

New Family Relationships: between Bio-genetic and Kinship Rarefaction Scenarios

SIMONETTA GRILLI AND ROSA PARISI*

Abstract

Since the '90s, there has been a renewal of interest on kinship studies produced by emerging topics within research into gender, personhood and particularly, the construction of kin relationships through Assisted Reproductive Technologies. The deconstruction of kinship as “a natural fact” has definitely questioned and challenged the genealogical dimension of kinship, which was traditionally based on the link between heterosexuality and procreation. The first part of this paper briefly reconstructs the new theories toward Euro-American kinship perceptions in anthropology. The focus is on the changes resulting from new assisted reproduction techniques, low fertility in relation to changes in genealogical space; and finally, issues relating to biopolitics. In the second part, starting from the ethnographic work that proponents have been conducting for years on homo-parental (same sex) families in Italy, the paper explores the way in which “new forms of family” are currently creating new textures of social cohesion and “relatedness”. The reflections of this paper focus on one hand, the different forms of procreative constructions and parenthood/intentional parenthood, and on the other, the production of “multiple genealogies”, new forms of relatedness and a new lexicon of relationships.

Keywords: Kinship, Genealogical Space, Homoparental Filiation, Lexicon of Relationships, Italy

Introduction

“Kinship is dead. Long live kinship”, wrote James D. Faubion in 1996¹. This

* simonetta.grilli@unisi.it; rosa.parisi@unifg.it

1 We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the precious suggestions. Many thanks to *Rainbow Families Associations*, to *Agedo Association* and to all participants in our ethnographic research. The paragraphs: Introduction, Kinship in the time of Medically Assisted Procreation (MAP), Relatedness beyond kinship: some concluding remarks were written by Simonetta Grilli and Rosa Parisi. The paragraphs: Transformation of the

life of kinship is certainly not only a retrieved life but one transformed by contemporary society. If it is true that at the confluence of this demise and revival of kinship we find the theoretical and critical contribution of David M. Schneider (1984), it is also true that it is thanks to the new perspectives offered by studies on gender, person, Medically Assisted Procreation (MAP), and new forms of filiation, that we have witnessed a renaissance of the studies on family and kinship². New trends of research on recomposed families, adoptive families, LGBTQI families, transnational families, etc., have definitely problematised the traditional way of dealing with kinship as a “natural fact”. Furthermore, they have contributed to deconstruct the genealogical dimension of filiation, symbolically centred on the heterosexuality-procreation nexus (Strathern 1992a, 1992b; Carsten 2000, 2004; Franklin and Mckinnon 2001; Edwards and Salazar 2009).

Overall, kinship has acquired a new position in the public debate and scientific research becoming, according to Marilyn Strathern, the central paradigm to rethink the relationship between nature and what individuals can do through the manipulation of natural facts (Strathern 1992b). Reproductive technologies, in particular, are not only modifying the framework within which we think the relationship between nature and culture but they are also redefining the way we represent the body and ideally reconstruct procreation and kinship ties. By consequence, we have started to perceive and represent reality as a frame where nature is no longer conceived as a separate domain, or a simple reference model in the representation of social relationships and the way society is in general imagined (*idem*). In addition, the multiplication of procreation and filiation choices has inevitably resulted in, on one hand, the inclusion in the legal system of private aspects of human life, such as the substances produced by the body (Rodotà 2006); and on the other hand, it has identified new connections between substance-body-life and, additional in general, private and public domain.

The present paper focuses, in the first part, on the analysis of the development trends in kinship in the so-called Euro-American societies. Such common trends may be identified notwithstanding national specific features or regional, social, cultural and legislative contexts. We particularly refer to biomedical technologies applied to procreation and the impact produced on the practices and ideas of kinship and filiation bonds. We also analyse the “demographic transitions” (low fertility, increased longevity, new forms of

genealogical space and other categories of relatedness, Procreative constructions and other relatednesses were written by Simonetta Grilli; the paragraphs: From life to vital processes, Intentional parenthood and the lexicon of relationships were written by Rosa Parisi.

2 Feminist anthropology, in particular, has long been questioning the biological nature of kinship as proposed in the anthropological kinship theory, claiming the central role of gender in kinship, that has been undergoing a process of “de-substantiation” and “de-naturalisation” (Rubin 1975, Collier and Yanagisako 1987).

cohabitation), in comparison with the most recent changes occurred in the family and the genealogical space. Moreover, we show how such tendencies interweave with another central issue, that is, the weight of political and juridical institutions in kinship issues (recognition and regulation of filiation and procreation, decomposed into its bio-genetics and social components).

In the second part of the paper, we analyse how these aspects find expression in same-sex couples and parenting, that represent the most significant change in family and kinship relationships in general. Our paper is based on the ethnographic research that we have conducted in Italy on homoparental families in the light of the most recent literature on this topic. Homoparenting offers many opportunities to reflect on the transition “from ascription to choice” in kinship formation, on the way in which biogenetic data are reread and interpreted at various levels by different social actors, and a new vision of contemporary “relatedness” is constructed (Carsten, 2000). As we will see, this vision blurs the boundaries between biological relatives, *quasi* relatives, friends, abandoning the great genealogical narratives organised along blood-lines that are reconsidered in more fluid and dynamic family narratives.

