A 'kinship anthropology of politics'? Interest, the collective self, and kinship in Argentine unions

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Abstract

In this article I argue for a kinship anthropology of politics, understood as a focus on the day to day imbrications of kinship and politics in a given political space, and the implications of that for the construction of political subjects. I describe kinship within shop-floor level trade union delegations of state employees in Argentina in three different ways: first, languages of kinship mobilised to describe political allegiance and dispositions, especially inheritance; second, family connections in recruitment and activism; and third, practices of kinning as relatedness. The combination of these three kinship modes creates the union as kin group, and enables them to act on the world politically in order to transform it.

Introduction: bringing Kinship back into Politics

In late October 2012, around a hundred civil servants from a central Argentine ministry gathered in the ministry's large meeting room to pay homage to Néstor Kirchner on the second anniversary of his death. The youth section of the union had organised the ceremony in homage to the former President. They had prepared a video, which one young man introduced. His voice breaking with emotion, he said that when Néstor died, 'you lost a political leader, the opposition lost a rival, and some lost an enemy, but many of us, we've lost a father.' As the video played, several members of the audience broke down in tears. They watched as the video depicted Néstor's role in the repayment of the debt to the IMF and defeat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, at political campaigns with his wife (then-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner), and public events with other important left-wing political figures of the region, like Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro and Lula da Silva. When the video finished, the General Secretary of the union delegation, a charismatic man in his late 50s, stood in front of the screen and gave a speech about how the Kirchners had between them halted thirty years of decline in his country. He said 'I come from a Peronist family, and I

thought we would never recover our dignity as a country'. At the end of his speech, we applauded once more and rose to our feet to sing the *marcha peronista*, the Peronist anthem[1]. As the song went on, its volume increased, and our arms moved in time with the words, I at least felt strongly the sense of togetherness and shared commitment it evoked.

Four aspects of this story are significant for my argument here. First, the gathering was a moment of collective sociality, shared by a group of workers who identified as Peronist. Second, although organised by a union, it wasn't confined to members, but was attended by some of their bosses as well, an important aspect of such gatherings as they forge relationships based on a common political identity across employee-employer divides. Those relations are significant because they often smooth the way for negotiations on more overtly political matters like employment conditions. Third, the video presentation celebrated some of the key political acts that happened in Kirchner's presidency, such as the achievement of independence from the IMF. Finally, not only did the young activist express the depth of his emotive attachment to politics through his tears, but he also called Néstor Kirchner his father; while the Secretary General of the union delegation framed his speech by asserting that he 'comes from a Peronist family'. This imbrication of kinship language, political ideology, local political practice and collective sociability is key to the strength of unions and Peronist political groupings in Argentina today. In this article I explore how that manifests in the day to day life of one union delegation in particular. I do so through a consideration of commensality and sociability among activists in the light of classic anthropological literature on kinship. This analytical strategy challenges interests as the primary motivation for politics, and focusses attention instead on the importance of the cultivation of the union delegation as collective self.

From Malinowski onwards, anthropologists have critiqued the 19th century notion of 'economic man'; the person who operates only or primarily on the basis of formal economic logics of (calculative) self-interest. This is a philosophy of universal economic motivation that is, I would argue, still dominant today, albeit not in anthropology. Yet, despite questioning what was gradually becoming powerful economic orthodoxy, it is surprising that Malinowski did not turn quite the same level of scrutiny towards what we might call 'political man'; the political person motivated by interest. In Crime and Custom (1926), for example, he tells us that 'on the whole, [the Melanesian] tries to fulfil his obligations, for he is impelled to do so partly through enlightened self-interest, partly in obedience to his social ambitions and sentiments' (Malinowski 1926: 30). He described the submission to the rules of civil law in a similar way, as derived from 'the rational appreciation of cause and effect by the natives, combined with a number of social and personal sentiments such as

ambition, vanity, pride, desire of self-enhancement by display, and also attachment, friendship, devotion and loyalty to the kin.' (1926: 58)

The notion of 'enlightened self-interest' as political motivation is a figure important more widely than in Malinowski's work. Interest-based understandings of politics have become fundamental to both academic political theory and popular theories of politics, linked in particular to the rise of capitalism and related assumptions about motivation (Hirschman 1977). We see the importance of the politics of interest in the political science of corporatism and clientelism, for example; also in academic and popular discussions of voting behaviour or false consciousness, or in our sense that political parties represent (or should represent) different interest groups[2]. Even in comparative political studies of processes like clientelism that acknowledge the importance of kin groups in political networks, there is often an underlying assumption of utilitarian motivation (Auyero 2001; Levitsky 2003; Lomnitz 1995). Yet it has also long been acknowledged, certainly among anthropologists, that the instrumental aspects of politics are actually only a fairly limited part of any story; and that interest-based understandings will only go so far. It is the 'social and personal sentiments' that have proven most attractive to anthropologists, at least, from earlier concerns about kinship to later turns within political anthropology to affect, subjectivity, and so on.

In this article, I want to focus on the relation between kinship and politics. In recent work, kinship has been brought into the anthropology of politics through analytical tactics such as the examination of the role of cultural languages of kinship for understandings of nationalism (Alonso 1994; Eriksen 2010; Herzfeld 2007; Wade, et al. 2014) or divine kingship (Forbess and Michelutti 2013); or how colonial governments operated through the regulation of intimacy (Bear 2007; Stoler 2002). An important edited volume has also recently explored the relation between kinship and 'modern' domains of politics and economy (McKinnon and Cannell 2013). Here I want to draw inspiration from a problematic that featured in earlier discussions of kinship, and that Malinowski claimed to be the 'real subject-matter of the study of kinship', namely, 'the processes of the extension of kinship from its extremely simple beginnings in plain parenthood, to its manifold ramifications and complexities in adult membership of the tribe, clan and local group' (Malinowski 1930: 25).

