

# Cultures of Relatedness

*New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*

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*Edited by*

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>  
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011–4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

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First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Plantin 10/12 pt [CE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Cultures of relatedness: new approaches to the study of kinship / edited by Janet Carsten.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 65193 X (hardback). – ISBN 0 521 65627 3 (paperback)

1. Kinship Congresses. I. Carsten, Janet.

GN487.C85 2000

306.83 – dc21 99–15844 CIP

ISBN 0 521 65193 X hardback

ISBN 0 521 65627 3 paperback

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# 1 Introduction: cultures of relatedness

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*Janet Carsten*

In recent years new life has been breathed into the anthropological study of kinship. This volume brings together some of the sources of the new vitality by exploring local cultures of relatedness in comparative context. The authors describe what ‘being related’ does for particular people living in specific localities in Africa, China, India, Madagascar, Alaska, and Europe. Rather than taking the content of ‘kinship’ for granted, they build from first principles a picture of the implications and the lived experience of relatedness in local contexts. It is a truism that people are always conscious of connections to other people. It is equally a truism that some of these connections carry particular weight – socially, materially, affectively. And, often but not always, these connections can be described in genealogical terms, but they can also be described in other ways.

Consider, for example, the Nuer, who constitute a paradigm of a lineage-based society and, as such, a classic case in the anthropological literature. Nuer are revealed here in very different terms from those in which generations of students have come to understand them (notwithstanding the complexities of Evans-Pritchard’s (1940, 1951) original ethnography). In this volume Hutchinson describes how, under the conditions of profound social and political upheaval experienced in southern Sudan, the connections and disconnections of Nuer relatedness have come to be understood not only in terms of blood and cattle but also through the media of money, paper, and guns. That these media are potentially convertible into each other, and that food is convertible into blood, and blood into milk and semen, lends an extraordinary degree of transformability to Nuer idioms of relatedness. This ‘unboundedness’ not only provides a strong contrast to the classic understandings of Nuer kinship in terms of descent groups, but has important implications for how we consider idioms of relatedness more generally.

Likewise, if we consider Iñupiaq relatedness as described here by Bodenhorn, much anthropological wisdom about what constitutes

kinship is called into question. Placing a high value on individual autonomy, Iñupiat strongly deny that ties deriving from procreation exert any overriding moral force. Whereas claims based on different contributions to productive work are described as permanent, 'biology' does not constitute an immutable basis for relations. One of the purposes of this volume is precisely to interrogate the role of biology in local statements and practices of relatedness. In this introductory chapter I situate local practices in a broader comparative context. For the Iñupiat, it is clear that a rejection of biology as constituting the moral bedrock to kinship does not mean that relatedness, as locally constituted, is irrelevant – on the contrary, Bodenhorn makes clear that Iñupiat constantly seek to acquire more ties through naming practices, adoption, and marriage. Crucially, however, these ties are seen as optative rather than given.

The aim of describing relatedness in indigenous terms appears deceptively simple. But it is of course part of a more ambitious project. That project involves assessing where the anthropological study of kinship finds itself at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and where its future might lie. The study of kinship was the very heart of anthropology for nearly a century. In the North American, European, and British schools, from Morgan to Schneider, Durkheim to Lévi-Strauss, Rivers and Malinowski to Radcliffe-Brown and Fortes, the major theorists of anthropology made their mark in the study of kinship (cf. Parkin 1997: 135). It seemed more or less impossible to imagine what anthropology would look like without kinship. And yet from the 1970s on, the position of kinship as a field of study within anthropology has been under question. 'Under question' is something of an understatement. For most anthropologists confronted with the question 'Whatever happened to kinship?', one might say quite simply, as David Schneider did in an interview published shortly before his death, 'the kinds of problems changed' (1995: 193–4).

In Schneider's view, the shift away from kinship was part of a general shift in anthropological understanding from structure to practice, and from practice to discourse. Kinship lost ground – most obviously to gender. But this was part of a wider recasting of the nature of social and cultural life which involved the breaking down of the discrete domains of economics, politics, religion, and kinship which had defined anthropology. This recasting occurred alongside what Schneider termed a 'democratisation of the intellectual enterprise' (1995: 197) in which concerns about social justice, from feminism and the civil rights movement, were crucial. Schneider's view was shaped, of course, by events inside and outside the North American academy. It was more generally

true, however, that social stability was no longer the central issue in anthropology. And in one way or another, the study of kinship – whether in evolutionary, functionalist, or structuralist guise – had been bound up with explanations of social stability.

But Schneider also noted that, perhaps surprisingly, kinship in the 1990s had ‘risen from its ashes’ (1995: 193) – a fact which he attributed to feminist work, to studies of gay and lesbian kinship, and to Marilyn Strathern’s *After Nature* (1992). If it is true that kinship has undergone a rebirth, there is no doubt that the ‘new kinship’ looks rather different from its old-style forebears. It has become standard, in works on kinship published since the 1980s, for gender, the body, and personhood to feature prominently in the analysis, while relationship terminologies are barely referred to, and kinship diagrams scarcely make an appearance. ‘The kinds of problems changed.’ This volume is one attempt to understand in what ways the problems changed, and how kinship might look as a result.

The present collection is intended as both a new departure and a return to comparative roots. It begins to explore how the issues underlying recent work on kinship in Euro-American cultures, on new reproductive technologies, on gender, and on the social construction of science in the West impinge on the study of relatedness cross-culturally. Much of this recent work has been concerned with a set of issues about ‘nature’ or ‘biology’ in Euro-American cultures.

