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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 intergenerational 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 socialization, 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 overseas, 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



Figure 1.1 The Hajnal line.

early medieval Germanic settlements (Kaser, 2000, see Figure 1.1). With nonnegligible simplification – overriding significant exceptions in Latin Europe – the line divided a Western variant of a norm of neolocality or household headship change upon marriage, late marriages, and a sizeable proportion, >10%, of women never marrying, from an Eastern one of frequent patrilineal descent (in Russia and the Balkans), patrilocality, a female mean age at first marriage 4–7 years lower, and almost universal marriage.

From the world hegemony of North Atlantic powers since the eighteenth century, we should expect this family system to be a global pacesetter of change, and so, it has turned out. Large-scale birth control first emerged in the aftermath of the great North Atlantic revolutions, the American and the French, spreading to the rest of Europe in the late nineteenth century and reaching the rest of the world only after World War II (WWII), into sub-Saharan Africa only in the 1990s. Western European and North American women's rights began to expand in the nineteenth century, again before anywhere else, and from a basis of historically circumscribed patriarchy. But even the theoretical principle of male–female family equality took a long time to conquer all of Western Europe, West Germany only in 1976 – when privileged paternal authority was abolished – and all aspects of French family law only by 1985, after a basic breakthrough in 1970, when “parental authority” replaced “paternal power” (Therborn, 2004, pp. 98, 100).

In the course of the twentieth century, other aspects of the European family developed in an inverted V trajectory. The marriage rate rose dramatically, peaking after WWII, in most countries of Western Europe in 1965–1973, in the United States in the early 1960s.

Birthrates rose correspondingly, reaching a top in the United States in 1957, when a woman could be expected to have 3.8 children (US Bureau of the Census, 2012), and in Western Europe around 1965. After that, marriage and births went downhill, with a massive rise of nonmarried cohabitation, pioneered in Scandinavia, and birthrates plummeting to far below reproduction, above all in Southern Europe. Under Communism after WWII, Eastern Europe pioneered egalitarian family legislation, together with Scandinavia, and pushed female labor force participation. Birthrates decreased.

2. The *Islamic West Asian/North African* family. Islam, more than Christianity, is, of course, a world religion, spread across continents. But outside its historical homelands, the Islamic family institution has been importantly affected by other cultures, and subjected to other regional processes of twentieth-century change, including African, South Asian, and Southeast Asian.

While Islamic marriage is a contract, and not a sacrament, it, as well as family, gender, and generation relations generally, is extensively regulated by holy law. This law does not only express a general principle of male superiority – like the Pauline tradition of Christianity – but specify it in a number of concrete rules, of male guardianship, of delimited polygyny, of divorce by male repudiation, and of the patrilineal appurtenance of children. But it is also concerned with the protection of women as individuals, of daughters' inheritance rights – although half of sons' – and recognizing female property rights, including property rights and legal capacity of married women.

Sexuality as such is not seen as morally destructive, but it is taken as a serious threat to the social order. Therefore, it has to be strictly regulated by a marital order. Forced marriages are forbidden, but the bride's assent may, according to Islamic law, be legitimately implied from her silence, and her marriage contract is signed by her guardian. Families are tightly knit because of close endogamy. By the end of the twentieth century, between a fifth (Egypt) and a third (Arabian Peninsula) of all marriages were between first cousins (Todd, 2011, 506ff).

Endogamy started to decline in the last decades of the past century, but the major change of the Islamic West Asian/North African family, also recent, has been the rise of the female marriage age – up to 26–29 in the Maghreb and to 22 in Egypt and Iran by the turn of the century – and the spread of birth control, beginning in Tunisia and Egypt in the 1960s. The region has been subjected to global antipatriarchal influence, in the wake of the UN 1979 Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ratified by most countries, save Iran and Saudi Arabia, but around 2000, only Tunisia and Turkey had done away with explicit legal norms of male family superiority.

