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Kinning and De-kinning

Houses, Heirlooms and the Reproduction of Family

Abstract: ‘Kinning and De-kinning’ introduces a special issue that considers how houses, heirlooms and other owned items reproduce kinship and family in diverse societies. It revisits death and inheritance in kinship studies, with a focus on processes of ‘passing on’ and the materiality of things as well as bodies. Incorporating temporalities and materialities in the changing expression of deeply felt emotions that extend between people and between people and things, we echo classic concerns in kinship studies around the incorporation of strangers via affinity, while mobilising the notion of house societies, bringing classic anthropological insight on intergenerational transfer of wealth to bear on questions of identity and belonging. Showing how processes of kinning are always selective and negotiated, the articles in this special issue argue that they also carry with them the potential for kinning’s shadow: just as property can enable kin relations to be re/produced, they can also be used to release people from kinship through what we term ‘de-kinning’: instances of failed appropriation and disrupted kin relations. The article outlines an approach to kinship that takes seriously the enduring qualities of material and property, while maintaining the argument that kinship is achieved (or negated) through the active performance of acknowledged relations.

Keywords: de-kinning, house society, inheritance, kinning, socio-material relations

This introductory article revisits death and inheritance in kinship studies with a focus on the links between kinship and property relations. While a generation of discussion in kinship studies was prompted by new reproductive technologies and addressed the issue of relationality through the lens of procreation (Bamford 2019), this special issue focuses on processes of ‘passing on’ and the materiality of things as well as bodies. We take a comparative approach to the making and remaking of kinship relations over time and between generations through a focus on the succession of material property – from land to houses to heirlooms. We mobilise kinning and de-kinning as analytical entry points, and incorporate temporalities and materialities in the changing expression of deeply felt emotions that extend between people and between people and material things. Our approach echoes classical concerns in kinship studies around the incorporation of strangers into kin via affinity, the role of economic exchange in the negotiations of kin relations and the notion of house societies (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Lévi-Strauss 1979). In this way, we bring classic anthropological insight on intergenerational transfer of wealth to bear on questions of identity and belonging across diverse contemporary contexts.

Kinning, as Signe Howell (2003) proposed, denotes an active process of incorporating persons into families of kin and families of the nation. This is partly achieved



through assemblages of specific persons (adoptive children, for example) and particular things (national costume, family farms), but it can also be effected through the transfer of material property from one person or group to another. As processes of kinning are always selective and negotiated, they also carry with them the potential for the opposite: just as property can enable kin relations to be re/produced, it can also be used to sever or weaken kin relations. We therefore propose the term ‘de-kinning’ to denote instances of failed appropriation and disrupted kin relations. As Michael Lambek (2011) notes, succession implies an ethical tension, resulting in conflict as well as connection, connoting theft as well as gift. Just as kinning may be performed through things, de-kinning, we argue, can similarly take place when expected kin-based transfer is disrupted (such as when material property is sold or disposed of), which may give rise to resentment among those who feel that they have been, in a sense, ‘dispossessed’.¹

Below, we briefly present an ethnographic case to anchor the subsequent discussion on kinning and de-kinning as relational processes. We then discuss these terms with a focus on how they complement and nuance existing kinship studies, focusing especially on their potential regarding the role of materials in constituting kin relations over time.

Doing and Being Kin

On a bright early summer day in 2017, Elisa has been showing us around her holiday home, or ‘*hytte*’, on a small island on the Helgeland coast of northwestern Norway. She has been telling us how her new partner has helped her to renovate the old wooden house that she inherited from her grandmother, repairing the floors and installing a new kitchen, emphasising how much his children and her children enjoy spending the summer here together as a family. Each of the four children has decorated a tile with images of their favourite things, which are now grouted into the kitchen wall behind the worktop, and on the walls there are photographs of them all, along with their drawings from various years. The house is full of evidence of their shared life, of their existence as one household both here and in the county town further north where they otherwise live.

The materiality of Elise’s house speaks to the richness with which house and household create one another, and the extent to which the family itself is literally built into the walls of the house, reflecting perhaps how deeply the house is built into the selfhood of the family members. Christopher Morton has written that ‘houses . . . are closely associated not only with the dwelling activities of persons, but also with the types of relationships between persons both in the present and over time’ (2007: 172). Referring to Tswana homesteads, Morton’s concern is primarily the embodiment of memory, but much of his ethnography suggests that daily practice implicates both the material and personal relationships that the house encompasses. Tswana homes are often referred to through bodily metaphors, while relations between generations are referred to through the language of sinews and arteries. These notions are reminiscent of other metaphorical traditions around the house – such as referring to the hearth

as the ‘heart’ of a home (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). Morton refers to Joëlle Bahloul’s (1996) historical work on Algerian houses to note that ‘talking about the house and talking about the family . . . often amounts to the same thing’ (2007: 165). In showing us around her *hytte*, Elisa simultaneously described her family relations, the shifting generations, marriages, deaths and births that brought the house into her ownership, and the future that she saw the house affording to her future family. Here, as in the other Norwegian *hytte* that we have visited (as in the Tswana ‘*lolwapa*’), ‘persons and things are, in a sense, embodiments of memory as expressed in the idioms of sinews stretching or arteries flowing between generations’ (Morton 2007: 171). More than merely condensations of value, the built structures are materially involved in the way kin relations are interconnected through memory.

