Globalization and Families

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Accelerated Systemic Social Change

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Preface

This work is the outgrowth of my realization that globalization and families are interrelated in a manner that has not been adequately explored in conventional approaches. Most analyses of globalization focus on its economic nature and the implications of this process for markets and nation-states. Other aspects of globalization have been virtually ignored, except for some contentious and significant, yet often marginalized debates about the relationships between globalization, poverty, and inequality. Nevertheless, there are substantial, complex social aspects associated with globalization. Economic conditions and the actions of nation-states have direct impacts on family lives. Conversely, the decisions that are arrived at in families ultimately contribute to the success or failure of economic agendas and nation-state programs and policies. The relationship between globalization and families, however, is even more profound and complex than economic or political perspectives reveal. Globalization is the critical driving force that is fundamentally restructuring the social order around the world, and families are the center of this change. In every society, traditional notions about family life, work, identity, and the relationships of individuals and groups to one another are being transformed due to globalizing forces. It is this critically important and little understood social dynamic that is the focus of this book.

In order to explore the nature of contemporary social change, globalization needs to be examined by highlighting the complex dynamic relationship between families, economies, nation-states, and transnational institutions. Globalization has been accompanied by unprecedented rapid transformation at every level of social life. As the flow of capital, goods, people, and ideas continues to accelerate, these processes have altered fundamental concepts about family forms, roles and relationships, gender norms, and identity formation. A focus on globalizing processes reveals that the restructuring of economies and the changing role of nation-states, the mass migration of individuals from developing countries to the industrialized world, and the widespread entrance of women into the formal and informal labor force are interrelated with significant changes for families around the globe.

Globalization is associated with the spread of specific ideologies that are realized and negotiated in the intimate sphere of the family. Families are integrated into the global economy through formal and informal work, through production and consumption, and through their relationship with nation-states. Moreover, constantly

evolving communication and information technologies allow families and individuals to have access to others in an unprecedented manner. These relationships are accompanied by new conceptualizations of appropriate lifestyles, identities, and ideologies even among those who may never be able to access them. In the West we are witnessing an increasing emphasis on individualism, a democratization of family life, the decreasing authority of men, the growing acceptance of alternative lifestyles such as cohabitation, divorce, and same-sex couples, and more varied life course trajectories. These depictions of family life have also spread to the developing world. However, due to a complex set of interrelated factors, the acceptance of varied family forms has not taken hold in the same manner. Instead, developing countries have been faced with their own unique challenges with respect to family life. In particular, economic concerns such as labor force participation, rising inequalities within and between countries, and fears about 'Westernization' have elicited, in some cases, nationalistic responses. Globalization is closely related to all of these social phenomena.

Globalization is a complex phenomenon: one the one hand, it has brought about a restructuring of economies that has opened up different venues for work and social relationships. However, on the other hand, a vital aspect of globalization centers around the proliferation and spread of new images and ideologies to the farthest reaches of the world. Moreover, globalization occurs on multiple levels simultaneously. It is realized on local, national, and transnational levels, and is accompanied by a compression of time. As information spreads ever more quickly, the impact of globalization can be felt immediately. When a crisis occurs in one area, it can have immediate repercussions in other places. This realization has been brought home by recent economic developments. As markets react to an economic downturn in one country, there are immediate aftershocks felt in multiple other areas around the globe. Families are not immune from these processes. In fact, it is within families that all of these forces come to bear. As we move into an increasingly interconnected, accelerating, globalized world, it is imperative to understand the dynamic nature of globalization by examining the transformations of the social order and how these changes are related to the linkages between globalization and families.

This study is the outgrowth of my own scholarly trajectory in cultural anthropology, political science, and family studies. Through immersion in these different disciplines, I have come to realize the importance of examining different phenomena from macro- and micro-level approaches, and to recognize the limitations of disciplinary orientations. I have also become aware that, in order to truly understand social phenomena, we need to take a multi-pronged approach that takes into consideration cultural, political, and economic factors. It is only through greater holistic perspectives that we can arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the processes and impacts of globalization.

My immersion in this research on the linkages between globalization and families has led me to understand that we are in the midst of a change that is more profound than is realized by more casual observers of these processes. We are experiencing a fundamental global restructuring of social life, unlike anything that

we have witnessed since the Industrial Revolution in the West. One of the fascinating and dissimilar aspects of this process, however, is that unlike the Industrial Revolution, this transformation is global and is rapidly affecting every part of the world, albeit differentially. Problematic for most analyses, however, is the fact that this transformation is highly complex and nuanced. No single approach and no topic area in isolation can capture the enormity of the change. Thus, what is required is an holistic examination of multiple spheres and their points of intersection. This book approaches this complicated issue by focusing on families as the arena where macro- and micro-forces come together. An investigation of the linkages between families and globalization allows us to understand how individuals and broader social forces intersect, and to gain greater insight into the fluidity and rapid social change that are an inherent feature of globalization.