Kinship in the time of Medically Assisted Procreation (MAP)

It has been immediately clear that medical technologies applied to procreation processes have been radically changing the idea of human reproduction and maybe, those of individuals and kinship. These technologies cannot be reduced to mere tools to fight the “biological misfortune” of infertility (Héritier 1997), but represent “a different method” to procreate, able to affect reproductive needs and desires of subjects and also on their identity (Strathern 1992a, 1992b, 2005). Technologies, in fact, have responded to people’s need to solve infertility and sterility, simultaneously creating new and most varied necessities: the procrastination of procreation through cryopreservation of the eggs of the so called “freezing mothers”; the desire to have a baby using frozen sperm taken from a dead partner; the chance to deliver without having sexual intercourse, as required by the so called “virgin mothers” (Strathern 1995); up to the point to procreate children with a genetic heritage from a specific ethnic group (Thompson 2007).

In contemporary society, the biological and social reproduction of children is a fact crossing the boundaries and the common sense of the weave nature-culture. We have gone “far beyond nature” (Strathern 1992a), beyond that natural basis represented by reproductive sexual intercourse between a man and a woman that David M. Schneider [1980 (1968)] identified as the central symbol of American kinship. Indeed, science in addition to guaranteeing the “certainty” of a family bond, and its “measurability” (it is possible

to ascertain the “true biological nature” of the relationship through a simple genetic test) allows, in a relatively easily way, the “de-composition” of natural filiation. In particular, maternal filiation can be divided in two different dimensions: we find, in fact, “genetic mothers”, or “gestational mothers”. So, we have gone far beyond the classic anthropological distinction between natural and social parent. The involvement of a larger number of bodies in this process – the genetic body of the possible sperm/egg donors, the gestational woman who offers to carry the baby on behalf of others, and fathers and mothers who identify themselves as “intentional parents” – has finally demonstrated the differentiation of sexuality and procreation, and enhanced the distance between these latter and parental and kinship roles.

If the natural body of the child results from a “collective contribution”, the position of those who have taken part in such generative process is still far from being clearly defined, both socially (social position and role performed by each actor, and their expected behaviour) and legally.³ The effects of Medically Assisted Procreation (MAP) on human reproduction practices, now detached from sexuality and fragmented into successive steps entrusted to biomedical care (see also Gribaldo 2005), have undoubtedly added key elements to the panorama of cultural representations of the family and kinship in contemporary societies. In this respect it is necessary to highlight how MAP processes have stimulated, in some cases, the redefinition of kinship in terms of biogenetic substances (eggs and sperm) understood as symbolic references of the natural dimension of kinship. In a more general term, the question that arises is what does it mean at practical and representational level to deepen this sense of kinship belonging, that becomes visible through technological, scientific and professional discourse. Furthermore, it is also relevant to understand how this transformation has affected the experience of human relationships, still feeding on bodies and materiality as social practices.

Several authors have speculated on the processes that have led to consider of genetics as the new contemporary discourse of “truth” in relation to kinship and filiation (Bestard 2004, Edwards and Salazar 2009, Cadoret 2007). The biogenetic paradigm reappears, indeed, not only in genetic tests that make it possible to ascertain the “real nature” of filiation, but also in the genetic maps of “ancestors” including kinship bonds in biogenetic substances made both by geneticists and anonymous genealogists (Solinas 2015). It is therefore necessary deem the social uses of this knowledge in different

3 We could list a whole host of examples, amongst which, embryo exchange between two couples from Rome that, on the same day, underwent the implantation of fertilized embryo at Pertini Hospital in Rome. This case represents a striking example of the social effects of the “de-composition” of maternity in the life of individuals, in its legal, political but, first and foremost, human dimension.

contexts, as it has become a relevant part of the more general awareness and discourse, both at popular and political level, of the so-called “technocrats” (Edwards and Salazar 2009). Even in the procreation constructions involving same-sex parents, which we will deal with in more detail below, and who pushes forward the breaking of boundaries between biological and social kins, we find references to a genetic heritage in the construction of parenthood, if not in reality a “genomania” (Pichardo 2009). It is required to adopt a perspective that would reveal, on each occasion, what is classified by the different social actors as biological or social. At the same time, it seems also necessary to ascertain the weight and value accorded to biogenetic bonds, to understand better the actual meaning of genetics and biology (Edwards and Salazar 2009). Furthermore, we should be aware that biological connections, in the usual sense, often move beyond genetics determining an “[...] oscillation between biological and social conceptualisations of kinship in our various fieldwork sites: we described this as a trafficking between concepts” (Edwards 2006, p. 133). Some ethnographic examples show how the notion of “common blood lines”, standing for the more commonly accepted “relatedness”, retraceable in a plurality of social contexts in contemporary Europe, not necessarily refer solely to the bio-genetic dimension. An interesting example of the real effects of this “trafficking between concepts” is offered by the ongoing debate in many European countries about the right of the child to know the identity of her/his biological parents, in the cases of anonymous sperm donation, or anonymous delivery, or even in transnational adoptions (Howell 2007).

Transformation of the genealogical space and other categories of relatedness

The other trend that has heavily modified the structural features of family and kinship, directly involving the genealogical space, concerns demographic changes occurring in Western societies, in particular in those countries with a low birth rate, such as Italy (where the ratio is 1.3 children per woman). Overall, these changes include both the modalities pursued in order to “do (and undo) a family” (de-facto, recomposed, single-parent, adoptive and homoparental families), and the most specific aspects related to the transformation of the “culture of reproduction” (Kertzer 1997, D’Aloisio 2007). With particular regard to this latter aspect, the essential information consists in the passage from the “pre-transitional” system – where the decision mainly concerned the “choice to reduce the number of births” – to the present “post-transitional” system, where “what is being decided is (whether or not) to have a baby” (Solinas 2004). If in the first system fertility “is limited”, in the second “the exception is infertility” that becomes in turn, the

new norm in a woman's life, since she spends a great deal of her life trying to avoid pregnancy (*idem*). Parenting turns then into a rarefied experience – one, maximum two, children – originating from an act of will. The decision of having a baby no longer pertains to the field of social fate, or rather to the inevitability of nature. It is made, on the contrary, after careful consideration and is procrastinated till the right moment, for both the single and the couple, therefore forced to develop a strong sense of responsibility. From a wider perspective, another important aspect to highlight is the combined effect of the falling birth rate and the increased life expectancy in the overall reconfiguration of the genealogical space.