3. The *South Asian* family pattern covers major subdivisions, geographical – first of all, North versus South – and religious, mainly if not exclusively Hindu and Muslim. Pakistan, northern India, and Bangladesh are more patriarchal, across religious religions, than the (Indian) South. Hindu marriage is a sacrament and as such in principle indissoluble, whereas marriage to Muslims is a this-worldly contract. Pakistan tops the world league of cousin marriages, whereas the northern Hindi belt of India is governed by kin as well as village exogamy. On the other hand, cousin marriages are twice as frequent, around fourth of all, in Hindu southern India as in Muslim Bangladesh (Todd, 2011,

pp. 507, 244). Caste is a Hindu phenomenon, and Hindu marriages are caste endogamous, but caste has also penetrated South Asian Muslims, and caste considerations can be fit into the equality of status norms of Islamic family law.

However, the region of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan also has a distinctive family commonality. It is the world center of misogyny; in the 1970s, it was the only one in the world in which female life expectancy was lower than male (World Bank, 1995). In the first half of the twentieth century, the subcontinent also stood out for its low female age of marriage, most girls marrying before the age of 15. Arranged marriages constitute the prevailing mode of Muslim as well as of Hindu and Sikh marriages. Patrilineal and patrilocal families are predominant all over the region.

In the last third of the twentieth century, the female marriage age moved upward, most strongly in Pakistan, least in Bangladesh. In the 1990s, female life expectancy overtook the male, but the natural female advantage is still unnaturally small. Postindependence antidiscriminatory family legislation was without much practical effect.

4. The *Confucian East Asian* family comprises the vast area historically shaped or heavily influenced by Sinic civilization, Japan, Korea, and northern Vietnam, as well as China. Classical Confucian patriarchy had been modified in Japan, softened in Vietnam, and was by 1900 most orthodoxly endorsed in Korea. In world history, it was the summit of normative patriarchy. The relation between father and son is the primary of the “Five Relationships” in human life, and filial piety the cardinal virtue, to which all other family and social norms are subordinate. Ancestor worship was the focus of ritual devotion.

Marriage was a contract between families, dissoluble by mutual agreement or by the husband. Bigamy was illegal, but “concubines” had a formal family status as second-rank wives, and their children were legitimate. The patrilineal joint family was the Chinese ideal, the patrilineal stem family – with married sons expected to branch off – the main Japanese one.

In the twentieth century, the Confucian East Asian family model experienced two major political shocks. One was the US occupation of Japan, and the other was the Communist revolution in China, with autonomous extensions to South Korea, Taiwan, and North Vietnam, respectively. Converging on individual autonomy and gender equality, American occupying Liberalism and Chinese Communism attacked paternal power and male dominance head on, introducing and endeavoring to implement norms of choice and equality. Neither was fully successful, but after a generation, marital choice had become prevalent, and women’s rights had been clearly enhanced, if not on par in practice with male rights.

5. The *sub-Saharan African* family pattern was to the structural anthropologists of premodern families a mosaic of fundamentally different systems, of descent, marriage rules, and conceptions of kinship. From a vantage point of contemporary comparison, rather some striking similarities stand out. Most conspicuously, by the late twentieth century, Africa south of the Sahara was the only region of the world with mass polygyny. By the end of the past century, it was also outstanding by its birthrate, much higher than the rest of the world. In contrast to the South Asian predominant dowry of marital alliance exchange, African marriages

have historically required payment and/or services rendered to the family of the future bride. Fertility is a high positive value, and there is, in most countries, no control system of premarital female sexuality comparable to the Asian patriarchies or to that of historical Southern Europe. Nevertheless, in spite of an economic autonomy within marriage wider than that of many Euro-American women, sub-Saharan families are widely subject to strong and harsh male power.

Within contemporary sub-Saharan Africa, mass polygyny is primarily, if not only, a West African practice. Stern marital regulations of sexuality are kept above all in the Sahel-savannah belt across the continent south of the desert, from Muslim Mauretania and Northern Nigeria to Christian Ethiopia. Female economic autonomy has grown along the West Coast, above all. Long-time premarital sex, with the longest periods between sexual debuts and marriage, is a southern practice, of South Africa and its surroundings (cf. Bongaarts, 2007).