A central theme running through this volume is the relationship between the ‘biological’ and the ‘social’. If ‘biology’ or ‘nature’ has been the grounding for the ‘social’ in the West, and this relationship now appears to have been ‘destabilised’, can we put our understanding of this process of destabilisation to work in studies of non-Western cultures? What kind of relevance does this breaching of our foundational certainties have for how we understand and compare relatedness cross-culturally? Rather than beginning with a domain of kinship already marked out, the authors in this volume describe relatedness in terms of indigenous statements and practices – some of which may seem to fall quite outside what anthropologists have conventionally understood as kinship. The chapters which follow suggest not only that biology does not everywhere have the kind of foundational function it has in the West, but that the boundaries between the biological and the social which, as Schneider demonstrated, have been so crucial in the study of kinship are in many cases distinctly blurred, if they are visible at all. These new understandings may force us to conclude that kinship needs to be reinvented in a post-modern, or – to use Bruno Latour’s (1993) term – ‘non-modern’ spirit.

### **A note on 'relatedness'**

It should be clear from the outset that this is a book with a particular mission. That mission is to bring together two trends in recent anthropology. One trend involves the investigation not just of kinship, but of 'nature' and wider knowledge practices in the West. The other, taking a broad and imaginative view of what might be included under the rubric 'kinship', describes the ethnographic particularities of being related in a specific cultural context. The authors collected here have all worked on one or both sets of problems.

The particular aim I have sketched necessarily involves constructing a selective version of anthropological history. In this introduction I highlight a set of issues revolving around the separation of biological and social aspects of kinship in anthropology, and I trace one particular thread of continuity in recent work. If in places the argument appears dismissive of previous renditions of kinship, this is unintended. I take it for granted that in order to say something differently one constructs rather partial versions of what went before (I have made this explicit at various points below). But of course the new relies and builds on the old, and I make my full acknowledgement here to the insights and inspiration provided by the scholars I cite as well as many that I do not.

The version of anthropological history which I give below leans heavily on the work of David Schneider and employs a concept of culture which may seem more foreign to British readers than to those trained in the American anthropological tradition. British students (we like to think) have been accustomed to think of kinship in terms of the social – as in social rules, social organisation, social practice (see Bouquet, this volume). American cultural anthropology focuses on meaning. But my sense is that there has for a long time been an implicit rapprochement between these schools which can be attributed as much to the influence of Lévi-Strauss and Dumont as to the writings of American cultural anthropologists.

Particular versions of history sometimes demand different terms. The authors in this volume use the term 'relatedness' in opposition to, or alongside, 'kinship' in order to signal an openness to indigenous idioms of being related rather than a reliance on pre-given definitions or previous versions. In this introduction I have also used 'relatedness' in a more specific way in order to suspend a particular set of assumptions about what is entailed by the terms social and biological. I use 'relatedness' to convey, however unsatisfactorily, a move away from a pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested. As a term, it is of course



open to criticisms – many of which apply equally to ‘kinship’. The obvious problem with relatedness is that either it is used in a restricted sense to convey relations in some way founded on genealogical connection, in which case it is open to similar problems as kinship, or it is used in a more general sense to encompass other kinds of social relations, in which case it becomes so broad that it is in danger of ‘becoming analytically vacuous’ (Holy 1996: 168).<sup>1</sup> Readers will perceive that ‘relatedness’ offers no neat solutions for the comparative endeavour – merely that its use has enabled me to suspend one set of assumptions, and to bracket off a particular nexus of problems, in order to frame the questions differently. ‘Relatedness’ makes possible comparisons between Iñupiat and English or Nuer ways of being related without relying on an arbitrary distinction between biology and culture, and without presupposing what constitutes kinship.

Issues about the natural and the social are of course central to two other areas to which anthropologists have recently given much attention: the body and gender (see, for example, Broch-Due, Rudie, and Bleie 1993; Lambek and Strathern 1998). As I discuss below, the parallel is hardly coincidental. But the study of the body and of gender in anthropology can be seen as part of a shift *away* from kinship in anthropology. One purpose of this volume is to confront these issues head on within the frame of kinship, rather than taking a more circuitous route via gender or the body. The volume thus reiterates in a new way a very old tenet of anthropology – the centrality of kinship.

This collection also reiterates an ambitious commitment to the *comparative* study of kinship in the face of an increasing emphasis on cultural particularism. The reluctance to engage in generalisation is one effect of the sustained attack on the concept of kinship and the increasing attention given by anthropologists to the diversity of the meanings of kinship (cf. Holy 1996: 172–3) – although, as Schneider noted, ‘symbols and meanings can be compared just as easily as modes of family organisation, the roles of seniors to juniors, or the methods of agriculture’ (1972: 48; cited in Marshall 1977: 656). And, as Andrew Strathern and Michael Lambek (1998: 23) remind us, ethnographic work is always at least implicitly comparative in that the society of the anthropologist is inescapably present. In this volume the analytic language of kinship, as well as certain Euro-American everyday practices and discourses of kinship, explicitly fall within the comparative frame.

It is noteworthy that there has been almost no prominent collection of essays devoted to the cross-cultural comparison of kinship since the publication of Jack Goody’s edited volume *The Character of Kinship* in 1973. There have of course been many innovative studies since. But

these have either focused on kinship in a local or regional ethnographic context, or have made something else – gender, personhood, houses, bodies, death, procreation – the main object of comparison, with kinship emerging as a prominent subsidiary theme.<sup>2</sup> I address the reasons for this long gap in what follows. But, if nothing else, it may be timely to attempt a fresh look at kinship in comparative perspective.