As we walk around the little house, Elisa recalls her grandmother and describes how her presence lingers in the house, and she alludes to how being at the *hytte* now produces a sense of family togetherness for her new family, through joint caring for the *hytte*, regularly spending free time together, sharing food, space and experiences. Elisa describes the six of them who mostly spend time together – herself, her partner and their respective children – as ‘one happy family’. We ask Elisa, therefore, what will happen to the *hytte* after she and her partner pass on. Will it be shared by all four children according to Norwegian ideals around the equal treatment of children, and of siblings?

‘Oh no, no, no no. That is quite out of the question!’ she responds without hesitation.

‘They know that it is not in *their* family. They will not inherit here, no. They know that, they are very clear about that.’

Having so heavily emphasised that they are all ‘one family’ at the *hytte*, she now tells us that her step-children do *not* have the same status as her own children in relation to the *hytte* in matters of inheritance. Elisa’s distinctions here might ring a bell for many readers, and indeed they conform with Norwegian inheritance laws, which do not include step-children as heirs, unless specifically stated in a will. What interests us here, however, is how it is that Elisa’s notion of family makes sense to her, and to her family, in relation to a particular kind of property such as the *hytte*. More specifically, our interest is in how kin idioms are mobilised to effect different socio-material assemblages, as well as cuts, and how the *hytte* works to both ‘kin’ the two parent–child groups into a blended ‘happy family’ but also hold them apart (see Lien and Abram, this issue).

Elisa’s use of the word ‘family’ is clearly rather fluid, with step-children both included and excluded from notions of family and kin inheritance, but this is not out of step with how these relations are understood by other *hytte* owners. We are interested in how the notion of ‘family’ can seamlessly change points of reference, and how key material items that ‘bring family together’, such as a *hytte*, can simultaneously be used to enact boundaries that cut across the same family unit. Elisa’s case is rather typical of so-called blended families in Norway. Children of different parents who grow up together in one household, for example when their respective parents marry, may in most other respects be treated as one family, yet when it comes to inheritance they are no longer equal. How do inheritance practices shape or break family and kin units? What is the role of property in making and unmaking kin relations?

Kinship Beyond 'Blood' and Procreation

Cultural links between biology and kinship relations have been challenged at least since the 1980s (see Schneider 1984; Yanagisako and Collier 1987), followed by the insight that relatedness is a dynamic process, and not merely given by birth, death or marriage (Carsten 2000). Signe Howell (2006) reinforced the growing insight that kinship need not require any form of genealogical (biological) relatedness, interrogating the means by which babies adopted from abroad were incorporated into Norwegian families and, more broadly, into the Norwegian National Family, as the children become 'Norwegianised'. Others focused on biomedical advances that allowed unprecedented reproductive practices such as surrogacy and sperm and egg donation (see Edwards et al 1999; Franklin 2019; Strathern 1992). Marit Melhuus (2012), for example, shows how the Norwegian state intrudes into kinship practices through regulation of artificial reproduction and its relation to sexuality and gender. But state regulatory practices also shape expectations and norms of kinning in relation to property ownership, inheritance and taxation. Here, we see important opportunities for legal anthropology, not only in examining the interpretation of law and regulation, but also in a close examination of the role of legal professionals in shaping and advising on questions of inheritance, in mediating in marriage and divorce cases, or in redefining what comes into the purview of the law or not, over time (see Blandy, this issue).

The attention to death and inheritance in the articles in this special issue complements work on procreation by asking how kinning is performed through processes of inheritance, succession and passing on. Like procreation, these processes are shaped both by state institutions and regulatory frameworks *and* by the active negotiations of paralegal norms and practices that circulate and are subject to interpretation (and are the subject of socio-legal studies).

