A cluster of configurations and reconfigurations gaining ground through Globalization. How is the family being transformed?

Dragos Lucian Ivan

1 The National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. The nexus between globalization and family life is complex. Besides this, often it comes as a surprise to many that a mutual interference between the two entities exists. The influences of globalization through its manifestations and through the policies of the nation-state impact the family. Surprising is also that the intergenerational relationships within the family, relations that dictate the actions and inactions of the family, ultimately contribute to the success or failure of economic and politic agendas. Beyond the economic and politic plan, there is the social plan. Globalization is acting in the direction of transforming the social plan, while the family is traditionally a unit of social cohesion. My realization is that we are in the midst of a change that needs a greater holistic perspective because it is profound in its enormity.

Keywords: globalization, family, social, social dynamic

JEL Codes: F60; J12; J13

1. Introduction

Family life is changing confronted with globalization. It is only natural to assume that family is going through certain changes when faced with globalization. The term globalization is a misleading one, giving the impression that it refers to the global, leaving aside the intimate life of the individual. How could that be in a world with instant communication and augmented accessibility? Globalization did not only change the relationships between major players. Globalization does not concern only states and macro forms of existence in our societal system, but it concerns our everyday life experience. It does not cancel out the family or the individual, but it forces a redefinition of their existence. We believe that Giddens has captured a reality when stating that we are faced with a powerful feeling of individualism. Traditional family values are retreating, but we believe this process is only temporary. Traditional frameworks of identity are not dissolving, they are merely reconstructing themselves to suit the new individual identity within the global world. The individual continues to aspire towards having a family, towards belonging to a community. We are witnessing a move towards individualism, but this cannot be done outside the community. Man is a social person, a person that defines himself also through the relationships established. New patterns of identity are emerging for the individual, but also for the family. The family changes so as to be able to accommodate the new patterns of individual identity. There cannot be a global society without family.

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E-mail: i_dragos_lucian@yahoo.com
2. **Methodological concerns**

2.1. **Research questions**

What are the trends that influence the relationship between globalization and family?

This question refers mainly to the theoretical analysis of this issue and its importance in the relation to the overall system.

Do we notice any change in family life brought about by globalization?

How do scientific theoretical elites assess the relationship between globalization and the family? Can we notice a change in their perspective and structure?

2.2. **Assumptions**

Hypothesis 1: Theoretical models can become sectors of positive influence between theory and practice, this in turn can expand into research methodologies that support the theoretical aspect and capture the reality as it was depicted in theories, managing to either support or attack the theoretical support. Hypothesis 2: Theoretical observations show that there is a constant interaction between globalization and the family and this interaction is not one dimensioned. During this theoretical research we have used content analysis. We have chosen this type of analysis so as to be able to present, interpret and discover the trends that affect the EU-27. We have analyzed documents, scientific journals and scientific books and we were able to make correct inferences that constructed a broad description of the social phenomena that influence EU-27. The purpose of our content analysis was to build a general context describing the evolution and future trends within the EU-27. Our approach was from the earlier models. This was the starting point and was deductive in nature. From there we have advanced from the general to the specific.

2.3. **Limitations**

As we have used this method we also took into consideration its limitations. The primary possibility of limitation for our study is the way in which the content has been analyzed. The content is made out of important and primary theories and their interpretation can be different. In order to prevent this we have analyzed a long bibliographical list on the topic of globalization, family and social change. The need for empirical research to support the theoretical perspective is another limit of this research.

3. **Literature review and limits of previous research**

3.1 **Limits on family research**

One reason for the little research done in the field of family studies and how the family has changed under the influence of globalization is the fact that globalization is seen as something global. Globalization represents the public interest through its focus on economy and politics (Giddens, 2002:15-27). On the other hand, the family was perceived as the private sphere. Although the private sphere is something intimate, it does not elude the influence of the outside or the global. Through the constructed interpretation of family as the private sphere (Flaquer, 2010:57-60), although this is correct, it does not justify the lack of research as long as the family is private, but it is not isolated. The family cannot escape outside influence, nor can we say that it has to. The family represents the private life, the intimate life, but this does not mean that it escapes globalization or changes. We acknowledge the difference between the public sphere and the private sphere, but we believe that willingly or unwillingly the two interact and exist also through their opposition.
As the public sphere is in a constant dynamics, in line with the reality (Dobrescu, Palada: 2012: 17-18) why would not the family be in the same type of dynamics. After all, the public sphere and the family share at least one value, that of solidarity. The civil society is associated with the term of solidarity sphere (Ciocoea, Cârlan, 2012: 183-184), while the family is also linked with this notion. The family is not spare of change. Exchanges and transformations exist as a result of their interaction or isolation. There is only an ideological distinction. In practice the two spheres constantly interact at different levels and influence each other. There has been little dialogue between researchers that study globalization and scientists preoccupied with family studies. We do not wish to oversimplify the discussion about globalization and propose the idea that the study of globalization was limited around economic and political issues (Zlotnich, 1961), but we wish to underline the fact that globalization has been analyzed mostly from these two perspectives. There has been interest on cultural globalization (Halman, Inglehart, Medramo, 2004: 47-68), but little research on the relationship between globalization and family. This is surprising taking into account that many of the aspects of globalization find their way among the harmonies and conflicts of family life and family relationships. An anthropological researcher could conclude that the family and the intergenerational relationships it fosters form the foundation of what we call society.

