

Genealogical Ancestors

Jeanette Edwards
School of Social Sciences
University of Manchester

Resumen

Críticas recientes a "los nuevos estudios de parentesco" han argüido que quienes los practican han ignorado intencionadamente la universalidad del parentesco biológico. En su búsqueda política por mejorar las formas sociales y alternativas de parentesco, los teóricos del nuevo parentesco, dice el argumento, han pasado por alto el hecho de que el parentesco en todo el mundo está construido sobre una lógica procreativa. Este capítulo se centra en la actual pasión y entusiasmo por la historia familiar y la investigación genealógica. Toma como ejemplo etnográfico las reconstrucciones de árboles genealógicos (*family treeing*) del norte de Inglaterra, práctica que ostensiblemente, y a primera vista, parece confirmar que se privilegia el parentesco biológico: después de todo, implica una búsqueda de los ancestros ligados por "sangre". La etnografía, sin embargo, complica un simple relato de que los ancestros son encontrados sin más en las actividades de prácticas heterogéneas de los constructores de árboles genealógicos (*family treers*). Ella revela el trabajo y el esfuerzo requerido para desenterrar, dar forma y fijar los ancestros de la manera en que los hace apropiados como ancestros genealógicos.

Abstract

Recent and vocal critics of 'the new kinship studies' have argued that its practitioners have wilfully ignored the universality of biological kinship. In their political quest to upgrade social and alternative forms of kinship, new kinship theorists, so the argument goes, have screened out the fact that kinship the world over is built on a procreative logic. This chapter focuses on the current passion and enthusiasm for family history and genealogical research. It takes as its ethnographic example *family treeing* in the north of England, practice which ostensibly, and at first glance, appears to confirm a privileging of biological kinship: after all, it entails a search for ancestors linked by 'blood'. The ethnography, however, complicates a simple story that ancestors are found in the activities of heterogeneous practices of *family treers*. It reveals the work and effort required to unearth, shape and fix ancestors in ways that make them suitable as genealogical ancestors.

Neo-biology meets ethnography

Social and cultural anthropologists have been responding in different ways to changes in family forms in contemporary 'western' societies. The increasing number of recombinant and single-parent families and the decreasing stigma of divorce, illegitimacy and homosexuality, alongside widespread use of assisted reproductive technologies (ART), have caught the attention of anthropologists over the past two decades. This growing body of anthropological research has been referred to as the 'new kinship studies' (see for example, Carsten, 2004; Edwards, 2009) and has contributed to the rekindling of interest in kinship theory. The studies which fall under the rubric of 'new kinship' have argued that kinship, at least in its 'EuroAmerican' guise, is more flexible, mouldable and less fixed than previous biological models had us believe. And ethnography from other parts of the world has been mobilised to add ballast to arguments for the complexity and plasticity of EuroAmerican kinship. Thus, for example, Trobriand Islander's ideas about paternity have been used as an example how 'other societies' (also) had complicated ideas about what constituted paternity (e.g. Franklin, 1997); milk kinship in the Middle East has shown how kinship can be created from substances other than blood and genes (e.g. Clarke, 2007); and commensality and adoption practices in Malaysia have highlighted the way in which kin are created through food and care (e.g. Carsten, 2000). In turn, the ethnographic focus on EuroAmerican kinship fed fruitfully and productively into anthropological approaches to kinship in more traditional ethnographic fields (e.g. Rival, 1998; Bodenhorn, 2000; Bamford, 2009). Such studies, and others, have been significant and successful in dislodging the premises and hegemony of biological kinship from which classical anthropological kinship theory was built.

