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Families in former times

Kinship, household and sexuality

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Introduction

The historian, in his capacity as a former or informer of the civic sense in others, has for a long time restricted himself to the study of public life. Even when he has set out to analyse the structure of the economies of past times, and the situations and social conflicts to which they have given rise, he has done so from a political point of view. The history of domestic life and of institutions has been left to the sociologists and the legal historians.

If, nowadays, historians are beginning to discuss the family, this is perhaps because the problems of private life have irrupted into the sphere of current events, and the respective rights and duties of husband and wife, their authority over their children, and the possibilities of divorce, contraception and abortion have become affairs of State. In the face of a transformation of moral conduct that is more evident with every day that passes, some people are, in effect, calling upon the State to preserve traditional morality, others are demanding that it accelerate certain 'necessary' changes, while yet others are trying to make these changes a weapon in an all-out war against the prevailing political system. How, then, can a historian conscious of the political conflicts of his own time fail to be interested in the 'private life' of our forefathers?

This is especially true because to make a clear-cut distinction between private and public life – a distinction so fundamental in our liberal societies – is of limited relevance to the analysis of the old-style monarchical societies. In the latter case, the family as an institution had many of the characteristics of a public institution, and the relations of kinship served as a model for social and political relations.

The authority of a king over his subjects, and that of a father over his children, were of the same nature, as we shall observe: neither authority was based on contract, and both were considered 'natural'. The king and the father were accountable for their governance to God alone. Both normally acted for the best interests of their family, however unfortunate this might turn out to be for their subjects or their children. How can one comprehend the marriages that took place in past times if one considers marriages as a purely private affair, in which the only objective is the happiness of the spouses? How can one understand the War of the Spanish

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Succession, at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, or the Italian wars, if one reasons only from the point of view of the interests of State?

It is true that there was in foreign as in domestic policy a logic of sovereignty that imposed its criteria on the princes of past times just as it imposes them on the States of the present day, impelling them to fight all other powers that might cast a shadow over their own power. We should not conclude, however, that there was nothing but vanity and hypocrisy in such formulas as 'my brother' or 'my cousin', which princes in former times used when they addressed another prince or some great lord of their realm. These formulas are highly significant: they constitute one indication, among many others, of the fact that relations of kinship helped to mould political relations; and, conversely, they provide information concerning the ties of fraternity and cousinhood for the historian of family relations.

Furthermore, particular families played a major role in political life. It was normal, when one possessed a share of the public authority, to govern with the aid of one's relations and for their profit. The greatest servants of the State – Richelieu, for example, or Colbert – did not decline this privilege. On the other hand, when the magnates were removed from power, they did not hesitate to take up arms against the king, with the collusion of their kinsfolk and clients.

The history of the Ancien Régime cannot, of course, be reduced to that of conflicts between families: some wars can be explained as being essentially confrontations between ideological fanaticisms, and others as class struggles; and sometimes ideological confrontations and class struggles closely combined. But this was not always the case. Rather than distorting the evidence in order to find, in all the conflicts of former times, the class nature of each party to the conflict, one might at times be better advised to investigate the ties of kinship, alliance or clientele which always bound them to a greater or lesser extent. Even when a group was ostensibly defending class interests, it often happened that the latter were in fact merely a mask for family interests.

For these reasons, too, and for others, the analysis of political, economic and social life under the Ancien Régime would seem to require that one take into consideration the structure of the family and the relations of kinship. There is, however, a further consideration: to us, who transfer into the public domain the problems of our private life and who are conscious of the upsetting of our traditional moral values, it is important in itself to know about the family life of our ancestors, more important, fundamentally, than the vicissitudes and the anachronistic annals of public life in olden times. Rather than the family affairs of the great, which constitute the thread of these events, it is the structures of the private lives of the masses that arouse our curiosity. In what ways did the families of past times differ from, and in what ways did they resemble, those of

today? What, precisely, do we know about their dimensions? About the age and the ties of kinship of those who composed those families? About the relations between husband and wife? About the attitude of parents towards their children? About the role of the family in the upbringing of children?

With regard to all these points, research is in progress, and the results will probably make more explicit or modify the ideas developed in this book. Nevertheless, it appears to us necessary to carry out, here and now, a preliminary evaluation of our knowledge as regards the family in former times – principally French families of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is because, for some years past, historians have perceptibly modified the image that had been presented by sociologists and legal historians. They have made fresh enquiries; they have approached the traditional questions on the basis of fresh documentary evidence and using new methods of analysis; and they have reached conclusions that are at times directly contrary to those that had been considered as firmly established.

However, it must be borne in mind that each of these sources, each of these methods, allows us to discover only one aspect, only one dimension of the real structure of the family in former times. The 'families' reconstructed by the French demographers on the basis of the registers of baptisms, marriages and burials are nothing more than a demonstration of the fertility of couples; they tell us nothing at all about the dimensions of the domestic group. The 'families' which British historians discover in censuses of households are merely, as it were, a snapshot of the occupants of accommodation in a given locality at a given moment. Neither of these sets of results could simply replace the images which, on the basis of different documents – less numerous but providing fuller information – legal historians and sociologists had presented of the families of past times.

Today, therefore, it is necessary to achieve a synthesis between the old images and the new ones, for the benefit of an educated public which is showing an increasing interest in these questions. The synthesis will be critical, provisional and at times speculative – let us acknowledge this here and now – but it will, perhaps, be useful to those specialists who, each on his own path, work without always considering what is happening on the neighbouring paths. Displaying a curiously provincial attitude, British historians and those of the Paris Basin attempt to relegate the extended family to the museum of sociological myths, in complete ignorance of the censuses held in southern France which confirm its existence. Many historians, both in France and in Britain, also confuse the extended household with the *lignage*, and the *lignage* with the *race* or the 'household', without taking account of the distinctions which legal historians have,

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nevertheless, shown to have existed between these different concepts.* Moreover, the distinction that the ethnologists have established between the notion of *lignage* and that of kindred is not always familiar to the historians. What has probably happened is that the historians of the family, like the demographers and the sociologists, have been too exclusively interested in the domestic family 'cell', and have not shown enough interest in the systems of kinship and alliance with which the ethnologists, by contrast, are obsessed.

It is true that the concept of the family is not entirely free from ambiguity. Let us attempt, therefore, to define it, before we begin our study of the actual facts of family life.

THE CONCEPT OF THE FAMILY

Nowadays the word 'family' refers to different things. In the widest sense of the word, it is 'the entirety of persons mutually connected by marriage or filiation', or 'the succession of individuals who descend from one another', that is to say, 'a line', 'a *race*', 'a dynasty' (*Petit Robert* dictionary). There is also, however, a narrower sense, in much more common use, which the dictionaries usually put in first place and which is the only one, generally speaking, taken into account by the sociologists. In this sense, the word designates 'related persons living under the same roof', and 'more especially, the father, the mother and the children' (*Petit Robert* dictionary). These two elements defining the family in the narrower sense can be reconciled in so far as, and only in so far as, it is rare, in our society, for persons other than the father, the mother and the children to live together in the same house.

This apparently was not the case from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. If one consults the older English and French dictionaries, one finds that the concept of the family was divided between the notions of co-residence and kinship, which one finds amalgamated in the definition that has become most current today. In former times, the word 'family' more often referred to a set of kinsfolk who did not live together, while it also designated an assemblage of co-residents who were not necessarily linked by ties of blood or marriage.

It was the *notion of co-residence* which was mentioned first in the older English dictionaries. That of Samuel Johnson (1755) gives, as the first sense of the word 'family', 'those who live in the same house' and, as a synonym,

* *Lignage* is used here in its medieval and early modern sense, very different from its current meaning. The most approximate modern English translation would be 'branch'. *Race* is also used in its medieval and early modern sense. The most approximate modern English translation would be 'stock'.

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'household'. Abel Boyer, in the first edition of his *Dictionnaire royal françoys et anglois*, understood by the word 'famille' 'all those who live in the same house, under the same head'; and he gave as English equivalents 'family' and 'household'. Similarly, Cotgrave, writing in 1673, translated *famille* as 'a family or household', and 'family' as 'famille, maisonnée', even though he went on to add other equivalents corresponding to other senses of the word. Not one of these dictionaries restricted the concept of the family to those who, living in one house, are united by ties of kinship. Moreover, usage confirmed the fact that the servants and other domestics were part of the family. Thus, Samuel Pepys wrote in 1660, at the beginning of his famous *Diary*, 'I lived in Axe Yard, having my wife, and servant Jane, and no more in family than us three.'¹

This sense of 'household' (especially common in English) is also found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French. It is this definition which appears as the principal one in the entry under 'famille' in the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1694): 'Toutes les personnes qui vivent dans une même maison, sous un même chef.' Moreover, as early as 1690, Furetière had clearly stated that, in this sense, the word 'famille' is understood to mean a household composed of a head and his domestics, be they women, children or servants. This definition reappeared in all subsequent editions of his dictionary, and in all those of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, published between 1704 and 1771. One observes, incidentally, the classing of the wife and children together with the servants in the concept of 'domestiques'. Furthermore, it sometimes happened that the word 'famille' designated only the domestic staff, as a collective noun, even including at times those who did not live with the master. Thus, the dictionaries of both Furetière and Trévoux noted that among the people of quality, one understands by the term 'famille' all the domestic servants, all the major and minor household officials. The use of the word in this sense was probably no longer very frequent in the eighteenth century, because from 1740 onwards dictionaries find it necessary to situate this usage geographically, e.g. when speaking of the Grandees of Italy (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*), and to illustrate it by such examples as 'the family of a cardinal' and 'the lower family [*basse famille*] of the Ambassador (of France in Italy)'. Nevertheless, it was still the case in the second half of the eighteenth century, both in France and England, and whatever the social milieu concerned, that the members of the family were held to include both the kinsfolk residing in the house and the domestic servants, in so far as they were all subject to the same head of the family.

The concept of kinship, without any indication of co-residence, was, on the other hand, given a prominent place in all the French dictionaries and most of the English ones. Nicot, writing in 1606, gave only this sense;

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Furetière and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, a century later, recognized other senses, but always placed this one at the beginning of their entries under the word 'famille'; Richelet, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* and the English dictionaries put it second or third. 'It is used in this sense of those who are of the same blood in the male line' (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie*); 'all those who descend from one and the same stock and who are, consequently, of the same blood' (*Encyclopédie*); and of 'those descended or claiming descent from a common ancestor; a house, kindred, lineage' (Murray). The *Encyclopédie* adds a significant nuance of meaning when it asserts that the word 'famille' is usually understood to mean the entirety of several persons united by ties of blood or of affinity. Moreover, the dictionaries give as synonyms of the word 'family' understood in this sense, 'race', 'house' (*maison*); 'descent', 'extraction' (*extraction, naissance*); 'stock' (*souche, tige*); 'branch', 'parentage', 'issue' (*lignage, parentage, parentelle*).

When one speaks of 'house', in this context, this does not imply co-residence. At that time (the beginning of the eighteenth century), the House of France had a branch established on the throne of Spain, as the House of Austria had had before it. This was too well known for the authors of the time to consider it worth mentioning. On the other hand, it did seem to them important to emphasize the differences in usage of the words 'family' and 'house'. 'In France [the word *famille*] is hardly ever used except for the Houses of the *noblesse de robe* or the bourgeoisie. . . It would be speaking improperly to say of a great lord "he is of the family of. . .", to describe his descent. One must say, "he is of the House of. . ."' (*Furetière, Trévoux*). *Famille*, according to the Abbé Girard, 'is more properly used of the bourgeoisie, and *Maison* of people of quality'. Certain usages, however, cannot be explained in this way: 'One says, in speaking of birth, that someone is of an honourable family and a good house, one speaks of a Royal Family, and of a reigning House' (*Trévoux, 1771*).

In the *Encyclopédie*, the Chevalier de Jaucourt took up arms against the affectation implied in the use of the word 'house'.

It is vanity that has imagined the word *house*, in order to mark even more blatantly the distinctions effected by fortune and chance. Pride has therefore decreed in our language, as in past times among the Romans, that the titles, the great dignities and the great appointments continuously held by people of the same name should form what one calls the *houses* of the people of quality, whereas one describes as *families* those of citizens who, clearly distinguished from the dregs of the populace, perpetuate themselves in an Estate, and transmit their line from father to son in honourable occupations, in useful employments, in well-matched alliances, a proper

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upbringing, and agreeable and cultivated manners; thus, taking everything into account, the *families* are worth just as much as the *houses*...

'Families', therefore, were not to be found among the 'dregs of the populace', any more than 'houses' were. The 'family', like the 'house', was a social assemblage characteristic of the élites; and a kinsman by blood, if he did not have the social status and the culture required of the members of the family, would doubtless be excluded from it. This is suggested, too, by the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* in 1771: 'Families are formed by matrimonial alliances, by polite behaviour, by conduct distinguished from that of the lower orders, and by cultivated manners, which are passed on from father to son.'

Were these social criteria in the definitions very long established? One may well doubt it, because they do not appear before 1750. Moreover, one has to wait for the fifth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1798) to learn that one 'calls an *Enfant de famille* a young man of honourable birth'. Previously, all French dictionaries had applied to the term *fils de famille* the legal definition: 'a young man living under the authority of his father and his mother'. This would carry complete conviction were it not for the fact that Cotgrave, as early as 1673, had translated *Enfant ou fils de famille* as 'Youths of good houses, rich young men (whose parents are living)'. Perhaps this was because the child of the poor man, living as a domestic servant under the authority of a master, was not included in the legal definition of a 'son of the family'.

