

# Introduction

## Politics of Making Kinship

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To Western observers, kinship and politics, seemingly not distinguished in “underdeveloped” or “premodern” societies, are and ought to be kept separate from each other in modern states. Development specialists, economists, bureaucrats, and social scientists widely endorse this view. But this is not the whole story. Kinship has neither completely disappeared from the political cultures of the West nor played the determining social and political role elsewhere that has been ascribed to it. This volume explores political and academic issues that arise once the sharp divide between kinship and politics is no longer taken for granted. Its aim is to demonstrate how political processes have shaped concepts of kinship over time and, conversely, how political projects have been shaped by specific understandings, idioms, and uses of kinship.

Under the particular historical conditions of modern Western states, kinship came to be conceptualized by anthropologists and historians as a form of archaic social and political organization no longer necessary or even present in modern public life. Kinship was thought by its very nature to have always supported particularized interests, inimical to the generalized and rational aims of bureaucratic states. For modern societies, the “public” came to designate the space where politics was enacted, laws were made for everyone, and general interests prevailed.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the “private” constituted a sphere of special interests, the place where families pursued their concerns without giving heed to the good of the whole.

Social scientists, colonial administrators, missionaries, and other observers developed the thesis that “primitive” or “premodern” societies were based on kinship, an idea that became part of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial imaginary that justified domination by more “advanced” societies and underscored the idea that a central feature of modernization was severing the connection between obligations to kin and economic and political participation. From the Enlightenment onward, kinship within Europe was privatized and relegated to the sphere of domestic relations and became associated with ever-more-articulated distinctions of gender in which it was coded “female.” Its projection outward associated masculinity with conquest over feminized colonial subjects, while internally it became an instrument to stem the tide of women’s demands for political participation.

In the social and political sciences, modern political life has been articulated within the public sphere and analyzed through its institutions: modern bureaucracies, parliaments, courts, civil society, and journalism and other forms of mass communication. Politics and kinship have come to be thought of as separate domains, each with its own principles of operation. While states may, for example, intervene in definitions of property and play a role in how wealth and property are distributed, the transmission of property between generations itself has been relegated to the private sphere, although Thomas Piketty and Melinda Cooper among others have recently brought such issues into clearer focus.<sup>2</sup>

However, the issue of how to articulate the interplay of kinship and politics in Western states or in states outside the West then becomes a central conceptual problem. We cannot brush it off with simplistic notions of “corruption,” the illegitimate incursion of family interests into government, or “kinship in the wrong place.”<sup>3</sup> It is time for kinship and family to be reintegrated into political theory, as they were in the early modern West. The erasure of kinship from politics is clearly superficial, an ideological pretension with far-reaching epistemological implications. It may be true that political offices less often follow lines of descent or alliance, but wealth certainly continues to and is therefore at the heart of the political order.<sup>4</sup> As the *New York Times* put it a decade ago: “The vast expansion of the government over past century has embedded marriage into all areas where the state and the individual intersect, from tax obligations to disability benefits to health care decisions to family law.”<sup>5</sup> All of this suggests a project: how to reconceptualize kinship(s) and political orders.

Kinship, as it emerged as a scientific concept toward the end of the nineteenth century and was elaborated during the next half century by anthropologists and historians, was decisively tied to an exercise of

mapping that concerned terminologies of relations of descent and alliance and their visual representation. This often had a jural cast, tracing a set of rights and duties determined by the circumstances of birth. The networks of kinship were conceptualized as offering the possibility of social regulation, even when no state in the modern sense was present. Indeed, it was assumed that no state was needed to carry on political life where kinship embraced all aspects of society. Social scientists and historians often worked with the hypothesis, whether explicit or implicit, that “pre-state” societies were regulated by ties of kinship, which was given precedence over voluntary, friendship, neighborhood, or even household ties.<sup>6</sup>

In this set of assumptions, premodern or “developing” societies were opposed to modern, developed ones—that is, small polities with large kinship groups to large states with small family units. Once the family was relegated to the private field of particular interests with specific claims on privatized property, and its small size gave it no weight in political life, kinship was no longer seen as playing a role in the modern, rational polity or having any legitimate claim to its public goods. The spatial distinction between private and public translated into a temporal succession: kinship was conceptualized as always coming “before” and as linked to “traditional” or “past” societies. As a few necessary functions and hazy claims remained, the West adopted the word “family” to designate its own institutions and to differentiate them from its own past and from other societies where the claims of kin prevailed.