Polygyny began to decline, substantially, with the female birth cohorts of the 1950s (Fenske (2011, appendix B). Birth control reached parts of the continent in the 1990s. For the rest, the main twentieth-century impact was probably that of the postindependence crises of the last third of the century; of economic disasters, wars, and social disruption with ensuing rapid nondevelopmental urbanization; and of the hecatomb of HIV–AIDS, particularly in the southern part. Taken together, these calamities meant an enormous family disruption, of orphanage, sexual violence, and breaks of marital exchanges and alliances.

6. The *Southeast Asian* type of family, like the African, draws on several formative cultural sources, religiously on Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity (Philippines mainly) and ethnoculturally on Malay customs. The less strict, though not egalitarian, norms of the latter and Buddhism's unique lack of interest in the family and in sex–gender relations have in interaction and overlapping shaped a cultural area outside of the three strongly patriarchal and patrilineal Asian regions, East, West, and South. Descent is usually bilateral. A freedom of marital choice evolved in the course of the twentieth century, without social upheavals or political drama. The virtual universality of marriage in the rest of Asia was here qualified by a minority abstention from marriage, rising sharply with female education (Therborn, 2006).

By current Euro-American standards, Southeast Asia is still a male-dominated sexist society. Egalitarian UN influence has been modest. More important have been the Vietnam War inclusion of the Philippines and Thailand into the US sex economy and the establishment of Filipinas as major producers in the global care chain (Hochschild, 2000).

7. The *Creole family* is a product of a violent encounter, of subjugated, enslaved, or enserfed African and American Indian populations with European conquerors and masters. Out of it came historically, on one side, a particularly rigid and elaborate European patriarchy and, on the other, a system of white male sexual predation and of informal, little regulated intraracial African–American and Indo-American sexuality, mimicking the ruling predators, with informal, matrifocal families. Most of the special white patriarchy, with its

male display and female seclusion, once prevailing at the top of the US antebellum South, of the colonial Caribbean and Ibero-America, and imperial Brazil, is now gone. Residues of it are discernible, though, in the lingering Latin American bans of abortion and (lately somewhat loosened) divorce.

The popular side of the dual Creole system, on the other hand, has continued to reproduce itself, among US blacks and among Latin American and Caribbean “people of color.” It is manifested in much lower rates of marriage, much higher rates of informal cohabitation and extramarital births, more union instability, and more mother-centered families and kin than among white compatriots and comparable overwhelmingly white societies.

Over the past century, there was a tendency toward more marriage among the Creole populace, culminating sometime in midcentury or around 1960 and reversed into more informalization (Castro Martin, 2002; Tolnay, 2004). The precarity of living in the American ghettos and the Latin American slums has reproduced family–sex–gender practices of the old plantations and landed estates.

The dynamics of family change

Family systems do not have an intrinsic dynamics of their own, but are subjected to pressures for change from their changing environments. Economic changes have been important: structural transformations, such as deagrarianization, proletarianization – undermining traditional rural patriarchies – industrialization, and deindustrialization and economic conjunctures, closing or opening opportunities and options – like the European Depression of the 1870s, that of the 1930s, the African crisis of the 1970s–1980s, the post-WWII Euro-American boom, the East Asian growth “miracles” from Japan to China, and the oil-rent windfall in West Asia/North Africa. Cultural developments, such as schooling and secularization, have had strong impacts. Old and new forms of rural and urban living mean major family effects from urbanization. Political changes have also played important roles, from the indirect birth control effects of the French and American Revolutions to the often much lagged effects of deliberate normative interventions, from early twentieth-century Scandinavian reformism and the Russian Revolution, the US occupation of Japan, and the Chinese Revolution to the late twentieth-century egalitarian efforts of the United Nations.

All the world’s family patterns have changed in modern times. But distinctive traditional practices and relations have been reproduced most successfully in the most rural regions of the world, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and in the least secularized, that is, the same areas plus secluded parts of West Asia, like the Arab Peninsula or Iran, although even there patriarchy is being undermined by a large expansion of female higher education.