My introduction is thus clearly not intended to provide a history of the anthropological study of kinship since the nineteenth century. That task has been undertaken by others (e.g. Kuper 1988). Nor do I offer either a new introductory textbook (e.g. Barnard and Good 1984; Holy 1996; Parkin 1997) or a comprehensive survey of the various trends in kinship studies since the 1970s (e.g. Peletz 1995).<sup>3</sup> Instead, I attempt a particular take on ‘whatever happened to kinship?’ – a take in which David Schneider has a pivotal role, poised as he was, in a unique way, between the old-style kinship and the new.

### **Whatever happened to kinship?**

Schneider is a key figure for a number of reasons. Although he was at one time part of the formalist tradition of kinship studies (see, for example, *Matrilineal Kinship* (1961), which he co-edited with Kathleen Gough), his later work was highly innovative. His *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*, which was first published in 1968 and reprinted in a second edition in 1980, was highly influential for later culturalist analyses of kinship – a point which I take up below. A crucial aspect of Schneider’s influence is the role played in his writings by ‘nature’ or ‘biology’ and its separation from law, which is itself encompassed by ‘culture’. The significance of biology in his writings is often highly contradictory (cf. J. A. Barnes 1973: 63–5), but these contradictions are at the heart of understandings of kinship and of wider knowledge practices in Euro-American cultures. The distinction between the biological and the social is also central to the analyses of local cultures of relatedness presented in this volume, and it is for this reason that I dwell on it at some length here.

Schneider’s *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984) can be read as a commentary on his earlier monograph *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (1980). In the first book he outlined American kinship as a cultural system, explicating its symbolic logic. This was in many ways a path-breaking work, exemplifying a symbolic approach to culture. Schneider argued that sexual reproduction was a core symbol of kinship in a system which was defined by two dominant orders, that of nature, or substance, and that of law, or code. The sexual union of two

unrelated partners in marriage provided the symbolic link between these two orders. It resulted in children connected to their parents through blood ties, or 'shared biogenetic substance', symbolising 'diffuse, enduring solidarity'. The idiom of nature was crucial to American kinship: 'The family is formed according to the laws of nature and it lives by rules which are regarded by Americans as self-evidently natural' (1980: 34). Here sexual intercourse had a critical symbolic role:

All of the significant symbols of American kinship are contained within the figure of sexual intercourse, itself a symbol of course. The figure is formulated in American culture as a biological entity and a natural act. Yet throughout, each element which is culturally defined as natural is at the same time augmented and elaborated, built upon and informed by the rule of human reason, embodied in law and in morality. (P. 40)

The role of the 'natural' or 'biological' here is telling. As Franklin comments, at least three different 'natures' emerge from Schneider's analysis of American kinship beliefs: biology, as in 'shared biogenetic substance'; nature, as in 'what animals do'; and human nature, as in 'man is a special part of nature' (1997: 54). The contradictions between these different 'natures', however, remain unexplored in Schneider's work. Franklin (1997: 54–5) demonstrates the tension in Schneider's analysis between 'nature' as a coherent symbolic idiom in American kinship, and 'nature' or 'biology' as a separate and distinct realm of scientific facts. As Schneider wrote in 1968:

These biological facts, the biological prerequisites for human existence, exist and remain. The child does not live without the milk of human kindness, both as nourishment and protection. Nor does the child come into being except by the fertilised egg which, except for those rare cases of artificial insemination, is the outcome of sexual intercourse. These are biological facts . . . There is also a system of constructs in American culture about those biological facts. That system exists in an adjusted and adjustable relationship with these biological facts.

But these biological constructs which depict these biological facts have another quality. They have as one of their aspects a symbolic quality, which means they represent something other than what they are, over and above and in addition to their existence as biological facts and cultural constructs about biological facts. (1980: 116)

Franklin observes how such passages indicate that Schneider in fact preserved the same distinction he started with:

On the one hand, Schneider was arguing that there is no such thing as a biological fact *per se* in American kinship systems – there are only cultural interpretations of them. On the other hand, he was also arguing that there *are* 'natural facts' within science which are true and which are separate from the cultural constructions of them. (1997: 55; original italics)

A similar problem underlies Schneider's later work, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984; see Carsten 1995a). Here Schneider subjected the history of the study of kinship to the same kind of analytic scrutiny he had previously applied to American kinship, and demonstrated how sexual procreation was central to anthropological definitions of kinship – in this respect his argument reiterated one that had already been made by Needham (1971a).<sup>4</sup> Schneider showed that this was an indigenous assumption in Euro-American folk beliefs about kinship which had been imported into anthropological analysis. It was hardly news, however, that sexual procreation was not necessarily central to local idioms of relatedness – notably in the famous example of the Trobrianders, or in the case of the Yapese whom Schneider himself studied, where the link between coitus and procreation in humans was reportedly not made (see Malinowski 1929; Leach 1967; Spiro 1968; Schneider 1984; Delaney 1986; Franklin 1997). If 'kinship' was not the same thing in different cultures, then the comparative endeavour of anthropology failed, because like was quite simply not being compared with like. Schneider, like Needham before him, concluded that 'there is no such thing as kinship' (Needham 1971a: 5), and that the discrete domains into which anthropologists divided up the world – kinship, economics, politics, and religion – had to be abandoned. His argument thus had particular relevance for the comparative study of kinship.<sup>5</sup>