After sociologists came to be seen as specialists of modernization and concerned themselves with the (primarily Western) kind of family characterized from the 1940s as the “nuclear family,” historians turned their interests toward issues of social change; whether they took on kinship or family depended on whether they studied premodern or modern societies. Anthropology continued to deal with stateless forms of political organization or with polities defined by hereditary power. With kinship, as a characteristic of the “savage” other, outsourced to anthropology or relegated to the premodern in historiography, the two disciplines came to face similar problems of rethinking the political and reassessing kinship.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the construction of kinship and the (modern) state as inherently independent units of analysis was increasingly challenged within anthropology and history, both theoretically and empirically. Historians have looked at long-term processes in Western state development and reconfigurations of structural features in Western kinship.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile anthropologists have critiqued the conceptual separation between kinship and the state and started to examine their coevolution in significant new contexts, ranging from new forms of

reproduction to issues of care, citizenship, and transnational migration.<sup>8</sup> These shifts in thinking are already underway in efforts to overcome the polarity between kinship, with its prerational or irrational or particularistic attributes, and what counts for political life in modern states. This volume addresses the problem of how to reconceptualize kinship and politics by examining some ways in which their interaction led to them mutually constituting each other. Since historians and anthropologists are both in the process of overcoming the constricting paradigms of traditional-society-with-kinship and modern-society-without-kinship, it goes without saying that an exchange of conceptual shifts and empirical findings can help break down obsolete assumptions in both disciplines and open up significant new territories for investigation. In the following, we trace some lines of discussion in both disciplines. We do not intend to give a comprehensive history of kinship debates in anthropology and history; instead, we concentrate on issues that have proved to be central in fueling debates and embed them in the political contexts of their emergence.

## **Categories, Comparison, Change: Debating Kinship in Anthropology**

Kinship has been a fundamental topic in anthropology. In the formative period of the discipline during the second half of the nineteenth century, some key categories were framed that continued to mark scholarship for the following century and a half. Sexual reproduction was a core concern, along with questions of historical evolution and societal reproduction. How had kinship been implicated in the evolution of politics, and how had the modern state evolved out of earlier forms of political organization? Asking these questions implied an understanding of kinship as preceding state politics and entailed searching for forms of organization without central rule. Unarticulated political interests underlay the scientific interests of nineteenth-century European and American scholars. Audra Simpson has diagnosed an anthropological desire at that time “for order, for purity, for fixity and cultural perfection,” which became translated into practices of documentation and theorization.<sup>9</sup> She demonstrates that processes of authenticating the Iroquois contributed to the making of the new category of “Indian” in the emergent nation of the United States of America. She argues that this internal other was needed to shape the political self-understanding as a settler nation. In particular, Simpson emphasizes the role of one of the founders of the academic discipline of anthropology, the lawyer turned anthropologist

Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–81). Morgan’s anthropological career began with a specific interest in the political and kinship organization of the Iroquois. This work mirrored, as she argues, the desire to construct a stable and coherent tradition of a society seen as non-Western, as part of making a unit comparable through difference.<sup>10</sup> While Morgan’s large-scale comparative work *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1870) assumed a universal principle of procreation, it also needed to identify differences so readers could understand the particular set of principles behind each cultural form, classify their structures, and study them in relation to each other. This agenda contributed to the shaping of a research methodology that ignored history as well as contemporary political processes.

Morgan established two of the central topics for subsequent research regarding politics and kinship. In *Systems*, he devised a set of protocols for comparing kinship throughout the world; in *Ancient Society* (1877), published seven years later, he arranged these systems in an evolutionary schema with the Western form of kinship representing the highest, most rational stage so far.<sup>11</sup> Adopting an evolutionary perspective allowed Western observers to differentiate themselves from societies organized without state institutions and for which kinship seemed to be the necessary mechanism.<sup>12</sup>

This tension between stability, change, and difference would constitute a recurrent topic of anthropological debates. During the 1930s and 1940s, many British anthropologists studying Africa, culminating with E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes’s *African Political Systems* (1940), tried to identify a range of societies that could be understood as kinship-based and to which the term *politics* in the modern Western sense did not apply. Certainly, their vision was continually questioned by other anthropologists, notably the “Manchester School” founded by Max Gluckman in 1947 in a string of important ethnographies.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Evans-Pritchard and Fortes’s synthesis led for some time to a trend within social and cultural anthropology of specializing either in political or kinship anthropology and more or less separating the two from one another.<sup>14</sup>

Evans-Pritchard’s most prominent study on Nuer politics, conducted only twenty years before much of Africa became independent, was firmly embedded within the British colonial endeavor that sought to “pacify” the region. Perhaps that is why he presented Nuer as without political leadership, downplaying recent changes brought about by (among others) spiritual leaders. In this respect, it is interesting that German, French, and Italian anthropologists each highlighted different aspects of the region’s political organization. Not only would the variety of diagnoses attest to different theoretical understandings but the diversity would

also reflect the political needs of their home countries. Subsequently, central debates in anthropology have circled around how to approach comparison, the questionable neutrality of its methods, the intellectual origins of its instruments, and the ways classification schemes have been and can be used in colonial contexts, nation building, and political conflict. A good example is the “genealogical method” formalized by W. H. R. Rivers (1864–1922), which generations of ethnographers used as a research tool in their fieldwork.<sup>15</sup> In 1984, the American cultural anthropologist David Schneider attacked this method’s claims for neutrality by insisting that Rivers had confused social and physical relationships and finally imposed English kin terminologies on all societies.<sup>16</sup> Schneider argued that kinship studies assumed notions of biological reproduction that were by no means universal.

