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the substance of kinship and the heat of the hearth: feeding, personhood, and relatedness among Malays in Pulau Langkawi

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This article describes how, for Malays on the island of Langkawi, feeding (in the sense of receiving as well as giving nourishment) is a vital component in the long process of becoming a person and participating fully in social relations. The process begins with conception and birth; it continues through feeding and through growing and living together in the house; it involves marriage and the birth of new children; and it is only in a limited sense completed when adult men and women become grandparents. For these Malays kinship itself is a process of becoming.

During the 18 months of my initial stay in Langkawi, and for four months on a subsequent visit, I lived in one house with a Malay family, eating with its members and participating in household activities on a daily basis. I thus gained a particularly intimate picture of life inside houses. My own experience of “becoming kin” lies behind some of what I present here, but it is also another kind of story that I must tell elsewhere.

Most of the material I present is derived from conversations I had with middle-aged and older women (including one traditional midwife) whom I knew well in the village where I did my fieldwork. Like all such material it is thus “slanted” in a particular way. Although men might put matters somewhat differently, nothing I know about this village leads me to suspect that they would deny the information I present. They might add more. But then women too differ among themselves over how they see the matters I discuss (their views are often complementary rather than contradictory). What I present here would not seem strange to most of the villagers I know. Of course, my account is incomplete, but I do not take completeness to be a proper aim for an anthropologist.

I also refer to published material on other areas of Malaysia, collected at different times by different ethnographers. The beliefs and practices I describe vary both regionally and over time—in some places I note such variation. Like other ethnographers, however, I have also been struck by a certain consistency in the cultural logic I describe. I hope I have not overemphasized the degree of coherence or consistency, since my aim is to convey the processual and transformative potential of Malay culture.

Malays on the island of Langkawi become complete persons, that is, kin, through living and consuming together in houses. Identity and substance are mutable and fluid. These perceptions suggest a processual view of kinship and personhood. They challenge anthropological definitions of kinship, which focus on procreation and which assume a universal division between the “biological” and the “social.” [Malay, kinship, personhood, feeding, social, biological]

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My argument may be placed in the general context of an analysis of kinship that begins from native categories. I take for granted that the meaning of “kinship” cannot be assumed a priori. I use the term “relatedness” to indicate indigenous ways of acting out and conceptualizing relations between people, as distinct from notions derived from anthropological theory. Ways of living and thinking about relatedness in Langkawi lead me to stress a processual view of personhood and kinship. It is through living and consuming together in houses that people become complete persons—that is, kin. The core substance of kinship in local perceptions is blood, and the major contribution to blood is food. Blood is always mutable and fluid—as is kinship itself.

James Fox has remarked that “it is true for the Austronesian world that one’s social identity is not given at birth” (1987:174). He contrasts this with the image given by classical monographs on Africa in which identity seems to be defined at birth by a structural position in a lineage. The material presented here bears out Fox’s emphasis on the fluidity of identity in Austronesia. Further, it suggests that it is not just a newborn child whose identity is unfixed (an assumption that is certainly not confined to Austronesian cultures) but that this fluidity of identity continues to a quite remarkable degree into adulthood. In Langkawi birth itself merely begins the process of becoming a person, a process that continues with feeding and living together in houses. Food creates both persons in a physical sense and the substance—blood—by which they are related to each other. Personhood, relatedness, and feeding are intimately connected. To unravel these connections it is necessary to understand the nature and mutability of substance and the way conception, birth, living in houses, and death are connected through the theme of substance.

Fox’s remarks address “social” identity. Schneider underscores how in both anthropological analysis and Western notions

kinship has to do with the reproduction of human beings and the relations between human beings that are the concomitants of reproduction. The reproduction of human beings is formulated as a sexual and biological process. [1984:188]

Both indigenous Western ideas and the analysis of kinship assume that social aspects of a relationship can be separated from, or added to, a biological substratum.

[S]exual reproduction creates biological links between persons and these have important qualities apart from any social or cultural attributes which may be attached to them. Indeed, the social and cultural attributes, though considered the primary subject matter of anthropologists, and of particular concern to social scientists, are nevertheless derivative of, and of lesser determinate significance than the biological relations. These biological relations have special qualities; they create and constitute bonds, ties, solidary relations proportional to the biological closeness of the kin (though the correlation between the strength of the tie and the closeness of the kin may not be perfect beyond primary kin). These are considered to be natural ties inherent in the human condition, distinct from the social or cultural. [Schneider 1984:188]

Schneider gives a trenchant critique of the way that anthropologists since Morgan have applied these ideas, derived from Western notions, to the analysis of kinship in other cultures. He convincingly shows that not all societies have something called “kinship” defined in these terms, and this is the basis of his thoroughgoing rejection of the category “kinship” in anthropological analysis. The material I present on notions of relatedness in Langkawi supports much of Schneider’s argument. In these ideas kinship is not always derived from procreation. I would nevertheless seek to rescue kinship from its post-Schneiderian demise. Although Schneider gives a convincing critique of the way kinship has been defined in anthropological analysis and the way it has been studied cross-culturally, he does not suggest that it might be possible to get beyond the criticisms he makes except by abandoning the comparative use of kinship as an analytic category.¹

On the basis of ideas about relatedness in Langkawi, I suggest a more flexible definition of kinship. Instead of asking, as Schneider does, “Given this definition of kinship, do these particular people have it or do they not?” (1984:200), I attempt to show, first, how people in Langkawi define and construct their notions of relatedness, and then what values and meanings

they give these notions. On the basis of these local notions, I show how the separation of the “social” from the “biological,” which Schneider has shown to be at the heart of the historical definition of kinship in anthropology, is culturally specific. Recently, Ingold (1991:360–365) has argued that this distinction is both culturally constructed and peculiar to Western thought: it is difficult to find any comparable division for many non-Western people. The distinction is certainly less than useful in understanding relatedness as Malays in Langkawi understand it.

In the conclusion of this article I suggest how the Malay understandings not only challenge traditional anthropological definitions of kinship but also how they offer the possibility of getting beyond Schneider’s critique and of redefining kinship in a more flexible and open way. The merging of levels, the elusiveness of boundaries within indigenous ideas, is a central theme of this article. Boundaries between people and what they consume—food—or between people and the structures in which they live—houses—may be less clear than we tend to assume. In the Malay case houses and food are not merely inanimate entities. Both houses and food share many qualities with the people they contain or nourish; the boundaries between the container and the contained are at some levels unclear.

