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Making Kin: Kinship Theory and Zumbagua Adoptions

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## featured article: issues in debate

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### making kin: kinship theory and Zumbagua adoptions

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#### fieldwork • Heloisa gets a daughter

The last time I went back to Yanatorio, a scattering of farmsteads on a steep hillside above the indigenous community of Zumbagua in highland Ecuador,<sup>1</sup> I found that my *achi wawa* (godchild) had a new mother. It was May 1993, and Nancy de Rocio was ten years old; she had been born during the year and a half that I lived in Yanatorio conducting doctoral research. In those days, Heloisa was Nancy's unmarried aunt, her father Alfonso's oldest sister. During my previous visit, in 1991, Nancy had been living with Heloisa but called her "*tía*" (aunt); two years later, the child was calling her "mama."<sup>2</sup>

The apparent ease of the transition contrasted vividly with conflicts surrounding unmarried women who want children in the United States. Heloisa, a tall, spare 50-year-old who favors black clothing, would not find it easy to adopt here. She lives without a husband in one windowless room, out of which she runs a small bar selling *trago* (cane liquor) on market days. During most of the 1980s her closest friend was a locally prominent white woman named Elena, who was rumored to be her lover; the two spent hours sitting together on wooden chairs in Elena's kitchen, and many nights in Elena's bed. But Elena moved from Zumbagua, leaving her friend behind. And so Heloisa brought her small niece Nancy to live with her—and to become her daughter.

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*The biological definition of family at the root of functionalist kinship theory has been rightly criticized by contemporary feminist and symbolic anthropologists, but in retreating into an antinatural position such critiques simply recapitulate the limitations of an opposition between nature and culture in which the former is prior and essential, the latter secondary and historical. From the perspective of Zumbagua, where people become parents by feeding and caring for children over extended periods of time, both schools of thought are not only inadequate to explain fully the material bases of local practice but are representative of a specific Western-bourgeois ideology that indigenous people actively oppose. [kinship, adoption, nature/culture, materialism, Ecuador, Andes]*

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At our reunion, Nancy, shy at meeting her godmother again after a two-year hiatus, clung to Heloisa, whispering into her ear everything she wanted to say to me before essaying it aloud. I had not seen the normally rather brusque Heloisa publicly so affectionate since her own mother's death some years before, and thought that she was creating in Nancy a passionately devoted daughter after her own image. Alfonso and Olguita, Nancy's birth parents, were obviously pleased with the new relationship, which strengthened Alfonso's ties to his rather intimidating—but financially solvent—oldest sister.

When I returned to Los Angeles, in contrast, I was once again besieged with stories of bitter conflicts over children. Extensive media coverage had brought to the public eye attempts by surrogate mothers to retain infants they had borne for the wealthy and barren; by 1993, journalists began to introduce new characters to personify these debates. One was the lost father, like Mark King (*Los Angeles Times* 1993; Perry 1993a, 1993b): men portrayed as troubled souls seeking personal salvation by trying to reclaim long-abandoned children.

Mark King based his case on his rights as a "natural" father; but as another newspaper story (Harrison 1993) from the same period demonstrates, the source of these rights is not always self-evident. Tammy Thomas, a young white woman from the South, fled an alcoholic and abusive husband and started over in Los Angeles. In 1993, however, a Mississippi judge denied Thomas custody of her two children, returning them to her estranged husband's parents. "Testimony [in the case] centered mainly on Tammy's interracial relationship with Jake Brown . . . and on her judgment in allowing her sister, a lesbian, to babysit," reported the *Los Angeles Times* (Harrison 1993). Even birth mothers, then, can lose their children by becoming "unnatural"—transgressing against "natural" categories of sex or race.

Neither "natural" nor "unnatural" parents gain secure victories; indeed, as cases climb up the appeals ladder, each side may experience temporary wins and losses. In a diverse and unequal society, it is unsurprising that individuals and communities create families that do not conform to the hegemonic ideal or that the courtroom serves as a public spectacle in which such deviant relationships are displayed and dismembered. What commands attention is the uncertainty of the judiciary about the ideals it should be defending: instead of reinforcing a familiar moral code, these cases and the media attention they generate exacerbate a national sense of doubt. In debates about custody, adoption, abortion, and reproductive technologies, the public searches for a suddenly elusive definition of paternity and maternity.<sup>3</sup> America is experiencing a crisis over consanguinity.<sup>4</sup>

The contrast between definitions of family in these two sites—Zumbagua and Southern California—is my focus here. Although the text concerns families in Zumbagua, the context is my own movement back and forth between these two social fields (Clifford 1986:2). When I initially agreed to write about adoption in Zumbagua for a conference on Andean kinship, I thought the results would be rather specialized, of interest only to a handful of scholars and not of immediate relevance to anyone's life in Zumbagua or the United States. But I found that differences in thinking about what makes a parent in Zumbagua and Los Angeles touched upon issues of critical personal and political importance.

The social fabric of Zumbagua is made up of small households based on lifelong heterosexual marriages, a pattern that superficially resembles the conservative Euro-American ideal embraced by the Mississippi judge. In fact, however, the bonds people form with one another in the parish are based on an understanding of relatedness that differs strikingly from Euro-American principles. Absent from Zumbagua discourse are those anxieties over natural and unnatural parents that loom so large in the popular imagination of Los Angelenos. This absence separates the premises underlying Zumbagua kinship, not only from American mass culture, but from scholarly preoccupations as well.

Anthropological thinking on the topic depends upon assumptions about human nature that derive from the peculiarities of Euro-American kinship in the 19th and 20th centuries. Growing

popular doubts about these assumptions have steadily undermined scholarly confidence in the anthropological ability to speak about families (M. Strathern 1992a, 1992b); yet, by the same token, the study of kinship itself has taken on a new urgency, propelled by the sense of crisis in Euro-American society (e.g., Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Glenn 1994; Ragoné 1994; Stacey 1990; Yanagisako 1978a, 1978b, 1979).

At the same time, insistent questioning about the relationship between metropolitan academia and the rural periphery where anthropologists have traditionally worked demands new conceptualizations of why and how a project such as studying kinship in the Andes might be undertaken. The challenge is to bring these two dilemmas to bear upon one another fruitfully. As social crises in the West force us to relinquish our claims to a greater truth value for abstractions derived from Euro-American models, new understandings about cross-cultural work need to be developed (Marcus and Fischer 1986:vii).

In my own case, studying Andean kinship has become less a matter of the bloodless documentation of cultural diversity than one of looking to indigenous practice and theory for answers to questions that cannot be resolved within the terms of the rancorous debates over parents and families in the United States. In Los Angeles as in Latin America, poor and marginalized communities have had to create strong, flexible kinship systems in order to survive. In Zumbagua these aspects of intimate daily life form part of a larger struggle against a national society seen as acutely hostile to the very survival of the indigenous community. One of the actions through which Heloisa became Nancy's new mother was to take her along on the famous 1991 national indigenous march on the capital. When I traveled to Yanatorio in 1993, I found that the local sense of embattlement toward a hostile white society, a perennial characteristic of parish life, had taken newly concrete forms: the road up to the parish was blocked by enormous boulders, set in place by local residents against possible invasions by the Ecuadorian military.