'The word *family* is understood in an even narrower sense', according to the French dictionaries: 'that of the nearest kinsfolk. In this sense, it is used of people of quality as well as of the bourgeoisie and the people' (Furetière, Trévoux). This sense of the word approximates so much more closely to the sense in which the word is used today that it was given after that of 'household'. But who were these kinsfolk? What were the criteria and the limitations of their proximity? The few dictionaries that concern themselves with this question give different answers, of varying degrees of explicitness. 'In this sense, under the name of the *Royal Family*, one includes the children and grandchildren of Kings', according to Furetière and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. The Academy understood in this restricted sense 'all those of the same blood, such as children, brothers, nephews'. This did not prevent it from reproducing verbatim Furetière's entry under the heading 'Royal Family'. To Richelet, 'family' signified essentially 'the father and the mother with the children'. The same definition was given by the Chevalier de Jaucourt in the *Encyclopédie*.

Is it possible to discern any progression in this third sense of the word, any tendency to separate from the rest of the extended family the father,

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the mother and the children? The sense of close kinship was not emphasized by Nicot (1606 and 1621), or Cotgrave (1611 and 1673), or the Abbé Boyer (1702). It does not appear in France until 1680, with the first edition of Richelet's dictionary. After that date, it appears in all the great French dictionaries. In England there was an analogous, though later, development: this sense of the word 'family' is still missing from Johnson's Dictionary (1755), but it is given by Murray, in the nineteenth century, with the first indisputable example dating from 1829. Moreover, the evolution of the concept of the family is illustrated by the definitions that are given of the 'Holy Family'. In all the editions of Furetière, from 1690 to 1732, in the first five editions of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (published between 1704 and 1752) and in the first two editions of the Academy dictionary, the Holy Family is held to include 'Our Lord, the Virgin, Saint Joseph and Saint John'. Subsequently, the presence of Saint John was not automatic, and it seems to have raised a problem: the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* in 1771, and those of the Academy in 1740, 1762, 1798 and 1835 describe the Holy Family as 'a picture representing Our Lord, the Virgin, Saint Joseph and *sometimes* Saint John'. There is a fresh nuance in Littré (1863), who observes: '*The Holy Family*, Joseph, the Virgin and the infant Jesus. A *Holy Family*, a picture representing the Holy Family, sometimes with Saint John.' Today, in the *Petit Robert* dictionary, Saint John has disappeared altogether.

At the same time as this reduction in the members of the family, there occurred the conflation of the two concepts of kinship and co-residence, which were still dissociated as late as the mid eighteenth century. Instead of listing the different senses of the word 'family', the Chevalier de Jaucourt, writing in the *Encyclopédie*, made efforts to unite them in one whole. According to him, the family is a

domestic society which constitutes the first of the accessory and natural states of Man. Indeed, the family is a civil society established by Nature: this society is the most natural and the most ancient of all societies; it serves as a foundation for the national society; for a people or a nation is nothing more than an entirety compounded of several families. Families are established by marriage, and it is nature herself that invites men to form this union; from it are born children who, perpetuating the families, maintain human society in being, and make good the losses which death causes in it every day.

One sees at work in this preamble the ideology of the Enlightenment: it was probably needed to mask the separation – which was frequent in the circles where one could read the *Encyclopédie* – between close kinship and the assemblage of co-residents. If the family has been established by Nature, then such a separation is without significance. It is only once these

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principles are established that Jaucourt goes on to distinguish two senses of the word 'family', with a plethora of justifications that reveals the innovative character of his interpretation.

In a narrow sense, it is composed, firstly, only of the father of the family; secondly of the mother of the family who, according to the almost universally accepted interpretation, becomes a member of the family of her husband; thirdly, of the children, who are, as it were, formed of the substance of their father and mother, and ineluctably belong to the *family*. However, when one considers the word *family* in a broader sense, one includes in it all the kinsfolk; for although, after the death of the father of the family, each child establishes his or her own family, nevertheless all those who descend from the same stock, and who are in consequence issue of the same blood, are regarded as members of the same *family*.

One has to wait until the nineteenth century for the concepts of co-residence and of close kinship to be united in concise formulas, in definitions whose very succinctness bears witness to the fact that they no longer constitute any problem. 'Persons of the same blood living under the same roof, and more especially the father, the mother and the children', in the words of Littré, writing in 1869. Even so, he still puts this definition in fourth place; and the Academy dictionary, in its sixth edition, suggests that this interpretation was still not widely accepted in 1835: 'The word is *sometimes* used of kinsfolk who live together, and, more especially, of the father, the mother and the children, or even of the children alone.' The concept of the family, therefore, as it is most commonly defined today, has only existed in our western culture since a comparatively recent date.

This conceptual analysis provides us with several working hypotheses. It suggests that the concept of the *lignage* was more deeply rooted among the élites than among the people; that in France, as in England, what united the members of a domestic group – kinsfolk and servants – in one 'family', was their common dependence on the 'father of the family'; and that, in both countries, the father–mother–children triad acquired an ever-increasing independence with respect to the *lignage* and to the servants, until in the nineteenth century it became the fundamental nucleus of our society. It is true that the chronology of the transformations of the concept of the family, as defined in the dictionaries, probably suffers from a time-lag with respect to the actual evolution of the institution itself. There is no lack, however, of other indications of the lateness of this evolution. In the eighteenth century, it was 'Enlightened' opinion that militated in favour of the intimacy of the family circle, and that interpreted the family as a 'natural society' and made of it the privileged haven of felicity. In contrast

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to this, since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has been innovative writers who have attacked the family, and conservative opinion which has defended it.

We are not, however, thereby prevented from giving a privileged place in our historical researches to the relations between spouses and between them and their children, because it is these relations that lie at the heart of our preoccupations today. It is, however, important to emphasize that what was referred to in past times as the 'family' was not identical with the father-mother-children triad, and that one cannot study this triad, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, without taking into account its relations with *lignage* or kindred on the one hand, and the domestic staff on the other.

1. The ties of kinship

1. THE NATURE OF KINSHIP

The house and the 'race'

'Kinsfolk', *lignage*, *race*, 'house' and, of course, 'family' appear in the dictionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as more or less synonymous, and we have ourselves seemed to admit this when we were drawing the distinction between 'family' in the sense of 'kinship' and 'family' in the sense of 'household'. In fact, they were not synonymous, or at least were not always so.

One of the most difficult concepts to grasp has been that of the 'house'. In his *Essays*, in the chapter entitled 'Of names', Montaigne speaks of a maid of honour of Catherine de Medici, of whom Henri II was 'of the opinion that she should be called by the general name of her *race*, because that of her paternal "house" appeared to him too outlandish'.¹ What did this mean? What the king understood by the 'name of her *race*' was the patronymic surname, or name of the family. The use of this was not customary, among the aristocracy of that era, any more than the use of the person's baptismal name. This custom had its drawbacks, as Montaigne emphasizes in the same chapter.

It is a wretched custom, and with most injurious consequences in our land of France, to call each person by *the name of his estate*, and it is the usage that most leads to confusion between different *races*. The younger son of a good *house*, having had as his appanage a piece of land under the name of which he has been known and honoured, cannot honourably abandon it; ten years after his death, the land passes into the hands of a stranger, who follows the same usage: you may well guess how confused we become when we try to ascertain the origin of these men.²

Whereas in the first passage he distinguishes between the 'name of the paternal house' and the 'name of the *race*', in the second he distinguishes between the 'name of the land' and that of the house and the *race*, which are apparently confused. Let us observe, in an example cited from Brantôme,³ how the different terms were used.



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Monsieur le Comte du Lude of today is the son of that gallant Messire Guy de Daillon, whose father and my mother were first cousins, both being descended from Louise de Daillon, known as the Seneschalle of Poictou, my grandmother, who was the aunt of M. du Lude, first cousin of my aforesaid mother. . . From the said M. du Lude, Guy de Daillon, and Madame du Lude, of the house of La Fayette, there issued the present M. du Lude and three daughters. . . M. du Lude [Jean de Daillon] had several sons and daughters. The sons were Messieurs des Chastelliers. . ., de Sarterre and de Briançon, who died without issue. The daughters were Mademoiselle du Lude, who died unmarried at Court, Madame la Maréchale de Matignon, whose son was Monsieur le Comte de Torigny, married to a daughter of Longueville, and the third daughter was married to Monsieur de Ruffec, Governor of the Angoumois, and their sons were the Messieurs de Ruffec of today, who are four male offspring. . .

The *name of the 'race'* – what we would call the 'patronymic' or 'family name' – was Daillon. By way of exception, Brantôme uses it for his grandmother, the 'Seneschalle de Poictou', and for the 'gallant Messire Guy de Daillon', who had, perhaps, become well known under this name during his father's lifetime. However, rather than call his own father Jean de Daillon or his son François de Daillon by their surnames and first names, he prefers to use paraphrases such as 'M. du Lude, first cousin of my aforesaid mother' and 'the present M. le Comte du Lude', or incur the risk of misleading the reader.

The *name of the paternal house* was used to designate the unmarried daughters, such as that 'Mademoiselle du Lude, who died unmarried at Court'. It was also used to record publicly matrimonial alliances between houses, e.g. 'Madame du Lude, of the house of La Fayette' and 'Monsieur le Comte de Torigny, married to a daughter of Longueville'. The sons used this name only during their childhood. An example of this was the case of the 'Messieurs de Ruffec of today, who are four male offspring'. When they grew older, the eldest son once again took the name of the paternal house, whereas the younger sons customarily took the *names of their estates*: thus, one speaks of the 'Messieurs des Chastelliers. . ., de Sarterre and de Briançon'. All three continued to belong to the *race* of the Daillons, but they no longer belonged to the 'du Lude house'. Were they each going to found a new 'house'? Their status as younger sons would have made this hardly possible; it was not entirely fortuitous that all three died without issue. These 'names of estates', therefore, which were always less long established than the names of *houses*, were also, in general, less enduring. It even happened that a younger son lost this name during his lifetime, as did Emmanuel de Gondi, lord of Dampierre:⁴ 'Monsieur de

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Dampierre still calls himself by this name, even though the place has been sold; others call him Monsieur the General of the Galleys, which is certainly a very fine and great estate.' This had been sheer good fortune! It remains no less certain that the custom of calling each person by his title – whether it were the title of an office or appointment or that of the lordship over a piece of land – was, as Montaigne put it, 'the usage that most leads to confusion between different *races*'.

This 'wretched custom' did not exist only in France, as Montaigne suggests. It existed also in Spain, and among the higher nobility of certain other countries. In England, where gentlemen were known by their first names and surnames, lords bore their titles. Thus, the royal favour created George Villiers Duke of Buckingham, Sir Edward Hyde the first Earl of Clarendon, and Sir Edward Montagu, Lord Sandwich. These titles, like the names of 'houses' in France, passed only to the heir, whereas the younger sons, in general, had to be content with their patronymic preceded by their Christian name, for example, Sir James Montagu, sixth son of Lord Sandwich.

It would be safe to assert that the French gentlemen were as pretentious as the great English lords. But was the use of the name of the house characteristic, in France, only of the nobility? In fact, one finds this usage even among the poorest peasants in many parts of the south-west, such as the Béarn or the Basque country. 'In Labourt', wrote the Bordeaux magistrate Pierre de Lancre at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the most beggarly men and women in the villages style themselves lord or lady of such-and-such a house, and these are the houses that each one has in his village, even though they be no more than pigsties. . . to such an extent that they usually abandon their 'cognomen' and the name of their families, and the women even abandon the name of *their* husbands, to take the names of their houses. . .⁵

The Basque house not only gave its name to its occupants, causing their official civil status to be completely forgotten, but it even decided their social rank: the house was called free, and noble, and displayed its coat of arms, enjoying a certain degree of juridical personality.⁶ And even the priests, in their parish registers, in addition to recording the family names and baptismal names, indicated the name of the house and the relation to it – master, heir, younger son, son-in-law, etc. – of the person concerned.⁷

The concept of the 'house' is, fundamentally, intermediate between those of *race* and of 'household', which we distinguished above. We shall return to this subject in the following chapter. However, it must be emphasized at this point that the concept of the 'house' linked the continuity of the family with the perenniality of settlement in a particular place. Designation by the patronymic surname, which has become the universal custom

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today, does not permit a family to survive the interruption of its male line of descent, whereas designation by the name of the house did make this possible. Let us take as an example the house of Le Vigean, founded in the sixteenth century by a younger son of the house of Le Fou.⁸ François du Fou, lord of Le Vigean, the son of the founder, 'died without male heirs', leaving only three daughters. The eldest, Madeleine du Fou, inherited the fief, which she bequeathed to her only daughter, Ester de Pons, the lady of Le Vigean, known in her time under the name of 'Madame de Fors' because she had married Charles Pesnart, lord of Fors, who was apparently the younger son of a good house. Nevertheless, the eldest of the children, instead of assuming the paternal title, became 'Baron du Vigean', thus reviving the house of Le Vigean, which had 'fallen to the distaff' for two generations.

