On (not) forgetting families: family spaces and spacings in Birzeit, Palestine.

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Abstract

This paper is a response to Valentine's (2008) recent suggestion that the family is an absent presence within Geography. Persuaded by her argument, I explore other disciplinary approaches to theorizing families, and in particular how discursive appropriations of 'the family' and theories of family practices can enlarge our understandings of what families are and how they are done. I then argue that geographers can contribute to such studies by exploring the spaces and spacings that co-constitute family subjectivities. I put these ideas to work in the context of Birzeit, Palestine, where I argue particular family spaces and spacings offer more nuanced understandings of this place, which challenge limited discursive constructions of the 'Arab family' and the 'Western family. I situate these theoretical maneuvers within broader geographies of intimacies, while arguing that there is still a great deal of work to be done to further spatialize our understandings of families.

Introduction

Kadeen: This is my younger brother here.

[Pause to say hi].

Kadeen: You were asking about my older brother?[1]

My recently completed research project in Birzeit, Palestine was initially conceived, even after my first visit to the 'field', as an investigation into different homes and mobilities. However, when I began my main period of field research, it quickly became apparent during my participation observant and interviews that I needed, in some way, to reckon with the concept of family too. People living in Birzeit constantly talked about their families in relation to home spaces, and often the different mobilities that they enacted revolved around living with or visiting family members. For instance, Khaled, a twenty-year-old student, suggested he would only build a home when he wanted to get married and start a family. Haifa, a woman in her eighties, lived in Birzeit for roughly six months every year. During the other six months, normally in the winter, she traveled between and stayed with her adult children's families in America and Canada. As my interview transcripts – '[Pause to say hi]' – indicate to me now, by passing over family too quickly,

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[1] In this paper I draw on eleven months of ethnographic research (participant observation and interviews) conducted between 2005 and 2007 in the village of Birzeit, just north of Ramallah in the centre of the West Bank. All participants have been given pseudonyms. Given the discussion of this paper, it is also important to state that due to social norms in this context, a great deal of my participation observation and many of the interviews were conducted with men. Therefore a masculine perspective inflects the account of intimate relations that I have produced here.

I was bracketing out a great deal. And as Valentine (2008) has recently noted, it was not the first time a geographer has done this.

In this paper I want to think more carefully about the relationships between different spaces and families. I will argue that focusing specifically on interconnected family spaces (contexts, timings, relations, flows) and spacings (the processes through which family spaces emerge) nuances both understandings of how various geographies emerge through practice, and how families are inherently spatial. This argument is put to work in the context of particular family discourses and practices in Birzeit, Palestine. I explore how the resultant spaces and spacings offer a more complex understanding of the relationships between Palestine, Palestinians and the Israeli Occupation rooted in everyday lives. I also argue that these analytic insights about family and families in Palestine can contribute to broader efforts to emphasize the collective and interrelated spaces of subjectivity.

Families and geographies

Given the importance of families to the geographies I was interested in, I wonder now why it took me so long to recognize the role that these families played. Perhaps this initial oversight could be explained by a lack of preparation on my part. Johnson's (2006: 92) survey data suggests that over 50% of people in the central West Bank living in apartments or attached dwellings share these residences with relatives (c.f. over 90% in southern West Bank and 80% in Gaza). She also points out that this data is consistent with a previously conducted statistical analysis (in 1992), in which an average of 75% of households in multihousehold buildings across the West Bank and Gaza share the space

only with relatives. These statistics demonstrate that there is a great deal of overlap between living spaces and family spaces in Palestine. Other researchers have also noted the important role played by Palestinian families in processes of urbanization (Taraki 2008), education (Rosenfeld 2004) and migration (Hilal 2006).

However, while a lack of preparation for research is (perhaps) a common phenomenon, I think in this instance there was another reason why it took me some time to grasp the importance of family. As Valentine (2008: 2098) has recently suggested, the family as an object of study remains something of an 'absent presence' within the discipline of geography. Simply put, families and family spaces have by and large not been the focus of much critical geographical attention in and of themselves[2]. They are usually in the background, playing a supporting role to a whole host of other geographies. To give two examples: this is the case in feminist work on social reproduction and care that Valentine (Ibid: 2100-1) cites, and in non-feminist economic geographies where the family is aggregated to household level income (e.g. Leinbach et al 1992, Moran et al 1996). Other social sciences such as Anthropology and Sociology have, by contrast, explored the concept and practices of family extensively.

In this paper I want to mine some of this extra-disciplinary scholarship for resources that help theorize some of the family practices and spaces I encountered in Birzeit. In taking

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[2] There are a few exceptions to this general tendency, and I cite most of them at different points in this essay. One study I do not cite elsewhere is Duncan & Smith's (2002) use of the national census to map different family formations in the UK, which they quantify through the activities of partnering and parenting. Significantly, the heterosexual couple/dependent housewife is the norm through/against which these measures are established. Their method is useful because it disrupts national and regionally based assumptions about family formations in favour of more situated local differences, although their system of measurement reinforces more 'conventional' definitions of family.

