The Stuff of Kinship

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In this presentation I’m going to try to provide some pointers from the recent literature in the anthropology of kinship that might be helpful for you, as historians, in thinking about a fluid world in which religious orthodoxies were changing, altering people’s allegiances and ties of connection to others in their communities or creating new communities of faith. So, I imagine a crucial issue would be how might people forge such new kinds of connections, or break older ties, and what idioms of kinship might enable them to do so? We might want to think about the ways kinship is made and dissolved through time, and on the materials through which these processes occur; gradations of kinship, and the different substances and metaphors in which accretions and diminutions of kinship are enfolded.

Kinship ties may strengthen and substantiate other ties, for example, religious ones, or possibly impede or provide a buttress for resisting political or religious change. Although in the contemporary West we tend to think of kinship as an inherently conservative and rather inflexible domain of familial practice and ideology, I will try to show that actually kinship provides an extraordinarily flexible and malleable set of resources and techniques, not only for adapting to changing circumstances, but also for imagining and creating new social ties and arrangements. This is partly because of the sheer range of human experiences, the repertoire of techniques and practices, kinship encompasses, and because of its emotional and moral purchase. Through the life course, practices and rituals of birth, marriage, and death are powerful and emotionally salient, intimate ‘familial’ experiences, and also communal events that draw in a wide nexus of

engagement. Everyday practices of sharing household space, cooking, and feeding, conjugality, and parenthood may be at one level unmarked, and accessible to only close family members, but they also produce and sustain emotional ties and provide idioms and registers for ritual enlargement and for incorporation of outsiders – or of social exclusion.

The emotions and morality of kinship have powerful resonances in personal and familial contexts but also across wider political terrains. The 'unmarked' or uncelebrated nature of gendered domestic activities may thus be deceptive. I suggest that they have a cumulative power over time and space, laid down in memories, and creating dispositions and possibilities for wider incorporation or exclusion that has long-term social significance. These effects are achieved at least in part through the material stuff to which ideas about kinship are attached and through which they are substantiated – for example, food, houses, marital or inherited property. Drawing on some recent literature, as well as on my own fieldwork over many years in Malaysia, I will talk about the ways in which temporality and substance are mutually entwined, suggesting that they are inextricably embedded in kinship and in the capacities it evokes.[i]

One starting point from the recent literature might be Marshall Sahlins's account of *What Kinship Is…And Is Not* (2013). Sahlins's discussion evocatively captures something immediately recognizable about kinship. Across cultures, eras, and social backgrounds, he argues, kin 'participate intrinsically in each other's existence;' they share 'a mutuality of being,' and are 'members of one another' (2013: ix). This is intuitively graspable—not as an analytic abstraction, as many definitions of kinship seem to be, but in a way that palpably makes sense of a whole range of human experience as described in the ethnographic record, but etched too in the personal memories of ethnographers. Rather than focusing on definitional issues,

however, I think it might be more helpful here to focus instead on the *effects* of kinship.

Sahlins's focus on kinship's inclusive tendencies illuminates its seemingly endless capacities to shape-shift, appearing in different guises with different effects: food, land, procreation, memory, emotion, and experience—to mention just a few—can be effortlessly encompassed by the idea of 'mutuality of being.' Taking Sahlins's definition of kinship as 'mutuality of being' as my starting point, is then partly a way to avoid an extended discussion of the significance of ties deriving from sexual procreation. But procreation and birth have of course a particular significance in Euro-American understandings of kinship, and also, as David Schneider (1984) underlined, in anthropological accounts. Here I take a cue from Michael Lambek's (2011) argument where he underlines how recent kinship studies have tended to focus on procreation and birth rather than other moments or processes, such as marriage, death, or succession. While Lambek makes an argument in this context for the importance of *ritual* as opposed to *everyday* practices of kinship, I prefer simply to reiterate his suggestion that we continue to hold all of the life course in view rather than allowing birth to overshadow other significant processes.

