

GROUNDING THE FAMILY

Locality and its Discontents in Popular Genealogy

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This paper discusses the grounding of the family in popular genealogy today. It applies a historical and comparative approach to the use of parish registers in three empirical cases from Austria. This use consists in a continued process of rooting the family locally, while simultaneously delocalizing it through the digital connection of data kept separate by the Catholic Church for many centuries. Grounding the family is thus a complex articulation of the modern discourse of settledness, closely bound up with a popular historical culture able to access archival sources directly for the first time in history. The paper questions the category of “imagined families”, which may marginalize this popular practice of producing kinship and perpetuate the essentialist notion of otherwise “authentic” (e.g. juridical, social, biological) families.¹

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Hello and good day to you, as a new member of this list I'd like to introduce myself briefly, my name is Georg Jochum, 64 years old and I live in Barsinghausen which is near Hanover. (...) My forebears came from Graben/Karlsruhe and seem to be spread across all of northern Europe. That's why I joined this list, because bearers of my name also ended up in Vienna. But it seems that the JOCHUM family in Vienna has died out. (...) Maybe one of the list members has the family name JOCHUM in their files, I would be grateful if you could get in touch. Greetings from the far north. Georg (Jochum)²

Posted on an email discussion list in 2011, this email is a dense and complex articulation of the

relationship between family and locality in popular genealogy today: the genealogist introduces his family, defined in patrilineal and historical terms, through its surname; he locates it in one (and only one) place, but also finds himself confronted with migration, leading him to begin his search at many locations. That is, he is aware of the history of the production and processing of genealogical data recorded by the state, communes, and churches over the last several centuries. A virtual place that enables him to access this data is the “austria” mailing list, a German-language forum open to everyone researching “in all the southern areas that belonged to the Habsburg monarchy up to 1918”. Mailing lists like this one are interfaces between the localization of the family and its de-localization. The names of the lists correspond to the

political, geographical, and ethnicized contours of Old Europe, with an “austria list”, a “bavaria”, “sudeten”, “gottschee”, “slovakia”, “westphalia”, “prussia”, “switzerland”, “poland”, and other lists. Yet at the same time, the users of the lists disclaim this historical world, because their databases generate a digital kinship that is no longer represented within this national, ethnic, and geographical order.

Genealogical sources have always arisen in relation to place. As Foucault (2007: 555–583) has shown, from the seventeenth century onward statistics emerged as a new form of government and “population” became an object of knowledge for the state, but long before that – starting with the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century – the Roman Catholic Church had begun to keep parish registers: records of births, marriages, and deaths that registered their objects in relation to place. Popular genealogy today uses this historical data and operates with this knowledge (in this case, the “distribution” of the “forebears”, or the idea that if I have ancestors in Vienna, I must network within the “austria” list that specializes in the southern Habsburg monarchy). For this reason, I argue here, popular genealogy grounds the family – both finds it and ties it to locality – not *in* Austria but *with* Austria. Yet at the very same time, it also delocalizes the family (the family name will be found in the “files” of some list member), reassembling it in new emplacements that are generated not by the technologies of rule but by the individual (“my forebears came from Graben/Karlsruhe”). At first sight, the label “imagined families” thus seems to capture neatly the notion of family that is at work in popular genealogy. However, on closer examination it becomes clear that such a definition would establish a problematic distinction – problematic because it asserts that the state of being “imagined” is limited only to particular families, and because it would have only essentializing responses to the question of what a non-“imagined” family might be.

In this paper, I use the example of the production and utilization of parish registers in Austrian

popular genealogy to examine how family and locality are at once connected and unbound. I show that the place where a family “comes from” or “originates” (thus the semantics in this field) always combines a dynamics of ontology with one of atopia. Every genealogical practice gives rise to both moves: the ontologizing deployment of locality as the first foundation of the family being researched, and the atopic pursuit of the family beyond the locality-bound sources. I conclude that a distinction between “imagined” and “actual” does not account for the family of popular genealogy. This becomes particularly apparent in the interplay of location and dislocation that is continually produced by the epistemic medium of the parish register.

Research on Popular Genealogy: Findings and Perspectives

In the classical phase of anthropology, genealogies were not only an object of study but also an instrument of analysis. After the crisis in the anthropology of kinship, this object attracted new interest and new perspectives, from both “new kinship studies” (e.g., Bouquet 1996; Franklin & McKinnon 2001) and its critics (for German-language ethnology, see Schnegg et al. 2010).³ In contrast, European ethnology and folklore studies paid almost no attention to popular genealogy until very recently (with some exceptions, e.g., Byron 1998). The scattered early studies on popular genealogy in Euro-American ethnology’s societies of origin were carried out by historians and sociologists (e.g., Burguière 1997; Hareven 1978) or by French or Anglo-American anthropologists (e.g., Ayoub 1966; Sagnes 1995; Segalen & Michelat 1990). This work indicates that local references and their political frames, such as the nation state, are utilized by popular genealogy activists in differing ways. They may be accentuated and selected, which is usually read by researchers as a way of producing and safeguarding “identity” (Angelidou 2001: 11; Caron 2002; Segalen & Michelat 1990: 208). For this approach, it is a short step – probably too short – from popular genealogy to “identity”, be-

