THE STUDY OF KINSHIP SYSTEMS AND TERMINOLOGIES IN RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

A SHORT HISTORY AND THE CURRENT STATE OF A DISCIPLINE AT THE INTERSECTION OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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The paper traces the origin of kinship studies as a subdiscipline of ethnography in Russia and the former Soviet Union. It identifies three long-term trends in the study of kinship (typological, ethnosociological and ethnocultural) in the region and highlights the importance of evolutionary thinking and the conceptual distinction between content and manifestation in the study of kin terminological systems. It presents several illustrative studies that demonstrate how Russian and Soviet scholars have tackled these trends and conceptual principles in practice.

Teaching or writing a historiography of the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet Russian and East European social sciences to a Western audience is a challenging task. A diverse set of barriers – linguistic, cultural and political – have compounded over generations to produce a situation where influential Russian thinkers from the remote and recent past (such as the evolutionary biologist Kropotkin or the ethnologist and geographer Gumilev) are virtually unknown in the West because of the perceived (importantly, sometimes in Russia, sometimes in the West) density, foreigness or political bias of their ideas; others (such as Potebnia, Veselovsky, Bakhtin, Lotman, Chayanov, Vygotsky, and Shklovsky) get belatedly recognized in the West due to the valiant efforts of some English-speaking academics, but they still remain poorly integrated into general Western curricula. Still others, albeit known

(such as the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin or the Moscow School of Nostratic Studies), have either failed to break out of the intellectual fringes or sank therein after a period of mainstream success. An important goal, then, is to achieve timely and contextualized linguistic translation and cultural interpretation. This paper is an attempt to lift a veil off some of the historical and contemporary developments in the Russian anthropology of kinship for a Western audience.

One can confidently assert that by the mid-20th century, the anthropology of kinship (or "kinship studies" in the English-speaking tradition) came of age as one of the main subdisciplines of contemporary sociocultural anthropology. The objects of study have been kinship systems and kinship terminological systems, as well as the phenomenon of human kinship in its relationship to the forms of marriage and family, descent and filiation, forms of property and status inheritance, post-marital residence, age and gender categories and so on. The foundations for the social-scientific study of kinship were laid by the American lawyer and pioneer ethnologist, Lewis H. Morgan, who was the first to systematically analyze the phenomenon of kinship systems, the British logician Augustus De Morgan, who discovered the relational nature of kinship terms, the Swiss antiquarian Johann Bachofen and the less well-known Russian-German and Russian historians, legal historians and philologists, Johann Gustav von Ewers, Sergei Soloviev, Fyodor Buslaev and Petr Lavrovskii. Between 1826 and 1870, Von Ewers and Soloviev argued for a "kinship" stage in the development of Russian society and state rule (Ewers 1826; Соловьев 1847). Buslaev and Lavrovskii pioneered historical semantics by identifying "the root meaning" of Slavic kinship terms in a comparative Indo-European (Sanskrit) context (Буслаев 1848; Лавровский 1867). Their followers in Russia developed the sociological ideas of Morgan, the historical ideas of Von Ewers and Soloviev and the philological ideas of Buslaev and Lavrovskii to form, respectively, the social anthropological (referred to as "ethnographic" in the Soviet Union), historiographic and linguistic (ethnolinguistic) traditions in the study of kinship in Russia.

In Russian anthropology, it has been firmly established that both social anthropological and linguistic approaches to kinship are rooted in the epistemiological principle of differentiation between *content* and *manifestation* or, in other words, between kinship systems (as a system of social relations of kinship) and systems of kinship terminology (as an egocentric expression of those relations using the nomenclatures of kinship). Ethnologists (or social anthropologists) study kinship systems with regard to the domain of kinship content and linguists study kinship terms as the expression of that kinship content in a specialized lexico-semantic class of a given language. But since kinship content can be cognized only through the study of kinship manifestation, kinship terminologies become an object of study by ethnologists as well, with goal addressing the correlation between content and its manifestation (i.e., between kinship relations and kinship terms), or, in other words, those principles of kin grouping that turn individual kinship terms into a kinship terminological system. Historical linguists have specialized in the morphology, etymology and semantics of kinship terminologies in a given language, mostly for the sake of reconstructing proto-systems of kinship terminology.

