspects of the naming of individuals, there is however more to the way in which the naming system operates in Palokhi. Most Palokhi Karen retain the names given to them at childhood until, of course, they become parents after which they are known teknonymously. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that individuals do have more than one name bestowed upon them by grandparents, siblings or age-mates on the basis of some personal idiosyncrasy or other. These names are more in the nature of nicknames and they generally do not replace the names given to them at birth. Names may, nevertheless, be changed for specific reasons such as prolonged illness. For instance, a girl by the name of Ti Ka was sick for several months and when her parents consulted a ritual specialist, he said that apart from his ritual ministrations, her successful recovery would also depend on changing her name to a new one. Her parents renamed her Mi Sau meaning, literally, “new name”.

What is important in the Palokhi naming system is that the names, and the social identities which they represent, are formed on the basis of events which are **unique** or non-replicable; thus, the proper names created from such events are themselves also unique.

In an illuminating discussion on the significance of naming systems in *The Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss has pointed out that proper names, or autonyms, possess an individuating function and also imply a distinction between “self” and “other” (1966:192). The discussion is instructive and the distinction is wholly appropriate in approaching the significance of the relationship between the naming system and certain kin terms in Palokhi.

In the Palokhi naming system, this individuating function of autonyms, and the “self-other” distinction is carried to the extreme. The autonyms are not drawn from a common pool of names available to all members of the society but, on the contrary, are formed from unique events. The “self-other” distinction and the distinctiveness of individual social identities in Palokhi is, therefore, highlighted by the very uniqueness of all autonyms which, incidentally, accords with a high degree of personal or individual autonomy in Palokhi. It also suggests a reason for the practice of naming children when the stub of the umbilical cord drops off: children are given names only when the last vestige of their connection with their mothers is lost, and hence acquire an identity separate from that of their mothers.

As I have mentioned before, there are two instances when autonyms are relinquished in Palokhi. The first is when a man and woman marry, and commence using the various spouse terms described. The second is the advent of parenthood, when teknonymy is used. There is an important difference in the two. In the first case, although a married couple do not use their autonyms, they are nevertheless known by their autonyms as far as others are concerned. In the second case, teknonyms replace the autonyms by which they are known to others. These two cases should, therefore, be examined separately.

If autonyms and their use, stress the individuality and the distinctiveness of social identities — the “self-other” distinction — then the abrogation of the use of autonyms upon marriage by husband and wife must be seen to stress the opposite relation, namely, a down-playing of such a distinction between spouses, as opposed to others who, nevertheless, continue to use their autonyms. In other words, the relinquishment of personal names in favour of spouse terms marks the conjunctiveness of spouse relations and the conjugal bond as against all other relations. The logic of the naming system, thus, leads us to exactly the same conclusion which was arrived at from an examination of the terminological system.

We can now turn to the question of teknonymy in Palokhi. Levi-Strauss has observed that whereas autonyms stress the individuality of persons, teknonyms and necronyms, on the other hand, are “relational” terms where the definition of “self” is derived from an “other” whose autonym forms the teknonym while necronyms effect this definition “negatively” since the names of the dead are never mentioned. Teknonymy in Palokhi is no different. The relations expressed in teknonyms are links of affiliation which are evident in teknonyms such as De’ Chaj Pa (“Father of De’ Chaj”) and De’ Chaj Mo (“Mother of De’ Chaj”). In Palokhi, however, teknonymy is extended into the second ascending generation as well (on a matrilineal basis because of uxorilocal residence at marriage), so that the parents of De’ Chaj’s mother would be known, after the birth of De’ Chaj, as De’ Chaj Phy (“Grandfather of De’ Chaj”) and De’ Chaj Phi (“Grandmother of De’ Chaj”). The point of reference in the system of teknonymy in Palokhi is, therefore, the eldest surviving child in the last descending generation.

In Palokhi, however, necronymy does not exist, so that unlike the Penan system which Levi-Strauss discusses, and which he describes as possessing three types of “periodicity” (necronym necronym, autonym necronym, teknonym necronym), the Palokhi system possesses only a single “periodicity”: autonym teknonym. Levi-Strauss has proposed that in systems characterised by these three types of “periodicity”, “teknonymy and necronymy are a single problem and amenable to one and the same solution” and that as far as teknonymy is concerned, “the reason why parents may no longer be called by their name when a child is born is that they are ‘dead’ and that procreation is conceived not as

the addition of a new being to those who already exist but as the substitution of the one for the others" (1966:194-5). In a system such as that in Palokhi where teknonymy exists, but not necronymy, the significance of teknonymy is in fact otherwise. Parents revert to the system of reference and address employed prior to the birth of their first child if the child dies, and hence "avoid" the "negative" definition of "self" through necronymy. Moreover, if there are more than one child, the death of the eldest child does not mean the end of teknonymy; teknonymy then becomes based on the autonym of the next child. Furthermore, when there are three generations, the autonoms appropriated from the second generation to define the first generation teknonymously become replaced by autonoms appropriated from the third generation.

Teknonymy in Palokhi, therefore, stresses the "positive" definition of "self" in which procreation is conceived as the addition of a new being to those who already exist. The relational nature of teknonymy in Palokhi thus emphasises **continuity** of links of affiliation as part of an ideology which treats the conjugal bond as a reproductive association within the "continuous flux of generations" (cf. Levi-Strauss [1966:199]).

There are two other features in the naming system which are worth noting: sex differentiation and age-grading. As we have seen, autonoms or "event" names in Palokhi do not, of themselves, contain any distinction between sexes being made up, as they are, of simple verbs, adjectives or nouns. However, when they are used with respect to individuals, they are usually prefixed by sex markers in address or reference according to context. These markers are **pha**, for males, and **nau** for females.

Very generally, these markers are used together with autonoms when ego is addressing or referring to another person who is older than, or is an age-mate of, ego. Age mates of the same sex who are on intimate terms may, however, drop the marker in direct speech if they are speaking to the person concerned, or if they are referring to the person when speaking with other age-mates. The sex marker is, however, usually retained if ego is referring to an age-mate, notwithstanding the closeness of the relationship, if ego is speaking to an older person.

On the other hand, these markers are retained if ego is referring to a person who is either older than ego or an age-mate, when ego is speaking to someone younger. If, however, the person referred to is younger than ego but is of the same age as the person spoken to, or younger, then the sex marker may be dropped. The reason why relative age is a factor in these usages is that it is not uncommon for there to be wide disparities in the ages of individuals within any particular generation.

It is clear that these markers function as honorifics of sorts, but this does not obscure the fact that their **primary** function is to indicate the sex of the person bearing a particular autonym.

Sex marking also exists in the case of teknonyms where the kin terms **pa**, **mo**, **phy** and **phi** are prefixed to the autonoms of eldest children. These terms are, in themselves, sex-distinguished. Thus, teknonyms are not merely relational terms; they also identify the person bearing a particular teknonym by sex. At the same time, they also act as age-grade or generational markers by virtue of the fact that the kin terms express generational relationships.

It may be noted here that teknonymy is a naming system that depends on the availability of relevant genealogical information and the social field of the individuals concerned. In Palokhi, the necessary information is wholly available because the community is small. This is not necessarily the case when the Palokhi Karen deal with Karen from other villages in the area as local knowledge then tends to be less than perfect. In such circumstances, general kin terms such as **phati**, **mygha**, **phy** and **phi** would be used in address and reference. As terms of reference, they are of course extremely vague and other information would then be necessary if there is a need for precision in referring to the person concerned.

## **Male and Female: The System of Sex Differentiation**

It will, I think, be evident that functioning within the systems of kin terms and naming there is another system: a system of sex differentiation. In kinship terminology, there is a consistent distinction between male and female kin. The only exceptions to this are the terms for younger siblings, spouse's younger siblings and parents-in-law. Nevertheless, even these terms may be distinguished accordingly by the use of the sex categories **phau'khwa** and **phau'my** as modifiers. Similarly, in the naming system, the distinction is established through the use of sex markers prefixed to autonoms. In the case of teknonyms, the sex distinction is made in the use of the kin terms **pa**, **mo**, **phy** and **phi**.

The entire corpus of linguistic categories which make distinctions between sexes, in Palokhi, is represented in these two systems. However, some categories which are used in these systems in the class "humans" are also used to make sex distinctions in the class "animals". These categories cannot, therefore, be examined independently because some of them are common to both classes.

If the corpus of terms which establish sex differences in their various usages is examined in its own right as a **system**, some intriguing features become apparent.

To begin with, there are only three basic contrastive pairs which express sex differences in the class "humans" and the class "animals". They are:

Humans:	<b>phau'khwa/phau'my</b> = male/female (-khwa/-my) <b>pa/mo</b> = father/mother
Animals:	<b>pha/mo</b> = male/female

The elements in these pairs may well be regarded as fundamental semantic units since they cannot be reduced further to any other constituent units of meaning. Furthermore, in their respective classes, they can only be defined semantically by their relationship to each other. As we have seen, **phau'khwa** and **phau'my** are general sex categories, while **pa** and **mo** are kin terms. The other kin terms **phy** and **phi**, which are also sex differentiated, cannot be regarded as fundamental terms because they can be represented in Karen by other forms such as “father’s father”, “father’s mother” and so on. The term **mo**, on the other hand, is the same for “female animal” and “human mother”. Similarly, the term **pha**, “male animal” and the male sex marker for autonyms is the same. They are, very clearly, polysemous terms.

Another important feature is the asymmetry between the categories “unmarried male” and “unmarried female” (**phau'khwa/phau'my**), and the sex markers (**pha/nau**) for the autonyms of males and females who are unmarried, and who are married but have no children. The term **phau'khwa** describes both the general sex category “male human” as well as “unmarried male human”. The general sex category, “female human”, on the other hand is **phau'my** while the category “unmarried female human” is different, that is, **mykoe'nau**. The term **mykoe'nau**, therefore, is a marked term.

It may be noted that the term **mykoe'nau** has the additional meaning of “pubertal” applied specifically to female humans (see also Jones [1961:123]) and that there is no equivalent term for males. Furthermore, although the term is partly derived from the general sex category (or, more accurately, its minimum free form —**my**—), **nau** itself presents every semblance of being a female marker of its own, serving the same functions as **my**. It occurs, for example, in the kin term **waenau** (elder female sibling). As we have seen, the complementary term for **waenau** is **waecau'**; unlike **nau**, however, **cau'** does not appear elsewhere outside of kinship terminology.<sup>7</sup> **Nau**, therefore, is clearly also a marked term. Accordingly, the term **mykoe'nau** thus possesses a high degree of redundancy, as it were, in terms of markedness.

The asymmetry in the sex markers for autonyms (**pha/nau**) lies in the fact that **pha** also describes a sex category in a different class (namely, “animals”) while **nau** is a marked term which is to be found only in the class “humans”.

Another noteworthy feature in the system of sex categories is the distinction that is made between being unmarried and being married in the class “humans”. This is to be seen in the terms for “unmarried human male”, “unmarried human female” (**phau'khwa/phau'my**) and “married human male”, “married human

female” (**phau’khwapgha/phau’mypgha**). If we also consider the case of autonoms and teknonyms, it will be seen that this distinction is taken further. Autonoms and their sex markers are used only for males and females who are either unmarried or who are married but have no children. Teknonyms, on the other hand, indicate not only the sex of the person concerned but also the fact that they are married and have children.

Other than the major contrast animal/human which forms the two classes within which these sex terms are found, all these terms are organised according to a single **natural** dimension of contrast, namely, male/female. The symmetries and asymmetries between the various terms which correspond to this contrast suggest, however, that there is some other ordering characteristic or dimension of semantic contrast at work in the class “humans”. This can be no other than the distinction between “unmarried” and “married” which appears consistently in the class. More precisely, the distinction is that between (unmarried) + (married-without-children)/(married-with-children) + (married-with-grandchildren) as the set of sex markers for autonoms and teknonyms indicate.

