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## Love changes all: making some noise by 'coming out' as mothers

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The thing about motherhood is that it changes you forever in obvious and unexpected ways. As female academics who have all come to motherhood in our thirties, we have experienced this transformation against a background of committed feminist politics and thinking. In the previous Women and Geography Study Group volume, Gregson and Rose (1997: 41) appeal to feminist geographers to produce 'multiple voiced histories to show that – like all geographical traditions, feminist geography is heterogeneous; that it is 'situated messiness', contested and negotiated by particular bodies in particular places'. In this chapter we contribute to such a polyvocal history by reflecting on the ways in which our feminisms have been transformed as we have been changed as women by the experience of motherhood.

What follows is a partial account of some of our reflections. It is partial for a number of reasons. First, we have discovered how difficult it is to recall, order and express in words, the jumbled and contradictory thoughts that we have each been having over the past few months/years (not only is transparent reflexivity a theoretical impossibility (Rose 1997), we are attempting to squeeze this process in between the competing demands of teaching, research, children and sleep). Second, if we are honest, the emotions, (particularly love and guilt), which are often overwhelming features of motherhood, render us angrier, more militant, less 'measured', more (dare-we-say-it?) 'emotional', and thus much further away from the academic ideal of rational, objective writing (yes feminism ... we hear you). Third, despite this, we are not used to writing in less-than academic voices, or writing about ourselves; and this has been strange and a little uncomfortable. It feels unsafe. Finally, we have each struggled with what we should say and what we should leave unsaid. Not least, we recognise the very real dangers of 'coming out' as mothers and admitting – dare we? – that our children come first. How regrettable, alien and disabling it is that still, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are acutely aware that love and family responsibilities are incompatible with hegemonic constructions of paid employment (and even academia) that demand total commitment.

Women of our generation, growing up in Britain in the socially optimistic 1970s, were told that we could 'have it all'. We four women then read the feminist literature and discovered that we almost certainly could not. Our various personal reflections that follow, hint at our surprises, disappointments and re-evaluations as we each experienced the degrees of truth and falsity surrounding these competing positions. Each of us has written a few words reflecting on how motherhood has altered our perspectives on feminist geography and/or ourselves as feminist geographers. These musings are inevitably shaped by our own social position – this is really the point of our piece. Readers should be aware that while we differ in terms of our partnership status, sexual orientation and institutional positioning, we are all 'white' and, by dint of our employment, middle-class mothers. Mothers from racialised minorities and other social positionings, might well paint a different picture, as could a considerable number of fathers: these stories remain to be told. Below, each of us presents our reflections, before cross-cutting themes are discussed in the final section of the chapter.

**Revisiting feminist geography: motherhood and militancy in a 'new' university**  
**Rebecca Elmhirst, School of the Environment, University of Brighton.**

As my four-year-old son bounces off the walls of our living room dressed in a Spiderman costume whilst my daughter ignores the collection of cars and tractors littering the floor and heads towards the nearest fluffy bunny I can't help wondering about gender essentialism. Right from when my daughter first arrived she seemed so *different* from my son – not just because she was a different person, but because she seemed to be gendered differently. By me? By the various institutions that reproduce socialised child birth in the UK? Or by something more core, more....er....essential? Beyond my brief observations above, becoming a mother has prompted me to reconsider feminist geography in a number of ways: as a substantive area of research and as an ongoing political agenda. Thinking through this has been extraordinarily difficult, partly because the whole process has been so contradictory, and partly because the job of combining child care with (coherent) abstract thought is not being made any easier by the emerging work place structures I face in a post-1992 university department.<sup>1</sup> Much of my reflection revolves around two interlinked themes: positionality in my research (motherhood and knowledge politics) and the consequences of parenthood (the shift from 'mother' to 'parent' is deliberate) for my own feminist politics.

