Precariousness, precarity and family: notes from Palestine

Abstract

Geographical studies that have engaged the family have generally done so by critiquing the patriarchal, heternormative family. However, this paper argues that families are enmeshed in a plurality of political and ethical spacings that exceed this singular focus, a claim advanced by reviewing recent studies of Palestinian families. These studies reveal ways in which Palestinian families have been constituted by colonialism and nationalism, and are also the means through which colonization and violence have been resisted. I then put these studies into conversation with the recent work of Judith Butler to argue for the importance of studying families at the intersections of different spatial, political and ethical practices and discourses. Butler's work argues for a social ontology of precariousness – the ways in which one's life is dependent on the lives of others – and a concomitant ethics of precarity, a means to challenge the ways in which certain subjects and populations are put at greater risk of death and suffering than others. I employ studies of Palestinian family spaces to read Butler's arguments spatially. A spatially attentive reading of Butler's ideas helps in turn to conceptualise the different ways in which families do political and ethical work. In particular, I focus on family spatial practices that reduce or alleviate heightened exposure to violence, some of which can be understood as a source of ethical responsiveness. This leads to a call for more geographically, politically and ethically nuanced approaches to apprehending family spaces.

Introduction

Geographical research has explored how families are constituted by, and enmeshed within, particular geographies such as transnational migration (Waters 2002, Yeoh et al 2005), home (Harker 2010, Oswin 2010a, Stenning et al

2010), the (post)colonial nation-state (Oswin 2010b), law and borders (Martin 2011), while being part of a broader array of intimate relations and spaces (Valentine 2008). Reading these investigations of family spaces - the spatial formations, relations and flows that manifest and are manifested by families - and family spacings - the processes through which family spaces emerge (see Harker 2010) – it is possible to pose two further, interrelated questions: what kinds of politics and what kinds of ethics do familial geographies enact and make possible? The answers currently provided by geographical research are not encouraging. Families, as practiced and as discursively constructed, have usually been considered politically conservative, reinforcing patriarchal, heterosexual norms (Valentine 2008) and/or exclusionary national identity spaces (Cowen & Gilbert 2007). Much feminist, queer and critical geopolitical scholarship has sought to challenge and overthrow such norms and spaces. In short, families as a political form and force are objects that progressive/critical geographies seek in various ways to surmount.

In this paper I take a different approach, arguing that relations between familial geographies and political and ethical practices are far more complex than this rather singular association. The first half of the paper begins by outlining the current ways in which families have been thought about as a conservative political force within Geography. Then, to challenge this narrative, I use an emerging body of literature on Palestinian family practices, to explore the specific geographic context of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. These studies reveal a series of complex and messy entanglements, in which families differ not only in terms of composition, practices (Morgan 1996), spaces and spacings (Harker 2010), but also engage in different types of political practice. More broadly, this context reveals a more variegated political-geographic domain of family than geographers have so far accounted for. Building on this argument in the second half of the paper, I explore why it is important to engage with the ways families, politics and spaces are entangled. To do this, I connect my discussion of families with Butler's (2009) recent argument for a social ontology of precariousness (the ways in which one's life is dependent on the lives of others), and her analysis of the uneven distribution of precarity (exposure to

violence). I employ studies of Palestinian family spaces to read Butler's arguments geographically. A spatially attentive reading of Butler's work in turn helps conceptualise the role families play in reducing different populations' exposure to violence, injury and death. This reading also allows for the envisioning of particular family-subjects as sources of ethical practice, a claim that will be embedded in the Palestinian family practices discussed in the first section of this paper. Thus in conclusion, I argue for a geographical approach to family that takes account of these multiple, contingent relations between family spacings, politics and ethics.

The family as a political and ethical problem for Geographers

Studying family relations and practices can offer a range of important insights into social-spatial processes and power relations that animate, inter alia, nationalisms, colonialisms and economic change (Joseph & Rieker 2008). This remains true even as family compositions and practices in certain places have changed significantly in recent decades (Morgan 1996). However, most geographical studies of family have either sought to critique the patriarchal, heternormative family, or ignored the family as an object of study altogether. This section briefly outlines the reasons for these approaches, in order to think about families in excess of the political role to which they are normally assigned.

Valentine (2008) notes that geographers are only just beginning a sustained examination of the geographies of families themselves, which is to say geographies that don't subsume family within concepts such as social reproduction and care. Geographies of families themselves have explored how families are enmeshed in spacings of transnational migration (Waters 2002, Yeoh et al 2005), home (Harker 2010, Oswin 2010a, Stenning et al 2010), the (post)colonial nation-state (Oswin 2010b), law and borders (Martin 2011), while being part of a broader array of intimate relations and spaces (Valentine 2008). This work provides a much-needed corrective to the prioritization of, and focus on, individual subjects and processes of individuation that has characterized

much social science scholarship in recent decades. Joseph & Rieker (2008: 16) note that

> Feminist research in the 1960s and 1970s shifted the terms of conversation to "women" and "gender studies", neglecting the family as a set of relationships, or positioning the family as a frame from which women had to liberate themselves in order to find their agency. Several decades of privileging gender has atomized "the social" into individuals in much of feminist scholarship. It appeared that social structures could only be viewed from the frame of "the individual", "the subject", and "the subject's subjectivity".

