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Suspended Kinship and Youth Sociality in Tamil Nadu, India

by Constantine V. Nakassis

This paper examines so-called fictive, or tropic, uses of cross-kin terms by college-going youth in Tamil Nadu, India. The paper shows how youth usages of cross-kin terms are motivated out of normative kinship practices, even as they decenter and suspend the semantic and pragmatic norms of such terms. Through such suspensions, forms of youth sociality and identity are performed. Such sociality and identity turn on the ability of tropes on cross-kin terms to distance their users from various hierarchies that youth associate with traditional adult respectability and propriety. At the same time, such practices inscribe new hierarchies of college year, region, class, and gender. The paper then turns to how such kinship appropriations and suspensions are linked to changing conceptions of kinship and practices of cross-kin marriage. The spread of such terms among college youth has gone along with a tendency among the upwardly mobile and urban to avoid using such terms within their kin groups and to avoid such marriages. The paper concludes with reflections on the interplay between normative and tropic kinship, arguing that focusing on the dialectics between kinship semantics and pragmatics, norm and trope, resolves certain impasses in the study of kinship.

When I went to Madurai, Tamil Nadu, in 2007 to conduct fieldwork about college youth culture, my previous time spent learning standard, if not high-register, Tamil with middle-aged female professors did not prepare me for the cornucopia of youth slang that was being used in the college hostel to which I had recently moved. The all-male hostel reverberated with curse words, local dialectisms, youth code words, slang terms, and forms of address that I had never heard. Perhaps sensing my confusion, within a week of moving in, my hostel mates and I sat down in the hostel's common area for my first lesson in youth slang: the niceties (and not so niceties) of address. Surprisingly for me, this first lesson was not about terms I did not know. It was about words familiar to me from classic village ethnographies read as a graduate student: cross-kin terms for male relatives. While the words were familiar, their usage was not, however. In contrast to their use in the kin group, these youth appropriations turned on the fact that no one here was kin at all, that the college was, in fact, a space marked by the absence of kinship. This was, of course, the whole point. Along with a large repertoire of other youth cultural forms (Nakassis 2013b), these kinship appropriations contributed to the creation of a liminal intimacy and solidarity among these youth, articulating an ethics of equality that attempted to invert those hierarchies of age, kinship, and caste

within which these youth felt themselves to be otherwise subordinate. Such playful address practices enacted forms of transgressive sociality whose alternative normativity was enunciated precisely through those forms that denoted the domain central to the social reproduction of respectable "society": cross kinship.

In what follows, I look at how young men in these colleges appropriate cross-kin terms in peer-group address and how such usages invoke and play with an adult order of propriety (*murai*). I focus on the ways in which such address practices systematically suspend the semantics and pragmatics of kinship terms and, in doing so, generate new possibilities for youth sociality and the performance of identity. Even as such performativities attempt to invert and suspend hierarchies of age and caste, I show how such usages simultaneously inscribe new hierarchies (e.g., of college-year, region, class), as well as leaving others, such as gender, in place. Indeed, the male provenance of such terms has recently become the site for resignification by middle- and upper-middle-class young women in urban spaces. As I show, these young women are increasingly using cross-kin terms in their peer groups as part of an attempt to suspend those gender hierarchies to which they are otherwise beholden. In the final sections of the paper, I turn to how such kinship appropriations are linked to changing conceptions of kinship and cross-kin marriage. The emergence and spread of such terms among youth has gone along with a tendency to avoid using such terms within the kin group itself, a correlation that results from, on the one hand, wider shifts away from arranged cross-kin marriage and, on the other, the increasing association of cross-kin terms with youth identity.

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I conclude with reflections on the study of kinship more generally, arguing that a focus on the dialectical tensions between kinship semantics and pragmatics resolves certain impasses in the study of kinship.

In exploring such address practices, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork from 2007–2009, with follow-up work in 2010 and 2011, conducted in five liberal arts colleges in the cities of Madurai and Chennai, Tamil Nadu. I lived in three men's hostels in two colleges, two in a Madurai college (2007–2008) and one in a Chennai college (2008). Both colleges were historically elite Christian colleges that, given shifts in higher education since economic liberalization in the 1990s, have increasingly catered to a wider demographic of students. Within the expanding field of higher education, today these colleges would be considered semi-elite institutions. Both are coeducational, but given their history as all-boys colleges, their student bodies are predominantly male. In addition, I conducted ethnographic research in three other colleges: a coeducational, but mainly boys, government college in Chennai whose student body is largely lower and lower-middle caste and class; a coeducational college in Madurai that caters mainly to first-generation, lower-middle- and middle-class students from surrounding rural areas; and a semi-elite all-girls Christian college in Madurai whose student body, like those of the colleges where I lived, was largely, but not exclusively, middle to upper-middle class and caste. Despite these demographic differences, however, all of these colleges were socially heterogeneous by caste, class, and region, and overlapped in significant ways (see Nakassis 2010 for more discussion of these ethnographic sites).

In order to begin explicating such nonnormative youth address practices, first I discuss the kinship norm against which such youth practice distinguishes itself. My aim here is outline the semantic distinctions presupposed by Tamil kinship terminology so as to show how nonnormative youth usages emerge out of those distinctions, even as they suspend and decenter them.

Dravidian Kinship

In his comprehensive review, Thomas Trautmann (1981) has argued that the “Dravidian” kinship terminologies of South India can be organized, more or less, based on four semantic distinctions: crossness (cross/parallel kin), relative age (older/younger), referent's or addressee's gender (male/female), and generation (+/–2). Among these four dimensions, crossness is generally taken as the central feature of Dravidian kinship. Following Trautmann (1981), the semantic dimension of crossness classifies kin as either “cross” or “parallel” (cf. Dumont 1983, 1986[1957]).¹ Parallel kin include parents (M, F),

1. Of course, as Dravidian kinship practices may involve repeated cross-kin marriage, kin are often related to each other in more ways than one. The point here, however, is that crossness as a semantic distinction

siblings (B, Z), and children (S, D), as well as parents' same-gender siblings (FB, MZ), their spouses (FBW, MZH), and children (FBS, FBD, MZS, MZD). Parents' same-gender siblings and their spouses are treated in the kinship terminology as (types of) parents, and their children as siblings. Cross kin, by contrast, include parents' opposite-gender siblings (MB, FZ), their spouses (MBW, FZH), and their children (so-called cross cousins: MBS, MBD, FZS, FZD). Children of opposite-gender siblings are cross kin (ZS, ZD, FBDS, FBDD, MZDS, MZDD, etc., for male ego, and BS, BD, FBSS, FBSD, MZSS, MZSD, etc., for female ego), while children of same-gender siblings are parallel kin (for male ego, BS, BD, FBSS, FBSD, MZSS, MZSD, etc., and for female ego, ZS, ZD, FBDS, FBDD, MZDS, MZDD, etc.). Similarly, children of cross cousins are the same category as the parent who bears the same gender as ego (e.g., MBSS, MBSD, FZSS, FZSD, etc. are cross for a male ego and parallel for a female ego, while MBDS, MBDD, FZDS, FZDD are parallel for a male ego and cross for a female ego). As the above indicates, crossness is egocentric and transitive, creating “classificatory” sets of cross and parallel kin that include kin of any degree of remove from ego.²

Crossness is the kinship basis for reckoning suitability for marriage (an age and gender-appropriate subset of cross kin) and incest (union between parallel kin), as W. H. R. Rivers (1968 [1913]) long ago noted. Indeed, what is key about crossness in South Indian Dravidian kinship is the conflation of cross kin and (potential) spouses (e.g., MBS, FZS = H to a female ego, MBD, FZD = W to a male ego). The superset of cross and parallel kin is the (sub-)caste, which is endogamous.

Figure 1 summarizes these semantic distinctions, giving an example of the kin terms that I elicited from the generally non-Brahmin students with whom I worked. While there is certainly much variation and complexity in Tamil kinship terminologies, regionally (Aravānan 1987; Meenakshisundaran 1968) and by community (Chithiraputhiran 1999; Good 1996; Shanmugam Pillai 1965), this figure gives the reader a starting point from which to understand youth appropriations of such terms. As I hope will be clear, the basis of my argument lies not in what we take the status of a kinship “system” to be, “Dravidian” or otherwise, but rather in how college youth's address practices presuppose some level of kin

characterizes the denotatum of the term as either parallel or cross, even if he or she is related to ego in more than one way.

2. For kin who are related to ego through multiple ascending generations (i.e., “second,” “third” and *n*th cousins, e.g., children of FFBS, FMBS, FFBD, or FMBD, etc.), the calculus proceeds by taking the classificatory relation (parallel or cross) of the senior-most generation through which ego is linked to the kin in question and tracing downward generationally until one comes to kin to which the above set of equivalences apply (see Trautmann 1981:48–51, 173–185; Trawick 1992:120ff. for more detail). Hence, e.g., MFBSS is a cross cousin because MF and MFB are same-gender parallel kin of the highest generation linking ego and MFBSS. The children of these brothers, in ego's case MFBS and M, are siblings. As M and MFBS are of opposite gender, their children are cross kin to each other.

Generation	MALE (<i>paṅkāḷi</i>)	FEMALE	FEMALE	MALE
G2	<i>tāttā</i> (FF, FFB, FMB, MF, MFB, MMB)	<i>pāṭṭi</i> (FM, FMZ, FFZ, MM, MMZ, MFZ)		<i>tāttā</i> (FF, FFB, FMB, MF, MFB, MMB)
G1	<i>periyappā</i> (FeB, MZH[elder to F]) <i>appā</i> (F) <i>cittappā</i> (FyB, MZH[younger to F])	<i>periyammā</i> (MeZ, FeBW) <i>ammā</i> (M) <i>cinnammā</i> (MyZ, FyBW)	<i>atte</i> (FZ, MBW, WM)	<i>māmā</i> (MB, FZH, WF)
G0 older than ego	<i>aṅṅan</i> (eB, FBSe, MZSe)	<i>akkā</i> (eZ, FBDe, MZDe)	<i>*maitini</i> (MBDe, FZDe, WeZe, eBW)	<i>maccān, attān</i> (MBSe, FZSe, WeBe, eZH)
younger than ego	<i>tambi</i> (yB, FBSy, MZSy)	<i>*taṅṅai(cci)</i> (yZ, FBDy, MZDy)	<i>*koḷuntinaḷ</i> (MBDy†, FZDy†, yBW)	<i>māḷḷe</i> (from <i>māḷḷiḷai</i>); <i>maccān</i> (MBSy, FZSy, WeBy, WyB, yZH)
G-1	<i>*magan</i> (S, BS, WZS)	<i>*magaḷ</i> (D, BD, WZD)	<i>*marumagaḷ</i> (ZD†, WBD, SW)	<i>*marumagan, māḷḷe</i> (ZS, WBS, DH)
G-2	<i>*pēran</i> (SS, DS, BSS, ZSS, BDS, ZDS)	<i>*pētti</i> (SD, DD, BSD, ZSD, BDD, ZDD)		<i>*pēran</i> (SS, DS, BSS, ZSS, BDS, ZDS)

Parallel kin are in black, cross kin are in grey (on crossness in G2 see Good 1981:115, Levinson 1977:450ff.). Terms used by young men within their peer groups are bolded. Terms generally not used in kin address are *asterisked. Normatively marriageable cross kin for male ego are marked with an obelisk†. M = mother, F = father, B = brother, Z = sister, S = son, D = daughter, W = wife, H = husband, e[...] = elder [...], y[...] = younger [...], [...]e = elder to ego, [...]y = younger than ego. E.g., MBSy = mother's brother's son who is younger than ego; WyB = wife's younger brother.

Figure 1. Tamil kinship terms. This figure is based on Trautmann's (1981) and Good's (1981, 1996) more comprehensive discussions of non-Brahmin Tamil kinship that I have simplified for a male ego. Variations in the cross-cousin terms in this figure indicate differences by caste and region. A color version of this figure is available online.

normativity—which may be described as I have above—in order to be intelligible and efficacious.³

Regarding the normative affective correlates to these semantic distinctions, cross kin are those kin with whom one is in mutual relations of obligatory ritual exchange and (potential) affinity, while parallel kin—and in particular, male patrilineal kin—are relatives who have a share (*paṅku*) in, or rights to, common ancestral property. Correspondingly, kin relations among men in the patriline are said, and tend, to be relatively marked by age and generational hierarchy, affective distance, and even competition (Kapadia 1995:27–29). By contrast, cross-kin relations with classificatory mother's brother (*māmā*) and his male children (*attān, maccān, māḷḷe*) tend toward the affectionate, if at times deferential. They are also the site for so-called joking relations (Beck 1974; Gough 1993 [1956]; Kapadia 1995). Between male cross cousins such joking may involve horseplay, reciprocal nonrespectful address, and sexualized teasing about one's sisters; between male

and female cross cousins such joking may involve flirtation and even romance (Beck 1972:220; Munck 1996).

Important here is the relative tendency to neutralize, or dampen, relative age hierarchy among cross kin in favor of indexing relations of mutuality, reciprocity, and affection (Beck 1972:224, 290–291). While almost all kin terms index either relative age or generation difference in kin reference, it is those terms that tend to flatten out, or scramble, such distinctions in address—in particular, cross-kin terms like *māmā* (e.g., usable with MB or MBSe), *maccān, macci*, and *māḷḷe* (which can, in certain contexts, be used reciprocally between cross kin [see table 1])⁴—that are drawn upon by

4. In addition to same-generation leveling of cross-kin terms in address, note the practices of addressing MBSe with *māmā* (MB) to honorificate, or addressing father with *aṅṅan* (eB; Beck 1972:227; cf. Bean 1978: 69–76, 139), father's sister with *akkā* (eZ; E. Annamalai, personal communication; Karve 1965:245–246), or son with *tambi* (yB) to show affection. Interestingly, the reverse—calling MB *maccān* [MBSe] or eB *appā* (F)—does not seem to happen (cf. Meenakshisundaran 1968:39). The mutuality that characterizes cross cousins enables a trope of generation-raising to honorificate, while the default hierarchy and distance between intergeneration parallel kin enables a trope of generation-lowering, or generation-flattening, to create forms of intimate address.