Meanwhile, Rodney Needham, in his introduction to the edited volume *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (1971), had already asked whether there was a separate field of human action or universally shared form that could be called kinship.<sup>17</sup> This critique was extended by Mary Bouquet, who in 1993 insisted that kinship theory, especially as it had developed among British anthropologists, depended on the genealogical method formulated by Rivers, which she considered bound up by British middle-class assumptions about pedigree. According to her, kinship studies in essence imposed provincial categories elaborated in British universities on the rest of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Following the fundamental critique of earlier kinship studies, large-scale comparisons and classification became increasingly questioned in anthropology. One author who still held to them in the second half of the twentieth century was Jack Goody, whose wide-ranging comparative project later influenced historical research. Goody distinguished Eurasian and African types of societies and related differences of property and marriage systems to ecological differences. This became the basis for his reflections on marriage prohibitions in medieval Europe (see below).

A further way of looking at kinship as a means of constructing difference was developed by French structuralism. In dialogue with structural linguistics, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) looked for a formal grammar of kinship and enduring mental structures as the shared basis of humanity, upon which differences among human societies rested. The political context influenced a nostalgic undertone of regret for the loss of cultural diversity through processes of modernization and change.<sup>19</sup>

Diachronic traces in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss became most apparent in his category of *société à maison* (house society), introduced subsequent to his great 1949 work on the elementary structures of kinship.<sup>20</sup> As earlier anthropologists, he developed this concept around property,

which he proposed instead of biology as the organizing principle of human sociality. House societies were interpreted as an intermediary form between simple societies organized by kinship and complex ones organized by class and contract. As such, medieval European dynasties and the local perpetual establishments (houses) of the native Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island were understood as jural entities (*personnes morales*) lasting for several generations and holding duties and rights of both material and symbolic value. To Lévi-Strauss, houses were both institutions and fetishizations of relationships. Although house societies might use the language of kinship to express forms of social organization, such forms followed a different logic: perpetuating the internal hierarchies of local domination.

The concept of house societies allowed phenomena of transition to be addressed but was fundamentally understood as a step in the long story of kinship's decline in the West and reinstated the presumption, otherwise largely discarded, of a uniform, unidirectional development path all societies and polities must take. Later anthropologists took up the topic of "house societies" and used it to overcome the stalemate Schneider's critique of kinship had produced. In this literature, modeling flexible domestic relationships provided an alternative to the idea of societies organized through descent (lineages). For example, Susan McKinnon used it to rethink Evans-Pritchard's model of the patrilineal Sudanese Nuer society, asking what would happen if the complexities he described in his empirical work that contrasted with his somewhat static theoretical model were seen not through the lens of lineage but as a house society.<sup>21</sup>

The concepts of the house and house societies were seen, in anthropology, as a closer understanding of lived, flexible relationships and, later, as a paradigmatic example of the entanglements between persons, places, and biographies.<sup>22</sup> For a while, taking the house as an appropriate unit of analysis seemed to offer an alternative to the dead end of kinship research in anthropology. With an empirical focus on immediate, tangible interactions and material dimensions that mediate relationships, the concept contributed to increasing presentism within anthropology at the expense of long-term perspectives. However, in the meantime, new political agendas related to changing family configurations in the West again led to a renewed interest in kinship. From the late 1980s, reproductive technologies, transnational and queer families, and (transnational) adoption increased awareness of the political constitution and implications of kinship. Ethnographic studies of these configurations put more explicit emphasis on the political.<sup>23</sup> In addition, focusing on shifting configurations in the West has been one step toward

challenging naturalizing assumptions of a preexisting kinship that was always already there.

In sum, tracing some anthropological paths of thinking about kinship reveals the concept's political implications. The development of categories of analysis and attempts to compare societal formations often served as a means for self-reassurance and political engineering. Though framed as neutral, categorizing kinship established its anteriority to politics and had long-lasting epistemological implications. It also contributed to constructions of difference and the reproduction of political hierarchies, as in the case of Iroquois and other colonial settings or when degrees of kinship are deployed to measure racial and national purity.<sup>24</sup> In the next section, turning to the use of these kinship categories and concepts in historical research, we can see similar topics and discussions around difference and change, the universal and particular, and the development of adequate tools and epistemological approaches reappearing.