Current Tendencies: Are the Family Systems Converging?

Whether recent changes are making family patterns more similar around the world is a question still unsettled by scholarship (cf. Ruggles, 2007, 436f). In my view, diversity still predominates.

Patriarchy/masculinism

Patriarchy and masculinism were major losers of the twentieth century, in particular of its second half. Egalitarian advances were considerable in Europe, the Americas, and East Asia, while changes were minor or marginal only in South Asia, West Asia, and Africa, north as well as south of the Sahara (Therborn, 2004, chapters 2 and 3).

Since the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, there has been no significant international effort at promoting more egalitarian family and gender patterns. But the increasing concern of the OECD with work–family relations, in particular with facilitating the combination of two-worker families and having children, bears upon intrafamily divisions of labor (OECD, 2008).

Politically, the big question of recent change pertains to the effects of post-Communism, of the implosion (Eastern Europe), abandonment (China and Vietnam), and military defeat (Afghanistan) of Communism. The Communists were in principle antipatriarchal and spent much effort on widely unpopular measures of family reform, from the Russian Bolsheviks in 1918 to the Chinese Communists some 30 years later to the Afghan Communists a good 60 years later (Therborn, 2004, p. 74, 83ff, 93ff). How far their achievements went, in the face of often ferocious resistance and gradually in the swamp of their own complacent authoritarianism, still has to be unraveled. But it was clearly enough to lead into a post-Communist backlash; post-Communist Europe has a clearly more maternalist and home-centered view of women than Western Europe (Haavio-Mannila and Rotkirch, 2010, 487ff). Post-Communist China has also taken steps back to its pre-Communist family past, of arranged marriages, ancestor worship, and misogynist discourse (Davis and Harrell, 1993; Xu *et al.*, 2007; Cook and Dong, 2011). Again, however, comprehensive studies of how far this backlash has gone are still in the waiting. And there are movements of feminist resistance, even in current Afghanistan.

One area where resurgent patriarchy and masculinism can be measured is in the sexual ratio of births, of surviving children, and of male–female life expectancy. Low fertility, an enforced public policy in China and a chosen option in other parts of the world, patriarchal/masculinist son preference, and prenatal scanning technology have recently skewed sex ratios of births in a distinctive set of countries. They have been spotted in South Asia; South Korea; China; Vietnam; the Caucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; and the western Balkans of Albania and Montenegro (UNFPA, 2011a). As the two first-mentioned countries indicate, the phenomenon is not just post-Communism, but it provides some hard evidence of the effect of the latter.

In India, the sex ratio of 0–6-year-olds has increased from a normal distribution of 104–106 boys per 100 girls in 1981 and 1991 to 109 in 2011 (UNFPA, 2011a, 15ff). The masculinist push has been strongest in post-Communist China, soaring to a sex ratio at birth of 120 in 2005, and so far stabilizing there, up from 107 in 1982 (UNFPA, 2011a, p.13).

Marriages arranged by fathers and/or mothers remain important in the twenty-first century, although their exact prevalence is unknown. Such marriages are still predominant in South Asia, that is, in India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh (Moody, 2008; WLUML, 2006, chapter 3; Jones, 2010; Bhandari forthcoming), a practice carried into the current diaspora (Charsley and Shaw, 2006; Penn, 2011).

It is widespread in rural Central Asia; in West Asia, including rural Turkey; in North Africa; and in sub-Saharan Africa. It is occurring in substantial parts of Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, backed up by permissive national or provincial law (WLUML, 2006, chapter 3). Islamic law forbids forced marriages, but no active consent is required of the bride. Parental marriage arrangements remain important in China, particularly in the rural west (Xu *et al.*, 2007; Judd, 2010).

However, it is important to underline the contemporary inadequacy of the binary conception of arranged and choice marriages. Classical arranged marriages without the future spouses – or at least not the bride – being consulted have largely disappeared in East Asia (Jones, 2010; Tsutsui, 2010; Zang, 2008) and is eroding in the other parts as well (WLUML, 2006; Bhandari forthcoming). In Arab countries such as Egypt and Morocco, there is overwhelming support for the idea that women should have a right to choose their spouse and also an overwhelming perception that this is currently the case (UNDP, 2005, pp. 263–264).

