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978-0-521-59021-1 - Kinship, Networks, and Exchange

Edited by Thomas Schweizer and Douglas R. White

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Structural analysis as practiced today in the study of human societies is characterized by combining the richness of ethnographic case studies with the formal rigor of social network analysis, the theory of games and of social exchange and social cognition, algebraic and graph-theoretical analysis of social structure, and more dynamic (and computer-driven) analyses of social processes. These approaches focus on linkages and relations as well as groups and individuals. The concept of the social embedding of economic and political organization makes it imperative that ethnological concerns with kinship, marriage, and social exchange be reconceptualized and reanalyzed as foundational in all parts of the contemporary world, to the way that societies, economies, and polities are organized.

Social network analysis focuses on social relations and the flow of resources within networks of actors and investigates the emerging social order or pattern generated over time by networked activities. In integrating anthropological studies of kinship and exchange with the social network perspective, anthropology profits from the precise and flexible framework of social network analysis while the interdisciplinary study of social structure deepens its understanding of social pattern and process in taking into account holistic ethnographic cases and the comparative agenda of anthropology. Studies of marriage, descent, and exchange can pay due respect to the social, material, and symbolic aspects of human societies and can assess change without sacrificing rigor and systematic understanding of social and economic patterns in a broader structuralist and dynamic perspective.

This collection of original articles, restudies of classic ethnographic cases, and fieldwork studies of kinship and exchange in contemporary tribal and peasant societies of Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Europe aims at revitalizing the study of kinship and exchange in a social network perspective. This volume brings together studies of empirical systems of marriage and descent with investigations of the flow of material resources in human societies to demonstrate how the social and material aspects of society are related. It addresses issues of concern to anthropology and the neighboring disciplines of history, sociology, and economics. This book marks the emergence of a new era in the study of kinship and exchange using a productive combination of ethnographic substance with formal methods, one that leaves behind older structural-functionalist and culturalist assumptions.

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PREFACE

This book offers an orientation to current anthropological research on kinship and exchange in a social network perspective. It contains case studies and formal approaches of substantive interest to social and economic anthropologists, sociologists, and historians concerned with marriage, descent, and the exchange of material and symbolic resources. For social networkers and methodologists the application of formal models and the social network approach to ethnographic case studies should be revealing, and a number of significant extensions to network methods and formal theory are introduced. Diverse cases and theoretical approaches are integrated into sections and explained in section introductions. The book can be used in classes on social organization, social networks, social stratification, economy and social change, in any of several social science disciplines.

This work is an outcome of a cooperative research program on the comparative study of social organization that we launched some years ago. We would like to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for funding Douglas R. White's first stay at Cologne under a senior scientist's award in 1990 and since then for enabling the continual exchange among the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Irvine, and the Institute of Ethnology, University of Cologne, under its Transcoop Scheme for Transatlantic Scientific Exchange. Likewise the National Science Foundation grant for "Network Analysis of Kinship, Social Transmission and Exchange" provided the necessary matching fund for which we are grateful. The German Research Society supported a conference on kinship and exchange in 1993 at which preliminary drafts of the chapters in this volume were presented. In addition, we thank the Leibniz program of the German Research Society for covering part of the production costs and the stay of Douglas R. White at Cologne in 1996. Also, we are grateful for the help given by French colleagues and institutions, most notably to Alain Degenne, Vincent Duquenne, and Michael Houseman and their research groups at CRNS, and to the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and Maison Suger in Paris, and

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