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What kinship is (part one)

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A modest proposal for solving the 150-year-old problem of what kinship is, its specific quality, viz. mutuality of being: persons who are members of one another, who participate intrinsically in each other's existence. 'Mutuality of being' applies as well to the constitution of kinship by social construction as by procreation, even as it accounts for 'the mysterious effectiveness of relationality' (Viveiros de Castro), how it is that relatives live each other's lives and die each other's deaths. Involving such transpersonal relations of being and experience, kinship takes its place in the same ontological regime as magic, gift exchange, sorcery, and witchcraft.

> The social universe [of Palau people] is divided into persons who are classed as *kauchad* 'mutual person(s)' and those who are simply *ta er tir* 'one of them' ... Ties of mutuality are commonly established through concepts of shared blood, shared land, shared exchange and/or shared ancestors who once behaved as 'mutual people' ... These ties of mutuality are glossed as 'kinship' by English-speaking Palauans.
>
> Smith 1981: 226

> Native [Piro] communities focus on the relationships in which food is produced, circulated, and consumed, such that for native people, to live with kin is life itself.
>
> Gow 1991: 119

> Despite the variation in and complexity of what [Korowai] kin relations are, it is worth postulating an overall quality by which these relations are known and measured. I will call it a quality of 'intersubjective belonging'.
>
> Stasch 2009: 128

This is a Frazerian-style piece, which is to say, an exercise in uncontrolled comparison. As graduate students we used to call the like an 'among-the text', with ethnographic examples cherry-picked from among this people and that. My defence is that I am not trying to prove empirically what kinship is, only to make some exposition of what I claim it is. I am trying to demonstrate an idea, for which purpose the ethnographic reports are mainly meant to exemplify rather than verify.

In brief, the idea of kinship in question is 'mutuality of being': people who are intrinsic to one another's existence – thus 'mutual person(s)', 'life itself', 'intersubjective belonging'. I argue that 'mutuality of being' will cover the variety of ethnographically

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documented ways kinship is locally constituted, whether by procreation, social construction, or some combination of these. Moreover, it will apply equally to interpersonal kinship relations, whether 'consanguineal' or 'affinal', as well as to group arrangements of descent. Finally, 'mutuality of being' will logically motivate certain otherwise enigmatic effects of kinship bonds – of the kind often called 'mystical' – whereby what one person does or suffers also happens to others. Like the biblical sins of the father that descend on the sons, where being is mutual, then experience is more than individual.

Constructivism

It seems fair to say that the current anthropological orthodoxy in kinship studies can be summed up in the proposition that any relationship constituted in terms of procreation, filiation, or descent can also be made post-natally or performatively by culturally appropriate action. Whatever is construed genealogically may also be constructed socially: an affirmation that can be demonstrated across the known range of societies and not infrequently within a given society (Bamford & Leach 2009; Carsten 2000*a*; 2000*b*; 2004; Franklin & McKinnon 2001; McKinnon 2006). Indeed, constructed forms of so-called 'biological' relationships are often preferred to the latter, the way brothers by compact may be 'closer' and more solidary than brothers by birth. But then, kinship is not given by birth, since human birth is not a pre-discursive fact.

Symbolically formulated and culturally variable, human reproduction involves a differential valuation of the contributions of the genitor and genetrix that ranges to some sort of parthogenesis – the woman functioning as medium only or the man's role unacknowledged. What may not be depreciated, however, is the necessary participation of third parties such as ancestors, gods, dream-time spirits, or the potency acquired from captured enemies. (Is the participation of a spiritual third a universal condition of human procreation?[1]) Moreover, the begetters may be connected to their offspring by a great variety of transmitted substances – blood, semen, milk, bone, genes, flesh, soul, etc. – with various effects on children's appearance and character. Although it is an axiom of our own native folklore that 'blood' ties are 'natural' and irrevocable, as David Schneider demonstrated in well-known studies of American kinship (1968; 1972; 1977; 1980), in truth, as he also told, they are as conventionally made as relatives by marriage. 'Substance' is as constructed as 'code'.

Ethnographic reports the world around tell of relations of birth being largely discounted as kinship, sometimes totally ignored. Certainly as regards shared substance, the Kamea of New Guinea are not the only ones who know no such connection between children and those who conceived them (Bamford 1998; 2007; 2009). Parenting is likewise devalued in the reincarnation concepts of many circumpolar societies. On the Alaskan North Slope, the Iñupiat will name children and sometimes adults after dead persons, thus making them members of their namesakes' families. Over a lifetime, reports Barbara Bodenhorn (2000: 137), an Iñupiat may acquire four or five such names and families, although those who bestow the names were not necessarily related before, and in any case they are never the birth parents. Begetters, begone: natal bonds have virtually no determining force in Iñupiat kinship. Kinship statuses are not set by the begetters of persons but by their namers. Indeed, it is the child who chooses the characteristics of birth, including where he or she will be born and of what sex.

Among the far-off Greenland Inuit, when a child is named after a deceased relative, say a maternal grandfather, he addresses his birth mother as 'daughter', her husband as

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'daughter's husband', and his grandmother as 'wife' (Nuttal 2000: 48-9). One is reminded of stock African examples of mothers' brothers who are called 'male mother' (Radcliffe-Brown 1924) or wealthy Lovedu women who use their cattle to acquire 'wives' and become 'fathers' to the latter's children (Krige & Krige 1943). Inasmuch as brothers and sisters of the Karembola people (Madagascar) are of one kind, 'rooted in one another' – n.b., the mutuality of being – a man can claim to have given birth to his sister's son: 'I am his mother. He is my child. Born of my belly. Made living by me. Crying for the breast' (Middleton 2000: 104).[2] Thus men who are mothers, women who are fathers: there is nothing inevitable about the kinship of procreation.

