What Is Kinning All About?

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The EASA2016 Conference "Anthropological Legacies and Human Futures", held at the University of Milan Bicocca in 2016, invited scholars to reflect on the legacy of anthropological studies "dealing with new forms of livelihoods, symbolic practices and material conditions". We examined fundamental issues within the anthropology of kinship, and questioned traditional theories, concepts and legacies related to this field. We aimed to reconsider the very notion of kinning (Howell 2006) setting it against the concept of de-kinning (Fonseca 2011); we therefore organized a panel on "Kinning and De-kinning: Kinship practices between 'parental figures', 'reproductive collaborators' and children in new family configurations". The fruitful discussions we had in those very hot summer days in Milan have continued in subsequent years, and we are now building on these reflections in collaboration with some of the panel participants, as well as new colleagues who have joined us since 2016.

We approach kinship by examining ethnographic case studies "at the edge of kinship", where there is "no template as to what the relationship is supposed to be" (Berend, Guerzoni this focus). The development of ARTs (Assisted Reproductive Technologies), combined with social and juridical changes within family structures, have reinvented child production, family reproduction and kinship practices. Contemporary forms of reproduction, family and parenthood (including increasingly complex networks of parental figures and progenitors – biological parents, adoptive parents, donors, birthmothers, surrogates, and social parents) offer new insights to the anthropological study of kinship.

This Special Focus brings together contributions by scholars working on various family configurations that are not typically discussed together: reproduction using ARTs; mixed marriages; same-sex-headed households; step-families; and intentional parenthood, either with or without genetic links. We have collected ethnographic studies from several Euro-American contexts (Italy, Belgium, UK, USA) and from various family configurations in order to show how kin connections are represented, constructed and de-

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constructed. In each article, kinship is not taken for granted [*ne va pas de soi*], and there is a distinct gap between outside observers of the family and internal actors within it. Some of these cases are characterized by the disruption of "important implicit assumptions about kinship and genetic relatedness" (Grilli this focus), while others disrupt other implicit assumptions about kinship and nationality.

We asked the authors to test whether concepts of kinning and de-kinning were useful in making sense of individual and family strategies, particularly in dealing with situations where "biological" and "legal" ties are missing or where they do not coincide with existing categories of kinship.

In her work on transnational adoptions in Norway, Signe Howell forged the term kinning to denote "a universal process" through which a "foetus or new-born child (or previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom" (2006, p. 63). According to the Norwegian anthropologist, the kinning process is the effort of incorporating adoptees into a network of kinship. Any kinning process presupposes a de-kinning process to strip a person of their meaningful relations – either by expelling a kinned person from their kin community, or by not kinning a new-born in the first place through abandonment (*ibid*, p. 70). The concept of de-kinning was developed further by Claudia Fonseca (2011) in her analysis of a direct adoption arranged by a Brazilian birthmother. More recently, these concepts have been used to consider new forms of reproduction involving ARTs (Edwards 2014), and contemporary family configurations such as same-sex couples (Guerzoni 2017, 2018; Sarcinelli 2018a, 2018b).

In preparing this Special Focus, we have recognized that this binary division between kinning and de-kinning was not sufficient to make sense of the high "level of kinship detail" (Edwards 2014, p. 44) used by both internal actors and outside observers to make, unmake, affirm or deny links between people. Existing or imagined ties between people can be not just activated or deactivated, but also never activated, made prominent, ignored, displaced, treated with reverence or indifference, or legitimized. For this reason, we needed more terms than just kinning and dekinning (Sarcinelli, Simon). One useful term is rekinning (Martin; Parisi); and another is akinning or never-kinning, which could be applied to the case analysed by Berend & Guerzoni (although these authors do not use the term themselves). Each one of these processes has its own specific functions. Kinning can be an effort to transform strangers into relatives and citizens (Parisi; Grilli), to foster the familiarization of family members, to tame the child's genetic foreignness (Sarcinelli, Simon; Parisi; Grilli), to build sibling relationships between children of lesbian-headed households, to legitimize the rights of particular family members in the eyes of political and health institutions, or to obtain social, juridical and political recognition (Sarcinelli, Simon). In

contrast, de-kinning is used to symbolically cancel, obscure or hide the presence of the procreative other(s) and to formally, socially disconnect from them (Grilli). Martin defines re-kinning "as the deliberate process through which someone reaffirms existing kin relationships, which have been jeopardised by information or an event that was unknown to them. It involves the active participation of those to whom the information was unknown". Similarly, Parisi describes re-kinning as a fundamental process that occurs due to resemblances between people. Finally, un-kinning/akinning/never-kinning refers to the efforts made by surrogates who do not use kinship idioms to express their relationship with the intended parents (IPs), or the efforts made by IPs to protect against any imagined or real kinning with their children by choosing anonymous sperm donors (Sarcinelli, Simon). These efforts are made before and throughout surrogate procedures, in order to avoid particular participants being identified as kin by either internal actors or outside observers.

All the processes captured here are long-term and involve several actors across different generations. Kinning processes are the result of both individual and family choices, and institutional policies about families. We might ask: who is kinning? The articles here demonstrate that, often, particular acts of kinning/de-kinning are the result of intentional effort by some actors, but not by others. For example, some intended parents put effort into kinning while the state might not (Sarcinelli, Simon); or surrogates might put effort into never-kinning, while external actors may assign them a kinship role (Berend, Guerzoni). In other cases, the gap is between family members; for instance, when children re-kin but other family members do not (Parisi; Martial). In both situations, each actor makes use of different kinds of truth: genetic, biological, scientific, social, biographical, or individual.

