KINSHIP STUDIES IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY ANTHROPOLOGY

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KEY WORDS: kinship, gender, marriage, family, social structure

ABSTRACT

This review examines the state of play of kinship studies in late twentieth-century anthropology, paying close attention to theoretical advances and shifts in methodology and intent that have occurred since the 1970s. It highlights developments in Marxist, feminist, and historical approaches, the repatriation of kinship studies, various aspects of lesbian/gay kinship, and issues bearing on the new reproductive technologies. Contemporary kinship studies tend to be historically grounded; tend to focus on everyday experiences, understandings, and representations of gender, power, and difference; and tend to devote considerable analytic attention to themes of contradiction, paradox, and ambivalence.

The handful of us...are prepared to wade through the sort of kinship algebra...which has gradually developed, memorize long lists of native terms, follow up complicated diagrams,...endure long deductive arguments,...[and] the piling of hypothesis upon hypothesis. The average anthropologist, however, [is] somewhat mystified and perhaps a little hostile....and has his doubts whether the effort needed to master the bastard algebra of kinship is really worthwhile. He feels that, after all, kinship is a matter of flesh and blood, the result of sexual passion and maternal affection, of...a host of personal intimate interests. Can all this really be reduced to formulae, symbols, perhaps equations?

B Malinowski (65:19)
Compared with cooking and music and the peculiarities of naming systems, the study of kinship...is dull and pedestrian stuff, but for an anthropologist, kinship is the hard core.

E Leach (56:10)

Kinship patterns can be understood as objects of artistic appreciation, in the same way that mathematical proofs or car engines are, for some people, such objects. Opening the hood of a fancy sports car, some of us will see nothing but a confusing jumble of ugly machinery. Others, who understand such things, will be perfused with bliss. It is the same with kinship patterns.

M Trawick (127:117–18)

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology’s romantic yet highly ambivalent relationship to the study of kinship has existed ever since the mid-to-late 1800s, when LH Morgan and his interlocutors invented the study of kinship by, according to one biographer, “drawing a border around certain aspects of human behavior, isolating them for study and affirming that they do indeed constitute an object, that they cohere” (126:4). Many features of the anthropological romance of kinship are familiar in one way or another to most of us; others have been documented by Kuper (53, 54) and thus need not detain us here.

But what of the ambivalence in this relationship? Following the wisdom of Sigmund Freud and Woody Allen, we recognize that all meaningful and intense attachments are infused with mixed emotions, and that anthropology’s intense involvement with kinship is no exception. We need also to bear in mind four context-specific factors that fuel this ambivalence. The first is Morgan’s philologically driven insistence that many of the key questions in contemporary intellectual, moral, and political debates—concerning the chronology of humankind’s origins and the basic lines of human progress and differentiation—were best answered through the collection and analysis of massive lists of kin terms, the precise significance of which has more often than not eluded even the most patient and intelligent readers. A second factor is the widely felt sense that despite over 100 years of painstaking work on systems of kinship terminology—which quickly became the basic stuff of kinship studies and ethnology as a whole—anthropologists have not made much headway in developing systematic accounts of the institutional and other determinants of similarities and differences in the terminologies in question (44:102). Third, the field is still dominated by the extremely formalistic, abstract approaches that led Malinowski and many others to feel that mastering “the bastard algebra of kinship” might be less than worthwhile, even if, as Fox (23:10) put it, “kinship is to anthropology what...the nude is to art.” Finally, the fourth factor is the idea that so-called primitive societies, based as
they are on "blood" and kinship, are in some sense a distorted or mirror image of our own ("advanced") society, based on "soil" and the state (54), about which anthropologists have long shared a celebrated ambivalence as social critics. The argument here is that in casting the Other as a distortion or inversion of ourselves, we inadvertently inscribe or introduce an ambivalence that the anthropological enterprise is in some sense designed to ameliorate.

Anthropology's love affair with kinship has cooled in recent decades, and the ambivalence in question has become more pronounced, or, stated perhaps more accurately, been revalorized. This trend has been construed by some observers as a clear (if not relieving) sign that the study of kinship is dead or moribund. Although such views remind one of Mark Twain's remark that reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated, they do resonate with two important changes in the status, scope, and constitution of kinship studies that have occurred since the early 1970s. First, theories and debates about what were once taken to be the basic building blocks of kinship (kinship terminologies, so-called rules of descent, marriage, and postmarital residence) no longer occupy their long privileged position of centrality within the discourse of anthropology. The dethronement is evidenced by recent reviews of anthropology and social theory (e.g. 12, 19, 66, 84), which make scant reference to issues that were the central focus of classic studies by American, British, or French anthropologists. The change has occurred partly because of the critical rethinking of basic assumptions in the traditional study of kinship by Leach, Needham, Schneider, and others beginning in the 1960s. More broadly, the shift reflects the waning of structural-functionalism as a guiding paradigm. The feeling has arisen in its place that the study of kinship and other traditional subfields (e.g. economic anthropology, political anthropology) cannot be pursued in the isolated terms of what are ultimately functionally defined institutional domains (14:1–3).

A second important change that has occurred in the study of kinship since the 1970s is frequently overlooked by those who persist in viewing anthropology in terms of the conventionally defined subfields. I refer to the fact that the study of kinship has been reconstituted and partially subsumed under other (admittedly problematic and contested) rubrics such as social history, legal anthropology, and political anthropology, and, of course, the feminist anthropology of Rubin (100), Weiner (133, 134), Ortner & Whitehead (87), Rapp (95–97), Gailey (26), Martin (70), Strathern (121–123), Collier (13), Ginsburg (28), and Weston (135). Feminist anthropologists have infused new enthusiasm into the field of kinship and have contributed to its reconstitution. This is especially apparent in Collier & Yanagisako's 1987 volume *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis*, the primary objective of which is "to revitalize the study of kinship and to situate the study of gender at the theoretical core of anthropology by calling into question the boundary between these
two fields" (14:1; see also 29, 63). The editors advocate a program that focuses on the cultural analysis of meaning and that deals with social systems as systems of social inequality that, like patterns of symbols and meanings, are most usefully understood in historical terms. They also argue that Schneider (108) has convincingly "denaturalized" the study of kinship, and that it is no longer defensible to take "the natural facts" of sex, procreation, and the rearing of offspring as "the universal raw material" comprising systems of kinship. The more general critique is that both "kinship" and "gender" studies typically fall short because they begin by taking "difference" for granted, "treating it as a presocial fact...existing outside of and beyond culture" (141:29).

Contributions of the latter sort are discussed in greater detail below, for the production of gender, power, and difference are key concerns in the reconstituted field of kinship. The more general objective of this chapter is to critically review some of the more significant developments in the study of kinship in late twentieth-century (socio-cultural) anthropology. The first section provides historical context by examining studies of kinship as systems of symbols and structures, focusing on selected themes emphasized by Schneider and Lévi-Strauss, and on the ways in which their approaches have been critiqued, reformulated, and historicized since the 1970s. The second section of the review addresses gender, power, and difference, while the third explores themes of contradiction, paradox, and ambivalence. The final section examines the repatriation of kinship studies and the new reproductive technologies.

