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A Critical Review

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REVIEW ESSAY

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years in France and the Anglophone countries, the subject of kinship has been eliciting new interest and new analyses. Four recently published works (three in French, one in English) offer an opportunity to assess how research questions and approaches, knowledge and theoretical debate are evolving in this field, a field that both anthropology and sociology are implicated in. Detailed study of the four works brings to light contrasting positions organized around a set of questions involving relations between the biological and the social, questions raised more than 20 years ago by David M. Schneider, an atypical North American anthropologist unjustly neglected in France. Today Schneider's work seems to have marked a decisive turning point in the recent history of kinship studies.

The recent publication of four works in kinship studies(1) offers an opportunity to take stock of developments in knowledge and theoretical orientations in this prestigious social science field. Kinship studies long held an eminent position in anthropology while being almost entirely absent from sociology of the family. In the last two decades, their position in both disciplines has been reassessed. In anthropology, kinship studies as classically conceived (functionalist or structuralist) ran out of steam,(2) falling victim to a post-modernist "deconstructivist" critique just as it was gaining influence in sociology of the family, which was broadening its investigations into kinship relations and networks. These developments worked to blur the distinction between the two disciplines, and the idea that comparison was possible between kinship in the west and kinship elsewhere in the world no longer seemed absurd.

(1) Mentioned here in the following order: *Incidence*, issue entitled "Qu'est-ce que la parenté? Autour de l'œuvre de David M. Schneider" (2005, 1); Maurice Godelier, *Métamorphoses de la parenté* (Paris, Fayard, 2004); Florence Weber, *Le sang, le nom, le quotidien*: *une sociologie de la parenté pratique* (Paris, Éditions Aux lieux d'être, 2005); Janet Carsten, *After Kinship* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

(2) This is attested by the fact that many North American university anthropology departments have dropped courses on kinship in the last two decades.

The studies reviewed here were marked by these changed frames of understanding. But they are also indicative of further new developments. New research objects are emerging, hitherto untried analytic perspectives are being taken up in what should now more properly be called simply "kinship studies", given how secondary the question has become of whether they are done in anthropology or sociology. Kinship studies in both France and the Anglophone world are currently attracting new interest, though this is not immediately perceptible because the "kinship" research object has been moving around under other names, becoming associated with new research issues –gender, sexuality, images of the body, ideas of "personhood"– that are in turn reshaping that object. To accurately grasp this reconfiguration, it is salutary to return to a recent moment in kinship studies and consider a work particularly unfamiliar to French researchers, written by an atypical anthropologist, David M. Schneider, whose questions and conclusions of twenty years ago have once again become intensely relevant.

David M Schneider: gravedigger or reformer?

David M. Schneider (1918-1995) was an important figure in North American anthropological study of kinship. His writings were discussed and debated in full in the 1970s and 1980s. He himself was an active participant in the discipline's main controversies for a period of forty years. In France, however, his work is virtually unknown. None of his books has been published in French, and most introductory kinship study texts devote no more than a few lines to him, with the significant exception of F. Zimmerman's *Enquête sur la parenté* (1993).(3) This wrong has been partly righted thanks to a new journal, *Incidence*, situated at the intersection of the humanities and the social sciences.(4) The journal's first issue (October 2005) is devoted entirely to Schneider. In addition to ten articles, it offers the precious resource of three "reference texts"; i.e., French translations of excerpts from two of Schneider's main works.

Schneider's first work, *American Kinship*: *A Cultural Account*, was published in 1968. The author, hardly a neophyte at the time, was known for

(3) Schneider is cited 35 times in Zimmerman's book, making him one of the most frequently cited authors. Dumont ([1971] 1988) does not mention him (however, his work was first published in 1971, only three years after publication of Schneider's *American Kinship*). Deliège (1996) and Ghasarian (1996) each cite him only 5 times.

(4) *Incidence* presents itself as a "review of philosophy, literature and the human and social sciences". Each issue is devoted to a single author, whose thinking is considered from different disciplinary perspectives, and each makes available either previously unpublished texts by that author or French translations of excerpts of his or her work). The aim is to evaluate the author's impact on intellectual debate and transmission and exchange of ideas. The first issue, intitled "Qu'est-ce que la parenté? Autour de l'œuvre de David M. Schneider" was coordinated by the historian Jérome Wilgaux. Unfortunately, it does not include an exhaustive bibliography of Schneider's work.

his studies of the Yap (inhabitants of an island in the Micronesian archipelago where he did his first field work in the early 1950s),[5] of North American kinship (the terminology system[6] and sibling relations[7]), as well as for his contribution to the debate on the nature of kinship. This debate dates back to the 1957 publication of an article by Ernest Gellner in *Philosophy of Science,* and it continued through 1964. It bore on the anthropological definition of kinship and whether or not it was necessary to refer to kinship's biological dimension. Among the implicated anthropologists were R. Needham, J. A. Barnes, J. H. M. Beattie and Schneider, who was the last to take a position.[8]

There were two conflicting options. Gellner put forward the idea that the social dimension of kinship could only be correctly studied if it was understood as a "function" of biological kinship.[9] While kinship relations should not be reduced to or confused with their physical substratum, they did refer back to that substratum regularly and systematically, either by adding to it, omitting it or distorting it.[10] Barnes and Beattie objected that social anthropology dealt exclusively with social facts, and claimed that kinship should be studied as a pure social construction. Schneider's contribution (in the form of a response to Beattie) represented a kind of third way. He rejected Beattie's idea that kinship was no more than an idiom for expressing political, religious or economic relations. The fact that kinship was an idiom in no way implied that it was devoid of specific content. Schneider thus recommended studying the nature of the cultural representations that make up a given kinship idiom, and put forward the following hypothesis: "Kinship as a symbol system is built on consanguineal and affinal elements" (Schneider, 1964, p. 181). He concluded his article by suggesting the relevance of examining kinship in

(5) See "Yap Kinship Terminology and Kin Groups", *American Anthropologist* (1953, *55*, 2, pp. 215-236); "Political Organization, Supernatural Sanctions and the Punishment for Incest on Yap," *American Anthropologist* (1957, *59*, 6, pp. 791-800).

(6) With G. C. Homans: "Kinship Terminology and the American Kinship System", *American Anthropologist* (1955, *57*, 6, pp. 1194-1208).

(7) With E. Cumming: "Sibling Solidarity: a Property of American Kinship", *American Anthropologist* (1961, *63*, 3, pp. 498-507).

(8) Debate references, in chronological order: E. Gellner, "Ideal Language and Kinship Structure", *Philosophy of Science* (1957, *24*, 3, pp. 235-242); R. Needham, "Descent Systems and Ideal Language", *Philosophy of Science* (1960, *27*, 1, pp. 96-101); Gellner, "The Concept of Kinship", *Philosophy of Science* (1960, *27*, 2, pp. 187-204); J. A. Barnes, "Physical and Social Kinship", *Philosophy of Science* (1961, *28*, 3, pp. 296-299); E. Gellner, "Nature and Society in Social Anthropology", *Philosophy of Science* (1963, *30*, 3, pp. 236-251); J. H. M. Beattie, "Kinship and Social Anthropology", *Man* (1964, 64, pp. 101-103); D. M. Schneider, "The Nature of Kinship", *Man* (64, pp. 180-181). This high quality debate was soon forgotten. Today it has become relevant again in connection with the new orientations in kinship studies; see below, p. 231.

(9) Gellner first used the term function in its mathematical sense [$y = f(x)$] in the 1957 article, and this point the focus of most of his 1960 response to Needham.

(10) "'Kinship structure' or 'descent systems' are, by definition, systems of social relationships, such as are functions of (are regularly related to) physical kinship, bearing in mind that the function is not identity, [...] involving additions, omissions and distortions. [...] Kinship structure means the manner in which a pattern of physical relationship is made use of for social purposes." (Gellner, 1960, p. 193).

western societies (the United States, England, France), which seemed to him for methodological reasons to offer the best observatory, since political, ritual, religious and economic functions were not as closely associated with kinship relations in those societies as in the ones traditionally studied by anthropologists.

