



Anthropology and Nannies

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CORRESPONDENCE

Anthropology and Nannies

SIR,

For new insights into the perils of cross-cultural generalisation, I give you England. Goodenough's recent attempt to salvage-through-paring arguments of 'functional universals—the concerns with respect to which people maintain cultures' (1970: 38) is fraught with fewer difficulties than the Murdock nuclear family formula he leaves behind, but the remaining difficulties are of exactly the same order. My proof: the British Nanny.

Goodenough rightly breaks up the 'bundle of universal human problems' (1970: 4) deemed by Murdock the inevitably co-institutionalised 'vital functions—sexual, economic, reproductive, and educational' (Murdock 1949: 3). He likewise chases the 'married man' from his 'woman with their offspring,' per Malinowski and the later Nayar material, bringing a host of legalistic refinements to bear on the locus of jural rights and duties documented in different societies' 'families'. But in busting up, as it were, universal marriage other than 'a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to a woman—this right having priority over rights of sexual access others currently have or may subsequently acquire in relation to her (except in a similar transaction) until the contract resulting from the transaction is terminated—and in which the woman involved is eligible to bear children' (1970: 13), Goodenough is left with 'a woman and her dependent children' which 'represent the nuclear family group in human societies' (1970: 18). The only caveats to this generalisation are transactions whereby 'rights in children are surrendered by one party to another in adoption; and in fosterage they are delegated by one party to another without being surrendered' (1970: 35). Such practices notwithstanding, motherhood as a natural principle is preserved by arguing that the whole of adoption or fosterage-like transactions rests 'ultimately on the idea that a woman has a claim to a child she bears, provided she is eligible to bear it and is otherwise qualified to assert the bearer's claim' (p. 36).

So far so good; the social unit always to be found in human societies is a female bonded morally (through an ideology of biological motherhood and/or jurally enforced transactions) to children: a culturally irreducible *Man* (N.S.) 9, 137-42.

post-pubescent-woman-to-infant solidarity principle. But Goodenough goes further and functionally relates this cultural family principle to something natural:

... The related phenomena of family and kinship organization, in all their complexity and variety, *derive from* the association of women and children in the natural sequence of parturition and nursing and from the attachments that develop therefrom, and also from the association of men and women as their sex partners in marriage (1970: 36, my emphasis).

He thus salvages 'fixed reference points for general comparison' (p. 37): 'the things that follow from sexual dimorphism, sexual reproduction, parturition, *formation of emotional attachments* . . .' (p. 38, my emphasis). Cultures see that men maximise continued access to *certain* women to assure satisfaction of a sex drive; and cultures see that women maximise continued access to *certain* children to satisfy emotional nurturant needs. In light of Nayars and matrifocal families, Goodenough acknowledges that mother's brother or no-one might be the male involved in nurturance and socialisation of offspring. But, save jural provisions for adoption and fosterage under specific mitigating circumstances, he finds mothers naturally and inextricably bound to these role sets—at least early on in child development.

Enter the Nanny. For the sake of argument let us accept the descriptive data in J. Gathorne-Hardy's wonderfully speculative answers to:

How was it that hundreds of thousands of mothers, apparently normal, could simply abandon all loving and disciplining and company of their little children, sometimes almost from birth, to the absolute care of other women . . . It was a practice, as far as I knew, unparalleled on such a vast scale in any other culture which had ever existed. How had it arisen? (1972: 19).

'It', at its most extreme, was the Classic Nanny role set complex; wherein a non-mother 'achieved Nanny-dom herself, with a nursery far removed from the rest of the house. . . . Over these charges she would have wielded despotic power. . . . Nor would the parents have had anything to do with the children until they were at least seven—if then' (1972: 20). Gathorne-Hardy estimates

that over two million Nannies were a vital index of and influence on the values and actions—the culture—of the entire British upper classes and a large part of the middle class from 1850 to 1939 (1972: 179–81). Not Britain alone, however, for the aristocracy and upper uppers (cf. Warner 1969) throughout Europe and the Americas sought to ape English ways, ‘and the cornerstone of this Englishness was the English Nanny’ (1969: 311)—yet nowhere does Kroeber (1948) mention Nanny as *oikumenē*. The socio-cultural fulcrum of Victorian-Edwardian high class families was that ideally genitrices suckled, and that was *all*; Nanny had become the childrens’ mother:

Nanny wiped bottoms and washed penises. Nannies fed. Nannies wiped up sick. Nannies gave baths and tucked up in bed. It was Nanny’s arms that went round little boys, Nanny’s breasts and lips they felt, Nanny they smelt. And Nannies were lower class (Gathorne-Hardy 1972: 98).