KINSHIP AS SYMBOLS AND STRUCTURES

Kinship as Symbols

Since its publication in 1968, Schneider's monograph on American kinship (105) has rightfully been regarded as an exemplar of an interpretive anthropology, pioneered under the tutelage of Talcott Parsons and centered on symbols and meanings. Like Parsons, Schneider finds useful a distinction between cultural systems, on the one hand, and social and psychological or personality systems on the other. He proposes that we treat American kinship as a system of symbols and meanings rather than focus on kinship's statuses, roles, and institutions.

According to Schneider, his book "is not an account of what Americans say when they talk about kinship,...[or of] what Americans think...about kinship. It...is not a description of roles and relationships which Americans...undertake....[It] is about symbols, the symbols which are American kinship" (105:18). Therein lies both the enduring legacy of Schneider's work and its shortcomings. Schneider incisively analyzes data bearing on "the distinctive features which define the person as a relative." He discusses with insight the
symbols and meanings of relatedness through “blood” (in biogenetic terms, shared substance) as opposed to “marriage” (relatedness in terms of law, code for conduct), and the more encompassing conceptual domains of nature and law or culture. Much may still be learned from his elucidation of symbols such as “home,” “family,” “sexual intercourse,” and “love” (“diffuse enduring solidarity”). But he presents his data and conclusions alike in a formalized, abstract, and totalizing manner. We now question his insistence that “at some level(s)” America boasts a single system of kinship whose symbols and meanings are more or less the same for males and females, and for members of all ethnic/racial groups, social classes, and geographic regions. [Schneider himself has more recently acknowledged the questionable nature of such assertions (107; see also 116).] It should be emphasized, however, that Schneider’s work remains a significant source of insights into kinship in North America (49, 93, 95, 135, 140) and Britain (122); and that it has informed important cultural accounts of kinship among Navajos, Malays, Balinese, and various groups in South Asia and the Pacific (e.g. 1, 8, 9, 27, 42, 68, 114, 138). Interestingly, some of Schneider’s dubious ethnographic conclusions have been shown to be the product of seemingly “culturally” neutral interview questions like “Who are the people you consider to be related to you?” Such questions entail methodological problems, particularly in the case of second-generation Japanese-Americans (nisei), for whom families and not persons are the cultural units relevant for purposes of calculating kinship in connection with funerary rituals and the giving of koden (quantities of money) on the occasion of someone’s death (139, 140).

Yanagisako points out that Schneider’s analysis holds for nisei “only if we isolate the definition of relatives and the rules for the inclusion of persons as relatives from the corpus of other meaningful acts and statements” made by nisei (139:24). More importantly, just as there is no analytic or other justification for doing this, “there is no reason to give priority to the act of defining and listing one’s relatives, and/or assuming it occurs in a contextually neutral vacuum” (139:24). We need to look much more closely at variation, both in the “distinctive features that define the person as a relative” (Schneider’s focus), and in constructions of sexuality, marriage, childrearing, family and household organization, divorce, etc (which Schneider largely ignores).

In hindsight, the larger problems have mainly to do with Schneider’s heavily Parsonian view of cultures as seamless wholes characterized by a high degree of uniformity and internal coherence; the attendant “assumption that symbols and meanings are less contextually variable than normative rules for action”; and the idea that we can isolate so-called pure symbolic systems with impenetrable boundaries (139:26–27). If, in a broader sense, our goal is to show “how symbolic systems articulate with the actual state of people’s lives, then Schneider’s approach is of limited value and becomes, potentially, a
sterile exercise in misplaced concreteness, much like the genealogically based methods of analysis that...[he] legitimately criticizes” (139:25).

In any case, what are we to make of Schneider’s (106, 108) claim, echoed in various quarters, that he has denaturalized the study of kinship and cut it loose from Eurocentric assumptions and even from the very “facts” of sex, reproduction, and the like? The contention is valid that Morgan biased many generations of fieldworkers and analysts by his insistence that systems of “kinship” are invariably built upon and are coterminous with genealogical grids, as may be the assertion that the functionally defined institutional domain of kinship as understood in the West exists nowhere else in the world. But assertions of the latter sort strike many as hyperbolic and problematic—while Schneider has decentered biology from the study of kinship, he has not really denaturalized the study of kinship (see 103)—and, in any event, have negative implications for the comparative study of social relatedness. Rather than insist that no one else has kinship as we do, and that kinship as we understand it is a nonsubject, we should perhaps first examine the systems of social relatedness others do have.

Collier & Yanagisako (14) and Yanagisako & Delaney (142), among others, stress that we should approach the study of kinship free of biases rooted in assumptions about biology. But to my knowledge none of these scholars have really begun to suggest what a kinship system cut free of any mooring in, or relationship to, cultural constructions of biology would look like (21). Two relevant bodies of data come to mind: first, the results of the brilliant “thought experiment” by Cucchiari (18), which delineate the structure and organization of a hypothetical (pre–Upper Paleolithic) hunting and gathering society with neither kinship nor gender; and second, data on the families created by lesbians and gays in the United States that are based on choice and not “blood,” but that are nonetheless conceptualized by the natives in relation/opposition to their “blood” or “straight” families; while such families are not grounded in biology, they are clearly defined in relation to it (135).

Schneider’s work (and other types of cultural analysis) also questions how to effect closure on kinship if it is defined in strictly cultural terms, especially since, as Schneider himself has pointed out in recent years (107), it interpenetrates with other cultural domains like gender, religion, etc. One solution is to define kinship as a domain of social relations, as Kelly has (48:521–22):

Kinship relations are social relations predicated upon cultural conceptions that specify the processes by which an individual comes into being and develops into a complete (i.e. mature) social person. These processes encompass the acquisition and transformation of both spiritual and corporeal components of being. Sexual reproduction and the formulation of paternal and maternal contributions are an important component of, but are not coextensive with, the relevant processes. This is due to the ethnographic fact that a full complement
of spiritual components is never derived exclusively from the parents....Foods may also constitute essential ingredients in the spiritual or corporeal comple-
tion of personhood....[And] maturation frequently entails...replacing, adding, and/or supplanting spiritual and corporeal components of personhood.

Another approach to the dilemma of locating kinship is to provide polythetic and not monothetic definitions. Barnard & Good (2:188–89), for example, argue that a relationship pertains to “kinship” if it displays characteristics such as the following (some of which are mutually exclusive):

...[It] is ascribed by birth and persists throughout life; is initiated by ‘mar-
riage’....; is explained or justified in terms of a biological idiom....; assigns the parties to an ‘in’ group or category, in opposition to persons not so assigned....; entails the joint ownership,....use,....or serial inheritance of property and re-
sources; serves as a medium for assigning hereditary social positions....; [and/or] involves the nurture and upbringing of small children....

These positions echo Leach’s earlier approach to the definition of marriage and will in all likelihood engage scholars in debate for some time to come.