The politics that underpin the intellectual shift described by Joseph & Rieker resonate with similar explanations for the disregard of family within Geography. Valentine (2008: 2099) argues that the neglect of families as an object of geographical study can be tied, in part, to a feminist and queer politics of rejection of a particular type of family: 'traditional patriarchal and hetero-normative models of "the family"'. The reasons for this rejection are clear: such normative family ideals, and the practices they promote, have had and continue to have devastating effects. For example, Oswin's (2010a) research in Singapore demonstrates how a very powerful statist production of a heteronormative nuclear family ideal, in part through the residential space of the apartment block, creates forms of exclusion that impact on a whole range of non-heteronormative, 'queered' subjects, (many of which might otherwise be thought about as families, e.g. single parents with children, queer couples). Yeoh et al (2005) argue that these patriarchal norms are also often reproduced through Singaporean transnational migration through discursively constructed ideals of the family as a site of morality, purity and tradition. In the context of the US, Cowen & Gilbert (2007) have shown how a particular normative family discourse, put to work in state policy making, constructs a 'national family' that is highly exclusionary of both 'foreign' others and 'deviants' within the national 'family' (see also Martin, forthcoming). These studies give credence to suspicions of 'the family' as a politically conservative form of collective subjectivity. Consequently, critique of

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family often becomes a point of departure for imagining an expanded sphere of intimate relations beyond the family, which might include same-sex intimacies and personal relationships such as friendships and communities (see Valentine 2008 for further elaboration).

Geographies that critique the patriarchal, hetero-normative family do important political work, exposing the means through which various forms of oppression and exclusion are rooted in and routed through the family (both as it is practiced and as a discursive construction). However, I want to argue that relations between familial geographies and political and ethical practices are far more complex than this consistent (and singular) association between families and oppression/exclusion. Studies that only critique geographically specific heteronormative nuclear family ideals overlook other political and ethical registers through which other types of families might be critically encountered. To advance this argument, in the next section I examine a range of recent studies of Palestinian families, focusing in large part on those located within the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As I will demonstrate, attending to this specific context reveals a much more messy and complex array of families and family politics than can be accounted for using existing geographical approaches.

Political geographies of Palestinian families

It is important at the outset of this discussion to contextualise Palestinian families, and the ways in which they have become heterogeneous analytical phenomena. Johnson & Abu Nahleh (2004) argue that despite commonly held assumptions about the importance of family in Palestinian society, there is actually little scholarly research on the topic. The reasons for this, they suggest, are tied to the Palestinian condition after the Palestinian *nakba* (catastrophe) in 1948, when Mandatory Palestine was wiped off the map through the creation of the State of Israel, and an estimated 700,000 Palestinians became refugees (Morris 2004). The enforced dispersion of Palestinian families into a variety of different contexts subsequently shaped a variety of different family practices, relations and spacings. This increasing heterogeneity thus became hard to

subsume under the singular analytical framework of *the* Palestinian family (Johnson & Abu Nahleh 2004). Furthermore, after 1948 there was no longer a 'Palestine' (i.e. a recognized nation-state) to anchor studies of Palestinian families. Other Arab nation-states often discouraged research on the Palestinian communities within their midst, (likely because such research would expose the severe neglect of Palestinian refugees and reflect poorly on the host nation). The research that was done with Palestinian communities overwhelmingly focused on historical and political narratives as part of a broader Palestinian nationalist politics (Johnson & Abu Nahleh 2004, see also Taraki & Giacaman 2006, Harker 2011). It is nevertheless worth noting that in recent years this lack of scholarly interest has begun to be addressed, in large part by the Arab Families Working Group. Since 2001, researchers working under the auspices of this project have traced family relations and formations across Palestinian, Lebanese, Egyptian and transnational space (Johnson & Joseph 2009).

The Palestinian family is also an ambiguous subject because even when focusing on one spatial context, such as the West Bank, 'family' is understood and practiced in a number of different, although interrelated, ways. Family relations and spaces may include *aila*, the nuclear or 'small' family; *hamula*, the extended or 'big' family; *qaraba*, or 'closeness', which can refer not only to kinship ties, but also fictive kin articulated through class, location, religion, political affiliation (Johnson et al 2009); and *dar/beit*, the household or home (Jean-Klein 2003). As Johnson (2006) notes, these shifting understandings of family are far from uniform within the Occupied Territories, and also differ in spatial and political contexts beyond the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinian families are also Arab families. In other words, they are partially constituted by discourses about (the importance of) the family that span the Arab world, a regional space that in turn is (re)created and modified by the mobility of families and familial discourses (Naber 2009). Palestinian and Arab families overlap in a number of different ways, not least through the lives and family practices of Palestinians living in a number of Arab states (usually as refugees). However, Palestinian families are also differentiated from other Arab

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families through their various ties to the Palestinian *nakba* (catastrophe) and dispossession that began in 1948. Thinking about the ways in which Palestinian families are more broadly Arab families opens up a series of intellectual resources, albeit ones that must be carefully modified to the specific context in which they are being used. For example, Joseph & Rieker (2008: 3) argue that it is vital to understand Arab families in relation to states, and particularly 'the failure of Arab state-building projects and the contradictory deployment of family structures, within those processes, in the crises of modernity'. This statement holds true for Palestinian families. However, in contrast to other 'Arab' families, most Palestinian families have been at the behest of state forms that are not their own, whether this is the British, Israeli and United Nations regimes in Mandatory Palestine and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or other Arab governments in spaces of exile (i.e. Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, etc). To a great extent this remains the case in the present day Occupied Territories, since Palestinian Authority governance has been severely limited by Israel's continued colonial sovereignty.

