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The Re-enchantment of Kinship**Fenella Cannell**

American kinship is built on the same set of premises.... The relative in nature is at one extreme, the relative in law is at the other extreme. The first is but a relationship of nature, fundamental as that is. The second is but a set of artificial rules...for conduct, without substantive or natural base. But the blood relative, related in nature and by law, brings together the best of nature modified by human reason; he is thus the relative in the truest and most highly valued sense.

—*David Schneider, American Kinship: A Cultural Account*

This chapter is concerned with ways in which US Mormonism might reconfigure our understanding of American kinship and its articulations with religion and what we call “modernity.” Sociological and popular paradigms assume that modernity is characterized by the separating of aspects of life into the progressively objectified domains of politics, economics, religion, and kinship. In modernization stories, these disembedded domains are then ranked, with economics and politics viewed as becoming more crucial to the workings of the world than either religion or kinship.

Not all aspects of the complex relations between religion and kinship—or between either one of these and the state—can be addressed here. However, one framing context for this chapter is the secularization debates. Secularization theories are, of course, presented as an analysis of religion and its supposed withdrawal or diminishment in modernity. Its most positivist variants assert that religion declines both as institution and as experience, losing salience as increasing religious fragmentation relativizes the claims of any particular faith.¹ One response is to claim, with Charles Taylor (2007), that the phenomenological “normality” of the secular world is itself a historical artifact. Secularization theories do not usually explicitly address the question of kinship, although some critical interpretations

acknowledge a connection with the changing boundaries between state and private life (Casanova 1994:64) or with the implicit ideas of human nature adduced in secular law (Asad 2003:57–58). This chapter shares with others in this volume—most explicitly, Lambek and Feeley-Harnik but, implicitly, also Carsten, Shever, and Rutherford—the aim of shedding light on the complex interplay between the ideas and practices of kinship and the rhetoric and institutions of secularization.

The case of historical and contemporary Mormonism bears in several ways on these debates. First, it speaks to a moment in American political thinking when kinship came to be cast as “private,” definitions of what was permissible in public religion were becoming narrower, and the relationship between religion and public life was less transparent. Second, it highlights the fact that anthropological theories of kinship themselves have become unintentionally limited by unexamined assumptions about secularization. I focus, in particular, on the work of David Schneider and especially on his 1968 classic, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (2nd ed., 1980). I choose Schneider for several reasons. Although in many ways sui generis, Schneider’s account has enormously influenced at least two generations of anthropologists and sociologists of kinship. Schneider demonstrated the fundamental limitations of assuming that kinship studies could simply trace the interactions between those who are related by blood; instead, he stressed the ways in which the American category of “blood relative” is itself a complex symbol, composed by a folding together of culturally specific claims about humanity’s place in nature and the relationship between nature and law. The effects of Schneider’s work—and his recognition of the culturally made status of categories of natural substance and natural linkage—were far-reaching in kinship and gender studies, feminist anthropology, queer theory, sociology of the family, studies of new reproductive technologies, and the anthropology of the laboratory. It especially inspired those writing about the United States but was also widely taken to be a model for a loosely defined category of “Western kinship.”²

I choose Schneider also because I believe that the characteristic ahistoricism of his approach to kinship can be productively read against the empirical material on Mormonism I present. My argument is that Schneider’s central constitutive categories—the famous “blood” and “law” by which, for him, American kinship is identified as a symbolic system—cannot be decontextualized in the way that he assumes. Janet Carsten (2001:31) has acutely commented that Schneider’s category of blood is underspecified and that many different ideologies of blood may be present in America. I entirely concur with that insight, but I wish to frame it in a

particular way. I suggest that Schneider's terms have no meaning separable from specific historical referents and that, in the case of the United States, neither "blood" nor "law" has a meaning separable from the particular *religious* formations through which US modernity was constituted (Feeley-Harnik 1999, 2001a, 2001b, and chapter 8, this volume). This observation runs counter to Schneider's placement of religion as a purely second-order phenomenon in his discussion of American kinship—a positioning that reflects his own secularist assumptions, which, due to the influence of his work, reinforced the secularist assumptions of others. In a later section of the chapter, I illustrate some of what is entailed through the example of contemporary American Mormon ideas about adoption, understood as one privileged locus for observing the intersections between "blood" and "law."

THE RELIGIOUS CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN MODERNITY

For the first empirical section of this chapter, I rely in particular on the work of the historian Sarah Barringer Gordon (2002). Gordon provides an outstanding discussion of the development of the US Constitution in relation to nineteenth-century Mormonism. The key to this story is the sequence of Mormon attempts to establish legal status for the religious commandment of celestial marriage (religiously motivated polygamy) between the 1840s and the 1880s. None of these attempts was successful. Eventually and painfully, the Latter-day Saints (LDS) would relinquish plural marriage in exchange for Utah's recognition as a state in the union, following a new revelation to the then prophet and president, Wilford Woodruff.³

The commandment that some Mormon men were to practice celestial marriage was a revelation given to the founding prophet and leader of Mormonism, Joseph Smith Jr., in 1831. However, it was so repugnant to Smith's followers—almost all of whom came from Methodist and other mainstream Christian backgrounds—that it initially was kept secret from all but a few. Even Smith's wife, Emma, was not told (Brodie 1996; Newell and Avery 1984). Yet, the importance of the commandment was insisted upon by Smith and by the second prophet, Brigham Young. Paradoxically, the great sacrifice and difficulty required in order to live in plurality made it increasingly recognized as a legitimate mark of the spiritual elite and, by the 1850s, as the sign and trial of those destined for Mormon leadership. As has been clearly shown by historians (Daynes 2001), by no means all Mormons entered celestial marriage even at the height of the institution, but it occupied tremendous symbolic importance even for those who did not. Celestial marriage was also connected to the theocratic and millenarian

tendencies of early Mormonism because it was understood to be required of the Mormon faithful in preparation for the imminent return of Christ (Underwood 1993).

As Gordon adeptly shows, the specter of polygamy aroused a steady resistance in the American mainstream, but the grounds for opposition constantly shifted. In the earlier part of the century, polygamy stood as a proxy for the even more fraught issue of slavery; eventually, the federal government would refuse to allow the states latitude on either aspect of “domestic relations” (Gordon 2002:57). In the 1870s, one key rallying point against polygamy was the concern over rising national divorce rates. This focused on Mormons in Utah, where converts whose spouses did not also join the Saints were permitted ready divorce and remarriage within the faith (175). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, polygamy in Utah came to be associated in the mind of the American public with fears about the control of both property and votes by private cartels (217ff.).

