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FATHERS AND SONS: KINSHIP VALUE AND VALIDATION IN TIBETAN POLYANDRY

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The assumption that men invariably place their first priorities with their own, over siblings', children, is a long-standing one and informs, for example, discussions of matrilineal and joint family systems. Fraternal polyandry as practised by ethnic Tibetans in northwest Nepal, however, counters this view. Here men do not necessarily seek the advantage of children they believe to be their own. Rather their principal concerns lie with socially validated fatherhood, specifically with the right to 'bind a child in one's name', and with children who have greater social value to them. Comparison of these cases shows how larger socio-cultural systems mould parent-child relationships and also how these relationships are strongest where they find jural support.

The notion that men find their first priorities to lie with their own, and not with siblings', children has a long history in anthropology. It was expressed as early as 1870 by Morgan, who argued that the development of individual property rights reinforced such discriminations and that these together were the only forces powerful enough to alter systems of kinship terminology:

. . . In Tamilian society, where my brother's son and my cousin's son are both my sons, a useful purpose may have been subserved by drawing closer, in this manner, the kindred bond; but in a civilized sense it would be manifestly unjust to place either of these collateral sons upon an equality with my own son for the inheritance of my estate. Hence the growth of property and the settlement of its distribution might be expected to lead to a more precise discrimination of the several degrees of consanguinity if they were confounded by the previous system (1870: 14).¹

The quotation, of course, is fraught with evolutionary preoccupations. Nonetheless it expresses two ideas that have continued relevance in kinship studies. First is that kinship obligations are reckoned by proximity measured in genealogical terms and second that people choose to pass on their property to their own children, in preference to other heirs. The former, the significance of genealogical reckoning in kinship, has become the focus of major theoretical debate. The second is a more limited issue—and one less well examined. It is cited principally when inheritance obligations run counter to this, as happens in matrilineal or joint family systems, and in slavery, although studies of slave systems have been rare. Impediments to inheritance by a man's own children might have been treated as problematic in polyandry as well. Until recently, however, we knew little about polyandrous systems, and discussions of them

have been mired in rather rudimentary debates, such as whether polyandry has ever existed as a form of marriage and whether it is best understood as an adaptation to extreme circumstances (see, for example, Keesing 1981: 262).

The conduct of relationships between men and their wives, brothers and children in fraternal polyandry provides significant points of comparison with other systems of kinship and marriage. This is because polyandry differs—being, in a sense, group marriage. Fraternal polyandry in particular requires co-operation between a group of men and involves overlapping conjugal and parental relationships. The consequences are not quite what one would expect. For one thing, as most ethnographers stress, sexual jealousy in polyandry is minimal. Paternity, by contrast, creates problems, at least in the Tibetan societies I have studied. Yet while men are preoccupied with paternity, they do not always establish closer relationships with, nor necessarily seek the advantage of, children they believe to be their own. Instead they place greater stress on what may be described as socially validated fatherhood, fundamental to which is the right to fix a child's kinship network. As we shall see, this is managed differently from one Tibetan society to the next and reflects, as it shapes, local patterns of inheritance. There is an additional factor that must be considered in this connexion. Women have interests in and responsibilities to *their* sets of children within a polyandrous marriage, responsibilities that can come into conflict with the divided interests of their husbands.

The systems of polyandry to be described are practised by ethnic Tibetan groups in northwestern Nepal. Here polyandry is the normative form of marriage and invariably fraternal. Brothers and sons of brothers share wives and together rear children produced in their marriages; women have children by many men. Polygyny is rare; when it occurs women have to share household resources with co-wives, and this is accomplished most easily with sisters. As we shall see, men's principal difficulty in polyandry is not sharing wives' sexuality, but sharing children. The societies considered here deal with this in various ways. In one, genitors have special obligations to their separate children, in another, families emphasise men's collective interests in common children, however engendered, and in the third, the eldest holds primary responsibilities and a kind of fictive genitorhood for all the children in the marriage. Each resolution creates a characteristic domestic order; it also gives rise to characteristic problems for parental and conjugal relationships. Some systems, however, are more successful in securing men's continued loyalties to the marriage and children than others. We also find the complex of ideas about paternal responsibilities echoed in obligations to children born outside marriage. That is, where men's individual ties with legitimate children are most stressed, so are the obligations to illegitimate ones. The focus of paternal interests, I should note, is sons, for in all these societies relationships with daughters are of subsidiary importance.

Matrilineal and patrilineal puzzles

McLennan argued that polyandry was linked to matrilineality, linked, that is, in an evolutionary sense, in that both were nascent kinship responses to paternity

uncertainty at earlier stages of human social evolution and in that they co-occurred (1865 [1876]: 138–9). This view was repudiated long ago, but there is one very real point of comparison between the two: problems of paternal authority and obligation. This is a theme that pervades the literature on matrilineal systems. It was formally stated by Radcliffe-Brown in his paper on the implications of matrilineal and patrilineal descent (1935 [1952]) and is manifest in Malinowski's ethnographic work on the Trobriands (1926; 1927; 1929). Both Fortes and Richards treated constraints upon paternal authority, rights and obligations to own children as major issues in their analyses of matrilineal kinship. Fortes spoke of the irreconcilable obligations stemming from matrilineal descent, marriage and parenthood among Ashanti. For men there were conflicts of loyalties to sisters' children, their heirs and successors by descent, and to their own children. Fortes describes Ashanti as trying to balance the two, but having a more fundamental interest in the latter, expressed in the notion 'that no man loves his sisters' children as much as his own' (1949 [1970]: 23; 1950: 262, 269). The compromise is for children to grow up in their father's home and then marry cross cousins—'a device by which men try to unite their love of their children with their loyalty to their maternal kin' (1949 [1970]: 23).