While this distinction is appropriate to the class “humans” and, indeed, essential to indicate the kinds of discriminations made in this class, it is clearly inappropriate to the class “animals”. Yet, as I have noted above, there are some terms (**mo** and **pha**) which may be found in both classes. The unmarried/married distinction therefore introduces a somewhat false dichotomy because it restricts further comparisons and contrasts between the categories in both classes which is analytically necessary, given the occurrence of **mo** and **pha** in both classes. A more general contrast applicable to both classes which allows the distribution of these two terms to be represented, and which can also subsume the unmarried/married distinction, is thus required. The only logical contrast which permits this is the contrast non-procreative/procreative or non-reproductive/reproductive. Such a distinction, I suggest, is the other dimension of semantic contrast operating alongside the animal/human and male/female distinctions which together account for the particular configuration of sex categories and their uses in Palokhi. For present purposes, I shall use the terms “non-procreative” and “procreative” to express this distinction.

Table 3.2 shows the various sex terms organised according to the three dimensions of semantic contrast which underlie the various uses of these terms in Palokhi. The symbol (+) indicates marked categories, while **pha** and **mo** as applied to animals make no distinction between those which have offspring and those which do not.

When the terms are ordered in this way, it becomes immediately apparent that they do not simply constitute a system of sex and gender differentiation. They also form a system of **social classification** for humans based on a logic of sexual difference, generational difference and the difference between states of “non-procreativity” and “procreativity”.<sup>8</sup> This classification is significant for what it establishes simultaneously. First, it isolates “non-procreative” female humans from all other categories, particularly the categories which share the feature “procreative” across classes. Second, it establishes, as it were, that the property “procreative” is common to animals, male humans (unmarried or married) and female humans with children, through the distribution of the polysemous terms **pha** and **mo**.

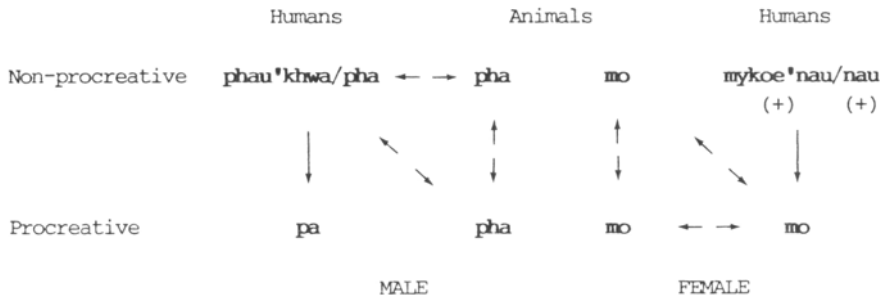
In the class “humans”, the nature of the relationship between the set of marked terms (that is, non-procreative female) and all other terms is the most crucial aspect of the classificatory scheme. The categories **phy** and **phi**, as I have mentioned before, are not basic contrastive pairs according to the semantic differentiations which underlie this scheme; they may be regarded as extensions of the terms “father” and “mother” according to the logic of generational difference and they are, therefore, not a crucial feature of this scheme. Any significance they possess in the sub-class “procreative” derives from the term **pa** and **mo**.

**Table 3.2. Sex Terms as Expressions of Non-procreative and Procreative Categories**

	ANIMALS		HUMANS			
	Male	Female	Male		Female	
Non-procreative	pha	mo	phau'khwa		phau'my	
			phau'khwa	pha + autonym	mykoe'nau (+)	nau + autonym (+)
Procreative	pha	mo	phau'khwa + pgha	autonym of eldest child + pa autonym of eldest grand-child + phy	phau'my + pgha	autonym of eldest child + mo autonym of eldest grand-child + phi

The relationship between the set of unmarked terms and the terms for non-procreative female humans are represented in Figure 3.1 which summarises the essential features of Table 3.2.

**Figure 3.1 The Relationship Between Marked and Unmarked Categories**



The bi-directional arrowed lines stand for “equivalent” relationships. The uni-directional arrowed lines stand for “non-equivalent” relationships and a substitution of terms in the direction of the lines according to sociolinguistic usage following the transition of individuals from “non-procreative” to “procreative” statuses.

These relationships lie at the core of the system of classification. In terms of the pragmatics of the uses of these terms, what is important is the regular **substitution** of terms as individuals go through their life cycles which recognises not only their sex at all times, but their change in “states of being”, that is, from “non-procreative” to “procreative”.

There is, however, a **further** significance to this cluster of terms. Much of the difficulty in apprehending it lies in the translation labels which may be used to represent the Karen terms. It will be more readily apparent if the Karen terms are rendered as follows:

- phau'khwa = “male”
- phau'my = “female”
- mykoe'nau/nau = “maiden”/“maid”
- pha = “non-genitor male”
- mo = “mother-genetrix”
- pa = “father-genitor”

Although somewhat clumsy, these labels serve to indicate the essential meanings and distinctions which are made by the Karen terms in their various uses. Other than the distinction between “non-procreativity” and “procreativity” and the singling out of non-procreative human females, it will be apparent that embedded in this group of terms is a distinction between the nature of reproduction in the two classes “animals” and “humans”. Where animals are concerned, there is a general recognition of the procreative role of females (or “motherhood”) but not that of males. In the case of humans, however, the roles of both males and females

are indeed recognised. As I show in my discussion of the domestic ritual ‘**au’ ma xae** (see Appendix A), the Palokhi Karen do indeed say that it is impossible to establish the “paternity” of domesticated animals since any number of males could copulate with a single female to produce offspring. This is not to say, therefore, that the Palokhi Karen are unaware that males and females (whether animal or human) are both equally necessary in sexual reproduction. They are quite aware of this biological fact. The point I wish to stress is that this group of terms, as cultural categories, carries with it **cultural definitions** of the nature of animal and human reproductive processes. Central to these definitions is “paternity” and “maternity” in human reproduction, and “non-paternity” and “maternity” in animal reproduction.

To return to the system of sex differentiation: it will be noticed that while the system is based on the logic of the differences discussed earlier, there is nevertheless an apparently arbitrary distribution of terms as well as markedness and non-markedness across classes.

This is a good illustration of the kinds of problems not uncommonly encountered in componential analysis and the referential approach to the study of semantics which Fox (1975:118–9) has noted. The reason, as Fox also points out, is that “... it is not taxonomic generality but polysemy — the property of a symbol to relate to a multiple range of other symbols — that becomes the criterion for hierarchical inclusion”. This is precisely the case with the Palokhi classificatory system. Where Palokhi sex categories are concerned, polysemy or “interlinkage” to use Frake’s term (1969, cited in Fox [1975:119]) includes relationships of homonymy, antinomy and shared semantic fields. It is this which gives the system the appearance of having an arbitrary distribution of terms and markedness.

The apparently arbitrary distribution of terms across and within classes, therefore, is in fact simply the “surface” manifestation of an embedded system of classification that rests on the semantic associations produced by a remarkable parsimony in what can only be called a selective distribution of lexical items. The system is, in other words, “motivated”: it is not just a linguistic artefact; it is sociologically meaningful.

As empirical systems, kinship terminology, naming systems and systems of sex (and gender) differentiation may be — and indeed often are — treated as linguistic systems in their own right as I have done here to some extent. The principal value of investigating these systems as such rests in the contributions which may be made toward an understanding of the human universals which underlie their formulation. My purpose in examining these systems in Palokhi, however, has been rather different, namely, to arrive at what is sociologically meaningful about these systems in the particular context of Palokhi Karen society. In this restricted context, it is not the features of these systems taken individually

which enable us to determine what is sociologically meaningful but, rather, those which emerge from their interdigitation. The classification of males and females in terms of “non-procreative” and “procreative” states of being is one such feature. The distinctiveness of “non-procreative” female humans, through redundant marking, is the other.

When, however, such emergent motivated features exhibit a demonstrable relation with features of the same order in a different, non-linguistic system, it can only be concluded that these features are not only sociologically meaningful but culturally **significant** as well. In Palokhi, such a relation of homology does indeed exist between the classification of males and females and a system of dress and colour symbolism.

## Dress and Colour Symbolism

One of the most striking aspects of the attire of the Palokhi Karen, obvious even to the most casual observer, is the difference between the dress of unmarried women, including young girls, and that of married women. There is no difference, on the other hand, in the dress of young boys, unmarried men and married men.

Young girls and unmarried women wear a white, smock-like dress reaching to the ankles. The dress is usually decorated at the hem and sleeve-ends with a red band or two, or some embroidery. Married women, however, wear a black blouse, half of which is embroidered over with various designs and stitched-on beads made from Job’s Tears (*Coix lachryma jobi*), which forms one part of their dress. The other part consists of a tubular, wrap-around skirt similar to a sarong. The skirt is conspicuous for its basic red, with narrow bands of black and white created by the *ikat* technique of dyeing yarn for the warp of the cloth with tie resists. Young boys, unmarried men, and married men wear a red pull-over shirt which is usually decorated with a dark, narrow band across the chest, tassles and a fringed hem. These shirts are worn short, ending at waist-level, with indigo-blue or black cotton Northern Thai-style trousers, or blue denim jeans. Both kinds of trousers are purchased from shops in the Northern Thai settlements of Ban Mae Lao or Ban Pa Pae.

In this system of dress, the primary opposition is white/red followed by a secondary opposition white/black according to chromatic distributions. That is, the costumes of young boys, unmarried men, married men and women are all characterised by the dominance of the colour red. The costumes of young girls and unmarried women, on the other hand, are distinguished by the colour white whereas the costumes of married women are conspicuous for the colour red and black. The distribution of the colour red, quite clearly, parallels the distribution of the feature “procreativity” amongst the sex terms discussed earlier. This concordance in the distribution of features, and their referents, in these two systems must be taken, at the very least, as **prima facie** evidence of a conceptual

association between the colour red and “procreativity”. Similarly, the distinctiveness of the terms **mykoe’ nau** and **nau**, and the colour white, must indicate a similar association between the colour and the property or condition “non-procreativity”. In other words, there is an isomorphism in the **iconicity** of these two systems. But, what then of the secondary opposition white/black? As this contrast appears only in the sub-class “female humans”, its symbolic value must therefore lie in the further distinction that it establishes specifically between “non-procreative” and “procreative” female humans.

The overall significance of the concordance between the distribution of terms with the attributes “procreative” and “non-procreative” and colour symbolism in male and female dress must be that “procreativity” is a state or condition that is inherent in, or intrinsic to, animals both male and female, and male humans whatever their status, but not female humans. It is a state which women only enter into when they are married, that is, when their fecundability or “procreativity” is realised in them through a **cultural process**, that is, marriage.

It is worth noting here that apart from the symbolism of colour in the system of dress in Palokhi, there is also a practice associated with the use of married women’s skirts which has nothing to do with dress as such. It consists of tying the used, worn or unserviceable skirts of married women to the base of fruit trees (usually papaya) in house gardens. It is not marked by any ritual activity nor is it the focus of any special attention. The practice is simply termed “dressing up (with) the skirt of the tree” (**ky’ thau se ni**). The Palokhi Karen, however, state quite explicitly that this helps the tree to bear fruit. There is, in other words, a conceptual association between married women’s skirts — and, hence, married women — with the notion of procreativity or fertility. It is significant, however, that swidden crops, the wet-rice crop and fruit trees in the forest are not similarly treated with married women’s skirts. The implication of this is clear: women and their procreativity or powers of reproduction are linked with the domestic domain.