It is not surprising, then, that the kinship practices of the parish seem to an outsider like myself to be not just different from those of Euro-American culture but to represent an embodied, if implicit, critique of that culture—perhaps even a site from which alternative understandings of the relationship between parents and children might be introduced into dominant discourses. Given the tremendous pressure exerted by Euro-American ideologies upon peripheral societies, such a critical focus on metropolitan culture from a non-Western perspective does not ignore the needs of the periphery in order to address those of the center, but rather, as Ahmad has recently commented in a rather different context, is the necessary starting point for understanding the “disorientations . . . in our [non-Western] institutions” as well (1992:44). As can be seen in the ethnographic material presented below, Euro-American preoccupations with consanguinity are not irrelevant to indigenous residents of Zumbagua but instead represent one particular aspect of the many ideological pressures to which they must respond.

I look at contemporary Zumbagua kinship, not as a set of facts to be interpreted using “our own” theories, but rather as a theory and a practice in its own right, which can be contrasted with a body of theory that emerged from a specific historical moment in Euro-American capitalist culture. Rather than allowing the latter to stand as “theory” to the other’s “data,” I want to substitute a more fluid juxtaposition, in which each reveals the unspoken assumptions of the other—and thus also the relationship between embedded theory and social practice that underlies all social life, whether in the decentered metropolis of Los Angeles or the indigenous periphery of Zumbagua.<sup>5</sup>

### **theory • jural fathers, natural mothers: the elementary family**

Radcliffe-Brown, a founding father of functionalist kinship studies, saw an unchanging natural “substratum” beneath the whole edifice of social structure: the elementary family (1950, 1965).

Its universality was an important tenet in “post-Morgan” refutations of the evolutionists’ claim that the human family had not always been the same (Fortes 1969:65). Meyer Fortes began an important lecture in honor of Morgan with a rather oblique reminder that the “momentous importance” of the scientific study of kinship lies in its special insight into the “very springs of man’s social life” (1969:9). The implication was made explicit a few years later, when John Barnes (1973:63) in turn introduced a tribute to Meyer Fortes with a flat statement that kinship is the aspect of human culture with the closest links to the natural world. The solemnity of statements such as these provided Schneider with ample material for parody in his 1984 critique, in which he suggests that the existence of the natural family was fundamental, not so much for actual social systems, but to the existence of functionalist anthropology itself.

One result of this implicit dependence on “Blood Being Thicker Than Water” (Schneider 1984:165 et passim) is that the institution of adoption has constituted something of a conundrum for kinship theorists. Adoption was especially troubling for Malinowski, for it undermined his conviction that in the domain of kinship, above all others, “cultural processes tend to follow the lead of innate biological drives. . . . [P]hysiological facts . . . lead to purely cultural institutions” (1930:165–166). Classificatory kin terms conform to this logic, he argued, because they begin with biological ties and then extend to others according to specific and limited principles (1957:x); but adoption, in which a consanguineal relationship is wholly fabricated, seemed so problematic that he was driven to assert that it must be statistically uncommon (1930:137).

It soon became quite clear, however, that a wide range of forms of adoption existed throughout the world, and that sometimes, even in European history, it was a very common practice indeed (e.g., Brady 1976; Cardoso 1984; Carroll 1970; Schildkraut 1973). Anthropologists wedded to the biological bases of kinship thus had to explain adoption, rather than simply dismissing it as Malinowski had done. They developed two main theoretical strategies for doing so. The first and perhaps older of these is what Cardoso (1984:196) has called the theory of “compensatory kinship”: the assumption that, although common worldwide, adoption is found within any given community only when biological kinship fails (as in the case of infertile parents, orphaned children, or the lack of a male heir). Keesing, for example, speaks of adoption as necessitated by “less than ideal circumstances” (1975:12). As a cross-cultural axiom, this too has been amply disproved, especially with data from Polynesia;<sup>6</sup> nor does this contention of biological necessity fit the Zumbagua case. Heloisa, 50 years old and childless, might seem to confirm it; but if we expand our acquaintances to include Heloisa’s brother Alfonso, who thinks himself fortunate to have more than one family, a more complicated story emerges.

## fieldwork • Alfonso greets his brother

When I left the parish in 1985, Alfonso, his wife, and two young daughters lived in the household of his father, Juanchu Chaluisa, a strong man in his sixties with an ironic sense of humor. During my last visit I found that as Juanchu’s health had begun to fail, the older man no longer presided in the main house; he spent most of his time in bed in a smaller building behind it, where he greeted me, as always, with an admonition to eat—or, more accurately, to allow myself to be fed. (In early 1994 I received a letter from Nancy informing me of his death.)

In typical Andean ultimogeniture, Alfonso had inherited both the main house and the primary responsibility to care for Juanchu in his declining years. But although Alfonso’s life had become completely enmeshed with that of Juanchu and his household, he had another family as well. I had lived among Juanchu’s children<sup>7</sup> for more than a year before I even learned of the existence of these other ties. One day, walking together into town, we were hailed by a young man who chided both of us for not coming to visit more often. “Don’t be a stranger,” he admonished us. “We miss you.” And he called me *kumari* (from Spanish *comadre* or co-mother), a reference to

my status as *achi mama* (Quichua for godmother) to Alfonso's daughter, and an implicit confirmation of his own membership in Alfonso's family.

As soon as he had gone, I asked Alfonso in astonishment who he was: "Did you say that was your brother? I've never seen him before." He laughed at me:

*Tayta* [father] Juanchu is my father, and that is why I live with him in Yanatoro. But before, when I was little, his sister was my mother; she's the one who lives in Saraujsha. That guy is my Saraujsha brother; I haven't seen him in a while, though. He's right; we should go visit.

And he chatted happily about what a good family it was, how much I would like them, and how lucky he was to have them as kin.

As I began to ask more about his life, and later to do genealogies of other relations, the biological connections I had assumed held together the families I knew unraveled more and more. Of the five adults I had known as "Tayta Juanchu's children," only one actually believed him to have been her genitor; at the same time, Juanchu cheerfully enumerated for me at least a dozen people to whom he had been father for varying periods of time, beyond the four who were his heirs.<sup>8</sup>

Every adult seemed to have several kinds of parents and several kinds of children. They remembered a man who fathered them, but another who "husbanded" their growth; they remembered a woman who gave birth to them, but others who fed them and taught them to speak and to know. Most adoptions are like Nancy's or Alfonso's, taking place within the family, rearranging preexistent consanguineal ties and, in the process, bringing kin even closer, overdetermining relatedness. Nancy is sister to Alfonso's other children but addresses as "mother" the woman whom they call "aunt." Alfonso is son to Tayta Juanchu but also to Juanchu's sister; the young man who greeted us on the path is both cousin and brother to Alfonso. Adoption in Zumbagua, then, is neither rare nor a last resort when biology fails. It is, instead, an important tool used by families, households, and individuals to shape social identity: providing each child not only with immediate care but also with the all-important dense web of kin needed to survive the vicissitudes of life on the economic periphery (Weismantel 1988).

The second, more sophisticated argument in defense of the primacy of the biological family contends that, despite enormous cross-cultural variation in how social networks are constructed, all peoples differentiate between "real" and "fictive" relationships, the former being based on biology while the latter are "merely" social (e.g., Gellner 1987[1973]; Malinowski 1930, 1957; Scheffler 1991). This idea, which can be found as early as Maine's conceit that adoption was the first legal fiction (Schneider 1984:172), resonates closely with folk beliefs of Euro-America, although proponents insist on its universality.

