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3

Social Organization

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NEARLY all topics of interest to contemporary anthropologists are understood in relation to social organization. As a result, social organization is depicted in many different ways—as extended description, as formal models that focus on social structure or specific processes, or as capsule descriptions of central features. Social organization is thus not a neatly bounded field of inquiry in which a single theoretical scheme prevails. Rather, it is a field in which intersecting perspectives offer a variety of insights, provoking debates but at the same time offering possibilities for synthesis. Evolutionary approaches vie with synchronic ones, comparative schemes are met by particularistic rebuttals, and cultural analyses are offered as alternatives to ecological explanations. But amid the apparent turmoil we perceive some significant trends, and perhaps the emergence of a synthetic perspective that promises to yield a much finer understanding of how Polynesians ordered, and continue to order, their social worlds. To provide a basis for understanding theoretical tensions, and how recent work bears upon them, we take a historical approach in this chapter

Attempts to grasp the fundamental features of Polynesian social organization began with the explorers. Their accounts, like those of other early voyagers, suffered from a dearth of concepts suitable for describing basic forms of social life, much less the nuances of ideology and interaction. These limitations constrained the interpretations of most early commentators, for whom forms of social organization were primarily of interest insofar as they reflected sequences of migration. Characteristically, those forms associated with commoner status were attributed to early migrations of people of inferior stock, while those associated with chiefdainship were attributed to subsequent migrations of culturally or racially superior peoples. Typical was the two strata the-

ory that hypothesized that the original Polynesians were an egalitarian people with a clan organization, but without a highly developed political system. They were presumably followed by a later wave of neo-Polynesians who brought with them well-developed political institutions complete with court etiquette, dynastic traditions (with a strong emphasis on seniority and genealogical precedence), social ceremonialism, and notions of social caste (see, for example, E. S. C. Handy 1930). A similar approach is found in the writings of Thor Heyerdahl (1950, 1952, 1958). He attributes the monumental sculptures on Easter Island and other marks of high culture to conquerors descended from Old World migrants. Such perspectives were no doubt encouraged by Polynesian myths that associate chiefs with stranger kings (Sahlins 1981b; Howard 1985b; Marcus, chapter 6, this volume).

Although fascination with Polynesian origins stimulated scholarly pursuit, interest in political structures was a practical matter for those Europeans who established trade, missions, and eventual colonial governance. They required surety with regard to who was authorized to make agreements that would hold over a period of time. To their dismay, Europeans often found it difficult to identify a clear-cut institutionalized hierarchy, but they were determined to have a recognizable form of chieftainship, and so set about creating it by elevating one of a number of rivals to a position of paramountcy wherever they could, then giving that individual material and ideological support.[1]

Descriptions of more mundane aspects of social life—kinship and kin groups, family structure and the division of labor, land tenure, and adoption practices—were generally colored by a pronounced ethnocentrism, with moral judgments as often explicit as implicit. Ceremonies were seen as amusingly barbaric, reciprocal exchanges as extravagances (or a failure to recognize the proper value of commodities), adoption practices as indications of parental indifference to the fate of their children, and so it went. It is not surprising, therefore, that nineteenth century evolutionists placed Polynesian societies well down the developmental ladder, often lower than would be warranted on the basis of technology.[2]

Early accounts of Polynesian social organization were thus biased in a number of ways, ranging from simple omissions to gross inaccuracies. But while such faulty accounts rendered the task of reconstructing traditional social life an exceptionally perilous one, it did not deter armchair anthropologists from the attempt. As standards for evidence rose, however, the need for fresh appraisals and systematically collected information soon became apparent.

The modern period of social analysis in Polynesia began in the third decade of this century with the efforts of Robert W Williamson (1924, 1933). Williamson's major contributions consisted of compiling the rel-

evant materials and sifting through them with an appropriately critical eye, but he was hampered by the lack of a suitable framework for interpreting them. He nevertheless recognized many essential features of Polynesian social organization, such as the optative nature of social groups. He also raised many of the right questions.

Most scholars who worked in Polynesia during the 1920s and 1930s devoted their efforts to the production of a set of standardized monographs (published by Bishop Museum). These aimed at providing a basis for understanding culture history. Social forms were examined in the same light as artifacts, myths, and other cultural elements—as traits to be compared so that judgments could be made concerning similarities and differences between the various societies. Furthermore, it was not contemporary forms that were of concern, but traditional, precontact ones. Typically the oldest members of a society were interviewed in order to elicit information about what social life was like prior to European intervention.

As fieldwork became the basis for anthropological accounts, broad comparative issues receded from view and both evolutionary and diffusionist assumptions fell into disfavor. The data collected on an island or in a single village proved to be sufficiently complex to tax the imagination. Raymond Firth set the standard for detailed ethnography and prudent analysis in his prolific publications on Tikopia, a Polynesian outlier It is a standard that has never been surpassed and remains a source of awe for all contemporary Polynesianists. In his best known work, *We, the Tikopia,* Firth (1936b) described in vivid detail the organization of social life on three levels: households, *paito* 'houses tracing descent from a common ancestor', and *kainanga* 'patrilineal clans'

Although social life on Tikopia had been relatively unaffected by European intrusion at the time of Firth's initial field trip, in 1929, most other Polynesian islands had undergone considerable change as a result of contact with the West. It soon became apparent, however, that there was still much to learn about traditional social forms, despite the magnitude of change. Ethnographies by Beaglehole and Beaglehole (1938, 1941), E. S. C Handy (1923), Hogbin (1934), M. Mead (1930b), and others provided material that, when added to Firth's splendid accounts, allowed for a new consideration of Polynesian societies as functional systems adapting to changing conditions.

The functionalist view predominated from the late 1920s through the 1950s, when a post-war generation of anthropologists took a new look at some old problems. Although Polynesian societies were less affected by the war in the Pacific than their Melanesian and Micronesian counterparts, the pace of change had accelerated. The continuities between traditional and contemporary social life had to be considered in a new light, given the obvious effects of new economic and political forces. In

response, postwar ethnographers took a more dynamic approach to social organization, focusing on social processes rather than the particular groupings most visible during fieldwork. Attention shifted to the cultural premises that Polynesians used in ordering their social lives, and the various ways people acted upon them. As a result, contemporary versions of Polynesian society were no longer seen as mere shadows of traditional cultures. Modern social organization came to be viewed as fascinating in its own right. Moreover, anthropologists discovered that studies of contemporary social life could contribute to an understanding of the past by helping to separate cultural principles from their material embodiments under specific ecological and historical circumstances.

Although most post-war ethnography was only incidentally comparative in orientation (with field workers citing each other's work when it served to frame issues of common interest), Marshall Sahlins and Irving Goldman undertook major comparative projects, both oriented toward accounting for the variations in sociopolitical systems in the region. Both assumed an evolutionary posture, although their perspectives differed markedly. Sahlins' viewpoint bordered on ecological determinism; he used the model of adaptive radiation, borrowed by analogy from physical anthropology, to account for similarities and differences in social forms. Goldman, in contrast, saw Polynesian social systems as grounded in a single cultural principle—status rivalry. He attributed the differences between them to the historically specific ways in which the potentials of that principle were realized. Thus, whereas Sahlins provided a view of Polynesian social organization from the ground up, so to speak, Goldman's view was from the lofty perspective of chiefs who shaped things to suit their own purposes. The contrasting perspectives of Sahlins and Goldman have strongly affected the form that explanations take in the current literature, with ecological explanations frequently counterposed to cultural ones (although Sahlins has changed his viewpoint and now champions the cultural perspective; see, for example, Sahlins 1976, 1981a, 1985).

The most recent work on social organization in Polynesia ranges from detailed studies of delimited problems such as adoption, incest prohibitions and siblingship, to broad speculative accounts. A definite shift has taken place toward a concern for the cultural principles underlying social forms, with the interpretation of symbols, metaphors, and myths playing a central role. Fueled by the possibilities of symbolic interpretation of textual materials recorded in earlier times, renewed interest in traditional, or early contact forms, has been part of this movement. So, too, has been a shift toward ethnohistorical reconstructions of the impact of European interventions on Polynesian social structures (see Borofsky and Howard, chapter 8, this volume).

The Issue of Descent Groups

The analysis of group formation has been central to Polynesian studies in this century. The issue was first raised by Williamson, who, after carefully reviewing the information available at the time, offered considered opinions and tentative hypotheses. He clearly recognized the optative nature of these groupings—that "the children and later descendants of a marriage between persons of two different groups might live and become established in the home of either the male or the female ancestor" (Williamson 1924, 2:2). Williamson treated this possibility as a source of confusion, along with adoption. He considered social groupings to be properly formed on the basis of kinship alone, a possibility obviated by such ambilineal reckoning since residential considerations inevitably must come into play under the latter circumstances. He went on to evaluate information on various Polynesian societies regarding the relative significance of kinship and locality in the formation of groups. Only for Samoa did he consider the data to approach adequacy, but he concluded nevertheless that throughout Polynesia groupings were based primarily on kinship considerations. This conclusion constituted Williamson's central finding regarding Polynesian social organization. It colors virtually all of his subsequent interpretations. For example, on the question of social classes, he distinguished four—chiefs, middle and lower classes, and a special category of priests and sorcerers—but he surmised that since kinship is the primary organizing principle, boundaries between classes are necessarily blurred (Williamson 1924, 2:356–357).

Edwin Burrows, drawing upon the Bishop Museum monographs of the 1920s and 1930s, took up the issue of social group formation in his paper "Breed and Border in Polynesia," published in 1939. Burrows held that alignments of breed (kinship-based groupings) and border (territorially based groupings) had fairly regular distributions. Coincidence of breed and border (territorially contained kinship groupings) was found either in marginal regions or on atolls with a comparatively small population. Intermingling of breed and border (groupings based partially on kinship, partially on territoriality) appeared in two separate areas, one to the west and the other farther east, between which stretched a continuous line of islands where breed and border either coincided or were aligned in unique intermediate fashions. Two isolated regions also had intermediate alignments peculiar to themselves. This situation suggested to Burrows that coincidence of breed and border was the earlier alignment, and intermingling developed later. Diffusion accounted for similarities within the area of "intermingled breed and border," he maintained, although "purely local dynamic factors"

accounted for the variations in detail that give each region a unique pattern (Burrows 1939a:18).

Burrows concluded that kinship groupings were the primary form of social organization in Polynesia, but that progressive encroachment of border over breed seems to have been the rule. He postulated several processes as favoring change in that direction, including intermarriage, adoption, migration, and most important, warfare arising from rivalry over land or ambition for enhanced status (1939a:20–21).

Amidst this variability, Burrows perceived a general pattern. Polynesians reckoned kinship by means of genealogies that were primarily patrilineal, he maintained, although matrilineal reckoning was sometimes used as a means of gaining status. Furthermore, a woman did not lose usufruct rights to ancestral lands following marriage, but unless her children were raised by maternal relatives, matrilineal rights tended to lapse after a couple of generations. "In short," wrote Burrows (1939a:1) "living and recently dead kinsfolk were grouped bilaterally; but the larger, more permanent kinship groups were almost invariably based on common descent from an ancestor in the male line."

From Burrow's culture historical perspective, certain questions that might have been asked of the data were secondary. How are "mainly patrilineal" units organized, that is, are there explicit rules of patrilineal descent; if so, what factors account for the retention of filiative links in genealogies? How are the two kinds of units sketched by Burrows—bilateral groups of kinsmen and larger, more permanent patrilineal units—related? Do the members of the former depend on rights and statuses gained through affiliation with the latter? (If so, such bilateral groups may be expected to have a patrilineal core of right-holders.) How do marriage patterns affect group membership and recruitment of group leaders? Do bilateral units have a recognizable structure? When kin units are formed bilaterally individuals may have claims on more than one unit: how does this affect the functioning of these groups?

These questions became pressing as British anthropologists developed models of unilineal descent structures. In the work of such analysts as Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, and Fortes, groups based on exclusive descent principles were seen as basic to social continuity. Where descent is non-exclusive, allowing persons to affiliate with both maternal and paternal groups, the result might be that each group would eventually include the entire population, and each person would belong to every other person's group. Such a situation would presumably be untenable, because corporate management of estates would not be possible and individual loyalties would be hopelessly divided.

As more cases that did not fit the assumptions of unilineal descent theory were noticed, they came to be viewed as demanding their own analytical models (Davenport 1959; Firth 1957, 1963; Murdock 1960;

Barnes 1962). Since many of these cases were found in the Pacific, a regional interpretation of nonunilineal groups, based on a hypothetical original form and variant historical realizations (due largely to adaptation to different environments), was advanced by anthropologists working in the area. Thus Goodenough (1955) suggested that nonunilineal landholding kin groups, with membership open either to all descendants of a founder or restricted by residence criteria, were part of original Malayo-Polynesian social structure. For Goodenough, the patrilineal elements noted by Burrows and others did not detract from abundant evidence of nonunilineal descent groups in Polynesia. Firth agreed. Although descent groups in Tikopia are unilineal, "in most other Polynesian societies they are not" (Firth 1957:4). Firth distinguished between definitive descent groups, with members expectably recruited by clearcut rules, as on Tikopia, and optative ones, in which actors' choice in affiliating to groups is crucial to their composition. He introduced the notion of viewing descent units operationally, rather than in terms of their charters or structural models, a view he developed in his re-analysis of data on the New Zealand Maori *hapu* (Firth 1963).

