INTRODUCTION

Cutting and Connecting—'Afrinesian' Perspectives on Networks, Relationality, and Exchange

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Abstract: This introduction sketches the history of anthropological net-work analysis and examines its influence and significance with regard to contemporary conceptual and theoretical concerns in the discipline. It is argued that recent Melanesian ethnography is an effect of, and owes a debt to, certain mid-twentieth-century developments in African-ist anthropology. These debts allow for the elicitation of concepts and concerns from Melanesianist anthropology and their deployment in the analysis of African ethnography. Such deployment may in turn explore the limits of these conceptual constructs and allow for their return in dis-torted and extended forms. As demonstrated by the contributors to this special issue, the historical relationships between Melanesian ethnogra-phy and Africanist anthropology hence enable an exchange of theoretical gifts and traffic in analytics that cut the network and separate the two regions, thus allowing for a new form of anthropological comparison.

Keywords: Africa, anthropology, comparison, ethnography, exchange, Melanesia, networks, relationality

The notion of network has recently gained attention and significance, both in public parlance and the social sciences. In an era held to be marked by unprece-dented mobility, networks envisage the movements and connections of persons and things through time and space, across boundaries and barriers. Information and communication technologies use 'network' to mean their operations and effects, which are claimed to bring about new kinds of behavior and actualize novel social forms (Anderson 2009). Both media and researchers herald the political potential of 'social networks' and ascribe to these phenomena pivotal roles in the recent Arab Spring and the Occupy and Indignados movements, as well as the alter-globalization protests that preceded them (Juris 2012; Mason 2012; Razsa and Kurnik 2012). The capacity of such 'liberation technology' to

"defend human rights, improve governance, empower the poor, promote economic development, and pursue a variety of other social goods" is explored at the intersection between academic research and applied technology.[1] However, 'network' is also used to describe terrorist organizations that—along with drug cartels, counterfeiters, and Internet fraudsters—exploit aspects of 'globalization' in a quest to undermine established institutional and political forms (Gray 2003). Like 'flow' and 'circulation', 'network' seems a commonplace in discourses that delineate phenomena on a 'global' scale (Ferguson 2006; Tsing 2000, 2005).

Meanwhile, actor-network theory and assemblage theory are just two approaches that employ the term with an aim to describe social complexity without recourse to totalizing concepts that are claimed to have run their course (DeLanda 2006; Latour 2005). As an alternative, these theories trace connections between heterogeneous elements that span different scales and levels to reveal the hybrid character of social phenomena, which transcend analytical divisions and domains (Latour 1993). According to these conceptions, networks not only provide a means for describing and understanding contemporary social phenomena, but also offer an opportunity to rethink the social itself and to reconceive the logic and language of the political (Escobar 2008).

These approaches stress the need to develop new vocabularies of 'actor-networks' and 'actants', or they redeploy familiar terms, such as 'assemblages', 'associations', 'articulation', and 'translation', with new meanings in order to reveal the phenomena and processes in question. However, the emphasis on novelty hampers reflection on the precursors to these concepts and ideas, as well as their potential for refashioning more concrete and practical aspects to the anthropological project. Marilyn Strathern (1996a), moreover, points out that the concept of network entails an 'auto-limitlessness' that constitutes both its analytical force and its weakness. It incites one to trace connections in every direction without end, despite the fact that networks—like any action, analysis, or interpretation—must have a point and therefore need to come to an end at some definite place and time. In line with Strathern's (1988a, 1995, 1999, 2005) idea that the relation simultaneously connects and divides, she argues that attention should be directed toward the occasions, events, persons, or things where connections are severed and networks cut in order to actualize specific and definite forms. Cutting is the corollary of connecting: both are conceptual, as well as pragmatic, requirements for any relationship.

Our concern with cutting and connecting in this issue seeks to extend Strathern's insight in order to explore specific relational forms in contemporary African settings with the aim of employing a novel form of anthropological comparison. The articles gathered here engage notions developed in recent Melanesian ethnography to discuss the means by which, in different African contexts, connections are cut and bonds severed in order to bring certain relations and social forms into being. As I argue below, this undertaking builds on relationships between Africanist anthropology and Melanesian ethnography that amount to debts of multifarious kinds, which enable elicitations of concepts and concerns, analytics and approaches from one region for their deployment in another.

However, the ethnographies that these concepts and analytics afford go beyond these interpretive frames, allowing for their distortion and return in modified forms. The ethnographic explorations of the ways in which connections are cut thus allow for an exchange of anthropological analytics that severs the bonds between Africa and Melanesia to proportion the distance between them.

In this way, a historically informed notion of network that retrieves aspects of earlier forms of analysis enables a new form of comparative anthropology that reinvigorates specific legacies by extending them in novel ways to encompass new areas and domains. It contrives a conversation between past and present authorships to yield a 'trans-temporal' and 'disjunctive' comparison (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009; Lazar 2012) that 'bifurcates' (Strathern 2011) two of anthropology's formative regions. Simultaneously conceptual and empirical, this approach forms part of an 'ethnographic turn' (Fortun 2012) that adds to the heterogeneous and pluralist comparativism that Gingrich and Fox (2002) offer in response to the intellectual impasse and uncertainty occasioned by the crisis of representation.

Nordic and African Networks

Network analysis was spioneered in the post-war years by a group of researchers with close ties to Africanist anthropology. John Barnes, who had worked among the Ngoni of present-day Zambia and Malawi in the late 1940s, introduced the concept of network to anthropology in his study of Bremnes, a fishing and farming community on the west coast of Norway. Barnes (1954) was concerned with the operation of the class system in interpersonal relationships and the organization of collective action in a setting characterized by an emphasis on social equality. He used the notion of network to capture the relationships of kinship, friendship, and neighborhood that fell outside the territorial fields of settlement, cultivation, and administration, as well as the industrial system pertaining to the herring fisheries. In contrast to these fields, the network was marked by egality, and Barnes analyzed the manner in which this aspect shaped decision-making processes in the plethora of local formal associations. The analytical focus of Barnes's idea of network was thus on the character of social relationships in order to account for the behavior of those entangled in them. From this viewpoint, action became a function, or an effect, of social relations, which shifted the center of attention to the relations between relations and away from the characteristics of the persons partaking in those relations (Mitchell 1969a: 4).