## **Decline, Denial, and Reconsiderations of the Modern: Kinship in History**

It may seem ironic that the topic of kinship began to preoccupy historians of the West just as kinship studies in anthropology had come under fundamental critique. But in many ways these moves were complementary. Since the 1970s, anthropologists had become hesitant to examine kinship—at least by using the old methods and categories—both because of the category's inherent Westernism and the methodological shortfalls, for example, of the genealogical method. During the 1960s and 1970s, historians discovered the need to take kinship into account as a crucial aspect of modern Western societies, from the analysis of which kinship had long been excluded systematically. These turns in each discipline worked toward overcoming a divide between societies with kinship and societies with state politics.

In general, historians have long been hesitant to address kinship as a concept that was made and changed over time, spaces, and disciplines. Some historians agreed explicitly with the older anthropological assumption that kinship structures in non-Western societies around the world were a basic part of those cultures that had always been there, and many more agreed implicitly. Regardless of the period in question, they tended to assume that whenever their research begins, kinship was just about to lose its former importance or strength. The pattern of placing kinship in a position of anteriority was particularly marked among historians relying on theories of modernization. Treating kinship as quintessentially



traditional—as the other of modernity—they followed sociological and modernization theories, as well as a related disciplinary distribution of labor that attributed kinship to those dealing with traditional societies: thus, anthropology. Wherever kinship mattered in the past or still matters in the present, this was read as an indicator that modernity and the related process of political democratization had not yet (at least fully) set in.

Assumptions about the anteriority of kinship were common even in the least theoretical historical literature. We have read time and again that associations, insurance schemes, childrens' and old age care, and many other phenomena of the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had become necessary to replace practices of social security that had previously been assured by the solidarity and cohesion among kin. Historians have argued that political institutional processes such as the formation of guilds or city councils had already become necessary in the Middle Ages because kin groups had lost their former sway over local societies. With the transition to the early modern period, the emergence of the state was explained by societies no longer being able to rely on structures of kinship to meet their needs. And this again resonated with the assumptions of anthropologists who saw societies organized in states as those in which kinship tended to fade out. For the longest time, no attempt at examining the long-term development had exposed the inconsistency of a historiography, in which assumed decline seems to recur in period after period, and each time explaining presumed change.

The temporality ascribed to kinship blocked research from asking about its making. History, as it had emerged as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, had a bias for objects that evolved over time. Unlike archaeologists, anthropologists, and folklorists, historians felt no particular impetus to examine what had been left behind in the process. Accordingly, they had long been more inclined to dwell on the history of the family with a teleological perspective that saw the modern nuclear family or the loving couple at the end. The assumption went that the nuclear family, with an emphasis on emotional bonds, had been formed in the process of modernization. Ideas about the dominance of kin groups, including residential patterns involving several generations of a patriline in premodern Europe, had already been developed by the pioneers of empirical-historical social research, including Frédéric le Play in France and Wilhlem Riehl in Germany.<sup>25</sup> For many historians, small families were an intermediary phase on the path toward a full-fledged individualism. And for most of them, these emerged as older structures built around more extended kin disintegrated.

Although Jack Goody's hypotheses followed the same pattern in many ways, they triggered the first major debate about how systems of kinship

are created, shaped, and made rather than simply handed down. Goody examined the rapid extension of ecclesiastic marriage prohibitions in Europe during the Central Middle Ages. Put very simply, he argued that the Catholic Church pushed these prohibitions ever further in order to undermine the marriage and inheritance strategies of noble kin groups. By reshaping kinship around radical prescribing of exogamous marriage, the argument went, the church aimed at diverting the flow of property away from the next generation and to itself. In the course of the last decades, critics have whittled away most elements of Goody's arguments one by one. But in the process, productive debates emerged about the ways in which different actors, including local noblemen, their dependent monasteries, and royal administrations, competed for the authority to define, shape, license, and sanction kin relations. These discussions opened eyes to the possibility of change in kinship structures rather than pure decline; to political debates, contentions, and manipulations these could give rise to; and, last but not least, to how kinship itself, as a way of seeing, naming, and doing relationships, was made and transformed.

The most prominent early attempts at examining transformations in rather than a decline of kinship are associated with Karl Schmid and Georges Duby, both historians of the nobility in the Western Middle Ages.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Goody pointed to interferences between political interests and kinship at the level of large institutions ("the Church") and broad social groups ("the nobility"), Duby and Schmitt related transformations to forms of domination on the ground, on the local level. This was the level that had become relevant after the large realms of the heirs of Charlemagne had been fragmented—the Western embodiment of segmentary societies?