Of course, it is impossible to cover the whole range of relations and their symbolic associations within the confines of a short article. Here I focus strictly on notions about substance and the way it is acquired through feeding. My intent is to show how bodily substance is not something with which Malays are simply born and that remains forever unchanged, and to show how it gradually accrues and changes throughout life, as persons participate in relationships. First, however, it is necessary to emphasize the centrality of houses, women, and sibblingship to Malay kinship and the way these are symbolically linked together. Sibblingship, houses, and hearths are in fact central to the way shared substance is conceived.

houses, hearths, women, and sibblings

The house has a fundamental structural significance for Malays, as it does in many Southeast Asian societies. Some implications of this emphasis on the house in Southeast Asia have been explored by Lévi-Strauss (1984), among others.² To underline the fact that houses constitute a central feature of social organization in these societies, Lévi-Strauss has used the term “sociétés à maison,” house-based societies. While some of the features of Lévi-Strauss’s model of the “house-based society” do not apply to Pulau Langkawi (see Carsten 1987a, 1995), his suggestions that the house is both an important indigenous category and that many Southeast Asian societies can be analyzed in terms of the house are fertile ones.

Perhaps the most important principle embodied by the house in Langkawi is that of unity and resistance to division. Household unity is reflected in the spatial arrangements of the house, which show a minimum of division. In particular, houses never have more than one hearth, *dapur*. However many couples reside together in one house, they always cook and eat full meals together; rice is a main constituent of these meals. To eat such meals in other houses is much frowned upon, and children from an early age are taught to return home for full rice meals. This commensality is a prime focus of what it means to be of one household.

Houses in Langkawi are strongly associated with women. In the first place this is because women spend much of their time there, while men are absent during most of the day on fishing trips, in the coffeeshops, or at the mosque. The association between women and houses, however, should not be construed as merely symptomatic of their absence from another, “public” domain. Women are particularly and positively associated with the focal space of the house, the *dapur*, a term that is used for the hearth, the kitchen, and the main living area of the house.³ It is in the *dapur* that women perform the activities that are central to the reproduction of the house and its members: here food is cooked and eaten, and here women spend a great deal of their daytime work and leisure hours.

People in Langkawi make explicit the association between women and houses when they say that while a widowed woman may live in a house by herself, a widowed man may not. A house without a woman living in it is not a proper house because it does not have a "mother of the house," *ibu rumah*. The association is also asserted symbolically. When houses are built, the senior woman to reside there, the "mother of the house," must hold the central post, *tiang seri*, as it is erected. This post is the abode of the house spirit, *semangat rumah*, who is also female. Houses are decorated and adorned just as women are, and this is another aspect of the way houses are conceived as female.

Houses are also strongly associated with children. New houses are never established until a couple has at least one child, and this is part of an enormous emphasis on children in marriage. The unity of the house, which I mentioned above, is also conceived in terms of siblingship. As McKinley (1981) has emphasized, siblingship is the most elaborated relation in Malay kinship, a relation from which all others may be said to derive.⁴ In Langkawi distantly related people who are asked to explain how they are connected will always express their link in terms of a sibling bond between ancestors.⁵ Many spirits appear in stories and myths as siblings, and in these cases their parentage is always unknown.

The importance of siblingship in other areas of Malaysia has also been underlined by Banks (1983:141–142) for mainland Kedah, and by Peletz (1988) for the "matrilineal" Malays of Negeri Sembilan. In Langkawi, as elsewhere, siblings are expected to render aid to each other and to remain close throughout life; this is especially evident in the warm, affectionate relations that occur between adult sisters. The relation between brothers is much more attenuated: while they adhere to the same ideal of sibling solidarity, brothers tend to avoid close cooperation in adult life (see also Carsten 1989, 1990; McKinley 1981:337–339; Peletz 1988:29, 40–41). Older brothers often have affectionate relations with younger sisters, and this has a structural significance in that it provides a model for the relation between husband and wife. Normatively a married couple should use the terms "older brother" and "younger sister" to address each other (although they may avoid this in practice); these terms capture the ideal of affection, equality, and respect on which marriage should be based. The modeling of marriage on siblingship means that affinity has a special status as it is always in the process of being transformed into consanguinity (see Carsten 1991; McKinley 1981:348–354).

Siblings are conceived as a more or less indivisible set, and this principle is expressed in naming systems for siblings that emphasize their similarity and completeness (see Carsten 1987b:143–191; McKinley 1981). If an in-marrying husband disrupts the natural order of the sibling group by marrying a woman whose older brother or sister is still unwed, he is said to "step over the threshold," *langkah bendul*. This phrase implies that the husband in such cases is viewed as violating the integrity of the house itself, and he incurs a ritual fine.

The association between a set of siblings and the house in which they originate is made ritually at the time of birth. Each child belongs to a set of "birth siblings" whose existence precedes birth. The child and the placenta, *uri*, are conceptualized as "two siblings," *dua beradik*. When a child is born, the *uri*—conceived as the younger sibling—is washed by the midwife and placed in a woven basket together with various ritual objects. It is then buried by the father on the grounds of the house-compound in a manner that recalls the burial of human corpses in the graveyard outside the village. The placenta sibling can cause sickness and mood changes in the child.⁶ What I would stress here is the way that the sibling set, in this ritual, is anchored to the house.

Siblingship thus asserts itself in the womb before birth and continues to influence a person's fortunes throughout life. The uterus may be considered the siblings' first house,⁷ and the placenta sibling can be considered as the child's first commensal relation. Co-eating, which is constitutive of kinship, begins before birth. Houses occupied after birth merely create a weaker form of siblingship than that created in the womb. The very notion of personhood can be said to involve

the relation of commensal siblingship since even an only child—highly undesired—has its placenta sibling. Although individuals may lack or be separated from human siblings, they are still part of sibling sets whose other members closely affect their well-being.

Notions of the person reflect the fundamental importance of siblingship in another way. Each person is said to have a life spirit or essence, *semangat*. The *semangat* is not, however, confined to people—animals and plants, for example, have a *semangat* too. The most important *semangat* are those of people, rice, houses, and boats. The *semangat*, then, is considered a vital principle of things that are valued. Each house, person, and boat only has one *semangat*, whose unity is highly ambivalent. The *semangat* is said to be one of seven siblings, but the seven members of this set do not have any independent existence. They are seven in number, but only one is active. It is as if they formed a kind of sevenfold unity. And this unity is perceived in terms of the sibling relation. Endicott, who draws on various sources, many of them published at the beginning of this century, discusses how

the vital principle permeates the whole of the physical world, and its division into *sẽmangat* is an integral part of the division of matter into significant discrete “things”. On the conceptual plane, the *sẽmangat* contributes to the object’s identity, preventing it being merged into another concept, and this is expressed in physical terms as the function of the *sẽmangat* to guide the actions and preserve the boundaries of the body. . . . Each *sẽmangat* is naturally differentiated and defined to the same degree as its body. [1970:63]

The person is thus both individual and multiple. Each body is the container of a sibling set. The *semangat* of the person is part of a seven member set, which may be likened to the parts of the body. Persons and their bodies have a multiple identity, and this is conceived in terms of the relation of siblingship. The human sibling set is closely associated with the house that gives it life, and the notion of *semangat* makes clear an association between the life-stuff of persons, houses, and siblings.⁸

Houses, hearths, feeding, women, and sibling sets are all intimately bound up with each other and with the way kinship is lived and conceptualized in Langkawi. These connections emerge more clearly through an examination of how substance derives from feeding.

feeding and shared substance

Feeding is said to begin in the womb. In its first house the child is nourished by its mother’s blood. After birth, the milk fed to a baby from its mother’s breast is believed to derive from the mother’s blood. People say that “blood becomes milk,” *darah jadi susu*. The mother’s milk is immensely important to a child’s physical and emotional development and to the child’s connection with its mother. Children who are not breast-fed supposedly become ill; they may also fail to “recognize” their mothers.

