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Indigenous Kinship

. . . if history is written by the migrants, the newcomers are typically portrayed as colonists and local groups are characterized as indigenous, aboriginal, or native, with connotations varying from inferior to quaint and pitiable. If history is written by the locals, the native-born are described as the hosts or defenders of the homeland and the migrants are identified as invaders, aliens, or foreigners (Clark, et al., 2019).

Fig. 1. Native paths from the Catawba in the south to the Iroquois in upstate New York. (Warren, 2014).

In 1692 a band of Shawnee Indians, accompanied by Martin Chartier, settled on Bohemia Manor at the head of Chesapeake Bay. Colonists in Cecil County were alarmed because Chartier was "a notorious *coureurs de bois* (runner of the woods)" who had married the Shawnee chief's daughter (Warren, 2014). He and Chief Opessa hoped to use the tidewater base to gain a share of the lucrative traffic that flowed between the powerful Catawbas in South Carolina and the hegemonic Iroquois in upstate New York. What the locals feared were hostile natives trekking across their land, plundering their fields, and abducting their daughters.

When Augustine Herrman, the Dutch owner of the 4,000-acre Chesapeake estate, appealed to Annapolis for a license to run this enterprise, officials there unsurprisingly denied his request. Maryland would eventually partner with Virginia to create a pass system restricting the movement of native peoples. Indians without passes could be killed or captured by Maryland

Rangers and sold as slaves.[1] As one Marylander admitted, the passes were needed because "the English cannot easily distinguish one Indian from another" (Warren, 2014).

Splintering and Coalescence in the Homeland

In *Indigenous Continent*, Pekka Hämäläinen invites us to see such incidents as a conflict between two investment strategies:

> The reality of an Indigenous continent has remained obscure because European empires, and especially the United States, invested power in the state and its bureaucracy, whereas Native nations invested power in kinship. From the beginning, European arrivals judged Indians on European terms. Later historians did the same, focusing on state power as the driving force in America. Kinship could be a source of great power, and Indigenous nations possessed advanced political systems that allowed for flexible diplomacy and war-making, even if Euro-Americans often failed to see them (Hämäläinen, 2022).

It's not that the colonials lacked kinship; rather, they converted old kin ties into newly emergent forms of global capital. The 2nd Lord Baltimore (aka Cecil Calvert), for example, financed two ships through London investors and then filled them with indentured passengers who signed away their headright land and future labor in order to sail to America (Chapelle, et al., 1986). Calvert's son would later complain that his agents had failed to process all the claims generated by the family business, making it difficult to sort out who owned which tracts of land (Gibb, 2019). Small wonder that the natives often lectured the colonials on the responsibilities of kinship and the proper distribution of social capital.

Shawnee kinship, by contrast, was a more portable and easily traded form of capital.

> When the Shawnees scattered from their Ohio homelands throughout the East, they learned to conceptualize the vast lands surrounding and separating them not as an insurmountable wilderness, but as a "kinscape." This was a landscape in which widespread groups of Shawnee relatives constituted anchorlike nodes, connected by networks of paths and rivers. Through decades, individual towns, clans, and families navigated this network in search of security, trading partners, and assistance (Lakomäki, 2014).

Europeans believed they were the agents of change and saw the native kinscape as a vestige from prehistoric time. Now, however, the work of many historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists has given us a radically different picture (Ethridge, 2009; Birch, 2012; Warren, 2014; Lakomäki, 2014; Clark, et al., 2019; Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). The basic model these

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[1] At a Council held at Battle Town June 14th, 1694, an order was issued "that Captain John Addison take care to Raise five men & a Captain to Range from the falls of Potomock to the falls of Petuxent or in other places where it shall be Needful to make quest after all skulking Indians and that the said Rangers be placed where the said Capt Addison shall direct; to be continued till the last of October" (Mayre, 1921).

