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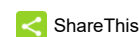
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TALKING ABOUT KINSHIP



EIRINI PAPADAKI, HSIAO-CHIAO CHIU,
JANET CARSTEN, KOREEN M. REECE &
SIOBHAN MAGEE

How, as anthropologists, should we be talking about kinship? Adam Kuper (2018) has recently asserted that ‘remarkably few anthropologists’ are doing so at all – or doing so in a way that he recognises. It is certain that, over the decades, the terms of the conversation have changed. This change can be traced not just to the influence of David Schneider and Marshall Sahlins, whom Kuper cites, but, amongst other disciplinary shifts, to more than forty years of feminist scholarship in anthropology, which has recentered the conversation on the messy, mundane ways kinship is made and experienced. While we agree that kinship merits a higher profile in contemporary anthropological research, in this light, the reasons Kuper gives for its marginalisation seem curious. By way of a rejoinder, we report in this article on an on-going programme of research into global transformations of marriage, currently being undertaken in five geographically disparate and socially distinct contexts.^[1]

What does it mean to marry, to be married, or to stay married – or not – over time? How do those of different genders reflect on these different states and experiences? How are marriages located in a particular place and at a particular historical moment? How do they trace and produce continuity or rupture between generations, and connections and disjunctions between the personal, familial, and the wider social and political sphere? Our projects investigate these questions, and others, respectively in terms of legal and religious contestation over marriage in Virginia, USA; the planning and arranging of marriage across changing politico-economic regimes in Jinmen, Taiwan, on the border with China; the resilience and transformation of marriage during an era of political flux and economic austerity in Athens, Greece; emerging forms of middle class marriage in a context of diverse ethnicities and religions in Penang, Malaysia; and the role of marriage in the management and production of social change in the shadow of Botswana’s ongoing HIV/Aids epidemic.

Our research is explicitly an experiment in anthropology’s ‘impossible method’ (Candea 2019): comparison. In this experiment, we build on other recent comparative accounts of marriage, like that undertaken by Holly Wardlow *et al*

(2009) in *The Secret*, or by Julia Pauli, Rijk van Dijk (2016) *et al* in their recent special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*. We suggest there is value in a comparative project of kinship – or any other anthropological topic – that is not about identifying (or generating) prototypes, universal theories, or meta-narratives (pace Kuper 2018; see Fox & Gingrich 2002), but in which insights from one field open up questions or possibilities for others. We have found that juxtaposing quite different contexts – different countries, different historical moments, different actors and institutions – casts them each in unusual new light, in ways that create a range of novel analytical possibilities rather than converging on similar conclusions (see Strathern 2002: xv).

Although not originally conceived in these terms, all our projects encompass histories of colonialism, political upheaval or civil war, and their aftermath. This shared historicity, and the continual re-envisioning of the future that such histories encourage, has initiated one productive line of conversation between the projects. This also hints at unexpected ways in which kinship ideals and practice echo across time and move between contexts, reshaping one another in the process. Indeed, the comparative study of marriage provides an especially apt means of tracing connections – but also of rethinking what ‘connection’ might mean, what it might emphasise or conceal, and what separations and exclusions it might involve (ibid.). Together, our projects ask: what connections are negotiated in marital practice, by whom, in what ways, with what legacies across history? What boundaries or limits have those connections produced or reinforced? And what do they tell us about specific places, their histories and futures, and social change more broadly?

The research seeks the sort of comparison made possible by drawing together themes, or ‘domains’, that modernist projects in the social sciences are accustomed to separating – kinship, politics, religion, economics, history, law, and so forth – and attending to the ways in which they blur together, and are actively merged or separated in lived experience and practice (McKinnon and Cannell 2013). We take kinship, not simply as a symbolic order, nor as a form of social organisation that is ‘really about’ something else, but as mundane, untidy, consequential and widely shared experience in which these domains interact, making it uniquely suited to understanding how they are produced, linked and distinguished in everyday life. In this sense, kinship is also a key context for examining the ethical work that suffuses everyday experiences (Das 2018). By taking this approach, we engage the project set out in Susan McKinnon and Fenella Cannell’s *Vital Relations*, to demonstrate how kinship animates and permeates these domains – in self-consciously ‘modern’ societies as much as anywhere else.

The following sections each offer an insight into ongoing ethnographic research on these questions and possibilities. Holding families, religious and state actors, businesses and NGOs in the same frame, they draw together and move between questions about the way families situate themselves in social history through marital tales; about wedding businesses, bridewealth economies, and the effects of austerity programmes; about the changing letter and practice of law, and of ritual forms of recognition; about the ways gender, ethnicity, and religion are reproduced and contested in marital strategy and practice; and about the legacies of civil war, the Cold War, and colonialism. They explore how marriage blends and navigates memories of the past, present experience, and imaginations of the future, in ways that drive socio-political change. Between us, we provide a glimpse into the ways anthropologists from a variety of regional and thematic backgrounds are currently talking about kinship, and a reminder of the vast scope of ethnographic work upon which those discussions are built – as well as an invitation to join the conversation.

Botswana *Koreen M. Reece*

'We're not in trouble; we're at a wedding!' the emcee exclaimed. The guests hesitated. 'Agh!' she admonished them, at which a few of the women started ululating, others joining them with mixed conviction.

I was late. I ducked in under the edge of the vast white tent, pitched at the edge of the *kgotla*, and took up a seat at a half-empty table in the corner. The rest of the tables were filled with women wearing stylish dresses or white shawls and blue skirts, men in suit jackets or working overalls. At most of them there was at least one woman in an elaborate white gown, a man next to her in a new suit and tie.

The head table was populated by an unusually influential cast of characters: the village chief, the District Administrator, the director of a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), and the Minister of Local Government. The emcee was introducing the Minister as *mmarona*, our mother, and she stood up by her seat in an elaborately-tailored blue German-print dress and matching hat to give the keynote speech. After welcoming the guests and congratulating the new brides and grooms on their beauty and their decision to wed, she commended the work of the NGO that had arranged the mass wedding – not for money or fame, but out of a sincere desire to help people realise their life goals, secure their children's futures, and to strengthen the fraying moral fabric of the nation. '*Motheo wa lelwapa ke one go agang sechaba*,' she concluded; the foundation of the home is the one on which the nation is built.

