Article

Kinship and the politics of responsibility: An introduction

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Abstract
This special issue presents a range of case studies that exemplify the potential of kinship for thinking about and acting in relation to various kin and non-kin others in ways that invite us to reconsider the boundaries of politics and the political. The introduction examines ethnographic research that informs the articles in the special issue and shows the ways in which tensions and continuities across relations of intimacy, family and kinship, play out in response to contemporary capitalism. The articles in the special issue demonstrate the usefulness of exploring the interface and overlaps between the political and other fields that are all too often positioned – within scholarship and public discourses – as the antithesis of the political, variously understood in terms of the private, the familial, the domestic and the sphere of kinship.

Keywords
Affect, care, gender, inequality, kinship, labour, politics, relatedness, responsibility

This special issue presents a range of case studies that exemplify the potential of kinship for thinking about, and acting, in relation to various kin and non-kin others in ways that invite us to rethink the boundaries of politics and the political.[1] The ethnographic research that informs the articles shows the ways in which tensions and continuities across relations of intimacy, family and kinship, and the political sphere play out in response to struggles, hardships and violence in the context of contemporary capitalism. The articles demonstrate the usefulness of exploring the interface and overlaps between the political field and other fields that are all too often positioned – within scholarship and public discourses – as the antithesis of the political, variously understood in terms of the private, the familial, the domestic and the sphere of kinship. Feminist activists and scholars in anthropology and beyond have made decisive contributions to a more encompassing, and

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arguably more embedded, approach to politics, showing how kinship, gender, family and intimacy are thoroughly entangled with political processes (Donner, 2023). The articles build on this body of scholarship and challenge us to rethink the origins and bases of contemporary capitalism and inequality, and to use our analysis to envisage liveable futures, arguing with and beyond contemporary formations.

Authors like Pateman (1988) and Federici (2004), for example, have proposed that hierarchical relations of kinship and gender are foundational to Western liberal states and to the processes of dispossession and primitive accumulation that underpin the rise and enduring hegemony of capitalism. Other feminist scholars have made the case for the centrality of gender and kinship in articulating political ideologies relating to the nation, the state and forms of citizenship founded on gendered and racialized notions of belonging and alterity (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989, 2005; Bhattacharyya, 2018; Brown, 2006). The ongoing commitment to the analysis of the entanglements of kinship and politics is important and, indeed, acquires new urgency as, across the globe, challenges to liberal, radical and progressive socio-economic projects and politics gain ground. The challengers, primarily from right-wing parties and movements, promise to deliver a brave new world while directly or indirectly evoking nostalgia for so-called traditional values and institutions, more often than not to the detriment of women, minoritized others, and all those embracing non-normative ways of being in the world.

Of particular relevance to the themes raised by the articles in this issue is the relationship between political formations, economic crisis and new forms of 'familialism', the state-sponsored claim to defend narrowly defined traditional family values, prioritized amidst assaults on reproductive freedom, livelihoods and collective structures of care, while support by the welfare state is rolled back (Fraser, 2013). Anthropology, and feminist anthropologists in particular, have offered ethnographic and theoretical insights that provide convincing critiques of universal assumptions regarding gender, family and kinship relations (for example, Collier and Yanagisako, 1987; Donner, 2023; Moore, 1988; Weston, 1997). These theoretical trajectories provide a useful starting point for a critical approach to normative definitions of the family, sexuality and gender that is crucially important when approaching the notion of 'family values' (Cooper, 2017) and the narrowly defined institution of the family as evoked explicitly in a range of political projects, including neoliberal ones (Fraser, 2013). A corollary of the discourse of family values that is used to normalize what are often authoritarian and repressive proposals, is the reaffirmation of heteronormativity and hierarchical distinctions of gender, class, ethnicity and race, condemning non-conforming actors, spaces and practices to invisibility or even illegality (Floyd, 2009; Stack 1974). Furthermore, while traditional family, sexual and gender roles are evoked and deployed as apparent solutions to the multiple crises that communities are facing worldwide, the structural roots of social and economic problems remain obscured and go unchallenged.

The economic and political trajectories that contribute to widespread experiences of uncertainty and growing unease reflect deep changes in the political geographies and dynamics of contemporary capitalism since the decline of post-Second World War geopolitics and the Keynesian consensus. The much-touted victory of capitalism in what Fukuyama (1992) claimed as the 'end of history' has been brought into question by

multiple global events and by scholars who offer a different perspective, often focusing on the consequences of the collapse of European socialism. They point out that, despite the enduring ideal of democratic government, the very possibility of articulating a desire for utopian futures, for a better, just society, has been profoundly undermined even in our most intimate imaginaries (Berlant, 2011). As Buck-Morss (2000: ix) argues:

> the mass-democratic myth of industrial modernity – the belief that the industrial reshaping of the world is capable of bringing about the good society by providing material happiness for the masses – has been profoundly challenged by the disintegration of European socialism, the demands of capital restructuring, and the most fundamental ecological constraints.

Among the more recent manifestations of the fault lines in this post-utopian, ideological global system, the 2008 crisis provoked by an overreaching financial system, stands out because of its enduring and extensive effects. The crisis disrupted global markets and had serious repercussions for social and welfare provision, deepening inequality and undermining material security for populations across the globe. Extreme hardship – social, economic and environmental – is today a feature of life even for those who had heretofore escaped the worst effects of the global system (Narotzky and Goddard, 2017), first experienced as enduring crises in the global South from the 1970s onwards.

Austerity politics and the range of apparently 'soft' measures deployed under the neoliberal model of governance are integral to ongoing processes of dispossession and extraction, including those leading to environmental degradation. In turn, these are closely related to generalized forms of structural violence, and the violence of nationalist, territorial and religious conflicts that undermine the capacity of populations – or certain segments of these populations – to prosper and thrive. This is evident in the case of the mass exodus of largely young people abandoning their homes in search of economic and political security, within nations and across regions. The long-standing pressures on communities result in highly perilous journeys, with migrants confronting what De Genova (2013) describes as 'spectacles of migrant "illegality"', which, in the receiving locales, generate further inequalities across categories of persons defined as insiders and outsiders, as entitled to, or excluded from access to rights and resources.

While the articles in this special edition do not directly address the macrostructural issues outlined above, the ethnographic cases discussed here unfold in contexts where the forces of global markets, crises and international policies have reshaped every aspect of peoples' lives. In some instances, the articles focus on critical issues that elicit responses from a range of social and political actors, and that are direct consequences of global processes resulting in war, displacement, pauperization and marginalization; in other articles, attention focuses on the effects of global contexts as they are filtered and mediated through the state and supra-state institutions, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs). All address questions that center on tropes of kinship morality, family and family values within political discourse, and the increasing tensions in nation states and across state and supra-state institutions with regard to addressing the antagonisms around gender, sexuality and reproduction that emerge from these political battlegrounds.

The ethnographically informed focus in this issue contributes to understanding how a politics of responsibilization – that, when located in the individual, works as a central tenet of centrist and right-wing projects across the globe – may reinforce hegemonic sexualities, static gender roles and patriarchal values more generally. The promotion of the 'ideal family' is key here, at the same time that authoritarian and pro-market institutions infiltrate relationships via 'soft' measures, including the financialization of intimate lives, fiscal policies and agendas of broadening inclusion into market relations. The combined effect of these policies and processes tends towards supporting specific social and kinship formations, propped up by normative institutional arrangements like heterosexual, monogamous marriage. At the same time, narrowly defined reproductive strategies diverge so that pre- and pro-natal policies for the few may be accompanied by anti-natalism directed at those considered non-normative subjects. As Cooper suggests for the United States, populist authoritarianism and its political ideology, closely aligned with neoliberal economic models, relies on the forceful and institutionalized promotion of familial ethics in the political sphere via think tanks, scholarship and the explicit support of reforms of welfare infrastructures based on making 'the family' a site of responsibilization (Cooper, 2017: 67). In the US as elsewhere, this provides the rationale for state and third sector actors to target access to a range of health, sexuality and reproductive services, and curtails rights that are purported to be in conflict with these values (Deckman, 2016; Rosen, 2012; Sparks, 2014). Increasingly, reproductive rights and provisions, such as the right to abortion and reproductive health services, have come under threat. Examples range from the case of Poland during the government of the Law and Justice Party between 2015 and 2023, where an effective ban on terminations was implemented in 2020, to Brazil under the Bolsonaro government of 2019–22, when a range of misogynist, anti-environment and other repressive measures included surveillance of rape victims seeking abortions. The attacks on such rights were advanced in the name of the 'traditional' family, despite fierce opposition from activists (see, for example, De Zordo et al., 2016). As anthropologists have shown, queer reproductive rights, and forms of kinning and configurations of pluri-parenthood, are also increasingly subjected to pressure as a consequence of discourses that confirm the dominance of 'legitimate', idealized, normative family forms (Stacey, 2018). However framed, whether in terms of an economic model such as Margaret Thatcher's 'common-sense' view of the economy as a variant of the household budget (Farmer and Zabczky, 2018), or the deepening inequalities within and between regions, these shifts and struggles over rights, meanings and the distribution of resources, have implications for private and public life, for individual and collective options, and for notions of citizenship and citizens' rights, such as the provision of education, health, housing and livelihoods, as the articles in this volume show.