What is prevailing in most of Asia and Africa is the conception of *marriage as a family business*, not just a decision of two individuals. Within this familistic conception and practice of marriage, there is a whole range of intergenerational power constellations and of considerations of status, income, and opportunities. (For two illuminating illustrations from two different cultures and from opposite social poles, see the Indian bestseller novel by Chetan Bhagat (2009) and the novelesque China reportage by Leslie T. Chang (2009).)

The world's two major redoubts of male family power are sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, in both cases particularly their northern parts. According to survey data reported by UNICEF (2007, pp. 19–20) in countries like Nigeria and Mali, about two-thirds of wives say husbands alone make decisions on daily household expenditure and alone decide if the wife can visit a friend or a relative. In Uganda and Tanzania, this is reported by just under half of all wives, in Kenya and Ghana by about a third of all married women, and down to a fifth in Zimbabwe. (South Africa was not part of the survey.) In Bangladesh, corresponding conditions are experienced by a third of women and in Morocco and Egypt by a good fourth. (The Indian survey worded its questions somewhat differently, but only a third of married Indian women said they could go alone to the market, to a health facility, and outside the community.) A good half of Indian women age 15–49 agreed, in 2005–2006, that there was at least one specific reason for which a husband was right in beating his wife (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2012, pp. 68, 81).

Under UN auspices and domestic feminist pressures, patriarchal power laws were scrapped in Western Europe and the Americas in the last third of the twentieth century (Therborn, 2004, 100ff). While not without influence on official norms, this global process had a much more limited impact on Africa and Asia. Arab countries and many African countries, for example, Congo-Kinshasa, have laws of wifely obedience and requirements of husband/father/male relative consent, for a passport, for example (Banda, 2008, 83ff). A Mali government bill repealing the obedience clause was withdrawn in 2009 after conservative male opposition, although it had been passed by the parliament (WLUML, 2012).

Like political power, patriarchy has also a soft dimension, not only commanding obedience but also enlisting respect, veneration, love, sacrifice, and support. Ancestor worship was a widespread practice outside the messianic world religions, from

China to sub-Saharan Africa and to Indo-America. As a social norm, this patriarchy of respect was most articulate in East Asia, in the supreme Confucian norm of “filial piety.” What has happened to it and its more diffuse equivalents elsewhere?

In the succeeding text, we shall take notice of one important breach of it, the refusal of a substantial minority of Hong Kong, Taiwanese, and Japanese women and couples to maintain the ancestral bloodline. Nevertheless, residential patterns and value polls show that filial piety, even if weakened, remains an internationally distinctive feature of the East Asian family.

According to the 2006 East Asian Social Survey, about half of adult household heads in Mainland China and in Taiwan were coresiding with a parent, in Japan about 40%, and in South Korea a third. Intergenerational money transfers show a net gain for elderly parents, except in Japan, with its older prosperity (Yang n.d., figure 2). Other studies tell of strong support among youth and adults for supporting parents (Deutsch, 2006). In Vietnam at the end of the past century, three-fourths of retired men (60+) and women (55+) lived with one of their children (Cobb-Clark, 2009, p. 95). Around 2000, about a fifth of Indian households had more than one married couple, with an additional portion of extended families (Palriwala and Neetha, 2011, p. 1068). In Latin America, as well as in Africa, extended families remain important. In Mexico, they make a fourth of all households, pretty constantly since the 1970s, and 13% of households have more than three generations (Montes de Oca Zavala, 2009, p. 108). In 2009, 16 million Brazilians, 8.5% of all, were living in a household of more than six members (CEPAL, 2012, table 1.1.21).

However, family values and resources may fail to keep up the enormous economic change in recent times. Among all the countries of the Luxembourg Income Study, South Korea has by far the highest amount of relative income poverty among the elderly; 42% of them are below half the median income, which may be compared to 28% in Taiwan, 27 in Mexico, 20 in the United States, and 9% in Germany (www.lis.org/key-figures). Coresidence of elderly with children is rare in Western Europe, 5–8% in France and Germany, but more frequent in Eastern Europe, 20% in Russia and around 25% in Bulgaria (de Jong Giervold, 2009, figure 1).