In this article, we build on the concept of kinning in a number of ways. First, drawing on Howell's (2003, 2006) concept of 'kinning' as active practice, rather than kin as relations fixed in time by birth, marriage or death, we note that it is not only children subject to international adoption who are subject to 'kinning' processes (cf. Howell), but that these processes apply in nearly all dynamic reconfigurations of family relations, including the incorporation of affines, for example (Lien and Abram, this issue). This means that all children are, in effect, kinned into different kinds of family assemblages. This includes step-children who are made into kin by the practices of family life. So-called 'unclear' (Simpson 1994) or 'blended' families also (re-)produce themselves as a family by seemingly trivial practices, such as sharing breakfast, pinning pictures to the wall or painting themselves into the decoration of their shared house. In the Norwegian case, as our vignette about Elisa shows, some relations then endure through inheritance, while others might not. Kinning presupposes, in other words, a process of selection, whether it concerns adopted children, step-children or children conceived biologically by their parents, and that is at least partly demonstrated through the occupation, ownership and inheritance of property. While kinship studies can, to some extent, be said to have been inspired by the intrinsic selectivity of genealogy, the selectiveness of kinning practices has been only partially recognised. Most crudely, kinning one child selected for adoption inevitably means not kinning other children

not chosen. More subtly, perhaps, kinning one sibling by leaving them property (e.g. through primogeniture) implies by default not – or differently – kinning other siblings. As Bodil Selmer (this issue) points out, prioritising spousal inheritance over offspring may de-kin children altogether, while kinning one ‘branch’ of an extended family (or kin) by continuing to share property (as in Lien and Abram’s article) may only partially occlude the lack of kinning of other branches, and of those who withdraw or are excluded from shared ownership. Typical in most such cases, we argue, is the glossing over and internal rationalisation of kinning and de-kinning practices such that, even if they continue to generate personal resentments, the process appears more or less self-evident to those involved, as in the case of Elisa. One reason such frameworks carry force is their codification through the agencies of the state (e.g. in inheritance law) as highlighted in this special issue by Jialing Luo, for example.

Second, we recognise that kinning often involves negotiation between ideals, norms and pragmatics. Kinning is not only about descent, but can act ‘upwards’, e.g. through kinning of step-parents and parents-in-law, or by the nurturing of tombs, graves or ancestor shrines as well as enduring disputes around succession and, importantly, ‘sideways’ through (step-)siblingship and cousin relations. In the revival of kinship studies from the 1990s, Tatjana Thelen, Cati Coe and Erdmute Alber (2013) noted a tendency to revert to an older focus on alliance and descent to the detriment of other relations. Siblingship offers a way ‘to explore how relatedness is created, maintained, and broken over the entire life course and even thereafter’ (Thelen et al 2013: 2; see also Lambek 2011). We argue that siblingship figures largely in kinning practices such as those described by Marianne Lien and Simone Abram, by Jialing Luo and by Constance Smith (this issue). Sideways kinning can take on particular significance in negotiations about the burial of parents or the dispensing of their property and can be particularly fragile at times.

However, as the case of Elisa shows, the notion of siblingship, what kinning entails, is not always entirely clear, and kinning thus holds the potential for its opposite, what we call de-kinning. The performance of specific cuts around the family unit, such as the refusal to inherit, or the withdrawal from family rituals can also imply an active renunciation of kinship. Recognising the negotiation inherent in kinning is particularly relevant in relation to houses and heirlooms where sibling rivalry or conflict between heirs can destroy the potential for kin relations to endure, such that intergenerational negotiation and siblingship are closely connected. What is at stake here is not always the monetary value of the artefact as such, but often what the process of (dis-)inheritance has performed, in terms of reproducing (or not) family or kin units (see Selmer, this issue). A focus on active de-kinning thus complements studies of the kinds of unintentional un-making of family that Boehm (2019) attributes to the vicissitudes of migration, for example.

One of the reasons why controversies over inheritance can so effectively disrupt kin relations is that inheritance is hardly ever only about material value. Relatedness usually involves the non-bodily and non-substantial processes of kinning, and inheritance is no exception (cf. Bamford 2004). The articles in this special issue show how kinning processes that involve material artefacts, owned property and/or shared use of space invariably also speak to less tangible aspects of a relation, such as shared

biography, affective memories and a sense of presence that exceeds the moment of death. Hence, deceased ancestors 'live on' often in quite mundane ways through the things they leave behind, heirlooms, intentions, sheds, gardens, interior decorations or stories.

Finally, we are interested in the role of material artefacts in the process of kinning, beyond bodily substances (see Carsten 2019). As the articles in this special issue emphasise, material things take on a particular significance in relation to processes of kinning and de-kinning, as land, houses, heirlooms and ambivalent items become entangled in the production and reproduction of family life. Work on house societies, and the role of houses in re/producing family structures provides inspiration to this observation, as we outline below, but we see good reason to bring house society literature more closely into discussion with work on the passing on of material items more generally. A house need not be the defining feature of a kinship structure to play a role in the endurance of selected relations (see Hoëm, this issue), but may provide a theoretical perspective that enables us to see how other material objects also play such a role. Our approach to house society is therefore rather liberal. We are less concerned with any need to define house society as a particular pattern of kinship (as opposed to bilateral, for example) but ask what the institution and the material of the house tells us about the infiltration of enduring material and immaterial goods into the affective and embodied experiences of kinship.