Richards focused upon structural conflicts in matrilineal systems in her influential paper on the matrilineal puzzle. The puzzle lay in combining descent passed through women with male political and domestic authority and rules of exogamy in marriage (1950: 246). The emphasis again was on men, whom Richards saw trying to get around the contradictions in the system. Their strategies included marriage to slave women (creating children who would belong to their father's clan), using their wealth as a lure to keep their children with them, or arranging cross-cousin marriages, which led to daughters' or grandchildren's co-residence (Richards 1950: 248). Schneider later expanded upon these themes. Among the sources of strain he examined was 'the emotional interest of the father in his own children', which he saw as a potential threat to matrilineal ties (1961: 21–3).

Gough's analysis of the Nayar of Central Kerala also drew attention to paternal interest, all the more striking in light of the strong institutional constraints upon men's relationships with their wives and children. Nayar polyandry was non-fraternal, which meant that women were involved in simultaneous sexual relationships with several unrelated men. Spouses did not live together, but with members of their matrilineage. Despite this, some men apparently formed strong attachments to certain wives and children, which led to concerns that they would transfer property to the latter, instead of matrilineal heirs (Gough 1961a: 361).² Gough also suggests that powerful men, who were more likely to develop more exclusive conjugal relationships and were 'more sure of the paternity of their Nayar sons', sometimes conferred offices upon them. Again we hear of cross-cousin marriage used by men to keep a favoured wife's daughter with them, and to make 'the nephew . . . less likely to accuse the uncle of infidelity . . . if he favored his wife and her children' (Gough 1961a: 365, 379).

Gough stressed the role played by property in the decline of matrilineality and the rising strength of the conjugal family, and this has remained a point of debate

as well. Some writers have argued that modern cultural influences have had the greater effect, while others point to scarcity of resources, or the economic differentiation between brothers that occurs with the introduction of modern economic systems. What is of interest here is the notion that, given a choice, men will turn their backs on their matrilineal kin and use their property for their wives and children instead (Gough 1961c: 596; 1961d: 649, 652; Douglas 1971: 132).³

Similar presumptions inform analyses of joint family systems. The argument here is that men's obligations to brothers and brothers' children come into conflict with their responsibilities to wives and children. In the Indian joint family, for example, men marry, bring their wives to their parents' home and are expected to remain and raise their children within it. The problem is that household members are supposed to contribute all they produce to the joint economy, while being entitled to withdraw only what their families need. Inequities in contributions and consumption are inevitable, people are all too attentive to them, and this gives rise to dissension and, eventually, partition (Parry 1979). The interpretation—of a conflict of loyalties between fraternal kinship and conjugal-parental ties—is reminiscent of and has been traced to Fortes's analysis of matrilineality cited above (Parry 1979: 178). Associated with this is the argument that commitments to joint family living decrease and obligations to conjugal families become more compelling as the joint family expands over time and includes more distant kin. These are characteristic themes in discussions of joint families and partition. Gluckman has seen in them a 'configuration of stress in [the] patrilineal complex' (1965: 248), in essence, a patrilineal puzzle.

Women's conflicts of interest over obligations to their families versus larger kin groups and their strategies for resolving them were mostly neglected in the older ethnographic accounts, partly because women were seen as lacking the authority or means to pursue independent goals. For joint families, we heard the native view that fraternal solidarity was undermined by women's quarrels, without much reason given for those quarrels. Now we find that women genuinely wish to expedite partition, because it provides them greater autonomy, full access to household resources (however diminished) and the ability to meet their children's needs best (Hershman 1981: 65). Among the earlier discussions of matrilineality, Gough's was atypical in considering how different types of cross-cousin marriage served the kinship interests of women as well as men (Gough 1961b: 397). I raise this issue, because keeping women's and men's interests separate in polyandry is critical, particularly when their sets of children diverge.

Tibetan systems of polyandry

Tibetan polyandry is classed as 'fraternal', although the co-husbands may include half-brothers and even cousins. This is because polyandry is repeated from one generation to the next, and if one begins with brothers, their sons will be half-brothers, followed by the sons of half-brothers in the third generation.

In the event of polygyny or the remarriage of widowed or divorced men, these children would be no more than half-cousins (being the offspring of half-brothers and different mothers), yet they too are expected to marry polyandrously. As I have said, polyandry differs from other forms of marriage in linking men's conjugal and paternal interests. While men experience difficulties in sharing a wife's sexuality and sexual inequities can lead to tensions, the far greater problem lies with individual interests in children, specifically, with how to allocate rights in a single woman's childbearing capacities. Logically, paternal rights could be held jointly or differentiated, could fall to one brother for all children, one brother at a time, or be held concurrently by all. Each of the societies I have studied has its own resolution to this problem, but in all a clear distinction is drawn between paternity in the sense of engendering a child and in the sense of 'giving', literally 'binding', 'a child in one's name' (*ming tag tag pa*). Despite preoccupations with the former, the weight of men's kinship interests lie with the latter and its public validation.

Three Humla Tibetan societies

Humla is a district of far northwestern Nepal, one of the poorest, most remote from urban centres and most sparsely populated regions in the country. Its poverty and low population density owe much to the mountainous terrain, which leaves little level land for agriculture or for herding of yak and crossbred cattle. Even land suitable for settlements is limited, and villages consist of tight clusters of houses with adjoining walls and roof walkways. Humla includes three major population groups, Hindus of high caste who occupy the valley floors where a high altitude variety of rice can be grown, a group called Bura or Byansi who farm a middle range of altitudes and Tibetan speakers who live in higher altitude valleys closest to Tibet. For reasons to be found in the peculiar political history of Humla, the Tibetan groups have remained small and confined to narrow territories. They have set themselves apart from one another, culturally and socially, and stress this in their constructions of ethnic identity (Levine in press). The result is that each has a socio-cultural system unique in certain details, although all share in certain fundamental cultural assumptions and social structural characteristics of pan-Tibetan civilisation.

Ladog, Rongphug and Gyaling,⁴ like other Tibetan speaking communities in Humla, include a number of adjacent village settlements of several hundred individuals each. They are endogamous by preference and, despite occasional intermarriage, see themselves as communities of kin, so that ethnic solidarity has come to be chartered in terms of common ancestry and common pedigrees. All trace descent patrilineally and treat descent as a marker of rank and purity of paternal antecedents. Ideas about kinship through women complement this and also are a consideration in assessments of social ranking. These notions of kinship are grounded in ideas of substance transmission, and close kin are thought to be most similar—in character, appearance and behaviour.

