

Introduction: a view through the family kaleidoscope

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FAMILIES IN CONTEXT

Societies are always on the move, never attaining a long-term equilibrium. We shape and reshape our environment in a continuous fashion, creating the impression that we live in perpetual motion. Family life is no different from this. Even though many people find peace and quiet in their families, others see their families change at a pace they would not have thought possible. The same impressions arise when family scientists look at changes in families. On the one hand, they find stability: families are formed, children are born, and family solidarity remains one of the main pillars upon which families are built. Some of these patterns have existed for many centuries, while others may have existed since the dawn of mankind. At the same time, family forms are changing; in particular, the forms of family in which daily life is lived are subject to shifts that give the impression of acceleration and diversification. Demographic processes are known to evolve over time, but the changes witnessed in the family as a social phenomenon during the past 50 years give the impression that we have never before in history seen such speed in the evolution of family life. We know that this impression is faulty, and that we are historically blind (see, e.g., Coontz 2004, 2006; Therborn 2004): change has been continuous at all times and it is our mission as scientists to study this change and look at its consequences today.

The story of the recent demographic evolutions has, to a large extent, been documented (Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). In the late 1960s, demographic behaviour started to shift as people started marrying later and parenthood was postponed (Billari and Liefbroer 2010). Couples also had fewer children than before, leading to below replacement fertility in many countries (Billari et al. 2007; Frejka and Sobotka 2008). At the same time, divorce figures started to climb to unprecedented levels (Kalmijn 2007).

The next step was the slow abandonment of marriage, the ascent of unmarried cohabitation and the subsequent rise of births out of wedlock (Kiernan 2001, 2002). Theoretical explanations have been offered from both the economic and the demographic sides. The economic explanation draws largely upon the new home economics of Gary Becker (Becker 1981; Becker et al. 1977) and posits that the increased labour participation of women changed the opportunity costs of marriage and parenthood. Being economically independent implies having the power to make one's own choices, and having the opportunity to leave an unhappy marriage. The introduction of the contraceptive pill also meant the making of independent choices as a mother, and gave women the possibility to postpone parenthood or even reject it entirely. A more cultural explanation is given by considering values. According to the paradigm of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe 2010; Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa 1986), the driving force behind the immense changes was an ideational shift. Using Inglehart's (1977) notion of postmaterialism, the theory argues that economic circumstances and increased labour participation of women are not sufficient explanations. Individualistic and anti-authoritarian values, spreading through Western societies as welfare states were maturing, gave rise to changing views on relationships and led to changes in demographic behaviour. Neither the new home economics nor the theory of second demographic transition has succeeded in explaining all evolutions occurring in Europe and beyond. Yet they are 'powerful narratives' (Sobotka 2008) serving to link transitions and to shed light on their interrelatedness across countries. A third, more recent, stream explains family dynamics by pointing to the evolution in gender equality across countries. This 'incomplete revolution', as Esping-Anderson (2009) calls it, points to the shifting behaviour and preferences of women in families. Throughout the evolution of families in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the shifting role of women, their preferences and the late adaptation by men explains why countries evolve at different tempos, and to different degrees (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015).

THE FAMILY KALEIDOSCOPE

Although scholars struggle to agree upon a theoretical framing, the trends involving the transition of family dynamics are clear and impressive during the past four decades. Both from the American and the European perspective, the conclusion is that family life has become more diverse and more complex. This has inspired us to use the image of a kaleidoscope to look at this diversity and complexity. The word 'kaleidoscope' originates from

the Greek words *kalos* (beauty), *eidōs* (form) and *skopos* (examine). The kaleidoscope thus looks at the beauty of different forms. This is exactly what this book aims to do. We start with Chapters 1 and 2 by Furstenberg and Toulemon, respectively, and look at the diversity and fragmentation of present-day family life. Like the kaleidoscope, each turn generates a different view through the built-in mirrors reflecting new insights into the coloured glass and beads. With this book, we bring the reader new insights into the field of family dynamics and family diversity.