Although Schneider took the discussion about the role of biology in the anthropological study of kinship rather further than he had in *American Kinship*, he still seemed to hold back from abandoning the very separation which he was investigating – that between culture and biology:

[T]he point remains that culture, even were it to do no more than recognize biological facts, still adds something to those facts. The problem remains of just what the sociocultural aspects are, of what meaning is added, of where and how that meaning, as a meaning rather than as biological fact, articulates with other meanings. (1984: 199)

Schneider's *Critique* was very successful in demonstrating the Euro-centric assumptions at the heart of the anthropological study of kinship. This was undoubtedly one of the many nails in the coffin of kinship, and contributed to the shift away from the study of kinship in the 1970s. It was somewhat paradoxical therefore that his earlier work on American kinship, flawed as it was, provided a highly fertile model for later culturalist accounts of kinship, one to which Strathern (1992a: xviii) and others have made clear their debt. Schneider is a pivotal figure in the study of kinship precisely because of the link between these two projects – and this provides a crucial distinction from Needham's

writings. Perhaps it is not surprising in retrospect that Schneider's stronger position, which focused on the 'meanings' of kinship rather than on formal properties, seems to have offered greater possibilities for the future study of kinship. By illuminating the role of nature or biology in American folk versions of kinship *and* in anthropological analyses of kinship, and by beginning to explore the connections between these two strands, Schneider left a particularly fruitful avenue for later scholars to pursue.

Marilyn Strathern claimed David Schneider as 'anthropological father' to *After Nature* (1992a: xviii), and this link is reiterated in Schneider's own comment on his *American Kinship* – one which might almost be taken as the epigraph for Strathern's book:

Nor did I notice until almost after it was all done how much the Euro-American notion of knowledge depended on the proposition that knowledge is *discovered*, not invented, and that knowledge comes when the 'facts' of nature which are hidden from us mostly, are finally revealed. Thus, for example, kinship was thought to be the social recognition of the actual facts of biological relatedness . . . The idea that culture, and knowledge, is mostly a direct reflection of nature is still very much with us, however inadequate that view is. (1995: 222; original italics).

The central point of Strathern's argument is that nature can no longer be taken for granted in late-twentieth-century English culture. In Thatcherite Britain, the effects of technological developments – particularly the new reproductive technologies – and the extension of consumer choice to domains in which such choice had not previously applied, have resulted in a destabilisation of nature.

Nature, at once intrinsic characteristic and external environment, constituted both the given facts of the world and the world as context for facts . . . Although it could be made into a metaphor or seen to be the object of human activity, it also had the status of a prior fact, a condition for existence. Nature was thus a condition for knowledge. It crucially controlled, we might say, a relational view between whatever was taken as internal (nature) and as external (nature). (1992a: 194)

What Strathern calls the 'modern cycle' involved a new conceptualisation of the ground for knowledge. In this new conceptualisation, nature does not disappear – in fact it becomes more evident – but its 'grounding function' is lost through being made explicit. If, for example, one considers the effects of the new reproductive technologies, which are often claimed to be merely 'assisting nature', then kin relationships, which in the past would have been seen as having their basis in nature, and could then be socially recognised – or not – may now be seen as either socially constructed or as natural relations which are assisted by

technology. As Strathern (1992a: 195–6; 1992b) makes clear, the significant shift is that what was taken to be natural has become a matter for choice; nature has been, as she puts it, ‘enterprised-up’. The more nature is assisted by technology, and the more the social recognition of parenthood is circumscribed by legislation, the more difficult it becomes to think of nature as independent of social intervention (1992b: 30). It follows from this that knowledge itself, which previously was seen as ‘a direct reflection of nature’, as Schneider put it, no longer has such a grounding in nature. It is not just nature, then, but knowledge itself which has been destabilised.

Kinship has a critical role in these shifts in knowledge practices precisely because, in the English view, kinship is defined as being the meeting place of nature and culture (Strathern 1992a: 87). Kinship facts can be seen as simultaneously part of nature and part of culture. Kinship performed a kind of dual function – it was based in a nature that was itself regarded as the grounding for culture, and it also provided an image of the relation between culture and nature (*ibid.* 198).

Strathern explores the cultural effects of ‘the demise of the reproductive model of the modern epoch’, where individuals can no longer be placed simultaneously in different contexts as social constructions and as biologically given (1992a: 193). Future technological developments, such as the mapping of the human genome, suggest that the shift from nature to choice will further destabilise the reproductive model. In the endless proliferation of a highly politicised discourse about consumer preference, new reproductive technologies, and gene therapies, it becomes possible to imagine ‘a cultural future that will need no base in ideas about human reproduction’ (p. 198).

Strathern’s conclusion highlights once again the centrality of pre-given biological facts to Western knowledge practices and kinship relations. The cultural construction of a scientific realm of ‘natural facts’ has, of course, itself been made the subject of study by historians of science. Thus, for example, Haraway’s (1989, 1991) work on primatology demonstrates how the boundaries between nature and culture are much more permeable than either biological or social scientists might suppose. The ‘traffic between nature and culture’ (1989: 15), which she illustrates through particular histories of the relationships between primates and those who studied them, puts into question the role of ‘biological facts’ as a domain separate from culture. Here scientific facts are shown not simply as ‘pure truths’, placidly awaiting discovery in a natural world, but as actively constructed by scientists whose work practices, gendered identities, and career paths situated them in particular historical and cultural milieus.