If it is true that low fertility is related to the process of *rarefaction* of kinship, that can be interpreted as a progressive reduction of the collateral genealogical axis, the increase of the average life expectancy has resulted in the activation of a process of *verticalisation* of kinship. The number of brothers, sisters, cousins, brothers-in-law, but also uncles and aunts, results significantly lower today, but the subjects experience the opportunity to be in a relationship with a wider range of ages, and different kinship positions (great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and sons/daughters), due to the amplification of the amount of shared time by three or four consecutive generations. Such trends heavily affect the domestic life, parental roles and solidarity practices therefore redefine nature and quality of relationships between generations. Therefore, a different conceptualisation of age and stages of individual life has consolidated over time, along with the redefinition of the sense of belonging to family and kinship. We would like to emphasize, in particular, the overturning of the “genealogical identity of the subject” (Solinas 2004). This is originated by the passage from one structure, typical of a past kinship system, where a lower number of living ancestors was outnumbered by descendants and collateral relatives, to a structure with few descendants and many ancestors (*Ibidem*).

Other social trends that, along with the *rarefaction* and *verticalisation* of kinship, have contributed to reshape the genealogical space are the “instability” of marriage, the loss of its centrality in relation to the family and the definition of filiation. The spread of informal ties, and *de facto* families, has given to natural filiation a social visibility, that it is now recognised as the new starting point for both family and kinship. Almost inevitably, the birth of children results in a sort of social recognition and valorisation of the *de facto* couple as a family. The legitimation of parents and families resulting from filiation, determines a sort of inversion in the genealogical time orientation, not moving forward but backward: it is not the parents who produce the son/daughter but rather quite the opposite (Grilli and Zanotelli 2010).

The priority attributed to filiation in comparison with the alliance – already existing in Family Codes in several European countries and in Italy amended in 1975 – has therefore redefined both the principles constitut-

ing the genealogical space and its internal hierarchies. By consequence, the order and the meaning of events – such as births and marriages – marking the individual's life-course and the domestic cycle has been modified. These processes must be considered also in their relationship with the “relational multiplication” (Simpson 1998, Strathern 2005), resulting from divorce and the family recomposition, that represent a sort of matrix producing several different categories of relatedness (full blood, half-blood kinship and step-kinship). Recomposed families can present in fact both several types of filiation (natural, legal, or step-filiation), and different siblings: full-blood, half-blood brothers and sisters, with one biological parent in common or step-brothers and sisters, with no parent in common (see Martial 2003). Moreover, kinship in the time of divorce also retains “ex” relationships – though in a resignified form – that is, those ties surviving the ending of a marriage or cohabitation (ex partners, ex-grandparents, ex-grandparents-in-law, etc.), and it incorporates all partners' new connections and relations. Step kinship appears therefore much more dynamic in comparison with biological kinship. Namely, it presents specific characters resulting from its being composed not by substitutable relationships – i.e. the step parent does not replace the biological one – but even by additional and, somehow, “unintentional ties”.

From life to vital processes

The observation that kinship in contemporary society is generated and multiplied by the possibility of individual choice, should not lead to underestimate the weight of legal and juridical frameworks in the (re)definition of family forms and filiation models. In general, the State defines what a family is, or should be, that is, those who or are willing or can actually marry, and which forms of partnership can gain the status of a “real” family (Saraceno 2012, Marella and Marini 2014). In addition, it also states what a son/daughter is from a legal point of view and provides all rights and obligations of parents, children, relatives in family relationships. Generally speaking, through this monopolisation of recognition and the consequent creation of a related vocabulary, the State, in all its manifestations, takes control and normalises situations, creating symbolic orders that allow the intelligibility of the relationships between individuals (Butler 2006).

A particularly relevant sphere of action is the policies of the reproductive health establishing the feasibility and limitations of procreation. In Italy, for example, law 40 (approved in 2004) on assisted reproduction – today totally different from its original form and also altered by the external intervention of the Constitutional Court – represents an interesting specimen. This law shows how MAP has been used primarily as a “laboratory practice”

to reproduce the “natural family”. It aims, in particular, to “normalise” parenthood as something still closely related to genetic bonds in a traditional heterosexual context. Moreover, this law officially offers a new conception of life centred on the dignity of the embryo, and also affirms its respect and tutelage as a legal entity. Law 40/2014 therefore, brings onto the stage the “ghost” of the foetus as a sign of a paradigm shift in the concept of life itself (Duden 1994).

Many authors have used the concept of bio-power to analyse these issues. It seems then, that bio-power’s objective is not just to administer life in its most material bodily form, as happened in the past, but also in the biogenetic materiality of its substances (Bestard 2004, Resta 2008). So each single biological part (gametes, tissues, but also blood, etc.) that technology has contributed to separate from the body is stored, classified and manipulated. Also reproductive substances no longer belong to the owners but are possessed and exchanged between unknown subjects. Biogenetic banks (of sperm and oocytes), for example, buy, patent and put them on the market as if they were goods, sometimes just for a few hundred Euros. Hence, the consequent appearance of a parable modifying “human reproduction in terms of consumerism of biogenetic reproductive substance” (Bestard 2004, p. 253).