All these communities are fraternally polyandrous, although in varying degree. Regardless of incidence, polyandry and fraternal co-operation in

marriage are idealised. Also idealised is the large, extended family household organised around a core of brothers that polyandry and virilocal residence create. This sort of household arrangement is very practical in Humla, because it permits men to specialise full time in one or another economic activity. It is not only a matter of greater income, but also of providing a cushion against the uncertainties of agriculture, herding and trade. Crops have failed several times in the last decade, herds have been lost to disease, and trading profits have fluctuated wildly from one year to the next, due in large part to unpredictable political conditions in Tibet. Specialisation means that brothers are separated for much of the year. The man who attends to agriculture mostly stays in the village, the herdsman takes cattle or sheep to near or far pastures, and the trader travels year-round, in an exchange of grain and salt that leads him from Tibet to India. Although all these communities have mixed economies, Ladog relies more on agriculture, Gyaling more on herding and Rongphug traditionally relied more upon trade. Rongphug's traditional trading arrangements with Tibetans collapsed in the 1960's, however, and many villagers were able to support themselves only through occasional labour for their agriculturally richer neighbours in Humla and regions south.

In all three communities, the key social unit is the household. It is the household that meets village obligations and is assigned political and ritual offices. It is the household, not individuals, that owns major productive resources, land, animals, buildings and so on. It is households too that form networks or groups for mutual assistance, although the principles guiding their formation vary in the different communities. For these reasons the political and economic strength of households is important, and that strength is founded upon fraternal unity. The major threat to that unity is partition, which occurs when co-resident brothers—who otherwise would be polyandrously married—separate. Thus polyandry is advocated, because it supports a higher standard of living for individuals, an economically more substantial household for its members and one better able to meet village obligations and to defend itself in political disputes. Unlike the Indian joint family, polyandry does not create conflicting sets of obligations to siblings and conjugal families, for the two are joined. Partition, however, creates separate families and negates all these goals. It is perceived as disadvantageous for individual, household and community. Nonetheless it occurs, occasionally out of sexual jealousy or the desire for autonomy, and mostly due to men's desires to have children of their own. Significantly only this last justification has any cultural legitimacy.

Ladog: mutual obligation and fraternal unity

Ladog is the oldest and wealthiest of the three communities, with the most substantial agricultural base. It is also the community in which polyandry is consistently followed, where more marriages begin and remain with several brothers. Tables 1 and 2, which compare the incidence of polyandry and the number of husbands women have across the three communities, confirm this greater commitment. As we shall see, the greater success of polyandry in

Ladog owes much to the way in which rights and obligations in children are managed.

Table 1 shows that more Ladog marriages begin in polyandry and also that non-polyandrous marriages almost always are the outcome of chance factors, not choice. Monogamy is unavoidable when a household raises only one son to adulthood or has no sons. In the latter case, a daughter acts as heiress; she marries uxorilocally—to one man. Contrasts with the communities of Rongphug and Gyaling are clear: there more marriages begin in monogamy, due to more frequent pre-marital partitions. In these communities too, fraternal separations are more common later in the marriage, as table 2 shows. The result is that Ladog women and men are more likely to live out their lives in polyandry and the average marriage includes more husbands. To take the example of women aged forty, those in Ladog have 1.6 husbands on average, while their counterparts in Rongphug and Gyaling have 1.3 and 1.2 husbands respectively. At age forty, marriage with two or more husbands remains the experience of 38.6 per cent. of Ladog women, while this is the case for 27.3 per cent. of Rongphug women and only 14.3 per cent. of Gyaling women.

More than in the other communities, Ladog people stress equality of sexual and procreative rights of all brothers in a marriage. No brother has priority of access to the wife. This is not to say that preferences never develop, because they do, but rather that preferences are not permitted to govern the relationship. And if a second wife is taken into a Ladog marriage, it does not precipitate partition, nor is it grounds for sexual exclusivity. Rather the woman is adopted into a polygynous polyandry, or conjoint marriage, with sexual rights extended to all brothers, in fact or potentiality (see Levine n.d. on Nyinba polyandry). Finally all men are entitled and all expect to have children in the marriage, especially sons. That is to say, all wish to have children who are acknowledged as theirs and who have rights of inheritance through them.

TABLE 1. Commitments to polyandry.

	<i>Ladog</i>		<i>Rongphug</i>		<i>Gyaling</i>	
	<i>N.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>N.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>N.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>
Women's marriages ^a						
<i>Polyandry</i>						
Households with two or more co-resident brothers	75	57.7	29	54.7	31	48.4
<i>Monogamy</i>						
Households with one brother and uxorilocal marriages	45	34.6	10	18.9	20	31.2
<i>Monogamy</i>						
Households with prior partitions	9	6.9	12	22.6	13	20.3
<i>No marriage</i>						
Households with women never marrying	1	0.8	2	3.8	0	0.0
Number of women surveyed	130		53		64	

^aThese and the data in the table following derive from a retrospective survey of women's marital and household histories conducted in 1983.

TABLE 2. Persistence of polyandrous marriage over women's lives.

	<i>Ladog</i>	<i>Rongphug Women</i>	<i>Gyaling</i>
At marriage			
N. of husbands	2.2	1.9	2.0
Pct. polyandrous	57.7	54.7	48.4
N. of women	130	53	64
At age thirty			
N. of husbands	1.9	1.6	1.6
Pct. polyandrous	47.7	38.3	35.4
Pct. of marriages experiencing partition or divorce ^a	14.7	23.4	20.8
N. of women ^b	109	47	48
At age forty			
N. of husbands	1.6	1.3	1.2
Pct. polyandrous	38.6	27.3	14.3
Pct. of marriages experiencing partition or divorce	5.7	18.2	19.0
N. of women	70	33	21

^aIncluded with this are rarer instances of late uxori-local marriage or out-migration of husbands

^bBecause fewer women have reached ages thirty and forty, the sample becomes smaller for those age groups.