an approach that explicitly chooses to continue working with concepts of family, I depart from Nash (2005) and Valentine (2008), who have both sought to broaden debates about collective subjectivities and more-than-individual forms of engagement through concepts of geographies of 'relatedness' and 'intimacy' respectively. Both these arguments move away from focusing on family because of long-held suspicions about the power heteronormative family idea(l)s wield within contemporary social formations and discourses (see also Puar 2007), and their ability to homogenize and delegitimize morally, socially and legally a wide variety of other intimate relations. Nash and Valentine's interventions depart from normative scriptings of kin relations and destabilize hierarchies of belonging through recognizing and proliferating other forms of material, social and affective dis/connection. While I am highly sympathetic to the political impetus of such a maneuver, I think there is also a great deal to be gained from pausing, to more fully understand how family spaces and spacings are created, maintained, negotiated and altered. Morgan (1996) suggests that proliferating forms of intimacy and individualism over the past fifty years within the (implicitly) minority world contexts that form the backdrop of Nash and Valentine's arguments, have (perhaps counter intuitively) ensured the resurgence of family as an important social concept, albeit one that is practiced in increasingly differentiated ways (see also Strathern 2005). As I will argue, in the majority world[3] context in which I am working, families are one of the key ways in which people deal with highly uneven topologies of power, primarily life under occupation. Furthermore, I will argue that there are various moments of intersection and

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[3] In this essay I use the term majority world to refer to what is otherwise known as the Global South, where the numerical majority of the world's population lives, and the minority world to what is otherwise known as Global North. Recognizing the limitations of these terms, I use them provisionally to indicate differential positionings in more extensive ('global') topologies of power (see Nagar 2009).

fracture, where families in Birzeit trouble any easy and clear-cut separation between minority and majority worlds, even as they inhabit the spaces created by this distinction. While the work that has been done on families in other academic disciplines is extensive, there is still a great deal of scope for more spatially attentive approaches. My attempt here to begin unpacking some of the spatial 'work' that family does, is therefore intended as a(nother) step in opening up some of the specific spaces and spacings that are both implicated in and fundamental to families and family practices. Having thus argued for a more sustained exploration of families, I nevertheless think that my approach, and geographies of families more generally, can still contribute to the broader scholarly projects that Nash (2005) and Valentine (2008) seek to advance.

The remainder of the paper will proceed in two parts. The first part builds on Valentine's (2008) summary of family focused work, in which she traces how feminist geographies of social reproduction, sociologists of risk, and geographies of caring (particularly childcare) have all begun, implicitly or explicitly, to think through family spacings and practices. My aim is not to recapitulate her work but rather extend it by thinking about how we might begin to theorize family. Therefore, I briefly examine some of the (often interconnected) ways in which social scientists in disciplines other than geography have thought about families and 'the family'. This section explores how 'the family' is produced as a discursive object, how different families are practiced, and the connections between such practices and discourses. The second section of the paper puts these understandings of family to work in the context of my research in Palestine. This approach allows me to understand some of the family spaces and spacings I encountered

in Birzeit, and to argue for greater consideration of such spacings within theorizations of family. I also explore how working with a very particular set of intimate geographies can broaden our understandings of living in Palestine, including the ways in which some family practices connect and shatter majority and minority worlds, and are means of both literally and figuratively 'getting by' (Allen 2008) the Israeli Occupation.

Discourses of 'the family'

Discussing geographies of sexuality, Valentine (2008: 2099) suggests that little work has been done on familial and other types of personal relationships by scholars working in this area precisely because 'a critique of traditional patriarchal and hetero-normative models of 'the family' (e.g. Bell 1991; Bell and Binnie 2000) … has been a foundation of, and inspiration for, much feminist and queer writing within the discipline'. 'The family' in this case refers to a discursive production, or set of productions that establish a particular set of norms about what families are and how they should be done. Examples include what Ong (1999: 143) terms 'family romances', 'the collective and unconscious images of family order that underlie public politics' in Asia, which inform a whole series of intimate and governmental relations. Gillis' (1996: xv) phrase, the 'imagined family we live by', also emphasizes that such discursive norms are not only ongoing and constantly reaffirmed achievements, but also extremely and extensively productive. Foucault (1978: 100), referring obliquely to Europe during the 18th and 19th century, suggests that 'the family organization, precisely to the extent that it was insular and heteromorphous with respect to the other power mechanisms, was used to support the great "maneuvers" employed for the Malthusian control of birthrate, for the populationist incitements, for the medicalization of sex and the psychiatrization of its nongenital

forms'. Donzelot (1979) builds on Foucault's method to define the family 'not as a point of departure, as a manifest reality, but as a moving resultant, an uncertain form whose intelligibility can only come from studying the system of relations it maintains within the sociopolitical level' (Ibid: xxv). Other work on productions of the family as discursive norm has tended to focus on the national scale (Farrell 1999, Tadmor 2001), including geographical studies of the ways family discourses emerge in relation to the nation vis-a-vis heteronormativity (Puar 2007, Oswin 2010), law and legal process (Martin forthcoming) and domestic and foreign policies (Cowen & Gilbert 2007).