Given the variety of different Palestinian family relations and spaces found in different nation-state contexts, this essay focuses mainly on Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. Within this particular context, I argue that three types of politics emerge from (and in turn construct) family spaces and spacings: discursive objectification, resistance and getting by. These political geographic practices are closely interrelated and hard to separate empirically. However, the conceptual separation of these practices illustrates different ways in which Palestinian families have been politically entangled, and also foreshadows discussion later in this paper of the ways in which familial geographies constitute, resist and/or deal with heightened experiences of precarity due to colonization, war and violence.

Discursive objectification

The politics of discursive objectification refers here to the ways in which a discursive object – *the* Palestinian family – is produced, reproduced and circulates within and beyond the Occupied Territories. This object, characterized

as patriarchal and heteronormative, encompasses both the *aila* (nuclear family) and *hamula* (big family, clan), although often the latter that is emphasized. Interpreted as the benign foundation for society or contrastingly, a repressive 'prison house' (Joseph & Reiker 2008), this object is far from natural. Rather, it is rooted in and routed through a particular historical geographical production that spans governance, data production, law, education, media, and everyday life.

Johnson & Moors (2004) suggest that the family has been a key target for different governmental projects in Palestine, whether colonial or national. The role of the *hamula* has been particularly important in this regard. An important part of Ottoman era economic and social life in the Levant (Kimmerling & Migdal 2003), *hamula* identification was reinforced and reinvigorated between 1948 and 1967 by the Jordanian and Egyptian regimes that controlled the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively, as a means of suppressing Palestinian nationalism (Hilal 2006). Israel had a similar goal in mind when it intensified these practices following its invasion of what became the Occupied Territories in 1967. The Village League system (1978-1987), which invested limited forms of power in male heads of particular *hamula*, was the most visible manifestation of this broader aim (Gordon 2008). Subsequently, when discussing family reunification as part of broader negotiations leading to the Oslo Accords in 1993, Israeli officials constructed the Palestinian family as nuclear, in contrast to a Palestinian focus on the *hamula* (Zureik 2001: 219). Following the Oslo Accords, the then newly established Palestinian Authority used the *hamula* as a means of seeking legitimacy to govern, through the establishment of a presidential office for clan affairs (Johnson and Moors 2004). However, as earlier noted, Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories remain largely under the authority of Israeli Occupation. During the second Palestinian *intifada* (uprising), Israel intensified a different form of family-focused colonial governance: home demolitions, deportations and collective punishment all based on family relations (Joseph & Reiker 2008: 2).

Closely connected with governmental projects, statistical data, particularly census data, have been one of the key means through which the Palestinian

family has been discursively constructed. As Reiker et al (2004) note, methods of data collection have been closely tied to colonial and modernizing projects since the British Mandate. Since 1948, the Palestinian family has increasingly been framed as a threat: a demographic 'time-bomb'. Such data-driven discourses, which began in Israel and Jordan, were initially echoed by the head of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics when this institution was created in 1995 (Reiker et al 2004: 189). While this discourse disappeared within the Occupied Territories during the second intifada, as the survival of a Palestinian national polity once again became an existential issue (Ibid), it may yet be making a resurgence following the (relative) lull in militaristic forms of violence (see Taraki 2008).

Data collection, and its roots in particular colonial and modernist epistemes, has also been partially responsible for the discursive elision of family with household. Since the Ottoman era, households rather than families have been enumerated in censuses and surveys (Reiker et al 2004: 192-3). This practice, continued by the British, identified a male 'head of household' to enumerate household members, and thus reiterated and reinforced patriarchal social relations. Furthermore, the focus on household composition ensured that wider notions of family and kinship were lost in data sets. 'Families' were counted, measured, profiled and thus produced in ways disconnected from their everyday, lived realities, but closely connected with a more geographically extensive modern (colonial) nuclear family ideal (Ibid: 195-6).

Law and education have also constructed the Palestinian family. The relations between law and family in the Occupied Territories are complex, and a full review is beyond the scope of this paper (see Johnson & Moors 2004). However, it is worth briefly noting that Shari'a law, while not producing the nuclear family itself, does provide a strong material form to the conjugal tie, since women are entitled to a 'house' (room) of their own when married (Reiker et al 2004: 201). Education, closely intertwined with colonial, national and modernisation projects that have taken place in the Occupied Territories, has also played its part in the construction of the Palestinian family. For example, Ibrahim et al

(2004) note that after Israel invaded the Occupied Territories, (Palestinian) nationalist sentiment in textbooks was quite literally translated into familial sentiment: '"Our unity will frighten the enemy" was replaced by "Our success will please our parents"' (Ibid: 77). After 1948, education became a form of highly desirable social capital, and in some contexts the family became a key enabler of education, as older siblings would work to support the education of younger siblings (Rosenfeld 2004)[1].

Moors (2004) notes that discursive constructions of a homogenous Palestinian family are in tension with divergent everyday practices of different family relations, forms and practices. Nevertheless, the Palestinian family as discursive object is also co-constituted through everyday practices, including a range of symbols, appearances and styles of dress. Such everyday performances of family have become closely connected with mass media discourses of family. This sphere of discursive production spans national, regional and global space, and is one of the ways in which ideas of the 'Arab family' are circulated (El Shakry & Moors 2004). While different discourses of family may be discerned within various forms of media, El Shakry & Moors (2004) suggest that the full complexity of these relations has yet to be fully examined.