After the keynote address, the District Administrator (DA) stood up, beaming broadly, and invited the youngest couple to be married to come stand in front of him. A cameraman repositioned a massive television camera to catch their faces, which they held carefully. Each swore in turn, repeating after the DA, that they were not married and knew of no reason they were not able to marry the other. Then he invited them to exchange rings, and to say whatever they would like to each other; nervous, they said nothing, but simply slipped their rings on to each other's fingers. With mischievous delight, the DA commanded them to kiss, which they did shyly amid the catcalling and provocations of the guests; and then he proclaimed them married, handing them their official certificate to the applause and ululation of the gathered crowd.

After the first couple, the DA took his seat, and rattled through the rest in quick succession. Eight couples had come to be married. Two clerks sat at a nearby table, dashing out certificates and slipping them into envelopes, one after another. With each couple, a new set of young relatives would slip in behind the DA to take pictures and videos with their phones, as the other guests shouted encouragement, laughed at the subtexts of some couples' impromptu vows, or grew restless waiting for the coming meal.

The mass wedding was held in a small village not far from the capital of Botswana, a landlocked country in the heart of southern Africa. Botswana is often described as 'Africa's miracle' for its political stability and economic success, but nonetheless faces one of the worst AIDS epidemics in the world. HIV infection rates have remained stubbornly high, in spite of extensive, innovative intervention by the state, local and international NGOs, and major donor agencies. Family breakdown is often cast as both the fundamental cause and most devastating effect of the epidemic. Limited anthropological attention has been paid to the effects of HIV/AIDS on marriage specifically – but, like family relationships of all kinds, it is assumed to be in crisis in Botswana. For decades, government reports have noted a low and declining marriage rate with concern, as a sign of social, moral, and cultural collapse. In periods where rates seem to be rebounding, as they have most recently,

concern shifts to purportedly skyrocketing divorce rates, with the same fears. Government, local NGOs, and churches alike have cast marriage as a panacea for HIV/AIDS and this apparent social decay (van Dijk 2010). And yet, marriage has also become a particularly fraught and frequent site for new infections (Smith 2009; Wardlow et al. 2009). Marriage, then, not only provides a unique perspective on the ways that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has affected the practice and experience of kinship, but this context highlights the transformative potential of marriage in turn.

My project examines the ways marriage in Botswana generates, mediates, and shapes social change, in the context of pandemic disease and widespread intervention. It builds on fifteen years' involvement with families, social workers, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Botswana, which I undertook first as a development worker, and later as an ethnographer. It is guided, in part, by my doctoral research, which argued that every means of making family – including marriage (Reece 2019) – generates *dikgang*, or conflict and crisis; and that in their negotiation and irresolution, crisis and conflict constitute, sustain, and recalibrate kin relationships, rather than simply disrupting or destroying them. Families, in this sense, may be especially well-equipped to absorb and respond to crises like the AIDS epidemic; and interventions, which read crisis and its effects quite differently, may be reworking Tswana kinship practice and personhood in much more lasting, problematic ways than the epidemic itself.

Moving between intimate family contexts, state policies and practice, the discourse and daily work of NGOs, and the archives, this project, like its predecessor, works from the premise that each of these domains is perhaps best understood through the others. I have attended family meetings to negotiate marriages, and have sat wrapped in a blanket in the blazing sun while women give a new bride 'the law' of married life. I have participated in several weddings, at the District Commissioner's office, at church, and at home, as a photographer, driver, prep cook, server, and even – once or twice – as a guest. And I have spent time with individuals and couples, social workers and NGO founders, men and women of different generations, discussing relationships, anticipating wedding celebrations, and reflecting on married life.

Over the past two years, I have observed a sudden surge of weddings, with an astonishing number of young people getting married more quickly than ever – often in spite of their parents', aunts' and uncles' apparent inability to do so, and in spite of the prohibitive costs involved. In the village where much of my work is focused, young people orphaned by the epidemic seem to have met the most success in marrying, perhaps *because* of the absence of their parents. Paradoxically, HIV and AIDS may be a key factor in strengthening and diversifying families over time; and marriage may prove one means of social creativity in times of crisis.

My initial reading of this potential creativity is that it is grounded in the ways that Tswana marriage preserves ambiguity – a key historical characteristic (Comaroff and Roberts 1977) that persists, if in different forms and timescapes (van Dijk 2010; Solway 2016). Ambiguity provides fertile ground for social change. Even as the ritual dimensions of weddings, for example, are condensed and rearranged, foreshortened in time and inflated in cost and flair, they seem to reproduce ambiguity and ambivalence, as much as resolve it. The NGO wedding combined several rituals that were often held separately – the legal ceremony usually held at the DA's office, the ceremony some villages held at their *kgotla*, and the family feast – while sidelining others, especially the presentation of *bogadi* (bridewealth) and *patlo*, both of which are often described as definitive of a 'Setswana wedding'. In this multiplication of rituals,

which can be separated, combined, rearranged, or sometimes foregone, there is a multiplication of interpretive possibility with direct implications for the lived experience of married life. Friends in my village, where a mass wedding similar to the one described above had also been held, had mixed feelings about what it meant in the absence of bridewealth, what couples would do if they encountered disputes, and whether it didn't encourage the mockery of the elderly couples marrying – though they also saw its potential for clarifying children's inheritance rights. While government, NGOs, churches, and families alike deploy marriage with the explicit aim of generating social change, then, they perhaps overestimate the predictability or malleability of the change it creates.

