

The Trajectory of “Modern Family” in the American Society (アメリカ社会における「近代家族」の軌跡)

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 「近代」という壮大な実験的試みの精神は、世界的レベルにおいてますます普遍化しつつあるように思えるが、本稿では社会を映し出す鏡としての「家族」の変貌を通して、アメリカ合衆国の社会・歴史的な文脈における「近代」の論理と経験の具現化の経緯について概観する。家族の領域における個人化・多様化の傾向を否定的に捉える「保守」勢力と肯定的に捉える「リベラル」勢力の相剋には「文化とアイデンティティの政治学」としての側面があり、アメリカ社会における「伝統」・「国家」・「資本主義」といった概念をめぐる哲学的かつ政治的論争と不可分に絡み合っている。南北戦争以降、特に第二次大戦後のアメリカ社会はこうした論争や相剋の調和を求めた試行錯誤の状況にあり、その象徴的場として、例えば、ポストモダニズムやマルチカルチュラルリズムをめぐる哲学的論争や、アフターマティブ・アクションや「家族の価値」をめぐる政治的論争がある。こうしたせめぎ合いは、「個人」という自我の完成を追求する近代社会の宿命の相剋であり活力の源泉であるともいえるが、同時にその矛盾・痛み・リスクを伴うものであり、家族の領域はこうした複雑な現実を反映している。

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The Birth of the Individual

The modern spirit and experience might best be condensed and embodied in the clock. With its rapid popularization since the seventeenth century, the European society, in its most overgeneralized sense, has experienced a subtle but significant conversion of its temporal pivot—from a cyclical time to a linear one. This temporal transformation is somewhat indicative of the permutation of the social ethos as well. Cyclical time, having little conception of the future in the present world, accommodates only the past and the present, and therefore tends to preserve and reproduce the social customs, beliefs, and values that ancestry lived with, whereas linear time, with a heightened consciousness of concreteness, precision, and progress, has a propensity to direct society beyond conservatism, traditionalism, or reproductionism, towards the brave new world that should exist in the future.

Medieval Christianity accused the usurer and the money exchanger of disgracing the sacred, divine (cyclical) time by their highly instrumental and manipulative utilization of linear time. It was during this period that a church bell in a municipal center was gradually superseded by a majestic clock, which symbolized the embodiment of industrial (linear) time among the merchant and the artisan. The systematic enforcement of linear time and stoicism among laborers was an essential condition of modern industry (Imamura 1994). Marx (1947), for example, pointed out a process in which mercantilism manufactured laborers by forcing farmers to abandon their own agricultural (cyclical) time and instead to adopt industrial (linear) time, while Weber (1976), as is well known, formulated a causality between the birth of modern capitalism and the development of "industry" (diligence) or the work ethic (asceticism) that sustains it.

The underlying concepts of linear time—concreteness, precision, and progress—have characterized, and have been characterized by, the European philosophical tenor. Concreteness and precision, both being a manifestation of a modern preoccupation with a mathematic mode of analysis, sustain a mechanism composed of its integral parts. Despite their contrasting methodological approaches, both Bacon and Descartes were engrossed in a model of the world that can be ultimately broken down into its indivisible components. Humanity was detached from nature, the individual was differentiated from society, and the mind was distinguished from the body in their conceptual framework. The differen-

tial and integral calculus of Newton and Leibniz would have been impossible without a mechanistic paradigm of the world as an integral whole consisting of quantitatively subdividable elements. Galileo's conviction of nature as a text written in a mathematical language was condemned as a profanity to the Christian faith rested on the notion of a cyclical time and its accompanying world view. Gradually, "science" contested and eclipsed religion as the explanatory schema of the external world. It was in this philosophical and intellectual context that the individual came to be accorded a political and legal safeguard as an indivisible social component by the natural law, as best exemplified in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights.¹

Such an individual was (and is) expected to exert his voluntary will and reason to fabricate the betterment or perfection of self, society, and nature. This conception of humanity as a progressive and enterprising agent became a preoccupation in an array of theoretical schemes of modern European philosophy. Phenomenological and existential thinkers such as Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre signified the subjective and ontological dimension of human life that appeared to be in peril amid the social complexity of modern times. Their apprehension has bestowed theoretical legitimacy on such critical insights of today's "postmodern" theorists (Imamura 1994).

It was this ideal for "progress" that justified a series of political and industrial revolutions in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Those revolutions occurred on the transitional border of two heterogeneous social tempos and world views from those of the cyclical to those of the linear, and ushered the political transformation from absolutism to republicanism, the development of the concept of citizenship, and the new society based on achievement rather than ascribed status as well as on the principle of equal rights.

However, the reinforcement of political legitimacy and the acceleration of econo-technologism required the nation-state to transfigure a fundamentally heterogeneous population into a homogeneous cluster of citizens, and to coin a series of new social categories to warrant the inclusion and exclusion of particular types of people, which spurred the complication of the problem of "identity" in modern times. In addition, the modern preoccupation with "progress" solidified the naturalization of such dichotomies as rational/irrational, normal/abnormal, human/animal, and civilized/barbarious, which often resulted in the augmentation of cruel discriminations, oppressions, and violences in the name of "rationalism" or "humanitarianism." Thus, ambivalent connotations have

been affixed to the doctrine of "progress": it is enlightening, liberating, and democratizing, while being moralizing, excluding, and homogenizing. How best to reconcile "progress" and tolerance for "others" and to accommodate it in the concept of citizenship is one of the urgent issues that face us today (Imamura 1994).

The birth of the individual as an indivisible, enterprising, and progressive social entity ("citizen") was occasioned within these broad sociocultural contexts, and American experiences furnish a culture-specific case for the further development of this process.