Sahlins is the latest in a long line of scholars to frame his discussion of kinship around the dichotomy between culture and biology, social ties and birth ones. This symbolic opposition provides one deep-running axis in a rich repertoire of idioms for participants in Euro-American cultures to reduce or undercut but also to thicken their own potentially infinite universe of kinship ties (Edwards and Strathern 2000). Thus idioms of social ties may be mobilized to reduce, replace, or reinforce biological ones—sisters or mothers and daughters may be so close that they are 'best friends,' but friends, in the absence of kinship ties—or sometimes in contrast to them—can also be 'like sisters.' Mostly, in English kinship reckoning, as Edwards and Strathern

point out, the reduction or cutting of kinship ties proceeds implicitly and gradually, without paying it undue attention.

It is perhaps because the opposition between culture and biology, social ties and birth ones, is so deeply etched in Western cultural history that it is sometimes difficult to keep all its effects in view. Sahlins synthesizes a wealth of ethnographic evidence around this theme to demonstrate that the intersubjective relations of kinship are 'the *a priori* of birth rather than the sequitur' (2013: 68), or 'relations of procreation are patterned by the kinship order in which they are embedded' (2013: 76), not the other way around.

The attempt to shift the definition of kinship away from the enframing division between the 'biological' and the 'social' whilst simultaneously placing it under scrutiny echoes earlier discussions—for example, the use of the term 'relatedness' as a way to sidestep the biological/social dichotomy and the particular baggage that 'kinship' carries as an analytic term (Carsten 2000a; see also Carsten 1995; 1997). A broad and inclusive definition of kinship runs counter to a long tradition in kinship studies that is the product of Western history and philosophy in which 'what kinship is' is precisely defined against what it is not, and in which biology has a defining role. And so, the more one tries to dispense with the dichotomy, the more one seems to end up reiterating it. Feeding and sex are obvious examples here. Although cultural anthropologists are prone to ascribing feeding relations to the 'social' category, and sexual procreation to the 'biological,' this has always been a strangely arbitrary assignment (Carsten 1995; Sahlins 2013). For human beings, feeding and sex are surely both physical and social processes. In the end, as Sahlins notes, this too-pervasive distinction disappears up its own tail—in the sense that, if kinship is intrinsic to human nature/culture, then it is also biologically given.

There is a sense then in which Sahlins's intervention in the end seems to reach a familiar intellectual impasse. But here I want to draw attention to another feature of his discussion. Following many scholars who write on kinship, Sahlins concentrates on the positive aspects of kinship rather more than the negative ones. 'Mutuality of being,' on the whole emanates a warm, fuzzy glow rather than a cold shiver (see also Shryock 2013). Kinship, however, as Veena Das (1995), Michael Lambek (2011), Michael Peletz (2000), and others have noted, often carries ambivalent or negative qualities, which anthropologists dwell on rather less. Indeed, Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern (2000) have commented on the 'sentimentalised view of sociality as sociability and of kinship ('family') as community that pervades much Euro-American commentary of an *academic* kind' (2000:152; original italics), and that this is a reflection of the positive, generative ideological force of ideas about connection, belonging, and kinship in Euro-American cultures.

In connection with this, one might want to pay attention to the coercive qualities that kinship practices often take (see, for example, Carsten 1997; Foster 1990). This can be particularly evident in feeding relations, which as Bloch (2005) notes, are often fraught with danger. Poisoning is of course a classic form of witchcraft (see da Col 2012 for a recent discussion of this association. Thus it is the 'intent to harm,' he argues, that distinguishes the positive from the negative. But rather than making a sharp opposition, it is worth pausing over the more subtle gradations in qualities and intent between kinship as positive, and witchcraft as negative force.

This point about gradations of kinship (which does not necessarily correlate with genealogical closeness) also highlights that a focus on what kinship is or is not, and on definitions of kinship, necessarily pays less attention to the ways that kinship accumulates or dissolves over time—processes of 'thickening' or 'thinning' of relatedness. Here one might want to

look at the way that certain vectors or registers of 'mutuality of being,' which Sahlins brings together, such as feeding, procreation, living together, memory, or land, complement or counteract each other in particular contexts. Thus, for example, residence rules—particularly following marriage—may, without dissolving ties of birth, lead to a 'thinning' of those ties where adult children move away from the natal home, and this effect will tend to be compounded if distances are great and visits are rare. Paradoxically, moving away may also intensify nostalgic ties of memory to a natal home as, for example, Joelle Bahloul (1996) documents in her wonderful ethnography of memories of a Jewish-Muslim home in colonial Algeria. That work might be a useful reference here as Bahloul records the memories of neighbourliness and kinship, often embedded in culinary, material, and spatial practices, among former residents of Dar Rafayil. Here temporality becomes significant, and not just in relation to a remembered past.