In Zumbagua, however, this kind of thinking is clearly associated with a hegemonic Hispanic culture.<sup>9</sup> While living in the parish, I heard the language of "true" kinship not from local residents but enunciated by an agent of the state employed to help local people—and, in the process, to change them.

### fieldwork • the younger Iza entertains some gringos

Yanagisako (1979:167) has observed that analysts' failure to distinguish between biological and social reproduction has blinded them to the many tactics by which people exercise control over household size and composition, one of which is adoption. Certainly rich Zumbagua families, like the Izas of Cocha Uma, would agree with her. In a society where "orphan" is synonymous with "poor," a defining characteristic of wealth and success is the ability to fill the house with children. Families like the Izas are big families, strategically assembled from a widespread web of close and distant kin through a variety of economic and social tactics.

The source of the Izas' prosperity is one man, Segundo Iza. He is widely considered to be the greatest living *yumbo* (shaman) outside of Santo Domingo de los Colorados; even wealthy whites from the coast seek him out, and his prices are exorbitant. Alfonso's landless brother-in-law, José Manuel, loves to talk about Segundo Iza; Iza is so rich, according to José Manuel, that he has a car and a pickup truck—unimaginable wealth in a community where few can afford so much as a bicycle.

Yumbo Iza may or may not have bought two vehicles, but he has certainly accumulated human capital: in the baptismal registry in the parish church, every entry from Cocha Uma listed him as godfather. And, like other wealthy and influential families, the Izas did not limit themselves to *compadrazgo* (fictive kinship) as a means of acquiring kin; other children, and their families, are bound to them through adoption.

It was Padre Toni who took me to meet the famous Iza. When we arrived at his house one morning in 1986, there was no sign of any cars or trucks or of the shaman himself. We were welcomed into the kitchen by a man in his thirties who Toni said was Segundo's son; we found him talking politely to another visitor who had arrived before us. She was a nurse from the clinic who had stopped there on her rounds, a young woman from Quito assigned to the parish for a year of "rural service" required by the government of all health professionals. Utterly out of place in the indigenous culture of the parish, she apparently thought of the Izas as one of a few families "civilized" enough to merit a purely social call; but she seemed to be finding small talk difficult. Young Iza was clearly bored, and was glad to see Toni, with whom he shared a passion for religious arcana.

But it was only when a sleepy little boy entered the kitchen from his nearby bed that the young Iza really came alive. The man served the child hot soup, and sat back beaming, happily watching him empty the bowl. "He was an orphan, a poor boy, so I brought him here to live with me as my son," he explained. "Where he was living there wasn't enough to eat."

The nurse was horrified; she gestured to him frantically to lower his voice. "Don't talk like that in front of the boy," she whispered. "He's very young; maybe, if he's lucky, he'll forget about his own parents and grow up believing you're his real father." Iza, puzzled and offended, responded by raising his voice instead of lowering it. "I am going to be his father," he said irritably. "Aren't I feeding him right now?"

The nurse's urgent need to hide the fact of adoption is based upon the assumption that in the absence of a "blood" tie the relationship between man and child is fundamentally a pretense. The family as she envisions it is both biological and social in origin. If biological reproduction takes place outside of the social bond of marriage, an illegitimate child is the result: a "natural" son. But with Iza's attempt to establish a bond with a child whose mother he did not impregnate, it is the parent who becomes illegitimate: in the nurse's eyes, Iza could never be the "real" father of this child.

The nurse uses a language of biological "truth" common in speech about family in the Euro-American world, where the use of consanguineal terms to talk about adoption is understood as a fiction. Scheffler (1991:368–369) insists that this kind of usage is not confined to Western systems: although many languages use the same polysemous term to refer both to biological and nonbiological relationships, he holds that the biological referent is inevitably "the structurally primary or logically most basic sense" of the term (1991:369).

But neither young Iza nor the nurse would agree. From an indigenous perspective, insistence on the primacy of biological kinship is one of a large set of beliefs and practices that governmental and religious workers attempt to impose upon local people. The bourgeoisie find fault with indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian cultural traditions for failing to delimit the nuclear family, a failing they characterize as an impediment to development and an indication of a fundamental incompatibility with modernity.<sup>10</sup>

In Zumbagua there is absolutely no privileging of the relationship a child has with the genitor or genitrix over others who are called parents. Often, in fact, the reverse is the case—as it is with Alfonso, who clearly places much more importance on his relationship with Tayta Juanchu and his adopted siblings than on his “Saraujsha family.” Zumbagua customs, then, pose a challenge to Malinowskian assertions of the primacy of nature within the kinship domain, and suggest that those critics who find Eurocentric ideas at the base of these theories are correct (e.g., MacCormack 1980; Schneider 1984; M. Strathern 1980, 1992a).

It may be a mistake, however, to overemphasize the importance of natural kin ties in functionalist thought; unlike Malinowski, his peers argued that because of its ahistorical, essential nature, the elementary family should be unimportant to anthropologists. What mattered was the social edifice erected upon this natural base, Meyer Fortes’s “jural dimension” (1969). This distinction and its philosophical roots have been much critiqued, most completely by feminist writers discussing its gendered dimensions (e.g., Harris 1981; Yanagisako 1979). In a related discussion, economic anthropologists have caricatured the notion of the household as a “black box” removed from study (Wilk 1989).

Of specific interest here are the implications of this distinction for a specific theory of procreation associated with functionalist thought, succinctly summarized in John Barnes’s (1973) famous “genitrix : genitor :: nature : culture” formulation. Keesing elaborates:

Humans everywhere observe the same processes of sex and reproduction. A female has sexual intercourse. . . . Once she is pregnant, it is ultimately obvious that she is, and that the infant is connected to her by the most physical of bonds—by the umbilical cord, by childbirth, by the milk of her breasts. But the connection of the one or several men who had intercourse with the mother . . . to the process of pregnancy and childbirth is far from obvious . . . [creating] a gulf between “social” and “physical” kinship, or between pater (the legitimate social father) and genitor (the presumed physical begetter of the child). [1975:11–12]

Writers who discuss the distinction between pater and genitor are with few exceptions quite explicit that no feminine version exists. Like Keesing, most insist upon the self-evident character of maternity (an exception is Gellner [1987(1973):191], who mentions cases from European history in which women pretended to be pregnant or to give birth). It is at this level that the essentialist argument is most clear: while their respective reproductive roles free men (but not women) to transcend biology, this difference nevertheless originates within biology, not culture. Whatever edifice of social kinship may be erected upon it is therefore universal and inescapable.<sup>11</sup>

But the Zumbagua kinship system does not discriminate between mother and father in this way. Birth mothers are free to give up their children if they do not wish to raise them, as are the genitors; it is also possible to establish a more limited relationship with a child one wishes neither to abandon nor to parent. By the same token, the choice not to raise children engendered early in life does not limit one’s ability to become a parent in later years for either women or men. Other limitations do of course exist: the wealthy acquire children while the impoverished lose theirs, and older, established couples have a more secure claim on children than do the young. But gender is not a factor in these matters.