In traditional Maori culture the *hapu* was a group of kin who traced their relationship to one another, with the ultimate point of reference a common ancestor. Although tracing genealogical connections through males was favored, membership was recognized if a line of descent included several females, so the *hapu* was not unilineal. In effect, a person could opt to claim *hapu* membership through his father, through his mother, or through both parents. Firth termed the system ambilateral because both parents were available in obtaining *hapu* membership. Theoretically, persons could become participants in many groups, but this was rare. In practice, membership was selective. For all practical purposes, *hapu* formed corporate units functionally analogous to lineages. Firth saw the mechanism for sloughing off potential members as the key to the effective operation of the *hapu*. Genealogical claims had to be validated by social action, notably residence and the use of the *hapu* lands. Since communication was difficult and travel dangerous in pre-European New Zealand, Firth maintained, most individuals' participation was practically restricted to one or two groups.

Ottino (1967) found the traditional descent units of the western Tuamotus (*'ati*) to be structurally parallel in most respects to lineages elsewhere, and argued that they should be classified as nonunilinear descent groups. *'Ati* were named, were located in definite geographical areas, had a guardian spirit, a *marae* 'ceremonial area', and by implication rites, rituals and priests—in short, a complete religious organization. *'Ati* were therefore corporate groups that owned rights, "if not exactly in the land itself at least in its resources and in the structures which have been erected on it" (Ottino 1967:478).

What distinguished the *'ati* from lineages in Ottino's view was the lack of a unilineal descent principle and of jural rules regulating marriage, postmarital residence, and the affiliation of children. The result was that no one had a specific legal destination at birth, so that the core of each such group was composed of both men and women. Ottino's (1967:477) analysis of genealogical records also suggests that although *'ati* linked by marriages formed allied groupings, compared with segmentary lineages they were "much less autonomous" and "neither self-sustaining nor functionally independent."

Two distinct approaches to resolving the problems inherent in descent group models emerged in the wake of such structural debates. One followed on the suggestion of Firth that descent units be viewed operationally. This led to an increased emphasis on individual decision making, on the strategies that people followed in making choices, and on the relevance of contextual factors, including ecological contingencies. The other approach focused on the issue of corporateness. Here the task was to evaluate the fit between the ethnographic evidence on functional groupings and a reconsidered definition of corporation.

An early example of the first approach is Howard's (1963) analysis of land tenure in Rotuma. He specifically rejects the unistructural model of society in favor of seeing societies as composed of activity systems, with the relevant units being principles, or factors, that are predictive of choice among behavioral alternatives. He focuses on the dynamics of usufruct, succession, transactions, and disputes as a way of illuminating the ways in which cognatic descent groups operate in Rotuma. In taking a behavioral as opposed to a jural perspective, Howard is more concerned with the principles that determine the actual composition of groups when specific activities are being conducted, rather than beginning with a descent group typology and trying to fit indigenous concepts into it. As a concept, he maintains, the Rotuman term *kainaga* is better understood as a cultural principle, used in a variety of situations by individuals as a means of legitimizing their activities in certain key activities, than as a kind of group. Following in Firth's footsteps, Howard advocates a decision-making approach to group formation.

As more evidence became available on cognatic descent systems it was apparent that the simple dichotomy between exclusive and non-exclusive systems was inadequate. Allan Hanson suggested that an intermediate range be recognized that he labeled "semi-exclusive," in which most individuals are associated primarily with one descent group but also may hold secondary rights of membership in others (Hanson 1971). The Maori *hapu* and Tuamotuan *'ati* both fit Hanson's semi-exclusive category, as did the traditional descent groups on Rapa, where he conducted fieldwork.

One of the major points of Hanson's analysis is that despite the non-

exclusive nature of contemporary Rapan descent group formation, the system works adequately. There are several reasons for this, including the fact that land is plentiful in relation to the population and thus competition for its use is limited. Also, improvements to the land, around which many descent groups (*'opu*) form, do not last forever. Groups based on improvements dissolve after a period of time, and if things get too complicated as a result of *'opu* memberships becoming too large, there is always the option of dividing the estate. Ultimately, according to Hanson, "because a Rapan is rarely called upon to act in the role of member of an *'opu*, and because his commitment to it is so narrowly defined, it is unlikely that his obligations as a member of one *'opu* would conflict with his obligations as a member of several others" (Hanson 1971:127).

This shift in perspective, from unistructural models of societies seen from the outside to models emphasizing choice and decision making, has gone a long way towards clarifying the manner in which contemporary Polynesian societies function, and has provided us with better conceptual tools for reconstructing traditional systems. An important point is the degree to which Polynesians seem to rely on specific contexts to organize their behavior Attempts to discover the rules governing Polynesian social behavior have thus been much less fruitful than studies examining the processes involved in conducting activities.

Ottino's study of modern Rangiroan social organization illustrates the value of the decision-making approach. He describes a situation of non-exclusive descent, much like that found on Rapa, except that land is far more limited on Rangiroa. He answers the question of how non-exclusive groups, formed of the descendants of land title-holders, can function by examining when and how decisions are made. Usually the children of a title-holder, "not wanting to destroy kinship bonds in dividing the lands" (Ottino 1973:407, our translation), do not divide their shares. Thus the grandchildren of the original title-holder inherit a joint estate and must work out arrangements to share the land and its profits. Over time, however, such arrangements become unwieldy. As descendants of the founder proliferate, questions arise as to the rights of different descendants. The value of maintaining a single *'opu*, so clear to the founder and his children, is not so obvious for second cousins whose shared activity consists of difficult discussions about the allocation of resources. Consequently, formal land division occurs about once every three generations. Although land divisions involve difficulties—they are, after all, generally occasioned by the inability of co-heirs to cooperate—they can be accomplished by drawing on arrangements for usufruct worked out in earlier generations. In other words, the working arrangements of one generation provide the basis for decisive alterations by the next. Although this form of organization may seem ill-

defined, it effectively orchestrates processes of group formation and division. Moreover, it is sensitive to ecological conditions, since the more demand there is for using a particular parcel of land, the more likely it is that co-heirs will either work out arrangements to use it or divide it up.[3]

The second approach—focusing on the issue of corporateness—was employed by Webster (1975)and Tiffany and Tiffany (1978) in efforts to clarify the nature of contemporary descent groups among the New Zealand Maori and Samoans, respectively. They start by reconsidering the notion of corporateness, and attempt to demonstrate that the Maori *hapu* and Samoan *'aiga* do indeed meet the qualifications for being considered corporations. However, they point out that the terms *hapu* and *'aiga* are polysemic, referring to different things in different contexts, and that it is only in a restricted sense that they are used to refer to corporate descent groups. Both Webster and the Tiffanys take an operational perspective and make their case by analyzing specific activities central to the functioning of those groups, but since corporateness is ultimately an ideational concept, their perspective is jural rather than behavioral.

Webster begins by criticizing the notion, ascribed to Metge (1964), that the contemporary *hapu* has become nothing but an abstraction, a name without a social function and without any sign of corporate life. He argues that most authorities have been misled by supposing the *hapu* to be a localized group, but that such was probably never the case, although he agrees that close association with a particular locality has always been a focal characteristic of the Maori kin group. However, it is the close symbolic identification of land, home, and ancestry that is at the heart of this association rather than practical considerations. This has made it possible for descent groups to continue as corporate entities despite an increasing necessity among contemporary Maori to be economically independent of the land.

The local center of the kin group is usually a *marae* 'ceremonial clearing with associated meeting and dining halls' (although the households of group elders also operate as centers for group activities), and it is participation in ritual gatherings on the *marae* that is the primary indicator of kin group membership. For any given ceremonial occasion, participants are divided into two categories: *tangata whenua* 'people of the land' or 'hosts' and *manuhiri* 'visitors' or 'guests' Those who are responsible for organizing and financing the gathering, typically resident and nearby descent group members associated with the *marae,* act in the role of hosts, while even quite close kinsmen who become involved after the initial organization has taken place are treated as guests. It is the *tangata whenua* who are the corporate core of the cognatic descent category, which consists of all those individuals who can legitimately claim

descent from the founding ancestor. Admission to *tangata whenua* status requires active support, including a rather heavy commitment of time and resources, which makes it difficult (although not uncommon) for an individual to be a core member of more than one descent group.

Whereas previously land was the primary foundation of a *hapu*'s estate, emphasis has now shifted to other resources. According to Webster it has been well documented that

> kinsmen with whom one interacts on a frequent basis and members of one's kindred or *whaanau* ['extended family'], as well as the usually narrower domestic group, have a reasonable claim on the use of one another's personal property such as cars or money, and usually enter, eat, and sleep in one another's houses without formalities. In the wider descent group, local marae committees or, in the city, "family committees" and regional organizations often maintain an account which is expended in their name on the occasion of formal gatherings, or is used to offset the emergency needs of its members . . . the corporate descent group maintains a jural claim on the labour, savings, and production of each of its members, mobilised on a moment's notice for any of its assemblies (Webster 1975:137).

Although hypothetically an individual can choose to affiliate with many descent groups, practically he or she is drawn toward only one by life-cycle events, beginning with birth. This tends to put the child into closer association with one set of grandparents, who are likely to be influential in the choice of a name. Courtship and marriage may further restrict possible affiliations, depending upon post-marital residence and the ease with which multiple ties can be maintained, but perhaps the most important factor dictating primary association is the choice of a burial place—a matter of great concern for most Maori.[4] Webster concludes that the contemporary *hapu*, in at least one of its usages, satisfies the jural requirements for being considered a corporation.

Sharon Tiffany approaches the Samoan *'aiga* in a similar way (see especially Tiffany 1975a for an explicit comparison). Like the Maori *hapu*, the Samoan *'aiga* is identified by reference to its founder, and all individuals descendant from that founder are potential members. Actual membership requires, as among the Maori, active participation in the affairs of the group. In Samoa this includes some combination of the following: economic support of *'aiga* exchanges and ceremonial redistributions, residence on the estate of the *'aiga*, cultivation of land vested in the membership of the *'aiga*, and political support (Tiffany 1975a:432). It is the internal organization of the *'aiga* as a corporate descent group, however, that is of special interest to Tiffany.

Three categories of individuals have rights to make decisions on behalf of an *'aiga*: the holders of chiefly titles, the *'aiga potopoto* 'an ad

hoc assemblage of *'aiga* members organized for the purpose of discussing matters pertaining to title successions or removals', and *faletama* 'constituent units of the *'aiga* composed of all those people who acknowledge common descent from a brother, son, sister, or daughter of the founder' Descent groups generally own several chiefly, or *matai*, titles, with the highest ranking title that of the reputed founder; all other titles are ranked in relation to it. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of chiefly titles to Samoans. Not only do chiefly titles carry with them one's symbolic importance as a person, but chiefs continue to play an extremely active role in regulating their *'aiga*'s affairs. Their responsibilities include allocating *'aiga* land for cultivation, designating house sites on *'aiga* land, arbitrating and mediating disputes involving group members, assessing goods and labor for ceremonial redistributions and village-sponsored projects, representing the group politically in the village council of chiefs, maintaining corporate property such as the *'aiga*'s official house site, and possibly a savings account, maintaining the *'aiga*'s genealogy, and defending the integrity of other titles associated with the group (Tiffany 1975a:435).

When a title comes up for consideration it is the *'aiga potopoto* who deliberate. The ability to trace a consanguineal link to the descent group is the only necessary condition for attending an *'aiga potopoto* meeting, at which the relative qualifications of various candidates are considered. Failure to express interest in the decision, by not sending a representative if one cannot attend, is likely to be taken by other members as a forfeiture of the right to dissent, and is one way potential membership in the group goes unrealized. As with village councils, decisions are not considered binding unless all interested parties (including those unable to attend the meeting) consent, and for this reason some disputed titles have remained vacant for extended periods of time.

Faletama are segments of an *'aiga* that are politically subordinate units, often having their own interests in opposition to other such units. Higher order *faletama* units may be subdivided into lower order units, and each may have its own title. Conflict between *faletama* gets most intense when they offer opposing candidates for a higher level title within the *'aiga*. In the past, when a descent group grew quite large, so that relationships between members became diffuse, *faletama* would sometimes split off to form their own *'aiga*. Thus, although *'aiga* are corporate groups, important internal political divisions often play a prominent role in the way they function (for an excellent account of the way in which political factionalism operates in relation to Samoan social organization, see Shore 1982).

As with all cognatic descent systems, Samoans have the option of making claims in several *'aiga* and often in several *faletama* within an *'aiga*. Given the political nature of such units, and their frequent opposi-

tion to one another, however, individuals are forced to make choices on a variety of occasions with regard to how they will use their limited resources. In an insightful article concerning redistribution ceremonies in Samoa, Tiffany and Tiffany (1978) illuminate the way in which affiliations and alignments occur in practice. They find that individuals generally seek to enhance their social position by opting to meet contribution obligations to high status groups that control desirable land, titles, and political influence. The structural implications of such cumulative choices remain to be spelled out, however.

The issue of descent group formation has served as a catalyst for moving Polynesian studies to a new level of sophistication. Analyses of the anomalies that Polynesian descent groups presented in the light of prior models stimulated a shift from rather simple structural models, which screened out the intricacies of political maneuvering, individual decision making, and the like, to much more complex understandings of social action. In the 1980s, praxis theories, exemplified in the works of such theorists as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Marshall Sahlins (see Ortner 1984), have provided a strong theoretical foundation for the latter perspective.