Academic scholarship, as a set of discursive formations, has also produced 'the family'. Of particular interest in the context of my own research, Sherif-Trask (2006) has suggested families in the Middle East are often homogenized through scholarly discourses of the 'Arab', 'Islamic' and/or 'Oriental' family, terms that are frequently used interchangeably. These terms not only essentialize different Islamic or Arab contexts, but also foreground culture or religion, and only culture and religion, as the conceptual lenses through which families are envisioned. Sherif-Trask argues that this staging can implicitly lead to cultural/religious determinism, which when juxtaposed with 'Western' family studies and their focus on agency, functions as a form of Orientalist othering. Noting that there has been significant research on family planning and demography - both venues for/of biopolitical power – but little else, she opines that broader Orientalist framings of the Middle East may also promote the assumption that families in the Middle East have been 'understood' (since they are 'static', 'eternal', see Said 1978). Hence she

concludes that if there is a scholarly field of study specifically about Middle Eastern families, it is still in its infancy (although see Johnson & Joseph 2009).

Joseph's (1993, 1999a, 1999b) work provides an exception to this more general critique. She has written extensively about the ways in which a particularly powerful family norm is established in Lebanon, which she terms 'patriarchal connectivity'. This concept signifies the ways in which age and gender are the basis for kinship mobilization, law, and forms of social understanding that create patriarchal privilege. The spatial context for Joseph's argument is important. She argues that '[i]n both scholarly research and popular culture, the centrality of family in the Arab world has been so axiomatic that there has been relatively little problematizing of the psychodynamics of family life' (1999a: 9). While she is interested in the cleavage between family discourses and family practices, she also negotiates the interrelated problems of universal ideas of family that are implicitly Western and ethnocentric, and the cultural relativist approaches that extend from and contribute to Orientalist processes of division. Patriarchal connectivity may be a concept that travels, but it changes as it does so, and acquires specific meaning in the lives (and hence practices) of particular working class families (Joseph 1993) and brother-sister relationships (Joseph 1999b) in Camp Trad, Lebanon.

One of the strengths of Joseph's ethnographic based approach, as with other ethnographies of relatedness (for an overview see Franklin & McKinnon 2001; Carsten 2000, 2004; Parkin & Stone 2004, and within geography Nash 2005, Power 2008) is that it is able to show how family normative discourses are sometimes extended, sometimes

disrupted through particular sets of material practices. Joseph's work is notable for

exploring how normative family discourses are themselves re/produced through sets of

practices in addition to discursive statements (to the extent that these can be

disentangled)[4].

Family practices

Joseph's work and many other recent kinship studies overlap with recent sociological

approaches to studying families. Within this literature, Morgan's (1996, 1999) work on

family practices has been important. Morgan (1999:16) suggests that we need to think

about family as an adjective or a verb rather than a noun - something that is continually

done - and so he uses the term family practices. The addition of the term 'practices'

captures the dynamic, active ways in which families continually perform themselves, in

different social contexts. He suggests that exploring practices allows researchers to

jettison preconceived notions of what families are, and instead look at the everyday,

situated, routine (and I might add ritualistic) ways in which different families are done

differently. While this method doesn't seek to establish how family norms are produced

(at least as outlined in Morgan 1996, 1999), it nevertheless recognizes that family

practices are situated in and take place through more temporally and spatially extensive

social discourses around the family. Morgan's approach not only establishes family as an

important practice to study in its own right (and not simply as a derivative of processes

such as immigration, home-making, gender relations), but also responds to the ways in

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[4] Ong's (1999) work on transnational Asian migrant families also focuses on this, although it is significant that many scholars who have subsequently built on this work focus on experiences of transnationalism rather than family practices (although see Waters 2002).

which the term family has endured and is still meaningful as a description of quite different ways in which kinship relations are done.

Morgan's concept of family practices has been embraced, extended and specified in studies of working at home (Seymour 2007), sibling practices (Edwards et al 2006), and display, or the ways in which practices of family are not only done, but to different extents are required to be recognized (made meaningful) as family practices by others and the families themselves (Finch 2007). Geographers have also begun to use this work to think about the ways in which young people come out as a member of a family and a process that families experience to a certain extent collectively (Valentine et al 2003), and the production of particular transnational migrant spaces by families (Waters 2002). These approaches focus on families in their various heterogeneous contexts rather than 'the family', which by its nature as discursive norm seeks singularity. However, many of these studies do recognize the pervasiveness of discursive norms about family, while seeking to hold these norms in tension with more varied sets of practices.

Anthropological and Sociological studies offer a means of theorizing families as dynamic material and affective social formations that emerge from intersecting discursive formations and situated practices. It is clear that space is very important in many of these studies, although usually this is implicitly so. Family discourses and practices not only vary across space, but are themselves inherently spatializing. I therefore use the terms *family spaces* - the formations, relations and flows that manifest and are manifested by families - and *family spacings* - the processes through which family spaces emerge – to

foreground the importance of space in discursively infused practices of family. These terms (family spaces and spacings) are heuristic, analytically separating things that are thoroughly and inextricably intertwined. In the following section I put them to work and develop them in the context of Palestine, and particularly my own ethnographic research in Birzeit.