While the above discussion outlines the punitive state interventions that abound and highlights gender relations, sexuality and reproduction as key sites of struggles for justice, Henrike Donner's article in this special issue shows the dispersed nature – and unpredictable outcomes – of these policies, which increasingly involve third sector actors for their implementation. Importantly, Donner addresses the 'modernizing' policies pursued by governments and by NGOs – in this instance in the context of India – aiming to

'empower' women through strategies that are based on the assumption that the problem lies with the patriarchal relations located in the sphere of the family, kinship and community. Participation in the market economy is proposed as the solution, since this would empower women to break free of the constraints of patriarchy associated with kinship. However, this proposition collapses in the face of ethnographic data and theoretical reflections. Focusing on vocational training programmes, Donner's study shows that the young women responded in ways that were far removed from the individualism that underpins the notions of empowerment promoted by the state and the third sector actors. In fact, far from abandoning the ties of kinship, the young women she encountered in Kolkata thought about, planned their lives, and appropriated training opportunities and notions of empowerment in dialogue with their family and community relationships.

Other examples in the special issue show how people's expectations regarding state-sponsored support, often drawing on earlier incarnations of state–citizen contracts, for example regarding education and stable economic prospects, are confronted with the reality of diminished services as neoliberal policies and austerity politics entail reductions in the provision of resources. In her article, Erdmute Alber shows how the gap between expectations of mobility through education and the scarce opportunities available to young people in Benin impact parents and children, despite their best efforts to forge a better future. Internalizing responsibility for failures in their strategies for the upward mobility of children and grandchildren, parents attribute these failings to their own 'blindness' or lack of knowledge about how the system works. Like Alber's article, Nina Haberland's contribution focuses on how neoliberal ideology reshapes people's attitudes and claims towards the state, often in unexpected ways, albeit mediated through state agents and structural reinforcements of familialism and kin responsibility. Young parents in rural Tanzania, usually mothers, seek support in times of familial crises, but, given the depleted resources, are only given advice by state officials. Nevertheless, and in the absence of substantive help, they are prepared to acquiesce to the instructions – and reprimands – of state actors who focus on parenting, intervening in even the most intimate expressions of mother–child relationships such as breastfeeding.

Despite more nuanced expectations of the state evident here, including its potential for good, the articles also address the limits of the caring state and the way such support reproduces existing inequalities. As Tarlo (2003) demonstrated in the ethnographic reconstruction of the entanglements of housing policies and violent anti-natalist measures aimed at the urban poor in India during a period of extreme authoritarian governance in the 1970s, kinship is often permanently ruptured and reordered by state policies aiming at engineering appropriate family forms. Whether perpetrated by state or non-state actors, suffering in the face of structural violence, and the embodied experience of direct violence, raises questions about the objective and subjective possibilities of care and kinning. The aftermath of direct violence can result in silence rather than overt expressions of resistance (Das, 2006), and in rupture and dekinning rather than care and bonding. In this regard, Loes Loning and Nayanika Mookherjee present two insightful ethnographic accounts of the long-term consequences of rape in post-genocide Rwanda and post-liberation Bangladesh respectively. The centrality of relations and relatedness, of connections and connectivity, emerges as a key feature in all contributions; but in the work

of Loning and Mookherjee in particular, attention shifts to how kinship becomes a web of entanglements to be managed – enhanced or devalued. Kinship is here created in the aftermath of rupture or in the face of steady decline, as crisis gives rise to new ways of relating, or indeed to a rejection of relations in the interests of personal or community integrity.

While some articles in the special issue contribute to understanding the complexities of state–citizen relations regarding claims and counterclaims towards the state and state-like actors, others highlight how the language and affects of kinship can reframe relationships and personal and collective projects in radically new ways. In her article, Maila Stivens focuses on opposition to constructions of legality devised by state and intra-state in-terventions regarding the movement of people. She shows how, from a position of privilege based on full citizenship, Australian grandmothers organize in support of migrants. They do so by claiming kin-like bonds that run counter to dominant narratives of race and nation, aiming to reframe the boundaries and contents of kinship, even where they may replicate hierarchies of class. The affective and relational potential of kinship as a model for inclusive social organization is taken in a different direction in Veronica Strang's contribution. Gaard (2011) points out that the paradigm of making connections in a world marked by crises has a long trajectory, starting with the scholarly and political work of ecofeminists in the 1980s and leading up to a revived interest in other than human actors under the label of interspecies and human–non-human relations. In this issue, Strang expands on these insights by challenging the boundaries of what might count as a significant relationship. Shifting to relations beyond humans, her article invites us to scrutinize interspecies relations and to consider the qualities we attribute to multiple 'others', and the consequences of these attributions. While kinship relations are a useful starting point for reconsidering interspecies relations, the theoretical and empirical in-sights arising from this perspective also have implications for how we might think through kinship and politics in terms of the radical possibilities of human sociality. They also point us towards other theorizations, including new thinking about an Anthropocene feminism that claims 'responsibility for all human and non-human actants toward a goal of mutual thriving' (Grusin, 2017: xi).

Given the above, it becomes clear that the historical context is a fundamental factor in the analysis of contemporary kinship relations, with gender a major axis along which individuals and collectives make sense of hegemonic notions of belonging and con-nectedness in the face of disruptions and dislocations, as well as the bureaucratic practices of classification, racialization and nationalist re-inscriptions. But while the importance of historical, structural and contextual factors is taken into account, all the authors highlight the agency of a range of social actors. The articles suggest that patience, ingenuity, solidarity, care and hope may be called upon as individuals and groups face the obstacles posed by structural constraints, and in order to seek solutions to the problems facing them, their kin and related others. This resourcefulness persists despite the fact that their problems originate beyond their personal space and place, that is, they arise from ex-posure to the unpredictability and the inequalities generated by global markets and the attendant political institutions. Nevertheless, as in the case of the young women in

Donner's study, the articles describe many instances of negotiation and reframing of dominant relationships and discourses.

In several of our examples the state – experienced as inept, unpredictable and disappointing, clearly capable of inflicting structural violence on the most vulnerable – is also, and often simultaneously, seen as a potentially benign point of reference and mediator between the forces of capitalist accumulation and destruction and the tensions arising in intimate relations. The multiple examples of the real, existing state, complicit in and/or guilty of inflicting trauma on communities, do not foreclose the appropriation of a discourse on state agents and policies as sources of conflict regulation, access to livelihoods, and as potential arbitrators between kin. This reflects Gupta's (2012) point about how participation in state-led programmes among India's poor creates arbitrary experiences of care, with kinship a prime site of proactive engagements with bureaucracies of power that promise relief but fail to deliver.

The ethnographic research presented in this volume offers an important critique and counterpoint to straightforward conceptualizations of normative and reified concepts of gender, sexuality, family and kinship, such as those that underpin neoliberal and right-wing ideologies. In each specific context, the articles demonstrate how the interdependencies of kinship, state and politics unfold on the ground and in everyday experience, in ways that cannot be accounted for by recourse to oversimplified notions of ideological dominance, nor by relying on an insistence on separate spheres of life and action. They demonstrate the complexities of people's relationships, including their relations with the nation and the state, and recognize the range of practices that make kinship relations meaningful or, vice versa, how kinship can give meaning and substance to actions and relations, supporting ideological constellations that allow different expressions of agency. As ethnographers and theorists we need to acknowledge that in most instances agency is determined by negotiating patriarchal forms of governmentality built on forms of familial patriarchy; both coexist in actors' lives (Sangari, 2015). They may therefore use strategies described by Kandiyoti (1988) as 'bargaining with patriarchy', and/or engage in actions and words that circumvent the constraints and limitations imposed by the intersections of different forms of oppression (Lorde, 1984). Drawing on ethnographic evidence, we argue that kinship can be recognized as emerging from, and constituting, a prime site for addressing, negotiating and overcoming multiple crises, and as such can provide the basis for an encompassing approach to politics and the political.

Intimacy, relationality and political paradigms

Governments across the globe have sought to articulate their responses to capitalist crises through ideologically informed policies, often referenced as neoliberal, and framed in familial terms, as Cooper (2017) points out in relation to the complex institutionalization of 'family values' by a series of conservative governments in the United States. Often, the notion of a 'backlash' is deployed in an attempt to explain and normalize political trends that target significant advances of personal-political rights, for example in relation to sexuality and reproduction. Populist agendas advocate a return to an imaginary status quo ante based on the idealization of long-lasting family values, close-knit communities and a 'simple' life,

which entrenches the existing inclusions and exclusions such visions imply. Such policies tend to draw on imagery stemming from domestic and kinship moralities, as was the case with 'the good housewife', promoted as an exemplary figure under the Thatcherite iteration of neoliberalism (Colegrave, 2019; Farmer and Zabczyk, 2018), and is also evident in frequent references to 'hard-working' families in current debates in the United Kingdom, to name one context among others. Consequently, it is important that we pay close attention to the connections between the spheres of intimacy, gender, sexuality and kinship, the public sphere and the political domain, and how they may interact empirically and ideologically.

