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Ingrid Lynch: Talking points

1. What is 'queer kinship'?

Kinship, according to Butler, is the sets of practices that 'address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child-rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying, and death (to name a few)'. But what makes kinship queer?

At its core 'queer' denotes not only self-aware LGBTI identities, but also challenges, unsettles and troubles the normative character of heterosexuality and its associated gender hierarchy.

Hence, our interest in the book was the intimate associations of those persons who **challenge heteronormativity** and have until fairly recently been positioned outside of and even in opposition to these fundamental facets of human existence—as threatening to society and families.

The chapters in the book demonstrate that various family forms exist outside of the heteronormative nucleus. And they are not a threat, on the contrary: the contributions illustrate how queer persons are living in spaces filled with love, safety, nurturance and affection.

2. What do queer families offer us?

2.1. Broadening of boundaries of 'family' beyond the biological, legal, institutional

A key theme in the book is that of the family we choose: the families created not through blood lineage, adoption or marriage, but rather through what Desiree Lewis calls '**bonds of affect**'.

In her photo essay in the book, Zethu Matebeni notes that "love, solidarity, offers of assistance, sharing of a common history and commitment could all signify kinship". She writes about the tragic loss of transgender activist and founder of the Swaziland LGBTI organisation Rock of Hope, Malume Mabuza, known fondly as the gentle giant. She describes the layers of connection forged among those attending his memorial, over the years:

Many bonds had connected us with Malume. Some of us shared stories of being ostracised or unaccepted by biological family members because of our sexuality, gender identity or expressions; others had faced homelessness and lived among friends; and some of us were lovers, ex-lovers and chosen family members.

These 'queer' bonds have continued to be meaningful for me, and many in my circle of families, and have sustained familial relations. Malume's death further connected me to many people I had never met before.

We all shared the same experience: we had lost a family member. Loss had brought us together" [...] Malume's death reminded me, and many others at the memorial service and online platforms, that care is fundamental to the continued existence of marginalised lives. It is urgent

that we explore different family lives and individuals in those families who are on the margins of society and yet at the frontlines of emancipating many whose struggles are intersectional"

*2.2. But also, a stretching of the **familiar**, the traditional, to accommodate families that are non-normative*

While some of the portrayals of family offered in the book are deliberately transgressive, the contributions also grapple with how to navigate and ultimately find a home in that which is familiar. Noma Pakade's research illustrates this well. Her work is interested in the marriage and family-making practices of queer women, with a specific focus on meanings around lobola as a marriage practice. Her work is remarkable in that she is able to convey not only the 'revolutionary' transgression of gender norms in that these women are essentially remaking a practice that is typically considered patriarchal, but also indicate how, simultaneously, participating in this practice affords a sense of familial and cultural belonging. Sape, one of the participants' in Noma's research, describes some of the steps she took with her partner Vaivi and their respective families:

We decided to contribute to the lobola amount together. This was the only decision that we were comfortable with. [...] On the day of the wedding our family bought a sheep for the ceremony and in the Tshwana tradition the family who pays the lobola will have to slaughter a sheep and leave with the meat and that was done appropriately.

At the Maodi's the Swartz presented their gifts and dressed all aunties with their headscarves and the men with suits and knives and at the Swartz home the Maodi's presented their gifts to the Swartz family. The Maodi's presented me to the Swartz as their bride and they accepted me; even at the Maodi's the uncles acknowledged that Vaivi was a female and that this is new, but because they have seen the love that we have for one another they accept us.

Noma's work deconstructs myths about the un-Africanness of same-sex sexuality. Her participants' narratives convey how traditional gendered practices are at times appropriated and at others resisted or reshaped, towards creating a family union acknowledged and respected by extended family and others.

The practice provides legitimacy to their relationships, something her participants said they would have to forfeit if they opt out of traditional marriage practice. The practice of *lobola* becomes symbolic of the couples' desire to join together their families and embed their relationship in their broader kin networks, with the support and care that accompany this.

Thus, a key theme grappled with in the book is that of, on the one hand, assimilation into normative ways of doing family, and on the other, the transgression and disruption of the normative. Tensions between the 'ordinariness' of queer parenthood and family-making and the revolutionary character of pushing the boundaries of belonging.