This approach is complementary to recent innovative approaches to kinship that examine the qualities by which kinship is assessed or 'measured', especially in relation to bureaucratic imperatives (Thelen and Lammer 2021), and studies of 'contagious kinship' (Meinert and Grøn 2020). Lotte Meinert and Lone Grøn explore the 'hauntology' of kinship in which traits or experiences are felt to pass between kin, particularly in relation to illnesses, substances and problems that 'run in families' (2020: 585). While the house barely figures in their discussion, the articles presented in this special issue certainly observe the house and its contents and milieu to be the locus of the continued presence of deceased or departed kin. The house also lends itself to calculation – in relation to shares of inheritance, for example (see Abram 2014), making ownership of property surely one of the means by which kinship is 'assisted', as Tatjana Thelen and Christof Lammer phrase it (2021: 2). Such approaches do not succeed one another in anthropological theory, but add layers of ethnographic nuance and theoretical possibilities to think about kinning and de-kinning.

Kinship and the house

The link between kinship studies and property has a broader and older history than discussions about house societies, of course. For example, in 1961, Edmund Leach published a book on a village in Ceylon that saw kinship as tied into both the material and symbolic worlds. He likened the contemporary theoretical debates about unilineal and bilateral kinship systems to acrostics destined to keep undergraduates busy at night, based on intuition rather than method. Instead, his study of Pul Eliya (Leach 1961) showed how systems of organisation were adapted to local economics and

property over time, even while they are described as traditional and timeless. In his view, ‘the concepts of descent and affinity are expressions of property relations which endure through time’ (1961: 11). The role of property was then taken in two quite different directions. Lévi-Strauss addressed property in a chapter in his *Way of the Masks* in 1979, as he struggled to classify Kwakiutl kinship, a system that seemed not to fit any of the established kinship categories but did appear to be organised around the house used in turn by generations of house members. Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones picked up on Lévi-Strauss’s comment that such a house combined male and female lines of succession, often through marriage, in order to keep a material and an immaterial estate together. Carsten and Hugh-Jones focus particularly on Lévi-Strauss’s comparison of the house to a moral person (1983:174, cited in Carsten and Hugh Jones 1995: 6–7).

Roxana Waterson (2000) stretches this further, observing that Southeast Asian houses may be referred to as being ‘alive’, and thus have a life history or biography intertwined with the house’s inhabitants. This observation provides a methodological opportunity to explore the house as an actor in its own right, demanding care and offering comfort (see Abram and Lien 2024). Lévi-Strauss’s moral person also bears a resemblance to a corporate person, an entity subject to the law in the way that a human person is. The moral person carries moral continuity, and is subject to relations with humans and with other material things. Lévi-Strauss identifies the corporate house as a carrier of contradictions between opposing structural forces: *descent and affinity*; as Carsten and Hugh-Jones highlight, the spousal couple that are the centre of a family are also the focus of tension between their respective kin, such that a marriage alliance is both a source of antagonism and a unity demonstrated in the very existence of the house. The house, in turn, becomes an object of contention in the context of divorce when all of those efforts to hold things together turn to the difficulties of moving them apart while forging new relations across a new divide, such as step-relations or inter-generational relations (Simpson 1997).

Another significant approach to the link with materiality lies in the focus on place and kinship, an approach that has itself given rise to a line of theorisations of kinship, as James Leach (2019) has recently summarised. Leach also explores the way that life-cycle rites themselves generate both places and people, adopting Marilyn Strathern’s proposal that bodies do not necessarily precede relations, but that relations generate worlds. In our terms, that would imply that people are not already fixed, waiting to be drawn into relations with other people and things (through kinning), but that kinning processes are generative of people and places. While kinship studies have tended largely to focus on the production of persons through kinship rituals or practices, it can be argued that kinning practices create more than relations, giving rise to houses, places and other material artefacts, as the articles in this special issue illustrate.

Donna Birdwell-Pheasant and Denise Lawrence-Zuñiga, on the other hand, take a more classical approach to the tensions between household and family, arguing that ‘The house defines a place that “belongs to” a particular set of people and also defines, through co-residence and shared usage, the set of people that “belong to” a particular place’ (1999: 3–4). They are primarily concerned to further elaborate the mechanisms by which such a thing as a house society might be produced, in order

to analyse the emergence of a twentieth-century European house and corresponding society. Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuñiga are primarily interested in everyday kinning practices, whereas Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason's (2000) study of the emotive power of artefacts that are inherited identifies particular moments when kinning becomes fragile or fraught. Their interest in the passage of things passed on through inheritance is a means to understand the affective import of relations that endure after death.

