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# Postplurality: An Ethnographic Tableau<sup>i</sup>

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## I - Signatures, Documents, Archives

Signatures, documents and archives are ethnographic objects that, in recent years, have gradually become central to my research on transnational adoption circuits in Guatemala.<sup>ii</sup> Through ethnography, they have emerged as conceptual and affective devices that conjure up relations connecting fragments of social experience – a declaration made in a notary’s office, the action of a body marking a piece of paper with a thumbprint, or the movements that accompany the filing or retrieval of a document – to the domains of identity, sociality, memory, belonging, kinning, and the law. There is a lot at stake: quests for origins, kin, bodies, truth, and justice. Rather than straightforward truth-telling devices, however, these ethnographic objects are held together precariously by multiple epistemologies pertaining to, inter alia, legal apparatuses, governmental taxonomic logics, forensic techniques and community practices of memorialization in the aftermath of genocide. They appear to temporarily crystalize and make explicit knowledge formations, but their contours shift and change, as they transverse multiple domains of knowledge and expertise. More fundamentally, they are infused with ‘epistemic anxieties’<sup>iii</sup> about the status of claims to identity, kinning and sociality. They appear to be opaque, contested, undecidable, and aporetic, as they emerge out of the domain of forgetting and tentatively move towards the center of struggles over historical memory and the interpretation of Guatemala’s violent past and present. They seem to precipitate socially embedded demands for understanding their own genesis and function, raising questions as to the exact conditions of their production, but their movements in and out of oblivion should be figured as slow and intermittent, full of stops, starts and retrocessions. On occasions, these movements are forceful jolts (Strathern 2014b) that shake up the social field and cut through layers of humdrum allusion, rumor and indirect referencing and propel ethnography towards a redirection of knowledge and the analogic flow. Jolts radically reconfigure the scene the ethnographer is concerned with and entangled in: from making family to committing a crime; from acquiring kin to losing kin; from kinning to child abduction; from child abduction to murder; from murder to arbitrary execution; from child to adult; from child to forensic remain; from adoption file to exhumation file; from child to adoptee; from kin to stranger; from stranger to kin; from subject to object; from subject to forensic remain; from personhood to the inorganic; from body to fingerprint; from body, to earth, to paper and back; from word to paper; from an archive replete with papers, subjects and relations to an empty building. These are some of the domain shifts that my ethnographic engagement has conjured up and become entangled in. Partial connections, disconnections and cuts in the network (Strathern 1991a and 1991b, 1996) incite multiple redirections of the analogic flow. In this shifting context, it is not always clear what one is looking at, or to move beyond and circumvent the straightjackets of ocularcentrism (Haraway 1991, Jay 1991) and representationalism (Stewart 2007), what one may be experiencing, producing, worlding. One’s situatedness (Haraway 1991) is also called to account and reconfigured in the process.

Ethnographic scenes are tableaux that elicit relations. The jolts that reconfigure them have elicitory power (Strathern 1990) with queering effects, in so far as persons and things are not quite what they appear to be and are also always already something else. Against this background, categorical thinking about gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, location, dislocation, direction of travel, biography, purpose, life and death is, to some degree and at different junctures, called into question. Existential doubt and self-questioning; politically and institutionally produced censorship and related absence of information; discrepant and conflicting interpretations of historical events all play a part, but the instability and evanescence of categories are more fundamental. In the face of demands for clarity, knowledge and truth, categories systematically work against ‘a certain literalism of the referent’ (Povinelli 2007:575) that tends to qualify them and lend them coherence. In this chapter, I dwell on some epistemological, ontological and political moves against this literalism of the referent. I explore how signatures, documents and archives – as affective and conceptual devices that conjure up relations – queer scale. I am interested in exploring a series of ethnographic tableaux as scenes in which jolts engender shifts in scale. Jolts have queering effects that refocus ethnographic attention and reveal a redistribution and rearrangement of relations, substance and meaning. I dwell on the proximity and distance between making kin and losing kin, kinning and unkinning, resemblance and incongruity, to focus on the ethnographic tableau and the queering effects engendered by the progressive emergence of a recurrent double scene: a slow motion split frame featuring a disappearing archive and the simultaneous coming into view of a mass grave. As I grapple with the intimately related terms of this juxtaposition, I am interested in thinking through ‘queering’ as an ‘ethnographic effect’ (Strathern 1999) that operates through scale, and more specifically, through a postplural scale. This, it should be stated unambiguously, is no generic postplurality.<sup>iv</sup> Rather, it is a deeply historically situated postplurality tied to the condition of finding oneself in the wake of genocide.<sup>v</sup>