In this respect, insights into the relationships between experience, thought and action afforded by anthropological approaches to kinship and politics – and in particular the contribution of feminist scholars and activists within and beyond the field of anthropology – provide a useful starting point to think through and counter a politics of forgetting and exclusions through discriminatory definitions of deservingness favoured by many in positions of power across the globe. Such hegemonic discourses draw analogies with the familial to naturalize political projects, so as to counter change and emancipation, rewrite welfare state provision and redraw the landscape of 'politics' (Deckman, 2016; Fraser, 2019; Sparks, 2014). Feminists, on the other hand, have pointed to the subversive potential of claims against inequalities related to the 'domestic' and to forms of politics that are inclusive of those marked as 'other'. They insist that the radical dimensions of such claims emerge through action and experience. These are also revealed through critical interrogation and theoretical engagements with reproduction based on acknowledging the implications of intersections of race, class, and gender in the articulation of the political field (Arruzza et al., 2019; Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Federici, 2020; Rosen, 2012).

Whereas kinship studies and the study of political processes have long and distinguished trajectories in anthropology, the study of the relationship between politics and kinship in the contemporary capitalist system has often been constrained by a tendency to subordinate the field of kinship, family and 'private' life or the 'domestic sphere' to the implications of power concentrated in political institutions and ideologies (McKinnon and Cannell, 2013; Thelen and Alber, 2017). While enacted and theorized as distinctive spheres of action and values, political ideologies (often but not always inflected with religious values) have tended to subsume or 'encapsulate' (Lambek, 2013) the relationships and institutions of the 'domestic' and of reproduction, constituted politically as a 'private' domain. Perhaps for this reason it has proved difficult to envisage the impact of kinship on the realm of the political and political action. Rather, much of the debate has been contained within boundaries that reflect, and reinforce the assumed separation between spheres of activity and morality related to reproduction. The limitations of this approach are particularly obvious in the case of subversive and transformative practices, for example where explicitly revolutionary politics are concerned and where a radical rethinking is required regarding relations of intimacy and the reproductive activities that are carried out in the 'private', domestic domain (Kollontai, 1972; Luxemburg in Ettinger, 1979 [1968–71]; Rowbotham, 1973; Zetkin, 1906).

To these debates we would add the implications of cross-cultural interrogations of fundamental concepts, such as 'kinship' and 'family', not least because such studies offer

examples of practices and beliefs that contradict the reifications pushed by right-wing discourse. Anthropology's development coincided with evolutionist projects that classified the organization of so-called 'traditional' and 'kinship-based' societies in opposition to other forms of organization, notably those based on territory. Clearly marked as colonial concerns, these dominant discourses then came to associate individuals with rights, based on Western understandings of property. As is the case in many contexts including those often described as 'Western', where kinship moralities and the rights associated with them articulate collective identities, these were regularly challenged and violently suppressed by colonial and state powers. Thus, the articles in this volume suggest that to date significant shifts are understood to be replicated through legally enshrined dichotomies marking out public from private, kinship from state, and so on across the globe. Such idealized distinctions are determinative but do not match with analysis based on careful ethnography, which is sensitive to the connections across public and private, kinship and the politico-jural domain (Pine, 2017). This blurring arises from on-the-ground relationships and actions, and is a useful point of departure for rethinking both kinship and politics. Clearly, earlier scholarship showed kinship to be adaptable and potentially inclusive of non-kin (including Euro-American kinning of non-biologically related others, as work on adoption and on queer kinship has shown) and others living in close proximity, often through sharing food, care, living quarters and livelihoods. Anthropologists have also emphasized the different logics of relatedness, for example, the differences between matrilineal and patrilineal ways of connecting kin transmitted across generations, and how systems of male authority over women and female autonomy work out (McKinnon and Cannell, 2013). More recently, the emphasis on process encapsulated in Carsten's (2000) concept of 'cultures of relatedness' enables a more ethnographically sensitive and dynamic understanding of how relationships are made and sustained, as well as the effects of such processes over time.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminist anthropologists have explored these conceptual distinctions with a new sense of purpose, building critiques based on ethnographic insights from research in a range of different contexts, including situations where women engage in economic activity that spans different countries and regions. From these foundations, it became urgent to illustrate the ways in which the domestic and the political are co-constituted. Arguably, the body of work addressing these entanglements and co-productions of public and private has generated one of the most long-lasting and productive areas of research in anthropology and beyond (Donner, 2023; Moore, 1988). It is significant that these cumulative theoretical contributions are based on the input of political activists, including Indigenous and Black feminists and/or feminists from the global South (Collins, 2021; hooks, 2000 [1984]; Jelin, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Mohanty et al., 1991; Rodriguez, 2001; Segato, 2003; Smith, 1999). Theoretical approaches to the state and to power have also developed in directions that allow for more nuanced and inclusive understandings of the range of practices and qualities we might recognize as political (Sharma and Gupta, 2006). More recently, the deconstruction of the heternormative family through queer theorization and politics (Edelman, 2004; Floyd, 2009) adds further layers to the labour of rethinking power, kinship and intimacy, and opens up new conceptual and political possibilities (Boyce et al., 2019).

As feminist anthropologists pointed out early on, the participation of women[2] in politics often relies on overcoming their kinship roles. Nevertheless, gender offers a useful focus to explore the relationship between kinship and the political in the context of current forms of capitalism and its crises. Historically defined through various gendered relationships with the domestic sphere, women's labour and skills have been systematically devalued or rendered invisible. The reproductive labour undertaken by women and others has often only led to public recognition when actions, protest or resistance have tied in with more mainstream forms of politics, for example for pay and working conditions, or women's reproductive and political rights, as in the case of women's suffrage pursued by feminist movements across the globe (Alexander and Mohanty, 2013; Jayawardena, 2016 [1986]). In contrast, many struggles, including those subsumed under the label of ecofeminism, that relate more closely to women's reproductive roles, emerged most forcefully in the global South and often focus on non-capitalist forms of subsistence production and novel forms of political action (Mies and Shiva, 2014 [1993]). Such movements, which are also often over land and Indigenous forms of knowledge and organization, have consistently been devalued and ignored in public writings on politics. In part, the problem of 'recognition' stems from the fact that public participation by women has frequently been expressed in relation to kinship roles and duties, and as such their actions may be misconstrued and considered particularistic, contradictory or paradoxical, a flaw that can be found in the scholarly literature as well as in 'common-sense' views (Day and Goddard, 2010; Gandsman, 2012; Stephen, 2001).

The widespread conflation of femininity with the sphere of family and kinship, whether manipulated with a view to normalizing specific political interests and projects, or naturalized as everyday understandings of the world, impacts a range of women-led struggles. Indeed, there are many historical and contemporary instances across the globe where women have stood for conservative political projects on the back of their socially recognized role in the family, for example espousing familialism and family values. But erasure can occur even when activism challenges the material inequalities and injustices of contemporary states and economies, such as in the ecofeminist movements mentioned above. While proposing radical challenges to the status quo, these struggles may well be framed explicitly by activists in relation to their position as kin, including relatedness with non-human actors, and are commonly framed around notions of sisterhood and motherhood. It is perhaps for this reason that they have been less prominent in accounts of liberation and anti-capitalist militancy, which are envisaged as distinct from and opposed to relationships stemming from the 'private' sphere.