This of course relied on a distinction between kinship within the family, and the extension of that kinship outwards. The distinction was a necessary part of his agenda to debunk previous evolutionist approaches to kinship, particularly in the context of debates at the time about classificatory kinship systems, and the extension of kinship terms from the parent-child unit outwards to other genealogical relatives.[3] Yet, in order to see ethnographic examples of a Malinowskian programme of study of the extension of kinship, we must turn to his students; and here the scholarship of Meyer

Fortes and Edward Evans-Pritchard plays an important role[4]. Both also separated out 'interpersonal kinship' from the 'politico-jural' realm, and all assumed that 'interpersonal kinship' remained broadly universal across all kinds of societies[5]. The key distinction for them lay between 'modern' societies where the 'political-jural domain' was governed by the state, and more 'primitive' societies where it was organised by means of kinship; specifically the lineage system (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; see also discussion in the introduction to McKinnon and Cannell 2013).

By now, anthropologists have thoroughly debunked the assumption that 'interpersonal kinship' is universally the same. From early on, legal anthropologists also explored the blurring of the boundaries between interpersonal kinship, the lineage system, and jural relations (e.g. Gluckman 1965). Feminist work from the 1970s and 80s disputed the gendered nature of the distinction between interpersonal and politico-jural domains; and its anchoring in differences assumed to be natural (Collier 1987; MacCormack and Strathern 1982; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). Yanagisako and Collier argued forcefully that it is crucial to transcend this particular dichotomy, for the 'oppositions assume the difference we should be trying to explain' (1987: 29), and that far more pertinent is the investigation of the means through which those domains come to seem self-evident, and self-evidently gendered. More recently, McKinnon and Cannell (2013: 15) have argued that this domaining is associated with ideas of modernity, with the assumption that 'modern societies are marked by a separation between the domains of kinship, economics, politics and religion, and that these domains are distinguished by fundamentally different forms of social relations.' They argue that in anthropological studies at least, if not in everyday life, there is a kind of 'taboo on reading across these domains' (2013: 15), or an expectation of ideal-type separateness. As such, institutional acts (such as the law, but also academic study) separate out domains that are in fact constantly experienced and held together in other bureaucratic and everyday practices.

The collection they edited is an example of some of the most productive recent ethnographic work which has drawn precisely on boundary-crossings and blurrings between domains to open up our understanding of how kinship influences other parts of life and vice versa. The contributors show how kinship relations shape economic practices such as textile manufacture in Italy and China (Yanagisako), drilling for oil in Patagonia (Shever) or boat-building in Kolkata (Bear). In particular, Yanagisako's contribution critiques the Weberian notion of economic action in modern capitalism as constituted through a 'secular logic of rational calculation' of interest (2013:77). This builds on her earlier work, which shows how kinship sentiments are an important 'force of production' for the transnational silk firms in both Italy and China with which she worked (Yanagisako 2002). Other contributors to the Vital Relations collection show how state regulation shapes kinship strategies of

marriage, birthing and adoption in the Americas (Lambek, Bodenhorn). The latter is, it seems to me, an excellent example of the political anthropology of kinship.

To complement this approach, I want to look further at how kinship connections are crucial in the organisation of politics; that is to say, I want to examine the flow from kinship to politics rather than from politics to kinship. In doing so, I do not wish to reinstate a clear distinction between domains, but I do find the domaining itself helpful as a heuristic device to describe the phenomenon that interests me here. Thus, and to return to the older language, my aim in this article is to explore some of the overlaps between 'interpersonal kinship' and the 'politico' part of the politico-jural realm in contemporary life. To do this, I focus specifically on the intensely political realm of the public sector trade union, and I suggest that the overlapping creates or indicates a form of politics that cannot merely be explained through a language of interest. We should instead seek alternative languages, which we can find in a related set of terms from kinship studies: *amity*, *consubstantiality*, and *mutuality of being*.

In Kinship and the Social Order (1969) Fortes suggested that kin were the group of people among whom notions of 'prescriptive altruism' ought to apply. He described this as a sense of 'amity', which is based upon an 'ethic of generosity'. It is a notion that kinsfolk 'are expected to be loving, just, and generous to one another and not to demand strictly equivalent returns of one another' (1969: 237). This expectation can lead to situations where kinsfolk expect much from their kin without return, such as support from salaried government employees among Ashanti in the 1940s, who preferred, he tells us, to be stationed far from their natal villages in order to escape those kinds of demands. The ethic of generosity could also apply – indeed, might be even stronger – between other, kin-like relations, of which Fortes points to blood-brotherhood, neighbourliness, and voluntary associations of immigrants in urban centres. In a later commentary on that essay, Julian Pitt-Rivers picked out the significance of the word 'amity' as one that unsettles the distinction between kinship and friendship[6], suggesting that 'non-kin amity loves to masquerade as kinship'. He argued that both amity and kinship are derived from a sense of *consubstantiality* (being of the same substance), and that 'consubstantiality can be established by other ways than by breeding', also using the example of blood brotherhood, among others (Pitt-Rivers 1973: 93).

Both sets of discussions acknowledge an ambiguity in who counts as kin and how you tell; in Fortes' essay alone we move from kin as member of a common lineage towards a broader notion of kin as the people among whom an 'ethic of generosity' works and circulates. This is quite a significant modification of the kind of kinship extension that Malinowski proposed in his interventions in the debates about classificatory kinship, since those older discussions did not cover the extension of

classificatory kinship terms to those not related genealogically. They both also made possible later discussion of kinship that developed the idea that kin can be made, through processes of – often – commensality (shared eating, or perhaps more precisely, shared feeding). Pitt Rivers hints at this with his discussion of how consubstantiality comes into being; and the theme of substance in kinship has been taken forward most significantly by Janet Carsten (2000; 2004; 2013), who has shown how the circulation and sharing of substance – food, but also blood - makes people into kin, alongside procreative ties.

