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### Imagining and living new worlds

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# **Imagining and Living New Worlds: The Dynamics of Kinship in Contexts of Mobility and Migration**

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## **Abstract**

This essay considers kinship in the contexts of movement and migration. Delineating two quite different models of kinship ('doing' and 'being', the performative and the ascriptive), highlights how mobility and migration are particularly congruent with models of kinship that emphasise its performative qualities. I use movement and migration as a prism to show how kinship provides a uniquely dynamic reservoir of resources to creatively imagine and put into practice ideas and visions that enable moving to and living in new worlds – both geographically distant and near at hand. Rather than being aberrant or unusual, mobility can be seen to be among the capacities that kinship generates. But kinship also provides a repertoire that may promote settlement – and in the conclusion I suggest that both performative and ascriptive models might contribute to an understanding of kinship in the context of migration.

**Key words:** kinship, mobility, migration, documents, property, marriage

I begin with two very brief vignettes of migration to the UK that have been partly inspired by the work of Apostolos Andrikopoulos (2017) on contemporary West African migrants to Europe. One concerns a refugee woman in her early thirties, recently arrived in Britain and applying for work as a school teacher but without the usual qualifications or documentation. Rather than turning to other, less skilled, employment possibilities, she ‘borrows’ the university degree certificate of her older sister (also a refugee in Britain) – a certificate that was issued in their country of origin - to apply for a post at a private school. Unaware of any subterfuge, her application is well-received by the school and she obtains a job, teaching there for about a year before going on to take up further teaching positions in other private educational establishments. The deception is not brought to light.

The second account is that of a political activist who is forced to flee the country of his birth in a hurry while being pursued by its security forces. His dilemma is how to escape passport checks at the frontier? This man, in his mid-twenties, travels by train to a station situated on an international frontier, and then takes the extremely risky measure of disembarking the train and crossing the railway tracks on foot from one country to another to elude the border guards. A few years’ later, in Amsterdam and needing to travel again, but with a passport that is due to expire, he takes another risk. In the hope that the bureaucratic record-keeping of his country of origin is not too efficient, he goes to the local embassy to have his passport renewed. Successful in this endeavour, he is able to journey to Britain using his original passport now duly stamped and valid. With the help of his leftist political ties, articulated in terms of brotherhood, he obtains funding and a means of settling in Britain.

Both stories involve migration and kinship; they highlight the importance of documentation to travel across international borders and to finding employment and the means to settle. As with other stories recounted in this volume, the vignettes also show the creative uses to which kinship ties may be put, and the semi-legal or illegal strategies to which refugees and migrants may resort - as well as the risks they entail. I will return to these two cases later in this article, for we will see how, in other ways too, they are illustrative of the creative dynamics of kinship in contexts of mobility and migration.

It is worth noting here that mobility as ‘the ability to move about’ is often, though not necessarily, distinguishable from migration, ‘the action of moving from one place to another’

as in its first definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or - in the second sense given in the *OED* - ‘the action of moving from one country, locality, etc., to settle in another; also, simply, removal from one place of residence to another’ (*OED*, 1978). Conventionally, and especially in contemporary contexts, the term migration often concerns the movement from one national jurisdiction to another. Thus migration can be understood as one particular form of mobility, and as embedded within the logic of nation states. But processes of mobility and migration, historically, long precede national boundaries and state jurisdictions and, in everyday life, they may be less distinguishable from each other than we often assume. The dichotomization of these terms is thus part of public discourse in nation-states (Faist 2013). Mobility, as a more general term, has been used by scholars to foreground the historical importance of movement more generally, and to counter assumptions about the normativity of staying put. As Cresswell (2010) has argued, this requires us to pay close attention to the ‘politics of mobility’, in other words, the inequalities within which mobility, both spatial and social, is situated, and the power relations and modes of regulation within which it is enacted. Current public discourse in Europe makes clear that whether migration stories are popularly understood as emblematic of the courage such journeys require or, instead, as demonstrating the furtive measures of deception to which migrants are prone, depends on the contexts in which they are told, and to whom, as well as on the political and economic circumstances in which mobility is shaped.

