

Vital Relations

I

The Difference Kinship Makes

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What difference does kinship make to our conception of the conditions of “modernity”? Why should kinship matter in an analysis, for instance, of the ways Italian textile and clothing manufacturers outsource the production of their fashion lines to China? How might attention to kinship illuminate our understanding of the Argentine nation-state and its oil industry? What does it mean that even high-tech, scientific workplaces—such as blood banks and pathology labs in Penang, Malaysia—are thoroughly domesticated by relations of kinship and marriage? Can Indian shipyard workers’ ideas about kinship, reproduction, and the divine tell us something unexpected about the presumed secular nature of productive labor in the global economy? How do Mormon understandings of kinship and adoption help us reflect on mainstream Protestant and even ostensibly secular ideas of kinship? What can kinship perspectives add to current discussions on “secular ethics” and claims that we are living in a modern, “secular age”?

Why are these provocative questions? For the past 150 years, at least, theories of social evolution, development, and modernity have been unanimous in their assumption that kinship organizes simpler, “traditional,” prestate societies but not complex, “modern,” state societies. And they have been unanimous in their presupposition that within modern state-based societies, kinship has been relegated to the domestic domain, has lost its economic and political functions, has retained no organizing force in modern

political and economic structures and processes, and has become secularized and rationalized. *Vital Relations* challenges these presuppositions.

This is a book by anthropologists. Indeed, it is because of our historical and ethnographic inquiries across the globe—in North America, Mexico, Argentina, Europe, China, and Malaysia—that we have been compelled to reconsider the significance of kinship for comprehending the political, economic, and religious relations of “modern” societies. But this is not a book about anthropology alone or for anthropologists only. It will be of interest to anyone who wishes to gain a different perspective on the concept of modernity itself and on the place of kinship and “family” in modern life. It will also be of interest to anyone who wishes to consider, with us, how our ethnographic investigations call into question the validity of long-standing ideas about what counts as modernity.

THE IDEA OF MODERNITY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE PROBLEM OF DOMAINS

Vital Relations brings anthropological understandings of kinship to bear on a critique of the narratives of social evolution, development, and modernization that originated in the West but now circulate widely across the globe as a powerful ideology that shapes both individual and national aspirations. Susan McKinnon (chapter 2, this volume) traces a genealogy of explicit and implicit ideas that give form to these narratives of modernity. She argues that a wide range of social theorists share a critical set of assumptions about what they see as the main lines of social development and differentiation, even as these assumptions are expressed in quite different theoretical terms. The point is not to single out or stereotype particular theories and theorists but rather to draw into plain view the often unspoken, limiting assumptions about the place and significance of kinship in so-called modern societies.

These assumptions include not only a temporal or typological dimension that differentiates *between* societies but also a structural dimension that concerns the relative differentiation of institutional domains *within* societies. Along the temporal/typological dimension, so-called premodern or kin-based societies are seen as organized by reference to kinship status, relations between groups, and religious ideas and ritual ceremonies. By contrast, “modern,” state-based societies are seen as organized by reference to territory and market, relations between individuals, and rationalized, secular contracts and laws. Along the structural dimension, in kin-based societies, kinship is understood to constitute the fundamental structure in terms of which all other social relations—political, economic, and religious

—are organized; indeed, all kinship relations are simultaneously and inextricably also political, economic, and religious relations. In “modern,” state-based societies, however, kinship is understood to be relegated to the domestic domain and divested of its political and economic functions—which are separated into distinct institutional domains. Thus, in kin-based societies, kinship provides the underlying structure and organizing force of political, economic, and religious relations, whereas in “modern,” state-based societies, kinship is assumed to have lost its organizing force and, instead, to be subject to the constraints of political, economic, and religious relations. Such assumptions, we argue, have had a collective rhetorical impact on the conceptualization of modernity in the social sciences that exceeds the determinism of any individual author and that has created unhelpful silences in our discipline and beyond.

MODELS OF MODERNITY AND HISTORICAL CHANGE

We hasten to stress that our purpose is not to suggest that there has been no historical change, nor that these social science models do not address what have been historically significant transformations in the history of the world. To take the United States as an example of these transformations, it is clear that between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, massive social transformations occurred in the structures of kinship, marriage, and family life and their relationships to economic and political structures and processes. Nancy Cott notes:

The period between 1780 and 1830 was a time of wide- and deep-ranging transformation, including the beginning of rapid intensive economic growth, especially in foreign commerce, agricultural productivity, and the fiscal and banking system; the start of sustained urbanization; demographic transition toward modern fertility patterns; marked change toward social stratification by wealth and growing inequality in the distribution of wealth; rapid pragmatic adaptation in the law; shifts from unitary to pluralistic networks in personal association; unprecedented expansion in primary education; democratization in the political process; invention of a new language of political and social thought; and—not least—with respect to family life, the appearance of “domesticity.” (Cott 1977:3)

In the midst of these broader social transformations, many dimensions of kinship and family life also changed. Although John Demos (1986)

cautions against an overly rigid interpretation of these changes, there is general agreement among historians on certain points: a demographic decline in family size due to changing patterns of fertility; a decline in parental control over marriage choice and family formation; a rise in both gender equality and individualism that challenged patriarchy; and the disembedding of production from the domestic domain and the constitution of the latter as a unit of consumption rather than production (e.g., Cott 1977; Demos 1986; Dolgin 1997; Grossberg 1985:6; Hall 1977, 1978, 1982; Mintz and Kellog 1988:xvi; Shorter 1975; Smith 1973).

Despite the historical accounting of these social transformations, the idea of what constitutes modernity—and its conceptual counter, “tradition”—is reiterated in a kind of stereotypical contrastive frame, the acceptance of which is as unquestioned as its empirical foundation is untested. Philip Abrams (1972) has argued persuasively that although one of sociology’s main goals is to understand the transition to industrial, modern society, sociologists have dealt more in “structural types,” with the mechanisms of social transformation from one type to the other assumed rather than demonstrated (see also Kumar 1991). Abrams observes that “logically ordered contrasts between structural types have been treated, quite naively for the most part, as though they effectively indicated chronologically ordered transitions. On this basis a sociological past has been worked up, a past which is linked to the present not by carefully observed and temporally located social interaction but by inferentially necessary connections between concepts” (1972:20). Conceptual polarities between structural types (such as status and contract) thus have evoked beginning and end points without requiring an empirical account of the transition between them. Abrams suggests, “The point after all was not to know the past but to establish an idea of the past which could be used as a comparative base for the understanding of the present” (28; see also Smith 1973). This “idea of the past” as a particularly configured structural type—and its implications for understanding the present configuration of the “modern” family—was widely accepted by sociologists and historians alike (see Cott 1977; Demos 1986; Dolgin 1997; Grossberg 1985; Hall 1977, 1978; Mintz and Kellog 1988; Shorter 1975; Smith 1973).

To take one example, in the article “The American Family: Its Relations to Personality and to the Social Structure” (1955), Talcott Parsons paints a picture of the American family as a kind of prototype of what becomes of the family in modern societies—an isolated unit with drastically reduced social functions. Taking up the classic contrast between kin-based and state- or market-based societies, Parsons argues that in “primitive” societies,

kinship “‘dominates’ the social structure; there are few concrete structures in which participation is independent of kinship status. In a comparative perspective it is clear that in the more ‘advanced’ societies a far greater part is played by nonkinship structures. States, churches, the larger business firms, universities and professional associations cannot be treated as mere ‘extensions’ of the kinship system” (1955:9). This development of independent institutions outside the family entails, he suggests, a “loss of function,” through which the family “has become a more specialized agency than before, probably more specialized than it has been in any previously known society” (ibid.). The family remains an important institution, Parsons suggests, but its functions have been radically circumscribed to two: the socialization of children and “the stabilization of the adult personalities of the population of the society” (16).

In the end, Parsons outlines the unambiguous separation of the familial and occupational (or economic) domains. The familial domain is a solidary and holistic unit in which “membership and status are ascribed, and the communalistic principle of ‘to each according to his needs’ prevails” (Parsons 1955:11), and gender hierarchy is evident in the role of “the husband-father as the ‘instrumental leader’ of the family as a system” (13). The economic, or “modern occupational,” system, by contrast, is based on achieved status, individual merit, and equality of opportunity—at least for males, who are seen as the agents in the economic domain (11–12). Critically important for our interests here, Parsons suggests that the “loss of function” both in our own recent history and as seen in broader comparative perspective, means that the family has become, on the “macroscopic levels,” almost completely functionless. Except here and there, it does not engage in much economic production; it is not a significant unit in the political power system; it is not a major direct agent of integration in the larger society. Its individual members participate in all these functions, but they do so “as individuals,” not in their roles as family members: “The most important implication of this view is that the functions of the family in a highly differentiated society are not to be interpreted as functions directly on behalf of the society, but on behalf of the personality.... [Families] are ‘factories’ which produce human personalities” (16).

Although, obviously, much has changed in the structure of the family since the time that Parsons wrote, the received wisdom about the place of kinship relative to other domains in society has not. Delimited as a unit of socialization, the modern family is understood to be subject to economic and political forces but irrelevant to the structure and dynamics of the “macroscopic” domains of economics and politics.