Schmid took the naming practices of the early medieval nobility—in particular a shift from the sole use of first names to a combination of first and last names that persisted over generations—as a point of departure to explore the formation of dynastic kin organization. His efforts were continued by Duby, and can be summarized as follows: during the Carolingian period (late eighth to ninth centuries), noble kin groups were primarily constructed through in-law and cousin relationships and formed extended, overlapping groups constituted by relations among living people. Such groups are sometimes described as horizontal because they were formed from genealogical ties among contemporaries, not through common ancestors.

Generational depth, in contrast, characterized the newer pattern of organization that emerged from the eleventh century onward. Here, kin organized themselves along lines of paternal descent into what could be classified as houses or dynasties. This was accompanied by a new

tendency to pass on property in a direct line of successions from fathers to sons, often excluding daughters, who upon marriage joined their husband's dynasty. Only now, and as an expression of male succession, did family names begin to stabilize themselves, along with coats of arms and a notion of ancestral lands or castles. Variations of this form of kin organization, including Lévi-Strauss's *sociétés à maison*, would characterize large sections of European elites until the eighteenth century. Some historians, especially in France, followed Lévi-Strauss in understanding such house societies as signs of a transition toward more complex organization.<sup>27</sup>

From the perspective of our volume, questions about the Schmid-Duby thesis's soundness matter less than its status as a model case for relating transitions of the political order and kinship. For Duby and Schmid it was clear that the transition they had detected was integral to a groundbreaking political change. They related the older form of kinship to the Carolingian Empire and its successor organizations with their large-scale power structures and a comparably high degree of institutionalization. Here, some kind of relation to the emperor and his leading officers (whether through cousins or in-laws) was key to being appointed to profitable offices.

The newer form of organizing kinship was an answer to the subsequent fragmentation of large empires in the Central Middle Ages and the emergence of smaller seigneuries, often organized around castles and including landed possessions and jurisdictional and fiscal claims, as the decisive political entities. Such political units needed to be passed on undivided in order to maintain their political effectiveness. Usually, they passed from fathers to sons. They stood at the center of what was passed on from generations but could also constitute entities such as the *Geschlecht*, the *maison*, or the house. There have been many objections to the so-called Schmid-Duby transition, but to our knowledge none have fallen back on claiming kinship's anteriority to the political order. All have maintained the perspective that kin organization is integral to modes of domination and their transformation. Dynastic and house organizations came to play an important role in many regional elites in Europe up to the eighteenth century.

The extent to which the new dynastic forms were kinship in the strict sense has been disputed. Joseph Morsel, for example, has referred to Lévi-Strauss's idea of European house societies in suggesting that dynastic forms were instead an expression of power relations veiled by the language of kinship during a period characterized by a general "deparentalization"—a decreasing structuring effect of kinship on social organization.<sup>28</sup> However if kinship in house societies was no longer any more than a means of expressing relations determined by factors other

than kinship, at what point in the history of the West had kinship been anything more than that? And how would we know? Even during the so-called Dark Ages around the year 1000, scholars in jurisprudence and theology continued to conceptualize kinship in the tradition of ancient law and philosophy, in which kinship appeared less as a domain on its own than as an aspect of the legal or political order. The question points to the broader problem of treating kinship as an autonomous domain, separate from (or prior to) politics, the law, the economy, or the distribution of power.

From the 1970s, when anthropological research on kinship had already started to be problematized and had rejected the idea of kinship and politics as separate fields of human action (see above), historians of the early modern and modern periods began to examine kin relations more broadly and to connect them with political and economic transformations. Attention to kinship became an important ingredient in many microhistories, and more generally in attempts to expand social history beyond a concern with class and conflict, to include solidarities, bonds, and emotions in political change. Detailed investigations, such as those of Christiane Klapisch, Gerard Delille, or David Sabean, were strongly inspired by anthropological kinship studies.<sup>29</sup> They examined the importance of kinship in local land markets, in economic production, in support of orphans and the poor, and in communal politics.