We can trace a link between the axiom of amity, consubstantiality and Marshall Sahlins' recent formulation of kinship as 'mutuality of being' (2013), which bears its own relation to other similar anthropological descriptions of kinship, such as Schneider's notion of love as 'enduring, diffuse, solidarity' (1980); or Stasch's 'intersubjective belonging' (2009). Sahlins argues that kin are 'people who are intrinsic to one another's existence' (2013: 2); and that 'generally considered, kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are parts of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent.' (2013: 21). For him, this joining of lives need not occur merely through biological relationality ('procreation, filiation, or descent'), but can be made 'performatively by culturally appropriate action'; and he says 'a catalogue of commonplace post-natal means of kinship formation would thus include: commensality, sharing food, reincarnation, co-residence, shared memories, working together, adoption, friendship, shared suffering, and so on.' (Sahlins 2013: 5).

Sahlins' description of 'mutuality of being' would also describe rather well the very close relationships between union activists that I saw in my research. Indeed, I hope to show that the political community of the local shop floor delegation is a common project of self-cultivation that often also combines with actual family relationships; or the making of family-like relationships ('intersubjective participations' or 'mutual being') as people share time, food, political action, commitment, hardship, care, laughter and so on. It is important to point out at this stage that in this context 'mutuality of being' should not be equated to sameness or equality of being, and to note that these relationships, although close, are also very hierarchical, often exclusionary, and require considerable work to bring into being.

In a series of commentaries on Sahlins' work in HAU, commenters pointed out that we can, and often do, feel 'mutuality of being' with people whom we do not consider to be kin (e.g. Robbins 2013) . Perhaps, then, the labour union is merely an instance of the development of mutuality of being or amity among non-kin but in a kin-like way that can be analysed and studied as if we were studying the formation of kinship. That might in fact be enough for my argument here; that is to say,

a weaker proposition would be that the analytical languages provided by the anthropology of kinship help us to understand other kinds of social groupings. However, a stronger formulation of this argument would propose a kinship among the union grouping. In this article I suggest that this results from the combination of three distinct but interrelated manifestations of kinship: languages of kinship that are mobilised to understand connectedness and agency, family connections understood as such, and the making of kin through experiences of sociality, including commensality and care.

Languages of kinship: Peronism rooted in family

For the last 8 years I have been conducting field research with the two major unions of state employees in Argentina: ATE (Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado, Association of State Workers) and UPCN (Unión del Personal Civil de la Nación, Union of National Civil Servants). Over the course of 9 months in 2009, and shorter follow-up trips in subsequent years, I conducted extensive interviews with unionists from both ATE and UPCN in both their workplace and the union offices. I attended plenaries, assemblies, and other meetings; courses for new and experienced delegates run by both unions; and demonstrations, press conferences, and other public events, and in 2012, I spent two months accompanying a UPCN delegation at their place of work, an important Ministry located in the centre of Buenos Aires. My main informants were union leaders, from union delegates at the level of the administrative unit (e.g. government department) to those with positions in the central offices of the union that oversee members in the city of Buenos Aires. The 'delegation', then, refers to the group of union representatives at the local shopfloor level – that is to say, the ministry or administrative institution.

Both unions represent workers employed by the state, at varying levels of public administration, not just civil servants but also researchers, health workers, even stage hands, actors and musicians in state-run theatres. Informants from both unions told me that UPCN has a stronger presence among civil servants in administrative departments, while ATE's main strength lay in state-owned industries before privatization, but is now in the health sector (especially amongst nurses, porters, and other auxiliary staff in hospitals). In this article I focus mainly on UPCN, in part because for a number of reasons I ended up developing closer relationships with members of UPCN; but also because UPCN is self-consciously a Peronist union, one which sees itself as negotiating with the employer (who is of course the State), rather than positioning itself as an antagonist. This became a more complicated position to take after the change to a non-Peronist government in late 2015, as fissures have opened

up between those who want to support the previous regime – now in opposition – and those who think they should negotiate on employment conditions with whichever government is in power.

Activists in both ATE and UPCN considered themselves to be Peronists; but UPCN delegates were usually much more fervent in how they expressed that identity. Peronism is the political movement founded by Juan Domingo Perón in the 1940s when he became Minister for Labour in 1943 and then President in 1946. In 1955, he was deposed by military coup, and his supporters entered a period of clandestine resistance, demanding his return from exile, which was eventually allowed in 1973. Shortly after, he became President again, but he died a year later as the country slid into sectarian violence between left wing and right wing forces. His third wife and Vice President, Isabela, took over the presidency but was deposed in 1976 by one of the most brutal military regimes in the region, which stayed in power for seven years[7]. Until the 1990s, the main strength of the Peronist movement lay in the unions, which were known as the 'spinal column' of the movement. During the 1990s, as president Carlos Menem enacted sweeping structural adjustment policies, the centre of power within Peronism shifted from the unions towards neighbourhood-based clientelistic political groupings, especially in the province of Buenos Aires (Auyero 2001; Levitsky 2003). Then, under the Kirchner regimes of 2003-15, the traditional unions recovered influence, but not to the same extent as before. They now share that influence with the territorial organisations and the youth group La Cámpora (Etchemendy 2013; Etchemendy and Collier 2007; Manzano 2013). Perón himself had attracted followers from an extremely wide political spectrum, from leftist Marxist guerrillas to anti-communist death squads; and that capaciousness is one of the characteristics of Peronism today as well.