It is not even inevitable that the kinship of procreation is essentially different from relationships created post-natally. Kinship fashioned sociologically may be the same in substance as kinship figured genealogically, made of the same stuff transmitted in procreation. For the New Guineans of the Nebilyar Valley studied by Francesca Merlan and Alan Rumsey (1991: 42-5), kinship, whether by sexual reproduction or social practice, is produced by the transmission of *kopong*, 'grease' or 'fat', 'the essential matter of living organisms, whose ultimate source is the soil'. Conveyed in the father's semen and mother's milk, *kopong* founds a substantial connection between a child and its birth parents. Yet as such 'grease' is also present in sweet potatoes and pork, the same consubstantial effect can be achieved by food-sharing, commensality, or eating from the same land. In this way, the children or grandchildren of immigrants may be fully integrated as kinfolk; but for that matter, the offspring of two brothers are as much related because they were sustained by the same soil as because their fathers issued from the same parents.[3]

Elsewhere in the New Guinea Highlands, as described for the Maring by Edward LiPuma, the generative 'grease' flows into the land from the bodies of clansmen and 'from there (through the use of labor and magic) into taro, pigs and other foods, and then ultimately returns to clansmen through eating food' (1988: 6-7). Or as neatly put for Baruya by Maurice Godelier: 'The land nourishes men, but men by their flesh fatten the land that they leave to their descendants' (1998: 10: the critical word is *engraisser*, to 'fatten' or 'fertilize', thus something of a trilingual pun). Similarly in New Caledonia: 'The yam is a human thing. Since it was born in the earth in which the ancestors are decomposed ... the yam is the flesh of the ancestors' (Leenhardt 1979: 62). Hence as Clifford Sather usefully put it for the Iban of Kalimantan, 'rice is the transubstantiation of the ancestors' (1993: 130).

Thus the capacity of shared food to generate kinship – a mode of 'consumptive production' that Marx did not imagine. Rather to the point, however, was Marx's notion of a tribal community presupposed to the objective conditions of its existence, from which it might well follow that the land has certain intersubjective relations with its human possessors, or indeed a certain kinship with the people (Marx 1973: 471ff).[4]

Then again, the social construction of kinship may function as a necessary complement of sexual reproduction, the two working together over time to forge a parental bond. Anne-Christine Taylor (2000) relates how the Amazonian Jivaro (Achuar) develop the kinship of father and son through a process that begins with the former's contribution of semen in sexual reproduction, continues with the food he provides during pregnancy, and is definitively achieved by his nourishment of the child in life. Note it is the nurture, rather than the transfer of bodily substance, that makes the relationship, for, by Jivaro lights, 'procreation does not suppose a substantial connection between parent and child' (Taylor 2000: 319).[5] Moreover, unlike kinship by

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procreation alone, an extended temporality is a condition of the relatedness at issue, since it requires a cumulative process of parental care – a condition more or less true of many forms of performative kinship. It follows that memory is also essential, the recall of acts of compassion. '[M]emory for Amazonian peoples is essentially linked to kinship. Indeed, in some sense it is kinship itself' (Taylor 1996: 206). Likewise Aparecida Vilaça writes of the Wari:

> [I]t is not just substances which circulate. The Wari body is also constituted by affects and memories. Memory, say the Wari, is located in the body, meaning the constitution of kin is based to have a high degree on living alongside each other day-to-day, and on reciprocally bestowed acts of affection (2005: 449).

Given such possibilities of kin relationship – that is, on the basis of shared life conditions and shared memories – one can imagine why the constructed forms of kinship are legion. Ilongot of the Philippines say that those who share a history of migration and co-operation 'share a body' (Rosaldo 1980: 9). The Malays studied by Janet Carsten acquire the same 'blood' by living in the same house and eating from the same hearth, 'even when those who live together are not linked by ties of sexual procreation' (2004: 40). A catalogue of commonplace post-natal means of kinship formation would thus include: commensality, sharing food, reincarnation, co-residence, shared memories, working together, adoption, friendship, shared suffering, and so on. But the performative modes of kinship known to anthropology – if not to socio-biology or evolutionary psychology – are indefinitely many, inasmuch as they are predicated on particular cultural logics of relatedness. In certain Inuit groups, people born on the same day are kin, even as those are 'brothers' whose parents once had a sexual liaison, although they are no longer together and neither of the brothers was born of their union. Indeed, the Eskimo-speaking peoples must be the world champions of post-natal kinship. Notoriously flexible as well as inventive, their kinship practices not only demonstrate that relationships of all kinds may be constructed in practice, but equally that they may be deconstructed in practice. As Mark Nuttal says of Greenlanders: 'If a relationship does not exist, then one can be created. At the same time, people can deactivate kinship relationships if they regard them as unsatisfactory. People are therefore not constrained by a rigid consanguineal kinship, but can choose much of their universe of kin' (2000: 34).

The people's freedom to revise their kin relationships, however, does not mean that the relationships as such are under revision – or otherwise without determinate properties and codes of conduct. In a highly performative kinship order, as that of the Inuit, the existing relations between persons are potentially unstable: continuously vulnerable to events and ever subject to negotiation. Unfortunately, such common instabilities of practice have likewise made kinship studies in anthropology vulnerable to the deconstructionist dispositions of the (former) avant-garde in cultural theory. Privileging the 'realities' of practice over the 'essentialisms' of structure, a certain indulgence in what James Faubion called 'the messy content of daily life' (2001: 1) threatens to leave kinship in that limbo of indeterminism where postmodernism habitually came to rest. Faubion says that because people 'fudge', 'make kin', 'change kin', and 'forge and consecrate alliances of greatly diverse sorts', an 'older anthropology of kinship' has been forced 'to endure the perturbations of an ever more unruly "supplement" (a term that I use in its Derridean sense ...)' (2001: 1). What the argument overlooks is that not all differences in