While most anthropological studies of kinship are necessarily synchronic—though sometimes encompassing different kinds of evidence about the past—kinship futures remain unknowable. This may be less significant for historians, but nevertheless worth pausing over I think. In the study of reunions between adult adoptees and their birth kin that I carried out in the late 1990s, I was struck by the way that seemingly trivial avenues of communication, Christmas cards, for example, might have left small openings for the potential reestablishment or strengthening of bonds in the future (Carsten 2000b). Slight in themselves, such channels of communication might offer generative possibilities when relations seemed unable to proceed in the present, too heavily encumbered by the weight of the past. Whether such potential was in fact ever activated is unknown to me, but it underlines that our interpretations of kinship are hampered by the limitations of anthropological methods.

Sometimes, however, a long familiarity with a particular field site and its people may surmount these constraints. Michael Lambek's evocation of 'Kinship as Gift and Theft' (2011) illuminates how knowledge of a particular family over many decades can shed light on the ways in which death brings about a rearrangement of relations among the living—involving a thickening in some cases but a dissolution or rupture in others. The gift of succession from parents to children in Mayotte can also involve illicit acts of theft when one sibling claims ownership of spirits that might have been thought to rightfully transfer to another. Kinship, as Lambek memorably puts it, 'entails promises and breaches of promise, acts and violations of intimacy, and acts of forgiveness and revenge' (2011:4). In the case he examines, when one adult offspring successfully lays claim to the spirits raised by her mother, she simultaneously excludes the claims of her older sister. And Lambek lays out how this act is in fact the culmination of a long process of exclusion experienced by the older sister whose life he is able to document.

In European contexts, trivial acts of exclusion (the forgotten birthday, the missing wedding invitation) are often the subject of family tensions that have the potential to grow into more serious rifts. These are familiar narratives; tellingly, they may resurface and take on an expanded significance after a death or when dealing with inheritance and succession. Marriages might perhaps offer similar moments where new constellations of relationships are made evident. New forms of marriage might be reconfigured to apparently conform to past practice, or alternatively may provide opportunities to explicitly and ostentatiously diverge from past practice for political or religious reasons (see, for example, Bourdieu 1977; McKinnon 2013; Schweitzer 2000). But however strong the tendency we face as participants in our own cultures of relatedness to focus on kinship as a positive force, it is important to grasp that acts and processes of exclusion

are an integral part of kinship and its multiple temporalities—rather than an occasional or accidental byproduct.

In the later part of this paper, I turn to temporality as a means of grasping the gradations and accumulations of kinship as well as its ruptures and dissolution. Temporality encompasses abuses of kinship as well as its mutuality. But before I do that, I want to turn to one example from my own earlier work that might be helpful here. It concerns not so much a religiously fluid world, but one that was spatially open and expansive, and it shows the importance of houses, unmarked domestic processes, and women to consolidating a Malay (Muslim) presence in peripheral areas of the Malay world of island Southeast Asia.

My fieldwork was conducted on the island of Langkawi in the early 1980s, and the process of learning what Malay relatedness was about began for me with simply living together with a family in the enforced intimacy of their house. In the first weeks of fieldwork I often found myself spending long hours inside houses - both the one I was living in, and those of neighbours close by. Together with my foster mother, and more gradually by myself, I visited other houses in the village both formally and informally. Much of this time was spent with women and with small children - men being mostly absent from the house during the day. I began to reflect on the importance of the house itself to Malay notions of kinship. The house is in fact strongly associated with women. When villagers went to marriage feasts or funerals, they went as representatives of their house. Usually, this meant that the eldest married couple of the house attended village functions. One might say that houses had a private, internal aspect which is strongly associated with women, and they also have a more public face to the outside world which is both male and female and associated with married couples.