Similar unexpected ambiguities are produced around *molao*, or customary law – which takes disputes about pregnancy and marriage as perhaps its primary object, but is also transmitted and transformed through marital practice. The primary aim of *patlo* – a term which may be used to describe the negotiations surrounding marriage, or the advice given to each spouse at their wedding – is *go fiwa molao*, to give the law. In my region, married women gathered around the bride in a secret session from which men, unmarried women, and children were banned, to advise her in whispers about how to behave as a woman and wife. But this advice varies among *merafe*, or tribal polities, and over time; and as they were whispering, women occasionally took it upon themselves to offer new 'law' altogether. The law was given to men in the same way, and underpinned their right to participate in the negotiation of further weddings or family disputes, and broader community disputes, such that what was transmitted and reinterpreted at a wedding might come to reshape customary law in wider practice. And this observation may hold for the common law as well: at the mass wedding above, the Minister introduced and explained the full range of common law relevant to marriage, as the District Administrator customarily does in his pre-wedding sessions with spouses-to-be. In both cases, marriage provides a site in which the family, *morafe* (tribe), and state are both linked and distinguished, and in which opportunities to create change in those configurations emerge.

Bridewealth, or *bogadi*, has remained a defining feature of Tswana marriage across generations of significant social change, in spite of vocal contestation and widespread complaint about the economic barriers it creates for spouses who wish to marry. But even its resilience may be a matter of diversity of practice and versatility of interpretation, historically and contemporarily – ambiguities that make it subject to extensive, often fraught, negotiation. Considered primarily in terms of debt instead of exchange, the changing patterns of who owes what to whom for bridewealth traces shifting intergenerational and gendered relationships among kin, as well as shifting relationships with friends, workplaces, banks and lending institutions – all with potentially significant implications for how marriage is experienced, sustained, and might be negotiated for others in the future.

In Botswana, then, marriage may produce a range of significant opportunities for creativity and change – not just for individuals and families, but for communities, organisations, and for the nation. The man who would become Botswana's first president, Seretse Khama, triggered the tumultuous series of political events that would finally lead to the country's independence from colonialism in 1966 by marrying a white English woman, Ruth Williams. Their marriage was achieved against the obdurate opposition of the British colonial powers. More than a fluke of historical circumstance or personal charisma, that potential for socio-political change may lie, at least in part, in the ambiguities of Tswana marriage practice itself: in the unpredictable ways it traverses and reconfigures the domains of family, economics, politics, and religion, both

locally and globally.

Jinmen, Taiwan *Hsiao-Chiao Chiu*

When I moved to Jinmen – a group of islands lying a few miles offshore of southeast China – for my doctoral research in the autumn of 2013, the peak season for marriages had just begun. I watched as women in the patrilineage-dominated village helped kin who were expecting a wedding to distribute biscuits in celebration to all the village households. After befriending some villagers, I was invited to several wedding feasts, in which every household in the village had at least one person present. At that time of year, and again in the spring, the newly-married men of the village were also expected to attend and undertake certain roles in the ritual worship of the patrilineage's common ancestors in the ancestral hall, symbolizing the full attainment of their lineage membership. Several months after the first time I observed that ritual, I worked with village women to distribute auspicious food, including glutinous oily rice and a sweet rice cake, to celebrate the birth of a baby boy, whose father had served in the ancestral ritual I had witnessed.

These customs, and the kinship-oriented networking they involve, are observable across the islands, though the details vary between patrilineages. Despite changes in their materiality, these customs have been sustained through the political and military turmoil of the twentieth century, which reconfigured Jinmen's relationships with both the Chinese mainland and the island of Taiwan (see Chiu 2017). These cultural continuities appear to confirm marriage's traditional role in maintaining the cycles of patrilineage reproduction and sociality, and, in turn, a patriarchal, family-based social order.

Nevertheless, over the course of two long-term periods of fieldwork (2013-2014 and 2017-2018), the marriage stories of multiple generations that I heard and collected suggest a constant tension between efforts to reproduce the patriarchal order, and attempts to challenge that order – both enacted through marriage. This tension had particular expressions in three distinctive political-economic contexts through which the Jinmen islanders have lived — the time of local men's labour migration to Southeast Asia in the early twentieth century, the period of military rule (1949-1992), against the backdrop of the Cold War, and the contemporary moment of democratisation. My project seeks to unravel not only how changing political circumstances provoked certain forms of marriage in the above three periods respectively, but also how multiple and mutually contradictory ideas about marriage informed and configured social change.

In the 1920s, Lin, at the age of thirteen, followed his male seniors in migrating from Jinmen to Southeast Asia, where the Western colonial powers had substantial need of low-wage labourers. This male-centred migration began in the mid-nineteenth century, following the Chinese empire's loss of the war to the British in 1842, and the opening of five Chinese ports for foreign trade, including Xiamen – a port to which the Jinmen islanders commuted frequently. But before Lin went abroad via Xiamen, his mother found a *tongyangxi* for him – a girl adopted by his parents to be a wife for him when they were both of age. When Lin turned eighteen years old, his mother hurried him back by means of several letters, in which she overcame her illiteracy by using drawings to indicate a wedding. As a young labourer, Lin earned very little and had to borrow money from his fellow-countrymen for his return, and for the wedding too. Nevertheless, a few months after the wedding, Lin left his wife and aged parents for Southeast Asia again, in the hopes of improving his family's livelihood by continuing to work abroad.

Lin's experiences of labour migration and *tongyangxi* marriage were shared by

many poor male islanders of both his and previous generations, as well as by the poor men of southern China (see Chen 2011[1939]; Oxfeld 2005). While the practice of *tongyangxi* was not new in early twentieth-century Chinese societies, its popularity among poor migrants, and the parental intervention involved in arranging this form of marriage, suggest anxieties over the migrants' long-term absence from home – a threat to the preservation of the agnatic line. In juxtaposition to the popular *tongyangxi* marriage, which manifested parents' authority and women's submission, the migrant economy nourished a new generation of educated men and women who echoed the May Fourth Movement in the newly-built Republic of China, arguing for gender equality and marriage based on free choice and love. They tried to marry someone of their own choice and adopted simplified forms of marital ritual, so as to critique and reform the traditional patriarchal system, which they felt suppressed individual emotions and reproduced gender inequalities.