In this sense, Heloisa strikingly exemplifies the possibilities inherent in the system. Somewhat well-off by parish standards, she is nevertheless a poor woman in a peripheral rural area within Catholic Latin America; she thus lacks the elite power so often found in women who assume masculine prerogatives (e.g., Amadiume 1987). Yet she seems to have given up little or nothing in exchange for avoiding marriage and physiological motherhood, and in fact she has gained a great deal: she has a business, a child, and is sexually active. Heloisa’s life, which seems to have as its dominant theme the exertion of a powerful volition over all matters including reproductive issues, poses a challenge to Keesing’s and Barnes’s representation of the biological female as helpless to avoid her physiological fate, while the biological male exerts an active, imaginative will over his.



Many readers are by now convinced that only simple contrariness could explain this unnecessary search through the landscape of elementary families and natural mothers. The criticisms I have offered are hardly new: they were first made in another and for the most part more recent body of writings about kinship (as I will discuss below). This second body of work, many contemporary anthropologists would argue, has clearly superseded theory based upon the natural family. Originating in symbolic anthropology, this approach to kinship and gender has long established that the “natural” aspects of reproduction should not be seen as immutable facts with universal power over female destiny, but as a rich body of metaphor and meaning from which humans construct their systems of signification, free of any constraints beyond those of their imagination. And, indeed, this second school of thought offers a much better approximation of Zumbagua lives, in which both women and men use their social resources to reshape the opportunities provided by biology. A closer examination of Zumbagua thinking on the subject, however, reveals that symbolic approaches, too, contain limitations that prevent them from fully expressing parish concerns.

### theory • mythic fathers, unnatural mothers: kinship as metaphor

Many of the best and most powerful analyses of kinship in contemporary anthropology stem from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969:29, 31, 479, 480, 489, et passim) and David Schneider (1984:172). But while the latter is perhaps best-known for his trenchant criticism of the elementary family, the former is not. Indeed, the pervasiveness of the idea of the natural family, its ability to prevail even within theoretical approaches at which it would seem wholly at odds, is perhaps nowhere more striking than in the writings of Lévi-Strauss. While he brought to anthropology as a whole, and to kinship theory in particular, a sustained critique of the unexamined naturalistic assumptions of previous scholars, the opposition between descent and marriage in his own *Elementary Forms of Kinship* (1969) nevertheless rests upon a more explicitly biologicistic conceptualization than that of Radcliffe-Brown (1965) himself.<sup>12</sup>

It was Simone de Beauvoir’s reading of Lévi-Strauss that inspired Sherry Ortner’s famous assent to the question, “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” (1974)—a logical proposition that Ortner found to be the universal root metaphor for an equally universal patriarchy. Recognizing the many excellent critiques of ethnocentric and essentialist premises hidden in Ortner’s work, some authors accept her mechanistic formulation of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, which overlooks the complexity and dialectical quality of his arguments.<sup>13</sup> The best known of these critiques, however, that of MacCormack and Strathern (1980), reveals the potential of structuralist methodology as a tool for feminist analysis once it is rescued from the universalism and biologism that mars *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

The “antikinship” school of thought associated with David Schneider (1964, 1984) shares with these authors a contention that specific symbolic orders, not universal biological facts, shape human relations (see also Beattie 1964). Two aspects of Schneider’s critique are of particular interest here: first, his dissection of the Eurocentric bias of kinship theories (1984:174–175, 193–194); and second, his desire to decenter sexual reproduction and the notion of kinship itself as an autonomous sphere within culture (1984:165–177, 187–201).

Schneider interprets the supposed universal primacy of blood and birth in kin systems as a fiction created by anthropologists unable to shed Euro-American folk conceptions. By incidentally exposing the inherent masculinist bias of these theories as well, Schneider endeared himself to a later generation of feminists trying to establish new foundations for the study of kinship (e.g., Collier and Yanagisako 1987:40; Delaney 1986:495). In Zumbagua the conversation between the nurse and young Iza in Cocha Uma seemed to support this critique, since the idea of blood ties was indeed rejected by an indigenous resident as the preoccupation of westernized outsiders. Marilyn Strathern (1992a) contends that these preoccupations are not part of an

unchanging European or Western cultural tradition but are a specific historical phenomenon characteristic of the late 19th to mid-20th centuries in Europe and America. Similarly, Zumbaguans characterize white preoccupations with consanguinity as being symptomatic of a particular kind of modernization effort to which local people are resistant.

To Schneider, sex and birth are significant only when they are used to furnish metaphors of social relatedness; any other aspect of perceived reality might serve as well. The Izas and Chaluizas—who make no discrimination between children born to women of the family and those born elsewhere and incorporated into the family at a later date—would seem to be in agreement. And Schneider's argument is close to my own assertion that "[i]n Zumbagua, the hearth . . . supplants the marriage bed as the symbol of conjugal living and the bond of blood as the emblem of parenthood: the Zumbagua family consists of those who eat together" (Weismantel 1988:169; for similar arguments from elsewhere see Clark 1989; A. Strathern 1973).

An anthropology that succeeds in ridding itself of Eurocentric notions about the family, then, as Schneider has attempted to do, leads to a better understanding of Zumbagua kin. The people of the parish, however, like many poor people, are relentless materialists in their thinking about important issues, including maternity and paternity. The idealist emphasis that remains at the root of symbolic and structuralist theories is at odds with this materialism, and ultimately limits their utility for thinking about social life in Zumbagua.

### fieldwork • young Iza feeds the boy

For Scheffler, biology is primary; for Schneider, metaphor.<sup>14</sup> For if Zumbagua notions of parenthood are not derived exclusively from sexual reproduction, neither do they rest upon purely social or symbolic understandings.

Schneider accuses kinship theorists of ethnocentrism, but his own concept of relationships as established through symbolic words and acts may similarly find its origins in his cultural background, with its logocentric emphasis and hierarchical political structure. At the core of those sensational fights between biological and adoptive parents in the United States is the courtroom drama: adults and children enter a room in which their fates will be decided in a single pronouncement by a powerful agent of the state: a judge (and, in rare cases, a jury). Once judgment has been passed, it becomes fact: all the toys and stuffed animals the would-be parents bought, the name they chose, the time they may have spent with the child, mean nothing.<sup>15</sup> Only the final statement matters, and only another judge's word, in another courtroom, could overturn its power to determine whose relationships are real and whose mere pretense.

This jural approach to determining kinship seems to have colored the thinking of anthropologists, who oppose to the biological dimension of kinship a single, conflated social/jural dimension, as in the following definitions:

In discussing paternity . . . one must distinguish between the role of genitor . . . and the role of pater. . . . A pater is an individual who is granted jural rights over offspring. . . . The practice of adoption . . . transfers jural authority from one man to another. [Paige and Paige 1981:168, 172]

Although anthropologists intend the word *jural* to have a far larger meaning than that implied by the courtroom, the legalistic emphasis on rights and duties conferred through an external authority and the logocentric emphasis upon verbal transactions remain strong in these definitions.

In the parish, authority is diffuse: paternity is determined by all those directly concerned, and then confirmed—or contested—through public discourse throughout the community; no single arbiter representing an abstract political authority can grant it or take it away. By the same token, the standard for judgment is different. In Zumbagua terms, our form of determining paternity

misses a crucial dimension of materiality that people in the parish seek in judging whether relationships exist: when looking to find parents and children, words are only a small part of the accumulated evidence.