3. See Good (1996) for a critique of the concept of “Dravidian kinship” and Schneider (1984) for general critique of the analytic of “kinship.” I return to the status of kinship as an anthropological object in the conclusions.

Table 1. Cross-kin terms used by college youth in the peer group

Cross-kin term	Normative kin address	In youth peer groups
<i>Māmā</i>	MB, FZH, WF (G1)	Not used as a reference term to denote peers ^a
Youth slang variants: <i>māms, māmū,^b māmē</i>	In some castes, also used for MBSe, FZSe, WBe (G0, elder)	Used symmetrically in address between age-equalized peers Slang variants associated with Chennai youth
<i>Maccān</i>	MBSe, FZSe, WBe (G0, elder)	Not used as a reference term to denote peers
Youth slang variants: <i>maccā, macci^c</i>	In some castes, MBSy, FZSy, WBy (G0, younger) In some contexts may be used symmetrically with cross cousins	Used symmetrically in address between age-equalized peers Usage associated with Chennai youth
<i>Māpḷe</i>	ZS, WBS, DH (G-1)	Not used as a reference term to denote peers
Youth slang variants: <i>māps, māppu, māppi</i>	In some castes, also used for MBSy, FZSy, WBy (G0, younger) In some contexts may be used symmetrically with cross cousins	Used symmetrically in address between age-equalized peers Usage of <i>māpḷe</i> associated with Madurai youth. Slang variants associated with Chennai youth or with upper-middle-class Madurai youth

Note. See fig. 1 for the definitions of abbreviations.

^a *Māmā* has two additional tropic meanings among youth: “cop” and “pimp.” Such usages, however, are only for reference and are not used for addressing peers.

^b Aravānan (1987:239) indicates that *māmū* is a Muslim Urdu variant on *māmā*.

^c There seems to be some ambiguity regarding the etymon of *macci*. One possible derivation is from *maccān* (MBS, FZS, ZH; Vasu Renganathan, personal communication). In their study of the “Harijan” dialect of South Arcot district, Srinivasa Varma and Ramaswamy (1976:v-vi, 87), indicate that *macci* refers to a woman’s eZH (cf. Meenakshisundaran 1968:52). Another possible derivation is from *maccini* (MBDy, WZy), whereby the gender reversal acts as a trope of endearment (similarly to the use of *tā*, *-ppā* for women or *ṭi*, *-mmā* for men; E. Annamalai, personal communication). In their description of the Saiva Vellala dialect, Karunakaran and Shanmugam Pillai (1976:171) gloss *macci* as “sister-in-law” (also see Meenakshisundaran 1968:45; Shanmugam Pillai 1965:62 on Vanika Chetty; Karunakaran 1971:52 on Malayala Gounder in Kollimai; Trawick 1992:120). Another possibility is *maccinan*, a term used by a female speaker to refer to HBy or MBSy and, in some castes, by a male speaker for MBSy (Aravānan 1987:33; Good 1996; Karve 1965:233; Meenakshisundaran 1968:49). Partly the ambiguity lies in the ending *-cci*, which is a feminine ending for certain kin terms but also an ending indicating intimacy, appended by certain non-Brahmin castes in address (e.g., *aṇṇācci* [eB]; Meenakshisundaran 1968:20–21).

young men in their peer groups. Such suspensions almost never happen with sibling terms in the kin group nor, as we will see, are such terms used within age-equalized college peer groups.⁵

Finally, while crossness in Tamil kinship implies affinity (Dumont 1983), it is important to distinguish between cross kin and affines. While all affines are construable as cross kin—

5. While parallel kin terms were generally not used by youth in their peer groups, there are some notable exceptions. The coaffinal, parallel kin term *sagale* (WZH) and the patrilineal term *paṅkāḷi* (or *paṅku*) were occasionally used among young men, though by 2007 their usage among youth had taken on rural connotations and were largely avoided. While exceptional, these terms conform to the general pattern noted above, however. Indeed, both *sagale* and *paṅkāḷi* are reciprocal and unmarked for relative age in kin usage. *Cittappu* (from *cittappā* [FyB]) is also occasionally used by youth for a particular individual in one’s cohort who is much older in age or who acts much older and more mature than his peers. (Similarly, the term *pāppā* [baby] might be used for students in one’s class who are significantly younger or who are physically immature; see n. 14 on the use of *tambi*.) *Cittappu* is an affectionate teasing term, figuring the addressee as like one’s *cittappā*. (Within the patriline one is generally more affectionate with one’s *cittappā* than with one’s own father or his older brothers.) This usage neutralizes generation, converting it into relative age or some figuration of it. *Cittappu* is not a reciprocal term of address. If one received *cittappu* one might jokingly give *maganē* (son [vocative]) in return. While I have received reports that *cittappā* is used as a reciprocal address term among lower-class, non-college-going Madurai youth in their peer groups, I never observed such usages.

either by genealogical fact or after-the-fact fiat—not all cross kin are affines. Presupposing repeated cross-cousin marriage, Tamil kin terminology, and the normative behaviors linked to them, partially conflate these two categories, though not totally (Levinson 1977; Rudner 1990:159–162). This is, importantly, an issue of (ritual) time and life cycle. Cross kin who may have once enjoyed joking relations before marriage are in many cases supposed to observe increased honorification and deference, bordering on avoidance, after marriage. It is the stereotyped associations of mutuality, intimacy, and affection linked to cross-kin relations that young Tamil men draw upon in their appropriations of cross-kin terms and not the affinal connotations of avoidance and deference.

“Everyone r mapla n Macha”

From Villages to College Campuses

As anthropological studies of kinship have long noted, kinship logics provide powerful models for construing and constructing social relations and interactions that exceed kinship’s normative boundaries. Kinship terminologies in many, if not all societies, for example, can be used to address individuals who



Figure 2. “Every friend is necessary, *maccān*.” Airtel mobile phone advertisement (2011). (Chennai, photo by Constantine V. Nakassis). A color version of this figure is available online.

are not otherwise referred to by those kin terms.⁶ Such appropriations are part of what anthropologists have termed “fictive” or “metaphorical” kinship (Beck 1972; Freed 1963; Levinson 1977; Vatuk 1969). Such nonnormative kinship practices, as Asif Agha (2007:340–385) puts it, “trope” on kinship. They deploy a kin term in a way that, in one way or another, is noncongruent with the default norm of the term’s usage, which is to say, how it is stereotypically construed, or imagined to be construed, by its users.⁷ Addressing

6. The distinction between address and reference is central to the pragmatics of kin terms, as well as to their interactional and historical fates. In general, it is as address terms that the normative meanings and relations denoted by kin terms are extended tropically and interactionally projected in novel and creative ways that are often disallowed in their “correct” referential use. Important here, but about which I can only note in passing, is how this functional distinction is ideologically mediated in ways that pattern similarly to other domains of linguistic rationalization (Silverstein 1979; Agha 2007:350). See n. 21 for more discussion.

7. In my usage, then, tropic kinship is an analytic category motivated out of Tamil youth’s, and adult’s, construals of (non-)normative kinship practices. It is not a category opposed to some universal, “real” domain of genealogical or biological kinship (Carsten 2000; Sahllins 2012:62ff.; also see Agha 2007:340–385 for discussion).

an age-equal friend as *māmā* (MB), for example, is a kinship trope, because the addressee’s status is at odds with the norm governing this term’s usage in the kin group, for example, that addressee should be cross kin, male, one generation elder to speaker, older, and the like. It is this gap between the norm of the term and its contextualized usage that generates the so-called fictive, or tropic, social meaning. Kinship tropes, then, always invoke some cultural model of kinship even as they suspend some aspect of it.

Tropic uses of cross-kin terms in address are not new in Tamil Nadu nor are they unique to contemporary youth peer groups—quite the opposite, in fact. The limited discussion of tropic kinship in Tamil Nadu attests that such usages are quite commonplace, as Beck’s (1972) and Levinson’s (1977) village studies in the rural northwest of Tamil Nadu in the 1960s and 1970s show (also see Chithiraputhiran 1999; DeNeve 2005:117, 123–125; Ferro-Luzzi 2002:39–40; Jayapal 1986; Shanmugam Pillai 1972). The unremarkability and normality of such tropes in these village studies contrasts with their avoidance by college students studying in the 1950s and 1960s. As it was explained to me by former students of the era, because of

their association with forms of ritual reciprocity and sexualized joking relations in rural village settings, such terms would never be used in the college. Colleges at the time were incredibly elite institutions, catering to and aiming to cultivate a “creamy layer” of English educated, urbane, and modern students. Using cross-kin terms like *māṭṭe*, *māmā*, *maccān*, and *macci* in the college, I was told, was anything but educated, urbane, or modern. By the 1970s, however, such terms were increasingly used between college friends and, by the 1980s, rather common. As I was told, however, these terms were only used with one or two friends with whom one was very close and, even then, only at particular times, in those intimate moments when one wanted to convey that “our relationship doesn’t end on the street” (E. Annamalai, personal communication). By the 1990s, and especially into the 2000s, male cross-kin terms became generic address terms in colleges, used freely among young men who were friendly with each other, even if not well acquainted (table 1).⁸ Further, into the 2000s young women increasingly began using these terms, extending them in ways that were totally novel.

In stark contrast with their avoidance by college students 50 years ago, today such terms are considered *the* linguistic emblem of youth sociality and identity in colleges, a fact that is widely circulated and normalized through college-centered films, popular music, television video-jockeys, youth-focal radio programming, and youth-targeting advertisements (fig. 2).⁹

Suspending Kinship

The “freshers” (first-year students) with whom I moved into my Madurai hostel were, like me, unsure of themselves, uncertain how they fit into the hostel and the college, uncertain how to negotiate their new relationships with other students. For many of them, this was the first time they had left their homes for any extended period of time. Even if under the watchful eye of the college administration, college was seen a place where one could, and perhaps should, do all those things that could not be done at home, be it growing out one’s hair, taking up smoking, indulging in brand fashion, or falling in love (Nakassis 2013b). The college had many of the classic hallmarks of inversion and carnival that characterize other liminal institutions tasked with reconstituting the social (Turner 1969).

For many students the liminality of the college crystallized,

8. One male cross-cousin term not so used is *attān* (FZSe, ZH). I was told that, given its connotation of strong honorification and deference (as characteristic of affines), such a usage with peers would sound funny (*kēli*) and “old-fashioned” (cf. Aravānan 1987:251). E. Annamalai (personal communication) notes that even when used with kin the term has a different feel from other cross-kin terms.

9. Kin terms are only one source for address terms in youth speech, of course, though they are perhaps the most important and ubiquitous. In addition to kin terms, youth use proper names and nicknames, curse words, words for animal and vegetables, words for social statuses (e.g., *talaṭṭavar* [chief], *vāttiyar* [teacher], boss, master, etc.), as well as address terms borrowed from other languages.

but also kept in abeyance, a set of overlapping middled positions that these youth found themselves inhabiting. Such youth were in between statuses in the life cycle, neither children (*kuḷantaikaḷ*, or *cinna pasāṅka*) nor adults (*periyā āḷuṅka*). Many of them were first-generation students from rural backgrounds, whose families were in the process of urbanization and upward (middle-)class mobility. This made college an ambivalent space for many of my hostel mates and friends. On the one hand, it was a place where responsibility and adult seriousness were bracketed. On the other hand, it was a place where one learned to inhabit those spaces of responsibility and seriousness that loomed outside and after college. It was a technology to achieve, but also to defer, a certain kind of urbane, middle-class adulthood. It was this conjunction of in-betweens—child-adult, rural-urban, working class—middle class, home-work, past-future—that made the college not only a space of uncertainty and anxiety (Jeffrey 2010) but also a space of possibility, for experimenting with new identities, modes of sociality, intimacy, and self-performance (Lukose 2009).

One of the factors that inaugurated this liminality was the detachment of these youth from the kinship logics of the everyday. And yet, while the college was often talked about as a space of possibility because of the absence of kin, college friendships were often figured through tropes of cross kinship. Consider the following conversation with three freshers from one of my Madurai hostels. It took place a month after we had all joined the college. My question about youth slang quickly turned to the affective bonds that they had developed over the past month, as indexed by cross-kin terms:

CN: *Sari, ḷaiṅnar inta vayasula avāṅka pēccu eppaṭi iruk-kaṇum, atāvatu eppaṭi irukku?*
 M: “*Ēy, vā ṭā māṭṭe, eppaṭi irukke māmā, maccān*” *ḷḷu* (???) *jolly-ā kūppiṭuratu. Ippa yārum peyar solli kūppiṭuratu keṭaiyātu. “Māṭṭe ṅkē vā ṭā.”*
 . . .
 Su: *Oru sontamāvē oru nerukkam nammaḷe uruvākkicatu oru sontatte. “Vā ṭā māṭṭe” māṭṭiriyē oru uravu. Friends vēra, friendship-ṅkrate viṭa orē oru uravukkāraṅka āna māṭṭiri āyiṭṭōm. “Vā ṭā māṭṭe paṅkāḷi,” anta māṭṭiri. Uravukkāraṅka-kaḷāvē ākiruvōm. Entā iruntālum share paṅnikkiruvōm. Eppaṭi namma relative-ā iruk-kumō atē māṭṭiri tān ivāṅkak-kiṭṭēyumu iruppōm. . . . “Vā ṭā friend” kūṭa, “vā ṭā naṅbā” ḷḷu kūṭa kūppiṭuratu keṭaiyātu ippa. Anta māṭṭiri māṅṅcu, el-lāmē.*

CN: So, how do youth at this age have to talk, I mean, how do they talk?
 M: We’ll call (???) in a jolly way, “Hey, come here *ṭā māṭṭe*, how are you *māmā, maccān*?” Now no one is using names anymore. “*Māṭṭe*, come here *ṭā*.” . . .
 Su: We’ve created an intimacy, a family. “Come here *ṭā māṭṭe*,” it’s like that kind of relationship. Not just friends, more than friendship, we’ve become like relatives. “Come here *ṭā māṭṭe, paṅkāḷi*,” like that. We’ve become relatives. Whatever it is, we share it with each other. However our relatives are, we’ve become the same way with each other. . . . Now we don’t even call each other (by saying) “come here *ṭā* friend, come here *naṅbā* (‘friend’).” (Compared to when we first came) everything’s changed in this way.