The Repercussions of the Civil War

Compared with other highly modernized societies such as those of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, the United States is unique in that it commenced and spurred industrial revolutions with no prior passage of ideological insurrections as manifested in political actions. The War of Independence was fought for the cause of liberation from political and economic domination by the British home government, but not for the sake of an ideological breakthrough from the old world embedded in cyclical time. Early immigrants were already inculcated with a disposition to linear time, a concept of the individual as an independent citizen, and an ideal of society as a republic constituted on mutual trust among those individuals. Even the Puritan immigrants in the early seventeenth century were highly existential, progressive, and enterprising in their deeds, and their biblical communities were founded on the firm conviction of the propriety of their collective reason, will, and covenant. American society was thus better structured for embracing the spirit and experience of modern rationalism from its early times than its European counterparts. The idealism of "modernity" was intensively and extensively appropriated in the definition of "Americanness," which facilitated and legitimized the progression of impetuous industrialization towards the Manifest Destiny for the Pax-Americana in the twentieth century (Imamura 1994).

The ideal of society as a republic sanctioned by independent citizens was thus innate in American history, but its implication has altered in the course of time. According to Gordon Wood (1992), the War of Independence had one of the most radical and revolutionary impacts on American society, effectuating

the permeation of egalitarianism, a preference of achievement over ascribed status, a preoccupation with self-interest, the fragmentation of order, and the obliteration of republican virtue. Wood's thesis requires further historical scrutiny, but it is plausible to assume such a social transfiguration as a consequence of American independence from the British colonial enterprise.

Many historical studies indicate that the Civil War was more far-reaching and penetrating in terms of its repercussions on American society and family (e.g. Bledstein 1976; Chandler 1977; Haber 1954; Hall 1982; Higham 1974; Lynd 1939; Trachtenberg 1982; Wiebe 1975).

The Civil War marked not only the abolition of slavery but also the furtherance of the rapid and profound transformation of an aggregation of fundamentally agrarian, decentralized, self-governing communities into a national society based on econo-technologism, bureaucratism, and expansionism. The Progressive movement of the early twentieth century called for the restoration of the social fabric that was severely corroded by the untrammelled pursuit of wealth and conspicuous consumption in the Gilded Age. As a matter of fact, the volume of advertising had multiplied more than tenfold during the three decades after the Civil War. Ironically enough, however, even the very process of "rationalizing" the tumultuous social conditions accelerated the fragmentation of the old republican social strands based on civic virtue and wisdom. Robert Bellah and his collaborators ascribe this unintended consequence to:

their [Progressive reformers'] commitment to "rationality" and "science" as the chief means for attaining the new national community. They developed an enthusiasm for public administration as a sort of social engineering able to heal political and social divisions and promote a more "efficient" and "rational" national society (1985: 261).

Morality increasingly became a sphere of legal and political procedures, and justice a realm of due process rather than one of substantive ends. The logic of linear time and the "analytical" mode of thinking of modern times were strenuously intensified and impelled in the wake of the Civil War, encompassing all the social areas. Bellah et al. exemplify this case in:

the division of life into a number of separate functional sectors: home and workplace, work and leisure, white collar and blue collar, public and pri-

vate. This division suited the needs of the bureaucratic industrial corporations that provided the model for our preferred means of organizing society by the balancing and linking of sectors as "departments" in a functional whole, as in a great business enterprise (1985: 43).

The departmentalization of life² widened, naturalized, and ossified the polarity between the instrumental, "masculine" world of competitive work and the altruistic, "feminine" world of nurturing domesticity. It was during this period that love and domesticity increasingly became sentimentalized as a "haven in a heartless world" (Lasch 1977) as symbolized in the distinct contrast between the suburban residential ambiance of peace, morality, and concord and the urban industrial surroundings of calculation, competition, and negotiation. It was also during this period that Mother's Day, which had been originally a vehicle for celebrating the organized social and political activities of mothers outside the home, became sentimentalized and commercialized as a special day for commemorating mothers' roles inside the home (Coontz 1992). The family as an arena of "diffusing, enduring solidarity," in David Schneider's (1968) well-known formula, is rather a historical process than a primordial archetype.

The ideology of femininity or a "woman's sphere" was incipient, not to say non-existent, in the ante-bellum American society. The emerging commercial and industrial economy eclipsed the perception of the family as an economically cooperative whole, and the rising affluence rendered women more homebound and culture-oriented." The preeminence of the patriarchal pattern of family life was thus gradually curtailed towards the early nineteenth century (and in rural contexts not until much later), resulting in the prominence and magnification of a woman's sphere as the locus of feeling, piety, sensibility, gaiety, and moderation, as opposed to man's sphere as that of logic, ambition, boldness, vigor, and perseverance.³ "Cult of domesticity" was intensified also as a backlash reaction to industrialization, especially to the presence of many women in industrial workforce (e.g. Cott 1977; Degler 1980; Ryan 1981).

This social interpretation of biology reinforced, and was reinforced by, the departmentalization or nuclearization of the family. According to Stephanie Coontz, American social policy in the nineteenth century was particularly geared:

to free the nuclear family from its former entanglements with kin and

neighbors and to concentrate previously diffused economic and social responsibilities for children within the nuclear family. Courts invalidated colonial laws establishing minimum ages at marriage and requiring parental consent or public announcement of marriage banns. Legislators lowered marriage fees and authorized increasing numbers of officials to perform marriages. These actions made it easier to form a nuclear family without consulting kin or community (1992: 128).