The network described a relational order that was not accessible to structural concepts pertaining to the institutions of settlement and industry. In addition, the idea served to identify a kind of relationality that was different from that which anthropologists studied in other parts of the world. While it was deemed possible for anthropological analyses of 'simple societies' to aim for a comprehensive understanding of those societies as a whole, the diversity of interactional domains in 'complex societies' meant that one could feasibly study

only one sector of these societies. Moreover, "[t]his limited area of detailed knowledge has then to be related, as best we can, to experience and information derived from other parts of society" (Barnes 1954: 39). The notion of network not only described a distinct relational order but moreover was a way of connecting the different domains of complex societies. Network analysis thus achieved an effect analogous, yet complementary, to that of conventional analytical frameworks. It made the network an addition to, rather than a replacement for, established modes of analysis (Mitchell 1974: 282).

Although early studies emphasized that the notion of network was best suited for complex societies (Bott 1957), Barnes (1954: 57) suggested that Bremnes could serve as a case study for the comparative analysis of the emergent administrative forms and nascent industrialization that pertained to processes of decolonization. A few years later, his concept was indeed deployed to study urban settings in central Africa (Mitchell 1969b) on the premise that the network was a device that could be used to explore social relationships in 'modern' settings. These studies built on research concerning urbanization and labor migration in South Africa (Mayer 1961; Pauw 1963) to investigate phenomena such as industrial relations, inter-ethnic politics, and urban social organization. Again, the strong point of network analysis proved to be the study of social forms that fell outside the purview of established approaches that relied upon notions such as 'structure' and 'system'.

The 'Point-Source'

Many of these studies were conducted by former colleagues of John Barnes from the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute of Central African Studies (RLI) and the Victoria University of Manchester, who were particularly well-placed to explore the concept of network and the mode of analysis it enabled. For them, the notion of network owed its attraction to two principal sources: "The first derives from a growing dissatisfaction with structural-functional analyses and the search, consequently, for alternative ways of interpreting social action. The second is in the development of non-quantitative mathematical ways of rigorously stating the implications entailed in a set of relationships among a number of persons" (Mitchell 1969a: 1). Before turning to anthropology, Barnes was trained in mathematics and was therefore able to appreciate the analytical potential of graph theory, which underpinned his vision of the network as "a set of points some of which are joined by lines" (1954: 43). Graph theory was claimed to hold great promise for the formal analysis and representation of social relationships, whose properties, it was argued, could be measured and modeled by various means (Mitchell 1969a: 34; 1974: 296).

Furthermore, these researchers were trained or influenced by Max Gluckman, whose directorship of the RLI and subsequent professorship at Manchester University fostered connections and cross-fertilization between these two institutions (Schumaker 2004: 121). In recognition of this, Mitchell's book *Social Networks in Urban Situations* (1969b) was dedicated to Gluckman, who was

designated the "point-source of our network" (ibid.: ii). As a former student of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Isaac Schapera, and a close friend and one-time colleague of E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes, Gluckman was hardly peripheral to the discipline's establishment. However, his vision for anthropology deviated in significant ways from the orthodoxy of British structural-functionalism. As Bruce Kapferer (2005a: 86) argues, Gluckman and his collaborators focused on issues that were outside the scope of the dominant paradigm to challenge its core concepts and theories. He developed an analysis that focused on the social, economic, and political conditions for the production of specific 'situations' that foregrounded process and temporality to enable a study of social complexity and change. This approach concerned specific persons and actual events in real time, rather than abstract reconstructions in the ethnographic present (Macmillan 1995: 47; Werbner 1984: 157), making history a closer ally than synchronic and static sociology.

Gluckman ([1940] 1958) explored situational analysis prior to his tenure at the RLI, and even then his approach matched the institute's mandate to contribute "to the scientific efforts now being made in various quarters to examine the effects upon native African society of the impact of European civilization" (Wilson 1940: 43). The RLI aimed to do this "by the formation in Africa itself of a center where the problem of establishing permanent and satisfactory relations between natives and non-natives—a problem of urgent importance where, as in Northern Rhodesia, mineral resources are being developed in the home of a primitive community—may form the subject of special study" (ibid.). Another institution that shared this concern was the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IIALC), which was founded in 1926 with Frederick D. Lugard as its first chairman. According to Lugard (1928: 2), the aim of the IIALC (later, the International African Institute, or IAI) was to bring about "a closer association of scientific knowledge and research with practical affairs." Its initial plan of research stated that the institute should provide "the exact knowledge that will assist in determining the right relations between the institutions of African society and alien systems of government, education, and religion" (IIALC 1932: 3). Questions concerning the effects of, and relationships between, colonial rule and African subjects were attenuated by indirect rule, whose conception and inception in large part stemmed from Lugard's tenure as governor of northern Nigeria and was subsequently formalized and extended throughout British colonial Africa (Perham 1965). The challenges posed by indirect rule became particularly acute in Northern Rhodesia, where the rapid development of the Copperbelt exacerbated the colonial contradiction between a desire to develop an export-led economy and a wish to limit social change and maintain institutions of political control (Brown 1979: 526).

Despite the similarities in the remits of these two institutes, however, Gluckman's conception diverged significantly from the 'practical anthropology' and 'the study of the changing native' that Malinowski (1929, 1930) devised on behalf of the IIALC. In particular, Gluckman (1947) objected to Malinowski's (1945) approach to colonial Africa as a situation of 'culture contact', where institutions that fulfill specific needs impact and impinge on one another. Gluckman

(1947: 112) argued that the presumption of 'culture' and 'institution' as the units of study committed Malinowski to the description of discrete realities, which blinded him to the similarities that cross-cut the differences. Moreover, it extroverted conflict and confined it to relations between cultures, whose internal relations in turn became marked by collaboration and integration. In such a light, 'contact' could only be accorded a destructive influence, which threatened 'African society' with disintegration (IIALC 1932: 32).