When used by internal actors within a family, kinning, de-kinning, akinning and re-kinning are "active, reflexive and intentional processes" (Edwards *ibid*, p. 48) used as "a space of resistance and creativity, where subjects react to social stigma" (Parisi). But kinning, de-kinning and re-kinning also involve outside observers of the family, such as medical professionals and civil servants. Both internal family actors and institutional actors use strategies of kinning, dekinning and rekinning to either extend or limit kinship.

The contributors show that there are many kinds of kinning: as well as symbolic, social or legal kinning (Sarcinelli 2018a), we might speak of emotional, institutional or genetic kinning, everyday kinning, bodily kinning, biological kinning, kinning of biographical capital (Parisi), racialized kinning/de-kinning (Parisi; Grilli), or gendered kinning (Gribaldo 2016, Martial; Grilli this focus).

There are various dimensions involved in these processes, including space and time. In the contributions to this Special Focus, we find entangled

intimate and public kinship spaces (Sarcinelli, Duysens, Razy 2019; Sarcinelli, Simon this focus), several stages and temporalities of kinning (Martial; Grilli) including before birth (Berend, Guerzoni), and various related strategies. This recalls the concept of "strategic naturalizing" (Thompson 2001) through the symbolic, creative and strategic use of somatic characters and resemblance (Grilli; Parisi; Martin); the social activation of "biological facts" (Edwards *Idibem*, p. 46) or national and cultural origins (Parisi); the use of love and care (Sarcinelli, Simon), corporeal substances and bodily processes (Grilli), family history (Parisi), or family everyday practices (Sarcinelli, Simon); and other material bonds such as the ones created by sharing the same food over an extended period of time (Weismantel 1995 in Edwards 2014, p. 48). Strategies vary not only according to the specific family configuration, but also in response to several intersecting variables: race, nationality, class, gender and sexual orientation.

Moreover, kinning and dekinning are heuristic concepts for studying the relationship between the family and the state (Courduriès, Roux 2017). State borders often coincide with kinship borders, particularly in the articulation between familial filiation and national filiation (Fassin 2009).

Parisi's article on kinning through national origins reveals the concrete connections between kinship belonging and national belonging, between being a relative and being a citizen (Ong 2005). On the other hand, Sarcinelli and Simon's article shows how the State has the power to define the boundaries of kinship (i.e. who is kin and who is not) and how, in turn, actors can resist and contest this definition by claiming "kinning rights". The entanglement between the family and the state has been evident since Howell initially used the concepts of kinning and de-kinning to show how Norwegian parents, by kinning their transnationally adopted children, were making them Norwegian, thus incorporating adoptees simultaneously into kinship networks and the body politic. Claudia Fonseca (2011) showed how the Brazilian state unkins those birth mothers who are not fully included as citizens because of racial and social barriers.

To sum up, the contributions to this Special Focus shed light on theoretical and epistemological issues involved in research on these topics and address some unsolved questions and key issues within this field. How do research findings shape and re-shape general concepts (parent, mother, kin)? What constitutes kinship? The Special Focus examines various "ways in which kinship is forged, maintained and broken" (Edwards *Ibidem*, p. 44) and considers how kin are "unmade, cut out and cut off (...) how kinship is undone and (...) how it may never have been there in the first place" (*Ibidem*, p. 46). It points out the fluidity, flexibility and arbitrariness of Euro-American kinship models (Strathern 1992; Edwards, Salazar 2009), their contradictory aspects, and the fact that kinship is far from being self-evident. The articles avoid under-problematizing kinship, instead contributing to the long-term

debate of the definition(s) and significance of kinship.

Marylin Strathern defines kinship as an artefact of the organisation of knowledges from different sources, with "different ways of verifying connections between persons" (Strathern 2005, p. 46 in Edwards 2014). The ethnographic case studies analysed in this Special Focus call into question the "internal reciprocal coherence" of the Euro-American kinship system (Leaf 2001, p. 74). They also point out that kinship relations are far from stable, but rather present different degrees of closeness and undergo many changes over time (Berend, Guerzoni), especially between different generations (Martial; Parisi; Martin). The articles make use of fluid concepts such as new kin, not-kin, kin-like and almost-kin figures who are "like a family" (Berend, Guerzoni). Contemporary forms of reproduction, family configurations and parenthood lead anthropology to "capture notions outside of binaries and standard kinship categories to show the range of relationships created". We aim to "creatively employ concepts to make sense of their paths", to "shift the inquiry from binary questions about kinship, about kinning and de-kinning" (Berend, Guerzoni, this focus), and to forge new concepts to talk about these connections, such as ties, relationships and relatedness (Carsten 2000). This offers a new understanding of the basis of kinship ties and, more particularly, of parenthood (Grilli; Berend, Guerzoni; Sarcinelli, Simon) constructed by institutional actors, medical professionals, third-party reproductive actors, and internal actors within the family. Desire, intention, and everyday bodily contact are claimed as the basis for kinship, rather than genetics, gestation, birth, or biological ties. If contemporary forms of reproduction and family configurations are fluid *coreografie familiari* – familiar choreography (Parisi 2017), they are framed not only by local conceptions of the body and kinship, but also by power relations stemming from race, gender, nationality and generation.

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