As these youth explained, using kin terms, and cross-kin terms in particular, in address invokes a kin-like relatedness, an intimacy beyond friendship or mere acquaintance (as indexed, for them, by the use of first names and terms like *naṅbā* [friend]). This intimacy is figured as, and as a substitute for, the affective bonds of kin (cf. Alex 2008:535). In the college, one's friends—and in particular, one's same-sex friends—are like one's family.

And yet, this collegial family is also unlike the kin unit, a fact represented by how these three friends use the very terms that index the intimacy of kinship. They casually deploy cross-kin terms with a seeming indifference to the norms governing how such terms are supposed to be used with cross kin. As we see in this excerpt, the same individual might be addressed as *māmā* (MB), *maccān* (MBSe), *māple* (MBSy), and even *paṅkāḷi* (male parallel kin). Further, cross-kin terms are reciprocally used, disregarding the hierarchy and honorification that these terms (in particular, *māmā*) typically convey in the kin group, a fact also revealed by their use alongside non-respectful second-person singular verb conjugations and address particles (*tā*). The mishmash of these kin terms and impolite and intimate address forms invoke kinship affect even as they bracket the hierarchies indexed by those very kin relations. As these and other students emphasized regarding their uses of these terms, such terms articulate an equality (*sarisamam*) between peers, an ethic that simultaneously cites cross kinship even as it marks distance from it.

There is also something fun and “jolly,” as these youth put it, about such usages. In the context of the peer group such cross-kin terms are “fun words,” as one of my Madurai roommates Stephen explained. They irreverently play with normative language and break its linguistic rules. They have an air of transgression about them. Many young men reported first using these terms with friends when they reached “maturity,” when they began to break off from their families and hang out with age-equal peers. For some this was around age 16, when they finished their “plus two” exams, for others it was when they joined the college. Using such terms was part of a more general coming of age (*vayisu āyiccu*), a time when one learned to smoke, drink, cut class, dress “stylishly,” watch the “second show” (i.e., late-night) movie with friends, wander around town aimlessly (*ūr sūrratu*), and fall in love.¹⁰ Before that, they told me, they did not know anything. They were just innocent “little boys” (*cinna pasāṅka*) who did whatever adults told them to.

As the linguistic equivalent of surreptitiously sharing a cigarette or downing a quarter of whiskey, such terms mark the solidarity, and intimacy, that emerges from conspirators in doing what they should not be doing.¹¹ Indeed, youth's usage

10. On the Tamil youth concept of “style,” see Nakassis 2010, 2013b.

11. One slang term for students who goof off in the back of the classroom is “*māple* bench,” the comparison being that students who take it easy and do not have a care in the world are like the recent bridegroom pampered by his in-laws.

of these terms with their friends is, in its own way, transgressive of adult propriety (*murāi*) and respectability (*marīyātai*). Such usages inappropriately, and “incorrectly,” project forms of ritual reciprocity and (sexual) intimacy outside of the kin and caste group, or their appropriate extensions (cf. DeNeve 2005:117; Seizer 2002:99).¹² “It's meaningless. It's just slang!” said a former Madurai professor in dismissing such youth usages. From many adults' points-of-view, the function of these terms was to demarcate the social relations and affects that determine the reproduction and respectable maintenance of the kin and caste group. To use them as youth do is to disrupt that very project. Youth's linguistic usages create kin relationality where it should not and cannot exist, creating a (temporary) exteriority from an adult order of things through those very terms that otherwise mark its dominion.

Not just social, this exteriority is also temporal and spatial. As the youth with whom I worked moved out of the liminal space of the college—into the work force, into professionalized higher education, into “society” (i.e., their kin and caste groups in their hometowns)—they generally did not use such terms with their acquaintances and (newfound) friends. Just as such cross-kin terms marked the boundary of the peer group and of the college, they also marked the boundary of this time in their lives.

But using such terms with one's friends did not just distance oneself from an adult order of authority and hierarchy. It also participated in its replication within the college. Within the college the usage of such terms diagrammed the institutionalized distinction between “seniors” and “juniors.” The senior-junior distinction converts age difference into ranked year difference (first-years < second-years < third-years), dividing the student body into year cohorts irrespective of students' age (cf. Simpson 1997).¹³ Students enter the college

12. This is not to say that all tropic uses of cross-kin terms are seen as transgressive by adults. Some uses might even be encouraged by kin, e.g., with (older generation) family friends whose social relations closely approximate kin relations, what Levinson (1977:99) calls “adopted” usages. By contrast to such near-kinship usages, youth usages flout the propriety of such relations, stretching the meanings of such terms by using them for relations radically different from their normative kin counterparts.

13. Consider the contradiction that this created for one of my Madurai hostel mates, Arun. Arun had begun his higher education at a government college but had discontinued his education and for several years worked in a Chennai office. Beginning his studies again at our Madurai college, Arun was 3 years older than his year-equal peers. He was addressed, however, as an equal by his younger cohort mates, rather than by what his age would otherwise dictate, namely, second-person plural forms and the parallel-kin term *aṅṅan* (eB). This mismatch of age and year caused in him a kind of bitterness and melancholy, that neither his age-equals nor his year-equals addressed him “decently.” This came out one night in his hostel room when he and Devan, a close friend and senior, were chatting before bed. In concluding his lament, Arun turned to Devan to ratify his complaint. In doing so, however, he addressed Devan, who was not older than him, as *aṅṅan* (eB), a practice that only makes sense with respect to a year hierarchy that subordinates differences of age. Despite his dissatisfaction, Arun largely accepted this state of linguistic affairs as unchangeable.

with their year mates, take classes exclusively with them, and in hostels often room with them. Importantly, one “rags” and is “ragged” with one’s year mates (Nakassis 2010, 2013*b*). “Ragging,” a colonial inheritance from British educational institutions, is akin to initiation rites like hazing that one finds in US fraternities and like institutions. While ragging practices in Indian colleges often taken violent and sadistic form (Jesudasan 2009; Saqaf 2009; Vijay Kumar 2009), in the colleges where I worked ragging was considered to be “mild.” Figured by seniors as “little boys” (*cinna pasaiṅka*), freshers were forced by their seniors to follow the college rules to the letter. They were prohibited from conspicuously displaying signs of youth status (or “style”) and made to perform exaggerated, and often embarrassing, acts of deference to their seniors (e.g., proposing love to strangers, singing songs on demand). While ragging only lasts for the first 3 months of the year, it inscribes into the student body a hierarchical distinction that structures student social life more generally, a fact reflected in the continuing deference demanded by seniors over the course of one’s college career, and even beyond.

With respect to address practices, this year hierarchy is instated in juniors by being forced to address seniors with honorificating second-person plural pronouns and verb endings (*nīṅka*, *-iṅka*) and to receive nonrespectful second-person singular pronouns and verb endings (*nī*, *-e*). It is also instituted by the asymmetric use of hierarchy-indexing patrilineal kin terms across years—seniors receive *aṅṅan* (eB) from juniors and give *tambi* (yB; these terms were not generally used within years)—as well as seniors’ privilege to use intimate/insulting particles like *tā* with juniors or to address them by name.¹⁴ Juniors cannot and do not generally speak to their seniors with such intimate and impolite language. To do so risks creating a “prestige problem,” that is, challenging seniors’ authority and domination (*gettu*). Such challenges might lead to physical confrontation or other punitive measures. Juniors did not generally use cross-kin terms with their seniors.¹⁵

In short, the boundaries of the college peer group are carved out of a collegial year hierarchy that brackets hierarchies of age by reinscribing its forms of intelligibility across years. Such reinscription is reflected and created, among other ways, by kinship tropes of address. Across years, parallel-kin terms were used asymmetrically (*aṅṅan-tambi*), mirroring and mirrored

14. *Tambi* (yB) was only occasionally used within peer groups of year-equal youth so as to imply the childish (*cinnaṅṅaṅṅan*) or inferior nature of one’s interlocutor. They are typically used when the speaker is jokingly correcting the addressee, telling him what he should already know (if he were more “mature” or smarter; also see Brown and Levinson 1987:108–109).

15. Only if very close with a senior would cross-kin terms be exchanged. Even then, however, *māṅṅe* would not be used to address one’s seniors. It would be, I was told, too informal and disrespectful to use with one’s senior. Rather, one would use *maccān* or *māmā*. In return, one’s senior would use *māṅṅe* or *maccān* with ego, thus instituting the asymmetrical address pattern and status differential that characterizes the normative kinship usage of such terms. Further, such usages would likely stop when other seniors with whom one was not close were within earshot.

by other modes of deference and distance between seniors and juniors. Within years, a variety of cross-kin terms were exchanged freely and symmetrically, along with other signs of intimacy and solidarity like shared clothing, class notes, money, cell phones, sleeping space, cigarettes, food, and drink (Nakassis 2013*b*).

Within the larger hierarchical structures that these youth find themselves inhabiting, then, cross-kin terms open up an envelope of sociality marked by (an ethics of) interpersonal intimacy, equality, and solidarity. The ability to enact this sociality depends on analogically projecting kinship relations onto nonkin relationships while simultaneously suspending aspects of those very kinship logics. In particular, these tropic iterations of kinship decenter the semantics and pragmatics of these terms. As used between these young men, such cross-kin terms are denuded of their ability to denote relations of crossness (they are used with nonkin), generation (they are used within generation), and relative age (they are used by age-neutralized year equals). They also suspend their pragmatics of honorification (they often co-occur with linguistic signs like second-person singular pronouns, curse words, and other signs of nonrespectful intimacy) and hierarchy (they are used symmetrically). Such improprieties—their semantic “incorrectness” and pragmatic transgressiveness—enable these terms’ refashioning as signs of youth identity and sociality. They, in effect, turn kinship inside out and on its head. And yet, they are also motivated out of, and draw on aspects of, the very kinship normativities that they decenter. It is not coincidental, then, that young men overwhelmingly use cross-kin terms to address their peers and not parallel-kin terms, a point to which I return in the conclusions.

While such address practices trouble the kinship normativities and hierarchies that they trope upon, they never quite leave them behind. Beyond their diffuse affective resonances, below I discuss the ways in which hierarchies of caste, class, and gender are always potentially still in play in such usages, hemming in, but also enabling, their performative ability to instantiate those youth imaginaries of sociality that aspire to do away with those normativities that they cannot seem to do without.

Suspending Caste and Community

The expectation among the students that I lived with was that in a “modern” institution like a college, invidious divisions of caste and community were not supposed to matter (Nakassis 2013*b*). Students at the colleges where I worked disavowed such communal logics, locating them everywhere but the peer group.¹⁶ Distinctions of caste and religion, it was

16. Partially this is a function of the colleges where I worked. Indeed, during my time in the field there were major caste clashes in law colleges between Dalit and Thevar students. Friends who had studied in government colleges in the south of Tamil Nadu in the early 2000s also reported that in those colleges caste was a major feature that organized the student population and peer-group sociality.

insisted, were only an issue in the past or in villages, among the orthodox, among one's parents' generation, or something politicians used for votes. It was not uncommon for my hostel mates to insist that they did not know their friends' castes.

The important issue here is not whether or not such insistences were accurate descriptions. They certainly were not. Caste and community did matter in these youth's lives. They pervaded their home lives, their social relations in their hometowns, and even the college campus itself, particularly at the level of administrative politics. Indeed, communal logics had to be disavowed precisely because of their ubiquity. Caste and religion were not absent from youth interactions either, though youth's disavowals certainly influenced how their relationships and interactions unfolded by backgrounding, and even negating, the issue of communal identity. The intrusion of communal distinctions into peer groups was always disputatious and contentious between peers. If and when such distinctions asserted themselves, it was always as a disruption to what these young men understood as how youth sociality in the college, as youth sociality, ought to work (Jeffrey 2010; Nakassis 2013b; Nisbett 2007; cf. Alex 2008). The invocation of caste and community introduced hierarchy and inequality into social situations that were supposed to be marked by solidarity and equality. As two Chennai friends, one Hindu and one Christian, explained:

R: Religion *nī* Christian, Christian-*le itu* *naṭantiruccu, atu* *naṭantiruccu. Eeee! Etukku?* *Namakku piraccanai tānē varutu.*

S: *Āmā atu teriyāta* *viṣayaikaḷai patti pēsa-māṭṭōm.*

R: *Atuvum ivanum vantu* total Christian-*leyē uḷḷa el-lāmē teriyātu. Enakkum Hindu patti avvaḷō teriyātu.* [Makes a clicking sound with his mouth.] *So arai-urāiyā tān nammaḷē ukkāntirukkōm nammaḷē vantu pēsi nammaḷukkullayē saṅṅai vantā nammaḷukku tānē waste. . . . Atu tān, namma eppayumē friends ṅṅā* "Hi *maccān* eppaṭi irukkure?" *Vīṭṭe eppaṭi irukkānka?" Avvaḷō tān. Religion namakku tēvaiyē illai eppō-tumē.*

R: Your [S.'s] religion is Christian, in Christianity this happened, that happened. Eeee! What's the point? It's just going to make problems for us.

S: Yeah, we don't talk about things that we don't know about.

R: He doesn't know everything about Christianity. I also don't know that much about Hinduism. [Makes a clicking sound with his mouth.] So, if we sit down and talk about all these things that we don't know that well, and we get in a fight, it's a waste for us. . . . That's the thing, if we want to keep being friends (then it's) "Hi *maccān*, how are you? How's everyone at home?" That's it. We don't ever need religion.

As these two youth note, religion and caste only cause unnecessary rifts. And their putative irrelevance to friendship—or rather, their always possible risky reappearance—means they have to be bracketed and disavowed, notably, through easygoing phrases of personal concern like "Hi *maccān*, how are you?"