To overcome the analytical poverty of this perspective, Gluckman advocated the study of relations of collaborations and conflict within a single social field that included colonial agents and subjects in the same frame. This approach aimed to transform the putative differences and assumed similarities created by the notion of culture into processes and elements that would facilitate comparative analyses. It derived its impetus and urgency from the social problems connected to labor migration, which fostered the singular "Central African Society of heterogeneous culture-groups of Europeans and Africans" that Gluckman (1945: 9) aimed to address through the RLI's approach and research. Situational analysis therefore abandoned 'the tribe' as a unit of analysis in order to explore concepts of a finer grain than 'culture' and 'society' (Kapferer 2005b: 279; Schumaker 2004: 106). Network analysis accorded with these principles and therefore was one of the conceptual and methodological innovations—along with the extended case method (van Velsen 1967) and 'social drama' (Turner 1957)—that flourished around Gluckman's situational analysis, in response to conditions considered unsuited for concepts and analyses that simultaneously relied upon and created bounded and autonomous entities (Gluckman 1961).[2]

Melanesian Extensions

The highlands of Papua New Guinea became available for anthropological research shortly before the exploration of network analysis. At the time, Anglo-Saxon anthropological analysis was dominated by lineage or descent theory that was largely developed on the basis of studies conducted in Africa. In this respect, the publication of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's *African Political Systems* (1940), under the auspices of the IAI, was especially significant due to the fact that its inauguration of political anthropology as a sub-discipline established kinship as the salient analytical context for the politics of stateless societies.

In the New Guinea Highlands, researchers encountered populations whose characteristics suggested useful comparison with the segmentary societies that had been described in Africa. The comparison was abetted by the fact that several of the early highland ethnographers were trained by Africanist anthropologists, whose commitment to lineage theory influenced the analysis of New Guinea social life (Barnes 2008: 279; Hays 1992: 33).[3] However, Barnes (1962: 5), who had relocated to Australia in the late 1950s, where he supervised several students working in the area, pointed out that mounting ethnographic evidence "weakened what we might call the African mirage in New Guinea."

Despite the fact that men in the highland communities apparently traced agnatic descent and that settlement patterns tended to be patrivirilocal, they did not constitute unilineal descent groups of the kind epitomized by the Nuer, Tallensi, and Tiv. Rather, the New Guinea Highlands were marked by multiple affiliations and allegiances, which enabled a proliferation of relationships on the level of the individual, rather than that of the group. Barnes argued that the situation was due to a greater range of choice and the widespread significance of ceremonial exchange, which contrasted New Guinea "network cohesion" and "unbounded affiliation" to the "group solidarity" and "bounded affiliation" of African sociality (ibid.: 8).

His institutional background and intellectual trajectory attuned Barnes to the problems posed by the structural-functionalist models derived from Africa and the alternative represented by the notion of network. The approaches developed at the RLI and the Manchester School struggled to overcome ontological commitments that opposed individual and society, part and whole, agency and structure (Evens 2005), where an emphasis on one element of the equation by necessity came at the expense of the other. However, the greatest significance and lasting impact of Barnes's text for Melanesianist anthropology does not lie in its promotion of individual choice and strategic manipulation at the expense of group structures. Its salient contribution rather consists in its self-consciousness regarding the heuristic nature of anthropological concepts and analytics.

Barnes (1962: 5) conceded that the African models of segmentary societies had enabled ethnographers to produce provisional accounts of the large, apparently patrilineal highland populations that lacked institutionalized forms of leadership. However, with time, the Africanist analytics threatened to overdetermine the highland ethnography and obscure its distinctiveness. Divergence from the models became a problem that required explanation, rather than a potential resource for anthropological reflection and theory. The solution to this quandary was to emphasize how the segmentary models had been heuristic devices for the analysis and representation of the experiences made by ethnographers. The pertinent issue was therefore not whether the people of central New Guinea had unilineal descent groups; rather, the key thing was how notions such as 'lineage', 'segmentation', and indeed 'group' shed light on their behavior.

The question raised by Barnes concerning the analytical effects of concepts for ethnographic representation and anthropological reflection gained great significance for a particular trend in regional anthropology that eventually was dubbed the New Melanesian Ethnography (Josephides 1991). Starting in the 1970s, scholars working in the New Guinea Highlands emphasized how anthropology consists of "a game of heuristic pretending" (Wagner 1974: 97) whereby concepts are adopted from one social context and applied to another in order to describe behavior in recognizable terms. Lineage theory, for instance, established analogies that enabled accounts of vernacular practice as if the Nuer and Tallensi have 'politics' and 'law', whose application as an analytical tool yielded groups of a specific kind.

However, Wagner (1974: 97) pointed out that the game of heuristic pretense is not played in isolation, but always takes place in relation to specific ethnographic material. Anthropological analytics therefore can—and must—be held to account by the material to which it is applied. This resulted in the realization that ethnography can be used to explore the assumptions that underpin anthropological concepts, including analytical staples such as 'culture', 'nature', 'gender', and 'society' (Wagner [1975] 1981; Strathern 1980, 1981, 1996b).[4] Ethnography can thus be used to chart the limits of analytical constructs in order to explore what they hide as well as what they reveal. It was furthermore maintained that this concern with the mutuality between revelation and concealment is shared with New Guinea Highlanders, who employ and enact similar processes in myth, ceremonial exchange activities, and initiation rituals (Strathern 1988a; Wagner 1978; Weiner 1988). These claims and alignments confound the distinction between theory and argument in a manner that recognizes simultaneously how analytics pre-forms ethnography and the way in which ethnographic phenomena may constitute conceptual resources for anthropological reflection.