cause the genealogical format is methodologically posed as a cultural form with an established, inherent effect. This contrasts with approaches that do not formulate “identity” as a given, defined and defining magnitude in their investigations of popular historical culture (Byron 1998; Edwards 1998: esp. 148, 155, 157f., 161). In his study of the genealogical emplacement of the Irish diaspora in the United States, Byron (1998: 27) reflects upon “ethnic identity” in multiple ways: firstly as an “empty vessel” both produced and invoked in the social context, which needs to be interrogated using a critical theory of the subject; secondly, as regards the evaluation of ethnographically collected data, he asks whether it is in fact feasible to infer a collective self-location (“ethnic identity”) from the empirical material (ibid.: 33f.); and thirdly, he questions the empirical findings in methodological terms: “That we were a research team from Ireland interested in their Irish connections and their sense of Irishness undoubtedly influenced what our informants told us” (ibid.: 34; for a similar methodological reflection, see Edwards 1998: 155). Malkki (1992: 25) pinpoints the problem of the methodological coupling of “genealogy” and “identity” by noting that it rests upon “deeply territorializing concepts of identity”.

The present paper picks up and advances this latter perspective, which takes the equation of genealogy and locality as its object of study. I argue that the territorialization of kinship knowledge is not, and has not been, a predetermined feature of genealogy or of genealogical research. Rather, the identification of “being *kin*” with “being *there*” has had to be constantly produced and secured afresh – in fact, this is a case of the production of settledness.⁴ It has been studied in some detail within the history of ideas and political thought, as the socially conservative ideological pairing of family and locality among nineteenth-century political theorists of society like Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1855) and Frédéric Le Play (1855). These two scholars grounded the family in blood, in the patriarchal order, with nature, and via property ownership. Jacques Donzelot’s (1979) discourse

analysis has shown how the “policing of families”, and especially “familializing the popular strata”, in the second half of the nineteenth century was spatially fixed and literally emplaced through its crucial grounding in architecture.⁵ Pierre Bourdieu (2005) traced in detail the resulting Fordist social order that finally supplied the lower social strata with homes of their own as well, localizing them in bourgeois respectability but also putting them under economic pressure and chaining them to their “house”. Research on the Parisian bourgeoisie of the present day indicates the extent to which an assumed genealogical and spatial locality forms part of the symbolic capital of these families.⁶ Since a genealogy of settledness has not yet been written,⁷ these case studies must suffice to hint at the extraordinarily momentous establishment of settledness for, and by means of, the modern Euro-American family in the modern era.

Presenting three case studies from a micro-perspective, in the following I will show how genealogical practices can articulate the family again and again as the sum of locations and dislocations.

A Genealogy of Grounding Family in and with the Parish Registers

My argument in all three cases proceeds from written, materialized sources of popular genealogy: parish registers, in Germany called *Kirchenbücher* and in Austria *Matriken*. It would be easy enough to classify this written record in one of two ways. Either, as Goody (2000) argues, the parish registers are instruments with which the Catholic Church pursued its economic interests (i.e., safeguarding legacies) by keeping track of kinship relations, enforced the canonical prohibitions on marriage, and by these means contributed to the replacement of kin-based, extended, and spatially dispersed social formations by the small, home-based “European family”. Or the parish registers’ function may be interpreted analogously with Foucault’s (2007) thesis of the emergence of state statistics from the sixteenth century on as part of a new technology of power that produced “population”: as a means of government which the Catho-

lic Church used to flank its pastoral techniques and tie them to territory, and the causes and effects of which cannot be explained by economic interests alone.

However, rather than trying to fit the parish registers into one of these hypotheses, I prefer to discuss the different ways they have been handled by genealogy. I think of the empirical sources not as representations of hidden forces of history (such as economics or power), but as “actants” in the sense of Latour’s (1996) actor-network theory – in other words, as virtual or material participants that develop their own logic and their own dynamic within the genealogical procedure. The three cases of genealogical practice I have selected exemplify the fact that “settledness” is not a given, and that “migration” is not its other. Instead, it will become clear that mobility and immobility can only be adequately understood as relational complements. The three examples are taken from Austria (I will come back to the problems of this localizing statement); they are small segments from my more extensive study on the cultural anthropology of popular genealogy. I arrange the cases not chronologically, but in the order that they made their appearance in my research. By choosing this arrangement, I am also suggesting a potential relationship between ethnographical and historiographical approaches to popular genealogy: is it possible to identify historical links or formal peculiarities without organizing these as a linear array, but also without essentializing them by detaching them from history?

I firstly show how Catholic priests in Bavaria and Styria between the wars invented a *Volksgenealogie*, “folk genealogy” – and, in their study of the parish registers, were taken aback by migration. In politically agitated times, they had hoped to extract a sense of stability from these monologically organized genealogies, yet such stability was precisely what the sources refused to supply.

I then go back several centuries, to the period of the Reformation and the beginning of the parish registers. Later used by priests as their sources, the registers began life as sources *produced* by priests.

