CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF KINSHIP AND COMPADRAZGO IN LATIN AMERICA

RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENCE AND THE INDIVIDUAL: A RURAL PANAMANIAN COMMUNITY. By STEPHEN GUDEMAN. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976, Pp. 274. $18.75.)

COMPADRINAZGO: RITUAL KINSHIP IN THE PHILIPPINES. By DONN V. HART. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1977. Pp. 256. $12.50.)

ESSAYS IN MEXICAN KINSHIP. Edited by HUGO G. NUTINI, PEDRO CARRASCO AND JAMES M. TAGGERT. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976. Pp. 256. $14.95.)

The investigation and analysis of kinship long has been among the central concerns of anthropology as a scientific discipline. Furthermore, an understanding and appreciation of the role played by kinship in human social life has been one of the major contributions of the discipline to the corpus of knowledge generally referred to as the literature of the social sciences. Thus it is surprising that for Latin America, an area whose investigation anthropologists helped to pioneer, and who were amongst the first scholars to devote themselves to its specialized study, there have been so few studies of kinship. For this reason the three volumes being reviewed make a welcome contribution. Unfortunately, however, each, in its own way, represents far less than the best of the anthropological tradition with which its author or editors identify.

Anthropology, as George Ritzer (1975) contends for its sister discipline sociology, is a multiple paradigm science. This means that there is no single paradigm, based on a single metaphor or image of the world, that orients all or even most practitioners in the field. Instead, there are several competing positions engaged in what may be thought of as a struggle for supremacy. One of these derives from the thinking and writing of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and his students. In the period just before World War II it came to be referred to as British social anthropology, to contrast it with the anthropology using culture as its master concept that had developed in North America under the leadership of Franz Boas and his students. The root metaphor of social anthropology is the organism, with emphasis on operation and function. Society is viewed as if it were an organism and the task of the anthropologist was to identify its structures and to analyze their functioning.

Most of the field research done by social anthropologists into the early postwar period was conducted in Africa, south of the Sahara. Later, and to a lesser degree, anthropological investigation oriented by the view of society as an organism—which in its application in other social science disciplines came to be

referred to as structural-functionalism—was conducted in the islands of the Pacific and in parts of Asia. The numerous studies of tribal and other groups in Africa pointed up the importance of kinship as a, if not the, major dimension of the social structure of the societies examined. Before long, leading social anthropologists, in an effort to reach tentative generalizations that might serve as hypotheses to be tested in other parts of the world, were equating kinship with social structure. Consequently, younger social anthropologists, no matter where they went to conduct research, looked to kinship to provide the basic structure for the social life they were investigating.

By the late 1960s, however, strong criticisms were being raised against structural-functionalism and its dependence on the organic analogy. Foremost, of course, was the inability of the framework to deal adequately with change, which by then had come to be of greater interest than stability and order to a new generation of scholars. Within social anthropology there also was a reaction against the way in which both culture, conceived of as the symbolic dimension of human life, and the individual had been neglected due to the excessive concern with social structure and function. One development within social anthropology, therefore, was a growing interest in symbols and meaning as can be seen, for example, in the writings of Sir Edmund Leach (1961a), Mary Douglas (1973), and Victor Turner (1974).

Stephen Gudeman, a student and a disciple of Leach, went to Panama in the late 1960s with an interest in both structure—which meant kinship—and symbols and their meaning. His *Relationships, Residence and the Individual: A Rural Panamanian Community* is the result of some eighteen months' fieldwork oriented by those interests. His objective in the book is to explain kinship structure—including *compadrazgo*—as it manifests itself in the local community in terms of symbols. He does this quite admirably perhaps for an audience of social anthropologists sympathetic to his approach. Latin Americanists, however, might be upset not only by the static, functionalist framework employed, but more so by the distortions in the analysis of Panamanian society used to make his case. In his defense, Gudeman is not really interested in Panama or Latin America as a region. Los Boquerones is a community that he wishes to present as comparable with other communities and peoples studied by social anthropologists. The difficulty is that the Nuer, the Tallensi, the Tikopia, and the other classic cases used for comparison by social anthropologists were—at least as presented in the literature—self-contained isolates. Hence, to make his presentation and analysis comparable with the studies of his mentors and others in the tradition, he must present the *campesinos* of Los Boquerones as if they were an isolate independent of national Panamanian society. And to do this he must distort and take liberties with his data.

Had he simply indicated that he wished to use Los Boquerones *as if* it were comparable to other societies described in the literature of social anthropology, he could have spared himself and his readers much misdirected effort. Instead, he presents two chapters ostensibly locating the residents of Los Boquerones within the politico-administrative and economic arrangements of

Panama. In both cases he concludes that the residents of the community are so marginal as to in fact be an independent isolate. Unfortunately, the facts contradict his contention.