researchers espouse happens in two stages: first, an old hierarchic order splinters; then new formations coalesce in the social cauldron of the recently splintered zone. That process, already unfolding in precontact areas such as Chaco Canyon (Clark, et al., 2019) and Mississippian mound cities (Ethridge, 2009), is the one Hämäläinen uses at the start of *Indigenous Continent* to describe a "sweeping retreat from hierarchies, elite dominance, and large-scale urbanization" (Hämäläinen, 2022). Initial contact with Europeans – exposing native North Americans to horses, guns, metal tools, disease, and Jesus – triggered even more splintering in areas like the Ohio River region, the homeland of the Shawnee, which were already egalitarian and less urban (Warren, 2014) (Fig. 2).
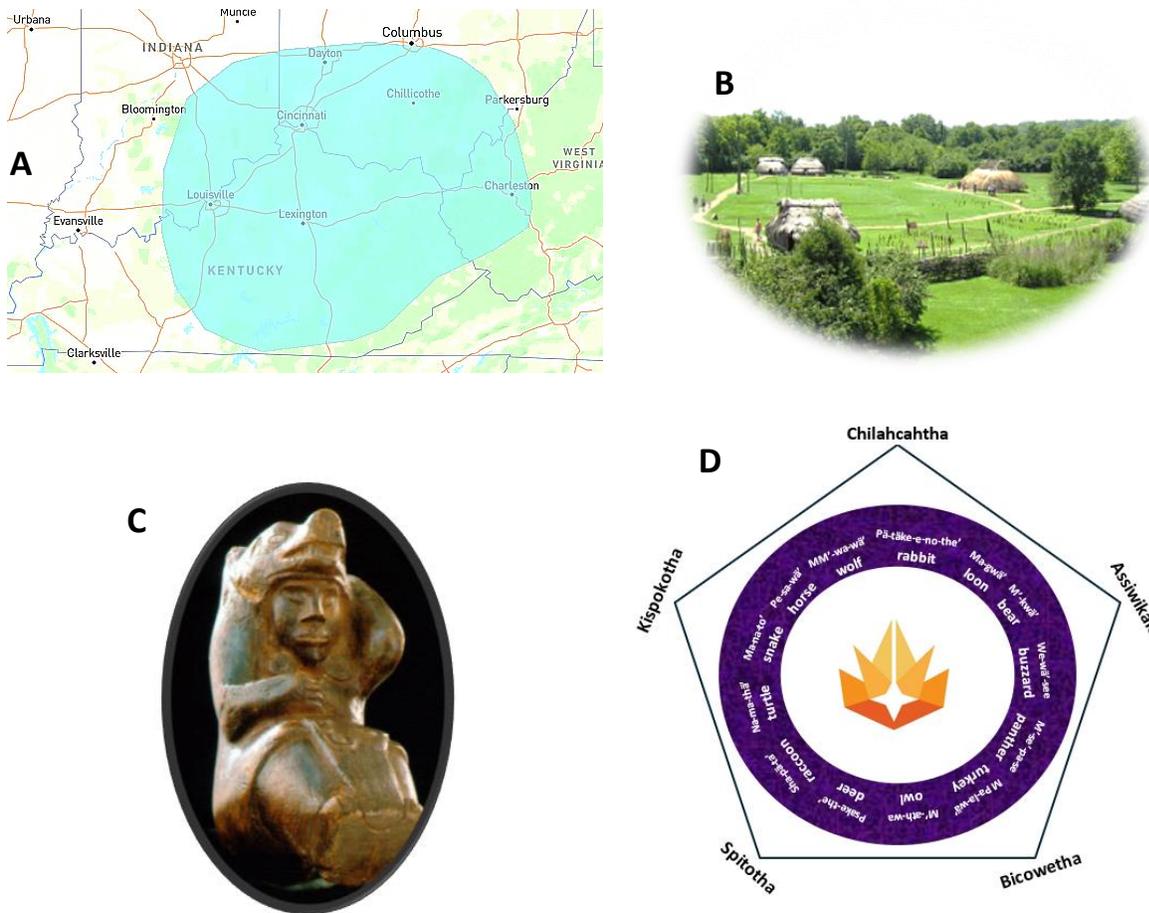

Fig. 2. A) Fort Ancient splinter zone and Shawnee homeland. Map from Native Land. **(B)** Reconstructed SunWatch native village near Dayton OH. **(C)** Wray Figurine from Newark Earthworks outside Columbus OH. The shaman figure, gender unknown, is covered in a bearskin with the bear head resting on the shaman's head. **(D)** Diagram of Shawnee clan system. Points on the outer pentagon are the five "society" clans used to name Shawnee towns; the inner circle gives the twelve clan totems used in all the societies (Lakomäki, 2014).