The feminist projects that have emerged worldwide have also served to undermine simplistic dichotomies and the reductive thinking that such erasures facilitate. They challenge the relegation of the family and of reproductive labour to the realm of non-productivity and consequent invisibility or irrelevance (Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Federici, 2020), while also undermining dominant notions of the political. Women's movements in the global South and third wave feminism have further disturbed overly simplistic notions and distinctions between public and private domains, especially through challenges to the social role of sexuality and heteronormativity (Day, 2010), while proposing novel forms of political action. Arguably, since Alexandra Kollontai's claims regarding the inseparability of revolution and the transformation of private and

intimate relations and subjectivities (Kollontai, 1972; Rowbotham, 1973), through to the analysis of the historical entanglements of patriarchal power and capitalism (Federici, 2004), feminist theorists and activists have proposed profoundly radical visions and calls to action. At their heart lies the recognition of the mutual shaping of the public and the private spheres, and of kinship and political economy – most prominently exemplified in 'Social Reproduction Theory' (SRT) (Arruzza et al., 2019; Edholm et al., 1978; Federici, 2004; Goddard and Pine, 2022; Mies, 1999; Pérez-Orozco, 2014). This is useful as a theoretical approach that focuses on the multiple layers of relatedness, between humans, between humans and other entities, and in the many domains of production, which – even under capitalism – are not limited to the factory floor, but encompass multiple sites where processes of life-making take place.[3] It becomes possible to theorize and track the links between care, kinship and kinship-making, and state policies; conversely, we can understand how state policies impinge on kinship relations and institutions, and shed light on the mechanisms that hamper reproductive justice through the allocation of responsibilities based on racial and gendered divisions of labour (Bhattacharyya, 2018).[4]

The diverse trajectories of scholarship and activism provide a useful starting point to confront current social and political trends, given their potential for formulating and enacting radical and encompassing propositions, whether through a politics of contestation or through exploring alternative social forms in the pursuit of a good life (Jayawardena, 2016 [1986]; Mohanty et al., 1991). One of the most important legacies of feminist work is the attention paid to the connections between personal struggles and embodied experiences, and the collective and broader systems of power and exploitation. While bearing in mind the shortcomings of some ecofeminist positions (Biehl, 1991), the history of struggles to safeguard the natural environment and livelihoods immediately depending on it (Mies and Shiva, 2014 [1993]; Shiva 1989, 2022) has supported environmental politics. Furthermore, the critique of traditions of 'othering' embedded in some anthropological approaches to Indigenous knowledge notwithstanding (Chandler and Reid, 2020), ethnographies of mobilisations around Non-Western ontologies extend the vocabulary through which we might understand and act upon the relationship between bodies, social reproduction and natural resources (Isla, 2019). The resulting struggles, confronting the biopower of states, corporations and powerful elites, are gendered and racialized. And, striking at the heart of the reproduction of capitalism and power, they are often violently repressed.

Similarly, the denunciation of gender-based violence has paved the way for explorations of how patriarchal structures and gendered, classed and racialized forms of privilege work across public and private spaces. Notwithstanding that such violence has remained stubbornly entrenched, these explorations have provided tools with which to rethink – and combat – the forms and consequences of social violence and social suffering (Das, 2006; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Peker, 2017; Segato, 2016; Vergès, 2017). Such rethinking entails a critique of what has been labelled 'carceral feminism', liberal feminist positions that insist on countering intimate and public violence with calls for policing and incarceration instead of a demand that the underlying social and economic structures are addressed (Gruber, 2023).[5] In contrast, movements such as 'Ni una menos' in Latin America redefine 'the political' by locating violence and patriarchal privilege across social relationships and institutions, not least those of the state and its different entities. In

the United Kingdom, activists/scholars like the Southall Black Sisters in London work towards 'undomesticating' intimate gender violence, showing it to be an extension of oppressive definitions of public/private domains and stratified citizenship, as well as policies based on culturalist assumptions (Bhattacharjee, 1997; Sen, 1999).

Along these lines, Vergès (2022 [2020]) opens her far-reaching discussion of violence with a reference to the composition of the Chilean feminist group 'LasTesis' that has been enacted, interpreted and translated across the world. Inspired by the work of anthropologist Rita Segato, their 'performative protest' denounces the perpetrators and embedded complicities that serve to sustain gender violence, from the sphere of the most intimate of relationships to church and state institutions. In a different activist vein, anthropologist Richa Nagar and the north Indian Sangtin Writers Collective experiment with explorations of the intersections between different kinds of structural constraints that encompass violence against women in their practical ethnographic conversations with women/activists in rural areas and beyond (Sangtin Writers Collective and Nagar, 2006). Movements against gender violence such as these have been very effective in forcing official recognition of femicide and gendercide, and also provide a shared language through which to make visible the connections between public – including state-sponsored conflict – and private manifestations of gendered violence.

Like these feminist collectives and activists, authors like Vergès and Sangari are clear about the role of the state as a regulator of economic and political domination, and a site of convergence and condensation of all forms of oppression and exploitation inherent in imperialism, patriarchy and capitalism (Sangari, 2015; Vergès, 2022 [2020]). The ethnographic research presented in this issue adds further layers to their argument. Haberland shows how and why the state might be sought by vulnerable people in Tanzania, as when they may approach representatives of a particular state institution (for example, social workers) for guidance and support. She attributes this desire, at least in part, to the country's historical legacies of Ujamaa socialism (1962–85) that proposed a more redistributive and participatory role for the state. Thus the historical and contextual specificities of individual states and their relationship with the body of citizens, whether related to post-socialism (Tanzania and Benin) or to a post-developmentalist trajectory (India), and/or exposure to global markets, World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies, all have implications for how 'the state' is perceived in terms of pasts and presents, and how it operates in any given context in making and/or breaking down kinship. Nor can we assume that relations that link kinship directly to state institutions are homogeneous across a nation. As Alber points out, rural populations are often placed in a particularly disadvantageous position so far as access to education and state employment are concerned. Others stress the relevance of class and other markers of identity like caste (Donner), which together with gender and generation have implications for how different institutions of the state might act upon, be perceived by and interact with different kinds of citizens.

Politics and responsibility

Drawing on the insights afforded by diverse yet convergent strands of work, our contributors engage with some of the enduring aspects of debates regarding the political, and

the entanglements of politics and kinship to propose fresh insights and potentially new lines of enquiry into the tensions and co-productions of public and private, kinship and politics. The articles ask various questions related to the field of responsibility including: 'Who is responsible? Where does responsibility lie? Between whom? Towards what? Who shares responsibility and upon whose authority is responsibility named?' (Demian et al., 2023: 1). Closely related to these questions is the issue of how processes of assuming, defining or attributing responsibility – or what has been referred to as a process of responsibilization (Geschiere, 2023; Puccio-Den, 2021) – might unfold in different contexts.

We approach responsibility as a boundary concept that variously speaks to a range of actors and actions across the spheres of kinship, the economic and the political domains and across scales. Where Kollontai integrates the revolutionary struggle with transformations in the organization of household and family, of intimate and affective ties, responsibility emerges through action and interaction in relation to opportunity and experience. Through such a lens, one stresses the relational and experiential, as they arise within and in relation to the world (Kollontai, 1972; Rowbotham, 1973). This suggests an important point regarding action: if it emerges situationally, as a consequence of social interaction, we can envisage that responsibility for or towards a singular and/or a collective entity will be neither fixed nor circumscribed. Furthermore, it can emerge from within or outside of a discourse imposed by the state, the church and other institutional settings. But it also arises from experience in a wide range of circumstances, and so encourages the potential for thinking about and making relations between different kinds – that is, between kin and non-kin, and between variously positioned others and selves: persons and things, places, entities, and beings both human and non-human.

The temporalities of responsibility, such as might emerge in relation to past events and suffering, but also relating to the future or what has been referred to as the futurity of responsibility, have been highlighted in the work of many anthropologists (Demian et al., 2023; Puccio-Den, 2021). Following Parry and Bloch's (1989) distinction between different transactional orders, the morality of exchange always includes weighing up the short term and the long term: one relates to markets, the other to broader 'cosmic' spheres. In kinship transactions, futures may entail entangling kin materially, as in the example of South African claimants in cases around inheritance (Bolt, 2021), studies of complex post-socialist negotiations around property ownership (Verdery, 2018 [2003]), or middle-class families in India and China considering investment in apartments (Donner, 2022; Zhang, 2010). But the more long-term perspective often aligns with Kollontai's – and perhaps more generally with utopian – visions, as future-related. This vision may refer to individual, kin, and political projections, whether they are focused on specific future generations or on broader visions for a future that is better, safer, and that embodies universal responsibility towards those who have not yet been born, and, crucially, envisages a just world.

In this issue, the articles explore the nuances of ethnographic situations that reference responsibility towards a future, whether these are intergenerational, between citizens and non-citizens, or shared beyond human futures. In her article on Benin, Alber recounts how, for parents such as Yarou, responsibility for their children's futures persists despite

repeated disappointments, as unfavourable circumstances mean that they fail to complete their education or find a job in the city. In defiance of the obstacles, Yarou's is an open-ended commitment to the future, to children and grandchildren, and is sustained by the hope that, at some point and in some way, these efforts will bear fruit (Miyazaki, 2004). Arguably, the actions of the grandparents' groups discussed by Stivens are also future-oriented, related directly to the plight and future of refugees, but perhaps also in relation to more encompassing, as yet unknown, relational future politics. As they build their struggle and assume kin-like responsibility for strangers, they are also making claims for a better, fairer, compassionate society. This ethnographically driven, open-ended approach to futures brings to mind the perceptive critiques of (hetero-)normative kinship-based futurity, or 'reproductive futurism' proposed by queer theorists (Edelman, 2004; Rutherford, 2013), as well as Weston's (2022) critical analysis of contentious generational responsibility within environmental struggles. From their different perspectives, they remind us of the pitfalls inherent in naturalizing concepts and relationships, in this instance, regarding how we understand generations and the future. Strang's article takes these reflections further in envisaging futures in the face of climate breakdown through a reading of pasts that contributes to imaginings of human–non-human relationships that advance the debates towards an ethics of responsibility based on respect and interspecies – or, more ambitiously – transspecies care.