Therefore Biogenetic banks become the “new global reproductive bodies”, or better still, “the new global wombs” where the body, as has been pointed out by Rodotà (2006), is multiplied, reproduced in a transnational space and in a time expanding towards the future beyond the limits of human existence. The creation of these networks of banks, and the possibility to maximize time and space of control and the manipulation of biogenetic substances, results on one hand, in the interweaving of the bio-political sphere with bio-law and bio-economy, and on the other, it directly relates to procreation acts. In particular Rose (2007), has investigated the transformations occurring in the field of biomedical sciences, and has highlighted the process of “molecularisation” of life – now imagined as a set of “sub-cellular processes”, and its representation through the DNA paradigm. According to the author, such transformation has produced new forms of subjectivity where the expectations, the desires and behaviour directly affect the “somatic identity”, that is physical and biological details. In fact, we are now facing a powerful system directly affecting life and its codes, imposing new “truth regimes” on life, that appears de-historicised and dematerialised. Moreover, it pushes towards new forms of “biological citizenship” where the body, in all its parts, becomes central in the increased demand for rights (Rose 2007). Genes, biogenetic substances, and the *foetus*, in particular, is presented to the public as a new “subject” claiming rights and protection,

as stated in several documents produced by the Roman Catholic Church⁴.

Accordingly, a semantic and symbolic change of places, subjects and relationalities deriving from the reproduction of life, from the body of the woman (Duden 2006) to those involved in the process by the donors, takes place. For instance, the new “community” of *diblings*⁵ originates from the encounter of subjects related to the same donor (Freeman et al 2009, Hertz and Mattes 2011), a new form of kinship that feeds on the practices and representations, and now also with the demand of legal recognition (Cahn 2015).

Generally, as Rodotà has observed, the “post-genomic” society is witnessing an increase in the number of possible relevant choices regarding different aspects of human life (birth, death, health). As a consequence, intimate life is increasingly crowded with laws (Rodotà 2006). On the other hand, if it is exact that economic truth permeates all procreation practices – both general bio-economical processes and individual imaginaries – we should also reconsider the many ways in which the genes “lose their universal characters of being a fact of nature – the human genome, becoming integrated into the relational aspect of kinship” (Bestard 2004, p. 262).

Homoparental families and kinship in Italy

Same-sex parenting in the contemporary scene works as a sort of “amplifier” of the complex, and sometimes contradictory, transformations occurring in the ways we ‘make’ a family and conceive kinship in general (Weston 1991, Weeks *et alii* 2001, Sullivan 2004, Gross 2005, Taylor 2007, Cadoret 2008, Pichardo 2009, Parisi 2014a). In more general terms, homoparental families are part of a broader context aimed to redefine kinship ties. They represent, indeed, the most advanced point of a sort of extremely “conscious kinship”, that carefully identify care, choice and love, as fundamental principles of filial and family ties. Furthermore, reflexivity and transparency become the distinctive features of the form of family chosen by this part of the population, finding in the associationism a ground for confrontation and visibility (Tarnowski 2012, Grilli 2014). For this reason, starting from the Italian case study, that will be presented primarily through our ethnographic research, we have chosen to focus on this specific mode of “making” a family and “represent” kinship ties. We therefore analyse, on one hand, the sev-

4 *Carta Dei Diritti Della Famiglia*, Pontifical Council for the Family, October 22 1983. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_19831022_family-rights_it.html, last accessed on September, 21 2015; *Il Rispetto Della Vita Umana Nascente e la Dignità Della Procreazione*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, February 22 1987, <http://goo.gl/CcYa8m>, last accessed on September, 22 2015.

5 Term resulting from the English word *sibling*, meaning brothers/sisters, the letter “D”, referring to the procreation through the donation of gametes.

eral possibilities of filiation and “solutions of procreation” in homoparental families; and on the other, we concentrate on the many conceptualisations of parenthood and the vocabulary originating from these new relationships.

Procreative constructions and other relatedness

The several “procreative solutions” experienced by same-sex parents direct our attention to some important issues related to intentionality; the difference between social and biological parenting; the weight attributed to biogenetic connections, resulting from the participation of third parties (donors, gestational mothers), and in general from the impact of gender difference on the genesis of kinship (Hayden 1995, Cadoret 2007, 2008, Gross and Mehl 2011, Gross 2014, Nordqvist 2012). Starting from the recognition of the difference between lesbian motherhood and gay fatherhood, visible both in the generative process (in the “fabrication” of the filial relationship) and the exercise of parental responsibility in everyday life, we particularly focus on the way aspiring parents use medical technologies, that would eventually affect their “filiation choices”⁶.

In Italy, the specific nature of same-sex parenthood clashes with its institutional invisibility and with the impossibility for the intended homosexual parents to have access to the MAP regulated by the law 40/2004, that, as we have seen, prohibits both the gestational surrogacy and, till last year, the use of gamete donation, thus representing an insurmountable obstacle for homosexual couples who require a “third party” to realise their parental project. Moreover, they are forced to “procreate in exile” (Zanini 2013), in clinics abroad – sharing this condition with many infertile or sterile heterosexual couples – and prevented from ensuring bilateral parenting, since only the biological parent obtains legal recognition in Italy⁷.

