

Kinship and Beyond: The Genealogical Model Reconsidered

Sandra Bamford and James Leach, eds. 2009. Berghahn Books, New York. 292 pp., 21 illustrations, bibliography, index. \$95.00 (hardback). ISBN 9781845454227.

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Received: August 21st 2009

Published: August 26th 2010

Volume 1:28-29

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David Schneider (1984) has famously showed that the original anthropological conception of kinship unwittingly reflected a middle-class Western folk biology, and furthermore, other kinship systems are themselves based on different key symbols. Yet since Schneider pronounced the death of kinship as a distinct domain, it has been revived more than once. This collection of ten essays is the latest major work to call for renewed attention to the topic, especially with respect to contemporary questions of how cultures relate to nature.

This volume takes the Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind, the target of Schneider's critique, and examines it as a cultural fact in its own right. Each of the authors in this volume addresses himself or herself to the consequences of genealogical thinking. The genealogical model of kinship, as described in the introductory chapter, is a cultural construction of relationships in terms of inherited, biogenetic attributes. As the editors show in their detailed review of kinship studies from W. H. R. Rivers, through descent theory, past Schneider's critique, to recent studies, the genealogical model not only lingers in the work of anthropologists, it also informs the way people of many cultures and in many contexts think about nature and culture.

In this respect, many of the authors echo Roy Wagner's argument that each culture makes its own distinction between the arbitrary and the conventional. Science, many authors imply for instance, is the way Western culture "invents" nature as a domain beyond human control. The knowledge nature scientists produce is often treated as though it were a representation of these forces, or a means by which people can predict and thus control natural forces. An example of this construct in science is provided by Sandra Bamford and James Leach in their introduction (p. 11); they discuss a case of a hospital accidentally implanting the wrong human embryos in patients'

wombs, the hospital immediately acted to flush the potential children from the bodies of the mothers. Had the fetuses been delivered by their surrogate mothers, it would seem, there would necessarily be a conflict between the chromosomal and uterine genetrixes over maternity. The reason why surrogacy and other IVF protocols attract controversy is because they alter the relationships between people by manipulating the biological substances that symbolize them. I want to focus on a few essays in *Kinship and Beyond* which best exemplify this theme.

In his essay titled "Knowledge as Kinship", James Leach presents a case of Reite kinship in Papua New Guinea (PNG) where membership in local groups is based on either matri- or patri-filiation, and coresidence or mutual recognition of knowledge of a kin group's founding myths. Leach argues that Reite do not believe that genealogical ties automatically confer membership in the group, nor do they believe that kinship is constructed or performed through people's creative symbolic acts. The nonbiological bases for Reite membership are equally constitutive of innate personhood. People, in essence, share substance with each other and with the landscape itself. Sandra Bamford ("Family Trees' Among the Kamea of Papua New Guinea"), describing another case from PNG, also argues that when Kamea use plants to assist procreation, they do not creatively enact kinship through ritual as much as recognize a wider set of possible consubstantial relationships, including between humans and nonhumans.

Sounding a somewhat contrary note in her essay ("Revealing and Obscuring Rivers's Pedigrees") on Veso in Madagascar, Rita Astuti describes a society in which people do hold a genealogical model of kinship, but simply do not use it in everyday talk. In the everyday discourse of kinship, people do not assume a genealogical model of inheritance of bodily traits. Yet

when given a hypothetical scenario, people's reasoning about inheritance is premised on genealogy. Veso suppress this when talking about physical resemblances between fictive kin because this, Astuti argues, allows them to emphasize the social norm of solidarity and mutual obligation among kin. Genealogy and alternative models coexist in this culture, but are only deployed in specific contexts.

In a three-part essay, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro ("The Gift and the Given") explores the ontological presuppositions behind genealogy and other models of kinship by linking kinship to magic, animism and gift economies. He also builds a case for bringing Levi-Strauss back into kinship studies. Although Levi-Strauss assumed that a distinction between consanguinity and affinity was a natural fact, Viveiros de Castro points out how he differs from the descent theorists Schneider criticizes. Descent theory makes kinship into a jural system of rights and obligations that arise from natural bonds. Levi-Strauss's model makes kinship into a Maussian gift economy, in which both subjects and objects are in circulation. Hence the former leads to genealogical assumptions and the latter suggests an alternative, horizontal imagination of relatedness. Viveiros de Castro sketches another possibility, the inverse of the genealogical model, which he sees at work in Amazonian kinship. Amazonians, he writes, believe that affinity is a natural property of people's being, in that they believe that they are fundamentally estranged from each other, and have to work to create relationships based on sameness through cultural practices. He alludes to Leach's case and suggests that his inversion of genealogy is what is needed to properly analyze systems like Reite and Kamea.

This book is a welcome addition to the ongoing revival of kinship, and will stimulate further debate among its many participants. One complaint is that the chapters on the implications for kinship of genomics, thoroughbred horseracing, African colonial policy, and IVF, as well as Tim Ingold's intriguing essay outlining a phenomenology of social relationships, are not as clearly articulated with what this reviewer saw as the most significant ideas of the book. Berghahn Books, the publisher, should be commended for making this book available in a digital format as well as in hardback, and by allowing readers to purchase individual chapters for download (at <http://www.berghahnbooks.com/title.php?rowtag=BamfordKinship>) as well as the whole work. This will give more students access to the book's rich and provocative material.

Reference Cited

Schneider, D. 1984. *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.