The state's generation and empowerment of autonomous, departmentalized, and nuclearized families against an extended-kin network, community associations, and local rulers contributed not only to stimulate the process of modernization, but also to augment the preponderance of objective, universal principles of the public sphere over subjective, particularistic relationships in the private, domestic domain.⁴ This does not mean that no public intervention into the family existed in the preceding periods. Coontz reports:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, city officials, social superiors, and prying neighbors regularly entered homes and told people whom to associate with, what to wear, and what to do teach their children; families who did not comply were punished or forcibly separated (1992: 126).

What the nineteenth century witnessed was not the public intervention into the private sphere per se but the formalization, specialization, and centralization of regulations by such agents as courts, police and military bodies, administrative and legislative sectors, and highly bureaucratized private institutions.

The hegemony of rationalization and legal codification not only contracted the private sphere but also sensitized it. As Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) explicates with his concept of "bureaucratic individualism," individuals became more sensitive to their privacy and became more reliant on bureaucratic authority and procedure both for shielding their rights and for sheltering their niches, which paradoxically solidified the very process of fortifying rationalization and enfeebling the private domain.

Furthermore, the rationalization and diminution of the private sphere incited the romanticization and sexualization of love. The "date" culture began booming at dance halls, restaurants, and cabarets in the 1920s (Bailey 1989; Rothman 1984). Coontz interprets this phenomenon as follows:

A date...was an invitation of into the public world, involving consumption of goods and services in the market. It was therefore initiated by men, who were more familiar with that world and had the economic resources to operate within it. A date often represented the only way that a girl could gain access to the new world of public consumption... (1992: 196).

The enchantment with love entailed the romanticization and sexualization of the body itself, and sexuality became a major reference and bulwark of identity and individuality. However, both romance and sexuality, while captivating and vitalizing the individual, paradoxically encroached on the private domain by routinizing the means of expression and communication. The passionate bonds and sentiments that existed among intimate friends of the same sex or between parents and children became stigmatized and was hallmarked as perverse (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Faderman 1990). Both men and women became absorbed in embodying "true love" and "ultimate beauty" promulgated by movies, advertisements, and professional experts. Romance and sexuality were thus incorporated into the competitive and consumerist culture of the public domain, leaving the private sphere more susceptible and vulnerable to the logic of the public arena. The ascendancy of emotional and erotic intimacy came to excuse the termination of a relationship that had ceased to stimulate or provide romantic solace and promise (Hochschild 1983; May 1980, 1988; Peele 1976; Sennett 1977). By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had the highest divorce rate in the world (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

The Social Complications in the Post-War Era

The period between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth observed the incompetency of the existing politico-economic system in accommodating the turbulent social fluctuations precipitated by the course of modernization. Such modernized societies as those of Western Europe, the United States, Soviet Union, and Japan leaned upon diverse, often conflicting, methodologies and ideologies, but the nature of their problems and the essence of their solutions was by and large identical. They resolved to overcome the unprecedented "modern" predicaments by undertaking a revolutionary transfor-

mation of their social systems into more planned, controlled, or managed ones, and by bolstering the logic of modernity itself—that is, by accentuating econo-technologism, bureaucratism, and rationalism. A moderately managed and socialized capitalism (“welfare-state”) was what the United States adopted for its “new deal” to resolve the social maelstrom stirred up by the Great Depression (Imamura 1994). The preeminence of the Republican Party over the foregoing seven decades was superseded by the Democratic Party led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The New Deal policy and its idealism manifested the crux of the modern spirit in a most vivid form. The “best and brightest” in the government, the bureaucracy, and the intelligentsia exerted its rational, progressive, and enterprising minds to frame corrective adjustments to the political and economic system, and to fabricate a “Great Society” in the United States. This social engineering engendered the proliferation of bureaucratic organizations characterized by such alphabetical abbreviations as AAA, FCC, SEC, TVA, USMC, and WPA. This “alphabet soup” simultaneously nurtured millions of laborers, and nourished the implementation of the welfare-state. New Deal idealism or liberalism had its ramifications not only for political and economic amelioration but also on scientific progress, technological innovation, educational reform, the Civil Rights movement, urban development, welfare service, and foreign policy.

However, its negative consequences and reverberations, most notably those of the Vietnam War, amplified the skepticism of the American enlightenment and Western rationalism. It was during this period that the American cultural scene witnessed a heightened awareness of “alternative” forms of religion, literature, art, and life style, which was inherited in the spirit of the multiculturalism and postmodernism of today. In addition, a period of unparalleled economic growth after World War II phased out by degrees, and the anti-communist sentiment gained its ground amid acute international relationships. These new contexts expedited the loss of the resources and legitimacy of the social engineering of New Deal liberalism. Since the 1970s, the Republican Party gradually regained its political seductiveness and reversed the ideological current from welfare liberalism to neo-conservatism and neo-capitalism. The inauguration of President Ronald Reagan in 1980 epitomized the termination of the New Deal era and the repudiation of “liberalism” (Bellah et al. 1985; Matsuo 1995). The Republican ideology and prescription proclaimed the energizing of

the stagnated economy and social ethos by emancipating individuals and the private sectors from the web of bureaucratic restraints. Progress in science, technology, and material prosperity was advocated, and even the gigantic military-industrial complex was espoused. On the contrary, governmental management of the political economy dwindled, and the social welfare system also diminished. The problems of poverty and unemployment were structurally perpetuated by the exacerbation of deficits and a deeply afflicted world economy. Even some conservatists assert that Republican insistence on a return to “small government” and “traditional value” often entangled, rather than transcended, these social tribulations (e.g. Peterson 1993; Phillips 1990, 1993; Will 1992).

The contestation for ideological hegemony has been invigorated to such an extent that neither camp has been able to preponderate. Various statistics indicate an American ambivalence towards both liberal enlightenment and conservative restoration, and towards both Democratic social engineering and Republican laissez-faire (Coontz 1992; Dionne 1991; Patterson and Kim 1991; Phillips 1990, 1993).⁵ American political consciousness is woven around these two divergent methodologies and ideologies for the identical agenda of how best to preserve and pursue the modern ideal without impairing the brittle balance of the modern condition.