This examination of kinship terminology, the naming system and the system of sex and gender differentiation in Palokhi makes it evident that these systems do not exist in isolation. They are, in fact, interrelated in consistent and specific ways which may be summed up according to three considerations: the primacy of the conjugal bond or marital tie in the kinship system, continuity of links of affiliation in the naming system and teknonymy, and the classification of men and women as “non-procreative” and “procreative” in the system of sex differentiation. They hold together in — to use Sorokin’s term (1957:7–19) — a “logico-meaningful” integration. I suggest that the interrelationships of these systems, in this manner, constitute a model or paradigm of social organisation in Palokhi. I consider, next, other aspects of this “procreative model” of society in Palokhi.

## Marriage Rules

Marriages, in Palokhi, are not arranged in the sense that parents choose spouses for their children. Young men and women make the choices themselves after a period of courting that is initiated by men. Courting, which is idiomatically called “to go and visit young women” (**lae ha’ mykoe’ nau**), usually takes place during the planting and harvesting seasons when there is a great deal of co-operative labour exchange between households in Palokhi swiddens and wet-rice fields.<sup>9</sup> As there are no prohibitions on village endogamy or exogamy, this also applies to other villages where the Palokhi Karen go to assist in the work on a labour exchange basis.<sup>10</sup> Often, however, during the slack season in the agricultural calendar, visiting between households in Palokhi itself and between villages occurs, and young men also take such opportunities to woo young women they are interested in.

When a young man and woman are certain that they do want to get married, they then inform their respective parents who, by this time, usually have an inkling of their intentions. Parents in Palokhi say that they generally do not object to their children’s choice of spouses unless these choices contravene the rules of marriage in Palokhi. Some Palokhi parents do say that, apart from this major consideration, they would object under two circumstances: opium addiction in the case of a prospective son-in-law and being an unmarried mother in the case of a prospective daughter-in-law. A potential son-in-law who is likely to be, or already is, an opium addict represents a liability as the Palokhi Karen know only too well from their experiences in Palokhi and other villages in the area. Not only is he likely to be incapable of contributing his labour to agricultural production, but he may well attempt to dispose of family possessions or livestock to obtain the wherewithal with which to buy opium.

A woman with an illegitimate child, however, represents a liability of quite another kind. Apart from the moral reprobation which her condition provokes, an unwed mother is an anomaly which forcibly confronts the ideas and beliefs which the Palokhi Karen hold about marriage and the status of offspring from a conjugal union.<sup>11</sup> Yet, at the same time, many Palokhi parents say that they feel a great reluctance to object to their children’s choice of spouses (whatever the reasons and this includes matches which would contravene the rules which govern marriage in Palokhi) because they fear that the couple, especially if they are not susceptible to dissuasion, will commit suicide (**kha lau sa’**, literally, “to kill down [one’s own] heart”).

Some parents and elders, elaborating on this fear, express their concern in terms of the limited repertoire of Buddhist concepts which they have acquired through their on-going contacts with Northern Thai. Specifically, they say that they would be “affected by demerit (**ba’ ba’**).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, some also say that those who commit suicide become transformed into malevolent spirits

(*tamyxa*) which would be a danger to the villagers. Thus, while parents and elders may feel an obligation to prevent, or at least object to, a match which they regard as undesirable, nevertheless, children who are bent on their choice of spouses can, even in such circumstances, have their own way, namely, by seeking recourse in the threat of suicide. This does not, by any means, imply that such threats are devoid of real intent. There have been sufficient precedents in Palokhi (and elsewhere) to justify the apprehensions of parents in this regard. Ultimately, of course, this means that parents and elders have no real means of enforcing their objections, which is of some consequence in the context of infringements of marriage rules in Palokhi.

If, however, parents feel that a match is acceptable, then the onus of initiating formal discussions lies with the parents of the man. This is done through a go-between (a man) appointed by the man's parents. He approaches the parents of the woman to ascertain that they consent to the marriage, after which various details of the marriage are worked out such as the time when the marriage ceremony should be held (which should not fall in an odd month), the size of the pigs to be slaughtered for the ceremony, the amount of rice liquor to be brewed and the time that this would take, and who should constitute the party of elders essential to the ceremony.

As there is no system of payments, apart from certain prestations made to the woman by the man and which are fixed by tradition, these discussions therefore do not entail bride-price or bride-wealth negotiations. Discussions can, however, stretch over a period of two or three months, mainly because of financial considerations, and whether or not the parties concerned are able to muster enough rice (for making the liquor and for feeding guests at the marriage ceremony) as well as money for the purchase of pigs if they do not have pigs available. One other important consideration in contracting marriages is whether the elder siblings of the man and women are married or not. The Palokhi Karen say that children should get married according to their birth order (see also Madha [1980:58]). If a person marries before his, or her, elder siblings, then he or she has to present them with a pig each before the marriage can take place. This, therefore, is a consideration which can also prolong the period of discussions initiated by the go-between before a marriage can take place.

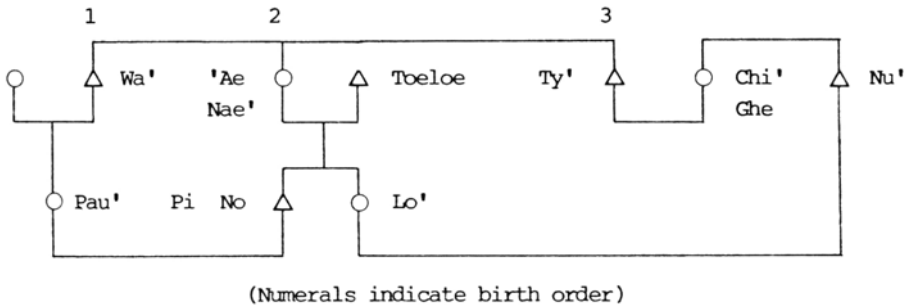
While the foregoing are general considerations which attend marriages in Palokhi, the most important consideration is, of course, the rules which govern marriage in Palokhi.<sup>13</sup> These rules may all be subsumed under a general prohibition on "crooked marriages" (*thau pgha ke'ko*), as the Palokhi Karen call it.<sup>14</sup> The Palokhi Karen do not offer any categorical definitions of what would constitute "crooked marriages", though from the examples cited by them (see below) it is apparent that such unions are those which result in the superimposition of affinal kin links over consanguineal kin links. Some Palokhi

Karen, however, do say that “crooked marriages” are those where, metaphorically, “elder brothers become younger brothers, elder sisters become younger sisters” (**waecau’ kae’ py, waenau kae’ py**), or where the parties to such unions “love (each other), mutually prying apart that which is closely bound together” (**‘ae’ khoekhae’ lau sa’**). The first formulation, or rationalisation, refers to the contradictory applications of kin terms which would result or, what Freeman has called, “dysnomia” (1960:74, 161 n. 17). The second, interestingly, refers to what are thought to be the divisive effects of such unions where not only is there a confusion in the application of kin terms but also in the order of commensalism in the **‘au’ ma xae** ritual which I discuss later. Such a blanket prohibition would, therefore, rule against virtually all inter- and intragenerational unions within the range of kin, recognised by the terminological system, who are genealogically traceable or “operative” kin to use Firth’s term (1963).<sup>15</sup> While this may seem improbable — and it is certainly true that in some societies dysnomia may be no bar to the marriage itself — nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that the Palokhi Karen express the prohibition on “crooked” unions in just this manner. It is also believed that the families of the couple in a “crooked marriage” will be “affected by their xae” (**ba’ xae**; see Appendix A on **‘au’ ma xae**).

At the same time, however, the Palokhi Karen also point out that “crooked marriages” are “destructive” (**tahaghau**) because they invite sanctions from the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. In general, these sanctions manifest themselves in ways where the natural order of things is upset or reversed, such as “tigers entering the village” (**bauso’ ny’ zi pu**).<sup>16</sup> It is significant, however, that the Palokhi Karen specifically say that “the village becomes hot, the land becomes hot” (**zi ko, hau ko or ko ba’ zi, ko ba’ hau**, “the village is affected by heat, the land is affected by heat”) resulting in the “destruction of the rice crop” (**by haghau**). There is, clearly, a conceptual association between marriage and the cultivation of crops.

In practice, it would appear that three kinds of unions constitute “crooked marriages”. These are: cousin marriages, marriages between traceable kin across generations and multiple marriages between two hitherto unrelated families where the relative birth orders of the siblings concerned cross-cut each other. The first two cases are shown in Figure 3.2, extracted from an actual genealogy in which two such “crooked” unions did occur in Palokhi.

Figure 3.2 An Intergenerational “Crooked” Union



When Ty' married Chi' Ghe, the situation was clear enough. 'Ae Nae' used the term *py* in respect of Ty' and the term for younger brother's wife, *demy*, in respect of Chi' Ghe. Nu' was *pyde* to Ty', and 'Ae Nae' was *waenau* to Ty', Chi' Ghe and Nu'. Lo', on the other hand, referred to and addressed Ty' and 'Nu' as *phati*, and Chi' Ghe was called *mygha*, while she herself was *phodo'* to all of them.

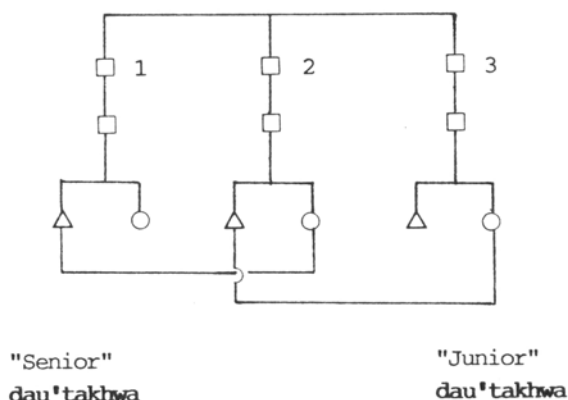
Although in different generations, the age difference between Lo' and Nu' was not great, and when they wanted to get married Lo's parents and the village elders objected on the grounds that it would be a “crooked marriage”. The reason adduced in this case was that the marriage would result in a variety of conflicting kin terms in use: Nu' being either *pyde* to Ty', or *phodo'* by virtue of being Lo's husband, 'Ae Nae' would be *mipgha* and would have to be addressed as *mo* whereas she was *waenau* prior to the marriage, and so forth. When the intended marriage was opposed by the elders in Palokhi, Nu' and Lo' attempted suicide by drinking insecticide. Although the attempt was unsuccessful, the village elders remained adamant, despite considerable misgivings lest Nu' and Lo' should repeat the attempt. Nu' and Lo', however, presented the elders with a *fait accompli* by leaving the village for a nearby unit of the Royal Forestry Department where Nu' managed to find employment as a wage labourer. Their parents and the village elders were forced to acknowledge the *de facto* union, but the headman and elders demanded that an expiatory rite be performed to appease the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. This was done, and a simple wrist-tying ceremony followed in *lieu* of the marriage ceremony which could not be performed under the circumstances.

The second union in Figure 3.2 (Pi No'-Pau'), is clearly a union between first cousins. The general consensus of opinion among the Palokhi Karen seems to be that cousin marriages are not permissible. First cousin marriages are definitely prohibited but, nevertheless, there are some who say that cousin marriages, beyond the first cousin range, are permissible. Those who say that marriage between cousins of whatever degree is prohibited allude to the old saw:

Toetakhwa lau chghe, lau de  
 Khitakhwa hi' ke, phau' ke

which, roughly translated, means "first cousins fall (?) close together in the (same) navel, second cousins taken back (must be) caught back". The first line of this couplet quite unequivocally points to the closeness of first cousins who, therefore, are unmarriageable. The second line, however, gives rise to ambivalent interpretations in Palokhi. Those who regard all cousin marriages as prohibited unions interpret the second line to mean that the "catching" of second cousins is too difficult to achieve and, therefore, indicates that second cousin marriage is not permissible. Others who say that cousin marriage (beyond the first cousin range) is permissible take the second line to mean that "catching" a second cousin, although difficult, is possible and that, therefore, cousin marriage is permissible.