It may seem a dubious venture to try to assign paternity where a woman has several husbands. Most polyandrously married women, however, have no more than two, and the men are not always home at the same time. Women keep track of sexual relations with their different husbands and the timing of their fertile period, which they believe occurs between the fifth and fifteenth day of the menstrual cycle. If there is any uncertainty, they wait until a child is born and compare its appearance to possible genitors. Thus it is wives who control assignments of paternity, here and in the other communities. Ladog men, however, rarely ever voice doubt about these decisions, whereas men in Rongphug and Gyaling are known to do so. Wives thereupon communicate the decision to kin and friends. Later when the child is old enough to understand, they tell him who his or her 'real' (*ngothog*) father is. Although paternity is a fact of common knowledge, it is not a matter for public discussion, and while women and men were able to tell me the assignments of paternity for every child in their village, they did so quietly, where we were not likely to be overheard.

The dilemma in this is that while real fathers and children are aware of one another's identities, they are not supposed to let this affect their conduct. It is disapproved of for fathers to discriminate between their own and brothers' children, and they really seem to be as likely to look after, teach skills to, make clothes or buy gifts for brothers' children as their own. If there is greater concern about or tenderness for own children, it is expressed privately. Nonetheless the facts of paternity are fixed—I know of no case of later changes—and ultimately incorporated in local genealogies.

Differential paternity becomes a public issue when it acquires legal import—at the time of partition. Then men begin openly to favour their own over brothers' children. This is because children's rights of household membership

are held by virtue of paternity and inheritance is calculated on a *per stirpes* basis. At the time of partition, men go off with whichever brothers and wives they feel are most compatible and take their own children along. Even when the mother joins the other side, children stay with their father, because they gain property and household membership through him. The property then is divided according to the following scheme: an equal parcel is calculated for each father, living or dead, and the partitioning sons 'take their shares from their own fathers'. This can lead to great disparities in the amounts of property people receive. Take the example of three partitioning brothers, two the sons of one man, the third the son of another. The first two obtain only a one quarter share—one half of their father's property—each, the third gets a half share, thus twice what his brothers have.

Rongphug: individualism and partition

While Ladog people are likely to emphasise the inherent value as well as the benefits they find in polyandry, Rongphug people are more apt to cite human failings that jeopardise it. They describe these regretfully, because Rongphug men and women alike say polyandry is better than monogamy. Women prefer two husbands (Ladog women say they prefer two or three), partly for security against widowhood and partly for the greater income they can provide. What is equally important to women is that if the household remains undivided, their children gain a larger inheritance. Men tend to cite the economic support and companionship a brother can provide.

Despite its perceived advantages, polyandry often fails, and people place the blame on the vagaries of individual temperament and short-sightedness. Older brothers, Rongphug people say, may be tempted to take advantage of household headship, assign the worst tasks to their brothers and monopolise the common wife. Younger brothers may be quick to infer slights in the way they are being treated. Some men are simply fickle in their affections and are not satisfied with any one wife. And in cases where the age difference between brothers is great, the older may refuse to wait until he can find a wife intermediate in age between himself and the younger ones. Some women do not mask their preferences, sleeping mostly with one brother, arranging that their favourite receives the easier work assignments and best food, treating his children best. Other women are poor workers or have character flaws that certain husbands are less willing to tolerate.

Rongphug people attribute their inability to sustain polyandrous marriages to individual behaviour and individual decisions. Here polyandry lacks certain structural and external economic supports it receives in Ladog. First Rongphug relies less upon agriculture and more upon the individual wage labour of men and women, as it did upon the profits of individual trade in the past. There are fewer advantages to staying together here, and in Tibet as well, landless labourers and traders less often lived in polyandry (see Aziz 1978: 157–8; Goldstein 1971). In accordance with this, polyandrous marital arrangements give greater emphasis to the roles of individual men and less to co-operation

and mutual obligations to children. Thus instead of strict equality in sexual relationships, there is a hierarchy of rights. Traditionally the eldest has first access to the common wife, the others sleep with her on his approval, or when he is not home. The wife, however, has a great deal of power in this and can enforce equality between brothers if she wants to keep them together. Overall, though, there is less commitment to continuing a polyandrous marriage, and, for example, if a brother takes another wife in haste, he will demand partition immediately, rather than trying to accommodate her in a conjoint-type union.

Partition is Rongphug's major paradox. It is frequent, and the nature of interpersonal relations in polyandry practically predisposes for it. Despite this, it is considered unwise and financially damaging. Mediators are called in, parents may interfere, and shares may not be settled for years. The quarrels that arise can divide kin and friends. There is so much bitterness in partition that brothers rarely ever work together again. Rongphug people contrast themselves in this with their Nepali neighbours, for whom partition is a normal phase of the developmental cycle. Nepalis anticipate it, build houses that can accommodate separated families, stock two or more sets of basic agricultural and domestic tools and anticipate co-operating in trade afterwards. Rongphug families, on the other hand, live in one large room that is not easily divided and keep single, high quality tools. After partition they cannot trust one another and may have to give up trade and herding entirely.

Even more divisive than Rongphug's conjugal arrangements is its system of allocating rights and obligations in children. Like Ladog, women calculate and assign paternity when they are pregnant. Rongphug husbands, however, are more likely to voice suspicions that their wives' paternity declarations are guided by family politics, for example, identifying the brother who otherwise lacks children as genitor in order to keep him in the marriage. It is true that the method of calculating paternity is not very precise. People think a woman is likeliest to conceive following the post-menstrual bath, on the fourth or fifth day of the menstrual cycle, although they say conception can occur up to the middle of the cycle. Doubts or not, it is Rongphug men who make the most of their role as genitor and differentiate between the family's children on the basis of it.

In Rongphug, assigned paternity becomes a public fact which is discussed openly in the community. I recall how when I walked through a village or visited homes, men would hold a particular child up and proudly announce, 'this one is mine'. People say that fathers are more concerned about their own children's welfare and that they love them more. Children reciprocally are thought to care more about their fathers and take better care of them when they are old. There is discrimination from the outset, and fathers try to ensure that their children get better food and clothes than the others. They arrange better dowries for their daughters and secretly transfer household valuables to their sons. People assume that men do so, and it becomes an issue of contention between brothers. Quarrels occur even when the family is together and escalate when partition is contemplated. Quarrels over children occur between husbands and wives too. A woman who has children by more than one husband will seek equal benefits for them, while her husband will try to divert more resources to his than to the others.