In *After Nature* (1992), Marilyn Strathern examines English kinship in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, at a time when new reproductive technologies were generating novel questions about the status of kin relations, against a background where the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher could announce ‘There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families’ (Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Strathern 1992:144). In this context, Strathern shows how plurality hinges on knowledge practices which assume persons are born into coherent identities, be them biological or social,<sup>vi</sup> so that ‘identity, like time and obligation, flows downward from parent to child’ (1992:52). Genetics provides new idioms for figuring the naturalness of biological kinship, though this cultural effort at producing the naturalness of biological ties is shown to be not new at all, but rather, to have also been important in the past. In English kinship, a pluralizing capacity or potential, then, inheres in persons conceived as individuals, to the effect that ‘individuals reproduce individuals’ (Strathern 1992: 53). In contrast, Strathern points to how, in some Melanesian societies, babies are not considered to be new persons (2012:55). Furthermore, drawing on Nancy Munn’s work in the Melanesian island of Gawa, Strathern shows how in Gawa canoes are the ethnographic objects through which relatedness is figured. These wooden objects are analogically related to the kin group – a group that contains many members – as well as to the body – and the maternal body whose cavity contains the person-to-be, more specifically. Canoes are at once the collectivity of kin contained within, and a single person, or mother, containing futural mothers and futural children (Strathern 1991b: 66-67; 1992:56). In turn, the

form of the canoe is analogized with the child's facial features, so that the carving and decorating of the vessel carried out by men is associated with men's efforts at shaping the fetus. In this matrilineal system where it is assumed nothing is transmitted by the father during conception, fathers have to carve the vessel to be able to carry out any transmission to their offspring. In other words, transmission has to occur through an explicit social act. In turn, '[e]ach clan member in Gawa may be regarded as an icon of the clan; but each individual *person* is an icon of a *relationship*, and a microcosm of diverse relations' (Strathern 1992: 62). By focusing on knowledge practices in Gawa, Strathern shows how plurality and singularity are differently figured, thus rendering the assumptions inherent in English figurations of relatedness as dependent on individuals reproducing individuals, newly unfamiliar.<sup>vii</sup> The nexus between pluralization and novelty is also thrown into question in the analysis of Melanesian ethnography, as in the Trobriands newborns are not, strictly speaking, new people: 'Trobriand babies are old people, not new ones. That is, they are ancestors re-appearing as spirit-children' (Strathern 1992:59).

Knowledge practices of composition and decomposition make explicit the relations that constitute persons and things. Strathern's dazzling analysis skillfully produces the effect of a progressive distancing from the knowledge practices for rendering plurality, diversity, individuality and collectivity proper of English kinship, through a juxtaposition with conceptual and aesthetic practices concerned with the reproduction of relations in Melanesia. Knowledge practices for figuring difference and complexity are shown to be relational devices through which descriptions of social wholes and identity are produced. In a postplural world, by contrast, '[w]e move from the unique amalgam of elements drawn from different domains to a literal assemblage of parts perceived as substitutable or replaceable for one another' (Strathern 1992: 183). As Jensen and Winthereik (2017:166-7) point out, postplurality entails, for Strathern, a loss of the mathematics of epistemological pluralism and a simultaneous proliferation of fragmentation. The contrast is between the plurality of the modern epoch and a postplural world where 'persons can [...] be imagined as simply composed of elements of other persons – whether in terms of organ transplants, or the borrowing of cultural forms or the imitation of other individual lifestyles, or even the transmission of genetic particles' (Strathern 1992: 183). Partial connections presuppose not only relations between (presumably bounded) entities, but more fundamentally, a fractal modelling of pluralization and replication in the composition of entities, hence the felicitous deployment of the term 'assemblage' to figure this relational domain for the composition and decomposition of subjects and worlds. Holbraad and Pedersen sum up this postplural model as follows: 'If of every thing one can ask not only to what other things it relates (the pluralist project of comparison) but also of what other things it is composed, then the very metaphysic of "many things" emerges as incoherent. Everything, one would conclude, is both more and less than itself. "More" because what looks like a "thing" in the pluralist metaphysic turns out, postplurally, to be composed of further things – infinity inward – and "less" because at the same time it too contributes to the composition of further things – infinity outward' (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009: 374). One way of figuring this contrast would be to juxtapose a modernist montage and a postplural assemblage, bearing in mind that the loss of 'the merographic amalgam of pluralism' where social life can be figured as a 'plurality of "countless" (i.e. potentially countable) discrete logics and "separate realms"' (Strathern 1992: 215 footnote 41) need not entail regret (1992:184).

