



Call for Reviews: Recent Publications on kinship

written by Allegra
January, 2016



Allegra's reviews editor curated for you this list of some of the most interesting recent releases on #kinship. It's sometimes good to go back to classic anthropological themes! And as usual, the list comes with a call for reviews. If you are interested in reviewing one of the books featured, contact our reviews assistant Carolin Hirsch at reviews@allegralaboratory.net and we will send out a copy.



Here are our review guidelines:

As we receive many requests for reviews, please write 2-3 sentences why you should be reviewing this book, indicating how it relates to your own research or interests.

Spelling: British English. Please use -ise and not -ize word endings.

Word limit: 750-1500 words.

Font: Times New Roman.

Size: 12.

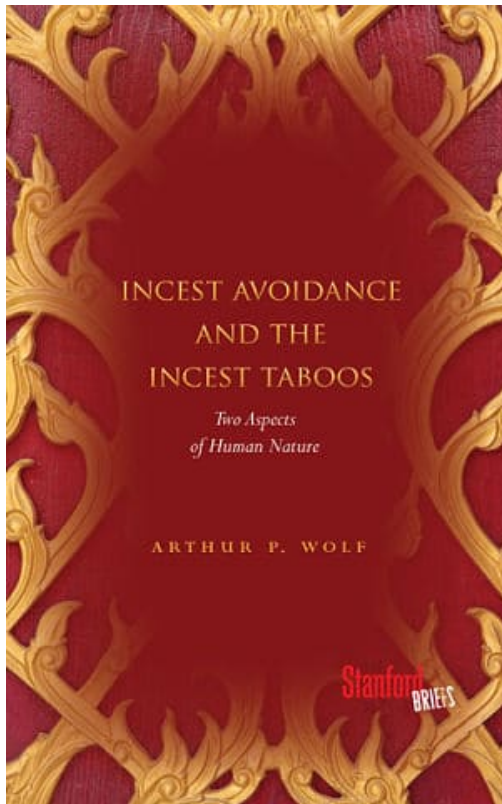
Line Spacing: 1,5

No footnotes.

If you cite other authors, please reference their publication in the end.

The review is to be written within three months from the dispatch of the book.

When submitting the review, do not forget to include your name, (academic) affiliation, a photograph of yourself and a short bio of 2-3 sentences.



[Wolf, Arthur P. 2014. *Incest Avoidance and the Incest Taboos*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 188 pp. Pb: \\$12.99. ISBN: 9780804789677.](#)

Why do most people never have sex with close relatives? And why do they disapprove of other people doing so? *Incest Avoidance and Incest Taboos* investigates our human inclination to avoid incest and the powerful taboo against incest found in all societies. Both subjects stir strong feelings and vigorous arguments within and beyond academic circles. With great clarity, Wolf lays out the modern assumptions about both, concluding that all previous approaches lack precision and balance on insecure evidence. Researchers he calls “constitutionalists” explain human incest avoidance by biologically-based natural aversion, but fail to explain incest taboos as cultural universals. By contrast, “conventionalists” ignore the evolutionary roots of avoidance and assume that incest avoidant behavior is guided solely by cultural taboos. Both theories are incomplete.

Wolf tests his own theory with three natural experiments: *bint’amm* (cousin) marriage in Morocco, the rarity of marriage within Israeli kibbutz peer groups, and “minor marriages” (in which baby girls were raised by their future mother-in-



law to marry an adoptive “brother”) in China and Taiwan. These cross-cultural comparisons complete his original and intellectually rich theory of incest, one that marries biology and culture by accounting for both avoidance and taboo.

[Robcis, Camille. 2013. *The Law of Kinship. Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 320 pp. Pb: \\$27.95. ISBN: 9780801478772.](#)