Clearly there is commonality among these approaches in tying the material to the affective, in examining the significance of things that endure for those who receive or reject them. We highlight this as a reminder that the production of relations through exchange and everyday practices is obviously not limited to kinning, but that kinning is a particular generative form, and that one of its central features is its potential for endurance. Kinning also structures time in particular ways, among things and people that endure in life and in memory over different timespans, or 'demographies in flux' (Day 2012).

Equally important, from our perspective, is the link with property rights and reciprocity, as several papers in this issue highlight. That is, this collection of articles combines the multi-generational approach of the house society, the emotive power of artefacts, and Finch and Mason's focus on the materials passed on through inheritance, taking up Lambek's (2011) exhortation that kinship studies should address the whole lifecycle.

Property, whether land, buildings or moveable objects, gains emotive value for passing on through its accumulated history of use. Here, we are not referring only to items of renown (cf. Weiner 1992) but 'ordinary', possibly cheap or even disposable domestic objects, including clothes, curtains, tables and cups that conjure links to those who once used them. Items 'passed on', whether they are sentimental mementoes, whole buildings, land or trees and bushes, are understood by givers and receivers to be, in some senses, gifts. Seen in the context of gift-exchange theory, recipients of inheritance can be seen to feel themselves under the obligation of having received a gift that carries with it the continued intention and emotional expectations of the giver (see Selmer 2017). When the giver is deceased, the prospect of a return gift must be sublimated into taking care of the object passed on (again, on kinship as care see Lambek 2011). Such care work can be fully embraced, as Lien and Abram show (this issue), but it can also be a burden, and it may be rejected.

As Selmer illustrates in the opening to her article, in disposing of gifts of inheritance, the receiver is effectively rejecting the ongoing relationship with the deceased, denying the potential for continuing kinship and breaking the link from past to future. Hence, every act of intentionally 'passing on' a material artefact carries with it the potential for refusal, which can in turn be seen as an act of de-kinning by rejecting the material carrier of that kin relation. Precisely because such kin relations carry a heavy burden of affective significance, accepting or rejecting the gift can cause deep responses. One feature that is developed in this special issue is the quality of succession and inheritance as a process, not an event. As Lien and Abram argue – and Hoëm also illustrates – preparation for inheritance, and the passing on of property often long-prior to death, stretches the event into a longer drama of negotiation, anticipation and

restructuring of kinning relations over time, indeed potentially right through the life course.

Our focus on dwellings and property goes to the heart of this, since enduring family homes carry the memory of the family's growth or decline over time, the shared experience of children growing up, and the weight of nostalgia for or rancour over times past. But they also carry the domestic and national expectations of family norms. Alongside these affective values, property carries potentially significant financial value as well as costs of maintenance. Hence, tensions over inheritance may be heightened by the distribution of wealth within the family, while arguments over money can be used as a proxy for resentment over family slights or perceived preferential treatments. Similarly, the failure to care for or maintain 'family property' can be used as a proxy for failure to act as a proper gift-recipient or to ensure appropriate acts of succession and thus of kinning new generations in a proper way.

Outline (or how kinning matters)

In this special issue, we explore how processes of substantial and non-substantial kinning can constitute enduring forms of relatedness and social formations that contradict the conventional notion of kin group or family. Sarah Blandy's (this issue) analysis of collective housing in the UK is a case in point. Blandy shows how alternative collective housing may involve performances of community that could be interpreted as 'non-genealogical kinning'. These are enduring and committed forms of relatedness that seek to carve out a legal and institutional space for forms of belonging that fulfil many of the functions of conventional kin and family but do not presuppose genealogical reproduction. This case thus helps explore the possibility of mobilising the notion of kinning to encompass a variety of social forms that involve long-term commitment and a sense of continuity that transcends the temporality of a human lifetime. Here, again, we see important opportunities for legal anthropology, as the participants of such quasi-legal communities often struggle to find an appropriate institutional form that acknowledges long-term commitment not anchored in marriage or reproduction. As Blandy demonstrates, a socio-legal approach helps flesh out inherent contradictions related to various forms of owning and of passing on material property, such as housing accommodation.

The articles that follow include but also look beyond the everyday practices of kinning to incorporate the often emotionally laden process of inheritance as an instance of exchange, a crucial moment in the family life-cycle where relations are called into question through the reallocation of property (and other belongings) between a diversity of potential heirs. We note, even so, that inheritance is not a universal notion, just as the idea of private ownership (private property) is not universally shared. While Hoëm's article is the one that most explicitly offers a counter example, depicting a society where ownership is primarily collective and property inheritance therefore meaningless, several of the articles challenge the assumption of individualised ownership, even in societies where such assumptions are taken to be the norm and permeate legal practices. In all cases, normative ideals can be identified, but mobilising an

ideal inevitably gives rise to local discussion or argument. It is in these discussions that expectations, norms and practices may be revealed that in turn help us to identify what may otherwise be tacit understandings of family and life-cycles.