Milk feeding also defines the prime category of incestuous relations: kin who have drunk milk from the breast of the same woman may not marry. This is an Islamic prohibition, but one that seems to gain additional salience for Malays because of the particular way it fits into notions that otherwise might not be considered in religious terms. Given local concepts of kinship, it is particularly important that this category of incestuous relations, prohibited in Islam, be primarily constituted by siblings.

The salience of a prohibition on marriage between milk siblings is rendered greater by the fact that many children spend a considerable part of their childhood in houses other than their maternal ones. The frequency of formal and informal fostering arrangements (see Carsten 1991) substantially increases the possibility that a child may drink the milk of a woman who is not its birth mother. It is this possibility that gives this a definition of incest its particular fascination and horror. It is quite easy to imagine that a child who has been casually put on the breast of a neighbor or distant kinswoman might later marry her child. This ever-present threat looms large in the minds of villagers and runs through their discourse on incest. Women often described to

me how in the past one might easily have given a child a breast to comfort it, but that now this is not done.⁹ If two of the children a woman had breast-fed later married each other, she would bear responsibility for the incest.

The substance that kin are said to share derives in a large part from their shared consumption of milk as babies. Milk feeding also makes reference to blood since, as I mentioned earlier, human milk is believed to be produced from blood circulating in the body. In these notions the blood shared through consumption of milk is, of course, only that of the mother or the woman from whose body the milk comes. Shared blood is shared female substance; it is never paternal blood. In the context of widespread fostering arrangements of different kinds, co-feeding can create shared blood, shared substance, and kinship. People in Langkawi say, "If you drink the same milk you become kin," *kalau makan sama susu, jadi adik-beradik*. "You become one blood, one flesh," *jadi satu darah, satu daging*.

Ideas about incest have a number of important implications that apply to feeding more generally. Blood itself is said to be created in the body from food, and the prime food for Malay is cooked rice. *Darah, daging mari pada nasi*, "Blood, flesh come from cooked rice," people say. Those who do not eat rice become "dry," *kering*. Such individuals have no "blood," and of them it is said, "All that remains is bones," *tinggal tulang sahaja*.

Eating rice and eating a meal are synonymous in Malay perception. Food is rice—the defining component of a proper meal. The day-to-day sharing of rice meals cooked in the same hearth (which is a definitive activity for those who live in the same house) thus also implies shared substance, albeit in a weaker sense than for milk siblings. There exists a continuum between rice (food), milk, and blood. The sharing of any or all of these connotes having substance in common, hence being related.¹⁰ Traditionally, after being given the mother's breast a child was ritually fed cooked rice and banana because "cooked rice becomes blood too," *nasi jadi darah juga*. A baby's body is cold at birth and, since breast milk—like blood—is hot, the baby becomes heated through breast-feeding. After this the baby can consume rice with its kin in the way that is constitutive of relations within one house.

Just as relatedness is thought of in terms of a continuum—one is more or less distantly related, and only rarely are the related categorically opposed to the unrelated—we find a parallel in the realm of substance and feeding. Mothers and their offspring and full siblings are most closely related, having blood in common. In fact, the blood of siblings is identical. I was once told that when someone is ill and requires a blood transfusion, they must be given the blood of nonrelatives rather than the blood of a sibling. If the blood requires changing, then that of a sibling would have no effect because it is the same as one's own. More distant than full siblings, but still close enough for marriage to be incestuous, are those, like foster siblings, who have drunk the same milk. Those raised in one house who have shared meals with each other on a daily basis could technically marry. They are very unlikely to do so, however, because this would carry connotations of incest.

If milk and blood are the prime sources of shared substance, it would seem to follow that transfusions of blood might be problematic in terms of incest. When I asked about the implications of receiving blood during operations in hospital, villagers seemed rather perplexed and worried. Generally, they referred me to those experts whom they thought might know the answer, but their own creativity eventually supplied an answer (in accord with the logic of local notions of kinship): donated blood does not carry the potentiality of incest because it is not eaten (*bukan makan, bubuh, tambuh*, "it is not eaten, it is put there, added"). I was told only *eating* the blood could render relations potentially incestuous.

It is important to emphasize the way that this axis of relatedness operates through women. Blood, milk, and rice meals derive from women, and all denote commonality and similarity. Blood, milk, and food are more than a source of physical strength. The emotional tie children have with their mother is thought to be particularly strong, because mothers are the source of

shared substance. Shared substance gives emotions and words a special effectiveness. Love for one's mother derives from being breast-fed: as people say, *makan susu badan, kasih ke ibu lagi*, "drinking milk from her body, you love a mother more." If a baby is given away it should first be given its mother's milk. If it does not at least taste this milk it will not recognize its mother. It is because children share blood with their mother that a mother's curse is thought to be especially powerful.¹¹

The mother's milk is thus the source both of shared substance and of the strong emotional bond between mother and child. It enables the child to recognize its mother. It is in this sense the enabling substance of kinship. If a mother dies before giving her child her milk, then, before it leaves the house, the child should be given water cooked in the house hearth. This is the only possible substitute for the mother's milk. It implies that the hearth itself is a source of shared substance, of attachment to the house and its occupants.

Women and hearths can produce kinship in another way. When children are fostered they are said to take on the character traits and the physical attributes of those who raise them. They come to resemble them, in the same way that children often resemble their birth parents (see Carsten 1991).¹² These speculations "at the margins" of normal occurrence—when a child is fostered, when a mother dies, when blood is given in transfusion—show very clearly that notions of shared substance to which blood and milk are central are also very much bound up with ideas about shared consumption, feeding, and the house hearth.

I have described a continuity between the relatedness of a mother and child or full siblings who are thought to share bodily substance, which in turn is partly derived from procreation, and those who are considered to share substance because they live in one house and eat rice meals together. These ideas show very clearly that kinship in Langkawi cannot be defined solely in terms of procreation, but also that it may be difficult to distinguish ties we would consider "biological" because they are derived from procreation from those we think of as "social" because they derive from commensality. These notions challenge us to rethink the conventional distinction between the biological and the social that Schneider has shown to be at the heart of anthropological definitions of kinship. I will return to this question in the conclusion.

That blood and milk should be central to ideas about bodily substance is not particularly surprising. But the fact that substance is conceptualized in terms of food cooked in the dapur means that food and the heat of the house hearth have a particular importance. This is vividly reflected in notions about conception and childbirth. It is to these ideas that I will now turn.

conception, birth, and feeding¹³

According to Malays in Langkawi children are created from the seed, *benih*, of their father and the blood, *darah*, of their mother. The father's seed comes from the fluid in the backbone, *air tulang belakan*. The seed spends 40 days inside the body of the father. The first, 15th, and 30th days of the month are the "days on which the seed falls," *hari jatuh benih*. The seed then "descends to the mother," *turun ke ibu*, where it mixes with the menstrual blood. It only has to mix with the blood of the mother once in order to conceive. The seed is then nourished in the mother's womb from her blood. People say that the blood of the mother becomes the child. And blood, as we have seen, is transformed food.

