Doing Politics – Making Kinship: Back towards a future Anthropology of Social Organisation and Belonging

Veranstalter: International Research Center „Work and the Life Cycle in Global History", Humboldt-University Of Berlin
Datum, Ort: 13.02.2014–15.02.2014, Berlin
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Kinship and Politics are often conceptualized as distinct realms of social life, in Western societies as much as in Western social science. The distinctness in Anthropological research in the sub-disciplines kinship and political anthropology began with the 1940s. However, recent process oriented kinship anthropologists tend to work increasingly on state regulation of reproduction and adoption, while political anthropologists studying nationalist identification and focus on entanglements of state and kin. Both research tendencies helped to progressively erode the conceptual boundaries between the subfields. The focus on the interconnections between kinship and politics expressed in the title „Doing politics – making kinship" of the international workshop organized by ERDMUTE ALBER (Bayreuth) and TATJANA THELEN (Vienna) is thus very timely.[1]

In their introductory comments, the organisers historicized the workshop topic and suggested four cross-cutting themes: the impact of kinship on politics, the impact of politics on kinship, the interaction of kinship and politics, and feedback loops between kinship and politics in which both are preconditions as well as results of the other. The impact of politics on kinship seems to be most easily acceptable for Western imaginaries, including for Western social scientists.

MICHAEL HERZFELD (Harvard) opened the conference with a 1st keynote on the multiple entanglements of tainted relationships ranging from the mountain pastures of Crete, over political bickering in urban Greek offices, petty-criminal banter in the Vatican, corruptive practices of international firms like Siemens vis-á-vis the Greek State, to other relations characterized by a „global hierarchy of values" within the European Union and Thailand. Defining corruption as „too much politics", the practice translates easily into the popular kinship idiom, such as „incest", which signifies „too much kinship". Using a social actors' perspective Herzfeld demonstrated in his evaluation of the same practices claims to cultural intimacy and condemnation of nepotism.

In his contribution on British/US American military anthropologists THOMAS ZITELMANN (Berlin) distinguished two main trends. Adherents of counterinsurgency (COIN) try to win the „hearts and minds" of the „other", aiming at modifying „their" kinship so that it resembles „ours", and to integrate the „status seeking young male". The competing „shock and awe" faction holds rather an essentialist view of kinship version, which sees „dark networks" as unredeemable, dysfunctional yet resilient, so that pain-inflicting violence is needed to win wars.

While Zitelmann demonstrated how classic anthropological kinship models of the 1940s[2] travelled into the military complex and were thus transformed, historian DAVID SABEAN (Los Angeles) took the panel into the 18th and 19th century kinship politics. He showed that in Europe the importance of kinship increased with the process of modernization. During the discussion, he seized again on the example of the Siemens family (see Herzfeld), to demonstrate how throughout the 19th century family/business networks relied on cross-cousin marriages to accumulate capital. The scientific divide of the twentieth century between models of Western families and Non-Western kinship was revealed to be an Orientalist myth.

SIGNE HOWELL (Oslo) reflected on 40 years of research among three societies – Chewong hunters and gatherers, Lio slash and burn agriculturalists, and Norwegian „modern" society, with very different relations

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[1] Susan McKinnon / Fenella Cannell. Vital Relations. Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship. SAR Press, 2013. Shever, Elana. Resources for Reform. Oil and Neoliberalism in Argentina. Stanford, California 2012.

[2] Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People. Oxford 1940.

between kinship and politics. She examined for each case the relations between kinship, notions of belonging, and the value and practices of political institutions. In the discussion she reflected that due to contemporary research foci she might have undervalued the role of the state in the Chewong case, and overstressed the regulation by the legal system in the Norwegian case.

In her comments, SHALINI RANDERIA (Geneva) pointed at the variety of scales between kinship and politics in the historicizing papers. Referring to „family parties" in India Randeria identified the „good family vs. bad kinship" ideology Zitelmann and Sabean had mentioned in the social capital narrative of Putnam's „Bowling alone".

In the 2nd Keynote lecture JANET CARSTEN (Edinburgh) turned century-old imaginations of blood as the essence/metaphor of the nation on their feet, by researching how the metaphor of blood links with everyday life and politics in the case of blood donation practices. The rich symbolic quality of blood is diversely invoked in these donations in Great Britain, Indonesia, India etc., often relating to the vitality of ones' own nation, or alternatively to a politics of letting die the „national other", as was remarked in the discussion.

FRANCIS PINE (London) revisited the problematic dichotomies of public and private, and politics and kinship, which have been too uncritically reproduced in studies of socialism and more generally. Drawing on long-term fieldwork in Poland (Górale, Łódż), she noted how state ideology uses kinship terms to create horizontal moral economic claims, as much as kinship ideology often incorporates hierarchical, even cruel practices.