This perception of the particular role and place of the family in modern life is, interestingly, reflected in the importance of family history as the fastest-growing hobby in the United States—and one of the most popular in Europe, Canada, Australia, and beyond. The enormous popularity of both the US and UK versions of the TV genealogy series *Who Do You Think You Are?* speaks to the significance placed on “family” in contemporary life (Cannell 2011). On the one hand, we think of it as a key to identity, morality, and personal and social wholeness. On the other hand, at the back of most people’s minds is an idea that, in the past, life was organized around and through kinship more than is the case today. Recognition of the institutional complexity of modern life easily shades into the feeling that modernity is a space in which kinship is constantly under threat of being lost. We may feel that we have to work to sustain, and sometimes to recover, those ties of relatedness (Basu 2006; Nash 2008). Genealogy and family or local histories may be ways in which people engage in the work of creating and maintaining those bonds of memory and practice.

Thus, both popular and classical scholarly accounts of the specific role and place of kinship or “family” in modern life tend to coincide: the larger organizing force of kinship in economics and politics has been lost; kinship has been progressively restricted to socialization and the development of personality, identity, and a moral compass; and, indeed, the continuity and relevance of kinship appear threatened by and at odds with modernity.

TOWARD A CRITIQUE OF THE NARRATIVES OF MODERNITY: CROSS-DISCIPLINARY RESONANCES

One can hardly argue with the fact that the historical development and diversification of institutions—such as hospitals, schools, orphanages, and banks—resulted in the takeover of several functions that had been previously the purview of the family. However, in *Vital Relations*, we argue that models of social evolution, development, and modernity have been overdrawn in such a way that it is nearly impossible to assess, or even consider, the ways in which kinship actually operates beyond the domestic domain in so-called modern societies. Although the understandings about the place of kinship in the modern world obviously relate to many fundamental institutional changes in the organization of modern life,¹ they also relate to the *myths* of modernity—the narratives that we all tell ourselves about how modern social life is different from, and differently structured than the past.

Historians have long recognized the ways in which these myths can be at odds with reality, and the complex effects of culturally formed expectations on how we understand what is happening. The historian Jay Winter,

for example, has shown us that the catastrophic death rates of young men during the 1914–1918 war, which were experienced as creating a “lost generation” in many families, were actually lower than the rates of loss of children to diseases in most British families only a few generations earlier (Winter 2005[1985]; see also Cannadine 1981). It was not only the trauma of war but also the recently raised expectations about the survival of children (ca. 1900) that created the sense of an unprecedented loss of young life. Similarly, social historians of early modern England have traced the relative mobility of the workforce—especially of young people—before the Industrial Revolution, and they have modified our idea that life before the factory age was securely fixed in place and ruled by tradition. Indeed, one discovery made by many amateur family historians is that modern families are often more rooted and stable than those of the nineteenth century and even the early modern past, because they are less subject to being divided by early deaths, economic pressures to migrate, forcible evictions, and so forth (Gittins 1993[1985]; Laslett 2004[1965]; Wrightson 1982). The transition between past and present thus cannot be reduced in any simple way to the “loss” of kinship in modernity. Nor, as we show in this volume, does kinship decline in importance in any automatic way with urbanization, industrialization, or other processes associated with modernity in non-Western settings.

In reflecting on the myths of modernity, the issue of domains, and the place of kinship in modernity, anthropologists are in the good company of not only many distinguished historians interested in these matters but also colleagues in social geography, demography, sociology, feminist theory, social policy, and other disciplines. An introduction such as this wholeheartedly acknowledges but could never pretend to summarize the variety and importance of this work. We hope, however, that the distinctive contribution of this volume will offer multiple points of engagement for these colleagues and will begin a number of conversations.

Among the many possible examples worth mentioning, let us consider some contributions in sociology that intersect with the themes of this volume. Viviana Zelizer has offered a fascinating series of studies that demonstrate the persistence of economic factors in family relationships, which are often thought of in North America and Europe as being about “love” and not “money.” In *Pricing the Priceless Child* (1994[1985]), Zelizer unravels the assumptions in different legal codes and practices of adoption in Canada, the United States, and Europe over the twentieth century, arguing *inter alia* that the widespread contemporary claim that children are “beyond price” is as much of an objectification as earlier views that children should

be valued (and adopted) according to their potential labor contributions to family farms and other enterprises. It both misleads (since economic costs are always attached to adoption) and carries its own risks for children when they are cast as economic dependents rather than as valued contributors to households. In *The Purchase of Intimacy* (2005), Zelizer continues to question the widely held view that love and money are separate spheres in modern Western life. She argues that personal relationships are constructed as much through the careful deployment of money as through its avoidance, although people may build symbolic boundaries between different kinds of expenditure in daily life, and these are often instantiated in complex forms in the law. A connected theme is taken up by Allison Pugh (2008), who gives a nuanced and illuminating account of the ways that American parents, rich and poor, take decisions about how to spend money on their children. Pugh shows that apparently “irrational” spending decisions actually represent a recognition by parents of the need to balance the purchase of items that give their children certain kinds of immediate social acceptance against items that may offer longer-term investments in social mobility. Thus, like Zelizer, Pugh clearly recognizes that intimate relations are made *through* economic interactions and not apart from them.

Zelizer’s larger conclusions are in tune with our own here in recognizing that popular and scholarly assumptions about a differentiation and an incompatibility between the spheres of economics and family life have long taproots. “Since the nineteenth century social analysts have repeatedly assumed that the social world organizes around competing, incommensurable principles: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, sentiment and rationality, solidarity and self-interest” (Zelizer 2005:23). The difference between her project and ours is that we ask not only how economic relations penetrate and shape relations of kinship in the domestic domain but also, and perhaps more important for the purposes of this volume, how relations of kinship penetrate and shape political and economic relations in the public domain.

One might think also of the sociological classic *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 2007[1985]). The tensions between “individualism” and “commitment” in contemporary American life are approached with a catholicity of attention to the ways in which political, economic, personal, and intimate relations are interconnected, but its rich account is framed with a pessimistic view of the difficulty of moving beyond the self in search of modern community.

The current volume approaches these areas of deep mutual interest—including those relating to secularism, discussed below—from the distinct

perspective of anthropology, which is fundamentally an attitude of sustained and radical comparison between different parts of the world. Anthropologists tend to start from the assumption that there is nothing universal or natural about the way change has unfolded in the history of the West.

We might sum up the heart of this attitude with reference to the classic anthropological thinker Marcel Mauss's most famous essay, *The Gift* (1990[1950]).² As Jonathan Parry (1986) argued in unforgettably incisive style, it is a mistake to take from Mauss's essay (as many commentators have done) the central message that "primitive" peoples have "magical" or superstitious forms of gift exchange (the famous "spirit of the gift") that contrast with the familiar reality of ordinary economic exchange. Rather, the central message is that it is only in Western late capitalism that we acquire the superstitious notion that "gifts" and "commodities" are two separable and distinct forms of object with correspondingly distinct registers of exchange that operate in distinct domains. In most other kinds of human society, in other times and places, the fact that there is no clear dividing line between gift and commodity exchange has been considered apparent (Parry 1986). Or, as Bruno Latour (1993) puts it, modernity can be diagnosed as the insistent attempt to create "purifications" between categories, which are, in fact, impossible to sustain.

The comparative reflections that we bring to bear in this volume therefore do not in any way deny the complex historical changes of the industrial period and later, but they do start from the assumption that the relationship between institutional change and the ideological or mythical aspects of modernity is a question to be empirically determined. We take kinship as our central topic because we each found through our empirical research that what we knew about particular cases did not seem to fit well with the claim that kinship is replaced by other structuring forces in modernity. This empirical work, moreover, led us to the assertion that the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* split is, above all, an ideological feature of modernity, not an entirely structural one. Indeed, we collectively propose that the *avoidance* of the term "kinship"—and the presupposition that kinship is irrelevant to matters of *Gesellschaft*—is one of the ways in which all sorts of implicit claims are made about Western modernity.

Thinking about the category of kinship in the contemporary world is one way to reason against the grain of modernization myths and to ask, with an open mind, what is happening in each case. If, as Zelizer says, it is actually impossible to keep "money" out of "love" relationships in modern America, we also ask how far the modern "economy" continues to be structured

both by kinship institutions and by kinship sentiments. In looking anew at the place of kinship in relation to contemporary politics, economics, religion, law, and science, we attempt to move beyond the theoretical marginalization of kinship and family in the landscape of what counts as modernity. In the process, we mobilize the particular resources of anthropological thinking against the “domaining” practices that have been so key to the narratives of modernity.

In the chapters that follow, we examine more closely the ways in which kinship has been situated—indeed, often erased—in narratives of modernity relative to the domains of economics, politics, and religion. We point to scholarly work that suggests that there is cause for questioning not only the received wisdom of the placement of kinship in these narratives but also the fundamental validity of the narrative structure of modernity altogether.

THE LIMITS OF DOMAINING: KINSHIP, POLITICS, AND ECONOMICS IN “MODERN” SOCIETIES

Vital Relations questions the core presumption in narratives of modernity: that kinship has been effectively cordoned off in the domestic domain and has become irrelevant to the operations of modern economic and political institutions. We build on several decades of work at the intersection of kinship, feminist, and gender studies in anthropology, which, beginning in the 1980s, critiqued the analytic separation of the domestic domain as it related to understandings of both kinship and gender. This analytic separation had at least two sources, and the challenges to it had slightly different but interlinked trajectories.

