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The Genius of Kinship: The Phenomenon of Kinship and the Global Diversity of Kinship Terminologies

G. V. Dzibel, German V. Dziebel

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This highly acclaimed book brings the cumulative results of a century and a half of kinship studies in anthropology into the focus of current debates on the origin of modern humans in Africa and on an entangled bit of human evolutionary history commonly subsumed under the heading of the "peopling of the Americas." This erudite study is based on a database of some 2,500 kinship vocabularies representing roughly 600 African languages, 140 Australian languages, 500 Austronesian languages, 200 Papuan languages, 350 languages of Eurasia (excluding Indo-Europeans), 440 North and Middle American Indian languages, and 200 South American languages. This valuable reference will take the reader to the dawn of kinship studies in the 19th century Western science in order to elicit the wider context of anthropological interest in kinship systems and the interdisciplinary salience of the phenomenon of kinship. The book also examines the founder of kinship studies in anthropology, American lawyer and Iroquois ethnographer, Lewis Henry Morgan, and the circumstances of his life that generated his interest in human kinship. The study ventures into the intricacies of scientific and quasi-scientific debates in the 19th century, and treats 19th century science as embedded in a myth featuring divinity, humanity and animality as principal characters. This account is divided into four sections, each of which is structured as a triad (philosophy, psychology and physiology; logic, semiotics and reproduction; religion, hermeneutics and evolution; law, grammar and speech). This far-reaching historical journey aims at formulating an idea of what human kinship might be all about, especially in the light of the widespread uncertainties about this question caused by the constructivist turn in anthropology. Eventually our ideas regarding human origins, ancient population dispersals and the homeland of modern humans are inextricably linked to our ideas about kinship. As a book that brings together evolutionary and sociocultural anthropology, The Genius of Kinship will be a critical addition for all Anthropology collections.

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