Nevertheless, for students who did have a strong caste "feeling"—or as some students put it more disapprovingly, "*jāti verṭ*" (caste fanaticism)—caste influenced with whom one socialized and, by extension, used cross-kin terms. Consider Vinoth, a Madurai student whose father is Thevar (a middle, but dominant, caste in southern Tamil Nadu) and mother Dalit (the most oppressed, so-called scheduled castes). Thevars and Dalits in the Madurai region have a violent history of caste conflict. While Vinoth would use cross-kin terms freely with anyone who would use them with him (he did not care about caste, he said), he pointed out that certain, but not all, of his Thevar classmates, knowing him to be half-Dalit, would keep their social distance, as marked by avoidance of cross-kin terms with him. Neither did a certain Dalit classmate, who only knew that his father was Thevar. When that classmate found out he was half-Dalit, however, he began initiating friendship with him by using cross-kin terms. Here, then, is an example where caste asserts itself as a principle governing the tropic extension of such terms, hemming in the possibilities of youth sociality and intimacy.

Among most of the students with whom I worked, however, such caste-based reckoning of address was infrequent and almost never so explicit. Students who disavowed caste, however, readily admitted that its absence in the peer group was largely a result of the particular kind of social space that the college was. Consider, for example, what Gautham, a middle-class Thevar hostel mate of mine in Madurai, wrote me when we corresponded electronically in 2011 about caste and cross-kin terms (I have preserved his original formatting with my additions in [square brackets]):

mapla machan this two words [a]r[e] awesome words in college friends. Am from thevar community. most of my fr[ie]nds r from different caste, but i di[d]nt feel bad w[h]en my frnds call [me] machan. I tell u my personal exp[er]ience..in my hometown(usilampatti) most of the people r from my caste. One day me and some of my frnds w[e]r[e] chat[ting], at that time one of my frnd(he is from low caste) he used to call me mapla everytime in college. So suddenly he start called us hey mapla. My other frnd(he is from my caste) he told to tat guy to stop callin everybody mapla, so call my caste people as bro [aṅṅan].at tat time only i felt bad. People who deserve wit caste(i mean jaathi veeri) i advise him to dont insult tat guy in front of others.suddenly he starts [to] argue wit me..we cant do any thing. But at the same time in college everybody wr free, so no prob[lem] wit[h] frnds to call each other as mapla macha. I think this two power full words [wi]ll stop caste between frnds. Now a days people r changed. Everyone r mapla n Macha.

Here Gautham narrates how caste indifference, diagrammed through reciprocal cross-kin terms on the college campus, runs up against the policing of caste hierarchy outside of the college. For Gautham's hometown caste mates, the usage and construal of tropic kin terms was to be reckoned against the caste identity of their interlocutor. This made Gautham's low-

caste classmate's usage of *māṭṭe* not a sign of youth solidarity or friendliness but of impropriety and caste uppitiness. Interestingly, Gautham's caste mates' offense was not due to the tropic use of kinship terms across caste lines but with the tropic use of cross-kin terms. Indeed, instead of symmetrical use of *māṭṭe*, Gautham's caste mates demanded from his urban-educated, low-caste friend asymmetric address with the parallel-kin term *aṇṇan* (eB).

Despite this experience, however, Gautham remained optimistic, idealistically (and ideologically) investing terms like *māṭṭe* and *maccān* with the power to "stop caste between friends." This optimism was itself founded in a particular vision of urban, "modern" sociality emblemized in the college. Gautham articulates this imaginary through a spatial and temporal displacement, projecting caste onto the absent times and spaces of backwardness—the past and the rural—in distinction to the present(-future) of the "free" urban college. Tropic kin terms mark this spatio-temporal distinction as a distinction of parallel and cross kin, an analogical projection that cleaves kinship out of itself, appropriating an outside of kinship through it.

Inscribing Region and Class

While most of the college youth with whom I worked used such cross-kin terms with their friends, some, notably, did not. For students who did use such terms with their friends, there was no trace of the teasing sexual connotations implied by the joking usage of these terms in the kin group. For those who avoided them, like one of my Madurai roommates, Sebastian, however, the sexuality of such terms lingered. While students like Sebastian, who "hated" such terms, often voiced the adult discourse that such tropes were denotatively incorrect, more important for these linguistically conservative students was that using such terms outside of their normal contexts of kin use was "*asiṅkam*" (ugly, embarrassing), "indecent" and "low class." Here "low class" indexes not simply low economic class but also lack of refinement; in particular, an uncomfortable proximity to the vulgarity of joking relations associated with the rural (hence the "indecent" of such terms).¹⁷ Students like Sebastian were a minority. For most students such cross-kin terms, when used with college friends, indexed an urbane, youth sophistication at odds with the rural.

And yet, the "indecent" of such terms lingers, refracted through the ways in which regional difference in the use of such terms is projected onto class difference. Among the Madurai and Chennai youth with whom I worked, for example,

17. One wonders if this "indecent" is linked to an implicit casteism, derived from the tendency among (right-hand, matrilineal) lower castes to construe kin relations horizontally, freely extending cross-kin relations (and conflating matrilineal and patrilineal cross cousins), rather than vertically and conservatively as for (left-hand, patrilineal) upper castes (Brahmins, in particular; Beck 1972; though see Gough 1993 [1956]; Deliege 1987 on caste and laterality in marriage preference among Brahmins and Paraiyars, respectively).

usage of *māṭṭe* in the peer group was associated with Madurai youth, while *maccā(n)*, *macci*, and the like were associated with Chennai youth (see table 1).¹⁸ What converts this regional association into class distinction is the belief that Madurai is a conservative and backward city filled with recently displaced country bumpkins (*paṭṭikkāṭu*), while Chennai is a cosmopolitan, rich, and hip metropolis. Indeed, many Chennai youth thought *māṭṭe* sounded funny and rural for precisely this reason. And for Madurai youth who associated Chennai with urban youth cosmopolitanism, Chennai-indexing terms like *maccān* were hipper and more "advanced." For some Madurai youth this registered in an avoidance of terms like *māṭṭe*—because it was too "traditional," "indecent," "local" and "low-class"—and a preference for Chennai-indexing terms like *maccān* and the like.

Here terms that are emblematic of certain areas, and thus social identities and imaginaries, come to be seen as icons of class difference and sophistication (Irvine and Gal 2000). This differentiation operates at two scales: across region and, by analogically projecting regional difference onto class difference, within region by class. While we have already noted how tropic uses of cross-kin terms index youth identity by subverting kinship semantics and pragmatics, interesting here is how this inscription of class-marked urbanity takes this one step further, distorting and decentering the lexical form of the kin terms themselves. Thus, even more than *maccān*, slang variants that morphologically distort cross-kin terms—*māps*, *māppu*, *māppi* (derived from *māṭṭe*, itself contracted from *māṭṭillai*), *macci* and *maccā* (from *maccān*, though see table 1, n. "c"), and *māms* (from *māmā*)¹⁹—were associated with a hip Chennai youth identity and, within Madurai, an (upper-)middle-class youth identity. The furthest extension of this decentering and distortion of kinship as a diagram of cool, or "style," is the usage of English address terms. Address terms like "dude"

18. This association of Chennai with *maccān* and Madurai with *māṭṭe* derives, I believe, from regional differences in how these terms are used with kin. This claim is complicated because there is incredible regional variation in kin-term usage by caste and community, and because, unfortunately, there is very little work on regional variations in Tamil kinship (though see Aravānan 1987; Bloch 1910; Meenakshisundaran 1968:49–50). By cobbling together what has been written, there is reason to believe that there is a regional difference, namely, that a younger male cross cousin is more frequently addressed with *maccān* and its cognates in northern Tamil Nadu (Bloch 1910:18–19 on Chettiars and Vellalals in Kumbakonam and Chidambaram; Gough 1993 [1956] on Dalits in Tanjavur; DeNeve 2005:xv on Vanniyars in Erode), while in southern Tamil Nadu, *māṭṭe* is more likely to be used (Bloch 1910:18–19 on Tirumangalam Nadars and Muslim "Labbes"; Dumont 1986 [1957] and Ajmalkān 1977:33 on Madurai Kallars; though see Deliege 1987 on Paraiyars in Ramnad district; Good 1996 on Tirunelveli Kondaiyankottai Maravars; Kamatchinathan 1969:172, 174 on Tirunelveli). I also found this regional difference among my college friends. This difference would indicate why *māṭṭe* is associated with Madurai and *maccān* with Chennai in youth usages: both terms are used in reference and address for the lowest-ranking male cross kin in one's own generation, and both terms can, in certain contexts, be used reciprocally in address.

19. By contrast, variants of *māmā* like *māme* and *māmu* are more likely to be associated in Chennai with working-class youth.

and “bro(ther)” were in high fashion among upper-middle-class college students while I was in the field. Such address terms invoked an upper-class, English fluent, and “stylish” persona, one who is not only outside of local kinship hierarchies (here, associated with the rural and “culture”) but outside of the state and the country itself. While we might see these borrowings as unrelated to cross-kin terms, not only were they used in similar ways (though indexing different class backgrounds, of course), they were also seen by the youth who used them to be functionally the “same” as youth uses of cross-kin terms. As my upwardly mobile, Chennai roommate Sam explained it to me, “‘dude’ is just the English word for *maccān*.”²⁰ In all these cases, distance from kinship normativities—be it morphological, semantic, pragmatic, or of linguistic code—diagrams increasing degrees of remove from adult propriety and, as a function of such distancing, youth cool and “style.” Such distortion and distancing enable multiply economies of distinction to be metonymized in such linguistic usages, such that oppositions of kin terms (*māṭṭe* vs. *maccā[n]*, *macci*, *māms* vs. bro, dude) can come to stand in for stereotyped regional identities and, by extension, class identities (Madurai bumpkins vs. Chennai hipsters, “indecent” poor vs. sophisticated rich).

Suspending Gender

If, as I was often told, “youth” language means using cross-kin terms, then “youth” as a category largely excludes women, a fact recognized and lamented by many of my female college friends. As three middle-class, master’s students at the semi-elite coed Madurai college where I lived, Bonnie, Sunitha, and Georgia explained to me over juices outside the college, girls lack “good words” to use with their friends. They were looking for “jolly” and fun words, words like the guys have, like *māṭṭe* and *maccān*, they said. Why not use terms for female cross kin such as *koḷuntinaḷ* (MBDy), *maitini* (MBDe), or *atte* (FZ, MBW), I suggested. They noted that those terms would not work. Most people do not even know, let alone use, those terms with their actual female cross kin.²¹ It would sound

20. Of course, this class difference makes these terms unlike *maccān* (insofar as they were paradigmatic choices that confronted youth in moments of address). As one upper-middle-class youth in the semi-elite Chennai college that I lived in noted, while he would use “dude” when he was trying to be “stylish” and show his “exposure,” he reserved forms like *maccān* to signal close intimacy and friendship. This was because “dude” implied a form of class hierarchy and cultivation (“exposure”) that “normal” terms like *maccān* did not. This contrast was seemingly neutralized, however, in peer groups where everyone was elite. In such cases both “dude” and *maccān* were freely interchanged without any seeming difference in their pragmatics.

21. Here we can note two patterns. First, kin terms that refer to those who are lower on the status hierarchy are more likely to not be used in reference and address. Second, terms are more likely not to be used in address than in reference. (Conversely, if one uses a kin term in address one will also tend to use it in reference.) In the Tamil case, these patterns are made possible by the decreased policing of (cross-)kin address and the loosening taboo on name address for lower-status kin. Also relevant

odd. Well, I persisted, why not just use the terms that guys use, *māṭṭe* and *maccān*? They chuckled at the idea, but then seriously responded that if they used those terms they would be teased by their male classmates, even threatened for using “men’s” language.

Indeed, such a conservative and aggressive response was not an uncommon reaction by many men, both college-going and not, to the idea of women using these terms with friends. As a lower-middle-class friend, Naren said, he found the idea of women using such language strange and even disturbing. Such usage projects a rough youth masculinity, a boldness (*tuniccal*) that is unfeminine. Such usages brazenly display *gettu* (prestige, domination), a macho swagger that ought to be reserved for men. Such uses were arrogant (*timiru*). From women’s lips such language verges on the thuggish (*poruk-kittanam*), one middle-class male student from Chennai explained disapprovingly. As Vanita, a middle-class English master’s student at the Madurai all-girls college noted, using such terms with, or even within earshot of, some men could cause an “ego problem.” It would be a challenge to the monopoly young men had on such kinship tropes and, by extension, to their masculinity as well, something they would not keep quiet about.

Unlike Bonnie, Sunitha, and Georgia, who were still looking for such “good words,” many young women had, however, already seized upon such terms in their peer groups. Addressing and being addressed by their female and male friends with terms for male cross kin was increasingly common among upper-middle- and middle-class girls in urban colleges (particularly in all-girls colleges in Chennai), as well as among young women in the neoliberal work force (e.g., in information technology companies, call centers, and the like). While such usages maintained the general affective connotations of intimacy, mutuality, and solidarity that characterized young men’s usages, they neutralized, and neutered, the semantic gender of these terms, as well as their capacity to index speaker’s gender. Not simply transgressing normative kinship, women’s appropriation of these terms redoubled that transgression by troping on the normativity governing young men’s own tropic usages.

Given these semantic and pragmatic suspensions of gender, such usages open up new possibilities for the performance of identity. While for many men young women’s usages indexed arrogance (*timiru*) and being outspoken (over-*ā pēsūratu*), for the young women who delighted in such linguistic trans-

is that usages of kin terms in address make (tropic) kin relations palpable in face-to-face interaction in ways that that third-person reference does not, making such usages potentially more contentious, embarrassing, and problematic. That is, address terms are relatively indexically “entailing,” while reference terms are relatively indexically “presupposing” (Silverstein 1976b); the former are thus both more likely to be tropically extended, while the latter subject to regimentation as “correct” or “true” (Silverstein 1979). These patterns describe which kin terms go out of usage and in which order: first in address, then in reference; first for lowest status referents or addressees, then for higher status referents or addressees.

gression such usages were valorized as “modern” and freeing. Users of such “bold” language were not “conservative girls” who would shy away from others’ disapproval or from attempts to police their language. As Vanita noted to me in an email (original formatting preserved),

We girls use such terms to show that we are no way down to the boys. . . u may ask why, the reason is, in Tamilnadu boys have much more privileges than girls..he can roam anywhere, can come home anytime, can chat with anyone... so they enjoy a good position in the society..similarly we want to have the same enjoyments as they have!! but its not possible..so we vent out our feelings by imitating them.(to some extent) [...] Yaarunaalum kuupidalam thappila” [Anyone can use these terms. There’s nothing wrong with it].