Family spaces in Birzeit

'The family' in Birzeit, and Palestine more broadly (Johnson 2006), is discursively fabricated in two interrelated ways. The first way is as *'a'ila*, the nuclear or 'small' family (or what kinship studies refers to as lineal descent group), discursively produced as father, mother and children (always plural). The second way is as *hamula*, the extended or 'big' family (kinship studies: 'a patronymic group often made up of several patrilineages' (Johnson 2006: 62)), discursively produced as countless cousins, aunts and uncles. These understandings, used and reproduced by people I met in the village, have an extensive lineage that shapes their meaning in this particular context. Kimmerling and Migdal (2003) suggest that powerful landowning families (*hamula*) dominated economic and social life in the Levant during the Ottoman era. After the *nakba* in 1948, the Jordanian and Egyptian administrations that controlled the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively, reinforced and reinvigorated *hamula* identification in an attempt to delegitimize and weaken nascent Palestinian nationalism. This practice was continued and intensified by Israel after 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Kanaaneh 2002, Hilal 2006, Gordon 2008). The Israeli Occupation also tied this system of (attempted) control to specific spaces – villages – through the creation of Village Leagues in 1978, which offered the male heads of particular families (*hamula*) 'truncated

leadership roles' (Gordon 2008:112). However, these efforts to promote a *hamula*-based model of colonial spatial governance that suppressed nationalist sentiment were largely unsuccessful, and were formally abandoned in 1987 when the first *intifada* (uprising) began and Palestinian national identity superseded local-based affiliations. In the wake of the first *intifada,* the discursive construction of family as *hamula* remained a key issue, particularly at the Oslo negotiations.

> In discussing the modalities of return, a key definitional problem cropped up which remains unresolved to this day, that is, what constitutes a 'family'? Israel, for example, insisted that 'family' implies a nuclear-type family, and for the purpose of family unification the children must be below the age of 16, whereas the Palestinian negotiators stressed that according to Arab culture and practice, a family encompasses immediate and extended members. It is clear that each definition impacts the number and category of displaced family members, if and when they are allowed to return home. (Zureik 2001: 219).

The definition of what constitutes a (Palestinian) family continues to have a profound impact on Palestinian mobility regimes, particularly since the discontinuation of the family reunification process at the start of the second intifada (Abu Zahra 2006, 2007). The fragmentation of Palestinian spaces in the Occupied Territories since the Oslo Accords (1993), which intensified after the beginning of the second *intifada* (2000), has also increasingly enforced new forms of local practice and localism (Johnson 2006: 54). This spatial fragmentation, coupled with increasingly ineffective governance by the

Palestinian Authority and increasingly acute economic deprivation, leads Hilal (2006) to suggest that the Palestinian family has acquired a new importance as one of the main socio-economic support systems in the Occupied Territories at the present time.

There are also a series of tensions emerging between discourses of the 'modern' family (*'a'ila*) where less children are seen as an economic advantage, and desires for a large number of children that fit within a broader demographic-nationalist discourse of Palestinians outnumbering Jewish Israelis within the borders of Mandatory Palestine (Kanaaneh 2002). Ideas around familial modernity in similar contexts are intimately intertwined with state policies and more extensive transnational ideas and practices of consumerism (Kanaaneh 2002, Ghannam 2002). However, in the context of the Occupied Territories where the Palestinian Authority only has a limited ability to govern - what Weizman (2007: 155) terms 'prosthetic sovereignty' – consumption of education, consumer goods and 'lifestyle' practices plays a much more prominent role in articulating modernity (Taraki 2008). This is particularly the case in the Ramallah region, due to both its 'liberal' history (Taraki & Giacaman 2006) and the post-Oslo influx of both Palestinian returnees and foreign companies and NGOs to the increasingly de facto 'capital' city (Taraki 2008). This influx has been augmented by internal migration within the West Bank towards Ramallah, and continued emigration to other countries (Hilal 2006), something I discuss more fully in the context of Birzeit later in this section.

These temporally and spatially more extensive discursive fabrications provide a context for understanding contemporary discourses, practices and spaces of family in Birzeit. The

local village historian, Anis, told me that since 1730, Birzeit was comprised of four *hamula*, although at an unspecified later date, divisions within the biggest *hama'il* created six in total. This discourse of Birzeit families is tied directly to space, and in particular, the Old City. The Old City is an area of town that is considered the centre of Birzeit. All three churches, the municipal buildings, the UNRWA girls' school, the old Birzeit University campus adjoin it, and the largest mosque is also nearby. The Old City itself mainly consists of a series of two storey stone houses, some of which were first built in 1600 according to Anis. Members of each *hamula* built adjoining houses, to form a *hosh* or courtyard, which in most cases had one entrance creating a shared and exclusive space for those particular residents. Thus, the *hamula* is quite literally written into the space of the Palestinian built environment. Many of these buildings in the Old City are now deserted, although some have been renovated and/or sold to refugee families and rented to students. Despite the fact that in many cases these properties have been unoccupied for two generations, a number of younger males who I befriended during my research took me to the Old City to show me *their* family home. Hence while unoccupied, these family spaces were nevertheless still vital for making present and future claims to territory, belonging and identity (see Harker 2009a).

