

Making Kin. Fare parentele, non popolazioni [*Making Kin Not Population: Reconceiving Generations*]

by Angela Balzano, Antonia Anna Ferrante and Federica Timeto (eds.) (2022) Bologna, DeriveApprodi, pp. 240 [Italian translation and editing].

by Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (eds.) (2018) Cambridge, Prickly Paradigm Press, pp. 209.

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I am sitting in the company of my notebook with *Making Kin Not Population*, edited by Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway on one side and *Making Kin. Fare parentele, non popolazioni* – the Italian translation edited by Angela Balzano, Antonia Ferrante and Federica Timeto – on the other. In this more-than-human gathering, I silently admire these two shining examples of collegial debate and respectful disagreement joining together in an antiracist, anticolonial, feminist polyphony. The conversation that I “heard” while reading the books makes my task particularly challenging. The result may be situated between a book review and an act of academic activism echoing these two books. Although the second book is the translation of the first, it is not just that: this translation is a political act and I want to honor it as such, along with its source of inspiration. If scholars – at least in Science and Technology Studies – agree that objects agentially *affect* us “humans”, this certainly applies to my relationship with these books that affect me deeply as a feminist scholar, as a heterosexual, white, middle-aged and relatively privileged migrant woman, and – relevant enough to say in relation to these books – as a mother of two. While presenting the book by Clarke and Haraway, in the following I link it to Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto’s book and specifically to their Afterword (pp. 183-196) where they frame their translation and act of translating. Indeed, the Afterword is the only chapter in the Italian translation of Clarke and Haraway’s book where Balzano, Ferrante and Timeto’s voices emerge.

Critical and appreciative reviews have been already published on Clarke and Haraway’s work (for example Appleton and Glabau 2022; Dow and Lamoreaux 2020; Strathern et al. 2019), which includes – along with an Introduction by Clarke – five essays by scholars based in North America (Ruha Benjamin, Donna Haraway, Michelle Murphy, Kim TallBear) and one by two coauthors based in Taiwan (Yu-Ling Huang and Chia-Ling Wu). The volume addresses a North American audience by entwining the contributions around five major categories – feminism, reproduction, population, environment, and kin. “Population” and “kin” are given prominence, both in the original title and in its Italian translation, which – in the subtitle – purposefully uses the plural “popolazioni” (“populations”) to stress the plurality of

human and nonhuman beings to make kin with. “Making” is equally crucial to appreciating the book. As Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto highlight in their Afterword, generative intersections require a “doing”, or, rather a “making” through caring practices across species (hence, the environmental theme) rather than the exclusive generation of new life (i.e., reproduction). Banu Subramaniam (2018) brilliantly summarize that *Making Kin Not Population*:

resurrects overpopulation as a question for feminism [...] Clarke and Haraway make clear that the solution is not about controlling women but promoting the idea of kin. Feminists, they argue, should promote a world where we make family through lateral networks of friendship and community of nonbiologically related individuals (i.e., kin), rather than increase the global population numbers by promoting traditional families based on biologically related offspring through reproduction (i.e., population).

The authors of Clarke and Haraway’s book – who all have been involved and implicated in issues of intimacy and kinship for decades – do not discuss them homogeneously, but differently embed their feminist activism into engaged political analyses of controversial topics. What keeps these authors united is the belief that “population control strategies and policies are by definition anti-woman hence anti-feminist, and that reproductive justice, environmental degradation and climate change are urgent *feminist issues*” (p. 34, *italics in the original*). In this book, the authors offer vital proposals to reconceive generations – as the English subtitle reads.

In the Introduction, Adele Clarke provides some background to appreciate the “intervention” (p. 1) – as she calls *Making Kin Not Population*. In this regard, to my surprise, Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto paraphrase “intervention” with a more didactic incipit (in Italian “Il tema centrale...”), which, in my view, weakens the militant ethos of the original incipit. In fact, Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto’s overall gesture *is* political, and it is itself an *intervention* addressing an Italian audience at a time of ecological, social, and global crises and, moreover, when the pro-life and pro-family rightwing Giorgia Meloni government took office. Let me come back to this later. Clarke explains that the booklet was born from the intention to provide a collaborative response to the “blooming silence” of feminist STS on the urgent need to reduce “*the human burden on earth while strengthening ecojustice for people and other critters as means and not just ends*” (p. 4; *italics in the original*). These words first appeared in Clarke and Haraway’s abstract for a session held at the 2015 meetings of the Society for Social Studies of Science. The session attracted two hundred people and motivated Clarke and Haraway to pursue this book by inviting other brilliant scholars to join.