A sense of ambivalence also delineates the domestic, private sphere in post-war American society. New social developments after the Civil War—rationalization and departmentalization of society, nuclearization of the family, feminization of the domestic sphere, romanticization of love, and sexualization of the body—continued to evolve by expanding their scope and magnifying their intensity. The 1950s witnessed the apex of these emerging circumstances, advocated by the conjecture of governmental incentives and exceptional economic resources of the post-war era. Coontz attests this case:

Less than 10 percent of American believed that an unmarried person could be happy. As one popular advice book intoned: “The family is the center of your living. If it isn’t, you’ve gone far astray”.... Nineteenth-century middle-class women had cheerfully left housework to servants, yet 1950s women of all classes created makework in their homes and felt guilty when they did not do everything for themselves.... By the mid-1950s, advertisers’ surveys reported on a growing tendency among women to find “housework a medium of expression for... [their] femininity and in-

dividuality" (1992: 25-27).

However, such a strong conviction of the supremacy of the family had an effect on what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) terms "symbolic violence," imposing a particular norm on people's thoughts and behavior. Most of the women who wished to continue to participate in the public sphere after their war-time employment were granted few options but to retreat to housewifery or to downgraded, lower-paid "female" jobs (Hartmann 1982; McLaughlin et al. 1988; Milkman 1987). Women who did not embrace "momism" and "creative homemaking" were stigmatized as perverted, neurotic, or schizophrenic. Bachelors and spinsters were pigeon-holed immature, self-centered, deviant, or pathological (Ehrenreich 1983; Hartmann 1982; Miller and Nowak 1977; Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Warren 1987). In addition, the ideology of the family as the "haven in the heartless world" inclined the nuclear family to isolate itself by developing a series of codes of prohibited and expected manners (Eisler 1986; Pleck 1987). Linda Gordon (1988) argues that it was not until the feminist movement in the 1970s that women could possibly disclose cases of incest and sexual abuse. According to Coontz, "one-quarter to one-third of the marriages contracted in the 1950s eventually ended up in divorce; during that decade two million legally married people lived apart from each other," and "[m]any more couples simply toughed it out" (1992: 36; see also Pleck 1987). More American housewives, especially young mothers, felt "trapped" in their feminine roles. (Chafe 1986; Crawford 1978; Friedan 1963; Miller and Nowak 1977; Mintz and Kellogg 1988). Coontz continues, "[t]ranquilizers were developed in the 1950s in response to a need that physicians explicitly saw as female: Virtually nonexistent in 1955, tranquilizer consumption reached 462,000 pounds in 1958 and soared to 1.15 million pounds merely a year later" (1992: 36). Men also felt "trapped" in their identity and self-image in masculine roles and developed a sense of discontent and exasperation with their commitment (Ehrenreich 1983). This symbolic violence afflicted and stigmatized the poor and minorities in particular, who were accorded too little access to resources and privileges to espouse the white middle-class family image (Barnouw 1975; Danielson 1976; Patterson 1986; Tylor 1989).

While this ideology of the family penetrated American society, a series of structural fluctuations thwarted its implementation only to augment people's frustration and agony with the discrepancy between what the family ought to

be and what it actually was.

The industrial expansion, the increased cost of living, the diffusion of new appliances, the Depression fertility drop, the postwar marriage boom, among others, demanded the accommodation of women, single and married, in the labor force. Between 1940 and 1950, the number of women at work increased by 29 percent. By the end of the 1950s, 40 percent of women over the age of sixteen held a job. In the 1960s, the number of working women rose by 39 percent, followed by 41 percent in the 1970s. This amplified involvement of women in the labor force stimulated the prevalence of college education among women and the postponement of marriage and childbearing among couples, which in turn spurred women's further participation in the public sphere and re-examination of their roles and identity in the private realm. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of working mothers bounced by 400 percent, and women with children under the age of eighteen comprised nearly one-third of all women workers by 1960 (Chafe 1991; Easterlin 1980; Kessler-Harris 1982; Harrison 1988; Ryan 1975; Van Horn 1988; Weiner 1985). Housewives who were "supposed to find their moral meaning, political significance, and societal worth in clean laundry collars, new curtains, and creative cookery" (Coontz 1992: 164) until the 1950s⁶ thus acquired an option and incentive, not only for themselves but also for their husbands, to discontinue an unfulfilling relationship for their social rebirth (Matthews 1987; Stacey 1990; Van Horn 1988). The frailty of marriage conversely resulted in driving more women to work (Cherlin 1981; Gerson 1985). The excess of the inflation rate over the average income gain in the 1970s made two wages vital to maintain any continued improvement in real income, which compelled more women, especially mothers of young children, into the labor force (Coontz 1992; Van Horn 1988).

In addition, care of the elderly increasingly became a major function of the family, as more people lived to an advanced age. An average life expectancy of 47 years in 1900 is projected to be 75.5 years in 1995. Various statistics deny the bleak view reported in the mass media that the Americans are abandoning the elderly, but the substantial demographic transfigurations in the post-war era have impeded the embodiment of the ideal of the family as the "haven in the heartless world." Among others, the disproportionate contraction of the number of children, the unprecedented proliferation of the "sandwich generation," and the tremendous emotional, financial or physical burden of care-giving often serve only to brutalize the impact of the symbolic violence (Hooyman and

Kiyak 1988; Louv 1990; Maskowitz 1990).