Naturally, the reconstruction of proto-kinship terminological systems (exemplars are the reconstruction of proto-Mande, proto-Dravidian and proto-Tai

kinship terms) cannot proceed without engaging with linguistic comparativism, but Russian anthropologists of kinship are skeptical about its methodology and its lexico-semantic results. Classical Indo-European reconstructions of kinship terms came under harsh critique, while the Nostratic reconstructions were dismissed altogether. The fundamental methodological flaw attributed by social anthropologists to historical linguists is the failure of the latter to differentiate between *content* and *manifestation*, hence the unscientific nature of formal "laws" derived solely on the basis of phonology and the naive etymologies of kinship terms generated by these "laws." However, structural-linguistic tools such as componential, transformational and generative analyses are generally much better received and more widely applied due to their ability to maintain and explore the conceptual distinction between content and its manifestation.

Within the social anthropological tradition in Russia, 3 main approaches have emerged: typological, ethnosociological and ethnocultural. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

First, the typological approach involves: 1) the field recording and formal description of a kin terminological system; 2) the building of typologies of various structural features of kinship systems and kinship terminological systems (e.g., sibling terms, alternate generation equations, self-reciprocal terms, Crow-Omaha terminologies, etc.); 3) the placement of kinship terminological types into historical typologies of kinship terminological systems; 4) the elucidation of the universal principles and concrete mechanisms of transformation of one type of kinship terminological system (e.g., Iroquoian, Hawaiian/Generational, Crow-Omaha, Sliding-Generational etc.) into another and 4) the ethnogeographic mapping of kinship terminological types across world geographies.

Regarding the field recordings of kin terminological systems, Soviet and Russian kinship typologists have been privileged, in addition to having access to Western research, by being able to study languages, cultures and populations that have usually been inaccessible to Western ethnologists and are underrepresented in their samples and databases (especially, in regions such as Siberia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia). One of these descriptive "jewels" is the so-called "Siberian Generational" kinship type described by Russian students of kinship among Uralic and Altaic societies. Only recently has it received mention in an English-language publication.

Access to additional empirical sources of information enabled Russian and Soviet scholars to make progress in the typological modeling of kin terminological systems. In 1951 Dmitrii A. Olderogge, who went on to become a patriarch of Russian Africanistics, drew upon a large comparative dataset consisting of ethnographic material from West Africa, Polynesia, and Northeast Asia to support W.W.R. Rivers's argument against the Morganian thesis regarding the historical priority of the Hawaiian type of kinship terminologies (Ольдерогге 1983). In the 1960s-1970s, Mikhail V. Kryukov integrated the Morganian typology of kinship terminologies, based on the grouping of +1 Ascending Generation categories, with the typology of George P. Murdock based on the grouping of 0 Generation categories (Крюков 1968; 1972: 36-43). Vladimir Popov has used Murdock's database to circumscribe the phenomenon of co-presence of Crow-Omaha terms with Bifurcate

Merging, Hawaiian/Generational and Bifurcate Collateral kinship terminological types (Попов 1977). He has also noticed that different kinship terminological types (such as Crow and Omaha, Generational and Bifurcate Collateral, Lineal and Bifurcate Merging) tend to form mirror-like, or "chiral" pairs. A. E. Shinkuba (Шинкуба 1987) used an Abazin kinship terminology to criticize the validity of the "Sudanese" kinship terminological type. The definition of the "Sudanese" type, ./ Shinkuba argued, conflates the morphosyntactic properties of kinship terms (their "descriptive" nature, in this case) with the underlying principles of semantic grouping. Finally, in the late 1990s-2000s, German Dziebel (Дзибель 1997) showed that +1/-1 generation categories tend to evolve in a mirror-like manner relative to 0 generation categories: the former tends to deviate from Bifurcate Merging into the direction of Bifurcate Collateral, while the latter into the direction of its opposite, the Generational type.