The 'new kinship studies' have run the risk, however, of homogenizing 'western' kinship: of effacing a diversity of kinship thinking within what is glossed as EuroAmerican. They have also run the risk of congealing and simplifying differences between 'the west' and 'the rest'. Enric Porqueres and Jérôme Wilgaux (2009), for example, have questioned what they see as two major distinctions (ruptures) that appear in the 'new kinship' literature: one between 'new' forms of relatedness and 'traditional kinship' and the other between western and non-western kinship systems (Porqueres, 2009). Their own historical focus on how incest has been conceptualised and inscribed on the body from antiquity to the present reveals more continuum than rupture, and more similarity than difference. The discussion continues (Parkin, 2009) and, as we might hope and expect, further ethnographic

detail of how kin are grouped, families formed and relatedness conceptualised and enacted vitalise anthropological debate. But not always. The 'new kinship studies' have also provoked harsh and *ad hominem* criticism which serves, intentionally or otherwise, to close down debate. Here, 'new kinship' scholars have come under fire for their political impulses in ways that can best be described as a backlash. The 'flexible choreography' of 'EuroAmerican' kinship, thoughtfully and skillfully unpacked by anthropologists inspired by feminism and alert to possibilities presented by, amongst other things, assisted reproductive technologies (Franklin, 1997; Thompson, 2005), gay and lesbian parenting (Weston, 1997), recombinant families and transnational adoption (Modell, 1994; Modell, 2002; Howell, 2006) has been dismissed as ideological bias. According to Warren Shapiro, for example, these scholars, amongst others, have willfully ignored the universality of the 'procreative grid' and the fact that **all** societies recognise two 'real' parents (Shapiro, 2008; Shapiro, 2009) however families are formed, valued and organised.

For Shapiro, the 'universal procreative or genealogical grid' posited by A.L. Kroeber, which is independent of external causation and a product of the human mind, is both ethnographically more sensitive and philosophically more satisfying than alternatives posed by 'the new kinship studies'. Furthermore, he points out, theorists in the 'new kinship' school are plain wrong to deny it (Shapiro, 2009). Kroeber read the kin universe as compact and simple, operating only from biological categories of male, female and offspring. Using Kroeber's 1909 paper as his springboard, Shapiro points out that **all** systems of kin classification use 'close, procreative kin' as the primary or focal point. This is the case, he writes, in systems that make a distinction between lineal and collateral relatives (the 'English pattern', in his example) and those that do not (Australian Aboriginal, in his example). So that 'other fathers' (FBs for example), for people that use the same kin term for father and father's brothers, are 'fatherish': ie. like the 'real' or 'true' father. For Shapiro, 'when it comes to the focal membership of kin classes, bifurcate merging systems and 'lineal' ones like our own are remarkably similar' (Shapiro, 2009: 5).

With this in mind Shapiro revisits the findings of Catherine Alès on the Yanomami (Alès, 2002), Susan McKinnon on the Tanimbarese (McKinnon, 1991) and Linda Watts on the Zuni (Watts, 2000). On the Yanomami, he writes that although the Yanomami may recognise 'multiple fathers' they acknowledge a hierarchy of fathers and Alès' ethnography provides evidence that the mother's husband is at the top of the hierarchy. In fact, what Alès says is that the mother's husband 'is credited with the predominant part of the engendering of the child' (Alès, 2002: 70). Alès is interested in how, in the kinship logic of the Yanomami, repeated sexual inter-

course, and not necessarily with only one man, contributes to the formation of the foetus. For Alès, this shows that Yanomami offspring do not have one unique father. For Shapiro, it shows that close procreative kin are more profoundly related to the child than other relatives: in this case, that the procreative father is more closely related to his child than the other fathers who have 'collaborated' in the making of the child. Shapiro cites Napoleon Chagnon to support his argument. Chagnon, he reminds us, translated the Yanomami term for a specific subcategory of kin as 'actual' which shows Shapiro that the Yanomami also (like us) make a distinction between 'actual' (real/true) kin and other kin and that, consequently, they have a procreative logic 'virtually identical' to Europeans.

But note: Alès did not say that the procreative father is more significant (or closer) than the other fathers, but rather that the mother's husband is 'always assumed to have participated to the greatest extent in the conception of the foetus' (Alès, 2002: 70, cited in Shapiro, 2009).