American Kinship, published in 1968 and extended in the second, 1980 edition, offers the results of just this investigation. In the introduction to the issue of *Incidence* on Schneider, Wilgaux writes: "Schneider [...] develops a symbolic approach to American kinship, grasping culture as a set of meanings and symbols" (p. 11). As C. Salazar points out in the same issue,(11) the influence of Parsons' cultural system theory is patent.(12) As a system of meanings and symbols, culture is distinct from the social structure –Schneider was breaking here with British social anthropology (which he considered mere "comparative sociology")(13) and advocating a cultural or symbolic anthropology of kinship. In Chapter 7 of his book, added in the 1980 edition, he claimed in opposition to Clifford Geertz(14) that it was both necessary and legitimate to study culture without taking social action into account.(15)

Schneider offered a two-part answer to the question of how North American culture defined a relative.(16) There were two symbolic kinship orders: nature and the law. In terms of nature, relatives were persons who shared natural, biogenetic substances, as symbolized by the indigenous term "blood". In terms of law, relatives were persons who followed a certain code of conduct. North American kinship involved an opposition between two sets of symbols: kinship "by blood", which was material, permanent and inalienable (examples being the tie between two brothers or a mother and her child) and kinship "by marriage", based on a human-imposed order and referring to morals, law and custom. "Blood" relations were considered superior to "legal" ones; the first were in fact the model for the second. Shared biogenetic substance was of greater importance than conventions defining the content of behavior,(17) and this created an almost mystical state: "A blood relationship is

(11) "David M. Schneider et l'anthropologie de la parenté" (pp. 25-49).

(12) Parsons' influence (Parsons [1943] 1955) can be clearly discerned in the articles Schneider wrote with Homans (1955) and Cumming (1961); their analysis of terminology as well as relations and roles constitute a recognition of the structural preeminence of the nuclear unit in American kinship and the egalitarian thrust of kinship relations.

(13) This was also the position of R. Radcliffe-Brown, a leading figure in social anthropology. As he saw it, anthropology was no more than a "branch of comparative sociology", and he rejected cultural anthropology as irrelevant.

(14) In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Geertz claimed that cultural meanings were to be discovered in the unfolding of social action.

(15) On the epistemological question of the primacy of belief (concepts or representations) *vs*. the primacy of practice (or social action), and for a critique of the first option, rejected as a "fallacy on misplaced abstraction," see Rawls (2004).

(16) The study is based on approximately 100 interviews with middle-class families in the Chicago region.

(17) The idea here is that a mother remains a mother whatever her relations with and feelings toward her child, for example. The tie can never be broken because it is defined as a material, objective fact. I have likewise observed the strength and resonance of this representation in a study of remembrance of the dead: see Déchaux (1997, particularly Chs. 8 and 9).

a relation of identity. People who are blood relatives share a common identity, they believe. [...] [A]spects like temperament, build, physiognomy and habits are noted as signs of this shared biological makeup, this special identity of relatives with each other. A parent, particularly a mother, may speak of a child as 'part of me'" (Schneider, 1980, p. 25, quoted in French translation in *Incidence,* p. 217).

In this cultural representation of kinship, procreative sexual intercourse is central. It is the moment when love links the two aspects of kinship, the one that involves a shared substance and therefore cognatic love between parents and children, and the one pertaining to the law and norms of conduct between parents and therefore to conjugal love. The combining of these two forms of love gives rise to "enduring, diffuse solidarity" among family members, implying trust, support and cooperation.(18) Commenting on Schneider, Zimmerman rightly speaks of a "spontaneous biologism" that gives the blood tie "legislative power over our feelings and conduct" (Zimmermann, 1993, p. 185). Schneider later summed up this idea with the aphorism "Blood is thicker than water".

In his article for *Incidence*, Salazar analyzes Schneider's move from *American Kinship* to his fundamental work, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984). What could still be read as biological reductionism fairly close to Gellner's position –yet this would be a tendencious reading because the anthropologist himself was working on the ground of indigenous representations, not facts– became in 1984 a thoroughgoing critique of any and all anthropology of kinship. In 1968, Schneider thought he had demonstrated, on the basis of the North American case, that kinship had specific symbolic content. Shortly thereafter, the "enduring, diffuse solidarity" he had claimed to identify no longer appeared a specific feature of North American kinship, since most of the same symbols could also be found in connection with nationality and religion in North America (Schneider, [1969] 1987). From then on, he invested considerable energy in denying that kinship constituted a specific cultural domain in North America. Ultimately, he reached the conclusion that kinship was a "non-subject", that it didn't exist in American culture any more than it did in any human society. If anthropologists studied kinship, this was because they were prisoner to the naturalist presupposition (the one he had decerned and presented in *American Kinship*) that "blood is thicker than water". *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* –this time an epistemological analysis– was meant to deal "the death-blow" (Godelier, 2004, p. 28) to the prestigious edifice of kinship studies. It is true that Schneider's assault had been preceded by a number of stinging criticisms elicited in the context of

(18) Schneider is quite evasive about the contours of the kinship group in which this "enduring, diffuse solidarity" prevails. A neo-Parsonian interpretation (inspired by the metaphor of the onion, which Parson uses to describe the North American kinship system) is plausible: solidarity is likely to be strongest within the nuclear unit (father-mother-children) because the fact of shared biogenetic material is most obvious there. Outside this unit, solidarity could be understood to assume increasingly diffuse forms.

another debate. In 1961 E. Leach in *Rethinking Anthropology* had sought to demonstrate that kinship was merely a language for expressing the weightiest social realities, such as relations to land and property and declared that kinship systems had no reality. Ten years later, R. Needham concluded his long introduction to *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (1971) with these words: "The term 'kinship' is probably fallacious and the wrong criterion for comparing social facts. It refers to no distinct category of phenomena or type of theory. It meets no requirement for competence or authority." (Needham, 1971).(19)

In *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* Schneider aimed to show that all kinship anthropology since L. H. Morgan shared the western representations brought to light in his *American Kinship* and that "kinship only exists in the minds of anthropologists" (Salazar in *Incidence*, p. 38). To develop his argument and convince the reader of the mystifying effect of the naturalist presuppositions characteristic of western culture, he criticized his own earlier studies of the Yap. He had described a dual filiation system founded on a basic social unit, the *tabinau*, identified as a patrilineage. Thirty years later, returning to his analyses of Yap representations of procreation, he concluded that his interpretation had been wrong: what linked *tabinau* members to each other was not actually kinship but rather real cooperation in working a single plot of land –and it was this work alone that was the basis for land inheritance. Schneider concluded that there was no such thing as a patrilineage in Yap. Classical descent-group theory posited the preeminence of being over doing; Schneider now believed this should be reversed. For the Yap there was no genealogical relation among members of a *tabinau*; a "child" inherited from his "father" because of the way he behaved toward him (respectful, obediently cooperative in work) more a matter of doing than being.

The heart of the problem, as Schneider saw it, was that kinship theories assumed that genealogy was universal. Was there any reason to believe that ties arising from procreation and marriage had cultural significance everywhere and were therefore commensurable? This view, which posits that kinship is first and foremost a matter of procreation, human biological reproduction, made implicit use of the western "blood is thicker than water" axiom and thereby distorted analysis of the societies in question. The idea was that from the outset anthropology of kinship had consensually accepted what Schneider called "the doctrine of the genealogical unity of mankind", the idea that any and all kinship systems are based on a universal genealogical structure that develops out of a primal core; i.e. the nuclear family.(20) While not excluding the possibility that kinship was specific only to Euro-American

(19) Translated into French under the title *La parenté en question*: *onze contributions à la théorie anthropologique* (1977).

(20) The genealogical survey method developed by Morgan, further developed by Rivers, then applied by all kinship ethnographers may be understood to have been based on this doctrine. As Zimmerman points out (1993, p. 28), Schneider's critique focused on the consecutive definitions of kinship (starting with Morgan's) as a system of "social recognition" of blood ties.

culture, Schneider rejected "genealogical reasoning"[21] and called for refounding anthropology on a new basis: "The first task of anthropology, prerequisite to all others, is to understand and formulate the symbols and meanings and their configuration that a particular culture consists of" (Schneider, 1984, p. 196; quoted in French in *Incidence*, p. 241). Anthropology should therefore study the categories of each particular culture; it should stop proceeding as if what was different were similar, as if there were a universal vocabulary and grammar in every empirical domain. The genealogical grid could be applied from the outset; it was at best a hypothesis that had to be checked.