As a scholar of kinship more than migration, my purpose here is to explore what features of kinship, which is often assumed to be primarily associated with being settled, might in contrast enable mobility. Rather than see mobile scenarios as unusual, I argue that kinship – which is my main focus here - provides a dynamic reservoir of resources with which to creatively imagine and put into practice ideas and visions that enable moving to and living in new worlds. These new worlds may be geographically distant or near at hand, and I suggest that they encompass too the temporally distant in the form of memories of the past and visions of the future. The capacity to imagine or settle in new worlds relies not on aberrant or marginal qualities of kinship, but on some of its most fundamental and intrinsic aspects.

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Over the last few decades, anthropologists have become accustomed to see kinship in terms of two prominent and opposed models. One, which we might characterise as broadly ‘conservative’, emphasises *being* over doing, *origins* over attainment, the past over the future. Here birth, ties of descent and ascriptive status tend to take priority – both analytically

and in terms of local articulations of kinship - over processes of 'becoming' (see McKinnon 2016). Anthropologists, no less than other proper participants in their own cultures, have often assumed that kinship is a stable or conservative repository of precepts and practices, and have placed these attributes at the forefront of their depictions. The other, apparently more 'radical' or open model, stresses the importance of processual and performative ways of *becoming* kin. In terms of tense, this model lays emphasis on the present and future rather than the past, and sees kinship largely in terms of practices of becoming, such as feeding or living together. It thus has the apparent advantage of being attentive to creative processes and activities in the making of kinship and relatedness, as opposed to assuming kinship to be strongly pre-scripted according to customs and precepts inherited from past generations.

These two visions can also be associated with particular eras in kinship studies. A 'descent-based' model, that construes kinship as the outcome of a layered sequence of generations of past relatives, reached its apotheosis with British structural-functional studies of the 1950s and early 60s. Much of the fieldwork that was the basis for these studies was conducted in Africa in the decades prior to this. More performative models of kinship, often based on research carried out in Melanesia or Austronesia, emerged from the 1970s onwards, but began to take hold in anthropology in the 1980s and 90s. The times in which these different views of kinship were shaped is important to their content. The 1950s, the heyday of descent theory, can be characterised in wider cultural terms in Europe and North America as a conservative decade. In contrast, many of those who conducted research in the 1970s and 80s were intellectually formed in the atmosphere of radical student politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in the movements of anti-colonialism and feminism that took root in the academy during and after those decades. So, there might be a confluence between a more open, 'progressive', and performative view of kinship, and the politics of the times in which it emerged. In any case, it is clear that, from the 1980s on, many studies of kinship were part of an emerging field of feminist scholarship or were strongly influenced by feminist approaches. A primary focus of this feminist work was the denaturalisation of kinship. Here the 'givenness' of kinship, embedded in sexual procreation and in gender relations, was itself made the subject of analytical scrutiny or deconstruction (see Carsten 2004).

In the following sections of this article, three themes are highlighted: property, documents, and marriage. The selection of these themes rests on their particularly dense entanglements with both kinship and mobility. Property appears antithetical to mobility but is often

inextricably bound up with kinship; documents (such as birth certificates or passports) apparently make kinship relations legible to the state, and are a prerequisite for migration across international borders, and sometimes also for internal migration; marriage, as a reason for the movement of at least one spouse, necessarily brings together the fields of kinship, mobility or migration, and the state. The entanglements of property, documents, and marriage with both kinship and mobility are, however, less straightforward than might appear; they can thus provide privileged insights into the nature of the intersections between kinship and mobility.

On the face of it, there would seem to be some obvious convergence between performative versions of kinship and processes of migration and mobility that are the topic of this special issue. Moving to new places relies on the possibility of creating new ties of sociality however these may be construed. In what follows, I describe some of the ways in which dynamic and creative aspects of kinship may come to the fore as part of migration processes. Beginning with a brief exploration of the significance of property - or its absence – to mobility, I go on to consider the importance of documents, and what such documents signify, in both kinship and in migration stories. A brief discussion of the enfolding of marriage in mobility and migration highlights the congruencies between these processes, and a final return to my opening vignettes pursues the entanglements of kinship and migration stories further.