Genealogy here is a way of fixing the kinship knowledge of the Catholic Church’s canon law, a technology for dealing with migration. My study of the sources demonstrates that the parish registers, as the key materials of genealogical research, originated in part from a confrontation with migration.

Finally, I turn to popular genealogy today, and specifically the ways that its networking, data, and knowledge formats ground and, simultaneously, digitally dislocate the family. In these genealogical practices, emplacing the family is both the objective and the means of the research – for without knowledge of the church, state, and communal record-keeping that divided people up by place and by rule, it is impossible to pick up traces in the archives and find the desired documents. Where migration interrupted the processing of kinship knowledge into the parish registers, today’s popular genealogy is collectively working to close the gaps, as becomes particularly clear in the case of the project to create a digital “marriage index”.

Producing and Using Church Registers: Three Examples

1. Styria, 1919: Priests Grounding the Family

In the mid-nineteenth century, the history of the countryside had already come to the attention of scholars, *Heimatspfleger* or “nurturers of local life”, and of social policy-makers in the context of urbanization and industrialization. As the weapon of choice against the “flight from the land” (the term itself was a political battle cry), ideas of agrarian romanticism arose that also contributed to the formation and expansion of folklorist interests in this period. Agrarian romanticism’s interest in the rural space and its history, gathering pace since the mid-century, had also embraced genealogies.⁸ In many European countries in the late nineteenth century, priests and ministers began isolated genealogical studies in towns and villages, taking their own parish as their object and starting point. Between the First and Second World War such projects, especially in Styria and in Bavaria, were drawn together under the head-

ing of *Volksgenealogie* or “folk genealogy”. The political basis of this movement’s argument was partly the notion of *Heimatschutz*, “protecting the homeland”. Its advocates’ energetic agitation was often largely dismissed by the local population, as Judson (2006) has shown for the case of nationalist language policy in Styria. This may be one reason why ever new arguments had to be sought, as here in the case of “folk genealogy”, where a family imagined in deeply historical terms was set up in opposition to the “flight from the land”.

When the Styrian priest and theologian Konrad Brandner started his genealogical research in 1919, he turned first to the registers of the parish of Haus, the oldest volume of which is a register of baptisms begun in 1586.⁹ In making this decision, he was going back to the earliest accessible point not only historically (even now, no older parish registers have been found to survive in Styria; see the compilation in Ruhri 1997: 123–138), but also biographically: Brandner had started his pastoral service in August 1905 to August 1907 as a chaplain at the Ennstal parish of Haus. He had no overview of the state of the sources, but judged the parish registers to be reliable evidence of a long-standing affinity between family and settledness. His key objective was to influence the rural population: “Genealogy now shows them [the inhabitants of Styria] in a documentary manner how long and where their family has been settled (...). This awareness will without doubt increase love for the homeland and spin threads between the past and the present” (Brandner 1920: 9).¹⁰

In his vision of popular genealogy as a brake on migration, Brandner assumed that an agrarian economy correlates with geographical immobility (Brandner 1926). However, the “folk genealogists” did not succeed in proving this claim. The correspondence of the priests carrying out genealogical research hints at a perplexity arising from the sources: many of their research reports and reflections on the innovative project of a folk genealogy discuss migration, and there are also specific assessments such as the following: “This study may, at least, indicate that even in such in-

hospitable regions, the ‘internal migration of the peoples’ is far from insignificant” (Felber 1927b: 10; see also Felber 1927a). But the genealogists did not allow such findings to shake their postulate of sedentarism, and the assertion that families from the villages had been immobile for many centuries remained intact. Interested in people’s *Bodenständigkeit*, their autochthony or “rootedness in the soil”, Brandner concentrated on the cases that supported this fantasy (Brandner 1926). He noted the predominant finding that most of the families showed no such *Bodenständigkeit*:

When I considered this result, I saw that among them there are many genealogical tables that cover only two or three generations. (...) They thus stand, so to speak, as fragments of a lineage in folk genealogy; in many cases these will only have been fragments split off from larger lineages in other locations. (Brandner 1926: col. 227)

Here Brandner identifies and isolates the empirical findings that counter the thesis of *Bodenständigkeit* – he qualifies the quantitatively prevailing cases as a “fragment”, something “split off”. Methodologically, he thus makes settledness an Archimedean point that permits him to register migration while leaving *Bodenständigkeit* untouched. At times Brandner gave very explicit form to this profile of his genealogies, marked both by a new collapse of boundaries and by new demarcations: “Of course, only persons born in Styria could be considered for the genealogy, in other words also many people who live outside Styria; however, on the other hand, many persons living in Styria would not be included in the genealogy because they were not born there” (ibid.: col. 228).

