RELATEDNESS AS TRANSCENDENCE:

ON THE RENEWED DEBATE OVER THE MEANING OF KINSHIP

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Introduction

This is an article about kinship, and more particularly the meaning of kinship, an issue that has characterized practically the whole history of anthropology from Lewis Henry Morgan's pioneering studies, including the influential dismissals of kinship as a universal category by both Rodney Needham and David Schneider in the mid-twentieth century and the prominence given to Janet Carsten's notion of 'relatedness' as part of the neo-Schneiderian revival of kinship study since the 1990s. Here I want to revisit the issues involved by bringing in notions of transcendence from religious studies, and in particular images of the transcendence of difference as a way of overcoming social division and disharmony. My starting point is that not only religion but also ideas about kinship can be used to express the internal unity of social groups or categories, often in opposition to other such groups and categories. In respect of kinship, these ideas are often expressed in terms of living, working and/or eating together, as much as genealogical connection. As a consequence, they are often seen by anthropologists as not simply modifying, but contradicting or even denying the realities of biological relations, or at least genealogical connections, between kin.[1] What often replaces biology or genealogy is some notion of spiritual or other cosmological intervention, which in itself can be seen as a form of transcendence, to the extent that spiritual beings are typically associated with other worlds, despite their impact on the human world.

There are essentially two arguments here. First, while there *are* transcendent representations of kinship that stress the unity of the group and that in so doing seem to play down or reject either biological realities or genealogical connections and distinctions, that does not necessarily mean that there is complete ignorance of them in the society in question. Certainly indigenous ideas will typically not reflect the western scientific view in all respects, any more than western folk models generally do, but I argue that they are more often recognizable in these terms than is sometimes claimed. One irony is that the 'new kinship' of the Schneiderian turn may well simultaneously expresses scepticism of the existence of

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[1] I am treating biology and genealogy as separate but overlapping concepts here, genealogies being essentially social products that are not entirely accounted for by the simple mapping of genetic connections between kin. Cf. Goodenough 2001, Helmig 1997.

biological ideas in indigenous world views while nonetheless incorporating the body and its connections with kinship into its considerations. At the very least bodily substances and excretions play a vigorous part in many ritual practices and symbolic inventories, and a basic if generally partial knowledge of physiology seems universal. Even monosexual explanations for birth, as have been claimed to occur in the Trobriands or on Yap, or conversely in strongly patrilineal societies, admit the significance of one parent in generating a new life while allegedly minimizing or denying that of the other.[2]

My second argument starts from the observation that idioms of kinship can be used both to include and exclude particular individuals and/or groups from association with oneself or one's own group. They can, in a word, be manipulated in accordance with different tactical priorities and interests in the recognition or denial of particular relationships and relatives. Narrow, even selfish individual interests may be behind such tactics, as much as transcendent ideas stressing harmony and unity. The latter may themselves actually be interest-based rather than simply idealistic, for example, increasing support for one's political ambitions, using claims to kinship with others as a coping strategy in straitened circumstances while denying those claims when one's conditions improve, or simply ensuring that one's social positioning is satisfactory. Essentially, therefore, I am contrasting those aspects of kinship that gloss over structural differences in favour of a transcendent image of unity and harmony with precisely the sorts of structural difference that, among other things, emphasise the distinctions between specific kin groups and genealogies, that is, that stress difference, opposition and possibly conflict and tension. Further, I argue that transcendent notions of kinship are such not only because they transcend division to produce unity and harmony, but also because they bring in transcendent spheres in the form of spiritual or other cosmological entities to explain birth especially. It is this, ipso facto, that may involve the denial of biological or at least genealogical realities just mentioned above.[3]

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[2] Many of these debates are well-rehearsed, and while I do refer to them (and an extended treatment of this topic should take them more fully into account), in this brief article I prefer to concentrate on more recent and/or unfamiliar material. In general, monosexual explanations denying the role of the father have proved more controversial than those denying the role of the mother, which to some extent is also a contrast between societies with matrilineal and patrilineal descent.

[3] One writer who has anticipated me in part is Robert McKinley, who, in a chapter entitled 'The philosophy of kinship' (2001), not only treats kinship, rather unexceptionally, as involving intense moral obligations between those who count as kin, but also says that this philosophy 'often embraces the spiritual as well as the human world' (ibid.: 132). However, he does not invoke transcendence, nor problematize the denial of genealogy or biology by certain writers in contexts where unity and harmony are being stressed through kinship. More immediate precursors are Louis Dumont and his former circle, discussed at points below.

Finally here, we should not ignore the predispositions of many anthropologists themselves, who, I argue, given their often radical personal positions and sympathy for those they study, often seem to prioritize the more harmonious, inclusive aspects of social life over the more divisive, exclusionary ones, however much they may admit that the latter are just as much a part of the overall human experience. If there is a bias here, it is clearly capable of distorting ethnographic accounts to highlight certain sorts of knowledge and certain social contexts over others that may have a place in indigenous world views but sometimes be neglected entirely by the anthropologist.

First, however, I will highlight some key points in the history of debate over the meaning of kinship, then describe what I mean by transcendence, before finally showing how the notion of transcendence may add to our understanding of the meaning of kinship. Ethnographically I shall range quite widely, using especially material collected and interpreted by others from, inter alia, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea and India. The argument I am making is a very general one, this being dictated partly by the restricted compass of an article and partly by the desire to get across certain fundamental ideas without the distraction of too much detail or qualification.

