# Appropriate Kinship, Legitimate Nationhood: Shifting Registers of Gender and State[[1]](#endnote-1) *Victoria Goddard*

This chapter explores some of the tensions and possibilities that arise from historical and context-bound relationships between gendered politics and the state. Contradictions between different spheres of action and value are understood to produce and reproduce different forms of freedom and non-freedom, exclusion and inclusion. The chapter draws on the example of the formation of the Argentine nation-state in the context of 19th century global capitalism, whereby increasingly circumscribed notions of appropriate kinship were associated with emergent parameters of legitimate nationhood, citizenship and belonging. The process of nation-building generated historically specific exclusions and invisibilities as effects of power relations and produced differentiated subjects, spanning “those who will be eligible for recognition and those who will not” (Butler 2010: 138), and thus, also generated particular forms of silence and invisibility (Trouillot 1996).

While recognizing the processes of non- or mis-recognition associated with the emergence of modern nation states, it is important to acknowledge those social actors who, by challenging dominant narratives, produced new spaces and new narratives that helped reverse such non-recognitions and invisibilities and redefined the terms and relations that underpinned them. Different possibilities and tensions are explored in relation to claims against the state, in what might be described as agonistic politics, where Antigone-like defiance entails an entanglement with, and a profound criticism of the state’s dominant logic and exercise of power. In the examples explored in this chapter, the parallels with Antigone’s plight are especially salient where demands are expressed in terms of the right of kin to claim and bury their dead, as victims of state violence (AFAT and WITNESS 2002; Elshtain 1982, 1997; Butler 2000)[[2]](#endnote-2). The Argentine Mothers of Plaza de Mayo provide a key example through their protracted struggle and critique of state violence from a position that was largely anchored in the values of kinship and solidarity, in contrast to the subjection and expropriation of land, life and value that has characterized the Argentine state throughout its history (Goddard 2005). While a critical distance from the state was central to their position of legitimate opposition, their demands for justice also entailed a struggle for recognition by the state. Through kinning the state (Thelen et al. 2014; Howell 2003), the political interventions of alternative actors can be understood to effect transformations of the state, by imbuing it with new ethical values, generating new perspectives on kinship, politics and the state.

Although the distinction between state and non-state actors, and between the ethical principles and morality articulated through kinship and the state can serve to support a range of social and political claims and counterclaims, it is also the case that, as demonstrated in Pine’s chapter in this volume, such distinctions encompass a wide range of socialities and ideas about morality (Pine this volume). The chapter follows Pine in arguing that despite the enduring appeal of dichotomies and distinctions between state and non-state, public and private, polity and kinship, ethnographic engagement with these categories tends to undermine their distinctiveness, pointing instead to their co-constitution and entanglement, as discussed in detail in the Introduction to this volume. The chapter complements Pine’s analysis of the hierarchies and inequalities that permeate both kinship and state ideologies and practices.

Kinship can be understood as a system, or a multiplicity of systems that are to do with subjectivation (Howell 2003; Faubion 2001; Thelen et al. 2014; Thelen and Alber this volume); given the entanglements of kinship, gender and state power, it is useful to approach the state as an assemblage of institutions, practices and actors that effect subjectivation in relation to, or in contrast with kinship. I take Howell’s and Faubion’s point that subjectivation carries a double meaning, as both the processes that make subjects of one kind or another and the processes through which individuals and groups make themselves into particular kinds of subjects (Howell 2003; Faubion 2001; also Butler 1997). At the same time, the entanglements of power outlined by Pateman (1988) and Federici (2004, see also Rubin 1975; Butler 2000) may produce alternative identities and subversions of power relations, evident in the borderings between nation, state and kin. It is therefore unhelpful to consider kinship and reproduction as entirely distinct from the political and from broader processes that pertain to the distribution of power and wealth. Furthermore, such processes are themselves imbued with meanings associated with the sphere of kinship and draw from its relationships, values and productivity.