Turning to McKinnon's ethnography, Shapiro questions her assertion that nurturance and solicitude define kinship in the Tanimbar Islands of Indonesia. He is particularly critical of what he sees as McKinnon's political project which he suggests has shaped and lent bias to her ethnography. McKinnon, following a well-worn trajectory in social and cultural anthropology, draws on findings from one ethnographic context to reflect on the practices and values of her own society¹. She uses the Tanimbar example to draw attention to the restrictiveness of western kinship regimes that are organised around 'biological relatedness, individualism and capitalist accumulation' (McKinnon, 1991). While we might argue that the concept of 'western kinship' (like EuroAmerican) is problematic insofar as it glosses a diversity of kinship thinking, and while we might also agree that a clear distinction between capitalist and non-capitalist societies, onto which restrictive and expansive kinship systems can be mapped, is difficult to maintain, it is clear from the ethnographic record that one version of western kinship does privilege biological relatedness. This version **is** restrictive and does peddle narrow notions of inheritance and exclusivity even if it does not exhaust all possibilities of 'western' formulations of kinship. Of interest, ethnographically, is when and

1. Margaret Mead's works immediately springs to mind (Mead, 1978 [1928]). Despite the sustained and detailed critique launched and executed by Derek Freeman (Freeman, 1983; Brady, 1983) Mead's commitment to using her Samoan ethnography to reflect on biological understandings of adolescence in the US which were deemed 'natural' and universal, impacted on a number of disciplines: as did, amongst others, Margaret Lock's research on menopause in Japan (Lock, 1993), and Marilyn Strathern's on gender in Melanesia (Strathern, 1988).

where it is mobilised and how and when it gets fixed as primary. Interestingly, the account that Shapiro critiques is taken predominantly from McKinnon's critical (and some would say timely) response to the excesses of evolutionary psychology. Here she argues that evolutionary psychology has taken 'a specific cultural understanding of kinship – one that derives from Euro-American understandings of the essential quality of genes – and attempted to make it into a cross-cultural universal' (McKinnon, 2005: 116). This is undoubtedly the case, even if the ethnographic record shows alternatives within 'Euro-American' kinship thinking to the model posited by evolutionary psychologists (for example).

The third ethnographer that Shapiro takes to task is Linda Watts who concludes that Zuni conceptualisations of core family rest on social proximity rather than genealogy. Watts provides a fine-tuned linguistic analysis of how kin terms are used and what they connote and denote for native Zuni speakers. She focuses, amongst other things, on the term *datchu* (which has been glossed as 'father/father's brother') and collates and ranks (by number of respondents using a particular explanation) what she calls 'folk definitions' of the word. In her response to Shapiro's critique (Alès, 2009), Watts lays out her findings as follows:

A very close older male who provides love and care for children (8), helps you get through life (4), and is either a biological parent who brought you into this world (3) or the one who raises you (4); he gives advice and teaches the right way to do things (5), does farming and herds sheep or helps with the jewellery (4); he does religious things (3); he may be an initiator or wear a ceremonial headband (3); he is a good role model who knows a lot (3).

For Watts, while genealogical definitions are presented by Zuni speakers, they are not dominant and their significance is linked to social role and proximity. Shapiro returns to Kroeber (1909) to refute this proposition. He lists, as counter evidence, Kroeber's assertions that: among Zuni, only the mother and the father were referred to using unmarked mother or father terms (others being 'old' or 'little' mothers or fathers); there were Zuni terms that specified blood relatives as opposed to co-members of a person's clan; and tekonymy was practiced – so that after the birth of their first child husband and wife refer to each other as father and mother of X respectively. Rejecting any advance on these ideas from more recent linguistic research or ethnographic detail, Shapiro concludes that 'the focal membership of most kin classes at Zuni, as probably everywhere else, is provided by procreatively close kin' (Shapiro, 2009: 16).