Anthropology and the meaning(s) of kinship
While there were some precursors, for most people the treatment of kinship in anthropology starts with Lewis Henry Morgan, the nineteenth-century lawyer who pioneered the ethnographic study of kinship among the Iroquois, as well as its comparative study through his work on patterns of kinship terminology. In most respects a typical nineteenth-century evolutionist, he is also notable for assuming that kinship terminologies express actual biological relationships deriving from marriage, whereas his critic McLennan, another lawyer, retorted that kin terms were no more than 'salutations' or greetings, thus stressing their social nature. Although in technical studies of kinship it is Morgan's insights that have proved the greater and lasted better, McLennan's focus on the social, not biological aspects of kinship, at least in explaining kin terms, has become standard doctrine in anthropology subsequently.[4] In fact, of course, the situation is a little more complicated. Objectively reproductive biology cannot be denied: while it is not the only mode of recruitment to social groups, the continued existence of human populations in general clearly depends on it, as do

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[4] This distinction applies above all to their attitude to kin terms. As one anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this paper pointed out, McLennan was fully aware of Darwinian perspectives, while Morgan did not deploy only biological arguments in his writings more generally.

these other modes of recruitment. But Morgan's fault was to place too exclusive a focus on biology in explaining kinship even as a social institution. If nothing else, a purely biological view would fail to take into account institutions like adoption, births resulting from clandestine adultery or other socially illicit relations, and in most societies around the world marriage, a legal rather than biological relationship, though it gives rise to the latter through the births of children. In addition, genealogies are often manipulated by the powerful for political reasons, and they need not invoke biological connection at all, or only metaphorically, as in the notion of an intellectual or artistic genealogy (Goodenough 2001).

Later, in the work of David Schneider, the focus of criticism was directed more at genealogy than biology, his argument nonetheless being that neither were necessarily the way non-European peoples saw kinship. This arose initially from his reflections on his own early work (e.g. 1953, 1962) on Yap in Micronesia, which he later repudiated as too reliant on genealogical modes of thought (in *Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 1984). Schneider's student, David Labby, considered Schneider's initial definition of descent on Yap as double descent to be problematic (1976), and Schneider relied on Labby's revisions in his *Critique* to dispose of the notion of descent entirely. Somewhat provocatively, Schneider had earlier suggested that not even Americans saw their kinship in wholly genealogical or biological terms, as is generally supposed (1968a). Not only were important folk symbols of relatedness at work, but notions of law informed both consanguineal and affinal kinship.[5] As for the idiom of blood, this was an ethnographically specific metaphor for relationships that was widespread but not universal (cf. bone, flesh, milk, sinews, muscle or semen in other societies).

Schneider's rejection of genealogy was long ignored or derided by functionalists and structuralists in Europe, partly because it seemed unnecessary, though in their opposition to functionalism, structuralists also rejected 'genealogy' in the analysis of what they called 'relationship terminologies', preferring the notion of 'category' as more reflective of ethnographic realities. Few social or cultural anthropologists after Morgan would deny the

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[5] Kinship in nature alone, i.e. purely biological, produces 'natural children' or bastardy, whereas consanguineal kinship, though biological and rooted in an idiom of blood, is at the same time social, being legitimized by the legal marriage of a child's parents. In America marriage itself is purely kinship in law, whence the English phrase 'in-laws' for affines. The cogency of *American kinship* as an ethnography is vitiated by Schneider's later admission that it was not in fact based on the ethnographic data collected for it, but written before that could be analysed. In effect, Schneider was his own informant for the work. See Fogelson 2001: 36. No wonder that, at the time it was published, the work was referred to by his colleagues and even by Schneider himself as a 'pamphlet' (Fogelson ibid., especially p. 42 n. 9).

fundamentally social nature of kinship, as of genealogies themselves where these are recognized, which certainly cannot be reduced to a record of genetic kinship, for reasons already given. And to speak in terms of any mode of descent, especially patrilineal and matrilineal, is to recognize cultural choice and bias. In his criticisms of others, Schneider seemed to be forgetting the extent to which such facts were already recognized within anthropology. As a result he found himself opposed by both structuralists like Rodney Needham and his followers, and extensionists like Harold Scheffler and Floyd Lounsbury, two groups of scholars that were themselves at odds over the interpretation of topics like kinship terminologies and prescriptive alliance.

Biology nonetheless was explicitly present at the time as an explanation for kinship behaviour in the form of the then new sub-discipline of sociobiology. Marshall Sahlins (1977) rejected its attempts, led by E.O. Wilson (1975; also 1980), to reduce the social aspects of kinship to neo-Darwinian theories of altruism, fitness and selection that relied on the greater genetic proximity to ego of some kin than others. This was primarily because sociobiology ignored the very strong social obligations in any society that existed between affines, whole kin groups and even non-relatives. Again, the issue revolves around the specific interests of groups and individuals. For sociobiology, altruism serves individual interests either directly or vicariously through behaviour that is conditioned, though not entirely determined, by the closeness or otherwise of biological relations. For anthropologists like Sahlins, on the other hand, much behaviour is group-oriented and subject to conflicts of interest because social obligation determines that, for example, property one could use oneself is handed over to another group; but this is still done because ultimately one's social status and even entitlement to membership of society depend on it. Thus the claim that behaviour is at least partly genetically determined fails to take social obligation into consideration, let alone to account for variation in such obligations between societies.[6]

A related if somewhat different argument was the so-called 'virgin birth debate', revolving largely around Malinowski's material in the Trobriands (e.g. 1932). While I do not want to revisit this debate in detail here, the essential issue was whether the Trobriand idea that the father of the child simply 'opened the way' through intercourse for a spirit child to be born, and only contributed to its bodily substance subsequent to the onset of pregnancy through repeated intercourse, amounts to a denial or ignorance of physiological paternity.

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[6] Sahlins has recently returned to kinship with a new short book on his notion of mutuality of being (Sahlins 2012). I only mention this in passing here, since I am not yet convinced of the relevance of its considerable insights to my own arguments, but I have discussed it at some length in a recent review (Parkin 2012).