If we follow Schneider, all studies on kinship had been in vain and done no more than to turn western assumptions into anthropological truths. This radical position in turn provoked several critiques; Maurice Godelier's will be examined in detail further on, but for now we can return to Salazar's and Porqueres I Géné's in *Incidence*. Salazar points out the aporia of Schneider's cultural conception of anthropology. Schneider maintained that nothing existed outside culture. Blood ties and nature in general had no particular existence of their own independent of how each culture defined them. This relativist approach raised problems. The work of reconstituting local symbolic systems, i.e., the particular workings of each system, made "translation" and comparison delicate, perhaps even impossible matters. Each "cultural ontology"[22] underlying reality becomes an idiosyncrasy specific to a particular society and has to be analyzed on its own terms. Those ontologies are therefore indeed incommensurable. Schneider's stance, by its very radicalism, had shown the impasses of constructivism when it is taken to its logical extreme. Porqueres i Géné, meanwhile, shows that Schneider could not really rid himself of the biological component, especially in his writings on the incest prohibition.[23]

Sexual prohibitions among the Yap, just like marriage between close relatives in other populations (Hawaii, ancient Egypt and Iran),[24] were justified by means of a rhetoric of blood: the first case involved an association with animality and endocannibalism; the second a concern to maintain the sacred qualities inherent "in the blood". About the incest prohibition we can only observe that for many it is the irreducible kernel of kinship: "the presence of the biological referent –i.e., 'consubstantiality'": a sharing of material substance by way of transmission through filiation, sexual contact, the sharing of food– in the entire set of rights and obligations that tie individuals to each other" (Porqueres i Géné in *Incidence,* p. 96).[25]

(21) The term is E. Porqueres i Géné's in *Incidence* ("David M. Schneider et les symboles de la parenté: l'inceste et ses questionnements", pp. 91-103), and he defines it thus: "the idea that in the last analysis the foundation for all possible kinship relations is the reference to genealogical ties, conceived primarily as ties of consanguinity" (p. 92).

(22) See Porqueres i Géné (*Incidence*, p. 91).

(23) Schneider (1957, and 1976, pp. 149-169).

(24) These cases are discussed at length in Godelier (2004, particularly pp. 404-417).

(25) Porqueres i Géné's commentary returns to the J. Pitt-Rivers' classical thesis. In an analysis aimed at identifying the specificity

If we were to take Schneider literally, we would have to deny all heuristic value to the notion of kinship and abandon kinship studies, for all we could ever discover in other cultures are our own presuppositions. But a more moderate interpretation, allowing a margin for provocation in the author's stance, leaves us with an entirely different image: far from digging the grave of kinship studies, Schneider was among those who renewed and reformed them. He had in fact made it clear that as soon as one begins to seriously study cultural representations of the process of conception, genealogical relations among individuals cannot be reduced to biological ones as they are understood in western culture (i.e., blood relations). Kinship does have a biological or bodily referent, but how that referent is referred to differs from one society and one culture to the next. In the 1980s and 1990s, studies of kinship centered on representations around the conception of human beings. In this respect, Schneider's critique represented a real turning point.

Kinship as belief

"So the death foretold did not occur!" Maurice Godelier wrote recently in *Métamorphoses de la parenté* (2004, p. 32). Godelier's book of course goes far beyond this observation. At nearly 700 pages, it is both an anthropology of kinship treatise that takes into account the greater part of the classical notions and theories of the discipline(26) while providing extremely useful appendices (glossary of technical terms, cartograms of the societies mentioned, an 800-entry bibliography, diagrams and boxed key information, concept, author and society indexes), and a book with an argument to contribute to the kinship studies debate. The work can be divided into four parts: a presentation of classical kinship studies components (descent, alliance/marriage, residence, kinship terminology); an analysis of representations of how human beings are conceived and the social effects of those representations; the incest prohibition and how it has been and may be interpreted –on this point Godelier goes against Lévi-Strauss; and kinship over history, how it has changed, what its future is likely to be. In this section I am concerned exclusively with the second of these matters; the other three are discussed in the last part of the article.

of the kinship tie, after criticizing Fortes' notion of "amity" as vague, Pitt-Rivers put forward the notion of consubstantiality, specifying that there are diverse ways of establishing its presence, not all of which imply transmission or direct exchange of a bodily substance. The ethnologist stressed the role of commensality in certain cases of "fictional kinship" (see Pitt-Rivers, 1973).

(26) Godelier's work is a useful complement to Zimmerman's excellent, learned study, *Enquête sur la parenté* (1993), more focused on the history of anthropology of kinship. It does contain a few factual errors; for example, Needham's first name is Rodney (not Robert) and Leach's *Rethinking Anthropology* was published in 1961 (not 1963).

On the basis of approximately 15 case studies, Godelier explores representations of how human beings are conceived; that is, ethnobiological ideas pertaining to the body and procreation. The example of the Baruya of New Guinea is presented at length and serves as a paradigm.(27) In this patrilineal society, the understanding is that intercourse between a man and woman is required to create a child: the man's sperm creates the child's bones but also its flesh and blood, whereas the woman contributes nothing (nothing passes from her body to the child's),(28) her belly being understood as a kind of receptacle which the sperm penetrates and the child's body develops in. However, sexual intercourse is not enough. The fetus would not have a nose, eyes, mouth or fingers "if the Sun did not come and fashion all these missing organs in the woman's belly, then adding breath to the now human body" (Godelier, 2004, p. 256). When the child is born, it only acquires a soul by acquiring a name. The father names the child, choosing from a stock of names specific to his patrilineage, thus attaching the child to its ancestors. Moreover, conception of boys is different from conception of girls. Boys are engendered twice, once by father and mother, the second time by the set of physically adult males, during male initiation rituals that start at age 9 and are spread over approximately the following ten years. The initiation ritual is carried out exclusively among men and is directed against women. The point is to rid the initiates' bodies of anything female they might still contain. The young initiate is forced to take the penis of each of the pubescent (and virgin)(29) initiates into his mouth and to swallow their sperm. This "ritual homosexuality" ensures that semen uncontaminated by any female stain will circulate among the men from generation to generation; that semen is understood to nourish the boys and to reengender them in such a way as to make them stronger and more virile than their mere biological engendering did. The Sun is repeatedly invoked during these rituals and is understood to be continuously present. With the help of the Sun, and without women, the group of young men reengender the boys. This collective engendering is also a cosmic event. The belief in the sacredness of sperm goes together with a phobia of menstrual blood, perceived as "antisperm" capable of destroying male strength. Overall, in Baruya society, conception beliefs lift the world of men definitively above that of women and are in keeping with a fundamental component of that kinship system: patrilineality.(30)

After presenting numerous other cases from different continents (Inuit, Trobriand, Kako of Gabon and others), Godelier draws a few general lessons.

(27) Godelier did his field work in this society, spending a total of seven years there from 1967 to 1988. See among others his *Production des grands hommes*: *pouvoir et domination masculine chez les Baruya de Nouvelle-Guinée* (1982) (English translation 1986).

(28) Even the mother's milk comes from the man because it is understood as a transformation of his sperm (Godelier, 2004, p. 258).

(29) The sperm of adolescents is considered perfectly pure because they have not yet had sexual relations with women (*ibid*., p. 263, p. 337).

(30) The descent tie, passing exclusively through men, links men who share the same blood because they were produced by the same sperm. Likewise, marriage between men and women who share the same blood or sperm is prohibited.

First, "in no society do a man and a woman alone suffice to create a child" (p. 325). The intervention of other agents, more powerful than humans –divinities, spirits and/or ancestors(31)– is required in order for the child to be complete, viable –human, in a word. The second is that the individual is never reduced to the bodily substances of which s/he is made. The observer must take into account, for example, one or several souls, breath, the life force –the specifics vary by case but the point is that these are non-bodily components implying the action of non-human agents. In this sense, the effect of conception beliefs is to inscribe the individual into a social and cosmic whole that exceeds the world of kinship relations. They also legitimate appropriation of the child by a group of adults and the nature of the descent principle recognized in the given society, though the two do not always correspond perfectly.(32) Third, the role of bodily substances has an imaginary character and refers back to beliefs. In agreement with Schneider on this point, Godelier claims that we cannot generalize the representation of sperm as seed to all cultures. He notes for certain societies (the Trobriand Islands, for example)(33) the important role of food, of ingesting certain dishes, and of the soil that has held these foods within it –soil fertilized by the flesh of the dead. These representations, as arbitrary as the words of a language, are taken for granted by the society's natives. They are materialized in its institutions and practices.