In my discussion, I grapple with a sense of postplurality in the aftermath of genocide in Guatemala, to foreground some epistemological, ontological and political dimensions inherent in scale. I explore how scale functions as a key device that refers to the making of different orders of relations. I explore how this meaning of scale and related knowledge practices of ‘scale switching’ might be considered closer to Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘family resemblances’ in *Philosophical Investigations*, than to disciplinary specific understandings of scale, as, for example, a spatial category. In this Wittgenstenian sense, scale and scale shifting refer to the making of connections between domains of knowledge and are analytical devices with great critical potential. Connecting these reflections to ‘queer’ as understood by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993), in this chapter, I explore the queering effects of scale and scale shifting. I aim to foreground postplural framings of context and scale and show how these fundamentally problematize assumptions regarding the assumed self-evidence of distinctions between notions of bounded, organic or integrated social wholes or individual subjects, as well as the assumed transparency of analytics of gender, sexuality and desire – and the idea of ‘proper objects’ of queer anthropology. I track the emergence of queer postpluralities and partial connections between and across Strathern’s oeuvre and queer theory.

## **II. Genocide kinning, public secrets, family resemblances**

It is common knowledge, at least in certain circles in urban Guatemala, that some of the children who were forcefully removed from their families and communities in the course of military offensives against civilians during the Guatemalan conflict (1960-1996) were not killed, but rather, were adopted by high ranking military officers. This is a public secret (Taussig 1997) in wide circulation in the country, and one frequently transmitted through allusion. It surfaces among those who were directly affected by the conflict, in the tales such as the one about a woman in her early forties, who, having been adopted by US citizens, searched for the sister she vividly remembered having before being adopted, only to claim to have found her in Guatemala City, the daughter of a prominent, though long-retired, general of the Guatemalan Army. The tale recounts how this woman, having approached the former high-ranking military officer in the hope to arrange a meeting with her sister, is said to have been refused contact. The retired general and his wife resolutely maintained that their daughter was unequivocally their ‘natural daughter’, not an adopted offspring. These rumors, insinuations and dismissals articulate a sense of social proximity among subjects whose location is usually posited to be incommensurate, due to the chasm carved by history, lineage and racism (Casaús Arzú 2007) between oligarchic families and everyone else in contemporary Guatemala.<sup>viii</sup> Claims and counter-claims concerning one’s relations to others produce a sense of proximity and distance across the (neo)colonial racist logics and practices of violent appropriation and dispossession that tie those who devised and operationalized the infliction of genocidal violence during the scorched earth campaigns of the Guatemalan conflict in the early 1980s, to those who suffered – and resisted – the onslaught. More fundamentally, such claims and counter-claims produce a sense of subjects being in *some* relation to one another and suggest that, in some instances, proximity might have been produced *through* genocidal violence: making kin out of genocide.<sup>ix</sup> In these accounts, high ranking military officers are figures that embody the sovereign power to ‘let live and make die’ alongside the biopolitical capacity to take life to manage it and foster it

(Foucault [1976] 1990:138). Quite literally, they are said to have taken children as spoils of war, moved by some ethical impulse to manage them by rescuing them. In the case noted above, however, the retired general never acknowledged that his daughter might be an adopted offspring, or conceded that she may have a sibling. He also refused the woman's request to take a DNA test, whilst also preventing his daughter from taking the test to ascertain if the two women might indeed be related. The woman searching for her long-lost sister resigned herself to perusing the striking family resemblance she saw in the photos of the woman she regarded to be her sister on social media.<sup>x</sup>

There are other cases whose details have been meticulously researched and publicly disseminated in the press, and most recently, turned into the subject of documentaries such as *Finding Oscar*, released in 2016 to wide acclaim. *Finding Oscar* tells the story of Oscar Alfredo Ramírez Castañeda, a man in his early forties living near Boston, Massachusetts. It recounts how Oscar Ramírez was unexpectedly approached by the Assistant Prosecutor of the Unit of Special Cases of the Internal Armed Conflict of the Human Rights Office of the Ministerio Público – the Office of the Public Prosecutor – in Guatemala. The Assistant Prosecutor was working on the case of a massacre known as Dos Erres that took place in the northern region of Petén in 1982.<sup>xi</sup> The villagers of Dos Erres were slaughtered by special military units known as Kaibiles, who suspected the village to be supporting the guerrillas active in the area.<sup>xii</sup> In this well-documented case in which 251 people were brutally killed by Kaibiles forces – an unusual case in Guatemala, because it has since led to a prosecution and a conviction – the Assistant Prosecutor found that following the massacre, some Kaibiles soldiers took children with them. These children were the only survivors. The same Assistant Prosecutor had previously handled the case of Ramiro Osorio,<sup>xiii</sup> now based in Canada, who having been traced and identified as a survivor of the Dos Erres massacre, subsequently received a compensation payment from the Government of Guatemala following the judgement from the Inter-American Court for Human Rights filed in his favour. Oscar Alfredo Ramírez Castañeda's early life seemed to have followed a similar path. The question for him now was to imagine a new family resemblance and reconsider the status of the family resemblances he had known all his life. As Rotella notes in the report on the case:

'[Oscar Alfredo Ramírez Castañeda] had never known his mother. He did not remember his father, who had never married. Lt. Oscar Ovidio Ramírez Ramos had died in an accident when he was just four. Oscar's grandmother and aunts had raised him to revere his father. As the family told it, the lieutenant was a hero. He graduated at the top of his academy class, became an elite commando and won medals in combat. Oscar treasured the soldier's red beret, his aging photo album. He liked to leaf through the pictures showing an officer with a bantam build and youthful smile, riding in a tank, carrying the flag. The lieutenant's nickname, a diminutive of Oscar, was Cocorico. Oscar called himself Cocorico the Second. "You don't know me." [the Assistant Prosecutor stated in her letter] If the prosecutor's suspicions were correct, Oscar didn't know himself. He was not the son of an honorable soldier. He was a kidnapping victim, a battlefield trophy, living proof of mass murder.'<sup>xiv</sup>

Family resemblances have something to do with common knowledge. For Ramírez Castañeda, they hinged on sharing a nickname with his father, 'Cocorico', a figuring of relatedness that was challenged

and radically reoriented by the Assistant Prosecutor's intervention. Jolts shake up the social field and realign domains of knowledge. They reconfigure connections, shift categories and perspectives – including understandings about the fate of individuals whose lives were marked by the experience of genocidal violence during the Guatemalan conflict. Jolts in the organization of knowledge not only reconfigure relations, they slides across scales through scale-hopping and scale-switching, in a context where there is a very fine line between figuring and experiencing family, and figuring and experiencing political violence and genocide. In the case of Ramírez Castañeda, the scales in questions were precisely those of kinning and violence. Knowledge practices tied to determining family resemblances through names had to be suspended and substituted with other scales in an effort to learn to see violence. This, in turn, entailed a process of familiarisation with the events in Dos Erres that, it now transpired, had so radically marked his life course. In parallel, the effect of defamiliarisation from those who had been family all his life also ensued. Violence emerged as tied to scales of kinning and dekinning through which identity and belonging had to shift and be reimagined. Thirty-five years after the events, violence yielded a new set of relatives. More surprisingly still, it yielded a father. In the reconstructions of events offered in the documentary *Finding Oscar*, the question of family resemblances, and the resemblances tying Ramírez Castañeda to an elderly man in Petén, is no longer in the domain of names, but rather, is returned to the body. The reports in the press stressed the capacity of the DNA test to tease apart child abductor from kin, and connect the survivor of a massacre to kin and community anew. The narrative of the film, however, asks Ramírez Castañeda – and by extension, the spectator – to see the likeness between Ramírez Castañeda's blue eyes and the blue eyes of this elderly man, whose gait and frame uncannily are also said to mirror his own. Blue eyes and whiteness elicit and make explicit the genocidal imaginary that sets Ramírez Castañeda apart. They reveal the racialized gaze that made the child worth saving and the racializing desire that oriented the action of the soldiers who, invested with the capacity of letting live and making die, resolved to take him.<sup>xv</sup> Ramírez Castañeda's process of reckoning with his personal odyssey in the film mirrors the spectator's reckoning with the scale of mass violence and genocide (cf. Nelson 2009). Queering relations, adjoining and distancing, learning and unlearning to see family resemblances are knowledge practices tied to the violent histories in which identity, sociality, life and death are all thrown into question. Persons and things entail an excess, in that they exceed the domains of identity and belonging and point to other possibilities and relations. In turn, they are inherently epistemological anxious, in that little is ever self-evident, and that which appear to be so entails the possibility of dissimulation and doubt. Paradoxically, in the case of Oscar Ramírez Castañeda, there had been no documents, signatures, or archives. The transnational movement of the former Kaibil soldier and the child from Dos Erres had unraveled though an undocumented trajectory. Indeed, it now transpired, Ramírez Castañeda still lived an ostensibly undocumented existence in Boston, Massachusetts. There had been no signatures, no papers, no archive. Jolts and relations had appeared through other means, through other persons and things.