The other major shift in the configuration of family life is the denaturalization and social re-interpretation of biological facts. Modern medicine has prolonged the average life span and created a new situation where parents have a long period to live with no other company in the household after the children leave home, and therefore parenthood is less an eminent and dominant part of life than it used to be. This trend has been accelerated by the diminution of the average birth rate due to economic constraints and the prevalence of birth control. The evolution of contraceptive and reproductive technology has made the separation of sex, marriage, procreation, and childrearing salient, the logical possibility of domestic alignments multiplied, and the tension between biological and social relationships acute and contentious, as is well manifested in many cases of child custody, child adoption, surrogate motherhood, and genetic tests (Coontz 1992; Edwards 1991; Ragone 1994; Scanzoni et al. 1990).

These ideological, structural, demographic, and technological changes have made the demarcation of family boundaries all the more ambiguous and negotiable, resulting in the enlargement of the sphere of personal choice and in the multiplication of domestic arrangements, as exemplified in the cases of divorce, single-person households, single-parent households, and domestic (heterosexual or homosexual) partnerships (Landsman 1995; Stacey 1990). Coontz describes:

The male-breadwinner family no longer provides the central experience for the vast majority of children, but it has not been replaced by any new modal category: Most Americans move in and out of a variety of family types over the course of their lives—families headed by a divorced parent, couples raising children out of wedlock, two-earner families, same-sex couples, families with no spouse in the labor force, blended families, and empty-nest families (1992: 183).

The ideology of the family which culminated in the 1950s has thus become less feasible and relevant in actual contexts, and various statistics reveal an ambivalent feeling among Americans towards this emergent reality. Liberals celebrate new family pluralism and enlightened individual autonomy, whereas conservatives lament the breakdown of family values and the decadence of social morality. Uncertainty thus characterizes not only the public sphere but

also the private domain in contemporary American society (Bellah 1985; Coontz 1992; Dionne 1991; Skolnick 1991; Stacey 1990).

Modern Dilemmas

The above overview of social metamorphosis in the United States suggests a wider implication for the consequences of modernity and modernization. The industrialization of the economy reinforces, and is reinforced by, the specialization of labor and the solidification of its functional interdependence and integration. However, the interrelationships or linkages of society tend to become invisible and abstract due to the expansion of the national market, the progress of the division of labor, the intensification of competition, and the complication of organizational structures. This lowered perceptibility of a social whole constricts the individual's frame of reference in envisioning and nurturing a context in which he can find himself intertwined within the social web in morally meaningful ways. Bellah et al. assert that "[i]nstead of directing cultural and individual energies toward relating the self to its larger context, the culture of manager and therapist urges a strenuous effort to make of our particular segment of life a small world of its own" (1986: 50). The tolerance for "others," which is so terribly needed to mitigate the moralizing, excluding, and homogenizing dimension of modernity, is hard to further in such an insulated and insulating circle.

The fragility of such a fragmented and sequestered world compels the individual to desperately search for his own security and retreat from outside forces in the name of the protection and exertion of individual privacy, freedom, or rights. However, the dearth of moral interconnectedness has a propensity to empower the legal and political procedures to preside over this process, making the strain in the private sphere between intimacy and impersonal objectivity delicate and acute, as is well symbolized in the case of a small child suing his own parents. This process of what Habermas (1984) terms the "colonization of the private sphere" paradoxically consolidates the atomization of the individual as a self-conscious, exclusive, and vulnerable entity. The relational distance between self and other (or society in general) becomes all the more delicate, intricate, and political in a modern society. Moreover, a harsh reality that those who can afford the best lawyers have a better advantage in the public

domain enervates the authority of morality and ethics, and exacerbates the existential foundation of personal life (Auerbach 1976).

Those individuals rely on consumer purchases, experts, love relationships, or physical distinctiveness to confirm their existence. However, such a self-identity is essentially ephemeral and fragile because these referential artefacts are all transitory. A consumer society's preoccupation with added-value compels the individual to a never-ending quest for evanescent distinctions and insatiable desires, which ironically trivializes the sense of personal fulfillment and actualization that they aspire to carve out (Hochschild 1983; Lasch 1978, 1984). This self-searching is vulnerable to ever-changing and unpredictable conditions of the economy, and particularly so since the late 1960s when the locus of the economy shifted from goods to service and information on a more global scale. The so-called "post-industrial society" (Bell 1976), "late-capitalism" (Mandel 1978; Habermas 1975; Offe 1984), or "third wave" (Toffler 1980) escalated "possessive individualism" (Macpherson 1962), or the game for "distinction" (Bourdieu 1979), whether symbolic (e.g. degree, membership, and manner) or material (e.g. automobile, clothing, and travel). The urgency of psychic and physical appropriation of self-identity is amplified against the encroachment of the public sphere embedded in the rationalism of contracts and transactions. The concern for the scanning and managing of psychic conditions becomes exquisite. This is well reflected in the pervasion of psychology (and its related subjects such as therapy and mental health) as an academic discipline, and more importantly, as a form of popular discourse (Veroff, Kulka, and Douvan 1981a).

The prominence of romantic love stems from such a cultural preoccupation with a psychic self. However, such affective sentiments are also transient, unstable, and elusive. Being essentially an act of securing one's own ego, love comprises a dimension of transaction or investment both implicitly and explicitly. It follows that a relationship falls into crisis if an assumed equilibrium of give-and-take is called into question. Similarly, a subtle boundary between the physical and sexual distinctiveness and the excessive, often destructive, narcissism is prone to be conflated and transgressed as the individual becomes minimized (Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981b; Peele 1976; Sennett 1977).