When this tradition of research began, it seemed likely that kinship mattered in premodern European societies in the past for the same reasons that it was assumed to matter in non-Western societies in the present: where formal markets, bureaucracies, and state institutions were poorly developed, kinship could be expected to assume important roles in providing local societies with coherence, solidarity, and conflict management and in organizing cooperation and structuring power relations. Empirical-historical research did indeed confirm all this. But just as anthropological research in the West confirmed the enduring importance of changing formations of kinship, historical research also made clear that kinship did anything but vanish as one moved forward on the timeline. Many historians with an interest in kinship focused on the *Sattelzeit* (1770–1830), presumably bridging the division between premodern and modern. They found that kinship was heavily implicated in developments usually associated with modernization, such as state building or class formation. David Sabean has described how kin relations up to the early eighteenth century that had been organized vertically and that connected people from different points in hierarchies began to be reoriented toward relations between people of similar status. At the same time, kin endogamous marriages became more frequent. Women's historians

of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries turned to kinship to reveal areas where women exercised power and influenced politics despite their exclusion from the formal institutions of parliamentary democracies.<sup>30</sup> And business historians found an explanation in kinship for how early industrialism and global trade pooled capital before the emergence of investment banking.<sup>31</sup>

Historical approaches to kinship produced a great variety of results but little support for notions of a general decline. Most of these studies looked at small segments of society (villages, noble groups, urban patri-cians, or individual families), and many were committed to microhis-tory. Authors were more eager to challenge existing generalizations than to offer new ones. Despite a growing number of specialized investiga-tions that pointed to the contrary, narratives of the decline of kinship remained a central element in historical explanations of modernity, the great divergence, and the societal foundations of democracy. It took much pleading to get authors of specialized studies to make an effort to examine major trends in the development of kinship that could chal-lenge received ideas. One attempt at this was the volume *Kinship in Europe*, which suggested that the development of kinship in Western Europe between 1300 and 1900 followed two major transformations, each of which made kinship formative in new areas of interaction.<sup>32</sup> The first, connecting the Central Middle Ages to the early modern period, was characterized by verticality, emphasizing the perpetuation of kin groups and lineages through descent beyond the lifespan of individuals, their endowment with jural rights and duties through the devolution of property, and their power to define hierarchies through persistent prac-tices of patronage. The other, extending from the late eighteenth century into the early twentieth, emphasized horizontal relationships, class and kin endogamous marriages, the pooling of capital over continuous suc-cessions within one line, and the provision of networks of support in partly meritocratic systems.

## Common Questions

Abandoning the idea of the decline of kinship not only offers the pos-sibility of looking at the many modifications of kinship relations con-nected to and sometimes caused by political change, it also opens a path to studying how kinship itself as a way of seeing, naming, and doing relationships contributes to political transformation. Asking how forms of kinship emerge and are made provides new insights into the history of state building, class formation, biopolitics, citizenship, and migration—to

mention just a few examples. In this volume, we take three specific routes, asking about the development of epistemologies of kinship and their political implications, about kinship as an element in political projects, and about the deployment of kinship in political, legal, and administrative systems. These questions are deeply interrelated around issues of how to conceive of social change and difference, as the chapters in the book will show.

The chapters of the first section address the tools that support the epistemologies and conceptualizations of kinship, including diagrams, visualizations, and quantification in the form of degrees. Such devices of kinship reckoning had until recently been taken for granted and seen as neutral and thus were rarely made subjects of research. These initial examinations show us the implications that changes and continuities in their configuration and application had for politics of kinship. Furthermore, specific conceptualizations of kinship reveal some aspects of it and conceal others, with tremendous consequences for both political visions of the world and scientific epistemologies.

The chapters of the second section, on “projects,” concern the use of families, households, and kinship structures to examine the workings of political and social orders and to frame cultural values and legal prescriptions. In many instances, the family has been regarded as the foundation of the state, but political theorists, social scientists, and moral philosophers also consider how the state ought to mold, shape, and regulate familial relationships. Politics and kinship are articulated at many levels, including those relating to issues of nurture, succession, hierarchies, marriage, authority, sexuality, and the distribution of wealth.

A relatively recent field of research looks at the conceptualizations of kinship in the administrative, academic, and legal venues involved in implementing political decisions. These are discussed in the third section, dealing with “deployments.” As long as kinship was seen as anterior to the development of states and administrative systems, attempts by lawyers, scientists, translators, and administrators to define it received little research attention—possibly because they appeared to merely reiterate something that already existed. Once we acknowledge the dynamism of kinship, we can see such efforts as contributions to making and remaking concepts, laws, languages, and systems of kinship. Twenty-first-century legislators are still busy changing all kinds of laws; regulating surnames, adoption, and surrogacy; or adapting inheritance law to the children of same-sex couples. Although ancient concepts of marriage and filiation are far from disappearing, they can receive new meanings in the process. No modern state can leave kinship behind.

Historically, the vision of a unified kinship founded in nature itself is anything but universal. Before the eighteenth century, no one would have associated similarities and differences between species with processes of descent or kinship. When exactly this need to unify visions of kinship and descent arose in different fields and why it did still remain to be explored. Our book attempts to contribute to this by following the politics of specific epistemologies, projects, and deployments of kinship.

