Accounting for the Familial:
Discourse, Practice and Political Possibility

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Families can be frustrating. Donna Haraway is not alone when she remarks that she is "sick to death of bonding through kinship and 'the family,'" and longs "for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality and persistent hope" (Haraway, 1997, 265 cited in Nash, 2005, 450). Nash (2005) echoes this frustration in her refusal to specify her own genealogy in her research on Irish genealogy tourism. But as Nash also points out, this irritation arises from her own privileging of mobile, unrooted identities, a position resonant with the emergence of transnational identity literature. Perhaps this tendency to privilege mobility, flows, and transnational identities is in part responsible for the family's 'absent presence' in geography (Valentine, 2007). Indeed, a number of geographers have called for more focused research on the family and heterosexuality (Domosh, 1999; Hubbard, 2000), intimacy (Valentine, 2007; Oswin, 2010), geopolitics (Harker, 2010, 2011, 2012), biological relatedness (Nash, 2005), and immigration politics (White and Gilmartin, 2008; Conlon, 2010; Martin, 2011). In this intervention, I pull together recent work beyond and between geographers, rethinking familial relatedness and showing how taking families seriously opens up opportunities for connecting seemingly disparate political projects.

Why the family and why now? In the context of neoliberal state restructuring in the Global North, social support increasingly falls to individual families. In the

Global South, labor migration, military conflict and occupation, and displacement force reworkings of family life, stretch notions of home, intimacy, and care across long distances. At the boundaries of the 'global apartheid' (Aizeki and Nevins, 2008) between North and South, familial relatedness is both a vehicle for inclusion (through family sponsorship for citizenship) and exclusion (by othering particular forms of care). It is in families that 'the global and the intimate' (Pratt and Rosner, 2006), 'the spectacular and the mundane' (Lee and Pratt, 2012), and the micro- and macro-geographies of power (Oswin and Olund, 2010) touch down in everyday life. More than just an analytic angle, however, accounting for the affective intensities of familial relatedness and care have provoked geographers to imagine alternative spatial politics (Harker 2012; Lee and Pratt, 2012).

For Elizabeth Povinelli (2006), liberal settler colonies like the United States, Canada, and Australia organize themselves through a paradoxical matrix of subjecthood and collective identity. For Povinelli, autological subjects are produced in the "discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom associated with the Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy and capitalism" (ibid., 4). Genealogical society is the autological subject's counterweight, the "social constraints placed on the autological subject by various kinds of inheritances" (ibid.). Together, the autological subject and the genealogical society "are a key means by which people in liberal settler colonies articulate their most intimate relations to their most robust governmental and economic institutions, make sense of how others do the same, account for the internal incoherence of these discourses, and distribute life and death internationally" (ibid., 5). In other words, political subjects understand who they are, become a 'who' who can act, as individuals and members of families (Kallio, this issue). The liberal subject is not only paradoxical because it is always already related to other subjects through particular notions of inheritance; the particular stitching-together of the sovereign subject and genealogical collectivity serves as an *a priori* metric by which other selves, other forms of intimacy, and other orderings of kin are measured. In other words, we become legible as subjects—as humans—in and through the ways in which we perform our families.

For example, early anthropologist examinations of human societies defined cultures by their kinship structures and evaluated them against Western standards. Critiques of kinship studies (especially Schneider, 1984) led anthropologists to focus on other cultural processes, but feminist anthropologists have recently rekindled a New Kinship Studies. New reproductive technologies, transnational adoption, gay and queer families, and same-sex parenting have demonstrated the continued importance of family as an organizing concept and demanded new conceptual tools for understanding them (Carsten, 2000; Franklin and McKinnon, 2001; Strathern, 2005). For Catherine Nash (2005), these conceptions of 'cultures of relatedness' offer a foothold for thinking through the enduring attraction of genealogy, particularly for, in her case, white settler colonies. Thinking of kinship

as an "analytical category, social practice and classificatory technology" (ibid., 451) repositions family alongside other powerful discourses of social order, theoretically heeding their importance without reproducing the family's naturalizing tendencies. From this perspective, Nash parses out how kinship rules ground and fix identity and yet are selectively deployed, signaling kinship's flexibility. This fixity/flexibility allows kinship to be used as a measure of inclusion and exclusion in the national family: "Thus, policing, negotiation and permeability of national borders are inflected by powerful but plural versions of 'natural families'" (Nash, 2005, 454). Who and what makes a legitimate family becomes a criteria of inclusion/exclusion from political membership. Thinking through a no-borders agenda, as Burridge (this issue) pushes us to do, will need to attend to the ways in which bordering is bound up with familial discourses of belonging, community, and territory.