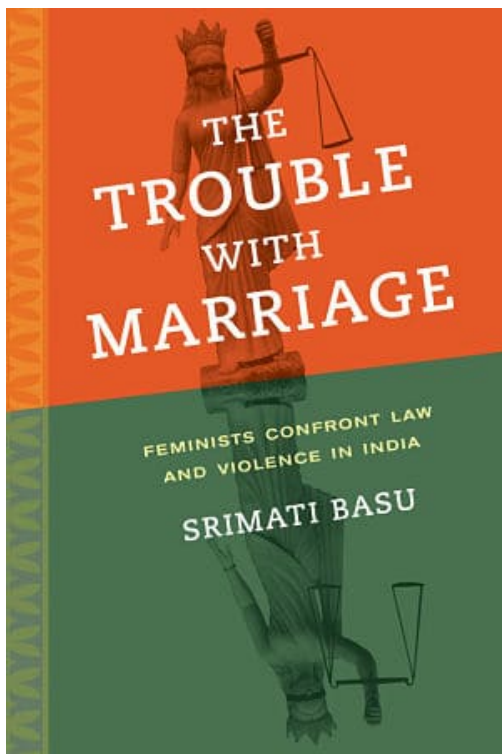
In France as elsewhere in recent years, legislative debates over single-parent households, same-sex unions, new reproductive technologies, transsexuality, and other challenges to long-held assumptions about the structure of family and kinship relations have been deeply divisive. What strikes many as uniquely French, however, is the extent to which many of these discussions—whether in legislative chambers, courtrooms, or the mass media—have been conducted in the frequently abstract vocabularies of anthropology and psychoanalysis.

In this highly original book, Camille Robcis seeks to explain why and how academic discourses on kinship have intersected and overlapped with political debates on the family—and on the nature of French republicanism itself. She focuses on the theories of Claude Levi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan, both of whom



highlighted the interdependence of the sexual and the social by positing a direct correlation between kinship and socialization. Robcis traces how their ideas gained recognition not only from French social scientists but also from legislators and politicians who relied on some of the most obscure and difficult concepts of structuralism to enact a series of laws concerning the family.

Levi-Strauss and Lacan constructed the heterosexual family as a universal trope for social and psychic integration, and this understanding of the family at the root of intersubjectivity coincided with the role that the family has played in modern French law and public policy. *The Law of Kinship* contributes to larger conversations about the particularities of French political culture, the nature of sexual difference, and the problem of reading and interpretation in intellectual history.

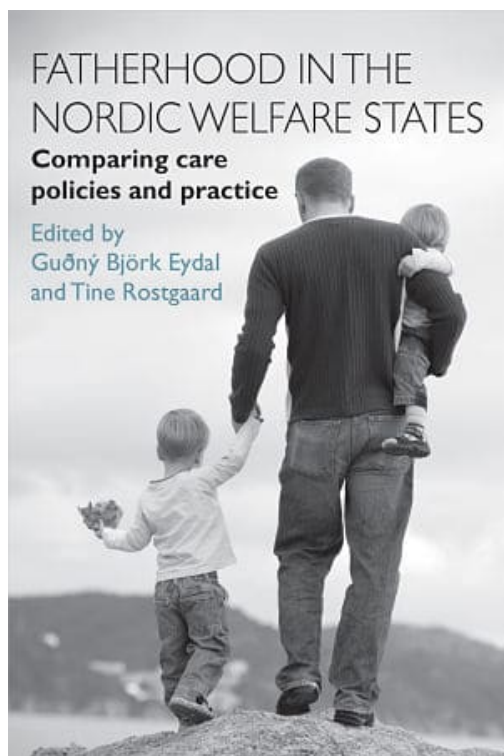


[Basu, Srimati. 2015. *The Trouble with Marriage: Feminists Confront Law and Violence in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 280 pp. Pb \\$29.95. ISBN: 9780520282452.](#)

The Trouble with Marriage is part of a new global feminist jurisprudence around marriage and violence that looks to law as strategy rather than solution. In this



ethnography of lawyer-free family courts and mediations of rape and domestic violence charges in India, Srimati Basu depicts everyday life in legal sites of marital trouble, reevaluating feminist theories of law, marriage, violence, property, and the state. Basu argues that alternative dispute resolution, originally designed to empower women in a less adversarial legal environment, has created new subjectivities, but, paradoxically, has also reinforced oppressive socioeconomic norms that leave women no better off, individually or collectively.

