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## Introduction

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# Kinship in the Pacific as Knowledge that Counts



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This book has its starting point in Unaisi Nabobo-Baba's observation that, for the various peoples of the Pacific, kinship is generally understood to come under the heading of 'knowledge that counts' (Nabobo-Baba 2006). Needless to say this is also the case for the analyst, from whose perspective kinship is at once a heuristic domain and a material, historically structured reality that is lived by the people whose ideas and practices are the object of analysis. The book's objective is straightforward: to provide case studies of contemporary Pacific kinship, and in so doing arrive at an understanding of what is currently happening to kinship in an area where deep historical links provide for close and useful comparison. The ethnographic focus is on Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, with the addition of three instructive cases from Tokelau, Papua New Guinea and Taiwan.

There is no question but that kinship remains central to the anthropological project.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the editors would argue that an understanding of kinship is always essential wherever anthropologists are working – whether it be 'down the road' in their own native places or somewhere far away from the land where they were themselves 'born and bred'.<sup>2</sup> If there was ever any doubt about this, it has certainly been laid to rest by the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2009) and others for Amazonia – Peter Gow (1989, 2000, 2001), Cecilia McCallum (2001), Vanessa Lea (1995, 2001, 2002), Laura Rival (1998, 2001), Fernando Santos-Granero (2007), Anne

Christine Taylor (2000), Aparecida Vilaça (2002, 2005) – and of numerous Pacific specialists, especially Mac Marshall (1981), Marshall and Coughney (1989), Marilyn Strathern (1985, 1988), Jadran Mimica (1991) and, more recently, Rupert Stasch (2003), James Leach (2003), Sandra Bamford (2004) and Bamford and Leach (2009). In a recent wide-ranging review essay, Marshall Sahlins finds in certain of their works the answer to the question of what kinship is: a quality he denotes as ‘mutuality of being’ (Sahlins 2011). No one would disagree – after all, mutuality is precisely what characterizes human collectivities.

Sahlins’ chapter ends with a celebration of Viveiros de Castro, whose ‘work offers a revelation of a certain cultural order of intersubjectivity in which kinship takes a fundamental place, indeed a cosmic place’ (ibid.: 239) – an observation that is, of course, as true for the Pacific as it is for Amazonia. Sahlins’s ultimate objective, however, is to persuade cultural anthropologists, and perhaps especially cultural anthropologists in the USA, that Schneider (1984) did not put paid to the study of kinship; indeed, that following through the position he proposed – that kinship is ‘culturally specific’ – has made it possible for kinship to re-emerge as a central object of analytical concern.

At the same time, there is a fundamental problem with Sahlins’s argument – one pointed out by Adam Kuper (2013) – that, because Sahlins is a committed ‘cultural determinist’, his argument depends on the dismissal of any idea that biology or what one might call, more broadly, physical substance has any significant part to play in the ideas and practices of kinship that feature in the lives of many peoples across the globe. Kuper’s trenchant critique of the two extremes of the culture versus biology argument ends with the following observation: ‘Like most of the important things in our lives, kinship is surely a matter of biology, of beliefs and concepts, and of social institutions and social pressures. Ultimately any kinship system is also constrained by brute necessity. You can’t just make it up’ (ibid.: 12).

One might take further the implication here that the problem for Sahlins, and for cultural anthropologists in general, resides in their taken for granted distinction between biology and culture. This distinction itself is historically constituted, and as such surely should not be used as a means of explaining the ideas and practices of the many peoples across the globe whose ideas of what it is to be human have their own historical inevitability.<sup>3</sup> History is, however, likewise a problem for Sahlins because he holds history to be, like culture, external to human beings and, as it were, imposed upon them – culture being a matter of ‘received meanings’ and history the process in which these same meanings are ‘risked in action’ and, possibly, transformed as a function of a clash between ‘cultural schemes’ (see Sahlins 1985;

cf. Toren 1988). If, however, we take the view that human autopoiesis is through and through itself a historical process, then it is possible to arrive at the awareness that literally every aspect of any given human being is historically constituted – from our genes to our most private thoughts – and that, from an anthropological point of view, the challenge is to derive a unified model of human being that provides a way in to understanding human uniqueness as a function of historical differentiation (see Toren 2012a, 2012b).

It is generally accepted in principle that history explains everything about us human beings. The problem is that history seems difficult to arrive at even once we have conceptualized it. What is under discussion here is not history as something external to us, confined to the past, nor history as it is known or generally understood, nor history as it is written, nor the personal history we can recollect and tell to others, but rather history as it is lived. An understanding of history as lived enables us to think about our in-all-respects-material selves as emergent, autopoietic – self-creating, self-producing – products of a past that from moment to moment evinces itself in the present in every aspect of our being and that is even now giving rise to a future we cannot surely predict even for ourselves as particular persons.