Although many of the village residents no longer live in the Old City, many extended families remain in close spatial proximity to one another. While this is in many cases through single-family homes built adjacently to one another, there are also a number of apartments or attached dwellings that house many relatives from one family. Anis, for instance, lives with his wife and five children on the top floor of a four-storey building,

which is jointly owned by Anis and his three brothers. Each brother owns a floor in the building[5]. While such buildings allow extended families to live together, the single-family apartments also indicate the increasing importance of the *'a'ila* (see Johnson 2006: 94). In other words, the (discourse of the) 'small' family has become increasingly important precisely because of the changing ways in which house and home are materialized and practiced. While this claim is the product of contemporary narrations of history by people I talked to in Birzeit, Doumani (2003) has argued in the context of mid 19th century Cairo that historically, *'a'ila* may have been more prevalent than other types of family formation due to short life spans, high infant and child mortality, and dislocations caused by the state. While I was not able to trace the shifting relations and spaces dis/connecting *'a'ila* and *hamula* in Birzeit over time, I am able to say something about how these relations inform contemporary imaginaries and how they were manifest at the time of my research. In particular I want to focus on how these interconnected discourses of family played out in summer 2006.

Birzeit, like many of the other villages that surround Ramallah, is partly constituted by 'villagers' living in other countries (Kartveit 2005, Hilal 2006). Some of these people have been displaced, many have emigrated and can be considered diaspora, and others circulate between Birzeit and other spaces. Haifa, the eighty-year-old woman I mentioned earlier who lives in Canada and the US for six months each year, is an example of the latter type of villager. Hanna, a man in his sixties, grew up in Birzeit but was studying

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[5] The widespread building of houses and apartments by male 'heads' of family (*'a'ila*) for their sons in Birzeit is one form of family spacing that indicates Joseph's (1993) concept of 'patriarchal connectivity' has a great deal of analytical purchase in this context. However, the primary empirical focus of my research on homes and mobilities prevents me from making this claim more concretely and confidently.

abroad in 1967, and therefore never received a West Bank ID[6]. He lived in a Western nation[7] for long enough to acquire a Western passport and at the time of my research spent three months at a time living in Birzeit on a tourist visa. He would then move, with his wife and two young children, to another Arab nation for three months. This was followed by another three months in Birzeit and then three months in Europe. A twenty something male who introduced himself to me as Charlie, but was called Khaldun by at least one older male relative, lived in Chicago and visited Birzeit for three months every summer with his younger brother and sister, mother and father. These types of movement were common, as was the suggestion that half of the village lived 'outside' (i.e. elsewhere). While there were a number of visitors/returnees in Birzeit during my first visit to Birzeit in summer 2005, the flows of people and things to the village were particularly large in 2006 because of the Birzeit Society convention. The Birzeit Society, a diaspora organization based in the US (with one chapter in Canada) holds biennial conventions, usually in US cities. However, in 2006, the event was held in Amman and Birzeit (one week in each place). Hilal (2006: 193) suggests that Palestinian diaspora associations 'are formed to keep alive traditions that in some cases have been abandoned in the home communities'. While this may be true to some extent, the Birzeit Society also maintained active socio-economic links with the village, providing scholarships to Birzeit University and funds for municipal purchases (a fire engine and water meters), in addition to the practice of visiting in the summer.

Spacing families in Birzeit

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[6] Palestinians who want to live in the West Bank must have an ID. These are issued by Israel, which controls the Palestinian population register. Very few Palestinians born outside the West Bank are granted such IDs. See Makdisi (2008).
[7] I use this deliberately vague term to protect 'Hanna's' confidentiality.

While there are many ways in which family is practiced in Birzeit, I argue that the sometimes occasional and intermittent, sometimes more extensive flows of people, things and knowledge across transnational spaces are particularly important in this place. In what follows I focus on one particular example to illustrate some of the family spaces and spacings that make Birzeit a distinctively transnational place. In this regard Birzeit is similar to many Palestinian towns and villages, particularly in the Ramallah region (Kartveit 2005, Taraki 2008). There has been a great deal of emigration from the Occupied Territories, much of which is motivated by the hardships of living under the Israeli Occupation, including inter alia physical and social insecurity, movement restrictions, high rates of unemployment and economic suffocation (Hilal 2006). However, as Hilal (2006) notes, destination, class, education, age and gender do produce differential geographies of Palestinian emigration. The context of the Occupied Territories is also very different from the links between transnational mobility and place that emerge in spaces of Palestinian refuge, for example Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon (Peteet 2005). Thus, working closely within and through particular family practices that emerged in Birzeit both demands and promotes attentiveness to the heterogeneity of Palestinian space, within (Taraki & Giacaman 2006) and beyond the West Bank (Peteet 2005). This heterogeneous rendering of Palestinian space, while commonly found in anthropological studies, is rare in geographical scholarship, particularly geopolitical work (Harker forthcoming).

Kadeen Rahal, a young man in his late 20s, grew up in Birzeit. After secondary school he did an undergraduate degree in the US, and in summer 2006, had just completed his first

year in medical school, also in the US. He returned to Birzeit that summer for a two-month holiday. His older brother, who was 'visiting' Birzeit that summer, also lived in the US. His parents and two younger siblings lived in Birzeit throughout the year. Kadeen's mobility abroad to study, enabled by an American passport, is a consequence of a series of family practices extending back three generations.

