

Navigating the Boundaries of Kinship and Politics

Veranstalter: Eric Hounshell (Los Angeles), Jeannett Martin (Bayreuth), Nathalie Büsser (Zurich), Andre Thiemann (Halle/S.), Astrid Baerwolf (Vienna) Workshop in the context of the ZiF Research Group „Kinship and Politics“
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The conceptual split between kinship and politics, which characterized Western social science since the 19th century, has lately been brought into question. Recent researches identified entanglements of state and kin and confirmed the fragility of the established boundaries. Aiming to bridge the aforementioned divide, the conference „Navigating the Boundaries of Kinship and Politics,“ which was organized by the postdoctoral fellows from the ZiF Research Group on „Kinship and Politics,“ engaged historians and anthropologists in a lively interdisciplinary discussion.

KEEBET VON BENDA-BECKMANN (Halle an der Saale) opened the conference with a first keynote lecture on the legally constructed boundaries between kinship and politics. Considering case studies on property relations, mainly from Indonesia, von Benda-Beckmann showed that kinship was not only (re)defined through law, but authority and economic power within kin groups were also shifted because of some imposed laws. By introducing the public/private dichotomy, the colonizing powers undermined especially the role of women in the public sphere confining it to the private domestic sphere.

Tracing the history of one of the fourteen leading families in Mauritius, PATRICK NAVELING (London/Bern) showed how kinship relations and marriage alliances determined and was determined by economic relations. Despite repeated crises during the „interregna“ between the death of a business leader and the installment of his successor, conjugal relations ensured a financial leverage and power networks for the family.

In examining the correspondence among members of the French royal family during the Wars of Religion in the 16th century, JU-

LIA HEINEMANN (Zurich) questioned the practices of negotiating conceptions of kinship in terms of political concepts. The state „Etat“ is conceived in the letters as a property of the king on the one hand, and as being incorporated by the king in a king-state-symbiosis on the other. The former makes the state a familial property while the latter defines their political authority as a kin group. The two aspects were closely related; the royal family should protect the familial property in order to preserve its royal authority.

Reflecting upon the impact of kinship on the disposal of private property, MARGARETH LANZINGER (Vienna) and JANINE MAEGRAITH (Vienna) examined the so-called „Verfächbücher“, court records, of the 16th century in Tyrol. They found that a vertical logic of transfer prevailed which gave an absolute priority to blood relations over conjugal relations. The Tyrol law code limited the freedom of the disposal of one's own property in two different ways, by defining the maximum proportion which could be bequeathed even if the property was completely acquired and by introducing the right to purchase back real estate by relatives.

ROBERTA ZAVORETTI (Halle an der Saale) investigated how young women of the middle-class in urban China can cope with social expectations in a demanding economy. Her research showed that young women tend to 'deal with' rather than 'openly challenge' power relations within the home, trying to achieve ideals of conjugality and intergenerational harmony. She underlined clear continuities with Kandiyoti's idea of „patriarchal bargains“ which leads ultimately to reproducing the gendered dichotomy roles. Young couples subscribe to the accepted social models while gaining the economic support of the older generation.

The problems and prospects for interdisciplinary work among historians and anthropologists were discussed in a roundtable session. MICHAELA HOHKAMP (Hannover) noted that an anthropological approach contributed to historical studies in breaking with teleology and in denaturalizing concepts. Contrasting it with the case of natural sciences, STAFFAN MÜLLER-WILLE (Exeter) drew attention to a systematic strain on in-

terdisciplinary work in the social sciences and humanities which, claiming to deal with the whole of reality, tend to be competitive rather than collaborative. JEANETTE EDWARDS (Manchester) underlined the non-normative and more relativist character of both history and anthropology, in contrast with her experience with the normative and individualistic field of ethics in policy-making settings in the United Kingdom. Appreciating the new avenues that can be opened by interdisciplinary encounters, SIMON TEUSCHER (Zurich) pointed out the possibility of constructive retreat within the researcher's own discipline. TATJANA THELEN (Vienna) emphasized the risks of reifying „kinship“ by taking it as the shared object of interdisciplinary conceptual analysis.

In her research of public day-care institutions in Vienna, ANNA ELLMER (Vienna) scrutinized the new policy of „educational partnership;“ while this is presented as an answer to diverse perceptions of being a family, it presupposes a specific version of the nuclear family: a loving partnership among a father, a mother and a child. When the family is judged to be harmonic, a partnership between the family and the kindergarten is founded and boundaries between 'public' and 'private' are attenuated. On the contrary, the partnership was suspended whenever the pedagogues judged this concept of family to be absent.