Some embittered commentators – from the end of the sixteenth century, and perhaps earlier – complained of a custom which, by 'making the lines of descent unrecognizable', made it possible for those of ignoble birth to graft themselves onto illustrious stocks. One must note, however, the advantages of the system. It maintained, in the face of the hazards of demography and economics, a certain continuity of names and families, thus disguising, as far as possible, the upheavals suffered by the social hierarchy. The use of the patronymic, on the other hand, increases the risk of the extinction of lines of descent, emphasizes the impudence of social-climbers, and, if one reflects on the matter, is no better guarantee of purity of blood than is the name of the house.

Why, indeed, link the *line of descent* to the patrilinearity of the surname? The physicians of the sixteenth century acknowledged, for the most part, that in the constitution of the genetic patrimony of the descendants – if one may, for the sake of brevity, risk using this anachronistic formula – the mother played as important a part as the father. Or, rather, the genetic privileges of the father were too widely disputed to serve as a solid basis for the patrilinearity of the line of descent. Moreover, it was common knowledge that it was less easy to discover the identity of the father of a child than that of its mother: the obsession with cuckoldry manifested itself in the writings of the jurists and theologians, and in stories, comedies and tragedies. Furthermore, in real life, the suspicion of illegitimacy was not absent from even the greatest families. Thus, the line of descent of the Condés probably owed its salvation from extinction in 1588 to the arbitrary decision of Henri IV to deem legitimate the father of the victor of Rocroy, a child born in gaol to a mother imprisoned for adultery and for poisoning her husband. The line of descent, in so far as it was denoted by the patronymic, was not, therefore, so much a biological as a juridical reality. It seems to have become solidly established in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, at the same time as the legal status of women

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was deteriorating, in circumstances that have not yet been fully elucidated.

The 'lignage'

Before the line of descent became recognized, there had been the *lignage*, an assemblage of individuals who descended or claimed to descend from a common ancestor, either in the male or the female line. By reason of this cognatic character, therefore, the *lignage* was more comprehensive than the line of descent, and, clearly, was quite distinct from the *house*. What, however, remained of it in the period with which we are concerned?

In the England of the seventeenth century it still happened that, rather than the name of the patrilinear line of descent, one adopted that of the maternal *lignage*. A famous example is provided for us by the genealogy of Oliver Cromwell. Through the male line, he was connected with a Welsh family of the name of Morgan, members of which had come to seek their fortune in England in the early sixteenth century. One of them married a sister of Thomas Cromwell, the favourite of Henry VIII. The children of this man Morgan abandoned his patronymic surname and adopted that of the now illustrious *lignage* to which they belonged on their mother's side. It does appear, however, that at that time such a practice was exceptional.

Can we regard as sufficient evidence of the survival of the *lignage* in England the survival of the word *lignage* in the dictionaries as late as the eighteenth century? In France the word itself was considered antiquated and had fallen into disuse by the dictionaries from the end of the seventeenth century onwards. Still current at the beginning of the sixteenth century – but in the vague sense of 'kinship' – it then disappeared from use, and only a hazy recollection of it was retained in its derivative 'lineal' (from *lignage*) in the expression 'lineal shrinkage', to which we shall have occasion to return. Finally, from the mid sixteenth century, the notion of the *lignage* survived in France only among the jurists. Let us observe, therefore, what they have to tell us about ties of solidarity based on the *lignage*.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, in a society in which the royal power had become almost non-existent, the *lignage* had had, as an essential function, the protection of its members. All were, in effect, obliged to avenge the injury done to one of them, or to punish his murderer. This duty of *faide* was sacred, and was recognized by law. The sovereign could pardon a murderer only if the latter came to an arrangement with the *lignage* of the victim by paying the blood-price. In such cases, the necessary sum was usually collected by the kinsfolk of the murderer and shared

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out among those of the victim. This custom suggests that the individual was, at that time, less a person in his own right than a member of the *lignage*, in the most concrete sense of the term.

The gradual resurgence of the royal power, and the opposition of the Church to private wars, effected a progressive reduction in the necessity and the exercise of vengeance by members of the branch. In the era with which we are concerned, it no longer had any legal sanction. It doubtless still figured in the news, especially during the turbulent times of the wars of religion. It appears, however, to have been more a question of clientele; these included the members of a *lignage*, even though the two groups were not co-terminous. It subsisted in an institutionalized form only in Corsica. 'They kill one another like Barbarians', wrote the missionaries from France in the sixteenth century,

and are not willing to pardon nor even to discuss any arrangement, until they are avenged. And not only do they make war on him who has done the injury, but also, in general, on all his kinsfolk, as far as the third degree of relationship. So that, if one has offended another, it is necessary for all his kinsfolk to be on their guard, for the first one to be found, even though he be innocent, and perhaps knowing nothing of the injury that has been done, will nevertheless be treated as though he were an accomplice.⁹

The surprise and emotion evinced by these missionaries bears witness to the fact that this Corsican vendetta contrasted strongly with the customs of continental France. In France, the most obvious reminder of the traditional *lignage* solidarities, in this sphere, were the crowds of kinsfolk who came to throw themselves at the feet of the king to plead for justice to be done to a murderer or, instead, to beg for pardon for a guilty man. It was still the kinsfolk who, almost exclusively, enacted this role.

The strength of the ties of lineal solidarity, in medieval western Europe, did not imply that all the members of the *lignage* lived as a community and possessed an undivided patrimony inherited from a common ancestor. This would have been even more difficult in view of the fact that, since kinship was transmitted by women as well as men, each individual had two grandfathers, four great-grandfathers, etc., and therefore belonged to several *lignages*. Nevertheless, the descendants of a common ancestor preserved certain rights over the entirety of a property that had been parcelled out. When one of them wished to alienate all or part of his patrimonial possessions, he had to obtain the agreement of his kinsfolk of the same *lignage*: the deeds of alienation of the eleventh and twelfth centuries provide evidence of this. From the twelfth century onwards, the renaissance of the economy based on the exchange of goods and services, and that of Roman Law, had the effect of diminishing these prerogatives of the *lignage*. From the thirteenth century, the kinsfolk of the person who

sold or gave away his patrimony had no other recourse than that of the possibility of obliging the person acquiring it to resell it to them. This was the law of 'lineal repurchase right' (*retrait lignager*).¹⁰

In the thirteenth century, this privilege appears to have fulfilled the function of protecting the rights of the most immediate heirs. After the fourteenth century, however, there was established a new principle, whereby in the case of alienation in favour of a kinsman, a closer relation could not exercise this lineal repurchase right. The lineal repurchase right was no longer the exclusive privilege of the most immediate heirs, but of the *lignage* as a whole. It resisted the onslaughts of the jurists inspired by Roman Law, and had from then on, as its essential function, the maintenance of the power and glory of the great families. In the fourteenth century, the *Grand coutumier de France* declared that 'the repurchase right was first introduced for the benefit of the *lignage*, so that inheritance might remain in the lines of descent from which they came, and for the honour of the said *lignage*'.¹¹ There is one further indication of the aristocratic character of this institution: the right of repurchase could be exercised within a year and a day in the case of the alienation of a fief, while the time limit was very much less in the case of a censive holding. This distinction, which had legal force in Picardy, Artois and Flanders, also became established at the end of the Middle Ages.¹²

Being an institution based on custom, lineal repurchase right never became fully established in the written-law provinces – with the exception of Provence – even though Henri III, for revenue purposes, tried to introduce it by edict in 1581.¹³ This was, perhaps, because it was not necessary for the continuity of houses in southern France, where Roman Law gave the heads of families the right to bequeath the entirety of their patrimony to a sole heir, after the deduction of certain meagre 'legitimate shares' for the younger sons.

In what one might, therefore, call 'lineal' France, how was the property of the *lignage* defined? Lineal redemption, in general, only applied to the inherited property – and not subsequent acquisitions. The inherited property was transmitted according to the rule of *paterna paternis, materna maternis*, that is to say, only the kinsfolk on the father's side had any rights over the property which had come from the father, and only those on the mother's side had rights over that which had come from the mother. This principle was unquestioned, but it received, owing to variations between customs, diverse interpretations. The latter can be divided into three systems. According to the *simple côté* system, all the kinsfolk of the vendor, on the side from which the property derived, had the right of redemption. This interpretation was exceptional: in the eighteenth century it was found only in the customs of Chauny, Meaux, Etampes and Chaumont. In contrast to this, the *soucher* (stock) system granted the right

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of redemption only to the descendants in the direct line of the first person to acquire the property being sold. This interpretation was more common, and examples have been found in Mantes, Dourdan, Melun, the Nivernais, the Bourbonnais and Touraine. Finally, there was the 'system of *côté et ligne*' which occupied an intermediate position between the other two systems, and was the most widespread. According to this system, the right of repurchase was granted to all the descendants of the first person to acquire the property, whether their descent were direct or collateral.¹⁴

In other words, the two most widely accepted interpretations of the *paterna paternis, materna maternis* rule defined the *lignage* as the entirety of the descendants of a common ancestor. This definition, which tallies with that accepted by anthropologists today, clearly distinguished it from what the latter call a *parentela*,* that is to say, the entirety of the relations of a particular individual. Moreover, the rule itself is evidence of the invariably cognatic nature of the ties of kinship, despite the appearance of patronymic surnames in the fourteenth century. This is not, however, evidence in favour of the reality with which we are concerned. In other words, it is not likely that individuals, in their daily lives, felt closer ties of solidarity with those whom the laws of succession called their 'lineal' kinsfolk than with their other relations.

The rules defining the ability to inherit or redeem in fact concerned themselves with the past history of the property claimed, rather than with the real extent of the ties of solidarity between kinsfolk at the time when the repurchase took place. Conversely, how could these rules have imposed a special solidarity between the individual and his kinsfolk of the same *lignage*, when – by the process, continued for several generations, of acquisitions, contributions from dowries and division among heirs – the majority of individuals possessed property derived from a multiplicity of ancestors, and belonged to as many different *lignages*? The relations who were not 'lineal' kinsfolk in connection with some property or other must have been extremely rare.

Rather than the status of 'lineal' kinship, what made for the strength of family solidarities was the line of descent – in other words, the sharing of the same patronymic surname – and the closeness of relationships. As evidence of this, one may quote a passage from *La Vie de mon père*, in which the lawyer Rétif de Noyer, in order to overcome the possible jealousy of the young Edme Rétif towards a cousin named Daiguesmortes, says to him 'he is my first cousin [whereas Edme was only the offspring of a first cousin], and the son of an aunt who has been like a mother to me. . .

* 'By a person's *parentela* is meant the sum of those persons who trace their blood from him. My issue are my *parentela*, my father's issue are his *parentela*.' Sir F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law*, 2nd edn (2 vols., Cambridge, 1968), vol. II, p. 296.

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He is my first cousin, he is one degree of relationship closer than you; but you bear my name, and for that reason you are at least his equal in relation to me.¹⁵

Consanguinity, matrimonial alliance, spiritual kinship and clienteles

The great dictionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in common with the civil law, held the notions of *kinship* and *consanguinity* to be absolutely synonymous. A kinsman is 'a person who is united to us by blood', wrote Richelet in 1680. And the Academy, in 1694, defined kinship in one word: 'consanguinity'. Nevertheless, the matter is debatable. After asserting that 'all kinship comes from birth and derives from the fact that persons descend from the same stock', the *Encyclopédie* had to admit: 'It is only those who are born of a legitimate marriage who are kin to their father and mother; for bastards have no kinsfolk, except for their children born in legitimate wedlock.'¹⁶ Logically, it could have gone further: the consanguinity of kinsfolk was not always evident in a society which recognized affiliation through men as well as through women. The reference to blood, however, was part of the ideology of kinship.

Moreover, canon law, in condemning marriages between kinsfolk as incestuous, held a much more complex view of kinship. In addition to consanguinity, whether legitimate or otherwise, which it termed *natural kinship*, it took cognizance of *legal kinship*, created by adoption and deemed to exist between the adopted person and the entire family of his foster-father; *legitimate affinity*, which marriage caused to exist between each of the spouses and the family of the other; *illegitimate affinity*, which resulted from all illicit carnal relations; and, finally, *spiritual kinship*, which united the baptized child and his parents with the godfathers and godmothers and their close relatives, and even the confessor with the penitent and the catechist with the catechumen. If one admits, therefore, that kinship is a social convention characteristic of each culture, and not a gift of nature, we should examine this ecclesiastical view of kinship – a maximizing one – with as much attention as the restrictive interpretation given by the civil law.

One cannot, in fact, explain this multiplication of impediments to marriage as simply the result of an incest-psychosis: it reveals the existence of ties of kinship other than those of blood, *race* or household, and particularly the solidarity which marriage established between two families, even after the death of one of the spouses. In linguistic terms, the analogy between 'allies' and kinsfolk was more clearly recognized in England than in France: the word *kin*, if one is to believe Abel Boyer, meant affinal as well as consanguineous relations. 'Are you any kin to him?' was translated

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as 'Etes-vous son parent?', whereas 'He is no kin to me' was rendered as 'Il ne m'est point allié'.

However, the strength of ties of kinship formed by matrimonial alliances was equally firmly established in France as well. In order to prevent certain families from dominating the royal law-courts, Louis XIV decided in August 1669 to 'stipulate by law the degrees of kinship which are incompatible with the holding of office in the same place'. He was mistrustful not only of the 'kinsmen of the first, second and third degrees of relationship, that is to say, fathers and sons, brothers, uncles and nephews', but also of 'affinal kin as far as the second degree, such as fathers-in-law, sons-in-law and brothers-in-law', going as far as to forbid – in that society in which homogamy was customary – 'that the permanent officers accepted and at present serving in our said courts and seats of government shall hereafter contract alliances of the first degree of father-in-law or son-in-law'.