Even the *völkisch* protagonists of folk genealogy did initially take note of the migration that appeared in the sources. For example, having completely transferred the information in the registers from 1650 to the present for his 650-soul parish to a card index and arranged it into descendency lists, Josef Demleitner – a Bavarian priest who later achieved fame through his guide to genea-

logical research or *Sippenkunde* (“clan lore”) in the context of the Nuremberg Laws (Demleitner & Roth 1935, 1936) – wrote the following in a letter to his Styrian colleague Brandner in January 1926:

When I looked through various parish registers in the area this year for a local-history study on the Thirty Years’ War, I found that, particularly in the 1650–1680 period, a tremendous number of strangers settled in the area through marriage. At least the tenth part of all weddings are to foreigners. At any rate, as folk genealogy advances, some attention must be paid to the question of population exchange.

The folk genealogists’ surprise at migration articulates the grounding of the family with great precision: they had worked their way through the records of the Catholic Church in the sure conviction of finding settledness there. The settled ideal that the priests intended to find in the parish registers reflects the discourse of a sedentary Europe. The correspondence demonstrates how the folk genealogists, searching for *Heimat* and aiming to produce the region in a combination of temporal constancy and spatial immobility, came up against a mobile history. At first, the priests reacted to this confrontation with surprise and curiosity; even an ideologue like Josef Demleitner did not immediately resort to denying this rupture of the nationalist ideal of centuries-old, secluded rural localities, home to enclosed families and clans. There is an element of tragicomedy in the way that these pastors, facing the depopulation of the villages, sat down at the sources to build bonds to the locality in support of settledness and love of *Heimat*, only to be confronted with and disappointed by the internal European migration of the past three centuries.

In the correspondence of folk genealogists of the early interwar years, the researchers still responded to the registers’ indications of migration using the tools of debate and argumentation. Just a few years later, that space no longer existed.

The compulsory genealogy that the Nazi state imposed through the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 (Ehrenreich 2007; Pegelow 2006) depended on forgetting the knowledge of migration that folk genealogy had addressed. When Georg Grüll, “Gausachbearbeiter für Sippenkunde im Gau Oberdonau” (“Regional Officer for Clan Lore in the Upper Danube Region”), organized the card-indexing of the parish registers in the early 1940s, settledness had already become a methodological essential. In point 8 of his 1941 “Instructions for card-indexing the Linz parish registers”, he required the indexing staff to fill out the marriage cards as follows:

The place of origin of A and B [i.e. the bridal couple] need only be included if it differs from the place of residence of the parents. (...) In a rooted [*bodenständig*] population, this field will as a rule remain empty, because the bridegroom’s and the bride’s place of origin will accord with that of their parents.¹¹

In the Nazi period, settledness appears as the ideal of an identity between descendency and alliance.¹² Nazi genealogy no longer expects to find any disparity between the two, and logically enough the regional genealogical officer signals an “empty field” in this segment of the data record. The empty space is there to prove that no rupture has occurred: that is the *völkisch* grounding of the family.

This conclusion is not new; it has already been set out in analyses of the ideology of “blood and soil”. However, the present micro-perspective on the genealogical utilization of historical sources shows how close the nationalist “folk genealogists” came to quite different evidence. Consulting the parish registers, they were using sources for the grounding of the family that had been created in the sixteenth century to localize kinship knowledge, but which nevertheless passed on manifold evidence of the disengagement of family and locality, as I shall now show.

2. Styria, 1563: Priests Producing Sources

The sources used by the folk genealogists were almost exclusively parish registers, and even today these books are key sources for popular genealogy. The history of such documents, and of the knowledge practices from which they emerged, is closely bound up with far-reaching political, religious, and social conflicts in Europe over the past five centuries. In the sixteenth century, parish registers were developed by technologies of power that could no longer make use of older forms of personal documentation – the medieval lists of townsmen or nobility, for example – because of their estates-based profile. Whereas older techniques for documenting populations were socially segregated and specific (each listing, for example, only townspeople or only nobles), parish registers were socially undefined from the very start.

The existence of parish registers in the Catholic Church goes back to the Council of Trent, 1545–1563 (for the case of Styria, see Ruhri 1997: 109–111; see also the following points). The Council's decree *Tametsi* of 11 November 1563 required all parishes to keep registers of baptisms and marriages. With this, the Catholic Church's documentation of the population was founded upon the documentation of the population-as-Catholic: the objects of the parish register were initially neither birth nor death but two Catholic sacraments, baptism and marriage. Parish priests were charged with entering the data and preserving the registers, in the shape of books or loose-leaf collections. Entries included the names of the bridal couple and the witnesses along with the day and place of the wedding, or for baptisms the names of the infant and its godparents.

The decree *Tametsi* is the founding document of the Tridentine marriage. It was the Catholic Church's reaction to religious, political, and social upheavals in the sixteenth century that sprang from many different sources: Reformation and Counter-Reformation, increased mobility, new family structures and lifestyles resulting from changes in urban life, and an altered form of statehood that no longer rested on the person

and family of the monarch. The new registers also responded to the everyday conflicts arising from the practice of “clandestine marriage” in the sense of marriage without a specific ecclesiastical form – the marriage format that had previously dominated in quantitative terms, except among the nobility and burghers, most of whose marriages were recorded by notaries and therefore, as in Roman law, functioned contractually, as agreements, rather than spiritually, as sacraments (Zarri 2001: 344f.). The Council of Trent decree turned the private matter of marriage, an undertaking between two individuals, into a public, formalized, written, clericalized, and sacralized act (ibid.: 361), and made priests the crucial figures in what may be described as a “disciplining” of the family (ibid.: 364f.).