In chapter 2 he presents a liberal, democratic model of electoral politics to argue that "From the *campesinos'* standpoint the voting practices undermine the conception of popular representation and effectively remove them from political participation" (p. 18). To this he adds a footnote arguing further that even when the campesinos participate, as they did in 1968 after he left the community, their candidate was deposed, as had happened before, by the National Guard or police. This misunderstanding of Panamanian and Latin American politics—actually an ethnocentric superimposition of Anglo-American political models on Panamanian data—enables him to conclude that the campesinos of Los Boquerones are an independent isolate. Had Gudeman been familiar with recent contributions by political scientists and anthropologists working in Latin America, or had he faced up to the implication of some of the events he himself reports, and to which I shall turn in a moment, he might have questioned this conclusion. But to make his case meaningful and comparable in the tradition of social anthropology, he concludes that Los Boquerones is an isolate.

In chapter 3 he locates his subjects economically. He begins by stating that "The villagers have a 'household economy' in that the production, distribution and consumption functions are focused upon and occur within the household group" (p. 26). He goes on to add, however, that "In times past the economy was based almost entirely on subsistence, slash-and-burn, farming, but within the last ten years the people have moved toward a mixed system of subsistence and market production" (p. 26). But from there on he says very little about the market-oriented activities, which, according to studies done in other parts of Latin America, most probably articulate his "isolated" campesinos with the national and international economy.

Gudeman, unfortunately, is trapped by the structural-functional orientation of the social anthropology he is trying to modify by the addition of symbolic analysis. Although he really wishes to criticize social anthropologists for their deficiencies, his book falls flat because he is unable to extricate himself from the static framework of the tradition. The people he studied, it appears, were undergoing a rather dramatic transformation during the very period Gudeman was studying them. His functionalist orientation, however, even with the addition of symbols and meaning, prevented him from reporting what was happening. Consequently, his book paints a picture of a stable social system maintained by symbols and meanings that appear to have persisted for centuries. In fact, however, as he tells us in the preface, the life of the people and their community were in the midst of change: "Much has changed in Panama," he writes, "since my original eighteen months of fieldwork in 1966–67. The current revolutionary government has taken a new interest in the economically depressed areas of the nation. On a brief visit to Panama in 1974 I found that the economic base of Los Boquerones had been transformed. A land area that once consisted of savanna, forest and subsistence crops is now completely devoted to the raising of sugar

cane—a crop financed and milled by a government-sponsored co-operative" (pp. xi-xii).

The residents of Los Boquerones, it turns out, were in fact an interdependent part of the political economy of Panama and as such were brought progressively into the national and international market system. Gudeman, however, writes as if it was not so, presenting us with a picture of an isolated community unaffected by external factors. He then proceeds to examine the symbols and meanings that supposedly account for and make understandable the assumed static social structure of the residents of the local community.

Chapter 4 is an interesting examination of the beliefs the campesinos hold with respect to God, the devil, and the saints. In it, Gudeman, drawing upon Leach's (1961b, 1962, 1967) interpretation of Genesis, sets the stage for what is to come later on. Chapter 5 then examines the images and assumptions made about the individual. In chapters 6 through 11 Gudeman examines aspects of domestic life. The reader might expect that in these one hundred pages he will find a description of domestic life in Los Boquerones. For the most part he does not. Instead, Gudeman engages in definitional polemics with his more established colleagues in social anthropology. A chapter will begin, for example, with a definition, i.e., household, family, etc., presented by some authority. Gudeman then argues that the definition does not fit the situation in Los Boquerones. The data, which are often difficult to follow because of this negative presentation, are then used to develop a new definition. Simple description would have clarified the presentation and made the book less tedious.

Chapters 12 and 13 on compadrazgo are of interest, for here the author brings together his major argument. Domestic life within the household is seen as following from one set of orientations, while compadrazgo is derived from another. Men and women, Gudeman argues, are believed to be different and complementary, ideas rooted in the Roman Catholic view of the world. They are joined in mating relationships, with the differences in their natures worked out within the household which is characterized by a sharp division of labor and expectations based on sex and age. Children are the most valued product of what is taken to be the private and natural domestic relationship between a man and a woman.