Even for those who say that cousin marriage is possible, there is however disagreement over whether this is possible at the second or third cousin range. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that some Palokhi Karen say this would depend on residential arrangements regardless of the range: they say that if physical proximity such as living in the same village or nearby lead to on-going intimate social relations, then cousin marriage under these circumstances should not be permitted. There is, nevertheless, a generally consistent agreement that cousin marriage (beyond the first cousin range) is possible only if the man belongs to an "elder" or "senior" **dau'takhwa**, and the woman to a "younger" or "junior" **dau'takhwa**, where "elder/senior" and "younger/junior" are defined in terms of the birth order of the parents or grandparents in the relevant connecting ascending generation. The rationale invoked to support the alleged permissibility of cousin marriage in this form is that when the couple perform the 'au' ma xae rituals (as they will have to eventually), the man has to eat before the woman and this would at least be consistent with the rule that food in the ritual should be partaken of according to sibling order. According to this formulation of permissible cousin marriage, therefore, same sex siblings would only be able to marry cousins in **dau'takhwa** forbidden to their different sex siblings (see Figure 3.3). It must be stressed, however, that this is by no means a prescribed or even preferred form of marriage. All it implies is that if cousin marriage is at all allowed, then it should take this form.

**Figure 3.3 Permissible Cousin Marriage in Palokhi**

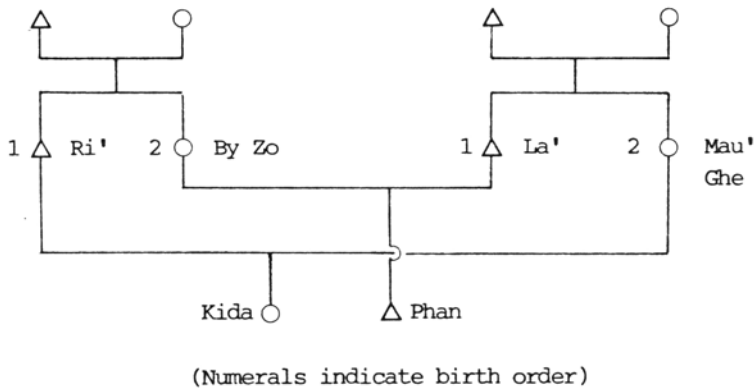
(Numerals indicate birth order)

The first cousin marriage shown in Figure 3.2, therefore, goes against all the views on cousin marriage in Palokhi because it is, first, a union between first cousins and, second, because Pau' belongs to a "senior" dau'takhwa since her father, Wa' is elder brother to 'Ae Nae', the mother of Pi No'. The circumstances leading to this "crooked" union were no less interesting than those surrounding the Nu'-Lo' union. Pau', though unmarried, became pregnant when she was living at a unit of the Royal Forestry Department several kilometres away where her father was working as a wage labourer. Pau' claimed that Pi No' was responsible for her condition which he apparently denied vehemently. Wa', however, pressed the matter with the parents of Pi No' (reasoning that a prohibited union for his daughter would be less shameful than her being an unmarried mother). The Palokhi elders decided that an expiatory rite should be performed and the two could then live as husband and wife after a wrist-tying ceremony similar to that for Nu' and Lo'. For reasons best known to himself, Pi No' consented to these arrangements while still protesting his innocence. He added, however, that as proof of his innocence, the child that Pau' was carrying would die on being born. As it turned out, the child did die but Pi No' did not carry the matter further. This union was, needless to say, regarded as a ke'ko union.

The third prohibited form of marriage is shown in Figure 3.4. If Ri' were younger than By Zo, or if La' were younger than Mau' Ghe, the use of kin terms before and after the two marriages would be clearly unambiguous. Ri' would address La' as wae by virtue of his being the husband of La's younger sister Mau' Ghe, and this would also be the term he would use in respect of La' as his elder sister's husband. By the same token, the other members of the two marriages

would have no difficulty in using the appropriate kin terms since these would all be consistent with one another if the two sibling orders were not crossed in marriage. As it is, Ri' is older than By Zo, and La' older than Mau' Ghe. Ri' married Mau' Ghe first and, some time later, La' and By Zo decided that they wanted to get married. This was met with objections by their respective parents and the village elders for the reasons I have already discussed, including the dysnomia which would result. For instance, La' could be either *wae* to Ri' as Mau' Ghe's elder brother, or *ca'li* as the husband of Ri's younger sister, and so on. Moreover, the dysnomia would not be confined to these people (and their siblings) but would also extend into the next generation. Their children, Ki Da and Phan, could be either *waenau/waecau'* and *py* to each other, or neither. When it became clear that La' and By Zo were determined to get married, By Zo's father attempted to apply the maxim "Those who love each other prying apart that which is closely bound together, cannot drink water on the same steps" (*ae' khoekhae' lau sa', 'au thi toe tauxau toe' se*) literally by giving them a bag of rice and ordering them to leave the village. After three days, the hapless couple returned and begged to be taken in. Duty done, and after consultation with the village elders and headman, By Zo's father accepted them into his house when the appropriate rituals had been conducted for the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 3.4 An Intragenerational "Crooked" Union**



It is obvious, from the cases which I have described above, that the rules which govern marriage as they are conceived by the Palokhi Karen are violated. Indeed, these cases were referred to by my informants in Palokhi to point out where the rules should not be contravened. This, however, raises two important issues in the operation of the kinship system in Palokhi: first, what is it about the structure of Palokhi kinship which would allow for the possibility of the contravention of these rules; second, what is there in the system of authority

and social control which fails to prevent infringements of marriage rules, given the fact that “crooked marriages”, as they are defined in Palokhi, are said to be prohibited.

To answer the first question: we have seen that the Palokhi Karen rationalise the prohibition on “crooked marriages” by referring to, amongst other things, the confusion arising from the contradictory application of kin terms — or what Tambiah has called, in dealing with a similar type of problem in Northeastern Thai ethnography, “an unacceptable linguistic asymmetry between husband and wife” (1973:131). There is, however, an important difference between the Thai and Karen cases. In the Thai case, husbands address their wives by the term **naung** (“younger sister”) while wives use the reciprocal term **phii** (“elder brother”). The “unacceptable linguistic asymmetry” that Tambiah discusses arises, therefore, when a man is younger than his wife and thus pertains to relative age differences between husbands and wives.

In the Karen case at Palokhi, the kinds of terms employed by husbands and wives have nothing to do with sibling terms. Instead, they constitute a set of terms in their own right within the corpus of kin terms. The linguistic asymmetry, which is rather more of a contradiction as the Palokhi Karen see it, therefore does not concern spouse terms and relative age but, rather, the kinds of terms employed with respect to, and between, traceable kin connected with “crooked marriages”. In other words, it is the result of the superimposition of affinal links on kin links prior to the unions which constitute the domain of difficulty. “Crooked marriages”, moreover, are implicitly defined in terms of previous marital unions to which the parties in “crooked marriages” are linked either consanguineally or affinally. Furthermore, where there is a broad rule such as the Palokhi Karen have against the contradictory application of kin terms, then such a rule must logically rest on the kinds of kin recognised in the society through its kinship terminology. The conclusion which may be drawn from this, therefore, is that marriage with genealogically traceable kin is undesirable.

Given, then, a general preference for marriage with non-kin (however, obliquely this may be expressed in Palokhi), this nevertheless leaves the problem of cousin marriage unresolved. If we consider the logic of the restricted form of cousin marriage described earlier, in terms of dysnomia, it is apparent that even in such cousin marriages dysnomia would result. For instance, if a man marries a woman from a “junior” **dau'takhwa**, there would still be a situation where the use of affinal kin terms would clash with the system of address for cousins which, in theory, is based on sibling terms applied **per stirpes** from the connecting ascending generation. Apart from considerations which have to do with **'au' ma xae**, the explanation for this inconsistency lies in another aspect of Palokhi kinship.

In cognatic type systems, the application of kin terms may be extended indefinitely so long as genealogical connections may be traced. The way in which the Palokhi Karen recognise cousinship could, hypothetically, be applied **ad infinitum** but, as I have suggested, the notional limit to the reckoning of cousinship seems to lie at the third cousin range. There is a good reason for this: the Palokhi Karen do not have very deep genealogical memories. The use of kin terms for kin, and non-kin, in ascending generations, the strong social sanctions which actively discourage children from referring (much less addressing) kin and non-kin in ascending generations by name (if they happen to know them), and the practice of teknonymy all serve to produce “genealogical amnesia” (Geertz and Geertz [1964:101]). Most Palokhi Karen do not know the names of their parents or grandparents, so that for them to be able to trace third cousins to a common forebear by name is very unusual indeed. Of course, in the Palokhi system, to be able to classify someone as a second or third cousin, it does not require a person to know who the common ancestor was. All he or she would need to know is how his or her parents addressed, or referred to, the parents of the person concerned. Given, however, that relative age sometimes overrides this system of address for cousins, and teknonymy, cousinship beyond the first cousin range under these circumstances tends to be a vague relationship. This holds true especially when the appearance of new generations, the movement of households and the absence of prolonged social contacts lead to the gradual sloughing off of otherwise traceable genealogical connections. This, of course, would apply equally to kin other than second or third cousins.

Looked at from this perspective, the “problem” of cousin marriage takes on a quite different complexion. The ambiguities over cousin marriage arise because of difficulties in defining where cousins become sufficiently removed to be non-kin. And the restricted form of cousin marriage is just what it implies: it is a means, at least in a functional sense, of restricting marriages between cousins and reducing the superimposition of affinal links over consanguineal links to a minimum. In terms of the logic of the rationale of dysnomia, this is wholly consistent. But, note that this consistency is achieved by invoking a **different** principle; this principle, which underlies the restricted form of cousin marriage, is sibling order in the ascending connecting generation.

The rules of marriage and definitions of who constitute eligible and ineligible mates in Palokhi **do not**, therefore, form a neat or tidy set of proscriptions and prescriptions.

The foregoing also points to the significance of the role of parents and elders in determining whether prospective unions should be allowed or not. The reason for this is that they possess more genealogical information than those in descending generations. This is due to the general properties of the kinship system and teknonymy which lead to gradual losses of such information through

successive generations.<sup>18</sup> This is not to say, however, that there is an absolute attrition of genealogical information over time. Each generation acquires a certain amount of information from existing operative kin links, but this is slowly lost with the appearance of successive generations where new information comes into existence; it is this which reproduces the continuities and discontinuities — of which the ambiguities over cousin marriage are a part — of the system.

We can now turn to the question of why the possibility of infringements of marriage rules occurring cannot be prevented with absolute certainty. Headmanship and the position of elders in Palokhi do not carry with them any capacity for social controls and punitive action. There are, consequently, no real means available for enforcing the rules of marriage in Palokhi, nor are there any effective sanctions which could act as deterrents to the infringement of these rules. In the final analysis, however, it is the fact that the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land **may** be placated through propitiatory rites, as a last resort, which allows for the possible occurrence of “crooked marriages”.

### **“Heat” and “Cooling”: The Symbolic and Ideological Significance of Marriage**

It is significant that the Palokhi Karen see the consequences of “crooked marriages” in terms of sanctions imposed by the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land in the form of “hot land” and the “destruction of crops”. Quite clearly, the sanctions fall on the community as a whole rather than on the offending couple. It is also significant that part of the consequences of “crooked marriages” concern the immediate kin of the couple in such prohibited unions. It is said that their kin may be “affected by **xae (ba’ xae)**”. Here again, the consequences are transitive rather than reflexive, that is, they are “other” cathected. In both cases, the only secular sanctions which may be imposed are expulsion of the couple from the village, and a ban on participating in the ‘**au’ ma xae**’ rituals of their respective families. Although expulsion is never pursued unremittingly, it is said that the ban is strictly applied. The consequences of “crooked marriages”, therefore, are conceived of in terms of a disruption of the solidarity of the community and the domestic group.