Shapiro sums up his position as follows:

Indeed, it is a reasonable surmise from these and many other analyses that we are dealing with something that is universal, or very nearly so, just as Kroeber thought. It is fine to point out, as Schneider's admirers do, that there are other means of establishing kinship links—a nod to what Kroeber called 'fondness of the marvellous'...—but to deny that these means are secondary or derived, as these scholars do, entails a remarkable misrepresentation of the ethnographic record and a violation of scholarly responsibility of a very high order. (Shapiro, 2009: 15)

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to address this critique by drawing on ethnography from England: more precisely, on the popularity and ubiquity of family history and genealogical research in the north of England. I am interested in the way in which 'ordinary' people, in large numbers, are searching for their ancestors, constructing their 'family trees' and, in the process, narrating various and diverse social histories. At first glance, it appears that family history research entails a search for biologically or genetically related kin. And in the process of finding deceased ancestors, contemporary and alive kin are newly found. Consequently, the current popularity of this kind of research, and not only in Britain, might support the argument that kinship, here at least, is biological and that however families are made and relatedness forged there is a shared understanding of what is 'real'. This may be the case, but it is only part of the story and for the analyst to screen out or ignore other aspects of the kinship forged is itself partisan. To equate the genealogical connections family historians make with a 'procreative grid' is to strip them of their significance in the social worlds from which they emerge and in which they act and accrue meaning.

Ancestors, Genealogies and Pedigrees

Family history and genealogical research has been identified as 'a national obsession' in Britain. There is good reason, however, to believe that its popularity is widespread and certainly not confined to Britain (see for example, Lambert, 2002; Schramm, 2004; Nash, 2005; Basu, 2007). I have become interested in the enthusiasm for, and practices, of *family treeing* (to use a local idiom) in the north of England; in a part of the world in which I have carried out ethnographic

fieldwork on and off for over two decades². In previous research in this region of England, I focused on kinship as it was made manifest in people's explorations of assisted reproductive technologies. My initial interest in the burgeoning activities of family history research was provoked by what else it might reveal about English kinship. In fact, it has proven much more generative than this narrow and initial interest and has opened up for investigation a number of other salient aspects of contemporary social life: for example, the use of information technologies and social networking, the constitution of expertise, the emotional investment in objects, documents and ancestors and a preoccupation with non-material worlds. I have also been interested in the materiality of genealogical research: the paper pedigrees and family trees; the accompanying archives of photographs, certificates (births, marriages and deaths), maps and letters; other objects of evidence such as inscriptions on tombstones, memorials and family bibles, or the family 'heirloom' passed down through generational hands. Different kinds of expertises are made manifest in the passion for family history and some family historians are known as and know themselves to be, experts: they talk of the role of fate serendipity and elsewhere I have written about their 'feel' for genealogy. For present purposes, however, I return to kinship and draw on *family-treeing* to think about the recent critique of kinship studies, one example of which I outlined above. I ask what kind of narrative is woven from the heterogeneous practices and materials of *family treeing*: how are they configured and refigured as both social and personal and, above all, as significant? What kind of kin are brought into being?

At first glance, it would seem that the current preoccupation with family history (and accompanying family trees, societies, television/radio programmes, books, magazines, software etc.) supports the idea that EuroAmerican kinship rests on a biological and procreative model. When I started thinking about the popularity of family history research and how it might provide another ethnographic window through which to discern the contours and texture of English kinship, I was compelled to look again at the demise of the Genealogical Method (GM) in British social anthropology especially as aspects of it were currently being mobilised in the efforts of a large minority of the British population (Edwards n.d.). Tim Ingold has also recently returned to the GM in his book on lines (In-

2. I borrow and extend the idiom *family treeing* that several of my informants used. For me, it connotes the processual and ludic aspects of family history research: the doing rather than the product. I extend the idiom to family historians and have coined the awkward phrase *family treers* in order to suggest the local specificity and dynamism of these particular genealogists as well as the diverse and eclectic research they undertake.