In post-eighteenth century upper class Britain genitrices briefly suckled, Nannies did the rest; in pre-eighteenth century aristocratic Britain genitrices did the rest and wet-nurses suckled. That is, in either system the nurturance-emotional complex that Goodenough functionally relates to one woman and a set of biologically or (by extension) juridically assigned children is parcelled between two women. We may summarise many of Gathorne-Hardy’s suggestions in a structuralist idiom. The historical inversion from out-suckling of children to in-suckling accompanied a revival of the ideology of breastmilk as a factor in character formation. But the new values on mother-child nurturance were compromised by allowing a professional socialiser into the family scene. The genitrix’s role was reduced to an early-on functionally specific breast (the ‘Nanny-reduced mother’, p. 237) leaving the Nanny to become the more functionally diffuse ‘nurtress’. Nannies were, one might argue, the socio-cultural ‘tricksters’ that inter-related contradictory categories and roles: they behaviourally and affectively separated child from mother; they facilitated the Victorian dichotomisation of women into lower-class-as-sexual and upper-class-as-asexual; they were a sexual object to their employers and a sexual restraint on their charges, and thus a source of anxious and ambivalent remembrance when the charges matured. Nanny-as-trickster, invoked in verse:

My second Mother, my first wife,
The angel of my infant life
(Gathorne-Hardy 1972: 129).

Finally, if these patterns of action and values are not enough for us to deny that the upper class British functional family consisted not of a single mother and her (biological or jural) children, ‘Nanny’ became, if we apply the criteria of one anthropologist (Schneider 1972), a *bona fide* consanguineal kinship term, for it could be modified by Grand-, Great-Grand-, Step-, and possibly in-law (Gathorne-Hardy 1972: 60).

Doubtless the Nannycentric family does not necessarily refute Goodenough’s mother-children functional universal as elaborately hedged. A functionalist can get around Nanny by embracing her as the rule-proving exception. Witness Gathorne-Hardy himself on the genitrix:

... mother-love is already awakened by her pregnancy and the birth. It grows very quickly as she cuddles her child and feeds it and looks after it; and so it would be with the child. But under the Nanny system this essential nurturing and loving is quickly taken from the mother, and it is this nurturing which awakens the child’s love, which earns it, which makes it a proper relationship, and not some mystical essence automatically emanating from the biological mother. Therefore many children, quite rightly, loved their Nannies more than their mothers (1972: 235).

By arguing that Nanny-reduced mothers are just one more example of British aberrancy, a functionalist could preserve the ‘natural’ mother-children solidarity as a universal, if he must. The more important point, however, is this: if we had born such a view into the ‘field’ of Nanny-data, it would likely have blinded us to the very aspects of British society that pertain to motherhood as a basis of general human culture. Whether Nanny-dom is taken as refuting the universal mother-child-diffuse-solidarity principle or as confirming it through exception, even a parred functionalist theory would have blocked our perception of the import of Nannies at all—as more elaborate ones long did. The crucial analytic question is: does the Nanny bear on Goodenough’s functional universals? And if not, what is the scientific sense in emptying generalisations to the point where Nannies would pass through their explanatory net? Look what, by ignoring Nanny’s nursery, we might have inadequately explained or altogether overlooked: 1) Romanticisation of childhood. 2) Critical acclaim of Proust in England (p. 83). 3) Rigidification of socialisation and the bridging of upper class Anglican and lower class Puritan value sets (p. 46). 4) Transformation of the cultural pattern of ‘lines’ into ‘families’ and ‘manor’ into