Decoding the Terms

The Shawnee kinship system that coalesced in the Ohio River splinter zone is a variant on one of four global types first documented by Lewis Henry Morgan in the 19th century (Morgan, 1870). These canonical systems differ with respect to which of four combinatorial possibilities they use to express or neutralize two genealogical features: collaterality and bifurcation (Lowie, 1928; Godelier, 2011) (Fig. 3).
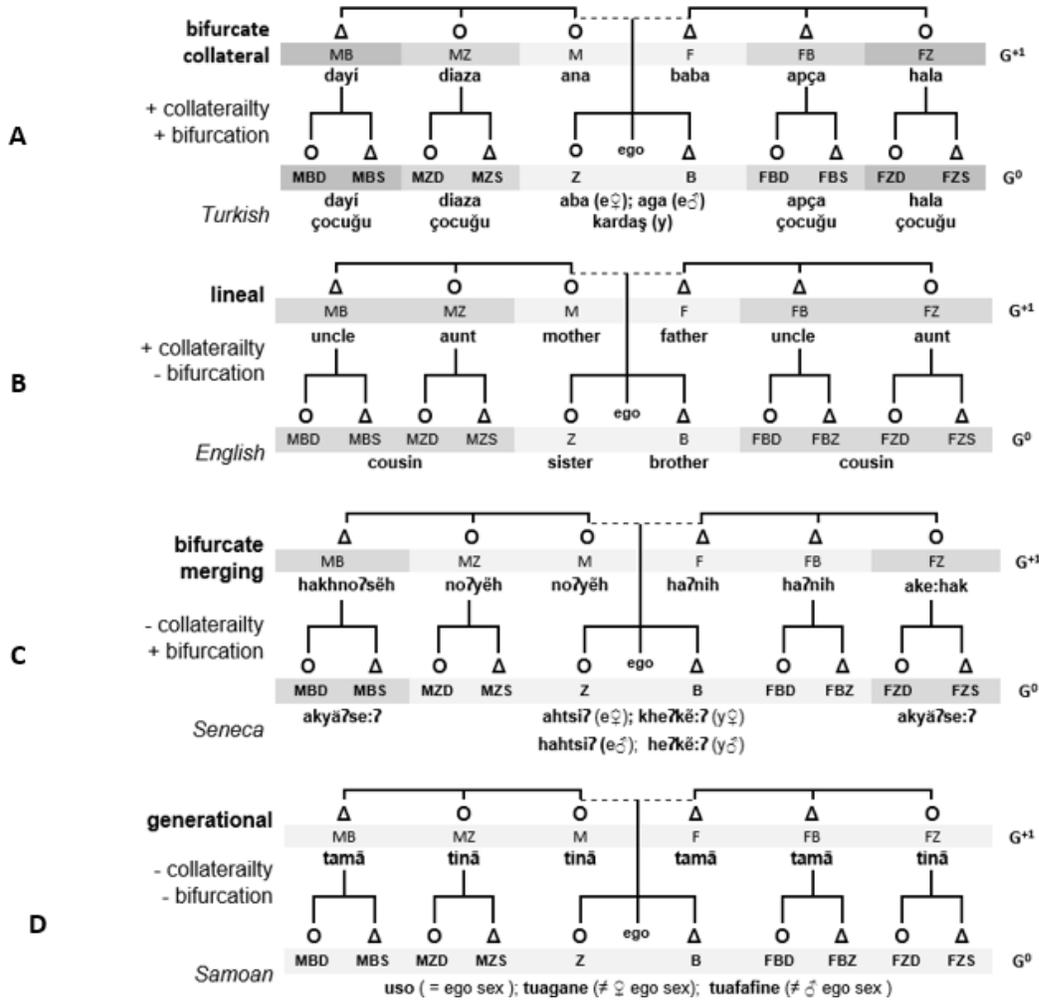

Fig. 3. Kin classification typology. (A) *Bifurcate collateral* terminologies divide lineal and collateral kin types while partitioning collateral types according to the sex of a lineal type. (parallel = same sex; cross = opposite sex). (B) *Lineal* terminologies divide lineal and collateral types but do not partition collaterals. (C) *Bifurcate merging* terminologies merge lineal and parallel collateral types in contrast to cross collateral types. (D) *Generational* terminologies merge all collateral and lineal types. Turkish terminology from Casson (1973); English terminology from Goodenough (1965); Seneca terminology from Lounsbury (1964b); Samoan terminology from Kernan & Coult (1965). G^{+1} = ego's parent generation; G^0 = ego's generation; O = female node; Δ = male node; solid horizontal lines indicate sib links; dashed lines indicate marital alliance between nodes. Kin type designations follow standard convention: M = mother; F= father; Z = sister; B = brother; D = daughter; S= son, e = elder; y = younger. Thus, FZD = father's sister's daughter.