The view that scientific facts are as much made as they are discovered has radical implications because it runs directly counter to Western assumptions about the 'natural world'.<sup>6</sup> As Franklin observes, the fact that the science of biology itself admits no distinction between physical phenomena and the study of these phenomena marks a telling difference from social sciences such as anthropology.

The conflation of the object to be known with the discipline of its observation and description ... performs the collapsing of knowledge with its object distinctive of modern Western scientific ways of knowing. Indeed, that is the definitively scientific 'collapse': that objective knowledge in the sciences is so transparent it is isomorphic with the reality it describes (1997: 56).

Franklin argues that in the West the 'facts' of biology symbolise not just certain kinds of relationships called kinship ties, but the 'possession of a particular form of knowledge which offers a particular access to truth' (p. 208). There is a crucial link between a category of relations which is regarded as particularly powerful (and whose power is derived from biological reproduction) and the power of science to determine the facts of this reproduction. It is significant that Franklin situates her study of women's experience of IVF (*in vitro* fertilisation) treatment in two British infertility clinics in the late 1980s in the context of the debate around the 'social' construction of 'natural' facts in the anthropological literature, particularly the discussion of procreation beliefs. Hers is one among a number of recent works to explore the cultural implications of reproductive medicine and the new technologies of reproduction (see, for example, Edwards et al. 1993; Franklin and Ragoné 1998a; Ginsburg and Rapp 1991, 1995; Martin 1987, 1991; Ragoné 1994). At the centre of these studies is a project of 'defamiliarising' the natural basis of human procreation and reproduction (Franklin and Ragoné 1998b: 4), which, of course, has been closely linked to the emergence of a distinctive feminist anthropology. Schneider had already demonstrated that the status of the 'natural' in the anthropological literature on kinship was open to question. It could now be shown to be equally 'displaced' in English and American social life (see Franklin 1997: ch. 1).

Franklin illuminates the same kind of shifts in knowledge practices as those discussed by Strathern. The significant effect of the new reproductive technologies in terms of how knowledge is understood is that nature and technology become mutually substitutable. Technology is described in the literature provided to patients as giving nature a 'helping hand'; this capacity of technology is 'just like' nature (Franklin 1997: 209–10). Biology, in the sense of scientific knowledge, has its own generative power, and this is evidenced in the new technologies. Simultaneously,

reproductive biology is denaturalised – it can be assisted by technology. Instead of a naturally given sequence of events, reproduction becomes an ‘achievement’ (Franklin 1998: 103). Science can no longer be viewed as extra-cultural; kinship is no longer defined against ‘natural’, ‘biological’ facts; it is no longer ‘given’ (Franklin 1997: 210–13).

Recent investigations of the articulation of biology and kinship in Euro-American contexts have not only focused on reproductive technologies. The place of biology and procreation has also been at the centre of studies of gay and lesbian kinship in America. Weston (1991, 1995) discusses coming-out stories which reveal that ‘blood ties’ are described as temporary and uncertain in the light of the disruptions to, and severance of, kinship ties experienced by gays who declare their homosexuality to their families. Meanwhile ‘chosen families’ of friends are invested with certainty, depth, and permanence, and spoken about in an idiom of kinship by those whose experience of biological kin has been thoroughly disrupted. This implies a view of kinship which, by displacing biology, turns the conventional understandings on their head – although Strathern underscores how the critique of gay kinship actually consists of making explicit ‘the fact that there was always a choice as to whether or not biology is made the foundation of relationships’ (1993: 196; cited in Hayden 1995: 45).

Investigating procreation in the context of lesbian relations, Hayden (1995) argues that, far from being displaced as a symbol, biology is here mobilised in myriad new ways. She outlines various strategies employed by lesbian co-mothers in order to equalise their claims and legitimate their relations to the child. These include giving the child the names of the co-parents in hyphenated form, emphasising the co-parents’ joint decision to bring up the child, and the partner performing the insemination of the birth mother. Hayden discusses how lesbian co-mothers in these ways appropriate generative powers. She shows how other strategies suggest an abstraction of biogenetic substance from the identity of the donor, and a dispersal of biological connectedness. These strategies include both partners bearing a child through the use of the same donor, careful selection of the donor in order to produce a child who will physically resemble the co-mother, or the use of the brother of the non-biological parent as donor.<sup>7</sup> Hayden’s exposition vividly conveys how, in her words, ‘lesbian families’ explicit mobilization of biological ties challenges the notion of biology as a *singular* category through which kin ties are reckoned’ (1995: 45; original italics). Strathern claims that it is by rendering biology, or nature, explicit that its grounding function disappears. The disruptions which have occurred when biology is deployed to legitimate the claims of co-mothers seem to substantiate



this thesis. For here biology no longer operates as a taken-for-granted or self-evident symbol. Instead, the meanings of blood ties, biogenetic substance, paternity, and generation, and their relation to each other, become contingent and variable (Hayden 1995: 56).

The writings I have discussed so far focus on how nature, or biology, and by implication kinship (which, in the indigenous view, could itself be read off from biology), are deployed in the West, and thus extend one part of Schneider's project. They are less directly concerned, however, with the questions raised in *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* about the future of the anthropological study of kinship and with specifically comparative studies. I have suggested that Schneider's work is crucial precisely because he demonstrated the links between these two sets of problems.