Labour migration ceased in the mid-twentieth century, following the Chinese civil war and the Kuomintang (KMT or Nationalist Party) retreat to the island of Taiwan and some smaller islands (including Jinmen). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began building the People's Republic of China in 1949. Because of Jinmen's proximity to China, the small island was of prominent military significance in Cold War geopolitics, and the KMT reshaped it into an anti-communist frontline, building a system of military rule there. The KMT also assigned a remarkable number of troops to defend the islands from CCP attack. The huge presence of soldiers, which far outnumbered the local population, generated economic incentives for civilians, but also threats to the local marriage market.

Numerous local households initiated small businesses providing food, goods and services to the troops, and local women, both old and young, were usually the primary operators. Young women, through their gainful employment outside the home, encountered various men from outside and began striving for the autonomy to decide their own life and marriages, including the option of marrying a soldier. As more and more local women, including younger widows, married soldiers from China or Taiwan, with or without their natal families' support, a felt crisis in the scarcity of local brides triggered a sharp rise in the brideprice that local men were requested to pay to their parents-in-law for a bride. The rise in brideprice, in turn, provoked a new way of arranging marriage – a report in the local newspaper in 1962 described two local men marrying each other's younger sister so as to save the payment of brideprice.

Changing relations among the US, China, and Taiwan from the 1970s signaled the gradual dissociation of Taiwan from the global Cold War. Domestic political movements for democratisation in the 1980s ultimately led to the repeal of martial law in Taiwan in 1987, and in Jinmen in 1992. The governments of Taiwan and China gradually broadened the scope of communication between their citizens. Nowadays, residents of Jinmen visit China frequently and have re-established their religious, economic, and kinship ties across the border. Alongside these contacts, informal channels for brokering marriage between the men of Jinmen and the women of rural China emerged. In the early 2000s, an old man from Jinmen, Huang, made up his mind to find a Chinese bride for his eldest son, who was in his late twenties and did not have a stable job. Through his Jinmen relatives, Huang got in touch with a matchmaker in China. He then took his son to China to meet a woman recommended by the matchmaker, and his son and the woman got married after a few months of courtship. Huang paid all the expenses related to his son's marriage, including the brideprice, the administration fees for the cross-border marriage, and the wedding feast in Jinmen.

The rapid growth of cross-border marriage in Jinmen reflected a general trend

observed across Taiwan, Japan and South Korea from the 1990s, where many men staying in their rural homes had difficulty in finding a local bride or a bride from urban areas, and turned to the neighbouring, economically less advantaged, countries to look for a wife (Constable 2005; Wang & Hsiao 2009; Freeman 2011; Friedman 2015). But, instead of the heavy reliance on commercial matchmaking services for cross-border marriage observable in other places, in Jinmen these marriages usually involved the active intervention of both the groom's and the bride's relatives or friends. These informal matchmaking channels resembled the old pattern of arranging marriage between Jinmen and the region of southeast China prior to 1949. While some parents intervened effectively in their sons' marriages, as in Huang's case, some parents' intervention was totally rejected by their children, who questioned the necessity of marriage in their life at all. These questioning voices were not just prompted by young people's, especially women's, greatly increased access to higher education, professional careers, and mobility, but conveyed their mixed feelings of aspiration and uncertainty about their futures in a rapidly changing world.

The above instances suggest that across these historical moments, anxieties about a man's marriage were inseparable from the Chinese kinship moralities of filial piety and parental duty—both linked to a patriline's longevity. These concerns were usually cited by my informants to justify a marital arrangement, such as *tongyangxi* and cross-border marriage, in a specific political-economic context. Changing circumstances not only exacerbated anxieties about extending the patriline, but also encouraged voices and practices challenging the patriarchal and family-centred ideology that structured gender inequalities and suppressed individual interests and emotions (see Yan 2003). The constant tension between family-arranged and individually-centred marital decisions across the past century problematizes the lineal, progressive understanding of family transformation toward democratisation in modern times (Giddens 1998). It also unsettles the view of marriage as a functional institution through which the patriarchal order is reproduced. By focusing on people's experiences of marriage across multiple generations in Jinmen, my project teases out the differences and even contradictions between people's experiences, and the ways they were entwined with broader political contexts, in which domestic and foreign political forces all endeavoured to impose their own models of social order. I show how marriage constitutes an arena of contestation, reflection and creativity for different actors – an individual of marriageable age, his/her parents, and the state – each of whom has a particular imagination of the future that they expect marriage to bring about. I will also show how marriage is not merely concerned with the personal and the familial, but also with the political at local, domestic and international levels. The making and enhancing of ties between the people of Jinmen and China through marriage, for instance, not only affected social policies for the Chinese spouses of Jinmen's local government, but has also complicated Jinmen's role in the thorny relationship between Taiwan and China. Marriage, as well as kinship, is thus both constituted by, and constitutive of, the configuration of political order within and beyond Jinmen.

Athens, Greece *Eirini Papadaki*

In October of 2018, I was having a coffee in the apartment of Elpida, my neighbour, a retired, widowed teacher in her seventies who lives with her son. We drank our coffee and discussed her marriage and life in her living room, the TV on in the background. When the national television news came on, we stopped talking, and she picked up the remote control to turn up the volume. We watched together as the news reported on the country's austerity measures and negotiations with the European Union, and then on the murder

of Zak Kostopoulos, a prominent LGBTQI activist and drag queen, in the middle of Athens in broad daylight. At first, Greek media reported that Zak had lost his life as the result of an attempted robbery. But then videos from the scene revealed that he had been accidentally locked in a jewellery shop, and, while attempting to get out, was beaten to death by the shop owner and police in front of dozens of witnesses. Mass protests had been sparked across the city. 'Are we becoming animals?' Elpida asked me. 'How did we get here?'