The Shawnee classification system (Fig. 4A) should be compared to the Seneca bifurcate merging terminology (Fig. 3C) which Morgan first encountered doing legal work for the Iroquois in Rochester, New York (Trautmann, 1987). The Shawnee terms use the same G^{+1} pattern as Seneca, most notably by referencing mother and mother's sister (M, MZ) with a single term as well as father and father's brother (F, FB) with one term.
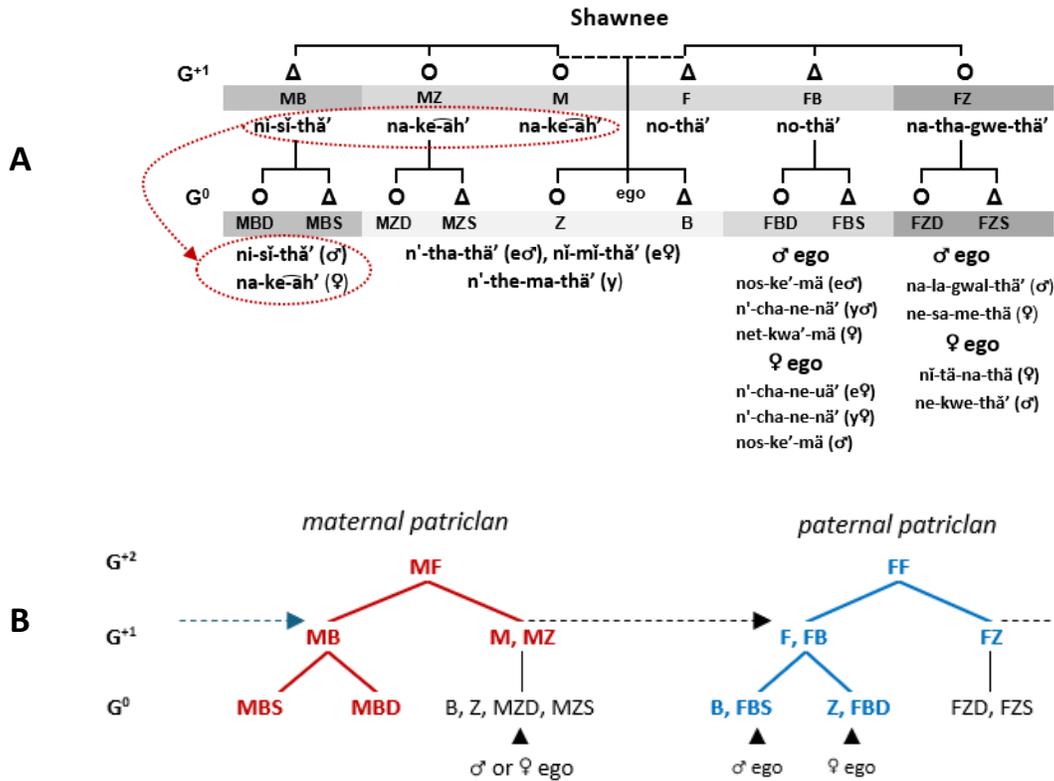

Fig. 4. (A) Shawnee kin terms from Morgan (1870). Red dashed arrow and ellipses indicate Omaha skewing for G^0 maternal patriclan. See Fig. 3 for explanation of kin type symbols. **(B)** Binary classification trees for maternal and paternal patriclans. Kin types marked in red belong to the maternal patriclan; types marked in blue belong to the paternal patriclan. Dashed arrows indicate the movement of spouses between patriclans. Black up-arrows indicate the position of sexed ego in G^0 kin type classes. MF = mother's father; FF = father's father.