Attempts to explain the nature of descent groups was also of vital significance because it raised the question of whether Polynesian social formations are primarily shaped by pragmatic adaptations to ecological circumstances, or whether they are better understood as manifestations of underlying cultural principles. Clearly both processes are involved, but the differential emphasis afforded one type of explanation at the expense of the other leads to quite different perspectives and understandings. The ecological perspective seeks explanation in economic advantage, with the key to Polynesian systems being sought in the adaptive demands of island environments. Cognatic descent, from this perspective, is seen as a way of distributing individuals so that ratios of population to resource are optimized. Whereas unilineal descent, rigorously applied, leads to groups that grow at disproportionate rates as a result of demographic fluctuations, thereby creating conditions in which some groups end up with an excess of land while others are land-hungry, cognatic descent permits individuals to go where the resources are, thus evening out person-to-resource ratios. In an island environment this can be crucial to the overall survival of the population.

The cultural perspective argues that Polynesians carried with them a set of principles for interpreting the world and organizing their social lives. From this standpoint Polynesian social formations are expressions, under a variety of historical and ecological conditions, of a basic world view that includes specific notions about kinship, relationships between human beings and ancestral gods, and a host of related beliefs.

Nowhere has this basic issue of interpretation been more clearly arti-

culated than in attempts to interpret the role of chiefs in Polynesian societies, and to account for the forms of political organization.

Social Stratification

It will be recalled that early theorists, working within the diffusionist framework, explained Polynesian political forms as the consequence of successive waves of immigrants, with an original population of egalitarian people followed by a wave of neo-Polynesians who brought with them a well-developed set of political institutions, including notions of aristocracy and chieftainship. The first significant shift in perspective was toward a functionalist view, which was introduced into Polynesian ethnography by Raymond Firth and Ian Hogbin, and to a lesser extent by Margaret Mead and Ernest Beaglehole. It was Ralph Piddington, a student of Malinowski, however, who articulated the functionalist theory of Polynesian chieftainship most fully. In his conclusion to *Essays in Polynesian Ethnology* (1939), a book based on Williamson's ethnographic files, Piddington offered a hypothetical sequence by which elaborate forms of political organization might have developed out of the simple social structures of small colonizing communities. He speculated that as population increased, pressure on food supplies led to a struggle for the most fertile and most easily cultivated lands, leading to inter-group rivalry and the eventual dominance of some groups over others. Political alliances were formed, along with them a greater centralization of authority, with some headmen becoming first chiefs, then head-chiefs. This extension of authority generated elaborate systems of etiquette and taboo, and once-ordinary principles of genealogical reckoning, prolonged through generations, merged the progenitors of the chiefly families with the ancestor-gods. These two factors led to the beliefs and practices subsumed under the general title of the sanctity of chieftainship (Williamson and Piddington 1939:206–207).

Piddington's explanation for why these various forms arose stems directly from Malinowski, his teacher and mentor: social institutions are presumed to satisfy social needs. He made no attempt to account for the variations that were to be found in the forms Polynesian political systems took, other than listing such factors as geographic and demographic circumstances, individual variations in role performance, institutional efflorescence within particular societies, and diffusion.

Some twenty years later, Marshall Sahlins (1958) presented an evolutionary explanation for the variations in political organization within the region. Sahlins reviewed data from fourteen Polynesian societies with the purpose of establishing a stratification gradient and correlating it to technoenvironmental differences. In considering traditional social

structure, Sahlins focused upon two features of stratification. degree and form. He estimated degree of stratification by using a combination of structural and functional features. The major structural criterion was socially recognized categories of rank, while functional criteria included economic, sociopolitical, and ceremonial privilege and power. The result was a four-level classification, ranging from the highly stratified societies of Hawaii, Tahiti, Tonga, and Samoa to the egalitarian small islands of Pukapuka, Ontong Java, and Tokelau.

Sahlins also examined forms of stratification from the viewpoint of adaptive radiation. He distinguished three types: the ramage system, which is based on "internally ranked, segmentary unilineal kin groups acting also as political units"; the descent-line system, which is characterized by "discrete, localized common descent groups organized into territorial political entities", and atoll systems characterized by "complex organizations of interlocking social groups different from both ramage and descent-line structure" (Sahlins 1958:xi–xii). A ramage system, in Sahlins' usage, is the working out of the principle of seniority within patrilines to its logical conclusions, without regard for territoriality (he accepted patrilineality as the dominant descent principle). A descent-line system, while based on patrilineal principles, makes important concessions to territoriality, such that titles are located in space as well as in genealogies. (Sahlins' distinction was an updated version of Burrows' breed and border thesis; see Sahlins 1958:200).

Consistent with his emphasis on technoenvironmental adaptation, Sahlins concentrated attention on systems of production, circulation, and consumption of goods. Chiefs are seen preeminently as directors of production, as central agents in large-scale redistributions of food and other goods, and as privileged consumers. They are also imbued with sacred powers and exercise political prerogatives, but these are clearly derivative, in Sahlins' scheme, from their economic roles. Ultimately, then, stratification is traced to productivity and the size of redistributive networks.

Sahlins accounted for forms of stratification by considering them as variant solutions to the problem of distributing surplus production. Thus ramified systems are postulated to be a response to familial specialization in the production of surplus strategic goods. Familial specialization, in turn, is a predictable reaction to spatial distributions of rich resource zones too scattered to be exploited by a single household, or where the range of crops is so wide as to preclude effective exploitation by a single household. Descent-line systems are presumed to be responses to spatial distributions of rich resource zones clustered in a small area, or to a narrow range of crops.

Sahlins was sharply criticized for his treatment of particular societies (Finney 1966; Freeman 1961, 1964), and a close examination of his

data shows that degree of stratification can be accounted for by the single factor of population size, without regard to productivity or technoenvironmental adaptation (Orans 1966). Nevertheless, his book demonstrated the potential for ecological explanation, and it served as a model for comparative research.

While Sahlins' study was awaiting publication, Irving Goldman published an article entitled "Status Rivalry and Cultural Evolution in Polynesia" (1955), in which he proposed a developmental scheme that hinged upon the notion that status rivalry was particularly acute in Polynesian societies. He suggested a sequence of three historical phases: traditional, which referred to early stages of Polynesian cultural development; open, which referred to a transitional condition; and stratified, which referred to the culminating phases of development. Each phase is identified by characteristic forms of authority, property, kinship, position of women, sexual practices, infanticide, mourning, warfare, priesthood, dieties, afterlife, sorcery, and omens. In several subsequent papers, Goldman (1957, 1958, 1960a, 1960b) elaborated on his thesis, which culminated in the publication of *Ancient Polynesian Society* in 1970. Although Goldman's evolutionism has been greeted with skepticism (Hawthorne and Belshaw 1957, Howard 1972), his dynamic portrayal of political life has had a significant impact on contemporary views of Polynesian social organization.

Goldman took Polynesia to be a cultural unity, and attempted to explain variation in terms of a dominant pattern that unfolded in historically diverse ways. He focused on the Polynesian status system, by which he referred to "the principles that define worth and more specifically honor, that establish the scales of personal and group value, that relate position or role to privileges and obligations, that allocate respects, and that codify respect behavior" (Goldman 1970:7). In Polynesia, he maintained, "it is the status system—specifically, the principles of aristocracy—that gives direction to the social structure as a whole. Principles of status dominate all other principles of social organization" (Goldman 1970:7).

In his discussion of social groupings, Goldman acknowledges that descent groups can usefully be viewed as deriving from rules of affiliation. He also acknowledges the value of examining the way in which kinship principles functionally allocate rights and responsibilities, but he regards descent as primarily concerned with honor. In Polynesia, Goldman (1970:419, emphasis in original) insists, "descent is not really a *means* to status, it is the *heart* of status." Rather than attempting to classify Polynesian descent groups as various forms of nonunilinear types, which misses the central point in Goldman's view, a more precise designation would be to consider them as status lineages.

> The status lineage in Polynesia differs from the broader class of "conventional" lineages in the lack of exogamy and in its lack of full commitment to either male or female descent lines. Or, to state the difference positively, the conventional lineage holds to categorical rules of exclusion and of affiliation; the Polynesian status lineage, to flexible rules. Polynesian flexibility is primarily political, and it is for political reasons that the status lineage is so highly variable an organization (Goldman 1970:422–423).

A special feature of status lineages is that even within specific societies, criteria of descent differ in accordance with genealogical rank. Among high chiefs, unilinearity authenticates rank and authority, whereas among commoners, whose central concerns are utilitarian rather than honorific, bilaterality is the rule. In the stratified societies, according to Goldman, (1970:424), "only the upper ranks can be said to belong to a lineage organization at all. Commoners are part of both a political organization and part of small kindreds."

Chiefs are concerned with descent as a means of establishing honorable affiliation to a prestigious descent line in order to authenticate their *mana* and authority. They are likewise concerned with affiliating themselves to people who will contribute to their power. Commoners' interests, in contrast, are best served by affiliating politically with rising chiefs and those who offer the best conditions of service. Goldman thus sees descent principles as part of a set of options by which individuals can structure their affiliations.

One of the more fascinating aspects of Polynesian social stratification is that island clusters such as Hawaii, the Societies, Tonga, and Samoa developed such elaborate political systems on such a rudimentary economic base (see Kirch, chapter 2, this volume). It is on these grounds that Goldman attacks materialist and ecological explanations. "Since Polynesian societies can be similar in basic culture whether they occupy atolls or high islands, relatively rich habitats or barren islands," he maintains, "they cannot be regarded as having been molded by their different material environments" (Goldman 1970:478). For Goldman, then, the general explanation for Polynesian social forms is cultural, while the particular outcomes result from the play of historical chance and human intentions. From his perspective, growth in political centralism does not stem from the organizational imperatives of modes of production, as the cultural materialists would have it, but from the status ambitions of chiefs, and more particularly, from wars of conquest.

The character of Polynesian economies stems, in Goldman's view, from the forms of aristocracy in the area. It is not that commerce, that is utilitarian exchange, was ignored, but it was subordinated "to a greater interest in ritual circulation of goods" (Goldman 1970:477). All Polyne-

sian economies were to be considered as aristocratic economies. Production, circulation, and consumption serve to measure, allocate, and validate honor. Thus, in those societies where the status of chiefs was comparatively high, the economy was slanted toward the honorific; where lower ranks dominated, the bias shifted toward the utilitarian. From the standpoint of aristocracy, participation in a cycle of exchanges is neither the source of status nor a test of status, but rather the prerogative and documentation of status. In a more general sense, as Goldman (1970:496) succinctly puts it, "exchanges are the code through which status information is communicated."

Goldman's cultural approach to an understanding of Polynesian political organization hinges to a considerable extent on the logic of *mana* 'efficacy, potency' Theoretically *mana* is an inherited potential, transmitted genealogically, with greater proportions going to firstborn children. It is therefore a matter of degree—a gradient ideally coincident with kinship seniority. Ultimately it stems from the gods, who are the source of prosperity or famine, of good or ill-fortune. The gods, as ancestors, are incorporated into the kinship system, and those individuals who are most directly linked to them through seniority are presumed to have the most *mana.* If *mana* were conceived strictly as an inherited quality it would have had a profoundly conservative effect on social organization, but such was not the case. Rather it was conceived to be dynamic, manifest in action and in the outcomes of problematic events (Firth 1940; Shore, chapter 5, this volume). To be effective was therefore to demonstrate the strength of one's *mana,* to be ineffective was to reveal its weakness or absence. Since *mana* could only be validated with results, maintaining high status required repetitive demonstrations. By implication, then, *mana* could be lost or gained by individuals, with rises in fortune signifying gains and declines in fortune signifying losses of *mana.*

Chiefs in particular were under pressure to continually demonstrate their *mana,* for only by doing so could they validate their status and demonstrate their vitality. On the one hand chiefs were engaged in efforts to defend their status against threats, for failure to successfully do so implied loss of *mana,* and hence significance as a person. On the other hand, there was no better way to demonstrate *mana* than by successfully challenging, and defeating, a person of equal or higher status. It was the impetus of this cultural logic that lay behind Goldman's (1970:12–13) notion of status rivalry as a relentless motivator of political change in Polynesia.

The concept of *mana* was also applicable to skilled craftsmen, whose wares were judged by their effectiveness, and to other specialists, such as healers, priests, and sorcerers. Successful specialists, along with successful warriors, gained status through their displays of efficacy. There

were thus multiple routes to enhanced status in most Polynesian societies, lending further impetus to the dynamism of social organization.[3]

Goldman's reconstruction of traditional Polynesian social systems constitutes a remarkable achievement. By focusing on the status system he highlighted many aspects of social and political dynamics that had been previously overlooked. The distinction he drew between the concerns of chiefs and commoners stands as a major contribution, as does his dynamic portrayal of status lineages. Yet, his account has the limitations of any grand scheme. It does not, for example, provide a satisfactory explanation for the details of political relations documented in ethnographic accounts such as Firth's work on Tikopia (1936a, 1964, 1967, 1970b). Goldman also overemphasizes the degree to which chiefs rely on patrilineal principles to authenticate rank. Since his work was published a good deal of evidence has accumulated suggesting that both paternal and maternal lines play a role in rankings, and that power stems from successfully claiming multiple affiliations. Goldman also oversimplifies the concept of *mana,* and does not deal effectively with such issues as the relationship between chiefs and priests, or between either of these and other kinds of specialists. His dismissal of ecological considerations is also a bit cavalier, but his analysis has the virtue of dramatizing the dynamic character of Polynesian sociopolitical systems.