Godelier's last point –the most fundamental, in his understanding– is that these bodily and non-bodily substances necessary to human conception create sex-specific bodies: "[They] constitute social attributes of the sexes, thereby transforming them into 'genders'"(p. 337). The substances create fundamental inequalities that are expressed in relations of domination and subordination by individual's sex, as seen with the Baruya. Representations of how human beings are conceived concern more than kinship relations. They are a response to social issues that go beyond kinship, issues involving the social order and reproduction of that order. Representations of human bodies, the various substances of which the body is composed, partake in the development of an order that is not only sexual but social and cosmic. "This means that the human body is at the intersection of kinship relations and politico-

(31) Godelier observes that in the Christian west, a child has to be reengendered by God and the Church to get beyond original sin and attain the path of salvation. This second birth is accomplished through the sacrament of baptism (which for Catholics must be maintained throughout life through the practice of confession). The child thus acquires new parents–godfather and godmother– through purely spiritual ties (*ibid*., p. 329, pp. 351-360). See also Fine (1994).

(32) Godelier admits this on several occasions (pp. 30-31, pp. 260-261, p. 333) but attributes little importance to it in the analyses that follow, as Allard rightly remarks (2006).

(33) S. P. Montague shows that the Trobriands have no equivalent for the western concept of "relative" and do not believe that a kinship relation can be based on sharing the same biological substance: sperm, blood or milk. On the other hand, diet and the magic powers associated with it, as well as the exchange relations the individual is implicated in, are decisive for Trobriand kinship classifications. See Montague's text in *Incidence*: "La classification de la parenté trobriandaise et le relativisme culturel de David M. Schneider" (pp. 51-73).

religious relations,(34) relations marked by all sorts of ordinary and ritual power exerted in the spheres of public and private life" (p. 268). At the heart of kinship relations are social issues that do not originate in kinship. Rather it is by way of those kinship relations that the society can in part reproduce itself. In every society, then, a "dual metamorphosis" is at work (p. 508, pp. 528-529): social content becomes kinship content, in the sense that social relations penetrate kinship relations and subordinate them to the imperative of reproducing "themselves" (i.e., of reproducing existing social relations); whatever becomes kinship content gets imprinted on the body, determining the differences between the sexes and transforming sex into gender.

At this stage, we can consider where Godelier stands with respect to Schneider. He agrees with Schneider that no society, however "primitive", is founded on kinship; "kin-based societies" only exist in ethnographic accounts. However –and on this point Godelier clearly rejects Schneider's analysis– kinship is not merely an invention of western anthropologists. It exists at the intersection of descent modes, marriage rules and representations of what a child is, and it refers back to a basis that is both biological and social, even though it is inhabited by other realities (material, political and religious), which are reproduced at the same time. The result is that, though specific, kinship relations are never and nowhere completely autonomous. The social relations they are invested with create content that varies in social terms: kinship obviously has neither the same meaning nor the same social function for a peasant with no inheritance to transmit and a lord endowed with titles, land and a glorious ancestry. Extreme caution is therefore in order when making general claims about the importance of kinship in one or another society.

These analyses, which dispute some of the more radical aspects of Schneider's,(35) are based on the vast amount of kinship study research done since the 1980s on representations of the person and human conception. While many of these studies claim to be in line with Schneider and his critique of "genealogical reasoning", Godelier's use of them is not in line with Schneider's thinking or aims. For Godelier, analysis of cultural symbols and representations (beliefs about procreation, for example) should not be isolated from analysis of social behavior and the practical necessities that such behavior responds to. He rightly insists that representations of how human beings are conceived are invested with social issues and materials that exceed them and are related to the social order and its reproduction. This gives his

(34) Godelier often uses the expression "politico-religious domain", defining it as the set of practices that affect or have claims to affect the society considered as a whole. The purpose is to ensure the continuity of social relations, to ensure reproduction and transmission of the social order (p. 268, pp. 488-489).

(35) Godelier vehemently criticizes Schneider as early as the introduction (pp. 28-32). It is true that they part ways on many points. Is kinship anything more than a word? Can it be maintained that that word does not refer to any biological foundation? Nonetheless, Godelier's interest in studying conception beliefs derives directly from Schneider's analyses and his critique of western "biocentrism".

analyses a materialist orientation that is diametrically opposed to Schneider's intellectualism.

The need to integrate analysis of representations and analysis of relations, symbols and actions is even more energetically affirmed and tackled in studies that consider kinship the fruit of socially situated practices and experiences; that is, a social process constructed (and sometimes destroyed) by means of relations among individuals.

Kinship as practice

With Florence Weber's study, we change worlds, turning now to kinship in the west –specifically France. Weber presents her book, *Le sang, le nom, le quotidien* [Blood, the name, the everyday] (2005) as "a sociology of practical kinship". "Practical kinship" refers to the set of obligations and feelings that give meaning to official kinship ties or create other ties, and that make all those ties effective.(36) It is a sum of social experiences that exceeds the set of kinship rules (family morals, the law). "Analyzing practical kinship requires restoring each person's words, words of experience and interaction. [...] It implies reflecting on the collective frameworks of singular experiences and interactions" (Weber, 2005, p. 16). Weber's research focuses on the "genesis of kinship feelings" and aims to identify the "cognitive frames for interactions and exchanges" among relatives. She thus discerns diverse cognitive frames (or styles or "registers" of filiation) and diverse types of collective functioning logic; in some cases these types overlap, but they are more likely to operate alongside each other in complex ways.

The investigation method here is an original one, based on analysis of eight cases that represent borderline family situations where nothing can be taken for granted. These cases, also related to different moments or periods in the life cycle (birth, childhood, the dependency of either sick or elderly persons, death), bring to light the complexity of kinship feelings, their relative incoherence, the tensions and conflicts among protagonists when it comes to domestic activities of caring for or organizing care for individual members, for example. They amount to natural experimentation, where things that are usually not discussed or that are often confused with each other may be sensed and identified. Each case is analyzed in careful detail. Overall, five of the six chapters are devoted to the case studies, making this a highly ethnographic work.(37) The author nonetheless draws several general conclusions,

(36) See the glossary at the beginning of the book (pp. 7-8). The attention paid to what people make of kinship, to feelings and obligations that develop through the experience of kinship relations, recalls Bourdieu's theoretical positions in *Raisons pratiques* (1994).

(37) The sequence of case studies, all of which are highly informative (but the author might have included kinship diagrams) occasionally obscures the guiding idea or aim of the work. The fact that general conclusions are presented throughout the book, then recapitulated at the end makes for an impression of redundancy. The book could surely have been shorter and gone more directly to the point.

first presented within the case analyses, then for the most part recapitulated in the last two chapters. I will focus here on those general conclusions.

Referring to conclusions reached in her earlier studies (Weber, 2002; Gramain and Weber, 2003), the author identifies three types of family membership and ways of functioning collectively, as manifested in the situations studied. These are the lineage, kindred, and the *maisonnée*.(38) For analytic purposes, they correspond to distinct kinship feelings. The lineage implies a feeling of symbolic affiliation ("where I come from"); kindred implies a feeling of elective affinity ("you and me") and the *maisonnée* implies a feeling of everyday belonging ("at our house"). In extremely classical fashion, the lineage refers to transmission and affiliation, kindred to an egocentric network of dyadic relations.(39) The *maisonnée* is a more original notion.

The term emphasizes residence or local proximity as well as the economic dimension of the group thus constituted; inspiration for it comes from 1970s and 1980s neo-Marxist economic anthropology.(40) The *maisonnée* designates a "collective of persons mobilized around a common cause, whatever the motive for that mobilization" (p. 150). It could be taking care of a sick or elderly member, the plan to construct a house, a young member's education or settlement plans, etc. The *maisonnée* is an unstable group, because the common cause may cease to be relevant, and its contours are not fixed. Some of the individuals participating in it are tied to each other by name or blood, others only by an elective affinity relation which involves neither consanguinity or marriage (this can involve a neighbor or even someone who receives a wage, such as a regular childminder). In all these cases, the group is based on the division of domestic labor and distribution of resources among members. It incarnates a form of practical, everyday solidarity.

Identifying these family collectives, collectives that in only very few cases correspond to the literal boundaries of the house,(41) is crucial in Weber's understanding because it enables the researcher to fully grasp what membership in them is by analyzing domestic production and, more broadly, kinship relations. Contrary to economic models, which the author believes are likely to reduce kinship ties to mere interindividual relations, Weber is working to

(38) [*Maisonnée* is deliberately not the same term as *ménage*, which is the French equivalent of "household" used, for example, in consumer surveys].

(39) Both terms are part of the established vocabulary of anthropology of kinship, as may be observed using Godelier's work. The line (more exactly the lineage) is a permanent group, assimilated in classical literature with a "legal entity", at least in its relation to other lines. In direct contrast, the kin group is an impermanent, open network centered around the individual; its boundaries are determined by many different social factors. See Godelier (2004).