Ruha Benjamin, in *Black Afterlives Matter: Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice* (Chapter 1), examines the relationship between race, reproduction, kinship and feminist imaginaries, and elaborates on the idea of “kinfulness” as reproductive justice. Although subordination, subjugation, subaltern relations and racialization cannot be disjoined from the idea of Black Afterlives, Benjamin points out that there is much more than that; “there is a lot happening underground. Not only coffins, but seeds, roots and rhizomes” (p. 47). Afterlives of past generations sustain future lives by enacting a practice of making kin “*beyond biological relatives, but also with the materially dead/spiritually alive ancestors in our midst*” (p. 48, *italics in the original*). In their Afterword, Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto make us aware of

the care they put into translating words like “black” and “blackness” (they use “ner*” and “nerezza”) and “of color” (translated with “di colore”), while keeping in English the word “brown” in consideration – as they explain – of what literature says on the matter and in order to generate “a [political] space and language the Italian speaking racialized subjectivities can identify with” (p. 188, *my translation*).

Donna Haraway’s *Making Kin in the Chthulucene: Reproducing Multispecies Justice* (Chapter 2) is “a plea for other-than-biogenetic kindred” (p. 69) that she articulates not without pain caused by the unjust “state-race-sex-resource-colony-and-capital-making apparatuses of counting and inventorying” (p. 70). Her chapter is inhabited by two “populations”: *the Born* – the “multi-billions of human beings, industrial food animals, and companion pets enterprised up to mega consumer status” (p. 35) – and *the Disappeared* – the literally disappeared, extinct, invisible, murdered or never-conceived, unborn beings – who, however, *are* a matter of reproductive justice and freedom. Haraway situates them at a time she calls “Chthulucene,” which requires sym-poiesis, or making-with or becoming-with, rather than auto-poiesis or self-making through the appropriation of everything as a resource. Such a view is common to the best scientific knowledge practices “foregrounding relationalities and not individual or massed countables” (p. 84). Resonating with Haraway’s discussion of the trouble with counting, Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto in their Afterword point out the difference between the transitive and intransitive Italian verb “contare”, translatable as “counting” (transitive) and “mattering” (intransitive): *counting* (in the sense of inventorying) is always a political practice of including and excluding or making some bodies *matter* and others not (in the general sense of being significant, valued, and important). Karen Barad (2007) – who is not mobilized by any of the authors – would refer to the practice of cutting together/apart to describe the differentiated mattering of the bodies as an inevitable consequence of practices of counting life/bodies. We may also recall the foundational STS work of Bowker and Star (2000) on the practice of classification and its consequences.

In *Against Population, Towards Alterlife* (Chapter 3), Michelle Murphy has a different use of the word “population” compared to Haraway’s and Clarke’s use. While the latter two are committed to population as a central problem associated with the growing human numbers, Murphy “takes a position against population as a framework for a feminist politics while still elevating the question of reproductive politics in feminist decolonial environmental justice” (p. 101). She reminds us that “population as a concept is enmeshed in the very infrastructures and logics that have produced ubiquitous environmental violence” (p. 106). Instead, she brings “reproductive justice” to the center to sustain community beyond biology. Her rejection of the concept “population” – as highlighted by Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto in their Afterword – allows her to avoid colluding with capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Far from a mere critic, Murphy opens a critical path “for a politics of differently distributed futures” (p. 111). She proposes the concept of “*alterlife* – the struggle to exist again but *differently* when already in conflicted, damaging and deadly conditions, a state of already having been altered, of already being in the aftermath, and yet persisting” (p. 113, *italics in the original*).