What is difficult to realize and to remain conscious of is the fact that we *are* our history, that from moment to moment, in literally every aspect of our being, we at once manifest our history and live its all-pervasive presence. Our history is not merely a part of us; it is the whole of us – we are constituted by the history that informs our entire being from conception throughout gestation in the womb, from our birth onwards throughout all our lives, to the very moment of our death. This history that continues to give rise to each of us in all our uniqueness is, at its most general, a material history of social relations that have transformed and continue to transform over the millennia that produced us as contemporary human beings in all our dynamic complexity. In other words, and to make the point as plainly as possible, social relations were always, and continue to be, fundamental to what it is to be human and like any other aspect of being human were always, and continue to be, differentiated in the course of daily life. Thus social relations at once transform and are inevitably transformed over time by we humans whose lives at any time and place may be understood to manifest a distinctive form of social relations. Any given human being's particular personal genetic profile is one dimension of this social history, and cannot properly be understood in isolation from it.

This theoretical position demands a brief consideration of how we theorize mind. Toren's formulation, discussed in detail elsewhere, is as follows: in respect of any one of us, mind is a function of the whole person that

is constituted over time in intersubjective relations with others in the environing world (Toren 1999b, 2012a, 2012b). The constituting process is to be understood as at once biological, social and psychological, such that at any given time, in all aspects of our being, each one of us manifests the history of social relations that continues to make us who we are. Furthermore, like all other living things, we humans inhere in the world and, as humans, it is given to us to find out and objectify its aspects as a function of consciousness. The challenge for the human scientist – for the anthropologist in particular – is to demonstrate the historical processes that continue, over time, to give rise to salient aspects of the ontologies and entailed epistemologies that at once unite and differentiate us humans through time and across regions of the world (see Toren and Pina-Cabral 2012). In the present case, the focus is on kinship as the lived artefact of a long, long history of regional differentiation in which transformation and continuity over time are aspects of the self-same process.

The case studies collected here concern kinship as one aspect of history as lived. They are all intended to show how the study of kinship provides the analyst with a way in to understanding its fundamental importance, but also its articulation with other heuristic domains – exchange, for example, or gender or cosmology. It follows that ideas of kinship are historically variable, but given the close historical links between Pacific peoples, case studies of kinship ideas and practices across the region are bound to supply fascinating comparisons. It is worth stressing here that it is history that differentiates our case studies from one another, and history which, at the same time, provides for a perspective on Pacific kinship that recognizes that continuity and transformation are a function of the self-same process that day to day brings particular forms of kinship into being.

The essays achieve their objective through analyses of kinship as lived, with certain of them being concerned with kinship terminologies in order to provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of their use. In most of the case studies, as is fitting for the Pacific, the focus is on the relation between brothers and sisters and its broader implications for marriage, and for differential status in the polity at large. As will be shown, this relation is a core relation, for some the starting point of kinship. Even when kinship is forgotten or yet-to-be found out, one can observe, during rituals, when the exchange of gifts is overwhelming, how kinship is made evident in gifting. People give as if they are brothers and sisters, or kin, and accordingly are seen to be kin. Thus the essays in this volume are bound together by the idea that to know about kinship and sisters and brothers is to know about political economy, and that to know about political economy is to know about kinship and sisters and brothers.

## Kinship and Political Economy

Each of the chapters pays a good deal of attention to the articulation of kinship with political economy. Thus, for Fiji, Nabobo-Baba (Chapter 1) argues that *veiwekani* (kinship) is best understood as relationships that obtain within and across chiefdoms and, by virtue of their continued acknowledgement, in one movement build and constitute the continuing strength and stability not only of kinship as such, but of the *vanua* ('country', 'land', 'place') and all that it contains – chiefs, people, fauna and flora, and ancestral spirits. It is important here to note that Fijians are not making a distinction between what we designate, for heuristic purposes, 'political economy' and 'kinship'. Thus Nabobo-Baba's examination of gifts of land by one *vanua* to another shows that such gifts are always conceived of in kinship terms. Knowledge of kinship is important knowledge, and is intrinsically connected to the philosophy of *sautu* ('peace and plenty'), or what constitutes a good life. This chapter shows how deeply embedded in everyday kinship practice are ideas of *loloma* and *veilomani* (compassion and love), of *kauwai* and *veikauwaitaki* (care), and how they are understood to be essential to sustaining the *vanua* in all its manifestations.<sup>4</sup> Nabobo-Baba shows how it is possible to see in *i solisoli* (gifts of land) how *veiwekani* is (re)constituted in forms that emulate, extend or, in some cases, disrupt ideas concerning the nature of the *vanua*.