Whereas Spiro, for example (1966, 1968), was inclined to think so, Leach rejected this (1967) in favour of seeing this supposed 'belief' as a myth subject to contextualization in its use, but not excluding the possibility of the recognition of biological realities in more mundane contexts. In short, and more mundanely, the 'belief' may work here to deny the Trobriand father specific rights in the matrilineage of his wife, expressed ideologically through this denial of his patrilineal connection to his biological children. In other words, Leach argued, while the patrilineal aspect of genealogy, a more strictly social idea, may be denied, that need not in itself entail a rejection or ignorance of either fatherhood or genealogical connection. Another famous matrilineal people, the Nayar, have also seemed to anthropologists to reject and deny physiological paternity. This is partly because it is not clear who in this society acts as a woman's husband: once ritually married to a Brahman (or by him as a ritual service in the Brahman view), a woman will have a series of lovers, who impregnate her in circumstances that undermine paternity confidence. Secondly, as in some other societies with matrilineal descent, residentially unified Nayar matrilineages deny residence rights to alien men in the form of the husbands of their female members, these matrilineages being organized around opposite-sex sibling ties, not opposite-sex spouse ones. Similarly if for different reasons, societies in the Himalayas like the Nyimba that permit extensive polyandry (here, fraternal) are sometimes thought not to be concerned about the low paternity confidence that this practice allegedly gives rise to. In fact, as both Moore (1985) for the Nayar and Levine (1988) for the Nyimba have shown, there is just such a concern in both cases. This hardly suggests an ignorance of physiological realities, nor a dismissal of its significance indigenously. In the Nayar case, it does suggest a tension between men's concerns as individuals for paternity and their exclusion from the matrilineages of the women they have children with, with the latter having a definite priority. The Nyimba keep track of the brothers' sexual activities and times of access to their joint wife as a way of determining paternity, relying in the last resort on similarities in the physical appearances of putative fathers and sons.

Finally here, I briefly discuss Janet Carsten's notion of 'relatedness' (e.g. 2000), which gained prominence as part of the revival of kinship in the 1990s. Relatedness was coined precisely to suggest that kinship is fundamentally social (or rather cultural) and to revive Schneider's rejection of genealogical thinking as irrelevant to the study of kinship. However, as Carsten herself has recognized (2000: 5), in agreement with Ladislav Holy (1996), if absolutely any sort of relationship can be seen in this way, then the category of 'kinship' becomes meaningless. Her interpretation of her own ethnography (1997) has recently come

under a typically pointed attack from Warren Shapiro (2010), who denies that there is any fundamental difference from western thought on kinship among Carsten's Malays. In making this argument he relies on 1) a close reading of Carsten's own writings, arguing that she often contradicts herself; 2) a scrutiny of earlier writings on Malay kinship, which generally do not share Carsten's downplaying of the genealogical framework; and 3) his own robust and longstanding defence of that framework. The notion of relatedness has proved influential, indeed has become almost the key concept in the canon of the new kinship, but I do not have the space for a full discussion of Carsten's ethnographic work here. What is more relevant for my argument about the Malay material is David Banks's suggestion (1972) that in upland Kedah a conflictual present associated with individual interests and selfishness is contrasted with a more moral past of intra-group cooperation as far as relations of kinship are concerned. While Banks sees this as possibly mythologized history, and even at times as reflecting a real history of change brought about by migration and local over-population, for Carsten, who worked elsewhere in Kedah, on the island of Langkawi, this is the present-day and everyday reality of Malay kinship.

As part of Schneider's influence, in this later, revived work on kinship there is also a clear stress on kinship as culture involving symbols, an approach which itself is used to undermine the earlier focus on genealogy, just as Schneider intended. In Schneider's case the idea of kinship as culture represents a position that owes as much to the influence of Talcott Parsons as to the tradition of American cultural anthropology. But currently there is also a somewhat more innovative stress on kinship as practice, linked to the principle that ideas about kinship can be 'read' through the practices of living, eating and working together, whereby, perhaps, one becomes kin with whomsoever one does these things. This is a development of a question asked long ago by Alfred Kroeber: do we live together because we are related, or are we related because we live together? It is clear that many societies, and their anthropologists, would say 'yes' to the second possibility, which implies that kinship is seen as being created rather than given by birth,[7] and also that it has to be maintained subsequently by appropriate behaviour—a view that is certainly found in western societies too. It also reflects the fact that, as has long been realized, local communities rarely consist of neatly arranged descent or other kin groups but more often of individuals related in various, often criss-crossing ways, through political allegiance as well as kinship, and through more

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[7] In his recent work already cited (2012), Sahlins objects to this view, arguing instead that kinship pre-exists the birth by virtue of prior relationships etc., some of which involve ancestry and therefore deceased kin who have become spiritual beings. It may be here that his arguments most closely approach my own.

than one kind of kinship (e.g. patrilineal, matrilateral, affinal). However, again this need not rule out recognition of genealogical connections, given especially that kin ties are likely to be present in any such community to some extent, and that descent is frequently residentially dispersed while nonetheless being recognized indigenously as descent.

Transcendence

Using kinship to express harmony and unity can also be seen as forming the basis for a form of transcendence. I have not managed to find any key definition of this term in anthropology and related disciplines, and much of my discussion of the relevant literature below consists of passing references in those works rather than sustained and lengthy discussions. The *Concise OED* defines the word 'transcend' as 'be or go beyond the range or limits of…surpass'. The word 'transcendence' in the same dictionary is given as a derivative of 'transcendent', the latter being defined inter alia as 'transcending normal or physical human experience', as '(of God) existing apart from and not subject to the limitations of the material universe', and '(in Kantian philosophy) not realizable in experience'. 'Transcendent' in the second sense is often opposed to 'immanent', defined as '(of God) permanently pervading the universe', that is, a contrast is mooted between God as remote from us and God as ever with us. There is also the related word 'transcendental', defined in the *Concise OED* as 'of or relating to a spiritual realm', which often appears in texts (e.g. in Firth, discussed below) as a synonym of 'transcendent'. In the texts discussed below these notions are often linked to those of change or transformation, a good example being Burridge (1991).