In this perspective, analysis consists of a double move, whose effect results from the parallel deployment and retention of specific concepts. As Reed (2003: 11) points out, in *The Gender of the Gift* Strathern (1988a) deliberately hides certain organizing conceptual oppositions in order to make visible an alternative analytic. This move does not amount to a simple substitution but rather a mode of concealment that assumes the form of an eclipse, where an interposition enables the contours of an obscured object to be traced. Strathern's notion of 'the relation' thus occludes the opposition between society and individual to render visible the otherwise hidden or tacit operations of anthropological knowledge practices. Her use of certain analytical 'fictions' thereby reworks Melanesian ethnography to highlight the operations of anthropology with the effect of dissolving their distinction. Several entities are thus simultaneously brought into view, albeit with different modalities.

Aspects of these moves were anticipated by the early network analysts, even though the concepts they deployed and retained differed from those of Strathern. Barnes, for instance, stressed the analytical, rather than metaphorical, character of the network notion and endeavored to characterize and define its heuristic utility (Mitchell 1969a: 2). These early analysts moreover recognized that 'structure' and 'network', as distinct relational orders, involved different modes of abstraction made on the basis of divergent assumptions from the same observed behavior (Mitchell 1969a: 10; 1974: 284). Networks were hence the effects of a particular concept and the outcome of the analysis, rather than entities in the world. The point was not that people *have* networks; rather, the notion allows for events to be described *as if* social life is constituted in a particular way.

Indeed, G. Kingsley Garbett (1970: 216) revealed that Gluckman's situational analysis shared the same analytical perspective: "When a situation is treated as a unit of analysis, the events contained within its temporal and spatial boundaries are arbitrarily and heuristically circumscribed … in terms of some theoretical

perspective." It is moreover held in common with more recent actor-network theory: "Thus, the network does not designate a thing out there that would have roughly the shape of interconnected points, much like a telephone, a freeway, or a sewage 'network'. It is nothing more than *an indicator of the quality of a text* about the topics at hand" (Latour 2005: 129; original emphasis). In this conception, 'network' forms part of a mode of apprehension and description that renders the world in a specific form which differs from that yielded by other analytical concepts.

However, network analysis did not simply consist in the application of an analytical concept; it also involved the subtraction of other notions. Thus, Barnes (1954: 43) argued: "For our present purposes … I want to consider, roughly speaking, that part of the total network that is left behind when we remove the groupings and chains of interaction which belong strictly to the territorial and industrial systems. In Bremnes society, what is left is largely, though not exclusively, a network of ties of kinship, friendship, and neighbour-hood." In Barnes's account, the network owed its appearance as much to the removal of the effects of certain analytical concepts as to his use of an alternative notion. In a similar way, Latour (2005: 221) argues that actor-network theory "is a negative, empty, relativistic grid that allows us *not* to synthesize the ingredients of the social in the actor's place." By pre-empting a specific sense of 'the social', Latour creates the space for an alternative to deploy itself, which brings forth a heterogeneity of actors that surpasses the homogeneous networks envisaged by Barnes and his colleagues, whose nodes tended to consist solely of individuals.[5] Latour's conception furthermore makes room for a notion of agency as a property of networks of relations, which resolves the equivocation between the structural and transactional perspectives on networks (Mitchell 1974: 284ff.) that mirrored a deeper ambivalence among the members of the Manchester School (Englund 2002: 29) and arguably contributed to the demise of network analysis. Despite their differences, however, all these authors acknowledge and explore how analysis creates its effect by bringing one concept to bear at the same time that other concepts are withdrawn. Melanesianist anthropology may have been dominated by 'tribal concerns' (Knauft 1999: 203; see also Reed, below), but its theoretical and analytical perspectives owe something to the notion of network, which was instrumental in subverting 'the tribe' in Africanist anthropology. En route to Melanesia, however, the social and political urgency that drove and characterized situational analysis and its offshoots became displaced onto the plane of anthropological representations and theorization.[6]

Cutting Connections to Make Relations and Networks

Strathern's account of Melanesian exchange activities involves a further debt to the notion of network, which moreover constitutes a resource for its conceptual development. In the classic conception, the obligations of exchange entail that the presentation of a gift is an instigation of a relationship between two persons

by means of a material object (Mauss [1925] 1990). According to Strathern (1988a), however, what appears as the donor's voluntary bestowal is in fact the recipient's elicitation on the basis of a debt relationship. The gift is not a means for establishing a relationship, but an objectification of the relationship that already exists between the parties involved. The gift does not connect the giver and the receiver; instead, it differentiates them as giver and receiver by making visible the aspect under which one is able to elicit something from the other. Thus, "[t]he constitution or capability of one person becomes externalized by he or she drawing out of another a counter condition" (Strathern 1988a: 173). In this way, the exchange separates the persons involved by making visible the conditions that connect and constitute them in the form of an object. Persons and things are thus the reified effects of social relationships that are manipulated in different kinds of exchange with the aim of extending, furthering, or fostering relations. Social relations are the object of concern and engagement in a world where relations can only be turned into, or made to stand for, other relations.

Strathern's conception of exchange radicalizes the network notion that a social phenomenon is a function—and thus effect—of a particular relationship, along with its corollary that salience pertains to the relations between relations.[7] However, her endeavor to grant primacy and priority to the relation displaces the individual and his or her impetus to connect, which allows exchange to emerge as simultaneously a means of separation and connection. In turn, this enables an expansion of the concept of the relation to include processes by which connections are severed, in order to make relations of a specific kind. Building on Wagner's (1977) heuristic analysis of relationality as a flow of similarity that must be interrupted in order to differentiate and make relationships of specific kinds, Weiner (1993: 292) points out that "[i]n a world such as that of the Foi or the Melpa that is relationally based, the task confronting humans is not to sustain human relationship. The very bodily compulsions of life—appetite, sexuality, anger, conflict—do that themselves. What people must do is place a limit on relationship, on this 'form-enhancing force'; they must restrict its extension." Cutting is a corollary of connection and a condition for the existence of relations.