Both sex and conception are associated with heat and with blood. Marriage involves a process of heating that may be counteracted by ritual means. Massard (1980:359) reports that the absorption of heating food leads to a surplus of sexual energy. In Langkawi, a couple that has consummated its marriage may be described as "cooked," *masak* (a term that also means "ripe" or "mature" and can have sexual connotations in all usages). Before consummation the man and woman are said to be "raw," *mantah*.¹⁴ Once women are old, after menopause, they "have no blood," *darah t'ada*, and they cannot conceive. I was told by the village midwife that male

infertility results from a lack of seed, for which there is no cure. Since female infertility is attributed to problems of the blood, it is perceived as alterable—as are other aspects of blood.¹⁵

Another middle-aged woman told me that infertility in women can be caused by “a thing,” *benda*, in the uterus that “eats the seed,” *makan benih*. It bores a hole in the uterus so that the blood escapes, and, since it is the blood that “grows the child,” *membesar anak*, the fetus cannot survive in its absence. The boring of this hole causes bad pains just before menstruation. Severe menstrual pains are therefore associated with infertility. Such problems are potentially curable, however, through the consumption of medicine and proper food.

Menstruation, sex, and pregnancy are times of body heating. For conception to take place the body must be hot and healthy, *badan hangat, sihat*. It is the “blood of menstruation” that “becomes the child,” *darah haidh jadi anak*. Menstrual blood is thus a potential child, and a good flow is a sign of fertility. At the end of the sixth month of pregnancy, according to Endicott (1970:65, citing Annandale and Robinson 1903:93–94), the fetus receives a *nyawa*, soul or “life-breath,” and “becomes a person,” *jadi orang*, having previously been part of its mother’s blood. In Langkawi it is at this point that the services of the village midwife, *bidan*, are secured by the husband’s mother, and it is also from this time on, Malays believe, the fetus can sustain life. At this point in a woman’s first pregnancy the midwife performs a ritual “bathing of the stomach,” *mandi perut*, of the pregnant mother, and a small feast is held to ensure a safe and easy delivery.

During the delivery itself the *semangat* of the child is believed to come into existence at the moment when the umbilical cord is cut by the midwife. The *semangat* is said to “come of itself,” *jadi sendiri*, (Endicott 1970:51, citing Annandale and Robinson 1903:97). It has no existence before this moment.¹⁶ The midwife must cut the umbilical cord with a special bamboo knife rather than a metal one, because metal frightens spirits (in this case the *semangat*), and that would cause sickness in the child. Generally, if the *semangat* leaves the body a person is thought to become vulnerable to intrusion by spirits (see Endicott 1970:51). It is the *semangat* that maintains the boundaries of the body. At the moment when the umbilical cord is cut, the child is also given a name by the midwife. (Names are often changed later, however, and this can be linked to the fluidity of identity.) At the point that the child is physically detached from the body of its mother, it gains the components of its independent identity: a name and a *semangat*, a life force and a bounded body.

The rituals following childbirth are elaborate and complex (see Laderman 1983:174–207 and Skeat 1900:333–348 for fuller descriptions of birth rites among Malays elsewhere). I will only give a partial account here, focusing on how such rites were conducted at the time of my fieldwork in Langkawi. Briefly, the rites reflect a concern to protect the participant’s body from the dangers of invasion by spirits that may cause sickness and infertility. Such spirits are thought to enter through the extremities of the body. Babies are swaddled during the first weeks of life, and an iron object may be kept near them because babies are particularly vulnerable to loss of the *semangat* and attack by spirits. Such spirits are presumably attracted by the “dirt of childbirth” *kotor beranak*, which is removed through ritually shaving and bathing the child.¹⁷ These ideas imply that the child, who is still strongly attached to its mother, is not yet properly bounded. Although the newborn receives considerable ritual attention, the baby’s mother is the subject of greater attention. By focusing on the mother in the ensuing discussion I aim to amplify further how fertility and becoming a person are assured through the consumption of proper food and through the heat of the hearth.

During the 44-day period of postpartum taboos, *pantang beranak*, both the child and its mother are confined to the house and, particularly, to the *dapur*. One aspect of this period of restrictions is especially striking—the continued application of heat to the mother. Immediately after the birth and for some days following, she bathes in hot water inside the house, whereas normal bathing is done at the well with cold water.¹⁸ Most importantly, throughout the period

of postchildbirth prohibitions, she must not consume foods that are considered to be “cooling.”¹⁹ All Malay foods are classified according to their “heating” and “cooling” properties, and women are extremely careful to consume the correct types of food at this time. They spend many happy hours discussing the heating properties of different foods.

The most explicit postpartum ritual is the traditional practice of heating the mother on a platform, *gerai* or *salaian*, beneath which a *dapur*, (fireplace, hearth) is constructed by the midwife. Skeat describes the process:

The fire (*api saleian*) is always lighted by the Bidan, and must never be allowed to go out for the whole of the 44 days. To light it the Bidan should take a brand from the house-fire (*api dapur*), and when it is once properly kindled, nothing must be cooked at it, or the child will suffer. [1900:342, n.2]²⁰

This heating is no longer performed in Langkawi, although many middle-aged women described to me how it had been done when they gave birth. The platform was built in the *dapur*, kitchen, of the house. The fire underneath it was lit by the midwife from the house hearth, *dapur masak*. Oil was rubbed into a woman’s back and she leaned her back against the *gerai* so that she became properly heated from behind. Women say their “body was cooked,” *masak badan*, “cooked inside,” *masak didalam*.

Today, postpartum women still apply to their stomachs a stone, *batu tungku*, which has been “cooked in the hearth,” *masak dalam dapur*, and then wrapped in cloth (see Gimlette 1971[1939]:245; Laderman 1983:176; Skeat 1900:343). In the past, I was told, more heat was applied frequently and with greater force. The stone was used until the skin became blackened, the prohibitions more strictly observed, hot medicines were used, cold food not eaten at all, and, supposedly as a result, women were more healthy.

It is evident that the process of heating involved in the postchildbirth rituals is designed to counteract the cooling effect of giving birth, a cooling particularly associated with excessive bleeding (Laderman 1983:41). The hot blood lost in childbirth cools the body excessively, rendering it vulnerable to the effects of the consumption of cooling foods.