Whether they are inspired by existing ties and relations or are intent on forging new ones, the ethnographies show the fundamental importance of relationality, even where individual strategies to counter trauma or disadvantage are concerned. Recognition of the centrality of relationships across space and time speaks to anthropological and feminist approaches to kinship, care and relatedness. Specifically, it draws on the temporalities of kinship and generation, and the dynamics of social reproduction whereby past, present and future are intimately connected (Bear et al., 2015; Edholm et al., 1978; Federici, 2004; Goddard and Pine, 2022). This also suggests a politics that is generative and generational – *pace* Edelman (2004) – and entails aspirations and hope for change (Miyazaki, 2004; Narotzky and Besnier, 2014; Pine, 2014).

Central to some of the articles in this issue is the tension between the neoliberal ideology of 'freedom' that focuses on an autonomous individual; that is, an ideology that 'disregards any reference to the social origin of responsibility and its inherent moral obligation toward others' (Pendenza and Lamattina, 2018) but is focused on a future for which responsibility is expressed through self-improvement – as is expected of the beautician trainees in Donner's article. However, these young women operate according to their own compass of responsibility, which defies state and NGO appeals to modern modes of self-making. Instead they embrace a nuanced, collective, shared responsibility located in the community while also addressing anticipated future kinship links. Mookherjee's and Loning's articles engage with responsibilities that similarly sit uncomfortably with official modes of responsibilization, which in post-conflict situations are dominated by nationalist reworkings of ruptured relationships. They both show that personal and collective futures are seen by actors as reliant on taking practical forms of responsibility. As the articles collected here illustrate, there are many and diverse, sometimes contradictory ways in which responsibility is embedded in relationships that

traverse public and private, kinship and politics. At the broadest level, the aim of the collection is to contribute to the task of reinstating the central importance of the relationships between kinship and polity when proposing encompassing theories of society and social change.

This brings into focus the need to rethink received ideas about power, politics and community. In doing so, the boundaries and the contents of both kinship and politics are changed, often stretched, and sometimes made more precise by sharpening expectations. The contributions by Loning, Haberland and Mookherjee in particular, show how policies and politics elicit responses that build on, and often alter fundamental, shared concepts and practices in the most intimate spheres, and how meanings and relationships are redefined in the process. Sometimes these responses allow for new forms of community and belonging to emerge, which may or may not coexist with earlier understandings shared across generations, class and gendered identifications. As the articles by Strang and Stivens suggest, they may also provide unexpected opportunities for navigating hierarchical and unequal social contexts.

Bringing these works into dialogue with Butler, we can take these insights into relatedness and relationality in a direction that proposes an inclusive range of ideas, actions and subjects that may be amenable to thinking and acting responsibly. Thinking is used here in the Arendtian sense, as 'a creative activity which requires remembrance, storytelling, and imagination. It also requires the virtues of both courage and independence' (Bernstein, 2005: 279). When we approach responsibility through relationality, the selfgoverning individual of neoliberal theory gives way to the decentred self, who can be understood as a subject that is constituted through, and in interaction with, 'others', in ways that are similar to those that have been emphasized in theories concerned with the ethics of activism (Dave, 2012). Furthermore, because the boundaries of the other are demarcated by social norms, they are subject to contestation and struggle over which subjects may be included in the community of responsibility. From this perspective, the potential of inclusion extends the scope of responsibility and of the questions about responsibility to, for, and about all life (Butler, 2020 [2004]; Kelz, 2016). In other words, as Kelz argues, deploying Butler's approach implies a re-evaluation of otherness as an important step towards political action, and towards conceiving a political community and forms of solidarity that do not require similarity. Rather, it envisages a politics of responsibility for others, based on our universally shared precariousness and the interdependency that characterizes all living beings, human and non-human (Kelz, 2016). While the potentiality contained in this perspective resonates with utopian and revolutionary projects, it is of crucial significance in the specific and urgent context of 'climate breakdown', where recognizing interdependence is, as Strang argues, the only way to create shared futures.

The articles in this issue contribute to these reflections with detailed examples of struggles for inclusivity and solidarity, and of contexts where the exercise of power has been directed at recognizing shared precariousness and dependency. The reflections prompted by Butler and Kelz – and building on earlier concerns with the possibilities of relationality and responsibility beyond human subjectivity importantly associated with complex narratives around gender, care and postcolonial crises in the global South, as

articulated by ecofeminists (Gaard, 2011) – speak most directly to Strang's argument regarding interspecies kinships. But they also resonate with the ways in which kinship responsibilities extend in time and space (Alber, this volume), across boundaries between kinship, state and civil society institutions (Haberland, Donner, Loning, this volume), and how they help redraw conceptual and political maps of sovereignty (Stivens, Mookherjee, this volume).

Responsibility and/or accountability

In common with feminist ethnographies, ethnographies of kinship as lived experience show the many ways in which subjects are embedded within social relations, which entail different kinds of responsibilities and opportunities. Parents and children in Benin must navigate what Alber refers to as 'eduscapes', as education is understood to be an indispensable step to achieve social and economic upward mobility. They invest in these efforts while facing enormous difficulties, not least those that arise from what is described by Alber's research subjects as their own 'blindness', that is, a lack of knowledge of the terrain and how to traverse it. Given the economic and social obstacles, and the condition of being uneducated or 'blind' that places parents and children in a very disadvantageous position, the outcomes are uncertain and diffuse. Nevertheless, there is a depth and inclusivity in relational responsibility here that negates the narrow calculations and individually focused self-interest proposed by liberal market and especially neoliberal dogmas. Similarly, Loning's article shows how a politics of recognition enabled by the state in post-genocide Rwanda meets with local expectations about personal and collective responsibilities, and ways of taking on but also refusing interference with established modes of thinking about parenthood and kinning. In her article, Strang argues forcefully in support of a radical rethinking about relationships, responsibility and others, pushing the boundaries of who might be considered as an 'other' worthy of responsible, ethical relations. Stivens' example of how kinship positionalities are used to mobilize in solidarity with as yet unknown others suggests how we might start to think, theorize and act upon the world. This brings together scholarship on activism and solidarities, and anthropological work that emphasizes the qualities of kinship as a sphere of relationality (Carsten, 2019) and 'mutuality' (Sahlins, 2013), which we would extend to our understanding of relations between human and non-human worlds. But rather than being limited to examples that focus on so-called 'traditional' understandings of kinship, often associated with pre-capitalist forms of relatedness, we emphasize the need to think solidarity and responsibility in the face of precarity, injustice, inequality or violence, as exemplified in the contributions to this volume. Here, the common theme of the various literatures discussed is about acting upon the world and may be the starting point for building forms of counter-power that are capable of effectively seeking – and establishing – accountability.

Research in the field of kinship has demonstrated the importance of the lived experience of kinship in relation to the elasticity and extendibility of kinship solidarity. This proves to be helpful when thinking about the relationship between kinship and the political, as well as understanding how communities of solidarity may be constituted in

different domains and circumstances. For example, social movements often utilize kinship idioms and appeal to kinship-inspired moralities to mobilize and form relationships across divides, in order to constitute community from unexpected sources and in different spaces. Examples range from veterans in Oman creating counterhegemonic solidarities (Wilson, 2020) to transgender kinship NGOs in the USA (Greene, 2021), as well as more traditional kinship discourses as they are lived in diasporic, working-class, political and religious communities (Wekker, 2006).

The unequal distribution of power that determines such possibilities is evident in all the articles, as for example the ideologies that create 'others' through racism and its variations, such as casteism or speciesism. Further, responsibility sometimes sits awkwardly alongside a range of emotions associated with kin relations, that are extendible to the public, political sphere, and may bind people together. While we have stressed the potential for inclusivity and solidarity, other emotions also emerge within families and among kin, ranging from distrust to alienation, and may give rise to a need for separation. In this respect, it is important to bring to the discussion the implications of what Carsten (1997) refers to as the paradox of kinship, discussed in more detail below.

Trust and betrayal are emotions that cut across the most intimate spheres of life and blend with affective connections to the political. Love, (com)passion, caring and mourning, hostility, grief and anger, all transcend the private and 'become incentives for political action' (Kelz, 2016, in reference to Butler). The broad and complex repertoires of affects that cross the spheres of intimacy and politics are important because, just as they may provide inspiration and support for political action, they may be a barrier to and undermine the possibilities of acting with others (Kelz, 2016; see also Mookherjee, 2022; Thiranagama and Kelly, 2012). As our examples illustrate, there are tensions and contradictions in social relationships – whether located in the sphere of kinship or in the sphere of the political – that have implications for any projects of hope and futures arising in the unfolding of everyday life and in the expectations of and aspirations for a life worth living (Butler, 2012).