In the conclusion to this essay, instead of straightforwardly underlining the conjunctions between migration and ‘kinship-as-*doing*’ rather than being, I also briefly allude to how alternative understandings of kinship may play their part in processes of migration. It might seem surprising, particularly in the context of a discussion of migration and kinship, where surely mobility, dynamism, and creativity are essential, that I should seemingly attempt to reconcile the opposition I have sketched between two very different anthropological understandings of kinship. Taking into account visions of *settlement* in migration, propels us, I suggest in the conclusion, to think further about alternative imaginaries of kinship and marriage and their political potentialities.

### **Mobility and the ‘stuff’ of kinship**

In most scenarios, mobility and stuff do not go well together. People on the move are often, of necessity, those who are ‘traveling light’ as the title of Kath Weston’s (2008) wonderful ethnography of riding the Greyhound buses of North America has it. As she makes clear, it is

mainly poor people in the US who travel by bus, and on these journeys stuff is more of an encumbrance than an enhancement. So, *Traveling Light* is an ethnography of poverty as well as movement in America. The countless images of migrants on the move to Europe that we have seen over the last few years are a stark reminder that most migrants, and especially those who are refugees, are strictly limited as to the material property they can carry. Food figures largely in Weston's depictions of riding the buses in the US, the food that some travellers, at least, bring with them from home and, in a perhaps surprising but most elemental act of human kinship, often are willing to share with fellow-travellers who may have none.

The apparent antithesis between movement and stuff is in some respects deceptive. Apart from food and a few belongings, much of what people carry with them when they're on the move is carried in their heads – the ever-shifting memories, relationships, stories, dreams and imaginings that we all hold within ourselves. And it is these that, to a considerable extent, though by no means exclusively, shape how people temporarily or permanently settle in new localities. The migration stories that I heard from Malay people in Langkawi in the late 1980s recounted how their parents or grandparents had come to the island from the mainland, destitute and landless, with no property. Finding land available, and with the possibility of making a living from fishing, they were able to settle. Such stories were usually somewhat sketchy in their details as to the means people had at their disposal to make a go of things. What figured mostly was an arrival in the company of siblings, or sometimes of parents, local hospitality in the form first of feeding and then fostering relations, loosely-conceived, followed by local marriage and the birth of children, which signified long-term settlement on the island. In these retrospective accounts of previous generations, kinship was both the means and the symbol of connection to new localities, and ties to land were notably attenuated (Carsten 1997).

These progressive stories of how kinship is made, first, through acts of feeding, then in more long-term relations of hospitality and care, to be followed by marriage, children, and grandparenthood, made clear that it was not the material stuff but the relationships that were deemed worthy of telling. No doubt, Malay peasant migrants to Langkawi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had little by way of property to bring with them or conserve. But I was struck too by how descendants of migrants from different areas of the mainland or further afield were not obviously distinguishable in dress, cuisine, house styles,

dialect or other cultural attributes. People I knew in Langkawi in the 1980s were not keepers of singular genealogies or family heirlooms. This merging and levelling of cultural forms that underlies Malay identity-building could be seen as paradigmatic of kinship processes that focused on the future rather than the past, and stressed doing rather than the being (Carsten 1995; 1997; Kahn 2006; Milner 2011).

Such processes are shaped in historical time, and are not necessarily stable. Urban centres in Malaysia today are replete with restaurants that specialise in particular genres of Malay cuisine, shops marketing different styles of Malay dress suitable for weddings that originate in particular regions, heritage buildings with their history on display, and other distinctive markers of middle class consumption and taste. Where class and wealth differences matter, distinctive cultural forms can be brought into play; some of those that would in the past have been affordable only by the upper echelons of Malay society (such as elaborate wedding costumes, furnishings, or items of display) can today be attributes of middle class identity.