An ethnographic survey shows the couple as the dimension in which lesbian motherhood and gay fatherhood are most frequently planned and realised. In

6 This paragraph is based on different data collected during an ethnographic research conducted from 2009 on homoparental family members of “Famiglie Arcobaleno. Associazione genitori omosessuali” (“Rainbow Families. Association of same sex-parents”), an association founded in 2005 to support and defend the homosexual parenting. Thanks to the contacts established with activists and to my personal participation at several public events (seminars, festivals, Pride), I had the opportunity to meet different homoparental families living in some cities of central Italy (Florence, Siena, Perugia). Quantitative data are derived from a survey (an on-line questionnaire) I have conducted last January (2015) among the members of the association.

7 At the moment, the draft of the Law Cirinnà for the legal recognition of civil partnership, also for same-sex couples, focuses on the issue of the legal recognition of non-biological parent through the so called “step-child adoption”. This remains though one of the most debated questions among the political parties.

personal narratives, the choice to have a child is commonly represented as the expression of individual desire shaped *on* and *by* a loving relationship with a partner who wishes to be a parent as well. This explains the very few examples of single parenting and also of co-parenting, in which the couple enters into an agreement with a “third party” (a single or one couple) in order to realise a shared type of parenting. This latter form of parenthood has not found favour among Italian same-sex couples, probably due to the many difficulties concerning a “multiple parenthood” in this country. With the exception of those who have already had children from previous heterosexual relationships, the majority of same-sex parents have resorted to MAP technologies⁸, mainly carried out abroad (in the United States, Canada for men, and Spain, Denmark, Belgium etc. for women). This was abundantly clear in the data provided in 2009 by the association “Famiglie Arcobaleno” (Rainbow Families), and confirmed by a more recent survey involving the members of the association to whom it was administered an on-line questionnaire which aimed at identifying some socio-demographical aspects and family types in order to better understand all prevalent “filiation choices”. The “sterility” of same sex-couple is resolved mainly adopting those practices recommended by medical technologies which help men and women to become parents¹⁰: aspirant fathers prefer the “gestational surrogacy”, where the embryo is fertilised with the egg of a female donor other than the gestational surrogate¹¹. On the other hand, aspirant mothers mainly resort to intrauterine insemination (IUI) and, in the case of failure, to the in Vitro Fertilisation (IVF). Only a few of them succeed in becoming pregnant through self-insemination.

As is the case with many heterosexual couples, who, being unable to have children naturally, consider the use of medical technology “a support to

8 This trend is common in France, See Gross, Courduriès, Federico, 2014.

9 In 2009 the families registered were only 188, though the majority were represented by female couples (<http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org/Documenti> last accessed on May 15 2013). By the end of 2014, the members were more than 1000 and the number of families had more than doubled (450 units). People who answered the questionnaire (100) live mainly in the central and northern regions of Italy (almost 85%), and the majority of them (67%) are graduates. Among them, 67 are parents (62 in couple and only one is a single parent); the others are couples and singles without children. Most of the families with children are formed by mothers (49), and only in 14 cases by fathers (13 in couple and one single). Mothers have in total 52 children (an average of 1,13 children per couple), fathers have in total 27 children (an average of 1,93 children for couple). Births are mostly concentrated from 2010 to 2014 (61 on 79). The average age of biological mothers at the birth of their first child is 37,14, that of biological fathers is 41,4.

10 All children (27 in total) of gay fathers are born through gestational surrogacy in clinics of the United States and Canada. 39 out of 52 children (75 %) of lesbian mothers are born through MAP (25 with IUI; and 13 with IVF); and 9 children through self-insemination.

11 Also France has presented similar amendments, see Gross and Mehl 2011.

nature” (Gribaldo 2005), same-sex couples prefer to “have a baby of their own”, who will be partially perceived as theirs, with the use of MAP – an almost compulsory solution for these parents, since it is impossible for them to adopt children in Italy or in other nations, despite the few recent cases of foster care allowed by some Italian courts. Through a closer look at “procreation solutions” we realise that the genetic and biological aspects are fairly often present in complex and controversial forms, and with various possible results also among same-sex couples. Quite inevitably here, sexuality-procreation-pregnancy-delivery appear “de-composed” into several forms.

In the different stages of the “generative construction”, aspirant parents have to make some choices that recall the issue of biogenetic constraints: who is going to be the biological parent? What is the identity of the third parties (sperm/ova donors, gestational surrogate) taking part in the generative process?

Several explanations have been provided for the choice of the biological parent, such as personal desire, willingness to continue a family lineage, or simply chance (Grilli 2014). Elena, social mother of three children she had with Giuliana, their biological mother, expressly refers to these two forms of maternity (her own and that of her partner) by saying: “one was more physical, the other more mental, also because pregnancy had never been my desire”. The desire to physically experience maternity is a recurrent motive that drives each woman to have own biological child. As an interviewee said: “It was a common desire, we both made several attempts and Fate wanted me to be the first to get pregnant; then we both decided that Simona had to be the mother of the second child”. Rarer are the cases of women resorting to the ROPA (Reception of Oocytes of the Partner), “a decomposition of maternity” where both mothers have a natural bond with the same child: one woman contributes with her eggs, the other woman will receive the embryo transfer and be the recipient. On the other hand, also among men is a common practice the double biological paternity where each parent is the genetic father of his own child. More recently, twin-births, very common in gay couples, clearly reflects the desire of the two parents to become the biological fathers of their own children: in some cases, twins come from the ova fertilised by the sperm of both fathers. Thereby we have two genetic fathers for two twins.

If in the case of mothers having a child for each is motivated mainly with the desire to experience the physicality of motherhood, in the case of men this practice seems to reflect the will to have genetically their own child, with their physical characteristics. In both cases however, other additional issues come into play. Central is probably the search for harmony within the couple choosing double maternity, and paternity, as the most strategic solution that should somehow compensate the imbalance deriving from the generative practice and the legal recognition of the baby.