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practice are necessarily differences in form – let alone negations thereof – since identity itself is a selective determination of certain (culturally) relevant resemblances among the many possible ones. Only certain qualities are essential. Many differences in practice may be as insignificant for the integrity of the kinship relation as variations in pronunciation are for the integrity of phonemes. Nor should the flexibility of people's kinship choices be conflated with disorder in the kinship they choose. Responding to this confusion in Inuit studies, Nuttal allows that while people often decide what kinship relationships are appropriate to them, they do not thereby decide what is appropriate to their relationships. He writes, 'While the flexibility of the kinship system allows individuals to choose who they want to have as their relatives (or who they do not wish to have as a relative), it does not give them license to decide how they should behave with that person' (2000: 45, see also 35, 39). Inuit people are not the authors of the kinship relations they adopt, as indeed it is the already existing meanings of these relations that make them desirable or not. Kinship is in this way the perduring condition of the possibility of its (unstable) practice.[6]

In this connection one may well ask, with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2009), whether the constructivist preoccupation with optation, since it singularly problematizes certain relations of consanguinity while assuming no such argument is necessary for the obviously 'made' character of affinity, does not subtly perpetuate our own folkloric distinctions of 'nature' and 'law', 'biogenetic substance' and 'code for conduct'? What to make then of Amazonia, where the presupposed generic notion of kinship – applicable to other peoples, certain animal species, strangers, and even gods – is affinity not consanguinity? Here virtually all men are brothers-in-law, actual or potential, rather than brothers. Yet if both consanguinity and affinity are constituted by human agency, still anthropologists have felt compelled to prove it only for consanguines. Fixed, moreover, on the biological attribute of bodily substance, this proof merely extends the sense of an organic connection from the sphere of the given to that of the constructed. Biology is still there, as Viveiros de Castro remarks, only it has less value than it had before, and sometimes less value than the socially constituted. It would seem that constructivism, although largely inspired by David Schneider's critique of the extension of our own biological fixations to the understanding of kinship in other societies, has nevertheless come too close to the same pass.

Schneider and Durkheim

Or perhaps one should say, the same impasse. Schneider's discussion of 'What is kinship all about?' (1972) and its subsequent elaborations (1977; 1980; 1984) is reminiscent of certain famous philosophical birds that fly in ever-decreasing hermeneutic circles until they fly up their own backsides. Long study of 'kinship' had convinced him that there was no such thing. Neither at home nor abroad did 'kinship' exist as a distinct cultural system, nor *a fortiori* as a comparative, cross-cultural category. Happily, this led to numerous and enlightening analyses of kinship the world around by anthropologists who were explicitly indebted to Schneider's work. It seems his announcement of the end of kinship had the logical force of the famous observation of the Cretan that 'All Cretans are liars.'

Schneider was trained in an era of social science hubris that from its centre in the lesser Cambridge spread its Parsonian doctrine that any differences that could be 'usefully' discerned in the object of anthropological study were legitimate analytic distinctions. Imitating the Galilean resoluto-compositive method, Parsons famously

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divided the social science world into a triad of component 'systems': the cultural, the social, and the psychological – a division that by now seems as arbitrary as it was then influential. Even at the time it struck some that the project was like analysing water into its discernible elements of hydrogen and oxygen in order to understand why it runs downhill.[7] Just so, Schneider's critique of kinship began from an *a priori* radical differentiation of a 'normative system' of social actions and relations from a pure 'cultural system' of symbols and meanings: as if the norms and relations of motherhood, cross-cousinship, brotherhood through eating from the same land, and the like were *not* constituted by and as 'symbols and meanings'. Following Paul Ricoeur in this regard, 'We should have to say, according to this generalized function of the semiotic, not only that the symbolic function is social, but that social reality is fundamentally symbolic' (1979: 99). What Schneider meant by 'culture', however, was nothing more nor less than ontology, what there is for any given people – which made it inevitable that the 'symbols and meanings' he discovered in 'kinship' would not be exclusive to that domain. And what he meant by the social or normative system were prescriptions of people's interactions – which made it inevitable that these were ordered by 'symbols and meanings'. I quote at length:

> By symbols and meanings I mean the basic premises which a culture posits for life: what its units consist in; how these units are defined and differentiated; how they form an integrated order or classification; how the world is structured; in what parts it consists and on what premises it is conceived to exist ... Where the normative system, the how-to-do it rules and regulations, is Ego-centered and particularly appropriate to decision-making or interaction models of analysis, culture is system-centered and appears to be more static and 'given' and far less processual ... Culture takes man's position *vis-à-vis* the world rather than a man's position on how to get along in the world as it is given; it asks, 'Of what does this world consist?' where the normative level asks, 'given the world to be made up in the way it is, how does a man proceed to act in it?' (Schneider 1972: 38).

Apparently Schneider did not notice that in distinguishing the cultural system from social action in the way the ontologically presupposed is to the humanly made, he produced as anthropological theory the functional equivalent of the contrast between naturally given relations of 'blood' and the made relations of 'in-laws' he had discovered in the American kinship system. Insofar as the ontological is the natural within the cultural itself, as also are 'blood' relations, one may even speak of permutations of the same 'symbols and meanings'. Nor did Schneider refer this kinship contrast of 'biology' and 'code for conduct' to the opposition of *physis* and *nomos*, nature and law (or nature and convention) that has been inscribed in Western ontology since it was elaborated by Greek sophists in the fifth century BC (Dillon & Gergel 2003; Kahn 1994; Sahlins 2008). And whereas a structuralist would be pleased to find fractal repetitions of the same opposition – most notoriously, the opposition of nature and convention (i.e. culture) – in various registers of cultural practice, for Schneider the parallels of the kinship contrast of nature and code in the native American concepts of 'nationalism', and again 'religion', were proof that there was no such cultural thing as a 'kinship system'. Why this should be so has never been very clear, since it does not follow that because kinship shares certain ontological characteristics with nationalism and religion, it therefore has no specific properties of its own. Nor has anyone (so far as I know) called out Schneider on his curious reduction of 'nationalism' to the way citizens are recruited, whether by birth or naturalization, or the equally tendentious resolution of 'religion' to how membership is established in church or synagogue (1977: 69-70). This is hardly what these

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cultural 'units consist in; how these units are defined and differentiated', and so on. Schneider should be credited, however, with taking the argument to its logical conclusion, for he deduces from the similarities between American kinship and his bargain definitions of nationalism and religion that there is no such thing as 'nationalism' or 'religion' either, culturally speaking (1972: 59).[8]