Given these tensions, it is important to recognize that both kinship and the more conventional political sphere may often be marked by a future that can only be imagined through the dissolution of bonds, through the public acknowledgement of rupture, and the memorialization of violent acts that challenge simplistic understandings of kinship's relationality as predominantly connecting, bridging and encompassing. As Josephides (2022) points out, attributing responsibility as a matter of accountability may get in the way of reconciliation, between kin and members of the community alike. More broadly, the less-discussed circumstances of rupture and distancing relate to situations of refusal of kinship, where kinship obligations and responsibilities are emptied out, deprived of content and meaning at least for some of the actors concerned, as Mookherjee describes so compellingly. There are also situations in which responsibilities can be addressed on a purely performative basis so it is interesting to identify and follow the 'practices of responsibility', including the conflicts that arise within specific fields of responsibility and across the multiple genres (legal, political, social) through which responsibilities are framed and claimed or refused, as Haberland's contribution articulates. Here, the articles highlight the significance of gender, age, generation and class, and illustrate the different

challenges, possibilities and positionalities that may arise throughout the life cycle. We also recognize the ways in which sexuality, both in relation to sexualized bodies and to the ways in which sexualities intersect with gender and other factors, may disturb and queer normative kinship ideas and practices and produce new responsibilities, albeit often mapped onto the temporalities and language of kinship (Stout, 2014). The ethnographies presented here complicate the expectation that the fulfilment of predetermined, normative and gendered kinship roles is the rule and show that not only are normative performances hard work and demand continuous negotiation, but that they are also the basis for subversion, reinvention and a politics of kinning against the grain, if only in relation to the expectations of those in authority. These ethnographically informed explorations reflect the critical rethinking proposed by theoretical and empirical work that aims at destabilizing the clear-cut definitions of sexual and social reproductive practices that are the focus of liberal and right-wing populist rhetoric (Butler, 2002; Edelman, 2004; Floyd, 2009; Weston, 1997 [1991]).

Pursuing the theme of the role of affect beyond empathy, and the personal and political possibilities of kinning, entails an exploration of the limits of the political possibilities of inclusion, for example where a politics of traitors and betrayal is at stake. As ethnographic work on traitors shows, those who are intimately related, including kin, can be turned into a politically relevant category by defining them as the abject, often based on betrayal of moral codes drawn from the domain of kinship (Thiranagama and Kelly, 2012). Betrayals underlie the experience of violence, whether these are 'private' betrayals from trusted others and/or those that arise as a consequence of a complicit or absent public sphere. Mookherjee's sensitive discussion of the unkinning of 'war babies' by the Bangladeshi government shows how the state's (and others') responsibilities towards particular children are sacrificed in order to salvage the reputation of mothers and, ultimately, of the nation. A case such as the Bangladeshi one suggests that in understanding the relationship of kinship and politics we must lay bare the terrain that enables the ethical and political possibilities of attributing responsibility and establishing accountability. At the same time, the articles in this issue show the messiness that appears in the aftermath of violence. For example, in Loning's article we encounter the impossibly difficult questions that the legacy of rape and violence in Rwanda forces upon mothers and children, including negotiating the nature of their relationships as kin. The articles by Mookherjee and Loning, in particular, show how the many 'sedimented social patterns' (Orlie, 1995: 342), histories and prevailing conventions impinge on the affective and agentive conditions that make it possible, or impossible, to take the necessary steps towards resistance and articulating claims of accountability versus powerful others.

One of the key sites for mobilizations around kinship and responsibilities are movements that enact kinship roles in order to mount resistance to the state. Often these movements have pushed understandings of politics and of the state by challenging sovereignty and extending their struggles beyond individual states or circumventing them altogether. In their different ways, the contributions to this volume invite us to think critically about what counts as kinship, who counts as kin and what obligations and responsibilities might be associated with different positions within recognized kinship and family relationships. Bearing in mind the contradictions inherent in kinship practices and

the deep structures of patriarchy that shape kinship, they invite reflections on the implications of recognition and its many sites. This would suggest that any personal and/or political work towards kinning (Howell, 2022; Thelen and Alber, 2017) requires a parallel questioning of what kinship is and what being kin may entail. Perhaps such questioning requires a radical reckoning with the family and subversive approaches to the sphere of intimacy, as proposed by Kollontai in her vision of a revolutionary new society, and articulated within contemporary political movements ranging from the Zapatistas' communiqués on the rights of women (Gender DSC 1, 2021) to ecofeminist interventions, as well as in Marxist feminist calls for the abolition of the family and struggles that are allied with and draw on Indigenous movements and their pedagogies (Isla, 2019; Lewis, 2022; Mallon and Reuque Paillalef, 2002; Pappas, 2021; Shiva, 2016, 2022).

About this issue

In this special issue, we trace some of the connections and entanglements that emerge in relation to kinship and the state, and we take the implications of our ethnographic examples one step further to question the very concept of politics and the sphere of the political, in relation to, in antagonism towards, or friction with, the state and supra-state institutions and processes.

As we show, the notion of responsibility can help us draw comparisons across different institutional settings and diverse forms of political action. It also allows us to address the affective dimensions that inform much political activity. We argue that the entanglements of kinship and politics, whether embedded within state ideologies and practices or expressed as values and experiences that contrast with those associated with state institutions, can also be used to articulate claims that are made meaningful within particular moral economies linking people and the state (Pine, 2021). Indeed, they are often building blocks with which to forge new communities of belonging, and can generate the language, symbols and affects that render both claims and actions meaningful. A focus on responsibility is also useful because it speaks both to contested claims and to what are often difficult entanglements, solidarities and cultures of belonging. It points towards the possibilities of individual positioning within communities, as well as offering grounds for community building, while allowing for the possibility that there will be frictions, areas of contention, distrust, struggle and exclusion.

Peletz (2000) has shown that the moral ambivalence of kinship plays a major role in Euro-American studies of institutions and their structural effects. Theorizing the roots of this ambivalence, Carsten refers to the 'paradox of kinship' in order to capture the way kinship can create links with all sorts of 'others' but is often not only exclusive, but also coercive, even where as she argues, everyday practices such as commensality can actually make outsiders into kin in a very real and substantive way (Carsten, 1997, 2019). Kinship's contradictory qualities come to light in accusations of witchcraft, common across the world, and coexisting moral codes, meanings and expectations that figure prominently when we apply the lens of responsibility and accountability to issues like fostering, inheritance and, last but not least, marriage or its breakdown. By recognizing the often disruptive effects of kinship, we avoid approaching it solely in terms of

(positively valued) affective attachments, of an ethics of empathy, of solidarity or a site of (positive) resistance against 'outside' forces like state institutions, labelled by Edwards and Strathern (2000) as a sentimental approach to kinship that is quite common among academics. We recognise that ambiguities and outright hostility are deeply entwined with kin roles and their meanings, and determine how apparently autonomous and salient idioms of kinship are shaped, transmitted and enacted. This makes thinking politics through kinship all the more productive by recognizing that, side by side with relations and practices of care, nurture and interdependencies, there may well be exploitation, hierarchy and violence.

The dual meanings of kinship morality are clearly articulated in cases where intergenerational support is at stake, as in the articles by Erdmute Alber and Nina Haberland. Drawing on the history of socialist expansion of the state into the homes of rural populations, and the subsequent contraction of state support for education that had included boarding schools and outreach programmes, Alber shows that parents in village Benin navigate the complexities of intergenerational dependencies that work against the grain, as children, once sent away to be educated and seen as future contributors to their parents' homes, are circulating back to live off meagre rural incomes. Kinship roles are reversed, parents internalize the blame for what are the structural constraints of a precarious labour market, buying into ideological forms of individual/collective, generational responsibilization and the associated narrative of their own incompetence to navigate the 'eduscapes' of neoliberal governmentality. This also comes out clearly in Haberland's account of engagement with the welfare office in Tanzania's rural areas, where the office assists citizens not materially but in terms of advice, for example on parenting. In this example, the officials – belonging to a different class and with a higher level of education than those they are advising – are actively sought out by struggling parents, mostly mothers, for advice on how to deal with wayward teens, babies refusing to breastfeed, and other parenting issues. The advice is delivered in alignment with standardized procedure, which assesses their situation against a set of normative expectations that are believed to provide good outcomes. Here, the state is not just actively engaging with and towards its citizens – it is the citizens themselves who demand that the state assume a mediating role in order to expand or decrease transactions and connections between kin, and allocate and shared responsibility. While clearly marked by hierarchies that extend beyond the specific interactions, the officials concerned are acutely aware of their own limitations, as resources that might, for example, allow clients to seek relief through the provision of housing in case of divorce, are non-existent. In the absence of resources, responsibilities are pushed back onto the family by evoking kinship interdependencies and gendered and age-dependent roles that embed discourses on ideal life courses, sexualities, relationships and care practices, which the poor, here as elsewhere, struggle to realize in their own lives.