Thus, the rise of a self-conscious awareness of distinctive aspects of individual, familial, or ethnic history might be regarded as inextricably linked to long-term processes of class formation in politico-economic contexts. It is significant that widespread fostering arrangements in Langkawi (much like those elsewhere in the Austronesian world) did not generate the kinds of issues about individual identity that were articulated to me by adult adoptees who engaged in searches for their birth kin in Scotland in research conducted in the late 1990s. In the latter case, the importance of ‘knowing where you’ve come from’, which required seeking out hidden documents and undiscovered birth relatives, was seen as a self-evidently constitutive component of identity (Carsten 2000; see also Yngvesson and Coutin 2006).

Curiously enough, these stories about searches for birth kin in Scotland sometimes involved travel over long distances, but often they did not. They might in fact result in finding birth parents who had for many years lived just a few streets away. The mobility in question here was thus as much temporal as spatial in character – it involved traveling backwards and forwards in time rather than settling in new localities. This ‘futurity’ and ‘pastness’ that kinship necessarily affords allows relatedness and sociality to be imagined beyond the temporally present - reaching into the past and towards the future – although this temporal



reach is so deeply and implicitly enfolded in everyday practices and narrative strategies that it is liable to be overlooked in the analysis of kinship.

As Andrew Shryock observes in the context of what he calls the ‘spatiotemporal declines’ that kinship may help to offset, ‘kinship, in this sense, becomes a special mode of travel, a way to engineer secure social landscapes and reliable histories’ (2013: 278). Shryock here builds on an essay on ‘Deep Kinship’ by Thomas B. Trautmann, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, and John C. Mitani (2011), which attempts to overcome the divide between ‘social’ and ‘biological’ kinship through the use of primatology and archaeology in combination with the anthropology of kinship to probe the long-term evolutionary significance of human kinship. The insights of these authors concerning the ‘mnemonic properties of artifacts deliberately intended to bind relations over time and space’ (2011: 185) are pertinent here. Their discussion focuses on the importance of houses and food that evoke memories and emotional responses through their association with the sensory patterns of childhood. It also includes other kinds of artifacts and mnemonic forms, including jewelry, pots, clothing, kinship terminologies, and genealogies, which are part of ‘the heavy memory work’, as they put it, that operates through kinship (2011: 186). We might want to add more recent technologies - for example, photographs or letters - to the list of material artifacts that are important in enfolding and transmitting kinship memories (see McKinnon 2016). Bodily substances, such as blood or bone, may provide yet another register for stretching kinship relations out in time or space (Carsten 2013; 2019). Evocations of blood kinship have a particular significance because of their simultaneous material and metaphorical referents. This wide range of meanings and evocations carried by blood is often only implicitly alluded to, but lends it an unusual emotional traction that often has significant political resonance.

All of the above suggests that the entanglements of kinship with different forms of property, which appear at first sight to associate kinship more obviously with settled existence than with mobility, have a more complex significance. The evocative powers of memory, and the capacity of portable objects and technologies to evoke relational ties with emotional resonance, means that kinship can readily be carried from one place to another even by solitary travellers and in the absence of living relatives.

## **Documents**

So far, I have been concerned with what we might think of as the more ‘portable’ aspects of kinship – a few belongings, food, clothing, the human body itself, and thoughts and evocations that may be carried in the head. They result in the possibility of being able to arrive in a new place, connect to people there, and to settle amongst them, or to imagine a chain of connection to past ancestors, and into the future to unborn children or grandchildren. But as my opening vignettes alluded to, there is another class of objects, at least in the context of states and the legal apparatuses they engender, that are situated in at the heart of the entanglements of kinship and migration: documents.

Without a valid passport and entry visa it may be impossible to cross an international frontier. And the passport is only the beginning of a chain of documentation that enables a migrant to settle in a new country. Further documents are likely to be necessary – work permits, certificates of education, birth and marriage certificates, driving licences, financial guarantees, bank statements – to name a few. The ability to show or acquire these may itself rest on other affidavits or documents. So the document, and its validating stamp, is an essential component of migration – and perhaps not surprisingly in our increasingly bureaucratized and securitized world, it has spawned a new sub-genre of anthropology (see, for example, Hull 2012; Mathur 2016).