Not only the choice of generative roles of each parent (subject, as seen, to a more or less complex negotiation), but also the choice of a third party collaborating in the generative process (male and female donors, gestational surrogates) shows the implicit pressure that “nature” (both in its genetic and bodily form) continues to exert in the construction of the homoparental filiation.

It is necessary, therefore, to include in our discussion the degree of “transparency” followed by these homosexual fathers and mothers, with specific regard to several options: an “open donor” (male or female), willing to reveal his/her identity, or to even come into contact with the intentional parents, and the baby he/she has contributed to give birth to. Other options are: an “anonymous donor” (male or female) or in some cases, a “friend sperm donor”, chosen among the acquaintances of the lesbian couple, who obviously does not play the role of father.

About the identity and role of donors, a significant divergence persists between the fathers and the mothers that recall their different roles in both the procreation process and in the exercise of parental responsibility (see also Gross and Mehl 2011). Lesbian mothers, in fact, would much rather resort to an anonymous sperm donation, in the belief that they can exclude the knowledge and possible relationship with the “kind man” who generously allowed them to become mothers (see Gross 2014)¹². In so doing, the lesbian couple reveals greater self-sufficiency, in comparison with gay couples, both in the generative process and the exercise of parental responsibility, and seems to focus more on the construction of a “double maternal role” for the two mothers. Conversely, gay fathers are more willing to waive the donor’s anonymity in the case of gametes donation, so revealing a peculiar sensitivity for the social status that should be attributed to the individuals contributing to the procreation process. Furthermore, they also show particular concern for the consequent relationship with the ova donors and gestational surrogate, in particular, whose central role in the gestation is difficult to render invisible¹³. In both cases though, the donors’ contribution represents “a precious gift” (Godelier 2004), but legally and socially irrelevant in the definition of parental bond: donors and gestational surrogates are not to be considered fathers/mothers, despite the fact that their identity is often revealed and, in some cases, a social bond is established with them – with gestational surrogates in particular.

Furthermore is very interesting to consider the methods chosen by parents to give birth to siblings through the body of a third party. In fact, resorting

12 Lesbian mothers have opted for an anonymous sperm donor in 81,08 % of cases, men, on the contrary, prefer an open ova donor in 73.43% of cases.

13 The creation of social ties among donors and particularly among gestational surrogates and the intended parents is advocated by the Association. These issues are dealt with in a recent document of *Famiglie Arcobaleno* <http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org/Documenti> last accessed on May 15 2013.

to the same donor to have a second baby, in the case of two mothers, and the same (donor or) gestational surrogate, in the case of two fathers, means that the donated substances (ova, sperm) and the uterus in the case of gestational surrogate have the capacity to “connect” the children of each parent, that is the capacity to create a kinship bond – brotherhood/sisterhood. They can create, in fact, a kinship, such as a *genetic sibling*, half-sibling, in the case of sperm or ova donation, or a *womb sibling*, because they have been delivered by the same gestational woman (Grilli 2014).

The third parties involved in the procreation, have children on behalf of others: they are biogenetically linked to the babies but not are recognised as their parents. However, their contribution to the generation of children of the same couple is able to create kinship bonds among those who are connected through them. Such evident paradox reveals, therefore, the hidden logic of such situations. The strategic, or “creative” use of biogenetic ties in some parental choices, gives way to other denials of – formal and social – some genetic or biological bonds (Hayden 1995, Sullivan 2004, Cadoret 2007).

Intentional parenthood and the lexicon of relationships¹⁴

All filiation options, considered above, raise new questions. How a relationship between the biological and the non-biological parent can be recomposed? How a new lexicon of such relationships can be created?

The arguments presented in this paragraph refer to the results of an ethnographic research conducted in Rome on same-sex family members of “Famiglie Arcobaleno Association” and on family members of AGEDO (Association of homosexuals’ parents) in Rome and Foggia. The construction of parenthood is always a dynamic and relational process, and in this case, as emerges from the ethnographic data, it is imbedded in, and connected to social homophobic regimes and heterosexual discourse (see also Weeks *et alii* 2001, Hicks 2011). They produce imaginaries and expectations on the parental bodies, in the form of incompatibility between homosexuality and maternity/paternity.

As stated in many interviews, the choice of parenthood often deals with the detachment from an experience of maternity/paternity, represented and

14 The biographies of ten same-sex families in Rome are reconstructed through joint or separate interviews with partners and, when possible, with their parents. The research on same-sex families originates from many sources, such as audio-visual materials, self-produced by the associations or by single individuals, and informal interviews. All the respondents were contacted through the association “Famiglie Arcobaleno”, or met in the occasion of public events concerning family matters and homosexuality. The research study on homosexuals’ parents involved 15 families living in two cities (Rome and Foggia) and was conducted through informal encounters and joint or separate interviews with the two parents and, when possible, with other family members, such as brothers and sisters.

imagined as an experience only possible within heterosexual relationships. For lesbian mothers it means that the love of a same-sex person, in addition to excluding them from a “normal” family, would also deprive them of motherhood skills (Parisi 2014b). These latter seem to originate, and produce, the traditional family model based on heterosexual bonds. As Federica says¹⁵:

There was a time when I conceived motherhood only with a man (...). When I left my husband and went to live with Cecilia, I had to show other people that even though I was in love with a woman I was still capable of being a mother.