The 'denaturalisation' of kinship has been taken up by Yanagisako and Delaney (1995a), who explore the specificities of different natures and the implications of questioning 'nature' as a universal base. Most of the chapters in their collection focus on North America, and analyse how the discourses and practices of kinship, gender, ethnicity, and nationalism involve the naturalisation of identity and difference. In illuminating the naturalising force of Western kinship discourse, the authors of this volume once again explicitly acknowledge their debt to Schneider.<sup>8</sup> They take the symbolic analysis of kinship considerably further than Schneider in demonstrating how the plural meanings of kinship are themselves embedded in hierarchies of power, which these meanings also serve to naturalise. If kinship, after Schneider, could no longer be seen as the cultural elaboration of biological facts, and if the discrete domains of kinship, economics, politics, and religion no longer held, then what would kinship look like when shorn of its foundational assumptions (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995b: 11)? Once again they highlight the significance of Western hierarchies of knowledge which mark off science as a 'sacred domain' where truths residing in the natural world 'transcend agency' and are 'discovered by humans' (p. 13). The separation of science from culture serves to naturalise a particular hierarchy of knowledge and to prevent 'reading across domains' (ibid.).

A recognition that the boundaries that separate off domains, such as 'science', 'kinship', 'politics', 'economics', and 'religion', are cultural constructions offers the possibility of asking 'how culturally-specific domains have been dialectically formed and transformed in relation with other cultural domains, how meanings migrate across domain boundaries, and how specific actions are multiply constituted' (ibid.). These authors show that it is possible to abandon the foundational

assumptions that have defined analytic domains, such as kinship, without abandoning ‘the study of the meanings and relations previously confined to those domains’ (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995b: 11). Indeed, the holistic project which anthropology has conventionally set for the study of ‘other’ cultures has involved just such a tracing of phenomena through the myriad contexts in which they occur – the most famous example being Mauss’s (1966) argument that the gift constituted a ‘total social phenomenon’ which was at once political, religious, and economic.

In the remainder of this introduction I explore some of the interconnections among the chapters which follow, returning in the concluding sections to the implications of the work I have discussed so far for the study of relatedness in non-Western cultures. Although the chapters focus on different local contexts of relatedness, many of the themes which emerge are held in common. I highlight these as ‘processual aspects of kinship’, ‘everyday practice’, ‘gender’, ‘substance’, the ‘social and the biological’, and ‘kinship as academic discourse’. The headings are intended as a means to explore the possibilities of a post-Schneiderian comparative study of relatedness.

### **The process of kinship**

An increasing dissatisfaction with the formalism of much of the literature on kinship was one cause of the move away from kinship as a field of study from the 1970s onwards. Formalist approaches omitted not only some of the crucial experiential dimensions of kinship, including its emotional aspects but also its creative and dynamic potential. As Malinowski had famously put it,

The average anthropologist ... has his doubts whether the effort needed to master the bastard algebra of kinship is really worth while. He feels that, after all, kinship is a matter of flesh and blood, the result of sexual passion, and maternal affection, of long intimate daily life, and of a host of personal intimate interests. (1930: 19)

What is striking, however, is how taken for granted formalist assumptions have been (e.g. Needham 1971a, b). The authors in this collection reject a highly formal analysis, emphasising local practices and discourses of relatedness, and demonstrating how these impinge on and transform each other.

The accounts of Stafford, Lambert, and Hutchinson show how different the ‘patrilineal’ systems of Chinese, Rajasthani, and Nuer kinship are from the classical accounts. Stafford demonstrates how the division between lineage and family in classic studies of Chinese kinship,

and the exclusion of domestic ties from patrilineal kinship, has limited an understanding of Chinese relatedness, particularly by obscuring the importance of ties between women and their children. Instead, Stafford discusses the importance of two cycles of reciprocity in the construction of relatedness. The cycle of *yang* connotes the mutual obligation between parents and children, and crucially includes not just birth children but also foster children – in other words, *yang* is not just about patrilineal descent, for this cycle can exist in the absence of descent, while a failure of *yang* may terminate descent. As Stafford emphasises, this cycle consists of small everyday interactions involving women, and is essential to the lived experience of relatedness; it is comparable to more obviously processual aspects of relatedness documented elsewhere in this volume. The second cycle is the cycle of *laiwang*, which involves reciprocal ceremonial transactions between those who do not consider themselves genealogical kin. Here Stafford uses the term ‘relatedness’ to include *any* kind of relation – including, for example, ties between neighbours or co-villagers which would not normally be considered as kinship. As Stafford points out, the justification for using relatedness in this very broad sense is that the boundaries between different forms of relatedness may in fact be more malleable than might be assumed, and here he highlights parallels with the Nuer and Rajasthani cases considered by Hutchinson and Lambert. The inclusion of these two overlapping cycles of reciprocity, and a recognition of the importance of ‘non-kinship’ ties in an understanding of Chinese relatedness, modifies the traditional restriction of Chinese kinship to a lineage paradigm. It demonstrates that women are not just considered as non-persons, outsiders to the system, and allows a much more dynamic understanding of Chinese relatedness.

Stafford also shows how the use of a broader concept of relatedness may facilitate comparisons between supposedly more ‘fixed’, descent-based kinship, such as the Chinese case, with examples of bilateral kinship which have long been considered inherently ‘fluid’. He rejects the contrast between a ‘fixed’ unilineal model and a ‘fluid’ bilateral one, which he shows to be more a product of a distinct type of kinship analysis than of the actual dynamics of relatedness. The point that restricting the analytic frame for kinship also restricts the scope of the comparative endeavour is also made by Lambert in this volume. Showing us that, in the Chinese case, very little is in fact ‘given by birth’ illuminates similarities with ‘non-unilineal kinship’. The contributions of Bodenhorn and Edwards and Strathern make clear how ‘bilateral kinship’ is amenable to a process of adding on or lopping off kinship connections – indeed, both processes are a necessary part of this kind of

relatedness. Both Iñupiaq and English relatedness involve a continuous process of becoming connected to people, in the former case through naming, adoption, and marital relations, in the latter through a complex process of interweaving social and biological idioms of being related.