One of the things which I learnt very early on in my fieldwork was the importance of feeding in the lives of those who share one house. Not only

was the food quite delicious, cooked with care and attention, but it was invested with great symbolic importance. As a visitor to many houses, I knew only too well how difficult it was to refuse an offer of food. Indeed, I often felt that a kind of bodily transformation was being worked on me, as I was persuaded to consume far more food than I would normally eat. Malay houses have only one hearth, and this is in many ways the symbolic focus of the house. It would be unthinkable for different members of the house not to share cooking and eating arrangements. The most important constituent of the diet in the Malay view is rice. To 'eat a meal' in Malay can only be rendered as 'to eat rice'; this is the main part of what constitutes a proper meal. More than all other types of food, rice is associated with bodily well-being. This is because, as I was often told, in the body it is transformed into blood.

I had many months, and many meals, in which to ponder the significance of the shared consumption of rice in ideas about relatedness. In the process, I learnt that houses have another crucial aspect. As well as being associated with women, they are also strongly linked to the sibling sets which are born there. When a couple marry they first of all live with either the wife's or the husband's parents. Eventually, after they have one or two children, they establish a new house. And so houses are associated with the birth of brothers and sisters, or sibling sets, which are the reason for their coming into existence.

Siblingship – an often-overlooked dimension of kinship - is central to Malay ideas about relatedness. In many ways it is more important than ties between parents and their children. Not only are ties between brothers and sisters thought to be very close, but people think of themselves as connected through ties of siblingship rather than descent. As I tried to make sense of who lived in the different houses of the village, and their interconnections, in the first months of fieldwork, I came to understand the

patterns of residence through tracing particular sibling sets. Often neighbouring houses of one compound were occupied by adult members of a sibling group or their descendants. I also came to understand how siblingship is also the idiom for much more diffuse ties of kinship. Cousins are addressed using sibling terms, and there was a sense in which the villagers thought of the many kinship links which existed between them as being derived from siblingship.

Very gradually, I came to understand that for the Malay people I lived amongst, relatedness was not simply derived from ties of procreation. The emphasis on siblingship in any case suggested that filiation (ties between parents and children) might not provide the key to kinship. My own intense experience of being fostered in a Malay family, sharing their house and food, made me realise that one could become kin through living and eating together. For the Malays I lived with, kinship means sharing bodily substance, particularly blood. Blood itself is derived principally from the mother during the period when the foetus is nourished in her womb, and to a lesser extent from the father. It is also derived from the full rice meals which household members eat together.

The frequency with which children were fostered either with relatives or with non-kin demonstrated that my own experience was by no means unique. Fostering practices are in fact very widespread in island Southeast Asia. And adoption and fostering might be one area to look at in in the Mediterranean world where okd networks were being disrupted and new religious ties could be enhanced or given practical expression in kinship. In Langkawi, the ties that come to exist between children and their foster families were thought to be particularly strong, and this was expressed both emotionally and physically. If they stay long enough, foster children are thought to come to physically resemble their foster parents in the same way as birth children. Indeed, people would often comment on changes to my

physical appearance while I stayed in the village with obvious interest and approval, noting that my skin was becoming darker or that I was putting on weight.

Historically, as I gradually came to understand through a consideration of the diverse origins of people on Langkawi, one could see hospitality, feeding, and fostering – activities in which women are central - as crucial to processes of incorporation that enabled a peripatetic population to move to new places as migrants and to settle in new communities. Here wider features of the Southeast Asian social landscape and polity are important. This was a region where in the nineteenth century land was plentiful, and people were scarce. A widespread reaction to unduly heavy taxation demands on the part of local rulers, or of poverty, was for people to move to areas further from the royal courts on the periphery of the state, such as the island of Langkawi where my fieldwork was conducted. The processes of kinship I have described enabled the absorption of new migrants through feeding, hospitality, fostering and marriage. In the long-term these migrants would have children and grandchildren, becoming 'Langkawi people'.

Substance revisited: the 'stuff of kinship'

This research led to further interests in in how kinship is made and in the memory work of kinship through such themes as houses, adoption, and ghosts (Carsten 2007). In what follows I attempt to put together these ideas with another theme from recent work in kinship studies: that of substance. If 'mutuality of being' captures something important and recognizable about how kinship is experienced, we also need to understand the media or vectors of that mutuality and its reversals, how they may operate, and how time might be sedimented into these processes.