For gay fathers, as stated by many interviewees, the choice of parenthood is even more complicated. Furthermore, the idea of parenthood that involves only men/fathers becomes an experience that should be redefined according to new “birthing bodies”, on one hand, and the new conceptual contexts within which the connection/difference between substances and gestational bodies reworks. Gay and lesbian parental affirmation, becoming increasingly widespread among the younger generations (Lingiardi and Caristo 2011), should be assessed, therefore, in the light of new models of motherhood and fatherhood, and, prior to that, with new images of parenthood. Most notably, new homosexual parents are related to procreation technologies, as we have seen, not only in technical terms, using all their reproductive potential, but they also embody the related symbolic scenarios deriving from such practices. The disjunction of sexuality from procreation and birth, therefore becomes the scenarios that allow the displacement from the sexual dimension of conception to the “ideational/intentional dimension” of the pro-creative purpose, without which no children would be born.

The term “intentional parents”, already existing both in literature and in current vocabulary, of the considered couples who met during my ethnographic research, refers to a slippage originating from parenthood based on the sharing of genetic heritage, and that resulting from the social “fabrication” of a child (care, education, nourishment). As a woman interviewed pointed out:

I tell my son ‘you were born not by the merit of the donor’s sperm; your mother and I wanted you to be born. We took all the necessary steps required to make it happen. The man you call Dad was unconcerned about your birth. Without us, you would not have come into existence. (...) We do not want to have anything to do with a man who might be the donor of many other children’ (Marilena)¹⁶.

15 Federica is a forty-five-year-old nurse; she met Cecilia at work. Federica has a child from a previous marriage with a man; she is now divorced and lives with Cecilia.

16 Marilena is an engineer from Sicily; she has been living with Carla for many years. They met during adolescence on the football pitch, both playing for the same team. After

Nevertheless, what we are witnessing is the re-emergence of bio-genetic aspects, even though no longer related to the identity of the donors (Parisi 2014b). In fact, genes become autonomous entities detached from their owners/donors, so becoming “personal properties” (Nordqvist 2012). Sometimes we observe an expansion of intentionality that goes to cover children born from previous relationships. As in the case of the daughter that a lesbian woman had from a previous heterosexual marriage, who is not only incorporated in the new family, but also considered a step-daughter by the same-sex partner of her mother, and sister to the son born from the present relationship of the two women. In such cases, intentionality is even extended from the “fabrication” of children to that of sibling, as it happens in recomposed heterosexual families. Siblingship produced by intentional parenthood of these two mothers reinforces and enlarges familial bonds. The incorporation of the non-biological parent, produced through the interweaving of biological and social elements, is connected to the tendency of same-sex families to “break” the boundaries between kin and kith. In so doing, they build more flexible family networks bringing together different subjects: relatives, non-relatives, friends, and all those individuals involved in a reciprocal caring relationship (Weston 1991, Rothblum 2014, Fassin 2011, Corbisiero 2016).

The process of inclusion of this new relatedness within “family cartographies”, as emerged from field research, is supported by the use of a specific kinship terminology. In order to illustrate this point, we will focus briefly on the terms aunt/uncle – niece/nephew, son/daughter. The naming of such relationships is central to the analysis of the kinning processes in these families. Aunt is a polysemous, relational, contextual term, traditionally stretched beyond genealogical positions. The first example of its use is in families with two fathers where it refers to the woman who gives birth to their children. In some cases the woman is also called “womb aunt”, a term that emphasises the relationship parents-children-gestational mother, where the term “womb” is directly associated with the birth of the child. Such use of the term ‘aunt’ undoes the signs of maternity on the body of the woman, inscribing the new-born child into the project of the two fathers¹⁷.

The term aunt/uncle is also used to strengthen the network of family relationships so as to include non-kin and friends in a quasi-kinship relationship. In this case aunt/uncle is linked to the term niece/nephew and refers to those-kith-(quasi) kin that become aunt/uncle of their children. The

several years spent in Palermo they moved to Rome for work.

17 In some cases we also find the term “womb mother”, where the term mother does not refer to the parental relationship between the woman and the baby delivered, but simply connect the baby with the place and the event of its birth.

relationship aunt/uncle- niece/nephew, between kith-(quasi) kin and their children does not create though a tie of cousinship. In fact, the children of the couples involved in these new relationships are not considered cousins. Therefore, the relationship between aunt/uncle- niece/nephew, within the framework of elective kinship, freed from a genealogical dimension, cannot reproduce all kinship positions that descends from it, for example that of cousinship. To make this happen, it is necessary that the aunts/uncles become linked through a (real or fictitious) bond of brotherhood/sisterhood.

The absence of biological traces does not prevent these subjects, linked by a solidarity exchange, from being included in the new “kinship cartography”. Although, it must be observed, these kith never take place in “kinship cartography” in the position of brother and sister but, as we have observed, in the indirect position of aunt/uncle of their children. In fact, family relations maps do not provide for given inclusions but rather for selective inclusion also for the kin. In some cases, the father rather than the mother, a brother rather than a sister, an aunt/uncle or a cousin rather than other aunts/uncles and cousins, are included in the kinship network. It depending on whether they have accepted their homosexual parent’s coming out or not. By consequence, the representation of kinship bonds recompose the family of origin articulating it on an equal-standing relationship with other subjects not included in the traditional map. In the end all this results in a larger and more flexible idea of “chosen/elective kinship”.