What is noteworthy about the communal consequences of infringements of marriage rules, however, is that they are expressed in an idiom of “heat” and a breakdown of the cultivation system. “Heat” (**tako**) and its corollary in Palokhi, “cooling” (**takhy**), are idioms central to Palokhi Karen religious conceptions. As we have already seen, one aspect of the ritual significance of “heat” and “cooling” is the “cooling” of the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land in the Head Rite through which harmonious and auspicious conditions necessary for the well-being of the community are established. This relationship is also of critical importance in agriculture; the simultaneous induction of a “cool” state in the rice crop and household members, for example, is a major theme of a rite called

the “protection of swiddens”. The essence of the relationship between “heat” and “cooling”, which lies at the heart of these ritual performances, is quite simply the ritual management of “heat”.

“Crooked marriages” and the “heat” that they generate are, therefore, part of a larger complex of religious conceptions in Palokhi. In the case of infringements of marriage rules, this “heat” is managed through a rite that propitiates the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. According to the Palokhi Karen, the rite entails the sacrifice of a pig or buffalo. The throat of the animal is slit and the resulting flow of blood is directed into a hole in the ground. The animal is then butchered and cooked to be eaten first by the headman and elders, followed by other villagers. The offending couple eat last after which a wrist-tying ceremony is conducted for them which, in effect, sanctions the union. Adultery is also said to require the performance of this ritual because the consequences are the same.

Here it is appropriate, indeed essential, to consider the symbolic significance of ordinary or correct marriages in Palokhi. Ordinary marriage rites are characterised by a multiplicity and density of symbolic representations as I show in the following section. I shall therefore examine here only those aspects of the symbolism of ordinary marriages which are of immediate interest.

One conspicuous feature of marriage rites is, interestingly enough, ritual “cooling”. At various stages of marriage ceremonies, for example, water is used for “cooling” purposes and this is described by the same expression as that in the Head Rite, that is, “sprinkling with water to make cool” (**pghi thi ma takhy**). The Palokhi Karen claim that this has nothing to do with “hot” land. The evidence of ritual performances, however, indicates that there is a general, diffused state of “heat” with a specific source.

To follow the sequence of ritual performances, the bridegroom is first “cooled” as he begins his journey to the bride’s house or village. Immediately after this, he and his escort are showered with water from bamboo water vessels (**thi toe**) to “cool” them. The musical instruments which are brought and played along the way are also “cooled” but this is done with libations of rice liquor which are also offered to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land as well. On arriving at the bride’s house or village, the groom and escort are once again showered with water. Thereafter, on various occasions, the bride pours water over the feet of the groom as he crosses certain thresholds in making his way to the main room of the bride’s parents’ house. Significantly, the bride is not subjected to these “cooling” ministrations and showers at any stage. It is only after the final ceremony, when she has changed into the costume of a married woman and a formal sharing of rice liquor with the groom has been held, that she and her husband are jointly “cooled” by the officiating headman and elders.

The groom is, quite unmistakably, the primary focus of “cooling” and the reason, according to the Palokhi Karen, is that he is “hot” or is liable to be so. This is also said to be the case for his escort and the musical instruments. However, it is clear that as the principal focus of “cooling”, the groom is the source or centre of “heat” which his escort and the instruments share through their association with him. On the other hand, the bride who is not the focus of “cooling” cannot therefore be regarded as “hot”. It is only when the final ceremony is over, when she has become a married woman, that she shares in the state of “heat” which distinguishes the groom.

The inevitable conclusion that we are led to about a more general, abstract level of conceptualisation within the system of religious ideas in Palokhi can only be this: men are inherently “hot” while women are “cool” until they have gone through the ritual process of marriage.

It becomes immediately apparent that the “distribution” of “heat” parallels the distribution of the colour red in the Palokhi dress system, and the way in which men and women are distinguished according to the “procreative”/“non-procreative” dichotomy. As we have seen, there is a demonstrable isomorphism in the iconicity of these two systems resting on an identity between the colour red and “procreativity”. In the case of “heat” and “cooling”, the Palokhi Karen do indeed establish at a certain cognitive level an identity between the colour and “heat”. In the rite called “the protection of swiddens” (which is specifically concerned with “cooling”), there is a ritual text which places the metaphors for fire — “heat” (**tako**) and “redness” (**taghau**) — in a metonymical relationship through semantic parallelism. In short, if the religious terminology of the Palokhi Karen is taken as a semiotic system at the levels of the terms “heat”, “cooling”, and “redness”, then we have yet another set of symbolic representations which express the **same** set of structural relations contained in the systems of dress and sex and gender differentiation.

The symbolism of marriage, however, is more complex than is indicated by the distribution of “heat”. In their everyday life, the Palokhi Karen are by no means concerned to manage the “heat” inherent in men and married women. It is only in marriage ceremonies that the ritual management of “heat” becomes critical. In other words, what is there in marriage ceremonies which makes “cooling” necessary that is not present in the normal course of events? I suggest that it is none other than what marriage ceremonies are all about: the conjoining of men and women or, more generally, the ritual conjunction of male and female in a process that actualises the fecundability or “procreativity” of females and thus increases the general state of “heat” which, therefore, requires its management.

This brings us to the crucial question: if “heat” is also present in ordinary marriages, in what sense then are ordinary or correct marriages different from

the union of men and women in “crooked marriages” and adultery? The answer very much depends on what we understand by “crooked marriages” and, for that matter, adultery. I have already described, through various examples, what constitutes “crooked marriages” as the Palokhi Karen see it. Essentially, they involve unions between men and women in violation of untidy but, for all that, customary definitions of eligible mates. There are, therefore, two concerns here which need to be kept analytically separate: first, unions between men and women; second, the definitions of eligible or ineligible mates. It is important to bear in mind that the fact of **wishing** to marry someone who is considered ineligible does not of itself result in “hot” land or a state of “heat”. It is through the attempt to establish unsanctioned conjugal relations, or by actually controverting established relations as in adultery, that these consequences come about. Of course, given culturally held notions about marriage and the attitudes they predispose to, the community — or, more precisely, the headman and elders — not unexpectedly attempts to pre-empt such consequences by threats of expulsion, bans on participation in ‘**au**’ **ma xae**, and indeed by the propitiatory rite itself.

The heart of the matter, however, seems to be **uncontrolled or unregulated sexual relations** (or procreative behaviour) between men and women, however their eligibility as mates may be defined. This is, of course, the issue which stands out more starkly in adultery. To take the perspective of the Palokhi Karen, what they have are certain untidy definitions of who constitute appropriate marital partners; given this, the system of social controls, however imperfect it happens to be, is brought to bear on those who threaten the established cultural order. It is an order in which marriage not only has an important part but, indeed, plays a crucial role in maintaining as the belief in “hot” land and the breakdown of the cultivation system clearly shows.

It is here that the symbolism of marriage becomes “ideological”. For it is the headman and elders, acting on the impulses, values and attitudes fostered by the cultural order to which the symbolism of marriage is integral, who ritually manage “heat”. They are the mediators between the community and the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land; in effect, they are the custodians of this order which is established in the Head Rite and, for all practical purposes, the system of social controls lies in their hands. Their role in marriage, therefore, is no other than the management of procreation or reproduction in younger generations by males in senior generations.

But, as we have seen, the cultivation of crops is also implicated in the symbolism of marriage in the form of the infertility of land, represented as it were by “hot” land. Thus, if the role of older men is the management of reproduction in younger generations, it is also concerned with the management of land and crops. To put it another way, the symbolic management of crops

and agricultural production is effected through the management of marriages. It is in this sense that marriage and its symbolism are **ideological** as I defined it earlier. While the symbolism of marriage consists of a certain array of conceptual relations, its extension into the domain of crop cultivation constitutes a further level of relations which form an important part of what may be called the cultural ideology of the Palokhi Karen.

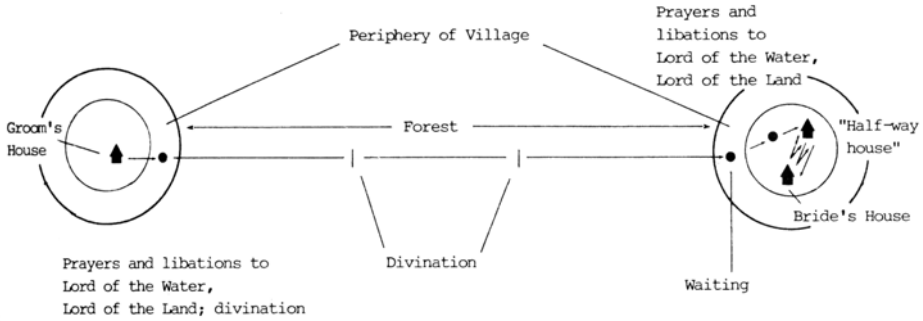
## Marriage: The Ritual Process

In view of the importance placed on correct marriages in the maintenance of a harmonious relationship with the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land from which devolves the well-being of people and crops, it is not surprising, therefore, that marriage ceremonies in Palokhi consist essentially of informing the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land that a man and woman are being married and asking for the spirit's blessing. Because the Karen have a rule of uxorilocal residence at marriage, these ceremonies and the rituals entailed in them not only mark the union of the man and woman, but also the incorporation of the man into the household of the woman's parents. These ceremonies, like most Palokhi rituals, are not elaborate or complex, but it is evident that they also mark out symbolically two things: the liminal condition of the man as he moves from single to married status, and the separate integrity of the union between the man and woman, apart from that of the woman's parents. A brief description of marriage ceremonies as they are conducted in Palokhi will suffice to elucidate these points. The overall structure of marriage ceremonies in general, in terms of the use of time and space, is represented schematically in Figures 3.5 and 3.6. The description which follows concerns marriage between a man from Palokhi and a woman from another village. If, however, marriage is between two people from Palokhi, then there is of course no movement outside the village, and the structure of the ceremony is essentially that shown in Figure 3.6.

