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Book Review

Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship. Susan McKinnon & Fenella Cannell, eds. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press. 2013. ISBN 978-1-938645-01-3 360 pp Price \$39.95 (Paper)

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Vital Relations is an edited volume by a group of professionally senior anthropologists. Their major argument is that conceptualizations of Euro-American modernity have long rested on presuppositions about pre-modern and modern societies where kinship is central to the former and erased, sidelined, or subsumed by more powerful social forms in the latter. Through historical processes of epistemological "domaining," kinship was separated from politics, law, economics, science and religion. Ethnographic research confounds this separation, and the contributors consider how kinship has grounded, interpenetrated, and fomented social, political-economic, and religious change. The second chapter by Susan McKinnon anchors these introductory claims by tracing how a quasi-evolutionary model of kinship influenced late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropological theories, positing that pre-modern societies structured by kinship systems and obligations progressed toward modern, secular societies structured by impersonal contract. To show this, she describes how certain forms of kinship like cousin marriage and sibling exchange were central the expansion of Western corporate entities, but were increasingly stigmatized as such forms "became inappropriate—indeed, scandalously out of place—in a world whose progressive modernity was measured by the standard of their presumed separation" (54-55), that is, the separation of kinship and economy. Like McKinnon, each of the volume's authors' then pays close attention to kinship in their respective cases so to render these categorical domains untenable and unstable.

While the lucid writing and theoretical overview of kinship is impressive, the related categories of age, aging, generation, life course, and life cycle do not appear in the index, and none of the authors take these topics as central to their arguments. Anthropologists of aging and the life course, cross-cultural gerontologists, and interested practitioners will have to sift more carefully through each case to unearth what the authors' claims about modernity and kinship might warrant for their own topical concerns. Thus, the focus of this review is to point out select chapters from the total eleven in *Vital Relations* for Anthropology and Aging readers in which they might find some initial ground to engage their age-related interests. These most relevant chapters interestingly involve thematic intersections of temporality, descent, and ethics.

Using Mormonism as her case, Fenella Cannell critiques David Schneider's analytic separation of blood and law in American kinship, "since Mormon ontology does not oppose the material and the immaterial to each other in any simple fashion" (225). One might read her case through a life course lens, to consider how social relations and family formations spiritually extend beyond the mortal life of an individual person. Contemporary Mormon ideas about

reproduction, adoption, and marriage, for example, account for children's premortal belonging in the world and the possibility of continued familial reproduction after death in the "celestial kingdom" (227), posing a distinctive "time horizon" (236) for intergenerational continuity within church families. Thus the religious temporality of Mormonism compels scholars to rethink how relatedness is made through time and across spiritual and physical worlds, and how people understand and envision themselves to change vis-à-vis others along that way.

Similarly, Danilyn Rutherford jumps off from the cliché of "what about the children" to investigate a "rhetoric of descent" within popular environmental discourses, which says resource (mis-)management in the present will potentially undo conditions for and relations with future generations. Are these children and future generations doomed due to our mistakes, or are they our salvation? Such discourses entail ideas of potential rupture between present and the future populations and "elicits an intergenerational form of what David Hume called 'sympathy': the bringing of another's passions and perspectives into intimate proximity with one's own" (262). Such rhetorical moves also push us to consider how different notions of the future are constructed and collocated, and she contrasts two examples of temporality using Rupert Stasch's discussion of future-oriented kin relations in Korowai, West Papua, and Cormac McCarthy's literature about post-apocalyptic survivorship. Her overall analysis suggests that future children and generations are not the only ones who are potentially doomed. "A broader vision of ethics and temporality" (281), she notes, forces us to acknowledge our own participation—or perhaps self-destruction—in shaping the world today and the world yet to come, as well as the ways our successors might dwell in it.

Michael Lambek sees kinship as a series of ethical, performative acts, pointing out later in his chapter that these acts continue across the "life cycle." In this account, kinship is both "immoderate"—meaning that it beholds a "surfeit of meaning, relations, and sentiment" and symbolizes a "wholeness that is always already compromised or lost" (242-243)—and "immodern"—meaning that while it was as certainly subsumed by modernist domains of law and economy, it has also been reconfigured by authority and power in historical epochs other than modernity. Indeed, he suggests that, "every generation looks back with nostalgia to the imagined richness and interaction experienced by the preceding generation" (243), pointing out how social differences and similarities consistently involve and are remade through kinship acts. In contrast to modernist, static definitions of persons or groups, difference, similarity and identity are relational and more fluid, and he invokes the "life cycle" to give this fluidity a temporal scope. In his account, however, the life cycle is relatively undefined and seems to be taken as a given (248-249), rather than one constructed via the intersecting forces and subjectivities of a particular historical era. I think, following Jason Danely and Caitrin Lynch (2013:4), this approach would productively ask instead how "the individual's life-course experiences and the social, cultural, and historical structures and meanings that shape the life course" or kinship for that matter within the scope of modernity, "interact with and permeate each other."

Finally, it is fair to offer brief descriptions of a few other chapters for their potential topical relevance to issues of age, life course, and generation. Sylvia Yanagisako shows how Italian families' fashion businesses expand transnationally in China while maintaining lineal solidity, a business model their Chinese counterparts find ambiguous. Elana Shever argues that kinship is central to understanding modernist histories of Argentinian nationalism and oil industries, detailing how the political economy of paternalism assured social reproduction for workers' families. Lastly, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, using the case of anthropologist Lewis Henry

Morgan's extended family, argues that professional and personal projects of genealogy emerged in the post-Civil War United States alongside legal concerns about who was a free person and who was enslaved. Besides her chapter's wonderful use of archival images and the lovely book cover by the Singh Twins, other figures supplementing the rich ethnographies would be appreciated.

Taking cue from the introduction's title "The Difference Kinship Makes," the next step might be to ask what "the difference aging or life course makes" to a project of rereading kinship through a deconstruction of modernity narratives. Lambek notes in his chapter that under modernity, "family" surpassed "kinship" as an object of regulatory concern, but Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham (2007:2) remind us that age and generation link "world historical economic and social change," like modernity, "to intimate spaces of caring and obligation within the family." Indeed, as kinship and notions of it transformed under conditions of modernity, we might presume that similar transformations occurred surrounding ideas of aged persons, bodies and the life course and the practices that rendered such ideas concrete. Describing how this occurred through and beyond politics, economy, law and religion, as *Vital Relations* has asked for kinship, is the task set for contributors to *Anthropology and Aging* and similar venues.

Cole, Jennifer, and Deborah Durham

2007 Age, Regeneration, and the Intimate Politics of Globalization. In *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy*. Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham eds. Pp. 1-28. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Danely, Jason, and Caitrin Lynch

2013 Transitions and Transformations: Paradigms, Perspectives, and Possibilities. In *Transitions and Transformations: Cultural Perspectives on Aging and the Life Course*. Caitrin Lynch and Jason Danely, eds. Pp. 3-20. New York: Berghahn.