The structural flexibility we have encountered in Polynesian approaches to group membership (insofar as descent group affiliation is optative) thus also characterizes Polynesian stratification. Prior to European intervention, the level of material development was insufficient to permit uncontested hegemony by any group. Weapons, tools, surplus food, and symbols of status were accessible to all who could mobilize the human resources necessary to produce them. So, despite the apparent structure imposed by rules of seniority and the superiority of the male line, political success required adept manipulation of interpersonal relations. It was through the dynamic processes of exchange, rather than the imposition of static structural rules, that real political power was acquired and exercized.

Ultimately, however, it may well have been the cultural logic of *mana* that lent to Polynesian political systems their volatile characteristics. Thus chiefs in power seemingly were encouraged to push their people's tolerance to the limit in order to display their potency, and aspirants to power appear to have continually tested their relative strength. The ambiguities in structural principles provided by the rules of cognatic descent permitted genealogies to be rearranged to legitimate new ascendencies, so changing fortunes could be accommodated without altering the basic structure. But in the final analysis political success, whether through the imposition of genealogical principles, the peaceful mobili-

zation of resources, or through conquest, was its own legitimation, for to be successful was to demonstrate *mana*, to make manifest the favor of the gods. It is therefore in action and process, informed by deeply embedded cultural principles as well as by situational pragmatism, that Polynesian social organization must be understood.

In a sense, the issues we have discussed thus far—those that dominated Polynesian ethnology up through the 1960s—placed the cart before the horse. That is, compelling generalizations about group formation and political structures require cogent theories about the nature of social action. Because kinship lies at the heart of the matter, we shall begin our analysis of how anthropologists have attempted to remedy the situation by sketching out a general view of Polynesian kinship based upon its more obvious features. We then go on to consider recent attempts at clarification by ethnographers who have been studying the ways in which kinship principles are expressed in specific contexts.

Kinship

The term *kaaiga* and its cognates can be glossed as 'kin' or 'kinship' in most Polynesian languages.[6] *Kaaiga* may be used as a verb, noun, or modifier, and is capable of indicating many kinds and shades of relationship. Huntsman's analysis of the Tokelauan *kaaiga* is exemplary.

> A Tokelauan uses the word *kaaiga* as a predicate *e kaaiga ki maa* "we are related"; and as an indefinite noun *ko ia he kaaiga e o oku* "he is my kinsman", and as a definite noun *ko ki maaua e i te kaaiga e tahi* "we are in the same kin group" A word derived from *kaaiga—ituukaaiga* (*ituu* means side or portion) —is used to classify, sort or type animals, plants, objects or activities. The myriad varieties of fish are classified into a number of overlapping *ituukaaiga* by their appearance, habitat and behaviour; sleeping mats are sorted into *ituukaaiga* by their design and fibre; ancient songs are typed into a number of *ituukaaiga*. Both the derived word *ituukaiga* and the base word *kaaiga* denote two or more items which share distinctive attributes; but *kaaiga* is used exclusively to denote two or more human beings with common attributes, which may be as broadly inclusive as the *kaaiga* of God encompassing all humanity, living and dead, or as narrowly exclusive as the *kaaiga* of a couple and their child.
>
> Shared ancestry conceived of as *auala* "paths" linking people to a single forebear, ancestral couple, or sibling set, makes two people *kaaiga* "kinsmen" to each other and defines a number of people as a *kaaiga* "kin group". People are *kaaiga* to each other because they have at least one common known or assumed progenitor. All the people with whom an individual is aware he shares a forebear or who he knows are linked to a kinsman of any of his forebears, he considers to be his kinsmen. This is an ego-oriented category. A number of people consider themselves a kin group because they all have a

common assumed or known, forebear. This is an ancestral-oriented category. In the *kaaiga* of God, all men are conceived as related because all 'paths', if they were known, would ultimately converge at Adam and Eve [this, of course, represents the application of traditional principles to post-missionary teachings].

Today, a Nukunonu man [Nukunonu is one of the atolls in the Tokelau group] speaks about *toto* "blood" as a substance shared by *kaaiga*, but says this is something they have learned from Europeans. However, he points out that people have always been aware that *kaaiga* share some substance, otherwise why would they have similar appearance and character. Distinctive attributes of personality and behaviour are attributed to certain kin groups; members glance sideways, eat excessively, are unkempt or are good cricket batsmen (Huntsman 1971:320–321).

The Tokelau use the term *kaukaaiga* (*kau* means 'to join') in reference to

a corporate group which has common rights to property, specifically to *mataaniu* 'coconut plantations', which they jointly exploit and from which they share fruits. This property was estates inherited by a founder or founders, who were occasionally great-grandparents or grandparents of elders, were most frequently parents of elders, and are often the elders themselves. All people who can trace a "path" to the founder are *kaukaaiga* members.

A kin group is recognized as a *kaukaaiga*, entitled to representation in the elders' council, only when it controls a *mataaniu*. People are acknowledged to be a *kaukaaiga* because they are linked to its founders, but, more important, they are identified by their common rights to shares of produce from a *mataaniu*. Consequently, *kaukaaiga* may have affiliate members who do not share ancestry, but do share produce (Huntsman 1971:327).

The notion of kinship as shared substance is richer and more ambiguous than analysts' conventional definition of kinship in terms of genealogy. Substance may derive from filiative links, from shared involvement in land (that most precious of commodities), or from shared consumption of produce. In particular, those who regularly share food are seen in Polynesia as acting like kinsmen, regardless of their blood ties. Thus behavior is treated as an index of kinship, as a basis for affirming or denying it. Furthermore, acting like kinsmen is a means to creating kinship bonds between persons previously unrelated.[7]

For example, on Anuta, a Polynesian outlier located in the eastern Solomons, Feinberg documented the importance of *aropa* 'positive affect as expressed through giving or sharing of material goods and assistance in performing tasks' for defining kinship (Feinberg 1981 116).[8] The elementary property-owning, producing, and consuming unit on Anuta is known as the *patongia*. Although patrifiliation is the primary genealogical basis for membership in the group, it is defined culturally as "that

group of people who share a common basket of food at island-wide distributions" (Feinberg 1981.116). Sometimes genealogically distant cousins who participate within the same unit have closer emotional and behavioral ties than full siblings who are separated. Likewise, an outsider who is adopted into a *patongia,* and who contributes to it economically, comes to be treated as a "true sibling of the same parents" by all his generation mates in the group (Feinberg 1981 117). Thus social distance in Polynesian societies is only partially determined by genealogical connection, other factors, such as residential proximity and access to resources, which can affect interpersonal commitments, also play an important part in structuring relationships. Sharing the same food regularly is perhaps the most powerful sign of relationship, that is, of sharing the same substance, although other indices are recognized.[9]

In his review of the literature on Polynesian kinship systems, Goldman (1970:especially chapter 21) concludes that they are constructed out of two fundamental principles—seniority and gender. Seniority is reflected in the precedence given to earlier generations, and to firstborn children. If it were to operate without modification, the principle of seniority would result in all of the descendants of a founding ancestral couple being ranked uniquely vis-à-vis one another. Not only would their children be ranked according to birth order, but in subsequent generations the descendants of their firstborn child would rank higher than the descendants of their second born child, and so forth. This principle, carried to its logical conclusion, results in a set of ranked lineages stemming initially from the first sibling set, but gaining further divisions from sibling sets in descending generations. The highest ranking person is the firstborn child of the firstborn parent, of the firstborn grandparent, and so on, and all other persons could be ranked accordingly.

Whereas the principle of seniority results in fine quantitative gradations of status, gender is categorical in its implications. Male is set off against female, providing the basis for dualistic divisions of kinsmen. The gender principle shows up most clearly in Polynesian sibling terms, where the main distinction is between siblings of the same sex and those of the opposite sex. In its simplest form, as in Tikopia, brother and sister call each other by the same term *(kave),* while siblings of the same sex call each other by another term *(taina).* In more complex systems, like that of the New Zealand Maori, males call their sisters by one term *(tuahine),* while females call their brothers by another *(tungane);* seniority is recognized between siblings of the same sex, with the younger calling the older by a different term *(tuakana)* than the one used by the older for the younger *(teina).* Some societies, like Pukapuka and Tokelau, are intermediate; they have a single term for siblings of the same sex but differentiate siblings of the opposite sex by separate terms for male and female (see Firth 1970c and Panoff 1965 for penetrating, comparative analyses of Polynesian siblingship).

For many years variations in Polynesian kinship systems were all but ignored by comparative theorists, perhaps because they appeared deceptively simple, but in fact, internal variation within the region requires explanation. Firth hypothesizes that the smaller the community, in numbers and in geographical circumscription, the simpler the terminological system is likely to be (Firth 1970c:275). The evidence, although there are some anomalies, seems to support this, at least in relation to the elaboration of sibling terms.

In addition to differences in sheer complexity are those that distinguish eastern and western Polynesia. Whereas western Polynesian societies appear to have elaborated the principle of gender duality to a considerable degree in structuring their kinship systems, eastern Polynesia has emphasized the principle of seniority. Thus in western Polynesian societies such as Samoa, Tonga, and Fiji the distinction between siblings of the opposite sex provides a basis for making distinctions between relatives in adjacent generations, whereas in eastern Polynesia (with two exceptions) it does not. Mother's brothers and father's sisters occupy special positions in these societies, as do their corresponding reciprocals, cross-nieces and nephews. The social significance of these gender distinctions lies in the special honorific status of women vis-à-vis their brothers. In western Polynesia, after puberty, a rule of avoidance applies between siblings of the opposite sex, and men are required to show the utmost respect to their sisters. The way this gets expressed in kinship idiom differs from one western Polynesian system to another, however.

In Tonga, although men hold formal political power, they are outweighed by their sisters in formal honors (Gifford 1929; see also Goldman 1970).[10] What a man holds in actual power over his sister he surrenders in ritual power to her children, thus balancing the relationship. A man's sister's son or daughter is known by the term *ilamutu*, the etymology of which Goldman reconstructs as "a destroyer," implying that one's sister's child is "above the law," and the symbolic destroyer of his or her maternal uncle.[11] In fact an *ilamutu* is entitled to take at will the uncle's property, and even has the right to seize his sacrificial offerings, which implies a god-like ascendant status. This relationship between sister's child and mother's brother is known as the *fahu* (*vasu* in Fiji), and plays an important role in political maneuverings (see section on political organization below). The father's sister, in contrast, is owed reverential respect, and is known by the term *mehekitanga*, which implies preciousness. This complex of relationships is summarized by Goldman as follows:

> Through his sister, a man loses ritual or symbolic power and suffers a reversal. Through her brother, a woman gains an ascendancy equivalent to what a man has over his children. Through his mother, a child gains an ascendancy

over a male of his parental generation. Through his father, a male submits to an awesome respect relationship before a female of his mother's generation. The key element is the concept of sex opposition as the switch-over point for status. Within consanguinity, the brother-sister pattern is the key (Goldman 1970:454; see also Bott 1981, Rogers 1977).

The Samoan pattern also derives from a heavy emphasis on restraint and respect between brother and sister, but in Samoa it is the father's sister who is known as the *ilamutu*. The term is also used in reference to the eldest sister of a man holding a high-ranking title. A man's sister has the power to place a curse of barrenness upon him, thus cutting off his line, which in Samoa (and indeed in any Polynesian society) would be an act of the utmost gravity.

In the Marquesas, within eastern Polynesia, the cognate term *i'amutu* refers to a man's sister's child or a woman's brother's child. There is no mention in the literature of sisters' power over their brothers; rather MoBr, MoBrWi, FaSi, FaSiHu act as ritual sponsors. It is the inequality between generations that is emphasized in this system.

In general, eastern Polynesian societies emphasize seniority and, although gender is important, gender is not given the same degree of prominence as in western Polynesian systems. Sibling terms provide one index of this difference. Whereas all of the eastern Polynesian societies make a terminological distinction between elder and younger sibling of the same sex, most western Polynesian societies do not. In the parental and offspring generations, on the other hand, the bifurcation that distinguishes cross from parallel kinsmen that is commonplace in western Polynesia only occurs in the eastern Polynesian societies of the Marquesas and Tongareva.

The Hawaiian case clearly shows the dominant eastern Polynesian concern for seniority. Relatives are grouped together by generation without distinctions between siblings and collaterals. Within each generation siblings of the same sex used the reciprocal terms *kaikua'ana* 'older sibling' and *kaikaina* 'younger sibling'. When required, sex distinctions were designated by adding generic suffixes for male *(kane* or *nane)* and female *(wahine* or *hine)* (see Handy and Pukui 1972:42).

Goldman (1970) interprets the differences between east and west as representing a reduction in complexity that corresponds to historical processes. Thus we find in Tonga and Samoa (and in Fiji) the oldest Polynesian societies, and the strongest brother-sister avoidance patterns. These are somewhat less emphasized, but still present, in other western Polynesian societies, and appear in an even more diluted form in the Marquesas. In the remainder of the eastern Polynesian societies brother-sister avoidance is essentially absent, and the sibling relationship in general is downplayed in favor of the husband-wife dyad. Since

dualism allows for a variety of elaborations, the kinship systems in western Polynesia are more complex and variable, those in eastern Polynesia are simpler and more uniform.