> I got it [a US passport] from my dad. See my grandma was born over there. She was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1917. See my great grandpa, he migrated to the US around 1900. He went there and worked for fourteen years I think, for twenty years, and I think he came back with fourteen thousand dollars. That was a lot of money at that time. So my grandma was born over there. She had the citizenship, she gave it to my dad, and he gave it to us.[8]

Kadeen's movement is not just the function of his great grandfather's emigration to the US, but also his grandmother and father's ability to transfer their citizenship status to him. While passports function as one of the technologies that allow states to control movement through the production of individualized non/citizen subjects (Torpey 2000), Kadeen's passport can also be thought of as a family technology, that facilitates a continued family spacing that stretches across three generations and between different parts of the US and Palestine. I argue that the passport is therefore a constitutive part of this particular family. It is not possible to think about the Rahal family without reference to this particular material-semiotic object. This understanding of family builds on Nash's

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[8] My interview with Kadeen was conducted in English, outside a local restaurant in Birzeit on 15th July 2006.

(2005: 459) argument for 'understandings of relationality that expand the meaning of the social to include objects, entities, institutions, and technologies of all kinds in complex networks and in continuous processes of co-emergence' (see also Sheller 2004).

Kadeen told me that he intends to stay in the US for a few years after receiving his degree to specialize and save money. He then intends to return to Birzeit to live and get married. In this regard, Kadeen's movement fits within broader patterns of Palestinian migration. 'The general motive for most Palestinians in crossing borders has not been to change their lifestyle, customs or identity, but rather to improve their life chances' (Hilal 2006:190). Hilal (2006: 195-6) goes on to suggest that Palestinian emigration is a 'household enterprise'. While, as I have suggested, the house and the family map on to each other very closely in the Occupied Territories, the role Kadeen's generationally-extended family (i.e. his great-grandfather whom he never lived with) played in his migration lead me to insist on thinking Palestinian emigration as family, rather than household, enterprise.

Kadeen's distributed and circulating family spacing is manifested in his everyday life in the US.

Me: Do you ever see any of your family [in the US]?

Kadeen: Yeah, I see them. I have some relatives in Columbus actually. I see them, sometimes every week, ten days, two weeks. I've been twice to Cleveland in the last year.

Me: Do you have family there?

Kadeen: Family no. Just some friends from here.

Me: So that must be nice having family and friends.

Kadeen: Yes, it's always nice having somebody close to you, you know.

In the moment quoted above, Kadeen chooses to interpret (my use of) the word 'family' as referring to *hamula*. While the English word family was used, even in Arabic, despite the linguistic distinction between *'a'ila* and *hamula*, these forms of relatedness bleed in to one another (Johnson 2006: 94). Familial relations are also intertwined with other forms of intimate relations, in this case, Kadeen's relations with his friends. This slippage between family and friends is captured by the concept of *qaraba*, or closeness, prevalent in a number of Palestinian and other Arab contexts (see Johnson 2006: 76-7, Ghannem 2002). The use of 'the vocabulary of kinship to establish [broader] social relationships and social worlds' (Johnson 2006: 77) was certainly a feature of everyday life in Birzeit. One spatial manifestation of a social world that circulates through both Palestine and the US, combining familial and non-familial relations, is Kadeen's living space in the US[9].

Me: Do you mind me asking who your roommates are?

Kadeen: No, that's fine. Last year I lived with my, a classmate mate of mine who went to school with me here.

Me: Here in Birzeit?

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[9] Significantly, materializations of homes are one of the ways in which family and friends do remain distinct social categories in Birzeit itself.

Kadeen: No, in Ramallah. So we were classmates, and he did his undergrad over there, so we lived together. And his younger brother was a freshman, so he came over, he joined us. So now the older brother graduated and he found a job in Florida, so he's moving over there, so it's going to be me and the younger brother.

Me: So are they from here?

Kadeen: They're from Ramallah yeah.

I argued earlier that families in Birzeit are frequently imagined and practiced as closely proximate. While Kadeen is not able to maintain this close spatial proximity with his *'a'ila* for most of the year, he is nevertheless maintains close proximity with relatives (*hamula*) and friends while in the US. His summer visit to Birzeit is another way of practicing proximity, albeit over a shorter period of time than most other families. While he cited the economic benefits of working in the United States after graduating ('they pay better over there') and the difficulties of traveling between Palestine and the US ('it was a hassle') as reasons for not visiting more, his situation was far from unusual when compared with other Birzeitis who live 'outside' Palestine for part or all of the year. Both of these reasons for not visiting more also gesture towards the broader context of the Israeli Occupation, and the impacts it has on restricting movement into, out from and within the West Bank (Makdisi 2008, Harker 2009b) and de-developing the Palestinian economy (Roy 2007, Gordon 2008). Thus, Kadeen's family spacings 'inside', 'outside' (the Occupied Territories), and between those spaces, are also in part co-constituted by the Israeli Occupation.

How an American model home was built in Palestine

The Rahal home, Kadeen's primary family space in Birzeit, is also a product of circulation between Palestine and the US.

Kadeen: You know we built our house, we got the map from the US, based on the model homes. So we got the platform of the house from there. Then we had an architect over here who took charge. So basically it's an American style house, but it's made out of rocks not wood. So we have four bedrooms, one master, three bedrooms. We have two and a half, three bathrooms. We have a living room, dinning room, a visitors' room and a kitchen.