In an earlier discussion of how ideas about substance have been used in anthropological discussions, I considered how 'substance' can lend

flexibility to anthropological definitions, and highlights the importance of bodily processes to understandings and practices of kinship (Carsten 2004, chap.5). Sexual fluids, gametes, blood, bones, maternal milk can be described as 'bodily substance;' ideas about their mixing and separation in and between bodies, or the transformation of food into blood or other bodily matter may be conveyed using the same term. So, substance seems to offer a way to describe and analyze how the production and decay of bodies over time is implicated in kinship. Crucially, 'substance' implies flow and exchange as well as essence or content, and this ambiguity can be put to work to tease apart what kinship involves. Likewise, it can be used to convey the contrastive physical properties of liquidity or solidity, which seem apt in connection with bodily processes.

More loosely, substance may be extended from 'bodily stuff' to other kinds of stuff. I have mentioned food already, and we might want to include other vectors of kinship that are linked to food, land, for example, or houses. And then there are the less material—but arguably no less important—vectors or 'substance' of kinship: the spirits inherited by Lambek's informants are just one of many possible kinds of ghostly presence that indicate the lingering presence of kinship after death. Other intangible forms are memories, such as those described by Bahloul, or the sometimes startling instances of convergent thoughts and emotions that can occur between close kin or friends who have known each other for a long time. Between the seemingly ethereal and the obviously physical 'stuff of kinship,' as anthropologists, we might also want to include other more papery kinds of materials: photographs, letters, certain kinds of documents, genealogies, or the Christmas cards to which I alluded earlier. Houses, furnishings, jewellery, clothing and textiles, and letters might all be important ways of substantiating kinship relations of which historians may be able to access records.

Putting all of these different kinds of stuff into the same frame is not just another way of pointing out the diverse attributes and means of expressing kinship—although it is that. It also highlights two other important points.The first is the multiple temporalities—and sometimes geographies—called forth by these different kinds of substance. They apparently have the capacity to build and extend kinship beyond the here and now, and to evoke or summon up relationships in the past as well as those in the future, those that have moved elsewhere as well as those that are close at hand. To say this also means that these substances are also integral to what I referred to earlier as the 'thinning' and 'thickening' of kinship.

Although the experiential sensation of 'mutuality of being,' which Sahlins emphasizes and which seems intrinsic to kinship, is apparently an affective quality, it actually seems to have a strong tendency to attach itself to *stuff*. We might therefore want to examine more closely the way that kinship seems to adhere to particular kinds of material. Procreative substances are of course the most obvious example here but, as Sahlins notes, blood, bones, land, and food occur with great frequency in the ethnographic record of what makes kinship. In a review of 'Substance and Relationality' (Carsten 2011), I suggested that we might look at the transfers of different kinds of bodily substance as being on a rough continuum in terms of their apparent power to evoke a sense of kinship in different cultural contexts. Procreative material and blood would probably score quite highly on such a continuum, skin, hair, or nails rather lower. Interestingly though, some of these 'more peripheral' bodily substances are widely used for nefarious purposes in witchcraft. The Malay villagers I got to know in the 1980s spoke vividly about how hair left in a comb or nail parings obtained surreptitiously from a victim could be used in witchcraft for their entrapment.

I am not of course suggesting that one could construct a cross-culturally valid numerical score-sheet for correlating substance and relationality—merely that we consider the apparently greater power of some kinds of substance compared to that of others to evoke or create kinship. I would also not attribute a necessary priority to procreative substances or to ties of filiation in kinship (see Bamford 2004; 2007; 2009; Carsten 2011). But these may or may not complement, take their place beside, or undercut other kinds of connections—for example, those articulated in terms of siblingship, land, food, or sentiment. I t would be worth thinking about whether we might draw any links between the various materials to which kinship seems prone to be attached, the temporality that may be enfolded in these materials, and the 'symbolic density' of kinship—its power to evoke 'mutuality of being,' or feelings of participation in each other's lives, as well as the more negative counterparts of these? Bearing in mind the way that time is made material as it is lived, substances might perhaps offer a way to think through these issues. One might draw on recent research on blood to speculate on these issues.