When Iza rejected the nurse's contention that he was not the boy's "real" father, he did not do so on symbolic or jural grounds. He did not contend that he had become the boy's father by undergoing a ceremony, pronouncing certain words, signing a document, or making a ritual prestation of gifts to the child's previous family. In fact, he did not claim that he was the boy's father at all—only that he wanted to be. But through his actions he expressed that intention clearly.

In the parish, any act involving food performed in the presence of others expresses important social facts. Young Iza's bowl of soup was no exception. When he fed the little boy soup out of the same pot from which he himself had eaten, the yumbo's son demonstrated to us, before he even spoke, his intention of creating a relationship between himself and the child. His actions were deliberately overemphasized, but they were not atypical of Zumbagua men who thus break gender rules to establish their social identity as fathers. While the burden of daily cooking and feeding falls on women, men do take bowls of food and feed their children by hand in small rituals of intimacy. Those who witness these acts then affirm the relationship in words: "Look at him feeding his child," they say, or, teasing, "Look at the good father." It was this kind of acknowledgment young Iza sought from us and did not receive. His irritation stemmed partly from the nurse's attempt to impose her own values on him but more profoundly from the fact that none of us, even Padre Toni (who had lived in the parish for years), fully understood his act.

This particular act of feeding is clearly a ritual, a symbol through which the tie between man and boy is established—especially since it is women, not men, who feed children and their fathers on a daily basis. Indeed, just as Schneider said would happen once ethnocentric assumptions were abandoned, we have simply found that a different aspect of biology—eating rather than sex—provides key metaphors in the Andes.

But the act of feeding is not a disembodied ritual. If it were, a single mouthful of soup, symbolizing the parent-child bond, might be sufficient to make strangers kin. In fact, however, young Iza did not hope to do more than express an intent to become a father through his action; a single meal was insufficient means to effect the transformation immediately. In the parish, the relationship between parent and child has more than social and spiritual dimensions: the bond is material in nature, created through corporeal means. For Iza, like those Euro-Americans who define paternity as a biological link created by the transmission of sperm, fatherhood is the establishment of a concrete and irreversible link between two human bodies.

It is this material link between himself and the boy that Iza wished to create. In so doing, he would not merely become the boy's fictive kinsman, living a pretense that could one day be thrust aside in the face of "real" ties. Instead, their relationship would be at once physiological (a link between bodies, experienced as one of shared substance) and ideal (a link between social identities, experienced as a shared fate in life). But although this relationship resembles paternity in the Euro-American sense because of its basis in a fundamental physical reality, the nature of the corporeal bond is not the same. Far from being prior to or transcending specific social relations, it is deeply embedded within them.

In Zumbagua eyes, engendering a child is only one component in the lengthy process of physical and social reproduction, and not necessarily the most important. Andean beliefs and practices about illness, death, and healing reveal an underlying conception of the human body as a material object built up over time through various substances and acts: ingesting food and drink, sharing emotional states with individuals or spirits, being in close physical proximity to people or objects. Bonds between people are created in the same way—gradually (Bolton 1977;

Carter 1977). The two processes are interrelated: the bodies of individuals are linked through shared substance to the bodies of family members (Allen 1978, 1988).

The physical acts of intercourse, pregnancy, and birth can establish a strong bond between two adults and a child. But other adults, by taking a child into their family and nurturing its physical needs through the same substances as those eaten by the rest of the social group, can make of that child a son or a daughter who is physically as well as jurally their own.

Especially critical in this process is the sharing of meals. Flesh is made from food, and especially from different grains and tubers, each of which has its own characteristic effect on the human body. Eating cooked grains raised by a household on its own land and harvested and processed through family labor results in a body and a self that have been shaped by work and skill invested in the farm. When men bring home foods bought with wages, these foods change the bodies of family members too (Weismantel 1988, 1989b). Those who eat together in the same household share the same flesh in a quite literal sense: they are made of the same stuff. It is when young Iza's boy has eaten so many meals with the family that his whole body is made of the same flesh as theirs that the bond will be unquestioned and real to the boy and his family.

This process is inherently physical, and yet it is not exclusively so. It is also social, symbolic, and linguistic: the words people use to talk to and about one another are part of the accumulated history through which relationships are established. But life in the parish makes it difficult not to experience these, too, as material in nature. The Izas will make this boy theirs by talking to him, sleeping near him, feeding and clothing him, and nursing his injuries. Eventually, he will look like them, smell like them, laugh and gesture like them: when people look at him, they will see an Iza. They will talk about him as an Iza to others, and it is at that moment that the relationship will have become real in a public and social sense.

This recognition will free up the language used by the shaman's son, which was so carefully provisional when we talked to him. Once securely the boy's father, young Iza will no longer need to express his relationship in a language of future tenses, of intentionality, of not yet accomplished desires, as he did in the conversation recorded above. He can use instead the Quichua present tense that asserts a still-relevant past, an ongoing movement from what was into actuality. One cannot, in reality, be a father in the parish without already having been one for quite some time.

From the perspective of the parish, parenthood is restricted neither to a biological determination rooted in insemination nor to a jural or symbolic definition based on metaphor. It is a multidimensional and overdetermined category. In standard anthropological practice, these multiple dimensions represent a challenge: they must be dissected to reveal one of two kinds of truth. Either humans are constrained by the facts of nature, or they can transcend them; either biology matters, or it does not. My disagreement with both extremes lies in their insistence that a "case" like that of Zumbagua can only be read in this restricted fashion. The opinions of people in the parish should not be interpreted by theorists simply as support for their own positions; these opinions should be used to challenge the very terms on which academic debate is conducted.

The fact that people in an Ecuadorian parish, or anywhere else, do not "acknowledge" biological kinship has often been treated as a conundrum: why do they not "know" the "truth"?<sup>16</sup> But however perplexing it may be that in society after society informants have insisted upon propounding theories of reproduction that are not in accordance with what theorists held to be immutable facts, this has not discouraged the latter from insisting that their own models do nevertheless represent the inescapable reality of human existence (Delaney 1986). Gellner, for example, urged his colleagues, whom he saw as confused by a misguided relativism, to "retain a firm grip on the fact that" one cannot give an account of a society except by situating "its

activities in and against the background of natural fact . . . a physical-biological reality seen through Western eyes" (1987[1973]:200).

Symbolic anthropologists critical of positions such as Gellner's are nevertheless equally convinced that the words of informants cannot change the analyst's commonsense knowledge about the world. The fact that non-European or nonbourgeois groups might insist upon a material basis for the ties that link them to others is merely more data about other ideational systems. Metaphorical by definition, informants' words are simply evidence to be used in the analysis of yet another symbolic system. Only the writings of another scholar, offering another interpretation of the same information, can challenge basic premises.

It is obviously possible to talk about Andean culture using the concepts of Western philosophy. Andean people, too, sometimes think in terms of differences between natural and cultural states of being. Processes of transition such as those of birth or adoption evoke oppositions between a nonhuman wilderness and a socialized humanity (see Allen 1978, 1988; Harris 1978; Isbell 1978; Weismantel 1988, 1989a). Olivia Harris, however, warns that "the resonances attached to these English terms are not applicable to Andean representations"; to use them precludes an understanding of what people are actually saying (1980:71). To reduce Andean social practice and ideology to these terms involves a kind of flattening of meaning, a distortion great enough to make unlike things sound alike. Young Iza is not speaking the same language as either Schneider or Scheffler, and what he has to say cannot be fully expressed within their discursive realm.