As this section indicates, the Palestinian family is a discursive object that has been constituted in a variety of different and often interconnected ways. 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, firmly routed through and rooted in the colonial present (Gregory 2004). As I will discuss at length later in the paper, the family as discursive object works as a frame, or way in which a particular world is made known (Butler 2009). Examining the production of this frame exposes the ways in which 'the Palestinian family' is enmeshed in patriarchal, state and colonial forms of power and violence, and thus offers a platform for (political) opposition to such

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[1] It is important to note the uneven geography of education within the West Bank (Taraki & Giacaman 2006: 32).

family practices and discourses as forms of violence in themselves. However, to only envision Palestinian families through this frame ignores practices through which Palestinian families have enacted political resistance or provided the basis for other forms of political resistance to colonialism and violence.

Resistance

While the Palestinian family as a discursive object is one that has been iteratively produced by a range of colonial and modernization projects, actual family practices have often been a means of responding to prolonged crises (Sayigh 1981). In other words, family practices have enabled *and enacted* forms of anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal resistance. Particularly in relation to Israeli colonisation, some commentators suggest that Palestinian families have been the central source of Palestinian survival and national identity (Johnson & Abu Nahleh 2004: 308). Since 1948, most Palestinian families have lived in nation-state contexts where they have no formal political representation. In such circumstances, the family has become a key protector and form of social authority (Giacaman & Johnson 1989). This remains the case even in the present day Occupied Territories, where the Palestinian Authority wields 'prosthetic sovereignty' only (Weizman 2007). The Palestinian family must therefore be thought about not only as a form of oppression, but also, simultaneously, a form of solidarity (Peteet, cited in Johnson & Joseph 2009)[2]. This politics becomes most easily discernible when focusing on the two most explicitly visible moments of anti-colonial resistance in the Occupied Territories, the two *intifadas* (uprisings). These are also two moments when Palestinians in the Occupied Territories experienced a heightened form of precarity, or exposure to unevenly distributed political violence (Butler 2009).

During the first Palestinian *intifada*, a broad based and largely non-violent uprising that began in 1987, Giacaman & Johnson (1989) note that familial responsibilities such as nurture, defence and assistance were extended to the entire community. For example, many women sought to protect young men from beatings by Israeli soldiers, through the claim 'he is my son' (Ibid.: 161),

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[2] This dual role of the family may also help explain, in part, the durability of *the* Palestinian family as discursive object.

regardless of kinship affiliation. Crucially, this transformation involved the expansion and enlargement of existing roles and spaces – particularly women's roles in relation to the space of home – rather than creating new social-spatial subjects altogether. As family relations and spaces became a key platform for practices of political resistance, relations within families changed, for example restrictions on women's movement relaxed. Jean-Klein (2003) makes a similar argument with regards to popular committees, the purportedly 'new' political forms through which much of the anti-colonial resistance was organised. In contrast to both external and internal discourses that framed popular committees as 'democratic' in opposition to the 'traditional' (and by extension repressive) kinship sociality of the Palestinian family, these committees in fact emerged from, overlapped with and often refreshed and remade existing familial relations. In particular, the first *intifada* transformed intergenerational relations, as young men usurped the power of their father, and mothering, as maternal sacrifice was used to demand equal rights for women (see Johnson & Abu Nahleh 2004: 313-6 for fuller discussion). As I will argue later in the paper using the work of Butler (2009), we might understand some of these family practices as constituting an ethical response to heightened exposure to violence. The concomitant transformations of family might also be thought about as enlarging the sphere of ethical responsiveness.

The second Palestinian *intifada*, a more militarized uprising beginning in 2000, was conducted by a small subset of the population - groups of armed young men. This second uprising created a crisis in masculinity that affected familial relations (as a new generation of young men supplanted the authority of older men who had participated in the first *intifada*), and caused various forms of stress at the level of the household and the community. However, many families were largely audience to, rather than participant in, this anti-colonial struggle (Johnson & Kuttab 2001). Johnson et al's (2009) study of weddings illustrates the different roles families played in the first and second *intifadas*. They note that while marriages were simple and inexpensive during the first uprising, reflecting a broader culture of austerity that all Palestinians participated in, ceremonies during the second uprising involved much more conspicuous consumption.

Reflecting the lack of popular engagement in the second *intifada*, violence was seen as an external threat to the ceremonies and 'ordinary life' more generally (see also Kelly 2008). Hence in the context of the second *intifada*, particular types of familial practices, such as getting married, became a form of resistance to political violence. Unlike the first *intifada*, this was not only resistance to colonial violence, but also to the militarized anti-colonial violence practiced in response to the Israeli Occupation. Jad (2009) nevertheless notes that the rise of group weddings during the second *intifada* was a means through which the dominant Palestinian political parties in the Occupied Territories promoted factional politics. She also notes that group weddings have (re)produced socially conservative beliefs and practices, particularly with regards to gender dynamics within families.

In addition to family as a mode of resistance during the *intifadas* in the Occupied Territories, it is also useful to briefly examine family as a form of resistance in spaces of exile and refuge. Kuttab (2004: 154) notes that Palestinian refugees were often families (unlike migrants who tend to be individuals), and kinship groups often settled together in exile. While other Palestinian spaces and institutions of belonging and identity were destroyed in 1948, the family was a durable and portable relational form; hence Sayigh (1981) asserts that the Palestinian family is a response to a crisis, not a cultural remnant. The expansion of family relations, by marrying into host communities, has been a means of surviving exile (Kuttab 2004). Family relations have also enabled 'return' to the spaces of Mandatory Palestine, now Israel, through marriage (Ibid) or prior to 2000, family reunification (Zureik 2001). While such processes have not necessarily challenged the heteronormative patriarchal family – Kuttab (2004) suggests that women remain the 'shock absorbers' within refugee families – they have been a means through which colonialism and inhospitable state regimes have been resisted. Thus, as I will argue at length in the second half of this paper, while such refugee families may enable a politics that alleviates heightened exposure to violence, it does not necessarily follow that family practices are a source of ethical responsiveness to this precarity.