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## Notes

1. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1989 [1962]).
2. Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2017).
3. Michael Herzfeld, "Corruption as Political Incest: Temporalities of Sin and Redemption," in *Reconnecting State and Kinship*, ed. Tatjana Thelen and Erdmute Alber (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 39–60.
4. Cooper, *Family Values*, 123: "The empirical data on wealth distribution suggests that inheritance is almost as decisive at the beginning of the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth. This phenomenon also and inevitably entails the reassertion of the private family as a critical economic institution and a portal to social legitimacy. The fact that marriage and family formation have become the overriding concern of queer politics; the claim, axiomatic among American social policy theorists, that marriage is now a marker of class and a means to social mobility; the fact that the recreation of the private family unit has become a key ambition of welfare policy—all of these trends point to the resurgence of the family as the essential vector for the distribution of wealth and status."
5. "The Wrong Reasons for Same-Sex Marriage," op-ed, *New York Times*, 15 May 2011.
6. This singled-out status of kinship has been itself shaped in the process of knowledge production. Mainly referring to how kinship became the dominant concept at the expense of friendship and others, Marilyn Strathern, *Relations: An Anthropological Account* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 29ff., has argued that this shift happened in the course of the seventeenth century, when scholars like John Locke conceptualized kinship as natural relations. In consequence, friendship and civil organization emerged as contrastive concepts in the West.
7. For example: David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and Jon Mathieu, eds., *Kinship in Europe: Approaches to Long-Term Developments (1300–1900)* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); Christopher H. Johnson, et al., eds., *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond* (New York, 2011).
8. For example, Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon, eds., *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies* (Durham NC: Duke University Press 2001); Susan McKinnon and Fenella Cannell, eds., *Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2013); Tatjana Thelen and Erdmute Alber, eds., *Reconnecting State and Kinship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Erdmute Alber and Tatjana Thelen, eds., *Politics and Kinship: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2022); On the state, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot. "Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization," *Current Anthropology* 42, no. 1 (2001): 125–38; Akhil Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (1995): 375–402; Tatjana Thelen, Larissa Vetter, and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, *Stategraphy: Toward a Relational Anthropology of the State* (New York: Berghahn, 2018).
9. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptions: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 69.
10. Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptions*, 69.
11. Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society (1877)* (OCR reproduction of the original by General Books LLC) (Memphis, TN, 2009): 337. "Like the successive geological formations, the tribes of mankind may be arranged according to their relative conditions,



- into successive strata. When thus arranged, they reveal with some degree of certainty the entire range of human progress from savagery to civilization.”
12. Among others, Friedrich Engels based his history of property and family forms directly on the work of Henry Lewis Morgan. Friedrich Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Property, and the State* (Chicago: CH Kerr & Co, 1902). German original: *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staates*, Im Anschluss an Lewis H. Morgans Forschungen (Hottingen-Zürich, Verlag der Schweizerischen Volksbuchhandlung, 1884).
  13. On the Manchester School, see Richard Werbner, *Anthropology after Gluckman: The Manchester School, Colonial and Postcolonial Transformations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020): 3. He claimed that given its high heterogeneity, its character of a “school” could only be confirmed from an outsider’s perspective.
  14. Edmund Leach, *Pul Eliya, A Village in Modern Ceylon: A Study in Land Tenure and Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). But see Maurice Godelier, *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, trans. Nora Scott (London: Verso, 2011 [2004]), 484. “It is no longer possible to assert, as so many anthropologists did for over a century, that so-called ‘primitive societies,’ that is, societies without castes or classes and without a state, were ‘kin based.’ There has never been any such thing as ‘kin-based’ societies, except in the anthropology and sociology textbooks. But to affirm this is not to claim, as Leach did, that kinship is merely a language or veil, or worse an invention on the part of anthropologists and therefore of the West.”
  15. William H. R. Rivers, “The Genealogical Method of Anthropological Inquiry,” *Sociological Review* 3 (1910): 1–12. Some of these instruments and their visualizations still remain popular, as we can see in the activities of the amateur genealogists analyzed by Elisabeth Timm. See Elisabeth Timm, “Ich bin Glied einer Kette”: Entgrenzung, Personalisierung und Gouvernementalität von Verwandtschaft am Beispiel der populären Genealogie,” in *Verwandtschaft heute*, ed. Erdmute Alber, Bettina Beer, Julia Pauli, and Michael Schnegg (Berlin: Reimer 2010): 47–71. They also remain in use in biomedical environments such as genetic counseling. See Anna Jabloner, “Relative Risks: Measuring Kinship for Future Health,” *Social Analysis* 65, no. 4 (2021).
  16. David M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984): 107.
  17. Rodney Needham, ed., *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (London: Tavistock, 1971): 3–4.
  18. Mary Bouquet, *Reclaiming English Kinship: Portuguese Refractions of British Kinship Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993): 16–17. See also Mary Bouquet, “Family Trees and their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (1996): 43–66. Later writers inevitably had considerable reservations about Schneider’s and Bouquet’s critiques. One example was Maurice Godelier, who insisted that the numerous genealogies that he collected from the Baruya of New Guinea were not at all a “matter of projecting our vision of consanguinity, our notions of fatherhood and motherhood. ... The notions of father, mother and siblings ... cannot mean the same thing for a Baruya as for a Western European born into a kinship system centred on the nuclear family. ... It is impossible to project one’s own concept of consanguinity onto their way of thinking and living.” Maurice Godelier, *Metamorphoses of Kinship* (London: Verso, 2011): 68f.
  19. Lévi-Strauss was well aware of social change, but unlike the evolutionary and developmental theorists he saw it largely as a process of homogenization and a global loss of the cultural richness and diversity of non-European populations. Rejecting the colonial politics of the French state as well as the Western universalist humanism of many of his French colleagues such as Sartre, he sought to preserve human difference. See also Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France: A Critical History of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