Me: So you got the architect from Palestine but the plan from the States?

Kadeen: Yeah, the floor plan.

Me: Was it you dad that built the house?

Kadeen: Yeah.

Me: Do you know where he got the plan from?

Kadeen: Yeah, do you know in the US they have these books for the model homes?

Me: Oh, do they?

Kadeen: Yes. We got it from there.

Me: Is it literally a book that tells you how to build the house?

Kadeen: It tells you the platform for the house, the different measurements.

Me: Do you know what it was like adapting, presumably that was suppose to be for wooden building?

Kadeen: I'm sure it was a hassle, but the architect did a good job.

Kadeen's family (*'a'ila*) live in an American model home in Birzeit. The house is a material embodiment of way in which the Rahal family has been practiced across and through particular transnational spaces. The house is not simply a space of family (i.e. a space where the Rahal family live, eat, sleep, etc), but also a family spacing, emerging from the circulation of particular family subjects and knowledges between the Birzeit and the US, and constitutive of the Rahal family. While the house, like many others in Birzeit, is a form of conspicuous consumption and demonstration of being modern that draws on knowledges of a particular (US/Western) elsewhere (Taraki 2008), it is also important to note that the house was built not from wood but stone. Stone is historically the most commonly used building material in Palestine, and many Birzeit residents frequently expressed concerns about living in a wooden house. As Kadeen noted, 'I feel homes are safer over here [in Palestine]. They're not as easy to break through as the homes over there [in the US]… The wood is easier to burn, but stones don't [burn]'. The Rahal family home is one example of how '"imported" items are assembled into a social field that has its own logic' (Taraki 2008: 63). Hence the Rahal family home, a distinctly transnational family space and spacing, fits within what Taraki (2008:75) identifies as a new urban middle class ethos in and around Ramallah.

> The new ethos of the urban middle class in Palestine entails the elaboration and amplification of new, modern concepts of the ideal home and community, domestic life, parenting, and selfhood. These are exemplified by the "villa,"

suburbanization, the conversion of the home into a learning and entertainment center, parents' commitment to the instruction of children in the arts of distinction, self-improvement through fitness and the arts, only to name a few.

While a modern ethos is being articulated and negotiated in many contemporary Arab cities (see for example McMurray 2001, Ghannam 2002, Deeb 2006), the emergence of this ethos in the centre of the West Bank is also quite distinct. Investment in living spaces as a form of conspicuous consumption has become one of the key avenues for this process in the Ramallah area, because the Israeli Occupation has blocked off many other avenues for social and spatial advancement (Hilal 2006, Taraki 2008).

The Rahal family's transnational spacing offers at least two further analytical insights. Firstly, the mobilities of Kadeen's family pose significant challenges to bounded discursive constructions of the 'Arab family' and also, simultaneously, the 'Western family' (Sherif-Trask 2006). The flows of people, objects and knowledges that constitute and are embodied by the Rahal family, do not easily fit within the spaces of the majority world to which Palestine and Palestinians are usually assigned. The Rahal family's American model home built in Palestine, highlights the connections that exist between the US and Palestine, or more broadly minority and majority worlds. This family space and spacing challenges the division of worlds into categories of minority and majority (or global North and South). As a counter point to this spacing, there are also a whole range of shatter zones, where minority and majority worlds are cleaved apart and disconnected. Such cleavages are also revealed by particular family spacings, such as the earlier

example of Hanna, a man born in Birzeit, but forced to leave the village every three

months because he didn't have a West Bank ID.

Secondly, the spacings and spaces of the Rahal family can enliven our understanding of

this particular place. Palestine has become a place that is known in very specific ways,

primarily through occupation, violence and death (Kelly 2008, Harker 2009a, Harker

forthcoming). However, as Allen (2008: 457) points out, the routinized violence of the

Israeli Occupation does not control processes of Palestinian subjectification.

> 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 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."

In this context, getting by includes practices of education (Rosenberg 2004, Harker

2009b), urbanization (Taraki 2008, Harker 2009a), different forms of mobility

(Hammami 2004, 2006, Hilal 2006, Harker 2009b) and in/security (El Haddad 2008).

Often these forms of getting by are not simply enabled by family, but are themselves

family practices and spacings. Kadeen's migration and education are intended to produce

a better future in Birzeit, and can be viewed as a way of dealing with the economic

deprivation in Palestine, caused in large part by the Israeli Occupation. This ability to get

by the Occupation emerges, in part, from Kadeen's enrollment in a series of family

spaces and spacings, including his passport, which I have argued is a family technology, and a family-home space that circulates between Palestine and the US.

More broadly, this case study is one example of a spatial story about Palestinian lives and the ways in which they 'go on' under conditions of occupation. Such accounts form a counterpoint to discussions around 'bare life' (Agamben 1998, 2005), and the dangerously reductive power of tying similar analyses, repeatedly, to particular spaces (Robinson 2003). These 'ordinary' Palestinian spaces (Stewart 2007) are valuable because they are not reducible to the Israeli Occupation, even though they can only be understood in relation to the 'extraordinary' (Kelly 2008). While many aspects of Kadeen's life are interwoven with practices of occupation, other aspects such as the migration of his great-grandfather to the US – a key moment in the Rahal family's transnational spacing – exceed the occupation both temporally and causally. Focusing on families allows for a more nuanced account of Palestinian spaces and spacings, in which Palestinians themselves are, to paraphrase Mahmoud Darwish (2002), more than just heroes or victims. These geographies also foreground moments of spatial connection and intimacy that are opposed to the punitive, bellicose and distanced relations that emerge from contemporary Oriental discourses (Gregory 2004).