Next, the ethnosociological approach aims at finding social determinants of kinship terminological systems. Among the social determinants of kinship systems, the topics that are the most popular among Russian social anthropologists – just like among their Western colleagues – are the determinants of kinship-based institutions (clan, community and family), marriage forms, forms of post-marital residence, and the so-called "sociological universals" such as the principles of sibling unity, lineage unity and alternate generation merging. In this line of research, correlations with gender-and-age stratification and forms of political organization have also been taken into consideration. What has traditionally set Russian and Soviet ethnologists apart is their unswerving interest in social evolution and the diachronic transformations of kin terminological systems. Pre-Soviet Russian social anthropology, Soviet ethnography and post-Soviet Russian anthropology are all characterized by a common understanding that kinship systems and forms of descent have undergone dramatic evolution over the course of human history. One of the earliest studies of kinship in the history of the social sciences, by Gustav von Ewers (1779-1830), entitled *The Ancient Law of the Russians in Its Historical Development* (1826), argued for an ancient kinship-based stage in the evolution of Russian society and state power succession that was later replaced by contract-based society and an individual pattern of state power succession. Von Ewers initiated an influential school of thought in Russian historiography called the "kinship theory of the origin of the Russian state" (*rodovaia teoriia*) that preceded Bachofen's, Maine's and Morgan's theories of social evolution, but by the end of the 19th century it was largely replaced by them in the minds of Russian ethnographers. In the Soviet times, the bulk of kinshp studies were directed towards identifying the social determinants of Bifurcate Merging and the reconstruction of ancestral ("primary" in the Russian tradition) kinship systems. In this regard, Marxism imposed a strict dogma whereby matrilineal kinship always historically precedes patrilineal kinship. In the 1960s-1970s, however, Soviet ethnographers actively debated the so-called "Australian controversy" that emerged when is was realized that Australian Aborigene kinship systems exhibited both matrilineal and patrilineal forms of descent in the context of the same appropriative, foraging-based economies. In the 1990s, Russian social anthropologists resolved the controversy by dismissing the primacy of matrilinearity in favor of the primacy of ancestral group-based ("lateral") descent (with bilateral, matrilateral and patrilateral

forms) instead of derived, genealogy-based ("linear") filiation (with matrilineal, patrilineal and bilineal forms). The central, epistemological distinction between *content* and *manifestation* has also been invoked in this research. Previously, Nikolai A. Butinov applied the *content*/*manifestation* logic to the evolution of the principles of post-marital residence and, in a discussion with American colleagues, he highlighted critical differences between matrilocal and patrilocal residence, on the one hand, and uxori- and virilocal residence, on the other hand.

From the point of view of the reconstructions of ancestral kinship systems of *Homo sapiens*, the most noticeable development in the Russian anthropology of kinship has been a discussion and critique of Nick Allen's "tetradic theory" (Аллен 1995), German Dziebel's hypothesis of pre-classificatory, "oecumenic" kinship systems (Дзибель 2005) and Nikolai A. Butinov's concept of "exogenous kinship." Butinov contrasted African with Oceanic models of kinship behavior: the former stress consanguineous kinship and marriage leading to the birth of offspring; the latter stress shared food and fosterage (Бутинов 1999).

With regard to the nomencaltures of kinship, the Social Anthropological approach to kinship studies has, in general, been one of treating the nomenclatures of kinship as a source of information about social history, including its earliest periods. Kinship terminological systems are considered to be historically heterogeneous systems whose structure reflects both past developmental stages and future tendencies, and so are considered to be rich information sources for the study of the early stages of social history. One of the main challenges involved in the reconstruction of social history on the basis of kinship terminological systems is methodological rigor. Robust methodologies are still work-in-progress and subjectivism and intuition still play a strong role. It also happens that modern kinship concepts are often extrapolated into the past, so that properties of modern, individualized, "derived" kinship systems are attributed to ancestral, classificatory systems (per Lewis H. Morgan) .

The problem of extrapolation is related to another problem, which has significance for research applications, namely the translatability of specific kinship terms in different languages in situations where the underlying kinship systems are vastly divergent. This entails a search for optimal semantic equivalents among different languages, as well as ways to neutrally and abstractly code kinship categories (e.g., graphical, geometric, numerical or alphabetical codings) that help avoid the distortions introduced in accounts regarding one kin terminological system due to the use of kinship terms derived from another kin terminological system (usually that of the researcher).

Over the past decade, another area of kinship studies has received growing attention among Russian social and cultural anthropologists. This is fictive (including ritual) kinship, specifically as practiced in various subcultures (e.g., Russian hippie groups), as well as blood-brotherhood, hospitality kinship (*kunachestvo*), fosterage (*atalychestvo*), godparenthood (*compadrazgo*), shipmate kinship and joking relationships. It is important to stress that in pre-colonial times the local use of fictive kinship, as in the case of West African "communities of jamu," gave rise to unified social and communicative domains comparable to local civilizations. Kinship was able to become the key building principle of these social and communicative

networks because only the metaphor of kinship is capable of expressing both hierarchical (vertical) and horizontal social relationships in which gender and age often play a bigger role than consanguineal kinship.

