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We live in extraordinary times. Even the youngest readers of the New Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families can mine their personal experiences for numerous examples of revolutionary change. Those among us who are a little older can recall when telephones were always tethered to a wall and long-distance calls were too expensive for the casual catch-ups with kin that we now take for granted. Certainly, in the decade since the publication of the first Companion to the Sociology of Families, the world has moved on with blinding speed.

Beginning in 2008, a global economic crisis shook the security of households. It derailed the retirement hopes of older family members. It upended young adults’ plans to strike out on their own, marry, and start families. It frustrated family men, who struggled not only to meet traditional expectations to provide for their families, but also to live up to new ideals as hands-on, involved fathers and gender egalitarian mates. The scope of the crisis reflected global economic integration. Globalization was already being played out in high levels of international migration, creating transnational families no longer calling a single country home.

Although the great recession left few families unscathed, it drew attention to persistent and growing inequalities between families. From the United States in the developed North to Latin American countries in the developing South, the lifestyles and life chances of family members were increasingly defined by their educations, incomes, and occupations. Where marriage is valued, it was becoming more and more the province of the rich. In some places, marriage had lost its cachet. Cohabitation was filling the void as a pragmatic partnering arrangement for younger and older couples alike.

Even if progress toward gender equality sometimes slowed, there was no sign that the gender revolution would be rolled back. Male privilege was challenged even in such patriarchal societies as East Asia. Despite enduring differences in the gendered life course, men’s and women’s responsibilities in the workplace and the home converged. Employment and motherhood seldom mesh seamlessly, however. Advanced welfare states embraced work–family reconciliation policies that might encourage childbearing and help them out of an unsustainable sinkhole of subreplacement fertility and negative population growth.
Demographic and family change was often read in terms of its implications for the care and support of the youngest and oldest family members. One hallmark of the last decade has been a continuing movement toward greater diversity in family forms. Cohabitation, divorce, nonmarital childbearing, and child-free unions made talk of the family seem a quaint anachronism. The question is not so much whether innovations in family life offers personal fulfillment for adults, but rather whether new family forms meet the needs of children. The continuing growth of female-headed families with limited means underscores the depth of this problem. With welfare state retrenchment, there are similar concerns that loneliness and insecurity await unmarried and childless older adults in coming decades.

Prompted by economic, political, cultural, legal, and technological developments, transformations in families have played out on a global stage. On the one hand, globalization means the diffusion of family innovations. For instance, revisionist Western ideas about gender intrude on East Asian societies. On the other hand, a worldwide perspective shows the region-by-region, country-by-country differences in key features of family life. Cultures retain defining aspects of their family systems. Countries do not necessarily trend together in the same direction. Even in the West, divorce started to rise in some places, just as it seemed to be topping out among countries that were early adopters.

Against the tumult of the last decade, there is a clear imperative to reassess what we know about families. Fortunately, research on families has thrived during this period. According to a recent online title search on family and families in the Sociological Abstracts data base, 10,184 articles were published in scholarly journals just since the first Companion to Sociology of Families debuted in 2004. This figure does not do justice to books or to the many important works published in other disciplines or in languages besides English. The challenge of this volume, then, is to synthesize a wealth of new findings in order to understand changing families in the context of a longer historical tradition of research and theory.

The new Companion is fortunate to have a distinguished team of family specialists as contributors. Drawn from five continents, there are old hands and fresh voices, all committed to making sense of family change around the world. Each chapter is new or significantly revamped. Each addresses a central issue or domain, describing the state of the field and emerging concerns. A comparison with the earlier Companion underscores transformations in families and in family scholarship.

The earlier volume emphasized Europe and North America. Markedly more global in outlook, this Companion leads off with an introduction to the distinctive family systems of world regions and cultures. To Europe and the United States, this new book adds dedicated chapters on families in East Asia and Latin America. While it is fair to say that European and American families are the subject of the most research and, hence, receive the most attention, the contributions in the new Companion areconcertedly comparative. Some chapters are genuinely cross-national in scope. Others have a narrower scope but take care to point out enlightening contrasts. Where the emphasis is on a particular country, the country case is carefully chosen. For instance, in an engaging chapter on religion, the US experience stands as an intriguing exception to secular trends elsewhere in the developed world.