The division of property is predictably *per stirpes* here. Men take shares according to their paternity, calculated as in Ladog. The brother allied most closely with the original wife partitions with her, and the brother who has precipitated the partition by bringing a new wife goes off with her. Ordinarily men take their sons with them, while daughters stay with their mothers, from whom they get their dowry property (and dowries are minimal in the best of circumstances). Parents earmark a bit of land or other property for themselves, called *jyuni* (Nep.), which saves them the stigma of complete dependency and is their right by Nepali law. People say that in the end a household partitioned is better than one plagued by quarrels. This is said in Gyaling as well.

Gyaling: paternity and responsibility

Gyaling is poorer than Ladog, although it has more reliable sources of income than Rongphug. Over the last few generations, the village population has expanded dramatically, and, to support this, people have expanded both their landholdings and involvements in pastoralism. People nowadays are concerned that if the village grows any more, they will face a serious decline in their standard of living. Despite this, men continue to take second wives, an action that immediately precipitates partition.

Gyaling in fact has no major impediments to partition, and the system of polyandry would even seem to encourage it. While in Rongphug the elder brother is the primary husband, here he is both primary husband and father. The wife is obliged only to sleep with him; whether or not she does so with the others is a matter of choice and depends on her interest in retaining them as husbands. Yet people say that all things being equal, polyandry is best. It brings wealth, prestige and political strength to the family. The men can engage in different economic specialisations, and wives in larger households have more help with child care and agricultural work. Because of this, parents prefer to arrange polyandrous marriages for their daughters. However, as table 2 above shows, such marriages fail as often as not.

I have said that younger brothers are not 'primary fathers'. That means that they never can be recognised formally as the father of any children produced in the marriage, for all children are 'given in the name of' the eldest. In essence the eldest brother is treated as if he were the genitor of those children, and he holds primary responsibility for them, making him the effective pater.⁵ The children are linked with the eldest brother in genealogies, he is referred to and addressed by a special term for father, and he and their mother refer to and address the children by terms that translate as son and daughter. The father's younger brothers, by contrast, call these children by a different term, which also is used for children of sisters and which sisters use for their brothers' children.

Gyaling people believe that assigning fatherhood to the eldest eases partition, because it supports a *per capita* reckoning of shares and avoids the inequities between brothers created in *per stirpes* divisions. It is true that partition here is less problematic than in any other Tibetan-speaking community I know in the region. A younger brother can demand partition and expect a fair share of the

property at any time.⁶ Parents do not try to prevent this, but take a small share of property for their support (*iyuni*) and go off with their younger sons and unmarried daughters. Daughters' dowries are allocated at that time as well.

Although socially recognised and validated fatherhood may fall to the eldest, this does not mean that younger brothers' procreative roles are denied. In fact they are not, and paternity in the end becomes a problem all the greater for this, a subject rarely discussed publicly and a continuing private preoccupation. This is why I spent two months living in Gyaling before anyone would acknowledge differentiating between children's fathers. With further inquiries I found some people continuing to deny this was a regular practice, while others said that it was, but an unwise one, responsible for a spate of recent litigation when men tried to secure a larger, effectively *per stirpes* share for their sons.⁷ Most people shrugged physical paternity off as a fact impossible to overlook, given the resemblances between 'real' fathers and their children. Despite the ambivalence, Gyaling women, like their counterparts in Ladog and Rongphug, decide who the physical father must be and announce this to their husbands. As in Rongphug, Gyaling men express concern that women sacrifice accuracy to marital politics and use this right to strengthen individual marital relationships. Gyaling notions about conception certainly give women enough latitude, for they believe pregnancy is possible any time in the first half of the month. Despite all of this, the children are 'given in the name of' the eldest brother.

This gives rise to another set of contradictions. A younger brother may be seen as and genuinely believe himself to be the father of a given child, but not have any special recognition for it. His elder brother meanwhile is singled out, in kinship terminological usages and in myriad other ways, as that child's father. It is hardly surprising then to find younger brothers using their 'childlessness' as justification for taking their own wives and setting up independent households. The common wife may try to prevent this, by reminding a man contemplating partition that he already has a child, by her, and his elder brother may cite an adage about children being shared in polyandry. The partition cannot be stopped, however, because by custom, as supported by local interpretation of Nepali law, a younger brother is neither husband nor father.⁸ As a lama said to me, 'the elder brother must accept his responsibility for the children and, if this rankles, all he can do is invoke the gods'.

There is a positive result of this policy: discrimination between children is minimised. Fathers are supposed to be and generally are equally solicitous of all children in the marriage. Nonetheless there have been cases of men trying and succeeding in gaining (larger) *per stirpes* shares of property for children believed to be their own. What most younger brothers do, however, is to leave the marriage and abandon those children, in order to establish recognised families of their own. And this means a smaller share of property for the children left behind.

Illegitimacy and the morality of kinship

However near to one another geographically, these three societies stand far apart in their management of fatherhood in polyandry. Although the establishment of

paternity is a matter of concern in all of them, it does not necessarily lead to men's greater authority over or interest in seeking the advantage of own, as opposed to siblings', children. These variations extend to paternity outside of marriage as well. Thus we find in Rongphug, where there is great stress upon individual paternity within marriage, a similar, and socially enforced, commitment to individual responsibilities for children born outside it. In Gyaling, although men assume less responsibility for their illegitimate children, they do so as individuals, irrespective of their position or age ranking within the marriage. Ladog, which stresses joint fraternal responsibilities most and has the least differentiation between brothers, is most likely to find children born outside marriage rejected. There is one significant parallel: just as Gyaling younger brothers' obligations to own children are sanctioned primarily by conscience, so are Ladog men's obligations to illegitimate ones. In neither instance does this have much force against competing kinship interests and obligations.

