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AFTER KINSHIP

This innovative book takes a fresh look at the anthropology of kinship and the comparative study of relatedness. Kinship has historically been central to the discipline of anthropology, but what sort of future does it have? What is the impact of recent studies of reproductive technologies, of gender, and of the social construction of science in the West? What significance does public anxiety about the family, or new family forms in the West, have for anthropology's analytic strategies? The study of kinship has rested on a distinction between the "biological" and the "social." But recent technological developments have made this distinction no longer self-evident. What does this imply about the comparison of kinship institutions cross-culturally? Janet Carsten gives an approachable and original view of the past, present, and future of kinship in anthropology. Her observations will be of interest not just to anthropologists but to social scientists generally.

Janet Carsten is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. She edited *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2000, and coedited *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond* with Stephen Hugh Jones in 1995.

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For Jonathan and Jessica

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Acknowledgments

One of the great pleasures of finishing a piece of writing that has taken longer than planned to complete is finding ways to say thank you to those whose support has made the task easier. This book was conceived a long time ago, and I am grateful to Steve Gudeman and Charles Stafford, who first encouraged me to write a book about the “new kinship.” Over several years, they, along with Jonathan Spencer, Sarah Franklin, and a number of others, have contributed much-needed positive reinforcement, which has enabled me to see this project through.

Originally, this book was planned as a kind of companion volume and expansion of my introduction to *Cultures of Relatedness* (Carsten 2000a). Although in the end this plan was somewhat overtaken by events, readers will find many parallels between the themes in these two books – including the intellectual debts that I acknowledge here. David Schneider’s work forms a running thread through all the chapters. But I have learned most of the anthropology I know from Maurice Bloch and Marilyn Strathern – who for quite different reasons may disagree with parts of what follows. My discussion of personhood in Chapter 4 owes a great deal to conversations with Maurice Bloch, and especially to his article on “Death and the Concept of the Person,” published in 1988. The title, *After Kinship*, is of course playful; the message of this book appears to be that “after kinship” is – well, just more kinship (even if it might be of a slightly different kind). But it is also a serious gesture of acknowledgment

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for the inspiration that Marilyn Strathern's work has provided over many years.

I began writing this book under the auspices of a Nuffield Social Science Research Fellowship. I am grateful to the Nuffield Foundation, and to my colleagues in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, for allowing me time off in 1997–8 to write, and conduct research on adoption reunions. I particularly thank Jennifer Speirs for her help in initiating my research on adoption reunions, and the staff of the agency that helped in contacting those whom I interviewed as part of this research. I have kept this organization and those interviewed anonymous in order to protect the latter's privacy.

A somewhat different and longer version of Chapter 5 was published under the title "Substantivism, Antisubstantivism, and Anti-Antisubstantivism" in *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, edited by Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon (Duke University Press, 2001). I am grateful to Tony Good, Sarah Franklin, and Susan McKinnon for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Some of the material on adoption reunions in Chapter 6 was used to a different purpose in my article "'Knowing Where You've Come From': Ruptures and Continuities of Time and Kinship in Narratives of Adoption Reunions," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6: 687–703, 2000. I am grateful to the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and the editors and publishers of this material for permission to use it here.

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Acknowledgments

Much of this book has been written in the shadow of a profound loss. My father, Francis Carsten, died in June 1998. Not long before his death, I discovered a surprising bit of kinship knowledge. As part of his Communist Party activism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Francis had given talks on Friedrich Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* to study groups in working-class neighborhoods of Berlin. From him I learned not to take kinship for granted, that relationships worth their salt are made rather than given, and that the unconditional gifts of love and support that are their true mark are both enduring and utterly irreplaceable.

Jonathan Spencer and Jessica Spencer have lived with the writing of this book. Apart from many other contributions, they have helped me to see that the givenness of kinship can be a restorative and creative force.

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