A.M. Hocart called the Fijian kinship system 'a whole theology' (1970: 237). 'Sacred blood' (*dra tabu*) flowed from the paternal house with an out-marrying woman, to become manifest in the divine privileges of the uterine nephew (*vasu*), the woman's son. In ritually appropriating the sacrifices offered by his mother's brother's people, this privileged nephew not only usurped their god, but also established enduring relations of material aid and political alliance between his own and his maternal kin (Hocart 1915; Sahlins 2004). Adding the many corollary details would show that Fijian kinship, without losing its determinate character but rather because of it, is also a whole economy and a whole politics. In the typical traditions of dynastic origins, the Fijian paramount chief, a stranger by paternal ancestry, is the sister's son of the indigenous people – whence come intimations of his divinity and specifications of his authority (Sahlins 1981; 2008).

Culture, as Marilyn Strathern has put it, 'consists in the way people draw analogies between different domains of their worlds' (1992: 47). The method Schneider used to deconstruct a culture is now the normal science of cultural order. This goes some way towards explaining the paradoxical impetus that his writing against kinship gave to the cross-cultural study of it. Positioning kinship in the realm of 'symbols and meanings', Schneider introduced a productive 'cultural' turn to a field that had itself gone meaningless and sterile, largely by its obsession with jural rights and obligations, and more generally by the paralysing theoretical effects of the culture-social structure distinction. Yet even as many ethnographers were parlaying his insights into important works on the diverse cultural forms and values of kinship relations, Schneider held to the answer of his article, 'What is kinship all about?', namely 'in the pure cultural level there is no such thing as kinship' (1972: 50). 'From the beginning of this paper,' he wrote, 'I have put the word "kinship" in quotes, in order to affirm that it is a theoretical notion in the mind of the anthropologist which has no discernible cultural referent in fact' (1972: 50). Or again:

> If 'kinship' is studied at the cultural level ... then it is apparent that 'kinship' is an artifact of the anthropologist's analytic apparatus and has no concrete counterpart in the cultures of any of the societies he studied. Hence the conclusion that 'kinship,' like totemism, the matrilineal complex and matriarchy, is a non-subject, since it does not exist in any culture known to man (1972: 59).

But as I say, Schneider's own project was based on an ontological distinction without a difference, for it is only by ignoring the symbolic constitution of social relations that one can speak of 'the irreducibility of the cultural to the social systems, or vice versa' (1972: 60). It is some testimony to the fateful outcome of this Parsonian problematic that Hildred and Clifford Geertz, who were likewise schooled in it, also came to doubt 'that kinship forms a definable object of study to be found in a recognizable form everywhere, a contained universe of internally organized relationships awaiting only an anthropologist to explore it' (1975: 153).

In sum, studying phenomena that do not exist by the ethnocentric means of our own *physis-nomos* dualism, now all anthropologists would be liars.

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Including Émile Durkheim, whom Schneider put in the company of L.H. Morgan and followers in attributing kinship to the natural facts of biological reproduction. Of course, Durkheim did employ the opposition of nature and culture in his sociology: most importantly in his notion of duplex man, whose egocentric, presocial dispositions were sublimated by social constraints; and rather in passing (in the *Elementary forms*) by the argument that collective representations are to social structure as the ideational is to the natural. But Durkheim's notions of kinship were thoroughly and explicitly constructionist. So much so that to pin some sort of genealogical fallacy on him would require a wholly conjectural stretch, which Schneider manages to achieve by certain unsupported allegations to the effect that the French master's sociological explications entailed a covert biologism. For example,

> Durkheim implicitly depended on some motivating factor, some hidden motor behind kinship to make it work. That motor was probably biology in the form of the axiom that Blood is Thicker than Water. But it had to be kept implicit, as motivation was kept implicit while he focused on the social facts, on kinship as social relations (Schneider 1984: 181).

Actually the key text, noted at length by Schneider, is Durkheim's radical constructivist critique of a book by Professor J. Kohler on the history of marriage that, for its part, defended Morgan's derivation of kinship from the knowable conditions of procreation (Durkheim 1898). Published in the inaugural volume of *L'Année Sociologique*, Durkheim's review is still cited today by those who likewise claim that 'kinship organization expresses something completely different than genealogical relations', that it 'essentially consists in juridical and moral relations sanctioned by society', and that it 'is a social tie or it is nothing' (Durkheim 1898: 318). Obviously this unequivocal differentiation of kinship from consanguinity and genealogy was sequitur to Durkheim's central project of disengaging the social as an autonomous phenomenal realm, subject only to its own determinations. As a social fact, kinship had to be explained by other social facts rather than reduced to biology or psychology. Hence Durkheim's sustained demonstration of the disconformity between kinship values and genealogical proximity; his notices of the creation of kinship by adoption and ceremonial legitimation, and its abolition by emancipation (in Roman law); and his detailed argument that Omaha and Choctaw kinship vocabularies 'must express something completely different from the relations of consanguinity strictly speaking' (1898: 315). If in Omaha the same term is applied to mother, mother's sister, mother's father's sister, mother's brother's daughter, and mother's brother's son's daughter, we are not dealing with practices of marriage and procreation. So what are we dealing with?

According to Schneider (1984: 101), Durkheim does not tell us 'what kinship is all about', since the claim that it consists of moral and juridical relations will not distinguish it from other social relations. This is certainly true in the sense that Durkheim offered no explicit intensional definition of kinship. Yet in regard to certain aspects of its social nature, he did make a point of its distinctive quality, 'some hidden motor behind kinship to make it work'. In the course of arguing for the independence of kinship from genealogy, he offered a determinate sense of what kinship is: mutual relations of being, participation in one another's existence. The point appears first in connection with the evident disproportions between the value of certain kinsmen – for example, as matrilineally or patrilineally related – and degrees of genealogical proximity. Some particularity of religious belief or social structure could make a child more

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closely or distantly attached to its mother than its father, Durkheim said, 'more intimately mixed [*melé*] in the life of one or the other, so that it will not be the relative of the one or the other to the same degree' (1898: 317). Secondly, the same is implied by totemism, which for Durkheim was a primitive condition of familial relations, and

> [i]f such is the case, to be a member of a family it is necessary and sufficient that *one have in oneself something of the totemic being* ... But if this *participation* can result from reproduction (generation), it can also be obtained in many other ways: by tattooing, by all forms of alimentary communion, by blood contract, etc. (1898: 317, my emphasis).

