



## EDITOR'S NOTE: ALL IN THE FAMILY

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OBERHOLSTER VENITA

Those who bemoan the decline of “family values” often cast domestic relations as immutable, even God-given. They portray the home as cleaved from the affairs of the state. But as far back as Plato’s *Republic*, political theorists have recognized the family as the primary site of social reproduction: where politics become personal. Perhaps this explains why “traditional” morals are so effectively used to cajole and control the public.

In this issue, on the politics and policies of family life, Chelsea Szendi Schieder, a political science professor at Tokyo’s Meiji University, describes how *kizuna*, or the bonds between people, emerged as a buzzword in 2011, in the aftermath of Japan’s triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown). Schieder argues that, especially for victims of domestic violence, the enforcement of *kizuna* can trap individuals in dangerous situations. In many cases, she writes, “bonds that link families become bondage.”

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Schieder catalogs the ways in which misogyny is built into Japan's bureaucracies, giving "household masters"—nearly always men—power over their families. "When a woman marries, she exits her family of birth and becomes part of her husband's family paperwork," she writes.

Japan's prime minister, Shinzō Abe, is taking this patriarchal logic even further. His conservative Liberal Democratic Party is attempting to amend Japan's Constitution to include the mandate, "Family members must help each other." This, Schieder argues, erodes a more civic-minded notion of the social contract, putting the onus of support on the "traditional" family unit. This, in turn, provides the theoretical foundation for gutting public funds for elder and child care, thereby "increasing the burden of care work already disproportionately borne by women." Right-wing visions of family are often directly connected to economic reforms.

Similarly, Barnard College history professor Nara Milanich links the proliferation of "responsible paternity" legislation in Latin America to the region's neoliberal turn. These policies help track down biological fathers and hold them responsible for their children born outside of marriage. The initiatives are attracting broad, if odd, coalitions: Feminists are working alongside evangelical politicians and business-friendly organizations. But Milanich writes that one group is conspicuously absent from this chorus of support: poor and working-class mothers. Milanich concludes, "It is no coincidence that responsible paternity has gained ascendance in an era of downsized states and social disinvestment. In Latin America as elsewhere, poor families have been enlisted to fill gaps created by states that have withdrawn from social provision."

But it's not just advocates of neoliberalism who invoke familial arguments to transform public policy. Columnist and author Rafia Zakaria returns to the pages of *World Policy Journal* to discuss the Pakistani Taliban's first women's magazine, *Sunnat-e-Khaua*. The underlying goal of its coverage, Zakaria writes, is to convince women to rebel against their fathers and join the larger struggle. In so doing, the Taliban are telling women to defy the very patriarchal structures they promised to uphold when they came to power in Afghanistan in 1996.

As radical groups campaign for young men and women to abandon their families, an organization of mothers in Belgium has begun to fight back. Journalist Lisa De Bode interviews Saliha Ben Ali, whose son was convicted *in absentia* of joining a terrorist organization. To prevent other parents from going through what she did, Ben Ali now runs *ateliers des mamans*, workshops for mothers with children at risk of radicalization. She tells De Bode that, due to the strength of maternal ties, "a mother is the best interlocutor and guarantor of the security of her child and, by proxy, of a country."

In our Portfolio section, we showcase the work of Tasneem Alsultan, who, as a longtime wedding photographer, started to wonder what happened to the marriages she captured on film. In her project "Saudi Tales of Love," she collects the stories of these relationships, revealing both the obstacles imposed by sexist laws and the strength of women across the Arabian Peninsula.

It seems fitting that this, my last issue as editor of *World Policy Journal*, would have the theme "Constructing Family." *WPJ* and its parent organization, the World Policy Institute, have been like family to me since 2011, when I joined as managing editor.

In my new job, as a senior editor at *The Nation*, I am guided by the inclusive, democratic vision of *World Policy Journal*. (I think of myself less as having left *WPJ* than as trying to spread its ideals elsewhere.) I want to thank the incredibly talented Caroline Preston, who, as interim editor, has made this issue sing. ●