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Research Article

Special Issue: *Kinship Trouble: Traversing Interdisciplinary Boundaries between Archaeology, Archaeogenetics and Socio-cultural Anthropology*

Commentary: Making Kin Beyond Kinship

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Abstract

This commentary returns to the initial motivation for the 2000 volume *Beyond Kinship*, which was to create an intersection between ethnographic approaches to kinship and archaeological ones through the overlap constituted by materiality and practice. From the vantage point of that project, the current collection of papers adds important additional material bases for exploring kinship derived from archaeogenetic investigations. It is significant that the contributors express shared commitments to non-reductive use of new genetic data, seeking to avoid static and essentializing approaches that would privilege a biological domain. Equally important is the commitment of the participants to understanding kinship as work, making kin, not simply recognizing kin. In this sense, it exemplifies the rhetorical move 'beyond kinship' in the 2000 volume. By adopting a perspective from queer theory, the volume's push to recognize a 'kinship trouble' parallel to Judith Butler's 'gender trouble' invites consideration of making kin as a process of emergence of belonging. This begins to fulfil an ethical burden that anthropology has, as the discipline that claims kinship, to understand the intimacy of the kind of knowledges we produce, and to ensure they are so critically grounded that they can no longer be used against people's interests.

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In 1996, Susan Gillespie and I organized a session at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association that brought together ethnographers and archaeologists to talk about the concept of social houses. We wanted to help archaeologists move beyond trying to identify kinship structures from a restricted range of archaeological evidence. In our own region of study, Mexico and Central America, we saw the reconstruction of linguistic terms for kin as part of the decipherment of the Classic Maya script leading scholars to assume that unilineal kinship structures would provide adequate models for past social relations in the region. As a feminist scholar drawing on queer theory, I was concerned that archaeology was continuing to treat kinship from a long-standing heteronormative perspective. As students of the ethnographer of Indonesia Clark Cunningham, we had been introduced to the idea that kinship cannot be captured by such rigid structures, particularly when it intersects with fluctuating forms of political centralization (Cunningham 1965; 1967). From the scholar of Inka society R. Tom Zuidema, we had learned to be wary of the ways that European accounts of other peoples reformulated their forms of social relations using unilineal, and often patrilineal, models (Zuidema 1973, 30–31). From scholars of Oceania like Bernd Lambert, we had learned the concept of ramages and the flexibility they provided for affiliation lending support to both individual and group goals in consolidating wealth, prestige and history (Lambert 1966).

What Gillespie and I were interested in promoting was a conversation between subdisciplinary specialists about how, in the absence of direct observation of people's actions, and without the potential to ask people how they understood society, archaeologists could do something more like ethnographic analyses in which people used the languages of genealogy as one among many approaches to forging connections and making distinctions between themselves and others. We were interested in the materiality of relationship making, in how house structures, crests, valuables and tombs might allow us to recognize, archaeologically, situations similar to those described by ethnographers that challenged the understanding of kinship formulated in the magisterial work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969). These were challenges that led Lévi-Strauss himself to

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propose his model of 'house societies', which Peter Whiteley ably discusses and critiques in his contribution here. While Gillespie and I began our conversation in 1996 with Lévi-Strauss's (1982) proposal for a form of social organization he called *sociétés à maison*, when the resulting volume was published in 2000, it was the keywords 'beyond kinship' that the press seized on for the title of the book (Joyce & Gillespie 2000). Yet, as Whiteley shows, and as we argued, recognizing the flexibility of forms of belonging does not entail ignoring or rejecting kinship; instead, it points us away from a single domain to a multitude of practices, from statics to dynamics.

Taking the Venn diagram that co-editors Sabina Cveček, Maanasa Raghavan and Penny Bickle offer as Figure 1 in their introduction as an orientation, what Gillespie and I hoped we accomplished was to produce an overlap between the circles of archaeology (material aspects of kinship) and socio-cultural anthropology (social and biological aspects of kinship). What was unimaginable at the time was the inclusion of specialists in biological anthropology, the ground for this collection. Today, biological anthropology and the study of ancient DNA provide additional material bases for addressing relationships, what Amorim and Raff describe as 'biological relatedness' in their contribution to this collection. This development requires us to return, again, to the question of what, precisely, we mean when we talk about 'kinship'. The challenge when we talk about kinship now is how to draw on this new information without reinstituting any kind of essentialization of identification, to maintain an anthropological focus on belonging as something people do, a project they pursue, with relationships as emergent properties of those actions. In making kin, people take advantage of a wide spectrum of tactics.