(40) See in particular Meillassoux (1975) on transmission of farmland in the farming milieu, and more specifically still Barthélemy (1988).

(41) Several households, or persons who are members of several households, can readily function as a single *maisonnée*. In some respects, the "matricentered" family of London manual workers studied by Firth (1956), Bott (1957), and Young and Wilmott (1957), based on domestic mutual support among women, is an illustration of this. See Déchaux (2001, Ch. 3, pp. 47-73).

identify the different groups in behalf of which each individual acts, and the positions that inform their actions. This leads to a critical dialogue with economics. A well-established collaborative relationship between sociology and economics should, according to Weber, allow for more precisely and accurately explaining what individuals in a kinship situation are doing; i.e., how their relations get constructed, whether or not the groups are transformed into collectives (either episodic or enduring) and what types of social practices they produce.(42)

To understand how these kinship collectives are constructed, Weber looks at the cognitive and moral frames that shape persons' actions.(43) These can be related to Schneider's symbols in *American Kinship* and Godelier's representations, the difference being that they are not a matter exclusively of culture, as in Schneider's thinking, but instead bring into play extremely different aspects of the sociopolitical context (class-based position, generation, family law, social legislation, etc.) and only exceptionally constitute coherent wholes (contrary to Godelier's representations of conception and human bodies). Weber identifies three distinct frames or "registers" of filiation" –these give the book its title. Being tied together by *name* represents a legal tie, instituted by the state and regulating transmission of name and property. In France this pertains to marriage or, if there is no marriage, official recognition of a child, i.e., an act of will whose effect is to inscribe the child in a kinship line, thus activating an obligation to care for needs (the same obligation that marriage activates for the two spouses' lines). The *blood* tie is biological and involves feelings. It is affected by changes in biomedical knowledge and techniques (the possibility of using blood tests to determine paternity, of dissociating sexuality and reproduction through new reproductive technologies) but also by social, legal and psychological norms pertaining to kinship.(44) To these two types or styles –blood and the name, which evoke Schneider's orders of law and nature(45)– the author adds a third, more volatile one: the *everyday.* This tie does not have the permanence of either an individual will guaranteed

(42) Weber is engaged in a collaborative research project with economists to construct a model of family decision-making when it comes to caring for dependent elderly persons. The theoretical aim is to determine "in what situations –in the ethnographic sense of the term– individuals come to find themselves acting –more or less consciously and more or less willingly– in the general interest (rather than pursuing their "individual" interests), and in the interests of what group, exactly, they do so act" (Gramain, Lacan, Weber and Wittwer, 2005, p. 482). See also Weber, Gojard and Gramain (2003).

(43) Weber's frames seem to me both cognitive and moral in that they shed light on and inform individual decision-making while furnishing moral norms endowed with some degree of legitimacy.

(44) Weber notes the growing role of psychological, and even psychoanalytic expertise in debates around "everyone's right to know his or her origins" (linked to the controversial question in France of a woman's right to put her baby up for adoption immediately after giving birth without leaving any record of her own name) and homosexual parenting. Above all, she underlines the changes in French filiation law, which since the 1980s have strengthened the position of blood in the legal definition of paternity (precedents resulting from interpretation of the French law of January 3, 1972, on the equality of natural and legitimate filiation have worked to make paternity searches an ordinary procedure); on this subject see Laborde-Barbanègre (1998).

(45) Curiously, Schneider does not figure in Weber's bibliography.

by the state or a scientifically establishable fact; it is instead a matter of co-residence, upbringing, affective and material ties (household chores or projects, care given and received, etc.). It is directly implicated in and affected by changes in roles and mores.

The fitting together of these three types, styles or areas is what produces practical kinship.(46) Blood, the name and the everyday –which, in the golden age of the nuclear family, were thought of as perfectly overlapping– seldom overlap in the cases the author studied, whatever the life-cycle stage. This means that the individuals in question experience filiation as incoherent. And this in turn means that it is not at all clear to them what their feelings and behavior should be. Different, more or less legitimate ideas of kinship collide with each other, conflict. Who should be thought of as close? Who should help take care of the elderly or sick member and in what proportions? Who is the "real" father, the one whose name the child bears (and who in some cases is not his or her biological father) or the one who lives or lived with the child every day? Who is or are the legitimate heirs? Not only are the contours of the kin group blurred, varying by individual and individual experience, but they turn out to be shifting and malleable. Membership in a *maisonnée*, for example, is almost always based on including certain individuals and excluding others: certain circumstances (disease, divorce, widowhood) determine for a time the boundaries of the collective of persons working for a common cause or trying to cope with a specific difficult situation. On the other hand, this everyday kinship can be literally effaced by a death: the ties of daily life do not weigh much when official kinship, ties of blood and name, are put into the scales. Death can destroy a *maisonnée*. Death in any case is a guarantee of priority for official relatives over "affinity or affect" relatives.

This is illustrated by the story of Violette.(47) Born in 1957 to Henriette and her first husband, Violette was taken in charge at 18 months by Maurice A., her mother's second husband, whom she thought of as her father. Three years later, this second marriage led to the birth of twin girls. Then in 1982 Maurice and Henriette got divorced. Violette continued to see Maurice after the divorce. She lived in the family home in Provence where Maurice and his two daughters spent three months a year (a house where Maurice's father and mother, his brother, married sister and her two children also lived more or less periodically, as well as Henriette's mother on occasion). After serious quarrels in 1984, then again in 1991, Maurice threw Violette out of the house. When he died in 1998, a new conflict surfaced, this time opposing Violette and her two half-sisters on the matter of Maurice's death and estate. After being excluded from her former household by Maurice, Violette was now excluded from the A. line by the twins. At stake in the conflict was the family home. Maurice's funeral brought Violette's exclusion and illegitimacy into relief. She gave a funeral speech that her twin half-sisters considered out of

(46) Weber may be reproached with attributing excessive weight to filiation; it is regrettable that alliance occupies so little place.

(47) The following synopsis deliberately simplifies Weber's case.

place and was refused any right to inherit. The more insistently Violette claimed her place as eldest daughter, the more insistently the other relatives (particularly the twins) pointed out to her that she had usurped that place: "But you're not his daughter, you've never borne his name, you never got along, you never loved him" (p. 80). These cases enable us to measure the instability and vulnerability of *maisonnée* contours, the precedence of official kinship ties upon death, and the complexity of accounts for determining inheritance. The conflict bears on the norms for sharing and the "perimeter" of heirdom. To schematize, Violette was reasoning in "*maisonnée"* terms whereas her two half-sisters were reasoning in "lineage" terms.

In an attempt to hierarchically order the three filiation registers, Weber stresses the strength of blood ties (which she had not expected to find) but specifies that this power is above all negative. The case of Violette and others in the book show that absence of a blood tie undermines the other two components of kinship, especially when they are already dissociated. Without blood ties, everyday kinship that has no legal foundation either is very weak. Conversely, if the other two dimensions are missing, the blood tie alone does not suffice to create kinship. The real difficulty, already pointed out in other studies (Le Gall and Bettahar, 2001), is having several filiations. Rather than combining or dovetailing with each other, the cognitive and moral frames conflict, intensifying the incoherence of filiation for the individuals concerned.

The situation of kinship in western societies thus appears much more complex than the binary, static vision Schneider put forward in 1968. Prevalence of the biogenetic tie and the two symbolic orders of nature and the law do not adequately capture that situation.(48) Moreover –and here the criticism is of Godelier (though his analysis of representations of the body and human conception bears essentially on non-western societies)(49) –the coexistence of such frames in individuals' lives means that what the frames themselves are is not at all clear to them. Weber contests the idea that filiation is a coherent whole encompassing the individual's life from birth to death, insisting, on the contrary, that it is a *process* constructed (and also destroyed) by successive moments in everyday life, according to events and how they are interpreted by the various protagonists. Periods of routine may be followed by periods of crisis during which filiation types or styles and contours are redefined. Transposing Bourdieu's renowned critique of life-story narratives, Weber writes: "Like the biographical illusion, the familial illusion creates continuity out of

(48) This is also A. Cadoret's view in "Une relecture de David M. Schneider à la lumière des nouvelles familles" (*Incidence*, pp. 105-121). Changes in family forms in the last three to four decades in the west have called into question the model Schneider developed in *American Kinship*. The emergence of procreation without sexual activity (made possible by progress in new reproductive technologies (NRTs), the strong increase in blended families, the emergence of homosexual parenting all work to relativize traditional "blood" rhetoric without necessarily disqualifying it.