Both the midwife and other women expressed their belief that if the postpartum proscriptions were not observed the mother would become sick. In particular, they feared that women would become afflicted with *sakit meroyan*, translated by Gimlette (1971:167) as “diseases after childbirth.”²¹ In Langkawi I was told *sakit meroyan* means that the “blood is cold,” *darah sejuk*, so that it could not flow. The consumption of cold foods during the period of postpartum prohibitions could lead to various kinds of *sakit meroyan*. These included *kudis meroyan*, skin disease; *gila meroyan*, meroyan madness; *sakit kancing gigi*, lockjaw; *demam*, fever; *bisa*, blood poisoning; bleeding; swelling of the blood vessels; and *keras*, in which the body goes hard and stiff like a plank, preventing speech.²² Women in Langkawi also spoke of “wind” entering and “rising,” *naik angin*, up the body.²³

Women’s principal fears are of bleeding, *darah turun*, and that the “uterus might swell,” *sarong anak kembang*, after childbirth. During pregnancy, women say, the uterus swells; after birth it becomes loose and there is a danger that it might prolapse. During labor itself, however, it is considered healthy to bleed a lot, because the body becomes *bisa*, septic, poisoned, unless the blood of childbirth is expelled. This blood is considered to be dirty, *kotor*, and must leave the mother’s body so that her body may become light, *ringan*. The flow should then dry up, and the blood vessels of the uterus and stomach should shrink, *kecut*. *Meroyan* is a general sickness following childbirth that takes many forms. Women say there are 44 different kinds of sickness, and their origin invariably lies in the blood. The blood is sick, *sakit darah*. “Meroyan comes from blood that isn’t good,” *nak jadi meroyan dari darah tak elok*.

The beliefs surrounding meroyan sickness show a deep concern with the boundaries of the body. In some contexts the meroyan is likened to an external malevolent spirit, *hantu* (it is “a kind of spirit,” *jenis hantu*), but it is also described as “a kind of blood,” *jenis darah*. According to one midwife, the origin of meroyan is postpartum women, within their blood. Blood that is

not good is said to descend back, *turun balik* (i.e., does not flow out of the body). She told me that a spirit, *hantu*, is different, it is not inside women. Whereas *meroyan* is a sickness inside the body, *sakit dalam badan*, a *hantu* is from outside, *dari luar*.²⁴

Metal implements such as scissors, betel nut cutters, or a nail in the hair are taken to the well by women who have recently given birth to guard against invisible spirits prone to attack postpartum women. Such spirits want to eat women's blood. Especially feared at this time is *Langsuir*, a vampire spirit of a woman who died in childbirth. She has a hole in her back and very long hair that covers it. She lives in trees in the jungle and especially likes the blood of women who have just given birth. She can take any form, animal or human, but often appears as a beautiful woman. She may be rendered harmless by plugging the hole in her back with a nail or other metal object; she is then immobilized so that she cannot fly.

This nexus of ideas about blood and heat is applied not only to women's health and fertility but also to men's. All Malay boys are circumcised according to Islamic rites and for religious reasons. Circumcision is also strongly linked in local terms to marriage and male reproduction. This is clear in the timing of the ritual, its form, and in men's comments on it. The food taboos imposed on boys after circumcision bear a strong resemblance to postpartum taboos: in both cases there is a restriction on the intake of "cooling" foods (see Laderman 1983:63; Massard 1978:148), although the restrictions applied to boys after circumcision last only until the wound is healed. I was told that cold food would lead to swelling; *angin*, wind, might enter the wound preventing it from healing. Once again this is linked to a control of bleeding and concern that the wound should heal rapidly. While these regulations are less restrictive than postpartum taboos, and are taken less seriously, the connection between the two states is evident to villagers.²⁵

Both sex and pregnancy imply "overheating"; at marriage and during pregnancy there is an attempt to keep cool. Excessive heating in these states leads to abortion, miscarriage, and infertility, perceived in terms of uncontrolled bleeding. In contrast, childbirth implies "overcooling"; women have to be reheated, and this process is closely associated with the consumption of appropriate food, with the hearth, and with fire used for cooking. In *meroyan* sickness it would seem that overcooling or overheating of the mother—both caused by the ingestion of cold foods or by wind entering the body—results either in the retention of bad blood, or in excessive bleeding. In practice, the two effects are equivalent, as Lévi-Strauss has observed in a South American context:

[Women] are perpetually threatened—and the whole world with and through them—by the two possibilities . . . : their periodic rhythm could slow down and halt the flow of events, or it could accelerate and plunge the world into chaos. It is equally conceivable that women might cease to menstruate and bear children, or they might bleed continuously and give birth haphazardly. [1978:506]

Marriage, circumcision, and childbirth are all symbolically and ritually associated. In childbirth and circumcision the regulated bleeding of women and men is linked to their proper fertility and to the reproduction of the house (see Massard 1978:148). In both cases this is assured through feeding and the heat of the *dapur*. It is the *dapur* that both equilibrates the heat of the body through the provision of food of appropriate heat and controls the flow of blood leaving the body.²⁶ The centrality of the *dapur* to processes that might be considered as much "biological" as "social" once again underscores the difficulty of distinguishing the two as separate spheres in the case of Pulau Langkawi.

Both the symptoms of *meroyan* sickness and its various causes can also be read as a subtle speculation on bodily boundaries. The origins of the disease are in fact at once external and internal: childbirth itself, the ingestion of food, wind, and blood that is retained instead of being released, becoming poisoned. The typical symptoms are also suggestive: lockjaw, skin disease, bleeding, and fever. The body's boundaries seem to become either too permeable or too rigid. *Meroyan* sickness can be thought of as both similar to and dissimilar from spirit possession. It

is at once internal and external in causation and effect. Appropriately, after childbirth, when the body's boundaries have opened to produce another body from within, normal health in the mother is restored through the reassertion of these boundaries. The boundaries of the baby are equally problematic: the child is liable to lose its *semangat* and to be penetrated by spirits.

the substance of death

If life, blood, and fertility are associated with heat, it is not at all surprising to find that death should be associated with cold. The apparent obviousness of this connection should not prevent us, however, from trying to understand its meaning as fully as possible. That people in Langkawi make this association in an extremely emphatic way suggests that its meaning is both more central and more complex than might be assumed. "Death is *really* feeling cold," *mati, rasa sejuk sungguh*, I was told. "If there is heat, it's all right, there's still life," *kalaupun hangat, t'apa ada lagi nyawa*. Death was described as a state of coldness and stiffness, and a feeling of extreme coldness could be interpreted as a sign of imminent death. But there was more to it than that.

"At the time of death the soul leaves the body and all the blood flows out," *masa dia mati, cabut nyawa, darah terbit*. The blood leaves the body but humans cannot see this. "There is no blood at all in the body," *t'ada darah langsung dalam badan*. The dead become bones and empty blood vessels without flesh or blood. If a person dies in the house, the blood from the corpse is believed to flow everywhere and become mixed with all the food in the house. "Everything becomes soaked in blood," *darah basah apa-apa*. Consequently, nothing that has been in a house at the time of a death may be eaten. Neither already cooked food nor raw products such as betel quids or water stored in the house can be consumed at this time. Most importantly, no food may be cooked in the house from the time immediately before a death until after the burial has taken place. Meals may be prepared on a fire made outside the house or in other houses, and must be consumed elsewhere.