Lastly, the ethnocultural approach to kinship studies places kinship in its cultural and synchronic ethnolinguistic context. Among the ethnolinguistic phenomena impacting kinship terminological systems are teknonymy (naming after junior kin), geraiteronymy (naming after senior kin), necronymy (naming after dead kin), birth-order names and others. An important theoretical development is the acknowledgment that: 1) such broad lexical classes as ethnonyms, anthroponyms and kinship terms share important social and cultural properties in common that set them apart from other lexical items and make them subject to anthropological rather than just linguistic and logical analyses; and 2) that teknonyms, geraiteronyms, necronyms and birth-order names form a special sociocentric category of "kinship names" that occasionally replace egocentric "kinship terms" in speech.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the early 2000s witnessed the emergence, in Russia, of integrative approaches to human kinship. Scholars working at the intersection of kinship studies, political anthropology and legal anthropology identified alternative developmental pathways to statehood, conducted an analysis of kinship-like networks and showed that dynastic conflicts are often rooted in specific kinship structures. The gignetic (previously called "idenetic") theory of kinship was pioneered in Russia by German Dziebel (Дзибель 2001), who then continued its development in the U.S. (Dziebel 2007). Gignetics seeks to unite anthropological, linguistic and population genetic approaches to human kinship into a single theoretical paradigm.

This short excursus into kinship studies in Russia demonstrates that the so-called "crisis of kinship studies," both in Russia and the West, is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, the staunch advocates of kinship studies have been working steadfastly on deepening, broadening and strengthening the methodology and span of kinship studies. So there is no crisis here. These efforts have borne their fruit, as can be seen in the emergence over the past 20 years of a number of monographs and collected essays (see, for example, Testart 1996; Parkin 1997; Gould 2000; Dziebel 2007; Jones & Milicic 2010; Trautmann & Whiteley 2012; McConvell et al. 2013). In Russia, *Algebra rodstva* (Kinship Algebra) -- the only journal in the world specifically devoted to kinship studies -- has been actively published since 1995. A special graduate seminar on the "anthropology of kinship*"* has been taught at the St. Petersburg State University in an uninterrupted manner for more than 20 years.

On the other hand, Russian social sciences and humanities as a whole have experienced a crisis related to globalization and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. These macropolitical, economic and cultural events have resulted in the restructuring and reorientation of both fieldwork and analytical methods of anthropological inquiry. The weakening of academic interest in fundamental topics such as human kinship is a by-product of this crisis. Beginning with the mid-1980s, field ethnographers have been paying less attention to kinship systems and now the study of kinship terminological systems is a rare topic for a Ph.D. dissertation in Moscow or St. Petersburg. These days, kinship systems often play a secondary role in the studies of family and marriage, and many ethnological monographs published in

the past two decades have omitted them altogether. (Local national academic traditions within the Russian Federation [e.g., in the Caucasus] have been less affected by this decline in the volume of kinship publications.)

One of the reasons for the decline of interest in kinship studies among mainstream Russian academics is the current, general lack of interest in the evolution of human society and the reconstruction of the earliest phases of sociogenesis. Anthropology has its roots in the study of "primitive peoples", "exotic cultures" and "archaic societies". During the Soviet times, Marxism and Historical Materialism maintained and modernized those concepts and consequently kept kinship studies alive and well. But the collapse of Marxism and subsequent disenchantment in concepts like this have led to the decline of kinship studies as a mainstream academic pursuit. Russian scholars do acknowledge, however, the role played by kinship in the social organization of "traditional" and "neo-traditional" societies and they admit that without such knowledge, understanding their operating principles is impossible.

The complex nature of the subject matter and the formal coding of kinship relations provide another minor impediment to the mass re-involvement of Russian scholars in the study of kinship. In other words, it is true for both Russia and the West that, to quote from a recent review of the state of kinship studies, "kinship used to be described as what anthropologists do. Today, many might well say that it is what anthropologists do not do" (Sousa 2004: 265).

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