Another reason that limited the research done in family studies was the existence of a fashionable topic. During the evolution of family research the very definition of the family encouraged scientists to focus on those families that corresponded with the accepted model of the family. On the other hand, contemporary scientists focus more on new types of families that in the past were considered as abnormal.

The family is not suspended in time, space, and culture, but it has to be analyzed in context. It is surprisingly that little research has been done on the changes brought about by globalization.

3.2 Limits to globalization research

Globalization has been constructed around the neoliberal model (Hajnal, 1983: 90). This model constructed a particular type of state, the welfare state and its policies have tended to privatize individual and family survival (Biblarz, Stacey, 2010: 5-9). Changes within intergenerational relationships in the family have not occurred only as a result of the actions that defragmented the family, but also as a result of the actions meant to reconstruct the family (Leccardi, Ruspini, 2006: 109-113). Paradoxically the effort of the welfare state to privatize individual and family survival had the opposite effect. The family existed also based on the need to provide social protection. The moment the welfare state privatize even this type of social protection provided by the family, entire generations stopped looking at the family from this point of view (Cole, Durham, 2006: 130-145). Through too intrusive policies the welfare state de-emphasized the importance of the family (Shoven, 2010: 15-27). We can admit that these policies were good at the core, but in the conditions of the economic crisis, global competition and ageing of the population (Epure, 2012: 97-99) proved to be unsustainable (Settersten, Angel, 2011: 167-180). The welfare state was forced to pull back from financing social protection, but this happened after the family lost its habit of providing social protection ((Mau, Mewes, Schoneck, 2012: 670-675). Although circumstances differ substantially this is the case in most Western countries.

Much has been discussed of the consequences of globalization. Observers have been quick to note down major events that mark the intensification of globalization (Streeten, 2001: 86-93). Their vast majority focus on cataclysmic events such as 11 September 2011 to mark globalization. Major events have come to dominate the international discussion around globalization and it is tempting to conclude that globalization is limited by major observable changes that can be quantifiable. Such a conclusion overlooks the manifold social responses to globalization. We believe that this social aspect becomes evident these days. Even in the
case of the European Union debates have started to be centered on the concept of solidarity. The crisis is no longer only an economic one, but there is debate around the solidarity crisis within the European Union (Dobrescu, Negrea-Busuioc, Radu, 2013:84). The European Union is vulnerable to socio-economic issues, not just to economic issues (Popoviciu, 2010:37). The economic crisis has caught the attention of the media and has become paramount in any discussion, leaving aside other dimensions. Similar examples can be found with other situations. Although the war on terrorism may have caught the media spotlight, the great globalization is more than these debated events. It takes place on the streets, within your family, not only on the battlefield, on the media spotlight or in the great financial institutions of the world. Public references to globalization has become increasingly synonymous with political, economic and military events. In this interdependent world people only started to reflect on the impact of international politics, economics and culture at home (Sharif, 2010). It is a lot to get used to. It is a lot to understand and comprehend. At this point it seems that globalization has resulted in new diverse patterns of family and intergenerational relations (Albert, Ferring, 2012). The dynamics of ageing and family life are changing in our globalized world (Izuhara, 2010:189-201).

Globalization has created a new situation. Social scientist should be humbled by two realities that are becoming clearer and clearer. One is the failure to foresee the social changes that accompany globalization (Jamieson, Backett, Simpson, Wasoff, 2010).