gold, 2007). The line of the genealogical chart, he writes, 'neither grows nor flows but *connects*' (Ingold, 2007: 104 original emphasis). He points to the distinction at the back of River's mind between pedigree and genealogy, which John Barnes was to elaborate and insist upon fifty years later. For Barnes, the pedigree was the genealogical statement made by the informant 'orally, diagrammatically or in writing', whereas genealogy was the statement of the ethnographer as field record or analysis—one belonging to the realm of culture and the other to science. Fifty years on, and after significant analytical contributions from Science and Technology Studies (STS), we are more likely now to reflect on the kind of work required to maintain a separation between culture and science or, as Marilyn Strathern has consistently done, to consider how, for Euro-Americans, science is deeply and historically embedded in society, and society in science (Strathern, 2005: 46). But this is not Ingold's concern, he is interested in the nature of the lines themselves. For him, the consanguineal line of the genealogy is 'a connector' and the genealogical chart is purged of the 'elegant tracery and ornamentation of the pedigree': each of the persons on the genealogical chart signified by the small female circles and male triangles is 'immobilised on one spot, their entire life compressed into a single position within the genealogical grid, from which there is no escape'. In Ingold's elegant idiom: 'The lines of the genealogical chart do not go out for a walk, as those of the traditional pedigree do' (2007: 111). Instead they follow the logic of the dotted line forming an 'assembly of *point-to-point connectors*' (2007: 113). His point is that, while residents of 'western', cosmopolitan societies live in fragmented environments which are assemblies of connected elements (like the genealogical chart he critiques), they nevertheless thread their way through these environments tracing paths as they go. Best then, he says, to shift from the paradigm of assembly (connecting up points) to the paradigm of the walk. I find the walk useful in thinking about the meanderings of family historians in their genealogical research, but want to think further about other genres of walking such as rambling, meandering and wandering; and of getting lost.

Family trees also make a distinction between pedigrees and genealogies, but not in the same ways as the anthropologists cited above. Their pedigrees comprise diagrammatic representations of parental lines only, and their genealogies are the family trees, the branches of which connect up lineal as well collateral relatives. They don't make genealogical charts with circles and triangles fixing people by gender and in one spot, but they do connect up real people, alive and dead, with names, birthdates and genders. Some *family trees* conceive the pedigree as the 'bare bones' on which the genealogy can be elaborated: the skeleton. But in most cases they are separate and

distinct enterprises. As mentioned above, *family treers* meander: the walk is useful in thinking about the digressions they take to find out what a particular occupation, inscribed on a census form, entailed; or to speculate on the living conditions in small and overcrowded houses or in large and spacious mansions; or to dwell on the experience of high infant mortality or lives serviced by servants and wet nurses. *Family treers* get distracted and sidetracked: enticed into research about a particular occupation, locality, building, person and so on. They wander and also get lost. They talk about coming to dead ends –to cul-de-sacs– and to lines that end abruptly. The lines of their genealogical diagrams most certainly go for a walk even if sometimes they go nowhere. Perhaps rambling is more apt a metaphor than walking.

In his criticism of the retrenchment of philosophy back to eternal values and reflection on things rather than movement, Deleuze writes of the relationship between art, science and philosophy (as aggregate, function and concept) and asks how, with their 'different rhythms and movements of production', is it possible for them to interact? (1992: 283). For him, they are separate melodic lines in constant interplay with one another and, in all three, creation requires mediators. Mediators tend to be, in his examples, other people (his, for example, is Guattari), but they can also be plants or animals and, I would add, ancestors. The point is that having found mediators you can say what you want to say.