**Kinship as Structures**

The study of structure in kinship brings to mind the far-reaching legacy of Lévi-Strauss, which is beyond the scope of my comments. It is clear, though, that in recent decades few scholars have occupied themselves with the quintessentially Lévi-Straussian search for “deep structures” capable of revealing the workings of The Mind. On the other hand, research on specific ethnographic instances and regional patterns of dual social organization, dualistic modes of thought, and binary classification of various kinds is alive and well, as evidenced by the recent publication of such titles as *The Attraction of Opposites* (72) and *Dialectical Societies* (71) (both edited by Maybury-Lewis, the first also by Almagor), and by Boon’s work on Bali (8, 9). Structuralist concerns are especially pronounced in Indonesia, New Guinea, the Andes, and the Amazon. This is partly because of the prevalence in such areas of data emi-
nently suitable to structural analysis; but it is also due to the reproduction of scholarly agendas through successive generations of area specialists. Indone-
sia, for example, attracted JPB de Josselin de Jong and his nephew PE de Josselin de Jong, both of whom helped build up the Leiden School, which gave rise to some classic ethnographies on the archipelago, and which also shaped the scholarship of Needham and his followers (e.g. R Barnes, G Forth). The Leiden school also produced RT Zuidema (146), who trained a generation of Andeanists and other Latin Americanists (130). This, in combination with Maybury-Lewis’s and Turner’s (128, 129) interests in structuralist analyses of Brazilian data, helped lay the groundwork for a rich tradition of structuralist research in the Amazon and Latin America as a whole.
Lévi-Strauss's shift from the content and functioning of kinship relations to concern with the underlying relationships among their constituent elements was clearly his most innovative move. Equally important for the study of kinship was his insistence that we examine the structural significance of ties of marriage and alliance, especially the ways in which they link descent units of various kinds. This move from descent to alliance helped reorient the study of kinship, and of marriage in particular, by forcing a critical reevaluation of the long-standing preoccupation with the entailments of descent and varied dimensions of unilineally bounded groups. But the move was far less profound when one considers that the focus was still on unilineally bounded groups and their external relations and reproduction through time. In short, descent-based social units still constituted the point of departure and ultimate loci of investigation, and little analytic provision was made for other structural principles such as siblingship, which may have highly variable implications for the presence or absence of bounded groups per se, but may nonetheless serve to inform a broad array of social relations and domains of cultural order.

The theme of siblingship as a principle of social order commensurate with principles of descent, filiation, and affinity was first developed by Kelly in his landmark study of structural contradiction among the Etoro (45). Kelly pointed out the analytic problems inherent in then current, widely held notions of "loose structure" and also resolved the "Nuer paradox" that had baffled Evans-Pritchard and many since. In recent years Oceanic materials have encouraged an analytic formulation of siblingship relatedness in terms of equivalent, parallel, or essentially complementary rights, obligations, and experiences, with respect to a specific territorial domain, political office, or other mediating element (69). This formulation has significance both within Oceania (68, 114), and beyond—in lowland South America (50) and Southeast Asia (52, 64, 73, 89).

The suggestion that we take siblingship, as opposed to, say, parent-child relations, as our point of departure is far more radical than it might initially appear. The proposal is that first we concentrate our analytic gaze on relations among the living (rather than links between the living and the dead and/or the unborn); and that, second, we zero in on bonds among individuals of the same relative generation—which, of course, constitute "key" ("core") social relations in all societies. Broadly speaking, by devoting greater attention to the ways in which siblingship serves as a key symbol and central organizing principle in intragenerational relations, we can reorient and revitalize the study of kinship, which has always been characterized by a focus on intergenerational links (47; see also 81:3, 103:373). This same general focus arising from both siblingship and "the exchange of women" relocates kinship in practice (see 11, 45).
Feminists and others committed to developing gendered approaches to the study of kinship and marriage have been particularly interested in intragenerational relations, though it would be equally accurate to emphasize these scholars' heightened concerns with temporality, power, and practice. In one of the most significant pieces of feminist scholarship of the 1970s, G. Rubin argued (among other things) that Lévi-Strauss was oblivious to the political implications of his insights on the "exchange of women" (100). Lévi-Straussonian notions of exchange and reciprocity have been critiqued many times in recent years (32, 94), perhaps most notably by Weiner (133, 134), who examines exchange not merely as a means by which to mediate conceptual oppositions between self and other, but also as a way to effect social control and deal with the paradoxes central to social life in all societies.

It is now widely recognized that static, highly abstract formulations and models of "official" rules and principles of social structure, such as those for which Lévi-Strauss is justly famous (see also 34; cf 4), don't take us far toward understanding social actors or the myriad contexts in which they organize themselves, relate to one another, acquire and use resources, or create order and meaning in their lives. This recognition resonates with Bourdieu's view that to understand actors and contexts we need to devote greater attention to behavioral strategies, especially everyday practical strategies geared toward the attainment of locally defined value. These strategies, informed by official rules and principles, are also conditioned by culturally induced but largely implicit dispositions as well as material and symbolic interests, and are thus not in any way "mere execution[s] of the model (in the...sense of norm...[or] scientific construct)" (11:29). Whether or not Bourdieu's interpretations of data bearing on parallel-cousin marriage in North Africa prove to be of enduring interest (see 32, 40), the analytic framework he has developed (practice theory) clearly is, as is his commitment to studying kinship through time (see also 99, 129).

Structure and History

Disillusionment with static, abstract models coincided with a historic turn in kinship studies and in anthropology at large. This trend has been pronounced in the important work of Goody, Thirsk, Thompson, and others on continuity and change in kinship and inheritance in Western Europe from 1200 to 1800 (33), as well as subsequent research by Goody on the shaping of the family and marriage in Europe as a whole from around 300 A.D. to the present (31). In the past few decades Le Roy Ladurie and others have used legal records and archival material for evidence of peasant testimony on marriage, the sexual division of labor, and the constructions of bodies and libidos (58, 102, 109). In these and other ways, they have discovered kinship in the course of doing
social history and conveying the everyday lives of European peasants as they are practiced, experienced, and represented.

Anthropologists' interest in social history, coupled with the increased availability of archival materials, helps to engender new perspectives on some old problems concerning the social organization of tribal societies (broadly defined). These include: the historical development of Nuer segmentary organization and the expansion of Nuer territory and population over time (at the expense of Dinka) (46; see also 41); the reproduction and transformation of conical clans, pyramidal ramages, or status lineages in Tonga (26); and the evolution of Andean ayllus (territorially based extended families or social units made up of ranked descent groups) under the Inca and the Spanish (112, 146). Much of this scholarship is characterized by an emphasis on the role of ambiguity and structural contradiction in historical change, and by a concern with both the structure of history and the history of structure in Sahlins's sense.