LUCIA MICHELUTTI (London) investigated how ordinary people claim to embody extraordinary leaders, comparing instances of „being Chavez" in mourning the Venezuelan leader, as well as becoming a „gangster-politician" in Northern India. Her argument describing those processes could be understood as divine kin(g)ship.

In her study of administrative practices in a Greek maternity ward, IRINI PAPADAKI (Mytilini) concentrated on processes of de-kinning between mothers and their new-born children. Papadaki demonstrated very different attitudes of the social worker who dealt with the cases of a Georgian Orthodox and an Afghan Muslim mother. In the first case, the social worker created empathic bonds with the mother who did not want to keep her baby because in fear of being sanctioned in regards to a non-marital child. In the second case, the undocumented migrant is under Greek law not allowed to keep her child. In this case the social worker did not show empathy or argue with cultural closeness instead attesting migrant mothers' non-motherly behaviour. While Papadaki's „institutional anthropology" could profit from researching how the „institution" is co-produced outside its material confines, it shed light on issues underrepresented in New Kinship approaches by emphasizing the dissolution of significant ties.

TATJANA THELEN (Vienna) pointed to the commonalities in this set of papers, which all stress „dark sides" of kin politics alongside the constant boundary work and shifting transgressions between kinship and politics. While Papadaki started form the practices, Pine started from the language showing how the configurations of the mutual constituency are ever shifting. Finally, all papers pointed to the importance of media in creating metaphors and messages of (anti)community.

The paper of CHARLOTTE BRUCKERMANN (London) took a bottom-up perspective to understand the changing relations between China's One-child policy, increasing state promulgated consumerism, and family networks. The „invisible" female work of grandmothering and expanding practices of lavish birthday parties of small children challenge Chinese Patriarchy by the emphasis of female solidary bonds. The latter are growing through the „modern" birthday parties which serve as nodal points to reconnect extended maternal kin.

KRISTEN CHENEY (The Hague) similarly looked at contemporary changes in kinship practices in Uganda. Building on the ethnography of international adoption by Howell[3], Cheney elucidated the political economy of international adoption. Her research suggests that the fostering practices of ear-

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[3] Signe Howell, The kinning of foreigners: transnational adoption in a global perspective. New York 2006.

lier Ugandan generations are presently re-evaluated against Christian-capitalist notions that „blood binds". As Erdmute Alber suggested in her commentary the research could profit further from engagement the rich tradition of fosterage studies on Western Africa[4].

The discussion of kinship as politics started with MARIT MELHUUS' (Oslo) paper on reproductive practices of non-heterosexual Norwegian couples. Since 2009, Lesbian couples can have full parental rights if one mother gave birth, the other is granted the status of a co-mother for the child. Male parents are dependent on surrogacy – a fact that forces by law to clarify the biological fatherhood of children, even if the two fathers do not want to know. People's choice in their reproductive decisions has markedly increased with the proliferation of new reproductive technologies, resulting in yet unsettled moral dilemmas.

INNA LEYKIN (Tel Aviv) researches the new psychological counselling method in Russia called „Rodologija", which focuses on genealogy building. However, unlike Western practices trying to connect to distant kin and unknown pasts, the actual Post-Soviet interest incorporates the painful national history of the twentieth century in their biographies. Whereas practices in the 1990s the personal morality of ancestors' actions were highlighted in the face of „terror", now ancestors appear as victims of troubled pasts. Kinship and genealogy are processes of self-realization, which open perspectives for researchers to understand the relationship between state and kinship.

The more recent past of the Palestinian West bank forms the screen for HENDRIK HINDRICHSEN's and ARNE WORMS' (Göttingen) investigation into generational conflicts over the political (non-) participation. Veterans of the 1st Intifada deploy their past political activism as social capital in family and professional relations, exhorting the young generation to lead active political lives. Significantly, the example of an interview with a mother and her adolescent son showed the ambivalence of family dynamics in a leaden conflict.

As commentator HEIKE DROTBOHM (Freiburg) emphasized that the three papers above powerfully demonstrated the social use of knowing ones' (states') past – investing this cultural knowledge with ambiguous social capital. As kinship is an over-determined category, it produces ambiguous results.

In her paper on the politics of assisted reproductive technologies, JEANETTE EDWARDS (Manchester) took a critical stance at the contemporary ideology of transparency and accountability. She used the term „Tyranny of Transparency" to reflect on how specific calls for transparency in a recent drive to disclose sperm donors by a British lobby group for adopted children tend to privilege white, middle class family values and stigmatizes non-white families as „traditional" or „Muslim".

DANIEL J. SMITH (Providence) connected his presentation to the „global hierarchy of values" (Herzfeld) to criticize Western stereotypes. Smith examined the passionate discourses about good and bad corruption that his Nigerian interlocutors mentioned. Reproducing the stereotype of being one of the worlds' most corrupt nations, they at the same time adapted the concept for their own uses, to negotiate the moral dilemma of living in a state which suffers as much from bad national politics as international stereotyping and international corruption.