The previous collection anticipated the rising interest in globalization with chapters on immigrant families in the United States and the United Kingdom. This edition
returns to these subjects, but it now also provides an overarching review of the much broader concept of transnational families. Importantly, immigrant families have ceased to be a side bar in family studies. Rather than merely an auxiliary topic with its own review, the families of immigrants are incorporated into essays across this book. We learn, for example, about the increase in foreign brides in East Asian countries, the intergenerational conflicts between immigrant parents and their native-born children, and the growing use of DNA testing to prove family relationships for purposes of immigration.

In the 2004 Companion, a thoughtful essay on lesbians and gays analyzed how a marginalized community nonetheless overcame the lack of institutional models and support to craft their own distinctive family lives. Picking up the theme here, a new chapter describes the much more welcoming environment for today’s same-sex couples. This chapter builds on the growth in scholarship, a development leading toward a positive consensus on once disputed questions such as gay and lesbian parenting. A new review turns to new topics, namely, the family lives of GLBT youths and grandparents. As in the case of immigrant families, same-sex couples have been mainstreamed in the sociology of families and take their place in chapters ranging from assisted reproduction technologies to partner violence to the health of children and adults.

The important connection of feminism and family demanded a chapter in 2004, but gender permeates every new chapter in this volume. Although women are at the center of virtually every family policy debate, research now recognizes men as integral to families, too. Today, fathers are the subject of their own chapter. In other chapters, the interest in men extends to protective marital health effects, the importance of male earnings for the transition to marriage, and changing attitudes toward male infertility. A similar case can be made for the successful colonization of family studies by the life course perspective. In the New Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families, there are chapters on age groups and intergenerational relations, and the life course appears as an important organizing theme for understanding everything from poverty to sexual behavior.

Overview and Organization

Although North American and European scholarship receives the most attention in this Companion, the book takes a broad and global view of family life, particularly with respect to the developed world. This perspective is seen, on the one hand, in a set of chapters that explores points of difference and convergence between regions of the globe. On the other hand, it is evident in chapters that investigate the family implications of globalization, such as international migration, which gives rise to transnational families spanning national borders and to immigrant families adapting to new circumstances even as they change the host society.

Göran Therborn (Chapter 1) sets the stage with a sweeping historical examination of families across time and space. He argues for taking a long view of family change, one that recognizes the persistence of unique features of family systems in different parts of the globe. The chapter maps family systems that reflect the continuing influence of distinctive beliefs and practices, whether Christian-European,
Islamic West Asian/North African, Confucian East Asian, Sub-Saharan African, South Asian, Southeast Asian, or Creole. Shaped by economic transformations, political change, and cultural exchange, family systems are characterized by internal power dynamics in gender relations, generational bonds, and the regulation of sexuality, marriage, and fertility. A lively cross-national account of patriarchy, marriage, and fertility reminds us that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Trude Lappegård (Chapter 2) turns the spotlight on Europe with family changes understood through a prism of the life course. Marriage and childbearing are postponed, their sequence altered, and their connection weakened. With some country-to-country variation in the level and pace of change, new family behavior is evident in the increase in cohabitation and decline in fertility. Important questions remain. As cohabitation becomes so widely practiced, why do couples still marry, and does it matter whether Europe’s children are born within or outside marriage? Wendy D. Manning and Susan L. Brown (Chapter 3) focus on families in the United States, where official definitions miss the mark by failing to capture the diversity in contemporary family life. There have been increases in age at marriage, cohabitation, same-sex couples, and nonmarital births. Divorce remains high. Many children do not live with two married, biological parent. Given income inequality and a weak public safety net, these trends – already closely tied to social class – drive a wedge between well-off Americans and disadvantaged segments of the population. Yen-Chun Cheryl Chen and Jui-Chung Allen Li (Chapter 4) consider Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and mainland China, where a Confucian heritage met modernization and rapid economic development in the twentieth century. East Asian societies defy scholarly predictions by maintaining values of Confucian familism. A system of mutual dependence survives, favoring males over females, the older generation over the younger one, and family members over unrelated individuals. Weaving a compelling story of assaults on male privilege, changing marriage practices, and a growing concern for family support of the aged, Chen and Li foresee the resilience of the East Asian family, even as it becomes increasingly egalitarian. Irma Arriagada (Chapter 5) analyzes Latin America, a case less well known than other regions. Her theoretical framework stresses the global forces of modernization that affect Latin American living standards, but also the processes of modernity that influence how individuals see themselves and their families. Living arrangements have become more diverse, dual-earner couples have increased, and female-headship has risen. Gender – together with ethnicity and social class – are key given the colonial legacy of Creole societies and the inequality and social exclusion in Latin America today.