In the history of France and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one finds a very great number of examples of this solidarity of cognatic and affinal kinsfolk in the conquest or the exercise of power. At the court of Henri II, for example, two great families contended for power: on the one hand, the Guises, who sprang from the house of Lorraine and could count on its unfailing friendship; and, on the other hand, the Montmorencys, led by the old Constable and his three nephews, Admiral de Coligny, Colonel-General d'Andelot and Cardinal de Châtillon. The accession to the throne of François II, the husband of Mary Stuart, who was the niece of the Guises, was enough to destroy the equilibrium existing between the two factions: the Guises took complete possession of power and drove out all their rivals, who inclined, along with Coligny and the other malcontents, towards Protestantism.

In the age of Louis XIV, families played almost as important a part in political life: throughout his reign, the Colberts contended for power with the Le Telliers, of whom Louvois was the most celebrated representative, while some less eminent *races*, such as the Phelypeaux, made efforts to retain some offices.

Less is known, perhaps, of the part played by family politics in the conquest and exercise of power by Richelieu. All the members of his family – the Du Plessis and the La Portes – were raised through his influence to positions of power or prestige: his brother became a cardinal, his niece a duchess, his cousin La Meilleraye a Marshal of France, his nephew Du Pont de Courley General of the Galleys, while his more distant relatives occupied innumerable other offices. He owed these favours to them, according to the moral ideas of the age, and he owed them to his own glory. These promotions, however, also served another purpose: even though some of his relations left something to be desired as regards their

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intelligence or their reliability, he appointed them to important posts because they were 'naturally' attached to him and he could therefore count on their fidelity.

In addition, Richelieu established, outside the ranks of his kinsfolk, a network of trustworthy clients: Father Joseph and Mazarin are the best known, but there were plenty of others. Many of these clients were attached to him by family tradition: the best example is that of the Bouthilliers. The ancestor, Denis Bouthillier, lord of Fouilletourte, had been clerk to François de la Porte, Richelieu's maternal grandfather. At his death, François de la Porte had left him his professional practice, commending to his care 'his grandchildren who had lost their parents', according to Saint-Simon. In fact, their mother was still alive, and did not die until 1616, but that did not matter: 'Bouthillier took care of them as of his own children, and that is the origin of the fortune of the Bouthilliers.' Richelieu installed Claude Bouthillier, who was a Counsellor of the *Parlement*, in a post under Marie de Medici, as 'executive secretary to the Queen Mother', and then had him appointed, ten years later, Secretary of State. His brother, Denis Bouthillier, lord of Rancé, was also secretary to the Queen Mother, which made it possible for him to keep Richelieu informed as to her intrigues and changes of mood. Victor Bouthillier was appointed Bishop of Boulogne, and later coadjutor to the Archbishop of Tours; in these posts, he could keep Richelieu informed of the activities of the clergy. In return for this collaboration, the Minister obtained for him all sorts of favours and benefices, particularly the post of Almoner to 'Monsieur', which made it easier to keep a watch on the activities of the intriguer Gaston d'Orléans. The fourth brother, Sébastien Bouthillier, was Bishop of Aire and Prior of Le Cochère. It was he who, in 1619, together with Father Joseph, obtained from Marie de Médici the recall of Richelieu from his exile in Avignon. Finally, Léon Bouthillier, Count of Chavigny, the only son of Claude, took over the appointment of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs when his father left it to become Superintendent of Finance. He, too, in accordance with family tradition, was a faithful client of the Cardinal, and one of the most partisan.¹⁷

When one examines the part played by ties of kinship in the establishment of clientele in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – a socio-political phenomenon deserving of a study as systematic as that devoted to the feudal system – one must, therefore, take into consideration the consanguineous and affinal kin of the clients as well as the kinsfolk of the patron. One should also, probably, take into consideration the ties of 'spiritual kinship', which made it possible, to a greater extent than matrimonial alliances, to institutionalize the ties of solidarity between the client and the family of his patron or between the patron and the family of his client.

It is, in any case, clear that at an equivalent social level these ties of fidelity, which might arise out of sympathy or interest, had to be consecrated by marriage, or otherwise they would incur the risk of remaining changeable and insecure. Saint-Simon gives us a glimpse of this when he recounts his first steps towards matrimony.

Though maintaining a considerable establishment, I felt myself extremely isolated in a country where credit and consideration were more important than anything else. Being the son of a favourite of Louis XIII and of a mother who had lived only for him, whom he had married although she was no younger than he, without uncles or aunts, or first cousins, or close relations, or influential friends of my father and my mother – so cut off from everything on account of their age – I found myself very much alone. . . The Duke of Beauvillier had always remembered that my father and his had been friends, and that he himself had been on the same footing with my father. . . His valour, his gentleness, his polished manners, all made him stand high in my esteem. His enjoyment of official favour was then at its zenith: he was Minister of State after the death of M. de Louvois, he had as a very young man succeeded the Marshal of Villeroy in the appointment of head of the council of finance, and he had followed his father in the post of first gentleman of the bedchamber.¹⁸

In short, for this young duke without relatives and without the sovereign's favour, it was absolutely necessary to find powerful affinal kin. This was more important than marrying a rich heiress, which, however, he also needed very much to do, because his patrimony was saddled with debts. He said so frankly to his well-wisher the Duke of Beauvillier, asking him for the hand of any of his daughters of marriageable age. Unfortunately, the eldest wished to become a nun, the second daughter was forced into that estate by her physical deformity, and the others were too young. The marriage could not, therefore, take place, to the great regret of the two men:

I expressed my regret, in replying to him that the needs of my business affairs [that is to say, his need for a dowry to settle his debts] did not allow me to wait until I could marry his youngest daughter, for perhaps not all of them would become nuns; and this was, in fact, my view of the matter. At the end of the conversation, there were the most tender protestations on both sides of an intimate and eternal mutual interest and friendship, and he promised to assist me in every way with his advice, in both small and great matters, and said that we would look on each other from thenceforth, and for all time, as father-in-law and son-in-law in the most indissoluble union. . . He told me that his only consolation

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was the hope that his children and mine might some day be married.¹⁹

2. THE DIMENSIONS OF KINSHIP

After having thus considered the different ways of being a kinsman and having observed the strength of each of these modes, we must now describe more precisely the dimensions of kinship. Let us first examine the civil law – that is, the rules of inheritance and of ‘lineal repurchase’.²⁰

In the Nivernais and the Bourbonnais, the rules recognized kinship only as far as the sixth degree. These were the most restrictive customs. More often, inheritance and lineal repurchase applied to those of the seventh degree of relationship. This was the case, for example, according to the ancient custom of Beauvaisis described in the eighteenth century by Beaumanoir, and it still survived, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the customary law of Normandy, Sens, the Duchy of Bar, and the Bassigny. The *Très ancienne coutume de Bretagne* placed the limits of the *lignage* at the ninth degree; and most of the other compilations of customary laws did not establish any limits. As time went on, this tendency became more generalized, probably because the advent and the improved accuracy of registers of baptisms, marriages and burials made the proof of distant relationship easier. ‘In accordance with the civil law observed in France’, asserted the *Encyclopédie*, ‘one succeeds *ad infinitum*, both directly and collaterally, as long as one can prove kinship, even when one cannot describe the exact degree.’²¹ Moreover, the jurist Pothier quotes, in the eighteenth century, cases of lineal repurchase by relations of the twentieth and even the thirtieth degree. It may well be doubted whether ties of lineal solidarity, and even the knowledge of the relationship, ever in fact extended so far.

This discrepancy between the unlimited character of legal kinship and the very limited character of the ties of lineal solidarity is, moreover, demonstrated by surviving wills. In these one often finds, in fact, particularly in Provence and the region of Lyons,²² a clause directed against known or unknown relatives who might try to lay claim to a part of the inheritance on the basis of the customary rules. For example, in 1559, in the will of Bernard Salomon, a painter of Lyons: ‘Item, he gives, and by right of appointment of heirs, to his relatives and friends claiming rights, to each one five *sous*. . .’ Or, in that of Louise Labbé, of 8 April 1565: ‘Item, the said testatrix has given and bequeaths by right of appointment of heirs to all other claimants against her aforesaid property the sum of five *sous* of Tours currency. . . without their being able to claim or demand any other part of her aforesaid property.’ This clause, which was quite customary, cannot be explained by any particular enmity which certain

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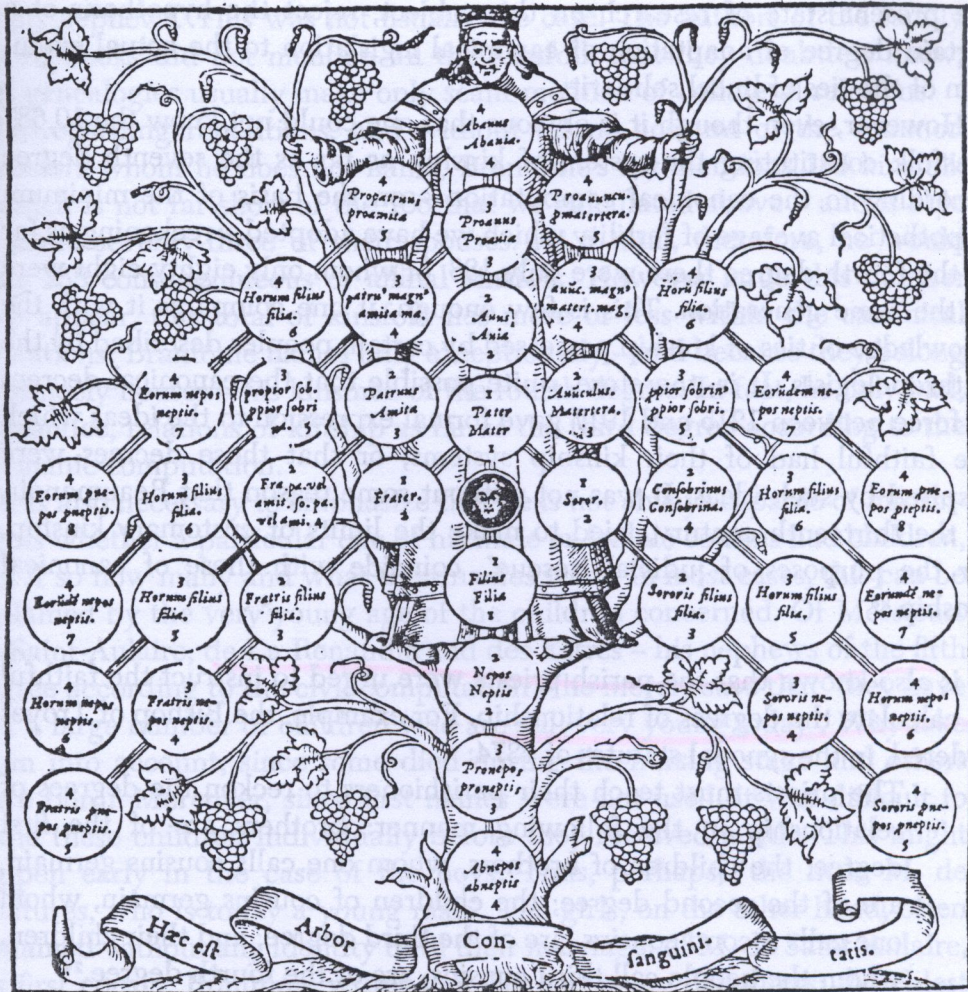
testators might entertain towards any of their kinsfolk. It constitutes evidence both of the rights which the law recognized as being possessed by the kinsfolk, however distant, with regard to the property of a deceased person, and of the refusal of a testator to concede such claims to the detriment of heirs who were nearer or dearer.

Did canon law, then, provide a more realistic definition of kinship? It had given extremely variable definitions in the course of the early Middle Ages. At first the Church had forbidden marriage only as far as the fourth degree of consanguinity according to the Roman computation; between the tenth and the twelfth centuries it had gradually come to forbid marriages as far as the seventh degree according to the Germanic computation, which was the equivalent of approximately the fourteenth degree according to the Roman computation (Figure 1). This bordered on the absurd: supposing that in each generation each couple had brought up and given in marriage one boy and one girl – which was lower than the real average, taking into account the increase of population in the eleventh and twelfth centuries – a marriageable youth would be forbidden to marry 2,731 cousins of his own generation, without counting their ancestors or descendants of marriageable age. In other words, whether he were a great lord marrying into his own class, or a peasant bound to the soil, he would be unable to marry all the marriageable girls he could possibly know and a great many more besides.

Without taking into account the impediments arising from spiritual kinship, which had multiplied, and those deriving from affinity, which had also been extended as far as the seventh degree, it is evident that the majority of young people had to remain celibate or defy the prohibitions. The constant infringements led to an extreme instability of the matrimonial tie, whether this was the result of the 'incestuous' spouses being denounced by some jealous person, or of one of the spouses, tiring of the other, demanding the annulment of the marriage. This was the reason why, in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council limited the impediments on the grounds of consanguinity and legitimate affinity to the fourth degree of relationship, and that based on illicit affinity to the second degree.

These facts are a clear demonstration of the unrealistic nature of the prohibitions of the early Middle Ages, and hardly testify to the realism of subsequent canonical decrees. Moreover, the Protestants curtailed still further the impediments on the grounds of kinship, and the Catholic Church came to a similar decision in 1917, with the publication of the new code of canon law. It appears that canon lawyers and theologians did not, for the most part, comprehend the social utility of the impediments on the grounds of kinship, and that the majority of them were, above all, obsessed with the sin of incest.