With regard to the latter, my own work (89, 91) has focused on kinship, gender, and social structure among the matrilineally oriented Malays of Negeri Sembilan (Malaysia) in the context of changes associated with British colonialism, heightened integration into the global economy, and Islamic nationalism and reform. In precolonial times the ideological significance of siblingship was at least as relevant in myriad domains of society and culture as norms and values tied to descent and/or alliance. This finding calls into question the received wisdom that the limited scope and force of descent-based values and norms in present-day Negeri Sembilan are a function primarily of the combined effects of colonialism, modern market forces, and twentieth-century Islam. My historical analysis of the shifting entailments of various categories of siblingship and other forms of social relatedness reveals that twentieth-century changes in property and inheritance are qualitatively different and far more limited than previously assumed. The system of inheritance, for example, has not broken down in the direction of bilaterality or patriliney, as suggested by earlier observers; and females continue to inherit most houses and land. The nature of proprietorship and devolution has changed profoundly, due in large part to the demise of the traditional institution of divided rights or title. Accordingly, collateral kin in the matriline can no longer automatically lodge residual claims against a proprietor's house, land, or other properties. The horizontal thrust of this development, however, must be distinguished from the fact that the (now concentrated) rights at issue ultimately pass between women and their daughters—women who, by definition, are of the same matriline. Hence the changes that have occurred amount to a historical erosion of rights grounded in the bonds among collateral kin in the matriline—especially natural and classificatory sisters—rather than an ongoing or incipient shift from
one variant of lineality to another (e.g. from matriliny to patriliny). The larger and most basic issue, of course, is the salience of kinship in social history.

GENDER, POWER, AND DIFFERENCE

Various aspects of gender, power, and difference were of central concern during the heady days that witnessed the invention of kinship by Morgan and the proliferation of debates over the temporal relationship between “matriarchy” and “patriarchy.” This was especially so after Engels entered the fray with his views concerning the status of Iroquois women in relation to their European sisters, the overthrow of “matriarchy” (“the world historical defeat of the female sex”), and the declining status of women in the context of the dissolution of kin-based societies and the rise of societies with social classes and state institutions. Debate over these topics receded in the early twentieth century, even though both Malinowski and Mead sought to debunk certain aspects of Freudian dogma concerning the Oedipus complex and the biophysical concomitants of maturation and used heavily gendered data to do so. For the most part, it was not until anthropologists rediscovered the value of Marxist perspectives in the 1960s that these issues regained primacy.

The Lineage Mode of Production and Beyond

In the 1960s, Meillassoux’s work among the Guro of the Ivory Coast sparked a new wave of interest in these topics. Meillassoux’s influence has been especially strong in France and England, where the “lineage mode of production” has often been debated (see 43, 74, 124). Despite some disagreement over key issues, the general consensus appears to be that in societies characterized as “segmentary” (which, for some, refers to societies with segmentary lineages à la Nuer; for others means “tribal” in Sahlins’s and Service’s evolutionary formulation; and for still others simply means “primitive”), lineage and kinship generally operate both as infrastructure and superstructure insofar as kinship relations serve as relations of production but also constitute the basis for ideologies and normative systems (6, 26, 43, 48, 113).

Of special interest to this side of the Atlantic and to feminists worldwide is Meillassoux’s twofold contention (74; cf 13:vii) that in societies without classes, or “castes,” or “estates,” kinship organizes rights and obligations, and that marriage as the basis of kinship thus organizes the inequalities that exist in terms of age and gender (a theme to which we return below). Issues of continuing concern are whether such inequalities are appropriately seen as entailing exploitation of the same general sort found in state contexts, and whether one can appropriately speak of the existence of distinct social classes in such societies. Also at issue is the validity (with respect to the study of kinship in precapitalist economic formations) of Althusser’s distinction be-
tween “domination” and “determination,” which is invoked by Meillassoux, Godelier, and others who argue that while kinship dominates the mode of production in segmentary societies, that mode is determined, in the last instance, by the economy (see 6, 43). I would only add that many scholars find Meillassoux’s approach rather mechanistic and reductionistic, especially inasmuch as it gives short shrift to ideological phenomena.

Bloch, Comaroff (16, 17), and others working within Marxist traditions have made good on these deficiencies. In his work on the Merina, for example, Bloch (7) emphasizes that kinship is a system of signs that not only organizes “production and reproduction...[as well as] the transfer of surplus from one category of person to another,” but is also “used for...mystification” (and, he might add, clarification), and “so in different situations...is called on to perform different tasks” (7:137, 144). Like Bourdieu, with whom he shares certain affinities, Bloch’s analytic framework makes ample provision for systems of ideas existing somewhat independently of political economy, “evolving with...[their] own mystical rationality and creating further disconnections with the base” (7:88). This framework is elaborated in explicit opposition to the “Kantian emphasis on the coherence and unity of cognitive systems” and the attendant, largely implicit, idea that cultures are best understood as “organized, undivided wholes.” Bloch thus deals extensively with contradictory representations of kinship and gender, showing how these are both contextually specific and contextually segmented, and how the acquisition of knowledge is best viewed as “the combination of different processes of different nature” (see 7:106–19).

**Kinship, Class, and the State**

French and British fieldworkers in Africa and elsewhere have focused on tribal societies and chiefdoms and have frequently emphasized how structures of kinship and domestic domains have been affected by state policies, trade, and colonialism. Recently researchers have turned to peasants and urbanites in state societies, particularly in Europe, the Andes, and China. Noteworthy here is Reiter’s (98) pioneering work on public and private domains in rural France, which shows how the marked segregation of the sexes (characteristic of most of the Mediterranean) is fostered by state societies, whose ideologies assign to women the jobs of serving and reproducing kinship networks. States, especially those built upon industrial capitalism, need taxes and labor power, hence people are reproduced and sustained in the context of (domestic) kinship; because only women can literally guarantee the reproduction of people, states tend to intervene in women’s lives in major ways and to effect relatively extreme distinctions between public and private domains (but see 141, cf 26, 28).
Such processes are also evident in the Andes. During pre-Inca times, *ayllus* operated in conjunction with parallel descent and inheritance, and a gendered division of labor conceptualized in terms of complementarity (112:9–10). But Silverblatt’s research reveals that processes of class formation in the context of the consolidation of Inca state rule over the Andes “left gender hierarchy in its wake” (112:19), and did so partly by undercutting the scope and force of representations emphasizing kinship as parallel chains of men and women. The Inca encouraged patrilineal inheritance of *ayllu* membership, thus undermining ties that had previously linked women, and otherwise used structures of kinship and gender parallelism to bind *ayllus* to their purposes. Their revision of genealogical history, moreover, both legitimized and masked class relations, partly by “camouflaging the politicization of kin relations and the coercion of tribute, which class formation is all about” (112:46–47).

China, too, is renowned for the institutionalization of various forms of inequality but also for the existence of egalitarian ideologies grounded in kinship. Because China was long closed to foreign sinologists who had to content themselves with doing research in Hong Kong or Taiwan, and because the political environment in China has not been conducive to indigenous social-science research, we have the bizarre situation of knowing “more about a single lineage in the New Territories than we do about the whole of village life in China since 1950” (125:280). This has begun to change with the relaxation of the research climate in China (92, 131, 132). Watson (131) has demonstrated that the development of powerful, localized patrilineages (*tsu*) was by no means an inevitable outcome of the patrilineal order, but occurred amid “a high degree of political centralization and economic inequality where a small landlord-merchant class dominated a much larger smallholder tenant class” (125:284). This was not a lineage mode of production, but the social relations of production were expressed in a kinship idiom that stressed unity and equality among brothers, which thus helped reproduce class (and gender) inequalities.