Transcendence is thus a key term in religious studies, where it may simply be a synonym of the divine, the sacred, an 'absoluteness independent of human initiative' (Firth 1996: 216). Elsewhere in the same book (ibid.: 47), Raymond Firth refers to the idea of 'an external reality, transcendent, providing its own cause, author of the moral order, and illuminant of the life of man'. Transcendent beings are typically thought of as having greater power than human beings, possibly unlimited power, some of which might nonetheless be transferred to humans in response to their supplications of the divine or other ritual action (ibid.: 184). Clearly this suggests ruling out secular ideologies, as Firth does in mentioning the conventional contrast between politics and religion (ibid.: 49, 158-9), as well as the idea that God, and therefore transcendence, no longer exists in the modern, secularized world (ibid.: 81), nor, indeed, in the post-modern world, with its keenness on decentering hegemonic, culturally defined positionings (cf. Saler 1993: 51-2). Firth also points out that belief in life

after death typically involves transferring one's existence to a transcendent after-life (Firth 1996: 159).

The key question for present purposes is exactly what is being transcended. From the above discussion it is evident that in religion it is first and foremost the world of our mundane, everyday existences, as we reach out beyond ourselves and those existences to the sacred, which also is the transcendent. It may also therefore be conceived as the distinction between profane and sacred itself; becoming one with the sacred is, I would argue, a key motivation of ritual in the indigenous view, and this requires, indeed is, precisely this kind of transcendence. Transcendence may therefore also be a matter of overcoming dichotomies in general, especially where they are associated with conflict, disharmony etc.: the transcendence therefore creates the opposite conditions and values of unity and harmony. This, of course, tends to make transcendence a process rather than a state or quality, which also appears to go beyond Firth's position.

One author who takes this view is William Paden (1988: 156-7), who stresses the unitary nature of religious realms, as in the Pauline transcendence of the distinctions of the mundane world in Christianity, though for him it is purity/profanity as much as sacred/profane that is at issue. For Roy Rappaport (1999: 382), similarly, transcendence suggests a sense of the ultimate in which time and place are both transcended, as is the dichotomy between order and disorder. Louise Child mentions the 'transcendence of emotional craving' in the Buddha's soteriology (2007: 105), and she suggests for the same religion that 'the union between masculine and feminine is not a distinct process from the vertical union between transcendent and submerged realms of consciousness, often symbolized as that between the sky and the earth' (ibid.: 122). Kenelm Burridge, in his study of Christian missionaries, refers to the idea of a transcendent God (1991: 19), as well as missionaries' aim to overcome social and cultural distinctions in order to achieve the unity of humans in Christ (ibid.: 5, 6). Writing about the schisms in Christianity, he suggests: 'Transcending the differences…is an idea of community, the Church' (ibid.: 41). He also interprets the 'transcendence of given laws and institutional forms, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers' (ibid.: 44), as involving Christ's love in the Pauline view, this being linked to both perfection (ibid.: 52) and the extinction of evil (ibid.: 118-19). Transcendence, further, is a process in which 'the Ego or self's assertive distinctiveness becomes identified with one's fellows and the divine will', and love as its vehicle is associated with wholeness and completeness (ibid.: 53). Benson Saler, conversely, who discusses interpretations of transcendence in philosophy and theology at length (1993: 50-64), stresses transcendence more as overcoming the mundane to reach out to

the sacred, though the idea of overcoming difference is occasionally mentioned, and indeed is implicit in the former perspective.

However, transcendence can also, I suggest, appear in other forms of ideology that are not religious as normally understood. I would argue that there is a sacredness about secular ideologies and ideological heroes (like Marx and Lenin in communism, to cite one of Firth's own examples, 1996: 158-9), who may even be supplicated and have their spirituality celebrated; I shall discuss the example of nationalism briefly below. To an extent this is basic Durkheimian orthodoxy regarding the character and function of ideology, though my more immediate inspiration is Dumont's revisionist work (though still mostly within that orthodoxy) on hierarchy and value (e.g. 1980, 1982). More specifically, in Dumont's figure of the hierarchical opposition, the superordinate level, which contains or represents the 'mother of all values', can be associated with transcendence, and it also represents the unity of the particular semantic domain, as it encompasses its polar opposite (making it unlike an ordinary binary opposition; see Parkin 2003, 2010 for more extended interpretations). One of Dumont's followers, Dominique Casajus (1985: 76), has explicitly made this connection: 'we should be sure that when we speak of "levels" in any given situation, some form of transcendence is involved'. A corollary is that, in the Dumontian perspective, distinctions are associated with a difference in value (1982). But it is another follower, or fellow traveller, of Dumont's, Serge Tcherkézoff, who has been most explicit in associating transcendence with unity (1986, 1987; summarized in Parkin 2002: 142-5, also 168). Finally here, Allen's modification of the tri-functional Dumézilian symbolic scheme in favour of further functions brings together both transcendence and totality or unity in the positive aspect of his (Allen's) fourth function, which is linked to the sacredness of the king and related to other functions as whole to part (Allen 2000: 106, 110, 129, 133, 141, 144).

I am therefore treating transcendence as the overcoming of potentially but not necessarily divisive dichotomies to ensure the production of harmony and unity in any collectivity, whether conventionally definable as religious or secular. In so far as religion or any ideology involves reaching out to the sacred and becoming one with it, another dichotomy, namely that between oneself and the sacred, must also be overcome and can be seen as transcendent too. The condition produced by transcendence and the values associated with it are conceptually and generally morally superior: through it, multiplicity gives way to unity, dissension to harmony, evil to good, laxity to morality, etc. It is this notion that I want to apply to the study of kinship. First, however, I develop the point further with some examples.

A prominent example is the biblical story of Genesis, in which Adam was created first, then Eve from his body. She is also associated with original sin, that is, with seduction symbolized by the serpent and by the apple she offers to Adam. That is, in the beginning there is unity; then division comes into the world and makes it imperfect. Similarly in Hinduism, the four *yuga*s or ages of the world are differentiated morally, the first in which the world emerges from water, depicted here as a unitary substance, while *kaliyuga*, the fourth and present age, is seen as the most corrupt and decadent. It is also the age that is most differentiated, both socially through the caste system and morally through the doctrine of karma, which evaluates different castes differently in terms of the worth of their members' previous lives, and through that, different individuals too; there is also perhaps a greater practical stress on the multiplicity of gods rather than the oneness of Brahma. Such myths are relatively common worldwide and are reflected in frequent imaginary claims that the good old days were better, with less conflict, more harmony and mutual respect, etc.; they also typically link harmony and unity with the primordial period in which things began, as in the Orokaiva rite of renewal described by Iteanu (1990). In short, transcendence is fundamentally unitary, overcoming dichotomies and other sorts of distinction, and may even be depicted that way, for example, by the unilateral figures (humans with one arm, one leg etc.) that so puzzled Needham (1980). Indeed, among the Dogon and Nyamwezi, ancestors and the unity they represent are depicted in the form of unilateral figures, and among the Dogon this is further represented by ritual officiants binding their legs together (Tcherkézoff 1987, Dieterlen 1968).