In each of these contexts (i.e. first intifada, second intifada, refuge), family relations and practices have been an important means through which war, colonial oppression and exile have been resisted by Palestinians. Furthermore, in each context, families as forms of resistance have different relations with the patriarchal heteronormative family ideal. As Jean-Klein (2003) illustrates, during the first *intifada* popular committees, enabled by family relations and spaces, transformed those families by challenging some patriarchal relationships and the practices associated with them. In the contexts of refuge studied by Kuttab (2004), changing family compositions did not transform gender relations within families. In the second intifada, family practices that resisted violence (re)produced socially conservative beliefs and practices with regards to gender relations within families (Jad 2009). Palestinian families are thus potent forms of political resistance in each of these three contexts, but the resulting family politics differs in each instance. As I will suggest later in the paper, taken together these family practices therefore offer an alternative frame through which Palestinian families might be known, which disrupts the discursive objectification (or framing) of *the* Palestinian family described earlier. However, only some of the family practices revealed by this disruption are potentially sources of ethical responsiveness. The next section also explores family practices that disrupt the frame of *the* Palestinian family, albeit through a different means of being political.

Getting by

Studies of getting married during the second *intifada*, which focus on one way in which Palestinians in the Occupied Territories have attempted to maintain an 'ordinary' life amidst extra-ordinary conditions (Kelly 2008, Johnson et al 2009), reveal a third form of political practice that is not entirely subsumed within either discursive productions of *the* Palestinian family or various enactments of resistance to colonial and state power. Drawing on Allen's (2008: 457) work, I term this type of political practice 'getting by':

> The kind of agency expressed by most Palestinians was neither military resistance to occupation… nor organized resistance to the prevailing

political power of the PA [Palestinian Authority] or social norms of nationalism. The kind of agency entailed in practices whereby people manage, get by, and adapt was simply "getting used to it."

Getting by is similar to what Bayat (2010: 19-20) terms 'the quiet encroachment of the ordinary', whereby the collective actions of non-collective actors seek change in practical and pragmatic ways. It is not a politics of protest, targeted at a perceived external source of power, but a politics of redress that seeks to directly change things on the ground (Ibid). In the context of the Occupied Territories, a politics of getting by is one that currently takes place amidst the Israeli Occupation, but doesn't take the Occupation, or resistance to the Occupation, as its start or end point (see also Harker 2011).

One example of this politics in relation to families is Palestinian men who built Israeli settlement-colonies during the second *intifada* (Kelly 2008). While such labour contradicted broader Palestinian nationalist politics and forms of anti-colonial resistance, these men did this work in order to feed their families. While acts such as this may be interpreted as forms of acquiescence to the colonial regime, Kelly (2008) argues that they can be understood as efforts to live an 'ordinary' life in conditions of extraordinary violence and economic hardship. Slightly less ambiguous politics of getting by are evident in the practices and spaces of mobility during the second *intifada*. This includes checkpoint economies through which commerce and public space are articulated despite barriers to movement (Hammami 2004, 2010) and journeys around the West Bank that maintain familial relations (Harker 2009). Post-Oslo movement restrictions and the fragmentation of Palestinian space in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which intensified after 2000, also produced new forms of localism that in turn reinvigorated the importance of the spatially co-present family (Johnson 2006). Migration beyond the West Bank provides families with another way of getting by the occupation (Hilal 2006, Harker 2010), even as such migrant practices have historical roots stretching far beyond the Israeli Occupation.

Recent work in and around Ramallah (Taraki 2008, Abourahme 2009, Harker 2010) has also highlighted how refiguring the family as nuclear (*aila*) enables forms of intergenerational getting by through interconnected investments in education, consumption and transnational mobility. While this transformation is decidedly middle class, analogous processes have been reported in refugee camps, where refugees refigure the physical and symbolic spaces of the camp while maintaining the political right to return (Abourahme & Hilal 2009).

These practices of getting by, many of which are familial in motivation or method, expose another style of familial politics. While they do not constitute an orchestrated or organised politics of protest, they have enabled meaningful forms of political change as families deal with the violence of Occupation and war. As I will explore later in the paper, practices of getting by enable a reduction in exposure to heightened precarity, and in the case of the movement/migration, such political strategies are explicitly geographical. However, these political changes are often unremarkable and unremarked upon because they are 'ordinary' (i.e. part of the practice of everyday life), and 'quiet' (i.e. emerging from disparate and non-unified sources). Family practices of getting by, like family practices of resistance, also disrupt the discursive objectification (frame) of *the* Palestinian family.

Pluralized politics of family

The family practices and politics described in the first section of this paper are undoubtedly more complex, nuanced and fragmented than this review suggests. Even the descriptive categories used (i.e. discursive objectification, resistance and getting by) are inadequate attempts to corral an always excessive plurality of familial political spacings for the purposes of analysis. However, these categories and the discussion they enable, illustrate an extensive range of Palestinian family practices that in turn intersect other political practices in various ways. This plurality of intersections clearly exceeds existing attempts by geographers to engage familial spatial politics, which have thus far sought only to critique the discursive deployments of 'the family' (and thus the ways in which families are discursively objectified through and within particular spaces).