Chinese kinship is of further interest in light of the success of contemporary Chinese family firms, often called “family fortresses.” Anthropologists have not yet directed much attention to them (61 is a partial exception), but the extended families that Weber, among others, saw as a major drag on economic effort have been reinterpreted in recent times as a tremendous resource whose successful utilization, however much fraught with ambivalence, is key to entrepreneurial advance. We clearly need to know more about how and why Chinese are often able to overcome familial ambivalence in the context of economic cooperation when many other groups (e.g. Malays, Javanese, and Thais) are not.
Rethinking Difference

Similarities and differences between Eastern and Western kinship systems are among the major foci of the most ambitious study of kinship in late twentieth-century anthropology. I refer in detail to Goody’s (32) *The Oriental, the Ancient, and the Primitive*, which is both the definitive treatise on systems of kinship and marriage in the preindustrial societies of Eurasia as well as an exemplary model of transdisciplinary research informed by a global sense of variation in space and time reminiscent of social theorists like Marx and Weber.

Goody has reassessed conventional wisdom pertaining to commonalities and contrasts in systems of kinship in: (a) “the Orient” (primarily China and India, but also Tibet, Sri Lanka, and parts of the Middle East), and (b) “primitive” societies (e.g. Australian aborigines, Tallensi), and the West, including both classical Greece and Rome and modern European societies. Goody’s central thesis is that the tendency among nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars to extend primitive models of kinship and social organization to the major civilizations of Asia has “primitivized” the Orient and reinforced Eurocentric views of contrasts between the West and the “rest.”

Goody reevaluates the extent to which marriage in the major agrarian societies of Asia involves the transfers, sales, and incorporations of women that are often said both to define marriage in “economically simple” tribal societies, and to distinguish Asian marriage from marriage in the “economically advanced” societies (ancient and modern) of the preindustrial West. He traces the history of exchange and alliance, especially Lévi-Strauss’s ideas concerning the exchange of women. Goody argues that this concept in particular seriously impedes our understanding of the practice of kinship and marriage because it carries the implication of women’s complete incorporation into the kinship groups of their husbands, and their thorough dissimulation from their natal kin. In a tour de force, he then surveys the literature on bridewealth, dowry, and diverging devolution [the transmission of parental property to women and men alike (32:2)], which is associated with advanced agriculture, socioeconomic stratification, the elaboration of status concerns, and attendant phenomena that are broadly distributed in Eurasia but relatively uncommon in African and other tribal societies. Goody illustrates that even in the “extremely patrilineal” societies of China, India, and the Islamic world, married women have long retained important moral and material rights and obligations with respect to their natal kin. They are, more generally, “carriers of property as well as of sentiments, ties, and relationships” (32:480), which may compromise unilineal hegemonies and social arrangements in the direction of bilaterality, but which are nonetheless central to “strategies of heirship” and domestic reproduction. Total assimilation of women into their husbands’
kin groups (like the notion of their complete severance from natal kin) is thus a Western fiction informed by market metaphors and economistic thinking. Goody concludes that while gender inequality is pervasive in the Asian societies under investigation, “women [in these societies] are never simply the pawns of others but are themselves players in the game, especially as heiresses” (32:68); that the “domestic slavery” and the purported absence of conjugal love and parental affection that Westerners have long associated with the Orient is a chimera (32:317, 425); and, more broadly, that ancient and modern Orientals are not so different from ancient and modern Westerners after all.

Much of the study is thus offered as a critique of Lévi-Strauss and other comparativists (e.g. Murdock) who apply concepts and models developed in the study of relatively homogenous, unstratified “simple” societies to extremely heterogenous, stratified “complex” societies in a facile fashion that makes no provision for inter- or intrasystemic variation or factors such as mode of production. This decontextualization of data precludes analysis of strategies of inheritance and devolution and otherwise obscures links between domestic domains and the more encompassing domains (political, religious, and legal) to which they are keyed.

Throughout the book, Goody demonstrates the value of focusing on “the modes of production, the system of communication, the practice of religion, the influence of the state and the control of the judicial apparatus” (32:157), and on combinations of dynamic variables rather than static principles of the sort associated with the “basic building blocks” view of kinship (32:70, 366). Goody’s modified Marxist perspective enables him to link similarities in the kinship systems of Asian and Western societies with similarities in these societies’ productive bases [e.g. their “advanced economic systems” characterized by intensive irrigated cultivation of cereal crops and “strong artisanal, commercial, trading and even mercantile sectors” (32:484)]. He can thus show how and why they differ from the kinship systems of African and other societies whose economies are based on extensive slash-and-burn cultivation (and/or foraging), which typically works against surplus accumulation, stratification, and the elaboration of status concerns of the sort realized in Asian and Western patterns of hypergamy, dowry, and diverging devolution. Goody’s approach is also ideally suited to account for variation in kinship systems in terms of class, caste, and religious affiliation; and to shed valuable light on topics such as polyandry, polygyny, filiacentric unions, brother-sister marriage, adoption, and infanticide. The book is also broadly appealing in its explicitly historical discussions of the ways state policies, formal law codes, and systems of writing affect kinship practices and local knowledge.

Anthropologists are indebted to Goody for reinvigorating the study of kinship and social organization, and for reaffirming the value of anthropology’s long-standing commitment to comparative research and generalization.
both within and across cultures. However, one can identify several issues to which Goody might have devoted more systematic attention. The frequently unqualified treatment of the “position [or status] of women” makes little provision for distinctions among variables of power, authority, autonomy, and prestige, a surprising lapse given Goody’s commitment to the development of an analytic apparatus that can be used to help debunk various myths in the literature on kinship and gender. It would have been useful as well had Goody devoted additional attention to siblingship, the more so in light of his arguments, advanced mainly in relation to South Asia, that ties linking married women (and their children) with their brothers may compromise the conceptual logic and social entailments of lineage and clan. There are, moreover, tantalizing references to the concept of contradiction throughout the book, some of which point to the important role of structural contradiction in historical change, yet Goody makes no effort to present a unified theory of contradiction, or to theorize social transformation in terms of process, though he clearly historicizes kinship. There is, finally, an occasional tendency to derive meaning from function, though for the most part Goody maintains the distinction between interpretations offered by social actors, and those constructed by the analysts.

**Modeling Inequality**

Works by Goody and others cited above provide key insights into the production of difference and inequality in the context of relationships between kinship and other institutions in state societies. The most systematic models of kinship and inequality, however, are those devised for classless societies. Collier (13), for example, synthesizes certain Marxist and feminist perspectives in the course of presenting three ideal-typic models for analyzing the loci and entailments of gender and generational inequality among nineteenth-century Great Plains groups and other societies that lack stratification (bands, tribes, and ranked societies, but not chiefdoms): the “brideservice” model, developed in relation to Comanche data; the “equal bridewealth” model, constructed largely on the basis of Cheyenne data; and the “unequal bridewealth” model, heavily informed by Kiowa data. In each model Collier systematically relates inequality to a particular form of validating marriage (performing brideservice, paying equal or unequal bridewealth), and systemically links the latter with numerous other variables: production and circulation (the meaning of work, the content of statuses, the meaning of gifts), political processes (the causes of conflict, the nature of leadership, folk models of social structure and human agency, practical action), and cultural representations (gender conceptions, rituals, etc). While Collier reformulates Meillassoux’s Marxism in light of contemporary feminist concerns, she is also committed to the more actor-oriented, practice-theory approach of Bourdieu; consequently, she not
only contributes to the reconfiguration of gender and kinship realized in Collier & Yanagisako (15) but also provides highly insightful analyses of themes bearing on coercion, hegemony, and “misrecognition.”