The lack of fit between Zumbaguan and anthropological conceptions of social life is not accidental. It is not only that the roots of parish kinship systems lie in the non-Western world of *lo andino* (indigenous Andean culture); in the intervening centuries, the people of Zumbagua, forcibly brought up to the cold *páramos* (high-altitude grasslands) to work as unfree laborers,<sup>17</sup> struggled to survive within one of the more destructive institutions of colonial capitalism. The events that brought them political freedom in 1965 are indelibly marked in parish consciousness, but so too is the recognition that the decades since then have brought new and in some ways more devastating forms of economic exploitation, heightening the need to develop a social system that can protect parish residents against the depredations of capital.

In contrast, much 20th-century kinship theory was formulated within societies fighting against the perceived threat of historical materialism.<sup>18</sup> Our debates have been limited to the opposition between nature and law, not just because our position as the inheritors of the European tradition condemns us to think in these essential and timeless categories, but also because of quite specific historical circumstances. Structural-functionalist kinship theory originates in a sanitized Morgan, stripped of those concerns with the material bases of human history that have made his work so central to Marxist scholarship. The static and ahistorical character for which structural-functionalism has so often been criticized (Fabian 1983) is not unrelated to its obsessive reworking of the dichotomy of nature and culture: the debate was phrased in these terms largely in exclusion of other notions similarly derived from the European Enlightenment but embodied in the work of Marx and Engels—concepts of history and temporality, and of materiality and production. And yet it is precisely these terms, time and work, upon which Zumbagua thinking about relationships depends.

## theory • real fathers, working mothers: conclusions

Implied in the Quichua words *tayta* (father), *mama* (mother), and *taytamama* (parents) is a relationship that is both achieved and ongoing. These words hold great temporal significance because they speak of future inheritance, but also because they take their meaning from the present and the past.

To feed a boy for a day does not make one a legitimate father, nor does impregnating a woman in a single night: not enough time and effort has been invested. It is when a man lives with a woman throughout her pregnancy and birth, having sex with her repeatedly as the child grows in her womb, feeding and caring for her and, later, for the newborn child, that he begins to be a father to the child he has engendered; it is when a woman has not only suffered through the labor of birth itself, but has also struggled to meet the incessant demands of growing children, and begun to produce recognizably socialized offspring who speak and understand, that people begin to address her with the honorific "Mama." If either conception or birth marks the end of their involvement with the infant, as happens not infrequently, these people cannot later in life make more than the most partial claims upon parenthood. The link between the material body and social identity is not given and immutable from the moment of conception but is gradually and laboriously produced. Evidence of this steady, constant investment of labor by an adult in the life of a child, is the only real criterion for parenthood.

This emphasis upon the investment of time is one of the fundamental differences between Zumbagua kinship theory and conventional western kinship analysis, where temporality is suppressed. In Euro-American thought, natural or biological parenthood occurs only at a single, specific moment—at the very inception of the relationship between parent and child; everything that happens afterward works only to establish metaphorical, cultural, jural, or symbolic relations. Biology—the only kind of materiality to be considered—is thus strictly ahistorical.

In its insistence upon a strictly genetic notion of physical relatedness, the Euro-American model, unlike that of Zumbagua, denies the impact of history on the physical self, the regimens of diet and exercise, and the stress and pathology through which societies produce specific human bodies at specific points in time. The origins of this model derive from particular class and gender perspectives. Conservative sexual politics embedded in both functionalist and structuralist kinship studies have been well documented (Amadiume 1987; Sacks 1979); but one aspect of this masculinist heritage that has remained largely unexamined is the emphasis upon sexual intercourse as the single moment in which paternity becomes embodied. The authors of classical kinship thereby universalized a heterosexual masculine perspective, derived from traditional bourgeois life, in which men defined their role in the family primarily in terms of sexual access to the wife and a distanced authority over the children. Extended nonsexual physical contact, especially with children or in the provision of labor, service, or nurturance for other family members, was defined as feminine and demeaning, lacking larger social import. But this form of masculinity, in which physical and emotional contact are exclusively channeled into sexual intercourse, and in which men take an active role as authority figures but are passive recipients of emotional and physical nurturance, is alien to Andean experience, known only through the gendered actions of outsiders. Theories of hierarchical opposition between cultural and natural, mental and physical, masculine and feminine are similarly foreign.

The emphasis in kinship studies on a single opposition of nature and culture and on its expression in a temporal structure in which the former is prior and essential and the latter secondary and historical has limited our understanding of real kin relations by restricting the terms of the debate. These definitions have been rightly characterized by contemporary critics as implicitly patriarchal. As Haraway (1983:125) and Scheffler (1991) have pointed out, however, such critiques too often end by retreating into an antinatural position, thus recapitulating the split between nature and culture instead of embarking upon a reformulation of the debate itself. A historically informed notion of materiality should be interposed between these two artificially opposed terms.

Zumbagua ideas about parenthood are evenhanded in their treatment of women and men, paternity and maternity. Economic circumstances permitting, women and men alike experience a variety of forms of parenting. Women like Heloisa Huanotuñu are not denied the pleasures of motherhood by their inability to become pregnant or give birth, nor are other women, like

Nancy's birth mother Olguita, restricted to a lesser sphere of life because of their ability to do so. Being a parent is not only possible, it is positively valued as a contribution to the public good, rather than being viewed solely as a means of personal fulfillment. Men like young Iza not only are *able* to feed a little boy and so make him their own; men and women *must* become parents if they hope to enjoy the full rights and privileges of social adulthood entailed in the words *Tayta* and *Mama*. For women and men alike, involvement with social reproduction through parenting enhances rather than diminishes opportunities for success in other spheres.

Zumbagua kinship relations are by no means Edenic, however. Adoption patterns are shaped by the inequalities of generation and class that permeate parish social life. Young women and men often must relinquish control of the children they engender to older, more established couples; unmarried women, in particular, lose children to their own postmenopausal mothers. And while adults with some economic resources gradually establish households that can support dependents, and so are able to keep or acquire children, poor couples often give up their children to wealthier relatives—a decision that many find agonizingly difficult.

My purpose, then, is not to idealize Andean society in its entirety, although I admire many aspects of Zumbagua culture,<sup>19</sup> but to suggest that close attention to the social theories embedded in these reproductive strategies can provoke new thinking about conundrums that have bedeviled the study of kinship. Zumbagua ideas about kinship stress the importance of physical relationships between parents and children as these are expressed over time through socially meaningful labor, without making any demeaning associations between the physical body and femininity. This suggests that women's search for equality need not entail a retreat into disembodied definitions of ourselves or of the relationships between parent and child. It is the very physicality, the materiality, and the enduring character of these links, as well as their symbolic import, that have made them so important to human life not only in the Andes but throughout Europe and the Americas as well. Neither Schneider's skepticism about the universal importance of physical reproduction and the bonds it creates between human beings nor the claim that new technological innovations could render the creation of interdependent and intimate relations between adults and children unimportant will lead to scholarship that can contribute to the creation of more just societies. Indeed, the opposite is true. The developments of late capitalism continue to erode the fabric of family, friendship, and community in both Los Angeles and Zumbagua, even as accelerating economic linkages bring the places themselves closer together. In this climate, in which the very ability to establish human ties seems to be under attack, neither the strictures of biological determinism nor those of a disembodied and hierarchical logocentrism seem desirable as starting points for an understanding of human relationships.