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1. The tree of consanguinity. In each circle, the upper figure indicates the degree of kinship according to the Germanic (or canonical) computation, and the lower figure the degree according to the Roman (or civil) computation. From *Decretum Gratiani* (Paris, 1561), folio, col. 1939–40.

Nevertheless, it is impossible not to be impressed by the analogy between the evolution of the impediments and what we can observe of the evolution of the ties of lineal solidarity. The latter appear to have reached their zenith between the tenth and the twelfth centuries, and it was precisely during that era that the impediments were extended so excessively. When, on the other hand, from the thirteenth century onwards, the lignage became more narrowly based under the influence of the patrilinear tendencies which preceded the introduction of patronymic surnames, and when, paradoxically, the ties of lineal solidarity became weaker – as regards both vengeance and rights to landed property – the impediments were severely reduced in scope. One cannot, therefore, in

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the present state of research on this subject, reject the hypothesis of a certain degree of adaptation of canonical legislation to the actual evolution of the ties of lineal solidarity.

However, even though it is obvious that one could not know the 10,687 kinsfolk constituting the system of kinship as far as the seventh degree according to the canonical computation – on the basis of the minimum hypothetical average of fertility which we have adopted – reckoning as far as the fourth degree there were only 188, of whom only eighty-eight were of the same generation. This is few enough, if one compares it with the knowledge of ties of kinship possessed by certain peoples described by the anthropologists. It is, therefore, quite possible that the canonical decrees in force between 1215 and 1917 gave formal expression to the ideas which the faithful had of their kinship systems, or that those decrees were inspired by such ideas. It was not without some reason that Beaumanoir, in the thirteenth century, tried to make the limits of customary kinship, for the purposes of judicial 'rescue', coincide with those of canonical kinship.²³

It is also known that the parish priests were urged to instruct the faithful to calculate the degrees of relationship. For example, the Bishop of Troyes ordered, in the synodal statutes of 1374:

The priests must teach their parishioners to reckon the degrees of relationship in the following manner: brothers are of the first degree; the children of brothers, whom one calls cousins germain, are of the second degree; the children of cousins germain, whom one calls second cousins, are of the third degree; and their children, whom the people call third cousins, are of the fourth degree.²⁴

It is true that it was probably not necessary to teach these peasants about their ties of kinship – the popular terms to which the text alludes suggest that they knew them well enough. It was rather a question of familiarizing them with the canonical computation. It must be observed, finally, that canon law attributed to kinship limitations similar to those attributed to it by customs of inheritance and of lineal repurchase, since the fourth degree according to the canonical computation corresponds to the seventh and eighth degrees according to the civil computation.

All these theoretical indications, however, need to be verified. Memoirs, journals and family record books provide the materials for this, particularly as regards the bourgeoisie. Before utilizing these sources, however, let us examine a more exceptional document, emanating from a nobleman: 'Nominal roll of my nephews, great-nephews and great-great-nephews, according to the custom of Brittany, which I, Brantôme, may have, and which I have made today, the 5th November 1603'. The interest of this document lies in the fact that the author attempted to compile a list of

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all his nephews. This was not usually the case. The authors of the family record books did not mention all the kinsfolk that they doubtless knew, and genealogies usually make only scant mention of collateral relations.

Disregarding repetitions, and without taking account of the common ancestors whom he does not name, Brantôme's list mentions 185 kinsfolk – which is not far short of the 188 that we calculated above – and is able to name seventy-three of their spouses. As a total, therefore, he would have 258 consanguineous or affinal kinsfolk. However large this number may appear, this total of kinsfolk lies more or less within the canonical limitations: Brantôme names only exceptionally – and because they belong to princely houses – his kinsmen of the fourth degree. In fact, he only had, in practice, relations of kinship as far as the third degree according to the Germanic computation.

It is also necessary to emphasize that he is not always capable of informing us whether a particular one of his male or female cousins had children, and if so how many and what their names were. In most cases, this can be explained by the very young age of the children concerned. Of Messieurs de Saint-Aulaire, de La Renaudie and des Estres – his nephews of the fifth degree according to the civil computation – he merely says that 'they have had a large number of children who are still very young today'. Why take them into account, since some died during the nursing stage and others were born? Moreover, since first names were not used, it was difficult to name these children individually before they received a title. This might happen early in the case of the boys. Thus, perhaps, 'the little M. de Coutures, who is today a young man'. The girls, on the other hand, often remained without any identity until their marriage: of M. de Saint-Aulaire, his first cousin, Brantôme writes that 'he had many daughters: the eldest was married at Borz-Saunier, and the second at Fradeaux. . .; and there were many other sisters whose names I do not know'. This is not due to lack of recent news, since he already knows that the second daughter, married at Fradeaux, 'has had many children'. The reason was, therefore, that there was not yet any interest in knowing them, their number – there were eight of them, counting the two eldest – condemning the youngest ones to obscurity. By way of a further example, he knows that his 'niece' of the fifth degree according to the civil computation, Madame de Charlus, had a son married to a daughter of the Count du Lude. Suspecting that she has had other children, and not knowing them, he takes it for granted that they are girls. In short, he mentions the unmarried girls only when they become known at court, e.g. 'Mademoiselle du Lude who died unmarried at court', or 'the beautiful and agreeable Maumont, brought up at court, who was the mistress of Monsieur the Dauphin', or when they are rich heiresses. Examples of this were the children of the two marriages of one of his 'nieces' of the seventh degree: 'The eldest is now married to

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Monsieur the Duke of Usez, and the other is still unmarried, and both of them are very rich heiresses of the house of Saint-Sulpice; as also that of Montluc. . . [who] must still be only twelve or thirteen years old.' If he identifies them, even when they are young, despite their unmarried state and the fact that they bear only the eighth degree of relationship to him, it is because they are destined to form splendid matrimonial alliances and found new stocks.

However, Brantôme has not simply compiled a *Who's Who*: the knowledge that he possesses of his kinsfolk appears to imply – except in the case of the princely houses – effective relations of kinship. A proof of this is his ignorance, in cases where geographical separation has prevented continuous contacts: 'Monsieur de La Rochandry married, and his daughter was Madame the Countess of La Chambre, who was married in Savoy. . . and I have seen her brought up as a daughter of Madame de Savoye at her court, where Monsieur the Count of La Chambre married her. I do not know if there have been children of the marriage.' He could meet his other kinsfolk at the court of France, when he lived there, or receive news of them after he had left it. On the other hand, the geographical distance, and the strained relations between France and Savoy at that time, isolated him from that particular kinswoman.

This leads one to suppose that other examples of his ignorance – the most significant for our purposes – may be attributed to the distance of his relationship with the persons of whom he is speaking. Of Madame de Pescels and her sister the Viscountess of Panas he writes, 'They have children, but I am unable to name them, and yet we are closely related.' Paradoxically, this comment supports our interpretation: it is not the age or sex of the persons concerned that he considers, but the distance in genealogical terms. In fact, however close Brantôme may consider his kinship with these 'nieces' and their children – because they are descended from one of his great-grandfathers – it is nevertheless the most distant that one can find in his compilation. According to the civil law these ladies were of the eighth degree of relationship, and their children of the ninth degree, that is, beyond that seventh degree at which the majority of the customs established the limits of the *lignage*. According to the Germanic computation, his relationship to them was of the third to the fifth degree, and to their children of the third to the sixth, therefore canon law did not establish between them impediments to marriage on the grounds of kinship.

It was because he wrote this memoir towards the end of his life that Brantôme was able to know 'nephews, great-nephews and great-great-nephews, according to the custom of Brittany', who were distant by four or five degrees from their common stocks. However, with the exception of those stocks that connected him with princely houses, Brantôme himself is

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never at a distance of more than three degrees from these stocks. In other words, he remains within the theoretical limits of his kinship. If this was the case with a nobleman, so attached to his genealogy, what can one expect of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry?

In order to evaluate bourgeois kinship systems in France, we will examine in detail two private journals written in the early sixteenth century: that of Jehan de Gennes, a prosperous merchant of Vitré, which was kept from 1490 onwards;²⁵ and that of Nicolas Versoris, a Parisian lawyer, which covers the period 1519–30.²⁶ The kinsfolk concerned are living – or actually die – at the moment when they are mentioned, whereas, in order to explain his ties of kinship with living people, Brantôme took into consideration the existence of kinsfolk long since dead. This artificially reduces the relative importance of these bourgeois kinship systems. On the other hand, whereas Brantôme was a bachelor and therefore had no affinal kin, our two bourgeois diarists were married, and the kinsfolk of their wives have almost as important a place in the journals as do their own. In addition, the strength of kinship based on matrimonial alliances is emphasized by the appellations ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ which designate brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law as well as full brothers and sisters. It often happens, indeed, that the reader is incapable of distinguishing between a brother-in-law and a brother sprung from the same womb. Furthermore, the two journals are written from a different approach, which makes comparison between them difficult. Nicolas Versoris notes, day by day and as they happen, the events which have appeared to him to be ‘notable’ – in particular, for our purposes, births, marriages and deaths. Jean de Gennes, on the other hand, has included, in what is as much an account book as a journal, details of his closest kinsfolk. The inventory of these details would have been instructive if the ‘journal’ had been published in its entirety. Since its publication was interrupted, the most interesting procedure is to make an inventory of the consanguineous and affinal kin whose presence he mentions at the betrothals and weddings of his closest relations.

Jehan de Gennes mentions thirty-five consanguineous relations, twelve affinal kin of these relations, and eighteen kinsfolk of these affinal kin. One must add fifteen relations of his wife, and seven affinal kin of these affinal kin, making a total of eighty-seven cognatic and affinal kin. More significant than this number is the genealogical proximity of his thirty-five consanguineous relations. These consisted of seven children, his father, his mother, eight brothers and half-brothers, two sisters, nine nephews, three uncles or cousins on his mother’s side and four uncles or cousins on his father’s side. That is to say, they extended as far as the second degree of relationship according to the canonical reckoning. Similarly, the relations

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of his wife, or those of the wives of his brothers, do not include those farther removed than uncles and first cousins. As far as kinship is concerned, the bourgeois had a short memory, which most certainly did not preclude – quite the contrary – the existence of a family spirit.

Nicolas Versoris mentions only thirty-four consanguineous kinsfolk, including eight children, six brothers and sisters, fifteen nephews and nieces, one maternal uncle and four cousins. To these are added fourteen affinal kin of these blood-relations, and twenty-three cognatic and affinal kin of his two successive wives – a total of seventy-one cognatic and affinal kin. Even though four of the children died within fifteen days of their birth, and some of his nephews may have met the same fate without his recording it, this still amounts to a considerable total of kinsfolk. Moreover, this is a record of only part of them: those who have been born, or have died, or have been married, or have even been godfathers and godmothers to his children and nephews, between 1519 and 1530.

The godparents, in both the Gennes and the Versoris families, were generally chosen from among the cognatic and affinal kinsfolk. Thus, spiritual kinship, by coinciding so often with consanguinity and legitimate affinity, did not cause complications with regard to future marriages. During the lifetime of the people concerned, there is no doubt that this custom had the additional advantage of making family ties closer. One extreme example seems to constitute evidence of this: when Nicolas Versoris chose, as godmother to his daughter Anne, the second wife of Pierre Herbert – of whom he does not even tell us the surname and Christian names – it was no doubt with the object of retaining within the kinship system of the Versoris Pierre Herbert, whose first wife, Marguerite Versoris, niece of Nicolas, had died six months previously. It also happened that a person was invited to stand as godfather in order to establish ties which one could not form by marriage because of a difference in social status. Perhaps the nobleman Guyon de la Charonnière, Constable of Vitré, and the wife of the chatelain of Vitré, who stood as godparents to the second daughter of Jean de Gennes, were a degree above him in the social hierarchy. This is by no means certain: it may have been simply a very short-term political manoeuvre. However, when he took as 'little godfather' to his eldest son, and as godmother to his second son, Pierre Tirel and Perrine Tirel, the children or close relatives of his trusted employee, it is evident that he was thus seeking to institutionalize a bond of fidelity which could not be institutionalized by marriage.

In the fascinating work of historical anthropology which he has devoted to the family life of Ralph Josselin, Alan Macfarlane has emphasized the few contacts which this rector of an Essex village had with his kinsfolk.²⁷

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Neither christenings nor funerals provided him with an opportunity of meeting them. We regard these ceremonies as essentially family occasions; but they were not so, to such an extent, in past times. When Bodynays de Gennes, a prosperous merchant of Vitré and one of the principal attorneys of the town, died on Thursday, 15 August 1521, around four o'clock in the morning, in his home at La Brosse, few family members were present at his funeral.

On the said day after vespers his said body was carried to his house in the Rue de la Poterie [his town and business residence]... and later the guilds and religious confraternities of this town and its suburbs came to fetch it, and his said body was carried by four merchants of note to the Church of Our Lady... and afterwards escorted by the said guilds and carried by the said merchants to the cemetery of Saint Martin, where it was buried close to and at the end of the tomb and sepulchre of my late father.

The family, in this account, is represented only by its dead members.

Occasionally the living relatives were present, in the more ostentatious funeral ceremonies, but discreetly so. An example of this occurred in April of the same year, when they buried the father-in-law of Jean de Gennes, André Cholet, lord of La Mereyaye, who died at midday on 8 March.