On the one hand, in the 1970s, feminist anthropologists attempted to understand what was perceived as the universal asymmetry in gender relations and the subordination of women in terms of a number of distinctions—deriving from various analytic perspectives—including domestic (kinship) and public (economics and politics), nature and culture, reproduction and production, and women’s and men’s consciousness (Rosaldo 1974; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; see Yanagisako and Collier 1987 and Comaroff 1987 for overviews). It was not long, however, before a number of anthropologists (Carsten 1995b, 1997; MacCormack and Strathern 1980; Strathern 1980, 1984, 1988; Yanagisako and Collier 1987) challenged the universality of this analytic framework. They demonstrated that these categorical distinctions were not cross-culturally universal and, in any case, could not be shown universally to correlate with gender relations. It became evident that these analytic distinctions were reflective of cultural categories that were central to Western, industrialized societies and were

most relevant to the analysis of gender in relation to the rise of states, class divisions, and, especially, industrial capitalism (Rapp 1979; Reiter 1975; Sacks 1975). Much later, others questioned their utility even in describing Western societies (e.g., Yanagisako 2002). The lesson here was that the separation of domestic (kinship) and public (political and economic) relations should not be presupposed but rather should be a matter of historical and ethnographic inquiry.

On the other hand, the anthropological study of kinship was built, particularly in Britain, on a distinction between the domestic domain and the politico-jural domain (Fortes 1958, 1969; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940) and, more broadly, on the analytic separation of kinship, politics, and economics as the building blocks of social organization, with religion and symbolic systems seen as both reflective of and a force for the integration of social organization. Although these domains were deemed inseparable in kin-based societies (if not in state-based societies), the rationale for their analytic separation rested in their distinctive underlying constitutive forces and institutional functions. In the case of kinship, the constitutive reference for the domain was the biological relations of procreation and the genealogical grid. David Schneider (1984) and a number of scholars who built on his work called into question the assumption that kinship was everywhere ultimately based on relations of procreation and biology—an assumption that was deemed to be tied to Western understandings of kinship that were not universally shared cross-culturally. Kinship, anthropologists showed, could be created through processes of doing as much as being and by reference to such processes as exchanging valuables, laboring, worshipping, residing, or eating together as much as sharing blood or other biological substances (Bodenhorn 2000; Carsten 1997, 2000b, 2004; McKinnon 1991; Schneider 1984; Weston 1991). If kinship could not universally be constituted by reference to biology and procreation, then the rationale of kinship as a distinct domain was also necessarily challenged (Schneider 1969, 1984:181–201). Anthropologists explored the problematic consequences of using Western analytic distinctions (in particular, the separation of kinship, politics, economics, and religion), which skew our understandings of other cultures (e.g., Collier and Yanagisako 1987; McKinnon 2000). Again, the lesson here was that the nature of kinship—and forms of relatedness (Carsten 2000b, 2004; Franklin and McKinnon 2001a, 2001b) more broadly—should not be presupposed but rather should be the focus of historical and ethnographic inquiry.

These two lines of inquiry inevitably overlapped because many of the scholars who were opening up new lines of inquiry for the study of kinship

were also feminists exploring new lines of inquiry in the study of gender. In the introduction to *Gender and Kinship: Essays toward a Unified Analysis* (1987), Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier mounted an integrated challenge to the ways in which gender and kinship had been analyzed. Analyses of both categories were mutually entangled, they noted, and both were assumed to be founded on relations of procreation and biology (Yanagisako and Collier 1987:31–32). Rather than take either gender difference or kinship relations as inherently given in the nature of things, the authors argued, anthropologists should attend to the ways in which the categorical differences in gender and kinship are culturally and historically produced and, moreover, how they are differentially valued in culturally specific systems of inequality (35–40; see also Strathern 1988). In the process, Yanagisako and Collier also rejected the utility of separate analytic domains: “We do not assume the existence of a gender system based on natural differences in sexual reproduction, a kinship system based on the genealogical grid, a polity based on force, or an economy based on the production and distribution of needed resources. Rather than take for granted that societies are constituted of functionally based institutional domains, we propose to investigate the social and symbolic processes by which human actions within particular social worlds come to have consequences and meanings, including their apparent organization into seemingly ‘natural’ social domains” (1987:39). Not only did this allow anthropologists to explore other cultural understandings of gender and kinship without imposing Western analytic separations, but it also opened up the exploration of the ways in which Western domaining practices themselves were part of a culturally specific system of knowledge and power.

In *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis* (1995), Yanagisako and Delaney emphasized how cultural categories and domains—and their differential valuation and power—are naturalized and essentialized by reference to either the order of nature (as revealed by science) or the order of the divine (as revealed by religion), both of which are understood to transcend culture and human agency. The unassailable quality of these categories—as outside human agency—is further enforced by taboos on reading across domains in ways that would denaturalize or desacralize their hierarchical order. Thus, for instance, “religion seems to be about god rather than about gender; the family seems to be about reproduction and child-rearing rather than about gender and religion” (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:12). But if one reads across domains, one sees how specific notions of gender and kinship are naturalized—indeed, sacralized—by reference to religious ideas about divine creation. For Yanagisako and Delaney, it is precisely by reading across domains that it is possible to reveal the processes

of naturalization and sacralization that hold particular relations of power, knowledge, and social hierarchy in place.

In the context of this volume, the idea of the modern—and the hierarchical order of social relations that is entailed in the distinction between modern and traditional social orders—is founded on the assumptions that modern societies are marked by a separation between the domains of kinship, economics, politics, and religion and that these domains are distinguished by fundamentally different forms of social relations. In *Vital Relations*, we ask what happens when we defy the taboo on reading across these domains and follow the trail of kinship relations as they lead us into what are supposed to be the discrete domains of economics, politics, and religion. How might such explorations challenge the domaining distinctions that have indeed naturalized the differences between what counts as modern and traditional and the hierarchies of power that are based on these naturalized differences?

One way to explore this question is to focus attention on the institutions that are understood to be quintessential social formations of modernity. Below, we take two such institutions—the economic corporation and the nation-state—to consider how kinship has generally been ignored in anthropological models of these institutions and virtually erased from accounts of economic and political domains, structures, and processes. Going further, we point to the work of scholars who have begun to question these received models and to the work of the authors in this volume as they develop alternative models to account for the vitality of kinship relations in economic and political institutions and processes.

Kinship, Economics, and the Corporation

Since most narratives of modernity locate kin relations either in “kin-based” (but not “market-based”) societies or, within market-based societies, in the domestic (but not in the political or economic) realm, it is not surprising that few scholars have actually asked what kinship means and does in the realm of “modern” economics—and one of its key institutions, the corporation—particularly in those European and American societies presumed to be the font of the “free market” (Marcus 1998; Watkins 1995; cf. Yanagisako 2002). On the whole, investigations of the significance of kinship for the economy have focused either on the past or on those places deemed to be “backward,” where economic relations are still presumed to be embedded in kinship relations.

With regard to the past, attention—primarily of historians but also of anthropologists and sociologists—has been focused on the relationship

between kinship, the economy, and the rise of capitalism both in premodern Europe (Adams 2005; Davidoff and Hall 1987; Grassby 2001) and in seventeenth- to nineteenth-century America (Faber 1972; Farrell 1993; Hall 1977, 1978, 1982). Adam Kuper (2001, 2009) has written accounts of the importance of kinship and cousin marriage to the formation of both the Rothschild transnational banking empire in Europe and the intellectual and corporate elite of Britain primarily in the nineteenth century. As McKinnon (chapter 2, this volume) shows, various American historians have provided ample evidence that extended family networks and dense webs of kin marriages helped consolidate not only the wealth of plantation owners in the American South but also the capital resources of the rising merchant elite—such as the Boston Brahmins—and the key banking and investment houses in the American North.

Yet, remarkably, this historical work has, on the whole, neither troubled the developmental narrative that places kinship and contract in antithetical temporal and social dimensions and domains nor precipitated much curiosity about the place of kinship and marriage in contemporary markets and corporations. It is true that, in Europe and the United States, certain legal instruments were put in place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that made it possible to separate the finances of family and business and marginalized such institutions as cousin marriage from their once central role in capital formation (Hall 1977, 1978, 1982; McKinnon, chapter 2, this volume). However, rather than provoke an inquiry into the newer configurations of kinship and economy, this fact has, as Yanagisako (2002:21) noted, been translated into an a priori assumption that kinship and economics have been, effectively, separated.

To the extent that anthropologists have studied family firms in contemporary societies, they have tended to focus on non-Western societies (for instance, Birla 2009; Ong 1999; Oxfeld 1993) or on recent immigrants to the United States or Europe (for instance, Glenn 1983; Liu 2005; Ong 1999), precisely in those places where kinship is presumed still to predominate. But, as Elana Shever (chapter 4, this volume) demonstrates in her account of the Argentine oil industry, the force of kinship for economic institutions and processes continues to be “underestimated even in the places where it is widely recognized as important.”

Although works delving into the kinship coordinates of contemporary corporations and financial markets in Europe and America are rarer (see Colli 2003 for an overview), there are notable and important exceptions. There is, of course, extensive research on family firms, which primarily comes out of business schools and specialized research institutes devoted

to the topic (see Stewart 2003, 2008, for reviews). The chief concern of this literature is the analysis of the organizational problems deemed to be specific to family firms and the development of strategies to deal with these problems.