## notes

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1. Zumbagua (Cotopaxi Province, Canton Pujilí) is the name of both a rural parish and the town center of that parish. The word *Zumbagua* has also become something of a regional denomination for a large area of western páramos in central Ecuador, inhabited by tens of thousands of indigenous Quichua-speaking people. The parish is located on the western edge of the Cordillera Occidental at approximately 1° S, with altitudes ranging from 3,200 to more than 4,000 meters above sea level (well above the upper limits of maize and vegetable cultivation at that latitude). Most of the more than 20,000 residents live in rural dwellings scattered over some ten thousand hectares of parish land. A state-owned hacienda until the 1960s, the local economy today is based primarily on the cultivation of barley, fava beans, potatoes, and onions

on small family farms on the lower slopes, together with sheep and llama pastoralism in the high páramos; each of these zones comprises roughly half of the total area of the parish, with settlement concentrated in the lower elevations. Households combine this largely subsistence agriculture with a variety of wage-earning activities, the most significant of which in recent years has been male temporary migration to the capital city of Quito; the strategy of sending a young family to live on the outskirts of the capital to provide a base for other family members is becoming more common in the 1990s. Other, older strategies include wage labor on small agricultural enterprises on the western slopes and involvement in the transportation of contraband liquor. The area is characterized by extreme poverty relative to other highland populations, and by the existence of a strong local indigenous culture shared with most inhabitants of the neighboring parishes; this is recognizable in the use of a local dialect of Quichua, a characteristic clothing style including distinctive handwoven striped ponchos, and, in the 1980s, an elaborated fiesta cycle (suffering some decline in the early 1990s).

2. In response to an astute observation by Elizabeth Chin about the agency of children, I want to emphasize that Nancy was a—perhaps *the*—key actor in making Heloisa a mother. The same is true of other cases, such as when Nancy's older sister Blanca remained with her birth mother rather than going to live with her maternal grandparents: the volition of the child is a critical factor. The question of children's rights in family decision making is more complicated in the matter of sibling opinions about adoptions.

3. Neither of the twin poles of "substance" and "code for conduct" that Schneider (1968) found to define white middle-class American notions of kinship in the early 1960s seems to have declined in importance; rather, each provides rallying points in the intensifying battles to define the family. At one extreme, Modell (1986) documents the vivid rhetoric of nature, blood, and biology used by a group of birth parents searching for children relinquished to adoption; in contrast, Weston (1991) documents the effort by gay and lesbian parents to claim legitimacy in very traditional terms for the unbiological families they have created. Often, actors involved in specific kinds of innovative kinship practices cull imagery from both "the order of nature" and the "order of law" (Schneider 1968:26–27). Ragoné, for example, in her study of surrogate motherhood, found that the agencies that provide this service appeal to the strength of the blood tie and the sanctity of the birth relationship on the one hand, and the unquestionable legitimacy of the nonbirth mother on the other, in their efforts to define surrogate motherhood as "less a departure from than as a reaffirmation of the importance of the family, parenthood, and biogenetic relatedness" (1994:2).

4. Court cases, public debate, and newspaper coverage provide only a limited and distorted view of actual American family practices; both individual families and particular ethnic communities, regions, religious groups, and social classes handle questions of relatedness in distinctive ways. Practices such as African American informal adoption within the kin network (Taylor et al. 1990:1002) and Chicana "nonexclusive mothering" (Segura and Pierce 1993) are cases in point. But the power of the courts to separate parents and children forcibly—however these categories are defined—reminds us of the penalties that can be inflicted on those who fail to conform to dominant ideologies of the family. Even when there is no official intervention, the public pathologizing of alternative kinship strategies within national discourse is painfully felt by those who practice them, as African American, Latino, and white working-class authors have documented.

At the same time, however, one does not wish to downplay the ability of those excluded from the dominant culture to resist its definitions. Martin (1987) found in her study of Baltimore women's experiences of giving birth that, while black and/or working-class women were subjected to greater abuses at the hands of hospital personnel, they were also, to some degree, more consciously critical of misogynist medical beliefs and practices than were better-educated and more privileged women. Stacey (1990) has argued that working-class families are more postmodern than their bourgeois counterparts, despite sometimes appearing to embrace traditional, even patriarchal, ideologies of the family.

5. This article is part of a larger project in which I present more extensive ethnographic and theoretical material. Here I concentrate on Zumbagua adoptions from the point of view of those who adopt, especially those who do not or cannot give birth: two men and an unmarried woman. In another paper I shift focus to the perspective of birth mothers who give up—or refuse to give up—their children. This allows me to talk about the most common form of adoption in the parish in which the infants of unmarried girls are raised by the girls' own mothers; it also permits more discussion of inherent conflicts. In the second paper I draw more extensively on Marxist anthropology and Marxist feminism. As I suggest toward the end of this article, Marxist theoretical conceptions provide a better starting point for the analysis of Zumbagua materials than do those of liberal anthropology; but the debate over how to include reproduction in the concept of the mode of production, while providing some fruitful directions, presents its own set of problems and inadequacies.

6. Two important volumes on adoption in Oceania are Carroll 1970 and Brady 1976. Howard and Borofsky summarize the Polynesian data on adoption as follows:

Both the form and the high frequency of adoption in Polynesia are remarkable, at least in comparison with Western norms. In the United States adoption is numerically insignificant, involving less than 3 percent of all children (United States Children's Bureau Division of Research 1964). Typical rates in Polynesia range from one-fourth to nearly the total population. For example, on Rangiroa atoll in the Tuamotus, Ottino (1970) reports that 35 percent of the households had adopted children resident within them and 73 percent of the households had been involved in an adoption transaction. Brady (1976b) reports that 30 percent of the households on Funafuti contain adopted children, and estimates rates of 50 to 70 percent on other islands in the Ellice group. . . . [O]n Nukunoor . . . Carroll (1970) was able to locate



only two married adults, representing just 2 percent of the resident population, who had no experience with adoptive parenthood. . . . Howard et al. (1970) found this to be the case in 28 percent of Hawaiian-American households studied. [1989:75]

7. The phrase “Juanchu’s children” may inadvertently create the image of the patriarchal family as a Zumbagua norm; but the Chaluizas were the exception in this regard. The long illness and early death of Juanchu’s wife had left the family without the matriarch who should have presided at Juanchu’s side. It was an absence he felt keenly.

8. For a fuller description of Tayta Juanchu’s family, and of Zumbagua kinship in general, see Weismantel 1988, especially chapter 6. I also discuss aspects of family structure in Weismantel 1989a. I mention heirs here quite deliberately; the traditional ultimate definition of full-fledged legitimacy is to be designated as a major heir of land. It is especially noteworthy in terms of my overall argument that Tayta Juanchu, typically for Zumbaguans of his generation, designated among his few primary heirs several adopted children, including one who is not even distantly related to him biologically, while his natural children with women other than his wife did not inherit anything. Changing economic patterns in the parish have complicated the question of inheritance, as the land is less valuable and there is less of it relative to an expanding population. Some parents consider it a wiser strategy to designate some children as heirs of land while using scarce cash to provide others with formal education in the hope that they will be able to support themselves in other ways; the money expended on this training is explicitly understood to be in lieu of inheritance in land.