In Rongphug, men rarely dispute allegations of illegitimate paternity and do their best to meet obligations to children born outside their marriages. The amounts involved may not seem much—clothes for the new mother and food for mother and child for ten years. It is, however, a considerable amount over time, and the readiness to share resources is quite striking in a community so poor. After that point, the father should take the child in, and if a son, should be prepared to grant him an inheritance.⁹ Daughters are more likely to stay with their mothers and get their dowries from them, as they do in the event of divorce or partition. If the natural father were to die, the man's brothers and wife would do their best to block the son's rights, which, of course, threaten the property rights of *their* children.

Rongphug, I should note, has the highest rates of illegitimacy, and the least stigma attached to it. Seventeen women in fifty-three households listed an illegitimate child in their pregnancy histories, and presumably there were additional, unacknowledged illegitimacies as well. In Rongphug too, marital bonds are tenuous and divorce common, far more so than in the other communities. It simply seems to matter less whether a child is born within marriage, or whether the child's parents stay together. Men take responsibility for a child, so long as it is declared as theirs, see that it is raised properly and try to pass a son the largest share of property possible. Wives complain about this; they see men's entanglements in illicit relationships and willingness to disperse household property to out-of-wedlock children as another cause of dissension and household partition and as a threat to their own children.

Gyaling has the second highest incidence of illegitimacy. I know of eleven illegitimate children born to the women of sixty-four households, although most died within the first year of life. Still the community is quite punctilious about father's obligations—nurturant food to the mother in the post-delivery period plus food for mother and child for three years. Villagers say that the father usually comes forward; if not, they hold an assembly in which the woman declares under oath who the father is. Villagers also say that it is the father's legal responsibility to take his children in and give sons a property share. Wives, however, oppose this, and with partial success, for illegitimate children have never been reared in their father's home, although two sons have managed to

win shares in past decades.¹⁰ 'Father' refers here to the man considered the genitor, not the eldest brother, and if a younger brother with an illegitimate child were to partition, he would take his responsibility to his new home.

Ladog is the community with the lowest rate of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and in which children are least likely to survive past the first day of life. It is also the community in which there is the least sense of obligation to illegitimate children. Thus we find no established scheme of payments to the mother and child, although people say that the man *ought* to give some food to the new mother and, perhaps, a dress. Not only that, men do their best to evade responsibility for an illegitimate child, and they are supported in this by their brothers and wives. The reason given is that to bring another woman's child into the household would enhance the chances of dissension and of partition between legitimate and illegitimate sons in the next generation. The only recourse illegitimate children have is to curse their fathers, although fear of this seemingly has little effect.

What we more commonly hear of in Ladog is wives' out-of-wedlock pregnancies shielded by their husbands.¹¹ Such children also are likely to be neglected and die. There are cases, however, mostly in otherwise childless marriages, where the husbands accepted the child as their heir. In this—a sort of covert adoption—one of the brothers is presented to kin and friends as the genitor, and the others act as they would to their brother's legitimate child.¹² At the same time, the family also marks who the 'true' genitor is. Later, when all participants in these events have died, truth becomes public fact. Not that this changes kin relationships. The only obligation is to avoid marrying kin by 'real' as well as 'adoptive' ties. The former, however, cannot be enforced, and there have been three such incestuous marriages and even more illicit sexual relationships in recent years. People awaited mystical punishments, and they came: the children of the marriages were stillborn, sickly or deformed, or the participants themselves died of dreadful wasting diseases.¹³ Marriages have not occurred within the adoptive clan—strong relationships between kin as much as legal sanctions prevent this.

Wealth has no bearing upon how people deal with their illegitimate children, although the manner in which people make a living and the inheritance system seemingly do. Thus while Ladog is the richest and Rongphug the poorest community, Rongphug is the most generous in providing for illegitimate children and Ladog the least. The reason for this is that Ladog social structure depends upon stability in landholdings, and its polyandry is geared to that, to preventing land fragmentation through partition. Acceptance of illegitimate children, especially sons, poses a great threat, because they would have little solidarity with legitimate brothers and could be expected to take their property elsewhere. Rongphug has less land and depends on land less. Most people are accustomed to supporting themselves by working for others, which means they fear partition less. In Gyaling, there was new land to clear until recently, so the small share an illegitimate child received created few problems for legitimate heirs.

These variations have to be seen in the larger context of characteristic features of fatherhood. Rongphug people make the greatest differentiation between men

in their marriages—fathers separate out their interests in own children from the time of birth and put those children first. In Gyalung all children are identified with a particular man, the eldest, and younger brothers are entitled to hivy off to establish their own, individual marriages.¹⁴ In Ladog, discrete paternity is emphasised least. The brothers represent themselves in public as equally fathers to all the children and only privately or at the time of partition distinguish among themselves. Obligations to illegitimate children are consistent with this, being strongest where individual rights of fathers in own children receive the most, and shared rights in children the least, emphasis.

Sentiment and social valuation of kinship

Theorists postulated another solution to the problem of paternal interests in matrilineal systems, that of compensatory sentiment. Malinowski early on described Trobriand men as compensating for lesser authority over their children by developing strong, affective relationships with them (Malinowski 1926: 100–11; 1927; 1929: 208–10),¹⁵ somewhat in the way women are presumed to respond to their limited authority in patrilineal societies. In this view, the father becomes the focus of sentimental ties and the mother's brother assumes the formal and authoritarian role that fathers ordinarily hold. This implies a strict disjunction between sentiment and authority in kin relationships.¹⁶ As Radcliffe-Brown, who expressed a similar position earlier, in his famous paper on the mother's brother (1924) put it:

A system of mother-right, in which a father has no, or almost no, legal rights over or legal duties towards his children, does not debar, but possibly encourages, mutual affection; for affectionate attachment can perhaps flourish best where there is a minimum of the kind of constraint that may result from the obligations of a jural relationship. . . . The system simply separates out the jural relations, which are confined within the lineage, and the personal relations of affection, esteem, and attachment (1935: 77–8).