(49) Godelier does note that in western societies "the exercise of kinship has become more difficult" (2004, p. 15) and that "kinship is increasingly taking on [...] social content that is independent of biology or genetics" (p. 569).

discontinuity" (p. 254). In direct contrast to classical theories of kinship, Weber affirms that priority should be given to doing over being, to what individuals' doing constructs rather than to what is given –precisely what Schneider did in *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* when he revised his analysis of the *tabinau* among the Yap. In this sense, Weber's research partakes of a late-Schneiderian approach and can be considered a move in the direction of Anglophone *new kinship studies*.(50) We are back to the question at the heart of the extremely lively debate of the 1960s: what is the nature of kinship?

What is kinship?

Schneider's work could conceivably have laid kinship studies in their grave. But the fact that the field took on new life in the 1980s is hardly due to chance and suggests instead that his influence worked to renew it. His contributions, particularly on the issue of the relation between the biological and the social, offer an excellent means for assessing current theoretical stances in the field of kinship studies. This may be illustrated by comparing Godelier's analyses with the new kinship studies analyses presented by J. Carsten in her latest book, *After Kinship* (2004). Up against the "new wave" incarnated by Carsten, Godelier cuts a neoclassical figure, renewing certain aspects of the classical edifice while remaining fundamentally loyal to it.

Maurice Godelier's neoclassicism

Godelier's main argument, which reappears at various points in his work, is that kinship relations "exist not only among individuals (and among the groups they belong to: family, lineage, house, caste, etc.) [but] also, and simultaneously, within those individuals" (Godelier, 2004, p. 92). These are therefore both social relations (of descent, marriage, residence) of the sort that have always been studied in classical anthropology, attentive to the social functions of kinship, and representations of what it means to be a son, a father, a daughter or a mother. The representations are developed by means of a kinship terminology that allows each person to situate himself or herself within a set of beliefs about human conception; for example, how a son is

(50) However, it is not Weber's intention to reject all established notions (blood, the name, the everyday; the lineage, kindred, the *maisonnée*) on the grounds that they are irrelevant and inadequate for analyzing an extremely fluid reality. The point is not to use them in reifying ways. For example, the *maisonnée* (and the common cause that founds it) is only what the actors make of it. It only holds together by means of the power relations and compromises obtaining among the actors, and the rules derived from them –rules that in turn may always be challenged. There is as yet no theory of contingency for an action system such as this. It is not clear that this analytic perspective is really compatible with the affirmation that individuals' social positions are always a decisive component in the power relations that get established among relatives.

conceived: what part of himself he receives from his father, his mother, his paternal and/or maternal ancestors, spirits, etc. In Godelier's understanding, it is impossible to understand the nature and operation of kinship relations if we disconnect them from how they are conceived and experienced by individuals. These representations are internalized and incorporated. They are "ideal realities" whose effects on social life are decidedly real: they work to produce kinship relations because they establish relations of complementarity, authority and domination between the sexes, and these in turn are activated and operative in kinship and beyond kinship, i.e. in economic, political and religious life.

The second key point in Godelier's argument is that kinship is governed by the reproduction of life. This is why it cannot be dissociated from relations between the sexes. The foundation of kinship relations is both social and biological.(51) Godelier wants to get beyond the "false debate" (p. 127) between partisans of an exclusively genealogical theory of kinship (i.e., in the last analysis biological) and partisans of an exclusively social theory. Kinship cannot be detached from sexuality and the reproduction of life; it is through kinship relations that human beings together ensure that human life is perpetuated, that societies regulate generational sucession and appropriation of the children who are born in each of them. Godelier clarifies that representations of human conception are not a matter of biology but of a society's ethnobiological beliefs. They are partly fictions, ideology. For example, the concept of blood or sperm makes it possible to exclude certain individuals (even if they are biological parents) from the forming and reproducing of kinship groups, and to legitimate such exclusion. It is in this sense that kinship is strongly related to politico-religious power in a given society. Kinship is therefore subordinated to the "politico-ritual system that makes the society exist as such –as a whole" (p. 108). Far from being merely a language (as Leach and Lévi-Strauss claimed), kinship functions as a set of material, concrete relations that work to ensure the reproduction of life and society.

This interpretation, which amounts to insisting on transmission and the role of kinship in politico-religious organization, is closer to British social anthropology (Fortes, Radcliffe-Brown) than to the structuralist theory of marriage alliance.(52) It naturally leads to a critique of Lévi-Strauss. Godelier affirms several times that exchange, i.e., alliance through marriage, cannot be the only theoretical basis for analyzing kinship (p. 143, pp. 443-459). For culture and society to exist, it is not enough for men to renounce marrying their sisters, exchanging them instead through marriage; it is also important for people to "force themselves not to give away what needs to be preserved

(51) It is obviously on this point that Godelier's understanding diverges most sharply from Schneider's in *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*.

(52) These terms are from Dumont's *Introduction à deux théories d'anthropologie sociale* ([1971] 1988). Godelier frequently cites British authors, including Fortes, Goody, Leach and Radcliffe-Brown. Lévi-Strauss and Héritier are also frequently cited –for critical purposes.

in order be transmitted" (p. 458).[53] Moreover, forms of descent are just as cultural as forms of alliance: they are dependent on representations and touch on social issues that involve the social order.

Godelier pursues this critique by analyzing the issue that was at the heart of Lévi-Strauss's theory: the incest prohibition (Lévi-Strauss [1949] 1967). The details of his discussion are complex,[54] but we can mention here what links Godelier's position on incest to his more general vision of kinship. The two anthropologists concur that incest is at the core of all kinship systems, but their reasons are different. For Godelier, the incest prohibition brings out not the obligation to form alliances through exchange of women (i.e., exogamy) but rather the absolute necessity to regulate sexuality. In contrast to other primates, "desire sexuality" is sharply distinguished from "reproduction sexuality" among humans, due to specific, exclusively human characteristics. Following Freud on this point, Godelier points out that sexual desire is a selfish passion that divides individuals more than it unites them. Because of its asocial character, human sexuality represents a threat to social cooperation and solidarity. This means that to ensure the reproduction of the social order, it is essential to work to socialize sexuality. The explanation for the incest prohibition is therefore not to be found in biology or the emergence of symbolic thinking (as Lévi-Strauss argued); it can only be explained by "social reasons". It becomes clear why, as he showed in his analysis of representations of human conception, the social order is simultaneously a sexual order.[55] The incest prohibition is at the core of kinship, but it is not exclusively a kinship issue, for kinship is a response to the necessity of organizing the reproduction of life and the social order. What is socially at stake in any kinship system, what implies the need to define rules for organizing human sexuality, is the appropriation of children by one or another group of adults.

The other point on which Godelier differs from Lévi-Strauss (and Freud)[56] is the idea that the incest prohibition marks a passage from nature to culture. The difference between humans and the primates closest to humans (chimpanzees, bonobos) is only one of degree. Kinship does not exist among these primates, of course, who are characterized instead by"primitive promiscuity" wherein any individual can couple with any other of the other sex.[57]

(53) Godelier here applies to kinship the thesis he developed in his preceding work, *L'énigme du don* (1996) [English translation: *The Enigma of the Gift*, 1998]: there can only be a society if certain things are taken out of circulation, meaning they cannot be either gifts or objects of market exchange.

(54) Godelier spends no fewer than 150 pages discussing this point. His conjectural interpretation of the origins of the incest prohibition (presented after his critique of Lévi-Strauss's) unquestionably gives his work an impressive anthropological scope.

(55) This is why study of kinship relations cannot be dissociated from study of relations between the sexes.

(56) In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), the murder of the father is at the origin of the incest taboo and the passage from nature to culture.

(57) The idea that the first humans lived not in societies but hordes marked by sexual competition for access to the group's females is common to Freud and Lévi-Strauss. Recent primatology discoveries about the primates closest to humans (chimpanzees and bonobos share 98% of human chromosomes) tend to disprove this.

Primatologists hold that coupling between "mother" and "son" is highly exceptional, and that this seems due to social rather than biological factors: primates' avoidance of consanguineal coupling seems a response to the concern not to imperil the band by stirring up conflicts among the males. In this understanding, the human incest prohibition has much to do with mechanisms present in nature among certain primates; it integrates them into new, specifically human objectives: organizing cooperation between the sexes in raising children and transmitting resources to them (knowledge, values, wealth, titles, etc.) for the purpose of ensuring reproduction of social relations. Far from being a radical break, the move from nature to culture, in this understanding, is "both a continuous and discontinuous transformation from animality to humanity" (p. 474).