The revelations about Edmond Mulet are a further case in point. Edmond Mulet, a prominent Guatemalan diplomat whose career included prestigious appointments in the United Nations, also came to public attention in a case of children adopted transnationally at the time of the conflict. In early 2015, *Plaza Pública* – an electronic magazine dedicated to political analysis and investigative journalism in Guatemala – released a detailed report about transnational adoptions during the years of harshest

political repression in the country. The report named Mulet as a key attorney (*notario*) who was instrumental in orchestrating the movement of children through transnational adoption circuits during the 1980s, primarily to Quebec, Canada (Escalon 2015). The report carefully traced the operations of *Les Enfants du Soleil*, a network connecting prospective adoptive parents in Montreal to children held in the state orphanage Hogar Elisa Martinez in Guatemala. The involvement of state orphanages in these adoptions meant that the adoptions themselves, unlike the majority of transnational adoptions from Guatemala up to 2006 (Posocco 2011), would not be literally extra-judicial. Rather, the involvement of social workers, notaries and the attorney general produced a copious flow of signatures and documents through which kinning and dekinning would be instantiated, and identity and belonging redirected and redefined. The archive, however, remained elusive.

When I first read the account in *Plaza Pública*, I thought the narrative was both familiar and revelatory. The account was familiar because it detailed the process of transnational adoption in the same way I had described it in my own analysis (Posocco 2011, 2015), thus confirming that I seemed to have understood and represented the process correctly. However, I was simultaneously incredibly surprised. I had worked extensively on adoption files in the archives of the Guatemalan Judiciary. Through this detailed reading of the files, I was able to build what seemed to be a solid account, albeit a fragmentary one, of the transnational adoption process. I was also able to identify the names of legal practitioners who appeared to have been central to the processing of adoption applications in different decades. They recurred, in the paperwork, as did the names of social workers. From the files I had been given access to by the relevant civil servants, it was possible to build a picture, albeit a partial one, of the working practices of legal practitioners and adoption agencies that had acted on behalf of adoptive parents from different countries – the United States, Canada, France, Italy, northern Europe – and the social workers who had written reports to inform decisions on individual adoptions. I had, however, completely failed to see Edmond Mulet in the paperwork. My fieldnotes recorded that I had identified some key players, but not Edmond Mulet. The revelations about Mulet elicited and made explicit the fundamentally fragmentary character of the archive. As it turned out, Mulet responded to the *Plaza Pública* revelations publicly (Mulet 2015), arguing that he had indeed assisted the movement of children abroad during the conflict, so the presence or absence of his name from the records was not really the question, but had done so to rescue the offspring of individuals who were active in the guerrilla organizations and therefore in danger. Responding to his critics who accused him of having facilitated adoptions of children who were not in fact orphans for his personal gain, Mulet pointed to the inherent ambiguity of the relevant legal definition of ‘orphan’: ‘the law says an orphan is one who has lost his father or mother, or both’ (Mulet 2015: 2). Losing kin, acquiring kin, this seemed to be an open ended affair governed by loose definitions – even in legal terms, Mulet admitted. One should not be too confident when aiming to pin down family resemblances or kin ties. These difficulties with family resemblance and kin ties were similar to those I encountered in my work on the adoption files. Through ethnography, signatures, documents and archives appeared to be devices with scaling capacities that anxiously shifted across domains of knowledge – in a context where their production was widely held to have entailed forgery, coercion, and censorship. It was impossible to ascertain the veracity of signatures and of the formulaic declarations of birth mothers redacted by notaries. Birth certificates attached to the files often had no referent in local birth registers offices. The archives seemed to be repositories of

counterfeit files and were increasingly difficult to access, making information appear at once spurious, sparse, or unattainable. The image of a disappearing archive emerged alongside the unreliability and fictitiousness of the paperwork that could actually be traced, located, retrieved and examined.

Persons and things were not quite what they seemed to be; they were – or could potentially be – always already something else. They were less than themselves and more than themselves simultaneously. Postplurality emerged to connote relationality and saturated the ethnographic tableau. The ethnographic tableau also continuously shifted. On occasions, when seeking to trace individuals who may have been put up for adoption, I was confronted not with an adoption file, but with the prospect of searching for an exhumation file. The movement from adoption file to exhumation file was engendered by the conditions in which individuals appeared and disappeared. Whilst some individuals could be traced as having been moved abroad through transnational adoption, others might be found in a mass grave in a military zone in the vicinity of the place where it could be shown some transnational adoptees were originally abducted. The simultaneous proximity and distance between life and death was produced by the kinning and dekinning capacities of genocidal violence. As reports emerged that the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) team was working on mass graves within the precinct of the military zone in Cobán, Alta Verapaz, and the graves were found to contain the bodies of many children, the ethnographic tableau shifted yet again. Through this jolt, the image of the vanishing archive appeared alongside the progressive coming into focus of a mass grave. This split tableau simultaneously captures the kinning and dekinning capacities of genocidal violence and the shift in scales thus engendered. It elicits new reckonings that emerge through juxtaposition. Shifts in scale engender a queering of subjects, objects and relations and a redirection of the analogic flow. When seeking to locate children forcefully removed from a community in Alta Verapaz whom I knew to have Maya Q'eqchi' and Maya Poqomchi' relatives, I found adult adoptees living in provincial Italy. Ethnography, then, is also reconfigured as a result. It appears as a series of jolts and a succession of postplural tableaux. It emerges as the ever shifting reconfiguring of subjects, objects and relations. Persons and things are not quite what they seem to be, and are (also) always-already relationally, intermittently, something else.