Blood, space and time

A recent collaborative volume (Carsten 2013b) juxtaposes depictions of the symbolic propensities of blood in widely disparate cultural and historical contexts: the history of blood donation, banking, and transfusion regimes in twentieth century North America, and in wartime London; sacrificial idioms of replenishment of bodily fluids by peasants in Northeast Brazil; an exhibition of portraits painted in blood of Indian martyrs of Independence held in 21st century Delhi; Medieval medical and religious texts from Germany concerning the maintenance of blood inside and outside the body; contemporary Mormon ideas in North America about the inheritance of blood; discourses surrounding the latest images of brain scanning in which blood seems

strangely absent; and sanguinary metaphors of blood which permeate descriptions of the contemporary global financial crisis. There is a cumulative and comparative force to considering these very different contexts together—without of course assuming that blood is necessarily the same across them.

Rethinking these depictions of the material and symbolic significance of blood through the lens of kinship highlights the wider importance of temporality, which emerged, somewhat unexpectedly, as a linking thread between them. For example, probing the extraordinary polyvalence of blood, Kath Weston (2013) lays out how the metaphors of blood that occur in depictions of the financial system enfold different somatic models with different historicities. Images of 'lifeblood,' 'circulation,' 'flow,' 'liquidity,' 'hemorrhaging,' 'stagnation,' or the necessity of 'blood-letting' in the financial system occur alongside each other. While the circulatory model discovered by William Harvey in the early seventeenth century is predominant here, Weston elucidates how older notions that pre-date Harvey's model are also present.

In fact, when we considered the different depictions of blood imagery in the cases discussed, it seemed that in almost all of them the deployment of blood as a metaphor implicitly invoked quite different temporalities. The Brazilian peasants described by Maya Mayblin (2013) use a modern technique of intravenous rehydration to replenish the fluid in their body when they feel unwell, but in so doing they evoke a Catholic imagery of Christ's sacrifice in which blood, sweat, tears, and water can be seen as transformations of each other, and have a particular local ecological and religious salience. In a quite different setting, Jacob Copeman (2013) shows how the importance of the literal use of blood to paint the portraits of Indian martyrs of Independence is intended to evoke both the past sacrifice of those martyrs, and also vividly reminds the viewers of these paintings that

their own blood may be called upon in further acts of political sacrifice in the future. Shifting to a radically different context, Emily Martin (2013) uncovers how contemporary medical discourses surrounding MRI scans of the brain, from which blood has mysteriously been purged, in fact reveal a deeper archaeology in which different kinds of blood, referring to somatic models with a different historicity, occur in a gendered hierarchy in the body.

In all of these cases, the imagery of which blood partakes evokes understandings that originate in different historical epochs. The 'uncontainability' of blood, thus also has this multiple temporal (or atemporal) dimension. This leads me back to my earlier suggestions about the temporalities of other kinship substances. If kinship necessarily involves relationships that can be envisaged as potentially stretching forwards and backwards in time (though not necessarily with equal emphasis on past, present, or future), might this also be a quality with which the substances to which kinship adheres are invested? Could we then understand the symbolic power of blood, and that of other more or less corporeal substances, in terms of the connection they afford between physical 'stuff' and more abstract qualities of kinship?

Here I am particularly concerned with the idea that kinship is a 'mutuality of being'—and simultaneously a process of exclusion—that allows relatedness and sociality to be imagined beyond the temporally present, reaching into the past and towards the future. As Andrew Shryock observes in the context of what he calls the 'spatiotemporal declines' that kinship may help to offset, 'kinship, in this sense, becomes a special mode of travel, a way to engineer secure social landscapes and reliable histories' (2013:278). Shryock here builds on an essay on 'Deep Kinship' by Thomas B. Trautmann, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, and John C. Mitani (2011), which attempts to overcome the divide between 'social' and 'biological' kinship in a quite different way from Sahlins—through the use of primatology and archaeology in

combination with the anthropology of kinship to probe the long-term evolutionary significance of human kinship. The insights of these authors concerning the 'mnemonic properties of artifacts deliberately intended to bind relations over time and space' (2011:185) are highly pertinent. Their discussion focuses particularly on the importance of houses and food that evoke memories and emotional responses through their association with the sensory patterns of childhood. But it also includes other kinds of artifacts and mnemonic forms, including jewelry, pots, clothing, kinship terminologies, and genealogies, which are part of 'the heavy memory work' that operates through kinship (2011:186).