In contrast, Henrike Donner's article focuses on young women from marginalized Kolkata families, who are seen as subjects of capacity building in line with neoliberal discourses that envisage women's empowerment through their insertion into the labour market. In this example the young women reinterpret their own engagement with kin and community in multiple ways, negotiating with patriarchal structures and expectations to

avoid being sucked into low-income, low-status body work, while their engagement in vocational training courses allows them to carve out a degree of autonomy, albeit temporary, away from the burden of domestic responsibilities. By refusing to see themselves as individuals without kin and community responsibilities they actively work against the reformist impetus of the NGO and the state-sponsored programmes that approach young women as objects of reform, rather than as subjects with complex agentive networks, including those conceived in terms of kinship.

Tensions and contradictions come into particularly sharp focus in relation to experiences of violence. Here, the multidimensional potentialities of kinship are evident, as the constituted and often symbolic boundaries between public and private collapse and violence exerted by the state and by family members fold into one another. The experience of violence cuts across age, racial, gender and sexual boundaries in complex ways and requires careful ethnographic sensibility to be theorized, with systematic patterns emerging precisely as expressions of the combined effect of patriarchal, racial and class dominations that demand an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991; Louis, 2014, 2018; Rodriguez, 2001). This is highlighted in the work of Black feminist activists, who engage with the ways the carceral state impacts kinship and intergenerational connections, and their implications for survival (Gilmore, 2023; Richards-Calathes, 2021). Conversely, violence based on gender/sex systems may be classified as a 'domestic' matter, often based on cultural stereotypes (Bhatttacharjee, 1997) – and purposefully deployed in contemporary moral and political projects referred to as 'culture wars' – during peacetime, and only becomes acknowledged as a public 'crime' where it is used as a collective weapon in situations of armed conflict. Even under these circumstances, there is evidence to suggest that shame attaches to the victims as much or more than to the perpetrators, and that speech, visibility and recognition in public remain highly problematic: the boundaries between individual trauma and collective suffering, between private and public violence, are blurred and consequently such highly gendered forms of violence and suffering often elude the lexicons of everyday life. This may be related to larger abrasive processes, for example being exposed to racism and exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, and caste in ways that are impossible to articulate or have to be rethought or recalibrated and claimed in novel, often non-verbal expressions (Das, 2006; Jayawardena and de Alwis, 1996).

If gendered bodies constitute a terrain of conflict, rape is a corollary or instrument of war, conquest, imperialism and domination. The prevalence of domestic abuse and rape across time and space testifies to what Segato (2016) and others have called 'a war against women', which is a continuation of histories of domination directed against women, nature and non-normative lives (Federici, 2004). Kinning that involves children born of wartime sexual violence embodies the vulnerability of both the female victims and the body politic of their communities/nations, exposing the contradictions of kinship and posing painful challenges to the possibilities of belonging, to collective memory and rebuilding (Theidon, 2015). Such violence can also be re-enacted when, as in the case of repatriated women and children after kidnapping and rape, the ensuing bonds of kinship and belonging are forced apart by claims made on behalf of the community and/or the state (Butalia, 1998; Menon and Bhasin, 1993). What happens when the violence

unleashed by political conflict erupts within the sphere of the most intimate relations and feelings? In this issue Loes Loning explores this question in relation to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Loning focuses on young people who were conceived from genocidal rape to explore how 'kinship' may be possible in these circumstances, and how it may work in the aftermath of violence and destruction. Inevitably, the ethnographer encountered situations where unspeakable trauma coexisted with the presence of new relations, including forms of parenthood relative to human beings who needed to be incorporated in various ways within a world of survivors (Das, 2006).

Living with the aftermath of war – in this case a war of independence largely supported by local communities – and focusing on what kinds of kinship emerge through acts of sexual violence stemming from the conflict, is also the theme of Nayanika Mookherjee's article on post-independence Bangladesh. Here kinship is approached explicitly as a site of disconnection rather than relatedness, of rupture rather than solidarity. While the women who were raped during that war were seen as worthy of re-incorporation into the nationalist narrative as war heroines, a process that was facilitated through rehabilitation programmes, their reintegration into the political community was premised on the ex-clusion of the children born as a result of this violence, who were considered to be beyond the bounds of the new national community. Instead, what Mookherjee refers to as 'the multiple uses of gene/alogy' were deployed in attempts to dekin the war babies from the emergent state of Bangladesh.

Ruptures of a different kind, but still very much related to structural violence, can lead to an activation of kinship through re-signified kinship roles in queer kinning and in what might be described as maternalist interventions, as is evident in subcultural mobilizations such as the reference to motherhood in drag collectives understood as queer families (Levine, 2023; Newton, 1979). Ahmed (2017) pushes the task of theorizing kinship with these practices further when she comments on the convergence of family and kinship forms that deviate from normative kinship and sexuality, and highlights the ways queer kinship and the lived experience of kinship in disadvantaged and minoritized commu-nities share conditions of vulnerability and exposure to risks and ruptures, of lives, homes and relationships.

In some contexts of state violence and its aftermath, kinship and its symbols, may defy the power of the state and its incumbents. Evoking Antigone's struggle against Creon and the state (Elshtain, 1997), the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina offer examples of the emergence of new kinds of politics that, over a period of more than 40 years, shaped the political field and put accountability at the centre of demands vis-à-vis the state and supra-state organisms (such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations and the UN Human Rights Coun-cil, among others) to fulfil their responsibilities. Or, indeed, to demand that these or-ganizations take on new – and heretofore not contemplated – responsibilities, such as making possible the reunification of children taken by the military and their allies with the surviving members of their families of origin (Vaisman, 2014). While the activists who built these movements expressed their claims against the state as mothers searching for their children, over the decades they have significantly altered the spaces and the formats of politics. In defiance of simplistic definitions of them as 'maternalist', they extended

their politics of care and responsibility to include claims for justice beyond their own kin, articulating claims for social, economic justice for all (Goddard, 2007). As Gilmore (2023) argues in her analysis of prison abolition activism by minoritized mothers in California, the possibility of mobilizing around maternalist practices among Black women in this context arises from radical histories and the everyday experience of the 'techniques of mothering that extend past limits of household, kinship, and neighborhood, past gender and racial divisions of social space to embrace political projects to reclaim children' (Gilmore, 2023: 406). Since experience and political action are intimately connected, these practices are entangled with, respond to and inform, what Collins (2021) refers to as 'legacies of struggle' (see also Mallon and Reuque Paillalef, 2002; Rodriguez, 2001).

Maila Stivens' article makes a strong case against reductionist definitions of women's politics, even where the lexicon of kinship may play a key role in expressing dissent and articulating claims of responsibility against those in power. Stivens' article addresses women's political action and their misrepresentation in relation to the activities of Australian groups of 'grandmothers' who deploy a range of identities that can be described as familial or kinship based in their struggle to support refugees and people seeking asylum. Indeed, as in the Argentine case, the groups adopt identities that explicitly refer to the sphere of kinship, such as 'Mums 4 Refugees', 'Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children' (recently renamed 'Grandmothers for Refugees'), 'Kindred Kindness', and the 'Knitting Nannas'. Stivens pays particular attention to the role of older women who, as 'grandmothers', take on responsibility and care for those who are 'outside' their own kin network and are 'othered' by the Australian state's draconian immigration policies. These actions, inspired by ideals and biographies of care and connecting, aim to draw in these no-longer-strangers, to bring them, through the language of care and kinship into the realm of the public and the responsibility of the state. In doing so, while attempting to transform the state through what Stivens refers to as 'cosmopolitan hospitality', they redefine the boundaries of public and private, and repurpose the role of kinship – and the state.

A politics of cosmopolitan hospitality expressed through the language of parenthood can call into question received notions of sovereignty and contemplates different bases for affect, solidarity and care. Veronica Strang's article takes this rethinking further. What if the boundaries of community exceeded not only the arbitrary and historically malleable boundaries of states, and the equally arbitrary classification of human groups in ideologically construed classificatory grids, and instead the struggle was intended to demolish an even more enduring and pervasive classificatory post-Enlightenment hegemony, that between humans and animals (Cassidy, 2012; Ingold, 1994)? What if, turning to Lévi-Strauss's suggestion that 'animals are good to think with', we might not only be allowed to understand the cut-up social world as described in relation to Totemism but also the artificial divisions between species *tout court*? Would this be a step towards de-centring the human, as suggested by Butler and others? As Strang observes, there is more than one way to understand the human/non-human relation or relations. Some will no doubt approach the relation through formulas based on hierarchical grids, whereas others seek to develop equitable relations or advance practices of reciprocity. Undoubtedly, cross-cultural ethnographic exploration has generated a wide

range of understandings of what it means to be human and non-human and whether the two can overlap, merge or contrast, raising issues around personhood, solidarity, care and various cultures of kinship. The exploration of such insights and consequent challenges to long-held assumptions of human exceptionality and the right and ability of humans to dominate multiple 'others' is arguably more urgent than ever given the effects of climate change and the ongoing ecological crises. Thus Strang's article provides a compelling case for us to reconsider deeply felt understandings of connectedness, of kinship and solidarity. It also points in the direction of one possible politics that embraces such rethinking and acts upon its responsibilities and urgencies.