Since the US Constitution supposedly guaranteed freedom of religious conscience, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that any marital arrangement justified by religion would be outlawed. However, the persecution of the Saints and their expulsion in 1839 from Missouri, whence they fled to Nauvoo, Illinois, had begun to undermine the Saints’ confidence in the powers of the Constitution to protect them. Federal law and the laws of individual states were in fundamental tension, and the theoretical federal protection of religious conscience proved unenforceable, given that mainstream public opinion in most states was against bigamy. Smaller and less well-organized religious groups making experiments in marital arrangements had existed for some time in the United States (Cross 1950), but the sheer numbers of Mormon converts and their success in making permanent settlements attracted greater attention, jealousy, and suspicion.

The prophet and founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith Jr., attempted to run for the office of US president as an alternative means to secure the Latter-day Saints’ ways of life, including polygamous marriage, but this attempt ended in and partially provoked his assassination at the Carthage jail in Missouri in 1844 (Gordon 2002:188; see also Bushman 2006). Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, then pursued legal security for the Saints through a succession of different means. When opinion once again turned against the Saints in Illinois and they were forced to abandon their town and temple at Nauvoo, Brigham Young took his followers to Utah with the intention of having the new Mormon settlements in the territory recognized as a state and thereby sheltering polygamy under a new state law that would enshrine Mormon principles as the wish of the majority.

The church's leaders began openly to acknowledge plural marriage from 1852, and this—combined with the growing population of Utah—provoked continued opposition. By 1856, the Republicans were building their campaign against the “twin relics of barbarism” said to exist in the United States: polygamy and slavery. In 1862, the Morrill Act passed by Congress declared bigamy illegal in all the states of the union, thus creating a double bind for the Utah Mormons, whose attempt to found a legal polygamous state was now blocked.

Brigham Young then shifted his campaign to the judiciary, hoping to create a ruling in favor of the Saints through the Supreme Court by arguing that the Morrill Act overreached the Constitution and exceeded the proper limits of federal interference in local democracy. However, the church's test case ended in failure, and the ruling in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879) insisted that although the Constitution protected the rights of all citizens to freedom of belief, it did not guarantee its citizens the freedom to act on those beliefs against national or state law.⁴ This ruling was followed by a campaign of federal prosecutions of polygamous Mormons in Utah. Women, formerly seen as victims of polygamy, were arrested alongside men (Gordon 2002:182).

As Gordon shows, central to the *Reynolds* judgment was the crystallization of a particular American majority view on the relation of law to religion and on the definition of religion that was to be entertained as valid. Although *Reynolds* in many ways represented an unprecedented extension of federal powers at the expense of the states, it simultaneously drew on a body of legal opinion developed earlier in state courts. In particular, it had recourse to a notion of “general Christianity” that had already gained wide acceptance in state common law. The key precedent here was the decision by Justice James Kent in 1811, in an appeal by John Ruggles against the state of New York. Ruggles had been found guilty of blasphemy,⁵ and his lawyer appealed based on the idea that offenses against Christianity could not be prosecuted by the state under a disestablished constitution. Justice Kent ruled against this, however, finding, “We are a Christian people and the morality of the country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity” (Gordon 2002:72), although *not* upon any other religion. Therefore, although religious opinion was entirely free, public utterances that offended the sensibilities of the Christian majority were liable to disturb the order of the community and were therefore punishable under the law. This view was eventually invoked in *Reynolds*; it was found that polygamy “obviously” offended against general American Christian principles and thus tended toward the “subversion of good order” (133).

As Gordon points out, the definition of “religion embraced in such... court opinions was a democratically constructed yet indelibly Protestant public morality” (2002:135). The assumptions of the majority outweighed alternative views of what Christian public morals might be; thus, Mormon claims to be following a revealed and restored Christianity were ignored.⁶ It is especially interesting to note the relation of this mainstream definition of “essential Christianity” to the relative spheres of influence of the churches and courts as they were being redrawn. Many Protestant churchmen of the time were wary of the fact that marriage was increasingly being defined as a civil contract rather than as a sacrament. The developments of the 1880s could be described as one form of “secularization” as the churches lost jurisdiction relative to the state. Yet, if America was becoming institutionally more secular, this was clearly a “Protestant secularism.” The national government was not tied to any church, but, implicitly, Protestant values shaped its claims and interests.⁷

Mainstream nineteenth-century American opinion had come to see a clear and apparent link between monogamous marriage and democratic government. For many commentators, types of marriage that did not conform to the Protestant norm must lead ineluctably to the abusive subjugation of dependents by patriarchs and to impediments to independent judgment and free competition in matters of business, choice of religion, and the exercise of the electoral franchise.⁸ Thus, the state came to articulate its claim to have “valid political interests in the monogamous structure of the household” (Gordon 2002:227), on which it expected to command public support. This claim was also expressed from early on through statements that claimed monogamy as an essentially *American* institution while casting Mormon polygamy as ineradicably “foreign” and also as deeply “barbarous” by contrast with American “civilization.”

As Gillian Feeley-Harnik has shown (1999, 2001a, 2001b, and chapter 8, this volume), religious worldviews were foundational in the construction of ostensibly nonreligious aspects of scientific and political culture in nineteenth-century America. Recognition of the powerful Protestant bias in supposedly secular US government thinking and policy in the nineteenth century and later is by no means new; indeed, it has been raised in a number of contexts by various authors.⁹ Protestant bias in the construction of ideas of interiority—which transform and objectify both kinship and religion—has been extensively discussed by Webb Keane (2007) for a European (Dutch) colonial context, as well as for sociological theory more generally. In the context of the battle over Mormon polygamy, I suggest that the issue of interiority was again to the fore, although this remains

implicit in Gordon's text. What the Protestant majority appeared to fear from Mormon polygamy was, above all, that the "wrong" sort of kinship arrangements would engender the "wrong" sort of person—a person insufficiently autonomous, self-governing, individuated, transparent, and "sincere" (Keane 2007; Trilling 1972). It was not only that the products of Mormon kinship might have allegiances running counter to those of the nation-state but also, and more fundamentally, that the person so produced would be an "uncanny" counterpart to the kind of person Protestantism envisaged as rightly populating and safeguarding the modern world.