Durkheim did not know it, but what sweeter confirmation of his sociology of kinship could there be than the derivation of the English and French scholarly term 'totem' from a Proto Algonquian word for 'co-resident' – via the Ojibway *do.de.m* 'patrilineal clan', 'clan eponym'?[9]

Mutuality of being

In his capacity as a missionary, Maurice Leenhardt once suggested to a New Caledonian elder that Christianity had introduced the notion of spirit (*esprit*) into Canaque thought. 'Spirit? Bah!' the old man objected: 'You didn't bring us the spirit. We already knew the spirit existed. We have always acted in accord with the sprit. What you've brought us is the body' (1979: 164). Commenting on this interchange, Roger Bastide wrote, 'The Melanesian did not conceive himself otherwise than a node of participations; he was outside more than he was inside himself' (1973: 33). That is, Bastide explained, the man was in his lineage and his totem, in nature and in the *socius*. By contrast, the missionaries would teach him to sunder himself from these alterities in order to discover his true identity, an identity marked by the limits of his body.

Later in the same piece, Bastide transposed the Melanesian sense of personhood to the African subjects he was principally concerned with, and in so doing produced a clear description of the 'dividual' person, the one destined for anthropological fame from the writings of McKim Marriott (1976) and Marilyn Strathern (1988). Bastide wrote of the person 'who is divisible' and also 'not distinct' in the sense that aspects of the self are variously distributed among others, as are others in oneself. Emphasizing these transcendent dimensions of the individual, he noted that 'the plurality of the constituent elements of the person' moved him to 'participate in other realities'. Reincarnating an ancestor, he had a portion of the lineage within him; associated with a totem, he had an 'exterior soul' as well as an internal one; knowing a bush-dwelling twin, he overcomes the distance that separates him from sacred space. Hence for the African as for the Melanesian, 'he does not exist except in the measure he is "outside" and "different" than himself' (Bastide 1973: 38).[10]

This, then, is what I take a 'kinship system' to be: a manifold of intersubjective participations, founded on mutualities of being. The present discussion thus joins a tradition that stretches back from Strathern, Marriott, and Bastide; through Leenhardt, Lévy-Bruhl, and Durkheim; to certain passages of Aristotle on the distinctive friendship of kinship. The classical text is the *Nicomachean ethics*. Anchored as it may be in concepts of birth and descent, Aristotle's discussion of kinship at once goes beyond and encompasses relations of procreation in larger meanings of mutual belonging that could just as well accommodate the various performative modes of relatedness. Or so I read the possibilities of his sense of 'the same entity in discrete subjects'.

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> Parents love children as being themselves (for those sprung from them are as it were other selves of theirs, resulting from the separation), children [love] parents as being what they have grown from, and brothers [love] each other by virtue of their having grown from the same sources: for the self-sameness of their relation to *those* produces the same with each other (hence the way people say 'same blood,' 'same root,' and things like that). They are, then, the same entity in a way, even though in discrete subjects ... The belonging to each other of cousins and other relatives derives from these, since it exists by virtue of their being of the same origins, but some of these belong more closely while others are more distant, depending on whether the ancestral common sources are near or further off (Aristotle 2002: VIII.1161[a]–1162[b], emphasis in original).

Of course, as the sage says, such mutuality of being comes in various forms and degrees. But generally considered, kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are members of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent. Ethnography tells repeatedly of such co-presence of kinsmen and the corollaries thereof in the transpersonal unities of bodies, feelings, and experience. Before exploring the relevant notion of 'being' and its entailments, however, it is useful to consider a few examples.

J. Prytz Johansen in *The Maori and his religion* (a yet-to-be acknowledged classic of kinship studies): 'Kinship is more than what to us is community and solidarity. The common will which conditions the solidarity is rooted in something deeper, an inner solidarity of souls' (1954: 34). Citing an old text collected by John White: 'You were born in me,' says a Maori. 'Yes that is true,' admits the other, 'I was born in you.' The interchange of being is more complex here than it appears, Johansen notes, if due to the same sense of transpersonal existence, for the Maori pronoun 'I' is also used to refer to one's entire kinship group (*hapū*, usually), past or present, collectively or in regard to famous members. More on this 'kinship I' in a moment, but in the present connection recall the distinctive possessive pronouns in Polynesian languages that notably refer to certain relatives and parts of one body, and signify an inalienable and intrinsic attachment. As suffixed to kinship terms in New Caledonia, such pronouns make the possessed appear 'an integral part of the possessor' (Leenhardt 1979: 13).

Something similar is involved in the difference reported for English townspeople by Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern between relating to others and 'being related'. As they write, '[T]he belonging produced by kinship has, for these people, a whole further dimension to it' (2000: 153). Persons in Alltown may have a sense of common belonging through what belongs to them, but 'families consider themselves as people who belong to one another' (2000: 150). Janet Carsten (2004: 106-7) develops a similar conclusion from contemporary accounts of adopted persons who search for their birth kin. Without knowledge of their birth mother, though to a lesser extent the father, these people, Carsten comments, apparently experience a sense of self as 'fractured and partial'. Here, then, is a notion of personhood where kinship is not simply added to bounded individuality, but where 'relatives are perceived as intrinsic to the self'.