This should make us diffident about our ability to anticipate the future accurately. The second is our weakness of our knowledge around the changes that take place at the level of the family and the way in which these changes interact with the greater society. We are stunned by this second one because there has been previous research on the changing patterns of the family (Willoughby, Olson, Carroll, Nelson, Miller, 2012:30-40). Family was seen as an entity in constant change, at least this was the case a couple of centuries ago (Bachofen, 1861; Maine, 1861; Morgan, 1877; Engels, 1902). All of these writers identified different stages of development for the family. Each stage of development was in direct link with the societal changes taking place at that moment (Amato, Booth, 2000:18-25). The industrial society was linked with the nuclear type family (Talcott Parson). The family was considered in a permanent evolution and a representation of the society (Shorter, 1975). The existence of a convergence between the type of society development and the type of family preferred was considered a natural thing (William Goode, 1963).

This weakness in knowledge should make us reluctant in proposing radical new plans without proper research and understanding. The most powerful engine of change in our contemporary society is the family (Bengston, Biblarz, Roberts, 2004:163-178). The most important point is that globalization clearly does allow for the existence of the family. We believe that it may even require its continuous effort to facilitate the construction of the local community within the globalized world.

4. Influences of globalization on family life

Globalization suggests both a growing magnitude of global flows, but also a growing magnitude of family interaction within itself and with the rest of the society (Strong, DeVault, Cohen, 2010:113). It is only natural to assume that globalization means not only the enmeshed of the global within the state, but also the enmeshed of the global within the family. The spatial reach of globalization does not stop at the level of the continental or regional, but continues towards the level of the community and the family. The family becomes more embedded with the global. The global does not necessarily displaces the family level, but it influences it, and in turn the family influences all the other forms of organization. The family, as the base of any social order and of any type of social life has become so embedded with the global that it starts to influence the community. Gradually it has put its mark on the macro level structures.
Globalization brings modernization and modernization changes the pattern of existence of the family. Reactions against globalization have manifested all around the world, but they were directed against the economic and political status-quo. New animosities and conflicts arise from globalizations, but they are not that drastic in manifestation in comparison with the profound changes that take place at the level of the family. We only begin to be aware of the ways in which globalization affects us. Only recently has public perception begun to understand in what way globalization influences the economic and political sphere. The public perception is still a long way from understanding the profound and irreversible changes that took place at the social level of the family in the presence of globalization.

The routines of everyday family life have started to be dominated by the global (Noller, Karantzas, 2012:324-334). National and local circumstances still play their part, but we believe we are living in a time when for the first time the global brings its contribution to the everyday life of the family. The disjuncture between the everyday life and globalization gets smaller and smaller. Globalization has led to real structural changes in the micro scale of modern social organizations. This was evident in the past from the existence of world financial markets, the spread of popular culture and the growth of Multi-National Corporations. That was just another stage in the process. We are witnessing the spread of globalization at the level of the family. Conceiving globalization as only an economic or political phenomenon would be misleading. It would leave out the social relations that are being changed.

Social reality is made out of several dimensions: the economic, the technological, the political, the cultural, the natural (Mann, 1986; Giddens, 1990). To expect globalization to influence only some of the strata of our complex society would be misleading and foolish. All the strata permeate each other and influence each other. Naturally, globalization needed time to permeate all the strata, but currently we believe it has reached the natural level, the natural social order of the family.

Globalization triggered a process of significant reconfiguration (Kaufmann, 2010:45-56). This reconfiguration could not have stopped only at some levels. Globalization is often seen as a process that changes the world order, but it is also a process that changes the principles of social life. It is only normal to analyze the family in the globalization context because globalization has created the context in which significant reconfiguration is possible. The global is mounted onto the regional and local and thus interacts with the family. The traditional conception of the family, in which it is positioned as the fundamental core unit of human society has at the base its inherited homogeneity. The family is supposed to be characterized by homogeneity and ruled by specific purposes. The form and state of the family has been altered under the pressure of international, transnational and collectivity forces. The family is no longer permeated only by domestic forces, but also by transnational networks (Castells, 1997:56-70).

4.1 Technology and the family

Technology promised to counteract the erosion of time and distance on social organization and interaction, but we are now seeing its limits. We have witnessed a growing interdependence with globalization, but this happened over the natural interdependence of the family. Although there is growing interdependence it related to the individual, not to the family. Growing interdependence of the individual with other entities outside the family has meant a decrease interdependence of the individual with the family. There is only so much interdependence, after all. It has been a growing intensification of the enmeshment among the individual and the world, but while this happened it has decrease the social interactions within the family. Globalization has been perceived as taking place in the context of time-space compression. If the constraints of time and space no longer exist, why should it not influence the evolution of the family? The presence of instantaneous electronic communication has changed the way in which family members related to each other outside the family. Family members no longer perceive distance in the same way. Technology
has been encouraged to surpass distance within the family members. This has encouraged the presence of geographical distance between family members. It also enhanced the temptation to leave the family at an earlier age and it encouraged geographical separation. Technology promised to overcome the erosion of relationships due to geographical distance.