And on Wednesday, the ninth day of the said month, members of the guilds of Our Lady and of Saint Mary Magdalene and of the Augustinians came to fetch the body, and they carried it, to wit: the lord of the Hayrie Jehan de la Reaulté, lieutenant-governor of Vitré, Maître Jullien Dargentré, attorney, and François de la Mue, lord of the Chederie, and the pall was carried by Guillaume Dollier, lord of the Caillere, Maître Guillaume de Grasménil, lord of the Meix, Maître Pierre Brocquet, lord of the Feu, and Gile Gaulay, lord of the Mesnil Morel.

Apart from Giles Gaulay, there is no mention of these persons as being kinsmen: they are the most notable men of the town, and it is in that capacity that they are present. They were followed by crowds of poor people dressed for the occasion in 'robes of very good frieze' and carrying torches, candles or flares in honour of the deceased. These, too, were part of the ostentation. The family, as such, appeared only at the moment of interment, the body then being carried by four of the grandchildren of the dead man. All four of them, however, were accompanied and guided by two men and two women from among the most notable citizens of the town, who thus associated the participation of the body politic with that of the family. Finally, the closest relations were distinguished by their being dressed in mourning: 'And mourning was worn by the said lord of the Neuptumières and his brother (the two grandchildren of the deceased), representing the men. And, representing the women, Jacquine Cholet,

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Briande Cholet and Gilete Cholet, all three of them unmarried girls and the sole heiresses of the said late lord of the Mereyaye.' The unobtrusiveness of the immediate family, on this occasion, was not, therefore, complete. Furthermore, Jean de Gennes observed in conclusion that at this funeral service 'there were present many gentlemen who were kinsmen of the said deceased man, and most of the people of the better class of the town and the suburbs of that place, both men and women, and most of them dined at the house'. However, these kinsfolk, whether close or distant, were not the only ones concerned in the event, nor did they occupy the most prominent place at the ceremony. At the other funerals of the Gennes family, which were less ostentatious, they did not appear at all. Nevertheless, the journal of Jean de Gennes leaves us in no doubt as to the closeness of the ties that he maintained with his cognatic and affinal kin.

The consanguineous kin of whom Macfarlane has made an inventory, based on the journal kept by Josselin, are not, however, less numerous than those that we have found in the journals of the two French bourgeois: thirty-three, as against thirty-five and thirty-four. This total does not include either the four children who died in infancy, or the grandchildren, of whom one at least brought great joy to Josselin, or the nephews whom his four sisters might have given him. Moreover, there are cited by name in this kinship system seven uncles and fourteen cousins, whereas uncles and cousins totalled no more than seven in the entire journal of Jean de Gennes and five in that of Nicolas Versoris, the essential core of the kinship systems of the two bourgeois being constituted by their brothers and sisters and their nephews. It is true that, with the exception of two of them whom he visited four or five times, Josselin never, or hardly ever, saw his cousins. This is not surprising, however, when one considers the distance that separated them. What must be emphasized, in the case of these kinsfolk of Josselin, is their geographical dispersion. In that respect, they bear a resemblance to kinship systems in developed industrial societies. Was this, however, in the seventeenth century, a habitual characteristic of bourgeois kinship systems?

As compared with forty-three family events, Nicolas Versoris noted, between 1519 and 1530, sixty-three deaths or marriages occurring among the lawyers and physicians of Paris. One should not, however, conclude from this that the professional or social milieu enjoyed, among his preoccupations, a higher place than the family milieu. His family milieu was quite indistinguishable from his social milieu: it was more restricted than the Parisian professional bourgeoisie, and it did not reach the summit of that class, but it was entirely included within it. The same can be said of the de Gennes family and their affinal kin in relation to the bourgeoisie of Vitré, subject to some differentiating factors – such as their residences

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in the country and their matrimonial alliances formed in Nantes or Alençon.

As a country parson, Josselin was in a very different situation. Like the nobleman in his feudal domain, the country clergyman was of a status different from that of his parishioners. Even though he succeeded in forming relations of friendship with certain neighbours of his own social and educational level, he could not usually convert these into relations of kinship: ecclesiastical benefices were not hereditary in the way that feudal domains were, and the children of the clergy were not destined to possess the same social status in the same locality. Furthermore, the nobles, by reason of their leisurely lives, enjoyed living in the company of their kinsfolk and friends; they had the means to offer them hospitality; and when they were as distinguished as Brantôme was, they regularly met them at court. The clergyman, on the other hand, lived in principle a life of austerity, little calculated to attract his kinsfolk, and he hardly possessed the means to entertain them. Like the village *curé* in France, he was condemned to live far away from them, and, with a wife and children, he had less interest than the *curé* in his nephews and nieces, and thus lived more enclosed in his own household. In short, the family life of Josselin was probably typical of that of many clergymen, but it is by no means certain that it provides us with an accurate portrayal of kinship solidarities among the propertied classes in England in the seventeenth century.

Another noteworthy English example is that of Simon Forman, a London astrologer of Shakespeare's time.²⁸ Coming from a good family living in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, he kept in touch with his brothers and sisters who occasionally came to consult or assist him, but he paid most attention to his wife's family, after a late marriage which ensured his fortune and his social standing.

Samuel Pepys,²⁹ on the contrary, situated in the uppermost sector of the bourgeoisie, lacked affinal kin, because he married the daughter of a French *émigré*. However, he mentions in his diary over eighty living relations – for the most part quite distant, since we often have difficulty in understanding his relationship to them – and he had regular contacts with a large proportion of them. Moreover, he owed his education at Cambridge, and his brilliant career, to the patronage of Lord Sandwich, who was his second cousin, even though Pepys never had the impudence to remind him of this relationship. The son of a poor tailor, he had thus become one of the most eminent representatives of the Pepys family, and one can understand that his close or distant relations should have wished to cultivate his acquaintance.

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3. KINSHIP AND NEIGHBOURHOOD AMONG THE PEASANTRY

The co-terminous nature of the social milieu and the kinship system, which we have emphasized in the cases of Jean de Gennes and Nicolas Versoris, as an element favouring solidarity between kinsfolk, was just as universal among the French peasantry. The census held at Brueil-en-Vexin, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, demonstrates that, whatever the differences in material fortune between heads of households, the circle of matrimonial alliances included all the 'lines of descent'. All of them, even the most recently established, had cognatic or affinal kin in the village.

The reason for this is that it was customary, among the peasants, to take a wife from the same parish. In the eighteenth century, at Saint-Méen-le-Grand (Ille-et-Vilaine), the proportion of endogamous marriages within the parish was 71.6 per cent; at Bilhères d'Ossau (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) it was 74.2 per cent; at Vineuil (Loire-et-Cher), it was 80.2 per cent; and at Roziers-sur-Loire (Maine-et-Loire) it reached a level of 93 per cent between 1661 and 1700. The proportion was even more impressive in some villages in mountainous areas, such as Caillac (Hautes-Alpes), where almost all marriages had to take place with dispensations from the impediments on the grounds of kinship. Elsewhere, dispensation was not customarily given, and the endogamic tendency was then curbed by the prohibitions of the Church. There were, it is true, some villages where the frequency of marriages among two young people of the same parish was much less marked than in the examples previously given: the proportion was 34 per cent at Rumont, in the Gâtinais; 33.3 per cent at Saint-Agnan, in the Morvan; 31 per cent at Rouvray, in the Vallage (Champagne). These were, however, generally small villages where the network of kinship was already too all-embracing for a young man to find a wife without infringing the prohibitions: Rumont had only 260 inhabitants, and Rouvray 216. The correlation between the size of villages and the degree of endogamy within the same parish is clearly shown in the Vallage, which has recently been the object of an excellent demographic survey:³⁰

At Rouvray (216 inhabitants): 31% of the marriages were endogamous

At Donjeux (305 inhabitants): 46%

At Blécourt (442 inhabitants): 55%

At Mussey (511 inhabitants): 68%

In short, the ties of kinship reinforced neighbourhood solidarities both in the larger villages – where the high rate of marriages between people of the same parish continually made the ties closer – and in the smaller ones, where endogamy was rare on account of the density of their networks of kinship.

It remains to be ascertained how far ties of solidarity within the village

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were based on kinship and how far on the simple fact of neighbourhood. Ethnologists have observed that in certain villages of present-day France one considers systematically as kinsfolk the other inhabitants of the village, even when one does not have any known tie of kinship with them, for the mere reason that they are from the same village.³¹ It is as though the concept of kinship were founded on the fact of belonging to the village community more than on ties of blood and affinity. This, however, might be because the peasant has been accustomed for centuries to being related to all the inhabitants of his village; for if one wished to emphasize only the fact of belonging to the village community, why make use of the terms of kinship? Such a custom, paradoxically, is evidence of the importance of ties of kinship in the ideology of the peasantry.

However, the customs which regulated the peasant life – whether in the extremely community-oriented regions of the north-east of France and the Paris Basin, or in the other regions – were related to membership of the village and the neighbourhood rather than to kinship. This was the case not only as far as political and agricultural life was concerned, but also as regards what we refer to as ‘private life’ and ‘family life’.

The young people of the village, as a group, regulated the meetings between lovers and intervened, again as a group, in the nuptial ceremonies, particularly by means of the rite of the ‘barrier’, when the young bride married an ‘outsider’, and by the mock serenade, when the marriage was not to their liking. These two types of intervention expressed, more or less consciously, the girl’s membership of the village, and the rights over her which that conferred on the marriageable young men of the parish. Moreover, their right of supervision of the relations between the sexes did not cease after the wedding: women who were unfaithful to their husbands and, worse still, complaisant cuckolds and husbands who suffered chastisement from their wives were called to order by the mock serenade and the ‘azouade’, i.e. the punishment of being promenaded on a donkey. Whereas among the nobility or the bourgeoisie such lapses in behaviour often led to the meeting of a family council, among the peasants and even among the town-dwellers it was the people of the village or of the suburb who intervened. It is of particular significance that in the ‘azouade’ the principal role was customarily played by the nearest neighbour of the couple that had caused the scandal, whether he led the donkey which the husband was forced to ride in a ridiculous posture, or, as happened more frequently in the period with which we are concerned, he himself had to ride the donkey and play the role of the husband who had suffered chastisement. This was a way of emphasizing his duty of surveillance and, in consequence, his responsibility for the misconduct of his neighbours.

Neighbourhood solidarities were particularly strong in the case of the

women, who were more attached than their husbands to the house, at least in the peasant environment. Every day they would go to borrow a cooking utensil from one woman neighbour, to ask the advice of another, and they would gossip on the doorsteps of their houses, or meet in those traditional meeting-places of the womenfolk – the well and the washing-place: 'Two women make a dispute, three make a great chatter, four make a complete market.' The peasant men, on the other hand, spent the entire day dispersed throughout the area of the parish – except in winter and during the summer months, when collective help was needed for the major tasks – and, when they met in the tavern in the evenings, it might be among friends or men of their own age-group as often as among neighbours.

It is possible that in the towns the men were more closely associated with their immediate neighbourhood. This was true in the case of the craftsmen of Lyons in the eighteenth century.³² They all lived in houses of from eight to twelve, and sometimes more, apartments, and they were subject, under the authority of the proprietor and of the municipality, to certain collective obligations under the supervision of a 'principal occupant': to maintain the latrines, and sweep the stairways, the corridors and the pavement in front of the building. This was, one suspects, the source of frequent conflicts. Their solidarity, however, often manifested itself in a more salutary way. When there was the slightest incident, everybody appeared at the windows, and everybody kept silent when the police made enquiries. When a trial took place, the neighbours provided the accused with certificates attesting to his upright life and conduct. And when the bailiffs or the police arrived with the intention of dealing severely with an occupant, the neighbours spontaneously offered their assistance. To quote one example among thousands: a man named Carra, a shoemaker working at his home in the Rue Puitspalu, was involved in a dispute with his guild, and the masters of the guild came one day to his house to deliver a summons. At once the occupant of the ground floor, a confectioner, recognized them, and from his back-shop he shouted to Carra to lock himself up in his apartment. At the same time, the women of the house who were in the street shouted to the shoemaker 'Carra! Carra! Shut your door, the master-shoemakers are coming up to see you!' This assistance was effective because, finding the door barricaded, the delegates postponed their visit until another day.

Everywhere, woman neighbours lent their assistance on the occasion of confinements, baptisms and funerals. In the Pyrenees, custom even prescribed in detail the obligations of each man and woman neighbour in these circumstances. In the case of a death, for example, it was the duty of the closest neighbours to hurry and inform the kinsfolk and friends of the

deceased person, and to prepare the house, while the second neighbour cooked the meal and attended to the livestock. The closest woman neighbour stood, in church, at the side of the bereaved; and it was often the four closest neighbours who carried the coffin.³³ They were taken into account even in the regulations which attempted to limit the ostentation of funerals. Thus, Article 19 of the statutes of the Val d'Azun prescribed that: 'In order to remedy the abuses and the great expenses that take place on the days of the burial of the dead, which ruin families of limited fortunes, only the two neighbours and the four closest relatives of the bereaved person may enter the house of the heirs of the deceased, except for people from another village.'³⁴ This article, however, also demonstrates that neighbourhood solidarity did not supplant kinship solidarity, whether the kinsfolk were from the village or from elsewhere.