Just as English families are 'people who belong to one another', so for the Nyakyusa of the African Rift Valley, kinsmen are 'members of one another' (Wilson 1957: 226). Monica Wilson puts the phrase in quotation marks, although it is unclear whether she is citing Nyakyusa rather than St Paul on the relations between members of the body of Christ. Like the constructivism of the latter, however, Nyakyusa conceive a kinship of mutual being with co-residents of their age-villages as well as consanguines and those to whom cattle have been given, that is, affines (Wilson 1950; 1951). Inversely if to similar effect, Victor Turner relates of Ndembu that people live together because they are matrilineally related,

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for 'the dogma of kinship asserts that matrilineal kin participate in one another's existence' (1957: 129). All this gives sense to Wilson's useful characterization of kinship terms as 'categories of belonging', a phrase also adopted by Bodenhorn in regard to Iñupiat (2000: 131). Kin terms indicate kinds and/or degrees of conjoint being: their reciprocals thus complete a relationship that amounts to a unity of differentiated parts (see below). Brothers and sisters, say Karembola people of Madagascar, are 'one people': they are 'people of one kind;' they 'own one another' (Middleton 2000: 113).

Defining kinship in regard to the Korowai people of Western New Guinea as 'intersubjective belonging', Rupert Stasch (2009: 107, 129ff.) provides a superb ethnography of the argument I make here. People's possessive prefixing of kinship terms, Stasch writes, 'emphasizes that a kinship other is a predicate of oneself. A speaker recognizes the other as the speaker's own, and embraces that other as an object proper to the speaker's own being' (2009: 132). In some respect his discussion is even useful for a certain ambiguity, in that he rather stresses 'belonging' in the differentiating sense of 'possession', thus implying a self-other relation, while noting also the sense of 'being a part of', thus of mutual co-presence (Stasch 2009: 132).[11] However, when discussing the subjectivity of kin relationships, the emotional and moral solidarity, there is no doubt he is speaking of 'mutuality of being' in the latter meaning, for he uses that very phrase:

> Reckoning with ways that emotion, value, and morality are integral to kin categorization, anthropologists have often previously linked kin relationships to feelings of intersubjective mutuality of being, using such terms as 'conviviality,' 'love,' 'care,' 'amity,' and 'enduring, diffuse solidarity' ... These vocabularies are all pertinent to understanding Korowai kin relatedness. Korowai themselves frequently describe specific kin relations in terms of a feeling of 'love, longing, care' for a person, a mental activity of 'caring for, loving' another person, or a moral position of being 'unitary, solidary, amicable' with someone (2009: 133).

Stasch here refers to a number of well-known observations on kinship amity, including those of Schneider (1968; 1984), Meyer Fortes (1969), and Robert McKinley (2001). Just as well known are the reservations almost all anthropologists quickly append, so soon as they speak of kinship love, to the effect that in practice not all kin are lovable – and often the closest relatives have the worst quarrels (see below). In Stasch's own terms: '[K]inship belonging is an impossible standard: the ideal includes its own failure' (2009: 136). No gainsaying that, but that does not gainsay either the amity subsumed in kinship relations of interdependent existence. I take diffuse enduring solidarity and the like as the corollary subjectivity of mutual being. Aloha is even implied, although of course love is not a relation of kinship alone and no matter that it is honoured in the breach. A breach of kinship love also implies the constituted love of kinfolk: the failure includes its own ideal.

We are inevitably led to Marilyn Strathern's discussion of the 'dividual' Melanesian person, a text that has inspired so many other ethnographic discoveries of the like, and not only in Melanesia. In Strathern's oft-quoted characterization:

> Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm (1988: 13).[12]

Beside her own experience in the New Guinea Highlands and her readings of other Melanesian societies, Strathern's description of the person as the 'composite site' of the substances and actions of plural others has resonated in ethnographic reports from

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around the region, including Vanuatu (Hess 2009: 51f), Fiji (Becker 1995: 4), Tanga (Foster 1990: 432) and the Trobriands (Mosko 2010). Then again, the same 'dividual' has been found in Polynesia (Mosko 1992) and Micronesia (Lieber 1990: 74), as well as Ming China (Clunas 2004: 11) and the New Kingdom Period of ancient Egypt (Meskell & Joyce 2003: 17-18) – not to forget McKim Marriott's (1976: 111) original exposition of the 'dividual' in South Asia and Bastide's (1973) *avant la lettre* discussion of the 'African person'. To adopt the title of a currently popular American television series, 'curb your enthusiasm': the Strathernian 'dividual' is threatening to become a universal form of pre-modern subjectivity – for reasons, it seems, of some confusion between personhood and kinship relations, with its corollary conflation of partibility and participation.

Considering that the issue is kinship as such, I take a more sociocentric view of what is theoretically at stake. This means at least as much attention to the transpersonal distribution of the self among multiple others as to the inscription of multiple others in the one subject, for what is in question is the character of the relationships rather than the nature of the person. Since Strathern was drawing a contrast to the autonomous Western individual – which in any case does not describe such individuals in their own family and kindred contexts – the effect was a highlighted interest in the 'singular person' too much like the demarcation and celebration of the bourgeois subject she was putting in question: dividual individuals, as it were. Hence in her extraordinary work on *The gender of the gift* there is a certain unresolved tension between the marked emphasis on dividual persons and the relatively backgrounded relationships that constitute them – the intersubjective relationships that are taken here as the fundamental elements of kinship order. Still, there are further implications of thus resolving the relations of kin in notions of person.

For all that 'the person' is a current idol of the anthropological tribe, as an analytic category it too may derive some motivation from the hegemonic force of bourgeois individualism. That helps explain why the partible 'dividual' has become a regular figure of kinship studies as well as a widely distributed icon of the pre-modern subject. (Perhaps we have been staring for too long at ego-centred, cum egocentric, kinship diagrams.) The problem here is not just the category mistake of rendering the relationships of kinship as the attributes of singular persons. The problem is that kin persons are not the only kind who are multiple, divisible, and relationally constructed. In this connection, not enough attention has been paid to Alan Rumsey's (2000) demonstration – following Émile Benveniste (1971) and Greg Urban (1989) on the meaning and use of personal pronouns – that the capacities of partibility and hierarchy (or the encompassment of others) are general conditions of humans in language.[13] Of course, this does not mean these capacities are necessarily enacted in social practice, as in the modes of 'dividual' persons and the 'kinship I'. On the other hand, both may be realized in the same society, indeed the same discourse, as Rumsey showed for certain Melanesian and Polynesian instances. Then again, as a general condition of possibility, partible and relational identities may characterize persons who are not 'dividual' kin persons – but perhaps even bourgeois individuals like us.