In Goldman's view, all Polynesian kinship categorizations denote honors, respect, and worth, so they are sensitive to changes in concepts of status. Since he associates dualism with the domestic status system and seniority with the public status system, he interprets the simplification process as a reduction in the significance of domestic status in favor of an emphasis on political pragmatics. In eastern Polynesia, in other words, a political concern for ranking shaped the kinship system at the expense of domestic concerns for gender distinctions. Goldman's preference for rational-cognitive explanations, as opposed to materialistic ones, is made explicit when he states that "evidence for high variability of the dualism—seniority pattern, particularly in western Polynesia, points unmistakably to acts of choice" (Goldman 1970:468).

Whereas Goldman relies on the etymology of kin terms to argue that Polynesian kinship systems reflect status concerns, other scholars have looked to the ways in which kinship principles operate in specific contexts in order to clarify the issues involved. Most notable are studies of incest taboos and adoption.

Incest Taboos

In 1976 the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* published a special issue on rules and beliefs about incest in Oceania. Four of the articles deal with Polynesian societies, and help to illuminate certain aspects of kinship. For example, the essays make clear that Polynesians disdain most incest between brother and sister, seeing it as action based on desire, untempered by respect for social rules and arrangements. Since the social consequences of incest are of primary concern, it is not so much the sexual component of the relationship that arouses negative responses as the prospect of marriage (although a marriage between cousins may transform a liaison considered scandalous into a routine relationship once it is accepted by kinsmen; see Ottino 1973). The focus is on the implications of an incestuous relationship for the kinship groups immediately involved—the ones to whom both partners belong. Furthermore, and perhaps most revealing, is the degree to which kinship is defined in a pragmatic and conditional manner, so that one cannot delineate a clear set of genealogical rules that would accurately define incest. This latter point, which is central to Polynesian perspectives on kinship (and social relations in general) can be understood from both an ecological and cultural perspective. Ecologically, it is important to keep in mind that we are dealing with islands, some of which are very small and can sustain only relatively small communities. But even on the larger islands, one

must assume that founding colonies were small, and became inbred before population expansion generated sufficient numbers to obscure genealogical relationships. Thus Polynesian societies probably all had to go through a period when mating was inevitable between closely related kinsmen, and there had to be some way to make it socially acceptable. From a cultural standpoint, the situation is complicated by the general Polynesian preference for local endogamy, for marrying within or near one's home community.[12] The reasons for this are multiple, and reflect such factors as bilaterality in decision making (women's choices are given enough weight so that they are not forced to leave their home communities for the political or economic expediency of their male consanguines), the notion of ancestral spirits who are associated with one's home locality and who are relatively benign in comparison with alien spirits who inhabit other communities, and a sentimental attachment to the land that is owned by one's cognatic descent group. It is, in fact, difficult to overestimate the importance of land as a symbol for Polynesians, even in modernized societies like Hawaii and New Zealand, where most Hawaiians and Maori neither exercise economic control over nor receive tangible benefits from their ancestral lands (for an excellent account of the symbolic importance of land as distinct from its use, see Hanson 1970). Given the potential for ambiguity in defining kinship relations within Polynesian systems, opportunities for negotiating, or renegotiating, relationships are often rather extensive, allowing for ready circumvention of generally formulated rules (such as those proscribing incest).

The study of Tokelau incest prohibitions by Huntsman and Hooper perhaps best exemplifies the operation of these principles. The Tokelau group is composed of four atolls, three of which are currently inhabited. Despite a common language and culture, people have a strong attachment to their home atoll and a definite preference exists for marriage within the local community. Demographic data gathered by Huntsman and Hooper in 1967 and 1968 show rates of endogamy ranging from 79 percent on the smallest atoll (population ca. 500) to 91 percent on the largest (population ca. 700). Despite a stated preference for atoll endogamy, however, the data suggest "that Tokelauans, when confronted with the dilemma presented by a preference for atoll endogamy and the prohibition on marrying close kin, do sacrifice endogamy" (Huntsman and Hooper 1976:268).

A genealogical study of Atafu, one of the atolls, supports this idea. Atafu was settled toward the end of the eighteenth century by two married couples, to whom members of the present population trace their pedigree. In the early generations following settlement the genealogies show that preference for endogamy was sacrificed in order to abide by incest prohibitions. In intermediate generations, as the population

grew, they compromised, with some marrying out in order to maintain the ban on marrying second and third cousins, while others married within these parameters in order to maintain local endogamy. With continued expansion of the population, generation by generation, it was possible for people both to find mates within their local communities and to conform to the rules governing incest. This is reflected in the fact that the degree of cousinship among those marrying relatives has become increasingly remote (Huntsman and Hooper 1976:268–269; reporting data collected by Raspe 1973).

Tokelauan social organization reflects its close historical connection with Samoa and employs essentially the same cultural principles. The relationship between brothers and sisters is characterized by avoidance, deference, and respect. They are complementary roles, involving mutual support, and bound together in a covenant, which extends beyond the life-spans of particular sibling sets to members of succeeding generations. Thus, as in Samoa, cognatic descent groups are divided into complementary divisions, with the founders' sons and their issue comprising the *tama tane*, the daughters and their issue constituting the *tama fafine* (for a discussion of this feature of Samoan social organization, see Shore 1982:91–95).

The Tokelau term most closely approximating that of incest is *holi kāiga*, which translates roughly as the 'desecration of kinship' (Huntsman and Hooper 1976:257). Theoretically, all Tokelauans are kinsmen because they derive from common ancestors, but pragmatically kinship is defined in terms of sharing common property as part of the same descent group. A marriage between two members of a *kaukaaiga* is thus the epitome of incest regardless of the degree of relationship.

> In the Tokelau conceptual scheme, those who hold joint rights to common property are by definition "kinsmen." "Kinsmen" do not marry; those who do are "no longer kinsmen." Thus those who marry can no longer hold common rights to property. The logic which forces this conclusion is irrevocable. Either the property of any "stock" [cognatic descent group] in which a husband and wife both hold land rights must be divided, or the property is retained intact and the marrying couple banished (Huntsman and Hooper 1976:265).

The high value Tokelauans place on maintaining the unity and identity of cognatic descent groups is a source of great social pressure on members who are tempted to mate.

Another problem generated by the marriage of close kin is that it forces role reversals, as kin become affines and vice versa. There is no single term in Tokelau that can be translated as 'affinity', and "the opposite of *kāiga* 'kin' or 'related' is simply *he kāiga* 'not kin' or 'unre-

lated' and marriage should take place only between people who are 'not kin' " (Huntsman and Hooper 1976:260).

When an incestuous marriage occurs, individuals who were previously related as categorical brothers and sisters, for example, and therefore expected to be respectful and restrained with one another, suddenly are cast into the roles of brother-in-law and sister-in-law, which calls for sexual banter and easy-going interaction, while categorical siblings of the same sex, among whom ease and unity are called for, suddenly become in-laws of the same sex, among whom restraint and respect is prescribed. These ambiguities can only be ignored if the marriage is ignored, which sometimes happens when outmigrants to New Zealand marry kinsmen; their common *kāiga* in the home atolls simply continue to act as kin. Huntsman and Hooper (1976:270) conclude that, "since they are conceived and expressed in the idiom of social rather than genealogical relationships, Tokelau incest prohibitions are pragmatic, flexible, contingent—more attuned to social and economic realities of village life than to absolute principles of any kind."

This pragmatic, contingent approach toward the definition of kinship is also reflected in the analysis of incest in Samoa, by Shore (1976a), and the papers by Hooper (1976) on Tahiti and Monberg (1976) on Bellona, which appear in the same volume. It is further evident in *Siblingship in Oceania*, a volume edited by Marshall (1981). The contributors to the volume each made an effort to contextualize the usage of sibling terminology, and in so doing contribute to a finer understanding of these central relationships. What comes through from the Polynesian chapters (Feinberg 1981 on Anuta; Hecht 1981 on Pukapuka; Huntsman 1981b on Tokelau; Kirkpatrick 1981 on the Marquesas) is the extent to which biographic, situational, and pragmatic considerations enter into kinship designations. Kinship terms are polysemic, and are used at different levels of contrast, depending on circumstances and purposes. Thus true siblings may or may not be distinguished in ordinary discourse, and a close relative in one context may be termed distant in another.

Adoption

Although the study of incest prohibitions in Polynesia focuses our attention on the brother-sister link, the study of adoption illuminates the relationship between parents and children. Two volumes published in the 1970s (Carroll 1970; Brady, ed. 1976) contain the bulk of the literature on Polynesian adoption. They represent a major comparative effort to understand the dynamics of Polynesian parenthood, and the results have been revealing.

Both the form and the high frequency of adoption in Polynesia are

remarkable, at least in comparison with Western norms. In the United States adoption is numerically insignificant, involving less than 3 percent of all children (United States Children's Bureau Division of Research 1964). Typical rates in Polynesia range from one-fourth to nearly the total population. For example, on Rangiroa atoll in the Tuamotus, Ottino (1970) reports that 35 percent of the households had adopted children resident within them and 73 percent of the households had been involved in an adoption transaction. Brady (1976b) reports that 30 percent of the households on Funafuti contain adopted children, and estimates rates of 50 to 70 percent on other islands in the Ellice group. On Kapingamarangi, a Polynesian outlier in Micronesia, Lieber (1970) found 51.7 percent of the persons canvassed to have been adopted, and on Nukuoro, another Polynesian outlier in Micronesia, Carroll (1970) was able to locate only two married adults, representing just 2 percent of the resident population, who had no experience with adoptive parenthood. Even in those Polynesian societies most affected by Western culture, such as Tahiti and Hawaii, adoption rates remain high. Thus Hooper (1970) reports that 38 percent of households in the community of Maupiti contained adopted children, and Howard et al. (1970) found this to be the case in 28 percent of Hawaiian-American households studied.

In form, too, adoption in Polynesia contrasts sharply with the practice in Western societies. Whereas adoption in European and American societies characteristically involves a formalized, legal procedure to transfer total and exclusive parental rights between unrelated persons, Polynesian adoption normally involves relatively informal transactions between consanguineally related individuals who all exercise parental prerogatives and responsibilities. Furthermore, while Westerners who give up their children for adoption are likely to be seen as incompetent at best, and are often stigmatized, prestige can accrue to Polynesian parents who give up their children, for they are looked upon as generous.[13]

The specific reasons given for adoption are multiple, and it indeed seems to be the flexibility of adoption as an institution that gives it such wide appeal in Polynesia. On a domestic level, the high value Polynesians give to completing families is a strong motivating force for adoption. Childless couples are pitied, and are regarded as both socially and economically disadvantaged. Adoption serves as a distributive mechanism, helping to equalize major imbalances in family size. It must be pointed out, however, that infertility is not a major problem in the region, and that most adopting adults already have, or have had children.

Economically, adoption often serves as means of balancing the labor needs of a household. In most island environments the domestic unit

operates most efficiently with a division of labor (flexible though it may be) between men and women, and between adults and children. Children perform a variety of light chores when they are young, and move into important economic roles as they mature. They also serve as a form of long-term economic insurance (see Hooper 1970 for an instance in which this is apparently of primary concern).[14]

Adoption also serves as a means of selecting heirs for land that might otherwise revert to less favored individuals. A favored niece or nephew or grandchild can thus be given priority over other competitors. In turn, the selected individual is placed under an obligation to provide for the adopted parent(s).[15] Another economic reason given for adoption is the desire to have a child learn a skill from an expert (Handy and Pukui 1972:46).

From an ecological perspective, adoption emerges from these studies as a powerful adaptive mechanism for equitably distributing people relative to resources, including land, in island environments. Particularly where periodic droughts, destructive storms, tsunamis, and other vicissitudes of nature combined with normal demographic fluctuations to create imbalances between population and resources, adoption became an important adjunct to cognatic descent as a means of redistributing people through the use of culturally approved strategies. Although such ecological variables may have stimulated the development and refinement of these strategies, their implications for social organization were elaborated within the framework of each society's cultural logic. We find, therefore, a number of variations on dominant themes, but there are some distinctive notions that appear to be widely shared throughout Polynesia.

One such theme centers on the way jural rights are defined in relation to children. Whereas in Western cultures jural rights over children lie almost exclusively in the hands of the natural parents unless otherwise altered by legal process, in Polynesia siblings, parents, parents' siblings, and even older children share parental rights with the natural parents. Adoption of consanguines is therefore not so much the transfer of parental rights from one to another as it is a strengthening of existing rights. Adoption and fosterage are, in this sense, expressions of a more diffuse conception of parenthood than exists in the West.