One last example is that of considering the terms used to refer to the son/daughter’s partner. In this case we find a wider range terms, from the simple partner, husband/wife, boy-friend/girl-friend, to the more inclusive son/daughter. According to Martine Gross (2011), the use of terms such as friend and son respectively allow one case to pull off the homosexual relationship and in the other to incorporate a subject in the kinship avoiding any reference to conjugal bonds. It is as if the family acquired a blood relative (son/daughter, brother/sister) rather than an affine. It is mainly in the field of affinities, that terminology presents evident innovations and refunctionalisations, as the use of the neologism “nuoro/son in law”¹⁸. The term is coined to refer to the partner of a son and is an example of heterosexual dystonia, that is, an attempt to incorporate homosexual sexuality in a terminology system constructed according to heterosexual norms.

The naming of all subjects incorporated in this family and kinship cartography highlights both the inadequacy of the traditional denomination system and its creative uses, and the refunctionalisations aimed to express “unexpected” forms of parenthood and relatedness. Moreover, this risemanticisation of kinship illustrates how, though in decline, kinship continues to

18 The masculine form for the Italian feminine “nuora”, daughter in law.

exert a certain influence on the imaginaries and the vocabularies through which the new relationalities are thought and articulated. On the other hand, kinship also underlines how the use of terms such as son/daughter, aunt/uncle, niece/nephew reveals a process of familiarisation, inclusion in the affective bonds and family history, rather than a repurposing of the genealogical system. All these terms, therefore, show a contemporary cartography of relatedness, denoting individual but not structured relationships.

Relatedness beyond kinship: some concluding remarks

In the present paper we have illustrated, on one hand, the structural decline of kinship and its collateral rarefaction, and on the other, its capacity to regenerate itself, to multiply into many hitherto unknown, somewhat unexpected, relationships originating from recomposed family and kinship (Strathern 2005). These latter represent, in fact, a partial *compensation* of the collapse of the areas of genetic-procreative bonds considered the foundations of the traditional family and kinship. Sibling relationships, in particular, reduced by the above mentioned process of rarefaction, are unexpectedly reproduced also by both same-sex families and the recomposed families, which we have only mentioned. As we noted, the siblingship formed by children of same-sex parents, as well as that of recomposed families, refer to several categories of siblings (Martial 2003): siblings sharing, in whole or in part, the same genetic heritage, or only partially linked in terms of genetic or gestational (because delivered from the same surrogate mother); or, step-siblings that, though not biologically related, are such because of the relationship between their respective parents. Along with these siblingships, socially recognised and valued, we also referred to the so-called *diblings*, produced by post-modern biogenetics. In a way they try to reappropriate their genes in a socially constructed self-aware relatedness.

What siblings – with anonymous sperm/ova donors in same-sex relationships – and *diblings* – sharing the same sperm donor – have in common is the actualisation of a siblingship determined by the irrelevance of the biological parent. To be more specific, whilst in same-sex families siblingship results rather than the sharing of a genetic heritage by family practices of everyday life; in the second case, siblingship originates from the willingness of the same co-donor siblings who decide that their biological bond is relevant to them, not to have more parents but to have more siblings. As a result, the collateral dimension takes on a new significance and open new perspectives on kinship and relatedness. Therefore the children fabricate their parents, but they also create their siblings, and in a way, it is the siblings who create their parents.

The study of homoparental filiations, in particular, has evidenced the effects of the “de-composition” of filiation and parenthood generated by

medical technologies (insemination, assisted fecundation, surrogate maternity) and the inevitable involvement of third parties (sperm/ova donors, gestational woman). These latter take part in the generation of a baby but don't find, and don't expect, a parental role, though in some cases they established a social relation with the intentional parents and their children. Not infrequently all these procreative solutions carried out by same-sex parents trigger a *socio-poietic* process aimed to redraw the boundaries and the sense of being together. In fact, they shift the focus from "biology" to "intentionality", firstly, because they want to make visible and attribute a social and status to the non-biological parent, but also because they are inevitably forced to deal with the physicality and biogenetics of their-filiation.

It is striking that precisely inside this advanced decomposition of the genealogical space, we are witnessing a revival of a traditional terminology, with the use of terms such as aunt/uncle, niece/nephew, etc. Such terms already readapted to specific past contexts, far beyond genealogical relationship boundaries (Piasere 1998), are today resemanticised so to include in the family cartographies otherwise "nameless" social relationships.

Kinship ties undermined by the experience of inconsistencies and possible objections, find a solution in the family narrative which follows the decision on the part of the subjects involved, to reconstruct significant relationships. If it is true that these new forms of procreation have produced a change in traditional kinship, it is also true that they have created new narratives eventually capable of making sense of the modified scenarios. "Kinning" processes, in fact, put together genealogical fragments, biological and non-biological kin, friends, gestational woman, sperm/ova donors, starting with the different positioning of the subjects involved and their biographies. Therefore, the decline of nature, the rarefaction of kinship, has dragged with it the de-composition of writings and genealogical narratives in a new form of kinship representation. It results in a (a)genealogical cartographies, where the belongings are produced within fluid relationships, in which the boundaries between ascription and choice, between *kin* and *kith*, are re-composed into an ethical dimension of kinship.

Finally, the picture that emerges reveals various trends where kinship, on one hand, with the "reappearance" of several forms of siblingship and on the other side, with the re-appropriation of a traditional kinship lexicon, chosen to denotate new and social bonds, also in their "unexpected" form, seems to take revenge on the processes of de-composition, the fluidity of forms, on the prevalence of choice over ascription (Zonabend and Collard 2013).

Such revival, as we have demonstrated, cannot be considered a simple sign of the restoration of the realm of nature, but it incorporates instead the many "beyonds" that have emerged, first of all, that of a kinship which is assessed "beyond" itself.

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