In contrast with adults who carry the guilt of original sin, children are pure. But for them to become social, and a part of the moral community, they must become a part of the church. To be baptized they need sponsors, who then may be thought of as their spiritual parents who raise them in the sacred domain as their natural parents raise them in the secular arena. Compadrazgo, then, is taken by Gudeman to be sacred and public in contrast with kinship and domestic life which is private and natural. But whereas the logic of the belief system throws paired men and women together in separate households, the baptism of the children resulting from their natural interaction, by means of compadrazgo, compels relationships between what otherwise would be isolated domestic units. The social structure of the community for Gudeman, then, is the combination of kinship and compadrazgo which stems from a cognitive dichotomy of the world.

The symbolic oppositions are brought together in these two institutions making social life complete.

The analysis and interpretation is interesting. Had it been presented as a short paper, without the mistaken attempt to present the residents of Los Boquerones as an independent isolate comparable with other classic cases in social anthropology, and without the tedious polemics and arguments, it might have been a welcomed contribution. As a book, however, its merits are outweighed by the tedious and erroneous arguments used to make the case in a manner consistent with the tradition of social anthropological writing.

In contrast with Gudeman's detailed analysis of symbols and meaning in the social life of a single group, Donn V. Hart in his *Compadrinazgo, Ritual Kinship in the Philippines*, is concerned with a phenomenon in general rather than with life in a region or community. The implicit imagery used in the book is that found in Plato's (1901, book 7) classic parable of the cave. *Compadrinazgo*, which Hart uses to combine in a single concept both *padrinazgo* (spiritual godparenthood) and *compadrazgo* (ritual co-parenthood), is viewed as a reality that cannot be confronted and understood directly. It is taken to be "real" and to exist, but in the imagery of Plato's bound prisoners in the cave, the scholar is assumed to be able to see only its shadowy manifestations. The true reality can be known only through analysis, by working from the many manifestations of it reported in the literature. Hence we have the reason for including a book with this title in a review essay in a journal devoted to Latin American studies. Since the phenomenon is an essence that can be known only through its manifestations, Hart is not necessarily confined to the Philippines. Instead, he is obliged to examine all reported manifestations of the phenomenon. And since most descriptions of compadrinazgo have been made in Latin America, and to a lesser extent in Iberia, the Mediterranean, and in Eastern Europe, much of Hart's book is about Latin America, his title notwithstanding.

Although there is reference to some original research by the author, most of the data included in the volume are taken from the published works of scholars who have done research in Latin America, in the Philippines, in the Iberian Peninsula, and in other parts of Europe. After an introductory chapter in which he states his objectives, surveys the Philippine Islands, indicates where he did original research, and provides a brief historical sketch of compadrinazgo (drawing heavily on Gudeman's (1972) prize-winning essay), Hart turns to aspects of the history of Latin America and the Philippines in an effort to show that the pre-contact cultures had traditions that could have served as a basis for the later interpretation and syncretization of the Hispanic Catholic practices associated with baptism, confirmation, and marriage.

In chapter 3 the "beliefs and practices associated with those Catholic sacraments that establish ritual kinship ties" (p. 51) are described. Baptism, confirmation, and marriage are examined, with two short sections discussing the possibility of using the same persons as sponsors for each of the ritual occasions in an individual's life, or extending the net of ritual kinsmen. Chapter 4 then presents the terminology used in compadrinazgo relationships. This is

followed by two chapters examining the qualifications and procurement of ritual kinsmen and their responsibilities and privileges. Chapter 7 discusses the social dimensions of ritual kinship. Topics such as real and ritual kinship bonds, compadrinazgo and folk beliefs about incest, intensification and extension, social classes and social control (and compadrinazgo) are presented as subheadings.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the comparative structural and functional variations of compadrinazgo. After about forty-five pages of discussion based on data taken out of context from different world areas, Hart is forced to conclude that "Given the versatility and flexibility of the godparenthood complex, it is difficult to present, with accuracy, any one pattern of roles and behavior typical of most ritual kinsmen" (pp. 193–94). The sentence is an adequate summary of the book. A ninth chapter is added in which Hart examines some selected issues under headings such as kinsmen or nonkinsmen sponsors, social class and compadrinazgo, centrifugal-centripital aspects of compadrinazgo, and urbanization and compadrinazgo. (There are no summary and conclusions at the end; they have been given at the end of chapter 8.) Hart is left with extreme variability. He is unable to discern in the data brought together any single pattern of compadrinazgo.

