



CFP DEMETER PRESS

*“I am, only because we are”:
The Gifts of Radical Kinship*

Edited by Michelann Parr

No kinship, no peace. No kinship, no justice. No kinship, no equality. (Boyle 201-202)

When I think about kinship, I think about a mutual exchange of gifts and responsibilities. I think of *kinship* as a verb – something that we *do*, by each member of the living world having a beautiful gift to share with one another. It is the exchange of those gifts that makes kinship more than ancestry or common history. (Kimmerer in Van Horn, Kimmerer, and Hausdoerffer 128)

Ubuntu is a way of living that begins with the premise that “I am” only because “we are.” It is a worldview grounded in survival, solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity. (Ogude)

In *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations*, Gavin Van Horn, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and John Hausdoerffer point toward how it is possible to become kin, how kinship is an intentional process that is cultivated by humans as an expression of life that revolves around the question of how to rightly relate. In *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, Father Greg Boyle describes radical kinship as exquisite mutuality, a hope that we will lift each other up, a space where everyone matters in a world without separation due to colour, gender, politics, religion, ability, etc. Similarly, in *Casting Indra’s Net: Fostering Spiritual Kinship and Community* Pamela Ayo Yetunde draws on various religious and spiritual traditions to explore spiritual kinship as a path of mutuality and relationality: a possible site for healing and transformation that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and a space where we can recognize our shared humanity, journey together, support one another, and foster compassion, empathy, and a sense of belonging.

Radical kinship is expansive and extends far beyond traditional and narrow understandings of kin; it is a site of “queer coinage, of a performative re-elaboration, and the recognition of binding ties made and remade” (Butler 41). For many, radical kinship is chosen family. Radical kinship reaches for a deep, inclusive sense of community, connectedness, and relationality where barriers are dismantled, circles are widened, and all individuals are valued, regardless of background, identity, or social status (Boyle). It resists patriarchal, hegemonic, and normative structures favouring instead nonnormative ways of being, practice, and wisdom. It is at once equitable, inclusive, relational, intersectional, place-based, spatial, and cultural. In the space of radical kinship, mothering and kinning are verbs that can be undertaken by anyone actively engaged in relationship. Like feminism and matricentric feminism, radical kinship is fuelled by radical hope – a sense of optimism and determination in times of profound uncertainty, belief in the possibility of positive change, collective liberation, and potential for transformation when existing structures or practices appear to be failing, and acknowledgment that the hoped-for-future is not only different but better in a meaningful, justice-oriented way. From a radical kinship perspective, the hoped-for-future is one where maternal labour and mothering are shared practices, where the village really does sustain individuals and communities, inspire creative problem-solving, foster resilience, liberate the oppressed, address systemic issues, create equitable systems, and drive collective action.

This collection seeks to uncover “the legacy of kinship relations both lost and made” (Butler 35) and the complicated history and potential futures of kinship. Welcome are pieces that demonstrate alliances and both centre and uplift voices that have been historically silenced, foster a sense of collective responsibility and care, work toward equitable and just systems that benefit all. Potential topics include, but are not limited to the following:

- theoretical and/or experiential explorations of how kinship emerges, promises, and endures within and across the lifespan and/or the complexities and/or unexpected joys in creating and maintaining kinship relations
- expositions of the challenging lineage of kinship due to colonization, slavery, war, forced migration, terrorized obedience, genocide, detainment and incarceration, marginalization, and destruction that exist within the broader systems of power and law (see Butler)
- accounts of intergenerational and cross-cultural radical kinship
- reflections on the gifts afforded by radical kinship
- ways in which kinship appears and operates as interdependence, relationality, belonging, inclusivity, imagination, memory, performance, oath, decision, care, identity, anonymity, obligation, choice, necessity,

survival, racialization, reproduction, politics, dispossession, exploitation, trauma, oppression, and struggle, particularly for queer, Indigenous, racialized, and minoritized identities (see Bradway and Freeman)

- how kinship is being (re)imagined as a site of belonging/exquisite mutuality/new relational form
- the need for heteronormative versions of kinship to be problematized, critiqued, dismantled, and re-imagined
- critiques of capitalist, state, legal, and religious institutions that shape and control family and relational norms, advocating instead for forms of alternative modalities and visions of kinship that resist these structures
- how radical kinship embraces (or needs to embrace) intersectionality, recognizing how race, class, disability, gender, and other social categories intersect to shape experiences of kinship and community
- exposition of how radical kinship may involve forms of collective and communal living that challenge individualistic, neoliberal, heteronormative, and nuclear family-oriented models
- ways that radical kinship is linked with activist and solidarity movements that aim to give life to kinship bonds that support social justice and collective liberation
- possibilities for becoming better kin who recognize our radical connectedness to the all, who resist the illusion of the all, and who are more receptive to the languages of others (including nonhuman others)

A diverse range of submissions is invited and encouraged including, but not limited, to personal essay/reflection, academic/scholarly essay, philosophical meanderings, political imaginaries, memoir, creative non-fiction, diary style, letter form, Q and A, conversation, poetry, art, photography, and hybrid genre.

Please send a 250-word abstract and 75-word bio by March 1, 2025 to michelap@nipissingu.ca

Please submit abstract/bio in one word file saved as Radical Kinship Name, and please put in your subject heading Radical Kinship. For example, *Radical Kinship Michelann Parr*

Works Cited

- Bradway, Tyler, and Freeman, Elizabeth (Eds.). *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*. Duke University Press, 2022.
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- Van Horn, Gavin, Kimmerer, Robin Wall, and Hausdoerffer, John. *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations, Vol. 5: Practice*. Center for Humans & Nature Press, 2021.
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