Some other ethnographic examples of transcendence follow, picked at random and in no particular order. One is the encompassment of the world by the Brahman in Louis Dumont's account of the Indian caste system (1980). Brahma is everything, and the human Brahman is in some respects his agent on this earth, but the latter is also responsible for the whole cosmos, unlike the Kshatriya in his insignificant worldly (and therefore illusory) kingdom, racked as it may be conflict, disorder and warfare.[8] Another is Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* or community as unitary and *Gesellschaft* or society as fragmentary, the latter being the domain of the competitive market as opposed to the united and harmonious local group. This was essentially revived in Victor Turner's distinction between the hierarchical structure of *societas* and the levelling anti-structure of *communitas* (e.g. 1969). Then there is the idea of the nation as culturally uniform, subsuming class and ethnic

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[8] This is, of course, the practically canonical example of the hierarchical opposition mentioned in brief above.

differences, as expressed through Benedict Anderson's famous notion of the 'imagined community' (1983), which leads the idea back to Tönnies.[9] Schneider himself made similar remarks about not only nationalism, but religion and kinship, all of which for him were characterised by 'diffuse, enduring solidarity', and therefore formally indistinguishable, a position that fed his argument that there is no discrete domain of kinship (1969; cf. Feinberg 2001: 9). Further examples are the works of George Foster (1968) and Brian Foster (1978) on the ideal uniformity and equality of peasant society, compared to its conflictual relations with the outside world through respectively political domination and the extraction of resources by powerful elites (George Foster), and competitive negotiation in trade relations in Thailand (Brian Foster). Brian Foster's ethnography of the minority Mon population shows that they are assimilated to the majority Thai population as peasants, but retain a separate identity as traders and potters, work in which they must bargain with Thai peasants commercially and therefore potentially conflictually. This example is also a reminder that assimilation generally can be seen as an attempt to overcome dichotomies between majority and minority populations in favour of the former identity. Peter Parkes (1987) has described the Kalasha, a non-Islamic society of northern Pakistan, as having an ideally harmonious, united and exclusively male society, constructed during the summer transhumance of prestigious goat herds into the mountains and encompassed by the sacred *markhor* or wild goat. This is contrasted with the society of the plains, to which the men return for the winter and which is racked by divisions supposedly provoked by the actions of women manipulating men through elopement, divorce and remarriage, and symbolized by the low-status sheep and cattle that are the women's concern.

   This overcoming of dichotomies also affects anthropologists themselves, as I have already argued. While anthropologists frequently indulge in binary thinking, despite it allegedly having gone out with structuralism, there does seem to be a veritable fashion at present for deconstructing dichotomies, such as inside and outside, domestic and political, nature and culture, science and culture, the material and the social, the material and the human, the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, and the anthropologist and those he or she studies. While not denying all validity to such moves, they do seem to me to be exaggerated, and indeed plain wrong in many ethnographic contexts. As Ayşe Cağlar has pointed out

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[9] The imagined community is close to becoming a cliché, as it is frequently used in contexts that are very different from Anderson's original: the nation has the quality of a community, but has to be imagined because, beyond a certain narrowly defined point, it ceases to involve face-to-face interaction. However, there is much about the social that is imagined, and the use of Anderson's phrase in all contexts simply diminishes it.

(1997) regarding the notion of hybridity, which itself is often seen as cancelling dichotomy, logically it still requires prior recognition of a polarity between the two things (sometimes more) that are being hybridized; a similar remark applies to the continuum (cf. Dumont 1962). But these approaches also appear to reflect, at least in part, the theoretical and even idealistic predispositions of anthropologists to prefer harmony to division wherever they can find it, occasionally celebrated by a volume dedicated to this theme (e.g. Howell and Willis 1989), but at the risk of neglecting the disputes and contestations that appear to be an aspect of any collectivity. A further example is Stanley Walens' account (1982) of the potlatch system of north-west Pacific coast groups like the Kwakiutl and Tsimshian, in which he emphasises the reproductive and cosmological, and hence transcendent aspects of these exchanges. This is in opposition to Mauss's depiction (1970) of the potlatch as 'agonistic', as a divisive form of competitive giving designed to shame one's political rivals. Walens may have been able to prove Mauss wrong in respect of these particular societies, but potlatch-type institutions certainly exist elsewhere in connection with political rivalry—among the highly competitive Big Men of Papua New Guinea, for instance, or the feasts of merit of the Nagas and other tribes of northeast India and Southeast Asia.