Like men’s usages, the cross-kin terms used by these young women are signs of intimacy and equality between addressee and addressor. But they are also something more, as Vanitha’s supplemental parenthetical “to some extent” indicates. They are also political statements, attempts to lay claim to an alternative normativity and ethics of gender equality that works through, or cites, young men’s language even as it decenters it (cf. Simpson 1997:57).

Interestingly, while male cross-kin terms are increasingly common in (fe)male-to-female address, in female-to-male uses certain of these terms—*māmā* (MB, MBSe), and to a lesser extent *maccān* (MBS, FZS)—risk reinvoking the sexual and romantic connotations of their normative kin usage (Beck 1972:220, n.20; Levinson 1977:410; Seizer 1997:338).²² Indeed, a common slang term for a woman’s “lover” or boyfriend is *māmā*, a usage that alludes to the marriageable relation between a girl and her mother’s brother and his elder sons (both of which may, among certain castes, be addressed as *māmā*; Good 1980, 1996). While this connotation of sexuality enables the creative use of such terms in flirtation and romance among youth, for this very reason its use by young women with nonromantically involved male peers could cause extreme embarrassment for all involved. As Manu, a male middle-class Chennai student said, “It’s like the (kin) relation . . . if (a girl) calls me *māmā*, even if it just expresses friendship, there is the chance to think her your *murai poṇṇu* [female cross-cousin who one has ritual rights to marry].” As an upper-middle-class Chennai female friend put it, calling a female friend *māmā* is fine, but a girl calling a guy *māmā* feels “weird.” It would feel like you are lovers or actual cross cousins.

In contrast to men’s usages, then, women’s usages tended to be reserved only for male peers with whom one was extremely close, and only in contexts where others were absent.

22. *Māple* was not attested as a usage between women or by women with men, though its “stylish” variants—*māppu*, *māppi*, *māps*—were. It was explained to me that *māple* is too “local” and “indecent” for young women to use. I would suggest that this is related to the negative regional and class associations of the term in comparison to other cross-kin terms (see n. 18).

As a result, in such “safe” contexts—that is, contexts where such terms could be used by women with men without being construed by participants or overhearers as romantic or “arrogant”—these terms were even more powerful in solidifying cross-gender friendships. Such terms could be used not only to neuter semantic gender and enact a politics of gender equality but also to neutralize and even transubstantiate the gender of the interactants themselves (or at least be felt to do so). As Sarah, an upper-middle-class student in the semi-elite Chennai college where I lived, explained in an e-mail (original formatting preserved in the left column):

Boys kitta Ipdī pesuna rendu perukum oru nalla bond irukum.. inum close agalam, oru ponnu paiyana machi, mama nu kupudum pothu avalum oru boy ya than marura. . . idunala gender poi relationship strong aguthu. . .	When you speak like this with boys, both people form a good bond. You can become closer. When a girl calls a boy <i>macci</i> , <i>māmā</i> , she changes into a boy. . . . Because of this gender goes away, and the relationship becomes strong.
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A middle-class friend, Raman, noted a similar transformation regarding his friendships with his female MBA classmates. He said that in his friendships with girls where he used cross-kin terms like *maccān*, “sometimes the gender difference is totally forgotten. I speak like I’m talking with a guy. It’s a good relationship” (“gender difference *sila samayam marantu pōgum*. Boys *kiṭṭa pēsura mātiri pēsuvēn*. Oru nalla relationship *irukkum*”). As Sarah and Raman both suggest, in such situations a woman becomes (like) a man, gender (seems to) disappear, and true equality and friendship is (felt to be) achieved. By inhabiting those registers of youth intimacy typically reserved for young men, the gaps between men and women can be overcome, forging intimacies that are unburdened by those manifestations of gender hierarchy that otherwise make male–female friendships so problematic (namely, kinship, marriage, romantic love, college youth culture). And yet, even as such kinship tropes seem to subvert gender hierarchy, something of this gender inequality remains. Indeed, even if we take such descriptions at face value, it is not that gender fully disappears but rather that women can become like men through the performative use of such kin terms.

“Everything Has Become *Aṇṇan–Tambi*”

As we have seen, youth address practices exhibit a tendency to suspend and neutralize the semantics and pragmatics of cross-kin terms (summarized in fig. 3) even as they explode the possible addressees and contexts within which they are used. From reference terms for cross kin, to modeling non-kin relations as if they had the intimacy of cross kin, to generic address terms of solidarity between young men, and finally to words shared among and between young women and men, such kinship terms are denuded of almost all of their normative meanings. In their stead, such address terms take on stacked indexical values, from affective alignment to addressee

	Normative usage in kin group	Usage between very close male friends (in colleges, ca. 1970s)	“Generic” usage among young men (ca. 2000s)	Usage by young women with young men (ca. mid/late 2000s)	Usage by young women/men to address young women (ca. mid/late 2000s)
Crossness	+	- (used for non-kin)	- (used for non-kin)	- (used for non-kin)	- (used for non-kin)
Relative age	+	- (used with same-year)	- (used with same-year)	- (used with same-year)	- (used with same-year)
Generation difference	+	- (used within generation)	- (used within generation)	- (used within generation)	- (used within generation)
Gender	+	+	+	+	- (used for either male or female addressee)
Reference	+	- (no reference use)	- (no reference use)	- (no reference use)	- (no reference use)
Address	+	+	+	+	+
Asymmetric	+ (- in joking relations between male cross-cousins)	- (symmetric and reciprocal)	- (symmetric and reciprocal)	- (symmetric and reciprocal)	- (symmetric and reciprocal)
Honorificating	+ (- in joking relations between male cross-cousins)	- (non-honorificating)	- (non-honorificating)	- (non-honorificating)	- (non-honorificating)
Sexual/marriage connotation	+	- (+ in tropes on joking relations)	- (no sexual connotation)	- / +	- (no sexual connotation)
Affection, intimacy	+	+ (only used with select friends)	- (can be used with acquaintances)	+ (not used as generic address term)	+ (not used as generic address term)

Figure 3. Suspending cross-kinship normativities.

(equality, solidarity, intimacy) to speaker identity (regional identity, class identity, “stylishness”) and political stance (being anticaste, antipatriarchy).

Interestingly, the emergence and spread of such kinship suspensions correlate with the neutralizing and bracketing of how “actual” kin are addressed and talked about by these youth. Among many of the (upper-)middle-class urban youth with whom I worked, there was a coincidence of the frequent use of such cross-kin terms with non-kin peers and their avoidance in addressing, and in some cases even referring to, cross kin with such terms. As one Chennai friend pragmatically punned, “*atu* family *maccān*, *itu* friend *maccān*”: “that’s family *maccān*, this is friend *maccān*.” “Family *maccān*,” as he later elaborated, is a sign of the rural and backward (“*kirāma pēsura mātiri irukku*”). As one elite Chennai college student noted with amused but surprisingly sincere (and naive) shock, “if you go to villages you can even see people using such terms with actual relatives!” He did not use such terms with his own kin.

In lieu of kinship terms, I observed a number of address strategies among friends who were part of the urban, middle class (or aspired to be). It was common with kin who were the same age or younger to simply use proper names. For elder kin, some used English kinship terms such as “uncle,” “auntie,”

“cousin,” “mommy,” or “daddy” (Karunakaran 1978:17; Vatak 1969:269). More interesting was the use of parallel-kin terms to address cross kin.²³ This was most salient in same generation usage and, in particular, between a man and his younger female cross cousins. For example, my Chennai roommate Sam, originally from the city of Salem, insisted that his *māmā poṇṇu* (MBDy)—with whom he is in a traditional marriageable relation—call him *aṇṇan* (eB) rather than the otherwise appropriate cross-kin terms *maccān* or *māmā* (FZSe). Using the “correct” terms would bring them into a marriageable and sexualized relationship, an embarrassing and “backward” situation that Sam wanted to avoid. He thought of her as his little sister (*taṅgaicci*), he said. Moreover, he noted, *maccān* is a term that his friends call him, not his kin.

Avoidance of normative cross-kin address and reference not only functions to symbolically distance oneself from the rural, it also instantiates a social distance from rural kin themselves and the institution of cross-cousin marriage more generally,

23. Such assimilation also happens in households where young children, otherwise considered cross cousins, are raised together (*tūkki vaḷarnta paṣaṅka*). By contrast to the cases discussed here, such adoptive usages do not imply avoidance of cross-cousin marriage, and marriages between such kin may occur despite such address practices.

as Sam's case suggests. One upper-middle-class, Brahmin friend from Chennai, Murugan, for example, noted that his female cross cousins call him *aṇṇan* (eB), and while it is "not right," in his family they no longer practice cross-cousin marriage. Arranged marriages with cross cousins are "archaic," as he put it, survivals from "back in the day." Since they do not do that anymore, "to avoid any misunderstandings *aṇṇan* is widely used." He continued, "it was fine in older days but marriage within the family is looked down upon now, so they make sure kids get the right idea from the beginning and encourage them to call cousins *aṇṇan*, *akkā* [eZ], (or) *tambi* [yB]." As one of my middle-aged female Tamil teachers put it with a sigh, "*ellāmē aṇṇan-tambi āyiccu*" (everything [i.e., all social relations] has become older brother-younger brother), that is, people do not recognize their cross kin as cross kin, instead calling them as parallel kin, *aṇṇan* or *tambi*. In contrast to Sam and Murugan, who saw this shift uniformly as a good thing, my teacher did not, taking it as reflecting the fact that today no one observes *murai* (proper relations) anymore, an indication of changes in generational values and a regrettable fact of contemporary urban life.

As these examples suggest, changes in how cross kin are addressed, and even referred to, are intimately connected with changing conceptions of marriage and marriageability and to what demographers and anthropologists have documented as an ongoing shift in Tamil Nadu away from arranged cross-cousin marriage, in particular, among the upwardly mobile and educated urban classes (Clark-Decès 2011; Kapadia 1995; Krishnamoorthy and Audinarayana 2001; Richard and Sundar Rao 1994). In the place of cross-cousin marriage is a growing preference for "modern" and urbane (*nakarīkam*) alliances with strangers of the same caste who are in equal, or higher, economic and educational status groups, a preference that approximates North Indian marriage practices (Kapadia 1995). Such marriage preferences, in effect, disentangle local kin and caste relations in favor of mobile class identities. While this nexus of shifting kin relationality and marriage practices, class mobility, urbanization, and higher education are long-standing—ethnographers have been noting them for over 60 years (Gough 1979:282, 1993 [1956]:157; Karve 1965:223; also see Yalman 1967:221–222)—the pace of this shift has accelerated since the liberalization of the Indian economy in the late 1980s and 1990s. While the reasons are complex, one important factor relevant to discussion here is the way in which the postliberalization explosion of (private) colleges (Fuller and Narasimhan 2006; Lukose 2009) has contributed to, and been driven by, the increasing education of women, concomitant rising marriage ages and decreased family size (and thus numbers of marriageable cross cousins), socialization to Western theories of genetic descent that stigmatize cross-cousin marriage (Clark-Decès 2011:525ff.; Richard and Sundar Rao 1994:26), and, most importantly for us here, increased class and educational disparities between households within extended kin groups.

It is all the more interesting that the shift away from cross-

cousin marriage is linked to the emergence and spread of tropic uses of cross-kin terms in colleges. Thus, while for my middle-aged Tamil teacher, within the kin group "everything has become *aṇṇan-tambi*," for youth like Gautham, discussed above, it is just the opposite, outside of the kin group "today everyone is *māṇḷe* and *maccān*." It is important to see this transporting of performative value from the kin to the peer group with respect to the above-noted shifts in marriage practice. In social relations where cross kinship is decreasingly important, and thus less policed, terms that presuppose and entail such social relations are increasingly free to be used in non-kin contexts, even as, or precisely because, they begin to be stigmatized and avoided in normative kin usages. This is why, I would suggest, such usages are so prevalent among youth in liminal places like colleges. On the one hand, college is precisely that institution whose putative *raison d'être* is to allow entrance into a socially mobile, urban, middle class partially detached from traditional (cross-)kinship logics. On the other hand, as itself at a remove from kinship and adult propriety, college is a space for enactments of youth identity and sociality that transgress and distance youth from such adult domains. Tropes of cross-kin address navigate both these distancings, mediating the multiple inversions and suspensions that intersect in the college. Through their playful linguistic transgressions, such tropes reanimate and bracket an adult order of things, keeping in abeyance its forms of responsibility, seriousness, and hierarchy, forms that youth associated with life outside the college. At the same time, these tropes voice a distance from the rural and the traditional, an ambivalent time-space that the college as technology for class mobility is seen to afford distance from. By pinning together these two modes of distancing and suspension, cross-kin tropes of address open up a youth space of intimacy and solidarity that defers and eludes both adulthood and the traditional, even as it keeps them on the horizon.

But it is not simply that tropic usages inhabit a space opened by the neutralizing of normative kinship relations but also that such tropic uses reflexively feed back into how normative kinship is itself construed. Here I briefly mention three examples. While I do not take these examples as representative of a total shift in Tamil kinship, they are indicative of the ways that for some people, in some contexts, the fact that cross-kin terms have become emblems of youth identity is exerting pressure on kinship logics more generally.