The first argument I want to draw out from this discussion of Gordon's work concerns the evidence that "law"—in the sense of both formal law and moral norms—is made in nineteenth-century US history through the progression of, and conflict between, different religious ways of thinking and is inseparable from these. For me, this renders problematic the whole approach that Schneider takes to the definition of American kinship. As those who have been versed in the anthropology of kinship will know, Schneider's famous account, though brief, is difficult to grasp in its entirety. This difficulty arises because Schneider describes American kinship as a paradoxical system, a system that has its cake and also eats it, that proceeds in terms of "contradictions and their resolutions" (1980:110n2). At times, Schneider's own analysis seems to mirror these contradictions descriptively rather than resolve them. Thus, "blood," for Schneider, is a symbol of natural substance and is opposed to "law"; however, Schneider claims that, in most spheres of life, American culture enjoins humanity to "dominate nature" (107) but simultaneously represents people as part of nature, obeying the natural destiny of animals to care for their offspring yet distinguished from animals by the exercise of "natural" human reason (that is, law). Kinship, Schneider (28) suggests, is a symbolic space of repose between these contradictions in which nature/biology/substance and law/choice/code for conduct can become one and the same. The symbol of the "blood relative" is so powerful because it achieves an apparently seamless conjunction of the criteria of "nature" and the criteria of "law." But, as others have implied, Schneider's treatment of marriage is less clear; its symbolically "natural" element is an act (sex) and not a substance, as Michael Lambek (chapter 10, this volume) points out, and the referents and equivalences of the sets of terms Schneider groups together are not self-evident. "Code for conduct" is an extremely wide category, which seems rather like a catchall in Schneider's analysis, and "law" could mean either familial ethical norms or formal state law. At other points, Schneider speaks instead of "destiny" and "morality" (1980:110), although these terms are not fully integrated into his schema.

For Schneider, this lack of concretion and specificity is not important since he aims to describe the general shape of a symbolic system that, he wants to argue, can occur in many registers. However, as others have noted, the approach he takes is deeply ahistorical in that it treats such terms as “blood,” “law,” “nature,” and “culture” as if the social conditions in which they are formed are not important facts about them. This ahistoricism coincides with and permits Schneider’s disregard for the role of religion in the formation of American kinship. Although religious communities or ethnic groups may have their own, local variations on a code for conduct, for Schneider these are purely secondary to the underlying consistencies in the arrangement of symbols that he discerns. Indeed, one might argue that Schneider’s whole method precluded any other conclusion, since he was looking for what was *shared* between these different groups and this was what he termed “American kinship” (1980:13–15). Schneider does not appear to set much store by informants’ claims that religious variation was important in their kinship arrangements, even where he does discuss these (70–71), but he is attentive to the points where claims of religious or ethnic specificity turn out to be replicated across many groups (15). One might say that Schneider worked from an already secularized assumption that “religion” is simply a subcategory of citizenship.¹⁰ The historical evidence reviewed so far argues powerfully that Schneider was mistaken in treating a symbol such as “law” as an ahistorical category or as one that functions independently of the specifics of different American religious beliefs. In ignoring the historical making of these categories, Schneider also ignores the real tensions and conflicts involved in this making.

Powerfully persuasive musings on the oxymoronic place of “nature” in America, for instance, appear in Schneider’s text:

In American culture man’s fate...follows the injunction, Master Nature! But...where kinship and family are concerned, American culture appears to turn things topsy-turvy. For this is one part of nature with which man has made his peace.... Kinship is the blood relationship.... Kinship is...maternal instinct.... These are the ways of nature.

[But] Reason selects the good and rejects the bad in nature.

The order of law is the outcome of the action of human reason on nature. (Schneider 1980:107–109)

Yet, the idea that “natural” kinship should be lived through the exercise of reason is *not*, as he implies, uniformly held throughout American culture.

Rather, this is the idea of the Protestant majority and is inseparable from the development of both Protestant thought and majoritarian interpretations of US constitutional rights in the period 1830–1890. Such ideas about nature-combined-with-reason are certainly descriptive of the “civilized” kinship of Protestant monogamy, but they are certainly not descriptive of the “revealed” kinship of the American Mormons, who were considered by antipolygamy campaigners as “barbarous.” Thus, Schneider presents as “American culture” in toto what is actually the ideology of the winners in a historical conflict of ideals, and he excludes from anthropological consideration the many Americans—including but not limited to American Mormons—over whom this victorious logic prevailed. At the same time, Schneider rules out serious consideration of the divergent religious logics that were actually the central dynamic in the making of American culture and American kinship. Although Gordon’s evidence speaks first to the category of law, my objection obviously applies equally to the historical formation of blood, which develops in relationship to the legal parameters of kinship and affinity to which she attends.

I return later to the possible implications of Gordon’s story for the theme of disembedding and modernity. First, however, I consider the issue of American kinship through the material that particularly problematized it for me—that is, through discussions I have had with American Latter-day Saints in research conducted since 2001. I show that the blood and law of contemporary Mormon kinship are not only different from those of the Protestant mainstream, and religiously constructed, but are also in a different relationship to each other than the “blood” and “law” (or nature-culture, etc.) of Schneider’s work, since Mormon ontology does not oppose the material and the immaterial to each other in any simple fashion.

MORMON ADOPTION AS RECOGNITION: THE IDENTIFICATION OF BLOOD AND THE LAW

Let me begin with part of a letter posted on a current website, Adoption Network Law Center. It is headed “Letters from Birthmothers: Cristal” and reads, in part:

My Dearest Matthew,

I have a strong belief that we get to choose our family before we are born. That we live with God before we become a flesh and blood person and He offers us a number of people to be our families on earth. As a result of this belief, I wrote you a short story. (www.adoptionnetwork.com, accessed June 2007)

The short story written by Cristal concerns a little boy who is with God before he is born. The child is eager to jump into the Pool of Life, but God calls him to come and choose his family from the Great Tree first. The little boy searches along its many branches in vain; then, he is drawn to the leaves at the very top of the tree and asks God to let him look there.