This dynamic quality is captured most vividly by Astuti in her description of Vezo relatedness. Here we are shown, through the eyes of an old Vezo man, how relatedness can only be understood as a dynamic process. As a young man, Dadilahy is part of a network of bilateral kin, a kindred, which can be imaged using the Iban metaphor of the concentric circles spreading out from a pebble thrown into water. The ripples gradually diminish until they merge with the background in the same way as one's recognition of kin gradually fades as kin become more distantly connected. As an old man, Dadilahy sees himself as the apex of a pyramid of ties to his children and grandchildren stretching through his daughters and sons and their spouses – and Astuti recalls another image from the Iban, that of a cone-shaped casting-net with Dadilahy at the top (cf. Freeman 1970: 68–9). Here Dadilahy sees himself as the source of numerous ties which he himself has created and which include men and women, affines and kin. In death, the image of relatedness changes again, for the Vezo are divided after death into *raza*, 'kinds', or patrilineal groups, which are buried together in the tomb. Astuti shows how the process of relatedness involves a transformation from 'kindred' to 'cognatic descent group' to 'patrilineal descent group' which accompanies the process of moving from youth to old age to death for particular Vezo women and men. Her account demonstrates the partialness of trying to understand Vezo kinship as either simply bilateral or simply unilineal. Indeed, it is the subtle transformation of one into the other, or the articulation of these different modes, which is not only particularly intriguing but also captures the essential dynamic of Vezo relatedness and its interconnections with personhood.

It is not accidental that a view of relatedness as essentially processual should also highlight the importance of children, who not only 'represent continuity' (in the classic formulation), but who may be said to embody processes of growth, regeneration, and transformation. Both Stafford and Astuti describe the importance of having children in Chinese and Vezo relatedness, while Bodenhorn discusses how Iñupiat continually 'add on' ties to children through adoption (which does not necessarily preclude maintaining ties between a child and her birth parents). As Bodenhorn emphasises, children are not merely passive recipients of these processes but themselves initiate them. What the Iñupiat see as crucial to the creation and viability of such ties is love – implying perhaps that parents who lose their children, because the

children decide to move elsewhere or cease to recognise them as parents, have a limited capacity to love.

### **Constructing relatedness through everyday practice**

There is a further dimension to the omission of women and children from the analytic frame, and this connects with Stafford's point about how the lack of participatory fieldwork in China has crucially affected the view we have of Chinese kinship. The formalisation of kinship as a field of study involved the separation of what Fortes termed the 'domestic domain' from the 'politico-jural domain' (1958, 1969). Both Malinowski and Fortes saw the nuclear family as a universal social institution which was necessary to fulfil the functions of producing and rearing children (see Malinowski 1930; Fortes 1949). They both had a keen interest in domestic family arrangements, which may in part be attributed to the influence of Freudian psychology (see Fortes 1974, 1977). Fortes also saw kinship as 'an irreducible principle', the source of basic moral values (1949: 346; 1969). His study *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (1949) devoted considerable space to relations between parents and children, sibling relations, and domestic family arrangements. The separation which he himself had introduced between two domains of kinship could, however, be taken to imply that the social context in which the nuclear family was set – in other words, wider kinship arrangements – carried greater analytic significance. The politico-jural domain of kinship – public roles or offices ordered by wider kinship relations, and the political and religious aspects of kinship – were described analytically as the source of cohesion in the societies anthropologists studied, and hence what rendered kinship of interest for anthropology (see e.g. Radcliffe-Brown 1950).

It is thus perhaps not surprising that the comparative study of kinship could devote relatively little attention to intimate domestic arrangements and the behaviour and emotions associated with them.<sup>9</sup> These were assumed to be to a large degree universally constant or a matter for psychological rather than anthropological study. If one considers Fortes's meticulous ethnography, it is quite paradoxical that the very data which documented in detail the small everyday acts of constructing relatedness between women, or between women and children, might be more or less excluded from the frame if his more general injunctions were taken seriously. Stafford makes a similar point with reference to scholars of China, who very early on noted the problems and omissions involved in operating with a descent-based paradigm for Chinese kinship.

However they are transmitted, these omissions may have important implications, as Stafford and Lambert both indicate, leading to a rather lopsided view of what kinship is 'about' – lineages in the Chinese case, marriage and descent in the Indian one. For Iñupiat, as Bodenhorn emphasises, personal autonomy and the rejection of pre-given ties of dependence mean that relatedness is continuously 'under construction' through precisely these kinds of everyday acts. Here it is difficult to see what relatedness would be about at all without the everyday activities of women and men as they engage in the labour process. In a similar way, I have shown elsewhere (Carsten 1995a, 1997) how Malay relatedness is created both by ties of procreation and through everyday acts of feeding and living together in the house. Both procreative ties and shared feeding create shared substance or blood in a community largely made up of migrants. Here the small acts of hospitality and feeding, together with longer-term sharing of food and living space which fostering and marriage involve, create kinship where it did not previously exist. Women and houses may be said to be central both to the 'domestic' process of creating relatedness inside houses, and to the larger 'political' process of integrating newcomers and the establishment and reproduction of whole communities.