In the relationships which a peasant had with his kinsfolk living in the same village, did he take account of their kinship? This question has hardly been studied at all, but the following dialogue, reported by Rétif de la Bretonne, suggests that he did:

We were joined by a man who was coming out of his vineyard, with his basket on his back; it was Jean Piôt, the weaver, the maternal cousin of the Abbé Thomas. He says to this man: 'Good day, cousin. Have they not said that you come from Paris?' 'That is true, cousin.' 'Do you know that your cousin Jean Piôt, son [of] Jean Le Maréchal, [who lived] opposite your grandfather, is dead?' 'No, cousin.'³⁵

If, among the inhabitants of the village, kinsmen were thus identified, we may suppose that ~~kinship did not fail to have certain specific effects.~~

When one had kinsfolk outside the village, one occasionally visited them. Nicolas Rétif recalled how, in his childhood, 'the two Rétifs from Joux, Jean and Bénigne, often came to the house. . . They brought news of what had been happening to the east of my village.'³⁶ The village referred to was Sacy, at six or seven kilometres' distance from Joux-la-Ville. More exceptional was the visit of 'my two Gautherin girl cousins', who came from Aigremont, situated a dozen kilometres from Sacy.³⁷ 'They were the daughters of a sister of my father's mother. Marie, the fair-haired eldest girl, was to be married; she came to tell her uncle of this.' Young Nicolas, who was then about ten years old, appears to have been seeing them for the first time. As an infant, he had also been shown once to Jean Rétif – an attorney at Noyers, at about fifteen kilometres' distance from Sacy – and to 'my cousin Droin, from the villages on the river-bank'.³⁸ These were two old men, of whom the former was first cousin to Pierre Rétif, the grandfather of Nicolas. He had often shown an interest in his peasant cousins, and particularly in Edme, the father of Nicolas. However, even

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though there is frequent mention, in the journal of Nicolas, of the Rétifs of Grenoble, the children of that judicious and well-to-do kinsman of Noyers, he does not seem to have ever met them.

Much closer, in terms of both kinship and distance, were the full sisters of Edme, who remained at Nitry, which their brother had left when he married. Marie, the youngest, who died when Nicolas was a small child, had spent some days at her brother's house, shortly after her second marriage.³⁹ As for the eldest, his aunt Madelon, she must sometimes have travelled the five kilometres to Sacy, because Nicolas asserts that he has known her well and loved her from his earliest years. Not having had any children by her two successive marriages,

she loved those of her brother as if they had been her own; I, above all, was the object of her endearments and of her tender and sincere affection; thus, whenever they spoke of me of going to see my aunt Madelon, I was beside myself with joy. It was a highly esteemed favour which my father did me, in taking me to the patronal festival at Nitry.⁴⁰

It appears, however, that he was over ten years old when he went there for the first time: 'I had in Nitry another uncle-by-marriage, the husband of my [deceased] aunt Marie, the younger sister of my father, named Pierre Leclere. My aunt [Madelon] took me to his house for me to pay him my respects. . .; he had with him a son, one or two years older than I. We became acquainted.'⁴¹ It was on that same day that he also made the acquaintance of all his other kinsfolk in Nitry, beginning with the beautiful Edmée Boissart.

We were approaching the church. . .when I saw coming out of a nearby house a girl. . .who was bringing home some small ducklings with their mother. Her beauty struck me like a flash of lightning. . . 'Edmée?' said my aunt to her, 'this is your cousin Nicolas, from Sacy, and are you not going to kiss him?' Edmée ran towards them; but when she got near me, she blushed and became all bashful. My aunt made us kiss one another. Thereupon we went to the church. . .I felt in my heart of hearts my natural timidity, which would have been very much more marked if my father had not been greatly respected in Nitry, if I had not been so well dressed and if I had not been among kinsfolk who had the highest opinion of me. . .⁴²

When they reached the church, Nicolas discovered the exclusive rights conferred by residence and the privileges of kinship.

My uncle, who was following us, took charge of me and led me to the choir, where his stall was; he, for his part, was going to sing bass in the choir. My father, ever since he had abandoned the place in church of the honourable Pierre, would never accept that which

his kinsmen or friends offered him; 'I am no longer anybody in Nitry!' he would say. And he would go and sit, as though in exile, by the door of the church, under the belfry, behind the poorest people...⁴³

However, outside a public place such as the church, the ties of kinship could manifest themselves to the full. Edme Rétif

had brought with him his genealogy; he read it to his two brothers-in-law, who were hearing it for the first time. They were enchanted with it, and I heard the praises of my grandfather re-echo. They did speak, however, of some of his defects. . . After dinner, all our kinsfolk of both sexes came to call on my father, the only descendant with a respected name; for each one of them wanted to invite him for tea or supper. Then there arrived Edmée Boissard, Ursule Simon, Catin Doré, Georgette Lemour, Catiche Touslesjours, Dodiche Gautherin, Ursule Lamas and other girls of my family, the most agreeable girls in the district. They took me to their cottage gardens, to make bouquets to give me, while their fathers and mothers chatted with my father, my aunt and my uncles.⁴⁴

This exceptional appearance of Edme Rétif and his son in the birthplace of their family demonstrates, therefore, the abundance of kinsfolk in the surrounding countryside more effectively than do the day-to-day tasks, christenings, funerals, and even weddings, for on those occasions not all the kinsfolk from outside the village made their appearance, and those within the village were inextricably intermingled with the neighbours and friends. Nevertheless, one should not conclude, from the exceptional character of the family reunion in Nitry, that relations of kinship were a luxury for the peasantry. They were often useful, and even possessed, in peasant life, quasi-specific functions.

Uncles, aunts and grandparents, not to mention more distant relations, felt a sense of responsibility towards their nephews, nieces, grandchildren and young cousins, and public opinion did indeed hold them responsible. This was especially evident on the occasion of weddings, not only among the higher nobility,⁴⁵ but also in the lowest social circles. When her father was ruined as a result of the burning down of his house, Barbe Ferlet, the future mother of Rétif, went to live in the house of a wealthy kinswoman, Madame Pandevant, in Auxerre and later in Paris. It was there that she made the acquaintance of M. Boujat, who proposed marriage to her. The girl 'asked him to apply for permission to Madame Pandevant. Enchanted by the gifts that this man bestowed on his intended wife, this lady accepted the suitor. The wedding took place within eight days.' Unfortunately, Boujat was a bigamist. His legal wife, when she

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found out about this second marriage, went to Barbe and asked her: 'Have you been married for long?' 'Eighteen months, Madame.' 'How did you make the acquaintance of M.B.?' 'It was in the house of my cousin Madame Pandevant, Madame: it was she who arranged our marriage.' 'Ah!... it was with the authorization of a kinswoman?..That makes things different.'⁴⁶ If the young wife had got married on her own initiative, she would have been culpable. But she could not be reproached on any grounds, since the marriage had taken place under the authority of that kinswoman with whom she was living.

Another example was that of Elisabeth Bernard who, in 1666, wished to have her betrothal annulled by the officiality of Troyes. She maintained that she had become engaged only 'out of respect for her mother, her grandmother and her relations, and that she had never had...any affection for the said Gross', her fiancé. The latter approached the question from another viewpoint, without contradicting her as to the facts: he maintained that 'the said promises of marriage had been made with the free and untrammelled consent of her aforesaid kinsfolk', that is to say the mother, the grandmother, the uncle, the aunt and other kinsfolk and friends of Elisabeth Bernard.⁴⁷

The intervention of the kinsfolk, which on this occasion took place to the detriment of the feelings of the girl concerned, might, on the other hand, be requested by young people who desired to escape from the tyranny of a father, a mother or a guardian. Furthermore, the law itself suggested such a course: 'The young person may complain to the Judge of the tyranny to which an unjust and barbarous father or mother may try to subject him; the father and mother of the young person are then called in evidence, and sometimes the kinsfolk are called: in this latter case, their decisions have judicial effect.'⁴⁸ This procedure was employed particularly in disputes arising between an orphan and his guardian. Thus, when Marie Guillier requested the officiality of Troyes to permit her to marry Jean Dauvert, despite the opposition of her guardian, the court ordered 'that fourteen of the closest kinsfolk of the said Guillier, that is to say seven on the father's side and seven on the mother's side, shall be called as witnesses regarding the said promises'.⁴⁹ Moreover, it is probable that this recourse to the kinsfolk did not always take place through the mediation of the courts.

In this society, in which widowhood and remarriage were much more frequent than today, it was accepted that the close kinsfolk should intervene to protect orphans from ill-treatment at the hands of a stepmother. This stereotype of family relations appears clearly in one of the children's games described by Rétif, the game of the stepmother, which was particu-

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larly dramatic. It required four principal actors: the father, the stepmother, the orphaned girl and the 'maternal aunt, sister of the dead mother'.

The aunt arrived from a neighbouring village. As she approached the place where the stepmother was sitting with the stepdaughter, whom she was forcing to work without ever raising her head, she sought information on every side as to how her niece was treated by her stepmother. Some said, 'She only gives her mouldy bread.' Others said, 'She only gives her half-rotten wild apples to eat.' The aunt, every time, would answer 'Oh! my poor niece! daughter of my poor sister whom I loved so much!' She reached the house of stepmother, who assumed a kindly expression. 'Good day, sister. . . Now then, my little girl, leave your work; you have done enough.' The stepdaughter stood up, but she had had her head bent down for so long, toiling at her work, that she could not lift it. 'Hold your head up, then, my niece!' 'Alas, I do not know how to. My neck is bent, it will never be straightened!' The aunt turned her head away to hide her tears, and the stepmother made the stepdaughter straighten herself up by two sharp blows before and behind. 'Come, sister,' went on the evil woman, 'you have come from far; you would like a bite to eat. I am going to lay out the tablecloth.' The stepdaughter brought her the tablecloth, in which was wrapped some black mouldy bread which fell to the ground. The stepmother said in a whisper, 'Bitch, pick up your bread.' And out loud, 'there is no lack of bread here; for one lets it get mouldy.' They all sat down at the table, and the stepmother served eggs and cheese. The aunt said to her niece, 'Eat, now, my girl!' But while she was not looking, the stepmother took away what she had on her plate, and gave it to her own children, by the father's second marriage, who were standing round the table. The stepdaughter got up, without having eaten anything. She surreptitiously picked up a piece of mouldy bread, which she devoured. 'What is that you are eating, my child?' said the aunt. 'It is some dainty that she has filched from me,' said the stepmother, 'for she is fond of delicacies and I spoil her somewhat.' But the aunt had seen everything, without showing that she had, and she flew into a rage, taking from her niece the piece of mouldy bread, which she showed to the father as he entered the house. Then she repeated to him the rigmarole of words which they had addressed to her when she arrived. The father beat the stepmother and gave the stepdaughter to the aunt, who took her away and kept her in her house. When she went out, she told the two rows of people who stood in her way all that she was going to give her: 'I shall feed her with white bread, fresh eggs and

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cheese made from cream. I shall dress her in fine linen and striped Siamese cloth; her under-petticoats shall be of soft flannel, and her outer garments of fine cotton embroidered with flowers; her corsets of dimity; her stockings of white wool with red clocks; her shoes shall have high heels, and her coifs shall be of muslin with neatly pleated lace.' The object of this game was to discourage remarriage by widowers with grown-up children.⁵⁰

There are numerous historical instances of orphans who really did suffer persecution at the hands of a stepmother. One of the best known and the most tragic is that of Captain Coignet.⁵¹ However, the oversimplified picture which this game represented of the wickedness of a stepmother and of the hopes that an orphan girl could place in her maternal aunt constitutes, fundamentally, a more sound historical document, more revealing of the stereotypes of the society concerned, and it does not necessitate any reflection as regards the personal character of each of the actors in the drama, or the situation of the person narrating it. It is evident that the situation of the second wife – though less tragic than that of the orphan – was by no means easy, either. Rétif de la Bretonne provides evidence of this, when he recounts the disputes of his own mother, Barbe Ferlet, with her five stepdaughters. 'As was the custom, she was not loved by her stepchildren, and there was no one to take her part in the village, because she was an outsider.'⁵² It was not by mere chance that she had this status: in the case of a second marriage, the impediments on the grounds of affinity combined with those on the grounds of kinship, and made it more difficult to find a wife in the village.

She wanted to exercise authority over her stepdaughters, who were already grown up and accustomed to being independent; she was unsuccessful in this, and suffered on this occasion from the defects of her personal upbringing; never having been contradicted, she doubtless went too far, but it was when one had overstepped the limits with her. Nevertheless, the husband never noticed these domestic disputes. His wife became all serene in her demeanour as soon as he appeared, and only rarely complained. It was another person who informed the father of the family of what was happening in his house.

This other person was, once again, an aunt, but this time the sister of the father, which might serve as a guarantee of impartiality.

A sister of my father had occasion to spend some days in the house; on the first and second days, everyone kept their feelings in check, but the older girls lost their patience on the third day, in the morning. They were in the wrong; and the aunt, surprised by this outburst, took the part of her sister-in-law against her nieces. But

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this was not the way to restore peace. The girls cried, and said that they had been abandoned by everybody ever since that beautiful lady had come to steal away their father's heart from them. On the following days, the same scene was repeated. Then the aunt, now quite convinced that people so ill-suited to live together were making each other miserable, spoke of the matter to her brother. 'It is what I had foreseen', he replied, 'and I had congratulated myself too soon on being happily deceived.'⁵³

Everyone was aware of the fact that a stepmother and stepdaughters inevitably made one another unhappy. For this reason the maternal grandfather of the five girls, when his son-in-law came to speak to him of the possibility of remarrying, was violently opposed to it. 'Thomas Dondaine took fright at the very idea of this marriage. He fulminated against it and, on the following day, made an inventory of the property of his daughter and his son-in-law in favour of his grandchildren.'⁵⁴ However, once the second marriage had taken place, the only solution to the inevitable conflict was for the children of the first marriage to leave the house. In the case of Captain Coignet, of whom no kinsman had been willing to take charge, this departure took place in the worst possible circumstances: he fled, wandered from place to place, and was brought up in the house of strangers from his early childhood. The daughters of Marie Dondaine, because they had kinsfolk on their mother's side, had more good fortune in their plight.