The latter volume should be read alongside Kelly’s *Constructing Inequality* (48), the most sophisticated treatment of inequality in classless societies to date and a seminal text in the reconstituted field of kinship and gender. With scrupulous attention to ethnographic detail and analytic logic, Kelly demonstrates that the viability of Collier’s model is undercut by misplaced causality in its focus on marriage as the principal locus or generator of inequality in classless, especially brideservice, societies (see also 25, 91). Kelly’s objective is not merely to show how data from Etoro society and other Strickland-Bosavi tribes are out of keeping with the brideservice model proposed by Collier (who cites Etoro and related groups as candidates for inclusion in the model) but also to develop an alternative model that can account for the phenomena at issue.

Defining social inequality as “social differentiation accompanied by differential moral evaluation,” Kelly emphasizes that stigma is the negative reciprocal of prestige, that analytic discussions of so-called prestige systems (e.g. 86) would benefit from greater terminological and conceptual precision (see also 141:26–28), and that such systems are more accurately characterized as systems of prestige/stigma. Kelly’s goal is to describe and analyze all social inequalities that exist among the Etoro and related groups, including, in particular, inequalities that are not “organized by marriage or derived from the means and relations of production” (48:4). In realizing this objective, Kelly highlights how a shamanic elite and other ritual experts—along with initiation ceremonies, witchcraft beliefs, and associated cosmologies—are implicated in the production of inequality. He also illustrates that social inequalities are entailed in marriage, and in the division of labor, but that in the latter case “the differential moral evaluation that engenders this is derived from the cosmological system rather than from economic processes per se” (48:9). This is to say that both “the means and relations of the production and allocation of prestige and moral superiority are...linked to the perpetuation of life across generations” (48:11); and, more broadly, that “the [gender] asymmetry that Collier points to...turns on the differential age of marriage for males and females and the fact that marriage corresponds to the age of transition to an adult level of production for women but not for men....The orienting proposition that marriage organizes inequalities collapses analytically pertinent distinctions and lumps together a number of independently variable causal factors as a single variable assessed in terms of presence or absence (i.e. married or unmarried)” (48:437).

Despite their divergent emphases, Kelly and Collier both call for a radical recontextualization of kinship and gender. And they both demonstrate that
systems of kinship and gender are "about" difference and inequality, and, as such, are most usefully analyzed as components of more encompassing systems of distinction and hierarchy that are variably grounded in cosmology and political economy (see also 90, 91, 121). These studies reinforce the theme that feminist and Marxist concerns alike lead back to kinship (or social relations). Indeed, Kelly and Collier share with Goody and numerous feminists and Marxists the focus on kinship as an array of key social relations that engage production and reproduction and that remain squarely embedded in practice.

CONTRADICTION, PARADOX, AND AMBIVALENCE

Many recent analyses of kinship (and gender) address themes of contradiction, paradox, and ambivalence. These are animated by efforts to understand concrete, variably positioned social actors, the contexts in which they organize themselves and their resources, and the ways they create meaning and order in their lives. This emphasis on the quotidian rounds of variably situated social actors and the emotional tenor of daily experiences (of intimacy, inequality, and the like) has been informed by Marxist perspectives (including practice theory as developed by Bourdieu and Ortner) and by feminist and postmodernist approaches that attend closely to hegemonies, counter-hegemonies, dialogue, polyvocality, and matters bearing on ambiguity, irony, and the ludic.

Myers’ work is relevant here (79, 80), as is Weiner’s scholarship on the paradoxes of “keeping while giving” (134). So, too, is Trawick’s Notes on Love in a Tamil Family (127), one of the most innovative and fascinating studies in all of late twentieth-century anthropology. Trawick derives much of the material in this erudite and delightfully humorous volume from her apprenticeship to Themozhiyar, a poet and articulate reader of texts who helped the anthropologist appreciate that ambiguity “permeates Hindu concepts of the sacred and pervades everything from speech to sexuality, dreaming to blood” (127:41), and that “love” (anpu) is, without question, the most ambiguous—and ambivalent—of all. Trawick warns readers that “‘meaning’ cannot be pinned down, is always sought but never apprehended,...is always inherently elusive and always inherently ambiguous” (127:xix), and she argues impressively that kinship is less “a stable architectural framework through which all generations pass” than “a form of poetics,...a web of deep-seated longings” characterized by “protean variability in form” (127:7). In this view, kinship “creates longings that can never be fulfilled” and is most appropriately understood “as a web maintained by unrelieved tensions, an architecture of conflicting desires, its symmetry a symmetry of imbalance, its cyclicity that of a hunter following its own tracks” (127:152).

A different approach to these topics that can also be seen as a sophisticated example of a certain type of practice theory (subsumed under the rubric of the
“anthropology of experience”) is presented in Wikan’s *Managing Turbulent Hearts* (137). Wikan’s main objective is to “de-exoticize” and “de-essentialize” Bali by fleshing out the contours of Balinese interpersonal relations and social experience that have been given short shrift by Western observers. She provides a most nuanced and compelling treatment of ambivalence and alienation, though, strictly speaking, neither ambivalence nor alienation are among her primary concerns. Wikan also avoids the artificial separation of kinship from friendship (and other types of social ties), and situates the long-neglected topic of friendship squarely within the anthropological gaze.

Wikan concentrates on the commonplace, the “concepts with which [Balinese] feel and think about, and handle, the tasks and tribulations of their individual existences” (137:xvi). In contrast to earlier writers on Balinese, Wikan devotes considerable attention to Balinese “feeling-thoughts” about the seamier side(s) of human nature and social relations. She believes that while Balinese commitments to graceful performances are partly about “beauty for beauty’s sake,” they also reflect an anxiety to avoid giving offense and provoking the ire of intimate others in a society where roughly half of all deaths are attributed to black magic or poisoning (137:43).

According to Wikan, Balinese are forever anxious about “liv[ing] always exposed and vulnerable” (137:81) to the threats of others. Balinese believe they live in a panopticon in which all kinship and social relations are hierarchical and power laden and all social activities are scrutinized and evaluated by intimate and not so intimate others. This is not the panopticon of Foucault’s (22) writings, in which Big Brother or his agents, with their unrelenting gazes and disciplinary mechanisms, penetrate the most intimate recesses of personal and social space and consciousness. Indeed, Balinese feelings of vulnerability are only minimally (if at all) related to their positions in class or other relatively fixed status hierarchies and are only minimally (if at all) keyed to the presence of Big Brother or his agents. These feelings stem instead from the hundreds if not thousands of big and little brothers and sisters populating their kinship and social universe(s), good numbers of whom are assumed to be deploying the social and cultural resources at their disposal in order to enhance (or at least maintain) their own status and prestige while simultaneously undercutting the status and prestige claims of others.