One might ask, what has this to do with kinship? Several answers are pertinent. Most obviously, many of the documents in question encapsulate and record kinship histories – in order to obtain a passport, details of parentage, birth, and marriage must already be registered with appropriate bureaucracies. In this sense, as in others, kinship and the state co-constitute each other - as Michael Lambek (2013) has recently argued (see also McKinnon and Cannell 2013). Where such details are missing or unrecorded, it is likely to be difficult and time-consuming to acquire state-issued documents. In the absence of appropriate documentation, individuals are likely to have recourse either to further bureaucratic procedures, which may prove unavailing, or to kinship relations - or both of these. Andrikopoulos (2017) gives many examples of migrants who loan or trade such documents – and interestingly, these relations are often phrased in the idiom of kinship. My opening story is suggestive of the way the loan of a degree certificate between sisters with the same surname may proceed under the radar, and remain undetected. We might view this as a case of the ‘identity loan’ (Horton 2015) or ‘unauthorised identity craft’ that Andrikopoulos describes in telling detail among his research participants.

Documents of the kind being considered here are part of the exclusionary practices of the state and constitutive of the dual nature of citizenship (see, for example, Brubaker 1992; Duyvendak 2011; Geschiere 2009). They are expressive of new forms of inequality currently being generated by state institutions. Kinship may thus provide avenues for mitigating or navigating such exclusionary practices - as in some of the examples Andrikopoulos depicts. Indeed, we tend to consider kinship in terms of its inclusionary tendencies and to focus analytic attention on the supportive and beneficial results that reliance on kin may elicit (see Sahlins (2013) for a recent rendition of kinship in positive tones). But we should remember that kinship is itself necessarily an exclusionary set of practices as much as it is inclusionary. Which members of a sibling group are enabled to achieve an education, to acquire a passport or a bank account, and which were not, is enfolded in particular kinship histories (see, for example, Gaibazzi 2014).

Recent research on kinship and migration in the central Philippines carried out by Resto Cruz (2019) shows how, in an extended sibling group, older siblings often take responsibility for financing the education of younger ones. When one sibling has acquired skills and qualifications and the documents that attest to these, she may migrate to the US or Britain to take up a nursing career, and send home regular remittances that enable a younger sibling to plot a similar trajectory. This kind of interdependence of siblings has a very Southeast Asian flavour as the bonds between siblings tends to be much emphasised and elaborated in the region. The burdens of older brothers and sisters may seem heavy. But in these drawn-out scenarios of kinship, class mobility and success, which play out over many years, and implicate different generations of one family, the erasures that occur along the way are easily obscured. What of the sibling who does not acquire an education and does not get to travel? Although she may have access to local land and the parental home, these may be less of a blessing than might appear. The foreclosed opportunities of the sister who is left behind may yet turn out to enfold the heaviest burdens as she foregoes marriage and takes on the long-term care of elderly parents with only occasional support from siblings. The inequalities of citizenship that are underlined in recent accounts may thus be exacerbated rather than alleviated by those of kinship. This is evident too in the stories of marriage that Cruz recounts. And it is to marriage that I turn next.

## **Marriage**

The complex entwinement of siblingship and migration, as in the Philippino case cited above, may be also entangled with marriage. In the marriages of sibling pairs among British Pakistanis perceptively analysed by Charsley and Bolognani (2019), we can see a variety of choices that encompass marriages across or within the boundaries of kinship, ethnicity, and nation. The negotiation of similarity and difference in these cases shows how ‘the marriage of one sibling may have consequences for another’ in terms of one type of marriage choice compensating for, or reinforcing, a particular strategy (2019:14).