After the corpse has been buried according to the Muslim rites, the floor of the house is washed and food can once again be eaten normally. Death, then, negates the life of the house and of its hearth. A house with death in it cannot simultaneously produce food and life. There is no cooking and no feeding. Death involves the loss of the substance of life—the blood, derived, as we have seen, from women.

Violent death by accident or intention has other implications. I was told several stories of murder in which it is clear that the taking of life affected the murderer as dramatically as the victim. A murderer became weak, powerless, and frightened; in this state the murderer was thus liable to be caught. The only way to prevent this was to drink the blood—life substance—of the victim. By performing the act of a vampire spirit, the murderer became "like a spirit," *macam hantu*. The act of drinking blood lent the murderer superhuman powers, and particularly the ability to appear and disappear at will and to evade pursuers. In this way the killer became brave, *berani*, and powerful, *kuasa*. Given all the attributes of a spirit but the substance of a human, the murderer was considered doubly alive, supersubstantiated.²⁷

The murderer, then, was faced with two possibilities: either to be consumed by the victim's substance or to be empowered by consuming it. Once again the notion of feeding is crucial. It is the act of feeding that confers power. The equation of murderers with vampires makes clear that this feeding is in every way negatively construed. Feeding on blood is the negation of feeding on rice cooked in the house hearth: it is death dealing rather than life giving; it negates human ties rather than producing them.²⁸

hearths, feeding, and substance: the process of becoming related

I have described how the house in Langkawi is a “female” structure, but that it also “contains” the notion of siblingship. Women and siblingship have been shown to lie in equal measure at the core of the house as a domain of meaning. I have described the house as an expanded hearth, and it is in the *dapur* that the most important reproductive activities are carried out, notably, cooking, eating, and childbirth.²⁹

I have given an extended discussion of notions of substance. These are subtle and complex. At their heart lie ideas about blood. Kin share blood, but the degree to which this is true varies. Siblings, and mothers and their children—all of whom share substance to a high degree—are most closely related. This is why the affective ties between a mother and her children, and between siblings, are said to be particularly strong. Blood is not simply a substance with which one is born—it is continuously produced and transformed from food that is eaten. Endicott (1970:82, 85) has suggested that blood, having a quality intermediate between organized physical bodies and undifferentiated matter, derives its power from its potential for being organized. Blood is a potential child.

Milk, too, has a particular significance in these ideas about substance and relatedness, since it is both a bodily substance and food to be consumed. It may be understood as the enabling substance of kinship: a source of emotional and physical connectedness. But relatedness is not so simple. To a lesser degree, food cooked on the natal hearth has the same qualities as milk. Through the day-to-day sharing of meals cooked in the same hearth, those who live together in one house come to have substance in common. From this point of view, eating such meals in other houses has negative implications, and children are strongly discouraged from doing so. Eating meals in other houses implies a dispersal of intimate substance to other houses.

This argument implies that husband and wife also eventually come to share substance. While I have heard no direct statements to this effect, it seems to me entirely in accord with the logic of marriage, which, as described above, is itself modeled on siblingship. As they become more familiar with each other, the relationship of a married couple recalls many aspects of that between older brother and younger sister. In this sense, as McKinley (1981) has argued, Malay marriage can be thought of in processual terms as converting “strangers” and “affines” into “kin.”

In a culture in which people often move to different houses, these ideas gain further salience. The frequency of divorce, and temporary or more permanent fostering, lend an enormous force to the idea that living and eating together is one way of coming to share substance. This has further significance, however, in the historical context of demographic mobility characteristic of Langkawi. Feeding is one way in which strangers and outsiders can begin their incorporation into a village community, a process that continues with fostering and marriage. The converse process means that if close kin move to the mainland or to other villages in Langkawi and cease to interact (either because of geographic distance or quarrels) their kinship and that of their descendants effectively lapses.³⁰

There are other important implications to the notions I have described. The long process of becoming—acquiring substance—is one that to a very great degree occurs through the actions and bodies of women. Children are produced from their mothers’ blood; their mothers’ milk may activate or create kinship. The food cooked in the hearth by women not only nourishes physically, it creates emotional ties and is central to the process of becoming related. The *dapur* is the transforming center of the house, producing life and ensuring the process of kinship.

The material I have presented has another theme: the notion of boundary. Boundaries are sometimes asserted, but they are always tantalizingly elusive. Blood, milk, and rice are similar and convertible into each other, but also different from each other. Houses, likewise, have boundaries within them, but these are systematically negated. The house spirit, who may be

said to embody the house, is herself one of seven siblings, although only one of these is active and the degree to which these siblings have separate identities is ambiguous.

These same ideas are echoed in notions of the person. Each individual is part of a sibling set, and these ties are conceived as being more or less unbreakable. Individuals' identities are always bound up with those of their siblings. The semang of the person, like that of the house, is one of seven siblings. Once again the precise identity of and relationship between the different members of this set is unclear. One might say that persons and houses are simultaneously individual and multiple, just as a human sibling set has both a single and a multiple identity. Although they grow up in one house, after marriage siblings eventually come to be embodied in different houses.

These ideas suggest a subtle and complex speculation on ideas about boundaries. We are confronted with the possibility of boundedness only to see it recede before us. Childbirth, when one body literally produces another from within, brings these concerns to the fore. The boundedness and permeability of both the baby's and the mother's body at this time are especially problematic. Bodies are simultaneously bounded and porous. In some respects it seems hard to say where one person stops and another begins. The person contains the core of relatedness, which is siblingship. What is true for people is also true for houses, and in exactly the same way. If the house is envisaged as a female body, it is also clear that the body is in another way a house, containing other bodies.³¹ Like bodies, houses have single and multiple identities that are envisaged in terms of siblingship.

conclusion: toward a redefinition of kinship

In the introduction to this article I mention Fox's remarks on the fluidity of social identity in Austronesia. Certainly, the material I present here bears out his thesis. My argument, however, goes further. It is clear that not only is "social" identity in Langkawi unfixed, but "physical" identity, a person's substance, is also continuously acquired and alterable. Identity and substance are mutable, fluid, and closely connected.³² Thus the ideas I describe lead me to question the division—as assumed by Schneider (and perhaps also implicit in Fox's comments)—between the "biological" and the "social," between kinship as a biological, genetic, instant, and permanent relationship, and social identity as fluid. In Langkawi, ideas about relatedness are expressed in terms of procreation, feeding, and the acquisition of substance, and are not predicated on any clear distinction between "facts of biology" (like birth) and "facts of sociality" (like commensality).

For Schneider, the analytical significance of defining kinship in these terms lies in the universality presupposed:

The Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind is a necessary corollary of the way in which kinship is defined (as reproduction) and the way in which reproduction is understood (as a biological process following sexual intercourse), and the fact that "Blood Is Thicker Than Water" for all human beings (the third axiom). If motherhood differed from one society to another, if there were no universal aspects to fatherhood, there could be no standard genealogy against which to plot cultural variants. [1984:195]

Schneider, partly by using his Yapese material, explicitly challenges the idea that procreation is everywhere accorded the same high value as in Western cultures. Although he traces the separation of the "biological" and the "social" in the anthropological study of kinship, however, his own analysis simultaneously (and implicitly) relies on their analytical separation. The distinction itself is not explicitly challenged.