We already saw an example with Sam, my Chennai roommate who refuses to let his female cross cousin address him with any cross-kin terms (partially because, as he said, that is how his friends call him), instead insisting on her addressing him as *aṇṇan* (eB) or by proper name. While Sam's is a case of cross kin being assimilated to parallel kin, the opposite also happens, where parallel kin address each other with cross-kin terms. Anthony, a middle-class student in the semi-elite college where I worked and a classmate of Sam, for example, used *maccān* with his younger brother. Beginning around the time he went off to college, he did so because, as he put it,

“I’m close to him.” Using *maccān*, he explained, connotes the feeling of “hanging out” with (college) friends. By contrast, using *tambi* (yB) “is kinda formal and creates a gap between [us], . . . , while [calling him *maccān*] brings me a step closer . . . and breaks the formality.” Even though many of my friends found the idea of calling their “own” brothers (*kūṭa pīranta aṇṇan/tambi*, brother born with me) with cross-kin terms disturbing—as “bad practices” or going against the “culture”—or just plain wrong, it was not uncommon for classificatory brothers (e.g., FBS, MZS)—or “cousin brothers” as friends often glossed it in English—to use cross-cousin terms with each other if close in age and particularly friendly. Important for our discussion here is that such tropic cross-kinship address turns on the reanalysis of patriline relations based on norms of youth peer sociality, a reanalysis that, in effect, neutralizes the patrilineal hierarchy between brothers in favor of intimacy that reframes parallel-kin relations as friendship.

But such leakage back into normative kinship is not only confined to the ways in which youth construe kinship and address kin. Consider my close friend Naren, whom we met above. A lower-middle-class Dalit living in Madurai, his older sister’s husband, Muttu (in his late 30s) had recently come to Madurai on military leave. In talking about Naren’s eldest brother, Kumar, Muttu referred to him as “uncle.” This usage of the English term was idiosyncratic, as Muttu would not refer, to my knowledge, to any of his other kin by English terms. Normally, Muttu should have referred to Kumar as *maccān* (WeBe). So why “uncle”? Muttu explained that it was to give him respect (*mariyātai*). Not only was Kumar an older affine, he was the oldest man in this family. However, Muttu could not refer to Kumar as *māmā*, as they are the same generation. Further, as Muttu tellingly explained, today *maccān* is a word that young guys use with their friends. As a result, he felt that the term was not respectful enough to refer to Kumar.²⁴ “Uncle,” on the other hand, as an English kin term he associated with the upper classes, does convey the admiration and respect that he has for him. Here the social indexicality of youth usages of cross-kin terms dampens the honorificating potential of such terms when used to refer to kin, causing a shift into an anglicized register of kinship address instead.

24. Similarly consider Ravi, a lower-class autorickshaw driver from the rural Viluppuram area. One of his younger cross-cousins—who he should call *māṭṭe*—was in his second year of college. Ravi, however, called him by name and avoided the term *māṭṭe*. When I asked why, he noted that this cousin, given his being in college, is “decent.” It was thus inappropriate to address him as *māṭṭe*. Further, he noted that his cousin uses terms like *māṭṭe* with his own college friends, making the kinship usage feel odd. Note here how proper name address, otherwise disrespectful or intimate with kin, is, through the avoidance of “indecent” kin terms, reconverted as status raising to the addressee.

Conclusions

Citing Kinship

In this paper I have shown how youth practices of address emerge out of and suspend kinship normativities. The usage of cross-kin terms to enact social relations of equality and intimacy that are neither hierarchical nor kin-based—and thus like (cross) kinship and unlike (parallel) kinship—systematically denudes their semantics and pragmatics, reconverting such terms into signs of speaker identity, political stance, and interpersonal alignment. This double movement of appropriation and suspension makes such terms, when successfully used, potent for the performance of youth identity and for the creation of liminal forms of youth sociality. Troping on kinship opens up new horizons of meaning, relatedness, and performative value.

This double movement does something more. Youth address practices are not simply tropes on a kinship norm, they are (incipient) norms of linguistic practice unto themselves, exerting a force on the kinship norms that they invoke. As I suggested, for some at least, youth’s suspensions of kinship feed back into how cross kinship and affinal relations are talked about and understood in Tamil Nadu. Youth address practices, then, function as one dimension of the contemporary, shifting basis of Tamil kinship. Kinship norm and trope stand in a complementary, dialectical relationship to each other (Agha 2007). There is a mutual dependence between them, each orbiting and becoming the other, each enabling and disabling the other.

This double movement is, importantly, reflexively marked by Tamil youth’s usages, called attention to by youth’s self-consciously transgressive address practices. Beyond simply being noncongruent with kinship norms, such address practices meta-communicate that very noncongruence. Their very condition of intelligibility and performative efficacy lies in their self-framing as tropes, as pointing to themselves as different from the norm that they repeat. In this sense, such address practices put kinship “in quotes.” Like canonical citations such as quotations, youth’s tropic kinship practices re-present that which they cite while marking that re-presentation as not what is presented, reanimating and bracketing kinship at once (see Nakassis 2012, 2013a). In so doing, cross-kinship tropes bring into reflexive focus the very gap between norm and trope that inheres in all kinship practices, a performative gap that is not coincidentally, as I noted above, central to the ongoing, historical (re)structuring of Tamil kinship more generally. It is in this gap we might reevaluate the study of kinship and the place of language within it.

Before turning to this point in the section below, here I would like to suggest that there is something particular about cross kinship with regard to this dialectic of norm and trope. Youth’s uses of cross-kin terms draw our attention to the ways in which this play of norm and trope is, in a sense, already anticipated in Tamil kinship; how the semantics and pragmatics of cross-kin terms prefigure their citation by

youth; how their bids to simultaneously reach outside of kinship while continually reinscribing it, how their desires to convert social others into intimates and found sociality and relatedness are all, in a sense, immanent to cross kinship. Cross-kin terms denote the shifting and liminal, and yet also the central and constituting, kernel of Tamil kinship: those kin who are convertible into affines, through whom consanguinity and future cross kinship come into being. Cross kin are, as culturalist theorists of Tamil kinship have suggested, kin that are the least related to ego, those who are “different enough” to be marriageable (Busby 1997:38) but are still kin (Fruzzetti, Ostor, and Barnett 1982; Kapadia 1995:13–45; though see Trawick 1992:132–135). On this understanding, cross kin share neither body (*uṭambu*) nor spirit (*uyir*), those substances passed on by fathers and mothers respectively (the criterion of exogamy). Yet they do share the same basic blood substance and thus caste essence (the criterion of endogamy). This makes cross kin ambivalent figures, temporally and ritually liminal, the outside within kinship, suspended in a constant movement between consanguinity and affinity, reproduction and exchange, intimacy and deference, “conjunction and disjunction,” as Radcliffe-Brown (1952 [1940]:91) might have put it. Cross kin stand at the threshold of kinship, where difference is introduced and recouped by repetition and reproduction, a dialectical transformation of affinity and consanguinity that we might see as resonating with, and through, the play of norm and trope in youth’s kinship citations.

Total Kinship Fact

In the life and times of the study of kinship, one recurrent problematic has been the relation of kinship terminological “systems” to kinship more generally. W. H. R. Rivers’s (1968 [1913]) critique of Alfred Kroeber (1909) and David Schneider’s (1984) critique of anthropological studies of kinship as a whole noted and problematized the tendency of studies of kinship to conflate the two. Such critiques put into question anthropologists’ and linguists’ attraction to kinship terminologies as discrete, coherent objects amenable to meaningful analysis through the tools of linguistic semantics (Greenberg 1990). For the structurally inclined, kin terms held the promise for a truly scientific study of culture. By bringing together semantic sense systems (i.e., denotational language) and their extensional reference in the world (i.e., “genealogy”), kin terminologies could be read as neatly “encoding” whole socio-structural and cultural realms in their cool logical form (see Carsten 2000; Fogelson 2001 for discussion). The culturalist critique of the genealogical, biological bias of such kinship studies problematized such an approach, if problematically (Sahlins 2012). By questioning the genealogical basis of kinship, such critiques cut the knot between sense and reference, thereby throwing into question the relevance of kinship terminologies to the study of social life, not to mention questioning whether “kinship” as a comparative analytical object was anything but an ideological fiction of anthropologists.

Without genealogy to anchor kin terminology, kinship semantics were, at best, a curiosity of logical form and, at worst, a fetish and projection of the anthropologist.

The result has been that an approach to kinship *as if* it were like language is today unthinkable. But the problem, I would suggest, is not just the fundamental difference, and divide, between the terminological aspects of kinship and kinship behaviors, discourses, and institutions more generally. Rather, it is the misguided view of what kin terminologies and language are as such; that is, that kin terminologies are fundamentally logical structures (kinship “systems”) semantically encoded by words (kin terms) whose function is to refer (to genealogically related persons). While the culturalist critique showed how kinship as a whole cannot be modeled with the structuralist tools of linguistic analysis, linguistic anthropological critiques of referentialist and structuralist theories of language have forcefully argued that neither can language itself (Agha 2007; Silverstein 2004, appendix A). Rather, as linguistic anthropologists have demonstrated, semantic systems cannot be understood independently of their pragmatics in interaction. Nor can they be understood independently from the latter’s reflexive organization, that is, users’ strategic uses and ideological rationalizations of such “systems.” Linguistic structure is always already mediated by, on the one hand, the indexical relationship of a linguistic form to its co(n)text—and thus, a norm to an always potentially tropic reiteration of it—and, on the other hand, to reflexive usages of language about language—that is, circulating metadiscourses about language that guide, but also emerge out of, moments of linguistic use. Language, in this view, is the ongoing precipitate of these dialectical relations between event and structure, interaction and metadiscourse, trope and norm. Michael Silverstein (1979, 1985) has dubbed this the “total linguistic fact.”

We might similarly suggest a “total kinship fact”: the ways in which kinship normativities (of whatever medium, linguistic semantic or otherwise, and of whatever ontology) are made manifest in the world through their contextualization in particular instances of interaction, iterated and reiterated through tropes on them and how those tropes come to be normalized and made the grounds for subsequent decentering through reflexive practices about those very kinship normativities (and the tropes they afford). This is a dialectic that simultaneously, and continually, animates and suspends kinship, sedimenting and disrupting it. This dialectic outlines the possibility and limits of the performativity and institutionality of kinship. Kinship terminologies are only one kind of normativity, of course, lexical sets whose deployment in discourse implicitly invoke the norm of their usage but always contextualized in ways that potentially disrupt their conditions of intelligibility. Tamil youth practices offer insight into one way that this happens.

To approach kinship as constituted by this suspending animation, this dialectical play of norm and trope, requires us to articulate the bases of kinship normativities (be they se-

matic, jural, ideological, affective, or other) and the ways such normativities enable/disable, and are enabled/disabled by, citations of and tropes on them in contextualized moments of interaction. Such an articulation is nothing less than an account of the dynamic structuration of kinship over socio-historical time-space, of the doubled, reflexive movement of the opening and foreclosing of the gap between kinship norms and tropes on them. It is this gap at the heart of kinship that is, perhaps then, the heart of kinship itself.

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Comments

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One irony of twentieth-century social theory derives from its insistence, since Durkheim 1895, on identifying “social” behaviors with norms of conduct and “individual” behaviors with what is shaped or coerced by norms; another irony derives from the salience accorded, since Weber 1949 [1904], to “ideal types” of conduct without an account of how “types” are normalized or altered through conduct itself. When the reflexive role of language in assigning significance to conduct is also not grasped, these ironies unravel as tragedies like structuralism or practice theory, as insouciant new wines in irony-laced bottles, as a century of slips between cups and lips.

When interpersonal conduct relies on kin terms—whether on utterances containing kin terms, or on any perceivable behavior typified by kin terms—social behaviors unfold as “kinship behaviors” (Agha 2007, chap. 8), and, as they unfold, are serially altered and re-particularized through a dialectic of norm and trope that differentiates locally enregistered models of conduct from each other. The fact that processes of re-particularization are sociologically asymmetric—that they do not occur everywhere in the same way, nor all at once—enables us to give a sociohistorical segmentation of the making and unmaking of norms by the very people whose social lives we presume to study.

Since norms of conduct involve criteria on appropriateness to context, they are invariably linked to multiple indexical variables and are defeasible in just as many ways. For instance, since the use of Tamil kin terms indexes the relative age, gender, generation, and cross/parallel kin relation of speaker to referent/addressee, each dimension of appropriate use is defeasible society-internally, but not identically for all speakers. Contrastive noncongruence with norms is a means of social differentiation; hence all social categories of persons do not appropriate the same tropes in any given phase of social history. Although Tamil cross-kin tropes were attested in the rural periphery and stigmatized by urban elites in the 1960s, they have slowly become normalized in elite colleges—in intimate dyads by the 1980s, among non-intimates by the 2000s—and are now emblematic of collegiate youth identity. They are correspondingly grouped into behavioral ensembles with other diacritics—of clothing, hairstyle, romance, media usage, caste, religion—that index youth rebellion from adult norms. But what is the principle of selection? Cell phones and sex have nothing intrinsically to do with each other, after all, whether in Tamil Nadu or elsewhere. Only when we study the social-semiotic process of regrouping (Agha 2007, chaps. 4–5) with ethnographic finesse and historical depth, as Nakassis does, can we begin to explain just why the social order is remade in quite the way it is by those who remake it, or why innovative registers of conduct are still hemmed in by those they appear to displace, or when, or for whom. For instance, even though caste distinctions are disavowed by college youth, and largely suspended in their behaviors, they surface once again when interlocutors have mixed-caste memberships, or when others are co-present as bystanders. Similarly, when mainstream emblems—of rural versus urban residence, of male versus female gender, of upper-middle versus lower-middle class—are reanalyzed as normalized tropes within youth culture, they differentiate youth from adults but also youth groupings from each other. Their deployment is least problematic when interlocutors belong to the same trope-normalizing social category (e.g., when both are women using men’s language); yet normalized tropes are fraught with anxiety when deployed for (or in the presence of) out-group others, just as in adult society.