Ching-Hsiu Lin (Chapter 2) shows how kinship and political economy implicate one another – a finding that is the more evident in a situation where new economic arrangements are producing concomitant effects in kinship and in social organization at large. The chapter examines the implications of the monetization of exchange for relations between *sapah* (household) and *gxal* (feast group) among Truku people in Taiwan. During the pre-colonial period, Truku people lived as hunter-gatherers in the mountain areas of the island; their kinship system was bilateral. The household, based on a couple and their unmarried children, was the basic kinship, ritual and economic entity. The exogamous feast group was comprised of different households, and residence on marriage was virilocal. In terms of marriage exchange, the groom's household should pay bridewealth (pigs) to the bride's household, which was obliged to distribute a portion of the wedding gift (pork) to each household of their feast group. Thus the definition of the household and the feast group was associated with marriage. With the advent of cash crops and the imposition of land reform on Truku society in the 1960s, Truku exchange came to be mediated by the market, and bridewealth and the wedding feast were monetized. An ethnographic analysis of the wedding ritual shows how the monetization of marriage is transforming relations between Truku people in respect of the constitution of the household and

the feast group and, in the process, is creating a socio-political hierarchy between richer and poorer households.

Jara Hulkenberg's argument (Chapter 3) likewise looks at the nature of ceremonial exchange, among Fijians in the United Kingdom. Her research on the uses of *masi* (Fijian barkcloth) in rural, urban and overseas settings reveals the perseverance of various forms of exchange and kinship obligations in daily and ceremonial life. Hulkenberg argues that current forms of exchange and the pressure to fulfil kinship obligations ultimately stem from pre-Christian ideas concerning sacrifice and tribute, where all forms of ceremonial exchange were directed towards the ancestor gods, from whom divine blessings were sought. With Christianity, many forms of ancestor god worship disappeared, but even so the necessity to acknowledge kinship obligations remains central to day-to-day life, as does the preference for ceremonial exchange over monetary transactions. The analysis suggests that, by virtue of reaffirming connectedness to the *vanua* – the reference here being to Fiji at large and its component *vanua* (referred to above) – these ceremonial practices provide for attendance on the ancestral gods, and facilitate the hierarchical kinship relations that structure relations between Fijians, no matter where they are located. Those Fijians who are unable to live a life 'in the manner of the land' (*i tovo vakavanua*), that is to say, fulfilling kinship obligations, risk godly repercussions and put in jeopardy their connection to their *vanua*.

Pauwels (2015) comes to the same conclusion when comparing city-dwellers to village people in Lakeba. It seems that for city-dwellers the brother-sister relation becomes even more important. The place of the eldest sister (see Pauwels, this volume) is not foreign to this, neither is the wish to be buried in the *vanua*. But a man is also eager to send his children to his brother's house in the city; a sister living in her husband's house is less comfortable doing this. Pauwels also observed that sending remittances is more active between brothers and sisters than between same-sex siblings or children and parents; note, however, that parents can be the ultimate beneficiaries of part of it.

Gender and household studies, along with studies of so-called house societies, have shown how kinship and other aspects of social formations may bear upon each other (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Pauwels 1990, 1994; Toren 1990; Carsten 1995; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Théry, Bonnemère, Downs and Taylor 2008.) Ingjerd Hoëm (Chapter 4) shows how such an approach provides for an exploration of how kinship and gender, and political and other aspects of existence, are orchestrated through ritual practices – broadly defined as the choreography of life – into recognizable segments. The analysis shows how the process of 'making sides' is present in Tokelau kinship and social organization; it is also evident in, and arguably

created by, ritual practices. Across different contexts, the pattern of ‘making sides’ is replicated, but the role, function and purpose of the activities involved vary. A mastery of relationships and characteristics, of people and situations, allows one to orchestrate the creation of sides through separation, and to facilitate the coming together of sides in a temporary unity – at once material and ideational. As Tokelauans describe the principle inherent in this dynamic, ‘*fau ma vehi*, “we put together (build, join) and we take apart (split, destroy)”’.<sup>5</sup>

Svenja Völkel (Chapter 5) provides a linguist’s perspective on Tonga’s highly stratified society with its *tu’a/eiki* status distinction among kin. This hierarchical structure, which is of central importance to daily life, informs and is informed by kinship classification. According to Lowie (1928) and Murdock (1949), the Tongan kinship terminology can be classified as ‘bifurcate merging Hawaiian type’; that is, the same term applies for father and father’s brother (*tamai*), while there is another term for mother’s brother (*tu’asina*), and the same term is used for siblings and cousins. A more detailed analysis reveals that the distinctive features of Tongan kinship terminology coincide broadly with those on which the relative *tu’a/eiki* status is based.