In order to delve into the significance of global forces in the lives of families the world over, a progression of topics are examined systematically in this analysis. As a foundation, and in order to familiarize the reader with the significant arguments in various social science disciplines, multiple perspectives and controversies around globalization and the current state of knowledge about families are initially considered. This overview reveals that, despite a prolific literature on each subject, neither globalization nor the state of families are clearly understood and actually suffer from many of the same conceptual problems. Both globalization and families are each distinctly politicized phenomena that lack definitional clarity and incite contentious discourse despite a dearth of empirical data to support many of such claims. Moreover, they are ephemeral phenomena changing constantly depending on context and time, thus provoking debate about their makeup and processes. Compounding this complexity is that, while most analyses purport to be interdisciplinary, they usually draw just from one primary disciplinary orientation, and focus on Western perspectives. These inherent biases skew analyses and conclusions, and distort most attempts at universal generalizations. They also thwart the creation of policies that could potentially harness some of the forces of globalization for the well-being of families and societies.

The discussion then turns to the multifaceted subject of globalization and gender. A critical but marginalized perspective suggests that every aspect of globalization is distinctly gendered. This standpoint highlights the fact that globalization does not just impact gender discourses and relationships, but the phenomenon itself is affected by gendered responses and challenges. Specifically, the relationship between gender and economics emphasizes that globalization has had unequal effects on men and women, particularly in the developing world. With the major restructuring of economies beginning in the late 1960s, and the growth of multinational corporations, certain parts of the labor market have become 'feminized' as women increasingly take on part-time, low-paid, and, at times, risky jobs. Moreover, in industrialized and developing countries, women struggle to balance participation in the formal and informal workforce with caregiving in their families. In the industrialized world, middle and upper class women are coping with this dilemma by increasingly employing women from developing countries to assist with child and elder care responsibilities. In the developing world, many of these tasks are being

relegated to extended family, husbands, siblings, and poorer women who are willing to perform this labor for minimal wages. Complicating this issue is that this form of work, also referred to as reproductive labor, is often unacknowledged in mainstream discussions. A gendered analysis of globalization reveals that this phenomenon has implications for the construction of femininities and masculinities on a global level, and that the process of globalization itself is a gendered one.

The focus of the book then shifts to some of the tangible linkages between globalization and families, and examines the changing nature of global migration. As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, migration from the developing to the industrialized world is playing an increasingly important role. While the United States, Canada, Australia, and Israel have always been 'immigration' societies, contemporary receiving countries such as Japan, and certain countries in Europe and the Middle East, are struggling with incorporating large numbers of non-citizens into their societies. In part, as a reaction to the magnitude of the migration, governments have responded by tightening laws and services to immigrants. Even in countries with a long history of immigration, such as the US, the rapid increase of immigrants has been met with resistance. Consequentially, immigrants are increasingly marginalized and, especially, low-skilled immigrants have been excluded from the mainstream. This movement and marginalization has led to new forms of transnational families, as migrants retain ties in their home societies, while also forging new relationships abroad. Of significance in this trend is the gendered nature of contemporary migration patterns. Increasingly, women from the developing world are leaving their families and communities behind, as they seek new opportunities in other regions of their own societies or in other countries, sometimes very distant from their homes.

From an overview of the importance of contemporary migration, the discussion moves to the changing nature of the relationship between the work and family spheres. While there is a burgeoning scholarship on work and family, this topic is dominated specifically by a US perspective on the issues faced by middle-class, white families. This approach emphasizes dual-earner couples, unequal gender roles in marriage, occupational stress, and work–family spillover. However, work/family issues are much more complex than many of these perspectives indicate. Care labor, ideologies about family roles and responsibilities, and the restructuring of work and businesses are all intertwined with family economies and ideologies. For example, among some of the poorest families in developing countries, children perform the majority of caregiving and economic assistance in their families. However, this significant aspect of the work/family interface is usually not acknowledged in mainstream discourse. Economic concerns, coupled with the issue of care, highlight the importance of expanding policies that allow families in industrialized and developing countries to balance their work/family responsibilities.

While mainstream approaches acknowledge the global spread of ideologies pertaining to women's empowerment, recognition of the worldwide expansion of conceptualizations of children, childhood, and children's rights has been more limited. As globalization leads to increasing interconnectedness, images and ideologies pertaining to children are spreading around the world. Most of these depictions stem

from a Western perspective about 'what' children need in order to 'develop' in a healthy manner. This point of view, however, does not account for children's extremely varied living conditions. Not all children are able to attend school for a set number of years and to grow up in conditions that encourage play and a responsibility-free childhood. Instead, for millions of children, poverty plays a pivotal role in their lives, forcing them, under certain conditions, to become primary breadwinners in their families. These same economic conditions also dispute popular assumptions that children the world over are being transformed into a homogenous group of consumers, increasingly assuming the same tastes and fads as communication and information technologies proliferate. In fact, growing inequalities between children within and between societies translate into varying amounts of risk for them. Also problematic is the un-gendered nature of conventional approaches to children and childhood. Depending on location, the concerns and challenges that girls face may be quite dissimilar from those of boys. For example, in certain cultural contexts, it is primarily girls who are pulled out of school to care for other family members, thereby limiting their future opportunities. This raises complex questions about the universal utility of laws pertaining to children's rights and the applicability of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in an undiscriminating manner.