Zarri (ibid.: 362; see also the following points) additionally interprets the parish registers as a means of creating a legally unequivocal definition of the domestic community in the context of growing conflicts around children born out of wedlock. But most relevant to the question addressed here, the localization of family, is the fact that the parish registers were first and foremost a technology for disciplining lower-status and mobile population groups. Increasing mobility threatened to hollow out the epistemological foundations for enforcing Catholic canon law, oral communication; the Church responded by switching to the written word. However, the parish registers did not completely replace oral tradition, for the regulations surrounding the Tridentine marriage also required the reading of banns, in other words the public announcement of a marriage among the congregation before the wedding. This targeted and prescribed scanning of unwritten kinship knowledge at the occasion of the wedding was intended to supply information about any impediments to marriage, namely family relationships that precluded marriage under canon law. The Church was not willing or able to rely upon the kinship knowledge it had itself recorded in written form. Publishing the banns was the technology that riveted together local kinship knowledge and

practices – “habitual kinship” – with the “official kinship” (Lanzinger & Saurer 2007) of the parish registers.¹³

The development of record-keeping was continued with Paul V’s *Rituale Romanum* of 17 June 1614, which prescribed the compilation of registers of confirmations and deaths (or rather funerals); these registers were also to include information on the family of the person involved. On 20 February 1784, the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II issued an edict making the keeping of parish registers a state duty, although he devolved this to the churches and state-recognized religious communities (Ruhri 1997: 108, 119). One consequence of this was the standardization of entries through the use of pre-printed tabular forms (Becker 1989). But whereas the German Empire established state civil registers in 1874, in Austria the parish registers remained the only documentation of this kind until 1938. State documentation has only existed in Austria since 1 August 1938 (the introduction of civil marriage) and 1 January 1939 (the establishment of civil registry offices).

In various historical contexts throughout Europe, long before the creation of a system of state civil registration, conflicts frequently arose around the right of access to the parish registers, as did calls for them to be taken into state hands. The Council of Trent had authorized priests to administer the parish registers, and they held on to that responsibility. The keeping of registers did not begin immediately in all parishes; there is evidence in the case of Styria, for example, that this sometimes took several decades and rebukes from the bishop. However, when a parish register was set up, priests quickly took up their role as guardians of the archive. Once the volumes came into existence, what Latour calls their “programme of action” began to unfold: mediating between locality and movement, and between connection and separation. Within that field of tension the priests acted as archontes, as the high officials and custodians of the archives, who constantly developed new ways to combine the collection and sealing of knowledge in the books

with the publication of knowledge and opening of the books.¹⁴

The registers always physically remained within the parishes, and this sedentary aspect both expresses and explains the fact that it was nearly the middle of the twentieth century before kinship knowledge could be produced from the parish registers that was not separated out and tied to a particular location. When Catholic priests in the interwar period began, as I have described, to use these volumes as historical sources for their “folk genealogy”, that move displays typical elements of an innovative utilization, and is not a distinctive feature of the history of Church documentation. In her genealogical study of files, legal historian Cornelia Vismann (2008) shows that well into the sixteenth century, the processing of the state and municipal administrations’ files consisted in either using them within the chancery or storing them – they were not yet deployed as historical sources, and “it took a long time for the practice of referring to old files to assert itself” (*ibid.*: 99). The Catholic Church in Austria had not even centralized the storage of parish registers, which is why the folk genealogists had to work on the registers of their own specific parishes. Even the diocesan archives that have now taken on the parish registers do not hold them as property, but preserve them in trust for the parishes (thus Ruhri 1997: 122, on the diocesan archives in Graz-Seckau). In fact, even today a clear distinction between chancery and archive has not yet been established in the parishes.

The most recent utilization of the parish registers, present-day popular genealogy, leapfrogs that distinction by digitizing the data to create an open archive. In its indexes and databases, simple search runs can close many of the gaps in kin connections that were opened by the local storage of the parish registers and by their localization of kinship in many different ways. Although this present-day use of the parish registers initially also arises from a desire to identify a particular family and to ground it historically in a single location, there are two further products of popular

genealogy's indices and mailing lists: on the one hand new relays that for the first time delocalize kinship knowledge, and on the other a popular historical culture with direct access to archival material.

3. *The Net, 2007: The Marriage Index*

Present-day genealogical research – which must rely on the parish registers if it is to reach back over centuries – always starts, like the email cited at the opening of this article, with a place: “My family comes from ...”. However, later this spontaneous logic of place is often frustrated. The researcher comes up against too many “blanks” – *tote Punkte*, “dead points”, in the German genealogical jargon – so that church records from other parishes have to be consulted in order to trace further connections and set up new relays. The converse of “the blanks” is “serendipity” (*Zufallsfund*), the chance discovery of an individual in the register of a parish where he or she was not resident (for example in a marriage or godparenthood entry). Using mailing lists and the Internet, popular genealogy today brings the “blanks” into contact with the “serendipities”, so that kin connections can be traced beyond the records that are localized by parish.