A second set of chapters engages diversity, inequality, and immigration in the lives of families. Timothy J. Biblarz, Megan Carroll, and Nathaniel Burke (Chapter 6) step up to remind us that same-sex families resemble other families in many ways. Their approach considers the distinctive features of same-sex families that may persist even when sexual pluralism is achieved. Most scholarship focuses on gays as partners and parents, but the authors highlight less studied groups, notably queer youth and gay elders. Moving beyond the narrow and misleading difference is deficit framework, they emphasize positive outcomes and relationship models that may prove instructive for heterosexual families. Rys Farthing (Chapter 7) provides a primer on family poverty for family sociologists. She approaches concepts of poverty not as a technical
issue of methodology but as a deeper moral exercise to understand what poverty really means. Putting poverty in global context reveals unimaginable absolutes of extreme poverty alongside the relative deprivation underpinning social exclusion in the developed world. Life cycle stage, gender, and disability raise the odds of deprivation, but poor families show remarkable resiliency. Their fascinating and resourceful strategies include getting by with little, getting out of poverty, getting back at systems stacked against them, and, less often, getting organized to address their problems collectively.

Three chapters analyze diversity from the perspective of immigration. Loretta Baldassar, Majella Kilkey, Laura Merla, and Raelene Wilding (Chapter 8) consider transnational families. Tools developed to study families bound to one community are inadequate to understand families whose member do not even live in the same country. Focusing on family caregiving, they emphasize not only conceptual and methodological approaches but also the practical strategies for doing family from afar. New communication technologies, global care chains of immigrant caregivers, cultural differences in what make a good parent, and state impediments to transnational caregiving come in for thought-provoking analysis. Alison Shaw’s (Chapter 9) questions how well modern individualism – the reigning cultural explanation for the retreat from marriage in British society – explains the behavior of South Indians, Afro-Caribbeans, and Pakistani Muslims. Their family practices are neither as stable nor as uniform as popularly believed – nor is there as much convergence with British norms as expected. South Indians in cramped terrace houses still create joint families housing by moving kin next door. Pakistanis still marry a cousin from abroad but traditional values of family stability now call for accepting divorce when a marriage fails. Karen D. Pyke (Chapter 10) frames her essay on immigrant families in the United States around race. Racial inequality shapes the experience of immigrants, but immigrant families color conceptions of race. Against the historical black–white divide, she emphasizes the rapidly growing Asian and Hispanic populations, which, she argues, are moving closer toward symbolic and material whiteness. Pyke examines the rise in multiracial families formed by racial intermarriage, biracial children, and transnational adoptees. Particularly within Hispanic families, immigration law creates mixed status families in which unauthorized immigrant kin suffer persistent disadvantage and pose insecurity even for family members who are citizens.

Family forms and family influences define four chapters. Rhiannon A. Kroeger and Pamela J. Smock (Chapter 11) report on cohabitation, now a normative part of the life course in many countries. In the United States, older adults live together without marrying, babies are born to cohabiting parents, and nearly half of children are apt to be raised in a cohabiting union at some point. Questions remain: What is the best way to measure cohabitation? How are children affected? How does cohabitation compare to marriage? Does cohabiting before marriage raise the odds of divorce?

