

**Espaces pluriels de la parenté**

**Approches qualitatives des (re)configurations intimes et publiques dans le  
monde contemporain**

*Plural kinship spaces*

*Qualitative approaches to contemporary intimate and public  
(re)configurations*

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## Introduction

Fanny Duysens, Alice Sophie Sarcinelli & Élodie Razy

*Les enseignements de l'ethnographie, du droit et de l'histoire permettent de mieux comprendre la place de la parenté dans les cultures contemporaines: tout en se greffant à la constitution de l'individu, ici comme ailleurs, elle établit des liens qui la situent au fondement de la société.* (Porqueres i Gené, 2009, p. 29)

The multiplicity of kinship systems, forms, categories and practices are central to the ways individuals and groups understand and experience their relationships with themselves, each other and the world. As such, they have drawn the attention of anthropologists and other social and human scientists. Although kinship is in a constant process of (re)configuration, some recent transformations – due to demographic, political, socio-cultural, economic, juridical, scientific, medical, age or gender considerations – have been interpreted as “revolutions” heralding new conceptions and practices. In today’s globalised context, there seem to be fundamental departures from more “traditional” kinship (Gourarier, Mathieu, 2016) in regard to genetic and medically assisted reproductive technologies (Thompson, 2005; Franklin, 2013), new practices in blended families (Martial, 2003; Cadolle, 2007) and geographically extended practices among transnational families (Razy, 2010; Coe, 2013) or same-sex parented households (Sarcinelli, 2018).

If “contemporary challenges of kinship” (Porqueres i Gené, 2009) present some new considerations, they nevertheless share similarities with other contexts and with more ancient forms of kinning in historical terms (Goody, 2001; Godelier, 2004). The same general issues arise: how do we engage with each other? How can we produce and reproduce children? How can we create kinning and belonging (Sarcinelli, Guerzoni, 2019)? From an anthropological perspective, ordinary and extraordinary aspects of kinship need not be interpreted in terms of departure and/or innovation. On the contrary, (re)configurations show the variety of articulation between the social, the cultural and the biological, the constructed and the innate, the same and the different – categories central for defining the notion of kinship (Schneider, 1984; Strathern, 1992; Héritier, 1995; Carsten, 2004). There is a need to rethink all aspects of kinship, rejecting categorisations which may be abstract, essentialist and reductive.

This collective volume examines these (re)configurations of kinship on the basis of multidisciplinary contributions using qualitative research methods, in many cases ethnography<sup>1</sup>. Issues explored across different places and times illustrate how ambivalences and contradictions are understood and experienced by individuals, families and other kinds of groups. Together, the chapters show the richness and the variety of research being conducted by promising young and senior researchers in several countries (Algeria, Belgium, Brazil, Korea, France, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico and Spain) and across a variety of disciplines, academic traditions or schools of thought (social and cultural anthropology, sociology, science and technology studies and law).

The multiple points of view represented by the chapters that follow aim at questioning Bourdieu's notion of "social space" (1984) – that is, the multi-dimensional spaces that compose the world and are built upon relations of power and the capital ratio between individuals and groups – by approaching it through the study of kinship. Said individuals and groups are defined by their "positions" within the spaces they are part of, depending on the distribution of material, cultural, social and symbolic values. Positions are not fixed, but rather evolve according to individual or collective actions.

The book is divided into four parts according to the spaces featured by each chapter and how the contours and characteristics of those spaces are defined. The first part explores "everyday spaces of kinship", namely intimate and domestic settings, by studying the ways in which family members appropriate and create repertoires of kinship and care, as well as parenting models that offer both "old" and "new" modalities. Soronellas-Masdeu, Comas-d'Argemir and Roigé explore the increasing implication of Spanish men in elderly domestic care. Alvarado and Wauthier question the construction of kinship, through the study of, respectively, the terminology used by Ludar children in Mexico and the emergence of "polyamorous" situations in Europe that contribute to the contemporary pluralisation of family forms. The consideration of these practices, ordinary gestures and interactions draws our attention to the "procedural, dynamic and performative approach of kinship", to quote Martial's chapter on the evolution of models of fatherhood and motherhood in France.