# Entangled domains: public and private, kinship and polity

The connections between kinship and the political are summarized in Meyer Fortes’ statement that “where there is society, there is both kinship and polity, both status and contract” (Fortes 1970: 220). As Pine proposes in her contribution to this volume, Fortes’ work is notable for its sensitivity regarding the connections across public and private, kinship and the politico-jural domain. Pine describes how concepts and sentiments derived from the doing, making and being in the private sphere of kinship lend themselves to broader uses, providing a compelling frame of reference for what might otherwise be ephemeral collectives and tenuous calls for solidarity, loyalty or obedience. Although the idioms of kinship, or what Herzfeld (this volume) refers to as a “technology of social knowledge”, are effective boundary markers, they are also adaptable and potentially inclusive, vividly illustrated in Fortes’ discussion of identity amongst Tallensi migrants[[3]](#endnote-3). This malleability and interconnectedness was explored by later anthropologists, for example to show how the language of kinship can express political relationships, often in contexts where confusion and contradiction confront individuals and groups, as described by Rajković (this volume). Indeed, the synergies between kinship and politics were frequently understood as a kind of “antipolitics”, as when primordial relations or familial ideologies were understood to distort or impede the emergence of fully fledged political identities and actions (Herzfeld in this volume).

While a number of anthropologists (see Kuper 2005: 44; Goody 1983) provided the means to explore the entanglements of kinship and gender relations in connection with competing claims and power regimes, the systematic analysis of the interactions between state and kinship, public politics and the private sphere was developed from feminist perspectives within and beyond anthropology—as discussed in the introduction to this volume and Pine’s chapter—making visible the processes whereby citizens are constituted, including their emergence as gendered subjects (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989).

The production of subjects and of the polity take place within particular historical circumstances that, as Federici (2004) shows for the nation-state, are intimately connected to the expropriation and privatization of resources that first unfolded in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. As a consequence of this general expropriation, women’s bodies, their labor and their children, became privatized in ways that (also) reflect stratification and class. Consequently, “proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of reproduction and a communal good anyone could appropriate and use at will” (Federici 2004: 97). The naturalization of women’s labor and of the sphere of reproduction was linked to the loss of the commons, as women became the new commons. The patriarchal arrangements underpinning the family, the economy and the polity were profoundly implicated in the emergence and reproduction of capitalism in a muted historical process of primitive accumulation and subjugation underpinned by violence and struggle (Federici 2004; Luxemburg 1951 [1913]; Mies 1998). State structures are also inscribed with multiple relations of inequality - like capitalism, the constitution of state power is enmeshed within what Wendy Brown describes as “masculinism”. This form of dominance consists of “the power to describe and run the world and the power of access to women: it entails both a general claim to territory and claims to, about, and against specific “others” (Brown 2006: 188). Yet state power is also ambiguous, allowing “regulated, subordinated, and disciplined state subjects” to emerge (Brown 2006: 191).

While recognizing the entanglements of power across kinship relations and polity, as outlined in the work of Pateman (1988) and Federici (2004, also Rubin 1975; Butler 2000), the language, spaces and relations of kinship can help build alternative identities and resist or undermine structures of power. The potential for subversion is particularly evident in the tensions that can arise through the crossing of boundaries and the mixing and hybridizations that take place in everyday practices of sex, reproduction and kinship (Stoler 1995, Martínez-Alier 1989, Wade 2003, 2009). The examples discussed here show that Herzfeld’s “technologies of social knowledge” (in this volume), or kinship idioms and ideas, can do the work of incorporation, continuity and normalization of relations of power on the one hand, and may also articulate proposals for alternative forms of intimacy, politics and kinship.

# Domestication through kinship and against kinship

In the first half of the 19th century, divergent understandings of belonging and territory competed for dominance in the Americas (Anderson 1983, Holt 2003, Wade 2003). In the Southern cone, the Spanish viceroyalty was a mosaic of populations with different ties to the Crown and the Church, while much of the territory was represented as a hostile “desert”, occupied by “wandering men” (Izard 1994) who were characterized as vagrants and outlaws. At the same time, the ideals of the French and North American revolutions inspired anticolonial movements, providing ideological tools to build a unified community from this diverse social and cultural landscape. For example, while rooted in French kinship structures and ideologies (Todd 1985), the notion of brotherhood aimed to foster solidarities across differences of region, class and race. Such gendered bonds effectively obscured other, female genealogies that were historically central to the constitution of classes and social boundaries, while marking the instances of their transgression (Wade 2003; Macpherson 2003).

Though contested, there is evidence to suggest that the 19th century revolutionaries embraced a radical project based on fraternity and equality, envisaging co-existence across different “nations” and cultures, expressed in the following statement, made during an official visit by Indigenous chiefs or *caciques* to the capital:

“The most important service that this government can carry out for its country is that of protecting, through the kindness of its administration, those who adhere to its principles. Regardless of the nation to which they belong, or to differences in language or customs, they will always be regarded as its most precious asset. If it recognizes this obligation towards all members of the earth, how much more important is it to recognize the affinity of blood that unites us. Putting aside the causes that have kept us separate until today, it is sufficient that we are children of the same stem…. Friends, compatriots and brothers, let us unite to constitute a single family.” (Walther 1970: 122–123, my emphasis).