As Levy (1970) first pointed out for Tahiti—and the principle holds for most of Polynesia—prevalent adoption serves to communicate to children, and indeed to everyone in the community, that all relationships, even those of mother to child, are contingent and problematic. According to Levy this has important psychological repercussions, including a tendency to avoid strong emotional attachments to anyone (see also Ritchie and Ritchie 1979, and chapter 4, this volume). On the

positive side, Firth (1936b:192–193) suggests that on Tikopia adoption conveys the message that persons must have ties beyond the domestic unit; it therefore constitutes a form of social weaning that complements physiological weaning. Brooks, in her description of adoption on Manihi in the Tuamotus, draws a further implication. Although particular relationships are fragile, she points out, it is always possible to find new partners for relationship. "All individuals are replaceable. Security cannot be assured through any individual, but chances for security may be maximized through the maintenance of a group of potential substitutes" (Brooks 1976:62–63). This is close to Firth's point, of course, although his functional imperative has been recast as a cultural perspective reflecting both on adoptions and the tenor of relational activity in general.[16] But perhaps the most important message, from a sociocultural standpoint, derives directly from the ecologically induced importance of maintaining cooperative relationships within potentially imperiled communities, "that relatives are interdependent and that the maintenance of this network of interdependency must take priority over the wishes of individuals, even such strong wishes as attach to one's natural children" (Carroll 1970:152).

An extreme case can be found on Taku'u, a Polynesian outlier in Melanesia. There, everyone is adopted at birth, and individuals are under great pressure to honor adoptive relationships over natural ones. The explicit reason given is that otherwise people may narrow their allegiance to their natural families at the expense of broader community involvement (B. Moir, I. Howard, personal communications, 1986).

The particular forms of adoption—who does the adopting and under what conditions—may carry even more specific messages about cultural principles.

> Adoption, as it is practiced on Nukuoro, is an especially appropriate vehicle for the expression of cultural norms of kin-group solidarity in that, by obliging parents to give up their children, the supposition that children belong exclusively to their natural parents is modified in the direction of recognizing a multiplicity of claims. The claims of particular parents and particular children on each other must give way in the face of the authority of all elders and the requirement that siblings should cooperate. To put the matter another way, "adoption" reiterates not only the principle of "group solidarity" but emphasizes the particular dimensions of this solidarity (Carroll 1970:152).

As in the case of Taku'u, Carroll points out that in practice adoption does not serve to deny the importance of biological parenthood, but in fact underscores it, while at the same time communicating the necessity of overcoming its threat of exclusivity (Carroll 1970:152–153).

Gender

One focus of the debates concerning the nature of Polynesian descent groups involved the question of a patrilineal bias. Although it is acknowledged that optation is a characteristic of most Polynesian systems, in many cases the core of corporate descent groups is composed of patrilineally related males. Succession patterns also reveal a tendency to favor males, so from a statistical standpoint evidence exists to support a case for patrilineality. Furthermore, cultural conceptions of descent widespread in Polynesia display a bias toward the male line. In Samoa and in the Ellice Islands, for example, alignments traced to an ancestor through males are referred to as "strong blood," while those traced through females are known as "weak blood," linkages (Brady 1976b: 124; Shore 1976a.177). Goldman, in summarizing the literature for Polynesia, concludes that the sanctity of the male line is a basic principle of status in the region. He considers most Polynesian societies to manifest a pro-patriliny bias, which is based on the notion that men and the male line carry more *mana* 'potency' than women and the female line. This bias is mitigated by the principle of seniority, and by other criteria associated with *mana,* such as genealogical depth and reputations for skill and valor (Goldman 1970:16). Sahlins, in his earlier comparative study, also referred to a patrilineal bias, and defined Polynesian corporate units as non-exogamous patrilineal descent groups, although he acknowledged that female links were occasionally important for tracing ancestry, and used the term ambipatrilineal to designate this mode of descent reckoning (Sahlins 1958:146).

Indeed, one could make a strong case for male dominance if one were to focus entirely on certain cultural conceptions of male and female, as these were described by earlier ethnographers (e.g., E. S. C Handy 1927.37). More recent ethnographic accounts based on cultural conceptions likewise tend to emphasize male strengths and female weaknesses. For example, in their description of male and female in Tokelau culture, Huntsman and Hooper (1975) report a distinction between *itu malohi* 'strong side' and *itu vaivai* 'weak side' The reference is only partly to physical strength, it also implies "that men are dignified and controlled and thereby qualified to make decisions and exercise authority," while "women are emotional, vulnerable and erratic, that they are unable to control their feelings and are prone to express themselves without caution" (Huntsman and Hooper 1975:419).

Women's activities are conceived as confined and sedentary, men's as expansive and active. As elsewhere in Polynesian societies, spatial metaphors are used to portray this difference. "The woman stays: the man goes on the path," is an expression translated from Tokelau to summarize differences between male and female activities.

In general, female activity is on land, within the village and in the domestic sphere of house and cookhouse, while male activity is at sea, on the outlying plantation islets of the atoll and in the public places of the village, known figuratively as "the path." Thus land and sea, village and outlying islets, domestic and public areas of the village are contrasted as complementary domains of the sexes. In each contrast set, it is the female who is more confined, more restricted in both social and spatial terms (Huntsman and Hooper 1975:418; see also Shore 1982:225–228, Hecht 1977).

In Samoa, men are allotted tasks defined as heavy, such as clearing the bush and planting, deep-sea fishing and preparing earth ovens, while women perform light tasks such as weeding, cleaning, taking care of children, fishing on the reef, and everyday cooking (Franco 1985). This division of labor is common throughout Polynesia, but the rigidity of task division varies from culture to culture. In some practicality dominates structure, and flexibility prevails; in others the separation of tasks is quite sharply defined. (Flexibility is not always forced on Polynesians by circumstances, of course; it also reflects a cultural assumption that persons can and will work out arrangements according to their own wishes or needs.)

Traditionally, restrictions upon women were often formalized in the form of taboos and were backed by supernatural sanctions. In many Polynesian cultures women were barred from sacred places, from contact with men's fishing gear, and from consuming certain kinds of food. Menstruating women were generally considered dangerous, and were secluded to a greater or lesser degree. The common notion was that women are especially vulnerable to capricious supernatural influence when menstruating; hence, they must be confined in order to avoid accidental disruption of supernatural-human relationships.

The literature reveals a number of other indicators of low status for women in certain Polynesian societies, including the enforced virginity of unmarried girls, a relatively high frequency of rape, and a marked subordination of wives to husbands within the domestic sphere (Ortner 1981.359).

Despite all these signs of inferiority, however, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that women enjoyed high status throughout Polynesia. As already indicated, in western Polynesia women outweighed their brothers in formal honors, and received deference from them. More striking is the active political roles that women played. Not only did they play a critical role in cementing alliances—indeed, as recent studies have shown they played a pivotal role in mobilizing networks and converting them into political power—but they held high office with some regularity (see Bott 1982). Furthermore, although virginity was generally valued, and some women were carefully guarded, for the

most part women were free to indulge in sexual relations without stigma.

The status of women in Polynesia thus appears at first glance to be paradoxical. Despite a negative ideology associating women with weakness, darkness, and an absence of control, and the overall subordination of women to their husbands, ethnographers have generally described Polynesian women as enjoying relatively high status (Loeb 1926:82, Linton 1939·162; Mariner 1827, 2:95, 119, 211, Oliver 1974:1132).

Steps toward clearing up this paradox have been taken by Schoeffel (1978, 1979) and Shore (1981, 1982) in their analyses of sexuality and gender in Samoa, and by Ortner (1981) in her overview of the topic. Schoeffel (1978:69) argues that male and female symbols in Samoa express "an opposition between the moral and secular aspects of society and [have] nothing to do with gender descriptions as such." The key concept is *feagaiga,* which refers to "a special relationship between two parties who interact in a defined, reciprocal manner and who represent opposed concepts which regulate their interaction" (Schoeffel 1979:69). *Feagaiga* relationships (which Shore glosses as 'covenant') occur in three distinct arenas: kinship and gender, religion and politics. As Schoeffel interprets them, *feagaiga* relationships involve social contracts between two parties, "one of whom represents sacred forces which impose moral order on the other, who represents the impulsive, 'natural' human animal (Schoeffel 1979:70). Sisters in Samoa are perceived as exercising such a controlling power *(mana)* over their brothers, and are thus honored and served by them. As wives, however, women are expected to serve their husbands and submit to their authority *(pule).*

According to Shore, sexuality in Samoa is associated with the concept of *āmio,* which is applied to behavior that is considered to stem from personal drives and urges. In contrast is the concept of *aga,* which refers to "social norms, proper behavior, linked to social roles and appropriate contexts" (Shore 1981.195). Shore presents these two terms as parallel to (but not identical with) the nature-culture dichotomy as it is used by structural anthropologists. Thus *āmio* implies "lack of social restraint or form, and the expression of personal impulse and spontaneity," while *aga* "suggests social constraint, dignity, and subordination of personal impulse to cultural style and social control" (Shore 1981 196).

For Shore, the key to women's status lies in Samoan conceptions of blood, which when it flows from the body in an uncontrolled manner (as in menstruation, or from a wound), is referred to in chiefly address as dirt and is a source of pollution (see Hanson 1982b for an alternative perspective). In contrast, when the flow of blood is under societal control (as in blood transfusions or during tattooing) there are no implications of pollution. The basic contrast as far as women are concerned is that between menstrual flow, over which society has relatively little con-

trol, and the hymeneal blood of a new bride, which Shore believes may symbolize societal control (Shore 1981:198; see also Shore, chapter 5, this volume).

There is, Shore maintains, a distinction that follows from this cultural logic between women as sisters, whose sexuality is restrained and is (properly) under their brothers' and father's control, and women as sexual partners, where their sexuality is an expression of personal desire. As a wife, therefore, a woman's status is lower than as a sister, although a woman whose marriage was arranged enjoys higher status than one who eloped, or one who has a reputation for promiscuity (indicating total lack of social control). Although not all Polynesian societies place such a strong emphasis on controlling female sexuality, in general this is the case, especially among women of rank.

Ortner takes as axiomatic the nature-culture distinction of Lévi-Strauss, and the tendency for women to be associated symbolically more closely with nature and men with culture. In particular, it is the reproductive capacities of women that are identified with nature, Ortner maintains, and are relegated to an inferior status. Men, in contrast, express their creativity externally and artificially, through the manipulation of technology and symbols (Ortner 1974:75), that is, through cultural means. But women are not only associated with reproduction. They are as wives, mothers, and lovers, but not when they are in the role of sisters, daughters and ceremonial virgins. Women thus have a dual nature in Polynesia; they are like men in some ways, different from them in others.

Like Schoeffel and Shore, Ortner (1981) perceives that the status ambiguity of women derives from the contrast between their roles as sisters and as reproductive beings (wives, mothers or lovers), but she goes further and relates the issue to the ranking system in general. Ortner gained inspiration from Goldman's insightful analysis of rank and status in Polynesia, and following Goldman, she sees the status system as having a dominant effect on other features of social organization, including kinship, gender, and descent group organization. She presumes the system of prestige and ranking to define the nature of personal and social value, and therefore what men and women are and should be. Ortner organizes her analysis about what men, who usually control the prestige system, are trying to accomplish, and how that project implicates the organization of their relations with women.

Ortner maintains that although the abstract principles of rank in Polynesia are based on kinship seniority, in fact the secular power of chiefs depends upon the resources they control, and in particular on the personnel under their command (see Marcus, chapter 6, this volume, for a discussion of these two aspects of chieftainship). But cognatic descent systems present a problem to chiefs, for they allow individuals

to choose between descent groups, especially at the time of marriage. Descent group strength is therefore subject to manipulation, and it is here that women provide a key. For one thing, since women, as daughters, inherit rights in their descent groups' land, "sons-in-law with less substantial property stakes in their own lines may be attracted into their wives' lines, while at the same time, given the patrilineal bias in the inheritance structure, they can hold on to their own land and bring it into their affinal line's orbit" (Ortner 1981:367). Since the children of such a marriage would more likely affiliate with their mother's group, this has the potential of adding substantially to its membership. Control of women thus becomes a key factor in manipulating descent group strength, and leads to placement of values on virginity, attempts to use women as lures, and a variety of sexual "assaults" upon women.

> A girl has real value to her descent line, particularly if she sustains her affiliation with it and brings in her husband, his land, and their children. There is thus structural motivation for "holding on" to a daughter/sister. This "holding on" is symbolically expressed through control of her virginity. The virgin both displays her kinsmen's symbolic retention of her and, because virginity is defined as highly honorable, expresses her genuine value to her group. At the same time the control structure means that sex with her must be "taken," "stolen," or otherwise forcefully appropriated, even when she presents herself, as she often does, as a consenting party. Hence the prevalence of various forms of sexual theft—sleep crawling, marriage by capture, triumphal defloration of virgins, and the like (Ortner 1981:375).

Why, then, do Polynesian women have the reputation for easy, uncomplicated sexuality? And how do we explain the extensive documentation of women's intercourse with sailors during the period of exploration? Is the popular image of natural Polynesian sexuality a myth? Ortner points out that not everyone has equal stakes in the recruitment game. There is therefore a considerable differential in the degree to which young women are controlled: high-ranking women are much more closely supervised than those of low status. Low status women—those with fewest material and social resources to bring into a marriage—were unlikely to contract a marriage with a resourceful male anyway, so the stake in controlling them was relatively low. Along with widows, divorcees, and other women tainted by explicit recognition of their sexuality, they constituted a pool of available women. Added to this cultural cynosure was the anomalous status of junior male siblings in senior lines. Being both of high rank and junior to their elder siblings who stood to succeed to titles and positions of chieftainship, junior siblings were perceived as potential threats, particularly if they married early, and well, and produced a sizeable progeny. According to Ortner,

the solution was to encourage them to sexual indulgence (but not to marriage or paternity), particularly with lower status women with whom marriage would be less of a threat, since their offsprings' status would be lowered accordingly. All this encourages an extended adolescence, with sexual adventures as a prime concern. As for the women who were made available to sailors during the early period of contact, Ortner surmises that here, too, they were used as bait to obtain valuable commodities, including insemination, from men who were considered to be of superior *mana* (Ortner 1981:376; see also Sahlins 1981a).