Family treeing in the north of England brings together art, science and philosophy as I think they are imagined by Deleuze: the art of creating sensory aggregates, the science of ordering, archiving and connecting-up, and a philosophy which mobilises concepts, in the case of *family treeing*, of fate and chance which project persons beyond mundane and secular worlds. The ancestors –the nodes on the family tree– are the mediators. They are caught (up) in what Deleuze, following film-maker Pierre Perrault, calls *legending*. The lines of the genealogical diagrams made by *family treers* do more than connect up kin they catch them up and carry them in more than one direction. If narrating ancestors in the north of England –elaborating their social lives as well as their genealogical niches– are states of *legending* (fabulations not fictions), then what kind of parents and parent's parents are narrated into being?

Great grandmother on a microfiche

While one aspect of family history research may be to trace one's ancestors as far back as possible and in some cases to produce as full a record as possible, most

family historians are constantly making micro decisions about which line to follow and which leads to pursue. The doing of family history research is for them as, if not more, significant than the results and, in the doing of it, some ancestors become more prominent –are given more attention– than others. Genealogical research is emotional work: leads that go nowhere frustrate and discoveries excite: disappointment and doldrums are interspersed with joy and elation. Ancestors evoke feelings of sadness, pride, disdain, sympathy and more. And *family trees* express fondness for some ancestors and antipathy towards others.

Stories are told of those who start *family treeing* and stop abruptly because they find a distasteful relative, or an unpalatable truth. Such examples are sometimes presented as out of the ordinary: as evidence of the narrow mindedness of those who want only an unblemished ancestry, or of those who are 'social snobs' imagining that their social standing will be diminished by the revelation of a 'bad un', in the family. Many of the family historians with whom I am working seem to cheerfully embrace the 'black sheep' in the family and 'the skeleton in the closet' –these characters go with the territory and indicate an idiosyncrasy and non-conformity which can be appropriated safely from a distance. As one person put it, 'we family historians wear scandals like medals'. Here the ancestors catch up and carry on the uniqueness and non-conformity that is thought to characterise people from this part of the world (see for example, Edwards, 1999; Edwards, 2000).

One of the beauties of family history research for the local family historians with whom I am working is its infinitude: a new affine, for example, even a daughter's new boyfriend, provides a whole different set of connections to explore: and an adoption, instead of curtailing genealogical connection, presents a new conundrum. Local genealogists describe the obsessive nature of their research and how it is like detective work with clues leading to other clues. The more one reveals the more there is to discover. The excitement of discovery features in the narratives of all the family historians I work with, as does the thrill of the chase. Listen to Mr Jones who describes a moment of breakthrough –what he calls a 'Eureka moment'– in the Mormon Temple³.

3. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) is responsible for the International Genealogical Index (IGI) which is an index 'to millions of names gathered from records all over the world' (Annal, 2004) and comprises mainly parish records of baptisms and marriages as well as information submitted by church members based on their own research. Local genealogists advise family seekers to check what they find on the IGI with the original record, and point out that it is not comprehensive and only useful for records from before 1837.

Mr Jones On Tuesday I went to the Mormons... I don't know whether you have ever been?

Jeanette Not yet.

Mr Jones They have these microfiches and we found – we could never find Harriet's [his wife's] great grandma – but we found her this week on a microfiche.

He describes his excitement at the discovery of his wife's great grandma: how he and his daughter-in-law punched the air above their heads and let out a football-supporter-kind-of-cry: 'Yes! We've found her!'. Harriet's great grandmother, found on a microfiche, is brought into being by tenacity and technology: by the efforts of research, the technologies of archiving and recording and the collation of knowledge from different sources. She is lumpier and more shapely than a circle on a genealogical diagram would convey and she is also more than biologically/genetically connected to Harriet. To think of the discovery of Harriet only in terms of the discovery of 'true' or 'real', already existing, relative would be to render her one-dimensional and would mean ignoring the knowledge, expertise, time and technology of which, amongst other things, she is 'found'.

