

Editorial Foreword

MILK RELATIONS Blood is thicker than water, but milk is another substance through which relations of kinship can be embodied, as the first article explains. (Also on kinship and its fluids: Gillian Feeley-Harnik, “Communities of Blood: The Natural History of Kinship in Nineteenth-century America,” 1999: 215–62.)

Peter Parkes examines the work of milk kinship in a large region of Eurasia extending from Central Asia to Serbia. It is a form of fosterage—kin relations of mother and child that are elective and created, but then made bodily by ritualized breastfeeding. Relations that are made and naturalized in this way are not egalitarian ones, but “political functions of fealty and tributary allegiance” complementary to and exclusive of structures of descent and marriage.

READING RELIGIONS The next three essays concern themselves with ways in which religions are read in the academy or by the state.

Bronwen Douglas excavates the complex, troubled relations of missionaries and anthropologists, and devises a method for reading missionary texts against the grain, for “cryptic traces of indigenous actions, desires and patterns of social and gender relations.” Probing missionary texts about the degradation of Melanesian women under indigenous religions, the author finds shadowy evidence of agency. (See also J. D. Y. Peel, “For Who Hath Despised the Day of Small Things? Missionary Narratives and Historical Anthropology,” 1995: 581–607.)

David Ownby seeks to carry forward the discussion of popular religions in China in their conflicts with the state, which tends to view them under the rubric of “feudal superstition” and as signs of tradition resisting modernization. The Way of the Temple of Heavenly Immortals is one such religion, which, exceptionally, has sacred texts that may be consulted to see the relation from the other side. Traditional popular morality, the healing powers of its leaders, and the coming apocalypse are themes of those scriptures, to which the government and the believers give decidedly different interpretations. (Andrew B. Kipnis, “Within and against Peasantness: Backwardness and Filiality in Rural China” 1995: 110–35 has more on this matter.)

Laurent Dubois reviews recent works on Haitian Vodou within a large historiographical frame of approaches to the subject, beginning with the works of Melville Herskovits and Zora Neale Hurston in the nineteen-thirties. So far from being the antithesis of modernity, Vodou is a palimpsest of “the profound after-effects of the processes of enslavement, migration, production, and cultural confrontation” shaping the Americas.

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RECONSTRUCTING WOMEN'S WORLDS Two essays demonstrate that, although they leave a fainter imprint on the documentary record of the past, women's lives and conditions can nevertheless be recovered if one knows where and how to look. (See also CSSH collections on "Gendered Economies" 1994: 3–67 and "Inventing Women's Roles" 1988: 483–549.)

Asiya Siddiqi revivifies the world of the unlettered widow of a butcher in nineteenth-century Bombay from evidence she gave in hearings on her son's petition to the High Court for protection. What emerges is a picture of an unusually forceful, capable and articulate woman who acts effectively in the face of many problems. Court records of insolvents may give scholars access to the lives of working people.

Hill Gates aims to bring real data on women's work—"essential but culturally undervalued"—into the analysis of China's economy. Women's labor tends to disappear into kinship relations and to fall beneath the radar of the state, but for recent times it can be retrieved through interviews. Survey research shows differential rates of footbinding in the last century among various regions, giving a common measure against which to compare the intensity and kinds of work that women contributed to the highly gendered political economy of China.

FRAMES OF MIND The next two pieces have to do with the politics of representation, verbal and visual, respectively.

Karin Alejandra Roseblatt observes that Chilean women working-class activists remember the popular front government of the twenties and thirties with special fondness for the promotion of a morality of family responsibility and male respect for women, and are critical of the recent left-leaning government for its failure to do likewise. The moral perspective differs starkly from most scholarly and political analyses on popular fronts, which have been more negative than Roseblatt's interlocutors. She explores the divergence, and the causes of this politics of memory.

Patricia Spyer, reviewing a sample of the rapidly-expanding literature on the photographed image, finds that its "sepia-toned glow" gives the colonial, ethnographic and familial work it does a special attraction for analysts just now. Theorists of society and history are drawn not only to reading photographs for what they freeze and fix, but also for what eludes and escapes them: "the unreliability of the photographic image vis-à-vis a more complex and layered real".

FOUCAULT ON THE FARM The concluding essay illustrates the versatility of Foucault's theorizing, and its usefulness in the most unexpected places—paddy fields in Malaysia, in this case.

Peter Triantafillou argues that rationalities of modern science and colonial government radically affected the lives of agricultural pests and farmers in Malaysia, beginning in the colonial period. The bio-science that justified gov-

ernment promotion of pesticides also provided a rationale for farmers' resistance to them, on account of their toxicity. In this dialectic farmers were re-fashioned from objects of development by experts to self-governing pest management experts in their own right.