Rethinking 'the family' as a modality of subject formation demands that critical geographers pay greater attention to how familial discourses are mobilized to differentiate, marginalize and oppress. As a metric through which life and death are distributed, Povinelli's (2006) configuration of self and kin has serious consequences, for example, for Palestinian families in the Occupied Territories. Harker (2012) argues that '*the* Palestinian family' has been discursively produced and circulated through various governmental projects, census data collection, and nationalist aspirations. Constructing an extended or nuclear family has material implications for family reunification policies, and census practices fixed family identity to patriarchal households in ways that masked other kinship practices. Thus the statistical and legal production of 'the Palestinian family' was part of a larger colonial modernization project, against which other essentializing claims about large Arab families could be made. As Harker (ibid., 854) argues, "While the Palestinian family as a patriarchal heterosexual norm is often interpreted through Orientalist tropes of tradition, timelessness, and backwardness—all of which promote a certain kind of naturalism—it is a thoroughly contemporary production". This discursive objectification is part of an othering process that allows Palestinian deaths to go unrecognized and unmourned, a process that allows liberal autological subjects to disavow ethical responsibility for others.

Ironically, Western liberal democracies are, according to Michel Foucault and Jacques Donzelot, governed through the family. For Foucault (2003, 79), the family served as a "'cell of sovereignty', a social institution based on patriarchal will, blood ties, and obligation, and this particular organization of authority guaranteed family members' participation in the burgeoning disciplinary institutions of the school, the military, and the factory". The family was a 'switch point', "linking up disciplinary systems and circulating individuals from one to the other" (ibid., 81–82). Where families failed to properly adapt to proletarianization, they became a target of philanthropic and therapeutic 'refamilialization' efforts which brought disciplinary practices into the home. For Donzelot (1979), the family served as a laboratory for the development of medical knowledge,

psychology, disciplinary order, and statistical knowledge practices. Moreover, social reformers' preoccupation with racial purity grew out of fears about (insufficient) mother-child attachments and formed the basis of particular forms of racism endemic to modern, liberal states in Western Europe and North America (Foucault, 1990, 149). For Foucault and Donzelot, the role and organization of the family was not just a passive stage, but a vehicle for the imbrication of sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical government that Foucault would ultimately call 'governmentality'. The family is not just important for its empirical role here, but for the work Donzelot and Foucault do by thinking through families' relationships to emerging disciplinary and biopolitical knowledge practices. Familial politics are integral, therefore, to the theories of power, biopolitics, discourse, bodies, and governance, from which many critical political geographers draw inspiration (see also Martin, 2012).

Analyzing family practices has also allowed geographers to explore the political possibilities that might be opened up by thinking differently about families (Harker and Martin, 2012). Families may resist dominant frames, and familial strategies of 'getting by' and rub against regimes of occupation and political oppression. As Ridanpää (this issue) points out, 'making do' often includes sarcasm and irony, as conditions of occupation and social control limit the range of allowable criticisms. These familial practices often rely upon certain silences and refusals, sometimes falling below the radar of spectacular and the production of official memories (Kuusisto-Arponen, this issue). Within social movements, appealing to mother-child bonds has been a popular strategy for calling attention to the suffering caused by deportation regimes. On the surface, the universality of familial bonds provide a testimonial frame that can appeal across national and cultural boundaries. Particularly for noncitizens married to citizens and/or with citizen children, children's rights to a stable household are often posed against the state's right to deport noncitizens. These arguments are typically presented as personal testimony and biographical narrative, developed with communities organizing to both politicize individuals and build collective movements. Thus, developing narratives of family separation and reunification shows how central the family is in the formation of political subjectivity (see Prokkola, this issue; Kallio, this issue).

As Pratt (2012) points out, however, appealing to privileged, Northern white (Canadian in her case) middle classes through the mother-child trope can backfire. Filipina mothers' testimonies about the injustices of the Live-in Caregiver Program, for example, sometimes fueled accusations of 'bad mothering'. Moreover, appealing to maternal connections often allows white audiences to inscribe Filipina narratives within their own without recognizing their singularity. Narratives of familial relatedness work on and through complicated racial, gendered, and nationalist geographical imaginaries that are neither clearly emancipatory nor repressive. Yet, Lee and Pratt (2012) provocatively connect stories of Filipino soldiers in the US and domestic workers in Canada, to

understand the violence underlying citizenship regimes. Pairing spectacular images of military recruitment with banal domestic labor migration, Lee and Pratt show how families are enrolled in and recruited by policies that ask them to pay for citizenship with death. Fleshing out 'the intimacies of exclusion' (Mountz, 2011) through a methodology of connection rather than comparison, Lee and Pratt (2012, 899) argue that these stories "radiate affective intensities that can become provocative political resources," excessive to family-based citizenship regimes. In the US, families of noncitizen soldiers are eligible for citizenship after the death of their loved one, and yet many refuse to redeem this 'privilege'. They "refuse death as a route to citizenship as embrace life as an excess to it" (ibid., 899). For Lee and Pratt, suffering and loss become a shared resource through which to challenge the experience of violence of modern citizenship. Thus, familial relatedness is central to both institutional and informal everyday embodiments of power, and the discursive power of the family to naturalize and exclude requires deeply critical analysis.

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