To be sure, these techniques are not the first attempts to overcome the locality of kinship knowledge. Popular genealogy worldwide has focused particularly on the Mormons' efforts to microfilm and centralize parish registers, which began as early as the 1930s.¹⁵ The Salt Lake City vault where these microfiches are stored is regarded in popular genealogy as a “mythic place” (Sagnes 1995), partly because of its association with the practice of baptism for the dead, but, among those active in genealogical circles, also as a “disputed paradise” (Richau 2007). It is a place that for many centuries did not exist because the church registers, scattered by parish, never documented every connection. The Mormon archive in Utah is a kind of super-locale for the grounding of the family. Yet it dates from an era that was able to bring together the parish registers materially, as microfilm, but

not informationally. That would be achieved only by today's newest generation of popular genealogy, which switched from the analogue mode of centralizing material sources into the digital mode of data without locality. I will now discuss how popular genealogy is collectively producing this unseparated kinship knowledge, using the example of a “marriage index”.

Several years ago, I interviewed Herr Noggler.¹⁶ He is a well-known activist of popular genealogy in Austria, and is one of those who organize and network activities (in associations, mailing lists, and web portals) and advance the field through methodological innovation. His work is not limited to research on his “family”; rather, he develops forms and formats of digitizing the historical source material that enable linkages far beyond what was available to him when he first began to research his “family history”. It is a notable feature of this type of popular genealogist that his innovations are developed inductively, out of his confrontation with problems of researching “my family” in the parish registers:

It's a regional peculiarity that for baptisms the mother's maiden name isn't included, and that makes it difficult, and for marriages, if the parents' names are not included, then it really gets problematic. If it only says that bridegroom and bride married, then that's a problem, but I have – if you want some idea of numbers – I have found 560 or 570 of my paternal line, mainly – not only – in Lower Austria, and more than 200 from my grandfather's line in the Bohemian Forest or round about 200, and for those of my grandmother it's now about 140. But that's also because registers are missing there, we've now even begun, with a few colleagues, to completely transcribe the registers of Liebental – that's the main relevant parish in Austrian Silesia (...) and to draw up tables of names (...). You wouldn't believe what there is lying around in the archives, tons of material, mostly not indexed (...).

“For marriages”, “if it only says that bridegroom and bride married”, then the genealogist is confronted with a “blank”, a “dead point”: alongside the names of the bridal couple, he finds no reference to their place of residence or birth, and thus cannot go to the parish archives of that locality to research their family background. In a case like this, his search for his genealogy comes to a stop. But Herr Noggler thinks beyond the locality of kinship that the parish registers present him with: his comment “mostly not indexed” implies that he could find many more connections if the material were arranged in a different way, if it were switchable as data. Herr Noggler has put that insight into practice, playing an active part in the association “Familia Austria”, which he also helped to found.¹⁷ Of the association’s many and various activities – networking genealogical activists and creating cooperative, collaborative structures to digitize data from historical sources (these might be written sources in archives, or gravestones carrying personal data) – the marriage index¹⁸ is of particular relevance for the grounding of the family in popular genealogy. The index’s presentation clearly shows the inductive procedure applied when networking the data. Popular genealogy may start out from research on “my family”, but that search soon generates very different dynamics:

Marriage index

Almost every genealogist and family researcher has been there: you find the baptism of a forebear some time in the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth century, but the wedding of the baby’s parents and the parents’ birth or baptism entries are nowhere to be found, even though you know their names. First you search the registers of the surrounding parishes (...). But then in most cases there is nothing else you can do! You will now only be able to make progress if, by a lucky chance, you discover the parents’ marriage somewhere after all. Some colleagues then invest years of work in complicated name analyses, bombard the parishes of whole regions with

enquiries, and put together extensive studies of migration in the period concerned. But most of these cases unfortunately remain unresolved.

This is where our MARRIAGE INDEX initiative comes in.

Working together with, if possible, all the parishes in former Austria Hungary, we are drawing up name indexes of the marriage registers, or collecting indexes that have already been made, and making this data accessible in a shared searchable database.

(...)

Our aim is to make it possible to track down ancestors who have moved across long distances (and whose origin is not named at their place of destination).

In the genealogical project “marriage index”, both the family’s settledness and its de-localization materialize. Today, the first step is still to assume the emplacement of familial reproduction – which is why the genealogists work concentrically outwards from the baptismal location of the “forebear”. But because most genealogists in these circles have now acquired very sophisticated historical knowledge (in the history of administration, social history and the history of rule) as well as skill in the use and critique of sources, particularly through the case-specific exchanges in mailing lists, they now wish to address the problem in a more thorough-going way. The marriage index realizes a de-localized kinship on the basis of the very parish registers that were created to localize the family. Where the historical sources are silent because they divide up kinship knowledge by place, the digital mode makes them speak again. Within a few clicks searching the index, a “blank” or “dead point” can become a potent relay. It is true that this move is once again linked to the restrictive grounding of a – “my” – family: as Herr Noggler put it in the interview, “my mother is descended from Sudeten Germans”. But this topographical ontology is not a logical consequence of the data researched or the atopic linkages that Herr Noggler himself helped bring into being. Rather, it is a

practical consequence of the suspicion of ontology that fuels the research.