Like the other canonical paradigms, Seneca is a harmonic terminology where the G^{+1} partitioning predicts what happens in G^0 (Passmore, et al., 2021). Shawnee is decidedly disharmonic, using fifteen terms to partition G^0 sibs and cousins into four classes. Furthermore, Shawnee references ego's G^0 mother's brother's son and daughter (MBS, MBD) with the G^{+1} terms *nǐ-sǐ-thä'* and *na-kē-ah* for uncle and mother. This feature, called skewing, is characteristic of kin classification variants known as Crow-Omaha (Lounsbury F. D., 1964a; Trautmann & Whiteley, 2012). Named after two North American tribes, Crow-Omaha skewing is found in terminologies throughout the world. In this case, Shawnee exhibits Omaha skewing often

associated with patrilineal descent and is one of ten known Algonquian terminologies to do so (Whiteley, 2012).

The disharmonic Shawnee classification system makes sense when considered in terms of the principle of patriclan exogamy, i.e., the rule that requires individuals to marry outside their assigned clan (Fox, 1967). That logic can be illustrated using downward-branching binary classification trees that encode the partitioning of kin types in a bifurcate merging system (Fig. 4B). Membership in a patriclan is reckoned by descent from the G^{+2} ancestral node (or root), in this case either mother's father (MF) for the maternal patriclan or father's father (FF) for the paternal patriclan. Both the left and right G^{+1} child nodes inherit clan membership from their G^{+2} parent node, but only the left branching male node can pass that clan membership to its two G^0 child nodes. Children of the right branching female node belong to the patriclan into which their mothers married.

Patriclan exogamy means that marriage options in G^0 are constrained by the history of marriages in G^{+1}. Those prior marriages involve a minimum of three of the twelve Shawnee patriclans: 1) wives for mother's brothers have been recruited from at least one other unspecified patriclan; 2) mother and mother's sisters have been recruited from ego's maternal matriclan as wives for father and father's brothers; and 3) father's sisters have been recruited as wives for males from at least one other unspecified patriclan.

Patriclan exogamy thus has two important consequences. First, father's sisters can't marry into the same patriclan that provides wives for mother's brothers. If such marriages were allowed, then the three G^{+1} patriclans could, generation after generation, engage in a one-way circulation of wives ($a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c \rightarrow a$) where clan a gives wives to clan b, which gives wives to clan c, which in turn gives wives back to clan a (Fox, 1967). Second, ego must marry into one of the nine Shawnee patriclans not involved in the G^{+1} recruitment of wives.[2]

What the rule for patriclan exogamy doesn't resolve, however, is how to manage the G^0 transfer of children from the maternal to the paternal patriclan. There are two possible solutions to this problem (Fig. 5): either split the children into two classes with ego's sibs and mother's sister's children in one class (B, Z, MZD, MZS) and father's brother children in another (FBS, FBD), or combine the two sets of kin types into one class (B, Z, MZD, MZS, FBS, FBD). The later solution, used by the Seneca terminology, makes ego an unsexed member of a single class where

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[2] For a critique of "the giving of wives" (Lévi-Strauss, 1969) as well as the sexing and positioning of ego, see Gayle Rubin's influential 1975 article "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." Also note that circulation of spouses under matriclan exogamy as practiced by the Seneca (Morgan, 1962) entails the "giving of husbands."

brothers and sisters use the same term to reference each other. The Shawnee solution, however, requires deleting the (B, Z) pair from one class but retaining the relative positioning of male and female egos with respect to the children of father and father's brothers. In that case,
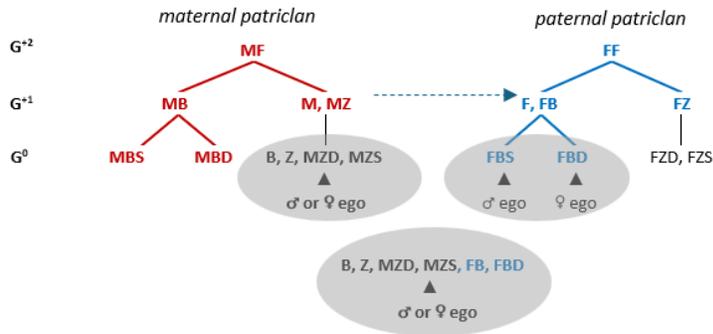

Fig. 5. Two solutions to the G^0 child transfer problem.

each sex uses one set of terms to reference same sex members of the class and another to reference opposite sex members, a pattern repeated for father's sisters' sons and daughters (FZD, FZS).