Overall, Godelier remains classical on quite a number of points,(58) and he is clearly in line with anthropological tradition. On the fundamental question of the relation between the biological and the social, he is an heir to the understanding that Morgan formulated nearly 150 years ago, the idea that kinship consists in "social recognition of biological facts". He also remains very close to British descent group theory, which holds that these groups and their functions are essential components of social organization, what Fortes called "the politico-jural system."(59) Lastly, he defines kinship in terms of human reproduction (of life and the social order). It should be added that his preoccupations lead him to study non-western kinship, the preferred ground of all classical theories.

However, on all other points he clearly differs from the standard kinship anthropology. He devotes great attention to representations of the conception of human beings, the person, and gender; that is, themes favored by new kinship studies. For instance, he agrees with the idea that kinship cannot be studied exclusively in terms of its functions; its meanings and symbols are also important. Furthermore, he relativizes the nature/culture dichotomy, particularly the issue of the origin of the incest prohibition. Lastly, at several points he criticizes the move to isolate, "sanctuarize" kinship, insisting that kinship is penetrated with social relations and that no society is founded on kinship alone.(60) On all these points, Schneider's influence, whether direct or indirect, is clear.

(58) Being classical is obviously not in itself a criticism. The social sciences often allow themselves to move toward the opposite extreme, characterized by a regrettable degree of amnesia.

(59) What Godelier calls "politico-religious" (see n. 35) is similar to British structuralist-functionalist anthropology's "politico-jural". Similarly, his idea insists on the rights and duties linked to membership in descent groups and to position within those groups.

(60) In underlining how fully kinship is both conditioned by social reproduction and facilitates it, and in concluding his book with a demonstration of how extensively kinship has been transformed over several millenia of history, Godelier may be said to return to neo-Marxist anthropology positions –those of Meillassoux, for example. The pages on incest (his use of primatology data, the understanding that social factors had a determining role for the incest prohibition) are strong evidence of this materialist approach.

The edifice the author has built is impressive for its breadth and the immense erudition invested in it. But might it not be made somewhat unsteady by the neo-classical combination of standard and more recent elements, the latter born of a critique of the former? No, on one condition: that we accept the idea that representations and beliefs about conception, the body and the person are ideologies; that is, in each case a vision of the world specific to the group or society in question.(61) It is in this connection that Godelier speaks of materialized "ideal realities". He emphasizes the fact that kinship relations are born by "putting into practice" the principles contained in the beliefs: "it is by putting these principles into practice, or into acts as it were, that individuals produce specific social relations among each other and among the social groups they belong to by birth (families, houses, clans, lineages, etc.), precisely those social relations we call kinship relations" (p. 118). Unsurprisingly, given that representations are supposed to produce and justify social relations, Godelier underlines the correspondance between indigenous beliefs and the politico-religious order or, at very least, the mode of filiation in a given kinship system. The body and sexuality are put into the service of the social order, the imperative that that order reproduce itself. As O. Allard notes (2006), this argument, both functionalist and Marxist, evokes Bourdieu, including in the importance it attributes to the body: beliefs are incorporated; one crucial effect of this is that they produce sexually differentiated bodies.

Two criticisms may be made of this general thesis. First, Godelier too readily smoothes over the incoherencies and contradictions in indigenous representations.(62) He proceeds as if the ideal realities constituted a homogeneous whole in every society. This is why he does not spend much time on contrary cases.(63) It is also probably why his analysis of kinship in the west is disappointing and seems somewhat extraneous to the rest of the argument. It is hard to imagine that beliefs about conception, bodies, the sharing of substances in filiation and more generally what produces the kinship tie constitute a homogeneous whole in modern western societies. On the contrary, the whole constituted by these beliefs is a blurred, composite, shifting one, as shown by F. Weber. The western case undermines Godelier's model, and this explains his relative discreetness on the subject. The last twenty pages (pp. 565-588), a discussion of "what has changed in the west", offer little more than a descriptive inventory; they are virtually without theoretical purpose. The second criticism concerns the social reproduction imperative, which Godelier posits as obvious and never questions. Over against this holistic vision of society as from the outset a coherent whole seeking to reproduce itself by reproducing its structures is the idea that every social system

(61) The relevant definition of ideology here is K. Mannheim's: the mental universe of a given group or society, the general structure of ideas and beliefs shared within it.

(62) Paradoxically (since Godelier continually expressses his opposition to this aspect of Schneider's work), this criticism is also valid for Schneider's *American Kinship*.

(63) Cases where several representation systems coexist are presented as coherently working, functional wholes; see the examples of the Khumbo of Nepal and the Telefolmin of New Guinea and the Kingdom of Tonga (pp. 287-303).

–and every kinship system– is only approximately an "order"; that it is a non-permanent setup rather than a stable, balanced configuration. Moreover, Godelier has difficulty explaining the origin of the impetus for change in kinship systems over history. He admits to not knowing the answer to this (p. 539) and mentions only the role of religion, citing Goody's work (1983) in this connection. Despite these two reservations, Godelier's work is so rich that it can only be considered a fundamental reference.

The new wave: "new kinship studies"

Along with Marilyn Strathern,(64) Janet Carsten is a leader of the primarily Anglo-Saxon current called new kinship studies. Her *After Kinship* (2004) offers a synthesis of this approach.(65) New kinship studies arose from the observation that since the mid-twentieth century, anthropology of kinship had gotten side-tracked into becoming a purely academic body of knowledge that turned its back on ordinary people's experience of family, meanwhile losing its previous prestigious place within the discipline. The stated aim of new kinship studies is to bring kinship studies back to life by taking up questions that have been neglected by traditional anthropology but are of great importance today, directly linked to the transformations that kinship is undergoing, specifically in the western world; e.g., reconstituted or blended families, homosexual parenting, new reproductive technologies.(66) The expression "after kinship" is to be understood as a dual revision: of what kinship is, given the recent developments and changes in this area; and of how it should be studied.(67)

Carsten holds that the three key concepts of new kinship studies are gender, substance and "personhood". The question of the cultural meaning of kinship is crucial: understanding what kinship is requires looking at indigenous symbols and categories concerning conception of the person, the sharing of substances, the body, and gender; i.e., the symbols and categories by means of which individuals make sense of their ties. In this approach, the reference to Schneider is fundamental: "[He] founded a new kind of study in the field of kinship. Here the generation of cultural meanings was the central problem, rather than either the functioning of social groups or the comparative analysis

(64) Like Carsten, Strathern is a specialist of the Melanesian world who later moved to study kinship in the west; see Strathern (1992).

(65) The book follows on a collective work Carsten edited, a kind of "manifesto" of new kinship studies entitled *Culture of Relatedness*: *New Approaches to the Study of Kinship* (2002).

(66) It is important to clarify, however, that Carsten rejects the idea of a division between western and non-western kinship. These two worlds, which new kinship study authors often seek to bring closer to each other, are represented in equal proportion in the illustrations she chooses.

(67) The absence of kinship diagrams in *After Kinship* is striking given that the book presents itself as a synthesis. Formalization technique (which is indeed often impenetrable) is rejected as a way of straying from the real question: what are the cultural meanings and everyday practices of kinship? Many new kinship study authors are women.

of kinship terminologies" (Carsten, 2004, p. 18). According to Carsten, Schneider opened a new path but proved unable to explore it meaningfully, either because he rejected the very concept of kinship, or because he remained prisoner to an excessively dualist vision that prevented him from grasping the complexity of the ways in which the biological fit and worked together with the social.

In her now classic analysis of kinship among Malays on the island of Langkawi, Carsten (1995) reiterated Schneider's critique of "genealogical reasoning" but refused to discard the notion of kinship.(68) She proposed a flexible approach in terms of process, an approach that establishes relations among the things individuals do in their everyday lives. She emphasized the role of the domestic space, commensality and shared food, particularly rice, demonstrating a continuum between rice, milk and blood. Repeated sharing of rice within the same domestic space creates shared corporeal substances (mother's milk, blood), thereby creating kinship. Kinship thus does not derive exclusively from procreation. Biology and social practices are interpenetrated to such a degree as to be indissociable: "Blood is not simply a substance with which one is born –it is continuously produced and transformed from food that is eaten" (Carsten, 1995, p. 234).