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<sup>1</sup> The chapters are a re-elaboration of a number of selected papers presented at the "Entangled Kinship Spaces" international conference held in 2016 at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Liege University (Belgium).

Part two considers “legal and administrative spaces of kinship”. This includes the application of legal expertise to studies of public administrations, as Costa and Taliani on requests for domestic adoptions in Italy or Fogel on the journey of an undocumented woman towards the regularisation of her situation in France. Then, Romero examines the judicial treatment of cases of incest in stepfamilies in France by the relevant courts of law and their jurisprudential approach. As a lawyer, Trouzine analyses the evolution of Algerian family law and its degree of dependence on Sharia regarding issues around Assisted Reproductive Technologies.

The third section is about “social and political spaces of kinship”, in which people’s intimate lives are publicised and politicised in order to contest mainstream categorisations. These public spaces are both real and virtual, counting public demonstrations, pride parades, meetings with politicians, newspaper publications and social media or television. De Giacometti is interested in movements for the legalisation of civil marriage in Lebanon, Grilli, Parisi and Tarnovski in some families’ demands for the recognition of same-sex unions and parenting in Italy and in Brazil, and Lee in the reconsideration of Korean “biological mothers” entrusting their children to transnational adoption.

The last part of the book looks at “medical and technological spaces of kinship” in which DNA or other biological reference points are mobilised by individuals to define their identities, kinship ties and relations. Fonseca examines the Brazilian “Movement for the Reintegration of those affected by Hansen’s Disease”, which works to secure legal reparations for victims and recognition of family connections by using three interconnected technologies. Déchaux analyses how some firms have introduced kinship into the market economy, by studying the services and marketing strategies of European sperm banks. Finally, revisiting a classic object of anthropology, Giraud and Porqueres *I Gené* both interrogate the evolution of conceptions and figures of kinship through life cycles in France and other western and non-western cultural contexts, with a special focus on prenatal stages.

All in all, the book calls into question the structuring of social and political order in different kinship spaces. It analyses the link between the public treatment of kinship and its more intimate conceptions, discourses and practices, and how these are, in turn, negotiated in everyday life. The intimate spaces of kinship enable us to identify what Weber (2005) calls “everyday kinship”,

namely the ties and relationships created through sharing everyday life and domestic economy, as well as through material and emotional considerations.

However, (re)configurations of kinship cannot be fully understood without considering the broader social, political, legal, or economic dimensions that together shape people's lives. Indeed, ambivalences and contradictions about socially normative and juridical categorisations can emerge, affecting the experience of them in everyday life (Théry, 1998; Ouellette, 2000; Fine, Martial, 2010; Razy, Baby-Collin, 2011; Baldassar, Merla, 2014; Sarcinelli, Simon, 2019). Moreover, discussions may also emerge when individuals, families and groups carry these ambivalences and contradictions into the public sphere, which serves as a crucial intermediary between state structures and intimate worlds. This can increase their presence, visibility and recognition and, consequently, the possibilities of negotiation.

Whether the site of (re)configuration is a State or public controversy about the boundaries of kinship (i.e. who is kin and who is not) and/or an intimate transformation of ties and relationships, our analyses centre on the practices, the discourses and the roles of the actors. These situations thus go beyond the enclosed realm of kinship groups and form part of a wider framework that exists both inside and outside the walls of people's homes. To that end, we argue for "reconnecting state and kinship" (Thelen, Alber, 2017). By focusing on both intimate and public spaces, we can explore why, how, when and to what extent (re)configurations of kinship are rooted in historical and/or anthropological continuity.

The empirical materials contained in the selected chapters do not allow for the examination of issues related to such kinship spaces as, for example, alternative culture community experiments in everyday settings or situations of climate change, economic crises or geopolitical conflicts that induce forced spatial displacements of people. Yet such issues sometimes appear between the lines of the book as kinship spaces and all of the spheres that make up societies are closely interconnected in a social and human scientific perspective considering the multiple dimensions of individual and collective positions. To conclude, we urge an epistemological debate about cross-disciplinary and comparative perspectives, bringing together different contexts, themes or disciplines in order to better understand the dynamics of entanglement of plural social spaces in the particular field of kinship, that is to say, their articulations, disarticulations and rearticulations.



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