Even individuals like us may be 'employees', 'clients', 'teammates', 'classmates ', guests', 'customers', 'aliens', and the like. These are relational terms. When aspects of the same person, variously salient in different social contexts, they are instances of partibility. But they are not instances of 'dividuality', since they do not entail the incorporation of others in the one person, making her or him a composite being in a participatory sense. Partibility thus describes a larger class of persons than 'dividuality', which is a differentiated subclass

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consisting of partibility plus co-presence. The two should not be confused, although as personhood and kinship they often are. Perhaps this is how we get 'dividuals' in Ming China and the New Kingdom of Egypt – even as we might ignore that bourgeois persons are in their intimate kin relationships as 'dividual' as Melanesians.

Not only should kinship and person be disentangled, but for understanding kinship much is gained by privileging intersubjective being over the singular person as the composite site of multiple others. For one, the extensional aspects of kin relationships, the transpersonal practices of coexistence from sharing to mourning, are better motivated by the sociocentric considerations of mutuality. 'Intrinsic' to each other, as Janet Carsten put it, kinsmen are people who live each other's lives and die each other's deaths. To the extent they lead common lives, they partake of each other's sufferings and joys, sharing one another's experiences even as they take responsibility for and feel the effects of each other's acts. For another thing, mutuality of being has the virtue of describing the various means by which kinship may be constituted, whether natally or post-natally, from pure 'biology' to pure performance, and any combinations thereof. In this connection, 'being' encompasses and goes beyond the notions of common substance, however such consubstantiality is locally defined and established. Neither a universal nor an essential condition of kinship, common substance is better understood as a culturally relative hypostasis of common being. Then again, as the distinctive quality of kinship, mutuality of existence helps account for how procreation and performance may be alternate forms of it. The constructed modes of kinship are like those predicated on birth precisely as they involve the transmission of life-capacities among persons. If love and nurture, giving food or partaking in it together, working together, living from the same land, mutual aid, sharing the fortunes of migration and residence, as well as adoption and marriage, are so many grounds of kinship, they all know with procreation the meaning of participating in one another's life. I take the risk: all means of constituting kinship are in essence the same.

Nancy Munn relates how a Gawa man begins to create a fosterage relation with an infant by masticating food and putting it in the baby's mouth. 'This transaction', she writes, 'is a paradigmatic instance of food-giving as the separation of food from one's own body for incorporation by another' (1986: 50) – a description, note, that could serve as well for breast-feeding or pregnancy. Gift-giving, especially of food, is life-giving, as Johansen lays out at length for Maori. 'Food can give a new nature since it can introduce a new kind of life into the eater ... The eater is not only bound to the givers, but they on the other hand recognize their own life in the guest who has eaten and respect this' (1954: 108). Moreover, the life-giving is normally reciprocal. Johansen goes on to explain how the life-force in the gift compels a return from within the recipient, which is why Maori proverbially say, 'Property is knitted brows.' Although he is critical of Marcel Mauss's famous essay on the gift, Johansen essentially confirms that the *hau* of the gift is the why of the gift.

At the other extreme from common practices of gift exchange, some of the more idiosyncratic forms of post-natal kinship recorded by anthropologists are nevertheless motivated by comparable principles of shared existence. For example, the Trukese category 'my sibling from the same canoe', referring to those who sustained each other through a life-threatening trial at sea. As described by Mac Marshall:

> The term refers to men who shared a disabled canoe, drifted together at sea for many days supporting each other's flagging spirits, and sharing completely what meager food and water they had until they

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> finally reached land or were rescued at sea. Born of mutual aid in adversity these men swear eternally to treat each other like brothers: they would 'take care or look after one another,' 'cooperate,' 'agree to be of one mind,' 'share land or other resources.' These phrases encapsulate the essence of proper kinship feeling (1977: 647).

Similar experiences may lead Greenland Inuit to form a name-sharing kinship, even when they do not share a name: 'They choose to become name-sharers and address each other as *atíitsara* ["name-sake"] usually on the basis of a shared experience, such as surviving a difficult time on the sea ice during a winter hunting trip' (Nuttal 2000: 49, see also 52).

The same mutuality of existence is involved in trans-specific relations of kinship, such as the plants who are children of the Amazonian or New Caledonian women who cultivate them, or the animals of Siberia and Amazonia who are affines of the men who hunt them. This is no metaphor, but a sociology of moral, ritual, and practical conduct. For Maori, kinship is cosmological inasmuch as all things – including plants, animals, and 'the very elements' – descend from the same Sky Father (Rangi) and Earth Mother (Papa). In the words of surveyor and ethnographer Elsdon Best:

> When the Maori entered the forest he felt that he was among his own kindred, for had not trees and man a common origin, both being offspring of Tane? Hence he was among his own folk as it were, and that forest possessed a *tapu* life principle even as man does. Thus, when the Maori wished to fell a tree wherefrom to fashion a canoe or house timbers ... he was compelled to perform a placatory rite ere he could slay one of the offspring of Tane (1924: 452).

The relevant Maori category of common belonging, *tupuna*, normally translated as 'ancestor' or 'grandfather', is classificatory, denoting an ancient with some legendary significance for current life. Johansen (1954: 148) observes that in traditional sagas, *tupuna* may refer to flies, whales, birds, trees, the canoe which brought a tribe to New Zealand, and Captain Cook (for example). All such beings – including what we deem inanimate 'things' – are subjects who share essential attributes of common descent, kinship, and personhood with Maori people.