Consistent with this understanding, Carsten considers Schneider's opposition between the order of nature and the order of the law to be reductive when applied to Euro-American kinship. Blood and biogenetic substances are full-fledged symbols that require exploration. Studies done in the west reveal both the wide diversity of beliefs and how the two dimensions –nature (i.e., what is given) and the law (i.e., that which is constructed, chosen)– are intertwined. The young people of Southall, for example, a working-class London neighborhood, use cousinship vocabulary to designate various relations, not all of which involve genealogical kinship: "Cousins are friends who are kin and kin who are friends" (Baumann, 1995, quoted in Carsten, 2004, p. 115, pp. 142-144). Another illustration is how North American homosexuals arrange a kind of substitute for kinship based entirely on affinity relations but including a claim to the kind of solidarity and permanence that usually characterizes blood relations (Weston, 1991, quoted in Carsten 2004, p. 115, pp. 144-146). In both cases, the levels of nature and choice are mixed together. It is misguided to speak of "fictional" or "pseudo" kinship, terms sometimes used in anthropology to describe spiritual kinship or other forms of godparenthood,(69) because that understanding is based on the assumption that "real" kinship implies biological ties. This type of dichotomy is precisely what new kinship studies rejects.

(68) "The material I present on notions of relatedness in Lagkawi supports much of Schneider's argument. In these ideas, kinship is not always derived from procreation. I would nevertheless seek to rescue kinship from its post-Schneiderian demise" (Carsten, 1995, p. 224).

(69) See Pitt-Rivers' analyses of the *compradrazgo* in Latin America (1973).

New kinship studies has developed a relativist, culturalist approach with a clearly anti-dualist orientation. All the analytical oppositions, dichotomies, that anthropology of kinship used in forging itself into a discipline –the given and the acquired, the biological and the social, substance and relation, nature and technology, blood and food, even sex and gender –are here criticized as unable to describe or "translate" the way natives conceptualize and construct kinship; all are deemed "reifying" and condemned. In reality, the understanding here is, all boundary lines are permeable, malleable. In the chapter on gender, Carsten echoes fairly radical positions that reject the idea that sex is to be ranked on the side of what is given, and therefore reject as irrelevant the distinction between sex (i.e., the biological given) and gender (i.e., the social role). Her purpose is to demonstrate that in this area of relations, all is socially constructed, and that gender oppositions in kinship are more or less pronounced by moment in life or circumstances of family life. On Langkawi, gender differences are strongly marked at the moments of birth and death; but during childhood and old age they are "relatively insignificant" (*ibid.*, p. 72). Likewise, the notion of the person should be purged of the presuppositions attaching to it, especially in the west; i.e., that the person is characterized by unity, is an integrated whole. The subtle workings of bodily substances, how they are transmitted, converted, transformed by procreation, commensality, hospitality, etc. mean that the person thus constituted is a divisible, composite entity with porous boundaries. This malleability, brought to light by ethnographers of India and Melanesia,(70) also applies to western societies. For example, adopted persons' search for their biological parents does not usually imply that they deny the role of their adoptive parents. Some even go so far as to perceive a physical resemblance between themselves and both their adoptive parents and their biological ones (pp. 146-153). This case illustrates the porosity of the notion of personhood, as well as the fluid boundaries between the biological and the social, what is given and what is constructed.

The attention to process, to what is a matter not of being but doing, the interest in what takes place within the domestic space (the understanding being that in classical anthropology this was sacrificed to the politico-jural domain of clans and lineages) and, more generally, in everyday practices, leads to preferring the strongly sociological concept of "relatedness" over that of kinship, marked by biocentrism.(71) The point, then, is to study how individuals enter into relationships with each other, establish similarities and differences among each other based on cultural idioms or ontologies –in sum, how they construct their ties and give them meaning. Kinship, commensality,

(70) Strathern's studies (1988) of the Melanesian notion of personhood emphasize the person's divisibility and compositeness ("the partible person"), showing in particular that the substances implicated in conceiving the person, such as food, blood, milk and sperm, take different male and female forms. They circulate, are exchanged and are therefore detachable from individual bodies; those bodies are only vectors of the substances.

(71) This concept refers to the verb "relate", meaning "be linked to". Carsten already used it in a 1995 article on indigenous ideas about kinship among the Malays of Langkawi, and it is used once again in the "manifesto" of new kinship studies (see Carsten, 2002).

friendship, ethnicity, nationality should no longer be considered from the outset a matter of opposition; they are instead so many modes of "relatedness", more or less different or similar, which the researcher then relates to each other, compares.

There can be no doubt that new kinship studies break with the anthropological tradition of kinship, pursuing as they do the deconstruction enterprise begun by Schneider. They clearly seek to investigate the terrain of cultural symbols and categories at the base of one or another society. They describe "a world made up entirely of processes, where nothing is conceived of as given" (Allard, 2006, p 19). On this point Carsten goes against Godelier, who for his part refuses to eliminate all reference to the reproduction of life. This relation to standard kinship anthropology constitutes a deep dividing line. However stimulating they may be, the bold theoretical choices of new kinship studies raise some thorny problems. Inspired as they are by post-modernist understanding,(72) firmly set against all substantialism, they figure the real through the prism of fluidity, malleability –"relatedness". All is movement, process. Even the given is constructed –constructed as a given. This approach clearly works to dilute all analytic categories, since all are suspected of reifying the flow of the real. The result is that the real seems ungraspable and, in the extreme, indescribable. There seems nothing left to analyze but indigenous idioms. All specific references to real practices and structures become lost in an ocean of discourse, as Godelier justly remarks (2004, p. 117). The search for meaning has entirely effaced the search for functions. If we consider sex to be socially constructed, and if we deem it a changing, contingent process, how can we then qualify the beings and relations that we study? If it cannot be known whether persons are men or women, what are they? And in what sense can we speak of sex or gender relations? More generally, where should we locate the limits of the concept of "relatedness"? In sum, the choice of epistemological postulates here makes it impossible to practice one of the defining activities of scientific study –categorizing the real– and therefore impossible to *compare* –an activity that has always been at the heart of anthropological research.

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Presenting and critically comparing the four works cited confirms the statement made in the introduction: recent developments in kinship studies show that the discipline is at a turning point. Kinship is no longer considered above all in terms of functions and structures with the understanding that it is a major component of social organization. It is also apprehended as a set of symbols, categories, representations and beliefs by means of which individuals construct kinship ties and give them meaning. This new perspective owes

(72) Carsten cites Geertz and Bruno Latour as theorists who have been influential for new kinship studies.

much to Schneider and the discussions –including the critical debate– elicited by his works. Once firmly anchored in social anthropology, the "kinship" object of research has migrated toward more or less post-modernist cultural anthropology.

In light of the way research issues have developed recently and some of the "deconstructivist" excesses of new kinship studies mentioned above, I would argue in favor of a middle way that requires firmly bringing together analysis of cultural representations and analysis of social relations. Kinship is an action system in that it is a relational configuration in which any of A's actions depend on those of the others in the group and in turn influences their actions; it is also a symbolic system in that relations among relatives (i.e., actions taken by them individually) are indissociable from a set of indigenous concepts defining what kinship is for individuals. The aim of including both levels of analysis (an aim less likely to be realized in the the research itself than included in introductory statements of purpose) is clearly operative in Godelier's research and in F. Weber's. But the mere observation of normative tensions and contradictions, instability and variety in constituted kinship groups, works against the overly mechanistic hypothesis that symbols have an ideological function destined to legitimate an action system.

Investigation that consists in considering kinship to be a system of action and a system of symbols without assuming that the two are congruent is particularly fitting to the current western context.(73) In the last two or three decades, western kinship has indeed come to be characterized by a weakening of institutions and the loosening hold of statutary norms (legal and other kinds). This situation requires the analyst to be extremely careful in determining and describing how individuals construct their kinship. The need to bring together action and thought, practices and symbols, seems crucial when it comes to analyzing the new forms of kinship resulting from blended families, homosexual parenting or new reproductive technology involving gamete donation.(74) And it is surely here that the main issues in kinship studies –western kinship studies at least– now lie.

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(73) In contemporary kinship groups in France, for example, the symbolism of blood and shared bodily substances can be associated with either "lineage affiliation" or, on the contrary, "subjectivist affiliation" devoid of dynastic norms aimed at perpetuating the line. See Déchaux (1997, Chs. 8 and 9, pp. 247-304; and 2007).

(74) On this subject in France see Fine (1998); Fine and Ouellette (2005); Mailfert (2002); Martial (2003).

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