Here it is worth thinking about marriage and how it encompasses and condenses many of the aspects of kinship I've been talking about. Most obviously, it involves a creative and dynamic vision of a shared future. Often it involves transfers of property. This may include money, jewellery, house furnishings, cooking utensils, a 'trousseau' of linen and embroidered work in the classic European bourgeois mode; or dowry items of house furnishings. Marriages in many parts of the world have for decades been captured in photographs and increasingly are now videoed. Photographs, perhaps bound into albums, may come to be treasured items of marital property and family remembrance. Marriage feasts are exemplary culinary occasions, and the costumes in which people marry are often lavish items of display that, if they are not rented, may be kept for decades after. In other words, marriage provides a condensed focus on objects that are rich in the 'mnemonic properties of artifacts deliberately intended to bind relations over time and space' to which I alluded earlier (Trautman et al. 2011: 185). Hylton White, writing of marriage in Southern Africa, suggests that the 'concrete materiality' of such objects contributes to the the effectiveness of ritual action, creating 'a whole sensuous ecology, of constructed space and assembled sounds and smells and things, all of which gather an audience and

focus it upon the difficult work of ritual reception' (2017: 304). Without the transfer of money and objects, the process of marriage and the wider affinal relations in which it is embedded cannot be initiated. And crucially, marriage often involves setting up a new home, so marriage and houses are intimately linked. Marriage might thus be central if we are considering the forging of new ties of community, or the breaking of older patterns of sociality. And, interestingly, marriage may also be thought of in terms of the creation of new ties of bodily substance – as in Christian notions of the merging of the flesh of a conjugal couple, or in a negative case the prohibitions on marriage between 'milk siblings' in Muslim ideas.

Temporality, materiality, and naturalisation

Transmission is clearly central to kinship—as Shyrock (2013:278) notes, citing with approval another definition of kinship from Sahlins: 'the transmission of life-capacities among persons' (Sahlins 2013:29). The aptness of blood as metaphor for transmission and descent is worth pausing over, as are the other meanings it may encompass. Metaphorical and material understandings of blood are in constant play with each other, and this is part of blood's heightened capacity for naturalization, and its symbolic power. Mayblin (2013) observes that, for her informants, the transubstantiation of wine into the blood of Jesus in the Eucharist is a literal truth, and essential to their sense of the beauty of, and aesthetic pleasure in, the Catholic Mass. She notes that a crucial quality of blood is that it can function as both metaphor and metonym—and this is central to theological debates about the Christian Eucharist (see Bynum 2007

Partly because of the way memories, thoughts, and experiences may be folded into understandings of blood, and through the way blood may be endowed with agentive force, it seems to offer a potent idiom for political ideologies. Such ideologies come, as it were, 'already naturalized,' and

freighted with implicit meanings that defy questioning. This naturalization effect seems particularly marked in the case of blood, and is likely connected to blood's association with animation (see Carsten 2011; Fontein and Harries 2013). This in turn may partly explain blood's widespread occurrence as a symbol of kinship in quite different historical and cultural contexts. But it should also alert us to the way other materials and artifacts to which I have alluded, from bodily stuff to houses, land, or food, may be endowed with qualities that evoke kinship. These 'vectors of kinship' have a similarly heightened potential to carry associations linked to different temporalities; their emotional resonances are, as it were, sedimented within them like so many archaeological layers (see also Verdery 1999). But crucially, these are, to echo Mary Douglas's famous phrase, 'implicit meanings' (1975)—they do not require articulation, and their implicitness means that such associations and the emotions they evoke are already naturalized. The apparently benign resonances of kinship conveyed by these vectors simultaneously have the capacity silently to encode hierarchies of birth, gender, or age. In other words, they are inextricably entwined with political distinctions and processes of exclusion. The fact that they may operate without explicit articulation—by moving through a house, partaking in a family meal, growing crops, means that as analysts of kinship we need to be particularly alert not just to the positive effects of kinship as 'mutuality of being' but to its long-term political potentialities.

