Contested Kinship: Towards a Redefinition of Human Relations

Veranstalter: Barbara Schaff, Seminar für Englische Philologie; Inge Kroppenberg / Nikolaus Linder, Institut für Grundlagen des Rechts (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)
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With the emergence of modern reproductive technologies, issues of kinship and family relations have returned as objects of controversial sociocultural, political and juridical debates. Current societal interest in genetics, epigenetics and DNA research indicates a trend to renaturalising kinship and subjecthood based on genetic bonds and genealogy. In various academic disciplines, this trend has been received critically. The interdisciplinary conference, organised by Inge Kroppenberg, Nikolaus Linder and Barbara Schaff (all Göttingen), brought together various researchers from the fields of anthropology, bioethics, law, political science, literature, gender and sociology to unfold the versatile facets of how Western kinship was and is negotiated.

The first panel *Concepts and Theories*, chaired by Barbara Schaff, was opened by SUSANNE LETTOW (Berlin) who outlined historical and philosophical considerations on kinship concepts. Initiated by the transformation of family structures in the early 19th century, Hegel's Crisis of Kinship questioned, as Lettow argued, issues of family, belonging and race. Engaging with the literary figure of Antigone from a philosophical perspective, she created awareness for contemporary ambivalences and instabilities of blood relations visible in Antigone's transgressive behaviour. Building a bridge to ambivalences of our present time, political theorist CHRISTINE KLAPEER (Göttingen) focused on neoliberal governmentality and different concepts of (homo-)normative citizenship. She critically questioned that queer family concepts are adapted to heteronormative family norms, which has produced new forms of marginalisation visible in societal expectations of „happy" rainbow families. SOPHIE SILVERSTEIN (Utrecht) critically approached dominating Western kinship models based on the nuclear family from a gender perspective. Drawing on the concept of the „virtual feminine", she introduced the concept of „virtual kinship" as a first step to change existing kinship practices and reinforce new intimacies and social orders.

The second panel *Inter- and Trans-Perspectives on Adoption* was chaired by Lena-Solveig Hansen. SILKE HACKENESCH (Köln) presented her work on early international adoption in the post-war period. Being often also transracial, these adoptions not only questioned traditional family concepts, but also practices of segregation and ideas of „natural kinship". Following up on the debates on redefining kinship, CHANDRA KALA CLEMENTE MARTINEZ and DIANA MARRE (both Barcelona) traced the ruptures of international and transracial adoptions. They focused on adoptees searching for their first families, origins and identities, constantly oscillating between the tension field of biological, social and cultural belonging. PATRICIA E. SAWIN (North Carolina) offered a further perspective, looking at narrative constructions and modes of storytelling in factual and fictional biographical projects concerned with individual transnational and transracial adoption experiences.

In the first keynote, MARGARET HOMANS (New Haven) examined siblings in adoption narratives in literature and film, emphasising the emerging trends of reconnecting, and thereby reconstructing, same-generation kinship networks. She critically discussed the cultural myth of the importance of genetic heritage, challenging the assumption that knowledge of heritage creates family. Homans illustrated the danger of experimenting with the competing powers of nurture and nature with the documentary film *Three identical strangers*, which revealed the severe consequences of separation and challenges of reunion.

In the following keynote ELIZABETH PEEL (Loughborough) told stories from kinship at the margins. She addressed concepts of critical kinship studies to question normative assumptions of caring (human) relationships. Focusing on challenging experiences, such as loss and absence, she demonstrated

the boundaries of existing family models. Instead, she created awareness for the significant gap between kinship categories and diverse kinship realities, considering also non-human family constellations.

Panel III was dedicated to relationships beyond human ones. KONSTANZE HANITZSCH (Göttingen) spoke about the goddess and the cyborg: non-human ethical relations and other kin in Björk's *Utopia*. Based on Dona Haraway's poststructuralist feminist theory, she analysed body, materiality, technology and gender in posthuman utopian narratives in relation to concepts of kinship. Following up on human-animal-relationships, cultural scientist MAGDA GARLINSKA (Frankfurt / Oder) linked her research on women and animal rights and new kinship norms with social criticism against oppressive patriarchal and nationalist structures im Poland.

Nikolaus Linder chaired panel IV, in which the speakers engaged with the politics of kinship. MARIA PIA GUERRA (Brasília), ROSEMARIE PEÑA (Rutgers) and CHRISTOPHER BEX (Ghent) offered their prevailing perspectives on the various challenges in adoption practice, such as legal kinning and family politics in different, eventually repressive political systems as well as reunions in transnational settings and issues of cultural belonging.

Kinship practices and technologies were the focus of panel V, chaired by Avrina Jos Joslin Thambi. SILKE SCHICKTANZ (Göttingen) discussed kinship relations at the end of life, looking at ageing families between nature and nurture. She put up for discussion how various forms of kinship are contested at the intersection between moral, legal and social obligations. From a bioethical point of view, ANNA SMAJDOR (Oslo) critically questioned the remaking of genealogy through reproductive technologies, reaching from sperm donation to reproductive cloning. She created awareness that new technological opportunities decisively question the existing ethical and legal frameworks and their meaning for Western societies.