The relative sexing of the child terms means that ego can differentially distinguish and track the patriclan movement of same and opposite sex cohorts. The logic of patriclan membership not only explains the four-class G^0 partitioning but also the Omaha skewing: mother's brother's children take precedence over all the other G^0 children. In other words, even though descent is patrilineal, the mother's patriline is nominally favored over that of the father. In a matrilineal Crow system, the coding works the other way around with father's sister's children given higher status.

Clan exogamy is particularly important in understanding how the Shawnee were able to move about and coalesce with other tribes when necessary. As Levi-Strauss notes, an exogamous Crow-Omaha kinship system acts as "a pump which requires an external supply to draw upon according to its needs, and an outlet through which to restitute the by-products of its ongoing operations" (Lévi-Strauss, 1965). Other bifurcate merging Algonquian systems such as Northern Ojibwe were highly endogamous and allowed repeated cross-cousin marriages. These systems tend to be rooted in specific places and grow into regional populations (Ives, 1998), a pattern also exhibited by the matrilineal Iroquois (Morgan, 1962). Given the role played by women as spiritual leaders, the Shawnee kinship system ensured that the totemic practices of the whole tribe as well as other tribes were cycled through extended families. As a result, Shawnee culture exhibited a kind of "parochial cosmopolitanism" (Warren, 2014).

English colonials in the 17th century were shocked and confused as they confronted the bewildering diversity of native tribes and kinship systems. There was no single "other" to serve as an enemy; rather, there were myriad kinds of "others" who, even as they were constantly exterminated, kept rising to fight again another day. Hämäläinen (2022) attributes part of the Salem witch hunt hysteria to Indian derangement syndrome.

> Others [accused witches] soared in their minds, surging through the sky, high above the American woods where stealthy shape-shifting creatures prowled, plundered, and took lives. According to the possessed, these were Indians, and they not only plundered and killed; some of them had joined the abominable French to assault English settlements. It was no coincidence that in 1692 the Indian frontier was within fifty miles of Salem: the proximity fueled terror, supercharging an already-established tradition of witch hunts in the New World. As much as the colonists tried to be pure and virtuous, they felt the Devil's tentacles creeping around them.

The colonists were unable to parse the native kinscape in part because they viewed it through the lens of their own lineal system which took the nuclear family, biological relatedness, and heteronormative sexuality as the necessary foundation for any civilized culture. The very fact that bifurcate merging systems neutralize the distinction between lineal and parallel collateral relatives was in itself a threat to family integrity. The colonists assumed that kin terms should always code for biological relatedness; whereas native peoples would knowingly mix biological and social relatedness, often using kin terms to reference relatives defined by other criteria such as food sharing or to adjust relatedness after a marriage in order to conform to rules for exogamy or endogamy (Bamford & Leach, 2009). Despite (or perhaps because of) the proclivities of their own elites, the colonists also denigrated native peoples for recognizing the reality of gender fluidity and same sex partnerships (Blackhawk, 2023; Smithers, 2023).

Colonial settlement of North America was only the first of Britain's encounters with alien kinship systems. The Indian subcontinent is divided between Indo-Aryan languages in the north and Dravidian languages in the south where kinship systems are almost exclusively bifurcate merging with as much diversity as in North America (Trautmann, 1981). When James Cook first landed in Australia in 1770, he found a whole new continent to colonize with an indigenous kinscape also largely bifurcate merging (Scheffler, 1978). There is then some irony that on his third Pacific voyage a deified Cook was killed and his body ritually prepared by native Hawaiians who respectfully returned some of his remains to his crew for burial at sea (Sahlins, 1995).

> Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!
> Britons never, never, never will be slaves.

Resilience and Reclamation

The Shawnee terminology referenced here was documented by Morgan in 1859 on a visit to a reservation in Kansas (Morgan, 1870). By that time, the connection between patriclan exogamy and kin terms had already been broken by reservation life and the teaching of English in Indian schools.