Conclusion: what kinship does—and how

In pushing at our understandings of substance, and thinking further about the semiotics of blood, I have focused particularly on historicity, temporality, and naturalisation. Thinking about a world of fluid ties and new forms of religious attachment, it seems important to focus on how kinship works, why it matters, and what makes it powerful. There are of course many ways to

go about answering these questions. Kinship is a practical realm of action; it is also, as Meyer Fortes (1969), James Faubion (2001), Michael Lambek (2011), and others have shown, an ethical resource, 'a philosophy' as Robert McKinley (2001:152) puts it, 'concerned with human obligation.' Precisely because the ethical obligations of kinship tend to be already invested with positive moral associations, it may be difficult to discern or articulate the possibilities they afford for cooption in exclusionary or hierarchical processes—whether intentionally or not. This is all the more the case when such processes occur through material such as blood or land that encapsulates highly condensed layers of symbolic meaning. In these ways naturalization is central to the power of kinship, its capacity to evoke strong and unquestioning responses both in intimate familial contexts and its potential to evoke emotion in political discourses.

Kinship also, crucially, provides an imaginative realm for thinking, partly in ethical terms, but also more speculatively, about who we are, and how we might be in the future; about our connections in the present as well as to past generations, and to the unborn. In this way, temporality is a crucial part of the imaginative potentiality of kinship. I have also suggested that temporality and other abstract or ineffable qualities of kinship may be rendered more immediate and thinkable through their adherence to less abstract, and more material, stuff, what I have called substance here. Such material substances, in other words, help to enable the imaginative leaps that 'mutuality of being' encompasses, and they allow us to think about the 'thickening' and 'thinning' of kinship over time and space. The connections substances allow between bodily processes and persons, on the one hand, and different temporalities on the other, are vital to the embedding and threading of kinship in everyday life. Sexual fluids and blood are thus not the only, or even necessarily the most privileged, sites of such symbolic work. And we might want to think more about the different emotional registers and

valences evoked by different kinds of bodily materials. Contrasts between the imagery and metaphorical extension of bone and blood, for example, may be connected to the solidity and liquidity of these media, while nail fragments and hair offer possibilities for illicit removal that can render their owners vulnerable to the will of others. We can understand why sexual fluids and blood seem to occur very commonly as media for the transmission of kinship. But these take their place beside other corporeal matter, and also beside food, living space, photographs, letters, clothing, relics, and other 'substances' that are good for transmitting the essences of people and relationships over time.[ii]

In focusing on what kinship *does* and *how*, we should think about how it is possible to imagine kinship relations as enduring over time and distance. This involves thinking about the place of material stuff, and the way essences of people and relations adhere to materials, or may be metaphorically assigned to them, and how these materials evoke temporal qualities. Partly because of its unique and striking material qualities, its association with the body and with life, and its apparent aptness for metaphoricization, blood offers a potentially rich avenue for such kinds of speculation. Temporality invites us to see how kinship is an inherently graduated process; to think about time and kinship is also to think in terms of more or less, and of allowing for the way kinship relations may accumulate or dissolve over time. Analytically, it means taking seriously the place of experience, intuition, emotion, and memory in kinship, and of how they may be invested with particular qualities and resonances. And it means being attentive to the ways in which the particularities and hierarchies of gender, birth order, and age rest in larger and smaller histories. This returns us to the insight that, for many people, time and history are largely understood through idioms of kinship, and that historicity is a fundamental property of kinship (see Carsten 1997:12-17). As Peter Gow has written of the native

people of the Bajo Urubamba river of the Peruvian Amazon, ‘Kinship relations are created and dissolved in historical time, and historical time draws its meaning and power for native people by being structured by kinship relations’ (Gow 1991:3). Kinship is in this way part of the creation of larger as well as more personal histories. When time is erased and memory occluded, many people find themselves in danger of losing not only their connections to the past, but also their sense of who they are in the present, and the possibility of creating kinship in the future.

The experience that makes aspects of kinship mutually comprehensible across different cultures and historical epochs, which is Sahlins's starting point, is worth reemphasizing. And this is because such experience, however culturally variable, is part of what is immediately recognizable and translatable about kinship across cultures, and also because of the implicit meanings it carries. These meanings not only convey hierarchies of gender, age, and generation, they carry with them possibilities for exclusion, which both explicitly and implicitly are readily enfolded into political discourse. I have tried to keep in mind that kinship can be a force for harm as well as for good because the assumption that kinship is intrinsically ethical is itself part of its political and ideological capacity that requires investigation. This seems particularly salient in the long history and multiple temporalities of the Mediterranean world, and in the hierarchies and exclusions that are part of what kinship enables.

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