Panel VI, chaired by Gulşin Çiftçi, dealt with kinship, violence and gender. ASHITA MANDAKATHINGAL (Göttingen) discussed the complex nexus between kinship ties and state regulations. She argued that gender violence in contemporary India is shaped by kinship structures, and their criminal jurisdiction is significantly determined by political tensions interfering with tribal conflicts. DRAGANA PEJOVIĆ, speaking about kinship norms, women's rights and domestic violence in Serbia, criticised the continued power of traditional family models, which interfere with new legal attempts against gender-based violence.

Imaginary relations were at the centre of panel VII, chaired by Inge Kroppenberg. ROMAIN PASQUER (Cornell) interlinked gender and literature theory in order to question heteronormative family models. Drawing on French plays by Lagarce and Koltes, he analysed the prominent absence of the father and its impact on kinship relations, relating it back to French psychoanalysis and the symbolic significance of the father. CORINNA ASSMANN (Heidelberg) problematised the emerging trend of the „family heritage industry" and genealogical research by looking at identity constructions of diaspora families in novels by black British writers. She addressed the disparity between personal identity formation, family memory and heritage as well as social and cultural belonging. KIRSTEN SANDROCK's (Göttingen) paper focused on the literary work of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West to discuss early attempts of modernistic reinterpretations of kinship, challenging blood-based Victorian kinship norms.

Opening the perspectives on kinship across time and place, REGINA SCHAEFER (Mainz) in panel VIII, chaired by Katharina Nambula, jumped back into the Middle Ages. By presenting differing concepts of family and kinship back then, she sensitised the audience for the dynamic ideas of family and social belonging, located between friendships, the household family and blood relatives. LOVITOLI JIMO (Delhi) spoke about identity politics and marriage alliance in Northeast Indian tribes. She problematised the restrictions and regulations that arise from patriarchal structures and the caste system and become visible in strict marriage politics and governance of social belonging.

In the final discussion, the manifold ap-

proaches to contested kinship were bundled in the call for increased interdisciplinary co-operation and exchange, the creation of new networks and the opening and refining of existing theoretical kinship conceptualisations. The future challenge to understand the diversity of kinship forms requires increased diverse disciplinary and cross-cultural approaches to gain a better understanding of changing relationships between humans, animals and beyond. This conference fruitfully brought together different perspectives and new approaches in the broad scope of kinship studies.

Conference overview:

Panel I: Concepts and Theories

Susanne Lettow (Berlin): Troubling Antigone. Hegel and the „Crisis of Kinship"

Sophie Silverstein (Utrecht): „I don't" – Desire For New Intimacies and a New Social Order

Christine Maria Klapeer (Göttingen): Neoliberal Governmentality and Articulations of (Homo-)Normative Citizenship in German and Austrian LGBTIQ* Politics

Panel II: Inter- and Trans-Perspectives on Adoption

Silke Hackenesch (Köln): Redefining Kinship through International and Transracial Adoptions

Chandra Kala Clemente Martinez / Diana Marre (Barcelona): Kinship in Spanish Adoptive Families, Searches for Origins

Patricia E. Sawin (North Carolina): Adoptee and Adoptive Parent Stories – Complementary Contributions

Keynote I
Margaret Homans (New Haven): Sisters and Brothers, Twinster and Identical Strangers: Siblings in Adoption Narratives

Keynote II
Elizabeth Peel (Loughborough): Stories from Kinship at the Margins

Panel III: Beyond the Human

Konstanze Hanitzsch (Göttingen): The Goddess and the Cyborg: Non-Human Ethical Re-

lations and Other Kin in Björk's_Utopia_

Magda Garlinska (Frankfurt/Oder): Kinship Between Women and Animals. Critical Perspectives on the Rise of Nationalism in Poland

Panel IV: Politics of Kinship

Christof Bex (Ghent): The Politics of Re-Kinning with „Families of Origin" in Transnational Adoption from Bolivia

Rosemarie Peña (Rutgers): Black Germans: Coming Home to Self and Community

Maria Pia Guerra (Brasília): Kinship in Authoritarian Regimes: Foreigners, Families and the Brazilian Supreme Court

Panel V: Kinship Practices and Technologies

Silke Schicktanz (Göttingen): Reciprocity and Reciprocal Duties of a Caring Kinship? Considerations about Aging Families Between Nature and Nurture

Anna Smajdor (Oslo): Redefining Reproduction

Panel VI: Kinship, Violence and Gender

Ashitha Mandakathingal (Göttingen): State, Kinship and Sexual Violence Against Adivasi Women in India

Dragana Pejović (Novi Sad): Referring to Kinship in Order to Annul the Danger from Domestic Violence

Panel VII: Imagined Relations

Romain Pasquer (Cornell): The Death of the Father in French Psychoanalysis and Theatre

Corinna Assmann (Heidelberg): The Genealogical Imagination in Diasporic Family Identity Construction

Kirsten Sandrock (Göttingen): Failing Families: Modernist Challenges to Kinship as Blood Relations

Panel VIII: Kinship Across Time and Place

Regina Schäfer (Mainz): Doing family – the „Frunde" Between Family and Friends

Lovitoli Jimo (Ambedkar): Theorising Gendered Kinship and Marriage: The Sumi Naga Tribe of Northeast India

Final discussion and concluding remarks

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