Indeed, the notion of network confronted its early analysts with the same conundrum. Barnes (1954: 43–44) argued that "[a] network of this kind has no external boundary, nor has it any clear-cut internal divisions," but the notion threatened consequently to engulf the entirety of social life. Mitchell (1969a: 40) therefore pointed out that "[c]ertain difficulties arise … in identifying the limits or extent of a personal network." He realized, though, that "[c]learly, some limit must be put on the number of links to be taken as definitive for any specific network; otherwise it would be co-extensive with the total network" (ibid.). The problem arose because the analytical effort was devoted solely to connections and their character, without a view for how their limits are drawn: "The majority, so far, have concentrated on the nature of the links among people in the network as being the most significant feature" (ibid.: 10). Strathern (1996a) points out that actor-network theory faces a similar

problem: if unchecked, its notions of network and hybridity facilitate narratives without end and the pursuit of networks within networks that are as extensive and entangled as one may wish. Like the term itself, actor-network theory acquires a hyphenated character, as its concern for chains of association and the effort required to sustain processes of translation and maintain assemblages generate descriptions of phenomena as series of connected nouns (Law 2012). A view that sees only connections, without a concern for distinctions, expands the network without limitation, at the same time that it restricts the concept of the relation.

The problem of delimitation in early network analysis was compounded by its failure to realize that the analysis imposes its own limits on the network. Or, rather, unease at the thought that the analytical severance does not accord with the limits of the vernacular network occasioned theoretical and conceptual developments to facilitate congruence between the two. Mitchell (1974: 279) pointed out that such elaborations came at the expense of empirical studies and precipitated a proliferation of concepts and terms, which in turn undermined the comparative ambition (Barnes 1969: 53). Furthermore, this development induced a combination of conceptual deliberation, on the one hand, and an empirical emphasis on small-scale personal networks, on the other, which made the mode of analysis simultaneously highly abstract and intensely specific. Network analysis thus yielded the middle ground that is occupied by the bulk of anthropological research (Knauft 2006). Latour's (2005: 221) call for increased theoretical abstraction, in combination with the myopic tracing of connectors and mediators, enables and inhabits a similar analytical space. It is a curious consequence of a concern with the correspondence between resultant and factual networks, which neglects the analytical nature of the concept, whose effect and value reside in its ability to reveal something and to contribute to a given material. As Riles (2001) argues, a correspondence between analytical and vernacular notions of network poses particular problems that require alternative analytical moves besides the application of a concept to a material for an effect.

In contrast, Strathern's idea that the relation simultaneously combines and divides accentuates the requirement to cut the network in order to render it into a particular form. In an apparent paradox, a focus on how connections are cut enables an expansion of the analytical concept of network. Strathern's attention to processes of separation, substitution, detachment, and decomposition thus is in marked contrast to the actor-network theory's logic of addition, which accords a different dynamic and directionality to both social life and theory.[8] As actor-network theory hones in on how elements are combined to produce something new, its conceptualization and theorization take the form of an addition or expansion in which concepts dilate to include ever more phenomena. In contrast, Strathern's concern for separation allows for an alternative form of abstraction—one where concepts simultaneously cut and are cut to reveal specific aspects of the world (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009), thus allowing for a view of how the concept of network itself cuts and combines phenomena in particular ways to present the world in a certain way.

Claiming Debts and Cutting Networks

The articles presented here result from a two-day workshop held at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, that was entitled "Explorations of 'Afrinesia': Experimental Approaches to Legal and Political Anthropology in Africa." Its initial impetus was the increased interest in Africanist anthropology with regard to notions such as globalization, democratization, and post-colonialism, which locate Africa within larger transnational dynamics that dissolve the boundaries of the anthropological field site and extend the reach of social processes. These developments raise questions regarding the salience of social phenomena, the manner in which they relate to each other, and the relevant contexts for their study, which allow for inquiries into the form and nature of received analytical domains. In this respect, the advances of the New Melanesian Ethnography were considered relevant, so the workshop aimed to explore new approaches to political and legal anthropology in Africa in terms of concepts and ideas developed about Melanesia. The focus was restricted to these domains partly due to their historical significance for Africanist anthropology, but mainly because they appeared to be the ones most affected by the new developments and seemed most vulnerable to the presuppositions and conceptions called into question by Melanesianist anthropology.

However, during our proceedings in Uppsala, we realized that this endeavor had several problematic implications. A straightforward application of Melanesianist models on Africanist ethnography would simply invert the earlier relationship between these regions to little effect beyond reversing the arrow of influence. It would moreover frame Africanist ethnography as raw material to be refined by means of anthropological resources and processes supplied from elsewhere, and thus create an intellectual analogy to the colonial economies with whose effects the RLI and the IIALC were set up to engage. Indeed, it would instantiate the logic of indirect rule, as notions and practices from one place would be generalized for their application elsewhere. Most gravely, however, it risked reiterating the moves made by the early students of the New Guinea Highlands by treating ethnographic divergences from these models as phenomena that require explanation, rather than exploration. Raised explicitly in Thomas Yarrow's workshop contribution, and sharpened through persistent and systematic inquiry by Yarrow and our discussant Adam Reed, the key question that emerged during the workshop was how to treat ethnographic material that exceeds the Melanesianist perspectives and approaches.

As it turns out, the history and development of the notion of network offer a solution to this question and provide a basis for a novel form of comparison between Africa and Melanesia. The personal, intellectual, and institutional connections between early network analysis and Melanesianist anthropology described above reveal how concepts and approaches that were pioneered in Nordic and African contexts were imported and improved upon in Melanesia. They show that Melanesianist anthropology is indebted to perspectives that were developed elsewhere and may be regarded as the effect of relations from a distance. These regions and perspectives are therefore already related, so the

task in confronting them is not to sustain relations, but rather to place limits on them. One way to do this is to enact an analogy of Melanesian gift exchange and activate these debt relations to elicit concepts, concerns, procedures, and forms from Melanesianist anthropology in order to utilize them in African contexts, where they may be modified before they are sent back. The heuristic analogy of gift exchange thus affords a traffic in analytics that differentiates the two regions by making visible the aspect through which they relate to each other. 'Africa' and 'Melanesia' are then not distinct entities between which connections must be fostered, but the effects of endeavors to cut the bonds between them.