On the whole, Ortner agrees with the assessment of most previous commentators that the status of women in Polynesia is relatively high. To account for this she argues that kinswomen—specifically daughters, sisters, and aunts—have culturally defined high status, and that consanguineal kinship is the idiom upon which social status is based. It is descent rather than marriage that generates rank and prestige. Sisters are more respected than wives, and women in general are conceptually identified as sisters more than as wives. Within the political sphere patrilineal biases work categorically only against wives. Ortner (1981 394) notes that sisters and other kinswomen occasionally succeed to public office within their kin groups.

Ortner's viewpoint, while stimulating, is too rigid and narrowly conceived to account for all the Polynesian material. Although the strategies she postulates were no doubt of importance on occasion, they almost certainly constituted only part of the Polynesian repertoire for strengthening groups. She also fails to take into account life cycle changes in sexual expectations and social status. In general, her model seems somewhat more compatible with the data from western Polynesia, where cross-sex sibling ties were most elaborated. Nevertheless she has brought into the foreground a number of important questions that should provoke fruitful research.

Other recent materials have raised questions about the image of women as inferior. For example, Tahitians are reported by Levy (1973: 236–237) as minimizing sexual dimorphism and portraying a man's lot as more difficult, rather than men as stronger. Hanson (1982b) concludes that the concept of female pollution has been misconstrued. He interprets the data as indicating that women were traditionally perceived as conduits of the sacred, and apt to attract, not repel, divine influences. He generalizes from an analysis of *tapu* removal to a broad hypothesis about women in traditional Polynesia. "Women were perhaps too close to the gods, too subject to their influence, to be able to control them. Although men were more remote from the gods—perhaps *because* they were more remote from them—they may have been thought to be more effective at relatively dispassionate manipulation of the

divine for human ends" (Hanson 1982b:375). Although it does not fully address the fundamental question of how gender informs social life, Hanson's formulation places the problem of gender relations in the context of cultural conceptions that assure cultural continuity. Thus he cites Sahlins, who suggests that in Hawaii, "the sexes represented the two fundamental ways in which humanity drew the necessary conditions of existence from the gods: for the male it was to extract human livelihood from the gods in the form of food, while for the female it was to attract the gods and to transform their generative powers into children" (Hanson 1982b:371).

An increased appreciation for the complexities of gender conceptions has led contemporary anthropologists to question the validity of earlier formulations emphasizing patrilineality as a structuring principle in Polynesian societies. Although a bias in that direction certainly existed at both conceptual and pragmatic levels, to characterize Polynesian societies as patrilineal, with merely a few concessions to practicality, seems clearly erroneous. An example is provided by Webster's reanalysis of the Maori data, cited earlier Webster asserts that previous accounts of Maori descent groups, including Firth's, neglected the egalitarian and bilateral aspects of cognatic kinship, emphasizing instead "the dogma of male autocracy and patrilineal descent" (Webster 1975: 125). In a careful study of one of the tribes reputed to be most firmly male authoritarian, he found an average incidence of 35 percent female links among all links traced by terminal descendants. The point is that female linkages were hardly trivial, and presented a genuine, and apparently culturally approved, alternative. Although there were certainly differences in the degree to which male links were emphasized in various Polynesian societies, and within the same society under different circumstances (see Linnekin 1985b concerning changing patterns in Hawaii), what evidence there is supports the view that linkages through females were both culturally important and pragmatically used to a considerable extent throughout Polynesia. They were clearly more than a residual phenomenon.

Alliance and Exchange

It is no accident that Marcel Mauss, in his famous analysis of gift-giving and exchange (1954), used the New Zealand Maori as an epitomizing case. Formalized exchange is an essential part of social life in Polynesia and operates at every level of society, from the domestic to the apically political. Although various aspects of exchange have been described by the earliest observers of Polynesian cultures (it would have been difficult to miss), recent field workers have placed the topic at the heart of their

analyses. For purposes of discussion we shall distinguish two general models of exchange, those in which persons are the primary commodities transacted, either through marriage or adoption, and those in which goods or services are passed between individuals or groups. In practice, of course, our distinction breaks down, and intangibles such as knowledge, prestige, and privileges can also be counted among the commodities that enter into exchange transactions.

As pointed out previously, for most Polynesians marriage between those recognized as kin is abhorrent. Yet marital bonds that reinforce local ties or reunite long separated lines of kinsmen may be welcome. The claim that all members of a local population are 'kin', heard often in Polynesia, is testimony to a history of endogamy as well as to a high level of recognized solidarity. Yet tensions may occur, especially within small communities where marriage partners are limited, leading either to uncomfortably close marriages or to the emigration of young people in search of new marriage partners.

For the western Tuamotus, Ottino (1965, 1967) has reconstructed traditional marriage strategies involving both patterns. For most people, nearby *'ati* 'descent units' formed marriage isolates based on local endogamy. A few children of chiefly status married elsewhere, into families of similar status. Such marriages not only sealed political alliances; they also helped to maintain the distinctive identities of *'ati* and the prestige of chiefly lines.

It appears that the transformation of political alliances into explicit rules or preferences for marriage partners among aristocratic families had a widespread potential in Polynesia. Close unions, precisely because they would be improper or even scandalous for common folk, underscored the differences between those of high estate and commoners. Given the heroic god-like qualities ascribed to high-ranking individuals in Polynesian societies, it is not surprising that incest, one of the behaviors that characterizes gods in myths, should also occur among the *ali'i*. In Hawaii, for example, marriages between closely related persons of exalted descent occurred regularly, with the closest marriages (between siblings) consolidating the highest status.

In Tonga, relations of wife-givers to wife-takers were stable among the highest chiefly lines, so long as these maintained their political position. When one line supplanted another as wife-giver to the Tui Tonga, this marked, and presumably sealed, a military victory (see Bott 1981, 1982). Gifford (1929:189) reported mother's brother's daughter (MBD) marriage to be "common among chiefs, but rare among commoners." In her analysis of the data, Biersack (1982) construes Tongan society as organized through the interaction of two structures, elaborated by cross and parallel relationships. Each structure is hierarchical and becomes a conduit for assymetric exchange. She goes on to argue that the MBD

marriage rule is not generated by an elementary structure (as defined by Lévi-Strauss), nor does it merely maintain the cross/parallel distinction. Instead, it is affected by both structures: wife-giving units stand as both mother's brother and younger brother to wife-takers. The result is an intensification of hierarchy and a generalization of the privileges of *fahu* (prototypically, sister's child) outside of life crisis contexts.

Biersack's analysis has some notable strengths. For example, it accounts for the cognatic emphases in the official genealogies among persons of high rank in Tonga. It also provides a rationale for marriage practices linking the highest *ha'a* units, and it helps to explain the correlation of changes in wife-giving units with changes in such units' political fortunes. In addition, it sheds light on relations between cross-siblings and between elder and younger brothers, relationships that western Polynesians have encumbered with elaborate interactional and transactional rules. And her discussion of adjacent-generation relationships brings out the patterning of relations between parents' siblings and siblings' children. One implication seems to be that parent-child relations are subsumed by structures of seniority and cross-sex kinship.

Biersack maintains that the two structures she has identified combine to produce a formation that underlies Tongan social structure. But for reasons that will emerge, we are uncomfortable with any attempt to locate fixed structures at the heart of Polynesian societies. We wonder whether the structures Biersack describes are truly fundamental, or whether they take on such clear definition only under conditions determined by the political system.

In the Marquesas, cross-cousin unions of chiefly children were seen as maintaining the rank of descent units *(mata)*, although the application of the rule was open to considerable interpretation. Thus Dening (1971) identified a marriage that Marquesans presented as following the rule despite the fact it united parallel cousins. We therefore suspect that the rule did not prescribe marriage partners so much as it provided a rationale for action in response to status considerations. Such claims appear to be only one of several ways to present a particular marriage as appropriate and momentous.[17] In fact, models of alliance that emphasize the workings of prescriptive rules appear to be of limited use in Polynesia, because exchanges tend to involve several media and to be practiced in a variety of contexts. Within this cultural area there are multiple mechanisms for forming alliances, including transactions in goods, services, and intangibles. And in addition to marriage, there is adoption.

Whereas our previous discussion of adoption emphasized its ecological importance and its implications for conceptions of kinship, here we are concerned with its significance for cementing relations between individuals and groups. As indicated earlier, adoption in Polynesia

plays an important role in affirming existing relationships and establishing new ones. This is especially true since natural parents do not give up their jural rights, but rather extend them to the adopting parent(s). Natural parents and adopting parents thus become co-parents of the same children, creating a bond between them that is logically parallel to that between husband and wife, whose strongest bond is apt to be that of co-parents of the same offspring. Although most adoption transactions are between individuals or nuclear families they have the symbolic capacity for creating and strengthening ties between larger groups in much the same way that marriage does. In some respects, however, adoption is even more flexible than marriage as an alliance mechanism, because it can be transacted between families for whom marriage is prohibited by incest restrictions. Indeed, this may be one of the reasons adoption has such a high incidence in Polynesia, since, as we have already pointed out, cognatic descent systems normally extend the incest taboo to third or fourth cousins, thus reducing the possibility of using marriage as a basic mechanism for forming alliances between groups so related. In contrast, most unilineal systems prescribe or encourage cross-cousin marriage as a means of forming alliances, with incest prohibitions extending only to parallel cousins. As Brady has written, the "adoption of kinsmen in cognatic systems with extensive prohibitions on marriage may fulfill many of the same internal group support and alliance functions that close cross-cousin marriage does in unilineal systems" (Brady 1976a:290).

The implications of adoption for political maneuvering in status-conscious Samoa are ably spelled out by Shore (1976b). He documents the importance of alliances for building the prestige of particular titles, and shows how adoption is structurally parallel to marriage and the transferring of titles between groups as alliance mechanisms. By extending parenthood over a child who is not related by blood, political alliances are symbolically transformed into attachments of common descent, in this case projected into the future rather than relying on common ancestry. Thus by adopting the child of an outside chief, a group creates a common heir to the titles of both political units.

Even in localized contexts adoption may serve to ally groups who have much to gain from such transactions. Thus in one case Shore describes, repeated adoptions and acts of name-giving link a pastor's family (A) with a kin group (B) in the village of his ministry, where the pastor has no resident kinsmen. The transactions are asymmetric, with the pastor's family giving names and taking children. The result is that "while members of family B increased their status by their new kinship links with family A, the pastor's family gained strong supportive kinship ties in the village" (Shore 1976a.187).

Although adoptive ties between families are often important, adop-

tions may also work to avoid differentiation within a kin unit. In eastern Polynesia especially, multiple adoptions may crosscut potential divisions between generations or emergent lines, and thus work to preserve the ideal of unity. As a result, exchange, in the form of reciprocal nurturance, may not only complement genealogical ties but may actually supplant them as the perceived basis for kinship.

In reviewing the literature on transactions, particular forms of reciprocity emerge as crucial in one society or another. However, moving from the study of marriage or adoption to alliance and reciprocity as a total social phenomenon is a complex business, because even the smallest Polynesian societies maintain dense networks of exchange. In Tokelau, for example, food distributions occur within and between *kaaiga* and other local groupings, as well as among small groups of households. Much attention is paid to food exchanges, not simply to effect generalized or restricted exchange, but to involve all in a shared social fate. As Huntsman (1981b:100) relates: "That everyone shares and shares equally is 'the true Tokelau way' " (See Linnekin 1985b for a similar view among Hawaiians.)

A deceptively modest paper by Tiffany (1975b) shows how complex Polynesian exchange systems can be. She documents chiefly redistribution in Samoa, describing sixteen occasions in a single year in which a chief contributed to redistributions. *'Aiga* 'Samoan units of descent, land and rank' are described by Tiffany as pooling units, and the *matai* who lead them as the coordinators of pooling and redistribution. But *'aiga* are involved in exchanges at several social levels, and the actions of *matai*, who invariably have ties to multiple *'aiga* and villages, cannot be seen simply in terms of self-interest or commitment to a single unit.

Tiffany's analysis is a welcome corrective to the simpler model of Samoan exchange based on two forms of goods, *toga* 'women's goods, especially fine mats' and *'oloa* 'men's goods, especially foodstuffs' Exchanges of these two categories of goods at weddings, between the family of the groom and the family of the bride, were documented early by M. Mead (1930b), and a number of subsequent commentators have accepted the wedding exchange as prototypical. Although the significance of these two types of commodities at life-crisis ceremonies cannot be denied, the closer look at exchange provided by Tiffany raises questions about the nature of these categories and their flow over time (see also Franco 1985).

