

Doing, Undoing, and Redoing “Family” in Uncertain Times: Kinship as a Site of Struggle, Resistance, and Hope

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In *Relations: An Anthropological Account* (2020), Margaret Strathern argues that relations has always been a dominant concept in anthropology. Our interest in relations including the connective, the disjunctive, the ambivalent, and the affective perhaps stems from our ontological interest in how people relate to one another (or not) and how relations are defined. Central to this inquiry is a focus on kinship, as discussed in our opening commentary by Pamela Downe who reflects upon the history of the anthropology of kinship and its changing inquiries over the past century. In “Decolonizing Relatedness and Kinship: Kyle’s Grandchildren,” Downe illuminates important anthropological shifts from structures of kinship to more personal, intimate, and collective senses of relatedness. Looking to locally and personally meaningful relations can help, according to Downe, to “decolonize the narrow definitions of family.” This becomes an important starting point for this issue of *NEOS*.

The anthropology of kinship in this contemporary moment combines classical questions in the discipline about how family is “done” as well as pressing concerns about how family may be “undone” amid precarity, violence, or resistance to heteropatriarchy. Several commentaries and original research articles explore what it means to define and “do family,” while several others examine what happens amid familial complexity and the challenges of “undoing family” or “redoing family” after it has been undone. Margaret K. Nelson explains that “how we ‘do family’ depends on the normative expectations for our particular social group as defined by such variables as class, race/ethnicity, religion, community, region of the country, and sexual orientation” (2020, 7). Drawing on anthropological sensibilities, definitions and formations of family vary through practice and are always locally situated, upending normative biocentric, legal, nuclear, or heterosexual explanations of kinship.

Several contributions to this issue of *NEOS* engage in these discussions of “doing family” through localized practices that meaningfully bring people into relations with one another. Michelle M. Jacob and Leilani Sabzalian speak to the significance of decolonizing and indigenizing kinship in the classroom in “Reclaiming Indigenous Kinship Education: Lessons from the Sapsik^wafá Program.” Jacob and Sabzalian showcase how Indigenous kinship systems, while heterogenous, often consider relations beyond the human by recognizing the connection to land, water, and more. While settler-colonialism violently tried to sever these connections, Jacob and Sabzalian show that Indigenous kinship persists. They reveal how Indigenous kinship is enacted among Indigenous

teachers-in-training and how this knowledge can be embodied and practiced in future classrooms through a return to love and care. An author interview follows that brings forward further dialogue about possibilities for practicing Indigenous kinship with students.

Further considering global inequalities, Cheryll Alipio speaks to migrant domestic workers' experiences of supporting families in Hong Kong amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Domestic workers, while already precarious and vulnerable workers, were all the more essential during the pandemic. At the same time, their work and autonomy became even more challenged by pandemic-related restrictions on mobility. Alipio considers the "linked lives" these women experienced through their work in Hong Kong and with their families back home, reflecting upon the "intricate and intimate nature of these interdependent and intergenerational" relations that were affected by the (im)mobility of the pandemic.

How kinship is cultivated in old and new ways is further explored by Naoki Asada in "Doing Household": An Anthropological Study on Adoptive Family in Romania" and by Stephania Rovira Ochoa and Anastasia Badder in "Food and Family: Cultivating Kinship through Cooking in Times of Uncertainty." Asada illuminates how Romanian adoptive families employ a rural and indigenous concept of "doing household" in the effort to cultivate kinship with a newly adopted child. Asada reveals that in the Romanian context, "doing family" is particularized through active engagement between parents and child within the space of the household. Asada also reveals how the parties involved — parents and children — may have different desires and investments in cultivating kinship through "doing household," thus working to form family (or not) sometimes on different terms.

Rovira Ochoa and Badder similarly examine the spaces and practices that are activated to cultivate kinship among international students in Luxembourg. Here, culinary practices reflect senses of home as one shares a familiar recipe and meal with peers. Food also becomes an opportunity to learn about others' lives. Cooking is not only a way to engage in a common activity surrounding food and the senses, but cooking is also a means to provide care for one another through serving a meal — an event that takes on particular meaning amid the social uncertainty of living abroad.

In "Queering Kinship: Biopolitics, the Death Function, and Transcendent Capacity," Ari Gzesh theorizes how trans and gender-expansive youth cultivate queer kinship as a means to persist against the death function of biopolitics. From a Foucauldian perspective, Gzesh illustrates how gender and sexual minority youth have been subjected to neglect or even death at both the bodily and population levels through, for example, poor state responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Queer kinship or a "queer family tree" is one means that these young people have to resist and transcend the death function of the state and cultivate relations of healing. Gzesh offers a model of this "transcendent capacity" for researchers to think with as well as an author interview to further expand on the model's applicability to a range of contexts that concern queer young people.