As Eric D. Widmer (Chapter 12) points out, who does and does not belong to the family is an open question, especially given divorce and remarriage. Approaching families as configurations, Widmer shows parent–child and husband–wife dyads embedded in interdependencies of social networks. With no less than nine family types (e.g., friends-as-family type, in-law oriented constellation, nuclear family of parents and children), configurations are the stuff that social capital is made of,
predicting conflict and ambivalence in relationships. Deborah Carr, Kristen W. Springer, and Kristi Williams (Chapter 13) frame disparities in psychological and physical health as a legacy of family life. One concern is the impact on children’s health of family structure, family transitions, and intrafamily processes, such as parenting style or marital conflict. Another is the influence on adults’ health of marriage, widowhood, and parenthood. Although causal relations are often in doubt, research debunks popular beliefs, including notions that children bring happiness or that the risk of widowhood lies in death from a broken heart. Christopher G. Ellison and Xiaohe Xu (Chapter 14) emphasize the continuing influence of religion. Starting with a short overview of the United States, they compare the churched and unchurched, as well as members of different denominations. Religious beliefs and practices are linked to partnering – from dating and premarital sex to marriage and cohabitation to marital quality and divorce. As for parenting, religion colors whether people have children, how they go about raising them, and even how children ultimately turn out.

Four chapters emphasize processes within families, including divorce, violence, money management, and parental investments in children. Juho Härkönen (Chapter 15) examines divorce and its contradictions. The rise in women’s employment seems a plausible explanation for divorce, but the evidence is less compelling. Some research detects negative effects of divorce on children, but many are modest and short-term. Under some conditions, divorce turns out to be a positive, not negative, influence on well-being. Better understood as a process than an event, the implications of the divorce decree are hard to distinguish from the consequences of a troubled marriage. Emily M. Douglas, Denise A. Hines, and Murray A. Straus (Chapter 16) place partner violence into global perspective with recent results from large cross-national studies. Theoretical approaches ranging from patriarchy to personality dysfunction come in for critical evaluation. Acknowledging the gains from 40 years of research, the authors argue against the dominant frame of violence as something men do to women. Researchers, they emphasize, need to consider men and women as perpetrators and victims. Programs must address same-sex, female-to-male, and reciprocal violence more effectively. Sean R. Lauer and Carrie Yodanis (Chapter 17) tackle money management as a window into bigger issues of couple solidarity and gender equality. The choice of the common pot or separate purses to organize finances speaks not only to a couples’ relationship but also to dominant cultural conceptions of marriage as an institution where individual interests are subordinated or given free reign. Money management presents a grand paradox. Equal access to monies signals a gender egalitarian approach, but women’s control over budgets can impose burdensome responsibility. Toby L. Parcel and Joshua A. Hendrix (Chapter 18) analyze the family’s role in the transmission of social and cultural capital. Parents actively seek to give their children the cultural tools and social connections that prepare them for their future lives. Their efforts are linked to academic achievements as well as social adjustment, including the avoidance of delinquent behavior. Because parenting behaviors and the opportunities families depend on social class, schools and communities must do more to bolster parents’ efforts.