Taking the first of these, when I was first introduced to feminist geography some time during my undergraduate degree at Newcastle in the mid-1980s, it chimed very much with my personal concerns, which were about enabling women to achieve in the work place. At that time there were very few women working in senior positions in Geography, and my own personal ambitions were given impetus by reading both populist liberal feminism and, more critically, socialist feminism with its emphasis on work and labour. Among my bibliographic favourites at that time were Michele Barrett's (1980) 'Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis', and from a 'development' perspective, Maria-Patricia Fernandez-Kelly's early work on the Mexican Maquiladoras: 'For we are sold, I and my people: Women and Industry on Mexico's Frontier'. Although my subsequent research has been influenced by later theoretical developments in feminist theory, my substantive interest has remained rooted in the world of work, broadly defined (and in a very different cultural context to my own). Until my children were born, much of my research centred on the lives of young women migrant factory workers who regarded such employment as a liberation (of sorts), and I was interested in seeing how they were able to negotiate the boundaries of parental control and the moral authority of the wider community (figure 1).

Underlying this, although I did not recognise this at the time, was an emphasis on *personal* fulfilment, ironically quite a 'western' concern. Having children has led me to revisit my socialist feminist interests in some ways (I'm still interested in 'gender at work', so to speak) but motherhood has complicated the idea of personal goals and practices centred on the self. Emotionally and practically, motherhood subverts the 'self' as a principal concern. My shifting positionality has led my research interests to drift towards a more direct concern with the intangible emotional attachments that colour people's actions, in my case, rural migrants engaged in resource struggles in Indonesia (Elmhirst 2002). At the same time, motherhood and my imagined connection with the experience of other mothers has meant some issues in my research are almost too painful to address in the objective and disembodied way that conventional academia requires. In researching ethnic violence and the displacement of vulnerable people I've found it hard to deal with the powerful emotions that are triggered when I've talked to mothers who have lost children. Perhaps motherhood has shortened the imaginative leap into empathy as I wonder how I would have coped in their position. I wonder too how I would be able to write an embodied and emotional dimension into my research.



**Figure 1: My initial feminist readings of family relationships in Lampung, Indonesia failed to acknowledge the ways parenthood subverts the 'self' as a principal concern, as the mother pictured centrally here amidst her children demonstrates. Source: Becky Elmhirst (Permission to use these photographs has been granted by those pictured).**

My own brand of feminist geography is now coloured with various doubts and caveats that previously I would never have considered, and yet in other ways the arrival of my children

and my entry to a different stage in the life course has meant that the relevance of feminist politics has become much clearer to me. Motherhood has brought about a militancy that I thought had begun to subside, particularly as I encountered endless female undergraduates that believed the feminist cause was no cause at all (for me, growing older and having caring responsibilities has really thrown feminism back into the frame). Again, what appear to be rather old fashioned socialist feminist concerns emerge in my politics, directed this time by my embodiment of the home/work dilemma (work-life balance?). There have been some wonderful studies of this issue by feminist geographers (e.g. Hanson and Pratt (1995), Perrons (2003), Skinner (2003)) but what is missing is a bit of self-scrutiny regarding our work as geography academics.

Increasingly I find myself sympathetic towards a more transformative (and in the current work climate, far more problematic) agenda than earlier liberal feminist concerns with appointing more female professors to the discipline. Becoming a mother has forced me to realise that as feminist geographers we need to do much more to tackle the tyranny of a crazy work load that, coupled with the non-negotiable demands of parenthood (not to mention other forms of caring), has made life as an academic in the type of university that I work in virtually unsustainable. Casual conversations with colleagues in my own and other Geography departments suggests there are many people – women and men – who feel unable to ‘come out’ and be honest about their difficulties, particularly where these concern the maintenance of a research profile. How can we be more open about this collectively? Can we forge alliances with people in similar positions in order to tackle workplace practices that undermine our humanity as parents or carers? How can we ensure that the ‘productivity’ and impressive creative thinking of some individuals does not create unnecessary and counterproductive pressure for others? How can we persuade our employers and other Geography ‘gate-keepers’ that being a parent is a social ‘good’, that people should be able to ‘slow things down’ over particular phases of their working lives, and that there is more to creating family-friendly workplaces than providing affordable crèche places. None of the quantitative measures of success that dominate teaching and research in universities allow for any of this: if anything, they have brought about enormous penalties for those with responsibilities beyond the workplace and present a largely unexamined disadvantage for those of us who choose to work part-time.