MICHAEL STAMBOLIS-RUHSTORFER (Bordeaux) investigated the role of scientific expertise in the United States and France in the legal debates surrounding queer parenting. While „queer family“ was publicly questioned on political and ideological grounds in both countries, American and French experts perceived the debate, and their role within it, differently due to different social contexts. In France, children are conceived as belonging to the Republic which resulted in people being much more supportive of same-sex marriage than same-sex parenting. On the contrary, marriage is regarded as more important in the U.S., and people are more in favor of queer parenting than same-sex marriage.

In the second keynote lecture, HEIKE DROTBOHM (Mainz) considered the im-

pact of forced return migration on kin relations within the deportee's family. Her research demonstrated that transnational families, while adapted to spatial separation, develop certain criteria of familial relations concerning economic support and morally adequate behavior. In this view, deportation seems to threaten family ties especially because former achievements of transnational mobility are undone which turned upside down the established norms and expectations. Among those deportees, who need to 'reinvent themselves' to gain a new role, single, childless women are particularly disadvantaged. She highlighted the contradictory dynamics between migration policies and family policies which can result in migrants who lose custody of their offspring after a forced return migration.

STEFANIA BERNINI (Warsaw/Venice) identified the family as an essential dimension of the political history of the postwar era in a very similar way across the Iron Curtain. Both the state and the Catholic Church in Poland and Italy, willing to shape social transformation after World War Two, targeted family as their primary means. While the state tried in both countries to assign a different role for women encouraging them to participate in the labor force, the Church emphasized women's crucial role in child care. The latter, together with religious education, became a political tool in affirming the Church's position against either the communist or the capitalist state in Poland and Italy respectively. The task was easier in Italy where the Christian Democratic Party guaranteed the interests of the Church. In contrast, the environment in Poland was hostile, and the family was conceived not only as a site of Catholic resistance against the pervasive powers of the state but also as a place of keeping alive the national values identified now with the Catholic's system of values.

In her study of child care practices in Cameroonian families in Berlin and Paris, PAMELA FELDMAN-SAVELSBERG (Northfield) investigated how transnational Cameroonians adapt their fostering and childrearing practices to the legal regulations in their countries of origin and destination.

Some Cameroonians circulate their children along transnational affective circuits due to socio-economic conditions on the one hand while strengthening kin relations on the other. However, governance practices, such as immigration policy, make child fosterage difficult and simultaneously they provide services, such as publicly subsidized child-care, which make it easier for migrants to raise their own children. She reflected also on how Cameroonian migrants deal with the state's intrusion in childrearing; original practices, such as corporal punishment, whose main goal is to preserve national values, are adapted to the new institutions and maintained in the shadow of the state, by sharing stories about children „knowing their rights.“

Considering Argentina between 1975 and 1983, CRISTIAN ALVARADO LEYTON (Hamburg) reflected upon the state-terrorist practice of forced adoptions, i.e. appropriation of the children of „subversive parents.“ In its „Proceso de Reorganización Nacional,“ the military junta aimed to transform the inner division of private/public into an idealized Catholic nation-family in which the political would vanish. Employing medical metaphors, the junta cut not only the infected tissue but also the surrounding sane one of the social body, which was achieved in persecuting the „subversives“ and their relatives and friends on the one hand, and in socially killing their children on the other. For the junta, „subversives“ failed as parents, and their children, i.e. the living disappeared „nietos“, though infected, could be healed by re-education and relocation. He concluded that the process of restitution, which searched to uncover cases of children's appropriation with the help of genetic testing, might show that the depoliticization of kinship could not be accomplished even with the practice of inflicting social death on newborns.

ANNA AYEHE (Bayreuth) investigated the Quranic schools in Djougou (Benin), underlining entanglements of familial reputation and political resistance of the Muslim minority. The Yaris family by assuming the communal responsibility (*fard kifaya*) of teaching the Quran, and distributing responsibilities along kin lines, gained social reputation, but

also provided the community of Djougouois Muslims with a source of identity and pride. Moreover, Quranic schooling seems to represent a political site of confrontation with authorities' attempts to govern schooling and impose secular values.

While development in genetic testing had been used to undo the political intrusion and re-make the kinship in Argentina (see Alvarado Leyton), JEANNETT MARTIN (Bayreuth) showed how „genetic truth“ is employed to break kin relations in cases of „cuckoo children“, „Kuckuckskind“ in Germany. She contrasted the increasing biologizing of paternity during the twentieth century, which is related to the development of DNA tests, with current tendencies to emphasize social parenthood due to the newly emerged kinds of families, such as „patchwork“ families, and the increased use of reproductive techniques. Her research underlined the predominance of legal debates about the rights and duties of the fathers, mothers, and children in the scientific discourse which is, in turn, embedded in the broader social discourse about familial and state reproduction. This illustrates again the deep intertwining of kinship and politics.