9. The hegemonic family ideologies of Ecuador are of course not isomorphic with those of the United States, but they are complexly related on a number of levels. Their relationship is in some ways an antagonistic one that reflects the larger problematic governing U.S.-Latin American relations. Many middle-class Ecuadorians feel that their family traditions are endangered by the pernicious influence of a decadent North American culture. They point to the high value placed upon the extended family rather than the individual couple, as well as an emphasis upon close ties between parent and adult child specifically, and upon intergenerational relationships more generally, as important qualities of Ecuadorian family life being steadily undermined (Weismantel 1988:119–122). Nevertheless, middle-class families in the two countries share many characteristics, including a strongly held conviction about the importance of consanguinity.

10. It was frequently explained to me by urban Ecuadorians that the lack of boundaries in the indigenous family prevented achievement, by bringing the successful few down to the level of the lazy and incompetent majority. The indigenous extended family was pictured as a trap in which constant demands for loans and assistance, and pressures to spend money on nonessential consumption items associated with indigenous cultural life, prevented accumulation on the part of those who earned salaries (see Whitten 1985 for an example of comparable thinking in the Oriente of Ecuador). The solution envisioned was a companionate marriage between two like-minded and ambitious individuals who would turn their backs on their extended families, instead saving money to give only to their own, biological children. Adopting the illegitimate babies of relatives or the children of poverty-stricken neighbors, according to this scenario, is precisely the kind of practice that needs to be discouraged among better-off Indians. (It is in fact indicative of the amount of respect that the young nurse had for the Iza family that she refrained from expressing this larger criticism of his decision to adopt the boy.)

11. This point of view is not by any means limited to male theorists or to antifeminist writings but also characterizes some schools of feminist thought about motherhood as well (e.g., O’Brien 1989). Butler (1990) has criticized Kristeva’s writings about motherhood on these grounds.

12. Lévi-Strauss 1969: 29, 31, 479, 480, 489 et passim; see also Schneider 1984:172 and Yanagisako 1979:187. This discussion concentrates only on *Elementary Structures*, and not on the entire corpus of Lévi-Strauss’s work. Although Boon and Schneider (1974) make an excellent point in discriminating between various phases in the writings of this prolific and long-standing scholar, it nevertheless remains the case that most American anthropologists discussing his kinship theory have confined themselves primarily to this text; constraints of space require me to follow their example here.

13. The question of nature and culture in Lévi-Straussian thought, even just within *The Elementary Forms of Kinship*, is far more nuanced than Ortner admits. While Lévi-Strauss did insist that “the rules of kinship and marriage are not made necessary by the social state and that they are the social state itself, reshaping biological relationships and natural sentiments, . . . and compelling them to rise above their original characteristics” (1969:490), his ruminations about nature and culture, taken in their totality, grant neither final transcendence to culture, nor immanence to the dichotomy itself. His assertion that the contrast between nature and culture is “neither a primeval fact, nor a concrete aspect of universal order,” but “rather an artificial creation of culture” (1969:xxix), has been much quoted; he goes on to speculate that despite human attempts to assert the dominance of their culture over nature, ultimately, “the interrelationship between nature and culture does not favour culture to the extent of being hierarchically superimposed on nature and irreducible to it” (1969:xxx).

Ultimately, this dialectical approach to the relationship between nature and culture is more workable as a starting point for feminist analysis than Ortner’s own position. Lévi-Strauss rarely discusses questions of gender directly; they are typically implicit rather than explicit in his work. And while much of his work is hardly feminist in conceptualization, the frequently expressed criticism that he denies women agency is not universally true. In the conclusions to *Elementary Structures* he distinguishes between what he, like Ortner, sees as a universal patriarchal ideology, implicit in symbol and language, and a quite opposite reality. For

Lévi-Strauss, whatever meaning may be given to “women in general,” each woman is always, in actual fact, “a person . . . a generator of signs . . . never purely what is spoken about,” but also one who speaks (1969:xx). While Ortner strives for a similar position from which to discriminate the reality of women’s potential from the myths that underwrite their subordination, the lack of a dialectic in her reading of myth leaves the reader at a loss to imagine an alternative to patriarchy.

14. A complete bibliography of this debate and its many participants and versions would be impossible. Other versions of the same positions have been held over the years by, among others, Barnes (1961), Beattie (1964), and Needham (1960) on one side, and Gellner (1987[1973]), Keesing (1975), Lounsbury (1965), A. Strathern (1973:23), and Scheffler and Lounsbury (1971) on the other. More recent feminist reformulations have tended to cite Schneider as their primary influence in arguing a social constructivist position (see, for example, Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Delaney 1986).

15. I do not mean to imply that these actions are completely unimportant in all cases; often—but not always—they are taken into account by the judge in making a decision. *Once the verdict has been pronounced*, however, they become meaningless unless and until another official finds them significant.

16. Delaney (1986) and Shore (1992:296) review the debate on this question.

17. See Costales and Costales 1976; Weismantel 1988:38–86. For a well-known literary description of the Ecuadorian system of *huasipungaje* servitude as it operated in the 20th century, see also Icaza 1953.

18. These societies fought against other threats as well. Euro-American kinship categories themselves are explicitly and implicitly ideological constructs that act to enforce heterosexuality; Weston (1991) has recently written of the contrast between the “straight” notion of the biological family and an oppositional category embraced by many members of the lesbian and gay community, which she calls “families we choose.”

19. My liking for those I know in Zumbagua and my admiration for their ability to survive and to create an indigenous society despite enormous obstacles are readily apparent in my writings and are things for which I do not apologize. I share the belief of Binford and Campbell (1993:13–14, 21, note 18) that an openly sympathetic, politically engaged form of postmodern ethnography, without claiming “either scientific or political neutrality as its guideposts,” is the most useful project possible for those of us writing about the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

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## debate

### nourishing kinship theory: a commentary on Weismantel's "making kin"

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In her article Mary Weismantel aims to "look at contemporary Zumbagua kinship, not as a set of facts to be interpreted using 'our own' theories, but rather as a theory and a practice in its own right" (p. 687). Although the goal is admirable, its achievement is undermined by some of her own assumptions.

Weismantel demonstrates that the framework of classic kinship theory presupposes the foundational primacy of nature, blood, and biology in the definition of kinship and that this makes it difficult to comprehend adoption, which contravenes the logic of biology altogether. Consequently, she argues, the opposition central to Euro-American kinship theory between a primary, essentialized, biological base (nature) and a secondary, jural and historical social edifice (culture) is totally inappropriate to the analysis of Zumbagua kinship theory.

It is therefore puzzling that in presenting this critique she simultaneously reproduces the same opposition in her analysis. She frequently evokes a distinction between symbols, ceremony, disembodied ritual, words, metaphors, documents, the jural, the logocentric, the social, and the spiritual, on the one hand, and the material, physical, biological, and corporeal, on the other (pp. 694–695). Although the explicit purpose of Weismantel's article is to transcend these