Heavenly Father smiled a warm and comforting smile. “Those are the adopting families,” He thought. He did not say a word but simply moved to the highest and most center part of the tree.... Matthew looked and looked.... He...saw one of the leaves sparkle. He reached out and touched the branch, and he knew that was his home. Excited, he turned his little head to God and exclaimed, “This is it! This is my family! They are the ones I want to be with! They are waiting for me!”

God tells Matthew that this is a “very special” family and that he “will not be able to get there the traditional way” and will have to choose another mother, a birth mother. “She will be guided to your parents and you will end up in their arms as you have chosen to be.”

After another long while, Matthew found someone, he believed, would be a great birthmother. Beaming he touched another branch and said, “This one! She will love me and she will want me to be happy with my family, I choose her.” Again God smiled. Thank you for choosing me. Much love always and forever ~
Your Birthmother,

Cristal

In citing this letter, I do not want to imply that it is simple or transparent. The story appears as part of a website for a private adoption agency specializing in LDS adoptions. It is therefore embedded in the institutional processes and political economy of American adoption, which are complex, the more so because the LDS Church also has its own adoption service and strong views on adoption protocols. Birth mothers’ attitudes are also not uniform. The prototypical situation is that of a very young woman who cannot marry the baby’s father, but there are also many variations in age and financial circumstance. Even among the “typical” teenage mothers, some choose to keep their babies and bring them up with the help of their natal families, despite the church’s strong advice that every child should be brought up by a married man and woman. Nor do I wish to suggest that when babies are

given up for adoption by Mormon birth mothers, this decision is somehow made bland or easy by religious teachings. The circumstances, attitudes, and experiences of birth mothers vary considerably, but the intense social and religious value ascribed to motherhood within Mormonism means that giving up a baby for adoption is understood as a very difficult sacrifice.

Nevertheless, Mormon thinking about adoption contains the potential of a distinctive interpretation that is not available to other Americans in quite the same way. Mormon doctrine posits that just as we proceed to another life after death, so at birth we do not come out of nothing, but from a heaven in which we are already individuated and where we are known to one another.¹¹ Although at birth we largely forget this prior existence, from time to time we may have glimpses of it in this life, including through kinship. Babies and very young children are sometimes said to show in various ways that they have not yet quite forgotten where they have come from. For adults, intimations often take the form of a momentary feeling of closeness to another person—perhaps a future close friend or spouse—that is experienced as a strong sense of recognition, of having known that person somewhere else before. For this reason, although the language of kinship “choice” is not devoid of the implications it might have in non-Mormon circles—including both the responsibility attached to personal agency and the risks and freedoms of consumerism—it is not delimited by them either. “Choosing” kin in this world implies recognizing the prior truth of a premortal belonging. Yet, as Cristal’s story shows, choosing kin in the premortal existence is imagined not as arbitrary selection but as an agentic recognition of connections that *already existed*.¹²

It might seem tempting to describe premortal kinship as metaphysical, were it not that, in LDS doctrine, spirit and matter are not opposed to each other. The spirit beings who populate the premortal existence are earthly-matter-in-potential, themselves a form of matter,¹³ waiting for their opportunity to develop through the acquisition of a mortal body in this life. Only through the physical life can individuals attain the highest level of the Mormon afterlife, the celestial kingdom. Those who reach it will still continue as physical beings, although their bodies will be of refined and perfected matter, they will still live in families, and they will continue to bear and parent children in heaven.¹⁴ Thus, as I have argued elsewhere (Cannell 2005b), a genealogical sensibility is not confined to the present life for Latter-day Saints but stretches forward into an infinite future of postmortal existence.

In LDS adoption circles, paradigmatic stories illustrate the imaginative power of these propositions. Pregnant women who intend to give up

their babies for adoption and prospective adoptive parents often meet each other in LDS agency settings, looking for a match. One hopeful couple was certain that the baby of a particular woman was meant to be brought up by them. When the baby was born, however, the young mother decided to bring up the baby, took him home, and cared for him lovingly. Unbeknown to her, the couple refused to consider other infants. Four months later, the young mother sought out the couple as adoptive parents, saying that she had come to recognize through prayers and signs that the baby boy was “theirs”: “Not mine.”

Latter-day Saints are not in any way indifferent to other registers of relatedness found in American society, including the claims of “biological” relatedness or of kinship founded in law or in social convention. The idea of premortal relatedness, however, at times complicates these definitions and at other times may be used as a frame of reference by which competing claims of other kinship paradigms can be judged.

Joan (all names in this section are pseudonyms) is the mother of five children by birth and three by adoption and lives in a small Mormon town south of Salt Lake. Her adoptive children were found at orphanages in an East African country; Joan and her husband had taken the step of going out to look for children to help after experiencing powerful and unexpected spiritual promptings to do so. The children were between five and ten years old at the time of adoption. Joan might have been expected to emphasize the idea that all eight of her children were premortally destined to be together as a family. Her experience, however, was more complex. Despite initial difficulties, she and the family had bonded with the two adopted sons, but her relations with the adopted daughter, Mary, remained distant and strained, causing Joan a lot of questioning. She worried because evidence had emerged after the adoption that Mary actually had living family members, including a half brother to whom she was close but whose existence had been concealed by the orphanage.

It is a distinctive aspect of Mormon teaching that bonds between living family members can be eternalized through Mormon temple rituals; thus, families can truly “be together forever.” For children not “born in the covenant,” including adoptive children, the parent-child bond is ritually “sealed” in the temple. Joan worried about whether to seal Mary, because of a strong, persistent feeling that Mary “was really her [birth] mother’s” and ought therefore to be ritually joined to her birth mother for eternal time. Eventually, Joan went ahead with the temple ritual and was reassured by the “sweet” sensations they shared during it (understood as promptings of the Holy Spirit) that she had made the right decision. But she reached

this point only after being assured by LDS temple officials that the sealing would not preclude Mary from being reunited with her birth mother in eternity. Although this is the standard official position, it continued to be puzzling to Joan, given the LDS emphasis on the absolute efficacy of temple ritual. But, as Joan said, she was confident that if there had been any mistake, “Heavenly Father would sort it all out” in the life to come.¹⁵ Joan also noted that her suggestion that Mary be sealed to her birth mother had been refused by the church on the grounds that the adoption had made Mary legally Joan’s daughter and “they had to go by the law of the land on that one.” Yet, the sense that Mary was really her birth mother’s persisted.