Moreover, romance and sexuality are deeply incorporated into the competitive and consumerist culture of the public domain and as such susceptible to the routinization of the means of expression, the obsolescence of its enchant-

ment, and the homogenization of the supposedly quintessential self-identity (Cahoone 1988; Gergen 1991; Lasch 1978, 1984; Moog 1990; Sennett 1977). This paradox becomes more evident when romance and sexuality are pursued on the basis of gender-specific departmentalization of humanity. Coontz critically explicates this paradox:

The male lover tries to find a partner who represents the highest embodiment of female virtue and beauty. To be worthy of her, he must meet the highest ideals of male virtue and beauty. The paradox is this: What makes each individual unique in other’s eyes is that each represents the best of a *stereotype*; what makes love complete is when each lover most fully conforms to the proper gender role.... Each person loses his or her *own* half in the process of finding “the other half” (1992: 61-62).

The fragility of identity is also consolidated by the fragmentation of social connectedness both temporally and spatially in an age of rapid modernization— a period of enormous social fluctuation and uncertainty. Broken away from history as a source of moral authority and legitimacy, but unable to count on opaque tomorrows, the autonomous self inevitably focuses its immediate concerns on the present. Similarly, the high social and spatial mobility incurred by the process of modernization undermines a sense of place as an identity. This sense of rootlessness is aggravated by the multiplication of roles and identities in a complex social organization in modern times. Bellah et al. relates this case to what is termed “utilitarian” and “expressive” individualism:

A self free of absolute values or “rigid” moral obligations can alter its behavior to adapt to others and to various social roles. It can play all of them as a game, keeping particular social identities at arm’s length, yet never changing its own “basic” identity, because that identity depends only on discovering and pursuing its own personal wants and inner impulses. If the individual self must be its own source of moral guidance, then each individual must always know what he wants and desires or intuit what he feels. He must act so as to produce the greatest satisfaction of his wants or to express the fullest range of his impulses... (1986: 77).

What seems to be a self is merely a series of social masks that change

with each successive situation. An absolutely autonomous self and a self determined completely by the social situation do not, then, turn out to be opposites (1986: 80).

Robert Wuthnow echoes Bellah et al. by arguing that “[r]ather than providing an ethical system that attaches importance to strict moral obligations, individuality seems likely to be associated with a highly relativistic outlook that focuses on inward pursuits and leaves public or collective values to be informed primarily by pragmatic considerations...” (1989: 203). When a self is devoid of its place in the social universe and a life is reduced to a game, one is more susceptible to fragmentation, alienation, and anomie. Social and moral ecology, Bellah et al. assert, have a propensity to be “damaged by the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to another, leaving them frightened and alone” (1986: 284) in the actual circumstances of modern life. Individual dignity is thus confronted with a possible danger of being invalidated and corroded, despite the modern ideal of the individual as an indivisible, enterprising, and progressive social entity.

American Predicament

Amid such a quandary of self-identity incident to the process of modernization, the twentieth century has observed a spectacular transformation from “horse-drawn wagons to the space shuttle, from washboards to Whirlpools, from quill pens to computer keyboards” (“Our Century,” *U.S. News & World Report* Special Issue 1995: 60). American society has accomplished a dramatic amelioration in the status of discrimination, poverty, ill health, sexism, environmental destruction, and inconvenience of life in general. While innumerable statistics illustrate grim portraits of American modernization, there are multitudinous cases that counterpoise such dismal views and celebrate modern progress. If “history is never history but history-for” (Levi-Strauss 1966: 257), the past is subject to any interpretations by pessimistic conservatives and optimistic liberals to corroborate their ideological legitimacy.

However, there are social structures and ideologies that appear to be exasperating the predicament of selfhood and social life in the United States of today. Lack of investment in social capitals poses structural impediments for

nurturing a sense of social reciprocity that endows contents and substance to the individual identity and dignity. John Galbraith's (1958) criticism of the post-war capitalism as polarizing private opulence and public squalor well corresponds to the deficiency of governmental aids for childcare, education, housing, the infrastructure, medical care, recreation, transportation, utilities, and other public services. It compels each family to think first of its own security and standard of living, spurring a vicious cycle in which a mistrust in government fortifies, and is fortified by, isolation and pressure on the part of the family (Coontz 1992; Miller and Nowak 1977). Coontz critically attests this case by quoting a comment from a Chinese immigrant that "the helping resources in America are devoted only to picking people up (or disposing of them) after they have fallen off the cliff, whereas elsewhere such resources are used to prevent people from getting too near the edge" (1992: 230). As a matter of fact, the United States ranks far lower than most other industrial nations in the level of enforcement of educational, financial, medical, and occupational safeguards (Hewlett 1986; Kammerman 1981; Luttwak 1993; MaFate 1991).⁷ As if to counterbalance this situation, the United States has developed one of the most highly elaborated legal systems in the modern world. Privacy and personal rights are extremely rationalized and emphasized even in the most intimate relationship, as is well exemplified in the intricate code of marriage contracts (Brill 1990).

Left in an open field of self-reliance and self-help, socially insecure and vulnerable individuals are driven to pursue a niche of their own, intensifying competition and inequality. According to the U.S. Bureau of Census (1988, 1989), the top 1 percent of American families held one-tenth of the total household incomes. The upper 20 percent of American families held nearly half the total household incomes and accounted for 80 percent of the increase in family income in the 1980s. By contrast, the lowest 20 percent of American families shared merely 5 percent, and more than 10 percent of American families were below the poverty line.