An overview of the content reveals that our particular kaleidoscope offers five different views on the matter at hand. These five perspectives connect the chapters transversally and show not only how the field of family studies investigates diversity and complexity, but also how it is composed of diverse and complex themes and angles.

A first view the kaleidoscope offers, regards the diversity of families, by taking the wide range of family forms into account. In this book, analyses are presented of childless families, young parenthood and empty-nest families. Many chapters take the perspective of children in families, a bottom-up perspective that reveals another wide variety of possible living arrangements for children. Not only do children grow up in married and unmarried families, divorced families with children also make clear that single parents, reconstituted families and re-re-constituted families cover the daily environment of children (Toulemon, Chapter 2 and Furstenberg, Chapter 1). In addition, custody arrangements go beyond the classic mother model or the 50:50 co-parenthood model. Children of divorced couples now move more frequently between their parents, and (moving) stepchildren add to the complexity of the family even further (Murinkó and Szalma, Chapter 8).

This book also captures a wide range of disciplines and theoretical perspectives. Even though family studies have a rich tradition in sociology and social demography, the range of disciplines looking at family life is much broader. This book offers perspectives from the fields of epidemiology (Featherstone, Chapter 6), anthropology (Brouckaert, Chapter 5) and gender studies (Furstenberg, Chapter 1 and Sigle, Chapter 9), all contributing ways of looking at cross disciplinary boundaries. Intersectionality invites traditional and dominant perspectives to open up their views and embrace new lines of thinking, analysing and informing policies, Siglie (Chapter 9) argues.

A third aspect of the book is that it does not centre on one methodology. Quantitative methodology, being dominant in family studies, is usually a connecting thread in books on population and family issues. Sophisticated survival analyses and multilevel models explore the complexity of processes that unfold over time. This book, however, also offers insights gained

via qualitative methodologies (Brouckaert, Chapter 5). Using ethnography and living with undocumented women reveals hidden facets of their reality that no survey could ever capture. Additionally, CART analyses (classification and regression trees) (Mortelmans et al., Chapter 4 and Sigle, Chapter 9) show how new quantitative techniques can reveal populations that would remain invisible with traditional regression-style analyses. The sophistication of today's graphical representations adds to the depth of exploring data and integrating theoretical perspectives such as the intersectionality approach.

A fourth kaleidoscopic look brings us to levels of analysis. Most of this introduction thus far has focused on the complexity that arises when studying trends over time. This is certainly one of the major domains of interest, but the book also offers a unique perspective on the interplay between macro and micro perspectives. The international community has invested a lot of effort in collecting comparable survey data enriched with context indicators. This allows us to study family processes such as fertility decisions in a wider context, the most obvious of which – from a European perspective – is the nation state. De Wachter et al. (Chapter 7) and Murinkó and Szalma (Chapter 8) use international harmonized data to compare the influence of context at the state level. They empirically document what Furstenberg and Toulemon observed in the introductory chapters: context matters, and the complexity of change can be explained by taking this context into account. When society changes, and especially when change is going at a rather quick pace, stragglers find themselves in a disadvantaged position. New family compositions seem to be characterized by neutrality and free choice, but instead turn out to be factors of segregation and discrimination. One of the major inequalities that has barely changed during the family turnover is gender. We have already mentioned the plea of Sigle to bring in the feminist concept of intersectionality but Kil et al. (Chapter 3) also point at the often forgotten stagnation in the division of household labour. Gender roles have evolved tremendously, leading to a greater gender equity within couples, but when it comes down to the activities in the kitchen and laundry room, the old male breadwinner model still prevails in the daily lives of partners.