On this basis, our solution to the question raised by our workshop is to appropriate Strathern's idea of cutting the network and redirect our efforts to explore how relationships are gathered, severed, docked, blocked, or turned around at strategic points in concrete cases concerning contemporary African ethnography. In the follow-up to the workshop, the authors were asked to give particular consideration to the manner in which the processes of cutting unfold, and how they serve to bring certain relations into view and give them distinct form. As the articles testify, this focus enables engagement with a wide range of ethnographic phenomena and theoretical concerns and allows for a reconsideration of the topic of relationality.

The concern with how networks are cut to enable and reveal different relational forms motivates Isak Niehaus's comparison of HIV/AIDS in South Africa and kuru in Melanesia. Certain significant similarities between these epidemics afford a comparative view, but Niehaus is not concerned with devising a universal framework. Instead, he deploys 'culpability' as a mediating term to demonstrate how different discourses bring "certain modes of relationality into view [while], at the same time, occluding others." The history of kuru shows how biomedical researchers, local people, and anthropologists engaged in exchange relationships, where bodies and their fluids were donated in anticipation of a cure. However, the network it created connected kuru to cannibalism, framing the Fore as a disreputable 'other', who in turn cut their engagement with the researchers to resume sorcery discourses that confined the matter to particular social relations. Both the medical and vernacular discourses involved the extraction of bodily substances, but their divergent configurations of culpability cut and connected people in different ways to render dissimilar relational forms. In an analogous way, South African health workers linked HIV/AIDS to sexual promiscuity, which stigmatized and isolated sufferers, while witchcraft accusations were "bids to affect relational forms" that involved alternative networks. As a heuristic, 'culpability' thus discloses how divergent and contested discourses of various interlocutors form part of multiple networks that are cut in different ways to bring about alternative relational forms.

Two of the contributions explore processes and phenomena that call into question the appositeness of cutting as a relational operation altogether. Niklas Hultin investigates the sharing and non-sharing of legal information in urban Gambia, where the law is marked by "indeterminacy … vagueness, ambiguity, and remoteness." Hultin terms this 'opacity', which does not mean non-transparency but instead designates an incompleteness or partiality that

enables specific social forms. Where the law is known about, but not known, the circulation of legal information may be considered a form of exchange that instantiates a mode of sociality, as a reiteration of the transactors' concerns. Conversely, non-sharing does not entail the absence of a connection; rather, it involves a relation of disinterest and condemnation that is attempted to be remedied through an amendment of law or supplement of legal information. Unlike elsewhere in Africa, the opacity of the law therefore results not in dis-engagement but in an aspiration for perfect legality. It does not simply cut and combine people in specific ways, but affords a dynamic and an impetus to social interaction that is constitutive of particular political communities. Opacity is therefore neither a hindrance for relations nor a provision that people establish in order to create relations. It is a condition and premise for a relation, as it defines what may count as information and hence what amounts to a relation through its sharing or non-sharing.

Tone Sommerfelt, meanwhile, describes marriage exchanges in rural Gambia, where the majority of unions take place between close relatives. Her account of the manner in which bridal trousseaus are acquired and assembled shows how money as a medium of exchange neither diminishes nor homogenizes the plethora of prestations, but enables their multiplication and the mobilization of wider networks of people. In turn, the redistribution of trousseau items materializes and makes visible a specific relationship between the bride and the other women in the marital homestead to whom she is already related in several different yet overlapping ways. In the redistribution, these multifarious connections are eclipsed in favor of the emergent relationship between co-wives. In line with accounts from Melanesia, the redistribution is thus not an effort to connect unrelated persons, nor is it a straightforward matter of separating people by placing limits on their connections. Rather, it accentuates certain connections and aspects, while allowing others to drift from view. This involves a mode of disclosure that departs from Melanesian ceremonial exchanges, where agents detach and transact gendered components in order to make visible and manipulate social relationships. Instead, in the Gambian context, certain relationships are allowed to stand forth against a background of receding relations that are erased from view. The distribution of the trousseau thus 'fades' certain connections to shape networks of relations as degrees of similarity and difference. In this way, the progressive receding of connections establishes gradual distinctions of proximity rather than categorical divisions between bounded units, thus rendering 'fading' a more apt term than 'cutting'.

Other contributors explore forms of connectivity that distort the notion of relationality developed in the Melanesian accounts. In her article, Daivi Rodima-Taylor considers the kinds of freedoms and constraints enabled and entailed by voluntary associations and collectivities among the Kuria of Tanzania that blur the distinctions of political and legal theory. She combines Gluckman's notion of relational rights with Munn's and Strathern's work on indigenous relational forms to explore how women's credit associations and mutual help groups extend particular social forms, where persons exert and expand their influence by engaging and multiplying exchange partners and debt relations.

Like Sommerfelt, Rodima-Taylor thus investigates how money and other material means augment and distend claims and obligations, making it necessary to contain and limit them. It furthermore allows her to show how freedom, independence, and sovereignty are the effects of engagements and entanglements in various associational forms, whose connections are cut to yield the figure of the autonomous business woman. Kuria ethnography is in this way suitable for exploration by means of Melanesian analytics, but Rodima-Taylor's account of the person in terms of the notion of *omooyo* challenges the 'partible person' concept described by Strathern. Whereas the latter is composed of gendered elements that are elicited and manifested in specific events, *omooyo* is a passageway or "vessel of flow and movement" that allows certain combinations and disconnections to emerge and take place. *Omooyo* renders the person neither partible nor permeable (Busby 1997) but rather a momentary gathering of heterogeneous elements that are funneled into a specific form. In turn, this has consequences for Kuria relational forms, whose public and political potential differ from the dynamics described in Melanesian accounts.