Watching the daily news in Greece is often a study in the country's tremendous political contradictions. On the one hand, under the SYRIZA government, a leftist public discourse has emerged, denouncing homophobia, institutionalising same-sex cohabitation and migrants' rights; but on the other hand, the neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn has risen in prominence, and perpetrated criminal acts, including murders and a pogrom against refugees and migrants. Elpida's disappointment and confusion with life in contemporary Athens, and her empathy and sympathy for Zak, a drag queen, in one moment rendered explicit the changing face of Greece.

Forty years ago, Elpida gave birth to twins, a girl and a boy. The girl, now a woman, has since married and had three small children. She works as a teacher in a private school, and her husband is an architect in a big construction company. The 'boy', however, was still staying with his mother, in his childhood room. In the past, he had studied at a school of graphic art. He had worked for a few years, but by the time of our interview, he had been unemployed for five years and was economically dependent on his mother. Two years previously, he had been diagnosed with depression and prescribed pharmaceutical treatment. I had met him many times in the neighbourhood and I was impressed by his friendliness and politeness. But his mother's narration was full of sorrow: 'What kind of life is that? He is a forty-year-old man. And he hasn't done anything. He doesn't have a family, children, work. When I die who will take care of him? He is no one. I feel so sorry for him.'

From the first ethnographic surveys in rural areas of Greece (Friedl 1962; Campbell 1964), marriage has been framed as the basic rite of passage into adulthood. Especially for women, it has been 'the absolute condition for having children and raising a family' (Papataxiarchis 2013: 221; see also du Boulay 1974; Hirschon 1978; Dubisch 1986). Nuclear households were, as Evthymios Papataxiarchis put it, the key metaphor of 'order, safety and happiness', and gave individuals 'the most viable cultural option according to which the self as a member of a corporate, conjugal group is entitled to a place in the wider community and to all the prerogatives that follow this recognition' (2013: 223). Papataxiarchis observed that, although Greece was undergoing major demographic, political and social changes from the 1970s through the 1990s, which influenced Greek notions of kinship and gender, the dominant cultural model of nuclear marital households did not seem to have changed significantly. In the 1990s, making families – nuclear families – was still the basic desire and goal for adults in Athens (Paxson 2004). This model seems to be extremely resilient even now; although other forms of relating and creating families are emerging and becoming visible, the statistical rates of alternative forms of kinship are extremely low compared to other European countries (Kantsa 2014). Are Greeks conservative? Why aren't there more single-person households? Why don't they divorce more? Social scientists in Greece are preoccupied with these questions. But while the model of the nuclear household seems to persist, so many other things are changing in Greece that, inside those households, the possibility of change is being re-imagined too. If alternative ways of creating families are acceptable, and if Greek imaginations of kinship are widening, why are the more traditional forms so resilient?

After we finished watching the news, Elpida told me, 'You should visit my

daughter as well. She has our whole family archive, photographs, books, letters. You will like her a lot, she has succeeded at so many things, and has managed to create a nice family.' When I visited the daughter's house, the walls were full of family photos, not only of her own children, but of her parents' life. Looking through her photo albums, I found that she had almost the entire family record. There were pictures of her parents' relatives and old photos of the entire kinship network. There were photos of her parents as small children in their villages, then at university, her mother pregnant, the marriage of her parents, and her grandmothers. It was as though these family albums were a miniature of modern Greece; I could see Greek history woven through the lives of three generations in those photographs. Marriage and family-making help people write and rewrite their own histories; but more than simply reflecting personal and social trajectories, they write families into the history of Greece (and this is especially the case for people who have been otherwise written out). The daughter, unlike the son, can continue this family story. She can 'relate' her mother and her dead father, place them in a narrative of social genealogy in Greece, and become part of this narration herself through her own marriage and motherhood. The daughter is the one who has kept family photos and family records, and has told stories about those photos to her children.

As I came to know this family better over time, I realized that Elpida's fear and anxiousness over her unmarried son were not so much about his status, but about her fear that if she dies while he is still so economically and psychologically vulnerable, he will lose the only safe place in which he can be looked after. The responsibility of kin to provide care is a deeply held, morally charged convention in Greece, where vulnerability – especially bodily vulnerability, illness and senility – was and is primarily an issue to be addressed by family. As for her daughter, Elpida was not only proud of her for getting married, having children, and conforming to the expectations of her gender; she was proud because her daughter had created a new family and extended her old one. Elpida acknowledged how much work her daughter had put into creating intimacy and kinship. Through this creative process, through marriage, Elpida's daughter was able to write her history into the history of her society, and make both her story and her family's story visible. Her brother also had a story, and carried a family history, but they had become invisible, difficult to write into the larger history of Greece without the trace of spouses and children. His story could not be transmitted, remembered, or reproduced. Marriage, then, seems to promise a well-recognised place from which people can write not only their daily lives, but their own social history, into the fabric of the history of Greece.

Virginia, USA *Siobhan Magee*

The Virginian strand of our project took place in the two cities of Charlottesville and Lynchburg. Charlottesville was generally thought of as a bucolic college town, a 'very safe' city and a 'progressive bubble' with a network of small businesses, historic sites, vineyards and microbreweries that drew a good deal of their takings from weddings. Lynchburg, in apparent contrast, was the birthplace of Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority. Historically, the politics of kinship has been a particularly pressing concern in Lynchburg (see Harding 2000). Falwell encouraged the 'religious right' to focus on issues such as gender, reproductive rights, and the rights and indeed acceptability of LGBTQ people.

And Lynchburg was often described to me as 'both geographically and culturally more Southern than Charlottesville'. What I found was a place that was much more diverse in its inhabitants, their views, and their 'values', as people put it, than the external stereotype of a somewhat homogeneous

community might suggest. Lynchburg has an important civil rights history, including being the home of Harlem Renaissance figure Anne Spencer. Its Diversity Center provides community and advice for LGBTQ people.