Using the dialectic of norm and trope as a method of sociohistorical segmentation enables us to make sense of where and when fractionally distinct norms take hold. Why are cross-kin tropes favored by Tamil youth? Cross-kin norms are delicate ways of balancing relations with marriageable kin in adult society, hence salient to youth as sources of tropic self-differentiation. Why so pervasively among college youth? A residential college is both a community of non-kin outside the family and a site where youth prepare to enter the world of adult family obligations from which they are temporarily recused. Cross-kin tropes are handy instruments for the recused, both for crafting in-group emblems of common difference and for imagining new kin relations as their futures. With what consequence? Nakassis shows that youth practices

are already influencing the kinship behaviors of at least some adults. Meanwhile, college youth say that cross-kin marriage appears archaic to them. As we glimpse these transformations, we are reminded that those who espouse adult norms were once youth who espoused youth norms. They grew older. If we pay attention to trajectories of tropic renormalization across life cycles, we are less likely to be surprised at how the thing called “society” is incrementally remade by the semiotic activities of those who comprise it, though not equally effectively by all, nor all of it at once.

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For even the relations of procreation already entail the greater kinship matrix whose social persons they produce. In contrast to our own native wisdom and an anthropological science that for too long has been indebted to it, kinship categories are not representations or metaphorical extensions of birth relations; if anything, birth is a metaphor of kinship relations.

(Marshal Sahlins 2012:ix)

Constantine Nakassis’s essay on Tamil cross- and parallel-kin terms crossed my desk just as I had finished reading Marshall Sahlins’s lovely new book, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not* (2012). As I began reading Nakassis’s rich linguistic ethnographic description of the tropic use of kin terms among college boys and girls in Tamil Nadu, I had the feeling that either my brilliant old teacher or my brilliant young colleague was wrong. Sahlins’s point is that a kinship system is no mere reflection of some deeper biological structure of procreation, filiation, and descent. Rather, that “mutuality of being” that characterizes kinship systems is predicated upon cultural logics that inform how people become kin of a particular kind regardless of biological parentage or filiation. “Begetter, be-gone,” Sahlins quipped of Iñuapiat kinship, “natal bonds have virtually no determining force” (5).

Nakassis, contrarily, appeared to be exploring a distinction between “fictive” or tropic uses of kin terms among college youth and normative kinship practices among actual and categorical cross and parallel kin. He found a series of extraordinary homologies (or “stacked indexical values”) between kin terms, social order, and ideology: the symmetrical use of cross-kin terms (MBS/FZS) among classmates to index intimacy and solidarity; the asymmetric and hierarchical use of parallel-kin terms (e.g., eB *aṇṇaṇ/yB tambi*) among college seniors and juniors—and non-Dalit and Dalit boys, disturbingly; the spatio-temporal “diagram of cool” holding between particular sets of cross-kin terms that are iconic of the hip urbanity of Chennai and northern Tamil Nadu (MB: *maccā(ṇ)*, *macci*, *māms*) versus the backwardness of tradi-

tional Madurai, village life, and the south (MB: *māṇṇe*). Nakassis even documents the increasingly common symmetrical uses of male cross-kin terms among college-aged girls—and even among college-aged boys and girls—to index new kinds of modernity, solidarity, and platonic friendship among urban same- and cross-gender youth. In all, tropic uses of kin terms “suspend the semantics and pragmatics” of their normative use opening up new spaces for conviviality, intimacy, and the production of a modern urban social imaginary. In borrowing from the realm of kin, college youth have developed a rich new language of solidarity and hierarchy that is in marked contrast to their parents’ uses of such terms and the traditional worlds in which they lived.

And there we have it, a theory of kin terminology based on maternity, paternity, and filiation deployed tropically in new contexts. It seemed to me, at first glance, that Nakassis was doing precisely what Sahlins had argued so eloquently against when he wrote that “kinship categories are not representations or metaphorical extensions of birth relations; if anything, birth is a metaphor of kinship relations” (Sahlins 2012:ix).

But my first reading was wrong. Nakassis argued that such tropic uses of kinship terms appeared to have a dialectical effect upon kinship practice. Demographers and anthropologists have documented the steady decline of actual cross-cousin marriage among the middle and upper-middle classes over the past 2 decades. At the same time, the growing ubiquity of tropic uses of cross-kin terms among peer and near-peer groups has led increasingly to the shunning of such terms among cross-kin themselves.

The further into the essay I read, the clearer his theory of an already tropic kinship became. The use of cross-kin terms among college boys and girls, he wrote, “draw[s] our attention to the ways in which this play of norm and trope is, in a sense, already anticipated in Tamil kinship.” For cross kin in the Tamil lands are already ambiguous, outsiders crossing-in, folks who could-be-but-aren’t-quite-us, different from us but not so different, not-brothers but certainly potential husbands to our sisters. Cross-kin terms lend themselves to the trope of transformation because they are already terms used in that magical transformation of people outside to the most interior of all our people.

Taking it a step further, Nakassis argues that far from being a formal “language” that “encodes” and “references” an already extant social order, kinship systems must be reckoned, like language itself, as a dialectical relationship between structure, usage, and ideology (Silverstein 1979), a “precipitate of these dialectical relations between event and structure, interaction and metadiscourse, trope and norm.” A “total kinship fact,” in other words, to paraphrase Michael Silverstein (who paraphrased Marcel Mauss). The highly complex system of “stacked indexical values” that Nakassis found were merely one more moment in what has been an ongoing dialectical play between trope and norm in the precipitation of actually existing kinship.

Such a refiguration of Tamil kinship from a periphery is, as far as I know, unprecedented in a deep tradition of theorizing one of the world's most profound systems. And in viewing Tamil kinship as a play between norm and trope, Constantine Nakassis emerges as a new voice in a rich line of Chicago anthropologists who, themselves, have refigured a genre "suspended in a constant movement between consanguinity and affinity, reproduction and exchange, intimacy and deference, 'conjunction and disjunction,' as Radcliffe-Brown [. . .] might have put it."

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After Trautmann's (1981) masterful synthetic work and Trautwick's (1992) meditation on the place of love and desire in familial relations, the line of inquiry followed by this article promises to open yet a new chapter in the study of Tamil kinship. Constantine Nakassis brings his broader interests in Tamil youth style to bear on the study of kinship terminology in a deft analysis of how terms of address are used creatively among peers in colleges. Although many have observed the ubiquitous nature of fictive kinship in Tamil Nadu, and elsewhere, Nakassis's theoretical framework is one that is more attuned to the dynamic and shifting nature of the relationship between normative uses of kinship terminology and "tropes," or figurative turnings of the norm. The aim of expressing affection without deference, however, leads to a new set of distinctions as gender, region, age group, and caste are refigured on college campuses with reverberations in the world at large. Nakassis ends with the more precise claim that, for some people, the place the cross-kin terminology has made for itself as a marker of youth identity has fed back to exert new pressures on more normative kinship logics.

On the whole, this article aims to reevaluate kinship studies and, specifically, to develop a better understanding of the role of kin terminology-in-use in shaping kinship ideologies and vice versa. The renewed interest in kinship and the approach taken are both salutary. Nakassis develops a framework that is attuned to a "dialectic" (perhaps dialogic?) that develops between normative and creative tropic uses of kinship terminology, propelling change over time. Here, the argument echoes aspects of Silverstein's (1985) analysis of how political awareness of gendered pronoun usage and creative approaches to more gender-neutral language have led to shifts in the English pronoun system. This is an argument Agha (2007) then pushes further by developing the concept of "enregisterment" as a broad theory of the complementary relationship that unfolds between the interactive dimensions of language use and the formation of relatively more durable registers of discourse. If anthropology has grown weary of using language

as a model for kinship behavior, it turns out, this has something to do with the very understanding of language that kinship studies after Lévi-Strauss were based on. Like language more broadly, and other cultural systems that were long thought primarily in terms of "structure," a focus on performativity and the inevitable gap that arises between normative usage and creative figuration in kinship studies opens a path to understanding the very historicity of kinship.

But the story does not, and should not, end there. The shifts that are documented here tell us quite a bit about the experience of modernity and critical reflections on sociality in a recently post-agrarian world. Nakassis has done much to bring his work on performativity, identity, and style to help re-ground the study of kinship. Where I think the analysis could be pushed further is in the other direction: to bring this perspective on the dynamism of kinship back to bear on our understanding of desire, modernist affect, and shifting senses of self on college campuses and elsewhere. Indeed, the decline of kinship as a primary category of anthropological inquiry was not only the result of Schneider's (1984) critique and a general dissatisfaction with structural modeling. The denial of historicity that seemed to adhere to the study of kinship was bundled with a whole set of tacit assumptions about disenchantment and individuation under the reign of capitalist modernity. These assumptions about the growing irrelevance of kin seem to have remained as anthropologists rushed to study the modern (cf. *Vital Relations*, an important new edited volume by McKinnon and Cannell [2013]).

Of course, kinship must be brought back to the center of our interpretations of everyday modern and postmodern life. How else we are to understand the particular "ego problem" Vanita and her plucky friends are causing their male classmates when using male cross-kin terms of address with each other as a sign of intimacy and solidarity? Or why Sam would insist that his mother's brother's younger daughter call him older brother, in a direct assault on the core normative Tamil kinship? These seemingly opposite directions of change are both inspired by a claim to be modern. If crossness is primarily associated with affection and a certain freedom (with an attendant aura of sexuality) and parallelness the domain of formality, hierarchy, with both familial property and propriety, we can understand an important contradiction in idioms of modern aspiration, infusing social relationships with modes of power and affect that are neither individuated nor traditional. This is not really a matter of domesticating the massive changes that have increased with the liberalization of India's economy but more precisely of "inhabiting modernity," as Nakassis's colleague at Chicago, Dipesh Chakrabarty, might put it. Perhaps this broader comment on modernity is much to ask of an article that has already accomplished quite a bit, but it strikes me as a direction that would enable an opening onto some of the large questions raised by the compelling stories Nakassis has shared with us.

Turning Kinship Upside Down and Inside Out: A Comment on Nakassis

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Nakassis demonstrates how Tamil-speaking college youth “turn kinship inside out and on its head” when they use kin terms to address each other. His rich ethnographic material has the potential to turn kinship theory inside out and upside down too. Kinship theorists have tended to focus almost exclusively on the analysis of reference terms. This is because data on address usage is rare and reports of the quality Nakassis presents almost nonexistent.

Reference terminology poses the question of the referential function of language and calls for an analysis of the semantic value of kin terms. Trautmann’s (1981) analysis of Dravidian kinship, using semantic contrasts based on generation, age, sex, and crossness, has defined the terms of this debate. Address terminology, by way of contrast, poses the question of the “emotive” and “conative” (Jakobson 1960) functions of kinship language and calls for an analysis of the affective value of address terms: respect/familiarity, intimacy/distance, and other moral sentiments. Out goes Ego and its logical opposite Alter-ego, in comes Addressor and its temperamental opposite Addressee, whose delayed reactions are uncertain. Juniors (j) typically show respect to a senior (s) by using a senior reference term (e.g., “dad”) as an address term; the senior typically reciprocates using the junior’s name (e.g., Chris) rather than a reference term. The intertemporal nature of this s/j = dad/Chris address ratio gives it an affective value that varies as the following alternative suggest: “daddy/Chrissie,” “sir/son,” “father/boy.”

Nakassis takes us one step further and examines how reference terms are used as *symmetrical* address terms by college youth. Thus, if someone is addressed as *māmā* (MB), the

Table 2. New semantic value of friendship terms

Year	Value	Reference term used for addressee	Reciprocal reference terms used for addressor
Y+1	s	<i>aṇṇan</i>	<i>tambi</i>
Y0	=	<i>maccān</i> <i>māmā</i> <i>māṇṇe</i> <i>paṅkāḷi</i>	<i>maccān</i> <i>māmā</i> <i>māṇṇe</i> <i>paṅkāḷi</i>
Y-1	j	<i>tambi</i>	<i>aṇṇan</i>

Note. s = senior; j = junior.

addressee reciprocates with *māmā* (MB), not *māṇṇe* (ZS). Symmetrical usages of this s/s and j/j kind are a logical scandal from the point of view of Kinship Ego who demands *māṇṇe* (ZS) as the reciprocal of *māmā* (MB).

I have one small quibble with Nakassis’s discussion of the category *māmā*. “Addressing an age-equal friend as *māmā* (MB),” he says, “is a kinship trope, because the addressee’s status is at odds with the norm.” No, this is not at odds with the norm because the defining characteristic of Southern Dravidian kinship (vis-à-vis Central Indian Dravidian) is ZD marriage, which means that WB is referred to and addressed as *māmā*. This equation (WB = MB) merges G+1, and G0 is balanced by the complementary merging of G0 and G-1 that *māṇṇe* (ZH = ZS) defines. Had Muttu come from the village Gough studied, he, as a non-Brahmin, would have used the term “*māmā*” instead of the English “uncle.” Fifth-generation descendants of Dravidian-speaking indentured laborers to Fiji still follow the non-Brahmin usage today.

Given that both ZD and cross-cousin marriage define the Southern norm, the key male terms in Nakassis’s figure 1 will have the slightly altered paradigmatic form to allow for ZD marriage (see fig. 4). Common normative paradigms of this kind emerge when people from different castes and regions in the Southern Dravidian zone live together, be they Tamil-speaking college youth in Chennai or Madurai or Indo-Fijian indentured laborers in the cane fields of Fiji. Logically speaking, *māṇṇe* as ZS should be the reciprocal of *māmā* as MB,

		II			X		
		s	=	j	s	=	j
Reference terms	G+1						
	G0	e	<i>aṇṇan</i>	<i>paṅkāḷi</i>	<i>māmā</i>	<i>maccān</i>	<i>māṇṇe</i>
		y					
G-1							

Figure 4. Semantic value of selected Tamil male reference terms.

but this does not follow here because Kinship Ego has undergone a change of identity and become a Friendship Ego with a new semantic value. Friendship address ratios of the kind *māmā/māmā*, *maccān/maccān*, and *māṭṭe/māṭṭe* are not logical scandals in this upside-down world. Kinship Ego, by definition, belongs to G0 and is an equal (=) between an elder (or senior) and a younger (or junior). College males extend Ego's definition and locate him in both the cross and parallel categories. The cross terms *māmā*, *maccān*, and *māṭṭe* have ambiguous values because of the generational merging, being equal in one sense and unequal in another. College youth exploit this ambiguity by treating them as equals; they become alternatives that students can choose from based on their regional origins. This use of kinship terms as modes of friendly address gives the terms a new semantic value as friendship terms. The distinction between cross and parallel is conflated, and the e/y contrast defines the year contrasts: Friendship Ego belongs to YO, *aṇṇan* (eB) to Y+1, and *tambi* (yB) to Y-1. This usage of kinship terms as friendship address creates a new friendship terms paradigm, a variation of Nakassis's table 1 (see table 2).