Joan’s interpretation was that Heavenly Father intended some children to be adopted into families eternally and other children were there to be looked after for this lifetime only—despite what national law or the church’s consequent regulations might suggest to the contrary. The sense of real kinship could not be determined in this way. Yet, neither was it dependent simply on “biology,” since Joan feels that her adopted sons are “meant to be part of [her] family” forever. She suggests, however, that the situation could still change; perhaps sometime in the mortal or postmortal future, she will discover that Mary *is* meant to be her daughter eternally after all. At that time, presumably, she will experience the bonding to Mary that still eludes her; that is, she will “recognize” Mary for the daughter she always was. Such an outcome is entirely imaginable within Mormonism because one of the purposes of mortal existence is moral testing and the gaining of experience. One way to view even difficult relationships is that we are locked together because there is something we are meant to be learning from one another.

Although much else could be said about Mormon adoption, these brief examples may be sufficient to establish my claim that LDS conceptions of kinship run counter to Schneider’s pan-American symbolic categories of “blood” and “law.” The Mormon teaching that kinship is recognition thus challenges not only Schneider’s understandings of kinship but also those of others in the anthropological literature on so-called Western kinship that he helped inspire.

Schneider assumed that “blood” (as opposed to “blood relative”) was a clear-cut symbol in which equal maternal and paternal contributions mingle at conception and create a child with enduring links to both parents. He later stated that, with scientific innovation, the symbolic workings of “blood” would be mapped onto “biological substance,” however it was then understood (Schneider 1980:23).

Much of the important work on the new reproductive technologies

(Edwards 2000; Thompson 2005) and other innovative literature on kinship in “the West” has focused on actual instabilities in the mapping of biogenetic material and in the constitution of the “biological” versus the “social” or “technological.” Thus, Sarah Franklin’s work (2001, 2007) develops the insights of Strathern, Rabinow, and others into the increasing preoccupation of science with animal and human heredity, the production of “second natures,” and the visible modeling of the new genetics on cultural practices. This work has moved the discussion forward in immensely valuable ways, but it will be readily apparent that Mormon recognition raises an additional difficulty with Schneider’s paradigm because it fits into neither the category of biogenetic substance nor that of man-made social law and convention. It occupies the space of a third term, suggesting that real kinship rests on something powerful but ineffable and certainly not simply material, as the term is generally employed.¹⁶ This is especially clear in the case of adoption practices, which in other Western contexts are often put forward as the paradigmatic case in which tensions arise as the dual components of kinship (blood and law or the biological and social) come into a conflict (Carsten 2000, 2001, 2007; Howell 2001).

Mormonism holds that all creation is, in some sense, material, and it does not place spirit and matter in opposition to each other. It therefore stands in contrast not only to many other Christian religious traditions but also to much anthropological discussion, which assumes that the meaning and status of the material and the physical are obvious, conceiving them in a dualistic relation with the mind or, in some contexts, with what is assumed to be the “unreal.” Thus, the point so well anticipated by Carsten—that there might not turn out to be one single template for the American symbol of blood—finds evidence here of a radical kind.

THE SECULARIZATION OF WESTERN KINSHIP?

This leads me to wonder whether the discussion of “Western” kinship has not, quite unintentionally, reproduced part of the cultural bias it is analyzing. Insofar as several of these studies take direction from a development or critique of Schneider, they reinforce the focus on the biological-social or blood-law axis as the space of kinship, and they thus inadvertently reproduce Schneider’s assumptions that kinship is delimited by secularity.

I am thinking, in particular, of the whole field of studies of new reproductive technologies and other medical perspectives on so-called Western kinship. The originality and fruitfulness of these studies are beyond question. However, the work has been firmly located in the clinic.¹⁷ In IVF (in vitro fertilization) treatment (as in other medical situations), the immediate

concern of informants is with the physical processes they are undergoing and what these entail for their lives, and the dominant discourse is that of specialists who couch their professional speech in terms of a materialist science. Anthropologists have, of course, recognized this, but their responses have tended to place these scientific views in contrastive tension with *social* understandings of relatedness, which (especially after Schneider) already assume the subordinate status of the religious.¹⁸ For example, Charis Thompson's admirable *Making Parents* (2005) refers to the "ontological" problems of IVF and to the image of the "sacred" fetus but treats these terms as merely metaphorical.¹⁹ For Thompson, the real story is about "the biomedical mode of reproduction operating within standard capitalism" (2005:258), and religion is important primarily as it defines interest group voting on embryology in the US Congress. Margaret Lock's brilliant study of "brain death," *Twice Dead* (2002), explicitly discusses the role of religious belief in organ donation in the United States. Interestingly, Lock finds that many of her informants are highly ambivalent about whether they believe in an afterlife or define themselves as "religious" and that they have things to say on this issue. Yet, Lock's main conclusion is that in the modern West "the *body* is the site of tragedy" (2002:203) and is also the idiom of the postmortal survival of individuals. For Lock, post-Christian reformulations continue to inflect organ donation; some kind of transcendence of death is sought through the gift of life to another person, but that transcendence is only in material form.

The topic of religion has also been addressed by other important writers on American kinship: Faye Ginsburg's (1989) memorable and pioneering study of "pro-life" and "pro-choice" women in North Dakota, for instance, where religious affiliations are a crucial factor. Rayna Rapp's (1999) work is similarly attentive to religious factors affecting attitudes to amniocentesis. Such studies respond to the realities of the American political scene and, in this sense, give more space to the issue of religion than Schneider's model would seem to invite. However, even these ethnographies ultimately treat religion as a factor that conditions opinion formation among citizens, rather than as a fundamental determinant of American kinship categories. Conversely, Susan Harding's (2000) superb account of Jerry Falwell's Liberty Baptist Church and of the turn toward social activism in fundamentalist Christian thinking is attentive to the place of both pro-family and pro-life rhetorics in the Moral Majority. Harding's central argument is that the apparently clear demarcation lines between modern, liberal, secular opinion and antimodern, religious opinion in the United States are partly a chimerical effect of the political and media battles won and lost around

the time of the Scopes trial. In this sense, Harding's book and this chapter are closely in tune in questioning the obviousness of the secular in the contemporary United States. Certainly, conservative Baptists have a distinctive view of the religious meaning of life and conception. Yet, although Harding writes most evocatively about the meanings of the pro-life turn in conservative Protestantism, her central focus is on the production of "born-again Christian subjectivity out of materials provided by the feminist...movement" (2000:185)—that is, on the production of the distinction between liberal and conservative opinion. To that extent, even Harding's work focuses more closely on the ways in which the changing categories of the "religious" and the "secular" help define American *political* constituencies and less closely on the ways in which understandings of *kinship* and their limitations derive from the same historical processes.