Marriage illustrates very vividly the ways that kinship and the state co-constitute each other. In most contemporary contexts marriages must be registered by state bureaucracies, this process requiring, and in turn generating, important documentation. In order for this to occur, a marriage must conform to local legal enactments as to what constitutes proper marriage and the eligibility of the spouses concerned. Thus relations understood to be incestuous are excluded – although, famously, the definitions of incest are varied - while marriage between partners of the same sex is legal in some places but illegal, just becoming legal, or highly contested in others. Bigamy, polyandry, and polygamy are not legal in most Western contexts but permitted under some non-Western legal and religious regimes. Age at marriage is another close concern of states, and again highly variable – sometimes for different groups within the same national jurisdiction. One might continue in this vein. In spite of this apparently obvious co-constitution of the state and marriage, clearly, marriage may be socially recognised in the absence of state procedures, and institutions of marriage historically preceded those of modern states. In this sense, marriage threatens to elude or ‘overspill’ state jurisdictions – one reason perhaps why states may be anxious to secure their legitimizing role in marriage. Marriage as an institution may thus reinforce or contribute to the power of the state - just as the state may strengthen and reproduce particular versions of the family.

Parallel with state regulations and enactments are kinship rules, histories and strictures which may accord or be in tension with state regulations. What is acceptable in some familial or religious contexts may be deemed illegal or unacceptable in others, or contradictory to ‘modernizing’ national state projects - and vice versa. The history of child marriage enactments in colonial Bengal is just one among many contested examples; that of the concern to exclude polygamy in nineteenth century North America is another (see Majumdar 2009; McKinnon 2013). Recent legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan, Ireland,

Australia and Germany (to take just a few examples) their preceding referenda, and in the case of Taiwan its attempted succeeding reversal by referendum, illustrate the contemporary salience of political and religious contestations over how marriage should be legally defined and regulated.

The topic of what constitutes legal marriage apparently takes us far from that of migration. But when marriage is enacted between those who do not have full rights of citizenship or when one partner does not, then both the marriage and migration which preceded it may come under threat. There is of course an extensive literature on marriage migration and transnational marriage (recent overviews include Brettell 2017; Charsley 2013; Moret, Andrikopoulos and Dahinden 2019). Rather than engage substantively with the breadth of this important field of scholarship, which space does not permit here, my aim in this brief section is to consider some of the more general features of marriage illuminated by the context of migration. The concerns of European states to limit migration, manifested partly by increased vigilance and surveillance over the legitimacy of marriages, place marriages of migrants as well as the continued right to stay in Europe at risk. But as in all marriages, we learn that stories may be complicated. The distinction between what is sham and what is legitimate, based on instrumentalism or love, may be less obvious than might appear (see, for example, Borneman 1992; 2001; Cole 2014; Maunaguru 2019). Marriage thus places migration under the sharp gaze of the state and vice versa – whether or not the residence status of a partner was already under scrutiny (see Wray 2006). These and other categorizations entail a particular challenge for researchers to avoid adopting the state classifications that they are investigating (see Moret, Andrikopoulos and Dahinden 2019). Full citizens do not normally encounter the same kind of state scrutiny as migrants although under certain circumstances, such as the love marriages in Delhi examined by Perveez Mody (2008), they may. Marriage may thus be a means through which the exclusionary practices of citizenship exacerbate those of kinship.

Perhaps what is arresting about marriage is how it encompasses all of the aspects of kinship I discussed earlier. Most obviously, it involves a creative and dynamic vision of a shared future, and an attempt to create certainty where circumstances may be highly precarious (Maunaguru 2019). Often it involves transfers of property. This may include land, a home, money, jewellery, house furnishings, cooking utensils, a ‘trousseau’ of linen and embroidered work in the classic European bourgeois mode, or other portable goods. Marriages in many

parts of the world have for decades been captured in photographs and increasingly are now videoed. Photographs, perhaps bound into albums, may come to be treasured items of marital property and family remembrance. Marriage feasts are exemplary culinary occasions, and the costumes in which people marry are often lavish items of display that, if they are not rented, may be kept for decades after. In other words, marriage provides a condensed focus on objects rich in the ‘mnemonic properties of artifacts deliberately intended to bind relations over time and space’ as Trautman, Feeley-Harnik, and Mitani have eloquently put it (2011: 185).