Archaeologists can and should try to trace multiple ways kinship could have been in the making. Yet the contemporary elevation of biosciences in public understanding to a kind of key to knowledge, what Amorim and Raff describe as 'molecular chauvinism', makes challenging maintaining an approach to new genetic findings that treats them as one among multiple sources for making relations. This is at the core of the complex tangle that Cveček, Raghavan and Bickle single out as 'kinship trouble'. As they write, 'kinship is much more than a reconstructed genetic pedigree'. Their description of kinship studies as concerned with 'acts of care and (non)mutuality of being' places us firmly on the plane of creative emergence of belonging *and being* in practice. In their contribution to this collection, Catherine Freiman and Caroline Schuster demonstrate that 'kinning practices' are active ways relatedness is produced. They rightly advocate for an approach fully informed by the decades of queer and feminist theory that refuse reduction to biological essences.

The linkage of kinship analysis with critical theory is not optional: when we propose kinship mechanisms or structures, we make claims about the naturalness or otherwise of forms of human existence. While celebrating the addition of archeogenetic information to our toolkit, Cveček, Raghavan and Bickle identify a need for ethical attention to kin-making as entailed by the kind of intimacy that genetic studies represent. In their framework of kinship trouble ethics, they call for attention to collaboration with communities under investigation, and for attending to multiple ways of making kin. Sandra Bamford pushes us in the same direction, linking contemporary availability of technologies for posthumous reproduction and the legal cases that ensue to ethnographic discussion of post-death parenthood in other societies.

The ethical responsibility Cveček, Raghavan and Bickle identify in part rests on the inherent assumption of authority that contemporary society gives to (what they imagine are) biological facts. Certainly, the people whose biological being is implicated should be part of any such study. But there is another reason why there needs to be an ethical dimension to the anthropological project of exploring kinship: anthropology has naturalized kinship, and we must undo that history.

Kinship is one of a very few concepts that is strongly attached to anthropology, historically and even today. To the extent that people believe there is an objective set of facts that constitute kinship, that belief comes from scholarship by anthropologists. We *are* the seemingly disinterested authorities on kinship. While lawyers have their own version of kinship framing, as Bamford notes, it is motivated by goals of maintaining economic order for inheritance. A public might expect that *scholars* should not have any incentive to straighten up the lines of kinship. What we say kinship is should simply be our best description of objective reality.

Which of course is far from the case. This creates a responsibility on our part *as scholars* to communicate the complex and at times ambiguous situations we study in ways that cannot be misunderstood or reduced to simple certainties. To the extent that kinship being real is part of public consciousness, anthropologists own it. Hannah Moots, Krystal Tsosie and Mehmet Somel touch on this responsibility when they argue for terminological precision. I would rather see us create new technical terms, or adopt unfamiliar terms, like Amorim and Raff's use of 'kindreds' for biological groups linked by genetics, so that we do not inadvertently convey too simple a picture to publics poised by molecular chauvinism to believe genetics is destiny.

We know that social relatedness can be, and commonly is, emergent from things other than reproductive biology. Adoption and fostering, feeding, and co-residence create belonging. Biological connection can be insufficient to establish belonging. In David Schneider's classic work in Oceania, offspring had to work to maintain their connection to their parental social group (Schneider 1984). Yet, despite understanding relatedness as inherently impossible to reduce to any form of biology, we have often made the strategic error of using the shorthand of 'fictive' for relations derived from things other than reproductive biology. It is up to us as a discipline to undo this semantic error. We should not compound confusion by describing genetic connections as 'genetic kinship'. We might reserve 'kinship' for understanding of mutual identification and disidentification serving as the basis for action. We might talk of kin-work and kin-making in place of the apparently static kinship.

The newly available approaches from analyses of aDNA, along with the capacity of bone chemistry to track the movement of individuals, provides archaeology the potential to identify complex scenarios of creation of such relations. Alissa Mittnik and Alex Bentley provide an instructive

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example, as they deconstruct assumptions about ancestral patrilineality and patrilocality in Neolithic to Bronze Age Europe. To interpret the genetic analyses, these authors turn to other contextual information, describing the emergence of what we retrospectively call 'patrilineal' and 'patrilocal' identification from the forms of relating among livestock herders and agriculturalists. Cveček, Raghavan and Bickle note that the emerging evidence for early European communities does not fall into any single trajectory of development of dominant genealogical connections from matrilineage to patrilineage, or uniform preferences for patrilocal or matrilocal residence. They write 'co-existence of communities that followed different descent and/or residence patterns better explains' the new data.