Nowadays, Peronism is much more than a political orientation, and is regularly spoken of in Argentina as an identity and way of life. Peronist activists do very often hold a strong ideological commitment to the movement, but tend to articulate those ideas through languages of the non-rational, the affective, and kinship. For example, one of the common phrases I heard was that a Peronist 'se nace no se hace' – is born and not made. Of course people I knew had come to Peronism via multiple trajectories, and many of them had indeed 'made' themselves and continued to do so. However, the phrase points to the importance of understandings and practices of Peronist militancy that stress its grounding in family.

Indeed, my informants often explained their Peronism to me through metaphors of blood, inheritance and family experience. I was told often that one is 'peronista de corazon' (Peronist of the heart); 'uno nace peronista' (you are born Peronist); 'lo llevas en la sangre' (you carry it in your blood). Once in a workshop in the UPCN school for new delegates, I accidentally said that I had been

impressed by how Peronism was 'sanguinario', meaning bloodthirsty. I was quickly corrected, as I should have said 'sanguineo', that is 'of the blood'. My mistake caused much amusement, but also general agreement that once I had picked the correct word I had understood how people felt.

In addition to metaphors of blood, other common metaphors referred to early infancy. You might be a Peronist 'de cuna' (from the cradle), or, very often, 'uno lo mama', meaning that you absorb it from a very young age. It may 'just be a word', as an Argentine friend said to me, but it is at the very least striking that mamar is also the verb that means to feed at the breast (baby bottles are called 'mamaderas'). A Secretary General of one of the largest UPCN delegations in his mid-thirties combined these various tropes when he said,

> One is a Peronist from the cradle. My father was general secretary of the Leatherworkers' Union, of the Argentine Federation of Leatherworkers, and, well, you carry that. I always say, I played the drums in a union before I said mamá (mummy)! You carry it in your blood. … I think you absorb it from the home [Creo que lo mama desde la casa].

So Peronism can be transmitted, or taken on, through experiences in the home when very young, and even perhaps through breast milk; it seems to be incorporated into the person from an early stage in their life. This can happen either physically or by association with key aspects of political activism, such as the drums in in this case, or by accompanying parents on union business, like demonstrations or meetings, or graffiti-writing.

Aside from physical or experiential incorporation, the cradle and breast-feeding were often linked to story-telling, and one of the most important mechanisms of transmission appeared to be the stories that parents and grandparents told babies and very young children; stories which often involved Eva Perón; a common one is that Evita gifted a family member their first sewing machine, freezer, or toy. This represented for many the golden era of 1946-55, when Peron delivered for the 'gente humilde' (humble people). In this way people combined spiritual and affective stories of allegiance to individual exemplary figures with a discourse about the material and political benefits Peronism brought to the country and to their class. So, their principled adherence to Peronism was spoken of as and through a particular understanding of Argentine history and their place in it (as a class), as well as through languages of inheritance, biology, and affective connection.

More broadly, many people, both Peronist and not, also felt that they had inherited a general disposition towards political activism from their parents, or in some cases from an uncle or aunt. That kind of disposition was described to me as, variously, a vocation for service, a tendency to rage at injustice, or to turn to action rather than simply talk; or even a virus or addiction. It might just have been as simple as the impulse to join the union when starting a job just because that was what

one did; or a set of values transmitted in daily small acts of charity, or political discussions around the Sunday dinner table. It was a mix of natural character and experience within the family while growing up. As I show in more detail elsewhere (Lazar, 2017), these explanations describe processes of ethical-political subjectivation, as people understand themselves as constituted by a set of virtues that are both inherent to their character and amenable to cultivation in pedagogical, social and political contexts. These virtues are thought of as the outcome of family experience, understood as directly inherited from older generations and also cultivated by children accompanying their parents in political action. The familial ideal operating here is an inclusive one, instantiated in weekend meals with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, where adult siblings argue and debate politics and culture with each other while their children play together.

Family as a means of organising employment and political activism

A discursive emphasis on family may not have been quite so acute or sentimental among those unionists who did not consider themselves to be passionate Peronists, but it was not unusual either. And beyond discourse, family also mattered very practically, not least because of how state employment is organised in many institutions.

From time to time, people working for the state told me that their institution was 'like a family', and when they did so, they often meant it in both a figurative and literal sense. In one institution that I visited, where over 90% of its workers were affiliated to UPCN, the delegates described themselves their institution and the union itself as a family in order to stress how smooth and well-functioning they considered their group to be. But the role of family in state employment also goes beyond languages of kinship, as family networks are a broadly-used means of recruitment to work for the state in Argentina. This has a long history, especially in state-run industries, as Elana Shever (2012) has shown for oil workers, and Sandra Wolanski (2015) for telecoms workers. In the past, jobs used to pass from father to son; and, indeed, Wolanski shows that this was seen as a right by the telecom workers, one that they had lost on privatisation and recovered afterwards. Returning to my civil servant informants, the nature of family recruitment to jobs seems to vary across institutions. For example, there was one department that a leader described to me as 'like a religious fraternity' ('como una cofradía'). He said 'we pile up all the relatives there' ('amontamos todos los familiares ahi').

Although the overlap between kin and job recruitment networks was quite a delicate question[8], many unionists were open about the fact that most people had got their job through some kind of family or political connection. One ATE delegate said in an interview:

> 'Well, nobody goes to work for the state by presenting their CV at the reception window; people get work for the state because they are someone's family member, through the unions or through the functionary [i.e. the politically appointed top civil servant]. […] An 18 year old kid doesn't get in on his own merits, he gets in because he is someone's family.'