Marriage

In Europe, the 1000-year-old divide between areas east and west of the Trieste to Saint Petersburg line has by and large survived also the implosion of Communism and the restoration of capitalism, as comes out of Table 1.1. The divide was never perfectly clear-cut, and a couple of recent developments do provide a few new exceptions, but the pattern is still there, younger and more marriages in the east than in the west.

The east–west marriage divide of Europe, first pointed out by John Hajnal (1953), is still there. Hungary has caught up with neighboring Austria on the other side of the Hajnal line, and Bulgarian marriages have plummeted below Western rates, at least in large part due to massive outmigration. (Slovenia, on the other hand, actually straddles the line and seems to have been west of it at least by the mid-nineteenth century (Svab, Renner, and Kuhar, 2012).) Between France and Germany, on one hand, and Russia and the Ukraine, on the other, the age difference is actually larger now than a century ago, in the mid-2000s 8 years and around 1900 5–6 years (Therborn, 2004, table 4.1).

Table 1.1 Marriage age and marriage rates in Eastern and Western Europe, in circa 2005–2007

<i>Female marriage age^a</i>		<i>Marriage rates, per thousand population</i>	
<i>East ≤25</i>	<i>West ≥30</i>	<i>West ≤5</i>	<i>East ≥7</i>
Albania	Denmark	Austria	Belarus
Belarus	Finland	Bulgaria	FYR Macedonia
Bulgaria	France	France	Romania
Estonia	Germany	Germany	Russia
Moldova	Ireland	Hungary	Ukraine
Russia	Italy	Italy	
Ukraine	the Netherlands	the Netherlands	
	Norway	Norway	
	Slovenia	Portugal	
	Sweden	Slovenia	
		Spain	
		Sweden	
		the United Kingdom	

^aSingulate mean age at marriage (SMAM).

Source: Data from UNFPA, World Marriage Data, available online from www.UN.org/esa/population/publications/WMD2008.

Marriage in the United States was, in terms of age and frequency, historically more similar to Eastern than to Western Europe and has remained so, with a crude marriage rate in 2006 of 7.2 and a mean marriage age of never-married women at 26 years. The age of marriage continues to differ in the world. About half of African and South Asian girls born around 1980 were married by the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2006, p. 46). There is no catching up at the poles. In Mali, the marriage age remained unchanged between 1976 and 2006; in Bangladesh and India it rose by 2 years from the mid-1970s to the mid-2000s. For about the same period, the rise in France and Sweden was 8–9 years (UNFPA, 2008).

New marital tendencies have appeared in East Asia, though mainly outside Mainland China. The norm of universal marriage has been abandoned in metropolitan East Asia, above all by highly educated women. Whatever nonmarital sex is going on, it is very discrete. Single mothers are few; informal cohabitation is largely hidden from view (Jones, 2007, 2010).

The marital regulation of sexuality and of reproduction has changed considerably. In several European countries, from Bulgaria to France, more than half of all babies are born outside wedlock. In Southern and Central Europe, it remains a clear minority phenomenon, though, and in South Korea and Japan, it is almost nonexistent (OECD, 2011). The latter is a common Asian and North African pattern, shared by China, Indonesia, India, and Egypt. Sub-Saharan Africa differs widely in this respect, between strongly predominant marital births in Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Sahel region, and Southern Africa with long periods of premarital sex and a current predominance of extramarital births (Bongaarts, 2006, table 2; Mensch, Grant, and Blanc, 2006, table 1; The Sustainable Democratic Dividend, 2012). The current fissiparous family behavior in postapartheid South Africa (Budlender and Lund, 2011) resembles the American Afro-Creole pattern.