These sorts of arguments informed interpretations of matrilineality for decades (e.g., Schneider 1961: 22; Gough 1961c: 578) and proved a continued influence upon the classic kinship literature.¹⁷ We can see this reflected in discussions both of slave kinship and of relations between parents and their daughters in strongly patrilineal societies (e.g., Fortes 1959 [1970]: 113). This misrepresents at least the latter, however, as we shall see below.

The notion that sentiment flourishes in the absence of jural constraints appears in other forms as well. It underlies the popular distinction between the domestic domain of women and the public domain of men and the presumption that parents, mothers particularly, will be committed absolutely and invariably to the welfare of their children. These ideas are all the more pervasive for their grounding in our own cultural system (Rosaldo 1980) and persist in the face of theoretical inadequacies and empirical challenges, including mounting evidence of child neglect cross-culturally.

The discussion here shows that men's interests in and relationships with their 'real' children are neither inevitable, nor invariable. The likelihood that a man will develop strong or affectionate relationships with his children, or that he will

seek to give them advantage over brothers', or cousins' or any other children depends upon the larger cultural and social system and the conduct it enjoins. Thus we find that Rongphug men openly discriminate between children, while Ladog men do not, unless they anticipate separating from their brothers, and relationships between Gyaling men and their children depend upon the man's age relative to his brothers, rather than what is thought about the children's paternity. What we find is that men do the most for the children who have the most 'value' to them, a value calculated in broad terms.

A major concern underlying paternal obligation is the perpetuation of kinship. This is an issue for mothers as well as fathers, since children expand and perpetuate the kinship universe of both. Children moreover carry on the household name. This is of great importance, for it is through household genealogies that people in these societies attain a sort of immortality. For men, sons also perpetuate the patrilineage, which is one of several reasons for son preference. In addition, children bring political and economic benefits to their parents, again sons more than daughters. That the major concern is kinship and not material advantage becomes obvious in considering the case of Gyaling. There men do not partition because they believe that their real children will favour their elder brother at their expense, but to start conjugal families in their own name. They partition, because they are socially without wives and children, although they may have these in a carnal and physical sense.

While these physical relationships are a matter of concern, they are incomplete without social validation, or social legitimation. Fortes made this point in his discussion of the social recognition of kinship, a similar notion. This 'converts genealogically identified . . . or represented connections into kinship relations' (Fortes 1969: 251) and makes 'offspring . . . children and their begetters and bearers . . . parents' (Fortes 1969: 252).¹⁸ It is only with such validation that there is full kinship—in people's own eyes. People in Ladog, for example, speak of such kinship relations as imbued with *dadpa*, which means sympathy and trust. *Dadpa* is strongest in the relationships between children and fathers who are both 'real' and legitimate, between mothers and their children and full siblings, followed by relationships with fathers' brothers and brothers by different fathers in polyandry. Relations with illegitimate kin, by contrast, lack mutual trust, and parents and children alike say their relationship is uneasy, marred by calculation and expectations of reciprocity, not unlike newly established relationships between affinal kin.

The concept *dadpa* conforms to Fortes's axiom of amity, defined as 'equality of sharing . . . involuntary, perpetual, and inescapable bonds of complete mutuality' (Fortes 1972: 293) and to the diffuse enduring solidarity Schneider finds enjoined in American kinship (1968; 1984: 53). This is not kinship in its entirety, however; in actual life, the morality of kinship and kinship obligations are moderated by other forces. We can see this in Gyaling men's abandonment of children in their brothers' names and Ladog men's rejection of illegitimate children. That these situations are culturally problematic, a locus of unresolved obligations, attests to the power of genitorship, here as elsewhere. This has been an issue of debate. Fortes, for his part, stressed genealogy as fundamental to kinship recognition, while Schneider has continued to affirm kinship's cultural

source and dimensions. Questions of priority, however, draw attention from the complexity of kinship as social relations that cut across and sometimes conflict with one another and other obligations of social life. This complexity becomes even greater when gender is factored out, as the position of girl children in these societies shows.

Thus far I have spoken mostly of sons, because daughters figure little in men's concerns about parenthood. As in much of China and north India, daughters have little status in their parents' homes, the major concern is marrying them off as soon as possible, and their principal value lies in their establishment of affinal ties in this generation and ties of matrilineal kinship in the next. Parents feel that daughters are worth less to them than sons, and this is reflected in a sense of lesser obligation to them, reinforced by what is emically viewed and can only be etically interpreted as deliberate diminution of sentimental ties. Parents say this outright—that daughters are less important to them and they feel less compassion or love (*nyingje*) for them than for sons. Many say quite bluntly that it matters not at all if their daughters die. In consequence, parents are less likely to provide good child care (as it is understood locally) for girls, and the mother of a girl baby is treated with less solicitude.

We can see this discrimination from birth. The mother of a daughter finds her postpartum rest cut short and is deprived of the preferred protein foods she otherwise would receive. She may feed the child less frequently and is discouraged from taking off work when the child is ill. Girl children are given lower quality cereals, less meat and milk and are less likely to have a religious ceremony sponsored for them or be taken to one of the newly established health posts. Such treatment also is directed towards the latter-born of too many sons, children in unstable marriages and, most of all, illegitimate children. The reason is that kinship ties to girls, children of divorce and those born out of wedlock simply are of lesser social value. Thus interpersonal obligations are guided by value as well as social validation of kinship ties, and all parent-child ties are not equal, a fact that has a profound effect upon the treatment of children.

Comparisons of father-child relations in polyandry also show that affection, as locally understood, complements rather than opposes relations of authority and obligation, and that these relations are weakest where supported by moral sanctions alone. This is why Gyaling younger brothers find it relatively easy to turn their backs on their children. While many have done so, only once has an elder brother left his wife and children. This happened a generation ago, it is notorious, and the man was penalised by the loss of half his property to his son. Younger brothers, by contrast, are not obliged to do anything for their children, and whatever their sense of responsibility, it is not enough to divert their interests from their new conjugal families. Similar conclusions can be drawn from comparisons in the treatment of illegitimate children. In Rongphug, where support for illegitimate children is strongly enjoined, men do their best for these children. In Ladog, where it is not, men prefer to invest in household children, even if so unfortunate as to have none of their own. The child a man is socially credited with simply has the greater social value.