While proclaiming a fundamental humanist spirit, the statement recognizes claims of belonging to an incipient and implicit collective that requires a narrative of brotherhood and blood to bring it into being. An emerging nationhood prioritized the rights of “children of the soil” over foreign-born Spaniards (Anderson 1983, Holt 2003), postulating a kinning through the soil that was conceived as a visceral connection to the land as the basis for a foundational brotherhood. While this proposition envisaged horizontal connections and fraternal equality, it also rendered invisible the transmission of blood, values and relationships by women and through women, that reflect other histories, boundaries and entanglements (Macpherson 2003).[[4]](#endnote-4)

The land challenged the rhetoric of brotherhood, not least in relation to “the desert” and, increasingly, to incompatible uses of, and relationships to the soil across different populations. A vast area beyond the farmland and the *latifundio* was occupied by indigenous populations whose economies combined hunting, agriculture, and crafts. In the Creole territories[[5]](#endnote-5), wild cattle were hunted for their hides, tallow and later to produce jerk beef for the expanding markets of the plantation economies of Cuba and Brazil (Bethell 1993). Although extensive trade networks and shifting political and military alliances were in place, the predatory political economies pursued on both sides of the border[[6]](#endnote-6) meant that trade and raids underpinned the unequal accumulation of power, prestige and wealth. Despite treaties regulating border relations, the capture of women and children and raiding for cattle persisted as an economic and political strategy[[7]](#endnote-7).

In the middle of the 19th century the question of what kind of polities would emerge across these boundaries remained unsettled. But as Darwin (1989 [1839]) predicted during his travels in the region, by the end of the century this complex landscape of emerging identities and shifting boundaries had disappeared, as particular Creole interests were consolidated with the region’s integration into the global economy. In a process that mirrored the enclosures of Europe, military campaigns and annexations progressively restricted freedom in the name of order and, despite the rhetoric of brotherhood, deep inequalities were reproduced as the politics of alliance gave way to highly contested projects of state sovereignty[[8]](#endnote-8). As the imposition of order gained greater urgency, particular configurations of kinship, gender and sexuality were privileged, such that the notion of family associated with clearly gendered public and private spheres became the legitimate means for individual and collective reproduction, marginalizing and criminalizing alternative forms of relatedness and sexual, gendered and ethnicized identities (Guy 1991). For women, (the right kind of) motherhood became the dominant means of fulfillment and the basis of their social and civic duties[[9]](#endnote-9).

Nevertheless, other histories, albeit “hidden histories” unfolded (Briones 2005; Valverde 2013) that frequently challenged the boundaries, institutions and common-sense understandings of politics and the nation-state (Bartolomé 2004)[[10]](#endnote-10). From these suppressed histories emerged new social actors, renewed identities and new forms of individual and collective visibility and struggle, proposing old and new claims to recognition (Bengoa 2009; Kropff 2011).

**Public kinship and political motherhood**

From the 19th century defeat and annihilation of indigenous populations through to the 20th century deployment of state violence against civilians, a largely invisible and forgotten history of violence has unfolded (Viñas 1982). For Rotker (1990), power, memory and forgetting are connected in the parallel stories of 19th century captives and 20th century victims of state repression that culminated in the disappearances perpetrated by the 1976–1983 state project of “National Reorganization.”[[11]](#endnote-11) Despite the rule of fear established by that regime, the disappearances provoked persistent and increasingly visible protests, largely pioneered by relatives demanding to know the whereabouts of their sons, daughters, husbands and wives. One of the central actors in this new political phenomenon were the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who defied the military state and embarked on a “discursive struggle” (Morales 2010), proposing new political and symbolic repertoires.

Unfailingly, every Thursday afternoon they met and completed their circling march around the pyramid in the center of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires and other cities across the country; over the years they devised a unique range of symbols, including the white headscarf that linked them to the children they had loved, nurtured and lost (Elshtain 1982, 1997; Schirmer 1994). Recognizing that their actions in the public sphere had transformed them, they embraced a reversal in the dynamics of generational transmission. In interviews and public declarations, many Mothers reflected on what they had learned through fighting for their children—the leader of the Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo summed this up when she stated that: “our children gave birth to us”.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Although the Human Rights movement in Argentina was not confined to the struggle of relatives of the victims, these groups have been a fundamental catalyst and support for the human rights movement and for a wide range of social movements. Mothers fighting for disappeared sons and daughters, Grandmothers searching for children taken along with their parents or born in captivity (Arditti 2002), the Relatives of the detained-disappeared, Brothers and Sisters (Teubal et al. 2014) and a new generation of activists concentrated in the organization of the children of the disappeared, H.I.J.O.S. (Bonaldi 2006) have contributed their unique perspective and devised their own strategies, enriching and amplifying the language of politics and protest.[[13]](#endnote-13)