Within anthropology, several scholars have taken on the cultural and social dimensions of the entanglements of kinship and economics in contemporary family firms. George Marcus and Peter Dobkin Hall in their book, *Lives in Trust: The Fortunes of Dynastic Families in Late Twentieth-Century America* (1992; see also Marcus 1980), explore the role of legal instruments not only in conserving “patrimonial capital” but also in creating the organizational structure (oriented around shared wealth) for intergenerational and extended family relations among American dynastic families (Marcus and Hall 1992:15, 48). Marcus and Hall note the irony: “American business dynasties...have achieved durability as descent groups in a bureaucratized society by assimilating, rather than resisting, characteristics of formal organization which are usually assumed to be antithetical to kin-based groups” (15). Antónia Pedroso de Lima (2000), in her account of elite Portuguese family firms, articulates a kind of double dynamic that characterizes the interplay between kinship and economics typical of family firms. On the one hand, “familial values—the ways of being and living in a family—are crucial elements in defining the ways in which the economic group works and continues through time” (152). On the other hand, “the enterprise itself becomes a cultural symbol of kinship. Its effectiveness in bringing people together attributes greater power to the enterprise by maintaining active kinship relations than to the sharing of a common substance: ‘blood’—one of the most important Portuguese cultural symbols of the family” (153).

Sylvia Yanagisako, in particular, has articulated a trenchant critique of the analytic domaining practices of Weber, Parsons, and others who characterize “modern” societies by their separation of domestic from economic domains; kinship from business relations; affect, emotion, and sentiment from instrumental economic rationality; communalism from individualism; and other social actions and desires from strictly economic actions and desires (Yanagisako 2002:9, 19–21; and chapter 3, this volume). As Yanagisako notes, the “study of family capitalism—a form of capitalism that has been marginalized in both Marxist and Weberian theories—enables us to see that its marginalization is itself part of the hegemonic process through which capitalism is made to appear as an economic process that is autonomous from family and kinship processes” (13). In the space opened up by this critique, Yanagisako has provided a remarkable ethnographic

account of family firms in the Italian textile and clothing industry, analyzing “the sentiments, desires, and meanings of kinship, gender, and capital that are crucial to the production of the industry at a particular historical conjuncture” (4). “As sentiments in play at different moments in the developmental histories of family firms, trust and betrayal shape the character of technological diffusion, firm competition, and the creation of new firms. They are, on the one hand, products of the workings of Italian family capitalism. On the other hand, they operate as *forces of production* in Italian family capitalism” (11). In the Italian textile and clothing industry, then, kinship sentiments and relations are neither contrary to nor separated from contemporary capitalism but rather count centrally among its forces of production.

The chapters in this volume by Laura Bear, Janet Carsten, Elana Shever, and Sylvia Yanagisako not only critique the separation of kinship and economy in contemporary modern societies but also question the implicit developmental framework that supposedly differentiates premodern, modern, and neoliberal capitalist formations. Yanagisako challenges the “absence of kinship in metanarratives of transnational and global capitalism [that are fueled by] an evolutionary model of modernity that posits a steady, global march away from the fetters of family and kinship bonds” (chapter 3, this volume). The authors in this volume take up this challenge from the perspective of both the owners (Yanagisako, Shever) and the workers (Shever, Bear, Carsten), and their chapters demonstrate the persistence and importance of kinship ties in contemporary transnational and neoliberal economic formations.³

Yanagisako argues that family sentiments continue to drive the transnational expansion of the Italian family firms that dominate the textile and clothing manufacturing industries as they form joint ventures with Chinese firms and outsource production to the cheaper Chinese labor markets. This transnational expansion into global markets has not resulted in the predicted “managerial revolution,” or what the Italians call the impetus to *managerializzare* businesses. On the contrary, it has been accomplished, on the one hand, by an intensification of the symbolic and managerial centrality of the proprietary families in Italy and, on the other hand, by the strategic use of a set of (explicitly nonfamily, but Italian) managers to oversee offshore production in China. These Italian managers and their allied Chinese entrepreneurs (all of whom have been trained in business schools to take the separation of kinship and economy as a normative ideal) find themselves confronted with what Yanagisako calls a “kinship glass ceiling.” In what might be read as an ironic turn, Chinese entrepreneurs are

surprised to find themselves in business with Western firms that are organized by the communal sentiments of kinship and family rather than the supposedly “modern,” rationalistic, managerial logic they learned about in business school.

Building on the work of Yanagisako, Elana Shever (2008, 2012, and chapter 4, this volume) investigates the dense interpenetration of kinship and industrial relations that characterized both the state-owned oil company in Argentina and its subsequent offshoots, generated by the neoliberal privatization of the industry in 1990s. The state-owned company not only fostered kinship sentiments and family life as a way of civilizing the Patagonian frontier and countering an anarchist labor movement but also explicitly built the industry on a paternalist model in which the company provided fully for the lives and livelihoods of its workers and their families. The relation between kinship, economy, and nation was multiply intertwined: the national industry was organized as a (national) paternalistic family; relations between workers were simultaneously relations between kin; and—in accord with Pedroso de Lima’s observations about the importance of enterprise in the constitution of kinship—oil itself came to be seen as a cultural symbol and the very substance of (familial/national) reproduction as much as (economic/national) production. Shever shows how Argentine oil workers continued to draw on kinship relations to forge the small businesses they were compelled to establish in the wake of the industry’s privatization. Unlike the managers of the foreign oil companies—who saw the continued emphasis on kinship relations as a liability—the oil workers saw these relations as critical to their survival in the newly restructured, global oil industry. Indeed, they continued to value kinship relations as *the* standard by which economic relations should be judged and implemented.

The same is true of the workers in the shipyards along the Hooghly River in India. Through these workers—skilled builders of massive ice-class vessels—Laura Bear (chapter 7, this volume) broadens our theoretical understanding of the nature of “productive power” within a context that must be read as utterly typical of the contemporary corporate structures of global neoliberal capitalism. Focusing on the contradictions in the market logic of wage transactions—which highlight tensions between short- and long-term social debts and relations, as well as radically different understandings of the sources of productivity—Bear argues that because “Marx and Arendt solved these problems with a naturalist, secular explanation of the fertility of capital, they could not anticipate the significance of kinship and ritual to the lived experience of the institutions of capitalism.” Bear elegantly shows that workers understand their productive powers in terms of a

transfer of their own life force into the form of the ship they are creating. She goes on to elucidate how—in opposition to short-term relations, which they characterize as causing a “burning of the stomach”—shipyard workers see models of trust and long-term relations between kin and friends, who live, work, eat, and perform religious *pujas* together, as critical to life-sustaining relations and (re)productivity in the shipyard as much as in the family household. Through ritual *pujas* in the shipyards, workers materialize the desired flow of (re)productive powers and life forces, and they elicit evidence from managers of the long-term social and ethical obligations that workers see as critical to their sustenance—that is, to maintaining and replenishing their (re)productive powers. The failure of owners and managers to recognize these claims is experienced by workers as constituting the conditions for a dangerous diminishment of life force—for ill health, despondency, or death.

The impossibility of disentangling relations of kinship from those of work is evident in another site of specifically “modern,” capitalist production: the scientific or medical laboratory. In chapter 5, Janet Carsten’s fine ethnographic exploration of the high-tech clinical pathology labs and blood banks in Penang, Malaysia, reveals the “seepage” of kinship relations into the workspace and life of modern scientific and medical practice, which, by definition, is supposed to be constituted as a space above and beyond social relations. Carsten documents the multiple ways in which these labs undergo processes of “domestication”: as people make the space and time to eat together both within and outside the labs; as actual kinship connections and marriages are forged between co-workers; as families come in and out of the labs; as family health, illnesses, pregnancies, postpartum practices, and childrearing are discussed; as workers and their families donate their own blood; as co-workers offer advice on life, marital relations, and financial problems. In the context of an ideology that stresses the separation between scientific and social relations, the impossibility of drawing a line between kinship/social relations and the workplace provokes a sense of ambivalence that is manifested in the ghosts that haunt the workers and mark the breach of a tabooed separation. By contrast, in Danilyn Rutherford’s account (chapter 11, this volume) of the logics of contemporary American environmental politics, kinship is invoked in the form of the spectral presence of future children, whose claims on present generations campaigners must struggle to articulate through established economic rhetoric that would otherwise discount them.

In the end, it is impossible to say that contemporary global capitalism is entirely structured by kinship (as economic relations supposedly are in

“kin-based” societies), but it is also impossible to say that kinship is irrelevant to its structures and processes. Resituating family firms in the overall landscape of contemporary capitalism helps us to rethink the assumed inevitability both of the separation between kinship and economy in modern economic systems and of the evolutionary logic of the stages of capitalism and its ultimate transcendence of kinship. Revisiting the entanglements of kinship and work, reproduction and production, and long-term and short-term debts and obligations in contemporary economic systems helps us to understand that these need not—indeed, ultimately cannot—be separated under capitalism. It behooves us to examine the particular configurations of kinship and economy that are manifest in various contexts. Reassessing the differentially configured claims of owners, managers, and workers helps us comprehend the centrality of ideas about long-term kinship relations and their (re)productive powers to the dynamics of capitalist relations of ownership and production—as, for instance, owners ground their proprietary claims (*vis-à-vis* managers and workers) or as workers assert their own claims (*vis-à-vis* managers and owners). Here, the ethics and ideologies of kinship have, perhaps, a special place in articulating and contesting the “managerial revolution” that values the idea of corporations as autonomous individuals and an economic imperative that achieves, for workers, only the “burning of the stomach.”