20. See the definition in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982): 194. "A corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods and its titles down a real or imaginary line considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both."
21. Susan McKinnon, "Domestic Exceptions: Evans-Pritchard and the Creation of Nuer Patrilineality and Equality," *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2000): 35–83.
22. See Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones, eds., *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Janet Carsten, "House-Lives as Ethnography/Biography," *Social Anthropology* 26, no. 1(2018): 103–16.
23. See, among many others, Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Susan Kahn, *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Signe Howell, *The Kinning of Strangers* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006); Deborah Brycson and Ulla Vuorela, *Transnational Families in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
24. See, among others, Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989): 134–61; Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2013); Susan McKinnon, "The Work of the American Eugenics Record Office: Technologies for Terminating 'Degenerate' Family Lines and Purifying the Nation," *Social Analysis* 65, no. 4 (2021).
25. Frédéric Le Play, *L'Organisation de la famille selon le vrai modèle signalé par l'histoire de toutes les races et de tous les temps* (Paris, 1871); Wilhelm H. Riehl, *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Socialpolitik*, 2nd ed., vol. 3: *Die Familie* (Stuttgart und Augsburg, 1855).
26. Georges Duby, "Structures familiales aristocratiques en France du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle en rapport avec les structures de l'État," in *L'Europe aux IX<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles: Aux origines des États nationaux*, ed. T. Manteuffel and A. Geysztor (Warsaw: Naukowe, 1968); Georges Duby, "Lignage, noblesse et chevalerie au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans la région mâconnaise: Une révision," in *Annales ESC* 27 (1972); Karl Schmid, "Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht, Haus und Dynastie beim mittelalterlichen Adel: Vorfagen zum Thema 'Adel und Herrschaft im Mittelalter,'" *Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Oberrheins* 105 (1957).
27. Elie Haddad, "Qu'est-ce qu'une 'maison'? De Lévi-Strauss aux recherches anthropologiques et historiques récentes," in *L'Homme* 212 (2014).
28. Joseph Morsel and Christine Ducourtieux, "L'histoire (du Moyen Âge) est un sport de combat ... Réflexions sur les finalités de l'Histoire du Moyen Âge destinées à une société dans laquelle même les étudiants d'Histoire s'interrogent," *LAMOP/Joseph Morsel* (Paris: LAMOP, 2007): 196.
29. David Sabean, "Verwandtschaft und Familie in einem württembergischen Dorf 1500 bis 1870: Einige methodische Überlegungen," in *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas*, ed. W. Conze (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1976); Gérard Delille, *Famille et propriété dans le royaume de Naples (XVe–XIXe siècle)* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome 1985); Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *La maison et le nom: Stratégies et rituels dans l'Italie de la Renaissance* (Paris: Éd. de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1990).
30. Elisabeth Joris, *Liberal und eigensinnig: Die Pädagogin Josephine Stadlin – die Homöopathin Emilie Paravicini-Blumer; Handlungsspielräume von Bildungsbürgerinnen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Chronos, 2010); Leonore Davidoff and Cathrine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London, Routledge, 1987).

31. See Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Simone Derix, *Die Thyssens: Familie und Vermögen, Familie—Unternehmen—Öffentlichkeit: Thyssen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Bd. 4 (Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016).
32. David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher and Jon Mathieu, ed., *Kinship in Europe: Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300–1900)* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007). With the follow-up volumes: Christopher H. Johnson, David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher and Francesca Trivellato, ed., *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences since the Middle Ages* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean, eds., *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship 1300–1900* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Christopher H. Johnson, Bernhard Jussen, David Warren Sabean and Simon Teuscher, ed., *Blood and Kinship: Matter for Metaphor from Ancient Rome to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

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