

## FOREWORD

The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures were originally conceived in 1961 by Bernard Cohn, who was then chair of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Rochester. A founder of modern cultural anthropology, Morgan was one of Rochester's most famous intellectual figures and a patron of the university; he left a substantial bequest to the university for the founding of a women's college. The lectures named in his honor have now been presented annually for over fifty years and constitute the longest-running such series in North America. Morgan's monograph *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*, published in 1871, inaugurated the systematic cross-cultural study of kinship. Morgan's other two main areas of interest concerned the ethnography of Native North America, *The League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (1851), and the comparative study of civilizations, *Ancient Society* (1881).

It was to explore the way these interests had been developed by the discipline of anthropology over the subsequent decades that the first three Morgan Lecturers were selected. Meyer Fortes delivered the first full set of Morgan Lectures in 1963, which resulted in his monograph *Kinship and the Social Order* (1969). This was followed by lectures by Fred Eggan on Native North America in 1964, which resulted in his monograph *The American Indian: Perspectives for the Study of Social Change* (1966), and by Robert Adams on ancient Mesopotamia and Mexico in 1964, which resulted in his monograph *The Evolution of Urban Society* (1966).

As the fiftieth anniversary of the first Morgan Lectures approached, the Department of Anthropology decided to invite a series of three lecturers to speak on the same set of topics as the first three. In 2011, Professor Marisol de la Cadena delivered the annual lecture on the subject of indigenous politics in the Andes. In 2013, Professor Peter van der Veer delivered the annual

lecture on contemporary understandings of the value of comparison. The present volume is based on the Lewis Henry Morgan Lecture that Professor Janet Carsten delivered at the University of Rochester on November 7, 2012, and the workshop held the following day. The formal discussants at the workshop included Eleana Kim and Sherine Hamdy, both now at the University of California, Irvine; and Ayala Emmett and Ann Russ, both at the University of Rochester.

Professor Carsten's monograph illustrates many of the transformations that the study of kinship has undergone over the past fifty years. Her research on the fluid meanings of blood in the highly technical and modern setting of Malaysian hospitals combines the concern of classical British social anthropology with kinship as a form of morality; of American cultural anthropology with kinship as a domain of symbols and meanings that are particular to each culture; and of science and technology studies with the processes by which modern societies attempt to purify social life into the separate domains of kinship, politics, economics, science, and religion.

By following the meanings of a single natural symbol as it flows from one "domain" to another, Carsten is able to call into question many assumptions that have guided social research in Malaysia. As she points out, most researchers focus on one or another of Malaysia's ethnic groups, which include the Muslim Malays, the predominantly Buddhist Chinese, and the predominantly Hindu Indians. This overlap between "race" and religion, and the way these categories are reproduced in an essentialized way by government policy and the media, makes it all too easy for the social analyst to accept these categories uncritically when conducting research.

In fact, very many—and possibly most—urban Malaysians work alongside members of other ethnicities on a daily basis, and the degree to which they have come to share similar sets of attitudes and values is a matter to be determined empirically. This is the methodological advantage of following a symbolically charged substance like blood as it flows from one body through a multicultural techno-sociological apparatus into other bodies. Each ethnic group has its own particular practices regarding the preparation, sharing, and consumption of food; rules relating to kinship, marriage, and childbirth; and long-standing political values and affiliations. Despite this sociocultural pluralism, everyone regards blood as a substance derived from individuals who have their own reasons for donating

blood and as a substance that can give life to any member of the whole human community.

Carsten concludes by arguing that the social and affective relations that are formed between coworkers of diverse ethnic backgrounds in even the most sterile laboratory environments are a necessary condition for the successful functioning of the Malaysian medical system as an integrated whole. More generally, she shows how the sharing of blood with the community at large is one of the ways in which Malaysia has become a modern nation whose citizens perceive themselves to be related to each other partly through idioms of kinship and family. In Malay terms, being *saudara* (kin) is derived from being of one blood—*satu* (one) and *darah* (blood)—according to at least some of her interlocutors’ etymology of a Malay term for siblingship that is often used for kinship in general.

It is a testament to the fluidity of the meanings of blood and kinship that an alternative etymology of *saudara* derives the term from the Sanskrit words *saha-* (together) and *udara* (womb), meaning uterine sibling. Following this etymology would lead us away from the concept of kinship as the sharing of a common substance and toward the concept of kinship as a form of sociality derived from the sharing of a common space such as a womb, a house, or a tomb, a notion that is found widely throughout the Austronesian language area. But as Carsten demonstrated in her earlier work on Malay kinship in a rural village on the island of Langkawi, *The Heat of the Hearth* (1997), there is no necessary conflict between these two meanings of *saudara*. Blood is held to be derived from the transformation of food, particularly breast milk and rice, and so the shared blood of kinship can be acquired through commensality within a shared domestic space. Similarly, in urban Malaysia, and perhaps in many other ethnically plural societies, the acquisition of a shared sense of national identity may occur through commensality and other forms of sociality within a shared workplace. It is one of the great merits of this monograph that it directs our attention to the way these micro-sociological interactions form the basis on which macro-sociological forms of solidarity such as shared national cultures may be either generated or undermined.

THOMAS GIBSON

Editor, Lewis Henry Morgan Monograph Series (2007–2013)

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