'home'. 5) Elaboration of the strict/sugary ethos. 6) Status hierarchies between domestic servants, and lower class snobbery sanctioned by upper class ideals (pp. 72-3, 199, 200). 7) The psychological effects of celibacy in a child-orientated environment. 8) Development of intra-domestic social sub-units, raising the question whether high class British 'families' were domestic units: 'the kitchen, under the head cook; the general household, bedroom, linen, etc., under the housekeeper; the pantry, dining-room . . . under the head butler; and the nursery under the Nanny' (pp. 191-2); between the mother and her children intrudes Nanny's kingdom:

Her kingdom . . . consists of a day nursery, a night nursery . . . and possibly the room of her servants. These consist of an Under-Nurse, nursery-maids . . . , and possibly a French *bonne*. Her other subjects are inanimate—toys, . . . medicines, clothes, hair-brushes, chamber pots. The parents are hardly seen at all. Mother may look in for ten minutes . . . Then all the children go down to the drawing-room for an hour around tea-time, very clean and very well-behaved. That is all.

Above all, the feeling of the nursery is that it is separate. Nanny is separate, suspended half-way between the mother and the rest of the staff, half-parent, half-servant. The children may see other adults, but there is always the sense of venturing out. The other servants look on the nursery as a separate and almost alien world. . . . Nursery-maids leave it in the role of ambassadors. And this psychic separation is expressed physically. It may have its own staircase, its own door out into the grounds, it may be in a separate wing, a separate corridor, a separate floor, cut off and even silenced from the rest of the house by a muffling, brass-studded, green baize door (1972: 77).

9) The related dawning of a whole new cultural sphere, with ritual specialist employing codes of food and potty, all sublimated and regarded in awe by those outside nursery sphere—the parents. 10) The basis of the Victorian tendency to equate the sensory-behavioural universe of the nursery with that of the brothel, with, I would add, the consequent ratio:

nursery : parlour-dining room :: brothel :
businessplace

11) Origin of the Factory Acts (p. 176).
12) Finally, the rejection symptoms of English upper classes, their obsessive politeness, general inhibition, and respect for the rule of law.

Even if most of Gathorne-Hardy's arguments are wrong (and the above is just a sampling), anthropological family theorists owe him much. It took the Nayars to boot the 'father' out of universal social-interactional families; perhaps the Nannies can do likewise for the 'mother'. Regardless, the Nanny phenomenon raises provocative questions. Why did it take not an anthropologist, but an author of novels (and children's books) to point out so forcefully the fascinatingly variant Nanny system? Have we anthropologists, as Goodenough still maintains (p. 5), merely been 'victims of our ethnocentrism' in long assuming nuclear families as universal? Were the Murdockian family and now Goodenough's mother-children family cases of ethnocentrism or pipe-dream? After all, American anthropologists were surrounded by matrifocal families in 1949, and British (and to be perfectly fair, at least East Coast American upper upper) anthropologists still have direct recall of their society's Nannies. Have functional definitions of the Family been less ethnocentrism and more sheer romantisation, no better than other *Naturvölker* formulations? Premature universal functional definitions—first of nuclear, now of matrifocal families—can distort cross-cultural perceptions. Why claim functional universalism at all, when heuristic problem-posing would suffice? The value of the Nayar problem has not been whether this group does or does not have a Murdockian family, but what, when asked a family-assuming question, comparativist insights it provides. In the present case a functional-universalistic etic grid perhaps blinded Anglo-American anthropologists to their own nurseries—a most proximate Bongo-bongo (cf. Douglas 1970: 64)! Here more, not less, ethnocentrism was in order. Lastly, what has been the effect of a Nanny-influenced cultural order on anthropological theory itself, which, coming of age with Nanny-dom, conceivably needed to compensate for a cultural reduced-mother—whence the nuclear *and* matrifocal 'universal families'? Here is fit matter for correspondence in *Man*.