Catching-up class

Of interest are the links that are made prominent and the ancestors that come to matter. Often, what intrigues the English about the celebrity genealogy, exemplified in the popular television series 'Who Do You Think You Are?', is the poor relative: the grandmother, for example, who died destitute in the workhouse or the great grandfather who worked in abysmally dangerous conditions as a navy. Conversely, what intrigues about the 'ordinary' person's genealogy is the discovery of a wealthy or famous ancestor⁴. Ancestors carry class. As mediators, in Deleuzian terms, they allow class differences to be narrated. Again to reduce them to biological kin, albeit deceased, is to screen out what they catch-up in their becoming.

4. Members of the FHS (Family History Society) were involved in the research for one of the 'Who Do You Think You Are' programmes which focused an actress from the Valley. They were struck by the programme makers stated attempt to elicit tears from the subject of the programme. Interestingly they had failed to do with the Lancashire actress, but had managed it with Jeremy Paxman a news caster famed for his 'tough' interviewing style (thanks also to Tony Simpson for reminding me of this).

Joyce is an avid *family treer* (her term). She tells me of how researching her own family history has deepened her connection to the town in which she was brought up, which for present purposes I'll call Alltown. In her words:

I never felt really connected to [Alltown] until I did me family tree and realised... on my nana's side just how much her family had to do with *really* important people [in the town], like the mayor. My great granddad must have gone and had meals with the mayor and stuff like that because of the position that he had. He was only an overlooker in a cotton mill but because he was on these various hospital boards and [the] trade's council he would have had lunch and dinners with all these, you know, noble people. And I am thinking 'well, me dad never told me anything about that'. So I do feel more connected to [Alltown]... and I think it's a good thing.

Joyce's discovery that her grandmother's father 'hobnobbed' with prominent people in the town; that, as an 'ordinary' working man, also took on and was given civic duties and responsibilities renders him more substantial. He, and consequently she, is more firmly connected to the town than previously as the boundaries between her own family and what she calls 'noble people' become less firm and more porous. Through this knowledge, her own sense of marginalisation is questioned.

Genealogical clans

Mrs Massey started researching her family history after the death of her son who died of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. She was interested to find out whether there was a history of the disease in her family. She thought that perhaps there was but that, in the past, people did not talk about it. She knew her great grandmother had six sons and Mrs Massey wanted discover how each had died. She discovered, eventually, that none of great grandmother's sons died of Duchenne but, by then, she says, she 'had the bug'. She tells me how she got started:

Mrs Massey I joined the Family History Association in Manchester – it's the Lancashire and Manchester family history society and I started to use their library – its not the Central Library it's on Piccadilly. Anyway, I was browsing around there one day. I knew my family were from Lincolnshire – this is my grandma's family. So I started browsing through these family history booklets – you know all these

Associations publish something every so often. I picked up one, started to flick through and there is this Arthur Massey of Doncaster – now my family are the Massey's of Doncaster. And I looked at it and all the names he was researching were all the names I was researching and I thought 'Wow!' So I.

Jeanette That was a coincidence.

Mrs Massey Just the first one I picked up – maybe I would have found it eventually – but I could not *believe* it – it was just there. Don't it make you think about fate sometimes?

Mrs Massey contacted Arthur Massey. He was pleased and amazed and worked out that her grandmother was his grandfather's younger sister. Interestingly, before Mrs Massey contacted him he was not aware that his grandfather had a younger sister. In the words of Mrs Massey:

He'd been searching his family history for a while and he didn't know about my grandmother... My grandmother was the youngest of eleven children – eight boys and three girls – and they'd got to about the eighth child and they thought that was it... he didn't know my grandmother wasn't living in Manchester and he'd been using the Parish registers, you see, and he's just not found her.

It turns out that the 'they' Mrs Massey refers to is Arthur and his brother Derek who is also a family seeker. They are also in touch, via the internet, with other Massey's –sons and daughters of their grandfather's other siblings (one in New Zealand, another in Canada and another in the United States). Joining them, Mrs Massey becomes part of what she calls 'the clan'.