Interestingly, the quality of kindness is referred to by both Stivens and Strang – alongside an ethics of care for life itself. Again turning to Butler, if precariousness is a universal feature of life, then the bases for responsibility towards and in relation to multiple others become clear – and today, urgently so. A politics based on compassion is still a politics, as Berlant (2004) argues. This draws particular attention to the question of value – the value of life and of the lives of different others, others who need not be similar to us in order to elicit empathy and demand responsibility, and to questions about how value is socially and historically determined. Kinship can provide the language, while politics can provide the bases of solidarity and action to challenge the socially imposed limits of what constitutes a life worth living and a life that must be given recognition.

While in the 1960s the economic and political violence unleashed across the global South prompted Gough (1968) to propose a partisan anthropology clearly aligned with the cause of the colonized and those oppressed by the structures of imperialist domination, in the 21st century these still urgent demands are exacerbated by the ubiquity of the notion of 'crisis' as a compelling *idée force* (Vine et al., 2021). In this context, encapsulated in the use of 'culture wars' and the weaponizing of culture to mask the entrenchment of privilege and power, the calls for renewed vigour in the work of anthropologists to engage meaningfully with the world are increasingly relevant. The value of ethnography is highlighted when added to the important legacies of anthropological critique, feminist theory and praxis, and the analytical power of intersectional approaches to positionality – and victimhood. These provide instruments with which to unmask the rhetoric and unpack the implications of racial capitalism and the 'violence of neoliberalism' (Vergès, 2017, 2022 [2020]) that lie beneath it. Alongside the recognition of social and economic vulnerabilities, compounded by the effects of the ecological crisis, the actions taken by a range of actors to confront them are at the centre of the ethnographic explorations of politics under late capitalism in this edited collection.

We argue that if kinship is taken as the point of departure for theorizing politics, the categories that emerge will derive from experience and will be deeply embedded in shared worlds. We envisage a truly inclusive, experience-based politics as a politics of radical struggle that is also heterogeneous, acknowledges diverse positions and priorities and is oriented towards a political sphere founded on plurality. Such politics would reflect the 'otherwise veiled link between racial, gendered and sexual belonging, differential ways of knowing and imagining the world, and the overarching governing codes that have created, maintained and normalized practices of exclusion' (Mignolo, 2015: 106). Lastly, if kinship is the starting point for our interrogation of the political, separations between

different spheres become meaningless and entanglements come to the fore and shape practices and thinking through the political. An equally valuable consequence of approaching politics with/from kinship, is that heretofore ignored, erased, and silenced actors become visible, as do their perhaps unique repertoires of struggle.

During an interview, Estela Carlotto, head of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, was asked for her thoughts about a personal attack directed at her by a candidate for the vice-presidency, a partner to the far-right candidate – who went on to win the elections in 2023. Carlotto acknowledges, indeed she embraces, her disappeared daughter's political engagement, but prefers to focus on the struggle ahead. While arguing for unity, for the defence of democracy and against the self-presidential candidate's professed anarcho-capitalist programme of extreme market liberalization, attacks on women's rights, sexual diversity, and the rights of workers and pensioners, she also remarks that she does 'not know about politics'. She feels it is important to define herself as a citizen and a grandmother. The interviewer, journalist Victoria Ginzberg, points out to Carlotto that she has been a towering public figure in her country, surviving changes of government, some more, some less sympathetic to the cause of the Abuelas or Grandmothers, surviving economic crises, and holding firm on a struggle for restitution and justice with kinship at its core and the state under accusation. Her position as an exemplary public figure does not sit comfortably with her disavowal of the political. And yet perhaps it is precisely this kind of politics, a politics that has generated power through the language of kinship, the force of sentiment and the courage of persistence, that her right-wing critics endeavour to erase (Ginzberg, 2023).

It may well be that kinship's contribution to radical politics is difficult, if not impossible to define, that despite cross-cultural differences, blurred boundaries, entanglements, kinship is in some respects irreducible. Lambek (2013) argues that, although kinship may be encapsulated by the state, it is not contained by it; that kinship exceeds the state and is both immoderate and 'immodern'. Kinship contains an excess of meaning and affect and since the demands for care and love stemming from kinship's relationality are inexhaustible and the boundaries of its inclusion are movable, they are perhaps infinitely extendible: 'It escapes laws that attempt to pin it down, that discuss and decide according to mutually exclusive choices: biological paternity or not, rights or no rights, one right but not another' (Lambek, 2013: 256).

The articles address the affective dimensions of kinship moralities as political by thinking with, rather than against institutions, which tend to reproduce normativity. As Lauren Berlant points out, this thinking with and beyond conventional categories and boundaries addresses 'processes of labor, longing, memory, fantasy, grief, acting out, and sheer psychic creativity through which people constantly (consciously, unconsciously, dynamically) renegotiate the terms of reciprocity that contour their historical situation' (Berlant, 2011: 53). Perhaps herein lies the key to the power of kinship to capture both imagination and affect, and to provide visions – even utopias – and offer profoundly alternative futures.

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Notes

1. This issue is based on the panel 'Kinship and the Politics of Responsibility' that took place as part
   of the ASA annual conference on 'Responsibility' held online 29 March - 1 April 2021. We are
   grateful to all presenters and our discussants Janet Carsten and Nayanika Mookherjee for their
   contributions at the time and to Frances Pine for thoughtful comments on the introduction.
2. We recognize that the category of 'woman' is and has been a subject of scrutiny and debate, from
   the early anthropology of gender through to feminist debates on intersectionality, and the more
   recent revisiting of questions regarding the tensions and overlaps between cultural definitions.
   Nevertheless, without pre-empting the contours or content of the category of 'woman', we argue
   that this category has important subjective and political trajectories and resonances. As Butler
   argues, challenging a unified identity of 'woman' makes it possible to articulate a more plural and
   diverse politics, 'responsive towards the demands of those excluded from political represen-
   tation' (cited in Kelz, 2016). This also implies approaching 'the political' in dialogue with the
   important challenges articulated by feminist and queer scholarship, as well as their associated
   politics, among others (Boyce et al., 2019; Butler, 1990; Davis et al., 2022; Gleeson and
   O'Rourke, 2021). In fact, our focus on kinship allows for a processual and relational under-
   standing of gendered experiences, one that emphasizes the multiple ways that caring for others,
   for example, may be the main way in which gender becomes relevant to struggles over re-
   productive justice that challenge hegemonic discourses on families. It is frequently through care
   that struggles over the redistribution of resources and social justice are expressed with reference
   to kinship terms and relations (Arruzza et al., 2019; Greene, 2021; Weston, 1997 [1991]).
3. The reproduction of life beyond divisions between private and public has been analysed by
   scholars who chart the making and unmaking of kinship and argue for the need to theorize social
   reproduction beyond the question of labour and its visibility in order to acknowledge the many
   spaces where relatedness sits, even under capitalism. Kinship, reproductive work and kin-like
   institutions, for example caste, have been shown to be part of wider formations of production and
   reproduction. For example, scholars working on South Asia have shown that labour relations are
   reproduced through caste networks that draw on notions of kinship, and that capitalism relies on
   specific kinds of relatedness appropriate to specific forms of production. But scholarship on caste
   also explains how kinship moralities that emphasize mutuality transcend specific forms of
   production – weaving textiles for global markets, growing tea on plantations, mobilizing capital

for entrepreneurs – that may depend on notions of caste, building on networks of kin which enable the system and may extend across regional and national boundaries (see, for example, Chari, 2004; De Neve, 2008; Raj, 2023).

4. The lens of kinship provides a way to challenge ideas about different kinds of work and their relation to reproductive activities and life-making, as is evident in accounts of the complex registers of love and care found in, for example, contemporary Cuban economies of desire and sex work (Stout, 2014). Theorized further, the lens of kinship challenges simplistic notions of reproductive labour in the context of queer studies, as discussed by Andrucki (2017), in an account of queer intimacies as they are made and unmade in multiple publics and neighbourhoods as a mode of survival (see also Floyd, 2009). All of the above emphasizes the need to engage with relationality as fundamentally networked socialities in the sense that Latour (2007) has suggested, which also allows the foregrounding of connections with non-human actors.

5. The reliance of some political strategies on state institutions, sometimes including the repressive state apparatus, reminds us of Audre Lorde's (1984) highly significant warnings about the traps, dangers and limitations of using the master's tools to fight oppression.

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