Yu-Ling Huang and Chia-Ling Wu, in *New Feminist Biopolitics in Ultra-low-fertility East Asia* (Chapter 4), talk of innovative living possibilities supporting nonbiologically related people, for example, in intergenerational relationships. Huang and Wu remind us that “[f]eminist

STS perspectives center the importance of investigating technoscience to untangle *biopolitics*" (p. 128, *emphasis mine*) which have materialized, for example, in the intrauterine devices in Taiwan and South Korea, abortion in Japan, or sterilization in China. In their Afterword, Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto highlight that those are necropolitical dispositives. In contemporary critical theory, biopolitics and necropolitics are two sides of the same coin, allowing us to analyze power relations and examine the inextricable politics of life and death. To biopolitics and necropolitics, Huang and Wu oppose practices of remaking demography by integrating concerns about the environment, reconceptualizing aging and intergenerational relationships, and taking gender into account in the very conceptualization of the population crisis.

Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family by Kim TallBear (Chapter 5) explores traditional conceptions of family through the affective dimensions of love and familial relations amid settler colonialism. Settler sexuality and family constructs have made both land and humans – women, children, and lovers, for example – into property. TallBear urges an alternative to the monogamist, heteronormative, marriage-focused, nuclear family ideal that, in the U.S., disciplined Indigenous and queer people. A strategy for making kin otherwise relies on thinking relationally about sexuality as a relational power exchange. In their Afterword, Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto help us see TallBear's invitation to queer intimate relationships as a call to exercise our imagination and vision toward caring relationships other than normative models of kinship ties and obligations. Allow me to link TallBear's contribution to the Italian context – the same that Balzano, Ferrante, and Timeto address in translating the book. I am writing this book review just after the premature passing of the Sardinian writer, playwright, blogger, commentator and literary critic Michela Murgia. She bravely and wisely turned her disease, and eventually her death, into a political situation to create a public debate on queering the traditional idea of family and sexuality. She strongly believed in the right of the "will" (in Latin: *Ius Voluntatis*) or "making kin" according to the principle of free choice. In Murgia's life, such an ethos found its maximum expression in building and making public her queer family with those she called her own "soul children" (from the Sardinian "fillus/as de ànima"; see Murgia's novel *Accabadora*) to describe those whom she – as a "soul mother" – helped to accompany on their journey towards adulthood regardless of any biological bonds but, rather, based on a sincere desire to grow up together. Among others, Murgia's queer family included her dearest friend married "*in articulo mortis*" (that is, "at the point of death") due to the fact that the Italian legal system lacks a formal acknowledgement of queer bonds as sufficient to legitimize the "family" status. She married him as a trusted person to delegate decisions if needed at the point of death. In my reading of TallBear's proposals, I found a resemblance to Murgia's open family, made up of people linked together not necessarily by blood ties. Much more could be said but I refer the readers to the books I am reviewing, including Murgia's novel (2012[2009]).

To conclude, translating is (always) to betray and – luckily! – Balzano, Ferrante, and Time-to did no less. They fully honored the depth and linguistic complexity of Clarke and Haraway's edited book while, in the Afterword, they turned Clarke and Haraway's "intervention" into a political gesture of their own. They did so by articulating their own positioning in relation to the book, its translation, the broader literature on the subject matter and the Italian context. As we understand by reading these final pages, they share with all authors of *Making*

Kin Not Population a feminist intellectual activism that the Italian audience could recognize at the meeting *Making Kin. Reproductive Justice is Eco-justice*, held on October 28, 2022, at the Ca' Foscari Theater. This event, sponsored by the New Institute Centre for Environmental Humanities, brought Ferrante and Timeto (Balzano was not present) in conversation with Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway, who attended online. On that occasion, the Italian authors brought the book down to the national political scenario and took an explicit position against the Meloni government actions (Undisciplined Environments, 2022).

If anything, I would have loved to listen to Balzano's, Ferrante's, and Timeto's voices more in the book, for example with an Introduction contextualizing the translation of the book and enhancing its connection with Italian literature and research. It would have been another way to make kin in an academic landscape deeply in need of thinking otherwise and letting its seeds, roots, and rhizomes flourish.

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