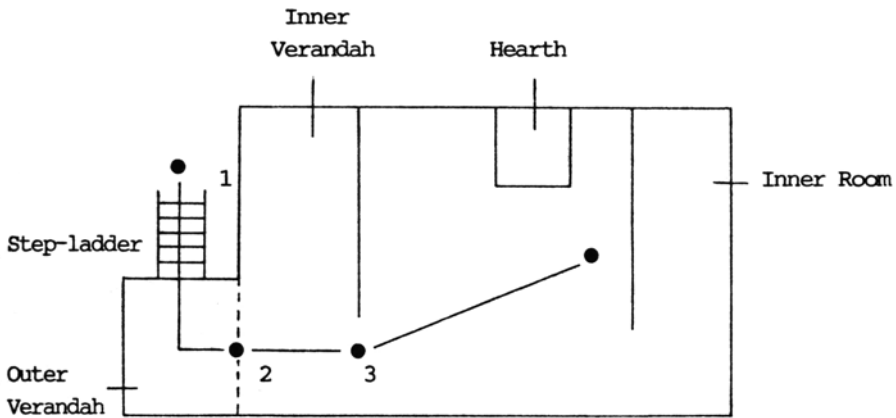
The ritual begins prior to the man's departure for the village where the woman lives. A boar is killed in the morning and part of it is cooked for a meal which the man, his parents and siblings, the headman, village elders, and members of the escort, including the go-between, eat. Before the meal is eaten, the headman and elders are given small cups of rice liquor (**si'**) which they use for making libations (**khwae' si'**) as they say prayers (**thupata**) to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and other tutelary spirits of the area. They do this by facing the walls of the house to which they happen to be nearest, and as they crouch here, they use their index or middle fingers to cause the rice liquor to drip slowly down the cups, which is how the libations are made. At the same time, they pray to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and other spirits, informing them that the man is about to be married, and request them to "look after" (**koe'tau**) the married couple, the villagers, their crops and their livestock. When this is done, the headman and elders then tie the wrists (**ki cy'**) of the man with

lengths of cotton thread. The purpose of this is to bind his souls (**koela**) to his body. It is also believed that the man and his escort are susceptible to becoming “hot” and, consequently, as the man and his escort leave the house of his parents, water is thrown over them from bamboo water containers (**thi toe**) by other villagers to “cool” (**pghi thi ma takhy**) them. At the same time, the prestations for the bride are given to a woman in the escort to take to the bride’s parents. These consist of a winnowing tray, two headcloths, a married woman’s blouse and wrap-around skirt, a packet of betel nut, a packet of salt, and four 25 **sataang** pieces (= 1 Baht). The head of the pig which was killed for the meal, and pieces of fat are also given to a man in the escort to take along for the parents of the bride. The man and his escort are then accompanied by his parents, the headman, and village elders to the boundaries of the village just before the forest, and here a mat is placed on the ground. On this mat are placed the gongs, drums, and cymbals played by the escort. The headman, the go-between, and village elders then squat around the mat and the father of the groom hands them a bottle of rice liquor and cups. The rice liquor is poured into the cups and they repeat their prayers to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and the other spirits while making libations to them. This time, however, the rice liquor is dropped onto the musical instruments to “cool” them. When this is done, the liquor is drunk by the headman, go-between, and village elders after which more liquor is poured out and passed around for the groom and the members of his escort to drink. The headman, an elder, or a ritual specialist then tears three leaves from a nearby bush in random fashion, and the pieces are then counted in pairs. This is a divinatory procedure to determine if it is safe for the groom and his escort to proceed with their journey to the bride’s village. If there is an even number of pairs of leaf pieces, then it is an indication that the party may leave the village. If, however, there is an odd number of pairs, the process of praying and making libations to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and other spirits is repeated, followed by further divination until a favourable omen presents itself. With the appearance of such a sign, the groom’s party then departs, amidst further showers of water, along the track leading from the village into the forest.

**Figure 3.5 Schematic Representation of the Ritual Process in Marriage Ceremonies Involving a Man and Woman from Different Villages**



**Figure 3.6 Sequence of Movements when a Groom enters the House of the Bride's Parents in Marriage Ceremonies**



- Position of whet-stone on which the groom steps when his feet are washed by the bride

At various stages of the journey through the forest, the go-between, an elder or the ritual specialist if he is also in the party, will perform further divinations (usually after traversing one stream valley into another) to determine whether it is safe for the party to continue with its journey. This may be done with leaves, or all the people in the escort may be instructed to pick up twigs from the ground and break them into small pieces and cast them onto a cloth laid out on the ground. The diviner then counts them in pairs and, as with the other method of divination, if there is an even number of pairs, the party proceeds with its journey. Apart from the time spent on divination, the procession usually moves along at a brisk pace to the clashing of cymbals and the beating of gongs and drums. This is undoubtedly part of the festive nature of marriage ceremonies, but according to the ritual specialist in Palokhi, the din made with all these instruments keeps away malevolent spirits (**tamyxa**) from the groom and his escort.

On arriving at the periphery of the bride's village, the party waits while the go-between and an elder go to the house of the bride's parents. Here, they are offered rice liquor, and together with the elders and headman of the village, say prayers to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and other spirits along with the mandatory libations. During this time, the groom and other members of his party wait at the outskirts of the village. When the prayers and libations have all been completed, the go-between then goes to bring the groom and his party into the village. From this point onwards, everything proceeds in slow, measured stages. As the groom approaches the house of the bride, he is met by elders of the village, and the precentor in the bride's party. A mat is laid out on the ground and the village elders, the precentors from both parties, the go-between and elders in the groom's escort squat around the mat on which the bride's father places a bottle of rice liquor and small cups. The go-between also places a bottle of rice liquor on the mat and the liquor is then exchanged between the two parties — those in the bride's party pouring out the liquor into the cups and offering them to those from the groom's party and vice versa. Prayers and libations are again made to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and other spirits, after which the liquor is drunk. More liquor is then poured out and passed around to those present.

When this stage of the ceremony is completed, a sword dance is then performed by men from each party to the accompaniment of cymbals, gongs and drums. When this is done, the groom is then led to a "half-way house" in which he stays for two days before he finally moves into the bride's house. As he commences walking to the house, the people in the host village immediately shower him and his escort with water thrown from water containers (**thi toe**). While he remains in the house, the members of his escort are invited into the bride's house. As they file up the step-ladder and step on the outer verandah of the house, a brother or sister of the bride will pour water over their feet after

which they enter the main room of the house where they are offered tea and pickled tea leaves.

Towards the evening, the elders of the bride's village, the headman, the go-between and elders from the groom's party assemble in the bride's parents' house, and they are given rice liquor and cups with which to make further libations and prayers to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and the other tutelary spirits of the area. They then go to the house where the groom has been staying, and repeat their prayers and libations to these spirits. During this time, a sow is killed and cooked for the ritual meal of the evening which the groom and bride share. When the prayers and offerings of rice liquor to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land have been completed in the house where the groom stays, the groom is then led by the go-between to the bride's parents' house. At the foot of the step-ladder leading up to the house, a whet-stone is placed on the ground. Here the bride waits for the groom with a bamboo water container filled with water. As the groom approaches the step-ladder, he places both feet on the whet-stone, and the bride pours water over his feet. From here, he is led into the house and sits at the back of the main room (see Figure 3.6) which is usually where the parents of the bride sleep. The bride joins him here, and a wooden eating tray (*soebi'*) in which rice and pork stew have been placed is set before them. The headman, elders, and go-between sit near them and, again, make their prayers and libations to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land after which the couple are given the cups of liquor to sip from. The cups are returned to the men who said the prayers, and they sip from the cups passing them around to each other until all the liquor in the cups have been drunk.

The couple are then told to eat the meal placed before them. They usually eat sparingly of this meal, and when it is judged that they have had enough, the headman, elders and the go-between repeat their prayers to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and the other spirits. The cups of rice liquor are then passed around again, and when this is done the groom is led back to the house where he was staying. The headman, elders and go-between remain in the house of the bride and continue drinking. At this stage, the preceptors of both parties begin singing traditional poem-songs (*tha*) usually about love and courtship. Young males from the groom's escort and from the bride's village will, at this point, usually go to the house where the groom is staying and here they do the same thing.

The next day, this process is repeated, but with two differences. First, a boar is killed for the ritual meal and, secondly, when the groom is led to the bride's house, the whet-stone is placed at the top of the step-ladder where the outer verandah adjoins the inner verandah, at which place his feet are again "washed" by the bride. Some variations in practice do occur with regard to the latter. In some cases, after the ritual meal has been eaten by the couple and when the

prayers and libations have been made, the groom is led back to the "half-way house" where he stays for several hours. He is then led back to the bride's house for another meal and, on this occasion, the whet-stone is placed where the inner verandah joins the main room of the house, that is, in the doorway. Alternatively, the whet-stone may be placed, first, at the place where the outer verandah joins the inner verandah and then, immediately, in the doorway in which case only one ritual meal is, of course, eaten by the couple on the second day. These variations seem to be dictated, primarily, by whether there is sufficient food because the ritual meals eaten by the couple are invariably followed by the provision of food for the guests and other villagers.

On the third and last day of the ceremony, the groom goes to the bride's house for the final time. On this occasion, he is led directly through the verandahs and enters the room where he again sits at the back facing the door. Here he changes into a new suit of clothes, while the woman changes from her white shift (which young girls and unmarried women wear) into the black blouse and red wrap-around skirt that only married women may wear. The man changes in front of the guests while the woman changes in the small back room after which she joins the man in the main room. This time, however, they are not given a meal to eat. Instead, the man is given a bottle of rice liquor and a cup. He pours a measure of the liquor into the cup which he drinks, and this is followed by a second measure which he offers to his wife. This cup is put aside, and other cups are then set before him which he fills and he then proceeds to offer them to the father of his wife, the elders from his wife's village and to the go-between and elders in his escort. They then pray to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and the other spirits, making their libations at the same time, after which the cups of liquor are passed around to be sipped by the couple and the ritual officiants at the ceremony.

The first bottle of rice liquor which, by now, is usually half empty, is set aside and other bottles are brought out by the father of the bride. The man then pours out more cups of liquor and these are offered by them to the other people present. This continues until all the bottles of rice liquor are exhausted. Then the man pours out the liquor remaining in the first bottle and offers this to the ritual officiants who proceed to pray to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and the other spirits. When this is completed, the cups of liquor are passed around again to be sipped by the couple and the ritual officiants. This marks the end of the marriage ceremony, after which the headman and elders of the village pour water over the heads of the now married couple while the members of the man's escort prepare themselves to return to their village. Before they do so, they try to "take the man back" with them by pulling on one of his arms. At this stage, the young men of his wife's village seize his other arm and try to detain him. While this may begin in a jocular fashion, it can sometimes become very earnest indeed, but after a while the groom's escort relinquish their hold

on the man and leave in a shower of water thrown at them by members of the bride's village.

As a rite of passage, the symbolism of the ritual performances and the use of time and space throughout the marriage ceremony quite clearly mark the incorporation of the man into the household of the woman's parents. What may not be so obvious, but which is nonetheless "stated" in the rituals, is the **separate integrity** of the union apart from but yet within the stem family that is formed. The evidence for this comes, of course, from the slaughtering of the sow and boar (which some informants quite explicitly say stand for the man and woman), and the drinking of rice liquor from a common cup which is, then, set aside and not put to general use at that particular stage of the marriage ceremony. But it is also to be seen in the serving of liquor by the man, on the last day of the ceremony, which **a fortiori** points to the couple as a unit distinct from the stem family, even though they reside in the house of the woman's parents.

Under ordinary circumstances any ritual observed in a family which entails the use of rice liquor (in libations to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land) or, indeed, when liquor is drunk merely for enjoyment, the head of the family (that is, the father in a nuclear family, or the father of a married daughter in a stem family) is required to serve the liquor in just this manner to the headman and village elders. It is a duty and obligation which no one else may assume. It is significant, then, that instead of the father of a daughter, it is the newly married husband of the daughter who is required to perform the act of serving liquor in this manner (which is a ritual in its own right no matter how trivial it may appear to be) in the house of his wife's parents. For, during the period in which he and his wife are resident in his wife's parents' house, and as long as his father-in-law is alive, it is his father-in-law who serves liquor in the rituals which entail libations to the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land. The performance of this particular ritual by a newly married husband, therefore, signifies the assumption of responsibilities, on the part of the man, that have no context other than within the nuclear family (and stem family) of which he **will** eventually become the head and ritual leader when the stem family fissions. The marriage ceremony, thus, reverses the priority as regards who should serve liquor in a stem family in ritual situations, marking out the distinctiveness of the new conjugal bond that is constituted by the ceremony. Palokhi marriage rituals, therefore, express precisely the same thing found in the terminological system, and teknonymy, described earlier.