My fieldwork in the US had already been planned when Donald Trump was elected in late 2016. Unexpectedly, it took place in the immediate aftermath of the KKK rally in Charlottesville on 8th July, and the Unite the Right Rally on 11th and 12th August when far-right opponents of the City Council's proposed removal of a Jim Crow-era statue of Confederate leader Robert E. Lee descended on Emancipation Park. On August 12th, after the rally had finished, James Fields Jr., a 20 year old neo-Nazi from Ohio, drove a car into a crowd of counter-protesters as they walked through the Downtown Mall, murdering 32 year-old Heather Heyer.

I had not planned to focus on the complex history of 'race' in Virginia, but on the legal and religious contestation around same-sex marriage. The Marriage Equality judgment that was handed down by the Supreme Court in 2015 required all states to grant same-sex marriage rights. Rather than concentrating only on same-sex marriage, however, my intention was to explore how discussions and practices surrounding legal marriage might refract everyday experiences, and complicate accepted binaries, such as those between 'tradition' and 'innovation', 'queer' and 'straight'.

As part of my research, I spoke to the owners of many small businesses concerned with marriage: venue owners, wedding planners, photographers, caterers, outfitters, jewellers, florists, and entertainers, as well as to marriage officiants. It quickly became apparent that marriage cannot be separated from politics and economics. The officials who celebrate marriage often have other important social and political roles where they live and work. I interviewed such people about the rituals of wedding ceremonies at which they officiated, and about what made 'successful marriages'. I would often see them subsequently on television and in online and print media in their various capacities as religious leaders, law enforcement officials, or actual or retired politicians. In these roles, they were asked questions about forthcoming elections, and about what the 'legacies' of the Charlottesville rallies would be.

Virginia has a special place in the history of marriage law in the US. In this history, racial equality and LGBTQ rights are often explicitly connected. The Supreme Court's 1967 judgement in *Loving v. Virginia* overturned the mandates of all states to ban interracial marriages. This judgement was much cited in the 2015 Marriage Equality judgement of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which found prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying to be unconstitutional. That marriage, like kinship more generally, is political is not news to those who remember 'anti-miscegenation' laws (see Cashin 2017; Hunter 2017). To quote one Lynchburg woman, '[when in the early 1960s] we had friends of ours come to visit from out of state, a black man and white woman, a married couple, we had to sneak them into our house, in case someone reported them to the police.' Being in the South, I was told, meant living with difficult histories, and such histories manifested themselves in present-day inequalities and prejudices. When a Virginia politician is referred to in the media, their earlier stance on (same-sex) Marriage Equality is often noted. Marriage Equality is perhaps the key index for political affiliations on a 'socially progressive to socially conservative' spectrum, and for religious affiliations – although in my research I learned that many religious groups had supported same-sex marriage.

The status of marriage as 'a contested domain', as Faye Ginsburg described the 1980s abortion debate, also struck me when I met with businesspeople, or 'wedding professionals' as they are known in the US, such as venue owners,

wedding planners, photographers, caterers, and outfitters. In the last few years, news stories from both sides of the Atlantic have reported on the 'conscience' claims that bakeries have used to refuse their services to same-sex couples. During my fieldwork, the existence of 'LGBTQ-friendly' wedding guides evidenced how many engaged couples felt the threat of this discrimination. So too did vendors' reports of people telephoning ahead to a bakery 'to check if they would bake a cake with a rainbow inside', or to say to a bridal shop manager, 'we are *both* looking for dresses, is this a problem?'. However, the discussion, particularly within the evangelical milieu of Lynchburg, was a bit more complicated than reports of conscience claims might suggest. What often emerged was a picture of certain religious conceptions of 'what marriage is' clashing with federal and state legal definitions. But apparently overriding this picture was a belief in the moral worth of the free market and in prosperity. A key part of Jerry Falwell's doctrine was that the previously awkwardly-matched domains of Christianity and business should be brought together. The health of Main Street in Downtown Lynchburg (which like many US cities took a hit in the latter half of the 20th Century) is ensured through the entwined areas of fiscal health and moral health: jobs, 'crime prevention', pride, and indeed 'family'. It was common for people to do voluntary or charitable work. Discussing serving same-sex couples, many wedding vendors told me that they 'put their personal beliefs about marriage to the side' when doing business. As one man put it, 'if you don't want to serve a customer, then someone else will, and that just makes you look stupid. Business is business.' This belief in the inherent morality of making money was particularly intense because weddings were the 'bread and butter' of many local businesses. Exploring the multiple links between marriage and economics thus called into question broad distinctions such as between 'progressive' and 'conservative'. Marriage can reveal something about diverging political opinion, and about local ideas about the economy. But the nature of these ideas is far from predictable, which is surely what makes marriage, an institution that 'hides in plain sight', particularly suitable for anthropological exploration.

And then there was the question, extremely pressing to just about everybody I met, of 'how to make a marriage work'. The present moment in US history may well be remembered as one of remarkable fear and division (even as the historical agonies it frequently indexes, especially in the South, should surely keep nostalgia at bay). As historian Nancy Cott has argued, marriage, with all the questions it poses about 'how to get along', can be a convenient analogue for the US nation. And indeed, during fieldwork there sometimes seemed to be something distinctly 'American' in people's optimistic view that strategizing, creating routines, and trying out new theories could hold the key to happy relationships. To merely mention marriage seemed to raise the question, 'how should I treat my spouse if we are to be together "forever"?' When inspecting my immigration papers one of the times I entered the US, an official whom I had told I was researching marriage advised without missing a beat, 'speak softly to each other: for me, that's been the secret to 25 years of marriage'. Quite familiar pieces of advice, such as 'never go to bed on an argument', were joined by more specific ideas, such as 'say "I love you" five times each day' and 'if you have a problem with one set of parents, let the person whose parents they are do the talking: blood talks to blood'. But then, in Virginia, one of the things marriage does is remind people that the location of national politics is very often in places of kinship and the everyday. Civil and human rights violations are often constituted by the removal of people's access to the mundane. Consider the words that Richard Loving asked his lawyer to relay to the Supreme Court in 1967: 'Mr. Cohen, tell the Court I love my wife, and it is just unfair that I can't live with her in Virginia.'