The second axiom, that kinship, by definition, has to do with human reproduction and that this is a biological process entailing sexual relations, *fails not by reason of its definition*, but rather because of the associated assumptions. These are that kinship is everywhere and always a culturally distinct, distinguishable, and highly valued entity. That is, the fact of engendering another human being . . . is always a culturally distinct construct and is always given a high cultural value. [1984:198; emphasis added]

Schneider is correct to challenge these corollaries: it is because the meaning and centrality of procreation are assumed a priori by most anthropologists that the culturally specific meaning and value of kinship cannot be discovered (see Schneider 1984:199). For Schneider, the category of kinship has no cross-cultural value because its definition is bound up in Western notions. The only solution is to abandon the category completely or to set a more limited agenda: "Given this definition of kinship, do these particular people have it or do they not?" (1984:200).

Schneider does not, however, specifically propose that we abandon the equally "Western," and logically prior, distinction of the biological from the social on which the definition of kinship as a biological process rests. Indeed, while analyzing the way earlier anthropologists have applied this distinction, his own argument appears simultaneously to rely on it (Schneider 1984:95–112). Thus in his conclusion, Schneider argues,

Blood Is Thicker Than Water is not only axiomatic in studies of kinship, it is a fundamental axiom of European culture. Even if this axiom were true as a biological fact, . . . the point remains that culture, even if it were to do no more than recognize biological facts, still adds something to those facts. The problem remains of just what the sociocultural aspects are, of what meaning is added, of where and how that meaning, as a meaning rather than as a biological fact, articulates with other meanings. [1984:199]

At issue here is the way Schneider speaks of culture as somehow superimposed upon, and adding to, prior biological facts.

Like Schneider (1984:95), I would argue that the relationship between "physical" and "social" kinship is central to the way kinship has been defined by anthropologists. It is only after biological and social ties have been distinguished from each other that kinship can be defined in terms of biology, and accorded a special value; conversely, the "social"—whether as separable aspect of kinship or as something opposed to it—comes to have an implicit "merely" attached to it.

Given our current *definition* of kinship, which Schneider shows to be thoroughly imbued with Western notions, he suggests that we might attempt to discover the culturally variable *meanings* attributed to ideas surrounding procreation. Following this argument, I would suggest that since both the definition *and* the meaning of kinship are culturally variable, we cannot apply a universal definition of kinship to which procreation is central. But—and here I part company with Schneider—this does not mean that we cannot compare both how people conceive of relatedness and the meaning they attribute to it. Schneider rejects a cross-cultural definition of kinship in terms of procreation because procreation may not be central in some cultures. He accepts that other kinds of relationship, which do not derive (or are not perceived as deriving) from procreative ties, may be important; but for Schneider these are necessarily "social" rather than "biological" facts and therefore not kinship within our present definitions.

For Schneider (1984:200–201) the central question is: Given our definition of kinship, do other people have it, and what value and meaning do they give it? I would suggest, by contrast, that the central question should be: how do the people we study define and construct their notions of relatedness and what values and meaning do they give them? It seems to me that we would do better to use the term "kinship" to characterize the relatedness that people act and feel. In this way we may arrive at a new and more flexible approach to the study of kinship in anthropology.

Ideas about relatedness in Langkawi show how culturally specific is the separation of the "social" from the "biological" and the reduction of the latter to sexual reproduction.³³ In Langkawi relatedness is derived both from acts of procreation and from living and eating together. It makes little sense in indigenous terms to label some of these activities as social and others as biological. I certainly never heard Langkawi people do so. It is clear that the important relationships of kinship involve what we would regard as both. If blood, which is the stuff of kinship and to some extent of personhood, is acquired during gestation in the uterus and, after birth, in the house through feeding with others as people in Langkawi assert, is it, then, biological

or social? The impossibility of answering this question merely underlines the unsatisfactory nature of the distinction.

Instead, the Malay fascination with boundaries, the subtle way in which distinctions are made only to be erased, may lead us in turn to question and refine the way in which, as anthropologists, we use dichotomies such as that between the biological and the social as analytical tools. If Malay thought on these subjects seems in many respects more subtle than our own, perhaps it is because kinship for Malays is part of a process of speculation as well as a process of becoming.

notes

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1. My criticisms of Schneider are “friendly” in the sense that I am in broad sympathy with his endeavor and that I agree with, and draw on, much of the argument of his important book without necessarily accepting his conclusions. (I agree particularly with his attack on the procreative model in kinship and his situating of anthropological definitions within Euro-American notions.) In contrast, Yeatman (1983) has presented an argument in favor of the procreative model in kinship, and Scheffler (1991) has criticized Schneider partly for the relativism of his analysis and its lack of explanatory power. Scheffler would keep a universal definition of kinship as a category for cross-cultural comparison but once again his definition is in terms of procreation (1991:373). Like Schneider, I would argue that such a definition does not apply cross-culturally.

2. See also Barraud 1979; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Errington 1987, 1989; Lévi-Strauss 1979, 1983; Macdonald 1987; and Waterson 1987, 1990 for a discussion of house-based societies in Southeast Asia.

3. I have argued elsewhere (Carsten 1987a) that houses in Langkawi can be seen as expanded hearths.

4. Space does not allow me to elaborate on all the complex associations of sibblingship here; in what follows I highlight certain features that are particularly relevant to the present discussion. Elsewhere I explore other aspects of this topic in more detail (Carsten 1987b, 1989, 1990, 1991), as do the authors cited in the text. For the significance of sibblingship in Oceania see Marshall 1981.

5. It is significant in this context that migration is very important to the demographic history of Langkawi. Many villagers have described to me how their ancestors came to the island together with sibblings.

6. Similar beliefs and practices have been recorded widely elsewhere in Southeast Asia and can be related to a complex cosmology that has been explored by Headley 1983, 1987a, 1987b. See Laderman 1983 and Massard 1985 for a description of these rites in the Malaysian states of Terengganu and Pahang respectively, and see Geertz 1961:89 for Java. In most of the recorded cases, however, the placenta seems to be considered the *older* sibling of the child. One woman in Langkawi told me that whether the placenta sibling is considered older or younger than the child depends on whether age is calculated by time of formation (in which case the placenta is older) or by time of birth (in which case the child is older).

7. See Headley 1987a. This idea is particularly powerful in the case of twins. It is notable that cross-sex twins seem to exercise a particular fascination for the more hierarchical Southeast Asian societies in terms of incest and marriage (see Boon 1977:138–40, 201–202 and Errington 1987). McKinley (1975:226) suggests that once a child begins to be able to socialize in the house it no longer needs to interact with its placenta sibling, from whom it becomes progressively detached.

