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The “Kinship” of the Anthropologist

The Impact of Family Relations on Knowledge Production and Positionality

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Kinship studies established itself as a core field of anthropology in the early 20th century. While anthropologists studied kinship and sexuality in different societies, they rarely reflected on their own family relationships, although accompanied research became very common from the 1930s onward. Anthropologists were accompanied by spouses, both academic and non-academic, and sometimes by their children, without mentioning different forms of family collaboration or in many cases even the presence of accompanying family members in their publications. Similarly, unaccompanied, unmarried and childless men and women rarely reflected on how their family situation and status affected their research.

In this paper I will examine how anthropologists‘ kinship has been historically marginalized and how this affects anthropological knowledge production and ethnographic writing practices to this day. Even after it has become commonplace to reflect on the positionality and relationality of the researcher in the field, reflections on marital status, family relations and sexuality of anthropologists and the importance of accompanied research remains understudied and marginalized. I will discuss the reasons for this and argue why these topics need more attention, in particular as academic research becomes more transnational. Reflections on family relations and the influence of researchers‘ spouses, children, parents and other relatives and family relations on academic knowledge production are important and

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enriching for epistemological and methodological discussions in the discipline and beyond. To advance the discussion on the entanglement of the private and the professional in anthropological research, this perspective is essential and urgently needed.