While people's faith in family commitments remains extraordinary high, criticism and cynicism concerning political and economic structures and authorities have steadily increased in polls over the past 3 decades (Kanter and Mirvis 1989; Newman 1988, 1993; Patterson and Kim 1991; Phillips 1990, 1993). As Coontz contends, "flight from commitment" is more pervasive beyond the family than within it" (1992: 275). A social structure based upon concepts of mu-

tual obligation and reciprocity needs to be ensured in order to mitigate a crisis of social reproduction. Coontz continues:

When there is so little trust and commitment outside the family, it is hard to maintain them *inside* the family... [V]ery few people can sustain values at a personal level when they are continually contradicted at work, at the store, in the government, and on television. To call their failure to do so a family crisis is much like calling pneumonia a breathing crisis. Certainly, pneumonia affects people's ability to breathe easily, but telling them to start breathing properly again, or even instructing them in breathing techniques, is not going to cure the disease (1992: 277).

Bellah et al. are critical of the fact that the Americans "have committed what to the republican founders of our nation was the cardinal sin: we have put our own good...ahead of the common good" (1986: 285). The issue, however, is that they have no choice but to do so under the precarious and adverse circumstances prescribed by the existent fabric of society.

The predicament of selfhood and social life is further made excruciating also by ideology, conservative or liberal, that does not correspond well to changing realities and social structures. This "symbolic violence" is often effectuated in the name of "common sense," "naturalness," "tradition," "progress," among others, and is exerted, implicitly or explicitly, in all the domains of social life.

The "family" is a good case. It is cherished and signified in the American society just as it is in other societies, and just as is the case in other modern societies, the family in the United States is highly idealized as the repository of dependencies, obligations, affections, and reciprocities that tend to be repudiated in the public sphere. However, the American family is simultaneously overwrought as a result of social expectations and responsibilities which form the sole bridge between the individual and society, and as such has become a highly demanding and contradictory field. The crisis of "parental authority" and "family values" is often alleged to result in larger social and structural problems when family life itself is challenged by the austere external conditions and geared "not to link individuals to the public world but to avoid it as far as possible" (Bellah 1986: 112).

Americans are caught between two modes of naturalness in family life—one being the core of the private sphere and the other the cornerstone of the public

sphere. In a society where these two realms are acutely polarized, it becomes all the more difficult to embody the two modes of naturalness in a unified form. This is well manifested in the delicate roles of the government pertaining to family life. The government aims at securing political mandates and legitimacy by providing miscellaneous services and regulations for the family permitting it to reproduce its functions in a capitalist society. These include advantages in taxation, subsidizations, nursing, welfare, education, restrictions on divorce, abortion, marriage age, as well as enforcement of family law, isolation of delinquents from the family, and an ideal image of family life. However, this reciprocal relationship easily becomes overbalanced when the government is perceived to be either "interfering" with the private, autonomous, and affective domain of family life, or "neglecting" the supposedly most fundamental unit of social life. The call for "family values," which has become conspicuous in neo-conservative discourse since the 1980s, appeals to the persistent idealism of "love" in the private sphere.⁸ However, the issue of how best to embody such an affective family life under the regression of governmental involvement and guardianship remains contentious.

Another ideological impediment is caused by radical anachronism, traditionalism, or idealism. The problem of elderly care, as mentioned before, reflects a demographic change during the post-war era, but it is often identified as an indication of moral degeneration or ethical breakup in contemporary society. The ideology of conjugal and gender roles in the nuclear family which culminated in the 1950s is still recurrent. Despite a growing number of women in the labor force, housekeeping and childrearing are still secluded in the woman's sphere, and as such poverty is prone to be "feminized" after divorce (Brannen and Wilson 1987; Delphy 1984; Goldin 1990; Hewlett 1986). Coontz asserts that "most of the pain is caused not by the equality women have won but by the inequalities they have failed to uproot" (1992: 168) and expounds on this situation using the examples of divorce, work, school, and medical care:

Accessible, low-cost divorce has been an important reform for people trapped in abusive or destructive relationships. Yet, the living standards of women and children tend to drop sharply after divorce and bitter custody disputes leave scars on all concerned, most especially on the children who may have to take sides. The majority of women who gain custody of children receive inadequate child support payments, while the

children lose contact with their fathers entirely (1992: 205).

Work, school, and medical care in America are still organized around the 1950s myth that every household has a full-time mother at home, available to chauffeur children to doctor and dentist appointments in the middle of the day, picking up elementary school children on the early dismissal days, and stay home when a child has the flu (1992: 215).

The problem of childrearing is exacerbated by the ideology romanticizing the private, nuclear family which is supposed to play the pivotal role for providing exclusive love and care for the child. The late nineteenth century in the United States observed a decrease in the mortality rate and the separation of women and children from labor (except for the working class). These new developments gradually deprived the family of its traditional function as the integral unit for survival and economy, and advanced a "sacralization" (Zelizer 1985) of childhood and a "proletarianization of parenthood" (Lasch 1977), i.e. a childrearing filled with the ideology of "maternal love." However, the questions of what is "true" love for children and how best to express it began bewildering many parents (Medick and Sabean 1984). At the same time, the preoccupation with the parents' exclusive love and care for children made it harder to envision childrearing as a more "social" enterprise. Coontz refers to this case by asserting that "[t]he debate over whether one parent can raise a child alone, for example, diverts attention from the fact that good childrearing has always required *more* than two parents" (1992: 230).⁹

"Traditional" conjugal and gender ideologies concerning the family also have a propensity to dismay and disorient both men and women, who may even become vindictive when their actual circumstances prevent them from embodying their expected roles, as is well reflected in the high divorce rate in the United States (May 1980, 1988; Mintz and Kellogg 1988). As a matter of fact, several studies demonstrate that incest and sexual abuse, which are alleged to be very frequent in the United States, are committed by males, and that these tragedies are more likely to occur in a family where a father escalates his quest for male (paternal) dominance and authority, and a rigid boundary between the family and the outside world obstructs its moderation (e.g. Gordon 1988; Gordon and Riger 1989; Herman and Hirschman 1981; Kempe and Helfer 1980; Rush 1980; Sanday 1981). This calamity becomes more coercive when the

father's authority is undermined by unemployment (Coontz 1992).