Conclusion

Attending to family spaces and spacings in Birzeit has been vitally important for me as I seek to understand some of the dynamic social relations that perform home (Harker 2009a), im/mobility (Harker 2009b) and place in this context. In the context of this paper, there are two broader points that I would like to draw out in conclusion. Firstly, I would

like to reiterate that working with family has been important when trying to understand many of the geographies I encountered in Birzeit, including the large number of people visiting in the summer, or the different types of houses in the Old City and in other parts of town (e.g. Rahal family home). Working with families in Birzeit afforded me a particular way of understanding Palestinian transnational migration and broader processes of urbanization in the Ramallah region. Studying specific family practices has also moved the focus of my analysis beyond the space of the nation, which characterizes many existing geographical studies of family (Puar 2007, Cowen & Gilbert 2007, Martin forthcoming), towards geographies that are both more local and transnational.

I argued that the family is discursively constructed in Birzeit as *'a'ila* and *hamula*, and these discursive constructions emerge from discourses that are more extensive in both time and space. However, despite their long history, these ideas of family are nevertheless a very contemporary (re)production, revivified in the face of extreme forms of socio-economic security created in the main by the Israeli Occupation (Hilal 2006), but crucially, not reducible to this context. These forms of relatedness are also spatially produced, by living in closely proximate dwellings. However, in practice these normative forms and spaces of relatedness are disrupted in a number of different ways. For example, some of the nuclear families I met in Birzeit, including the one I lived with and the family of my translator, consisted of only a mother and her children. While the imprisonment of men by the Israeli Occupation Forces can often be a common cause of fatherless families in Palestine (Rosenfeld 2004), in both of the cases mentioned above heart disease claimed the fathers' lives.

Similarly, there were many examples of how actual family spaces did not conform to broader norms. For instance, while Anis lives in a four-floor building that is co-owned with his three brothers, the rest of the apartment building remains uninhabited. While each brother intended to live on one floor, two of his siblings live in Jordan because they don't have West Bank IDs. His other brother lives in Birzeit, but in a high-rise building called the Spanish Apartments. The Spanish Apartments is a multistory building inhabited mainly by young couples with children: *'a'ila* who are not part of the same *hamula*. The Spanish Apartments is an example of a family space, or set of family spaces, that differs from the more commonly and extensively produced familial spatial relations in Palestine (see Harker forthcoming).

Secondly, the ways of doing family that I have discussed in this paper, regardless of the extent to which they conform to or diverge from the interconnected discursive norms of *'a'ila* and *hamula* performed in closely proximate spaces, are significantly different from the practices that emerge in minority world studies of intimacy and relatedness, which tend to focus on recombinant families, new reproductive technologies and queer families (Strathern 2005; Franklin & McKinnon 2001; Carsten 2000, 2004; Parkin & Stone 2004). In the previous section, I suggested some of the family spacings explored in this paper both challenged a minority-majority division of space, and helped to illustrate how such a cleavage is produced. I think it is possible to argue, as Sherif-Trask (2006) has, that academic studies of family are another means through which such the majority-minority division is produced. It is therefore important to situate the different foci of different

family studies within transnational power topologies of scholarship. While doing this can facilitate critique of Western theorizing, I think it may also be productive to explore how these different analytical foci travel, and how they themselves are changed in the course of such an analytical maneuver (Robinson 2003). For instance, the language of 'families of choice', used most frequently to discuss same-sex intimacies in minority world contexts (e.g. Weeks et al 2001), has very different implications when transferred to Palestine, and the social and economic inequalities that exist there largely as a result of colonial occupation. Likewise, the role Palestinian family spaces and spacings play in helping people 'get by' could be further explored in minority and other majority world contexts.

While analyzing nuclear families carries with it the danger of reaffirming or naturalizing particularly powerful (and thus pervasive) discursive norms around intimate relations, the pervasiveness and power of these relations, and their intersections with a range of more or less non/normative family practices provide a reason why it is important to not simply overlook or forget such families. At the same time, the ways in which many of the families I encountered in my research spill beyond the borders of these norms contributes to efforts by scholars such as Nash (2005) and Valentine (2008) to think further about different spatial subjectivities that exceed the individual. Putting this into practice by working with families has not been easy. During my field research I largely conducted interviews with individuals, which are then reproduced here and certainly colour my account. While the traces of family remain in my transcripts, they are nevertheless bracketed, as in the excerpt '[Pause to say hi]'. Conducting research with families also

presents challenges with regards to confidentiality, access and negotiating power

relations that are worthy of article length examination themselves (see Pratt forthcoming).

I would hope that these are challenges that can be embraced if geographers are to further

explore the vital and vibrant roles played by family spaces and spacings.

Acknowledgements

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