I find it enormously ironic that so much of the feminist geography that I grew up on was all about liberating women from the drudgery of the domestic realm and releasing them into the world of work. Domestic drudgery is still there, and although I am grateful for the opportunities that working in academia has presented to me, I am not sure I would regard attempting to combine work and motherhood as ‘liberation’. Is this because the character of academic work in the UK has changed so much over the course of the past decade? The generation of feminist geographers that preceded my own were often quiet about the fact that they had children – I assume for politically expedient reasons. These women have opened many doors for the rest of us, and as both work cultures and feminist demands have shifted, we are now accorded the luxury of being able to acknowledge our motherhood in the workplace. Yet whilst we are happy to be recognised as mothers we keep quiet about the daily physical and mental struggle of combining success in this with success in contemporary academia. It might just be time to make a bit of noise.

### **Experiencing café culture.....or when the political becomes personal Sarah Holloway, Department of Geography, University of Loughborough**

Like the others, I had a child after a number of years working in academia as a feminist geographer. My academic work at this point reflected my political commitment to, and particular interpretation of, feminism. My doctoral research would be read as straightforwardly feminist research by most geographers, as it explored how ideas about good mothering are reproduced through locally embedded social practices and the influence these have on the organisation of pre-school childcare provision (Holloway, 1998). Subsequent projects might perhaps be considered less self-evidently feminist, focusing as they did on children’s ICT usage (Holloway & Valentine, 2002) and the racialisation of Gypsy-Travellers (Holloway, 2003). However, they came squarely within my understanding of a feminist approach, which to me means foregrounding gender when appropriate, but recognising that this need not always be the case.

My academic understanding of feminist politics, and the research I had undertaken on motherhood and parenting issues, provided a background to my own transition to motherhood. My experiences as a white, middle-class mother chimed with those of a similar group of women I had interviewed for my thesis: motherhood for me has been a highly social activity, as I along with other women in my neighbourhood worked through late pregnancy and early motherhood to establish a network for interaction and support. Like the early 1990s accounts from the white, middle-class mothers in my doctoral research, this has been facilitated through the use of domestic and child-centred spaces, and in my case early in the new century also café culture and access to email. Similarly, my decision to return to work on a part-time contract fits in with my pre-natal feminist politics. I have always thought feminism is about achieving choices for women, whether that be to pursue a 'malestream' career profile of full-time work with few or no breaks from paid employment; to work part-time; or to mother full-time in the home.

What I hadn't expected from motherhood, aside from the level of sheer pleasure it has given me, is the degree to which it brings questions of feminist politics home with such an emotional force. Again as part of my doctoral studies I had read both social histories and sociologies of childrearing which charted changing 'expert' advice to women on how to mother in the home, and critiqued the consequences of this for individual women's experience of motherhood. I began pregnancy with a healthy degree of scepticism about childcare manuals, both in terms of the contradictory nature of advice they offer and the varied gender ideologies that underpin them. They were, however, inescapable. One text, in particular, seemed omnipresent. I was advised by some mothers, neighbours and health care professionals to use Gina Ford's (1999) *Contented Little Baby Book*, and by others to burn the book ceremonially at the bottom of the garden. The age-related routines this book recommends for babies (and their mothers) were a godsend to some of my friends, but a complete anathema to me. Nevertheless, despite my dislike of the advice, and my training as a social scientist which encouraged me to deconstruct the text as I read it, I was shocked by the ability of the text to make me feel guilty about mothering in a different way to that advocated in the book.

These experiences of mothering now inflect my views on feminist politics and research, just as my employment as a feminist academic first acted as a context for my mothering. One belief that mothering has reinforced in me is, rather unsurprisingly perhaps, the continued importance of research which considers the geographies of childrearing as a key aspect of many women's life experience. Whilst feminist geography has come a long way from its initial emphasis on the geography of women, there is still a need for research which explores 'traditional' topics such as the changing geographies of the lifecourse for diverse groups of men and women. Two further elements of my experience shape my interpretation of how we might do this. The joy I have in mothering re-emphasises for me the need for feminist politics to promote choices for women, and in doing so to represent motherhood as a positive life choice for some women, as well as considering the conditions which mean it impedes labour market advancement for women (including those without children) and leaves many managing multiple roles. Equally, my experience of mothering with sufficient socio-economic resources to support my chosen style of parenting has taught me quite how privileged I am, and consequently acts as a reminder of the necessity to study the experiences of the majority of the world's women whose lives differ markedly from my own. To end, I would say that it is this emphasis on the importance of different forms of privilege, and the widely differing worlds of people we label as women, which means that my understanding of feminism as an approach which requires us to foreground gender in some circumstances but not in others has been left unshaken by maternity.