Kinship and transcendence, kinship as transcendence

Yet there are also many examples from the study of kinship, found inter alia in Fortes' 'axiom of amity', Schneider's 'enduring, diffuse solidarity',[10] and Sahlins' 'mutuality of being' (2012), all of which have notions of harmony and unity embedded in them, though they differ in detail. Ethnography from India provides a number of other examples. The Santal of east-central India, like many other peoples, regard themselves as a single tribe in ritual contexts where transcendent ideas of unity and harmony are important. This is despite the divisions into clans and subclans that are pertinent in other contexts, such as inheritance and marriage (Bouez 1985: 177). Beals (1962) records a similar sense of village unity ultimately transcending the diversity of caste in Gopalpur, south India. In caste villages in north India, women typically marry into any one village from a number of surrounding villages, giving rise to the stereotype of their lack of community among themselves. Indeed, wives are routinely seen as undermining the unity of the joint family of a group of brothers, as they allegedly concentrate on their own nuclear family interests, not that of the joint family as a whole. In some areas, as in northwest India, studied by Ursula Sharma (1978), they are

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[10] Allegedly an unattributed borrowing from Parsons: see Kuper 1999: 135-6.

veiled in an attempt to remove their individuality and to stress village unity, despite caste, gender and age differences. In Lambert's case (Rajasthan), however, in-marrying women are 'adopted' by the affinal women who are already resident there, so as to avoid their feeling isolated, but also to bring them into the local community (Lambert 2000a, 2000b). The image of adoption is therefore used to create what Lambert, influenced by Carsten, calls 'relatedness', as well as a harmonious and unitary community of women. I would therefore argue that this idiom of adoption is an instance of kinship as transcendence. Lambert adopts this approach partly as a means of overcoming what she sees as a false dichotomy between fictive kinship and real kinship, under the assumption that since both are actually culturally constructed it is not feasible to distinguish them. However, this is also partly intended as a counter to the traditional structuralist and still earlier functionalist depictions of kinship in north India by writers like Kathleen Gough, Louis Dumont, Sylvia Vatuk and Anthony Good that see kinship as fundamentally patriarchal and stress divisions between families, lineages, etc., as well as genealogical connections. It is nonetheless clear that the distinction between fictive and real kinship is actually locally valid, the former being preferred as kinship not based on the impurity and sin of sexual intercourse that characterizes the latter. Adoption is thus distinguished within the village itself from the patriarchal forms and genealogical idioms of kinship that Carsten's term 'relatedness' was coined to counter. Lambert herself seems somewhat reluctant to admit this, but clearly the two idioms belong in different contexts, one more transcendent, the other divided, not to say divisive, and particular. And in so far as the 'transcendent' aspect of kinship can be linked to another Schneiderian position, namely the importance of culture as a set of symbols, it is significant that the patriarchal, genealogical aspect of kinship also has its symbols here, such as the importance of burying the placentas of the family's new-born children in the floor of the patrilineal residence, to which those children are thereby connected.

A broadly similar example of this apparent bias in an account of kinship idioms and practices is a recent paper by Sandra Bamford (2009) on the Kamea of Papua New Guinea, appearing in a book she co-edited with James Leach that was concerned precisely to show that genealogical modes of thought and biological ideas do not exist as standard notions about kinship around the world. As with Lambert, there is a similar contradiction between Bamford's attempts to argue away such ideas among the Kamea and other evidence that suggests they do indeed hold such notions in some form some of the time. Bamford argues that among the Kamea it is land rather than blood that is the chief marker of relations between fathers and sons, in the sense that land rights are preferentially transferred in this

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way. The Kamea are, therefore, basically patrilineal, and 'paternal names and ritual competences', as well as land and the trees upon it (planted by each father for his son), are transmitted in this way. However, there is a contingency about such transmission, as land claims have to be maintained through continuous cultivation. Thus it is through land that patrifiliation is constituted. Also, although blood is an idiom of relationship, it only unites siblings born of the same mother, not members of successive generations, though presumably this idea does rely on recognizing a connection between each sibling and their shared mother. Bamford nonetheless argues that no tie of bodily substance is recognized between biologically linked members of different generations, this supposedly rendering genealogical thinking alien to the Kamea. However, she also states that, in intercourse, the father contributes 'bone and internal organs', the mother 'skin and surface blood vessels' to the foetus. More generally, it is clear that the Kamea do recognise relations between generations in specific ways that involve a recognition of genealogical connection between kin. Their ideas of physiological reproduction may be culturally determined rather than objectively scientific, but they nonetheless reflect biological realities sufficiently to be recognizable. In any case, Bamford's argument depends on equating biology with genealogy, a fit that is not perfect, nor even necessary, for reasons already given. Here the element of transcendence is less marked, but it probably lies in the residual rights of the local community in land, especially if it is abandoned. Bamford's interpretation of Kamea ideas about kinship therefore invites scepticism, and her conclusion that they do not involve genealogical thinking is unconvincing. In particular, the focus on land as linking father and son need not rule out the recognition of a genealogical connection between them. A key question, not really asked here, is what happens to the father-son relationship if either of them is forced off the land: does it endure nonetheless or is it broken? Helmig (1997) asks a similarly sceptical question on Yap as an adverse commentary on both Schneider's interpretations (1968b, 1984) and Labby's later reinterpretation (1976). By contrast to Bamford, Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi's work on the Gende (2001) recognizes clearly that practice is informed by a folk biology that recognizes genealogical ties without relying on them exclusively.

Clearer in these respects is Maurice Bloch's work on the Merina in Madagascar (e.g. 1971a). He draws attention to the existence of two idioms of kinship here, one relating to life and stressing division and individual activity, the other stressing the unity of ancestors in the tomb, but also unity in life in some of its aspects. In the former case patrilineal aspects are stressed, in the latter bilateral ones, which are potentially more inclusive of a wider range of relationships. In other contexts too, Merina idioms and practices of kinship may stress the

unity of all Merina as kin under the inclusive use of certain kin terms, as well as suggest distinctions among them (Bloch 1971b). Here Bloch advocates seeing kin terms as denoting moral properties rather than individual kin types, and he links this to their tactical use in including or excluding particular alters as kin.

Particularly interesting, however, is Rita Astuti's ethnography of the Vezo (especially here 1995), another Madagascan people, whose identity is largely determined by the practice of fishing: that is, cease to fish and one ceases to be Vezo. Like the Merina, there is a focus on including as wide a range of alters as possible as kin, regardless of known or unknown genealogical connections. In effect, while relatives are distinguished by different kin terms, there is a reluctance to recognize distinct kin groups for most purposes in this life. However, unlike the Merina, for whom ultimate social unity occurs only after death, that is, in the tomb of the deme or cognatic descent group, for the Vezo death separates people into groups or perhaps rather categories known as *raza*. Astuti uses the notion of 'kind' to distinguish the 'unkindedness' of the undifferentiated kinship of the living from the 'kindedness' of kinship distinctions in death. It is the concept of *raza* that most nearly approximates to the notions of lineal connection in classic kinship studies, while 'unkindedness' seems closer to Carsten's 'relatedness'.