Kinship, Nation, and the State

Another of the key categories and outcomes of the modernist narrative—whether the frame be evolution, development, or modernization—is the nation-state, with its corresponding emphasis on territory, property, equality, individualism, secularism, and legal and market rationality. Richard Handler’s account of nationalism in his 1988 book, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, perfectly captures the critical relation between the idea of nationalism and (possessive) individualism. The “primary reality” of the ideology of the nation is “individuated being,” defined “in terms of choice and property” (Handler 1988:50). Handler draws upon Louis Dumont’s formulation that the nation “is in principle two things at once: a *collection of individuals* and a *collective individual*” (Dumont 1970:33, qtd. in Handler 1988:32). As a “collective individual,” the nation is territorially bounded, self-contained, independent, equivalent to other nations, and possessed of autonomous will/choice and self-determination (Handler 1988:40–43). As a “collection of individuals,” the nation is composed of a type (like a natural “species”), the members of which are equal and equivalent and possessed of the same attributes, common origins, and history (43–47).

In various accounts, the fully realized modern nation (as described more or less in Handler's terms) is juxtaposed against something that is prior, more primordial, and ultimately to be transcended. These accounts—and the very ideal of “nation” entailed by them—reproduce (often inadvertently) the familiar evolutionary distinctions of the modernist narrative. For instance, Clifford Geertz's work (1963, 1973b) on the “new nations” project makes use of a distinction between “two conflicting tendencies” (1973b:258–259): “primordial sentiments” (kinship, religion, particularistic languages and customs) and “civil politics” (universalistic rationalities of the modern market and nation-state). As McKinnon (chapter 2, this volume) notes, although Geertz does not see these tendencies to be temporally discrete, he nevertheless implicitly resurrects an evolutionary frame that contrasts kin-based societies (in which primordial sentiments predominate), “new states” (which are characterized by an unresolved tension between primordial sentiments and civil politics), and fully modern states (which have supposedly contained primordial sentiments in favor of civil politics) (see Kelly and Kaplan 2001:431).

Benedict Anderson (1991[1983]) conceptualizes the nation and its precursors in different terms from those of Geertz but clearly in line with the narratives of modernity (see Kelly and Kaplan 2001:433, 434). In contrast to religious communities and dynastic realms—organized as unbounded, centripetal, high centers with porous borders and by reference to sacred languages and texts and to cosmological hierarchies—nations are understood by Anderson (1991[1983]:6–7) to be organized as bounded, sovereign, autonomous, self-determining communities constituted in terms of horizontal, egalitarian, individualistic comradeship and by reference to secular, vernacular languages and texts, as well as print capitalism. Because he is focused on other distinctions, kinship rarely enters his account. When it does—for instance, as he discusses the difference between the kinds of solidarities created by pre-bourgeois ruling classes (royalty and nobility) and the bourgeois elites of the modern nation—Anderson notes that kinship and marriage are critical tools of the former but claims that they are irrelevant to the latter. “Factory-owner in Lille was connected to factory-owner in Lyon only by reverberation. They had no necessary reason to know of one another's existence; they did not typically marry each other's daughters or inherit each other's property. But they did come to visualize in a general way the existence of thousands and thousands like themselves through print-language” (76–77). This is a good example of the way in which contemporary theorists have erased kinship and marriage from the

“reverberations” of contemporary political economy. It is not a question of *whether* but a presupposition *that* they are irrelevant.

The dominant portrait of “nation” has been critiqued from various perspectives. A number of scholars have questioned the assumption that the nation must necessarily be tightly bounded, egalitarian, or defined by ideologies of possessive individualism, singular national identity, or autonomous will and choice (Kapferer 1989; Strong and Van Winkle 1993). Others have critiqued the focus on nation and sought to transcend altogether the framework of modernity within which it is situated, preferring rather to concentrate on the workings of (neo-)imperial power (Kelly and Kaplan 2001) or the uses of “primordialisms” “in the project of the modern nation-state” (Appadurai 1996:146) and of ethnic “culturalisms” in the transnational movements and diasporic publics of the postnationalist political order (147).

What is remarkable is that, no matter whether scholars have sought to explicate the making of national cultures (Foster 1991), to critique and transcend the centrality of the idea of nation, or to focus on transnational diasporic publics, rarely has kinship been considered relevant to the topic at hand (see below for notable exceptions). The relative invisibility of kinship in relation to nation may be due, in part, to the fact that kinship studies went out of fashion about the same time that the study of nationalism came into vogue (Franklin and McKinnon 2001a). But it is more likely that the absence of kinship in studies of the nation-state is due precisely to the fact that kinship has been a priori defined as a pre- or sub-nation-state formation. As David Sutton observes, kinship’s “significance in the study of modern nation-states has been underplayed, particularly because, as Herzfeld put it, ‘the absence of kinship [in political and economic formations and processes] seems to be one of the defining characteristics of the West’s view of itself’ (1992:148)” (1997:416).

Vital Relations contests the idea that kinship is a social formation that can be understood exclusively as either historically prior or structurally subordinate to the nation-state and that the nation (or state) can be conceptualized apart from its entanglements with kinship. Building on other work in kinship studies noted below, chapters in this volume by Barbara Bodenhorn, Fenella Cannell, Michael Lambek, Elana Shever, and Sylvia Yanagisako suggest that the reigning understanding of what counts as the nation-state needs to be queried in several different ways.

First, we posit that ideas about kinship and nation are inextricably bound together. What is at issue here is not simply a “metaphorical” relation (the nation is “like” a family) but rather how particular cultural

understandings about kinship, marriage, family, and relatedness organize, inform, and naturalize what will count as the nation and citizenship and how these intersect, as John Borneman (1992) has attempted to document, with contrasting visions of the state. Since David Schneider (1969) called attention to the shared distinctive features of kinship, nationality, and religion in American culture, several works have begun to survey this terrain, including explorations of the different generative qualities of paternity and maternity in the parallel constitution of ideas concerning kinship, nation, and state (Delaney 1995; Heng and Devan 1992; Lampland 1994). Other works have analyzed the tension between ideas about nature and about law/naturalization—birth and choice—that shape laws, debates, and policies about immigration and citizenship in the United States (Chock 1999; Coutin 2006[2003]). And still others have investigated the relation between understandings of kinship and marriage and those of nation and citizenship that focus on the forms of inclusions and exclusions, hierarchies and equalities, movements and restrictions, and shared essences and essential differences they entail (Alonso 1994; Bear 2007a; Carsten 2004; Das 1995; Delaney 1995; Heng and Devan 1992; Kim 2003, 2010; Mauer 1996; Nash 2008; Rutherford 2003; Sutton 1997).

Several chapters in this volume continue in this vein to explore the relations between ideas about kinship, nation, and national identity. Yanagisako (chapter 3) shows that the authenticity of Italian fashion brands—indeed, their essential “Italian-ness” (*italianità*)—is tied to the rootedness of proprietary families in their provincial homes and towns. Thus, the continuity of the family line—and its unbroken connection to its home place in a specifically Italian landscape—becomes a way of anchoring and differentiating the national authenticity and vital Italian-ness of brands that are produced offshore and in the flux of global economic relations. The deployment of nonfamily managers to oversee production in China makes it possible for proprietary families to guard the purity of their Italian-ness (through their presence in Italy, their consumption of Italian food, and their participation in an Italian lifestyle) and avoid compromising it by residence and work abroad in China. Shever (chapter 4) examines the ways in which kinship and nation are mutually constituted through the generative power of oil and oil work in the context of the paternalism of the state-owned oil industry in Argentina. Shever notes, “National sentiments meshed easily with kinship ones because both rest on a trope of familial bonds as the authentic basis for solidarity, care, obligation, and sacrifice. Kinship offered a language to talk about many kinds of affinity, most importantly, those that bound people together as company employees, town residents, and national citizens.”

One worker's statement, "I am a petroleum product," points to the fact that sentiments of kinship, national belonging, and company loyalty were inextricably intertwined through a national industry that seamlessly articulated both familial and national aspirations.

Second, the dominant assumption that the individual is both the unit and the model for the nation-state makes invisible the kinship (and religious) correlates of those nations that are assumed to conform most to the ideals of a progressive, individualistic, secular, democratic nationalism, let alone those of nations that explicitly do not conform to this logic. Fenella Cannell (chapter 9, this volume) articulates this point as she follows Sarah Gordon's (2002) argument about the constitutional crisis posed by Mormon polygamy and its prohibition in the United States. Gordon suggests that this model of the nation-as-individual is actually grounded in Protestant (read as progressive, secular) notions of kinship—including the nuclear family, monogamous marriage, and individual autonomy and choice—in contrast to the Mormon theocracy of extended polygamous families and the presumed lack of individual autonomy and choice (specifically of wives and daughters).