Life course perspectives, which run through this Companion, receive special attention from one set of contributors. Matthijs Kalmijn (Chapter 19) considers the relations between adult children and their parents. Intergenerational solidarity,
tempered by conflict and ambivalence, is the organizing theme. On intergenerational exchange, Kalmijn weighs the evidence for competing theories – self-interested exchange and altruism. Consistent with altruism, is it better to give than to receive, or does personal well-being result from being on the receiving end of exchanges, as a cost–benefit exchange paradigm suggests? Or, is a balance of giving and getting what really matters? Jacqueline Scott (Chapter 20) takes the youngest family members as her subject. She challenges family sociologists to study children as children, not just as the appendages of families to which they belong. Family circumstances, while not determinative, are certainly consequential for children’s outcomes. Scott, however, argues for studying how children view their circumstances and how they act to influence the course of their own lives. This perspective demands we rethink the benefits and downsides of child labor and home alone self-care. Kevin M. Roy (Chapter 21) examines the changing roles of fathers in the family. The masculine provider role is still important, but it has become harder for some fathers to support their families. Furthermore, men today confront growing expectations that childcare and emotional involvement, not just providing economically, be part of their parenting portfolio. Although research on the importance of fathers for child outcomes, men are up against challenges, whether living apart from children or coping with incarceration, immigration, or depression. Phyllis Moen, Jack Lam, and Melanie N.G. Jackson (Chapter 22) turn to families of later life. Historical context, transitions and trajectories, linked lives, and adaptive strategies motivate their review. Against an historical backdrop of financial stress, the transition to retirement has become uncertain, demanding older workers adapt to careers cut short or unavoidably extended. With demographic changes altering the landscape of support, family members must pursue different strategies to cope with changes in the health and dependency of older relations – from quitting paid work to furnish care to finding a group residence for an infirm parent or spouse.

Families exist in broader contexts as the final section emphasizes with chapters on policy, science, and social change. Pernilla Tunberger and Wendy Sigle-Rushton (Chapter 23) consider family policies. Labor market conditions and family structures are needed to sustain any allocation of work and care to men and women. Each approach has its own logic, but as conditions change, each comes under pressure to change. Depending on employed wives and informal childcare is not sustainable when grandmothers, too, forsake homemaking for paid jobs. Below-replacement fertility, shrinking labor forces, and aging populations demand measures to raise fertility and women’s employment rates. EU countries have converged on work–family reconciliation policies. Getting men to do more caring and helping women earn enough to support families remain elusive goals. As Hadas Mandel (Chapter 24) argues, women’s earnings contribute to the household well-being and promote gender equality. Her cross-national analysis, however, challenges generalizations about the impact of family-friendly initiatives such as public childcare and parental leave. Work–family reconciliation programs benefit low-educated women by keeping them in the labor force and, thus, increasing their skills, experience, and earnings. Well-educated women with the greatest incentives to continuous employment are little affected by state efforts. Martin Richards (Chapter 25) places the family in the context of scientific developments, namely, genetic and assisted reproductive technologies. Richards’ fascinating account covers the history of these scientific developments, the changing
public response, and the implications for definitions of kinship. As genetic testing intrudes on mate selection, as parents craft a reassuring narrative for their nonbiological child, and as prenatal screening imposes painful choices, the implications for families increase. Judith Treas and Thomas Alan Elliott (Chapter 26) consider sexual behavior in a cross-national analysis of changes in the family institution and the broader society. The greater autonomy of adolescents and young adults is evident in their more active sex lives, but the risks associated with early sexual experience still elicit family concern. Compared to earlier generations, adults bring greater sexual experience to marriage. They no longer expect that sex lives will end with advancing age. Perhaps the most dramatic change is the increased acceptance of sex between two men or two women. As same-sex couples achieve marriage equality, it remains to be seen whether they will adopt the practices of the heterosexual institution (e.g., putting more stock in sexual exclusivity) or whether same-sex partners will pose marital models for others to follow.

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (Chapter 27) draw the volume to a close by returning to the overarching themes of global families and change. Although the questions of family sociology (What is a couple?) may be timeless, the answers are less obvious today. Globalization means that love is now cosmopolitan. It transcends a particular place and culture and is enmeshed with political and economic geo-conflicts of our times. For instance, a stalled gender revolution has left women in developed countries to rely on Third World immigrants to care for their homes and children, even as the household workers must leave loved ones in a distant homeland. Jettisoning methodological nationalism characterizing family scholarship, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim chart a course for far-ranging analyses of the global chaos of love.
Part I
Global Perspectives on Families
1

Family Systems of the World: Are They Converging?