### **III – Postplurality, Queering Scale**

The difficulty in pinning down the question of family resemblances and the precise status of one's ethnographic objects dramatizes and makes explicit a fundamental analytically and ethnographically resonant problem: a problem with categories. Signatures, documents and archives – in their alternating presence and absence, appearance and disappearance – are ethnographic objects that have scaling capacities with queering effects. Scale and scale switching transitively and agentially queer categories of knowledge and being. In common parlance and in academic analysis, the notion of 'scale' relates to knowledge practices of spatialisation and contextualization. Scale has to do with the figuring of spatial categories such as, for example, 'the regional', 'the global' and 'the transnational' – or inversely, 'the local', 'the vernacular', 'the molecular'. These are important terms in contemporary queer studies and in queer anthropology.<sup>xvi</sup> Indeed, there exists a significant archive of regional literature which engages with

scale as a spatial category from a number of perspectives. This important archive includes critical and reflexive positions.<sup>xvii</sup> Conversely, Valverde (2015) conceives of scale through the notion of the 'chronotope' and reconfigures scalar analysis as concerning 'space, time, and affect and mood' (Valverde 2015: 57). One way of figuring the project of analysis of scale for Valverde is to exceed the confines of both geographical critical spatial analysis and of the interdisciplinary critical legal studies' deployment of mapping analogies 'to reflect the open-endedness and dynamism of all networks' (Valverde 2015: 67). Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) has also suggested that a complex scalar composition of space and time might be in play in the constitution of research objects. The 'rush of stories' that emerges and is sensed through ethnographic attention posits a problem with scale, as '[i]ts scales do not nest neatly; they draw attention to interrupting geographies and tempos' (2015: 37). Scalability can occur neatly, without engendering a shift in the ethnographic tableau. However, for Tsing, and arguably, for Strathern too, it is at the point of *nonscalability* – or incommensurability – where ethnographic insight lies. For Tsing, '[i]t is time to turn our attention to the nonscalable, not only as objects of description but also as incitements to theory' (Tsing 2015: 38).

Valverde's critical chronotopic re-imagining of scale and Tsing's emphasis on nonscalability are important for a theoretical account of the shifts in scale I have been concerned with here. Scale and knowledge practices of scale shifting, I have argued following Strathern, foreground the complex project of grappling with scale's epistemological dimension (Strathern 1991b; 1999) and ontological properties and consequences. Scales refer to different 'orders of knowledge' and relational shifts in modes of being. Corsín Jiménez (2005) partially captures this problematic, placing emphasis specifically on the epistemological implications. Corsín Jiménez states that scales as 'orders of knowledge' refer to instances 'where particular orders of relations (of economy, or religion, or kinship, etc.) [and here I should add, gender, race, and sexuality] are mobilized and measured up against other scales, e.g. what image of "the family" is conjured up when thinking about "the miner" as the emblem of "modernity"' (Corsín Jiménez 2005:158). The shifts in orders of knowledge I have been concerned with here have similarly entailed juxtapositions between images of family resemblances, kinning and dekinning, on the one hand, and genocidal violence. The ethnographic tableau pointed to the postplural figuring of family resemblances in play in the proximity and distance between figuring family and figuring genocide. In turn, the postplural emergence of a shifting diptych containing a disappearing archive and the progressive coming into focus of a mass grave radically reconfigured and reoriented the ethnographic tableau. These are concrete relational figurations through which multiple and shifting connections and disconnections brought on by violence are imagined, experienced, embodied, and enacted. In this context of fragmentation, parts have ontological valence, as it is through them that a relational redistribution of substance is enacted. Fragments emerge as relational material figurations of histories and experiences of violence, conflict and genocide. Concurrently, the ethnographer's analytical attention shifts onto the place of such fragments in the making of relational shifts in scale, form and ontological status. Fragments progressively appear entangled in performative, worlding and transformative reconfigurations (Kockelman 2013) such as those connected to shifts from adoption file to exhumation file, body to paper, personhood to the inorganic, and from archive replete with files, subjects and relations to empty building. A range of postplural shifts in scale, form and image comes into

view, and new questions emerge as to the place of ethnography's commitment to tracking, figuring and conjuring up relations in these complex dynamics.