MARGARET PEACOCK (Alabama) reflected on the different American and Soviet narratives of Samantha Smith's journey to the Soviet Union in 1983. Her research showed that the Soviet propaganda machine pictured the Soviet Union as a strong and resilient nation which is not only open for cooperation and peace but also able to adopt and incorporate other children who want to live the Soviet „revolutionary dream.“ Samantha's full agency was crucial in constructing this narrative, since only her agency made her choice of the Soviet family a valuable one, standing in contrast to the Soviet hooligans and punks who looked to the West. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, Samantha was presented as a reflection of the charismatic, vibrant, individualist spirit of the „great America.“ The two narratives about Samantha reflected the divides of the cultural Cold War in the 1980s, in which the politics of kinship was of utmost importance.

In the wrap-up session, four distinguished scholars (ERDMUTE ALBER (Bayreuth), JU-

DITH SCHACHTER (Pittsburgh), THOMAS ZITELMANN (Berlin), and CAROLINE ARNI (Basel)) reflected on the conference outcomes and attempted to open new perspectives for future research. While Schachter and Zitelmann questioned the potential impact of genetic techniques on different social practices such as adoption, Alber stressed, in a similar direction, the deep change that our technologies of knowledge production through classification and evidence-making have undergone. In her turn, Arni encouraged a theoretical conceptualization concerning relations between kinship and politics which should help in crossing the split and in defining the connection at the same time.

The conference was successful in making evident the relatedness between kinship and politics on the one hand, and revealing the contingency of the private/public dichotomy on the other. Particularly fruitful was the debate between the two different disciplines of history and anthropology on tackling the issue, which did not only confirm each other's findings but also explored new areas and initiated many promising lines of investigation.

Conference overview:

ERIC HOUNSHELL (Los Angeles), JEAN-NETT MARTIN (Bayreuth), NATHALIE BÜSSER (Zurich), ANDRE THIEMANN (Halle/S.): Welcome address

KEEBET VON BENDA-BECKMANN (Halle an der Saale): 1st Keynote Lecture: Kinship and politics: A legal anthropological perspective

Area 1: Property and kin relations

PATRICK NAVEILING (London/Bern): Corporate interregna: Kinship politica, joint ventures, and embedded exploitation in the making of a Mauritian multinational enterprise since 1786

JULIA HEINEMANN (Zurich): Owning the state? Conceptions of kinship and monarchy in the letters of the French royal family in the 16th century

MICHAELA HOHKAMP (Hannover): Commentary

MARGARETH LANZINGER and JANINE MAEGRAITH (Vienna): Kinship ties and wealth: The limits on the disposal of property and its consequences

ROBERTA ZAVORETTI (Halle an der Saale): Being the right woman for „Mister Right“: Marriage and household politics in present-day Nanjing

STEF JANSEN (Manchester): Commentary

Roundtable discussion

Exploring kinship and politics from an interdisciplinary perspective: problems and prospects

Participants: JEANETTE EDWARDS (Manchester), MICHAELA HOHKAMP (Hannover), STAFFAN MÜLLER-WILLE (Exeter), SIMON TEUSCHER (Zurich), TATJANA THELEN (Vienna)

Area 2: Negotiating the limits of the nuclear family

ANNA ELLMER (Vienna): „Educational partnership“ and its paradoxes: Relationships and boundaries between public day-care institutions and diverse families in Vienna (Austria)

MICHAEL STAMBOLIS-RUHSTORFER (Bordeaux): Study and sanction: How U.S. and French „experts“ construe queer parenting in legal debates

MARGARETH LANZINGER (Vienna): Commentary

STEFANIA BERNINI (Warsaw/Venice) : Competing for souls, bodies and rights: Child welfare and ideological competition in postwar Italy and Poland

PAMELA FELDMAN-SAVELSBERG (Northfield): Remaking kinship across political orders: Migration, fostering, and disciplining

CAROLINE ARNI (Basel): Commentary

HEIKE DROTBOHM (Mainz): 2nd Keynote Lecture: Migrant families undone: Rethinking kinship, care and new inequalities in the context of forced return migration

Area 3: The (re)making of political order through the lens of children

CRISTIAN ALVARADO LEYTON (Hamburg): The politics and poetics of forced adoptions during Argentina's last dictatorship

ANNA AYEYEH (Bayreuth): Entanglements of kinship and politics in education: Lessons from northern Beninese quranic schools

JUDITH SCHACHTER (Pittsburgh): Commentary

JEANNETT MARTIN (Bayreuth): On search for the „right“ father: Current debates about so called „Kuckuckskinder“ in Germany

MARGARET PEACOCK (Alabama): Samantha Smith in the land of the Bolsheviks: Kinship and propaganda in the late Cold War

JEANETTE EDWARDS (Manchester): Commentary

Wrap-up Session: Navigating Boundaries of Kinship and Politics

Participants: ERDMUTE ALBER (Bayreuth), JUDITH SCHACHTER (Pittsburgh), THOMAS ZITELMANN (Berlin), CAROLINE ARNI (Basel)

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