This should always have been our expectation, because it has been the case in every historical period known, and is the case when we examine the world-wide literature generated through ethnography. We simply should not be hoping for, or trying to tell, a reductive story about human society following a single pathway or adhering to a few defined structures for making kin. Forms of relationship are emergent properties of groups situated in unique historical circumstances. They must be understood to be open to variability in response to those specific circumstances. We can and should identify, explore and provide models of the variety of tactics that are repeatedly used by human beings to create relationships. Cveček and Gingrich provide an excellent example of this, in their discussion of a range of ethnographically documented kinship practices in relation to data generated from archaeogenetics. As they illustrate, we must do this comparative work while acknowledging that these tactical deployments generate different outcomes under different conditions, conditions we will never be able to reduce to simple models precisely because this complexity is a fundamental part of being human.

Moots, Tsosie and Somel show us how urgent maintaining the complexity of making kin is. Dramatically illustrating the stakes of the ethical dimension of kinship trouble sketched out in the introduction to this volume through an account of the contemporary removal of a child from their family, based on models of biological belonging, these authors bring us back to the reason why Schneider (1984) called his reformulation of kinship studies in anthropology a critique. He was concerned by the naturalization of a particular view of belonging, one that is lodged in European political philosophy, one that is contradicted repeatedly by the people who anthropologists encounter, and yet somehow keeps returning. Particularly troubling are examples like the use of ancient DNA to deny connections between contemporary Indigenous peoples and archaeologically investigated sites. This form of biological gatekeeping defies the abundant evidence of forms of affiliation and relationship that would not be adequately reduced to genetic kindreds. As Moots, Tsosie and Somel note, this form of kinship trouble cannot be erased by referring to some forms of belonging as social kinship. That would simply reproduce the problematic division of biological ground and cultural overlay that has been thoroughly undone in relation to sex/gender, misrepresenting a single phenomenon that cannot be separated into two layers without giving the mistaken impression that one is given by nature and the other is thus less fundamental.

This is, of course, the core argument Judith Butler (1990) makes in *Gender Trouble*, offered as the model for kinship trouble by Cveček, Raghavan and Bickle. It is worth revisiting that argument. There is no prediscursive moment when sex presents itself independent of cultural framing. The assertion that some aspects of sex are prediscursive, made as part of sex/gender discourse, is itself part of the cultural frame. When we turn to the contemporary study of kinship through archaeological research, amplified by the use of archaeogenetic techniques, we are again confronted with a discursive field in which becoming and its actual performative (and thus flexible, fluid, changing) nature is converted into a mere inflection of a preceding biological ground.

As with sex, genetic kindreds do not exist before we articulate them as subjects of analysis. There are other ways we, as analysts, could discursively manifest belonging. The contributions in this collection point us to three domains that were among those Gillespie and I proposed for exploration: feeding, living together, and afterlife care. Beth Scaffidi's review of one region, the Andes, is illustrative. Scaffidi notes that there, 'kinship is often actively made and remade through communities and households of practice'. I would go further: kinship is *always* made and remade in this way. Genetic connections, genealogies, may be one of the materials employed in this making, but do not form a privileged ground for making kin.

Scaffidi's review of anthropological debates about Andean kinship identifies sharing of substance and sharing of space as locally relevant dimensions of shaping belonging and relatedness—the things that the anthropological domain of kinship is supposed to inform about. Freiman and Schuster describe generation of relations of the living and the dead through burial practices as 'kin-work'. Archaeological discussions of mortuary kin-work have reproduced heteronormative assumptions of biological connection. Emerging archaeogenetic work, like that described by Ana Herrero-Corral, is serving to challenge such assumptions, expanding the networks of adults connected to care for children.

The prominence of these three material fields of kinwork is not random. Mortuary contexts, residential remains, and discarded debris from acts of feeding of course make up much of the materials archaeologists excavate. But beyond this, these are domains where relations of substance, of intimate identification and of generational belonging were actively being shaped. Maintaining a focus on the activity of producing relations, activity in which biological connections may be relevant but never determinative, is what kinship trouble demands.

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