This meaning of scale and scale switching, and the shifts in composition engendered in the domains of knowledge and being, evoke, in part, Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' found in *Philosophical Investigations* (2009). In this Wittgensteinian sense, scale and scale-switching refer to the making of connections between domains of knowledge, where 'things which may be thought to be connected by one essential common feature may in fact be connected by a series of overlapping similarities, where no one feature is common to all' (Wittgenstein 2009: 64). These types of connections and constituencies seem, *prima facie*, rather queer. They are relations between persons and things that may intermittently share a commonality, but have no features in common.<sup>xviii</sup> Rapport (2012) has argued that this modelling of connection, similarity and difference corresponds to Wittgenstein's polythetic category, whose key characteristic is that 'members of the category need to share no single feature in common' (Rapport 2012: 158). Rapport points out that no single feature has to be shared by all; rather, common traits may be partially shared and randomly - or merographically - distributed. For Rapport, what really matters is the making of the individual that takes place through this partial and discontinuous sharing of features and traits: '[t]here is no necessary limit or closure to these traits (no alphabet) and their particular possession and also their ordering is unique to each member, making each individual' (Rapport 2012: 158). From this perspective, Oscar Ramírez Castañeda's individuality and uniqueness are paramount, over and above the names and embodied traits which might have come into view through the rescaling of family resemblances engendered in the wake of genocide. The individual, as a unique assemblage of traits across multiple scales of family resemblances and violence, is, for Rapport, a modelling of a 'universal relationship between individual and human totality' (Rapport 2012: 159). In other words, shifts in scale are for Rapport all conducive to modellings of generality and individuality which ultimately and fundamentally constitute each individual subject in the irreducible generality of human individuality, or 'anyone' (Rapport 2012).

In my analysis, I have stressed the aptness of multiple ways of figuring connections beyond mimesis, and emphasized instead connections marked by partiality (Strathern 1991 b), incommensurability (Posocco 2014a), non-equivalence (Povinelli 2007), nonscalability (Tsing 2013), discontinuity and rupture (Posocco 2014b), as productive starting points for reconsidering relations. In 'Queer and Now', Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994:8) took 'queer' to refer to 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning' when elements do not signify monolithically. In this context, 'queer' extends to work that 'spins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: all the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses.... To do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state ... [where] the centre of the term queer deepens and shifts' (Sedgwick 1994:9). Partial connections point to such fractal intricacies, and to how, through the work of jolts in knowledge and being, 'context', 'subjects' and 'objects' are also queerly figured and rescaled as a result. They deepen and shift. Such fractal intricacies are, for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, replete with queer cross-identificatory potential that is constitutively fragmenting as it is world-making. Strathernian fractality, in turn, as an abstract modeling of relations

through repetition and replication in juxtapositions, continuously fragments and reassembles (partial) subjects, objects and worlds. In my analysis, I have argued that queering effects can be discerned in the shifts in scale which engender a reorientation and reorganization of ethnographic tableaux and the categories which underpin them. Such jolts have epistemological and ontological valence.<sup>xix</sup> Partial connections, and the relations and entities relationally engendered, are assembled and disassembled in the orders of knowledge *and* in the distribution of substance that ensues from socially and historically situated practices and figurations. Here, then, I have been concerned with grappling with and thinking through postplural understandings of scale. Scales of postplurality, I have argued, have formal qualities – like the ‘strathernogram’ conjured up in Gell’s reading (2006) of Strathern’s *The Gender of the Gift* – and are therefore concerned, one might say, with ‘*picturing* the facts of the world’ – in Wittgenstein’s terms – as ‘a thought expressed perceptibly through the senses’ (Wittgenstein 2009, Proposition 3.1). Such formal qualities are most apparent in the reorganization and recomposition of the ethnographic tableaux and in the movement from figuring a disappearing archive and the coming into view of a mass grave. In turn, the scale of postplurality is always already ‘worlded’ – qua *knowledge practice*. Postplurality’s worlding effects are most conspicuous when figured at the point of scale shifting, where relations are not stated but shown – to follow Wittgenstein – or conjured up through the ‘ethnographic effect’ – to follow Strathern. Further, shifts in scale always already entail breaks with context – and a merographic postplural conjuring up of objects and subjects, parts and wholes, fragments and worlds (see Posocco 2014a). Such an understanding of scale and scale shifting has queering effects and could be figured as a form of queer analysis, a queer analytic. Postplural queering is a knowledge practice, an operation, a figurative conjuring up. It is not a domain, subject or object category, though it refers to processes through which domains, subjects and objects are assembled and disassembled, and substance is intermittently distributed and rearranged. Always already historically situated, postplural scaling and scale shifting queerly dislodge the assumed transparency of the categories that underpin ethnographic tableaux, as well as the idea of ‘proper objects’ of queer anthropology.<sup>xx</sup>

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## Films

*Finding Oscar*, Director Ryan Suffern, 2016 (USA).