The kinship and marriage coordinates of Western liberal, supposedly secular, individualistic, democratic states—and their connection to claims to sovereignty—are therefore unmarked and invisible. Various chapters in this volume demonstrate that they come into focus only when the underlying cultural politics of difference are made evident by the state's suppression of contrasting forms of kinship and marriage and of divergent claims of sovereignty. Thus, Cannell (chapter 9) shows how the US government simultaneously suppressed Mormon aspirations to secure rights to plural marriage and to religious sovereignty in the Utah territory. Shever (chapter 4) elucidates how the Argentine state's suppression of Native people centrally involved its support of particular forms of family (marital, nuclear, settled, with particular gender configurations) in its attempts to colonize and "civilize" the Patagonian frontier. And Bodenhorn (chapter 6) describes American colonial efforts to stigmatize and actively suppress certain indigenous forms of relatedness that were considered "morally suspect"—including open and extended families created through acts of labor and nurturance and correspondingly high rates of fosterage and adoption—at the same time that Americans suppressed indigenous forms of sovereignty (for parallel cases in Hawaii, Guam, and Native North America, see Modell 1998; Monnig 2008; Schachter 2008; Ungar 1977). In the state's attempt to deal with the "native problem," children from Native Alaskan families were resettled far from home in order to combat tuberculosis (in

distant sanatoriums), to foster Western, Christian values (in distant missionary and boarding schools), and to implement assimilation into the dominant culture (through nonnative adoptions in distant places). Ultimately, Bodenhorn argues, the intention was not simply to deal with “morally suspect” forms of kinship and relatedness but also, and in parallel, to “breed out” nativeness altogether (a goal that would inevitably lead to the eradication of claims to sovereignty and separate nationhood). Similarly, Judith Schachter (2008) and Laurel Monnig (2008) show us that in Hawaii and Guam, respectively, precisely those forms of kinship and relatedness that were suppressed in the colonial order have been revalorized as the sign of new sovereignty movements, becoming the means for the restoration of indigenous cultural integrity and for alternative visions of the relation between kinship and sovereignty (McKinnon 2008).

If one can assume that all nation-states have some kinship (and religious) correlates, then the operative questions become when and how models based on different forms of kinship and marriage (or on the individual) are mobilized and made visible and when and how they are erased and made invisible. What we are interested in here is the politics of their different valuation and of their different visibility. Why and when are some kinship or religious configurations made evident as an example of backward primordialism and tribalism, and why and when are others made to stand for progressive secular democracy (see McKinnon, chapter 2, this volume)?

Third, Michael Lambek (chapter 10, this volume) makes a larger argument about the relationship between kinship (and religion) and the state. He suggests that in so-called modern societies, the state asserts the right to define, control, legitimate, and authorize acts of kinship and the making of new persons and kinship relations. But he queries the extent of this state control and its implications for the “encapsulation” and privatization of kinship presumed in the metanarratives of modernity. Powerfully, Lambek suggests that this encapsulation of kinship by the state does not result in the separation of kinship and state into discrete domains. On the contrary, “kinship is not separate, because it is embedded in the fundamental actions of the state, and it is not subordinate, because it is part and parcel of what the state is and means. The state is constituted in and through such acts as making citizens, providing birth and death certificates, registering property, taxing households, and, more generally, producing and authorizing the means by which people are related to one another as parents, offspring, spouses, siblings, and the like” (Lambek, chapter 10, this volume; see also Carsten 2007; Mody 2008). Although

the state and kinship are intertwined and marked by the state's efforts to establish bureaucratic clarity, exclusivity, singularity, and the referential identity of persons and relations, Lambek argues, the nature of kinship inevitably exceeds the grasp of the secular state. On the one hand, the state is almost never the only agent capable of authorizing and legitimizing kinship relations; religious and other cultural agents and agencies retain powers to do so, and they operate with goals and values that contrast with those of the state bureaucracy. On the other hand, kinship itself, Lambek contends, is immodern in the excesses of its very nature—which are evident in the superfluity of who can count as kin, in kinship's "surfeit of meaning, feeling, and presence," and in its immoderate demands for care and love.

In different ways, Bodenhorn (chapter 6, this volume) also questions the relationship between kinship and the state. First, she suggests that "the state" is not singular but rather multileveled. In Alaska, for instance, the federal, state, regional, municipal, and tribal governments often operate with quite distinct laws and customary understandings, practices, and goals—which at times are at odds with one another.⁴ Furthermore, she is concerned to broaden our historical and ethnographic appreciation of the multiplicity of social boundaries—racial, ethnic, religious, territorial, cultural—that people negotiate within, between, and beyond those imposed by the nation-state. And she points to the ways in which marriage, in particular, is inherently an institution that effects transboundary crossings at these multiple levels. Indeed, marriage and kin ties are among the few legal ways of penetrating restrictive immigration policies and crossing borders, and they are everywhere mobilized to this end (Constable 2005; Freeman 2005, 2011).⁵

It is evident that the narratives of modernity—which presuppose the temporal and structural transcendence of the nation-state over kin-based social formations—do not do justice to the interpenetration of kinship in the political units of contemporary societies. In revisiting the ideologies of the nation-state, we find kinship and marriage central to the conceptualizations and practices of this quintessentially "modern" institution, even in its most individualistic forms. In reexamining the ways in which contrastive forms of kinship and marriage articulate different claims to sovereignty, we reveal how they have articulated the dynamics of colonial subordinations and postcolonial contestations. And in reconsidering the entanglements of kinship and the state, we understand how critically intertwined and inseparable they are, even as kinship in its immodernity perpetually exceeds the constrictions of the state.

KINSHIP, RELIGION, AND THE “SECULAR”

We began by discussing a range of models that claim that modernity is defined by a move from status to contract—from social organizations structured by kinship to those dominated by the state and by rationalized economic and legal processes. One central contribution of this volume is to bring these claims into conversation with a key paradigm that identifies the modern by its relationship with religion rather than with kinship. Many forms of secularization theory—or, more recently, framings of the secular—have proposed that the modern state is characterized by its annexation of functions previously belonging to formal religion. One strand of secularization theory claims that as these functions are annexed, the power of religious experience also wanes and religious indifference becomes a universal feature of modernity (e.g., Bruce 2002). Other writers have taken divergent positions, and the literature is extensive (see Cannell 2010; Martin 2005). The most teleological versions of secularization theory have subsequently been rejected. José Casanova (1994) famously declared that such theories were a myth, and he reexamined changes in the public role of European and American religion without assuming a necessary link between these and religious indifference. Charles Taylor (2007) focused instead on the phenomenology of the “secular” and how it was historically constructed.

Narratives of modernity and modernization—whether centered on kinship or on religion—have been understood sometimes as empirical claims about changes in institutions and sometimes as descriptions of changing ideologies. Both accounts of modernity have been articulated not only by academic social theorists but also by actors in the larger social world. Thus, whether or not we believe them to be truthful descriptions of social processes, they come to have an “ethnographic reality” of their own. They become articles of faith to many people in contemporary society and therefore a basis upon which people may act (Cannell 2011).

Despite deep connections, the kinship-to-contract and the secularization models have often been discussed in isolation from each other and by different academic constituencies. Debates about secularization have been led by political scientists, sociologists, and philosophers, among others for whom the language of kinship is not an everyday tool (Cannell 2010). It may seem unremarkable, therefore, that kinship does not figure in the important accounts of secularization given by Casanova (1994) or Taylor (2007), for instance. Yet, where these discussions come closest, as in Casanova’s work, we see a reaching for the terminology of the “family,” the “private,” and the “domestic” (Casanova 1994:41–43). It almost seems as if, in concentrating on the problem of supposed secularization in modernity,

many writers have let the parallel claim about kinship—including its attenuation and its separation from the domains of politics and economics—pass under their guard.

In this collection, several authors explicitly ask what happens when kinship—which, following Collier and Yanagisako (1987), may be understood in terms of its particular conceptual potentials for evoking contexts of connectedness between different aspects of social action and formation—is put back into play in the debates about religion and secularity in the contemporary world. We ask this question at the level of empirical institutional changes. We also ask it in relation to modernization myths: how are kinship and religion said to be related to each other, for example, as competing stories are told?

Certain versions of “domaining” already discussed in this introduction link kinship and religion as two subordinated domains in a world where economic and other material, causative dynamics are supposed to prevail. As Lambek (chapter 10, this volume) points out, this connection is reinforced to the extent that kinship has often been identified with ritual or religious acts (marriage, the naming of children), which are understood to create and sustain kin relations. Cannell (chapter 9, this volume) considers the case of American Latter-day Saints, whose present-day kinship subverts ordinary expectations in ways rooted in their history. Nineteenth-century Mormonism asserted the religious value of kinship through explicit teachings on the divine value of plural marriage (Gordon 2002). For the developing US federal state and its legal system, the specter of Mormon theocracy became a key target and a persistently haunting threat. Both religion and kinship, when not defined and placed exactly as the state would have them, become subversively charged with “primitive” associations, and the alliance of the two all the more so.

However, in other strands of modernization stories, kinship and religion may be treated as different in kind. As Cannell (chapter 9, this volume) argues, when kinship is considered within the domain of “science”—for instance, with a focus on reproduction, heredity, and DNA—the idea of its material reality is often privileged, and religion may be contrastively viewed as having no ultimate material basis and therefore being less real. Janet Carsten’s account of laboratory blood work in Malaysia (chapter 5), Danilyn Rutherford’s description of the polemical linkage of contemporary US kinship discourse to both economics and the environment (chapter 11), and Gillian Feeley-Harnik’s recuperation of the “science” of genealogy in the mid-nineteenth-century eastern seaboard (chapter 8) trace different attempts to anchor kinship in what is “scientific,” that is, truth understood

as ultimately material. Each also attests to the impossibility of achieving this fixed meaning for kinship, which continuously overflows the boundaries set for it. Although this is well recognized in the context of the fluidity of the social meanings of kinship (e.g., Edwards 2000; Franklin and McKinnon 2001b; Strathern 1988; Weston 1991), the chapters in this volume each suggest ways in which kinship also exceeds the implicitly secular definitions that have been set for it in social theory and in social action (Cannell, chapter 9). In bringing secularization and kinship-to-contract narratives of modernity together, therefore, *Vital Relations* permits each to illuminate the limitations of the other.