Our aim is to address the changing practices through which kinship is produced and reproduced. Such an approach incorporates temporalities and materialities in the changing expression of deeply felt emotions that extend between people and between people and material things. Our approach resonates with intellectual and theoretical developments that have inspired anthropology after the turn of the twenty-first century, which we may refer to here as an emergent recognition of 'sociality beyond the human'² (see also Lien and Pálsson 2019). What they share is an engagement with aspects of the other-than-human as something more than merely symbolic, utility based or the object of cultural construction. We take inspiration here from the way in which these authors invite us to explore other modes of knowing and being, and call for ethnographic attention to the ensembles of relations that constitute enduring socialities beyond the human. Hence, we think of kinship produced by property and kinship produced by relations as non-separable processes.

A broad comparative approach, we argue, is particularly well suited to challenge theoretical assumptions that are based on Eurocentric understandings of the relation between people and things. While we may see quite a few commonalities across sites in Northern Europe, when it comes to the ways that property inheritance plays a role in kinning and de-kinning people and things, any conclusions must be tempered by the consideration of societies that do not acknowledge private or personal ownership of items of value. In Tokelau, as described by Hoëm (this issue), material and immaterial belonging bind kin in quite different ways. Where material of value is owned by a corporate group that extends beyond the lives of its human participants, its ownership is not in question when one of the group dies. This is partially in contrast to the passage of privately-owned property but only to some extent, because, as the article demonstrates, the notion of shared (and enduring) ownership does not always map onto legal property arrangements. Hoëm's article thus confronts the assumptions implicit in the Scandinavian ethnographies on the distribution of worth among things, while also helping place the latter in a broader perspective. Which things matter and how they matter is brought directly to our attention, unsettling the association between owning and valuing, and opening up the ways we might think about property's kinning potential.

That passing on of property in a Northern European context can be almost determinative for kinning relations is made explicit in Selmer's article. Her material, from Denmark, shows that a change in the law prioritising spousal inheritance over descendants' inheritance can lead to the de-kinning of children via the institution of step-parenting, a function of remarriage. Where a step-child is deprived of any of the belongings or even a sentimental memento of their deceased parent (items which are, instead, inherited by their step-parent, the deceased parent's spouse), they may well feel that the parent-child relation itself has not endured beyond death. The removal of owned, material things may exacerbate sentiments of grief, doubling the loss of the person through the loss of their things, understood as extensions of their personhood. And as Selmer illustrates, rejection of those things might also be used to limit the

endurance of relations with a person one would prefer to forget. Each of these active forms of kinning through property can thus be negated through what we have called 'de-kinning', where material inheritance is rejected, refused or passed on further.

Material property can therefore be understood as a medium through which kinship is reproduced or truncated over time, but Lien and Abram's article (and indeed Smith's article, see below) shows how property can be used to extend the activation of kinship beyond the limits it might have without that property. In Lien and Abram's article, the passage of *hytter* from generation to generation is acknowledged by some *hytte* owners to be a means by which some kinship relations are maintained that otherwise would have fallen into abeyance. This is possible because *hytte*-families have to maintain active contact in order to enjoy, maintain and manage the *hytte* itself. Specific forms of material property, in other words, have a particular hold on their people in ways that challenge us to critically reflect on the sharp analytical distinction between people and things so commonly taken for granted in ethnographies from Europe.

In Lien and Abram's article, inheritance is a process that takes place throughout life, even if it is accelerated in relation to particular deaths. Smith's article, on the other hand, deals directly with the way that death practices reinforce particular kinds of kin relations among the Luo of Kenya. In contrast with the Norwegian case, where it is the holiday home that accompanies a journey between generations who are usually born, live and are buried at the primary place of residence, Luo men, in particular, retain attachments to their natal homestead via the building and maintaining of burial houses, or *dala*. Contemporary *dala* fulfil the purpose of demonstrating their owners' success in Nairobi, serve as a residence for holiday visits and provide a place for burial in due course. Smith explains how planning for a good death entails planning and building a *dala*, or homestead, which has long been an important physical manifestation of Luo kinship. As recorded by Evans-Pritchard in the 1930s, sons are allocated plots successively downhill of the main house. But contemporary homesteads differ radically from those recorded by Evans-Pritchard (1965), especially when it comes to the durability of the building materials. While older *dala*, built of mud and straw, would decay along with the body of the head of household buried there, newer *dala* built with concrete, glass or corrugated plastic, endure well beyond the living memory of the deceased. Lack of decay can mean the endurance of memory, but it can also give rise to haunting and in cases of 'bad death' this can pose intractable difficulties for subsequent generations, as well as difficulties in reusing increasingly scarce land. Hence, Luo homesteads tie people to place and tie generations together in what Smith calls a 'topology of kinship', in which the eventfulness of life and the durability of modern materials can get in the way of idealised practices.