In the Americas, the Creole pattern of informal unions and extramarital births has staged an uneven comeback. In the United States in 2007, 71% of births to Afro-American women were extramarital, as compared to 27% to white women. Taking cohabitation into account, in the early 2000s, about half of all births to black US women occurred outside both cohabitation and marriage but only one-tenth of white births (Manlove *et al.*, 2010, pp. 622, 628). Mexico is now near the very top in the OECD, having more than half of its babies born outside marriage (OECD, 2011). And the historical hemispheric cards are being reshuffled, with Jamaica experiencing a marriage boom and Chile, once a very conservative buttoned-up country, letting its marriage rate (3.3 in 2005) fall to less than half the Jamaican. Chile is here accompanied by Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru, of the old Indo-Creole region. Since the early 2000s, the large majority of Chilean births take place outside marriage (Larrañaga, 2006, p. 139).

Fertility and the future of populations

Recently, birthrates have fallen strongly in most of Asia, in Eastern Europe, and in Latin America. In sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, fertility has also fallen recently, to 4.5, but not in all countries. For the whole world, women are now expected to bear 2.5 children in their lifetime. The rapid Arab adoption of birth control is worth noticing, with the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) falling from 6.7 in 1970–1975 (UNDP, 2005, p. 290) to 3.2 in 2010 (UNFPA, 2010, p. 105).

Is the world converging on a low fertility rate? Probably, but we are not quite there yet, and a new divide is emerging. Around 1900, the fertility differential between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa was something like 2.2 to 2.7 children. In 2010–2015, it was 2.7. In 2010–2015, the differential between India and Germany was 1.0; in 1896–1900, it was 0.8. On the other hand, the United States and Western Europe are now much closer to China, to Russia, and to Latin America than 100 years ago (historical data from Therborn, 2004, table 8.7, current ones from UNFPA, 2011b, pp. 116–121).

Currently, the birthrates of the world are hung up between one pole, not or only very marginally affected by birth control, and another of historically unprecedented low rates. Basically unaffected by birth control (TFR at 6 and higher) by 2010 were nine African countries plus Afghanistan and Timor Leste (UNFPA, 2010, 100ff). At the other end are populations far below natural reproduction. Following the lead of the Australian demographer Peter McDonald (2009), we may focus on countries with a fertility rate at or below 1.5. The extremely low-fertility countries are made up of two or three distinctive groups, situated in very different cultural and economic contexts.

One is European, which may be divided into two subsets. There is a Western, central and southern, cluster, comprising of Austria (1.4), Germany (1.3), Greece (1.4), Italy (1.4), Malta (1.3), Portugal (1.4), Spain (1.5), and Switzerland (1.5) and an Eastern, post-Communist cluster: Belarus (1.3), Bosnia and Hercegovina (1.2), Bulgaria (1.5), Croatia (1.5), Czech Republic (1.5), Hungary (1.4), Latvia (1.5), Lithuania (1.4), Moldova (1.5), Poland (1.3), Romania (1.3), Russia (1.4), Slovakia (1.3), Slovenia (1.4), FYR Macedonia (1.4), and Ukraine (1.4). All post-Communist Europe has fallen below the reproduction rate, and above the 1.5 cutoff are only Estonia (1.7) and Montenegro and Serbia (both at 1.6). The other group is East

Asian and includes Hong Kong (1.0), Japan (1.3), Singapore (1.3), South Korea (1.2), and Taiwan (1.0) (McDonald, 2009; UNFPA, 2010, 100ff).

Scholarship has not yet fully caught up with this new global phenomenon, which at first appears rather puzzling. It involves two and half historical family systems but so far no other. It spans, on the one hand, the European post-Communist area of mass impoverishment and insecurity, combined with soaring inequality, and the East Asian zone of spectacular economic development, with some post-1990 qualification for Japan. In family terms, the most radical change has happened in East Asia, partly breaking the ancient intergenerational line. For completed fertility cohorts, a third of women in Hong Kong and Japan and a fifth of women in Singapore and Taiwan have had no child at all (McDonald, 2009).