Perhaps even more than Falwell's Baptists, American Mormons are not, in any stereotypical sense, rightly viewed as "antimodern." They are decidedly not antitechnological, for instance, and their views on matters related to scientific innovations affecting human reproductive life are less predictable than those of conservative Protestants. Thus, all five LDS members of the US Senate voted in favor of stem cell research in 2001 (Clark 2001), invoking an LDS ambiguity about when life enters the fetus.²⁰ As in the case of the meaning of adoption described above, Mormon teaching is distinctive precisely in refusing to make "matter" and "spirit" or "body" and "soul" into each other's opposites. In this, it contrasts with most major bodies of American Christian and Jewish opinion *and* with mainstream secular discourse. It thus throws into relief what the latter may share with the former and confirms the suggestion that the character of the American secular is Protestant.

For Latter-day Saints, the idea and the lived practice of kinship are saturated with explicit religious meaning; salvation is thought of as a collective endeavor in which both hope and anxiety are invested in the idea that all members of an extended family should find each one another again in the celestial kingdom. LDS teaching permits vicarious baptism for the dead, through which deceased family members can also be offered membership in the church and thus potentially be united with their kin. Kinship bonds are conceived as being eternal in the hereafter and also, as we saw, as being chosen before mortal birth. Therefore, all kinship relations are invested with a sacred quality, and quite ordinary family activities partake in this sacredness. The LDS institution of Monday night "family home evenings"—during which family recreations such as playing a game or sharing a snack are combined with a moral and religious lesson—is one expression of this tendency.

Latter-day Saints are not alone among religious Americans in reaching for ways to articulate kinship relationships as sacred. This is suggested, for instance, by Pamela Klassen's (2001) account of Christian, Jewish, and pagan women in the home birthing movement and by Linda Layne's (2011) ethnography of the construction of children lost through miscarriage as "angel babies." It would appear that the difficulty of separating "religious" from "scientific" views of kinship described by Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1999, 2001a, 2001b, and chapter 8, this volume) for contemporaries of Lewis Henry Morgan did not end in the nineteenth century in the United States but has, in some ways, persisted. Indeed, in my view, the Latter-day Saints' ontology both attracts and (sometimes) repels non-Mormon American Christians precisely because it explicitly articulates certain ideas that, in some ways, "feel right," but it does so through a theology they find unacceptable. This ambivalent relation has, of course, a historical dimension: Mormonism emerged in the 1830s out of a Christian culture on the eastern seaboard that was shared with the traditional denominations. Then, the LDS Church and mainstream values became differentiated, as this chapter has shown, through a series of painful clashes over the course of the nineteenth century. In several ways, therefore, Mormon thinking figures as the "path not taken" by mainstream American churches (Cannell 2005b; cf. Bloom 1992).

At the same time, we can also see a hypervalorization of kinship taking place in self-defined "secular" circles in the United States and the United Kingdom. This occurs in many registers, for example, in avowedly secular expressions of care for and interest in the related dead (Bennett 1999; Day 2009) and in relation to the heightened meanings ascribed to contemporary childhood (Zelizer 1994[1985]). I have argued elsewhere, in an account of the way these expressions of care are articulated in hobbyist popular genealogy (Cannell 2011), that the analytically secular status of such practices in the UK context does not follow automatically from the important fact that people may not wish to describe what they do as "religion." Connectedly, we might suggest that certain lacunae in secular thought speak loudly of the explicitly Christian ideas that recently preceded them (Mauss 1985[1938]). Much of Jeanette Edwards's ethnography, for instance, with its fine ear for the significant in what people say, shows her northern English informants pondering the complexities of kinship transmission. Her informants muse on how characteristics understood as inherited can "[skip] a generation" (Edwards 2009:138). They linger over the interplay between physical inheritance and the inheritance of behavioral traits acquired from one's upbringing (Edwards 2000:217). Or, as

Edwards says, the assertion that human characteristics are passed on “in the blood” can be made one moment and contradicted the next. People call on alternative modalities of envisaging kinship, especially those that derive from the work of care and nurturance, love, and sympathy. This range of modalities, for Edwards, gives English kinship its resilience as a way of speaking about social connections of all kinds.

In Edwards’s approach to English kinship, we see, above all, the theoretical influence of Marilyn Strathern (1992b). But it also recalls Schneider in the assumption that these tensions and tautologies primarily works to make a certain kinship system, one viewed as a secular object located on the axis social–physical. For Edwards, as for several other scholars attending to the new reproductive technologies, the expression of contradictions is intensified by the novelty of these interventions. But what if the work being done in these conversations is also, or instead, the production of a space of mystery? That is, what if one aspect of the tautologies of this kind of kinship is not that it signifies a clash between two structuring principles (blood and law) but that it permits the expression of feelings about kinship as what is mysterious, yet intimate, in the human condition; the sense of connectedness to and yet separateness from others, both past and present, living and dead; the sense of something patterned, not arbitrary, yet too complex to be amenable to any complete or reductive explanation?

My own view is that Edwards’s informants’ sense of mystery about how a person is made is a soul-shaped space in contemporary discourse. Indeed, since Edwards tells us that some residents of her field site attend Catholic and Baptist churches (although she does not tell us more about this), it may be that her informants might still call on that vocabulary more explicitly from time to time.