The kinship terminology expresses this specific social stratification in an unequivocal and unambiguous way. Furthermore, Tongan makes use of two different possessive categories – where possession is inalienable (O) or alienable (A) – in reference to kin and while the idea of ‘control’ seems to determine the choice of O or A, the relative *tu’a/eiki* status does not provide an explanation for all cases. Völkel’s careful and fascinating analysis shows that, in respect of kinship terminology, the A/O dichotomy seems rather to be based on the idea of control over birth that is ascribed to the mother and the father’s sister. Her chapter makes it clear that the subtleties of kinship terminology in use continue to have much to tell us about historical transformations already accomplished and those evidently in process.

## **Kinship and the Sister–Brother Relationship**

The next few chapters all concentrate on the relation between sisters and brothers. They show that this relationship very often has to be considered across two generations, and even through two pairs of brothers and sisters, to get an overall view of its implications, especially where life-giving and life-taking capacities are at stake. Since the first writings on siblingship, as noted by Mac Marshall (1981), opposite-sex siblings seem to be an expression of complementarity, as if together they were one, or as a Lakeban villager formulated it, ‘when I see my sister, I see me’. He would not say the same about his wife, who, on the contrary, is seen as taking him away from his sister. Different chapters in this volume (by Bonnemère, Cayrol,

Douaire-Marsaudon, Pauwels; see also Pauwels 2015) show the primordial role of the opposite-sex sibling in the procreative power of the other. Sisters intervene in their brothers' fertility, brothers play a role in their sisters'. The child of the one is also the child of the other in ways which are described in detail.

Pascale Bonnemère (Chapter 6) examines the relation between brothers and sisters among the Ankave-Anga, who hold that brothers and sisters share the same blood but that only women, therefore sisters, transmit it to their children. The brother–sister relationship is emphasized during the male ritual cycle, which transforms a young boy into an adult man, a warrior and a father. Bonnemère argues that this emphasis is related to the importance given to the position of the mother's brother and to the avuncular relationship. Among all male kinship statuses, only that of maternal uncle is endowed with the capacity to influence another person's own life and life-giving abilities. The analysis relies on diverse ethnographic materials: the actions a sister must perform, and the taboos she must respect for her brother during the various stages of his initiation; the content of the relationship between a married sister and her brother, and the exchanges that take place during her married life; the content of the relationship between a maternal uncle and his nephews and nieces.

Through the analyses of the sister–brother relationship in daily interaction and in ritual performance, Simonne Pauwels (Chapter 7) shows that, for the Fijians of the Lau islands, the *mana* and superiority of sister's children or *vasu* over their maternal uncle stems from the (eldest) sister's superiority over the brother. Her investigation of the history of the founding of the present-day chiefdom in Lau shows how the *vasu* (sister's child) doubly represents the whole *vanua*, being a synthesis of its relations both with the exterior, as *vasu levu*, and the interior, as *vasu taukei*. Sisters and daughters played an important role in the building up of the Lauan chiefdom through repetitive marriages intended to exploit politically the prerogatives of *vasu* status. Younger sisters of the high chief married minor chiefs within Lau, their sons became powerful *vasu taukei*; elder sisters of the high chief married chiefs in other major chiefdoms, their sons became powerful *vasu levu*. Together, through the taking of first fruits and artefacts and through waging war, they brought prosperity and peace (*sautu*) to the chiefdom.

Serge Tcherkézoff's (Chapter 8) penetrating analysis of social organization in contemporary Samoa provides an answer to an apparent puzzle: although the 'families' (*aiga*) that make up a 'village' (*nuu*) are generally far from 'related' (*aiga*), Samoans are unanimous in condemning marriage within a village – a principle that goes back as far as family accounts stretch, to the late nineteenth century. Why is this so? The answer comes to light in

Tcherkézoff's explanation of how it comes to be the case that, at a certain encompassing level of representation, all villagers are 'brother or sister' to each other. This kind of village organization is the most striking example of the continuing importance of the 'brother-sister relationship' (*feagaiga*) in Samoa. The brother-sister overarching link becomes evident by means of an analysis of the composition of the 'village' (*nuu*) not just as a group of 'families' (*aiga*) but as made up by three ceremonial groupings that include everyone, and that are also called *nuu*: the family (*aiga*) representatives (*sui*), also called family heads (*ulu*) or *matai* (translated in the literature as titleholders or 'chiefs'); their 'sons'; their 'daughters'. Tcherkézoff explores this configuration as it is evinced in ideas and practice to show not only why the deep meaning of the word *nuu* is 'community', but why that community continues to demand that marriage be exogamous.<sup>6</sup>

Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon (Chapter 9) sets out to reconsider the institution of the Tongan *fahu*, and through it the sociological and symbolic implications of opposite-sex siblingship. Her objective is to show that the brother-sister relationship acquires its full meaning when the brother and sister have produced their respective offspring: each of them is, in their own way, the true parent of the other's child. This appropriation of descendants through opposite-sex siblingship is institutionalized by the *fahu* relation, which appears to be the core of the unfolding of kinship over generations. As such (like the *vasu* in Fiji), the *fahu* position plays a crucial role at the interface between the domestic and the political spheres. Douaire-Marsaudon thus argues that the *fahu* complex of relationships continues to be the pivot of the Tongan kinship system, linking together generations, male and female lines, the living and the dead. As such, it shapes domains of domestic and ritual life, and the political sphere in particular, and creates kinship bonds between persons who are not supposed to be kin.

The kinship vocabulary of the Nasau people, who live in eastern central Viti Levu and are part of the former so called 'hill tribes', is analysed by Françoise Cayrol (Chapter 10). The structure of this vocabulary, in which opposite sex plays a determining role, leads to the distinguishing of two main categories of kin, shaped by the distinction, or not, of birth order. Cayrol's analysis focuses on the relations of principal importance expressed in this vocabulary: those of status, those between brother and sister, and between maternal uncle and the uterine nephew – this being linked to the famous *vasu* position associated with the 'heaviest' and most difficult work. These relations evoke the differentiated ties a person has with the origin gods of their mother's and father's group, for Christianity has had little impact on their importance for Nasau people. The analysis demonstrates how the structure of this vocabulary is linked to the omnipresent generational distinction of '*ako/lavo* and its particular expressions of temporality.

There is a beautiful analytical connection made here between the kinship logic and the constitution of a Nasau person in terms of place – *vanua*, *dra* (blood) and *bula* (life) – as expressed in the giving of names.

## Knowledge that Counts

The overall objective of the present volume is to make evident the continuing central importance of kinship in the Pacific as ‘knowledge that counts’. As Toren shows in the concluding chapter (Chapter 11) this knowledge is constituted over time in terms of life-cycle and other rituals, of pervasive ritualized behaviour, and of exegesis specifically concerned to remind people of ritual duties and obligations. The microhistorical process of constituting knowledge is one in which ideas are at once maintained and transformed. Thus the essays collected here will, it is hoped, enable the reader to understand what is happening to contemporary kinship in certain Pacific contexts, and at the same time enable them to see that change and continuity in the ideas and practices in which kinship consists are not separable processes, but rather aspects of one another.

## Notes

- 1 For example, for an able consideration of the history of the genealogical method and its uses in contemporary anthropology, see Bamford and Leach (2009); see also Franklin and McKinnon (2001) and Schweitzer (2000).
2. See Carsten (1995 and 2000), Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) and compare Strathern (1981), Edwards (2000), Edwards and Strathern (2000) and Evans (2006).
3. This observation is explored by Viveiros de Castro (2009) in respect of the widespread focus on kinship as a ‘constructed process’. In this connection, Toren has long argued that ideas of ‘cultural’ and/or ‘social construction’ are artefacts of taken-for-granted theoretical distinctions between biology and culture, and individual and society (see e.g. Toren 1999b).
4. Toren (1999a) shows how the ontogenetic process of constituting kinship as intentionality makes any given Fijian able ideally to be kin with any other and, further, makes kinship serve at once as the expression of collective order, as the domain of relations in whose terms libidinal desire is structured, and as the ground of ideas of self and other. An understanding of kinship has to be constituted rather than merely received, and a key element in this process is a developed consciousness of one’s peers as peers. To become consciously a subject of kinship, a Fijian child has to find its peers; in so doing it begins to know kinship as the inexhaustible and unifying medium of all its relations with others. This example of an analysis of a particular Fijian ontogeny

- provides a method that allows access to the preoccupations of the people whose manifold relations with one another are the object of anthropological analysis.
5. In contrast, a house in an Eastern Indonesian house-based society strives for permanence in its relations. Two houses, wife-givers and wife-takers, constantly repeat marriage alliances, and tend to join in a much wider timeless circle of houses bound by marriage (Pauwels 1990, 1994).
  6. Here Samoan kinship contrasts with the Fijian and Tongan variants, where a woman can be a sister and a spouse in the same community, even if her ritual role will always be that of a sister.

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