**Genes, politics and appropriate kinship**

Along with the Mothers, the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo became a morally exemplary group, as their unwavering struggle to find the children that were taken at the time of their parents’ disappearance, or who were born in clandestine centers of detention and given to sympathizers of the regime revealed the extent of the militarized state’s undoing of society. Estimating the time of their grandchild’s birth, piecing together fragments gathered from the testimonies of camp survivors, they search for children whose names and faces they can only imagine.

Given the secrecy surrounding the fate of these children, their quest has been painfully difficult, but was greatly enhanced by the advances of genetic science and its application to public forensics. In 1984, the creation of the Argentine Team of Forensic Anthropologists (*Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense*) and the national database of genetic information in 1987 (*Banco Nacional de Datos* *Genéticos*[[14]](#endnote-14)) provided the means for accurate identification and, therefore, legal prosecution. Largely as a result of genetic testing[[15]](#endnote-15), by the end of December 2014, 116 grandchildren had been “recovered” out of an estimated 500 children abducted by the regime.

Genetic testing, carried out according to strict scientific protocols, has provided the basis for the judiciary to define the parameters of the state’s recognition of appropriate kinship, which here privileges shared genetic material over the relations, sentiments and loyalties derived from nurture and shared time. The latter are deemed to be suspect, flawed at their point of origin and directly or indirectly connected to a criminal act against the legitimate state (as opposed to the illegitimate militarized state) and a morally outrageous act of violence against legitimate kinship.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Two competing versions of kinship emerged from the struggle against state violence, simultaneously splitting and healing the rift between public and private. The separation, secrecy and illegality that gave rise to the bonds of nurture sets them in stark opposition to the kinship of genealogy and transmission through blood. While both forms of relationship entail some kind of recognized and valued generational transmission, the state, in confronting its own history, upholds the primacy of blood ties and shared genetic material. The exceptional circumstances underpinning the emergence of this form of bio-citizenship may come to support new versions of normality, with unintended and enduring implications for the ways in which kinship is envisaged and experienced.[[17]](#endnote-17) The strategic role of the state in the processes of identification and restitution enhances the state’s position vis-à-vis the public and private relationships of subjects to the state and to each other.[[18]](#endnote-18) On the other hand, while privileging cognatic kinship, the genetic focus also reveals fluid and messy connections and transmissions.[[19]](#endnote-19) Far from obscuring the genealogical ramifications across gender, class and ethnicity associated with the narrative of Republican brotherhood, the intervention of science makes possible the recognition of complex genealogies that have been hidden and muted through histories of power. The processes of struggle (by kin and social movements) and accommodation (by the state) reveal novel approaches to both kinship and politics through a wide range of practices and representations that open the field of kinship—and the sphere of political action—to unpredictable repertoires, reconstituted and negotiable relationships and new kinning practices and relations that seek to establish new bonds, new loyalties and new forms of subjectivation and recognition.

# Public and private loyalties

While the development of genetic identification techniques supported the Grandmothers’ project of recovery, it precipitated a schism within the movement of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. In the early days of post-dictatorship democracy, the exhumation of unmarked graves was widely rejected by relatives of the disappeared because of the haphazard and careless treatment of the graves and the bodies, often in a context of disrespectful and offensive media spectacles. The subsequent introduction of scientific protocols and procedures enhanced the reliability of results and altered the terms of the debates about recovering the disappeared. For the Mothers, the possibilities afforded by scientific methods of exhumation and DNA identification brought to a head underlying tensions and resulted in a split in 1986. One group of Mothers stood by the right of mothers and families to claim and bury their dead. The other group saw such particular claims as potentially divisive, rejecting Antigone’s resolution to embrace collective responsibility for all the disappeared. Refusing private burial and disdaining state compensation for their loss, they proposed a new, “socialized” motherhood. Revolutionary commitment and action displaced the narrative of suffering, as Hebe de Bonafini, leader of the Association made clear: “I don’t want [people] to understand our pain, I want them to understand our struggle” (Gorini 2006)..