Idealised practices feature also in the article by Blandy, which takes a more explicit socio-legal approach to property ownership and sharing. The link between legal anthropology and socio-legal studies is a fruitful arena for rethinking kinship because modern kinning practices bear implicit (or even explicit) reference to legal frameworks. Blandy's article about shared housing in the UK shows how constructions of shared property challenge a legal hegemony favouring individual ownership, and her cases expose ambivalences around the practical use of legal frameworks. At the same time, her article also raises questions about how far the notion of kinning can be stretched.

Are the people rejecting traditional forms of kinship in favour of what are sometimes called intentional communities in fact ‘kinning’ beyond the genealogical kin idiom? What happens to such individual properties when the owners die, and to what extent can such non-genealogical communities be inherited by descendants? Through such questions the article gives a glimpse into alternative forms of kinning and of family life.

Each of these accounts reports on relatively stable forms of intergenerational inheritance, but Jialing Luo’s account of the contradictory fate of private property in Beijing gives us insight into the endurance of implicit understandings of property through moments of radical historical change. The removal of property ownership under the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent reintroduction of revised property rights raises further questions around the role of property in kinship. The prevailing political regime underwent enormous shifts in its approach to property and family, yet the sense of what might constitute a family shifted more sluggishly, with the multi-generational memory of lifecycles of family-property institutions resurfacing at different times. The article focuses particularly on the role of the state in de-kinning, taking up Blandy’s focus on the negotiation of legal and social practices with a more explicit account of the structuring and metaphorical relation of paternity and paternalism within families and in relation to the state. Where sons who fail to perform their duty of filial piety can be brought before a court of law, the extent to which the state regulates family life becomes clear through comparison with the conflicts over inheritance and sharing outlined in the other articles. Luo also addresses the tensions between financial and affective value ascribed to property that weave through all of the cases described in this special issue, showing how the potential to realise the value of property in financial equity lurks in the shadows of arguments about sentimental and kinning properties of material property.

Finally, Hoëm’s article indicates how intergenerational succession can proceed without private property ownership or its accompanying inheritance structures. In the atoll society of Tokelau, intergenerational succession has occurred since approximately 1925 without a concomitant exchange of enduring material objects, with the exception of land. Shared ownership means that the death of one owner does not give rise to a moment of inheritance, since land is always already owned by all of the other members of the group. There are, of course, patterns of relationship that are entwined with exchanges of material objects, and objects are transferred intergenerationally. Hoëm outlines how material is differentiated into things that matter and things that do not, in ways that cast a valuable critical reflection on the forms of materialisation of kinning described in other articles in this special issue. The article explores how a significant increase in material wealth, including more permanent housing, and the ultimate threat represented by climate change – of losing the land altogether – affects the intergenerational transfer of goods and relationship patterns. The case of Tokelau illustrates how kinning and de-kinning operate in a society where the passing on of property is not associated with death (inheritance) or with private property but with the ongoing transmission of collective belonging and selected, inalienable things.

In summary, this special issue compares diverse examples of property or land-based kinning, with the focus respectively on inheritance, property ownership, funer-

ary practices, collective belonging, collective ownership and legal practices of kinning and de-kinning. The articles speak to one another in offering counter-examples: heirlooms take on embodied affect for Danish step-children, while personal items are considered dispensable in Tokelau; the endurance of Norwegian '*hytte*' holds expanding genealogies together through ancestral presence, while in western Kenya the enduring materials used to build family holiday-homes-come-burial-sites threaten to squeeze new generations off the land. The imagined timeless autonomous nuclear family in Norway, or the remaking of intentional communities in the UK are facilitated by the subtle presence of an enabling legal system in contrast to the brutal re-appropriation of family houses through the turbulent political history of the state that saw Beijing's '*hutong*' family houses first collectivised then reallocated. Taken together, the ethnographic articles shed new light on kinship, property and inheritance, opening up a new avenue in one of Anthropology's most classic fields.