A fifth and last reality that the kaleidoscope shows us is the inertia of institutions. Most of our welfare systems are built on the idea of a breadwinner society with a clear-cut division of labour between men and women. Marriage is at the heart of the system and supports the legislation regarding property, social security, some labour market regulations, and so on. Even though our institutions have changed enormously during the past century, they often show a remarkable lag when it comes to catching up with demographic evolutions. The final chapter of the book

(Scott, Chapter 10) looks at this inertia from the point of policy makers. If institutions are not adapted to societal change, policy makers are the ones that need to change them. Family policy, and more specifically the care deficit, is debated in Scott's chapter. She shows how ideology can blur the policy discussion, and continues to fuel the inertia.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into four parts. Part I builds on this introduction, and looks back at changes in family diversity and family dynamics. From a trans-Atlantic perspective, Furstenberg (Chapter 1) and Toulemon (Chapter 2) sketch a historical and geographical overview of the major changes that have occurred in the past few decades. This is mirrored in Part IV, where Sigle (Chapter 9) and Scott (Chapter 10) cast a forward glance, focusing on new theoretical perspectives to study the kaleidoscope and the policy context that will need to respond to it. Even though all the chapters are connected in many ways, we chose to organize them thematically in the book. Besides the mentioned historical and prospective view, two guiding principles became apparent throughout the different chapters: a focus on gender, and a focus on children. These connections were taken as a guiding principle to organize Parts II and III.

The first two chapters set the scene of this book on family transitions by picturing the above-mentioned evolutions from a US and a European perspective. Furstenberg's Chapter 1 spans half a century of developments in American family life. Departing from the 1963 prediction of William Goode (1963) that family life would converge to the conjugal family, he shows how divergence was what actually took place after the 1960s. Like Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) and Goldscheider et al. (2015), Furstenberg also considers the gender revolution as one of the major forces driving the changes behind families. He shows how a combination of economic, technological, social and cultural factors all undermined the traditional male breadwinner model of the early post-war era. The gender role revolution went hand in hand with a widening stratification in the American society. Furstenberg describes this as the two-tiered family system. The top tier consists of well-educated and rich couples who cohabit for a certain period, after which they usually marry. Children in the top tier get more resources and time from their parents and are more likely to end up in a more favourable position themselves (Carlson and England 2011). The lower tier consists of more disadvantaged couples who cohabit early and often have children within a short period of time. In this second tier, families are much more unstable, generating more complex families as

time passes. Social inequality is both installed and reinforced by this two-tiered family system.

The first chapter ends with a comparison with Europe, which connects perfectly to Chapter 2 by Toulemon, who examines family change across Europe. Toulemon documents the same kind of processes as Furstenberg, but shows the European variations in these patterns. For instance, not all European countries have followed the same pace through the generations; there are clear differences marked by the North–South and West–East gradients. Toulemon maintains that the differences in pace notwithstanding, the economic, technological, social and cultural factors play a similar role in all European countries. The differentiation in family trajectories does not go uniformly hand in hand with social stratification processes, as was suggested by Furstenberg for the US; most of Europe’s diversity is due to institutional, political and cultural differences among its nation-states, rather than to social stratification.

Part II of the book combines three chapters that take the analysis of gender as a starting point. Kil, Neels and Vergauwen (Chapter 3) provide us with a pan-European outlook on gender inequality in domestic work. Using data from the European Social Survey, they show that the gender balance in domestic work throughout the continent still disfavours women compared to men. The gender gap is smaller in younger families and families without children. In a multilevel analysis, both the national gender culture and the policy context interact with micro-level characteristics. Gender culture turns out to be more important for the division of unpaid labour than national policies on gender equality.

Chapter 4, by Mortelmans, Meier and Defever, uses intersectionality in an empirical study on early adulthood. Drawing on what Sigle (Chapter 9) calls an ‘inter-categorical’ approach, these authors examine social categories such as gender, ethnicity and social class in order to expose patterns of inequality in the transition to adulthood. Leaving the parental home is a particular moment in an adolescent’s life; it is a moment of great change, but it also turns out to be a transition in the life course with a high risk of increasing inequalities between young adults. Using a cross-national, quantitative intersectionality approach, the chapter identifies groups exposed to an accumulation of risk factors. The chapter concludes with a reflection on how quantitative analysis can adopt the intersectionality approach and provide new insights that can guide policies.