Furthermore, these traditional "family values," just like the enlightening "progressive" doctrines, tend to impose self-righteous and antagonistic attitudes toward those who have different modes of family life for cultural and economic reasons (Barnouw 1975; Danielson 1976; Patterson 1986; Tylor 1989). If American society is ever to be divided up, it is not so much because of cultural diversity and pluralism per se but because of the intransigent imposition of an anachronistic, traditionalistic, or idealistic ideology that refutes any possibilities for other lifestyles.

In actuality, the distinction between structural and ideological causes is probably not so clear-cut as indicated above, and the relationship between structure and ideology is more convoluted and dialectic. The predicaments of selfhood and social life in the United States are well reflected in the pervasion of psychotherapy not only for patients but also in popular parlance, especially since the post-war period (Veroff, Kulka, and Douvan 1981a). Emotional pain, stress or instability often account for the prevalence of drugs and alcohol, and in extreme cases, violence and homicide.

The trajectory of "modern family" in the United States as outlined above demands that future studies of American family should recount more rigorously how Americans construct their social realities and cultural histories by appropriating and internalizing these complex, oftentimes distressing, modern processes in their actual experiences, and at scrutinizing the interactions and negotiations of the familial sphere with these realities and histories. The ultimate goal of such projects is to shed a light on the dialectics between the structural and historical constraints in which American social actors are located and their "practical" maneuver to create and nurture a context for a stable identity and social universe in this late modern era, or to put it more broadly, in their experiment in modernity and modernization.

Notes

- 1 Strauss (1953), and more recently Dyck (1994), underscore a radical shift in moral thought and practice when the modern era was ushered in by Hobbes and perpetuated by Locke. Strauss and Dyck maintain that "responsibilities" (or "social") became superseded by "rights" (or "individual") in the new, modern mode of natural-right thinking.
- 2 The impetus for rationality and measurement was exemplified in the process of classification and

commodification of life course. Chudacoff (1989) illuminates how "age" came to occupy a prominent place in the public consciousness in the course of modernization. "Age" became signified as "a criterion for social status and as a norm for behavioral expectations" (p. 182). "The history of age grading shows that in a bureaucratized society, age has considerable practical advantages as an administrative and normative gauge. It is an easily measured, inescapable attribute and a quality that everyone has experienced or will experience" (p. 190).

- 3 Rotundo (1993) portrays how American conceptions of manhood and masculinity have been transformed from "communal manhood" in the colonial period to "self-made manhood" in the 19th century, and then to "passionate manhood" in the 20th century that gratifies competitiveness and aggression as ends in themselves.
- 4 As Blau and Duncan (1967) point out, heightened universalism has had profound implications for the stratification system in the United States. "The achieved status of a man, what he has accomplished in terms of some objective criteria, becomes more important than his ascribed status, who he is in the sense of what family he comes from" (p. 430).
- 5 While this ambivalence is intertwined with cynicism and apathy, it is also susceptible to radicalism.

"From Jerry Brown on the left to H. Ross Perot in the quirky middle to Pat Buchanan and David Duke on the far right, voters have turned to outsiders and political renegades, hoping they will turn the tide and bring back the prosperity that is central to the self-definition of this society" (Newman 1993: 26).

"In America, the standard political model is to assure the middle class that it's being suckered by some evil other. Americans are addicted to being told that they are deprived of their fair share by 'the rich' and corporations and right-wing scrooges and the Japanese (according to liberals), by welfare cheats and pork-barrelers and left-wing social engineers and the Japanese (according to conservatives), and by 'special interests' (according to everybody). The standard message from politicians and lobbies, who earn fees on every transaction, is: you deserve more benefits and transfers than you're getting. In other words: 'Cut down some more trees.' And the public replies: Yes ! Faster !" (Rauch 1994: 241).

- 6 Shapiro (1986) relates this ideology to the development and prevalence of housekeepers' clubs, housekeeping/cooking magazines, cooking school, and degree programs in domestic science (home economics) in the late 19th century. Domesticity became increasingly rationalized, professionalized, and commercialized.
- 7 For instance, Lawrence Stone, in his Tanner Lecture at Harvard University (1993), provides a long list of suggestions for coping with American society's varied problems, which includes: banning all handguns and automatic weapons; keeping school open until 5 or 5:30 pm; banning violence from daytime television; putting metal detectors in the schools; locking up the 7 percent of incorrigible criminals who are responsible for 50 percent of violent crimes while turning all nonviolent criminals out of jail; federally funding child care; promoting flextime and home employment for working parents; restricting access to divorce for parents with children; legalizing homosexual marriages; cutting back futile attempts to control the supply of illegal drugs; increasing the number of detox centers; garnishing the salaries of fathers who do not pay child care; and cutting off welfare to mothers who continue to have more children.

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- 8 Stone's (1993) historical research indicates that the “golden age of family life” never existed. He rather reveals the stifling repressiveness of the paternalistic moral code that prevailed in European and American society since the Renaissance. The code underscored religious piety, obedience to authority, the passive acceptance of one's lot in life, working hard in one's calling, and the repression of aberrant sexuality by shame and guilt. He interprets this repression of individual liberty as a reaction to the instability of society in those days.
- 9 Hewlett (1986), for instance, argues: “In Europe... there was no flowering of a cult of motherhood. As a result, European governments had no ideological hang-ups—no commitment to mother care—when it came time to set up nurseries and preschools for children. Conservative countries like France and Italy and socialist countries like Sweden have all been able to make pragmatic adjustments to the modern age and provide family support structures for working parents. America, however, remains handicapped by the fifties and its peculiar vision (p. 229).

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