

Introduction to Volume 3, Issue 2

Fadwa El Guindi
Retiree University of California, Los Angeles
Former Distinguished Professor
Qatar University
Email: felguindi@gmail.com

Dwight W. Read,
Distinguished Emeritus Professor
University of California, Los Angeles
Email: dread@ss.ucla.edu

We begin this introduction to Volume 3, Issue 2, 2023 by referring to a publication report called *Chapeau Kinship* that we published in the last issue of *Kinship*. That report was written by two representatives of the *Equipe de Parenté* of the *Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale du Collège de France*, Klaus Hamburger and Michael Houseman. The *Equipe* has been directed by Klaus for over 10 years. He has also directed the *Atelier de Parenté* over this time period. Their report briefly summarized the imaginative Avatar Kinship Project started in 2018 by Klaus and has now appeared as a special issue of the French journal *Terrain*, « Lectures et débats » section, openly accessible online at <https://journals.openedition.org/terrain/15912> and in book form: *Anthropologie de la parenté — Le débat des avatars*, Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie, 2022.

The Avatar project is organized around the question: Can we think about kinship without reference to procreation? If yes, How? If not, Why not? This question was divided further into five subtopics: (1) conceptualization of the link between kinship and procreation, (2) the role of non-procreative kinship in kinship systems, (3) the role of the incest prohibition in forming kinship relations, (4) the status of kinship terminologies in the study of kinship relations and behavior, and (5) the heuristic scope of the intercultural variation in kinship systems. The project Avatars are: Hominidae, Paratio, Generatio, Kingen, Correlationnel, Sexus Nexus, AnthropOikos and Comparator.

After the project appeared in publication online and true to the scope of the journal *Kinship*, we sent an open invitation to scholars of kinship asking for comments about or reviews of the project and its publication in *Terrain*. One scholar of kinship systems from France was so inspired by the whole project and the Avatar idea that he suggested sharing the review task among several scholars. Another scholar also expressed strong interest. It was finally decided that these two scholars would be the reviewers and they would choose the Avatars they wished to review, which they did. They selected as their Avatar name Circumspector and thus became Circumspector 1 and Circumspector 2. This spirit of open scholarship and debate is exactly what the journal *Kinship* seeks. The eJournal senior co-editors, Read and El Guindi, find both of the Avatar reviews inspiring.

In this Issue we are publishing both of these Avatar ‘reviews-comments’. The first of the published comments is by Circumspector 1, who expounds on the choice of the name Circumspector for the Avatar, writing that:

The name speaks for itself, indicating that neither categoric judgements will be made, nor ukases issued. *Circumspector* is basically someone who looks at thing with sustained curiosity. Our *circumspectio* will address the way that three of the avatars, namely *Hominidae*, *Generatio* and *Sexus Nexus* (in their order of occurrence) helped shed light on the crucial issue of incest avoidance. Nonetheless, more needs to come. Not only do the other *avatars* need to be accounted for, but we also need to consider the intermediary steps of the debate that lead to the final papers. Here we basically just account for the differences between two steps in the debate without considering what lead to these differences. We hope that this will allow us, in the end, to see if this collective process of thinking and managing ideas opens the way to new avenues for resolving kinship issues and that it allows us to see if there is a new consensual basis or it serves to form a new and brilliant scholastic dispute.

Circumspector 1 concludes: “Human genetics is moving forward at a rapid pace and a number of answers will be probably be given soon that will perhaps make all of us reconsider some past or recent theoretical assumptions.” It was stressed that the reviewers approached the review project “considering the concept of kinship as being a milestone in human cognitive development.”

The second comment published here is by Circumspector 2 and is titled *Sex, Love, Incest, Death, and Succession: Beyond Basic Biology*. It reviews the contributions of the three Avatars, *Hominidae*, *Paratio*, and *Comparator*, and proposes further possible avenues for the study of human kinship. It addresses the issue of universality and dismisses the claim that kinship is grounded in biology. Circumspector 2 writes:

The ability to not only recognize and name close and distant relatives and to regulate the relationships among them, but also of turning strangers into relatives through marriage, fictive kinship, and other metaphoric extensions is a human universal. Together with the capacity for language, and closely related to it, this is the hallmark of human nature. The sheer complexity of this multi-layered phenomenon that includes not only procreation, but also regulates behaviors among categories of relatives, cannot be reduced either to rules and laws or to biological facts of reproduction. In my review of the recent Avatar debate “Can we talk about kinship without procreation?” (Peneque 2022) I approach these questions by considering the concept of kinship as being a milestone in human cognitive development. I propose that the New Reproductive Technologies and Artificial Intelligence are test cases for further exploration of kinship rooted in human analogical thinking.

We are clearly being taken on a journey of innovative thinking and rethinking of kinship issues by Circumspector as we already have by *Hominidae*, *Paratio*, *Generatio*, *Kingen*, *Correlationnel*, *Sexus Nexus*, *AnthropOikos* and *Comparator*.

Finally, we wish to convey that any scholars of kinship reading this Issue of *Kinship* or its earlier Issues is encouraged to comment in writing on any part or aspect of the journal Issues and to submit their comment (no limit on length) for publication consideration. Engagement with kinship issues is highly encouraged. In this regard, we would like to announce that kinship anthropologist Bojka Milicic will be co-editing with Helena Schiel a special issue of the journal *Kinship* with a focus on *compadrazgo*, which was the topic in the recent hybrid session on *Compadrazgo* at the 57th *Congresso de Americanistas*, held in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil. The Special Issue will encourage new insights, new data, and new perspectives. The deadline for submission of articles for consideration is October 15th. Please contact Bojka Milicic directly at bojka.milicic@anthro.utah.edu for more information and for making a submission. The Special Issue will be published in January, 2024.