As elsewhere on Madagascar a person has eight *raza*, notionally lines descended from each of one's eight great-grandparents, though in reality that of one's father is of greatest importance, since he should perform the *soro* ritual for at least his eldest son, a ritual that admits all his sons to his *raza* on their own deaths. If the father does not do this, the *raza* of his wife has the claim to the sons, though their father can still beg for his sons' bodies from their mother's *raza* on behalf of his own *raza* (i.e. in anticipation of his sons' eventual deaths). Astuti talks of *raza*s on occasion as unilineal, without specifying whether they are patrilineal or matrilineal, but she is reluctant to stress this as fundamental to Vezo ideas of kinship, as she wants to counter previous interpretations of not just Vezo but Malagasy kinship in general as involving a cognatic recognition of kinship that in some contexts gives way to unilineal ideas; indeed, unilineal descent seems incompatible with the notion that the *raza* is focused on all eight great-grandparents equally.[11] Nonetheless her argument that what is united in life is divided in death is key to her overall interpretation of the Vezo life-world and is clearly supported by the evidence. Certainly the *raza*s are ancestor-focused, and the fact that a woman will be buried in the tomb of the *raza* of either her father or her husband

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[11] A point I owe to Nick Allen.

indicates a patrilineal bias (there is no suggestion that she is ordinarily buried in that of her mother's *raza*, which would indicate matrilineal descent).

In a slightly earlier work (1993), Astuti discusses gender among the Vezo, showing that there is a clear contrast, especially in the respective contributions of mother and father to a new life through intercourse: the father places the child in the womb through his semen, after which the mother contributes more to growing the child, including the placenta. Other work of hers (2000) shows how marriage also creates difference, on the basis that the Vezo do not like marrying people who are the same as themselves, but people they define as other to them. In fact, marriage also expands relatedness by creating in-laws, even though they may in practice also be definable as existing kin in Vezo thought. However, all these perspectives, on the *raza*, on gender and on marriage, indicate that, although the Vezo may exploit kinship to promote unity and harmony, this does not rule out a recognition of genealogy in the context of death, nor of the fundamentals of procreation, the latter approximating recognizably to scientific realities in the Vezo case, nor of a sense of difference between kin categories in marrying properly.

Astuti's chapter (2009) in the Bamford/Leach volume, already cited in discussing Bamford's own work, takes things a step further. Here she describes how she has had to revise, to some extent, her earlier views about the lack of distinction in Vezo kinship and to confront the fact that this did not imply a denial of such connections, or of the biological realities of many of them, by Vezo. One methodological objection to this later study is that her informants did not volunteer such knowledge and that she had to persuade, even provoke them into admitting that they possessed it through questioning directed to that end. This could be condemned as opening up the possibility of the intrusion of western ideas post-contact, which she does not consider, or simply of falsely provoking the answers she was seeking. Nonetheless, the very ability of Vezo to admit to such knowledge indicates their understanding of it, as elicited through her carefully targeted questioning, which draws on the methods of developmental psychologists. As with Leach and Spiro in an earlier debate, therefore, we are faced with what people know (which Astuti calls 'inferential knowledge') and what they believe (or rather, their collective representations). And again, the answer seems to be that it depends on context. The Vezo evidently do prefer to stress the unity of their communities for a variety of tactical and moral reasons, and they do so using idioms of kinship that stress unending connections and the unending potential for creating alliances with as wide a range of alters as possible. But at the same time they are aware of biological realities and the smaller-scale connections of parenthood, siblingship etc. within the nuclear

family, even though these too are subject to social definition, determination and contextualization. What is significant is that Astuti accepts this situation, even though it has involved her in revising her earlier views about Vezo sociality. In that respect her chapter is more convincing than Bamford's in the same volume, as well as Schneider's earlier rejection of his own previous work on Yap, where, of course, the epiphany led in the opposite direction. Yet another paper by Astuti (2001) uses similar methods to challenge the claim frequently made of non-western peoples that they are not wedded to dualist thinking. Again, while some Vezo statements can be interpreted in this way, their inferential reasoning clearly demonstrates an alternative ability to think dualistically, including a recognition of the dichotomy between biological and social kinship, which children lack and only adults acquire.

As already noted, what is perhaps most ironic in Schneider's rejection of the alleged focus on biology and genealogy in previous studies of kinship is that the cultural and symbolic approach he adopted as an alternative led inter alia to a focus on the body and its connections with kinship in both his own and later work in this area. This focus automatically implies a consideration of bodily substances and processes that a scientific biologist is likely to recognize, despite the expectation of a degree of cultural variation away from the latter's point of view. The body may not be seen as a biological organism, and there may be no notion of biology at all in the indigenous view, but that does not mean a complete ignorance of the existence and even significance of the body's substances and processes. Even the Yapese, Schneider found (1968b: 127-8), had a clear view of the physiology of mammalian reproduction in pigs; their reluctance to apply this knowledge to humans, if such it was, was precisely because humans are not pigs and implicitly need something better. I would interpret this as a modest example of transcendence. Similarly for Lambert's Rajasthanis (2000a, 2000b), although the adoption of inmarrying women is considered a higher form of kinship than procreation in a patrilineally dominated context, since it does not involve the impurity of sex, they still have a discernible if partially vague idea of the physiology of human reproduction.