Conclusion

If kinning denotes an active process of incorporating persons into families of kin and families of the nation (Howell 2003), then what is de-kinning? Returning to the example of Elisa's family *hytte*, we see that the rights and expectations of a step-child in processes of inheritance are far from given, and that siblingship can take many forms simultaneously. Not inheriting Elisa's *hytte* can be interpreted as a rejection, but it can also be accepted as an expected differentiation between (step-)siblings of different parents (as in Elisa's case). The first interpretation could lead to a feeling of being excluded from the family unit, and thus qualify as an act of de-kinning, while the second interpretation might not have any consequences for the kinship ties at all – in other words, there is not a straightforward moral alignment between the choice of kinning or not. De-kinning then is a counterpart to kinning, an active process of exclusion from units of family of kin. It follows then that de-kinning, just like kinning, will be subject to negotiations, it must be performed in accordance with a somewhat shared understanding among the parties involved. When such understanding is not shared, such as when the exclusion is felt by one party but not by another, conflict may ensue.

However, both kinning and de-kinning unfold within cultural expectations of what constitutes kin relations. That is, processes of incorporation and exclusion are performed in relation to a shared notion of kinship as a significant mode of ordering relations. Hence, we may argue that the opposite of kinning is not de-kinning but rather the indifference that comes with not recognising kin relations at all, or perhaps 'un-kinning'. Gradually losing touch, not knowing one's cousins, are examples of what we might call un-kinning, instances in which kin relations simply do not matter. This, then, is the opposite of the process of kinning, which always, necessarily, carries the potential for its own negation, or the process of de-kinning, as its shadow.

Our aim in this introduction has been to outline an approach to kinship that takes seriously the enduring qualities of material and property, while maintaining the argu-

ment that kinship is achieved (or negated) through the active performance of acknowledged relations. We do this by bringing together concerns with relations-of-practice, more-than-human relations, house society and socio-legal inheritance studies, weaving the performance of more-than-human relations into theories around inheritance. Our aim has been to explore how kinning and de-kinning as relational performances are achieved at least partly through the means of materiality, rather than being predominantly focused on bodily experience or emotional or physical metaphors.

In exploring the depth of emotions that emerge in the process of transferring property, whether that is through inheritance or in the incorporation of persons into sharing relations, it becomes clear that these emotions are not only attached to material items for what they are in themselves, but also for their role in mediating other relations. We are not proposing a hierarchy of such attachments but highlight instead the multiplicities in social-material-affective bindings where kinship is concerned. The legal processes of inheritance play a crucial role in formulating expectations and limitations to the extents of kinning and de-kinning, even while they are continually managed, evaded or manipulated in the interests of promoting desired relations and escaping those less favoured. In emphasising de-kinning as much as kinning, our account disarms the moral weighting towards kin relations that can be discerned in many kinship studies and offers a way to give attention to the way that kinning actively cuts through and across other kinds of relations.

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Notes

1. Can you be dispossessed in relation to something that you do not legally own? We shall argue that this is indeed possible because people's sense of ownership or entitlement is not always in accordance with legally codified property relations. We are grateful to Anita Nordeide who brought our attention to the relevance of this concept in relation to Norwegian *hytte*.
2. See also the 'more than human' (Whatmore 2002), 'performativity' (Abram and Lien 2011), 'becoming with' (Haraway 2008), 'more than human sociality' (Tsing 2013) and 'biosocial becomings' (Ingold and Palsson 2013).

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Faire et défaire la parenté : Maisons, héritages et reproduction de la famille

Résumé : « Faire et défaire la parenté » introduit un numéro spécial qui porte sur la manière dont les maisons, les héritages et autres objets reproduisent la parenté et la famille dans diverses sociétés. Ce volume entend revisiter les dimensions de la mort et de l'héritage dans les études de parenté en portant une attention particulière aux donations et à la matérialité des choses et des corps. Notre perspective prend en compte les temporalités et matérialités incorporées dans l'expression changeante des émotions qui passent entre les personnes, et entre les personnes et les choses. Nous faisons ainsi écho à l'intérêt classique de l'anthropologie de la parenté pour l'incorporation des étrangers via l'affinité – notamment autour de la notion de société-Maisons – et sur transfert intergénérationnel de richesse en le faisant porter sur des questions d'appartenance et d'identité. En montrant que les processus de parenté sont toujours sélectifs et négociés, cet ensemble d'articles défend l'idée que ces processus portent aussi en eux l'inverse de ce qu'on pense qu'ils font : de même que la propriété permet aux relations de parenté de se re/produire, elle peut aussi être utilisée pour faire sortir les gens de la parenté à travers ce que l'on désigne comme « dé-parenter » (*de-kinning*) : par des instances d'appropriation ratée ou des relations de parenté auxquelles il est mis fin. Cet article délimite une approche de la parenté qui prend au sérieux les qualités de longévité du matériel et de la propriété, tout en maintenant l'argument que la parenté est réalisée (ou négociée) à travers la performance active de relations reconnues.

Mots-clés : faire parenté, défaire la parenté, sociétés à maisons, héritage, relations socio-matérielles