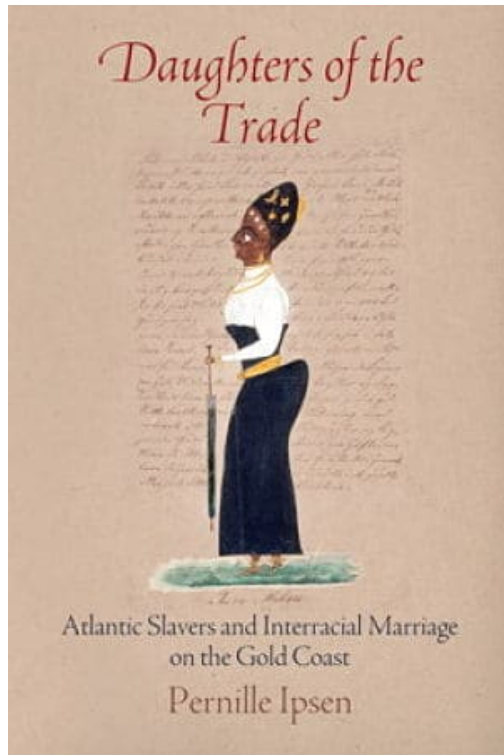


[Eydal, Guðný Björk and Rostgaard, Tine. 2015. *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States: Comparing Care Policies and Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press. 424 pp. Pb: £27.99. ISBN: 9781447310471](#)

The five Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, are well-known for their extensive welfare system and gender equality which provides both parents with opportunities to earn and care for their children. In this topical book, expert scholars from the Nordic countries, as well as UK and the US, demonstrate how modern fatherhood is supported in the Nordic setting through family and social policies, and how these contribute to shaping and influencing the images, roles and practices of fathers in a diversity of family settings and variations of fatherhoods. This comprehensive volume will have wide international appeal for those who look to Nordic countries and their success in creating



gender equal societies.



[Ipsen, Pernille. 2015. *Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. 288 pp. Cloth £32.50. ISBN 9780812246735.](#)

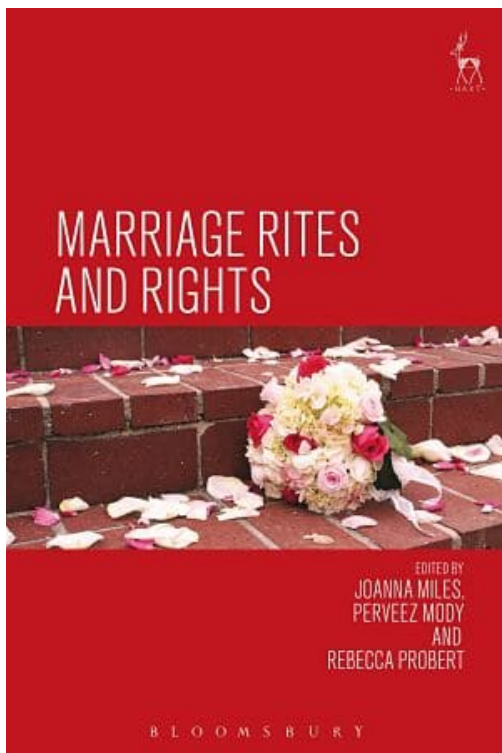
Severine Brock's first language was Ga, yet it was not surprising when, in 1842, she married Edward Carstensen. He was the last governor of Christiansborg, the fort that, in the eighteenth century, had been the center of Danish slave trading in West Africa. She was the descendant of Ga-speaking women who had married Danish merchants and traders. Their marriage would have been familiar to Gold Coast traders going back nearly 150 years. In *Daughters of the Trade*, Pernille Ipsen follows five generations of marriages between African women and Danish men, revealing how interracial marriage created a Euro-African hybrid culture specifically adapted to the Atlantic slave trade.

Although interracial marriage was prohibited in European colonies throughout the Atlantic world, in Gold Coast slave-trading towns it became a recognized and respected custom. Cassare, or "keeping house," gave European men the support of African women and their kin, which was essential for their survival and success, while African families made alliances with European traders and secured



the legitimacy of their offspring by making the unions official.

For many years, Euro-African families lived in close proximity to the violence of the slave trade. Sheltered by their Danish names and connections, they grew wealthy and influential. But their powerful position on the Gold Coast did not extend to the broader Atlantic world, where the link between blackness and slavery grew stronger, and where Euro-African descent did not guarantee privilege. By the time Severine Brock married Edward Carstensen, their world had changed. *Daughters of the Trade* uncovers the vital role interracial marriage played in the coastal slave trade, the production of racial difference, and the increasing stratification of the early modern Atlantic world.