As the focus on Palestine in this section makes clear, families are immersed in a whole host of geographical processes. The next section outlines one way for geographers to gain some conceptual purchase on these intersections, through Judith Butler's (2009) recent work on the possibilities for political and ethical responses to violence. As I will outline, Butler's work requires greater geographical sensitivity, something that can be achieved by putting it into conversation with the studies of Palestinian families covered thus far. However, Butler's argument is nevertheless useful for linking social ontology (a world of more-than-individual subjects) with an ethics of precarity (a world in which 'we' must respond to unevenly distributed exposure to violence). I argue that this discussion not only helps conceptualise the complex, messy forms of familial political discourses and practices described above, but also offers a means of envisioning particular family spacings as a source of ethical engagement.

An ontology of precariousness and precarity

The challenge of recognizing and forging a response to Israeli state violence against Palestinians, itself motivated in part by 'a certain Jewish value of social justice', is one that has animated Judith Butler's recent work (Butler 2010: n.p.; see also Butler 2004, Butler & Spivak 2007). Such concerns provide one of the contexts, in *Frames of War*, for a broader examination of the political and ethical problem of responding effectively to violence (Butler 2009). In this text, Butler (2009:1) begins with the proposition that 'specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living'. This in turn leads to an epistemological problem – how we apprehend (or fail to apprehend) lives – and an ontological question:

> '*What is a life?* The "being" of life is itself constituted through selective means; as a result, we cannot refer to this "being" outside of the operations of power, and we must make more precise the specific mechanisms of power through which life is produced' (Ibid., emphasis in original).

As Butler develops the argument that questions around the ontology of life must be addressed in relation to power, the importance of thinking the ontology of life socially is made explicitly clear.

> To refer to "ontology" in this regard is not to lay claim to a description of fundamental structures of being that are distinct from any and all social and political organization. On the contrary, none of these terms exist outside of their political organization and interpretation (Ibid.: 2).

While Butler does not explicitly define her use of the term social organization in relation to life, she does go on to suggest that:

> The "being" of this body to which this ontology refers is one that is always given over to others, to norms, to social and political organizations that have developed historically… to be a body is to be exposed to social crafting and form, and that is what makes the ontology of the body a social ontology (Ibid.: 2-3).

Butler's discussion therefore might be seen to resonate with concerns, noted earlier in this paper, about social science's prioritization of individual subjects over more-than-individual social relations. And as the prior discussion of Palestinian families (particularly in relation to the politics of discursive objectification) makes clear, family is one means through which bodies are always already given over to others and to social norms. One consequence of this social ontology, Butler argues, is that all life is precarious.

> Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous. These are not necessarily relations of love or even of

care, but constitute obligations towards others, most of whom we cannot name and do not know, and who may or may not bear traits of familiarity to an established sense of who 'we' are (Ibid.: 14).

If we take the precariousness of life as a point of departure, then there is no life without the need for shelter and food, no life without dependency on wider networks of sociality and labor (Ibid.: 24-5).

Precariousness is therefore an ontological condition common to all life[3]. This dependency of all life on 'wider networks of sociality and labor' (Ibid) therefore offers one explanation for the persistence of family as a form of intimacy (Morgan 1996; Valentine 2008). However, the concept of precariousness does not explain why certain subjects and populations experience a greater risk of death and injury than others. To capture this differential exposure, Butler introduces the concept of precarity: the 'politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (Ibid.:25). Precariousness, common to all life, and precarity, the politically induced differential exposure to violence and suffering, 'are intersecting concepts' (Ibid), a claim that reinforces Butler's argument that it is not possible to divorce ontology from social and political context.

However, Butler never explicitly states how we might understand precarity's 'differential', aside from a general reference to political process. A prior reference to 'differential *distribution* of precarity' (Ibid.; my emphasis) suggests that it is possible to understand differential precarity not simply in social and economic terms, but also geographically. In the earlier discussion of Palestinian families, the different time-*spaces* in which those families are enmeshed are a key factor for understanding their different experiences of violence. The precarity experienced by female family members in the Occupied Territories during the 1st *intifada*, where equal rights for women were demanded (Jean-Klein 2003), differs from experiences in spaces of refuge, where women remain

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[3] I return to the ethical implications of this statement later in the paper.

'shock absorbers' (Kuttab 2004). Time-*spaces* also play an active role in reducing and/or alleviating exposure to precarity, through enabling and constituting particular political practices. For example, the space of the home during the 1st *intifada* enabled practices of resistance (Jean-Klein 2003). This spatialized understanding of precarity's distribution might be said to constitute a generous reading of Butler's thesis, an argument that requires fuller examination.