Few of my interviewees were as frank with me on record as this person, but the role of union networks in getting jobs for family members was not especially hidden in day to day interactions, especially as I got to know my informants better. In informal conversations, my friends discussed where they might find a state job for their adult children, for instance; and when I asked activists about their family histories, many of the stories they told me included how they had got a place for a family member. The phrase is 'hacer entrar' (to make [someone] enter), and it is used in an active sense – so, 'hice entrar mi madre, sobrino, hijo, etc.' means 'I got a job for my mother, nephew, son, etc'. One delegate told me how his mother had been widowed when he was very young, and had worked as a domestic worker paid by the hour, in order to support him through school. Once he was in the union delegation, he got her a job as a cook in a nursery, which he said, with great pride, was 'the most dignified job she had had in her life'. [9]

Kin-based recruitment shaped the union as political entity in several ways. First, the practice of getting jobs for relatives actualised the overlapping of kin and friendship networks in the state institutions and as a consequence, union delegations: put crudely, those who got their job via a family connection with the union might then often be expected to collaborate with the union delegation as activists themselves (cf. Wolanski 2015). Second, the control of recruitment was often thought to grant considerable political power, in terms of what the union could do for its members, and how it could negotiate with the employer. Third, it affected sociality, the subject of the following section.

Sociality and care: relations of kinning

The fact that a given ministry is often staffed by people connected to each other as kin or friends helps to maintain an easy sociability, which is in turn generally considered to be an indicator of a well-functioning workplace, for UPCN delegates at least. When I asked for permission to accompany a delegation, I was explicitly directed to one that the higher leadership of UPCN considered to be a good model. That meant that I was prevented from gathering detailed material on conflictual

delegations, although I knew of some problematic ones. The cohesiveness of this particular delegation hinged on the charisma of the leading personalities involved, their willingness to work at creating the kind of sociability I discuss in this section, and at times their ability to shout down opposing positions in the name of jocular debate. When I first arrived, everything seemed to work smoothly, as two leading delegates took me around a few of the offices, greeting the workers with a kiss on the cheek, introducing me, explaining to me who everyone was and how they were connected to each other (cousins, nieces, etc.), joking with them, and so on. Of course, a number of the workers kept their heads down at their computers; but the Secretary General who escorted me around was at pains to show me how well he and the other leaders know their affiliates personally.

The friendly sociability was one of the most distinctive and appealing aspects of my research when I accompanied the Ministry delegation in 2012. I found it to be important both in the day to day and on special occasions, such as birthday lunches, excursions to places of interest; or cultural events and meetings run by the union central office. On a day to day basis, I spent much time sitting in the delegation office with the activists: chatting, smoking, debating, drinking *mate*, coffee, soda; eating pizza, biscuits, cakes, sandwiches; playing cards, watching TV, examining people's holiday photos, recent purchases, or medical test results; discussing newspaper stories; gossiping about functionaries, about tensions elsewhere in the Ministry, poring over leaflets produced by rival groups, telling jokes; and so on. The gatherings took place throughout the day, but became less oriented to business matters as the day went on. Since most of the delegates in leadership positions are men, the sociability of the gatherings often took on a masculine gender: the TV would show football matches, the jokes that circulated might be sexist, some of the men would stay until well past the time that parents needed to get back home to see to their children, even if they had young children of their own, and so on.

Few women stayed until the end, most leaving to care for their children at home, and conforming to a hegemonic notion of the responsibility of women for family matters in the domestic sphere while the men occupied the work space. The kind of atmosphere that developed in this latter space was more akin to the gatherings of adult siblings at the parental home in the weekends than it was to the organisation of the household of the nuclear family. Both are ideal type models for Argentine families, but in practice, the activists I knew best had a broad range of family arrangements. For example, I knew a divorced father with a grown-up son, a father on his third marriage and second set of children, a single mother with teenage daughter, single mother with adult sons, single mother who lives with her own mother and her 19- and 10-year old children, young widow with daughters and grandchildren, married father with adult children, lesbian woman with nieces and nephews, and

several married fathers of pre-school or school age children. The reader will no doubt note the absence in this list of the married mother of pre-school or school age children.

One substance that often circulated at the moments of sociability at the end of the day is especially associated with unionists and public sector employees. *Mate* is a herbal infusion prepared in a round cup: one person packs the cup with the yerba mate leaves and pours boiling water on from a thermos flask. They then hand it to another person in the group, who sips from a metal straw until they have consumed all the liquid, and passes the cup and straw back to the person with the flask, who pours more water on and then passes the drink to the next person, and so on. Although people do also drink *mate* on their own, the conventions of sharing make it into a very social endeavour; a form of commensality that makes people into kin, or some other kind of close social group, through the circulation of the *mate* gourd. It is so associated with a particular attitude of sociability that from the outside it has come to represent a lack of commitment to the job, as when people make comments about public servants just drinking *mate* all day instead of working. But it is also considered to be the national drink, a rite that affirms Argentinianness as much as the barbeque (asado) does. *Mate* consumption in itself does not automatically create kin in a restrictive sense, and it is not especially associated with family consumption (in the way that the asado is, for example). *Mate* is used in many group contexts without automatically creating them as kin. Rather, it creates a slightly more diffuse sense of group belonging; and in the case of the union delegation, it is one among many circulated substances that creates that delegation as a close group, at the very least a kin-*like* group.

Ministry delegates usually prepared *mate* when we came together to discuss the issues of the day. Discussions might cover topics internal to the ministry and the delegation's work, or current affairs, or debates about interpretations of Argentine history. The latter may have been often prompted by my presence, and it is true that the topics of conversation became less intellectual as my stay went on. However, it was clearly not uncommon for people to talk about weighty matters, and they evidently enjoyed debating nearly as much as they enjoyed joking and teasing each other. So, substance (*mate* or other foodstuffs) circulated, but also so did jokes, political viewpoints, gossip, understandings of history and what it is to be Argentine, etc. It is through this kind of circulation as well as through job recruitment that the union actualises existing social and kin networks, and brings new people to those networks.