Penang, Malaysia Janet Carsten

I was slightly puzzled when Husin, whom I interviewed in 2018, began to speak about his uneasy relationship with his in-laws. He had talked enthusiastically about traditional Malay marriage rituals – those at his own and his parents' wedding. And with considerably less approval, he spoke about the enthusiasm of younger relatives for lavish weddings with a 'Bollywood theme', using 'Chinese wedding planners'. From a Penang-based family of several generations depth, Husin seemed quintessentially Malay. But he spoke vividly about how irritated he became when his wife's family referred to his 'Indian' appearance and ways, and how, in their manner, they revealed that they felt themselves to be superior to his own family: 'I'm a Penangite – mixed blood with Indian. They kind of looked down on us... consider us 'not pure Malay'. I got over it after nine or ten years of marriage. They kind of like to remind me.'

The island of Penang is not considered typical of Malaysia. As an entrepôt of the Indian Ocean since the end of the eighteenth century, a long history of trade and migration has made it exceptionally diverse in terms of the origins, cultures, and religions of its population (Yeoh et al. 2009). This is materially expressed in the streets and buildings of the centre of its capital city, George Town, where old trading establishments, jetties, Chinese clan houses, mosques, churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, medicine halls and shop houses, printers, lawyers' offices, law courts, museums and government buildings, with their distinctive architectural styles, nestle within a few minutes' walk of each other. It can be viscerally experienced in the diverse culinary traditions – Malay, Chinese, Indian, Nyonya, and Western, in many variations, that have made Penang justly famous as a gastronomic destination. And of course, it is inscribed in its people, the languages they speak, their clothing, their forms of religiosity, and their bodily comportment, which reveal – or obscure – distinct ethnic and familial histories.

If marriage is, amongst other things, an attempt to assure the reproduction of families and local communities, and simultaneously a process of creating, reproducing, and erasing distinctions, then Penang is a singularly interesting place to investigate it. Rapid urbanisation and the expansion of the middle class, which have marked Malaysia in the closing decades of the twentieth century, suggest that exploring marriage through an intergenerational lens might be particularly rewarding.

The main part of my research has been a set of interviews with middle-class, urban Penangites of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and ages about their own experiences of marriage. These have been conducted alongside a plethora of marriage-related activities and informal conversations. In interviews, participants have been asked to reflect on their childhood and their parents' marriage, and where possible, the marriages of grandparents, adult children or other relatives. Perhaps it is not surprising that, in many ways, these conversations resemble life story interviews in that telling the story of one's parents', one's own, and one's children's marriages also tracks a life course and a family history. These are often strongly located in Penang and reflect its twentieth century history and economy.

For many of those interviewed, considering how marriage has changed in their own families means above all reflecting on gender relations between wives and husbands. Probably the most marked and most commented-upon change in marital life over two or three generations is the increasing tendency of women to achieve tertiary education before marriage, and after marriage to continue to work outside the home. This reflects wider patterns in Malaysia; it is also perceived as fundamentally altering the dynamics of conjugal relations. Women whose mothers worked, or who themselves work, in contrast to their

mothers or grandmothers, usually describe themselves as more independent, more autonomous, and having more equal relations with their husbands. Although there are some variations, this is undoubtedly broadly the case across all ethnicities and religions.

Over the last forty years or so, one could map two quite different and rather contradictory trends in gender relations in Malaysia. On the one hand, a very marked rise in women's education and participation in the workforce, which is in line with trends in many other developed or developing nations (Jamilah 1994; Lee 2014; tan beng hui and Cecilia Ng. 2014). This has been accompanied by the co-opting of ideals of gender equality into public policy and governmental rhetoric – whatever the realities such rhetoric may obscure. Connected to this, the same period has seen a flourishing middle-class feminist movement and civil society activist groups emerge. On the other hand, and in apparent contradiction to these trends, as Maznah Mohamad (2010; 2013) has documented, the same period has seen the rise of a more conservative Islam, and its institutionalisation in legal and governmental procedures and policies. These changes have a direct impact on Muslim family law and on gender relations for Malays and other Muslims, and arguably they indirectly affect too the non-Muslim, non-Malay population (even though they do not come under the same legal and religious jurisdictions) and Malaysian society more generally.

In the Chinese Malaysian cases, the strong tendency to engage in education and employment over the last 30 years or so has occurred in the context of a patrilineal kinship system that has, at least in the past, been strongly patriarchal. Wives and husbands in more equal economic partnerships, describe fundamental changes in these patriarchal values. The dynamics travel both ways: many women comment on their broader expectations of equality, which they often see as very different from the experiences of their mothers or grandmothers. Several older women spoke about how, for their fathers, only sons counted among their children, and not daughters, and they contrasted this with the attitudes of the present generation of young husbands.

Among Malays, the patterns are more contradictory. While there have been similar shifts towards a greater engagement with tertiary education and employment outside the home, Malay kinship is bilateral rather than patrilineal and, in the past at least, there was an emphasis on gender complementarity rather than a straightforward gender-based hierarchy (Carsten 1997; Wazir 1992). The prominence of a more conservative Islam since the 1980s has arguably therefore meant a shift *towards* more patriarchal values rather than away from them. For many, the experience of gender inequality within marriage has probably increased over the last two to three generations rather than decreased, and expectations seemed more mixed. One rather paradoxical expression of this is that younger people sometimes described the relation between their parents as quite 'traditional', meaning unequal, or spoke of their fathers having 'old-fashioned', meaning holding patriarchal, views. The irony here is that the supposedly 'traditional' is, arguably, not all that traditional to the norms of Malay kinship.