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Early farming in Europe

SIR,

In a recent letter (*Man* (N.S.) 8, 475-6), the claim has been made that arbitrary practices were used in selecting the data included in 'Measuring the rate of spread of early farming in Europe' (*Man* (N.S.) 6, 674-88). We should like to indicate briefly why various additional dates and sites listed for Italy by Evett were withheld from the analysis. In most cases, the reasons will come as no surprise to those who have taken the time to read the sample descriptions in *Radiocarbon*. Before turning to specific examples, it is perhaps worth repeating one of the criteria used in the selection of data for the analysis (Ammerman & Cavalli-Sforza 1971: 679): 'Sites were not included when contamination of the dating sample was suspected.' At the site of Scaramella, sample R-351 is described as 'scarce charcoal fragments and mainly calcareous-carbonaceous earth' (*Radiocarbon* 1969: 486); the latter is not commonly viewed as an acceptable dating material and the sample is even mentioned as being possibly contaminated in the comment on the date. At the site of Chiozza, it is not entirely clear what prehistoric culture (several kinds of neolithic material appear to be represented at the site) the date (R-458) refers to. It is mentioned (*Radiocarbon* 1970: 601) that the 'sequence of the Fiorano and Chiozza cultures, particularly at the Chiozza site, is not clearly defined,' and the sample itself is described in the following terms: 'R-458 is from Pit E where only coarse, reddish, atypical pottery was found.'

A whole series of neolithic dates from the rock shelter of Arma di Nasino were published in *Radiocarbon* in 1968 (e.g. level VIII: R-313, R-262, R-263; level IX: R-315, R-316, R-265, R-267). The question here (as with the Swiss Alpine sites) is whether or not cereal agriculture (what is being measured) was actually practised during early neolithic times in a rugged mountain valley setting. One would really like to have positive palaeobotanical evidence in this case. At the site of Arene Candide, sample R-101 is described as 'charcoal from levels 25-26, 3.05 to 3.30 m below the surface' (*Radiocarbon* 1966: 402). Not only was the sample apparently collected

over a depth of some 25 cm of cave deposit but it is further noted (*Radiocarbon* 1966: 403) that level 25 is 'suspected of being mixed to some extent with overlying strata.'

At the time of the original analysis in 1971, the chronological position of the Square Mouth Pottery culture in the neolithic sequence of the Po Basin was not entirely clear. The extensive stratigraphic sequence recently found at the site of Loc di Romagnano by Broglio strongly suggests that this was not one of the earliest neolithic cultures in the Po Basin. This means that the site of Molino Casarotto was incorrectly included in the original rate measurements.

Mention should also be made here of what is perhaps an even more basic flaw in Evett's argument. This is the implied assumption that substantially different correlation and regression coefficients would result if one were willing to include some of the suspect data in the analysis. This is something that needs to be shown rather than assumed. Inclusion or omission of dates (for a given area) that are reasonably close to the ones employed in the 1971 analysis would have a trivial effect on the values of the coefficients. In the case of sites such as Arene Candide and Arma di Nasino among the Italian data, the inclusion of dates would, if anything, only tend to build up the values of the correlation coefficients. Here one is faced with the unenviable situation when it comes to data selection of being 'damned if you do and if you don't.' In trying to evaluate the rate measurements put forward in 1971, it would seem more productive to look towards new radiocarbon determinations coming from reliable archaeological contexts rather than dredging up old data that are known to be of questionable character.

Since the original analysis was published in 1971, a new measurement technique has been employed which makes it possible to avoid postulating centres of origin and permits a more empirical treatment of the data. This was applied to a slightly expanded set of some sixty sites from different parts of Europe and revealed essentially the same general pattern and rate of spread (see Cavalli-Sforza 1973: 21). It is worth stressing that the rate estimate obtained from the full set of European data is an average or overall rate. This does not rule out the possibility of variations in local rates. However, viewed as a central tendency, the overall rate estimate is useful when it comes to trying to determine the processes that are responsible for the spread of early farming. This question has been discussed in general terms in our recent paper 'A population model for the diffusion of early farming in Europe' (in Renfrew (ed.) 1973). An