As well as including people through the circulation of ideas and substance, the group dynamic also shut down people with opposing views, unless they had the confidence to stand out as the resident non-Peronist. Several did, and there was usually one or two people around the table who did not

agree with the dominant political position. But those who did not enjoy the atmosphere tended not to come for the social events, preferring to approach the leadership earlier in the day on an individual basis to discuss any problems. Or they enacted their political activism in other spaces, such as the rival union, ATE, or within party politics. It was not possible to be a leader of the delegation without participating in its sociability, but that did not completely exclude people from being affiliates or from going to leaders for help. That said, at times leaders did grumble that some people would only come to them when they had problems they needed to be solved, and certainly they made more effort on behalf of the people they were most connected to, and who had in their eyes contributed to the delegation.

If inheritance, sharing actual kin links, and sharing *mate* and other substances are key ways of creating the union delegation as a kin or kin-like group, care is a fourth way of doing this. Members of the union delegation care for each other and for ordinary affiliates in multiple ways – through the sociability, but also through more structured practices like the provision of childcare for the summer months of January and February, and, very importantly, the union health insurance. Administering both these schemes forms a large chunk of the delegation's activities during the year, and, especially in the case of the health insurance, they are one of the main attractions of the union for ordinary members.

To take the latter, delegations often administer the union discount scheme on prescription medication; they may also advise affiliates on precisely which kind of health insurance to take out; arrange to receive test results, or organise emergency medical transport, compassionate leave to care for a sick child, and so on. Delegations also sometimes organise health check-ups at the workplace; and educational events about preventive health. These activities are especially gendered, as it is in these areas where women are most likely to be found in positions of leadership: in charge of 'Acción Social' (Social Action), which includes the organisation of childcare, the health insurance scheme, health outreach activities, and charity collections. Both unions also have recreational areas that members can use; they also provide gifts and discounted goods at particular lifecycle moments like marriage and bereavement. Thus care stretches beyond employment conditions into life itself; into the realm of interpersonal kinship, where it is the responsibility primarily of women, again mirroring the ideal-type division of labour within Argentine families.

All these are in some sense 'practices of kinning', to use Signe Howell's term (2006). They combine to create a sense of mutuality of being within the delegation, and to an extent between the delegation and ordinary affiliates, although that relationship is less intense. That mutuality of being is hierarchical, reliant very much upon some being prepared to lead while others follow. Leadership

is often based upon an avuncular kind of personal charisma as well as an ability to negotiate and strategise on behalf of the collectivity. The collective justifies hierarchy through philosophies of organisation that stress 'organicity', by which unionists mean discipline and vertical hierarchy, with a strong sense that there is one group of people who decides upon strategies and another that carries out those strategies (see Lazar 2015 for a more detailed discussion). UPCN unionists are very proud of this, and make a clear contrast between themselves and their overly democratic rival, ATE, which, they say, cannot as a result be nearly as effective as they are.

This might be a 'non-kin' kind of mutuality of being; and unionists would rarely claim that the union delegation is a family as such. However, I would argue that the combination of all these different kinship modalities and practices makes the union into something at the very least close to a kin group. Although the kin group is never exactly consonant with family, it often overlaps because of the nature of job recruitment and recruitment to the union. And the most cohesive delegations have relationships that are sufficiently close and enduring to mean that they consider themselves as all but kin.

That blending of kinship modalities and practices of kinning with more straightforwardly recognisable family networks in recruitment might not be as problematic as it might initially seem for a political anthropology of kinship – or, better put, a kinship anthropology of politics – if we return to Fortes and Pitt-Rivers' ideas of 'amity'. For there is in practice not a terribly clear distinction between a realm of amity within which the 'ethic of generosity' applies on the one hand and the 'politico-jural domain' on the other, whether the latter is thought of as the lineage system, the state, or even just a politics of interest. The personal elements of amity include both kinship and political allegiance (where the latter is understood as passionate conviction that is partially reliant upon family), and they absolutely influence more conventionally 'politico-jural' spaces such as collective bargaining. This is partly because, when negotiating politically on behalf of its members, the union relies upon shows of collective power at ritual events, street protests and the like; but also, as one would expect, much of a delegation's effectiveness in negotiation lies in the abilities of its leaders to create relationships with bosses, which draw on friendship networks, sometimes on family relations, and on some of the 'practices of kinning' through sociality described above, which are opened up to non-delegation members. These can include ritual celebrations of important Peronist dates, to which the bosses are invited, as in the example I opened this article with. The delegation works to build an ethic of generosity and a sentiment of amity within itself and between it and 'the employer', for its own sake and in order to achieve political ends such as a good salary settlement or the protection of jobs. And so kinship and politics blend into each other.

Cultivation of the collective self

Although Pitt-Rivers continued to maintain a kind of barrier between kin and non-kin within a broad set of 'amiable relations', his work brought in the question of self in an especially helpful development of Fortes' notion of amity. Pitt-Rivers suggested that

> A system of thought that takes the individual as its starting-point and assumes that he is motivated by self-interest, faces a difficulty in confronting the examples of behaviour that is not so motivated …[Yet] the majority of the world's cultures do not share the individualism of the modern West and have no need to explain what appears to them evident: that the self is not the individual self alone, but includes, according to circumstances, those with whom the self is conceived as solidary, in the first place, his kin. Alter then means not 'all other individuals' but 'all who are opposed to self, the non-amiable' (Pitt-Rivers 1973: 90).

Pitt-Rivers, then, proposed an intensely collective self, and I too wish to make this suggestion, even if I am applying it to a group of people that he would have probably considered to be very much of 'the modern West'. I want to do so by way of bringing in an insight from contemporary anthropology of ethics that selves can be cultivated; and propose that the kinds of kinning practices and discourses described above could be understood also as forms of ethical subjectivation in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1990 [1984]). They are technologies of cultivation of collective ethical subjects or selves that are first, partly understood to derive from kinship, as in the inheritance of a particular political identity and ethical disposition towards action for others. But, second, they operate through kinship modalities: especially commensality, care, and circulation of substance and values.

