

Call for Proposals

Entangled Kinship Spaces

Ethnographic approaches of contemporary public and intimate (re)configurations

Espaces pluriels de la parenté. Approches ethnographiques des (re)configurations publiques et privées dans le monde contemporain

International conference

20-21 October 2016, University of Liege (Belgium)

The multiplicity of systems, forms, categories, and practices of kinship has drawn the attention of anthropologists as central for the ways individuals and human groups think and experience their relationships with themselves, others, their society and the world they live in. Transformations – demographic, political, socio-cultural, economic, juridical, scientific, medical, or those related to age or gender – have contributed to constantly (re)define kinship. In particular, recent innovations regarding, among others, Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) and surrogacy, and the debates around same-sex couple marriage and adoption, have been understood as deep breaking points in relation to more “traditional” conceptions of kinship (Cadoret 2007; Gross 2015), appearing as yet unprecedented and controversial (Gourarier & Mathieu 2016).

From an anthropological point of view, such (re)configurations of kinship testify to a variety of articulation between the social and the biological, nature and society, the innate and the constructed – categories central for definitions of kinship (Carsten 2004; Courduriès & Fine 2014; Godelier 2004; Grilli & Zanutelli 2011; Schneider 1980; Solinas 2010; Strathern 1992; Viveiros de Castro 2009). This suggests a need to rethink kinship in all its dimensions, from public to intimate ones. Drawing from anthropology and intending to widen the field of empirical, theoretical and epistemological reflections, this conference invites a crossing of perspectives on contemporary (re)configurations of kinship within the human and social sciences with a focus on ethnographic approaches. It is organized around two main, yet non-exclusive lines of research. The first one wishes to interrogate the ways contemporary (re)configurations of kinship take place in different public and intimate entangled spaces. The second one opens up a debate on epistemology when it comes to crossed and comparative

perspectives between contexts, themes or disciplines in order to analyse issues, contributions and limits of such field of research.

1. Entangled kinship spaces

The emergence of “new” forms and practices of kinship seems to reconfigure current or operative norms and models, especially within the present context of globalization (Browner & Sargent 2011). As a result, ambivalences and contradictions with regards to socially normative and juridical categorizations have been emerging, affecting the ways those are experienced in everyday life (Fine & Martial 2010; Ouellette 2000; Théry 1998). Such is the case of the complex itineraries of parents-to-be in order to have access to genetic and medically assisted reproductive technologies (Franklin & Roberts 2006; Thompson 2005) or to international adoption (Yngvesson 2007), or of other issues related to parenthood (Marquet, 2006), such as fatherhood (Martial 2012), motherhood (Fonseca 2011; Hayden 2004), pluriparenthood within blended families (Cadolle 2007; Martial 2003) or geographically dispersed families (Razy 2010). Moreover, discussions can emerge when individuals, families and groups carry these ambivalences and contradictions into the public sphere. Actions such as public demonstrations in support of same-sex marriage and for the recognition of various same-sex parenthood configurations (Tarnovski 2012; Théry 2013), or claims by activists such as groups of parents of disabled children for the applications of the principles of inclusion (Ginsburg & Rapp 2001) share the fact that they politicize kinship in order to contest juridical or mainstream categorizations.

This conference aims to understand how public treatments of kinship are entangled in intimate conceptions, discourses and practices, but also how the latter are, in turn, negotiated in everyday life. It invites questioning the articulations, disarticulations, and rearticulations of plural entangled kinship spaces (geographic or temporal, public or intimate) in which the structuration of social and political order take place, as well as everyday representations and experiences. In which plural entangled spaces is kinship constantly undone, made and remade? What are the issues embedded in these constant and diverse rearticulations? In this context, it is also important to analyse the dynamics of individual and collective subjectivation and desubjectivation involving kinship (Wieviorka 2012). Because they constitute a significant space of mediation between the political-social level and the intimate one (Agier 2012), such dynamics are shaping subjects, their identities, citizenship and agency as well as issues relative to the construction of such subjectivities.

2. Ethnographic approaches towards contemporary (re)configurations

A second objective of the conference is to review the field of kinship studies in the human and social sciences, and more specifically in anthropology. In the past decades, classical studies have been questioned (Collard 2000; Courduriès & Herbrand 2014), disclosing their ethnocentric stance (Geffray 1990; Meillassoux 2000; Strathern 1992), as well as certain limits of interpretative theories stemmed from them (Schneider 1984). Scholars have also explored new fields and themes in order to tackle “new” forms and practices of kinship, revisiting classical concepts and theories, such as filiation and alliance (Godelier 2004; Goody 2001; Segalen & al. 2002). How can kinship studies be rethought to face “contemporary challenges” (Bamford & Leach 2009; Porqueres i Gené 2009)? How to grasp articulations, disarticulations and rearticulations between politico-juridical principles, public action and intimate experiences? How to diversify points of view in order to overcome dualist approaches between the study of structure and ethnographies of everyday practices (Morgan 1996) or of “practical kinship” (Weber 2005)? Or again, what are the issues, contributions and limits of comparative perspectives among different contexts, themes or disciplines, such as Anthropology of Kinship, Sociology of the Family, Kinship Studies, Gender Studies, or Science and Technology Studies? While kinship is constantly reinvented in different repetitive or creative forms – such as « Make Kin Not Babies! » (Haraway 2015), inviting to include a myriad of temporalities and spatialities, human and other kinds of beings, in the concept – scholars are invited to reflect upon the relevance of their empirical, theoretical and epistemological approaches to the contemporary (re)configurations of kinship.

Call for Proposals

Scholars in the human and social sciences from every discipline, theme, and fieldwork working on contemporary (re)configurations of kinship are warmly invited to submit proposals. Abstracts in French or English of 500 words maximum, including information about academic status, affiliation, and contact details, should be sent to kinship.ulg.2016@gmail.com. The deadline for abstract submission is on May 25th, 2016. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by June 30th. The conference will have a bilingual format. It will take place on the 20-21 October 2016 at the University of Liege, Belgium. Further information about panels and keynote lectures will follow in due time. Participants’ travel and accommodation fees cannot be covered.

Contact

Please do not hesitate to contact the organizing committee via email at kinship.ulg.2016@gmail.com for any further questions regarding the conference.

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