## **Marriage, Residence, and Domestic Group Formation and Fission**

Despite the general rule on uxorilocal residence upon marriage, in Palokhi, this rule does not lead to the formation of extended families consisting of parents, married daughters and their husbands and children. The reason for this is that

the Palokhi Karen stipulate that a house should not contain more than two married couples on a permanent basis. Thus, if in a two generation family with one married daughter, another daughter marries, then the daughter who married first and her husband (and children if any) must make way for the second daughter by moving out of the natal family and building a separate house for themselves. On the other hand, if it is a three generation family to begin with, then even the first daughter who marries and her husband cannot expect to remain indefinitely in the house of her natal family. She and her husband would usually move out within a year of being married. Married daughters who move out of their parents' houses usually build houses near their parental homes, although virilocal and neolocal residence have been known to occur. The reasons have been mainly economic, having to do with wage labour opportunities available at the various units of the Royal Forestry Department in the area, and personal preferences as well.

The Palokhi Karen offer no satisfactory reasons for the limitation on the composition of stem family households beyond saying that "it must be done so" (**ba' ma di' ne**), although some informants say that the reason for the limitation is that otherwise there would be "too many people" for the '**au' ma xae ritual**'.<sup>19</sup> In fact, however, the reason for the limitation on household composition becomes readily apparent when we examine the sleeping arrangements of households in Palokhi. Houses have one main room, and this room is roughly divided in half by a hearth, as Figure 3.6 shows. In a nuclear family household, the parents and children would sleep in the rear half of the room. As their children grow older, pubertal daughters sleep in the front half of the room, while pubertal sons sleep either on the inner verandah or the rice barn, or in other rice barns along with their age-mates.

In traditional times, "communal houses" (**blau**) served the purpose of accommodating young men who were expected to sleep on their own, as well as other ritual functions (Marshall [1922:139]); but, in Palokhi, there is no such communal house, hence the practice of young men sleeping in rice barns or inner verandahs. When a daughter in a nuclear family marries, the front half of the room is given to her and her husband to sleep in, thus maintaining a spatial, and therefore **symbolic**, separation of the two married couples in the stem family that is formed. With the marriage of a second daughter, such a separation of all the couples would be impossible to maintain if the second daughter and her husband were to reside in the house as well, given the structure of Palokhi houses. In the same way, in a three generation (stem) family, such a separation would not be possible to maintain when a woman married, because her grandparents would occupy the rear half of the room, and her parents would occupy the front half of the room.<sup>20</sup>

This is not to say that house form in Palokhi determines the composition of households by any means, but, rather, that sleeping arrangements which are conditioned by house form are taken into account in an ideology of kinship which emphasises the discreteness of conjugal pairs, even within stem families.

Palokhi residence customs, however, are a little more complicated than I have indicated in the foregoing. If a mother dies, the house is taken apart and burnt, and the father then builds a new house in which he and his children live. The Palokhi Karen say that the reason for this is that “the house belongs to the wife” (**phau’mypgha ‘a’ doe’**), at least, initially. The house which a widower builds, however, “belongs” to him, so that when he dies the house is likewise destroyed. If, on the other hand, a father dies before the mother, the house is not destroyed, and the mother and her children may continue to live in the house.<sup>21</sup> In either case, the rule that there may not be more than two married couples living in the same house still applies, with the surviving parent and deceased parent regarded as constituting a “union” nonetheless.

This condition on residential arrangements, the stipulation that there should not be more than two couples in a house, may in practice be circumvented in either of two ways. The first, a long term one and one which was resorted to on only one occasion in Palokhi, entails building a separate hearth (which, in effect, means extending the house) for the couple not ordinarily supposed to live in the house. This also requires the construction of separate step-ladders so that, for all practical purposes, the separate hearths and steps represent separate houses.<sup>22</sup> The second device which is a short term one, and customary practice in Palokhi, involves one or the other couple sleeping on the inner verandah of the house until the new house for the first married daughter and her husband has been built and is ready for occupation.

In the event that both father and mother die, the house is destroyed and alternative arrangements are made. If there are any children who are married, then the unmarried children may live with either the married sister or married brother, although the former is more usual given the fact that the brother moves away to live with his wife. If there are no married children, then the children are fostered out to patrilineal, or matrilineal, kin depending on the circumstances: that is, whether they can be located easily or not, whether they can afford the upkeep of the children, and so forth.<sup>23</sup> Whatever the resulting arrangements, married siblings cannot live in the same house when their parents are dead, and the reason for this lies in the way ‘**au’ ma xae**’ rituals are structured, as the Palokhi Karen conceive it, and which I discuss later. In sociological terms, however, this is understandable. First, the rule on uxorilocal residence at marriage which leads to brothers marrying out would act to prevent the formation of households consisting of co-resident married brothers, or married brothers and sisters. Second, the **succession** of married sisters resident in their

natal homes, according to the condition on uxorilocal residence described above, would itself act to prevent the formation of households composed of co-resident married sisters.

Residential arrangements are, of course, part of the total process of household formation and household fission within the overall developmental cycle of domestic groups. This cycle, in ideal type terms, spans three generations. During the cycle, brothers marry out, and as sisters marry successively, nuclear family households are formed, while the natal family at any point in time retains a fixed structure, consisting of two conjugal pairs, regardless of whether it is a two or three generation stem family. The cycle ends with the death of grandparents, followed by parents, and what is left are siblings with independent nuclear family households which then repeat the process. This cycle in the family sociology of Palokhi, and its residential concomitants, are fully reflected in the structure and organisation of the 'au' ma xae ritual.

A full account of the 'au' ma xae ritual may be found in Appendix A. It is a quintessentially domestic ritual and it is an integral part of the religious life of the Palokhi Karen. As I show in my discussion of the ritual, it is relevant to a further understanding of the institution and rituals of marriage, the family sociology of the Palokhi Karen, as well as the issues which I consider next.

## **Divorce: Throwing Away Marital Partners, Pots, and Pans**

In the foregoing sections, I have attempted to draw out the main features of Palokhi Karen kinship and the symbolic aspects of marriage as well as to show how these are linked together. The discussion would not be complete, however, without a consideration of divorce and remarriage, both of which have occurred in Palokhi, although not frequently.

Divorce, which is termed "to throw away mutually" (cu khi' lau sa'), may occur for a variety of reasons. These include infidelity and adultery (which has happened, despite the fact that this is said to give offence to the Water, Lord of the Land), dissatisfaction with a spouse's handling of marital responsibilities, and a desire for children not possible to fulfil because of a spouse's presumed barrenness or sterility. As with "crooked marriages", the Palokhi Karen believe that adultery results in sanctions imposed by the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land and, consequently, an important feature where adultery has been committed is the expiatory rite performed for the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land, as discussed before. For this rite, a pig must be supplied by the persons party to adultery. Divorce, if it is sought, in the case of adultery is called "to throw away the husband" (cu khi' 'a' wa) or "to throw away the wife" (cu khi' 'a' ma), depending on who is guilty of infidelity. In circumstances where divorce is desired by mutual consent, there is, however, no need to perform the expiatory rite. Divorces in either case are effected by a version of 'au' ma xae which is

called “to finish eating the pig, to finish eating the chicken” (**‘au’ lau thu’ thau’**, **‘au’ lau thu’ chau**) which, of course, refers to the **kho thi’** animals reared for **‘au’ ma xae**. Unlike “big” **‘au’ ma xae**, where four nights are required for the performance of the ritual, this requires only two nights. When the couple have decided when they wish to perform the ritual, they have to sell off all but the oldest **‘au’ ma xae** pigs and chickens so that they do, in fact, eat the last pig and chicken. All other pigs and poultry may be shared out between the two, or sold off and the proceeds divided between them.<sup>24</sup> This also applies to buffaloes and rice in the barn.

When all this is done, and it has to be done before the ritual, then the couple may conduct the **‘au’ ma xae** which dissolves their marriage. On the first day, the last chicken is killed and served in the same way as that for ordinary **‘au’ ma xae**. Before they eat, both the husband and wife take out pieces of the **kho thi’** and wrap these up in banana leaves, with some rice. As they do so, they pray to the souls of their respective parents (if they are deceased) informing them that this is the last meal that they will eat together as it is the last **kho thi’** chicken. This done, they shove the wrappings through the floor of the house and eat the food in the tray. If their parents are alive, however, they attend this ritual and they, instead of the couple, will then say the prayers to their deceased parents’ souls. The eating of the last **kho thi’** is done in the same manner as that in ordinary **‘au’ ma xae**, that is, the husband eats first, followed by the wife, and then their children according to birth order. The eating of the last pig is also carried out in the same fashion. When this is completed, the wooden eating tray, cooking pots, the bamboo spoons for stirring rice and stews, the bamboo water vessels, and the three hearth stones are all thrown away in the bush outside the village. For one day, after the eating of the last **kho thi’**, the couple must not do any work, and on the following day the man leaves the village.

There can be no doubt that these cooking utensils stand, symbolically, for the domestic household. This symbolism is by no means confined to the Palokhi Karen. Although it has not been reported in the contemporary ethnography of the Karen, Marshall (1922:260) has observed, however, that Karen families in Burma who renounce their traditional religion and **‘au’ ma xae** in favour of Christianity, throw away these utensils.<sup>25</sup> This alone suggests a symbolic link between household cooking utensils, the marital tie and the domestic group, as well as the traditional religion of the Karen. The practice of disposing these utensils in the context of the last **‘au’ ma xae** which dissolves a marital union, however, is indisputable evidence that the three are inextricably linked.

When the ritual is completed, the children of the couple are given the choice of remaining with their mother or accompanying their father. Whichever the choice they make, they may not, thereafter, have anything to do with the parent they did not elect to be with which, in practical terms, means that they do not

sleep in the house of that parent. For children in such situations, any ‘**au’ ma xae** performed for them will be by the parent they have chosen to live with. When they eventually marry, however, they do call upon the souls of both parents in the ‘**au’ ma xae** they conduct if both parents are dead. Otherwise, the parent with whom they chose to live with would, of course, attend the ritual in person. It is well worth noting in this connection that children are given a **choice** as to which parent they wish to live with following the divorce. Although a variety of factors may operate to influence the choice, it is significant that in theory there is a choice. It is a reflection of an ethos of individual autonomy here extended to children.

## A Note on Remarriage

Remarriage for divorced men or women is a relatively simple matter. But, here again the marriage ritual would depend on the status of their new spouses-to-be. If, for instance, a hitherto unmarried man marries a divorcee, then the ritual recognises his unmarried status in the killing of a boar, and the two are then married by a simple wrist-tying ceremony. The same applies to a divorced man who marries a woman who has never been married before, but in this case a sow is killed for the wrist-tying ceremony.

Remarriage, as with first marriages, also results in the formation of **xae** by the married couple and the birth of their children. This **xae**, however, is regarded as separate from that which a divorcee shares with his or her spouse and children from a previous marriage. This is also extended, of course, to the children from the second union. Thus, in these circumstances, two distinct ‘**au’ ma xae** must be performed according to the two **xae** which exist in such situations of remarriage. If the children of a divorcee are **ba’ xae**, for example, the ritual may only be performed by their parent. Their stepparent and stepsiblings may not participate in the ritual. Conversely, ‘**au’ ma xae** for their stepsiblings will be performed by their parent and stepparent; they themselves can have no part in the ritual.

These sociological and ritual arrangements are fully reflected in the kin terms which are employed in such circumstances. It is interesting to note that although the Palokhi Karen have no terms for “stepfather” and “stepmother”, the terms **pa** and **mo** are not used in reference or address for stepparents. Instead, the terms **phati** and **mygha** are used. If further specification of the nature of the relationships is necessary, then these collateral kin terms may be modified by the terms **pa** and **mo** as suffixes. By the same token, stepchildren are referred to and addressed as **phodo’**. Stepsiblings, however, use real sibling terms in both reference and address. It is also worth noting that step-relationships, where they are recognised (that is, stepparent/stepchildren) are sloughed off with the appearance of a further generation: thus, a person’s stepchildren’s children will refer to and address him, or her, as **phy** or **phi**. This is what we might expect

in view of the observations made earlier about the terminological system. The structure of **'au' ma xae** and the use of kin terms in situations characterised by divorce and remarriage, thus, recognise the separateness of marital unions and the offspring from these unions just as it is in the case of first marriages, and evident in the rest of the kinship system and the ritual.