Strangely, Schneider never discusses the concept of the soul, which surely as much as “reason” is a crucial aspect of American theories about what makes humans human. Nor does he discuss the injunction quoted above to “Master Nature” in relation to the postlapsarian interpretations of the Fall, which, according to Sahlins (1996), have decisively influenced all American culture, kinship, and economic thought. The only direct engagement Schneider offers with the formative role of religion in US culture appears to be in an essay of 1969. This is rather adumbrated but includes the claim that whereas in Judaism one is a member of the religion by both blood and law, Christianity in the United States has developed by separating out kinship by blood from membership in a religion under the law (Schneider 1969). Leaving aside the fact that Mormon thinking does not follow this pattern, the general logic of this argument seems to

me highly questionable. Surely, it is more likely (and perhaps empirically demonstrable) that the particular kinds of symbolic interplay envisaged between the “given” and the “made” in American kinship derive in part from the strong influence of Christian (and Judaic) models in the history of the culture?

My argument, therefore, draws on Lock, Edwards, and others who go a little against the grain, to shed light on the restrictions that a purely secular reading of American kinship (Schneider’s, among others) may confer. Rather, I suggest that in avowedly secular contexts, kinship may be an acceptable locus for ineffable meaning when explicitly religious framings are not. However, kinship treated as what Lambek (chapter 10, this volume) powerfully describes as something akin to Arendt’s “romanticized object”—as something “immoderate” and “immodern”—also appears to be a central constitutive feature of avowedly religious opinion, albeit differently framed.

DISEMBEDED KINSHIP?

One conclusion that could be drawn from this chapter is that the material considered here tends to support those who question the applicability of the term “secularization,” in the European sense, to describe the relationship between the state and religion as it has developed in the United States (Casanova 1994:9). In contrast to European states—with their history of what Casanova calls “caesaropapism”—the US Constitution formally espouses a position of neutrality toward different faiths, which, however, has never amounted to the attempt to create a formal separation between religion and public debate, as in some European settings. In addition, the brilliant historical account offered by Gordon offers support to those analyses of supposedly neutral state or legal spaces in American culture that discern in them a decidedly specific Protestant bias. Insofar as America became secular at all, it was a Protestant secularity.

In this framing, other forms of religiosity were consigned to spaces of activity that did not overtly challenge the developing federal state, and the Constitution, in turn, exerted a surprising pressure toward conformity in this respect on the individual states of the union. Both religion and kinship were to be modeled on one particular kind of Protestant idea, which set limits to the institutional freedoms of both. What was specifically disallowed, of course, was the prospect of theocracy, or rather the multiple proto-theocracies that had belonged to an earlier phase of American religious, legal, and political life. Insofar as such ideas continued to be pursued institutionally (and they were), they had to be framed within new limits.

At the same time, it may be supposed that this restriction of the religious character of the state, while eliciting conformity even from Mormon Utah, at one level, only added to the imaginative power of the interdicted, at another. I am always struck by how many people I meet who assume, if the topic of my research comes up, that I must be working with polygamists and that most Latter-day Saints still practice plural marriage today. In fact, as we saw, official church sanction for the practice lasted only sixty years and ended twice as long ago, in 1890. Intensive media interest in the small groups of present-day breakaway polygamists is, of course, part of the reason for this misconception; often, it is not made clear that these groups are excommunicated from the mainstream LDS Church. Nevertheless, the media coverage itself evidences a public fascination with the transgressive attraction of polygamy that I assume is not only a sexual frisson but also a political one.

Most contemporary Mormons have no thoughts of a literal theocracy. Yet, even in Mormonism's present, politically integrated form, it always retains a millenarian element. The time horizon of Mormon kinship is distinctive, not only bringing in flashes of memory from the premortal existence but also creating a context in which present actions prefigure and help create the postmortal future of eternal togetherness and progression. In the sense that Latter-day Saints are empowered and obliged to act to make families who will achieve salvation together, their religion implicitly relativizes the claims of the nation-state. Every ordinary Mormon necessarily helps to make a community that will far outstrip America.²¹

Simultaneously, Mormon time—through its focus on the premortal existence—emphasizes not only the ultimate alternative collectivity but also the ultimately irreducible individual. The being who comes into this world at birth is not simply a vulnerable little physical creature but is the instantiation of a person who was always already himself or herself in another form before and will be so again in a form to come after this life. Since Mormonism also refuses to make an opposition between spirit and matter, we can see that, for Latter-day Saints, birth and motherhood, as well as death, are moments of an intense integration of religious and familial concerns, in which ordinary relatedness is literally identified with the stuff of divine salvation. These ideas, which constitute central experiential facets of Mormon piety, are not necessarily widely understood among people outside the Mormon church. Yet, I argue, they seem to have elective affinities with tendencies toward utopian or romanticized treatments of kinship in both religious and secular culture. Indeed, Harold Bloom (1992) has argued that Mormonism's tendency to suggest that each individual is, in

some way, always co-present with God prior to birth (as in Cristal's story about her son, above) is characteristic of "gnostic" tendencies widely found in American Christian churches with quite different explicit theologies. If so—and ethnographies such as Luhrmann's (2004) seem to support this interpretation—then it is not surprising that Mormon kinship fascinates both LDS members and non-LDS observers.

Each contribution to this volume questions the default positioning of kinship as a less significant structuring force in modern life than politics or economics. This, of course, does not mean that the political economy of kinship ideology is unimportant; indeed, Feeley-Harnik's work (chapter 8, this volume) is exemplary in showing the joint emergence of new structures of property with new ways of thinking about descent. The developments she charts in relation to Lewis Henry Morgan's family took place just a decade or two after the Mormons had left the eastern states in their search for a permanent home. Several astute commentators on American kinship have drawn attention to the ways in which contemporary investments in family sentiment can distort reality and permit an evasion of real social responsibility for the vulnerable (Ivy 1995; Zelizer 1994[1985]). I would not disagree. Indeed, the economic context of adoption is one of several aspects of LDS practices that require more exploration than I am able to supply in this short account. At the same time, I would not wish to suggest that Mormon kinship thinking or practice can be accounted for solely in terms of economic factors.

If, from the point of view of the expansion of legal power, both kinship and religion are subordinated to the modern state (Lambek, chapter 10, this volume), then the relationship between kinship and religion remains perhaps the least clearly specified area of modernization narratives, whether in practical politics or in academic theory. From the perspective of material science and medicine, I suggest, religion is perhaps subordinated to kinship, insofar as kinship is treated as a physical reality and religion is not. I argue that secularist trends in kinship analysis—including Schneider's theories—effected a parallel maneuver. Another tradition of literature has derived ultimately from Weber's (1978b) suggestion that in a disenchanted world the search for meaning and value—which, for many, could only with difficulty continue to be pursued in formal religious contexts—might be displaced onto a range of other settings, including art, intellectual life, and the erotic.