There is much to take from Mrs Massey's interest in family history and I have written elsewhere of the prominence of fate, chance and serendipity in the narratives of local family historians but, for our purposes here, let's dwell on 'the clan': a clan not of Masseys *per se* but of *family treeing* Masseys. A collectivity of Masseys who are interested in the genealogical links that connect them. Through 'pooling' their resources they come to know kin who would otherwise remain unknown. Arthur, for example, gets to know his grandfather's younger sister. Mrs Massey has since been to Doncaster and Arthur has lost interest:

Mrs Massey [There are] loads and loads of other family there [Doncaster]. All *their* family, all *their* kids – every time I go one more pops up. Now

Arthur was interested in it for a couple of years then he dropped me like a hot brick – he just lost interest really. However I have stayed in touch with Derek in Doncaster and James in New Zealand. I talk to Derek quite a lot – he comes on Messenger in the evening on the computer. I talk to James Massey that way as well and I am also planning to go visit him when I can get the money together.

Jeanette

In New Zealand?

Mrs Massey

Yeah, he's very keen for me to go over now. So it's been (laughs)

Jeanette

So although it's about the past – you have actually made a whole kind of new family. So do you feel connected to these people?

Mrs Massey

Well yes, we discuss family history sometimes but we also get on. Like we get on MSN and we're all laughing our heads off. You know we get on well. We'd love to all meet up together – but the guy in New Zealand is not very well and there isn't any way he can get over here. I could go if I had the cash, but my cousin Derek his wife's very ill so he's tied to her really, so at the moment we can't all meet up. Whether Derek and I will get over at some point I don't know but we'd love to go... we can't at the moment that's the reality. So that's the Massey side of it. There was like a pooling of resources.

The practices of *family treeing* both unearth ancestors and create new living kin. This Massey clan, constituted through sharing 'resources' and collating knowledge from different sources, is not however fixed and unchanging over time: Arthur, for example, has absented himself and there is always the potential for another 'cousin', for example, to 'pop up' and join in. *Family treeing* in the north of England epitomises the kind of scientific kinship that Strathern eloquently identifies as EuroAmerican: where kinship is an artefact of the organisation of knowledges from different sources, so that connections between people can be verified in different ways (Strathern, 2005: 46).

Genealogical ancestors

Listen to Goodenough on the anthropological genealogy:

We do not assume that it is a biological procreative pedigree... A genealogy does not necessarily show how people are biologically related; it is a ramifying chain

of parent-child links and marital ties that are recognized as such by members of a society under study in accordance with their cultural criteria for doing so. Biological pedigrees may be needed for the study of inherited diseases, but they are not the only genealogies used in ethnographic practice by cultural anthropologists for getting at principles of family and kinship organisation (Goodenough, 2001: 207).

The genealogies fashioned in the practices of *family treeing* in the north of England seem neither to fix nor geneticise kinship. Indeed genetics rarely comes up as an idiom of relatedness in this context. Nonetheless, a doubleness of sorts is reiterated: your ancestors can be either deeply implicated in the person you are or distant enough not to be too influential. And the living kin you find in the genealogical pool can endure or 'drop off'. They matter (or not) because of their social lives not their biological links which is not to deny their biological linkedness but to put it in perspective. Like the donated ovum in the treatment of infertility which is understood, on the one hand to forge connections into the future and on the other, to be a detachable, alienable, body bit (Edwards, 2005; Konrad, 2005; Orobitg, 2005; Bestard, 2009) the genealogical ancestor is also both embodied and detachable—he or she is both part of who you are and safely disconnected through the distance of time.

Rather than showing a preoccupation with procreative kin, *family treeing* in the north of England shows the intermeshing of materials, substances, concepts and emotions that make-up kin in their English forms. While the branches of family trees connect up kin that are connected through birth those kin are not only (or always) biologically related: they are kin by virtue of being connected up through genes, place, class, occupation, capacities and so forth: they are filled out and filled in, brought into being and made social and sociable persons.

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