4.2 Family life in the context of the thick globalization

In a thin globalization the need of the individual to socialize and to develop socially speaking was under severe barriers. With the rapid process of globalization, socio-economic activity stopped being limited to the family and to the local community. The socio-economic existence of the individual became part of a shrinking world. While it has positive aspects, a shrinking world has also changed the relationships within the family. A shrinking world meant that the individual could venture out in the world further than before. A familiar world meant that the individual no longer felt the need of the familiarity of the family for emotional support. The place of the family, in a shrinking world, where you feel at ease everywhere, has changed. A shrinking world meant that people extended the circle of what they called family to everybody to who they developed emotional bonds.

4.3 The global family and the local family

In a globalized world, with constant and instant communication it is a lot easier to construct apparently stable emotional connections. Wrapped in modernity, these connections seem to present greater value than the traditional ways of communicating and interacting. Being part of the global family has become a welcome target for many, sometimes forgetting of the importance of blood family. What distinguishes contemporary family from the traditional one is the differential emphasis given to the family in a globalized world. The material, cognitive, temporal and spatial characteristics of the family are seen differently by different generations. It is worth dwelling on these changes in an effort to clarify the concept of family and intergenerational relations in a globalized world. Looking over the major elements brought about by globalization: knowledge, movement of labor, trade, capital flows, foreign investment (Stiglitz) to which we add opportunities for individuals, the spread of technology, access to capital and the need for capital, it is easy to imagine what a powerful impact had globalization on the family.

4.4 The value of the individual within the global labor market

In the presence of globalization we have witnessed the shift towards the depreciation of the value of the individual in the work force. Capital is free to move and to choose the target for direct investment. This has made the labor market a lot more unstable for the individual. Recently more and more individuals choose to work for themselves. The entrepreneurial spirit is something typical for the model of growth promoted by globalization. In this context, however, the individual is the sole responsible for the success of the business. Often the time spent for family decreases as any business requires constant care. There are different degrees of precariousness, instability and insecurity in the Romanian society as a result of the job market. This has put its fingerprint on the relationships established within the family.

4.5 Consumerism
Globalization has created enchantment around consumerism. Parents have to either succumb or risk alienating other generations. New values have arisen and it is difficult to offer education within the family without coming into conflict with them. Traditional values of the family are difficult to transmit to young generations in a context in which more open values on sexuality and physical attractiveness reign supreme at a global level. Traditional norms such as durability and family cooperation are hard to balance with freedom of movement and playfulness. On the other hand, technology has been spread through globalization. It greatly improved the life of a family through health and living standard augmentation. Technology has changed, for better and for worse the way in which a family cares for its members and the way it socializes with its members.

I would like for us to start reconsidering the importance of the family in our contemporary society and to think about the future. I would like for us to start considering the subject of the family seriously and not take it for granted.

4.6 Overlapping networks

Globalization has developed overlapping networks. Once this happened the family has started to be under severe pressure and strain because it was designed for another world order. The locus for family existence can no longer be assumed to be represented by the local community or even the national state. The idea of self-determined individual or self-determined family can no longer be located within only the community. Some of the most fundamental forces that determine life-changes are sometimes beyond the control of the individual or of the family. The issues raised by these issues merit the most serious research. We would like to reflect in depth upon this issue. Globalization has illuminated important transformations with the family. It would be highly implausible to assume that in a globalized world the family has not suffered any changes. It becomes even harder for the family to present itself as a discrete world or as a self-enclosed entity. It has become enmeshed in complex structures of overlapping forces, influences and relations. The family change spark can hardly come as a surprise, especially given the visibility of the world’s new lifestyle in an age of globalization. Globalization is reshaping the family, although it represents a trend. We believe this trend is contingent upon many factors. It can be moderated, but not reversed. We witness a reconfiguration of the social geography of the family. In such a context we need to acquire a social understanding of the family so as to be able to explain the contemporary human condition. In a world where globalization is transforming societies, the family can become an expression of these transformations. Understanding the family helps explain the patterns of global social change at the national and community level.

