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FAMILY SYSTEMS AND CULTURAL CHANGE

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Contents

2 Editors' Introduction

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Family demography is a recent and relatively underdeveloped branch of population studies, in large part owing to the complex problems of data collection and analysis that are encountered. As a step towards amending this situation the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) in 1982 established a Scientific Committee on Family Demography and the Life Cycle. That committee convened a group of experts at the Population Council in New York, and ultimately produced a volume of concepts and applications in the field (Bongaarts, Burch, and Wachter, 1987). Another seminar was conducted in Berlin on the later phases of the family life cycle, the proceedings of which resulted in a second volume (Grebenik, Höhn, and Mackensen, 1989).

When the committee's term expired in 1984 it was superseded by a new committee, the objective of which was to advance the substantive demography of the family and the life cycle. The new committee planned three seminars: the one recounted here, on Changing Family Structures and Life Courses in Less Developed Countries (Honolulu, Hawaii, 5–7 January 1987); another on New Forms of Family Life in More Developed Countries (Vaucresson, France, 6–9 October 1987); and the third on Theories of Family Change (Tokyo, 29 November to 2 December 1988).

The first committee had focused almost exclusively on developed countries and on the nuclear family model most readily applicable there. That focus of course reflected the geographic concentration of both appropriate data and relevant experts. Nevertheless, it was felt even then that strenuous efforts should be made to rectify this situation. The subsequent efforts of the new committee focused on developing countries. Its mandate was to reveal the need, and the possibilities, for models of family demography and family change more attuned to the world's socio-cultural diversity.

The Honolulu seminar was co-sponsored by the East–West Population Institute and took place at the East–West Center. Over a three-day period there were nineteen formal presentations of papers by a total of twenty-three experts. The seminar comprised an overview session on 'Themes and Concepts' and five main substantive sessions dealing with 'Life Cycle and Household Histories', 'Marriage Systems', 'External Pressures on Family Systems', 'Rural Family Systems', and 'Family Systems and Cultural Change'. Thirteen contributions by seventeen authors are included in this volume.

The call to the Honolulu seminar affirmed an interest in 'marriage systems'—how such systems have evolved and how they function in specific socio-cultural settings and economic conditions. Only by examining the wide range of actual marriage systems over time and space, it was felt, could ethnocentrism be avoided. At the same time scholars were encouraged to seek out the common threads, 'the anthropological basis of the family' underlying the various marriage systems world-wide. A related goal was to document the paths to change under modern conditions. Central here was critical examination of the nuclearization/convergence idea, as well as investigation of more specific forces operating on the family, for example the historical institutions of slavery and of colonialism.

There has been a return recently to comparative and historical analysis of family systems world-wide. For a long time comparative family theory had been largely evolutionary and heavily Western in orientation and in that sense ethnocentric. In the absence of empirical investigation, theory was often deductive and grounded in evolutionary or functionalist principles more than in systematic observation. Generalization across all times and places was the overarching goal. The central idea that emerged posited a process of convergence of family forms on the nuclear family roughly as found in the West of the early to mid-twentieth century. In this view, contemporary developing societies differ because their traditional social organization has not yet, or not fully, been transformed by industrialization and modernization.

However, the last several decades have seen much new historical research on the Western family as well as thorough documentation of the rather divergent recent trends in Western family systems; these have, in Oliveira's phrase 'destroyed a whole set of mistaken images' about Western families and seriously undermined the simple convergence view. At the same time the developing countries have seen, in different degrees, unmistakable change in their family systems.

The way has been opened to new research on family systems throughout the world, now much more firmly grounded in both anthropological field studies and large-scale household surveys in a variety of cultural settings covering much of the developing world. This volume of new essays and research documents, synthesizes, and contributes to the new family research. It illustrates the ongoing revision in our views of the family systems of developing regions.

Also reflected well in this volume are some of the emerging styles and methodological directions of family research on developing countries. Modern data collection in the developing world is rich and varied. Standardized methods of large-scale data collection (especially traditional interviews with ever-married women) are well developed, and there has been movement recently toward forms of in-depth data collection such as life-history reconstruction, focus-group interviews, micro-level community studies, and richly textured functional studies of households. The preferred investigations, judging from many of the contributions in this volume, are fine-grained in their

detail, and multi-levelled in the way that they link conditions and processes from the local through the national to the global society. Still, reservations are expressed throughout the volume, about both multi-purpose surveys and detailed life-history data collection. Proponents of those approaches are challenged to make clear the advantages of the additional effort that is inevitably involved, and in particular to demonstrate the value of the data already collected. A middle ground is recommended by some, between simplistic life-cycle and highly complex life-course information.

A demographic paradigm pervades this volume, with its stress on the systematics of space and time (residence and age) as essential components of family organization. N. Ryder begins with the force underlying all demographic process, time's passage, and examines the problems this raises for individuals (aging, survival) and populations (replacement). He identifies the family as the institution meant to solve these problems at both levels, as the 'prototypical formulation of family demography'. Practical observations stem from Ryder's comments, among them: the need to treat events individually; the need to stress the variances around mean ages at occurrence, particularly in developing countries where often these variances are great 'in every dimension'; the need to explore viewpoints other than that of the respondent generation (the child's viewpoint for example); the need to examine male as well as female outlooks (e.g. gender differences in generation length); and the importance of the marriage market in studying issues of population growth.

