Book Review

Fictive Kinship: Family Reunification and the Meaning of Race and Nation in American Immigration
Catherine Lee. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013. 181 pages

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Challenging the focus of most immigration scholarship on individual persons or on groups defined by race, ethnicity or national origin, *Fictive Kinship* posits the family as the primary unit of analysis. This important shift in analysis brings new revelations to historical and contemporary debates about immigration which link them to issues of reproduction, gender norms, racial purity, class resources, war and post-war impacts and, ultimately, foundational beliefs about what constitutes a family and a nation. Catherine Lee, Associate Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University, employs the tools of narrative analysis not to tell individual immigration stories, but to chart how the stories a society tells about immigration intermingle with the stories it tells about families to impact laws, ideologies and social relations.

Lee cautions, however, that the idea of the nation as fictive kin does not necessarily lead to more open immigration policies. Instead, it has fueled exclusionary and racist policies and discourses, as the boundaries of who can belong to the national family are far from permeable. The belief that the nation should only include those who are "like one of the family" thus sets a high bar that leads easily to xenophia and exclusion.

The greatest strength of the book is its long historical arc, as it covers over a century and a quarter of major U.S. immigration legislation: the Page Act of 1875 which excluded Asian contract laborers and specifically targeted Asian women seen as prostitutes; the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which prohibited Chinese immigration and citizenship for Chinese already in the U.S.; the Immigration (Johnson-Reed) Act of 1924 which established the system of national origins quotas; the Immigration and Nationality (McCarran-Walter) Act of 1952 which in-

stituted preferences based on skill and family relations; the Immigration and Nationality (Hart-Cellar) Act of 1965 which ended the national origins quotas; the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 which imposed employer sanctions and provided legalization pathways for undocumented immigrants; the Immigration Act of 1990 which implemented the visa lottery program; and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 which tightened border control and restricted benefits to immigrants.

Furthermore, outside of this chronology of major immigration legislation, *Fictive Kinship* examines key moments and tensions, such as the treatment of military families following World War II and the Korean War, "vulnerable families" who might become "public charges" and security concerns post 9/11. In analyzing all of these laws and debates, Lee shows how they reflect the process of "family ideation" in which the "ready set of symbols, meanings, and reference points associated with family allows actors to use family as a metaphor or synecdoche for related kinships constructs such as race or nation" (13).

For feminist scholars, the most interesting sections address the ways that normative ideas of gender and family shape immigration in complex and contradictory ways. For example, Chapter 3 addresses how conservative gender ideologies such as coverture (which regarded women as the property of their husbands) combined with class privilege to allow for the immigration of Chinese and Japanese wives of merchants even as they were labeled a racially undesirable group during the exclusion era. Also, Chapter 5 links immigration debates to welfare reform policies showing how legislators sought to limit food stamps, cash assistance, Medicaid and other programs, and how this impacted poor women and families.

Although the book's main concern is immigration policy in the U.S., it also includes comparisons to other countries. In particular, Table 2.6 in Chapter 2 provides a very helpful summary of international family reunification provisions regarding the use of family as a category or entry for citizens, permanents residents and foreign workers.

Methodologically, the book focuses on content analysis of formal documents regarding policy debates and archives of personal papers and correspondences of key players involved in shaping immigration policies. While Lee's historical approach is meticulous, compelling and appro-

priate for her goals of understanding the interwoven discourses of race, nation and family in immigration policymaking, it tells a top-down story of immigration that does not give full voice to immigrants themselves and their role in shaping these policies. Although I appreciate Lee's focus on the ideational processes driving policy, I would also have liked to see how family ideation evolves from the bottom up through formal and informal dissent and protest. In addition to the archival work related to key players in immigration debates, more attention to recovering the experiences of those marginalized in these debates would be valuable.

Lee does provide moving short vignettes about individual families to introduce most of the chapters but these stories could be pursued more in-depth. In particular, while Lee is attentive to the hetero-normative values which shaped family reunification, more detailed treatment of the impacts on families who fall outside of this framework (such as same-sex and childless families) would provide important counter-narratives to the limited view of family recognized in the law. Finally, while the conclusion offers connections to contemporary debates about immigration reform, I wished Lee would share more of her immense expertise to chart possible avenues for change utilizing her insights drawing upon the family ideational frame.

Overall, *Fictive Kinship* is an original, comprehensive and rigorously researched book that shines new light on historical and contemporary immigration debates by illuminating the often hidden discourses of family and how they coincide, contradict and challenge notions of race and nation. It is essential reading for scholars, policymakers and undergraduate and graduate courses on immigration, family, race and policy.

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