Like Rodima-Taylor, Richard Vokes queries Strathern's notion of the partible person, which is shown to have heuristic value for ethnographic evidence from southwestern Uganda concerning the constitutive character of the flows of bodily substances. Furthermore, the curtailments of these flows may be considered socially productive ways of cutting the network that controls and directs the currents of substances in generative ways. Melanesian analytics thus allows for and brings forth phenomena that Vokes considers "the primary dynamics of everyday social life," but that Africanist anthropologists have tended to consider in negative terms as 'blockages'. At the same time, however, the Ugandan emphasis on flows points out the limits of the unit-based forms that recur in accounts of Melanesian transactions and allows for an 'intensive quantification', where the 'swelling' of the person indexes the character and gradual shifts in the currents of substances. As with the Kuria, the person assumes the character of a vessel or conduit that enables certain connections and separations, whose effects are registered in its form and appearance. This perspective moreover allows Vokes to reconsider the social significance of cattle, whose greater quantities of the same crucial bodily substances afford them a role in amplifying the dynamics of swelling and quantification. In this way, Vokes is able to further extend and distort Melanesian analytics by demonstrating the implication of animals in these exchanges and the significance of non-human agents for human personhood.

Livestock also feature prominently in Knut Christian Myhre's exploration of how animals are butchered and their meat shared among the Chagga-speaking people of Tanzania. When the analytic of 'sacrifice' is deliberately hidden, butchering can be considered an event and process in which specific relationships are cut from the animal's body and revealed in the form of the different shares of meat. Seen in this light, butchering is a mode of differentiation where "people are distinguished and constituted as persons of specific kinds by virtue of the social relationships that are intrinsic to their personhood." Each share of meat enfolds a relationship between multifarious entities, which butchering

unfolds as a network. Myhre shows how dynamics similar to those in Melanesian reports may be revealed in this particular African context, but only after the vernacular language use that surrounds and pertains to butchering is taken into consideration. The Chagga ethnography thematizes the significance of language for processes of elicitation and decomposition, which is 'muted' in Strathern's account. On this basis, Myhre shows how the Chagga cut and combine language and life in a way that can serve to place the ethnographic description and anthropological analysis on the same scale and level as vernacular statements. The case of how animals are butchered in Kilimanjaro thus cuts the expanse of social life to conjoin and divide vernacular and analytical concepts in a different way. The emphasis on language expands the modality of disclosure described from Melanesia to recombine and recast the relation between theory and argument.

Harri Englund and Thomas Yarrow explore the relationship between ethnography and theory to problematize the connection between generality and particularity in anthropological thinking. Strathern's insights into the dynamics between theory and place require a heightened reflexivity and an increased concern for the origins of theoretical propositions, which preclude a simplistic application of ideas between contexts. The same point applies to Strathern's own theorizations, whose limits are thus traced by her own approach. Inspired by this, Englund and Yarrow explore how the multiple origins and constitution of 'relational rights' entail that this notion cannot be conveniently localized but must be recognized as the conceptual outcome of comparison. Meanwhile, the divergent trajectories and recent inversion of the notion of network support their broader point that the deliberate confusion of theory and evidence implies that analytical concepts are not a means for connecting and comparing distinct places. Rather, both concepts and places are effects of comparison that enable reflexive engagement with epistemological assumptions to delimit and reorder anthropological concepts by way of ethnographic artifacts. In an analogue to Myhre's move regarding the relationship between language and life, Englund and Yarrow's exploration of Strathern's thinking as a self-limiting device cuts and combines the connection between ethnography and anthropology to recast the relationship between theory and place. In this approach, place becomes a heuristic and arbitrary entity, whose analytical construction and usefulness should not be mistaken as a geographical counter to, or as an origin of, theory.

'Afrinesian': The Comparison of Concepts and Relationships

Unlike the early researchers of the New Guinea Highlands, we do not look on ethnographic surfeits as curiosities and artifacts that need to be explained; rather, we treat them as potentialities for modifying, extending, or distorting the notions and approaches developed elsewhere. The articles gathered in this special issue trace the limits of Melanesian-based relationalist perspectives and highlight the contributions that material and perspectives from African contexts make to anthropological theorizations. In this way, our considerations of how networks are cut in different ethnographic situations and contexts 'cuts' Melanesianist

perspectives in relation to the various African localities we explore. The focus on the limitations of Melanesianist perspectives for Africanist ethnography reveals how, where, and the extent to which the anthropological relationship between Africa and Melanesia may be severed. The regard for how connections are cut in specific ethnographic contexts thus cuts the anthropological perspectives, whose connections have brought them into existence. Like the Melanesian gift, the elicited concepts and concerns objectify the conditions under which Africa and Melanesia already connect, and, as theoretical gifts that we extract and receive, they are employed and modified before they are returned.

The tangled origins and effects of the notion of network make its cutting a superb basis for a comparative project between Africa and Melanesia, under the auspices of a Nordic research institute, whose results appear in a journal intended to extend the ideas of the Manchester School (Kapferer 2006: 5). Furthermore, it enables engagement with aspects of Melanesianist anthropology that differ from other attempts at deploying its concepts for comparative purposes. Where we focus on cutting the network, along with the relational forms and modes that this entails and effects, other researchers concentrate on notions and practices concerning personhood, embodiment, and gender (Busby 1997; Gregor and Tuzin 2001; Keen 2006; Lambek and Strathern 1998; McCallum 2001; Mosko 2010; Piot 1999; Vilaça 2011). Our concern with networks moreover draws on different elements of the RLI and Manchester legacy compared to other recent attempts to explore its potential and significance for contemporary anthropological theory. Where they concentrate on the relevance of situational analysis and the extended case method for practice theory and other post-structuralist social philosophies (Evens and Handelman 2005; Kapferer 2010), our agenda concerns the contribution of an expanded notion of the network for relationalist perspectives. Hence, our efforts to trace, cut, and theorize the network of 'network' make a distinct contribution to other attempts at engaging related concepts and discourses.

Recognizing and reiterating the recursive relationship between Africa and Melanesia moreover averts the localization of concepts that commonly accompanies their movement from one place to another (Strathern 1988b, 1990). Or, rather, it effectuates a different form of localization, one that does not depend upon the negative strategy of inversion. The analytical debt relationship entails that the elicited conceptual gifts are not exogenous imports, whose negation brings forth indigenous resources that in turn may be exported. Instead, the mutual implication of Africa and Melanesia destabilizes the distinction between the external and the internal, bringing into view the ways in which they contain or permeate each other. As Englund and Yarrow demonstrate, this enables a co-theorization of Africa and Melanesia that ruptures the association between theory and place, which equates particular concepts with specific parts of the world.