The notion of re-enchantment as it is generally discussed, however, has less to say about intense religious investments in familial, rather than sexual, love.²² Bellah (1997) is very much in the minority in taking up Weber's discussion not of erotic love but of kin and neighborly love and Weber's

implication that these are the values least distinguishable from the development of salvationist religions. Indeed, Bellah suggests that Weber never described kinship in this sense as an objectified value sphere in competition with religion in the rationalized modern world, as economics and politics came to be objectified. Rather, “brotherly love” was transformed and universalized within world-denying religions (8), and there are some suggestions that Weber thought this form of love could also be understood as informing modern companionate marriage (Weber 1998).

Whether or not we wish to use Weber’s terminology, I find it difficult not to return to the trains of thought provoked by these two diverse insights. On the one hand, the process of disenchantment would, he thought, produce a new “polytheism” in modernity, a world of bizarrely objectified domains, increasingly and rivalrously incompatible in their values (Kippenberg 2005). On the other hand, he suggested that religion and kinship never came to be completely objectified in opposition to each other, even in the West. I illustrate here the possibility of a particular irony in the way that Mormon kinship has meaning in the modern context. Certainly, religious kinship ideas can be used to conceal social realities and can be deployed to mask them. But even so, they may also reveal something truthful about the modern world that is otherwise difficult to see, precisely by evoking a world in which the domains of human experience are not fully divided from and against one another. In this sense, modern disenchantment may be partially transcended through a language and practice of kinship understood as ineffable, a third term, one that escapes from the polarity of substance and legality and remains embedded, like an anti-fetish, hidden in our metaphors of human transmission.

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Notes

1. For an overview of the anthropology of secularism, see Cannell 2010. On secularization theory, see Casanova 1994; Dobellaere 1998; Martin 2005.

2. That is, for kinship in the United Kingdom, mainland Europe, and former colonies where the influence of either is considered to be dominant.

3. A scholarly and insightful account of contemporary (“fundamentalist”) Mormon polygyny is given by Janet Bennion (1998). Since polygamy is now forbidden by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all such groups are excommunicated from the church and constitute independent organizations. None of my own LDS informants were polygamous.

4. Gordon notes that by the late 1870s, the Supreme Court “had reined in the applicability of the Reconstruction amendments to the daily lives of those who claimed that the federal government should now protect their rights.... The development of an alternative body of limitations on affirmative government power lay in the future.... *Reynolds v. United States* lies on this fault line between constitutional interpretations” (2002:120).

5. Having opined that “Jesus Christ was a bastard and his mother must be a whore” (Gordon 2002:71).

6. In the *Reynolds* case, the church’s lawyer, George Washington Biddle, argued that the Ten Commandments were a sufficient basis for a minimal, public, consensual Christianity. His opponent, Charles Devens, insisted that the New Testament clearly prohibited polygamy. Biddle and the Saints disagreed and claimed that this was a theological and not a legal issue (Gordon 2002:141).

7. Compare the possibility of a distinctively Muslim secular being defined in Malaysia, as discussed by John Bowen (2010).

8. As Gordon rightly notes, these formulations avoided dwelling on the abusive exercise of patriarchal power outside Mormonism.

9. On the otherwise unaccountable unfolding of policies toward the (Roman Catholic) lowland Philippines in the US colonial period, see Cannell 2005a. See also Casanova’s (1994:9) analysis of the contrasts between Europe (where formerly established churches were often superseded by the state) and the United States (where there was no established church but a greater public role was retained for religion). On American “civil religion,” see Bellah 1967.

10. Raymond T. Smith (n.d.) also notes the limitations of Schneider’s attention to class variations.

11. For details on Mormon concepts of the war in heaven, the spirit world, and the question of whether being precedes gender, see www.lds.org.

12. This kind of always-already logic is part of what Harold Bloom means when he refers to Mormonism’s “gnostic” tendencies. There is obviously a tension between the idea of agency (Matthew has to search hard for his family) and the idea of the predestined character of kin bonds. This tension is central to Mormon thought and is epitomized, for instance, by the phrase “choose the right” (or CTR), which is used on

youth jewelry and other items. The right already exists, but our free agency is required to discern and select it; it is quite possible to make wrong choices.

13. The prophet of Mormonism, Joseph Smith Jr., taught, "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter" (Doctrine and Covenants 131:7, see also 93:33). For an example of gospel doctrine commentary on this, see Woodford 1998.

14. These children will be born in spirit form and will eventually go on to populate other worlds when their turn comes for mortal existence. The celestial kingdom is, as has often been noted, a form of apotheosis.

15. The position of last resort is often taken by Latter-day Saints and is sometimes accompanied by the reflection that things may look different in the life to come anyway. This kind of response is typical of situations in which ritual and social kinship (or kinship of the heart) may be in conflict.

16. It might be argued that Latter-day Saint kinship bonds follow some principle of divine law, but this would be misleading. As already noted, the fulfillment of the mysterious connections between kin rests on the deployment of human free agency. Besides, it is clear that, for Schneider, "law" is a category of man-made convention (for instance, laws governing embryology research and surrogacy or the legal status of marriage) linked to man's imperative to "conquer nature," as he says. The question of divine law is not discussed.

17. Jeanette Edwards's important study, *Born and Bred* (2000), is the exception. However, the questions Edwards asks are still provoked by the imagined clinic and its innovative procedures, although people are asked to reflect on these at home or in the pub.

18. Compare Kath Weston's insight that "the critique of kinship has provided a tonic for the fetish" (2001:151).

19. Compare Lynn Morgan's *Icons of Life* (2009).

20. This teaching is rarely adduced to justify abortion.

21. Radical comparative perspectives on the current world order are, of course, potentially available in any Christian tradition and were discussed by Weber as one motivation for conversion to Christianity (see Hefner 1993); however, only for Mormons is Zion clearly and immediately made through earthly kinship.

22. Except in their standard Protestant forms, which Weber mentioned as a compromise between religious universalism and familial or local idioms of a more normative kind than the material discussed here.