Spacing Butler's social ontology

As Butler outlines her social ontology in *Frames of War*, space is consistently downplayed or overlooked altogether. The very subtitle of her book – *when* is life grievable? – suggests a temporal rather than spatio-temporal approach (i.e. when *and where* is life grievable?) to the questions she poses. Butler's (2009: 4) 'historically contingent ontology' outlined in the previous section, for the most part lacks explicit spatial expression or extension. This ontology draws on earlier work on the performative logics responsible for the production of the subject (Butler 1990, 1993), work that has been critiqued for its lack of spatial attentiveness (Gregson & Rose 2000, Nelson 1999, Pratt 2004). Butler's (continued) spatial inattentiveness in *Frames of War* is clearest in the discussion of framing. Framing, as Butler outlines it, describes the ways in which we come to know particular worlds, and subjects within those worlds. A frame is a 'way of organizing and presenting a deed [that] leads to an interpretative conclusion about the deed itself' (2009: 8). As Butler goes on to argue, frames are never stable. 'The frame does not hold anything together in one place, but itself becomes a kind of perpetual breakage, subject to a *temporal* logic by which it moves from place to place' (Ibid.: 10; my emphasis). At this moment in her argument, which is crucial for understanding how epistemologies of war, violence and life are performative, place is clearly articulated as a derivative of time. Place is proscribed a static logic and passive agency, while time is active and dynamic (c.f. Massey 2005).

However, I argue that framing must be thought about geographically, which is to say operating according to a *spatio*-temporal logic. In the first half of this paper I suggested that there are a range of Palestinian family politics, and different ways

in which Palestinian families resist and/or deal with heightened exposure to precarity. These differences are not only distributed temporally (e.g. the 1st and 2nd *intifadas*), but also spatially (families living in the Occupied Territories and in spaces of refuge). This framing of Palestinian families operates according to a spatio-temporal, not simply temporal, logic. Moving between these time-spaces – a 'perpetual breakage' of the frame (Butler 2009: 10) in which space like time is active – unsettles the framing of the Palestinian family as a particular kind of discursive object: patriarchal and heteronormative. It helps us to see the different sorts of political work that Palestinian families accomplish. Thus this understanding of framing is closely linked to a geographical understanding of precarity. The frame of the patriarchal, heteronormative family living under Occupation is not only broken by foregrounding different types of political work (i.e. resistance, getting by) but also, crucially, where and when such political work occurs. The iterative production/disruption of particular frames is inherently temporal *and spatial*. [4]

This argument for the inherent spatiality of framing is borne out in other aspects of Butler's thesis, if only implicitly. For instance, in the discussion of framing, the language of displacement Butler uses – 'moves' – betrays the importance of spatiality to the logic she describes simply as temporal. The 'social' that forms the primary context for her argument in *Frames of War*, has a particular geography - the United States - and at various points this is made clear (see for example Butler 2009: 24, 47-8, 124-132). The language she uses when discussing precariousness - 'dependency' 'reciprocity', 'obligation' and 'networks' – can, and has been, read in explicitly spatial ways (see Amin 2002, Massey 2005, Barnett et al 2010). And as I have suggested her ideas around the differential distribution of precarity may be understood spatially.

Hence, while Butler's social ontology in *Frames of War* ignores space as a concept, I think a generous reading of her work – one that understands framing,

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[4] For another example of the *spatio*-temporal logic of framing, see Falah et al's (2006) study of how Arab news media contested US representations of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a 'just war'. It is precisely a spatial movement, from one regional context to another, which unsettles the frame of 'just war'.

differential distribution and obligation as spatial terms - can rearticulate a social ontology of life that is also resolutely geographical. This reworking illuminates my previous discussion of Palestinian families in two ways. First, the resultant *spatialized* social ontology helps conceptualize how subjects are differentially exposed to precarity, and the social 'work' done by families (and other more-than-individual subjects) to sustain life in conditions of heightened exposure to violence, injury and death. In the empirical context outlined earlier in the paper, family has been a key means through which both Palestinian subjects *and Palestinian spaces* in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have been exposed to colonial power and violence (e.g. the Village League system). In the same context, family practices *and spaces* have also been an important means of reducing, or dealing with, this heightened exposure to precarity. This includes practices of resistance during the first *intifada* that extended family relations to broader communities and simultaneously expanded family practices beyond the space of the home (Giacaman & Johnson 1989; Jean-Klein 2003), and practices of getting by during the second *intifada* that maintained familial relations through particular spatial strategies, such as moving around the Occupied Territories (Harker 2009) or migrating (Hilal 2006).

Second, Butler's epistemological argument also helps make family visible in particular ways, if the instability of frames is thought about in *spatio*-temporal terms. As I have argued earlier in the paper, the patriarchal heteronormative family has been a key frame for interpreting Palestinian society. Indeed, in a great deal of Orientalist discourse, the Palestinian family is cited as a 'prison house', or in other words, one of the causes for the heightened exposure to precarity experienced, particularly by female family members. However, a closer examination of these processes of discursive objectification reveals a series of Orientalist, colonial and nationalist geographies that work to maintain such a frame (and the existence of such families). In this context, exploring family-based practices of resistance and getting by works to disrupt this frame, unmooring assumptions about Palestinian families by foregrounding their role in *reducing* or *alleviating* exposure to politically induced violence, injury and death. The differential distribution of such Palestinian family practices over time and space,

and the role of particular time-spaces in producing certain types of political practice, in turn demonstrates the importance of a *geographical* conception of framing.

An ethics of family

I have argued that a geographically inflected reading of Butler's social ontology of precariousness and precarity, and her epistemology of framing, help conceptualize the geographical relationships in which families are enmeshed. In this section I want to push Butler's work further, to suggest that it can be used to envision ways in which particular family practices might be a source of ethical responsiveness to the geographically differential distribution and experience of precarity.