A consequence of this is that the relationalist perspectives are 'demoted' and no longer appear as high theory, which is to be employed on African ethnography. Indeed, the relationship skirts the analytical move whereby concepts are applied or added to a material held to be of a different epistemological status and

character in order to evade the analytical colonization of one region by another.[9] Instead, our move recognizes the endeavor on the part of Strathern, Wagner, and their collaborators to borrow analytics from ethnography. These analytics do not derive from Melanesia in a simple manner but owe something to Africanist and Nordic ethnography, as well as the anthropological canon. Melanesian, African, Nordic, and theoretical constructs are on a par with each other and of the same character to facilitate their comparison. However, this mode of comparison does not presume the existence of discrete contexts or entities among which the ethnographer connects and translates, in order to document their similarities and differences. Rather, it assumes an analytical similarity, which allows for explorations of the differences that bound and delimit it. The comparative exercise elicits specificity, rather than subsuming difference under a general term. Keeping in mind the contingent and heuristic character of the enabling similarity unsettles the distinction between fieldwork and writing to relativize the basis for comparison and reveal the relational character of knowledge production (Bruun Jensen 2011; Strathern 1999). It ensures that the mode of comparison remains what Vokes, citing Herzfeld (2001: 261), describes as "reflexively reflexive." The analogy of gift exchange thus enables a heuristic comparison of heuristics that levels theory and argument, anthropology and ethnography, comparison and fieldwork. It achieves a flat conception that locates anthropology, Africa, and Melanesia at the same latitude to trace a topography of multiplicities that differs from that of other modes of comparison (Strathern 1988b).

It is in this respect that the notion of 'Afrinesian' is of significance. A deliberate riff on the idea of 'Melazonia', developed in a comparative project of Melanesia and Amazonia (Gregor and Tuzin 2001), we originally envisaged an exploration of 'Afrinesia', which then shifted to a concern for 'Afrinesian'. Instead of an imaginary place, 'Afrinesian' is a supposed language whereby heterogeneous regions, notions, and phenomena can engage in dialogue. In an attempt to make explicit the indebtedness described above, this language consists equally of analytical concepts and vernacular notions derived from both Africa and Melanesia. 'Afrinesian' realizes Strathern's (1988b: 95; 1990: 212) idea of an analytical vocabulary that acts as an explicit voice and is capable of mediating an encounter between alien interlocutors. It facilitates a comparison of concepts and relationships, rather than regions or places, and is therefore simultaneously conceptual and empirical. At the same time, efforts to trace the limitations of these concepts and relationships accentuate their lack of identity and congruence, thus exposing the basis for this comparison and its inadequacy for representing one in terms of another. 'Afrinesian' is therefore an artificial language that aims for comparison while keeping the non-comparability of phenomena in mind. Through the vernacular and analytical concepts it engages, 'Afrinesian' furnishes its own subversion to achieve a 'controlled equivocation' (Viveiros de Castro 2004) that allows the differences between Africa and Melanesia to emerge.[10]

The origins and extensions of the notion of network thus involve a multitude of debts and connections, which enable a novel mode of comparison that retrieves and expands analytics from the anthropological past and conjoins

these with contemporary concepts and concerns to chart a possible disciplinary future. At a time when the notion of network is gaining currency, it is important to recognize the long history, complex afterlife, and perambulatory capacities of this analytical construct. The attempt to trace relations that separate contributes to an understanding of the longtime and ongoing relationship between Africa and Melanesia, which has been cut in different ways at various moments in time. 'Afrinesian' thus speaks of an exchange relationship that not only allows two regions that have been formative for anthropology to emerge as mutually constitutive and constituted terms, but also provides theoretical gifts that may circulate beyond anthropology where the notion of network is currently in vogue.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. See http://liberationtechnology.stanford.edu/ (accessed 16 June 2011).
2. This argument is underscored by Mitchell's (1969a: 32) point that several of the contributors to *Social Networks in Urban Situations* combined situational and network analysis or deployed them at different stages during the research process.
3. Marilyn Strathern, for instance, was supervised as a doctoral student by Esther Goody, who had research experience from West Africa. Her student days at Cambridge in the early 1960s moreover coincided with Fortes's tenure as William Wyse Professor and the ascendancy of Jack Goody as his eventual successor. Edmund Leach, meanwhile, was arguably a significant non-Africanist influence (cf. Gell 1999).
4. Anticipating Strathern (1996b) to some extent, Gluckman (1961: 14) argued that "it may well be that we shall have to abandon the concept of society altogether, and speak of 'social fields.'"
5. As such, network analysis presupposed a concept of the individual and a relational form that Strathern undermines by means of the notion of the relation. However, it should be emphasized that although the early network analysts mainly considered networks consisting of connections between individuals, they did not restrict the notion to such links, leaving open the option for the inclusion of other entities (Barnes 1962: 5). Indeed, in Elizabeth Bott's (1957) account, the nodes of the network consisted of conjugal couples, whose relationship to each other was a function of the density of their relations to other couples.
6. In light of the debts that the New Melanesian Ethnography owes to the concepts and approaches of the RLI and the Manchester School, it is appropriate and fitting that Marilyn Strathern eventually succeeded Max Gluckman as Professor of Social Anthropology at Manchester University.
7. The focus on exchange activities represents a further commonality with the work of the early network analysts. While they maintained that the notion of network did not commit one to any particular theory of action, Kapferer (1973) argued that exchange theory was the most appropriate basis for network analysis.
8. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this point.
9. As such, the project bears affinities with the complex relationship between ethnography and anthropology, case material and concept formation, implicit in Gluckman's situational analysis (Evens and Handelman 2005: 1; Kapferer 2010: 5).
10. It thus accords with the orientation toward the "internal destabilization of interpretation" that Kapferer (2010: 4) identifies with the Manchester School.

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