While some contributions explore the doing of family, other contributions in this issue invite readers to consider the ways in which family and kinship relations are undone through crisis, challenges, shifts, separations, and transitions, many of which occur under or due to conditions of precarity. Amidst uncertain and unequal times, many families live under constant threat of undoing from systems and policies. Cheryl Rodriguez's commentary explores one example of how families survive amidst constant threats of undoing, particularly in relation to the core need of housing and safe shelter. The home represents not only a core human need, but also a tangible and concrete structure through which people come together to form kinship and community through proximity. Rodriguez's research makes visible the work of Black mothers in the US state of Florida as they respond to threats of undoing from systems and policies that obstruct access to affordable, safe housing for their families. Recognizing the family not as a stand-alone unit, but as one part of a complex constellation of community, Rodriguez highlights the role of social support and community activism as strategies "to push back against social, political and policy issues that threaten to 'un-do' families and communities."

Like Rodriguez's commentary, the article from Shelene Gomes, Antonia Mungal, and Krystal Gopeesingh works to make visible the "unwaged and undervalued labor" required for the ongoing 'doing' of family and social relationships in Trinidad and Tobago. Their article explores kinship responsibilities and caregiving at the intersections of race, gender, and culture, referred to by the authors as "social reproduction in precarious times." In particular, the authors contend that the unpaid or undervalued labor of women, especially professional women who return to Trinidad to fulfill socially expected caregiving roles, is essential to the "reproduction of social life." However, through positioning this caregiving as an expected norm, the societal conditions necessitating such familial obligations become obscured. The authors conclude, "Within this context, the work is not accounted for, reminding us how work for society becomes framed as love for the family, highlighting the contradictions between values and value."

Sebastian Jackson's article offers another exploration of threats of undoing created by systems, policies, and structures. Examining how families are undone through racist policies and practices, Jackson explores Sara's retrospective on her childhood in South Africa through the significant transformations of the 1990s. Historicizing the present, Jackson reminds readers that the present is merely a moment in a larger historical arc, and that shifts in ethnoracial boundaries over time must be navigated not only at the political and societal levels but also at the personal and interpersonal levels and in everyday life. Sara's story reveals that while no longer legally enforced, the Apartheid's legacy of racism and discrimination continues to threaten the creation and construction of families in South Africa.

Through undoing prompted by crisis, challenge, and uncertainty, family remains a site of hope, and the potential of redoing emerges. Mădălina Alamă's article on the complex negotiation of

family relations through opiate addiction recovery explores the notion that undoing may at times lead to redoing. Alamã's contribution encourages readers to consider: After disruptions in physical proximity and emotional closeness, what is necessary for redoing family and living a "good life"? For Mick and Hailey, a young couple in substance use treatment in the US state of Nevada, their struggle with opiate addiction led to their family being undone, resulting in both physical and emotional distance between them and their children. For this family, living a good life meant having opportunities to demonstrate that they exist for one another. With time, vulnerability, and healing, this family was able to "re/visit family relationships and re/connect with family."

Finally, Sandra Castro's article offers another perspective on redoing family and connecting or reconnecting after disruptions in physical proximity and emotional closeness. Castro explores the experiences of Central American mothers reunifying with their children in the US after years of separation. Though the separation was one of physical distance, it necessarily also invoked emotional distance. While in the US, many mothers had additional children, meaning that when their children joined them from Central America, they were joining blended families. Castro examines families in flux and the precarious nature of hope, offering "ambiguous reunification" as a term to remind readers that coming together also involves the loss of other kinship connections, such as grandparents, and the negotiation of shifts in autonomy and the relationship between self and others. Castro highlights mothers' reflections on the differential and unequal opportunities available to their children depending on their birthplace while also recognizing caregiving as a shared responsibility that increases a sense of bonding and connection, particularly among siblings.

Together, the collection of articles in this issue of *NEOS* encourage readers to consider doing, undoing, and redoing family as an ongoing, dynamic, and complex process shaped by experiences within and outside the family or kinship system. As families persist through uncertainty and inequality, the contributions in this issue offer examples and examinations of how people take up shared responsibilities for participating in the creation, maintenance, and persistence of social relations, kinship systems, and community.

We end our editorial introduction to this issue of *NEOS* with a quote that speaks to the long tradition of Black, queer, and socialist communities fostering diverse family formations to enable persistence, resistance, love, and hope across all kindred:

In 1979, at the National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference, where Audre Lorde gave the keynote speech, a caucus of lesbians agreed on the statement: "All children of lesbians are ours," a socialist context for mothering, where children are not individual property but rather reminders of the context through which community exists. This means that 'mothering' is a queer thing. Not just when people who do not identify as heterosexual give birth to or adopt children and parent them, but all day long and everywhere when we

acknowledge the creative power of transforming ourselves and the ways we relate to each other. Because we were never meant to survive and here we are creating a world full of love. (Gumbs 2016, 23)

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