Economic adversity tends to affect birthrates, wherever they can be controlled. This is most likely a major reason for the plummeting birthrate of post-Communist Europe, a fall down to a TFR of 0.8 for 1993 and 1994 in the former GDR (Therborn, 2004, p. 258). But the bulk of explanation of very low fertility derives most likely from recent gender imbalances. The low-fertility areas are all strongly patriarchal, in relation to their region, with few facilities for accommodating dual-career couples and children, and in East Asia, male conceptions of marriage have not kept up with female successes in education and business. The result is a modern *Lysistrata* rebellion of career women, abstaining from marriage and children (cf. Jones, 2010; McDonald, 2009). Whether all these very low fertility rates are reversible is anybody's guess, but if they are not, the world is likely to divide between reproducing and shrinking populations.

Transnational familism

After globalization, transnationalism has become a buzzword of our times (Portes, 2001; Vertovec, 2009). In contrast to the economic and mass culture macroperspective of the former, the latter focuses on the microsocial dynamics of human actors crossing and straddling economic and cultural regions as well as state boundaries. The size and the novelty of transnationalism had better not be exaggerated by romantic fascination. Worldwide transnational migration today is about the same size as it was a good century ago – when the Americas got its mass population and when crowds of Chinese and Indians fanned out overseas – now and then about 3% of the world population living outside their country of birth (UNFPA, 2011b, p. 66). Largely new are the global care chains – of mothers from poorer countries migrating for caring work in richer ones while somebody else is caring for her children at home (Hochschild, 2000; Yeates, 2012) – and the East Asian transborder marriage mass markets. For 2005–2009, more than 10% of South Korean marriages were with foreign spouses. Between a fourth and a third of Taiwanese men's marriages were with wives from abroad (Choe, 2011).

This is not the place to enter into the now extensive literature on transnational families and the complex and varied effects on family process it has found (see, e.g., Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004; Charsley and Shaw, 2006; Huang, Yeoh and Lam, 2008; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Mazzucato and Schans, 2011; Yeoh, Huang, and Lam, 2005; Yeates, 2012). But migration as a transnational family raises two questions of a more general character which we shall touch upon. First, how far does family transnational migration affect the geocultural pattern

of world family systems? Second, what does it tell us about the current importance of family in the context of alleged individualization?

What comes out of the literature earlier is that the transcontinental migration has not given rise to a new family species. On the contrary, in spite of new pressures and through various ways of accommodation – facilitated by new cheap and fast communication – so far, the main effect has been an extended reproduction of existing family patterns by spatial displacement. The territorial impact has been largest in Western Europe, where the long outmigration stream has been reversed. Within Europe, the Western European family pattern is now coexisting with arranged marriages and extended family households. In Europe as well as in North America, higher immigrant fertility rates are helping the reproduction of the resident population. While second-generation immigrant fertility rates and other practices tend to move closer to those of the surrounding population, the existing literature has not found any significant rapprochement between the families of sending and receiving territories produced by migration.

Highlighted by the literature, on the other hand, is the importance of family in the migratory process. Very often, migration is part of a family strategy for a better life, whether by migrant remittances, by international hypergamy, or by staged family outmigration. The latter is facilitated by family reunification permits in many receiving countries.

Conclusion: Persistent Diversity, Persistent Importance

Families continue to differ around the world, in size, in composition, in sexual regulation and marriage, in patriarchy or male sex–gender–generation power, in their stability, in their care for the elderly, and in their fertility and patterns of reproduction. Persistent global diversity should also be considered in relation to the ongoing processes of divergence by class in postindustrial societies. Successful industrialization once meant a stabilization and standardization of the Euro-American family (Therborn, 2004, 163ff). Currently, a new postindustrial sociocultural dynamic is driving family patterns apart between classes, through mounting educational and income homogamy and bifurcated paths of prosperity and insecurity. It has received most attention and is perhaps most pronounced in the United States (Murray, 2012; Brooks, 2012, reporting research by Robert Putnam).

From the persistent global diversity of systems of family–sex–gender relations, from transnational migratory familism, and from the growing divergence of family patterns in the postindustrial center of the world, we may also conclude a persistent, and in comparison with a generation ago probably increasing, importance of the family.

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