End of Part One. In the next issue of JRAI (17:2), the entailments of mutuality of being: including the transpersonal character of experience; the different mutualities of primary kin and their affines; and, following Viveiros de Castro and Johansen, the common ontological grounds of kinship, gift exchange, magic, sorcery, and witchcraft.

NOTES

A shorter version of this article was presented in June 2010 at the celebration of Professor Bruce Kapferer's 70th birthday at the University of Bergen. I also offer this publication as an homage to Bruce, who is the 'father' of the cosmological understanding of culture that importantly informs it. Comments on an earlier version of this article were offered by Maurice Bloch, Robert Brightman, Janet Carsten, Philippe Descola, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, Susan McKinnon, Alan Rumsey, Thomas Trautmann, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, to all of whom I am most grateful.

[1] Maurice Godelier and Michel Panoff asked this question in 1998, in the introduction to a collected work on *La production du corps*. None of the societies discussed in the book, they said – some sixteen were the main subjects of the articles, half from the island Pacific – held that human birth was the product of humans alone. Humans, they opined, were not sufficient to produce another human being; spiritual beings were also necessary (Godelier & Panoff 1998: xvii-xviii).

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[2] For further reference, such claims of responsibility for the life of children – and of compensation for their injury or death – on the part of affinal kin are frequent concomitants of intermarriage between corporate descent groups (see below). It may even be that the whole substance and appearance of the child comes from the affines, as from the sperm of the father among the matrilineal Mandak of New Ireland (Derlon 1998). See also Fox (1980) on the 'flow of life' in Austronesian societies.

[3] I am indebted to Alan Rumsey for bringing this ethnography to my attention.

[4] On the common identity of people and land in other Pacific societies see, for example, Margaret Jolly (1981), Jane Goodale (1981), Robert Rubenstein (1981), and especially James Leach's monograph *Creative land* concerning the Reite people of New Guinea's Rai Coast, who 'incorporate bodies into places and places into bodies' (2003: iv). As against those who argue that kinship is a metaphor or idiom of land-holding (e.g. E. Leach 1961), property being the utilitarian reality of the matter, James Leach shows that land and persons are in the same ontological register:

> The land is very much alive, and enters directly into the constitution of persons. The relation between land and person is not one of containment, with the land outside and the essence of the person inside, but of integration. ... the constitution of persons and places are mutually entailed aspects of the same process. In this sense, kinship is geography, or landscape (J. Leach 2003: 30-1).

[5] Margaret Mead reported something similar for New Guinea Arapesh, where a father's parental claim is not that he has begotten the child but that he fed it (1935: 36).

[6] Not to rule out the risk of practice to kinship categories, and the possibilities of change. By and large, change in kinship categories is beyond the scope of this article. But I will say that something depends on just who is innovating, under what circumstances, and with what powers. Also, any such change in a category, however contingently motivated, enters into relations with coexisting categories as well as with the world; hence the effect, though it be altogether novel, is also likely to be a culturally relevant form (cf. Sahlins 2000; 2004: chap. 3; 2008).

[7] At the time, Clyde Kluckhohn made a relevant objection. As Adam Kuper described it:

> Specifically, Kluckhohn objected that social structure should be treated, in part at least, as an element of culture: 'social structure is part of the cultural map, the social system is built on girders supplied by explicit and implicit culture.' According to Parsons, Kluckhohn was too much of a humanist to accept that social structure could be separated from culture as 'an authentically independent level in the organization of the components of action' (Kuper 1999: 55).

[8] Indeed as the argument goes, there would be no such thing as anything: no possible internal differentiations of a cultural order, inasmuch as a shared ontology obviates them.

[9] Thanks to Rob Brightman for this etymological comment on totemism.

[10] Among other early descriptions of 'dividuals' there is Nancy Munn on Gawan funeral custom:

> Gawan mortuary practices are concerned with factoring out the marital, paternal and maternal components which have been amalgamated to form the deceased's holistic being, and with returning this being to a partial, detotalized state – its unamalgamated matrilineal source. Death itself ... dissolves neither the intersubjective amalgam that constitutes the *bodily person* and forms the ground of each self, nor the intersubjective connections between others built on and condensed within the deceased's person (1986: 164, emphasis added).

[11] The self-other opposition is reiterated in Stasch's adoption of Faubion's observation that '[t]he terms of kinship are inherently linking terms; ... they render the self in and through its relations to certain others (and vice versa)' (Faubion 2001: 3, quoted in Stasch 2009: 132). In the work referred to, Faubion treats kinship as a technology of the self in the Foucauldian sense: a technology of 'subjectivation' consisting in part of 'subjection' (or Althusserian 'interpellation') and in part of self-fashioning (2001: 11ff.).

[12] Alan Rumsey (pers. comm.) points out that, according to this characterization, Melanesian persons are as individually as they are dividually conceived – which poses something of an unexamined problem. Probably Strathern meant a dividual person as an individual entity (or subject).

[13] In one of Rumsey's wordings, '[M]oments of both encompassment and partibility are inherent in language, corresponding to two distinct dimensions in which the pronouns are meaningful (the "direct indexical" and "anaphoric")' (2000: 101). Rumsey is able to show, for example, how in a single discourse, the shifting frames of reference of the pronoun 'I' can refer alternately to the current (partible) speaker, the collective kin group to which he belongs, or the long-dead chief who heroically instantiates the group.

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Ce qu'est la parenté (première partie)

Résumé

Une modeste proposition pour résoudre l'équation, vieille de 150 ans, de ce qu'est la parenté, sa spécificité, à savoir la mutualité d'existence : des personnes qui sont membres les unes des autres, qui participent à l'existence les unes des autres. La « mutualité d'existence » vaut aussi pour la constitution de lien de parenté par la construction sociale et la procréation, bien qu'elle tienne compte de « la mystérieuse efficacité de la relationalité » (Viveiros de Castro), de la manière dont les parents vivent les vies et meurent les morts des uns et des autres. La parenté, en mettant en jeu ces relations transpersonnelles d'existence et d'expérience, s'inscrit dans le même ordre ontologique que la magie, l'échange de cadeaux, la sorcellerie et la magie noire.

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