The problem, I suggest, is in Hart's approach. To treat social phenomena as if we were dealing with a Platonic "truth," whose shadowy manifestations are all that we can know, is an outmoded and bankrupt approach. Compadrinazgo may be thought of more productively, for example, as a number of culturally diverse phenomena, historically related to be sure, but whose understanding and explanation is rooted in the decisions and choices of specific individuals working out their lives as parts of local communities that articulate with national and international systems. Hart as much as acknowledges this approach in a quote from Middleton on page 3, but then backs away, concluding with Middleton (1975, p. 461) that "*compadrazgo* has remained largely outside the pale of this theoretical orientation." In fact it has not; but those who have approached social phenomena in terms of decisions and choices of individuals treat compadrazgo as a manifestation or epiphenomenon of a series of transactions and exchanges and not as a phenomenon. As such, the subject is not easily classified in an index or a table of contents. Consequently, Hart, given his view of social reality, could not find his subject in their writings. Had he, he might have enlivened and enriched a dull and disappointing book.

Essays on Mexican Kinship is the product of a seminar at the 1969 meeting of the American Anthropological Association. For the general student it must be pointed out that as Hart's book was less about the Philippines than about Latin America, so this book is not really about Mexican kinship, at least as the general reader would think of it. What the editors and authors are interested in is the kinship systems of Indians and mestizos in Mexico who have been studied by anthropologists in the tradition of Robert Redfield's image of "the little community." The thrust of the introduction by the senior editor, Hugo Nutini, carries us full circle back to the persisting influence that British social anthropology exerts on the thinking of contemporary scholars.

The equation of kinship and social structure by some social anthropolo-

gists referred to above was made after working in parts of the world characterized by systems of unilineal descent. Mesoamerica, however, like the rest of Latin America, was characterized by the absence of unilineal descent. Instead, the kinship systems of the region, for the most part, were bilateral. In an effort to explain these bilateral systems, anthropologists began to think in terms of decisions and choices. In Mesoamerican anthropology this was typified by George Foster's (1961, 1963) presentation of the image of the dyadic contract as the basis of social organization. Nutini's objective in his introduction is to reject Foster and to turn Mesoamerican anthropologists to a search for unilineal descent systems.

> The notion that the organizing principles basic to community culture and society are structured along lines of dyadic relationships has not been at all conducive to the study of kinship, for it tends to restrict the operation of kinship to patterns of interaction which can best be expressed within the context of family structure, thereby disregarding corporate kin groups or networks of relationships which might be part of the kinship structure. The plain fact is that Mesoamerican anthropologists have tended to see not only family structure, but also *compadrazgo* and several other fields of social interaction, strictly in terms of dyadic relationships and without any awareness that dyadic relationships can be structured into multidyadic networks. Thus, the causes of the inadequacy of kinship studies in Mesoamerica stem from an intrinsic polarization in terms of kinship and territoriality and an emphasis on the notion of dyadic relationships, to the detriment of the concepts of system and network. (Pp. 6–7)

What he proposes then is that anthropologists go out and look for systems of unilineal descent in the little communities they study. "I must insist that the published literature is not an adequate gauge of the incidence of communities in which this approach* is warranted. My experience of Mesoamerican communities has led me to believe that kinship is still a pervasive principle, if only we redefine it correctly" (pp. 19–20).

He follows this with three prescriptions: (1) to reexamine the concepts of residence, locality, and territoriality; (2) not to be deceived by the apparent absence of kinship; and (3) to include ritual kinship, or compadrazgo, under the general rubric of kinship. This third point is elaborated by Henry Selby in chapter 2:

> We have always made the supposition that *compadrazgo* and kinship are logical contraries in some sense. The natives tell us this, and we map *compadrazgo* into our genealogical grids. As a beginning formulation in the structural study of kinship in Mesoamerica, I will suggest that kinship and *compadrazgo* are the same, or best treated the same. What kinship "is" and "does" in one context, *compadrazgo* "is" and "does" in another. If we attempt a compara-

*I.e., making kinship "the central principle of organization of community culture and society" (p. 19).

> tive study of kinship and *compadrazgo* (in Mesoamerica) taken as separate entities, then we are going amiss. Each is minimally defined in terms of the other. (Pp. 39–40)

In the first volume discussed in this essay, Gudeman does just what Nutini and Selby suggest. It results in the most valuable contribution of his book. Hart, by contrast, separates ritual kinship from kinship, treating it as an independent phenomenon. This leads to one of the major defects of his book. In spite of several good papers, especially those by Mercedes Oliveira, Eva Hunt, Dorene Slade and Timothy Murphy, *Essays in Mexican Kinship* is a disappointing book. But if senior editor Nutini's introduction is heeded by his fellow anthropologists working in Mesoamerica and the rest of the hemisphere, it will result in a further separation of anthropologists from the mainstream of Latin American studies. This unfortunate situation already is painfully evident in the three works reviewed.

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