If men feel conflicting loyalties towards their own and siblings' children in matrilineal or fraternal joint family systems, the conflicts they experience are

socially constructed. These systems are no more marked by discord in kinship interests than patrilineal or nuclear family ones, just as polyandry is no more puzzling or problematic than polygyny. The fact that certain marital and domestic arrangements are statistically rarer is another matter. Each system is associated with a characteristic set of structural contradictions, which lead to sets of resolutions, which in turn create paradoxes and conflicts for individuals to resolve. The cases discussed here should indicate how greatly the resolutions can vary from one society to the next. These cases of polyandry also should make clear how narrowly we have framed questions about male concerns in sexuality and parenthood, as well as about the role of children in mothers' and fathers' lives in pre-industrial societies. Finally, I should note that the concepts of social value and validation as I have used them stand beyond and should not be confused with notions of calculative reciprocity, which apply to new affines and friends and for which there are quite separate sets of concepts in these societies.

NOTES

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¹ Schneider uses this statement as an example of Morgan's biogenetic theories of kinship, here manifested in the notion that closeness of (recognised) biological kinship correlates directly with expressions of solidarity between kin. For Schneider this 'fundamental assumption' has continued to influence mainstream kinship theory, much to its detriment (Schneider 1984: 168). Goody cites this statement as well in a discussion of the consequences of property accumulation and individual inheritance for social structure (Goody 1976: 19).

² This refers to self-acquired, not ancestral property (Gough 1961a: 361; 1961d: 647), a point stressed by Fuller (1976). Fuller also points to concerns about *taravad* heads favouring their own matrilineal segments, at the expense of more distantly related uterine kin (1976: 126–7).

³ The article by Douglas (1971) is the first I know of to criticise the notion that stresses and strains are intrinsic to systems of matrilineality.

⁴ These names are pseudonyms.

⁵ In an earlier discussion of Nyinba paternity, I found it useful to differentiate between genetic paternity, as a physical fact; the genitor, as the man to whom paternity conventionally is assigned, and the pater or paters, who take on the obligation of rearing a child (Levine 1980, following distinctions drawn in the the debate between Barnes 1961; 1964; Gellner 1963 and others). These concepts are applicable to fatherhood here as well.

⁶ It seems that inheritance in Tibet was *per capita*, although elder brothers in landholder strata were likely to keep the others from taking their rightful shares (Goldstein 1978). The *per stirpes* system of Ladog and Rongphug may be an adaptation to Nepali law, which stipulates *per stirpes* reckoning.

⁷ I know of six cases in the last two decades. The motives cited for seeking *per stirpes* shares included the wish of the partitioning fathers to secure control over more property for themselves and to get back at wives who neglected them, as well as the wish to secure a larger share for their sons.

⁸ People state that their practice of treating the eldest brother as husband and father is an adaptation to Nepali law, which does not recognise polyandry. In reality, the legal code makes provisions for traditional customs such as this, no Tibetan speakers have ever been prosecuted for polyandry and fear of the law does not deter other Tibetan speakers in Humla from it.

⁹ I know of one exception to this, and it is an instructive one. It involved the son of a Rongphug man and a woman of a distant, Bura village. During her illegitimate pregnancy, she married another Bura, who promised to treat the child as his. But the Rongphug man refused to keep quiet about his

Bura son, possibly because none of his marriages succeeded in producing any children. When the boy had grown up, his Bura parents sent him to gain his inheritance from his Rongphug father. Once arrived in Rongphug, however, he found his natural father remarried and, finally, with a son. The Rongphug man rejected his claim and told him to go back to the Bura man whom he knew as his father.

¹⁰ They got a lesser share, which villagers justify by reference to Nepali law. Actually this was the law in past, but it has been revised to ensure all children, legitimate and illegitimate alike, an equal share from their father.

¹¹ It may be that there are more illegitimate pregnancies involving single women in Rongphug and Gyaling, because there are more single women and more older single women there.

¹² In the one case of partition under these circumstances, the son inherited a *per stirpes* share from his fictive genitor, following the rules of a normal partition.

¹³ One marriage was to a man's father's father's legitimate son's daughter, that is, to a woman who was his father's half-brother's daughter. The second was to a father's father's legitimate son's widow, or his father's half-brother's widow, regarded as equivalent to a father's widow. Parallel-cousin and leviratic marriages are not acceptable here. The third case involved a marriage to the daughter of a man widely imputed to be, but not publicly fixed as, the husband's natural father. That such marriages are regarded as incest, yet allowed to persist, suggests a certain ambiguity in the treatment of natural clan and kin affiliations of quasi-adoptees (see Scheffler 1973: 754fn, 754–5).

¹⁴ The eldest brother's role may most aptly be described as fatherhood by a genealogical fiction (Scheffler 1973: 756), and although this may oversimplify, it does justice to how the relationship is conceptualised. This is less problematic for future generations (see n. 13 above) than the fiction of adoption by a mother's husbands, since the men concerned are brothers, belong to the same clan and have the same kin networks.

¹⁵ As Scheffler puts it:

. . . Malinowski . . . described the norms (rights and duties) of paternal kinship as though they were wholly emotional or sentimental reactions to the failure of the society to give any legal recognition to the 'natural' interests of men in their offspring (see Malinowski 1926: 100f)—that is, as though they involved no concepts of right and duty at all. But it is clear from his ethnographic descriptions that they do (Scheffler 1974: 758).

¹⁶ I lack the space to deal adequately with the problems fundamental to such simplistic and disjunctive characterisations of kin relationships or the literature that has grown up around this and the issue of sentimental generalisation.

¹⁷ Westermarck was an exception to this (see 1922: 276), but his monumental *History of human marriage* has been unimportant, curiously so, in the development of modern kinship theory.

¹⁸ This does not mean the simple recognition of 'biological' ties (as Barnes argues 1971: 246, and contra Schneider 1984: 54).

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