Conclusion: Grounding the Family and Losing Locality

These three cases of the genealogical handling of parish registers indicate the complexity of the dynamics associated with the grounding of the family. In the history of genealogy, the parish registers are an extremely dynamic epistemic medium, on the one hand producing settledness and migration as complements while, on the other, creating connections between them.

Rather than grounding its family *in* Austria, popular genealogy grounds it *with* Austria – locality functions both as the ontological grounds of the family and as the medium of research. But in this encounter with the sources, objectives and outcomes ultimately emerge that the researchers had not intended: the genealogists develop a pleasure in tracking down information, in source criticism, in historical and critical evaluation of their data, in their growing knowledge of European history. In parallel to its location and dislocation of the family, popular genealogy also brings forth a historical culture. This vernacular historiography emerges not via the mediating authorities of public cultural and educational efforts, but in direct contact with the archives. This is why Tyler (2005) emphasizes the emancipatory thrust of popular genealogy today, while Hackstaff (2009: 178) refers to a “democratization of genealogy”. Direct, unmediated access to the sources is a specific enjoyment that arises precisely from the problems encountered in research. It rests not on a positivist reading of the sources, but on an open process of interrogating one’s own research results, and on the knowledge that there are also research situations (for example in the case of homonymy) where it is not possible to move forward. In her ethnography of US genealogical associations, Hackstaff (*ibid.*) has described this attitude as “analytic realism”. It is, though, striking that this criminological pleasure in working on sources does not supersede the grounding of the family but, on the

contrary, is inextricably connected with it. It is only the imagining of a monolocally situated family and the attempt to verify this which leads to the navigation through the archives – a navigation by means of which popular genealogy simultaneously reconstructs historical migrations and digitally erases them.

The question now arises whether this grounding of the family is specific to the Austrian situation. Because few case studies on popular genealogy have so far been carried out, this cannot be answered with certainty; but historical emplacement is always involved in popular genealogy. It is worth noting that many studies on the United States describe popular genealogy as working with a combination of historical sources and genetic testing (Hackstaff 2009; Nash 2004; Nelson 2008). This may be partly due to the particular questions such studies pose – certainly, Tucker’s (2009) ethnography, focusing primarily on the relationship between public and private archives, does not confirm the hypothesis that genetic kinship is central to US popular genealogy. There do seem to be some features specific to popular genealogy referencing Scotland and Ireland and to black genealogies: the political and economic momentum of the heritage industry and a sophisticated “roots tourism” sector (Basu 2005; Basu 2006; Gilroy 1997; Legrand 2006; Schramm 2008) – formations that have not been recorded for genealogy relating to other countries, at least in Europe. Critically upturning the question of the national specificity of popular genealogies today, one might conclude that the question itself does not so much address cultural differences as pursue a “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). Within which popular genealogy should we classify, for example, an activist living in Australia who is researching his ancestors in Europe by means of the “austria”, “slovakia”, and “switzerland” mailing lists, archive visits, and databases? Just as popular genealogy is unsettled by historical migration as it searches for unequivocal localizations of its family, the digital mode of current popular genealogy’s networking and information exchange is

antagonistic to an anthropological form of questioning that focuses on the national specificity of popular genealogies.

I also doubt that “imagined” adequately describes the specific kinship whose grounds popular genealogy both seeks and disrupts in the course of its encounter with the parish registers and other sources in its databases. The ligature between family and place is not an “idea” or “mental image” external or subordinate to an otherwise authentic (e.g. social, juridical, genetic) kinship. Rather, grounding the family causes an ontological unrest that is what produces the kinship of popular genealogy in the first place. Therefore, my comparative discussion of the genealogical production and utilization of the parish registers since the sixteenth century stresses that locating the family is always associated with dislocating the family. Unlike an intellectual or political history of settledness, the perspective of cultural anthropology can face up to the finding that knowledge about the discontents of locality is not simply the result of academic research, but itself part of the field it studies.