Despite their differences, the two groups of Mothers’ persistent visibility in the public sphere has articulated radical challenges to “official” histories of nationhood, while promoting alternative visions that encompass the excluded and marginalized (Burchianti 2004). After years of implacable opposition to government policies in which distance from the politics of the state guaranteed their autonomy and legitimacy (Goddard 2005), they confronted new challenges in their relationship to the state when, in 2003, Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency. In the wake of the 2001 economic and political crisis and a context of widespread mobilizations, one of Kirchner’s priorities was to recognize the Human Rights organizations. At his first public appearance in the Plaza de Mayo, the Mothers and Grandmothers were prominently visible on the presidential podium. Later, in his inaugural address to the UN General Assembly, Kirchner proposed moral and political renewal for his country by claiming that: “We are the children of the Mothers and the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo” (*La Nación* 2003). On the anniversary of the 1976 coup in March, his speech at the ESMA ex-detention camp connected kinship and state as he proposed a new beginning: he came “no longer as a comrade and brother of so many comrades and brothers who shared those times [of the repression], but as the President of the Argentine Republic […] to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the national State for the shame of silence during twenty years of democracy for so many atrocities…” (*Secretaría de la Comunicación Pública, Presidencia de la Nación* 2012). In drawing on the overlapping loyalties, bonds, duties and responsibilities of kinship, state and nation, Kirchner’s words resonate with the call to brotherhood of the Republican revolutionaries. But now, not least because of the violent erasures carried out in the name of the nation-state, the hidden asymmetries and genealogies of reproduction of class, gender and ethnicity were exposed and embodied in the active presence of Mothers, Grandmothers, and children in the public sphere.

Kirchner’s apology was followed by more substantial interventions that included the abolition of the laws of Due Obedience and Final Point, passed in the 1980s in response to pressure from the military to restrict the scope of the trials of perpetrators of crimes committed by the civil-military dictatorship. The abolition of these laws and the annulment of the 1990 amnesty of those found guilty in the 1980s trials paved the way for the resumption of the prosecution of crimes against humanity[[20]](#endnote-20). In 2004, early in his presidency, an Association Mother summed up the implications of the changed political context in simple terms: “We can work with this man [President Kirchner]”. Faced with a government that supported projects such as the creation of a center for memory and education in sites of clandestine concentration camps such as the notorious ESMA, and that was prepared to support the movements’ social projects, the Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo led by Hebe de Bonafini were persuaded to work closely with Kirchner and, later, with his wife and successor Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Many of their supporters disapproved of what they saw as a dangerous rapprochement towards what Rajković describes as “political intimacy” (this volume).

Collaboration was, indeed, fraught with danger. While the governments of Kirchner and Fernández have been accused of corruption, the Association has also been affected by scandal. The Association’s ambitious social housing project, “*Sueños Compartidos*” or Shared Dreams, focused on combining training and building “dignified” homes for those involved in the project. Supported by funds from the Ministry for Federal Planning, it was managed through the Foundation of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, with Hebe de Bonafini’s son-in-law, Sergio Schoklender, as its manager and administrator. In 2011, Schoklender and his brother were accused—and later found guilty—of misusing public funds and embezzling the Foundation, resulting in non-payment of workers’ wages and non-delivery of many homes. The Foundation was mired in a complex legal process that included government intervention and the involvement of the Vice-President. While this crisis may be understood in terms of “too much kinship” as presented in Herzfeld’s chapter in this volume, it also echoes Rajković’s discussion of good and bad kinship (this volume), while reminding us of the convoluted ramifications of Antigone’s “kinship trouble” (Butler 2000).

The Founders’ Line group of Mothers also recognized the distinctive and positive turn of state politics after 2003 but they were cautious in their response to the government’s overtures, expressing concern about the degree of “politicization” or the effects of “too much politics”. Their discomfort about the implications of close entanglements with the state is exemplified in their response to a proposal by Fernández de Kirchner’s government to grant the Mothers’ white headscarves the status of national symbol, where they reaffirm the value of kinship over the priorities of the polity:

“The Mothers’ movement, which emerged from sorrow, is a movement of active resistance. Our circling in the Plaza de Mayo, wearing the scarf, symbolizes our unwavering commitment to memory, truth and justice. The headscarf came into being when we went in search of our sons and daughters. As part of our struggle it was, and continues to be, a symbol of our link with them and it has given us the strength to carry on. We do not feel it to be a national emblem, but rather it is a sign of love for our sons and daughters, and we therefore refuse to see it declared a national symbol.” (*Página 12*, 8th July 2014).