Indeed, in relation to Yanagisako and Delaney's observation (1995:12) noted above, about the taboo against reading across scientific and theological contexts of kinship, several chapters in this volume illustrate the inevitability of violating that taboo, even if the breach is temporary, muted, or denied. Rutherford's reading (chapter 11) of Cormac McCarthy's end-times novel, *The Road*, as a text about kinship and futurity brings out such taboo-breaking moments, in which the notion of divinity is threatened with the same collapse as the notion of genealogical continuity and the survival of each inheres in the other. In *The Road*, Rutherford suggests, the "man's orientation to his son verges—but only verges—on the religious. He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: 'If he is not the word of God, God never spoke'" (McCarthy 2006:6). The prospect of world destruction—like the contemplation of world creation (Feeley-Harnik 2001a)—brings religion and kinship into intense contiguity, even in contemporary American settings, where each is otherwise supposed to reside within a clearly demarcated ("secularized") space.

Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (2003) offers one of the most influential accounts of the secular constitution of modern society. Lambek (chapter 10, this volume) notes that Asad offers acute insights into "the retraction, objectification, and subsumption of religion by the state"—especially, perhaps, into its objectification. For Asad, it is crucial to understand the limits of secular liberalism and the forms of human experience that are cast as antithetical to its political projects. Certain conceptions and self-conceptions of human "nature"—particularly those that value "passionate agency," including, in some cases, the ascetic and religious valuation of physical pain—are excluded from the dominant national and international forms of recognition, including human rights law. Religious traditions that do not reproduce the values of the secular nation-state are deemed "irrational" and are cast (once again) as primitive forms to be superseded by the modern. Contemporary forms of governance are predicated on a "secular

ethics,” which sidesteps the potential claims of religion on the state, and other evaluations of the “ethical” (or the religious) are to be tolerated only where these are underwritten by the state as legitimate “private” arenas.

Asad devotes the final chapter of *Formations of the Secular* to changes in the regulation of Egyptian marriage, to the shift away from polygamy, and to the gradual encompassment of *shari’*a courts and principles by state law. For Asad, it is inadequate to see these changes in terms of European imperial agency pitted against local resistance or accommodation or even in terms of the expansion of the Egyptian state: “There was more at work here than a single project of increasing state power. There was also the question of how liberal governance (political, moral, and theological) was to be secured during the different phases of state building” (Asad 2003:218). Asad is concerned with how specific forms of experience (such as companionate marriage) came to be desirable or imaginable as a social goal, creating the conditions under which the secular demarcation of private from public, by law, would take root. He contrasts these secular demarcations (a form of what we have been discussing as “domains”) with an ethical and legal order associated with Islamic “traditional discipline,” in which “the moral subject is not concerned with state law as an external authority. It presupposes that the capability for virtuous conduct and the sensibilities on which that capability draws are acquired by the individual through tradition-guided practices” (250). These practices, which Asad also sometimes refers to as “habitus,” are at odds with “the liberal concept of the right to self-invention” (*ibid.*).

The historical specificity of Western concepts of agency is a point well taken from both Asad and Foucault. Put simply, historical change is multifarious and more than the sum of any personified intentions. As Lambek (chapter 10, this volume) suggests, “there is no critique of the place of kinship in narratives of modernity that could be completely objective.” Much depends on which aspects of the problem a particular analyst seeks to illuminate. Asad’s “secular ethics” and Saba Mahmood’s “secular religion” (2006:341) have shed much light on progressivist myths, especially in relation to European attitudes toward Islam. One could, however, argue that Asad’s Foucauldian approach also casts other areas into shadow. In drawing on a contrast between historical Islamic—or, occasionally, European early medieval (Asad 1993:123)—bodily traditions and the secular law-ethics split, Asad risks creating an impression of oversimplification. Veena Das (2006) has remarked that there are more views of “human nature” to be found in the world than those that might be labeled either the Islamic traditional view or the Western liberal Enlightenment view. Indeed, India

offers one rich source of alternatives, as Bear (chapter 7, this volume) writing on Hindu Kolkata also observes. Further, Asad's dichotomies sometimes skirt a reductive view of European and American experiences as primarily defined—from the early nineteenth century on—by their supposed secularity, which would appear to suggest that contemporary Western experience does not partake of embodied ethical meaning. Asad (2003:87–89) does offer one concrete counter-example of embodied ethical meaning, in citing Pamela Klassen's (2001) description of the meaning found in childbirth by home-birthing women in North America, but he does not develop this line of inquiry.

Various chapters in *Vital Relations* contribute to the problematics of “secular kinship” in several ways. Lambek (chapter 10) builds on Asad's insights but seeks to enlarge them by thinking more explicitly about kinship as such and what makes it more than a subdivision of the secular state's constitution. Lambek distinctively views kinship as a series of “performative acts” and the histories they create. Kinship terms themselves are a form of kinship act because they have the quality of invoking a relationship and implying further webs of relatedness beyond the speaker and the person named. Although fully accepting that objectified categories of law, religion, kinship, and so forth, are mutually constitutive in contemporary life, Lambek gives a more dynamic and less occluded place to kinship. He suggests that we can observe a particular freighting of meaning and value onto kinship, as onto religion, in modern secular constitutions. Kinship, Lambek argues, becomes a “romanticized object,” using Hannah Arendt's (1958b) term, loaded with inexhaustible, multiple significances. However, for Lambek, the signifying potential of kinship is not simply derived from its heightened role in modern sensibilities; in agreement with other contributors, he suggests that too much has been made of the division between the place of kinship in “traditional” and “modern” contexts. For Lambek, Foucault's characterization of governance through “biopower” as a modern hallmark seems to miss the fact that traditional states, too, have attempted to rule through intervention in the reproductive and kinship lives of their subjects, albeit with different technologies of knowledge. Furthermore, Lambek argues that kinship always has profound utopian and dystopian potentials of signification in any polity or culture. Thus, for him, kinship is both immoderate and “immodern”; it always has multiple and distinctive powers to signify, and, although historical variation is wide-ranging and crucial, these powers do not ultimately originate from one particular historical order of knowledge or another.

Gillian Feeley-Harnik's work (chapter 8) articulates an invitation

to provincialize the historical and geographical heartland of status-to-contract theory as one way to establish a broader theoretical foundation for the study of kinship and capitalism. One of the many ways to read her richly wrought account is as a counterpart to Lambek's chapter in rethinking "secular kinship." Her investigation proceeds, first, from a meticulous examination of the historical specificities of thought and action about family at the time of Lewis Henry Morgan and his brother, the amateur genealogist Nathaniel Morgan. Like the battle over Mormon polygamy discussed by Cannell (chapter 9, this volume), developments in the eastern United States in the mid-nineteenth century were heavily influenced by the British withdrawal from the slave trade and, later, by US abolitionism. For Feeley-Harnik, one fundamental element in American kinship practices during this period was the energy invested in making clear one's status as a free person (and not a freed person). At the same time, shifts in political economy were prompting new patterns of investment and the development of urban property among the middle class, who thought of themselves as highly respectable but self-made, having fortunes based on success in gentlemanly trade and scientifically informed, "improved" agriculture. At stake was the creation of a particular sense of persons as made through their own and their family's merit, work, and skill—a model tacitly opposed to both "aristocrat" and "slave." It is out of this highly specific historical and geographic milieu that the idea of the move "from status to contract" as a universal marker of progress can be seen to emerge.

Like other contributors to this volume, Feeley-Harnik also calls on comparisons with societies outside the modern West to illuminate what kinship can be and do.⁶ Her familiarity with Malagasy kinship and secondary funerals leads her to recognize the development of nineteenth-century American genealogy—and associated changes in the organization of cemeteries—as a change in the way that the living make ancestors, underwriting the assertion of a certain reading of personhood. A series of erasures is involved: the new urban poor are excluded from the communities of both the living and the dead; the elimination of Native American communities is both effected and symbolized by the mass destruction of forests and their replacement by commemorative groves in the parkland cemeteries of rich white Americans. Class formation proceeds through both the making and the breaking of kinship ties—through both "kinning" and violent "dekinning."⁷ This kind of comparative "provincialization" characteristic of anthropology is sometimes evoked by Asad (2003:17). However, it seems in tension with a Foucauldian view of historical change, in which it would be difficult to hold steady any term or category across periods or cultures

in order to make a meaningful comparison. “Immodern” kinship is not, in this sense, a Foucauldian concept.

Weber defined modernity, in part, by the pervasive experience of disenchantment, by which he meant that modern people would increasingly feel that the world was fractured. He himself was divided between vitally important but incompatible value spheres, including, but not limited to, an incompatibility between “science” and “religion” (Kippenberg 2005; Weber 1946).⁸ In Feeley-Harnik’s account of the world of the Morgans (as also in Cannell’s and McKinnon’s chapters), we see aspects of a particular nineteenth-century moment in which this incompatibility was increasingly being felt, without yet having the status of the obvious. Thus, Lewis Henry Morgan’s publisher’s refusal to include Morgan’s memorial to his dead daughters in a “scientific” work is balanced against Nathaniel Morgan’s view that genealogy itself is a science and compatible with conventional Christianity. This moment, and the social science thinking it engendered, has a continued legacy both in contemporary scientific discourse on kinship as materially determined and in the resurgence of forms of ethical kinship thinking that have, as Lambek notes, a countersecularist tendency.