For our purposes here, perhaps what is crucial is that marriage generally involves mobility - though not necessarily over long distances or transnational borders. One or both spouses is likely to take up residence in a new home. Often it is the establishment of a new home that is precisely the object of marriage. Perhaps because it is assumed that it is more often women than men who move at marriage, the more general significance of this has not always been considered (see Bretell 2017: 91). Marriage and mobility (including migration from one country to another), are intimately entwined, and this means that mobility has historically, and still today, for many people been woven into the normative life course. Indeed, this might be one of several reasons that states have a deep and abiding interest in marriage as part of their efforts to keep track of the movement and enumeration of their populations (Scott 1998). Although marriage is celebrated as a familial event, it has far wider ramifications. But unless marriage explicitly involves partners of different nationalities moving in order to marry, we are unaccustomed to think of it in terms of migration, and we tend to minimise the significance of the bureaucratic formalities, keeping the different jurisdictions of the state and family separate in our minds.

The themes brought together in Michael Haneke’s film for our times, ‘Happy End’ (2017), capture the density of these many imbrications in a particularly powerful manner. The drama concerns a French haute bourgeois family, their north African domestic servants, the family construction firm, its financial dealings, and an impending marriage, all unravelling before our eyes. The setting is Calais, a city depicted through crumbling building sites, traffic, soulless buildings, and haunted by its footloose migrant population who provide a stark contrast to the prosperity and assumed rootedness of French upper class family life. In the climactic final scene – an engagement party at a restaurant with elaborate napery, at which the charms of the bourgeois guests are not so discreetly on display – migrants, kinship,

corrupt financial dealings, and marriage clash head-on in an unforgettable implosion. Happy end indeed. As a vivid representation of the ‘politics of mobility’, the film instantiates how impossible it is to keep separate the domains of marriage, class, family, economy, and migration in real life. Their inevitable coming together in the last scene has disastrous implications for the family and the firm, and speaks to wider political failings on a regional and global scale.

### **Migration stories**

I have suggested that migration, partly because it is nested in more general processes of mobility, could be considered as an all too commonplace feature of kinship and the life course - in spite of the anomalous and pathological character with which it is endowed in contemporary national politics and in the popular media. The naturalisation of attachment to place is woven through nationalist state discourses, and often draws on rhetorics of kinship – including the symbolism of blood that I mentioned earlier.

It is time to return to my opening vignettes. Deliberately, I have revealed little in the way of context or historical moment for the sketches I provided in the hope that, in some respects, they might stand as paradigmatic of more widespread experiences. The time period spanned by these stories is 1936 to 1944; the country of origin is Germany. The two protagonists, one of whom borrowed the degree certificate of her older sister, the other who twice managed to evade passport checks that might have resulted in his arrest, can be ‘uncovered’ as Ruth Moses and Francis Carsten - my parents. Not so very surprising perhaps.

There are, however, other features of these two stories that are illustrative of more general phenomena. Although with the comfortable hindsight afforded by the passage of historical time, refugees from Nazi Germany are today classed as worthy of sympathy and a safe haven, paradigmatically ‘good refugees’ as it were, at the time, their welcome was limited numerically and in other ways, and far from assured. The portrayal of Jewish refugees in the British press was mixed at best. There might be a lesson here in terms of the negative depiction of contemporary refugees and migrants by European governments and the media. Second, and in keeping with the importance of attending to the ‘politics of mobility’ (Cresswell 2010), it is worth noting the class position and cultural capital that made these particular trajectories possible. Degree qualifications, passports, the possibility of moving across borders and finding employment, then as now, were attainable only by those with

some means at their disposal, often through the combined resources of members of their families. Third, and perhaps pertinent to a discussion of kinship, several elements of these stories remained obscure until relatively recently. The story of Francis's escape from Germany was one he only told his children when he was already in his eighties; the visit to the German embassy in Amsterdam in 1939 to renew his passport came to light in an interview recorded in the 1970s but to which I only listened much more recently. Ruth's use of her sister's degree certificate was revealed quite by chance in 2016 when I wrote to the schools where she had taught after her arrival in Britain for information about her employment. One archivist wrote back regretting how little information he had, but noting the dates of her employment and the fact that she had a degree from Tübingen university. This came as a surprise to me as I knew that she had had to leave university – Heidelberg as it happened – after one term following the enactment of the Nazi racial laws. The archivist, however, perhaps already concerned as to where this set of enquiries was going, showed no further interest.