One final example I wish to discuss is a paper by Christoph Brumann comparing a number of utopian communities mainly in the USA, but also the kibbutz movement in Israel. Clearly such communities can be seen as transcendent, in that they stress harmony and unity, as well as frequently having religious aspirations to reach out to the sacred. Though the kibbutzim themselves are secular and socialist in orientation, they have similar tendencies, given the utopian potential of even secular political ideologies. As far as kinship is

concerned, these examples may also seek to stress the unity of the commune above the allegedly particular interests of individual families, teaching and even caring for the children communally, for instance, and arranging work similarly. Yet all such communities are faced with problems of continuity, not only biologically, but also because they either collapse after a time or change in ways that compromise their purity and lead them to engage more with the mainstream society. Brumann found that, all things being equal, it was those communes that allowed a degree of space to the individual family that survived the best, contrary to what one might have expected, namely the intrusion of the family undermining the commune's ideals and therefore its very existence. Again, however, there is a confrontation between the quasi-religious transcendence of disunity in favour of a sense of community and the mundane recognition of particular kin groups, here families, whose internal genealogical connections, incidentally, are admitted in these basically western environments.

Conclusion: kinship, personhood, exchange

In concluding, I would like to make clear what I am not arguing or objecting to. First of all, I am not proposing a form of biological determinism but am as wedded as most of my colleagues to the view that, in social anthropology, kinship is basically social, provided that notion covers recognitions of genealogy and biology where indigenously appropriate. I also fully recognize that studies that make cultural ideas and practices their foundation make very clear the very considerable range of ideas about kinship that exist around the world, which, like culture generally, help define social and ethnic groups and their differences from one another. As already noted, this variation in *culture* was precisely what Schneider had in mind when he rejected the notion of kinship as a universal. Nor am I suggesting that there is no society in the world that is totally ignorant of the physiology of human reproduction or of genealogical connection—though I'm also inclined to doubt it.[12] Nor, as I hope this article has made clear, am I suggesting that kin ties have to be all one thing or the other—all genealogy or all cultural practice. However, it is also striking how frequently those who adopt

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[12] One potential fault on all sides in debates about the meaning of kinship is a certain tendency to assume uniformity of opinion and belief in a community, almost certainly falsely. Given especially that we only have informants' statements, not their inner states, to go on in arriving at what they believe, it may well be that community opinion and individual beliefs are more varied than the average ethnography reveals. One reason for this is the natural tendency of the fieldworker to latch on to the more (and relatively few) articulate members of the community and thus not to probe too far the opinions of the less articulate majority. There are sceptics in any society: not everyone believes their collective representations, though they may not always have an alternative world view to put forward.

the cultural approach find themselves having to admit, often tucked away in a footnote, that the cultural ideas that allow kinship to appear as transcendent do not exhaust local understandings of kinship in the sense of genealogical connection and biological continuity. The latter tend to be recognised at a more fundamental level of the distinction of groups, connections between generations through something like genealogy, and the pursuit of more particular and exclusive interests, as well as in the acknowledgement that, at least in certain contexts, close kin are more important than distant kin even within the same category, such as cousins. The latter sort of distinction informs the differentiation between optative and non-optative relationships in the Arctic in the work of, for example, Mark Nuttall (2000) and Barbara Bodenhorn (2000), and the latter, at least, acknowledges that recognizably biological ideas also exist in her area. This leads to another point critical of the 'relatedness' tendency. Biological kinship may be denied in order to stress the values of unity and harmony in a community. It may also be denied for narrow, individual purposes that may be dismissed as selfish, that is, undermined for tactical, as well as transcendent purposes.

In many ways, I think there is a similarity here with the study of personhood. In Mauss's famous paper on the person (1985), he starts out by describing how, among peoples like the Kwakiutl, masked dancers in rituals enact out the primordial period as the ancestors, thus subsuming individuality under, again, a transcendent connection with a representation of the sacred and of unity with it. Yet this is obviously a special occasion associated with the circulation of key Kwakiutl values and cultural ideas of ancestry and sacredness. Outside the ritual cycle, in everyday life, we can expect individuality to return, as individuals measure one another up in terms of their relative abilities, introversion and extroversion, being easy or difficult to get on with, and so on. Again, it seems to me, anthropologists have tended to focus on privileged cultural and ritual representations of personhood without sufficiently considering everyday life outside and between ritual events. Finally here, a remark on the theme of exchange and how that relates to kinship also seems to be in order. In very many cases, it is clear that exchange stresses disunity or at least difference, as those one exchanges with are 'Other' in some sense, at least in that context. Conversely, the heirloom is generally not exchanged with 'the Other' but passed from generation to generation within a family or lineage as a way of maintaining its own social continuity as a unified and identifiable unit (cf. Weiner 1992). Also opposed to exchange is surely the sharing that Carsten et al. emphasise as an aspect of relatedness and of the unity of specific groups. Although Mauss and Lévi-Strauss both treated exchange as the cement of society, it often involves a fundamental recognition that the groups or individuals who exchange are Other to one another. By contrast, the

inheritance of heirlooms and sharing both indicate unity, harmony and therefore transcendence, respectively diachronically and synchronically.[13]

Concluding, then, I suggest that people are prepared to invoke transcendent unity when it suits them, as on ritual occasions or as a tactic in pursuing a particular goal, but are also exercised by narrower and more fundamental interests, which may lead them, within the limits of optative kinship, to exclude others from the sphere of recognized kin. It is on these latter occasions that kinship as division, exclusion and particularity is more likely to show its face, and as a consequence that specific kin ties and genealogical connections will be emphasised over group unity and the transcendence of division, the latter being a process that entails invoking the transcendent in the sense of the sacred too. This division may well also be expressed in quasi-biological terms, as even neo-Schneiderian studies of the body in kinship have shown. Anthropologists cannot allow themselves to be seduced by a preference for the transcendent aspects of kinship into denying the more mundane and potentially divisive aspects without at the same time making it impossible to create rounded, multi-dimensional accounts of the societies they choose to study.

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[13] An example are the Daribi of Papua New Guinea (Wagner 1969), who have bilateral descent with a patrilineal bias, or what Wagner describes as 'normative patriliny' (p. 63): in his words, 'members of a clan are those who "share wealth" or "share meat" together, non-clan members are those with whom one exchanges wealth or meat' (p. 58); and further, 'Put in the simplest terms, the normative system correlates the transmission of paternal substance with the sharing of wealth, and the transmission of maternal substance with the exchange of wealth' (p. 59).

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