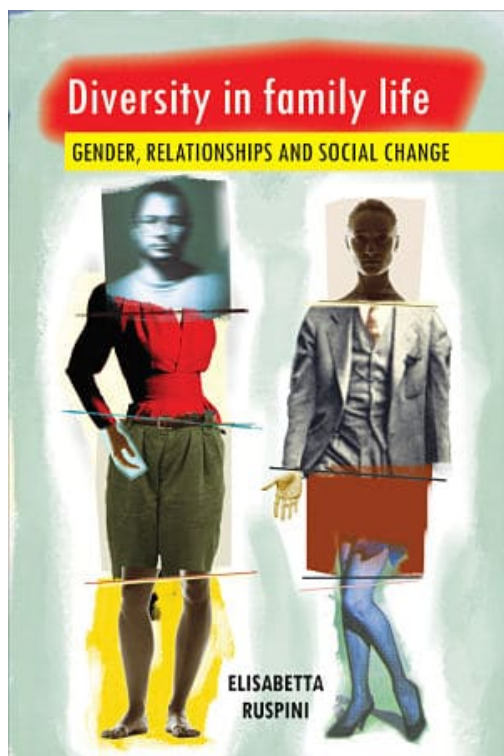
[Miles, Joanna, Mody, Perveez and Probert, Rebecca \(eds.\) 2015. *Marriage Rites and Rights*. Oxford: Hart Publishing. 320 pp. Pb: £35.00. ISBN: 9781849469135.](#)

Recent years have seen extensive discussion about the continuing retreat from marriage, the increasing demand for the right to marry from previously excluded groups, and the need to protect those who do not wish to marry from being forced to do so. At the same time, weddings are big business, couples are spending more



than ever before on getting married, and marriage ceremonies are increasingly elaborate. It is therefore timely to reflect on the rites of marriage, as well as the right to marry (or not to marry), and the relationship between them.

To this end, this new interdisciplinary collection brings together scholars from numerous fields, including law, sociology, anthropology, psychology, demography, theology and art and design. Focusing on England and Wales, it explores in depth the specific issues arising from this jurisdiction's Anglican heritage, demographic development, current laws and social practices.

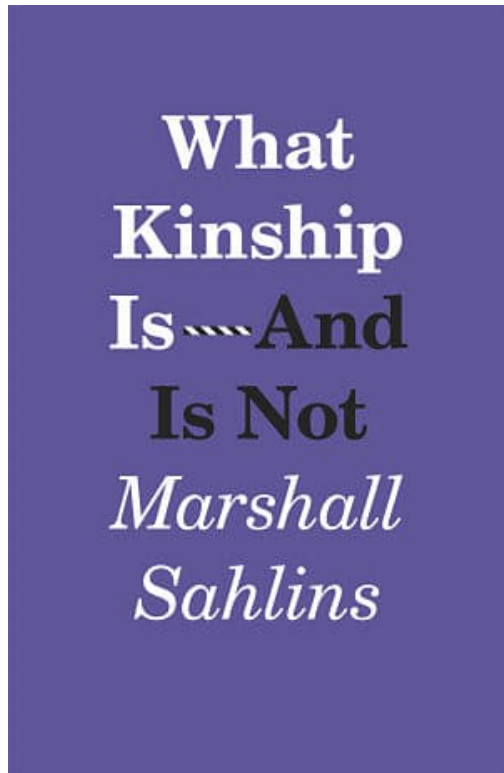


[Ruspini, Elisabetta. 2015. *Diversity in Family Life: Gender, Relationships and Social Change*. Policy Press. 176 pp. PB: \\$39.95. ISBN: 9781447300922.](#)

As the variety and number of nontraditional families grow, so does the need for new models of family and parenthood. *Diversity in Family Life* discusses the relationship between shifting gender identities and the processes of family formation, examining non-traditional family structures, including asexual couples, child-free couples, living-apart-together couples, single parents, and homosexual and transsexual parents. Calling for bold reformulations, it argues that it is



possible to live, love, and form a family in an astounding variety of ways.



[Sahlins, Marshall. 2013. *What Kinship Is - And Is Not*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 120 pp. Pb: \\$16.00. ISBN: 9780226214290.](#)

In this pithy two-part essay, Marshall Sahlins reinvigorates the debates on what constitutes kinship, building on some of the best scholarship in the field to produce an original outlook on the deepest bond humans can have. Covering thinkers from Aristotle and Lévy- Bruhl to Émile Durkheim and David Schneider, and communities from the Maori and the English to the Korowai of New Guinea, he draws on a breadth of theory and a range of ethnographic examples to form an acute definition of kinship, what he calls the “mutuality of being.” Kinfolk are persons who are parts of one another to the extent that what happens to one is felt by the other. Meaningfully and emotionally, relatives live each other’s lives and die each other’s deaths.

