

## SAN 2.

### Affinity, Exchange & Perspectivism

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#### Lecture 1: Approaching Kinship from Melanesia

In the 1960s Papua New Guinea ethnography posed a challenge to African-derived descent theories, as well as to the exchange theory presented by Lévi-Strauss in his *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Rather than pre-existing groups exchanging things and women, people exchanged things in order to differentiate themselves from one another, creating temporary groupings in the process. This implied that in studying kinship anthropologists needed to move away from a focus on static structures and systems and towards unfolding processes and creativity. I start with a general presentation of this problematic and go on to a couple of ethnographic cases. The first is the *palem* ('body of wealth') constructed by Nekgini speakers on the Rai coast of Papua New Guinea and described by Leach (2003). Secondly we'll look at Stasch's (2009) elaboration of the central place that otherness, alterity, avoidance, and separation have in the Korowai kinship system.

#### Readings

\*Barnes, John A. 1962. "African Models in the New Guinea Highlands". *Man* 2: 5-9 (a short paradigm changing essay, which summarises the way that PNG began to register in kinship theory in the 1950s and 1960s).

Strathern, Andrew. 1982 'Two Waves of African Models in the New Guinea Highlands.' In *Inequality in New Guinea Highlands Societies*. A. Strathern, ed. Pp. 35-49.

Brown, P. 1973. *The Chimbu: A Study of Change in the New Guinea Highlands*. (In a very short chapter (Chapter 7) you can see Brown grappling to fit her material with African segmentary models whilst recognising that she is doomed to fail!)

\*Leach, J. 2003. *Creative land: place and procreation on the Rai Coast of Papua New Guinea*. (Especially chapters 1 and 3)

\*Wagner, R. 1974. Are there social groups in the New Guinea Highlands? In. M.J. Leaf (ed.), *Frontiers of Anthropology*. (read it also for a provocative critique of both Alliance and Descent Theories)

\*Stasch, R. (2009). *Society of others: kinship and mourning in a West Papuan place*.

Stasch, R. 2003. Separateness as a relation: the iconicity, univocality and relativity of Korowai mother-in-law avoidance. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, 317-337. (Stasch invites a consideration of avoidance, separation and alterity as relations constitutive of the intimate bonds of kinship.)

Strathern, M. (1992) 'Parts and Wholes: Refiguring Relationships in a Postplural World', in A. Kuper (ed.) *Conceptualizing Society*. (*The dividual person, the problem of theorising societies as though they were collections of individuals.*)

Strathern, M. 1996. "Cutting the Network". *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (3): 517-35.

#### Lecture 2: Approaching Kinship from Amazonia

Long term fieldwork began relatively late in the Amazon region with the first ethnographic monographs dealing with kinship emerging in the late 1960s. Many societies seemed to have 'Dravidian' terminologies like those described most famously by Dumont for South India, which split people into two opposing categories: parallel kin (consanguines) and cross kin (marriageable affines). However, in Amazonia, this dualism was found to be 'metaphysical' rather than sociological. People preferred to marry people they considered consanguines, and affinity was associated not with potential spouses but with other kinds of beings:

animals, enemies, spirits. Research in Amazonia has shown that this 'pure affinity', which is associated with predation, provides the resources for social and cosmological reproduction. Since alterity is the dominant principle, people have to work hard to stabilize community and kinship by moulding and decorating human bodies, eating special diets, feasting together and seeking shamanic interventions.

### Readings

\*Vilaça A. 2002 'Making kin out of others in Amazonia.' JRAI 8:347-65

\*Gow, P. (1991). Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia

\*Viveiros de Castro, E. 2001. 'GUT feelings about Amazonia: Potential affinity and the construction of sociality' In *Beyond the Visible and the Material: the amerindianization of society in the work of Peter Rivière* L. Rival and N. Whitehead, L. pp. 19-44.

\*Viveiros de Castro, E. 1998. Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism. JRAI 4, 469-488.

Rival, L. (1998) Androgynous parents and guest children: The Huaorani couvade. JRAI, 4 (4). pp. 619-642.

Fausto 2007. 'Feasting on People: Cannibalism and Commensality in Amazonia', *Current Anthropology* 48(4): 497-530.

Taylor, A.-C. 2001. 'Wives, pets and affines.' In *Beyond the Visible and the Material: The amerindianization of society in the work of Peter Rivière* L. Rival and N. Whitehead, L. pp. 45-56.

Conklin, B. (2001) *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*. (Like Vilaça, Conklin works with the Wari'. In particular, read Chapter 7 'Embodied Identities' and Chapter 9 'Predator and Prey'.)

### Recent work that brings Melanesian theory into Amazonia...

Hugh-Jones, S. (2013) Bride-service and the absent gift. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2), 356-377. (*Why has gift exchange been all but ignored in Amazonia and what have we missed as a result?*)

Nahum-Claudiel, C. forthcoming 'The curse of Suow among the Amazonian Enawene-nawe' in Pitarch and Kelly eds. *The culture of Invention in the Americas (email me @ cn253 if you fancy a read of my attempt to cross between Amazonian and Melanesian kinships!)*

### Suggested Essay Questions

1. Drawing on at least two ethnographic contexts comparatively, examine the role of exchange in creating, sustaining and transforming social relations.
2. How has attention to avoidance, alterity and otherness brought new insights into human kinship? And how, in your view, is what we understand by 'kinship' transformed by these insights?
3. How has work in Amazonia and/or Melanesia challenged the paradigms of descent and/or alliance?