I have in this chapter described the kinship system in Palokhi, the naming system, the system of sex differentiation, marriage, and residence and the formation and fissioning of domestic groups. These three systems and **'au' ma xae** are interrelated at several levels to form a complex whole in which there is a discernible ideology linking key features in these systems and the sociology of marriage and domestic groups. Central to this is a logic of sexual difference, the primacy of the conjugal bond as a procreative union and the role of males in senior generations in managing reproduction in younger generations.

In the next chapter, I consider the broader sociological implications of the kinship system in Palokhi for subsistence production which were left unexplored in this chapter.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Madha (1980:202), however, says that the term for younger siblings, **"pu"**, may be modified by the suffixes **"de khwa"** and **"de Moo"** to indicate the sex of younger siblings. I believe Madha is mistaken in this having probably confused the terms for younger affinal kin with the terms for younger siblings, as I indicate later.

<sup>2</sup> It has been reported for the Pwo (Hamilton [1976:116–7]) that terms for intermediate children also exist, similar to the Roman system. The Palokhi Karen, however, do not have such terms.

<sup>3</sup> For the term **phosoeda**, see also Jones (1961:201). Madha (1980:202) reports the term **"weh-ko"** which he says is a general term for "elder brother" and "elder sister". Madha is again mistaken in this; the term refers to eldest brother or sister.

<sup>4</sup> The etymology of the term **dau'takhwa** is unclear to me. Although its meaning is clear, the form that it takes varies from place to place as it has been reported in the literature. **Dau'** is the same co-ordinate as in **dau'pywae**, while **ta** is a nominalising prefix, and **khwa**, "male". This does not, of course fit in with the way the term is used, that is, bilaterally. Jones (1961:201), however, provides a Moulmein Sgaw term for cousin which is bilateral in form, namely, **khwamy'**. Hamilton makes similar observations with regard to the cognate Pwo term **dang the khwae**, where **the** is the nominalising particle in Pwo, of which the cognate in Sgaw is **ta** (Hamilton [1976: 117]; Jones [1961:25]). Morgan (1871:445) says, on the basis of information provided by Wade, Mason and Van Meter, that male cousins are known as **ta-khwa** and female cousins as **ta-khwa-mu**. Hamilton notes that there is an alternative term in Pwo for cousins, namely, **dang myng dang khwae** which he glosses as "related female related male". He suggests that the term **dang the khwae** represents a shortening of the term **dang myng dang khwae**. This would, indeed, seem to be the only reasonable explanation for the variations in the term and the fact that it is applied bilaterally.

<sup>5</sup> See also Smeaton (1887:81–2) and Marshall (1922:170).

<sup>6</sup> The word for rice seems to be reserved exclusively for female names suggesting an association between "femaleness" and rice. This association is also to be found specifically in the cultivation of rice where a small crop of rice, which is grown solely for ritual purposes, is called **By Mo Pgha** or "Old Mother Rice".

<sup>7</sup> Jones (1961:179) notes that whereas in most Sgaw dialects in Burma, **s** (cognate to **cau'** in Palokhi Karen) means "Mr", nevertheless, in Moulmein Sgaw, it has the additional meaning of "elder brother". Jones offers no further comment, but it is by no means unlikely that the original meaning of the term was "elder brother" and that it was at some later stage employed as an honorific, perhaps, beginning in an urban setting. **Nau** along with **pa**, **pha** and **mo** would appear to form a related set of terms, in

themselves, of some antiquity, if Benedict's historical reconstructions for Tibeto-Burman (1972) and Jones' reconstructions for Proto-Karen are accepted. From terms in various Tibeto-Burman languages (but not Karen) "sister", "maiden", "cousin", "daughter-in-law", and so forth, Benedict reconstructs the root *s-nam* (1972:35). Jones reconstructs *nam* in Proto-Karen for various cognates of *mykoe'nau* (1961:123). For "mother", Benedict offers *ma* in Tibeto-Burman (1972:148), but Jones does not provide any reconstruction for the term in Proto-Karen. Benedict also gives *mow* for "woman" (1972:66). For *pha* and *pa*, Benedict gives *-pa* (1972:134), whereas Jones has only *phah* for *pha* (1961:124). It is clear from these, and other related terms in present-day Tibeto-Burman languages (Benedict [1972:35, 63]) that the relations amongst these terms are highly complex. I refer to these reconstructions, however, to indicate that in these related languages there is a conspicuous, if not a consistent, differentiation in the female terms which is not the case with the male terms. The differentiation of these terms in Palokhi, therefore, is not some linguistic oddity peculiar to Palokhi Sgaw Karen (or Karen dialects), but to the family of languages to which it belongs even though the cultural meanings of these differentiations may not necessarily be the same.

<sup>8</sup> There is a certain irony in this. With the exception of the Pa-O or Thaungsu whose kinship system exhibits very clear Dravidian features (Wijeyewardene, pers. comm.), developments in kinship studies since Morgan would now lead us to place most, if not all, other Karen kinship systems outside the category "classificatory" in Morgan's nomenclatural sense. Yet, these Karen systems (if the Palokhi data is anything to go by) are undoubtedly classificatory, though in a sense that Morgan did not perhaps quite appreciate. It is clear, I think, that the Palokhi terminological system — or at least parts of it — functions together with the systems of naming and sex and gender differentiation to establish what is, for all practical purposes, a classificatory system that is sociologically significant.

<sup>9</sup> In common with what has been reported on courting patterns in other Karen communities, the Palokhi Karen also treat funerals as occasions for courting. The common denominator in planting, harvesting and funerals is that these are all occasions when singing or chanting takes place. For the Palokhi Karen, singing is one of the ways employed by young men and women to express obliquely their interest in each other.

<sup>10</sup> The Karen have a saying containing that brand of ironic humour, much appreciated by them, about the business of seeking wives. It runs as follows:

'Ae' ma kau zi, mae' blau'  
'Ae' ma zi pu, kau'ka

Roughly translated, it means "To love a wife in a distant domain, is to be blind; to love a wife within the village, is to be lame".

<sup>11</sup> I am not suggesting that these objections are necessarily shared cultural attitudes. However, they do certainly reflect the concern of many Palokhi Karen parents. In Palokhi, there were seven confirmed opium addicts and one unmarried mother (who lived with her parents), so the parents who expressed their views on the undesirable qualities of potential spouses were undoubtedly doing so on the basis of their experiences of life in Palokhi.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter II, p. 106, n. 25, for a comment on *ba'*. The use of the term in this context suggests interesting insights into Palokhi Karen religious conceptions in relation to Buddhist concepts. The Palokhi Karen cannot be considered Buddhist in any real sense of the term and, indeed, their acquaintance with Buddhism is superficial. Though familiar with the common Thai expression, *tham bun daj bun, tham baab daj baab* ("to perform meritorious acts is to receive merit, to perform demeritorious acts is to receive demerit"), nevertheless, the Palokhi Karen do not use the literally more accurate Karen gloss for *daj* which would be *ne* ("can", "to acquire", "to receive" through one's own efforts or fortuitously). The use of the auxiliary verb *ba'* suggests "being acted upon", a common feature in Palokhi conceptions of illness which is generally thought of as being the product of some external agent.

<sup>13</sup> Karen marriage preferences have sometimes been described as preferences for "kindred exogamy" (see, for example, Hinton [1975: 55]; Marlowe [1979:178]) but I would prefer not to use such a term (see n. 15, below).

<sup>14</sup> In a preliminary description of Palokhi Karen domestic ritual and the "ideology of kinship", I referred to these marriages as "crossed" (1984:355). I wish, here, to correct that error in translation. The literally more accurate translation of the term *ke'ko* is "crooked". The term is used in a generic sense, but cousin marriages of the kind where the birth orders of the siblings involved are not followed are sometimes described as "crossed".

<sup>15</sup> Firth's term is particularly appropriate to the Palokhi data as it accords more closely with the nature of the constitution of kin groups which, in large part, depend on the traceability of genealogical

connections. This is an important consideration in understanding why the Palokhi Karen express their marriage prohibitions in such elliptical ways, as I discuss later.

<sup>16</sup> The Palokhi Karen interpret “tigers” metaphorically, taking it to mean wild animals. Many, however, are convinced that in the past, when there were tigers, this did in fact happen.

<sup>17</sup> About a year later, after this had happened, an ethnic Karen Seventh-Day Adventist missionary came to Palokhi to convert the villagers. By Zo’s father took the opportunity to convert to Christianity including his whole family and the couple. They were the only people who became Christians in Palokhi. Duang, By Zo’s father, told me that he did so because he was afraid that the rites to placate the Lord of the Water, Lord of the Land might not have been entirely successful leading to supernatural sanctions being imposed on the village. He was also apprehensive that the family would have to perform the ‘au’ **ma xae** rituals frequently (see Appendix A) which would have too onerous to bear. Moreover, Duang was also concerned that if, indeed, the crops in Palokhi failed, he and his family might be forced to leave the village and either abandon the wet-rice fields which he had acquired, or sell them at a loss.

<sup>18</sup> I am, here, of course drawing out the operative principles at work in the Palokhi kinship system. This does not necessarily explain the individual cases of “crooked marriages” which provided not only insights into how the Palokhi Karen conceive of their marriage rules, but the point of departure for this analysis of the system itself. The people involved in these cases of “crooked” unions, unfortunately, were reluctant to discuss the personal facts of their unions. If anything, however, I would suggest that these cases do lend support to my argument that people in descending generations tend to disregard what in ascending generations are seen as significant kin links, much more than is stated in my argument.

<sup>19</sup> It is significant that ‘au’ **ma xae** is so readily adduced as a rationale for various arrangements having to do with kinship and domestic organisation. One reason for this is that the ritual itself contains a complex of ideas based on kinship (as I discuss later in the Appendix on ‘au’ **ma xae**) and religious beliefs, and in this sense these ideas could well be regarded as an “ideological” system, as conventionally if loosely understood, quite apart from the sociological arrangements which I describe here.

<sup>20</sup> There are, however, ways by which these can be circumvented — through temporary sleeping arrangements or a restructuring of the house itself while yet maintaining the spatial and symbolic separation of the couples involved.

<sup>21</sup> Almost all houses in Palokhi are built of bamboo, but four are built of more durable materials, namely, wooden planks. Some informants say that it would be a waste to destroy these houses built from wooden planks, in which case — should the necessity arise — the houses can be taken apart and rebuilt.

<sup>22</sup> In Palokhi, a very attenuated long-house of this kind did exist some ten or fifteen years ago consisting of a single structure with two hearths. It was built to accommodate a married couple and the aged mother of the husband.

<sup>23</sup> Adoption does not seem to be practised in Palokhi. In April 1981, a woman with an only daughter died, and no one in Palokhi was able to trace any of her kin to whom the thirteen year old daughter could be sent. The elders in Palokhi finally enquired in the nearby Northern Thai village of Ban Mae Lao to see if there were any Northern Thai families prepared to adopt the girl. A family was eventually found and the girl left Palokhi to live with the family in Ban Mae Lao.

<sup>24</sup> Whoever buys these ‘au’ **ma xae** animals cannot use them in their own ‘au’ **ma xae** rituals. These animals would be reared for use in other sacrifices, or for feeding helpers during the planting and harvesting seasons. The original owners of these animals, however, cannot eat the flesh of these animals after they have been sold, regardless of the circumstances.

<sup>25</sup> This was in fact done by the one family (H3) in Palokhi which converted to Christianity.