This might seem an abrupt shift, from Pitt-Rivers and Fortes straight to Foucauldian anthropology of ethics. Yet, anthropologists have developed significant debates about the relations between kinship and ethics that turn on the nature of relations between (and within) persons, and ethics as living with others (Carsten 2004; Das 2015; Lambek 2010). Robert McKinley suggests that this in fact constitutes kinship itself, which he views as a 'philosophy about how a person can feel categorically obligated to a series of other persons' (2001:143). Similarly, Veena Das (2015) views ethics as coming into being in everyday interactions between related persons, often kin. However, my argument here approaches the question of ethics and collectivity from a slightly different direction, that of the building of political subjects that are at the same time ethical subjects, and even in some sense selves. As such, I draw on the Foucauldian ideas of subjectivation and cultivation of the self to describe the making of these kinds of ethical-political subjects.

Although I use this framework, I depart from Foucault in two main ways: first, by giving a highly kinship-inflected story of these processes. As McKinnon and Cannell (2013) tell us, Foucault tended to relegate kinship to the 'traditional' order, considering that it had been replaced by biopower in modern constitutions. Second, Foucault's original discussion of ethical subjectivation and care of the self took an individual or dialogical perspective: for him, the self under cultivation was on the whole an individual, albeit perhaps in dialogue with the confessor or some other figure, including even potentially the same person later on in their life. Anthropologists' tendency to discover collective or relational selves, including in Western societies (Carsten 2004), has recently combined with anthropology of ethics to draw analytical attention to the possibility of a collective ethical subject, as in the example of Webb Keane's discussion of revolution in Vietnam (2016).[10] As I describe in detail elsewhere (Lazar 2017), unionists create themselves as particular kinds of activists both individually and collectively. Individually, they cultivate virtues of commitment, vocation, and passion that they understand to be part of their character. These are understood as building 'militancia', a word which means activism but which refers at the same time to activism as a pathway through political life and to the collective of activists in a given political group. In training sessions for new delegates those same values are elicited more collectively and in more structured ways, articulated by both facilitators and trainees. In ritual and social moments the delegation encompasses activists in a process they call 'containment', giving them a social and political context for their activist self (see also Lazar 2013).

In contrast to what might be expected from a purist Foucauldian perspective, these processes serve to cultivate not just multiple individual selves, but a collective self, the self that stands in contrast to 'Alter … [that which is] opposed to self, the non-amiable', in Pitt-Rivers' words. For the unionists, the 'alter' varies according to the political context: it could be the rival union, or their employer in the abstract or the right wing President elected in late 2015; it could be an annoying or incompetent functionary; 'neoliberalism'; or a general public that stigmatises unionists as corrupt and coopted.

These are, then, both ethical and kinning processes, which create a difference between self and alter, and thereby create the collective self (to be more precise, multiple collective selves). That is when they 'work' properly, which may not always be the case, as delegations do become dysfunctional all the time. But even when they do work well, they do not create a singular kind of collective self that is necessarily egalitarian or inclusive, morally virtuous, or that always operates smoothly. Often, quite the opposite, as – just as within families – they also produce exclusion and hierarchy, stifle debate or develop into factionalism and favouritism. The amount of effort that goes into these practices indicates the extent of the work that they involve, and the task that must be

done to construct a collective self. Yet, somehow, collective identities and selves do come into being: the delegation itself, the delegation as part of the union, or an overlapping sense of Peronist militancy. By eating together, drinking *mate* together, engaging in everyday practices of sociality and care, and in the spectacular and occasional moments of ritual events, the union pulls people together, and thereby makes itself into a powerful political actor. The collective selves are cultivated through experiences of togetherness and consubstantiality, as well as through the circulation of substance.

Conclusion

To conclude, the making of kin and the collective self in this way is part of how politics is organised and understood in Argentina as elsewhere. A kinship anthropology of politics would of course look different in different parts of the world, but kinship would rarely be completely absent from politics. Considering the relationship between the two might well enable us to think anew about various problems in contemporary politics. One example might be using a kinship anthropology of politics to think about inequality, especially gendered and generational inequality, a feature of all kinship systems and most anthropological approaches to kinship. Another is the construction of powerful political subjects, which uphold or contest the asymmetrical distribution of resources and enactment of power over others. In the specific case of the Argentine labour movement, the approach I have advocated shows that it does not make sense to describe membership of a political entity such as the trade union as (just) an outcome of an individualised 'enlightened self-interest'. This is not least because in the past, union activism could get you killed, while today it can lead to stigmatisation in the public eye by association with corruption and a delegitimised political system. Union activism can also be hard work, taking its toll on intimate relationships and personal health. From a self-interested perspective it probably does not make much sense to make that kind of commitment; we need to look elsewhere for an answer to the question of why people devote so much of their lives to this cause. The building of a group sense which generates a sentiment of amity and ethic of generosity helps to keep people going in the face of stigma and when 'success' – defined as the fulfilment of their (rationally-calculated) self-interest – seems very distant.

Second, and beyond just presenting a claim that motivations for political action lie beyond mere interest, I want to argue that the processes of making collective selves are the source of the unions' strength. This is true across the region, but in particular in Argentina, where that strength is being sorely tested under the new presidential regime, especially in the public sector. In the three months after Mauricio Macri assumed the Presidency on 10 December 2015, possibly around 25,000 public

sector workers were fired from their jobs – or their temporary contracts were not renewed, which for the unions amounts to the same thing. The reasons given were associated with the overlap between social networks and recruitment to public sector jobs: specifically, those fired were accused of being political appointees, even parachuted in at the last minute by the outgoing regime. However, at the end of 2016, many of my informants pointed to estimates which suggested that the overall number of public employees had not changed a great deal. The implication is that the restructuring of 2016 was not so much a cost-cutting exercise as a clearing of space in order to implant new networks and thus meet the imperatives of a new political collective, which is just as infused with kin networks as the previous one.