Thus a focus on what I have called the 'everyday' – small, seemingly trivial, or taken-for-granted acts like sharing a meal, giving a dish of cooked food to a neighbour, dropping in to a nearby house for a quiet chat, a coffee, and a betel quid – has provoked a careful examination of the symbolic and social significance of the house (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995) as well as a reappraisal of what constitutes 'the domestic' and the boundary between the domestic and the political (see also Moore 1988; Strathern 1984; Yanagisako 1979, 1987).

### **Gender and kinship**

This volume was intended to address the question 'Where is the study of kinship at the end of the 1990s going?' rather than explicitly to focus on gender. There is a sense, however, in which all the contributors have implicitly or explicitly taken account of recent work on gender, and indeed would argue that the terms of studying kinship or relatedness are necessarily reformulated by that work (see Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Howell and Melhuus 1993; Yanagisako and Collier 1987).

The central concern of much recent work on the cross-cultural study of gender has been the extent to which gender identity is performative rather than biologically given (see Astuti 1998; Broch-Due et al. 1993; Butler 1990, 1993; Errington 1990; Moore 1988, 1993, 1994; Morris

1995; Strathern 1988). This discussion is highly relevant to an analysis of kinship partly because it in many ways replicates an analogous discussion on the nature of kinship which focuses on the articulation of social and biological aspects of kinship. And this only underlines the extent to which the anthropological study of gender in the 1970s and 80s in many respects encompassed the study of kinship (see Yanagisako and Collier 1987). The distinction between what is 'made' and what is 'given', and the degree to which kinship is necessarily predicated on the 'biological facts' of procreation, are discussed in the chapters by Bodenhorn, Bouquet, Edwards and Strathern, and Lambert in this volume. The starting point of Middleton's chapter on Karembola notions of relatedness makes clear the interconnections between these two strands of recent scholarship.

Middleton notes how the issue of maternity and the bond between mother and child have been neglected in anthropological studies of both gender and kinship. In part, this absence may be regarded as an effect of the explicit exclusion of the domestic, intimate world of women and children from the study of kinship which I discussed above. In part, as Middleton notes, it is linked to the way motherhood has been construed by anthropologists as having an apparently direct and obvious relation with the natural world (see J. A. Barnes 1973). For the Karembola, the image of motherhood is central to relatedness, and is also the key idiom of rank and power, but it is not restricted to women. This of course immediately problematises the status of motherhood as intrinsically 'biological' or 'domestic'. To be powerful, men imagine themselves as the mothers of other men. Middleton discusses what is meant when Karembola men describe themselves, or are described by others, as 'mothers' or 'mother people'. Noting in what ways such statements can be characterised as metaphorical, and what is left out by such a depiction, she asks how Karembola men are mothers – by what performative acts do they construct male motherhood? Paradoxically, however, men's performance of motherhood can only be made manifest by reference to the sexed bodies of livestock or women. Although male motherhood must be performed to become manifest, this performance aims to elicit what already lies hidden within men – here Middleton makes comparative use of Indonesian and Melanesian idioms of source and display. For the Karembola, she argues, men and women are really different kinds of people, and their difference is rooted in their bodies.

Middleton discusses how rank for the Karembola rests on the articulation of two kinds of marriage, asymmetric alliance and patrilineal parallel cousin marriage (another example of the way in which new anthropological descriptions simultaneously refigure and encapsulate

the old). Karembola notions of relatedness, like those of the other Malagasy people described in this volume, can be described as both cognatic and patrilineal, 'unkinded' and 'kinded'. In this case, however, patrilineality is not banished to the world of the tomb but is part of the experience of relatedness for the living. Patrilineal parallel cousin marriage keeps together male and female agnates – people thought of as of the same kind; asymmetric alliance divides people of the same kind. Here wife-givers are thought of as superior to wife-receivers, and the idiom of cross-cousin marriage is used to construct an image of a ranked social order in which the image of mothering is central. Karembola kindedness, although in their view intrinsic, has to be performed, and as with male motherhood, the performance aims to elicit what lies within. During confinement and after giving birth to a first child, a Karembola woman is fed and nurtured in her father's house. In these and other nurturant acts, fathers and brothers materially demonstrate their kindness with sisters and daughters, just as they demonstrate that they are the source and root of the child. For subsequent births, the child's father rivals his wife's agnates' claims to be the source of the child by taking on 'women's work' in rituals of *couvade* which, likewise, have meaning only in relation to the intermediate term of the mother's sexed body giving birth. Thus the performance of male motherhood, Middleton argues, focuses on the sexed body of women who give birth to children. It relies on the consubstantiality *and* the sexed difference of brother and sister. Men cannot substitute for women, because it is women who have to give birth, just as, when a man gives gifts of cattle to his sister and her children, the cattle must be female, because only cows give birth.

In her subtle exposition of Karembola ethnography, Middleton demonstrates how, for the Karembola, the performance of gender as well as the construction of the imagined polity rests on what she calls 'the natural capacities of the female body'. She also makes clear, however, that fertility is not an intrinsic value of women *per se*; women are not everywhere accorded this value. Rather, in the particular context of the Karembola ritual economy, women's value is linked to work which only female bodies can perform. For Karembola, properties of women and men are rooted in their bodies rather than being the product of relations. And this suggests a refinement to a rather crude division between the social constructionist view of gender and a biological determinist position. This refinement allows for performance while also admitting a place for material bodies; it reminds us of a not very surprising fact – that the construction of gendered difference may invoke or rest on what particular people take to be the intrinsic 'natural capacities' of male or female bodies.<sup>10</sup>