We have already observed that the modern preoccupation with what Latour has called “purification” is a doomed endeavor. Although we may believe that religion and science are incompatible—indeed, Weber argued that it may be the central fate of our time to suffer under and wrestle with that conviction—we cannot, in practice, keep them separate as we live our lives. It is unclear, therefore, whether kinship can ever be wholly secular even in the contemporary West, and we know that it is not so in other times and places. The tensions and multiple meanings of kinship experience at key moments in the formation of modern American sensibilities of kinship are instructive. They counterbalance the tendency—exemplified in the work of Asad—to cast Western spheres of action as “already” secular with a vivid sense of the lived contradictions and inherent incompleteness of secular experience. For Weber (1946), the possibility of joining up the different orders of value in modern life was a lost hope, belonging to the historical past; courage and clear-sightedness in the face of this existential dilemma—and the avoidance of self-deception—were what he mainly urged on himself and, at least publicly, on others. Nevertheless, Cannell (chapter 9, this volume) notes that even Weber sometimes perceived a utopian potential of kinship in modern times. As Robert Bellah (1997) has shown, Weber sometimes argued that altruistic fellow-feeling in salvationist religions was a generalization of kinship sentiment; Weber (1978b, 1998) also wrote as though kinship is not, itself, subject to rigid objectification

(domaining) in modernity, unlike erotic love, which is. Whether or not one wishes to use Weber's categories, it remains possible to consider, as Cannell suggests, that in a "secular age," people may place in "kinship" discourses and practices a range of meanings that defy and exceed neat categorization. Thus, if Pamela Klassen's (2001) ethnography of home-birthing hints at an "unsecular" register in contemporary American kinship, then Cannell and the chapters in this volume by Feeley-Harnik, Lambek, Bear, and Rutherford indicate that there may be a much wider range of practices and contexts in which this is the case. Home-birthing is, in multiple ways, coded as a "private" sphere of action, as Asad's conception of the limits of secular ethics would predict. But the case of American Mormonism discussed by Cannell points to the fact that elements of the more public, historical refusals of the "secular constitution" persist into twenty-first-century life also.

Finally, among the chapters that converge on the theme of the secular, Bear's account (chapter 7) of the productive life of Indian shipyard workers addresses what she calls "theologies of materiality." In tune with Veena Das's observation (2006) that there are more than two understandings of human nature in the world, Bear explores the construction of ships as an act of labor inseparable from the ethics of kinship and divinity, which Bengali workers understand to power it. For Bear, in this context, labor retains an ethical dimension through its longer-term interpolations with social relations, especially the relations of kinship, which are partly made and remade through exchanges with the Hindu gods. Thus, in India, where the history of the secular is widely divergent from Western concepts of the same (Cannell 2010), kinship appears to be "secular" neither in a Western nor yet in an Indian sense of the term.

Myths of modernity and modernization continue to resurface in unexpected places. In this introduction and in the chapters by Cannell, Lambek, and Bear, it is suggested that there is a crypto-progressivism in the approaches taken by Foucault, among other theorists. Despite his radical skepticism about the advances made by liberal modernity, Foucault, like many other writers, tacitly assumes that kinship has no place in modern constitutions, being instead replaced by "biopower," which operates on the capacity of its citizens for physical reproductive, rather than for social and imaginative, life. This thought has been taken up by many constituencies, including scholars writing on the important issues of "biocitizenship" (e.g., Novas and Rose 2000). But as Bear (2007a; see also Cannell 2011) has demonstrated elsewhere, genealogy is not, as Foucault would have it, just a metaphor, but a lived reality. It is now widely accepted that religion has not

simply drained away in modernity; it may have taken different forms. We suggest that it may soon seem as obvious to draw attention to the continued life of kinship in the vital relations of modernity.

CONCLUSION: THE VITALITY OF KINSHIP RELATIONS

As we wrote the final paragraphs of this introduction, one episode in a major scandal was unfolding in the United Kingdom. Rupert Murdoch and his vast international company, News Corporation, were in trouble with the British Parliament and police over allegations of phone hacking, corruption, obstruction of the course of justice, and attempts to intimidate members of Parliament. On the eve of being granted permission to increase his share in the biggest British pay-TV company, BSkyB, from 40 to 100 percent, Murdoch saw a severe check to his ambitions. He, his son, and his lieutenant were summoned to appear before a Select Committee of the British House of Commons, and public inquiries and criminal investigations were under way. The scandal held the potential to spread to the United States, where Murdoch owns Fox News, among other major media interests.

One of the key debates was over the relationship between the possibility of large-scale corruption in a global company of this stature and the “clan” organization of Murdoch’s business. Also under fire with Rupert Murdoch were both his youngest son, James Murdoch (chair of BSkyB), and Rebekah Brooks (former CEO of News International), who—because of the closeness of her relationship to Rupert Murdoch—has regularly been described as being “like a daughter” to him. Other major shareholders in BSkyB have complained of feeling “shut out” by the inner core of the family.

The central issues of the scandal are related to the structure of global capital and to the ability of vast monopolies to dominate national media and, allegedly, to direct decisions of national governments that are otherwise meant to be answerable to their electorate. These issues are, in fact, similar to concerns that have been raised in relation to the dominant power of international finance and speculative banking and its effect on the economic crises of both the United States and Europe in the 2000s.

Whatever the sequel to the Murdoch drama, this moment alone is surely enough to remind us of the fallacy of assuming that kinship—either literal or figurative—is a spent force in the contemporary world. Here, we see deeply entwined relations between kinship, economics, and politics that have fueled both the rise and, potentially, the downfall of one of the most powerful corporations in the world (if not also its allied government in Britain). Here, we observe the tensions between claims of status and contract, kinship and meritocracy, which have not been resolved, as predicted,

under the conditions of modernity. And here, we witness the critique of a family's corporate organization as nepotism in an attempt to assert a properly modern separation between kinship, economics, and politics—as if the corruption derived from their kinship alone and not from the structures of capital and governance.

Precisely these kinds of compelling entanglements are what we explore in this volume and what motivate us to question deeply the narratives of modernity that have been so central to our scholarly and popular cultural understandings of the world for so long. Indeed, the goal of this book is to consider ways of thinking about kinship in contemporary societies that escape the constraints of the evolutionary imperatives and domaining practices that have structured our ideas of the modern and to reach toward more complex and nuanced accounts that reveal the vitality of kinship in contemporary social life.

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful for the generous support and exquisite hospitality of the School for Advanced Research, which made possible the week-long advanced seminar “The Difference Kinship Makes: Rethinking the Ideologies of Modernity” (March 20–26, 2010), on which this volume is based. SAR's staff and facilities created an atmosphere that was gracious and nourishing (both literally and figuratively) of our intellectual project. We are also greatly appreciative of the intense intellectual energy, engagement, and camaraderie that the participants brought to the discussions of one another's work and to the project as a whole, throughout the week of the seminar and long thereafter. This is the best of what we all hope for in the work of intellectual exchange. We dedicate this volume to Olivia Harris, whose presence in our lives is profoundly missed, as it was, indeed, during our week in Santa Fe.

Notes

1. For a review of seven aspects of institutional change relevant to an understanding of the transition to modernity, see Reed and Adams 2011; for an extensive account of the history and future prospects of historical sociology and its analysis of modernity, see Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005.

2. Interestingly, Mauss (unlike Durkheim or Weber) rarely seems to be invoked by colleagues working in sociology or historical sociology. Perhaps this is because they have been given the impression that his work is less relevant because it appears not to speak directly about Western developments.

3. Work on transnationalism and globalization has attended to the ways in which the bounded integrity of core units of so-called modern society—the nation, the corporation—have been called into question by the movements and migrations of people,

capital, and culture (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). This work has rarely called into question either the larger metanarrative of modernity or its presupposition about the separation between kinship and economic processes. However, a few anthropological studies have theorized the ways in which kinship organizes transnational economic ventures (see, for instance, Ho 2006; Ong 1999; Ong and Nonini 1997; Oxfeld 1993; Ratanapruck 2008).

4. Viewing sovereignty from the margins of the state, Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat have pointed out that a number of figures and networks of “informal sovereignty”—whether these are of chiefs, big men, strong men, mafia, masons, warlords, gangs, traitors, terrorists, brigands, bandits, pirates, outlaws, or elite families—“operate within, beside, or against formally sovereign states” (2006:306; see Heyman 1999). As David Nugent (1999) shows for Peru, the illegal networks of kin and patronage that constitute “shadow states” can quickly become the legal structures of the state. No one has yet theorized more generally the extent to which such figures and groups are organized in configurations of kinship, such as families, brotherhoods, or fraternities.

5. Nicole Constable’s edited volume, *Cross-Border Marriages* (2005; see also Freeman 2005, 2011), explores the paradoxes of gender, class, and nation in the proliferation of transnational “hypergamous” marriages. Caren Freeman (2011) paints a striking portrait of the brisk market in the creation and documentation of fake kinship ties that help move ethnic Koreans out of the cold winters of Harbin, China, into the warmer economic climes of South Korea. The worldwide manufacture of fake kinship ties is a testimony to the force of kinship in transnational movements and in claims to citizenship in the current global political economy.

6. From among the chapters in this volume, we think, in particular, of Rutherford’s juxtaposition of US politics with Melanesia (chapter 11) and Yanagisako’s examination of Italian family firms in China (chapter 3).

7. Signe Howell (2006) coined the terms “kinning” and “dekinning,” which she used in her discussion of transnational adoptions. By kinning, she means “the process by which...a previously unconnected person...is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom” (63), and dekinning refers to the opposite process (9).

8. Weber did not, of course, mean, as is sometimes said, that no belief in magic or religion was possible in the modern world (although sincere belief in traditional religion might be difficult).