4.7 The welfare state: a new environment for the family

The idea that the family has been undermined by globalization has appeared both in scientific and non-scientific writing. Many writings have argued that the family is being replaced by other practices. We argue that the family continues to exist, but under a different form and that it goes through several changes. In our century, the family is clearly under attack and there is no doubt that there have been some serious changes. Despite changes in the expectations and desires of individuals, despite changes in their behavior towards their family, it is important to understand that the vast majority of people desire a family of their own. They do not wish to eliminate the family. They still wish to be part of a family and wish to realize a family of their own. They find it difficult to harmonize this desire with present day expectations from themselves and with present day evolution. It is also accurate to say that present day globalization is eroding family as we are used to think of it. For better and for worse there still is a desire to start or to belong to a family. It is not easy
to assess globalization’s implications for the family. Looking at the welfare state and its present day condition we can note that the importance of the family has even actually increased. The current crisis has pointed out that the welfare state is much more limited that many realize. Any system presupposes some kind of social order.

The deepening of social pressures can harm all. Globalization has made it very difficult for the state to provide protection to social risks. In our period of crisis, a period in which the competitiveness and even the survival of the welfare state is put into question we need to understand the way in which the family can manifest itself as a local welfare system. It could act as part of a local compensation in response to the need of the welfare state to pull out from spending too much on social protection.

Globalization may be perceived at the economic and political level, but it is truly realized at the level of the family. In contact with globalization the members of the family have to make choices, use opportunities, refuse responsibilities and support ideas. Actions and events brought about by globalization intersect with personal decisions because they arrive in the family context.

4.8 A new model of success

Globalization has brought about a new model of success. This model of success is based on individualism. This was seen as manifested both locally and globally, but never was it researched as potentially changing the way in which family intergenerational relationships work. The spirit of globalization is competition and social roles are less strongly ascribed. This was beneficial for economic development, but an individual cannot manifest a separate behavior in different circumstances. It is hard to separate work and family life, thus we expect an increase in intergenerational competition and on the importance of individual values. Affiliation and obligations are less important when compared with the entrepreneur spirit and with the desire to compete. It would be understandable the role played by globalization in strengthening individualism over group affiliation and moral obligations. Traditionally, the family has offered security through mutual support and through continuity. These are no longer values promoted by globalization that promotes personal and professional freedom. It promotes constituency over the stability of tradition. Individualism is associated with the shaking of constrains. If we are to grasp contemporary changes in the world we need to understand the increase in social mobility and the new ideas of personal responsibility. In a globalized world relationships are more heterogeneous and are not dictated by grid constraints.

4.9 The clash between individualism and fundamentalism

Individualism can isolate the family from the community, but also the members of the family from the extended family and from themselves. The bonds between generations within the family are eroded because each individual becomes more autonomous from the family itself, and more dependent on the global economic situation. Education, training, lifestyle, residence, political views, aspiration and expectations come to be different and create more generational gaps. There is the danger that generations are drawn into competitive consumerism and miss out on the family bonds that can help development, both at the micro and macro level. We are curious whether we are witnessing a transfer from a family sense of belonging based on shared feelings to a self-interest individualism that is based on instrumental behavior. We tend to believe that intergenerational relationships are progressively weakened, but we cannot be sure that this process is one-way oriented. On the other hand through individualism globalization offers an excellent instrument for self-development and the perfect context to escaping from a limited opportunity environment. It is very interesting to put in balance these developments and notice the direct of evolution of the Romanian family.
Individualism is prone to appear on certain generations. We assume that young generations are more inclined to this type of manifestation.

In the context of globalization, within the family we might even expect a clash between generations based on the distinction between individualism and fundamentalism. Rapid change can push one generation towards individualism, to gain from the changes brought about by globalization, while other generation can have a negative outlook of rapid changes and adopt fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is a desire for the past, a feeling of resentment towards contemporary evolution. In our globalized context we may expect a clash between fundamentalism and individualism within the family. This would not be surprising taking into account all the choices that are now available. A clash between the benefits of the individual and the good of the family has become a common discussion or a common source of conflict within the family. It brings into question another issue, the issue of power within the family. It is increasingly more difficult to realize who holds the power of decision within the family.

5. Conclusion

Naturally, globalization stands for risks while the traditional family is perceived as a secure environment. We are living in an age of change, a change that characterizes the family just as much as anything else. Every family in every local community is confronted to a higher or lower degree to issues pertaining to globalization. Family continues to be the training ground for life. Its importance cannot be diminished. The understanding of the changes brought about by globalization can be of help to eliminate double-standards within society. Both globalization and the family environment have imperative demands from its members. Misunderstanding or neglect can lead to segregation and isolation.

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7. References