**'Baby Café': Making 'space' for motherhood**  
**Carol Ekinsmyth, Department of Geography, University of Portsmouth**

I am writing this in a coffee shop with a steaming cappuccino in front of me. It seems appropriate as a location for this exercise as, since becoming a mother of twins 17 months ago, a cappuccino in a coffee shop has become my treat, my luxury and possibly my salvation. As an act of pleasure, seeking this has taken over from an evening out or a day spent shopping in London. It is a moment stolen from my new, busier and at times frantic schedule and its significance is so great, that I've spent these many months deliberating the perfect coffee shop for the mother of new babies and her friends. (If I were an



entrepreneur, 'Baby Café' would be coming to a High Street near you). Why am I telling you this? Because in my experience and those of my new-mother friends, the geographies of new-motherhood and pleasure are very different from those geographies of life that preceded childbirth. For the first few months at least, these different geographies are small-scale, localized and governed by issues of accessibility, logistics and the social rules that enable or limit daily activity. All this had been written about or alluded to in the feminist geography literature, but it didn't really mean anything to me until I had experienced those micro-social geographies for myself.

And this is perhaps where my relationship to feminist geography has changed the most. I was once an 'insider' in relation to those feminist writings positioned or concerning career women without caring responsibilities, for a year during my maternity leave, I was an 'insider' in relation to writings about full-time home-based motherhood (why is there no accepted, neutral, or even positive, term for this role?), and now I am a 'juggler', juggling motherhood and career, nursery and work, food and teaching. Being an insider has made such a difference to me. The feminist aspects of my research pre-motherhood had concentrated on how organisational structures (in my case, the magazine publishing industry), and in particular, neo-industrial organising (and so-called 'flexible' working) had differential impacts on different types of workers (women, men, mothers – Ekinsmyth (2002)). My focus had been upon working arrangements, and how workers experienced and negotiated their working lives despite their home commitments. (This is especially pertinent in an industry that has no geographical boundaries and where much of the productive labour is performed in domestic spaces.) I was aware that this topic could take me much more into the domestic realm, but I hadn't taken this direction yet. As a consequence of my new, shifted positionality, I now find myself more aligned to feminist writings concerned with women's daily lives and homes, and shall re-visit my work with the focus on how their domestic lives are compromised by and constructed through their working situations.

I now realise that pre-motherhood, my own personal brand of feminism emphasised the liberation of women from the domestic. For families with two parent-figures, I believed in the ideal of equal-parenting and still do (though I realise how privileged I am to have the option to live this ideal). I am surprised however, at my reaction to motherhood. I want to be identified as a 'mother' and not a 'parent'; I didn't want to go back to work and be parted from my children (although I see its advantages now – more on this later); I hate the responsibility of always being the one who decides upon daily menus and shopping - but I want to have the power (over my partner) to decide what my children eat and I want to perform the loving act of cooking for them; I even want to be the one who decides what they wear each morning. I am, in these ways and to my surprise, someone who embraces (admittedly my own version of) domesticity. My politics as a result, have subtly shifted in focus. In particular, my commitment to researching the 'home/work balance' issue remains, but I believe it important that a body of feminist work does not inadvertently suggest that the woman or man who juggles paid employment and family is necessarily the one with the hardest life (vis a vis the full-time Mother). Despite missing the children, I find days at work something of a relief. I am able to have a leisurely lunch by my normal standards (i.e. I can sit down for longer than 60 seconds and eat something), I can do a little shopping on my way home from work, I can sit at my desk and read or write. All this is a relief from the hectic world of twin-toddler-dome, and far, far easier. I believe that politically, we need to recognise this and prevent the limited amount of attention that there is for mothers, being focused upon the 'juggler' at the expense of the 'mother-at-home'.

I used to be angry about patriarchal assumptions regarding what constitutes work and the way that these ignore the domestic, caring and emotional labour of women. Post-natally, I am furious. Having been in the position myself of out-right fear about how we were going to cope with the relentless demands of two babies, and having been challenged by this more completely and severely than any academic course, thesis or research publication has ever challenged me, I now have a more personal understanding of the need to valorize, understand and draw attention to the work that women do in the home.