Göran Therborn

Times of Change and Family Patterns

Two things, only, are certain about the future of the family. First, the family pattern will look different in different parts of the world, and the future will offer a world stage of varying family plays. Second, the future will not be like the past. The second point has an important corollary, which needs to be underlined. Times of change are seldom aware of their own proper significance. Interpreters of the present have a strong tendency either to underestimate (even to deny) what is going on or to exaggerate it (as a new era), caught up as they are in conflicting whirls of social processes and in a competitive race for attention. In the case of the family, exaggeration is the name of the game in public debate. The “End of the Family” contest is mainly between the positivists, hailing a triumph of “individualization” and the advent of “pure relationships,” and the negativists, lamenting the dissolution of society, population decline, and the coming of an old-age ice age. To understand your own time of change, you need a strong dose of historical knowledge and a self-critical distance of reflectiveness.

On the basis of my research, then, I would like to present here two conclusions. First, there are different family systems in the world today, and they are, on the whole, not converging and in some respects rather diverging; they will also characterize the world in the foreseeable future. Second, the recent changes in the Western European or American family must be comprehended with a longer time perspective than that of the standardized industrial family between the Depressions of the 1930s and the 1970s. The great world religions and the cultural history of civilizations provide us with a world map of major family systems, internally subdivisible and still very diverse but nevertheless discernible patterns of a manageable number.

Families in the global world, what do they look like in this new awareness of the intensive interconnectedness of the planet indicated by the word “global”? What meaningful world patterns are there, making sense of the infinite individual
variations? Are family patterns and behavior becoming more similar across the
globe? How do families connect in today’s world? Are families losing or gaining
social importance in the early twenty-first century?

Family typologies have been developed mainly by anthropologists and historical
demographers with a focus on premodern, preindustrial societies and their rules of
descent and inheritance, of prohibited and preferred partners of marriage, and of inter-
generational rules of residence (cf. the recent magisterial overview by Todd, 2011,
chapter 1). For purposes of modern and contemporary understanding, another approach
may be more practical. With a searchlight on power relations, between generations and
between spouses, and regulations and practices of sexuality, marital and nonmarital, we
may try to discern a few large geocultural family areas of the world. Then, we can find
at least seven such family systems, most of them with ancient roots, albeit historically
changing in their processes of evolving reproduction. Each of them contains not only
a myriad of individual variants but also distinguishable subsystems.

The World’s Seven Major Family Systems
and Their Twentieth-Century Mutations

For brevity’s sake, I shall talk about “family systems,” but what I have in mind might
be more adequately rendered as family–sex–gender–generation systems. A family is
a product of sexuality, and one of its modes of functioning is regulating who may or
may not have sex with whom. Historically, if not by necessity or future, the family is
at the very center of male–female social gendering, of husband and wife, mother and
father, daughter and son, and sister and brother. Thirdly, the family sets the stage of
intergenerational relations, of actual fertility, and of rights and obligations of social-
ization, support, and inheritance. The brief overview in this chapter derives from a
book-length and fully referenced study (Therborn, 2004).

1. The Christian–European family, exported also to European settlements
overseas and therefore also known as the “Western” family, was historically
distinctive, because of its monogamy norm and of its insistence, by the
Catholic Church above all, on the right to free choice of marital partner while
also legitimizing nonmarriage. In Western Europe, one of the distinguishing
features, transported overseas, was the norm of neolocality, transported over-
seas, with new couples forming their own households. Also, descent and
inheritance were bilateral, with the female lineage as important as the male,
with some notable exceptions, like the British aristocracy.

Social gendering was basically asymmetrical, patriarchal, and masculinist, like in
most parts of the world, but its patriarchal gendering was uniquely fragile, among all
major family systems. Freedom to marry, or not, monogamy, neolocality, and bilateral
descent and inheritance (even if unequal), each and all gave Western European
women a much stronger hand than their sisters elsewhere.

Among internal European variations, the most noteworthy historical one, very
much in evidence at the beginning of the past century, was an East–West divide running
from Trieste to Saint Petersburg (Hajnal, 1953) and traceable back to the frontiers of