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<sup>ii</sup> See Posocco 2011, 2014, 2015.

<sup>iii</sup> See Stoler 2009.

<sup>iv</sup> I am grateful to Sarah Green for her critical engagement with a very preliminary draft of this chapter I presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in Denver in 2015. This point of clarification is in direct response to her comments raised then. On situated postplurality, see Posocco 2014a.

<sup>v</sup> I borrow the expression 'in the wake' from Sharpe (2016) to refer to the complex aftermath of genocide and to signal that genocide is an ongoing event.

<sup>vi</sup> With reference to this model of pluralisation, Strathern states: 'I refer to as the sense of infinity given by the Euro-American view of society, as made up of a plurality of persons, would correspond to the pre-nineteenth-century assumption that the infinite was present "as a more or less tacit horizon of numbers" (1988: 107). This is the potential as opposed to the actual and absolute infinite, which exists as a totality, given all at once' (Strathern 1999:302, footnote #9).

<sup>vii</sup> Strathern writes that "'But to write society, as anthropologists do, is another matter altogether. Persons are involved, yet what completes them seems to be society itself, whether through 'socialisation' or through the analytical strategy of putting people's acts and artefacts into their 'social context'. they are supplemented by society, persons are being-supplemented by an entity of a different order of abstraction, with its own properties, its own presence. These include the necessity that persons represent society to themselves, which generates an incompleteness of a particular kind: a demand for interpretation. The EuroAmerican vision of society further presumes a plurality of persons; insofar as their interpretations are held relative to one another, so too may interpretations of societies seemingly supplement and relativise one another' (Strathern 1999:236).

<sup>viii</sup> See also Nelson 1999.

<sup>ix</sup> See also Posocco 2014, chapter 4, 'Secrecy, Sociality, Merographic Analogy'.

<sup>x</sup> DNA tests are part of new idioms of relatedness and kinning tied to forensic technologies and forensic aesthetics deployed in the search of victims of forced disappearance. Their potency and efficacy are said to rest on the truth-making capacities that are attributed to genetic substance (TallBear 2013). In practice, forensic techniques appear to be rather blunt instruments and matches and identifications are rare, when set against the number of forced disappearances and the samples individuals are willing to donate in order to trace the whereabouts of their relatives. A sense of incongruence and lack of proportion permeates the scene.

<sup>xi</sup> See also CEH 1999.

<sup>xii</sup> See CEH 1999. See also Posocco (2014, Chapter 4).

<sup>xiii</sup> The full judgement for the case of Ramiro Osorio is available online,

[http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec\\_211\\_ing.pdf](http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_211_ing.pdf) (last accessed 8 November 2017).

<sup>xiv</sup> See, Rotella 2012, <http://www.propublica.org/article/finding-oscar-massacre-memory-and-justice-in-guatemala> (last accessed 8 November 2017).

<sup>xv</sup> The residents of Dos Erres were not Maya but rather, poor Ladinos, that is, of mixed ancestry. Whilst the massacre of Dos Erres does not fall within definition of genocide in the terms and protocols of international law, these cases of child abduction clearly show the workings of the racist and genocidal imaginary which made some children rescuable and other dispensable.

<sup>xvi</sup> For critical engagements with these framings see Jafari Allen (2011), Manalansan (2015, 2016), Morgensen (2011), Weiss (2016). See also the special issue on 'Queer/ing Regions' edited by Cüneyt Çakırlar (2016).

<sup>xvii</sup> I have reviewed some of this literature in the context of a discussion of Povinelli's book *The Empire of Love* (Posocco 2008). I stand by the distinctions between diffusionist, translational and critically translational perspectives as useful heuristic devices to map and orient the extensive literature.

<sup>xviii</sup> There is an opportunity here to queer Wittgenstein more abrasively and ask what exactly amounts to a 'family', not to mention a 'resemblance', in Wittgenstein's own oeuvre.

<sup>xix</sup> See Gonzalez-Polledo (2016).

<sup>xx</sup> It could be argued that the challenge here lies in the fact that the point should not be stated, but shown. The question has to do with the relation between meta-theoretical reflection and (ethnographic) analysis and theorizing. For this purpose, it is useful to return to Alfred Gell's chapter on the strathernogram, as he so explicitly

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and persuasively notes the different registers Marilyn Strathern's work engages with and operates in. The arguments and figurations of Strathern as a meta-anthropologist of anthropology and meta-gender theorist are very clear to me – they animate the page.