Like many stories about parental or grandparental lives, these are entangled in kinship relations and in historical sensitivities. What is disclosed or not, to whom, and at what point in time, is neither predictable nor straightforward. We do not know as much about our parents' lives before our birth (or even after) as we might presume. And the reverberations of such upheavals are often lived out over decades and by successive generations of families. But it is worth adding that these two stories of migration could also be told as the prelude to a marriage. Like many who migrate, Ruth and Francis met each other through a series of unlikely chance events after their separate arrival in a new country, and this was the beginning of their joint marital project.

## **Conclusion**

This essay has highlighted some of the deep interconnections between mobility, migration, and kinship. Foregrounding processes of kinship, we can see that, rather than being an exceptional set of scenarios, for many people, mobility and migration are woven through their family histories. Whether on a small-scale or part of larger population movements, mobility is part of kinship, just as kinship is intrinsic to migration. Mobility and migration can, in this view, be seen as part of a continuum rather than sharply distinguished. As others have noted, it is the national borders of modern states that render contemporary forms of migration increasingly anomalous, and modern state regimes of governmentality that



constitute a historical blip in the long flux of human kinship. In line with these suggestions, instead of assuming kinship to be a conservative repository of precepts and practices, steeped in tradition and the ancestors, I have suggested that its dynamic and open characteristics make it a flexible resource when people are on the move.

These open and creative aspects of kinship are also of course a vital part of kinship work in more settled contexts. Returning to the dichotomy between ‘kinship-as-being’ and ‘kinship as doing’, which I sketched at the beginning of this article, we can begin to see that, although I have highlighted performative aspects of kinship here, in fact both versions are intrinsic to the processes I have described. If being on the move is compatible with a vision of kinship that allows for the creation of new ties and an emphasis on the present and future, settling somewhere over the longer term – migration’s usual hoped-for sequitur - may draw more fully on its past-oriented capacities. Settled imaginaries often evoke an attachment to place and to ancestors, and rest on a symbolic elaboration of past-oriented ties. Here inheritance and descent may take on a greater significance. But such ascriptive models of kinship may also be implicitly or explicitly mobilised in political rhetoric deployed *against* migrants - or the imagined prospect of accepting them - by those who view themselves as rightfully settled citizens. This is the unspoken tension within Michael Haneke’s *Happy End*, which I referred to above. That such anti-migration discourse has very real repercussions for migrants and for those seeking to migrate is amply apparent from current European political debates with their many examples of essentialist rhetoric of home and nation. The political circumstances in which such discourses arise should reinforce our awareness that, for many families which experience these processes, migration and its prequels have highly disruptive and negative consequences, which may reverberate over several generations.

It is thus worth linking the two models of kinship depicted here with the two approaches to citizenship that Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak (2020) outline in their introduction to this special issue. If ethnic nationalism lays emphasis on origins, descent and a common history, civic nationalism stresses the values that ensure a common future. Yet, as they point out, in practice, nation states draw on both kinds of symbolic repertoire in their attempts to ensure the allegiance of citizens. Similarly, kinship imaginaries encompass both past- and future-oriented visions. The capacity to think about and imagine past ancestors or to dream of future descendants, to travel forwards and backwards in time, is a fundamental property of kinship as it is of the human imagination more generally. Kinship can thus be viewed as a set of

relationships, practices, ideas, and values that link people in time and space, and whose affective qualities readily attach themselves to particular kinds of objects and material stuff. The singularity of marriage, and its entanglement with migration, which I have emphasised here, is in the way it encapsulates and condenses the multi-dimensional nature of kinship – imaginative, material, and relational. As Charsley and Bolognani (2019:11) argue, ‘marriagability’, has the capacity for creative extension and transformation no less than kinship in general. Importantly, we should consider the disposition to openness, movement, and the future-oriented creation of new ties, as well as its apparent obverse - attachment to place, and a foregrounding of the past as a repository of values and connections (as well as the creative and dynamic interplay between these two modes), as intrinsic properties of human kinship – enabling mobility, and allowing for settlement.

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