'It is the older girls who cause all the trouble', Edme Rétif had asserted, to justify their expulsion from the house.

I have been asked to give the eldest in marriage; the match is advantageous, but I hesitated; yet I will marry her off. The second girl wants to go to the town to serve an apprenticeship: she shall go. My father-in-law Dondaine has asked for the third one; I will give her to him. He already has the fourth; therefore I shall keep here only the youngest, who is of an amiable character and, besides, is but a child. . . These are all natural arrangements. But, believe me, sister, if I were in a different position, I would have been able to speak as a father and master and bring all these little people to their senses.'⁵⁵

This recourse to the maternal grandfather was due to the fact that he lived to an exceptionally great age and he still possessed the patrimony of the Dondaines. He did not die until the age of eighty-eight, when Marie-Anne Rétif was twenty-six and Marie-Madeleine twenty-one. The former was by then married to a wet cooper of Joux-la-Ville, and the latter was house-keeper to her brother, the parish priest of Courgis. Usually, however, it

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was an uncle who had inherited the patrimony and who took charge of the boy and girl orphans.

There are innumerable examples in the registers of dispensations for marriage of this recourse on the part of orphans to their uncle. A farmer of the diocese of Meaux, whose son and niece, both aged twenty-three, had fallen in love with each other, thus causing a scandal in the entire district, declared

that it is only too true that the petitioners have been together often, the said female petitioner having lived in the house of him, the witness, for about six years with the said male petitioner, to which the witness was obliged to consent by reason of the fact that he was her guardian and that she could not conveniently live in another place; that the public had often spoken of their association, for which reason he, the witness, had sent the said female petitioner to the house of her uncle, living at Lumigny, but she had not been able to stay there, owing to the ill-treatment she received from the wife of the said uncle.⁵⁶

Similarly, Madeleine Millet, aged eighteen, the daughter of a farmer, and in love with her first cousin Joseph Bertin, explained 'that they had been in each other's company for a long time, the said female petitioner having lived since the age of nine years in the house of the mother of the said male petitioner'.⁵⁷ It is clear that this situation, even though it facilitated 'incestuous' love-affairs, did not inevitably lead to them, and that there were many more orphans brought up by uncles and aunts than these registers of marriage dispensations indicate.

Moreover, it was not necessary to have lost one's father and mother to go and live in the house of a kinsman. The better-off farmers, who always had work to be done, frequently offered a place as a domestic worker to their poor relations. Thus, the man named Lange, who had made a girl pregnant, in the bailiwick of Provins, was a 'carter working for Lange, his uncle, a farmer at Fontaine-Argent'.⁵⁸ Another example was the man called Touslesjours – in fact a Rétif – 'a ploughboy, and kinsman of the house', whom Edme Rétif, when he was still living with his father, 'had himself brought up', and whose conduct had so satisfied him that they 'struck up a warm friendship'.⁵⁹ Yet another example was Nicolas Siot, that young saddler of the village of Saint-Jean-de-Rebès, in the diocese of Meaux, whom his cousin Marie Varié summoned on the death of her husband, who had also been a saddler, to take over the shop and marry the eldest girl who was to inherit it in due course.⁶⁰

In this type of arrangement between a kinsman who possessed a means of production and a proletarian kinsman, the position of a son-in-law, which gave rights over the inheritance, was in principle better than that

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of a nephew or of a young cousin employed as a servant. Not all sons-in-law, however, were satisfied with the situation. Edme Rétif, who lived and worked for seventeen years in the house of Thomas Dondaine, 'suffered much on account of the harsh temper of Thomas'; 'his servitude - for it really was such - terminated at the death of the respectable Marie... As soon as Edme was made a widower, discretion and his obligations towards his young family did not permit him to live any longer with his father-in-law. He left him, and went to work on his own account.'⁶¹ This idealized account - which pictures the association of Edme and his father-in-law as similar to the seven years of slavery that Jacob underwent for the love of Rachel - unfortunately gives no details of the provisions of the marriage contract nor of the actual possibility or impossibility of Edme's establishing himself on his own account earlier. It has some value, however, in making clear to us the psychological problems to which these family arrangements might lead. The resentment of Edme found an echo, at the other extremity of France, in the Basque or Béarnais proverbs emphasizing the misfortune of being a son-in-law - or describing the misfortune of having only sons-in-law instead of sons - and the Provençal proverbs portraying the cupidity of nephews.⁶² In these arrangements between kinsfolk, each one was under the impression that he was assisting the other on account of their kinship, and was being duped by him. However, notwithstanding the obsessive repetitiveness of the proverbs on the subject, people generally preferred to serve their kinsfolk - or be served by them - rather than have recourse to strangers. An extreme example was that of the young Coignet. After spending many miserable years in the service of strangers, he entered the service of one of his half-sisters who was married to an innkeeper, concealing from them his identity, and he spent in her house some years which were happier than the preceding ones. Was it by mere chance that he had recourse to her, or was it because he preferred, in his heart of hearts, to serve a sister and a brother-in-law rather than strangers? Nevertheless, he bore a deep grudge against her for having engaged his services without recognizing him and for not having, as a sister, taken him away from his father's house, where his stepmother was ill-treating him: he was to create a considerable scandal, in front of the whole village, when he left her service.⁶³ Rather than sentiments of affection - which might be aroused, but rather as a result of esteem and personal sympathy, as between Edme Rétif and Touslesjours - kinship established obligations, and a moral and legal bond, considered as 'natural'.

The father of a family, even if well-to-do, often turned to kinsfolk for the education of his children. On two occasions Edme Rétif sent his son Nicolas to live in Vermonton, in the house of his son-in-law Michel

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Linard, the husband of Anne, the eldest daughter by the first marriage and godmother of Nicolas. Later he sent him to study at Bicêtre, under the tutelage of Thomas, the second son of the first marriage; and, when Nicolas arrived in Paris, he quite naturally went to stay at the house of another half-sister by the first marriage who had married there. Finally, he was entrusted to the parish priest of Courgis, the eldest son by the first marriage, who was to look after him for two years. All the kinsfolk who took charge of Nicolas were, it is true, very close relations. However, there was no hesitation in approaching more distant relations: it was to his cousin, the attorney in Noyers, that Pierre Rétif had sent Edme, when he resolved to 'take some care' over his education.

The lawyer did not assume this responsibility for Edme out of an unsatisfied need for paternity. 'There lived with this kinsman, in addition to his two children, a first cousin... named Daiguesmortes', as we have observed. He appears to have been impelled by two sentiments which are both evident in the brief speech which he addressed to Edme to explain his preference for Daiguesmortes. The first was his sense of obligation, which was all the stronger because the relationship was closer: 'He is my first cousin, and the son of an aunt who has been like a mother to me... He is one degree of kinship closer than you...' Besides this, however, he also expected a tangible benefit from this kinship:

He has great intelligence, and my object is to support his natural talent as far as I can, for I am persuaded that this young man can make a name for himself and bring honour to us all... As for you, to try to treat you as I treat him would be a waste of time and trouble: he has wit, and you have none.⁶⁴

In the society of former times, whether one wished it or not, one shared in the glory of one's kinsmen as in their dishonour, and the closer the relationship the more this was so.

This was true of the peasants almost as much as of the bourgeois and the nobles. More so, one might say, when it was a question of dishonour. In 1751 Louise Thomas, a girl of twenty-four, had been made pregnant by Michel Maury, a farmer of forty, in whose house she was a servant. The dishonour seems to have been even more irremediable by reason of the fact that the seducer, being the godfather of his servant and mistress, could not marry her without a dispensation from the Church. Who felt themselves to be affected by this scandal? Maury declared that he 'had heard it said by the kinsmen of the said Thomas that if he did not make reparation for her honour they would handle him roughly and his life would no longer be safe'. And the innkeeper of the village confirmed that he himself 'had heard... a kinsman of the said Thomas, talking with other persons of the dishonour of the said Thomas, ...and saying feelingly that if the said Maury did not marry her whom he had thus dishonoured, he

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would take his life or Maury would take his'.⁶⁵ Such a scandal was intolerable to the honour of the kinsfolk, especially if they lived in the same or a neighbouring village.

Distance attenuated the seriousness of such problems, but it did not sever kinship ties. Even if, for years, one had had no contact with kinsfolk living far away, they constituted so many islets of familiarity in an external world looked upon as 'alien'. In so far as kinship created a solidarity of honour – and also of fortune, by virtue of the customs governing inheritance – one could place one's trust in one's kinsfolk; it was to them that one turned 'naturally' when one was without protection in an unfamiliar and hostile world. Conversely, when an outsider arrived in the village, he was no longer exactly an outsider, seeing that he could count on his kinship with one or more 'inhabitants' of the parish. Since his behaviour towards the villagers involved the honour of his kinsfolk, they could be counted on to remind him of his obligations, whereas, in the case of an outsider lacking any ties of attachment to the village community, one could expect anything.

The only way to prevent these village communities constituting so many closed societies, hostile towards one another, was to multiply the relations of kinship existing between villages, and, with this end in view, to encourage exogamous marriages. The greatest theologians – Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas — seem to have understood that this was the reason for the prohibition of incest. However, the day-to-day practice of the peasantry ran counter to the exogamic policy of the Church. In many villages, if not in all, the 'big boys', grouped together as an institution, made efforts to establish their monopoly over the marriageable girls of the parish.⁶⁶ Every girl married to an outsider represented, in fact, for the less fortunate among them, an increased probability of remaining a bachelor and a servant in the house of another. Thus it was that with cudgel-blows, if one is to believe Rétif and some other observers, they dissuaded outsiders from associating with the village girls. Furthermore, they proclaimed the dishonour of such girls as became interested in others than themselves. This attitude on the part of the village youths met with the approval of their parents, who were always perturbed if they saw a girl take away as her dowry a fraction of the patrimony of the village, to bestow it on a stranger who would not pay his share of the fiscal obligations of the parish. In short, the village community as such had all sorts of methods of preventing the marriages of girls with men from outside the village. This was the reason for the proportion of endogamous marriages, which was often startlingly high, and for the recourse to dispensations from the impediments on the grounds of kinship.

Not all the dispensations, however, were granted to betrothed couples

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from the same parish: quite the contrary. For example, in Saint-Agnan, in the Morvan, the four marriages which, between 1730 and 1794, required dispensations from the impediment on the grounds of kinship, all took place with someone from outside the village. The fact was that kinship — an impediment to marriage according to the Church — really encouraged marriages between young people of different parishes. This was not so much because consanguineous marriages made it possible to join together again plots of land which had previously been divided — this was true, primarily, in the case of cousins belonging to the same parish — but rather because having kinsfolk in another village was the best means of introducing oneself into that community. Furthermore, kinship with a girl made it possible to associate with her under the pretext of cousinhood; and if one succeeded, as a result of such association, in arousing feelings of love, the youths of the village were no longer in a position to prevent the marriage. This was the origin of the ambiguity of cousinhood with a pretty girl, and the character of the cousin in love stories.

Finally, how do the ties of kinship in the society of former times compare with those in our society? It has for long been asserted that they were stronger, and this seems to be undeniable in the legal sphere. To take only three examples, the possibility of the right of lineal repurchase, the rights which kinsfolk could claim with regard to an inheritance, and the help that young people could secure from a family council against the abuse of authority not only of a guardian but even of a father or a mother, are sufficient evidence of this.

As far as mental outlook and behaviour were concerned, the strength of the ties was especially evident among the nobles, who were obsessed with their ancestors, their descendants, and their cognatic and affinal kin, because these ties of blood or of affinity were the foundation of their honour, their privileges, their power, in short, their place at the summit of society. Moreover, even if there is no justification for identifying the great clientele of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the traditional medieval *lignages*, it is nonetheless true that family solidarities formed the thread of those clienteles which, in their struggles for power, formed the structure of political life as do the parties today.

It has been asserted in recent years by certain French and, above all, British historians that among the peasantry, on the other hand, family attachments were less solid than in the present time. And we have, in fact, observed that not only in day-to-day activities and in agricultural labour, but also on the occasion of the important family events — births, christenings, funerals, perhaps even weddings — the kinsfolk were less prominent than the neighbours, the guild associations, the notable citizens of the

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locality, etc. This evidence is not, however, decisive. It shows, above all, the abundance of ties of solidarity in society in past times, in comparison with our society, where the majority of services are bought or sold, or are provided free by the State. Amid the general collapse of the older ties of solidarity, those of family solidarity have survived best, and therefore appear in certain respects to be more fundamental than before. In many circumstances, however, they were more necessary and more effective in former times than today. This was so, for example, in the case of the orphans, who were much more numerous than in our time, or of the poor peasants who did not know what to do with their children, or of the rich man looking for a trustworthy servant, or, in more general terms, of all those who had business to do outside their village, in an unfamiliar and hostile world.