8. See Endicott (1970:38–39, 41, 50, 63) on the fragmented and unitary nature of the semangat, which he does not, however, discuss in terms of sibblingship. Barraud (1990:218, 223) discusses the notion of *mat inya* in Tanebar-Evav in terms strikingly similar to the terms I use in discussing the semangat. The *mat inya* is a kind of sevenfold life essence of things that have social value.

9. The reference to the past is meant to imply that the villagers had been less aware of the connotations of milk feeding in Islam in the past than they were at the time of my fieldwork.

10. As far as I know, the idea that the shared consumption of food creates a weak form of sibblingship is not an Islamic one.

11. Babies are regularly bottle-fed with powdered milk as a supplement to breast milk, but I know of no case where bottle-feeding replaced breast-feeding entirely. While I would expect the impossibility of breast-feeding at all to be quite problematic, there is no indication that supplementary bottle-feeding causes any concern or that it has similar connotations to breast-feeding. Fresh cow’s milk is not available in the village.

12. The daily sharing of rice meals defines members of one household. While those who live together are generally close kin, there are important exceptions that are normally thought of in terms of fostering (Carsten 1991). My own experience of living in one house and eating with a family on a daily basis was also one of being fostered, of "incorporation" and of "becoming kin."

13. Some of the material used here was presented in an earlier form in a paper specifically on childbirth (see Carsten 1992).

14. In contrast, Laderman (1983:74) reports in her material on Terengganu that conception occurs when both parents are in a "cool" state. This may be a regional variation, or it may be that while sex produces and requires heat, *jatuh benih*, "dropping of the seed" requires coolness. However, it is clear that in Terengganu heat is believed to have a powerful effect on pregnancy: "hot" medicines have abortifacient and/or contraceptive qualities (Laderman 1983:78–79). "The fetus is considered to be a clot of blood in the early stages, and hot medicine is thought to liquefy the blood, and to make the womb uncongenial for the child" (1983:78). "Hot" foods are avoided during pregnancy in order to control bleeding (1983:82).

15. Ideas about menstrual pollution are not very elaborate in Langkawi. Women may not pray or have sex at this time, and may cause ill fortune to a fishing trip. Elsewhere in Malaysia, Laderman (1983:73) also notes that a scanty menstrual flow is not considered healthy, and that, while sex during menstruation is religiously prohibited, it is also believed to restore potency to a man (1983:74).

16. Interestingly, Endicott (1970:37–38) notes that Cuisinier (1951:207–208) states that a mother gives part of her soul material to her baby.

17. Laderman reports that spirits "are attracted by the sweet smell of the blood of parturition and the lochia of the puerperium" (1983:201).

18. Laderman (1983:175) refers to "hot" leaves added to this water.

19. The categorization of foods according to their intrinsic "heating" and "cooling" properties is discussed at length by Laderman (1983:35–72). She discusses postpartum food restrictions in detail (1983:183–188). See also Massard 1983:262–268.

20. Together with Laderman (1983:181) I would argue that use of the terms "roasting" and "roasting bed" by Skeat (1900:342–343) and others for these practices is misleading, and "heating" is more appropriate. What is aimed at is a *regaining* of *lost* heat through a more gentle warming than "roasting" implies, that is, a reassertion of the body's equilibrium not an objective rise in temperature; see also Massard 1978.

21. Gimlette states that *meroyan* is derived from *royan*, "to run, or discharge, of a sore," particularly used for "abnormal uterine discharges following childbirth" (1971:167). He continues, "the causal agent is referred to as *angin meroyan* (*angin*, wind)" (1971:167). See also Laderman 1983:98, 201–202.

22. An anonymous reviewer of this article suggested that the symptom of losing speech makes this condition the inverse of *latah*, in which women's speech becomes uncontrolled and usually obscene. The suggestion that various conditions affecting women's speech (including spirit possession) be looked at in relation to each other merits further research.

23. See Laderman 1983:58–60 on *angin*, glossed as "temperament." A build up of *angin* in the body destroys the balance among the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water—and causes sickness.

24. Laderman discusses how *sakit meroyan* is caused by the "Hantu Meroyan" that "arises from the afterbirth, the blood and the amniotic fluid" (1983:201).

25. Wilkinson (1957:49) describes a rite performed at circumcision, involving coconuts rolled over the boy, that strongly recalls that traditionally undergone by women in the seventh month of pregnancy.

26. See also Gimlette 1971:49, 245 on heat of the *dapur* applied directly to the *bukang* root in the treatment of loss of male virility. That a state of heat may have political implications is suggested by Zainal-Abidin bin Ahmad (1947) and Laderman (1981), who note that the Malay ruler's coolness balances the destructive heat of war, anger, dissent, and nature that threaten the body politic. The sultan embodies coolness, which ensures the prosperity of the kingdom.

27. These notions about the power of blood can be related to Endicott's discussion of the Malay concept of *badi* (Endicott 1970:66–86). The *badi* can be thought of as a harmful expression of disturbed blood—it arises from the blood—and, in the case of a murdered person, it is the *badi* that makes this blood especially potent (1970:72). The *badi* can eventually become an independent spirit, which in the case of a murdered person is likely to be especially powerful and malicious (1970:73–74). In the case of a woman who dies in childbirth, it is the *badi* that reanimates her body as a vampire spirit (1970:72). Endicott points out that vampires, familiar spirits, and *badi* all share an intimate connection with human blood.

28. Once again I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion that the female vampire spirit, *Langsuir*, who attacks women after childbirth and herself died in childbirth, can be thought of as the spirit of "pure alienated kinship." Her untimely death cuts off the normal process of feeding and making kinship between mother and child. The sucking of blood from her victims is the inversion of the social feeding that should have occurred had *Langsuir* not died in childbirth.

29. Sexual intercourse normally occurs, in privacy, in a couple's sleeping area inside houses. This is either situated in the main living area, *dapur*, or the optional formal room, *ibu rumah*, or in a small sleeping room, *bilek*, partitioned off one of these rooms.

30. The implications of this, in a society where divorce followed by relocation of one or other spouse is a frequent occurrence, are intriguing and merit further research. Relations between a divorced father and his children are in fact quite variable, depending partly on how far away the father lives from his children.

31. This idea has been explored by Headley (1987a) for Java. He describes how the body physically houses siblings during gestation.

32. Fluidity of identity has also been described, if in somewhat different terms, for Melanesia (see, for example, Strathern 1988). Elsewhere in the Austronesian world, Astuti (in press) gives a beautiful example of how the Vezo of Madagascar continuously acquire identity. She explores the implications of this for notions of ethnicity.

33. Our own rather narrow definition of “biology,” in which reproduction is separated from nutrition and is seen chiefly as a matter of genetic transmission rather than generation, appears to date from the mid-19th century (see Ingold 1990:209–211; 1991:359 on the conflation of biology and genetics). In this view the individual is more or less determined at conception, but it is notable that in both the popular and the scholarly culture of early modern Europe the characteristics of a wet nurse were thought to pass to the children she fed because breast-feeding was part of a long process, intrauterine and extrauterine, by which a new individual was generated (see Marvick 1974; Ross 1974).

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