In the second part of his essay, Sahlins shows that mutuality of being is a



symbolic notion of belonging, not a biological connection by “blood.” Quite apart from relations of birth, people may become kin in ways ranging from sharing the same name or the same food to helping each other survive the perils of the high seas. In a groundbreaking argument, he demonstrates that even where kinship is reckoned from births, it is because the wider kindred or the clan ancestors are already involved in procreation, so that the notion of birth is meaningfully dependent on kinship rather than kinship on birth. By formulating this reversal, Sahlins identifies what kinship truly is: not nature, but culture.

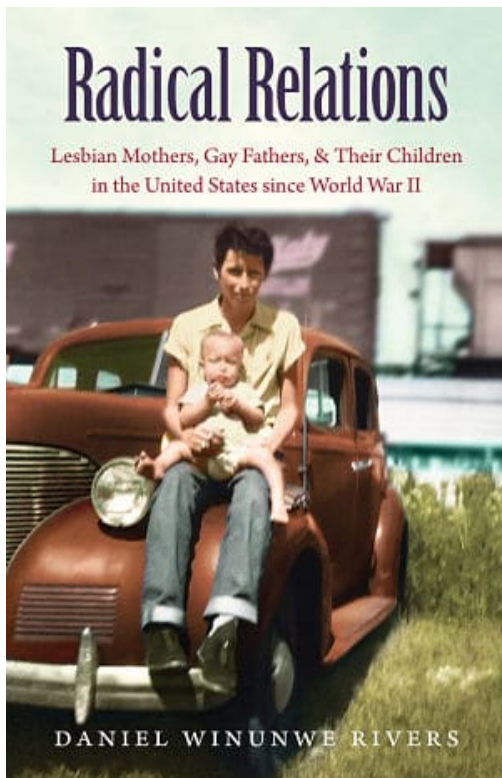


[Zhang, Everett Yuehong. 2015. *The Impotence Epidemic: Men's Medicine and Sexual Desire in Contemporary China*. Durham: Duke University Press. 304 pp. PB: \\$25.95. ISBN: 978-0-8223-5856-5.](#)

Since the 1990s China has seen a dramatic increase in the number of men seeking treatment for impotence. Everett Yuehong Zhang argues in *The Impotence Epidemic* that this trend represents changing public attitudes about sexuality in an increasingly globalized China. In this ethnography he shifts discussions of impotence as a purely neurovascular phenomenon to a social one. Zhang contextualizes impotence within the social changes brought by recent economic reform and through the production of various desires in post-Maoist



China. Based on interviews with 350 men and their partners from Beijing and Chengdu, and concerned with de-mystifying and de-stigmatizing impotence, Zhang suggests that the impotence epidemic represents not just trauma and suffering, but also a contagion of individualized desire and an affirmation for living a full life. For Zhang, studying male impotence in China is one way to comprehend the unique experience of Chinese modernity.



[Rivers, Daniel Winunwe. 2015. *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children in the United States since World War II*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 312 pp. Pb: \\$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-4696-2645-1.](#)

In *Radical Relations*, Daniel Winunwe Rivers offers a previously untold story of the American family: the first history of lesbian and gay parents and their children in the United States. Beginning in the postwar era, a period marked by both intense repression and dynamic change for lesbians and gay men, Rivers argues that by forging new kinds of family and childrearing relations, gay and lesbian parents have successfully challenged legal and cultural definitions of family as heterosexual. These efforts have paved the way for the contemporary focus on family and domestic rights in lesbian and gay political movements. Based on



extensive archival research and 130 interviews conducted nationwide, *Radical Relations* includes the stories of lesbian mothers and gay fathers in the 1950s, lesbian and gay parental activist networks and custody battles, families struggling with the AIDS epidemic, and children growing up in lesbian feminist communities. Rivers also addresses changes in gay and lesbian parenthood in the 1980s and 1990s brought about by increased awareness of insemination technologies and changes in custody and adoption law.

Featured image by [Municipal Archives of Trondheim](#) (*flickr*, [CC BY-NC 2.0](#))