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This beautifully detailed paper by Nakassis, a dude who is at once my *pēran* and *maccān*, points up the dialectical relationship between (1) the baseline semantics of kin terms, lexical simplexes structured into paradigms by dimensions of egocentrically centered ethno-genealogy versus (2) the pragmatic deployment of these terms by young, urban Tamil speakers in acts of referring and particularly of direct address, in which terms semantically designating generationally close "cross"-kin are pragmatic cat's paws of social and semantic change. In effect, the semantics-pragmatics divide has long been noted in the kinship literature, but unfortunately earlier social anthropologists' and symbolic anthropologists' spectacular innocence of any adequate linguistics, philosophy of language, or semiotics hindered progress in seeing how such lexical expressions function in cultures in regular and theoretically expectable ways. It was perhaps easier to deny to kinship practices and their terminological aspects any right to existence as a domain of social and linguistic life, precisely because verbal usage seemed to lead from ethno-genealogy to every other kind of conceptualizable social relation.

Indeed, it is precisely such a meandering or, if you will, such "metaphorical extension" of Tamil cross-kin terminology deployed in reciprocal address that Nakassis shows to be increasing among first male and now female urban, college-age youth in Tamil Nadu. But not to argue that therefore it is impossible to situate such address terms within an ethno-genealogically

anchored conception of relatedness in a Dravidian-type kin-classificatory structure. Rather, the general points raised by this material can be framed within our contemporary understanding of the multi-factorial complexity of the "meaning" of any word or expression and of kinship words and expressions in particular.

As forms within denotational language structure, aka grammar, possessed kinship expressions, for example, his mother's brother's daughter, have the general semantics of what are termed 'nouns of [habitual] agency', "the one who VPs," as though derived from some verb phrase [VP] that otherwise would occur in predicating a state-of-affairs. Thus, in English, we have the habitual intransitive [he] runs and its corresponding noun of agency [he is a] runner with the characteristic -er derivational suffix. The semantics of kinship expressions, whether simplex lexical forms or, as just cited, so-called relative product nominal expressions with multiple internal possessors, always involves at the very minimum a logically two-place predicate, that is, a predicate relating two (or more) entities, one of which is denoted by the grammatical possessor and the other as the quasi-'agent': thus, to use a simplex example, the semantics of your father is that of 'the one *who* [*habitually*] *relates-as-*"father"-to you' precisely parallel to your baker 'the one *who* [*habitually*] *bakes-for* you', where the underlying predicate is still transparent in the noun, or your butcher 'the one *who* [*habitually*] *serves-in-whatever-way-a-*"butcher"-does-for you', where no simplex verb exists. All these nouns of agency, including the kin expressions, are, of course, status terms, sociologically speaking; they designate classes or types of people in the social world by describing them within universes of habitual or expected role incumbency through which they are known to others with whom they interact. The linguistic forms are what we term *meta-pragmatic descriptors*, descriptors of role incumbents of social-interaction-in-context.

Then how, normatively, does a butcher in fact serve a customer? What does the butcher do in respect of the ascriptive norms of being provider-of-food-for customers? How normatively does a father relate to someone to/for whom he "is" (in a genealogical computation) father and who—who—who . . . CALLS HIM "father?" The point is, a central part of so-called kinship as a lived reality is how we address one another using one of the simplex status terms as a term of address. In denotational structure, many human status terms and especially those of kinship share the property with proper names of being usable as a vocative without additional deixis ("Michael!" "Dad!" "Professor!"); most languages have special vocative kin-term forms as well and numerous nickname-like alternants. But unlike proper names, when kin expressions are used non-vocatively in referring to individuals, one must use a deictic possessor to anchor one of the two underlying arguments of kinship relationality, just as one must for something like my house, my vacation by the sea, and so on, here with a deictic first person singular possessor.

In Nakassis's material, the quality of the social relationship

between Ego and a school chum whom he vocatively calls “*maccān*” underlies the pragmatic—context-bound and context-defining—verbal trope, performatively insinuating comfortable “*maccān*”-ness across contexts as a social-relational quality. So the in-group status of one’s interlocutory partner is transformed: Ego hopes *maccān* now does as “*maccān*,” so addressed, now is. The easy affective comforts of same-generation cross-kin social interaction are, like verbal pixie dust, transformative of adolescent chumminess at urban schools and workplaces into “new/youthful” quasi-kinship, thus, in turn, problematizing as “old” what such kin terms can still possibly mean back home.

Reply

I am very grateful for the stimulating and engaged comments on my paper. And I am delighted that the paper has been able to serve as the occasion for such exciting discussion and vistas for future research. The commentaries happily strike me as serendipitously participating in a conversation with each other, one that I was pleased to overhear, and now join. Below I draw out some of this virtual byplay, and add my rejoinders where they seem fit.

Asif Agha incisively lays out the form of the sociohistorical logic by which norm and trope dialectically unfold vis-à-vis the enregisterment of “kinship behaviors.” Through the more general analytic of enregisterment Agha invokes two orders of analysis to which any study of kinship must attend: on the one hand, to the sociologically particular and event-specific nature of social interactions that indexically invoke and (re)constitute kinship; on the other hand, to the wider (meta)semiotic dynamics that mediate such kinship behaviors and, as Agha has suggested elsewhere (2007:382ff.), perhaps any cultural formation. As Agha points out in his commentary, processes of “re-particularization” and “the making and unmaking of norms” are sociologically located, asymmetrically and often contingently. One direction for the study of kinship in Tamil Nadu, then, is a finer granularity of sociological specificity.

To that end, Chris Gregory implicitly raises the question of the distribution of kinship norms. As he notes, if Muttu had come from the village that Kathleen Gough studied in the early 1950s in Tanjore district, then perhaps he would have used *māmā* for his wife’s eldest brother. Muttu, however, was not and would not. He was not only from a different class background and generation, he was also from a different region than Gough’s informants. Any work that deals with Dravidian kinship—as the voluminous and finely sliced and nicely diced literature demonstrates—must be sensitive to the sheer diversity of kinship behaviors (hence my numerous qualifications and hedges throughout the paper). Indeed, *whose* kinship? While the paper addresses this issue in various

ways, one attempt of the paper is to understand how youth’s usages construe, deploy, and even ignore this diversity to pragmatic ends. (Hence, e.g., my speculations on the regional specificity of various kin-term usages and their indexical projections vis-à-vis youth citations, as detailed in nn. 18 and 22, as well as in the body of the text.) There is much more work to be done here, and Gregory’s helpful intervention regarding the term *māmā* and its use in address is important. Particularly useful is how Gregory highlights the fact that generational merging in normative cross-kin term use anticipates what he calls “friendship terms,” an observation that also goes to Bernard Bate’s emphasis on the prefiguration of youth tropism by cross-kinship itself.

If Gregory raises the issue of sociological specificity and distribution, Francis Cody’s and Bernard Bate’s stimulating commentaries pose larger questions related to processes of enregisterment. Cody pushes the paper to put a finer, if also more expansive, point on the affectively charged imaginaries and aspirations that result in the complementary distribution between normative kinship back home and youth’s tropic kinship practices in their peer groups. Cody rightly suggests that youth’s differential engagements with kinship—parallel and cross, normative and tropic—reveal particular, and sometimes conflicted, modes of inhabiting modernity. Cody’s use of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2002) phrase points to an important dimension of the filament that entangles these domains (kin group, peer group) and the various social processes that (de)form them (some of which I mention in the paper). There is obviously much more to be said, but what I want to highlight here is how, in addition to the question of what such kinship practices say about these youth registers of modernity, Cody’s provocation also troubles the very language of the discipline (cf. McKinnon and Cannell 2013). That is, as part of the register of anthropology-speak, “kinship” has come to be loaded with indexical meanings associated with a particular kind of anthropology, and because of this has tended to disappear from anthropological discussions in equal measure as tropes on it have proliferated. It is not, then, simply that “the kinds of problems changed,” as David Schneider (1995:194) suggested but that the interdiscursive accumulation—or indexical “baggage”—of kinship, caught within the tumult of disciplinary change, disabled certain avenues of exploration, even as it opened others up. Paralleling the situation of Tamil youth, kinship reveals, at a meta-analytical level, yet another contradiction and tension in the inhabitation of modernity: our own.

Bernard Bate similarly raises a big, and equally meta-anthropological, question. Bate’s provocation is equal parts analytical and metaphysical: what kind of analytical and ethnographic object “is” kinship to us as anthropologists, and how does that square with how kinship behaviors are understood, lived, and used by those we study? Further, what is particular to kinship as such, that is, what makes a kinship register, to return to Agha’s notion, different from any other kind of register? What are its specificities as a sociocultural

formation? What does taking the “mutuality of being” (Sahlins 2012)—or the ways it is differentially understood, lived, and used in different places by different social actors—into account *do* to the (meta)semiotic dynamics entailed in the “making and unmaking of (kinship) norms”? Here, rather than enregisterment functioning as the more abstract category within which kinship is simply an instance, how does understanding kinship behaviors in all their complexity change how we understand enregisterment itself, either altering it or forcing us to grant kinship its own specificity (or both)? (I come back to this question below with regard to Silverstein’s comments.)

The anthropological literature on Dravidian kinship is complex, convoluted, and contentious. One must enter it with care and respect, even a little fear. Bate’s invocation of Sahlins keys his initial hesitation, a grating friction (the gears grinding but not coming, thankfully, to a halt) at my use of a genealogical—or rather, ethno-genealogical (as Silverstein notes in his commentary; also see n. 7 of my paper)—metalanguage to describe the normative semantics of kin terms. To oil the gears and calm the shriek, let me offer the following comments.

First, it seems critical to ask: for any particular case, what kinds of analytic metalanguage are appropriate to discuss kinship behaviors and, more particularly, to discuss the semantics of kin terms? Second, what is the status of such metalanguages vis-à-vis the phenomenon itself? (The confusion of the two is, of course, the unforgivable sin in the history of the study of kinship.) As I would emphasize, my use of a semantic metalanguage along with its tabular aesthetics is pragmatic and rhetorical (in addition to descriptive), so much the better to highlight the creative effects that youth citations of those kin terms and norms have on those semantic grids. There are many possible ways of understanding, and representing, kin terms and their semantics, but whatever analysis we employ should be able to capture the performative work that (meta)pragmatic uses of kinship enact. With respect to these materials, starting from the ethno-genealogical (as captured through a familiar, if maligned, notation) and following it as it unravels itself in the interactional performativity of tropic kinship captures this process, redoubling that unraveling by performing that very operation on the semanticist assumptions that are indexed by the anthropologist’s use (and mention) of *that* kinship register and its aesthetics (i.e., some of the “baggage” noted above). This is, we might say, a paleonymics of kinship.

Third, there is an important difference between the so-called metaphorical extension of birth relations (as Sahlins critiques them) and the “metaphorical extension” of (normative) kinship behaviors, however construed by those we study. Whatever the mutuality of being comprises, whatever the cultural or ontological formulation of what kinship is or is not (including a bio-genealogical formulation), that formulation can itself be troped upon, altered, reinscribed, cited. This is the condition of possibility of kinship and its study. And this, I think, is the crucial point: the reflexive relationship

and movement between formulation and reformulation—or norm and trope—is central to what kinship does and is seen to do, and thus *is*, over time, space, and social domain.

Michael Silverstein, in his perspicacious commentary (thanks *tāttā-maccān!* [a true scandal for the literally minded genealogist]), moves us in one direction toward addressing the question of the specificity of kinship alluded to above. Silverstein highlights how kinship functions as a semantico-socio-pragmatic domain, not simply as performatively enactable of social relations and identity but as the site for the generation and maintenance of the phenomenological qualia of those relations and identities. (In this is a more general point about performativity.) Silverstein’s analysis of kin terms and their relationship to other nominal forms raises an important question: what is the place of kinship as a part of grammar *per se*? Within Silverstein’s (1976a, 1987) hierarchy of noun phrase types, kin terms are liminally located between inherently indexical expressions (the notionally more “animate” personal pronouns, third-person pronouns, and proper names) and relatively deictically unanchored expressions (common nouns, abstract nouns, etc.; also see Fleming 2012). Kin terms thus partake of the different (meta)pragmatic and semantic properties of the noun types “above” and “below” them on the animacy hierarchy (e.g., of having a symbolic—in the Peircean sense—denotation like common nouns; of being indexical and metapragmatic in instances of address; and of being inherently possessed in definite reference). Suggestive is how this grammatical fact (the semantic liminality and hybridity of kin terms) diagrams—prefigures and reflects—the special status of kin terms as pragmatically usable to foreground and instate particular qualia of relatedness (e.g., “*maccān*”-ness, as Silverstein puts it); that is, as a function of their ability to denote forms of relationality (predicates, or rhematic signs, as Peirce called them) that are simultaneously projected onto the interactional contexts within which they are used, kin terms are performatives *in potentia*, nomically calibrated schemas of relational qualia that are reflexively calibrated to the moment (and speaker and addressee) of their utterance, always potentially transforming the worlds of their users, even as they transform themselves in the process. Echoing Gregory, Bate, and Agha, this is perhaps no coincidence, as what we think of as the semantic baseline of kin terms is perhaps simply the effect of the metapragmatics of kinship in action, which, through the gates of address, comes to be delocutively lodged “in” grammar and beyond.

—Constantine V. Nakassis

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