Having read Sarah's thoughts on Gina Ford, I want to add my own experiences of mothering ideologies. I find it ironic that, in an age where it is increasingly unlikely that women are financially able, or personally willing, to be full-time mothers, the social

pressure to conform to the stereotype of the 'perfect mother' is, it seems to me, increasingly pernicious. This is of course, purely personal conjecture as I have not experienced motherhood at any other time, nor have I carried out any research (if such were possible) on the matter. The 'guilt' that many women speak about as looming large in their experiences of motherhood is encouraged by popular discourse (often contradictory) and public policy, both of which threaten to taunt mothers on a daily basis. On public policy for example, the fact that Midwives are prohibited to talk about bottle-feeding to expectant mothers, is a grave disservice to those mothers who find that they cannot breast-feed once their babies are born. On a much lighter note, another such discourse, fairly pernicious from the point of view of the employed mother, surrounds the notion of the 'domestic goddess'. This seems to be at large in my community of mothers and those of friends in south-east England, and appears to centre around a return to domestic-productive skills (many of which are food-based). Allison Pearson (2003) at the beginning of her recent best-selling novel 'I don't know how she does it', sums up the scenario perfectly. The fictional narrator begins her narration explaining how and why, at 2.00am, she is "distressing mince pies" (apparently because she doesn't want to be judged a bad mother at her daughter's school for supplying shop-purchased pies for the Christmas party). Recent literature focusing on constructions of femininity in rural areas has highlighted the prevalence of traditional gender discourses (Hughes 1997, Little 2002), and the control affected on women living in the countryside. Although women in urban areas perhaps escape the conforming pressure from gossiping local communities, they do not escape media discourses and those at large in their informal communications and network groupings. The latter are likely to be localised (as well as variant by class, race and other social divisions), and some more damaging than the example given above, so there is still much scope for geographical research on local parenting cultures.

Finally, I have two boys. This, I have found, has the potential to change one's perspective on who has a hard time in life. I notice books in the child-rearing sections of bookshops entitled 'That's my Boy: A modern parent's guide to raising a happy and confident son', 'Raising Boys: Why boys are different – and how to help them become happy and well-balanced men', and 'Bringing up a Boy: The nature and nurture of the male character'- to list three that were in my local bookshop last week. Judging from the absence of girl-titles, no such special attention is thought to be necessary for girls. Just what problems will my two little boys face as they go through the purportedly female-centred education system and learn to perform and negotiate their (troubled?) masculinities? How will I as a woman help them to do this? And should I buy female-gendered toys? How do I enact my feminist values and what consequences might they have?

### **How life imitates research** **By Helen Jarvis**

It is said that 'life imitates art'. This is also surely true of research. Having interviewed dozens of working parents, years before I had a first child in my late 30s, I should have been the best prepared of anyone for the challenge of reconciling work with the rest of life. I cringe to remember how, child-free, I interviewed exhausted parents in the hour or two they had between putting children to bed and succumbing to sleep themselves. Now I am the one who curses anyone who phones during the evening rush of tea-bath-story-bed and nine pm is like midnight in other households. Long before my daughter was born I knew all the pitfalls of travelling with a buggy on the bus and having your child excluded from nursery on the pretext of a vague infection. I had parents regale me with elaborate arrangements; such as when the childminder broke her leg; or when the car broke down coming back from work and both partner and parents had to be rung round urgently to find someone who could make the school run. The problem is all these plans relate to couples – and from day one I have been a single parent. Missing from this stock of ready solutions is an extra pair of hands.

Now when I compare my daily life with the (mostly) dual career couples in my research it baffles me that I am so often considered at a disadvantage. True, I have no one to mind my daughter while I pop out: we go everywhere together, even if that means a pram of soft toys goes with us to the end of the street, just to post a letter. But neither do I have to negotiate with a partner (doubtless equally stressed out) the terms of reconciling

parenthood and career: my daughter's welfare comes first and work seeps into every moment not directly engaged in her care. I have no time for 'a life' as my students would have it. But this self-sufficiency also highlights the negative impact of a growing neoliberal emphasis on individual capability. Every day at work and even socially it is assumed that partners and parents are universally on hand, waiting in the wings, to plug the numerous gaps that open up between everyday resources and real life demands. I do not have a partner and my parents live overseas. Even in situations where relatives live nearby they may themselves work or, given the age most of us are having children, be too frail to mind a lively youngster. It is wrong that the academy, which should blaze a trail of enlightened thinking, sweeps childcare aside as a private concern.