Globalization is also closely interconnected with aging and the elderly. While there is general acknowledgment in the West that the aging of the population portends difficulties for societies in the near future, there is less recognition that, within a relatively short time frame, the largest number of elderly individuals will actually reside in the developing world. Currently, most of these societies do not have programs and policies in place for the elderly, due to cultural norms that usually relegated care to females in families. However, as women are increasingly incorporated into the labor force, the elder care that they performed in the invisible sphere of the family is becoming a growing and, at times, impossible burden on them, their families, and their societies. Simultaneously, this transformation is occurring as many states are cutting provisions in services to families. The arena of aging and the elderly provides, however, also a sphere where globalization can be deployed in a positive manner. For example, by raising awareness of the impending issues surrounding the aging of the global population, the inequalities within and between societies with respect to the elderly, the increasing multicultural nature of an older cohort, and the demands of care work, globalizing forces can be used to mobilize and disseminate solutions for these issues.

Concern over family-related issues such as gender roles and work, the socialization and care of children, and the well-being of the elderly also entails an examination of the contemporary role of nation-states. Today's nation-states need to be understood as engaged in a global framework that is in a consistently dynamic relationship with its inhabitants, as well as with transnational institutions. Globalization is raising questions about basic issues such as the role of territory and the rights of citizens versus non-citizens. Increased migration coupled with accelerated information and communication technologies is bringing individuals from very varied locales and cultures into contact together. New communities and identities are created that are often divorced from territorial belonging. Contemporary nation-states are also part of a new

social fabric that places them in direct purview of transnational institutions that attempt to regulate a range of issues from economic activities to environmental concerns. While these concerns are primarily realized on a local level, nation-states function as an intermediary between the global arena and the local sphere. From this perspective, nation-states are not losing their functionality, but through globalization, are reformulating their activities. This reformulation has direct impacts on families and individuals, with respect to policies and the provision of services.

Nation-states and transnational institutions are also closely tied to the conditions that are leading to increased inequalities within and between societies. While the relationship between poverty and globalization is a contentious issue, few dispute that, under current conditions, some individuals, groups, and countries have become wealthier, and others are increasingly poorer. Even though it is unclear which specific factors contribute to conditions of progress through globalization, and which contribute to decline, it is generally acknowledged that globalization is an uneven process that interacts with local conditions. All of these transformations have repercussions for families as they navigate economic and social fluctuations.

Global transformations have significant implications not just for the material side of life, but they are intertwined with ideologies about the rights and roles of individuals. These shifting conceptualizations are accompanied with profound implications for families. As families are increasingly integrated into the global economy, and simultaneously exposed to new and varied representations of lifestyles and choices, they are forced to adjust to changed conditions and representations. This process, however, is not occurring in a uniform manner. Within various societies, and in a number of regions of the world, new images and ways of life have been met with opposition, resistance, and the growth of fundamentalist and nationalistic sentiments. Thus, what we find is that globalization is a highly uneven process. Globalization may be a transnational economic, political, and social process, but it is primarily realized in local contexts.

As material foundations of life, concepts of space and time, and identities are increasingly redefined and transformed, globalizing forces are reaching into the very core of contemporary social life. In this new world, individuals are able to adopt multiple identities, form new sorts of families, and claim membership in a variety of communities, many of them not bound by place or region. As identities are increasingly in flux, new affiliations, and ethnicities are created and sustained through ties with other places and people across far away spaces. This has given rise to new unimagined types of issues and problems. We are faced with new forms of inclusion and exclusion, with increasing economic inequalities and shrinking conceptions of boundaries and space. Proliferating communication and information technologies allow for instantaneous communication and transmission. In our time, our lives have become more fluid, our beliefs and concepts, once believed to be natural and immutable, are in greater states of flux. With this transformation have come challenges, in every culture, to assumptions about family life, the life course, and the role of the individual. There exists greater variability with respect to images of children, youth, adulthood, aging, marriage, gender roles, and power relationships in families, in communities, in societies, and between nation-states.

These transformations portend a deep-rooted restructuring of the social fabric of our world, our societies and our families.

This book is not meant as a treatise on either the benefits or challenges of globalization, nor does it take a stance on the role of families in society. Instead, I would like to initiate a dialogue about the transformative processes of which all of us are a part today. This includes the naturalness of so much that we take for granted with respect to gender, to intergenerational and familial relationships, and our relationships to others, both whom we know, but also our fellow world citizens whom we do not know. I would like for us to think about the future and to see if we can build a better and more just world; one that harnesses some of the forces of globalization for the benefit of mankind, instead of perpetuating and ignoring gross inequalities and the despair of so many. There are many topics that are touched upon in this book, but there are also many others that are open to investigation and discourse.

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