

THOMAS SCHWEIZER and DOUGLAS R. WHITE (eds.), *Kinship, Networks, and Exchange*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, xi + 337 p.

There was a time in anthropology, a long time, when the collection data on and the analysis of kinship systems were assumed to be essential and reached a sophisticated level of intellectual argument. Indeed, some experienced anthropologists claimed, at least half seriously, that the one thing that characterized the discipline and distinguished it from other social sciences was the study of kinship. That specialization seems to have slipped away into near-obscurity in recent decades. Another anthropological concern, during a much shorter period—roughly the 1960s—was network analysis, applied to both kinship and other sociocultural investigations. That too faded out.

The editors of this new symposium explain that its purpose is "to help revitalise the study of kinship and exchange" (1). By implication, the same is true for network analysis. Of course, the anthropological concern for kinship never quite vanished, but it languished for want of fresh concepts, methodologies and interests and in the face of burgeoning concern with philosophical, cultural and cognitive matters.

After its fairly brief appearance, when it never reached full mainstream status in anthropology, network analysis did virtually vanish. Its limitations seemed too frustrating. It required highly detailed field data that all too many anthropologists did not have. It looked as if it were restricted in its application to only small populations: to extend beyond that required a knowledge of mathematics that the large majority of anthropologists did not possess. Further developments have largely been kept up by economists and sociologists: for example, in journals containing papers full of algebraic and statistical manipulations that sometimes seemed, perhaps wrongly, not to relate to concrete social life.

During the 1990s, however, some anthropologists began to develop a renewed interest in kinship and marriage and in the application of network analysis. This book is a product of that ongoing renaissance. In typically anthropological fashion, it comprises ethnographic essays (14 in all, with minimal editorial introductions), each on a separate society in various parts of the non-Western world, and each with its own structure and culture, its own peculiar processes and its own problems  
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for description and understanding. It is in many ways an excellent set of partial ethnographies, fine examples of the high art of empirical and analytical ethnography in the discipline. It is not always an easy book to read because of the marked technical nature in parts of most of the essays. Unfortunately, the editors and contributors do not explain some of their key concepts and methods sufficiently, probably assuming that these have been well discussed elsewhere and are available to interested scholars. For example, do most anthropologists understand graph theory, or statistical methods of block modeling or PGRAPH? Moreover, is there now sufficient consensus as to what can most usefully be meant by, say, personal network or partial network and other such concepts, which tended to bedevil the application of networks three decades ago? Let me emphasize that I do not say this in order to belittle this book nor to deter anthropologists from reading it and turning to this fertile renewal of earlier interests. Indeed, anthropologists, whether as researchers or teachers, are urged not to neglect this work and its implications. These essays are not only commendable in their own right but they demonstrate the rich potential of renewed, intensive study of kinship and marriage and the network approach. Although there are no examples from the "Western" world or from radically changing societies (nor from non-kinship contexts), the possibilities are clear. This is an important rung in a ladder leading to intellectual understanding and to improved field research.

As one pair of the essayists put it, after a brilliant reworking of Leach's Pul Eliya data: "Instead of taking kinship as a normative or moral order, network analysis . . . relies, as it were, on an 'outside' view of kinship—mapping out the cumulative effects of actual or past behaviours—as well as on detailed case material about actual people [and] events" (84). Such a declaration may not be to the taste of some contemporary anthropologists, no doubt, but for those who continue to be concerned with actual behaviours, with what people do, as well as with cultural meanings, these essays offer good practical examples of a mode of operation applicable to all kinds of ethnographic interests.