Take the case of professional association conferences. These are grist for the mill of any RAE<sup>2</sup> acceptable academic career today, yet search the publicity details and you will not find information on childcare, just local bars and restaurants. The problem is simple: a toddler does not get herself fed, dressed and transported to and from day-care at the appointed opening times. If I cannot journey to perform the work expected of me within the hours of routine day-care, then my daughter has to come away with me and I must make alternative childcare arrangements at the other end. This means paying two lots of childcare for the period of the conference or seminar or whatever (no-one gives up routine day-care which is like gold-dust and is in any case paid year round). On a number of occasions recently I have employed a casual babysitter to cover the time it takes me to get to and from invited seminars. Let me tell you how I struggle each time to claim this expense! It is as if our children run on batteries which can be removed out of hours for the sake of convenience! I dare not contemplate research which requires overseas fieldwork. Anyone reading the terms of funding council grant applications will know there is no box on the form which recognises any caring work: meals out, travel and accommodation yes, responsibility for others no.

The cultural capital associated with a white, middle class, graduate education makes me a beneficiary of the feminist revolution. I confront the inequities of this uneven 'liberation' daily, knowing that the women I pay to entertain and care for my child are in no position to have anyone do the same for them. Although I spend what is for me a huge proportion of my salary on nursery fees, this pays the dedicated nursery staff, many of whom are also working mothers, a paltry wage. Ultimately my economic activity relies on my child-care provider's mother who, recently retired, takes care of her grandson without payment in order that her daughter can earn a pittance caring for other people's children. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild (2003) identify this as a 'care chain' which can be global in extent.

This reliance on individual women's unequal capacity to compete in the workplace on a par with men strikes me as a poor outcome of one hundred years of feminist struggle. It returns me to the untutored feminism I practiced eighteen years ago, marching to Westminster on International Women's Day, demanding 'wages for housework'. Though often considered narrow and elitist, had we successfully concluded such public debates, we might today see the value of nonmarket childcare and domestic labour receive proper recognition. Reinforcing this message, Nancy Folbre and Julie Nelson (2000: 129) estimate that nonmarket (re)production accounts for upward of 60 per cent of the total value of the U.S. output, valued on the basis of time-use and labour inputs alone. Moreover this assumes perfect substitutability between home-produced goods and commodities. In reality there are no market substitutes for some labours of love.

Of course, it is by choice that I am a mother, a choice made in full knowledge that my career would suffer as a consequence. Yet my 'choice' to work full time (in a culture where it is normal to put in a 'second shift' writing papers in the evening at home) is not without constraint or acute ambivalence (see for instance Jarvis 2002). The love I feel for my daughter is at times physically overwhelming and with this comes a permanent sense of guilt. While some women (and men) reading this might exercise their choice to remain child-free, I see parenthood as a collective endeavour, not as some privileged or exclusive club. Certainly I get immense joy from my daughter's unconditional love, but her presence in this world is not for me alone to benefit, like a fireside pet poodle. When all of us in the Baby Boomer generation are put out to grass, we will rely equally, parents and non-parents alike, on our collective offspring to keep us fed and watered. So where is our sense of collective responsibility? I fear it has gone the way of all social responsibility in



this hostile climate of individualism. It is in pursuit of a moral economy and more equal society that I continue to view the personal as political as an 'old fashioned' feminist.



**Figure 2: Who looks after the nursery worker's children when she is at work?  
Source Helen Jarvis.**

### **Reflections on reflections**

So far we have presented our autobiographical accounts verbatim and without comment. Here, we enter the contested territory of how to represent, make sense of, and use our collective material (Gregson and Rose 1997). The route we have chosen is one of joint revision of a single-authored preliminary draft of these reflections on reflections. Through this process we seek to draw common themes from the accounts about the influence motherhood has had on our understandings of feminist geography, and our attitudes to the conditions of our employment as feminist geographers. This process clearly risks universalising some aspects of our experience and masking our (and others') differences. However, we think the risks are worth it if it enables us to draw out the political implications of our experiences.

