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Mihaela Robila (ed): "Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe"

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The *Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe* is a collaborative effort of internationally renowned experts on family policies, practices, and research. The editor, Mihaela Robila, has assembled a diverse team of 53 authors and has given them the task to analyze a specific country's family policies through a common structure and criteria. This unifying approach makes the book a much enjoyable, hard-to-put-down reading: each author contributes to the creation of an exuberant global tapestry of diverse cultures, traditions, and family practices from Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, North and South America, and The Caribbean.

Part one introduces the seven-part structure of the book with its 29 chapters, each examining the state of explicit and implicit family policies in countries across the globe. Each author's work exhibits a consistent pattern of analysis on issues of marriage, family-friendly work practices, work-life balance, childcare, poverty, domestic violence, social exclusion/inclusion, and elder care. Despite the similarities in structure, however, each work reveals diverse family practices rooted in the cultural and societal traditions and values of the people they represent. Rich research data on development, implementation, and evaluation form the evidence-based approaches to family policies that are effective under the specific circumstances of each country. These serve as a self-study to policymakers as they navigate through cultures, traditions, and customs specific for the people they serve.

Part two represents family policy of four African nations, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Botswana, and South Africa. As African countries do not have specific family policy, Mokomane (2014) instead identifies the traditional legal proceedings as an "enabling legislative and policy framework" (p. 59). Common issues in the authors' analysis are (1) blending of Western cultural values, inherited from decades of colonialism, with traditional indigenous African norms; (2) decades-lasting regional wars, genocide, and apartheid; and (3) the AIDS epidemic. These historical circumstances have created similarities in legal systems where judiciary matters in family court are governed by customary rather than statuary laws in Sierra Leon (Akinsulure-Smith and Smith, 2014, p. 19), Kenya (Rombo et al., 2014, p. 40), and Botswana (Laite, 2014, p. 62).

In addition, in the African context, male-dominated parliaments consistently vote down national policies that are in line with the international conventions on women and children's human rights (Rombo et al., 2014, p. 40). The authors agree that the political rhetoric is promising but has yet to deliver the intended practices on the ground.

Part three depicts the advances in family policies of 11 European countries, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Moldova, Russia, and Turkey. The family policies are as diverse as the cultures they represent. The success of the Nordic countries is governed by the principle of equality for all. It is government's responsibility to assure gender equality, which in their social policies is manifested as gender neutrality. The Global Gender Gap Index reflects this tendency (Barran et al., 2014).

In contrast, in Italy and Germany, the family has the legal and moral responsibility to secure the economic and social wellness of its members. Thus, childcare services are designed for educational purposes, not to facilitate mothers' employment (Gianesini, 2014, p. 164). In Russia, "propagandistic image of the embodiment of communist morals legitimized the double burden of paid and unpaid work for women" (Kravchenko and Grigoryeva, 2014, p. 224).

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In part four, China, Taiwan, India, South Korea, and Japan represent the Asian version of family policies development and implementation. The notion of family management in this part of the world is considered a Western concept, and thus, all responsibility for success is entirely delegated to the government (Hwang, 2014, p. 273). China's One-Child Policy is discussed around a birth quota system in work and residential units nationwide (Xia et al., 2014, p. 262). Strong governmental oversight appears to correlate with lower birth rates. Taiwan (Hwang, 2014), South Korea (Chin et al., 2014), and Japan (Sano and Yasumoto, 2014) are among the countries with the lowest fertility rate in the world but stagnating female labor force participation.

Part five depicts an analysis of Australia's reform and lingering challenges on policy implementation due to the lack of coordination between levels of government with the nongovernmental sector which plays a key role in "service delivery, philanthropy and consumer/advocacy" (Higgins, 2014, p. 335).

Part six is a display of the clash between human development social policy approaches with neoliberal approaches for economic development. Analysis of the priorities in implementation of family policies in Canada and the USA examines the differences from the family policies instigated in Mexico and The Commonwealth Caribbean.

Part seven concludes with an overview of family policies in South America. Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil are chosen to represent the values, traditions, and attitudes from this part of the world. The discussion brings a wealth of the information on the success of new initiatives for protection in vulnerable families in poverty and forced displacement in Colombia (Carillo and Ripoll-Nunez, 2014, p. 423).

The unifying structure of each country's presentation is a definite strength of this book, allowing easy comparison between policies and cultures. In addition to this horizontal assessment, the work would have benefited from a complementary, vertical framework of evaluation that represents international covenants, treaties, and laws. The text does suggest that the policies are analyzed from an international perspective (p. 5). The work, however, fails to provide a unifying international legislative framework to serve as a model against which each country's policies could be judged, compared, and recommended for further development. The advancements made by the Nordic countries could serve this purpose. Their high ranking under the Gender Equality Index exemplifies compliance with the United Nations' expectation of the Conventions on Women (CEDAW) and Children (CRC) human rights.

In conclusion, *Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe* can be used as a complementary resource for graduate social policy courses as well as a general guidebook for practitioners. It abounds with case studies where family social policies could be critically examined for learning or reference purposes. It is an exceptionally valuable field manual for social work in an international context.