In reclaiming the private, kinship-based value of their actions and idioms, the nationalization of their key symbol is seen as misconceived. It exposes them to the risks of appropriation of their work, sentiment and sacrifice by a state that, while undergoing significant transformations, remains contaminated by the excess of politics and power that it concentrates. Their reaction reflects concerns about the complicities of violence underpinning the power of states, and raises the problem highlighted by Butler (2010) for whom reliance on the nation-state for solutions or protection implies exposure to the violence inherent in it, since “not all violence issues from the nation-state, but it would be rare to find contemporary instances of violence that bear no relation to that particular form” (Butler 2010: 26). The dangers inherent in exposure to state power became clearer when thirteen years of “Kirchnerite” policies were swept away with the election of a new, Centre-Right government in 2015.

# The 2000th March

On Thursday, 4th August 2016, the Association Mothers prepared to attend their weekly meeting in the Plaza de Mayo, repeating a ritual enacted over 40 years. On this particular Thursday, members of the police force attempted to intercept them and arrest their leader, Hebe de Bonafini, under orders from the judge of leading the *Sueños Compartidos* embezzlement case. A crowd rapidly gathered and surrounded the Mothers’ distinctive white van, preventing the police from arresting Bonafini and entering the Association offices. The crowd escorted the van to the Plaza de Mayo and formed a cordon around the Mothers and their supporters as they completed their weekly circling around the Pyramid. Then, forming a human shield, they protected the Mothers as they returned to their headquarters. As the afternoon advanced, the crowd outside the Association grew, drawing supporters, trade union leaders, artists and intellectuals, and members of the outgoing government of Fernández de Kirchner. Many, even some of Bonafini’s critics, felt that the use of force against the Mothers was unacceptable, a kind of transgression. For her part, Bonafini responded to the judge through a public letter that stated that: “since 1977, or more precisely since the 8th February of that year, I have suffered the aggression of the erroneously named justice, implemented by national judges”. She goes on to describe her repeated attempts to obtain a response to the 168 claims she submitted to the courts when her son Jorge disappeared; and again when her son Raúl disappeared, and yet again when her daughter-in-law María Elena was taken; she reminded him of the violent attack suffered by her surviving daughter in her own home in 2001. Explaining her defiance of the judge’s summons, she pointed out that she and the Mothers had already submitted 60 boxes of evidence and other material relating to the “Schoklender case”. The Mothers now felt—in their own bodies (*en carne propia*)— “the mockery, the punishment imposed on all of us, old women of 85 to 90 years of age …”. She ends her letter with a defiant commitment to continue the struggle in the name of solidarity and on behalf of the vulnerable (Madres de Plaza de Mayo 2016; La Nación 2016).

The following Thursday, the Association and the Founders’ Line Mothers completed their 2000th march around the Plaza de Mayo, accompanied by a large group of supporters, who were in a defiant mood. Since taking over the presidency in January 2016, the new government of Mauricio Macri, a wealthy entrepreneur and ex-governor of the city of Buenos Aires, has shifted the direction of state policy regarding human rights. Key institutions have been starved of personnel and funding; the questions of memory and justice are being reframed in yet another chapter within the “discursive struggle” (Morales 2010) initiated decades ago through the Mothers’ and Grandmothers’ efforts to be heard, seen and understood[[21]](#endnote-22). The Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, variously ignored or maligned, find themselves, once again, in a political space that is firmly located against the state.

**Concluding remarks**

Tracing the politics of the state over a period of change and contestation, the state appears as an assemblage of institutions and practices that reveal continuities in the structures of power. However, these institutions are also unstable and amenable to negotiation and change. The foundational expropriations and appropriations associated with the emergence of the nation-state alert us to it's inherent imbalances and excesses of state power. These imbalances are acutely evident today in the ongoing struggle of indigenous groups against the state and global capital as historically entangled agents of expropriation.[[22]](#endnote-24) However, the state can also be understood as a space of process, ridden with contradictions and therefore open to challenge and change – and perhaps some forms of collaboration. In this respect it becomes clearer how subjectivation is both ongoing and contradictory and that the subjects produced through it are themselves unstable. The potential for unexpected outcomes is clear.

A politics that deliberately places itself outside and even against the state (perhaps from a space of kinship) may afford great insights and possibilities for critique. However, different spaces, values and relationships are deeply entangled across public and private spheres and any struggle aiming to transform society is likely to engage with—and perhaps compromise with—power. Taking a position of proximity to the state from which to act and to make (kinship, society, wellbeing), carries opportunities and risks as exemplified by the Association Mothers’ efforts to enact their motto of ‘making revolution’ through everyday practices. The chapters in the second part of this volume testify to the scope and potentialities of such engagements, as well as the challenges that arise in carrying them forward.