Feelings such as these serve as powerful moral constraints and deserve thorough analysis, especially in conjunction with themes of domination and resistance. I make the point partly because moral variables tend to be given short shrift in studies of domination and resistance unless they “muddy the waters” of class or otherwise impinge on relations of power and domination between major status groups (landlords and tenants, rich and poor, etc). The underlying issue is that while scholars of resistance (M Taussig, J Scott) frequently distance themselves from Marxist theories of exploitation and class,
they often preserve one of Marxism's own hidden premises: that class is somehow the most essential, natural, or unfetishized of all social groupings, and that class interests are thus the most important or rational of all social interests. Data from Bali, Malaysia (91), and elsewhere indicate that in order to understand kinship or social relations of any variety, we must seriously consider culturally specific (as well as generalized) forms of personal submission, humiliation, and degradation that are not tied to class-based (or feudal) hierarchies, or to systems of caste, apartheid, slavery, and the like.

THE REPATRIATION OF KINSHIP STUDIES AND THE NEW REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Anthropologists have increasingly turned to their own societies to gather data and build comparative and theoretical arguments relevant both to the reconstituted field of kinship and to the study of society and culture at large. This repatriation, along with the cultural critique commonly entailed, has given rise to some of the more significant developments within the reconfigured field.

There is now an impressive corpus of ethnographic material on contemporary European kinship (e.g. 10, 20, 63, 102, 104, 109, 122, 123), much of which is informed by the perspectives of social history and is explicitly attuned to issues of gender, power, and difference, and to themes of contradiction, paradox, and ambivalence. The ethnographic literature on contemporary American kinship is likewise growing in quality and scope and has become one of the primary sources through which to theorize both kinship and gender, and culture as a whole. This latter body of literature includes studies of African Americans (3, 49, 88, 119, 145), Afro-Trinidadian Americans (39), Italian Americans (57), Japanese Americans (139, 140), Vietnamese Americans (51), Chicanos (55, 143), Appalachians living between town and country (35), working-class whites of European descent (101, 118), the fabulously rich and famous (67), lesbians and gays of various ethnic/racial and class backgrounds (38, 59, 110, 135, 136), as well as those involved in adoption (76), surrogate motherhood (93), and other aspects of the new reproductive technologies (see below).

Studies of the myriad ethnic and racial groups comprising the American mosaic do not simply fill in the gaps in our understanding of "theme and variation" in American systems of kinship and marriage (e.g. by "adding 'ethnics' and stirring"). They also underscore the importance, when studying kinship and marriage in any context, of factoring into our analyses the intersecting variables of race/ethnicity, class, and gender, as well as the ways state policies, nationalist discourses, and other understandings of imagined communities shape local experiences and representations of kinship, family, and household. They also demonstrate that modernization theory and world-sys-
tems approaches (e.g. 115) alike tend to be insufficiently attuned to the ways the politics of cultural identity and ideological factors inform not only the pooling, “patchworking” (51), and deployment of resources among household members, but also intrahousehold competition over resources, relations between the sexes and generations, and the multitude of pathways in terms of which households are reproduced and transformed over time.

Kibria’s ethnography of Vietnamese American families in Philadelphia (51), for example, reveals the complex and often contradictory reworking of Vietnamese traditions bearing on kinship and gender. Taking issue with accounts that depict Vietnamese in the United States as yet another example of a “model minority” or Asian immigrant “success story,” Kibria shows how Vietnamese in Philadelphia cope with life in the States, how “modernization” is a highly uneven, ambivalence-laden process, and, more generally, how “the relationship between families and industrialization is far less inevitable, linear, and rigid than previously conceived” (51:17). Kibria explains that while Vietnamese American women experience “multiple jeopardy” and “triple oppression,” their households and kinship roles are not simply arenas of subjugation; they are also “sites of resistance” and “vehicles...[through which these women and their families] struggle to survive” (51:20). Equally important, the ideology of family unity frequently masks discordant interests, conflict, and resistance among household members, whose cultural identities, forged in contexts of marginality and liminality, are both shifting and emergent.

The prevalence of gender-based struggles to control familial and other resources and institutions, struggles that help to define the way moral families should be, is highlighted as well in Stacey’s ethnography of “brave new families” in the Silicon Valley (118). Stacey investigates the frontiers of contemporary morality through a focus on recombinant families. Underscoring that “traditions” are not given or fixed but continuously renegotiated in ways that are both ironic and unintended, Stacey (like Kibria, a sociologist by training) emphasizes themes of contradiction, paradox, and ambivalence, and also provides historical (and postmodern) perspectives on gender, power, and difference.

Vastly different ethnographic terrain is traversed in Marcus & Hall’s Lives in Trust: The Fortunes of Dynastic Families in Late Twentieth-Century America (67). This postmodern account fills in our knowledge of the families and marriage practices of the rich and famous. It also undermines the myths that surround such dynastic families as the Hunts and the Gettys—especially those myths bearing on heroic individuals—by illustrating how fiduciaries, teams of lawyers, therapists, and family biographers have helped to reproduce (and transform) such families over time. Building on some of the insights developed in the literature on descent theory and Big Men, Marcus clarifies how dynastic sensibilities and legacies are structured, organized, disseminated, and
experienced, particularly in relation to European High Culture. Hall’s master-
fully argued concluding section delineates the crucial role of archives, biogra-
phies, and trusts in both the authentication and debunking of dynastic identity.

Other developments in American kinship related to the rise of lesbian and
gay families and the new reproductive technologies are also forcing specialists
and nonspecialists alike to confront their largely implicit understandings and
representations of “what kinship is all about.” They also attest to the point that
“what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central” (120:20).

Weston’s research on lesbian and gay kinship (135) provides what is per-
haps the most compelling example of the theoretical insights and challenges
engendered by the repatriation of kinship studies, and of anthropology as a
whole (see also 38, 59, 110, 136). Weston builds on the work of Rapp (95–97)
and others who have underscored the extent to which discourses about kinship
and family have become overtly politicized in the United States and elsewhere.
And she makes quite clear that while the family—like marriage, love, and
sex—is a central institution in American society, it is equally, and in some
ways more importantly, a thoroughly contested concept.

The subjects of Weston’s study refer to the domestic partnerships and
families they have created as “families we choose,” and they conceptualize
these families in relation (opposition) to the “straight” or “biological” families
in which they grew up. Weston thus stresses the significance of analyzing her
informants’ early familial experiences. Especially engaging and poignant is
her treatment of “coming out” stories, particularly those shared with parents
and siblings. This evocative material adds to our understanding of what kin-
ship is for lesbians/gays in America, for kinship is not simply what is created
within the lesbian/gay community; it also includes preexisting blood ties, the
real test of which is how parents and other blood kin react to the news of their
lesbian and gay relatives’ sexualities, and whether they continue to acknow-
ledge and honor their blood ties with them. Here, as in many other segments of
American society (49, 93, 119), the performative aspects of kin ties are central
to kinship as “lived experience” and “culturally constituted order” (cf
107:126).