On reading and re-reading the accounts, it strikes us that love and other strong emotions are predominant underlying themes. Love seems to change all, but despite this, love is not on the agenda frequently in feminist geography, geography or academic endeavour in general, perhaps because it is so frequently the subject of the arts. The personal and transformative consequences of love for our children are different from those of the love that we might experience for another independent human being. As Becky Elmhirst

suggests, '(E)motionally and practically, motherhood subverts the 'self' as a principal concern' and we are in agreement here that this de-centering has had many consequences for us as academics, both in terms of the things that we might or might not want (or might be too painful) to study and our attitudes to work and the Academy. Equally importantly, the increased emotionality that motherhood brings lurks beneath these testimonies (the testimonies are littered with hard-hitting words such as 'passion', 'emotion', 'fear', 'anger', 'shock', 'militancy', 'struggle', 'guilt'), rearing its head angrily from time to time, and informing our perspectives on a feminist geography that might do more to harness this energy as a creative force.

What this means in practice for our agenda as feminist geographers is (unsurprisingly) that we have all, in our various ways, a commitment to the re-valuing, valuing or valorizing of the domestic, the home and the role of mother. We seem to agree that feminism has not gone far enough in doing this, and a great deal of further work is needed to research the geographies of parenting, childrearing, family and the home. This commitment comes both from the joy that our accounts clearly reveal we experience in mothering, and the frustrations we sometimes experience with the structural, social and cultural frameworks within which our mothering takes place. Whilst recognising our privileged positions as professional, economically secure mothers, we speak of circumstances that have made our lives as mothers more difficult than they might be. The contexts of parenting (family type and size, wealth, support from family and friends, neighbourhood type and facilities etc.) are of course fundamental and as Sarah Holloway remarks, our own privilege should serve to remind us of the need to understand the situations of 'the majority of the world's women whose experiences differ from my/[our] own'.

Underpinning these social and cultural frameworks in which we, and other women, care for our children, are powerful ideologies of mothering; ideologies our own experiences teach us are ripe for interpretation by feminist geographers. We each allude to various forms of social control that become (sometimes painfully) apparent and attempt to inform us about how we should mother/parent. The tears brought to a fraught and worried mother by a baby care manual that is seemingly suggesting the impossible (if not the down-right alien), is an experience that we are sure, most mothers know. Sarah Holloway is most explicit about this, with her thoughts on Gina Ford's book. Carol Ekinsmyth mentions the social rules 'that enable or limit daily activity', rules that become all too apparent to the mother who is trying to inhabit a space (coffee shop, bar, shop) that those around her feel is no place for a buggy and child(ren). She also talks of popular discourses that hark back to traditional feminine identities and domestic abilities, which, can make mothers feel pressured, insecure and guilty. The time-space geographies that Helen Jarvis refers to are also aspects of social control which generate the rules about how much a mother can participate in non-baby/child centred activities (like paid employment, academic conferences and the like).

More unexpectedly, for us at least, has been the influence some (though not all) of us have had of raising children who seem, without social bidding, to conform to gender stereotypes. As feminists we acknowledge the social construction of gender and sex, and recognise the pitfalls of essentialism. So where does this leave us when we are faced with raising a gendered child? There are surely no easy answers to this either personally – any attempt to influence such gendering is an essentialist act – or professionally – as the personal experiences of some of us conflict with deeply held political and academic belief, and have troubling implications for feminist theory in geography. What is clear though is that our motherhood has challenged the way we approach our work as feminist geographers – for some of us this has presented a challenge to the way we theorise gender, for all of us it has reshaped our research agenda in the ways described above. Though inevitably partial and fixed in time, we have told our personal stories here in order to contribute to contextualist histories of the discipline, and more specifically to demonstrate that maternity (like our class, 'race', gender and so on) matters as it shapes our practices as feminist geographers.