> A person belonged to a *m'shoma* [clan] simply because he or she had received a name connected to the guardian being of that *m'shoma*; the members of a clan, then, were no longer united by kinship. The *m'shomas* did not regulate marriages or the inheritance of political offices. These changed clans, often called "name groups" by anthropologists, were essentially ritual units. Officials for such major ceremonies as the annual planting and harvest Bread Dances continued to be selected on the basis of their *m'shoma* membership, for Shawnees still believed that the name of a person conferred upon that person sacred *m'shoma* power from the guardian of the clan (Lakomäki, 2014).

Yet, Shawnee kinship did not disappear. Rather, it became a different kind of cultural capital still vital to the tribe's identity and new ways of coalescing with other tribes. Warren (2014), for example, describes a [Native American Church](#) funeral on the [Oklahoma Quapaw reservation](#) which mixes native Shawnee and Christian practices.

> Sculptures of the Virgin Mary sat atop a Quapaw burial. Beside it, a steel pipe ensconced at the head of a concrete-covered grave enabled the soul of the deceased to depart for the afterworld and identified its occupant as Shawnee.

The Shawnee in Oklahoma also perform their ceremonial Bread Dances and War Dances with the participation of the [Kickapoo](#) and [Seneca-Cayuga nation](#) (Warren, 2014). As Ned Blackhawk (2023) has explained, native peoples have found numerous ways to resist the "vanishing Indian" trope.

> The phenomenon of being Indian—of being both familiar and forgotten—became an overarching feature of the ideological terrain upon which Native peoples had to navigate life in modern America. Starting in the late nineteenth century, a new generation of Native leaders emerged that confronted this ideology, challenging the foundational mythology of America. Often educated in boarding schools as well as U.S. colleges, they hailed from across the continent and had different ideas of nations and of the United States itself. Raised with distinctive cultural practices, kinship networks, and different understandings of history, they responded to this intellectual formation in sustained and powerful ways.

Fig. 6. Spectrograph of George Blanchard speaking Shawnee.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xsyZZqgs-I

In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Languages Act which proclaimed that indigenous people had the right to learn and use their own languages. Unfortunately, there are few native speakers of many indigenous languages (Cohen, 2010). George Blanchard (Fig. 6), who performed the Shawnee funeral, is one of the last native speakers of Shawnee and is working to infuse instruction in Shawnee into reservation schools. The Language Conservancy is also providing support for indigenous languages in North America.

In "Refusing 'Endangered Languages' Narratives," however, Wesley Leonard (2023) has argued for replacing the narrative of vanishing languages with one focused on reclamation.

> . . . the second key to an alternative narrative is a focus on reclamation, and what non-Indigenous agents and institutions can do to support it. Shifting the unit of analysis away from "endangered languages," which focuses on languages rather than the peoples who claim them, is crucial to this narrative. "Language endangerment" is an improvement, as it references a process rather than objects, but better yet would be to position community language ecologies as the anchor for the story. Language ecologies are the ways in which languages exist in their environments, and an ecological approach thus inherently emphasizes place (which is especially fundamental to Indigenous communities) along with sociopolitical, economic, and other factors in language shift and recovery.[3]

This notion of language ecology was already understood in the 19th century with respect to geographical names (Trumbull, 1870).

> . . . .many Indian geographical names, after their adoption by Anglo-American colonists, became unmeaning sounds. Their original character was lost by their transfer to a foreign tongue. . . . The Indian languages tolerated no such 'mere marks.' Every name *described* the locality to which it was affixed. The description was sometimes *topographical*; sometimes *historical*, preserving the memory of a battle, a feast, the dwelling-place of a great sachem, or the like; sometimes it indicated one of the *natural products* of the place, or the *animals* which resorted to it; occasionally, its *position* or *direction* from a place previously known, or from the territory of the nation by which the name was given,—as for example, 'the land on the other side of the river,' 'behind the mountain,' 'the east land,' 'the half-way place,' &c.

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[3] Leonard's article is part of a special Summer 2023 issue of *Daedalus* on Language & Social Justice in the United States (https://direct.mit.edu/daed/issue/152/3).

Fig. 7. English glosses for Native American place names. From KATEOPLIS.

Given the extensive use of Native American place names in North America, there is certainly more than enough reclamation work left to be done. These names are hardly "mere marks" on a map. They can be recited aloud from coast to coast as the residual semiotics of what the indigenous continent's first arrivals experienced in the remarkable places they found. They bind humans, animals, and natural stuff in a single spiritual economy which we would all do well to reclaim.

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