In short, although models of exchange circuits such as Lévi-Strauss' models of generalized and restricted exchange focus attention on a single type of transaction, Polynesian exchanges can be mapped by such models only insofar as they take into consideration a variety of transactions that can be reduced to instances of a rule, or by noting why alliances are, in a particular sector of society, so narrowly focused. Where

special value is granted to a transaction, as confirming the privileged positions of those involved, such value does not appear to follow inevitably from set rules. Rather it appears to be based on contextual definitions, complex social histories and actors' attempts to promote versions of events that suit their perceived interest.

The above considerations testify to the importance of exchange in Polynesia as well as to the gap between Polynesian practices and models based on the repetitive practices of one or another form of exchange. At a moment of heightened transaction, such as a wedding, many participants can choose to define their relationship to the major actors involved in one of several ways. At other exchanges they may give priority to a different path or linkage. Hence it is easy to view skilled transactors, such as Samoan chiefs, as calculating strategists. It should be kept in mind, however, that they are also working to maintain a network of ties that might collapse if the ambiguities of multiple connections were to be reduced.

Both the power and persistence of multi-stranded exchange in Polynesian communities is illustrated by Linnekin's description of the contemporary Hawaiian community of Ke'anae. Ke'anae Hawaiians categorically separate commercial relations with the outside from social relations inside the community, where gift exchange is governed by an ethic of generalized reciprocity. In addition to short-term exchanges based on bananas, taro shoots, and small favors, "the imperative of reciprocity also drives long-term cycles of exchange among Hawaiians, as marriage and adoption join families and localities in a network of relatedness" (Linnekin 1985b:240; also see Ito 1985b concerning the presumption of continuing relationship among modern Hawaiians).

If the complexities that confront would-be analysts of exchange in Polynesia under relatively stable conditions are not formidable enough, Polynesians have also been known to tinker with social groupings in order to produce new alignments of relationships. In Pukapuka, for example, a council of elders decided to recreate a traditional form of social organization as a means of rearranging the bases for competition and exchange (Borofsky 1987). Consequently, one must deal with a plethora of organizational forms, and confront the suspicion that such forms may be continuously generated from the traditions of the atoll. As Borofsky's analysis makes clear, there is by no means an agreement about what the traditions are, making the possibilities for realignment even greater. It may be that the dispersion and confounding of competing units, rather than stable patterns of reciprocity, are central to these transactional practices (see Glasse 1968 for a similar view of feuding).

To summarize, whereas descent group models bring to the fore discrete and continuing social units, the classic exchange model places in the foreground cycles of reciprocity through which such units are

defined as partners. We see Polynesian practices as conveying a view of society in which the fact of widespread relationship is assumed, but in which the emergence of well-bounded units and well-defined circuits of exchange may also be precipitated through extensive and repeated actions. From such a perspective, a wide range of exchange strategies can be seen as operative, and under certain conditions clearcut exchange systems can be located within particular social fields.

In our opinion the challenge of developing an appropriately supple model of Polynesian exchanges remains. Although the analysis of structures or total social facts has often been revealing, the work of specifying the contexts in which such structures obtain, and the logic whereby contexts are aligned in a larger social order, has barely begun.

Toward an Understanding of Polynesian Contexts

One starting point for the analysis of Polynesian contexts is the study of formalized events, such as *fono* and chiefly kava ceremonies in western Polynesia, and settings for heightened action such as the Maori *marae* (see Bott 1972; Duranti 1981b; Salmond 1975). By identifying the parameters that define such events for participants, the potentials for variation in them, and the sense made of such variations, perspective can be gained on the ways in which Polynesians view their organization. Any perspective would be incomplete, however, unless attention to elaborately ordered situations is balanced by attention to everyday interactions. Without explicit means of relating these, analysts may find that well-enunciated views of social life, enacted and expounded in formal events, do not correspond with other realities. We may therefore be tempted to take such views as masks or illusions, but the efforts Polynesians devote to ceremonial events would make such a deduction questionable. In fact, formal events often serve to order everyday relationships. They may do so by summarizing them, by selecting out one or another aspect for mention, or even by asserting ironically what people know to be not quite the case. When dealing with dramas of status, such as chiefly kava ceremonies, or even with celebrations of youth and beauty such as those that occur at Bastille Day festivals in French Polynesia, local conventions of dramaturgy must be examined closely.

The analysis of contexts involves a search for those aspects of action and events that signal cultural interpretations of situations, and for the underlying cultural logic whereby situations are aligned or contrasted. Studies of Polynesian ideas (e.g., Salmond 1978; Kirkpatrick 1983) and interactive procedures (Keesing and Keesing 1956; Marcus 1984) touch on these issues, but Shore (1982) has confronted them most directly.

Shore identifies several key dimensions that lie behind Samoan con-

cepts of action and of relationships. The terms of his analysis—*āmio* 'personal impulse and behavior' and *aga* 'social conduct, behavior style'; symmetrical and complementary relations; ranked and unranked relations—are used both to point out contrasts important for Samoans and to model the general principles Samoans draw on in making sense of social action.[18] Similarly, his analytical focus on social control works on two levels. He deals with the control of aggression (organizing the book around the background and responses to a murder) and with the ways in which certain types of relationships stand as complements and control mechanisms for others. The approach yields a scheme of relational types (Shore 1982:212) but, more important, it portrays the interdependencies among relationships and levels of social organization in such a way that Samoan processes of gauging and responding to crises are illuminated. In other words, he provides the materials for either a homeostatic account of Samoan society or a symbolic one, but turns away from these objectives to stress the interplay of institutions and relationships that frames Samoan political strategies.

Shore (1982:257) argues that "social contexts are always negotiated to some extent in the course of social interaction, but the range of possibilities for the tone of these contexts is sharply delimited by the logic of the culture from which they take their meaning." Oppositions of dignity and crude power and control and energy pervade presentations of self, formulations of relationships, and hence understandings of situations.

The accounts of isolable situations provided by Shore (see especially 1979) constitute only one part of a fully articulated analysis of contexts. His emphasis is on the ways social forms help to shape events; by establishing potentials, tensions, and alternatives that actors can explore. This type of analysis goes a long way toward clarifying both the significance of particular event sequences and the inherent dynamics of a social system.

Conclusion

During the past few years the standard categories and domains of social analysis have been challenged. Once the topics that came under the rubric of social organization could be easily listed, now analysts include a wide variety of issues, with differing emphases. Although this decrease in consensus makes institutional comparisons more difficult, it forces authors to specify more fully the extent and nature of the coherence they find in their data. Hence it offers the hope of a theoretically more explicit account of social organization, and for comparative understandings of entire social systems, not just of institutions that are vaguely similar in form or function.

Although no single vision unites the field, there is broad agreement among analysts of Polynesian societies on the importance of studying social dynamics; on the need to integrate accounts of structures and events; on exchange as constitutive of, not just reflecting or linking social groupings; and on the need to map Polynesians' definitions of situations and the ways they negotiate meanings. As we have indicated, a search for cultural principles that structure social life in Polynesia is yielding suggestive results. This is largely a comparative effort, but it does not lessen the need to study processes within particular societies, and to analyze them in detail. If we are to comprehend Polynesian social realities, even the most extensive and subtle models of cultural principles must be buttressed by accounts of the processes that bring them into play.

In the course of this essay we have referred to differences between cultural and ecological explanations, between structural and processual analyses, and between studies aimed at generalized models and those with a particularistic emphasis. These differences indicate that much theoretical work remains to be done. For explanations to be fully adequate, cultural analyses would have to take into consideration ecological opportunities and constraints, structural models would have to be complemented by considerations of the social processes that reproduce structures and the historical realities that transform them, and generalized models would have to be responsive to the nuances of form and process contained in the most sensitive particularistc accounts. The order is a tall one.

Currently, studies focusing on the cultural bases of social life are in vogue, but this is not to say that a single paradigm has triumphed. Rather, most analysts agree that any satisfactory understanding of Polynesian social organization must be grounded in the ways that information is systematically organized and communicated. For some, this means giving priority to views articulated by Polynesians. For others, the impetus is to discover codes implicit in artifacts, etiquette, formalized events, and myth. But regardless of the approach we take, the task of constructing compelling models of Polynesian social systems remains before us. The task is both theoretical and ethnographic, for new models raise to prominence data that have been refractory. Such data, in turn, stimulate new insights. In the light of past scholarship, prospects both for extensive debate and increased understanding appear good.

NOTES

We would like to acknowledge the extensive critiques of earlier drafts provided us by Aletta Biersack, Rob Borofsky, and Judy Huntsman. Jocelyn Linnekin and Merrily Stover also made helpful comments.

1 Later on, colonial administrators often redefined features of traditional social organization in order to make them conform to a preconceived legal order. Thus in Fiji, an attempt to codify customary land tenure rules and to record holdings led to a rigidification of descent units as corporate, and to a restriction of rights in previously accessible land. It also magnified the power of unit heads (Chapelle 1978; France 1969; Walter 1978a). Crocombe's (1964) analysis of Rarotonga landholding also reveals a pattern of streamlining complex social relations into a legally recognized unilineal descent system. It has also been pointed out that in some instances Polynesian chiefs supported the elevation of one individual to paramount status, partly to facilitate trade between themselves and visiting Europeans (Newbury 1980:47).

2. The most notable case is Morgan's (1871) view of Hawaiian kin terms as evidence for the earliest form of human marriage.

3. It should be noted that views of descent found in eastern Polynesia differ systematically from those found in societies with classic unilineal descent groups. Thus the descendants of an ancestor, X, are not necessarily "the sons of X," a phrase that implies continuing filiation. Instead they are likely to be "inside" or "in the belly of X." We see an image of pregnancy here, one that entails the eventual birth of those "inside," and hence their separation from the ancestor and each other. (Tree metaphors, whereby ancestors are "trunks" and descendants "branches" are often found in Polynesia. Interestingly, these can be read either way, stressing the continuity of trunk and branch or the differences between the two.) Terms for descendants may mark these as extensions of an ancestor, rather than as members of a group. Marquesans sometimes explain *kina* 'great grandchildren' as the gray *(hinahina)* hairs of the ascendant, a usage that signals the old age and imminent demise of the latter as well as the formation of a unit around the ancestral estate. We are not claiming that an etymological analysis of these phrases is an adequate substitute for detailed analysis of social data, but rather suggest that the view of cognatic descent as involving perpetual units may reflect preconceptions that Polynesians do not share.

4. Hecht (1976) reports a similar concern for burial sites in relation to group membership on Pukapuka. There, patrilineal groups control burial plots, and interment in a particular plot defines membership. Living persons, however, may attempt to maintain ties to several patrilines, rendering their status ambiguous until burial.

5. The importance of *mana* for competitive relations among chiefs or specialists is evident in other Oceanic societies as well. See Roger Keesing (1984) for Melanesian concepts.

6. Even where idiosyncratic terms are used (such as Tahitian *feti'i*), they are conceptual equivalents.

7 The notion of kinship as shared substance derives from a point made by David Schneider (1968). More generally, Schneider's (1972, 1976) insistence on ethnographically based concepts of kinship has been a major stimulus to studies of social organization within Polynesia.

8. The term *aropa* is cognate with Hawaiian *aloha*, Samoan *alofa*, and so on.

9. Here, sign and reality are distinguishable but of equal importance. Most Polynesians take kinship to be real and proper when sign and reality, action and filiation coincide; they take it to exist in an important way when signs abound

despite the absence of filiation; and find it to be little more than hypothetical, even shameful, when genealogy alone links persons.

10. Women sometimes do assume political office in Polynesia. In postcontact polities, Ka'ahumanu of Hawaii, Pomare IV of Tahiti, and Queen Salote of Tonga are notable.

11 One ought to exercise caution in accepting such etymological speculations. The relationship between the semantic content of currently used terms and their root forms is at best highly problematic. Such reconstructions cannot be taken as an accurate indicator of speakers' attitudes when they use a concept.

12. An exception to this rule of preference is that persons of high rank often opt to marry out in order to establish political alliances with other groups.

13. It should be made clear that the concept of adoption causes difficulties when used cross-culturally, especially since Western definitions are legalistic in orientation. It is often difficult to distinguish between temporary fosterage and long-term arrangements. Indeed, much ink was spilled in the volumes edited by Carroll (1970) and Brady (1976) in attempts to arrive at a suitable cross-cultural definition of adoption and related concepts.

14. Kirkpatrick (1983) casts doubt on the economic insurance view of adoption with regard to the Marquesas. There the hope that children, adopted or natural, will provide for their aged parents may be questioned. More important, Kirkpatrick argues that adoption serves to bolster the identity claims of adopters. Marquesans appear to be less concerned with getting eventual support from their dependents than with maintaining their roles as providers, which signifies their status as competent, mature adults.

15. Whereas adoption in Europe and the United States normally involves an adopting couple, in Polynesia transactions generally take place between individuals. Thus only one partner in a marriage is usually considered the adopting parent.

16. This is in line with Silverman's (1969) model of Banaban strategizing as a matter of maximizing options. Silverman's account of a Micronesian case can be neatly applied to Polynesian data.

17 See also Shore 1976a:294 for comments on factors militating towards alliance among a few families at the pinnacle of the Samoan status system.

18. Freeman (1984) has challenged Shore's account of the terms *āmio* and *aga*. In our view, much of his criticism fails, for he faults Shore on details that are not critical to Shore's analytical project and, in discussions of the notion of nature, seems to misunderstand Shore. As a result, while Shore's account of the two terms may not be definitive, his broader argument concerning Samoan understandings of action is upheld, or even strengthened, by such criticism.