The intergenerational thread of interviews in Penang means that they are inevitably comparative, and they provide a lens on continuities and ruptures: what is transmitted over the generations, and what has changed; what produces tensions, and how these are absorbed. The involvement of parents in choosing a spouse, for example, is no longer as prominent as it was in the past. Younger interviewees, especially, and also many in their forties and fifties, said that they had chosen their marital partner themselves, often having met through a family connection, at school or university, or sometimes at work. Individual choice within a framework where wider family relations were

perceived as important was the most common pattern.

Families where in each generation marriage has involved a strong element of mixing – of religions, nationalities, or ethnicities – might be one more of intergenerational continuity. And here the ethnic and religious diversity of the population in Penang is pertinent. But there are also families which seem to have a more ‘conservative’ disposition – whose members over several generations have married within a particular community rather than outside it. It seems obvious then to consider marriage through the lens of familial transmission – as an institution that readily reveals both replications and disjunctions, that affords possibilities for both innovation and conservatism.

To different degrees, marriage is always about mixing. But in a world permeated by distinctions of class, ethnicity, religion, and language, marriage has a uniquely far-reaching (and often fraught) role in terms of producing and reproducing distinctions, or managing the connections, between individuals, families and within communities. The mixing and separation that marriage enfolds may easily be perceived as transgressive from the point of view of policing the boundaries of such distinctions. What emerges here is the way that marriage expresses and encompasses *degrees* of distinction. One could discern familial dispositions to marry within a relatively small and tight community or sub-community – whether Malay, Chinese or Indian – and those where over several generations there had been several more ‘open’ marriages across sub-communities or even across ethnic or religious lines. Strikingly, the familiar categories of Malaysian ethnic identity (Malay, Chinese, Indian etc.) with their roots in colonial history, tend to fracture into smaller sub-categories under the scrutiny of marriage. Some of those interviewed were actively concerned with conserving the heritage of their own particular group (although, interestingly, their own marriages might have been outside these boundaries), Peranakan, Chettiar, Mendaling, Jawi Peranakan, Hakka, or Teochew – or any of the many others that are woven into Penang’s history.

Many marriages crossed over the lines of sub-community, and some over religious or ethnic lines. Some said that such marriages were on the increase because of contemporary urban educational and employment patterns, which meant that people were ‘mixing more’. Most Malay participants said that they wouldn’t mind whom their child married – as long as he or she was a Muslim. Marriages between Chinese and Malays seemed likely to create particular familial tension because of religious and cultural differences between families, as well as the fact that such marriage required conversion for the non-Muslim partner. Such marriages may be viewed as especially transgressive by parents of intending spouses. Over time, they may be absorbed into familial worlds, resurfacing at the time of a marriage in a later generation. Evaluations and distinctions, as ways of judging and managing connections, are inevitably part of the process of marrying. But the strains and difficulties of managing difference, and equally, the importance of continually producing distinctions, take their toll. Some connections prove impossible to manage; some marriages, across wide gulfs of national, class, or religious background floundered and in the end broke down. ‘Too much mixing’ might be diagnosed. Others were more successful, depending partly perhaps on the degree of autonomy and separation of the main actors from their families, as well as the temperaments and personalities of those involved.

An intergenerational approach thus provides a glimpse of the textures and layers of familial histories, and of the almost ‘laboratory-like’ conditions of cultural diversity that Penang affords. The simultaneous past, present, and future in which marriage takes place gives us the possibility of understanding the myriad ways in which time, comparison, and ethical judgements are woven through familial life. Profound political, economic and social changes over the

last fifty years, and more, have been enfolded into how marriages are made and experienced in Penang. But as part of this process, the expectations surrounding marriage and how it should be transacted have also transformed, and these new imaginaries generate their own political momentum.

Conclusion

It is premature to draw conclusions from the work we have described here. But perhaps we can begin to say something about what marriage is and does under conditions of modernity, and about how, as anthropologists, we could continue to talk about kinship. One of the many themes that emerges in our ethnographic work is how marriages thread individual and familial lives into a national narrative or, as Papadaki puts it: 'promise a well-recognised place from which people can write not only their daily lives, but their own family history, into the history of Greece.' The turmoil of Greek history over the last 100 years or so – encompassing two world wars, civil war, dictatorships, two 'migration crises', and prolonged economic austerity – suggests that some Greeks might view the ability to weave themselves into the socio-historical fabric of the nation as a hard-won achievement rather than a given certainty. Conversely, as the case of Virginia illuminates, for many people marriage marks, precisely and viscerally, the experience of being excluded from a national narrative. In Virginia and in Penang, familial histories not only illustrate ways of transgressing and overcoming social distinctions of 'race', ethnicity, gender, religion and class, but also, crucially, of reworking their historical reproduction. Marriage – and the ethical judgements it involves – crystallises moments when such distinctions are made salient. In Taiwan, where different marital strategies have been forged under the conditions of colonialism, civil war and the Cold War, we see how political and social formations have been actively enabled and produced through transformations in marriage. And in Botswana, a marriage that appeared highly transgressive to the colonial international order was itself at the centre of the struggle for an independent post-colonial polity.

Without being prefigured in this way, marriage has provided a lens on the turbulent history that each of our projects encompasses. The traces of these histories, as well as new imaginaries of the future that marriage encapsulates, can be read in the marital stories we have collected. This suggests an opportunity for generating a new kind of comparative conversation between the very different contexts described here. In 1955, reflecting on the many obstructions that she and Seretse Khama had encountered to their marriage during an interview for the *Evening Standard*, Ruth Williams observed, 'All marriage is an experiment' (Williams 2007: 256). If marriage is always an experiment, this highlights its unknown outcomes, the hopes and promises it enfolds, and the possibilities of innovation and change it may encapsulate. But paradoxically, this capacity for transformation often rests on more conservative buttresses – on understandings of ritual as handed down over generations, on seemingly impermeable boundaries between religions or communities, on law as constituting and safeguarding the *status quo*. Between the twin poles of innovation and conservatism, marriage and the negotiations, comparisons, and judgments through which it is accomplished, is ambiguously, unpredictably, and productively situated – a subject eminently worth talking about, as much for anthropologists as for those whose lives they study.

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