Chapter 5 by Brouckaert shows how ethnographic methods can unveil gender inequality in impoverished high-risk families. Brouckaert participated in the lives of undocumented mothers surviving in the anonymity of urban areas. She focuses on the ways these mothers instil ‘feelings of

home'. When living in an undocumented, 'illegal' way in a country, the concept of 'home' for a mother with her children is quite problematic. The chapter shows that daily, repetitive tasks like preparing food are essential practices in establishing some notion of integration with the society they are living in. Highlighting the importance of mundane activities like preparing food for a family, Brouckaert touches on the basic elements of what can turn households into families.

Part III presents three studies that take the perspective of children. Children are important actors in families and the diversity of research focusing upon children not only illustrates this importance, but also points to the huge vulnerabilities and inequalities that exist among the variety of families with children. In Chapter 6, Featherstone links Parts II and III by focusing on both gender and children in her study on genetic risk and its place in family life. Touching upon the same basic issues of what constitutes a family, Featherstone uses genetically inherited diseases as starting point for a qualitative study on the core essence of kinship. The study explores patterns of (non-)disclosure within families affected by an inherited degenerative condition.

De Wachter, Neels, Wood and Vergauwen (Chapter 7) take another aspect of (young) households into consideration: female labour participation and childcare. More specifically, they look at the educational gradient of maternal employment patterns in 11 European countries. Using the first round of the Generations and Gender Survey, they show how more highly educated women tend to stay active on the labour market after giving birth. Low-educated women, on the other hand, tend to leave the labour market or decrease their working hours. The country comparison showing that the educational gradient is clearer for highly educated women, indicating that they receive better chances to combine work and family life compared to low-educated women. This gender inequality is partially explained by taking the differential use of childcare into account.

In the third chapter of Part III, a cross-country analysis is again used on the Gender and Generations Survey. In Chapter 8, Murinkó and Szalma focus on re-partnering from the perspective of men. The analysis not only takes a comparative perspective but also provides detailed insight into different family constellations that men end up in after a relational break-up. Not only are cohabiting and marital unions considered, but also – and more importantly – the residential arrangements of the children. This approach reveals that co-residence with children after parental separation in general makes it easier for men to re-partner. The country differences were small, indicating a parallel trend between France, Hungary and Norway.

The concluding Part IV of the book ambitiously looks into the future. In the demographic literature, this might mean that simulations give an insight into how future developments are expected to go, under well-defined conditions. We conclude our kaleidoscopic view on families by taking theory and policy prospects into account.

Chapter 9 by Sigle looks at theoretical perspectives in the field of demography and the predominance of economic theory therein. A dominance as such is not problematic, she argues, but the hegemonic refusal to use different perspectives when needed, leads to an impoverishment of the field. The chapter uses the concept of intersectionality as an example of how demographic research can be enriched by new insights from disciplines other than economics. Intersectionality, as a feminist research paradigm, points to the separability and multiplicativity of sex and race as social categories, the former dominated by white educated women and the latter by black men. Using fertility as an example, Sigle shows how intersectionality can help to gain other – more critical – insights than the current frameworks would allow.

The book concludes with a prospective outlook from Scott (Chapter 10). Policy needs scientific evidence to inform decision-making, she argues. Two crucial areas – child-centred perspectives and gender inequalities – are at the heart of this debate. The child perspective is crucial because research in sociology is too often adult-centred, leaving out the lived experiences of the children themselves. Scott illustrates this by using child poverty as an example. Gender inequality is illustrated as a major domain where the scientific body of evidence is huge. At the same time, (United Kingdom) policy deals with the work–life issue in multiple ways, leading to very different and often unexpected outcomes. The conclusions from these analyses lead to a plea not only to ‘deconstruct’ the literature on children and gender inequalities but also, more importantly, to give room to knowledge-based policies that go beyond ideologies that simply misuse or misinterpret scientific results.

NOTE

1. This book is based on an international workshop organized by the University Centre Saint-Ignatius Antwerp (www.ucsia.org) at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, in March 2014. During this workshop, a multidisciplinary group of experts exchanged ideas and results on the panoply of new family forms and its societal challenges (more at http://www.ucsia.org/main.aspx?c=*UCSIAENG2&n=116376).

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