Notes

- 1 The article was translated by Kate Sturge. I thank her for the thorough discussion concerning translations from historical sources. Also, I would like to thank the four anonymous reviewers for their critique and valuable suggestions regarding the first version of this article.
- 2 Austria-L, 23 September 2011 (names anonymized), <http://list.genealogy.net/mm/listinfo/austria-l> (accessed March 28, 2012). Here and throughout, translations from German are by Kate Sturge.
- 3 These new perspectives on genealogy must be placed in the context of increasing anthropological research on family and kinship (for selected European states, see the extensive historical and contemporary, quantitative and qualitative comparative studies by Beck et al. 2007; Grandits 2010; Heady & Kohli 2010; Heady & Schweitzer 2010; Knecht, Klotz & Beck 2012; Segalen 2012).
- 4 The “transnationality” of kinship is not a recent phenomenon. As has been sufficiently demonstrated, kinship was never something immovable, either in the city or in the village or provinces: labour and economic forms (e.g., transhumant shepherds), markets and commerce, natural disasters, pilgrimages and wars, the science and technology of ecclesiastical and secular powers (such as visitations, tax collection, population censuses), and not least emotional yearnings have always given rise to mobility, including in pre- and early modern Europe. Although there were certainly variations, with different regions experiencing more or less mobility, it is clear that the narrow horizons and immobility of the village were inventions of the nineteenth century – carefully crafted ideals that seemed to promise some contemporaries an element of stability in the maelstrom of manufacturing’s dizzying pace.
- 5 Social housing construction in the nineteenth century calculated the space required very precisely, the objective being “to design a housing unit small enough that no ‘outsider’ would be able to live in it, yet large enough for the parents to have a space separate from their children, so that they might watch over them in their occupations without being observed in their own intimate play” (Donzelot 1979: 42). One figure of this discourse was the vagrant, who for “roughly ten years (1890–1900)” became the “universal of mental pathology” and a “special category” for the legal system (ibid.: 130).
- 6 “One does not search for one’s roots; they are there, forming part of one” (Le Wita 1994: 120f.). Le Wita argues that the Parisian bourgeoisie’s forms of housing and property – a town house, a country house – function not only as economic capital but also as symbolic capital, because they index the respectability of sedentary life in relation to the mobility of migration: “The existence of family seats places the bourgeois at the opposite pole from the migrant. His urban way of life is not made up of wrenching breaks or splits. He knows nothing of exploded kindred, the separation of the generations, weekends spent in the grey monotony of Paris or the suburbs with the children entrusted to their schools’ outdoor centres” (ibid.: 35f.).
- 7 Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic utopia *A Thousand Plateaus* (1992) may be read as this kind of a genealogy of settledness – albeit one that is so obligated to the atopic that it cannot bring forth its nascently empirical approaches in the shape of recognizable “fields”.
- 8 For example as peasant family histories or “family books”, intended to help preserve ties to the agrarian lifeworld and working environment. Indications of this can be found in, for example, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl’s *Land und Leute* [Land and people] (1851), which recommends drawing up peasant family chronicles; in *Die Familie* [The family] (1855) Riehl calls for bourgeois family chronicles to be compiled.
- 9 Diocesan archives Graz-Seckau, Graz, Personalakten

- Priester, Dr. Konrad Brandner. Unless otherwise mentioned, this is the source of all information on Brandner in the following and all the documents cited.
- 10 In fact Konrad Brandner was aware of the existence of similar interests. He explicitly mentions, for example, the “efforts of folklorists”, which he wishes to supplement through his project (Brandner 1920).
 - 11 Upper Austrian Archives Linz, Arbeitsbund für österreichische Familienkunde [Working Group for Austrian Family Lore], box 9, Georg Grill: “Arbeitsanleitung für die Verkartung der Linzer Kirchenbücher” [Instructions for card-indexing the Linz parish registers], November 1941.
 - 12 In popular genealogy, this ideal resulted in a distinct genre, the *Ortsfamilienbuch* or village genealogy. These family registers are not simply one more component in the “grey literature” of this field; rather, they function as important interfaces between popular and scholarly genealogy or demography, because their use saves time compared with the extremely time-consuming research on the original parish registers. This certainly applies to the historical and demographic research carried out by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure (Knodel 1975, 1988; Knodel & Shorter 1976). As can be seen in the example of Styrian folk genealogy, the compilers of these village genealogies (later also called *Ortssippenbücher*) were not so much collectors as editors of the material. For an example of source criticism on migration in an older form of the genre, the *Familienbuch* or “family book”, see Lanzinger (2003).
 - 13 However, it would be wrong to conclude that the introduction of the written form resulted in a straightforward implementation of canonical and legal provisions. The parish registers were compilations, open to interpretation, and all those involved (married couples and their relatives, representatives of state and church authorities) pursued flexible strategies and their own distinct interests when producing and deploying them (Lanzinger 2003, 2006, 2007).
 - 14 In a late-eighteenth-century example, when the district authorities demanded access to baptismal registers in order to identify potential conscripts the pastors refused. They feared that making public the paternity of children born out of wedlock, recorded in the registers, would result in conflicts. In this case, the solution was to draw up a separate and confidential register, the *liber arcanum*, to document the baptisms of children born out of wedlock (Ruhri 1997: 117).
 - 15 On genealogical research by the Mormons, see Mehr’s overview (1992) and Richau’s (2007) critical account from popular genealogy.
 - 16 Interview with Herr Noggler, Vienna, May 5, 2007.
 - 17 This association has no physical home. Some of its most active members have been working together for many years to digitize archival genealogical data without ever having met in person (interview with Herr Noggler, Vienna, May 5, 2007; interview with Frau Eschenbach, Vienna, March 16, 2009). As a result, the web portal does not indicate activity in “real life”: it is itself the association. www.familia-austria.at (accessed February 10, 2012).
 - 18 All the following quotations are taken from www.familia-austria.at/projekte/hzindex_projekt.php (accessed February 10, 2012).

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