The trajectories of the Mothers and the Grandmothers illustrate the entanglements of kinship and polity which, from different perspectives and with different emphases, anthropology has highlighted, from Fortes’ observations about the co-relations between contract and kinship, to work that highlights the ways in which distinctions between public and private, kinship and state are simultaneously contested and reaffirmed (Thelen et al. 2014). Early anthropologists and feminists have drawn attention to the ways in which these connections contain and produce relations of power and inequality and point to significant and enduring inequalities of gender, sex and kinship inherent in the constitution of society and state. Their observations have clear implications for the kinds of politics (in relation to kinship and the state) that we might envisage in the present and for the future.

The examples discussed in this chapter suggest that the entanglements of kinship, politics and the state are productive and dangerous, normative and subversive. The return of the repressed grandmother, the stories of reproduction and the battles of the private sphere, and thus new arguments expressed in the language of kinship, can and do produce new idioms of politics and of the state. For the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, there has been a process of learning through action “inherited” from their children, a process through which they have shifted the notion of revolution from the realm of ideas and rhetoric to the sphere of action: revolution “is what we do”, an Association Mother commented when she showed me the plans for the *Sueños Compartidos* project. Their alliance with sympathetic governments represented a decisive step in broaching the divide between public and private, the language of kinship and of politics, while also kinning the state to bridge the gap between state rhetoric and practice (Thelen et al. 2014). Nevertheless, both state and kinship represent spaces of contestation; the question remains whether political projects based on the ethics and idioms of kinship, and supported by the genealogies of Mothers and Grandmothers, will endure in the face of new challenges and proposals for a reconstituted citizenship that ultimately draws from submerged histories of appropriation that underpinned the state of brotherhood.