The overarching if not always explicit theme of the collection is diversity among family systems, even prior to the recent period of rapid change. The J. and P. Caldwell notion of a universal 'traditional family' notwithstanding, evidence of that pre-transitional diversity is abundant. The collection is rich with expositions of historical and contemporary variety, from the experience of families under slavery (V. Stolke; R. Steckel), to that of Malay households under the pressure of urbanization (M. Young), to the changes taking place in the process of entry to marriage in the Philippines (L. Domingo and E. King), and the evolving institutions of consensual union and celibacy in Latin America (E. Jelin). V. Stolcke, drawing on the revisionist work that has appeared over the last decade, examines and compares Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil. The resulting analysis casts light on family systems under extreme tension. This is an important aspect in the contemporary world situation, characterized as it is by massive refugee populations and other kinds of movements. Similarly, R. Steckel examines the ante-bellum slave family in the United States, as to forces weakening and forces strengthening. Both Stolcke's and Steckel's analyses are important as well for their insights into families of intermarriage, in settings where this is not accepted because important social boundaries, often racial or religious, are being challenged—another notable feature of family change in the modern world. M. L. Young considers the lives and family relationships of young, working Malay women in Malaysia, with their divided loyalties, yet continued sharing of earnings with families left in the villages. L. Domingo and E. King seek to

understand the shift to later marriage that is occurring across Asia. The explanation they develop centres firmly on the family and especially on intergenerational issues of control, resource transfer, and family continuity. E. Jelin relates female celibacy in Latin America to broader institutional changes.

There is little support in these chapters for the one-time consensus view of family convergence under conditions of industrialization. A wide range of evidence is cited by P. McDonald as exceptions to the convergence idea. Many of the contributions (that by C. Wilson and T. Dyson, for example) further emphasize that variety exists not only in family form and function, but also in the nature of the family's links to the rest of the local community and even to the entire society and to the world as a whole. For example, Wilson and Dyson question the stress often placed on the generational principal in family analysis, and particularly its utility when studying family systems in social and cultural contexts, such as South India, where marriages may take place among close kin. They suggest instead considering all relevant interrelations within the family.

The paucity of theory regarding family change is noted by many of the authors. This is attributed to the great variability of family forms and functions globally. An implicit question underlies many of the contributions: Is it really possible to have theories about the family that are plausible cross-culturally for the whole of the transformation from pre-industrial to industrial society? The collection reflects the long-standing tension between understanding specific phenomena holistically versus the scientific goal of generalization. The Caldwells' contribution offers such a generalization, though it should be noted that they are 'generalizing' to families that are 'patrilineal, patriarchal, virilocal, exogamous, peasant, and with a closed agricultural frontier and recognized, inheritable land tenure'. The more prevalent contrary view is illustrated by C. Oppong's assertion that Western concepts are largely ineffectual in understanding African reality: 'The simple addition of polygyny or "extended household/family" to the repertoire of (Western) concepts is in no way adequate.' She examines the diversity of African family and household systems and implicitly their differences with systems elsewhere in the world. This is demonstrated by C. Oppong in regard to kinship, rules of residence, rules of sexual access, and other important features.

There are numerous suggestions regarding the future of family and household studies in developing countries. Conceptual and analytic problems are identified as blocks to progress. For example, N. Ryder's discussion emphasizes the all too frequent use of a female reference-point for data collection and the construction of indicators. He also derides the pursuit of modelling for its own sake rather than for the purpose of answering research questions. It is noted that considerable ambiguity remains regarding certain fundamental dimensions of household. Thus, N. Ryder argues that residence and descent are critical dimensions whereas E. Jelin suggests 'everyday maintenance' and 'descent' as more appropriate. C. Wilson and T. Dyson stress demographic maleability and the importance of lateral relationships, thus their questioning of the adequacy of

generational concepts. Another example of conceptual ambiguity is the notion of celibacy: as E. Jelin points out, it remains to disentangle such dimensions as 'alone-ness', virginity, and childlessness. She calls for a view of celibacy giving equal place to the positive elements of solitude and autonomy, and to the underlying forces of individuation and female emancipation. Oliveira emphasizes the value of the historical research that has been carried out on Latin American societies. She urges further work of this kind, drawing on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative sources. However, a significant difficulty in trying to reconstruct the processes of family change in developing societies is the fact that many historical studies rely mainly on family systems prevailing in the dominant élites or castes.

Another point of agreement concerns the necessity of linking family and marriage systems with other important features of society, for example with issues of gender stratification, the societal process of individuation (namely, E. Jelin's view of marriage and celibacy decisions in the context of women's roles and the individuation process), the changing value of daughters (namely, L. Domingo and E. King on Asia, remarking that daughters are more and more fulfilling family obligation by providing income and, in certain cases, prestige and in turn enjoying more autonomy in decision-making).

One factor—the technology of data collection and data processing—has been of undeniable importance in the last decades and will be a dominant influence in the future. The hand of technological change is clearly reflected in the recent paths of family studies, and the present volume is a microcosm of this. Underlying many of these studies is a vast quantity of highly detailed data which has been subject to interactive manipulation in ways unimagined only two decades ago, and imagined perhaps but certainly unavailable only a few years ago. One senses that the future trajectory of the field will likewise be impelled by the possibilities that technologies of information processing will bring within reach. This applies equally to studies of the past and of the present.

A final comment on the scope of these chapters. It should not be necessary to point out that not all viewpoints and methodologies are represented here. This is a collection of papers either centred on or in some way responsive to the categories and topics of demography.

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