Our accounts are, if anything, most outspoken about the home/paid employment relationship, and our experiences of working as feminist geographers. We have different personal circumstances and numbers/ages of children. Some of us have partners who are able to help flexibly and a great deal, others do not. These have an impact on what we, as mothers and workers can do. But Helen Jarvis makes the point forcibly that it is not the

absence of a helpful/able or present partner that disadvantages mothers, but a society that expects that a mother has one and that she is able to arrange cost-free cover for her childcare at the drop of a hat. Helen also most clearly demonstrates that the relationship between home and paid employment is not one of 'separate spheres' (temporally, emotionally or geographically), but that 'work seeps into every moment not engaged with her' (Helen's daughter). What we all require is a progressive workplace that recognises, as Becky Elmhirst reminds us, that there 'is more to creating family friendly workplaces than providing affordable crèche places'. Even the latter of course, would help.

As we all work in Academia, our home/work considerations inevitably relate to this employment setting. Some of us work in departments more accommodating to non-traditional employment patterns than others. However, we are collectively disappointed and angry that Academia does not 'blaze a trail of enlightened thinking' (Helen Jarvis) in this respect. Aside from practical and logistical inadequacies such as the lack of childcare provision for employees, and the ignorance of the possibility that Academics just might have family responsibilities either side of the nine-to-five weekday, the prevailing climate of RAE-encultured self-absorption and competition causes us most concern. Some of us work in departments where research is only possible outside of a nine-to-five day but where success is nevertheless measured by research output. In these circumstances those of us who are 'hands-on' parents (women and men) simply cannot do well. Furthermore, those who do achieve research 'success' inevitably put pressures on the rest of us who are expected to cover their 'less-important' activities at the coal-face, further compounding our disadvantage. Others of us work in departments where there is protected research time during the working day and where workloads are more equitably distributed. Here, as women, we have benefited from the RAE inspired culture which bases promotion on more or less objective measures of output rather than patronage or being a good chap. However, as active mothers we cannot compete in a system that has always required us to undertake unpaid overtime, and one that cannot fully accommodate part-time working. If promotion is based on your international reputation, and the RAE judges us by our overall profiles rather than a set number of publications, how can the part-timer compete on a level playing field? While your salary can be paid pro rata for the number of days you work, what constitutes a two, three or four-day-a-week international reputation? Some of us spent time in our pre-natal careers researching organisational structures and cultures that disadvantage mothers. Academia still has a long way to go (for recent empirical evidence see Knights and Richards (2003)).

It is in this context that we want to 'come out' as mothers, and we are writing this, in part, as a political act. We don't want to hide as mothers or keep quiet about the responsibilities that bring us such joy, and that are our priorities and our passions. Neither do we want our careers to stagnate. We feel it is time, as Becky Elmhirst says, to 'make a bit of noise' and draw attention to 'workplace practices that undermine our humanity as parents or carers.' And we are not alone in Academia, as we know from our research, reading, friends and acquaintances that such practices are becoming more, not less common in 'professional' jobs/careers (see for eg. Perrons (2003), Beck (2000), Ekinsmyth (1999), Massey (1995), Grahber (1993)).

We often refer to our 'politics' in this chapter. Perhaps it is through motherhood that our daily lived experiences have become more obviously 'other' to the malestream and that has enabled a renewed recognition of what is at stake. For some of us, there has been a slippage between a politics of the personal and a wider politics (within the family, workplaces and society), a blurring of boundaries that makes us want to express our militancy publicly. In all of our accounts, we speak of shifted positionalities and the effects of these on our feminist politics. Whilst our interests may have subtly shifted, we all maintain a commitment to feminism. When we considered writing this piece, we were all attracted to the idea of having the chance to put our disjointed thoughts on this subject into words. For some of us, this felt like a chance to have a little therapy. We have welcomed this not because we have had negative experiences of motherhood over the last few months/years. Far from it. Rather, we think it is because babies come as part of a package which – along with the sleepless nights, baby-care manuals and Health Visitors – slaps the Political right in your face.

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<sup>1</sup> Post-1992 universities includes former polytechnics that were granted university status in 1992. Historically, the emphasis of such institutions was on teaching rather than research, and although this distinction is beginning to change, resources (in terms of time and money) for research is limited compared to pre-1992 universities.

<sup>2</sup> RAE – Research Assessment Exercise. This is an exercise conducted nationally in Britain by the 4 main Higher Education funding bodies, to assess the quality of UK research and inform the selective distribution of public funds amongst Higher Education institutions.