In his ethnography of underemployed male workers in a Serbian car factory, IVAN RAJKOVIĆ (Manchester) opened up a complex case of cultural intimacy. In a highly paradoxical move, workers who were made redundant by capitalist restructuring and downsizing of their life long work places, attributed moral superiority to the individualizing (and ostensibly meritocratic) capitalist values of entrepreneurialism which they counterposed favourably to the apparently corrupting values of community and kinship.

CAROLA LENTZ (Mainz) noted that when in Rajkovićs case self-interest was supposed to bridge common interest, his interlocutors were demanding in fact a „Hobbesian state". Lentz suggested that in narrative analyses, the role of the media should be scrutinized. Thus, mediation emerged once more as a co-

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[4] Esther N. Goody, Parenthood and social reproduction: fostering and occupational roles in West Africa. Cambridge 1982; Erdmute Alber / Jeannett Martin / Catrien Notermans, Child Fostering in West Africa New Perspectives on Theory and Practices. Boston 2013.

re methodological problem in understanding the kinship-politics-relation.

All the presenters aimed at positioning their case studies within the given framework, a fact that guaranteed a high originality of the presented papers. The participants sometimes wondered about up to date discussions of the kinship or politics approaches to their subjects of interests. The atmosphere of the workshop resulted in fruitful discussions and inspiring views on same objectives through different lenses. As Anthropological research is promising insider perspectives, some deeper insight can be highlighted in subjects like memory, belonging, national identity, or other regimes of „truth". Moral economies and kinship patterns can be important to understand corruption in politics, the question of personal and social trust, as well as questions of procedural reliability. Connecting to the question whether kinship is inclusive or exclusive (legalistic perspective) would be fruitful. Furthermore, as it is actually quite common in actual kinship studies to focus on international adoption or reproductive technologies, these issues were rarely linked to a long term perspective. The different lenses of politics and kinship should be integrated on a theoretical scale, in research questions, as well as on the level of the academic gender divide. A more explicitly historicizing dimension to the recurrent and changing interactions between politics and kinships over time would aid in tackling the related ontological and epistemological questions.

Conference overview:

ERDMUTE ALBER (Bayreuth) and TATJANA THELEN (Vienna): Introduction to the workshop

MICHAEL HERZFELD (Cambridge, MA): 1st Keynote Lecture: Corruption as political incest

Panel 1: Kinship as category of difference in political spaces

THOMAS ZITELMANN (Berlin): Kinship weaponized: representations of kinship in military anthropology

DAVID SABEAN (Los Angeles): Kinship and politics in historical sciences

SIGNE L. HOWELL (Oslo): From anarchy, to oligarchy to democratic absolutism: my ethnographic career through the lens of kinship

SHALINI RANDERIA (Geneva): Commentary

JANET CARSTEN (Edinburgh): 2nd Keynote Lecture: Natural politics – substance, kinship, worldview

Panel 2: Idioms of kinship – negotiating belonging

FRANCIS PINE (London): Inside and outside the language of kinship: public and private conceptions of sociality

LUCIA MICHELUTTI (London): Sovereignty and kinship across India and Venezuela

IRINI PAPADAKI (Mytilini, Greece): (Un)doing kinship in a public maternity hospital. State policies and adoption practices in Greece

TATJANA THELEN (Vienna): Commentary

Panel 3: Care for Children and the Nation State

CHARLOTTE BRUCKERMANN (London): Ambiguities in celebrating children: negotiating intergenerational care and the politics of family planning in Rural China

KRISTEN CHENEY (The Hague): Blood binds: confronting the moral and political economies of orphanhood and international adoption in Uganda

ERDMUTE ALBER (Bayreuth): Commentary

Panel 4: Kin as Politics

MARIT MELHUUS (Oslo): State practices and the (re)making of kinship. Examples from Norway

INNA LEYKIN (Tel Aviv): „Who do you think you are?" The genealogical imagination and the state in post-Soviet Russia

HENDRIK HINRICHSEN and ARNE WORMS (Göttingen): How does participation in resistance interact with the construction of family relations? West Bank Palestinians between the first intifada and the 'post-Oslo' period

HEIKE DROTBOHM (Freiburg): Commentary

Panel 5: Corruption, patrimony, transparency: entanglements of kinship and politics

JEANETTE EDWARDS (Manchester): The politics of see-through kinship

DANIEL J. SMITH (Providence, RI, USA): Kinship, patronage and politics in Nigeria

IVAN J. RAJKOVIĆ (Manchester): Familiarly political: intimacy of interest and problems with belonging in Kragujevac, Serbia

CAROLA LENTZ (Mainz): Commentary

Tagungsbericht *Doing Politics – Making Kinship: Back towards a future Anthropology of Social Organisation and Belonging*. 13.02.2014–15.02.2014, Berlin, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 21.05.2014.