Butler's (2009: 14) definition of precariousness as an ontological condition explicitly demands an ethics of reciprocity and obligations towards others. She suggests that we are dependent on 'people we know, or barely know, or know not at all' (Ibid). If Butler's social ontology permits no 'I' without an ontologically prior 'we', then the ethical thrust of her argument is that acknowledging the precariousness of life means this 'we', (inherently unstable and ambiguous), has a series of obligations to not just known, but also unknown others. This argument must be understood with regards to her broader discussion of state violence and contemporary war. It is made in opposition to cultural discourses that fold distance (both physical and intimate) into difference, and thus legitimate the heightened exposure of unknown 'others' to precarity (see also Gregory 2004). By contrast, Butler's ethics of precarity demands that we are responsive to all 'others', known and unknown, a demand that resonates closely with efforts to think about ethical responsibility as a geographical responsibility (Massey 2005, Sparke 2007).

Butler's ethics of precarity rests on the assumption that 'we' are more ethically responsive to those who are known to 'us'. This assumption is more clearly manifest when Butler (2009: 32) calls for the creation of 'new coalitions', which

constantly expanded the boundaries of the 'we'. The implicit assumption and promise of this argument is that 'we' act ethically towards those who 'we' consider part of 'us'. Therefore, ethical practice must involve continually displacing stable identities - disrupting any established notion of the 'we' – in order to draw more subjects into this ethically responsive space of the 'we'.

> The "we" does not, and cannot, recognize itself… it is riven from the start, interrupted by alterity… and the obligations "we" have are precisely those that disrupt any established notion of the "we" (Ibid: 14).

While it is possible to question the ethics of a 'we' that continually incorporates alterity (see Jazeel 2011), I want to examine what happens to an already constituted 'we' in the process of disrupting stable identities and forming 'new coalitions'.

I have argued that Palestinian families played key roles in reducing heightened exposure to precarity in a range of contexts, but these family-subjects changed in different ways according to these contexts. During the first intifada, Palestinian family practices in the Occupied Territories provide a good illustration of how existing subject forms (Butler's 'we') may be the basis for creating 'new constituencies', in this case popular committees. As Jean-Klein (2003) illustrates, existing family relations were not only the condition of possibility for these new entanglements, but these new constituencies also transformed families at the level of practice. Thus Palestinian families were a source of ethical responsiveness. In the contexts of refuge, Kuttab (2004) shows how family has been an important means of responding to crisis, allowing access to political rights or territory. However, while this response has taken place through changing family compositions, it has not transformed family practices, as women remain the 'shock absorbers' (Kuttab 2004). In this instance, practices that have alleviated heightened exposure to violence, injury and death have emerged from the creation of new families. However, these new families are not 'new ethical coalitions', in the manner envisioned by Butler, since the family form itself has not changed. In the second intifada, families practices have again been a means

of resisting violence, whether the violence of the colonial occupation or the militarized anti-colonial uprising. However, these practices have not opened the familial 'we' to new constituencies, but rather sought to entrench it through the production of socially conservative beliefs and practices with regards to gender relations (Jad 2009).

There are two important implications emerging from this discussion. First, while only some family practices - the exchanges between families and popular committees during the first *intifada* - offer a means of envisioning Butler's (2009: 32) 'new coalitions', such practices nevertheless suggest that family *can* be a source of ethical responsiveness. In the context of Palestine, it may be suggested that popular committees more properly represent such 'new coalitions'. However, I follow Jean-Klein (2003) in arguing that this view doesn't adequately account for the continued importance of family. Therefore the 'new' in 'new coalitions' must be understood as the transformation of existing social-spatial relations, rather than the creation of radically different ones. This is in keeping with Butler's ethics, which is based on a performative notion of 'we' that requires and produces constant, iterative disruption. Such an understanding both underscores the continued importance of family as *a* (potential) source of ethical responsiveness, and suggests that family as a source of ethical responsiveness might be linked with other (post-colonial, queer, workers') struggles to reduce heightened exposure to economic and social precarity.

Second, as is clear from the discussion of Palestinian family practices that played key roles in reducing exposure to precarity without being refigured into 'new coalitions', family is only ever a *contingent* source of ethical responsiveness to differential precarity. Furthermore, forms of getting by that involve families in Ramallah investing more in the nuclear, rather than extended family (Taraki 2008), suggest that in some contexts exposure to precarity can be reduced by 'shrinking' the 'we' of ethical reciprocity and obligation. It is precisely this range of different family spacings, and their different political and ethical potentials, which demands a more nuanced approach to family than is currently adopted by

geographers. What is also clear is that a spatially attentive approach to families is vital if we are to account for the complexity of these empirical moments.

Conclusion

I have argued that relations between familial geographies, politics and ethics are far more complex than geographers have accounted for thus far. In the Palestinian context that served as the extended case study for this argument, 'the family' - patriarchal and heteronormative – is geographically and historically specific, produced in part by colonial and modernist political discourses and practices. However, family spatial practices have also been an important means through Palestinians have resisted and got by war, colonial oppression and exile. To better explain this variegated political-geographic domain of family, I employed a spatially attentive reading of Butler's (2009) ontology of precariousness and ethics of precarity. Using Palestinian families themselves to spatialise Butler's (2009) work allowed, in turn, conceptualisation of the ways in which families play key roles in reducing heightened exposure to precarity, albeit in different ways in different contexts. However, with regards to Palestine, only in one of these contexts (i.e. the first *intifada*) did families produce social relations that are akin to the 'new' ethical coalitions Butler envisions, a 'we' that is constantly disrupted and transformed. Given this complexity of political and ethical practices, it is therefore vital for geographers to approach families in ways that take account of the multiple, contingent relations between family spacings, politics and ethics.

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