Third, the unions are organising their defence against the loss of jobs and asserting themselves against a relatively weak Executive through modes underpinned by the processes of collectivity and kinship described here. ATE is taking to the streets; and, while UPCN also takes to the streets from time to time, it is in addition working behind the scenes to defend the jobs of its affiliates, and negotiate the best salary settlements possible. Both tactics require a strong sense of collectivity in order even to take place, let alone be successful. In the case of behind the scenes negotiation, they also require the ability to forge relationships with the bosses, which often works on the basis of common kin identity or identity as Peronist, and so on.

Thus we could suggest that kinship is a force of production for politics in Argentina today, to use language inspired by Yanagisako's analysis (2002). This is because kinship produces particular kinds of collective subjects and thus shapes politics in very important ways. To evoke Malinowski once more, the 'social and personal sentiments' described in this article are consequential; they are not merely colour to add to the 'real' stuff of politics that could be found in calculation of interest, whether group or individual. To be clear, it is not that interest is unimportant, or that the unionists do not act as an interest group. Instead, my analytical claim is that describing interest as the primordial explanatory factor only reveals part of the picture, at best, and at worst might even be misleading; as for example when we can only come up with theories of false consciousness when we see people acting against their interest. The key is to examine how particular political groups come into being, whether their subsequent action can then be understood through a language of interest or an alternative language. For that alternative I am proposing a kinship anthropology of politics. I suggest that this analytical strategy illustrates how practices of making kin build collective subjects that can take action on the world in order to transform the world.

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Endnotes

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[1] The marcha peronista is sung at most collective Peronist events. See (Buch 2016) for a historical discussion.

[2] For example in theories of corporatism and pluralism (e.g. Malloy 1977; Schmitter 1974; Wiarda 2005). On interests and democracy more broadly, see (Christiano 2015; Korab-Karpowicz 2013; Schmitter 2006).

[3] In the 1930 article, Malinowski was especially polemical in his attack, calling these debates a 'speculative mist' reliant upon a 'bastard algebra' of interlocking kinship terms. The debates surrounded the question of classificatory kinship; with theorists proposing that kinship terms would be extended outwards from the nuclear family according to a classificatory system, which makes sense as a theory of society - as Morgan originally described - if societies hold within them a history of group marriage. Malinowski was describing the extension of *kinship* outwards from the parent-child relation and not just the rather arcane question of extension of particular kinship *terms*. But his version was equally a theory of society, working (analytically) outwards from immediate needs to construct the social system. This was of course his version of functionalism. Another functionalist, Radcliffe-Brown, began, according to Service (1985), from the broader social system, not the parent-child relation, in order to find how kinship terms elucidated societal structure. Malinowski's understanding of kinship accords well with the kinds of approaches we take today, with the important exception that his psychologism was universal. He thought that interpersonal kinship was experienced in exactly the same way everywhere; this would not be a dominant position in anthropology of kinship now. I am grateful to Rupert Stasch for guidance on this debate.

[4] Fortes trained with Seligman and also Malinowski at the LSE. Evans Pritchard trained with Marett at Oxford, but went to Malinowski's seminars in London (Kuper 2015).

[5] Janet Carsten points this out in her introduction to the collection Cultures of Relatedness (Carsten 2000). See also the introduction by McKinnon and Cannell {, 2013 #1948}. Carsten also notes that if Fortes had truly kept to his injunction to leave interpersonal kinship to more psychological study, we would miss some of the incredibly rich interpersonal material he actually provides us with in Web of Kinship among the Tallensi (1949).

[6] Discussed by Marilyn Strathern in an unpublished paper, titled 'Axioms of amity: a tribute', and given at the workshop: The legacies of Meyer Fortes, Trinity College, Cambridge, July 2015.

[7] After the return to democracy in 1982, the next Peronist regime was that of Carlos Menem, in 1989-99; followed after the 2001 economic crisis by the Kirchner regimes of 2003-2015. This very brief description of Peronism does not give a sense of the complexities of Peronism for many adherents as an identity and way of life, not just a political orientation. In my book I explore that complex picture for one group of Peronists (the UPCN unionists); but there are many studies of Peronism across different periods of its history. For some of the best, see (Auyero 2001; Elena 2011; Halperin Donghi 2012 [1994]; James 1988; Levitsky 2003; Torre 1998; Torre 2012)

[8] Wolanski suggests that this is because it is a matter from the private realm, and that talking about it was somehow washing dirty linen in public. For my part, I suspect that people thought I would disapprove; and so it was a topic discussed in the realm of the sideways glance. It is an open matter that sits alongside a genuine commitment to Weberian ideals of bureaucratic action, which include recruitment based on merit.

[9] Of course, the allocation of jobs according to particular social networks is a feature of public sector employment across the world, including in the supposedly more Weberian bureaucracies of the North Atlantic region. Probably in no part of the world does a civil service fully conform to what was after all an ideal type even for Weber (1968). For example, in the US significant parts of the civil service are explicitly political appointments; in the UK, connections to particular schools and universities are extremely important in civil service recruitment; in France, civil servants can explicitly only be recruited from a few elite institutions. As Bourdieu's work reminds us, a person's ability to enter and subsequently succeed in those institutions (schools, universities, grandes écoles) is heavily influenced by family and class background (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

[10] See also Laidlaw (2014), which raises the possibility of a collective ethical subject at some points but does not discuss it in depth; Faubion (2011) discusses a composite ethical subject, but I would argue that his non-individual ethical subjects might more properly be considered to be compound (the anthropologist and the informant) rather than collective.