Weston’s material challenges the American idea that procreation is invari-
ably the “base, ground, or centerpiece” of kinship (135:34). She thus poses
questions that are key to emergent public discourses: Does “procreation alone
constitute kinship”? Does “shared biogenetic substance in itself confer kin-
ship”? Do nonbiological ties have to be patterned after extant biological mod-
els (135:34, 211)? Emphasizing that the emergent discourses index a culturally
ambiguous move from biology to choice (see also 76), she also reformulates
Schneider’s (108) claims that “kinship would cease to have meaning as a
cultural domain” in the absence of “a notion of genealogy” (135:210). She
does so by demonstrating that this would be the case only if kinship were
“robbed of its relation to biology” (emphasis in original), and that such a relation need not be coterminous with a “grounding in biology” (135:210–11).

The sophistication of present-day kinship studies is also apparent in the literature on the new reproductive technologies associated with amniocentesis, in vitro fertilization, and myriad issues surrounding abortion, the birthing process, etc (20, 24, 28, 30, 70, 96, 97, 106, 110, 111). Strathern’s work (122, 123) is in many respects the most theoretically incisive, but unfortunately her dense writing style renders some of her arguments inaccessible.

Ragone’s 1994 study (93) dispels numerous popular misconceptions about surrogate motherhood: that it signals “the dissolution of the American family,” “is a threat to the sanctity of motherhood,” “reduces or assigns women to a new breeder class,” and constitutes “a form of commercial baby selling” (93:1). Since surrogate mothers are typically sought out by infertile couples seeking a child to whom at least one of them (i.e. the husband) is biogenetically related, surrogacy may be viewed as a contemporary, high-tech solution to the traditional American goal of creating a family defined (at least partly) in terms of shared biogenetic substance. Because surrogacy clearly entails some unconventional arrangements, those involved in the arrangements play down biological relatedness during the insemination process and the ensuing pregnancy, even though concerns with biogenetic relatedness motivate many to pursue this option, as opposed to adoption. On the other hand, they play up themes of love, choice, and the adoptive mother’s desire to have a child in a highly selective account of “traditional” American kinship.

One of the most radical implications of all this is the fragmentation of motherhood, such that, as Martin (70:20) puts it, “the organic unity of fetus and mother can no longer be assumed.” The dispersal of different aspects of maternal procreation is most pronounced with gestational surrogacy, where the surrogate provides a uterus but not an ovum. In these cases, the gestational mother is related to the child neither through biogenetic substance (though there has been a sharing of fluid) nor through “code for conduct” in Schneider’s sense. Gestation is thus “culturally ambiguous” (123:27), encouraging the distinction between “mere” biological relatedness and specifically biogenetic relatedness (93:112).

Surrogate motherhood is an important example of how motherhood and kinship as a whole are created through intention, choice, and love. The more general point, however, is that the new reproductive technologies call into question the supposedly “inviolable chain of events” linking marriage, sex, conception, pregnancy, gestation, parenthood, and childrearing (93:87), as well as “natural kinship” and “nature” itself (122, 123). If only for these reasons, they have profoundly subversive potential.

The extent to which this potential may be realized in the United States or elsewhere will embroil scholars in debate for some time to come (see 20, 24,
It is clear, though, that developments in the new reproductive technologies make "nature" and biology more relevant to our analytic thinking about kinship than they have been since Morgan. Scholarly and public discourses on lesbian/gay kinship and marriage and, of course, sociobiology have done this as well. Sociobiologists, however, have yet to bring about the new synthesis promised by EO Wilson and others, and the overall significance of sociobiology is probably exaggerated by proponents and critics alike (75), even though the field captures the popular imagination. Most (cultural) anthropologists reject the basic concepts of sociobiology (e.g. kin selection, reciprocal altruism) (62), and have turned their backs on sociobiologists rather than involve them in serious discussion. This seems a strategic mistake, especially since anthropology has long been strongly associated within academe and elsewhere with topics such as kinship and race, which are also central to sociobiology. We should encourage colleagues and students alike to engage sociobiologists constructively with data and arguments from cultural anthropology as well as studies of primate social organization that bear on sex/gender, power, difference (e.g. 36, 37, 144), and the exceedingly complex relationship between biology and culture.

CONCLUSION

I conclude by emphasizing five points. First, while studies of kinship as a terminological system and as a symbolic system "in its own terms" haved both waned, studies of kinship in terms of social relations among variably situated actors engaged in the practice of social reproduction within broader political economic contexts have become central to contemporary anthropology. Second, anthropological (and other) social histories often deal with the same general subject matter (albeit over time), inasmuch as they commonly revisit the concerns of kinship studies with production and reproduction. This is especially true because much current ethnography focuses on socio-cultural systems (or locales) that were the subject of earlier investigation. Understanding socio-cultural transformation thus frequently presupposes a determination of whether the alleged patriliny or matriliny of an ethnographic starting time declined or was partly an artifact of some descent theory or other formulation employed by prior ethnographers. Goody perhaps best demonstrates the necessity of carrying out this task of excavating past studies of kinship in order to conduct anthropological social history (see also 5, 41, 60, 78, 82, 89, 117).

Third, the twentieth century has witnessed profound, globally far-reaching changes in relations between expansive political economies on the one hand, and domains of household, kinship, and marriage on the other, owing to the spread of capitalism and the attendant transformation of the means and relations of production and of reproduction. Women are commonly recruited into
factories in developing Asian economies (83) and expelled from them in postsocialist Eastern European economies, and in both cases there are massive repercussions for kinship and gender relations and social reproduction on the whole. The nexus of kinship, gender, and social inequality explored by Meillassoux, Collier, Collier & Yanagisako, Kelly, and others is thus a problem formulation equally relevant to preindustrial, premodern societies, and to their modern and postmodern counterparts.

Fourth, the concern with contradiction, paradox, and ambivalence that has represented an established analytic and theoretical current within studies of kinship anticipates postmodernist critiques of totalizing schemas. Moreover, kinship is, in a sense, a “postnominalist field” and has been since the work of Needham (81). Noteworthy in this connection is Comaroff’s (16) delineation of how to reconstitute and reproblematize the field while attending to the objections raised by the nominalist critique.

The fifth and most general point is that the study of kinship is alive and well and still vital to the discipline, though often carried out under other rubrics and aliases. This is epitomized by Marxist approaches and Modjeska’s comment that while he “explore[d]...inequality [by looking at means and relations of production]...[he] like other anthropologists concerned with neo-Marxist problematics...[was] led to conclude that production and its relations do not constitute an autonomous economic level dominating the totality of social relations since the relations of production are relations of kinship. To pursue the relations of production to their heart only to find structures of kinship is by now predictable” (77:51). Much the same discovery is being made by anthropologists and others analyzing gender, social inequality, social history, and the entailments of capitalist transformation, modernity, and postmodernity. This is one reason why the reconfigured field of kinship has become a key site on which to theorize gender, power, and difference.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Raymond Kelly, Nancy Ries, Ric Thompson, and Gary Urton for reading an earlier draft of this essay on short notice and for offering comments. Thanks are also extended to the following individuals: Tom Fricke, Sharon Hutchinson, Mary Moran, Fred Myers, and Terence Turner, who provided references and/or reprints; Randi Feinstein and Lisa Todzia, who served as research assistants; and Letta Palmer-Holmes, who patiently prepared many versions of the bibliography. Because of space limitations, I have focused almost exclusively on English-language sources and published material.
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