**Notes**

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1. I would like to thank Tatjana Thelen and Erdmute Alber, Frances Pine and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and interesting suggestions. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. It is worth noting that in Butler’s analysis in particular, Antigone does not merely represent defiance towards the state. Rather, Antigone’s complex relationships with her kin, including her father Oedipus’ incestuous relationship with his/her mother are reflected in her action, and throws her kin into disarray, resulting in what Butler refers to as “kinship trouble” (Butler 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Fortes’ ethnography provides many examples of such flexibility, as when one of his informants comments that those who may be enemies “at home”, “are all kin” when they find themselves in Accra (Fortes 1970: 248). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. These principles were expressed in regulations that granted Indigenous populations the right to direct participation in government through delegates to Congress. However, this measure was never implemented. Similarly, the Revolutionary government’s drive to ban slavery was eroded under the pressure of plantation owners in neighbouring territories and the interests of large landowners (Andrews 1980). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. In this context Creole refers to those born in the Americas of predominantly or exclusive Spanish ancestry. It is used more widely to refer to all things associated with notions of tradition and of locally developed customs and usages. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. People and goods moved across the Andes from what is currently Chile towards Argentine Patagonia and across borders with Creole settlements on both sides of the mountain range. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Captive women were a source of prestige and key to the *mètissage* strategies pursued by many chiefs who wanted their successors to be fluent in Spanish language and culture. Captives, mainly women and children, were also a feature of Creole or “Christian” society, incorporated as brides for frontier soldiers, servants, and soldiers in the case of young warriors. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. While both the Creole and the Indigenous projects were likely to result in a more heterogeneous and ethnically diverse forms of “brotherhood” than the centralized—and authoritarian—state that reflected the interests of large landowners, all these projects were mired in violence and rupture. Creole society was plagued by tensions and wars with neighbors, as in the case of the wars with Brazil and Paraguay, as well as bloody civil war until 1852, principally between those pursuing regionally-based strategies and those supporting unification of the regions and the establishment of a liberal national economy. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The rhetoric of fraternity, liberty and equality persevered, while other ideologies came into play in the constitution of state institutions. For example, in her comparison of “national” approaches to indigenous populations in the emerging South American states, Ramos argues that in Argentina the ideas of British positivism prevailed, while Brazil was influenced by French positivism (Ramos 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Challenges can arise from state-led processes, as when the new Constitution of 1994 recognized the rights of original populations (*pueblos originarios*) to political and civic rights and ancestral lands. Ramos (2012) suggests that this recognition effectively annuls the achievements of the “conquest of the desert”, and Valverde comments, thus “denying the most noted figures of the country’s republican history” (2013:56). Ramos comments that instead heterogeneity is recognized against ethnic homogeneity (“não é com homogeneidade étnica que se faz uma verdadera nação”, Ramos 2012: 52). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Systematic kidnappings and disappearances of people were seen as a solution to the problems of international repudiation that followed the Chilean coup against Salvador Allende’s Popular Front government in 1973. The clandestine operations of the regime were frequently referred to as the “dirty war” (Calveiro 2005). Human rights groups argue that any reference to a war is misguided they have been largely successful in their struggle to establish the more precise descriptor of “civilian-military dictatorship”. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. At an event at the Espacio Cultural Nuestros Hijos (located in the site of what was once the ESMA detention camp), Hebe de Bonafini combined notions of love, kinship and revolution: “Our children gave their lives with infinite solidarity. They taught us that. We learned from this and hopefully we deserve the children we had, hopefully they are satisfied with what we are doing. As long as we live we will continue to fight so that the word ‘Revolution’ might be the best word, because a revolutionary loves the other and gives their life. It is the word that contains the most love”. (29th April 2015, accessed 2nd May 2015 at madres.org). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio/Children for Identity and Justice, against Forgetting and Silence) was founded in 1995 by sons and daughters of victims of the dictatorship. The original core of those “directly affected” by the state’s persecution of their parents has been extended to include young sympathizers. A disproportionate number of the disappeared were Jewish, reflecting the institutionalized anti-Semitism of the regime (de Pozuelo and Tarín 1999). There is a Jewish human rights group (Movimiento Judío por los Derechos Humanos) and an NGO of Jewish relatives of the disappeared (Asociación de Familiares de Desaparecidos Judíos). In recent years the Association of Relatives has participated in commemorations of the disappeared that have taken place in the premises of the AMIA. Under the umbrella organization of Memoria Abierta, a number of groups commemorate their dead and disappeared, including the workers of Mercedes Benz and the shipyards, disappeared of European and Bolivian extraction, writers and lawyers, students from the Nacional Buenos Aires and the Carlos Pellegrini schools (memoriaabierta.org.ar). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. The genetic data-base was established by law in 1987; in 1989 it was brought under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, Technology and Productive Innovation. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The test is considered to be scientifically valid truth and has legal status as evidence of a kinship link. But many of the personal stories also revolve around less easily measurable factors, such as physical likeness, predispositions, tastes, etc. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. While the regime rationalized their crimes by claiming that they were removing children from “bad” families (who were against the regime) to deliver them into the care of “good” families (who supported the regime), thirty years on the challenge has been to make a “good state”, distanced from the military state through a legal apparatus that provides the mechanisms for defining rights and duties and defining the contours of the appropriate kinship in the context of the violence of child abductions. On the 5th July 2012, the Courts found in favour of the Grandmothers and some of the recovered grandchildren to condemn perpetrators such as ex-General Videla of the crime of illicit capture of babies. While the majority of recovered grandchildren have come forward on their own initiative, there is also a campaign to identify possible abductees Here too the state can play a role, in enforcing the collection of genetic data from suspected victims (see Vaisman 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. The concern here is that kinship might be reduced to biological notions to the detriment of more fluid and relational approaches (see Carsten 2000). Although geneticists do not see their research as sustaining biological notions of race, the dissemination of their models can have unintended consequences, confirming biological models of race amongst non-experts Wade et al. (2014: 2). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Vaisman (212) shows how the use of genetic testing in the identification of “living disappeared” and the legal changes that emerged in response to the challenges produced by the state’s abduction of children “repositioned the Argentine state so it can now shape, decide and influence its’ citizens’ identities through their own DNA” (112). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The search and identification of grandchildren has entailed close collaboration with scientists, in particular geneticists, forensic anthropologists, and psychologists. In 1982 the “Grandparenthood Index” was developed. Today, tests focus on SSRs including Y chromosome SSRs that identify patrilineal connections, mitochondrial DNA to identify matrilineal links, combining techniques to identify connections with paternal and maternal kin, siblings, grandparents (see “99.99%. La Ciencia de las Abuelas” abuelas.org.ar). The new rights arising from the recovery of grandchildren are supported institutionally; the Right to Identity is protected by the Sub-secretariat for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of the province of Buenos Aires. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance declares the forced disappearance of persons as a crime against humanity. In 1984, the government invited the Grandmothers to participate in a United Nations consultation on the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into force in 1990. The Grandmothers contributed to three articles of the Convention, including Article 7 that states the right of the child to have a name from birth, to acquire a nationality “and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents” and the duty of the state to “speedily” re-establish a child’s identity where he or she has been illegally deprived of it (Article 8). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)