

Epilogue – The Family as a Frontier of Hope: Gender, Agency and Transformation in the Global South

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In choosing to write an epilogue rather than a conclusion, we aim to signal that the dynamics of family life, gender relations and social change in the Global South are *unfinished stories* – fluid, contested and continuously evolving. A traditional conclusion often implies synthesis, closure or the distillation of key findings into a singular narrative. However, our edited collection resists such finality. The chapters collectively demonstrate that ‘the family’ in the Global South cannot be captured through a singular framework; rather, it is a constellation of shifting practices, negotiations and meanings shaped by global capitalism, migration, digitalisation and the reconfiguration of gendered power.

An epilogue allows us to reflect on these ongoing transformations without prematurely freezing them into a fixed analytical frame. It provides space to look forward rather than to summarise, inviting readers to consider emerging questions: How do families in the Global South serve as arenas in which gender norms are both reproduced and resisted? In what ways do political, religious and economic forces shape everyday negotiations of power and care within the household? How can acts of resistance, reinterpretation and reconciliation within families contribute to broader social and political transformation? And, finally, what does it mean to imagine the family not as a fixed institution but as a dynamic site of agency, vulnerability and hope?

Whereas a conclusion would traditionally consolidate findings, the epilogue performs a more open-ended, reflective function. It acknowledges that research on gender and family in the Global South is embedded within broader global

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epistemic currents that continue to shift. In this way, the epilogue becomes a reflexive space, not to close debate, but to extend it beyond the text. It situates the book within an ongoing scholarly and political conversation about decolonising knowledge, recognising the multiplicity of family forms and foregrounding the lived experiences of those negotiating change on their own terms.

Thus, the epilogue serves as both a bridge and a horizon: it connects the chapters' insights while gesturing towards the futures of family scholarship in the Global South, futures that remain open, plural and deeply gendered.

The three chapters in Section 1 on the *Dynamics Within Gendered Households* collectively illuminate how gendered household relations in the Global South are both resilient and fluid, anchored in social networks, kinship obligations and cultural meaning systems, yet continuously reshaped by economic pressures, policy interventions and shifting social norms. Across contexts as diverse as Ghana, Botswana and Mexico, the analyses reveal that the household remains a critical site where gender, social capital and well-being intersect. Still, it is also a site of negotiation – between structure and agency, tradition and change, dependence and autonomy.

Taken together, these chapters call for a reconceptualisation of the household not as a static economic unit, but as a dynamic field of gendered relationships, one shaped by historical legacies, policy frameworks and everyday acts of negotiation. They demonstrate that gendered power operates not only through institutional hierarchies but also through the subtle textures of kinship, labour and care. This epilogue, therefore, resists closure; it looks forward to more inquiries that trace how households adapt to intersecting pressures, economic volatility, migration, climate change and digital transformations, while redefining the meanings of family, work and belonging.

Future scholarship must continue to probe these shifting dynamics, foregrounding the interplay between gender, social capital and the moral economy of care. Key questions arise about how gendered roles and decision-making evolve within these changing household structures and how kinship and friendship networks both enable and constrain resilience in times of uncertainty. Further enquiry is needed into how class, age and location intersect with gender to shape access to resources. Understanding these processes in their historical, cultural and relational specificities remains vital for shaping policies and theoretical frameworks that speak to the lived realities of families in the Global South.

The three chapters in Section 2 on *Understandings of Caregiving and Gendered Agency* reveal the complex, often contradictory nature of these phenomena in the Global South. Across diverse contexts, from Moroccan domestic workers immobilised in Melilla to market traders in rural Venda to carers of disabled relatives in South Asia, care emerges not as a singular act of compassion or duty but as a social practice shaped by economic necessity, moral obligation and structural constraint. These narratives challenge the binary framing of care as either burden or empowerment, instead exposing it as a political field in which women exercise agency within and sometimes against, systems that undervalue their labour and circumscribe their autonomy.

Collectively, the chapters demonstrate that caregiving in the Global South is neither static nor purely private. It constitutes an evolving moral and political economy through which gendered identities are continually renegotiated. Women's agency emerges not in opposition to care, but through care, through acts of persistence, redefinition and collective improvisation that sustain families and communities amid structural inequities.

Looking ahead, this section invites more profound reflection on the future of care amid global uncertainty. How will climate change, migration crises and ageing populations reshape the moral and material dimensions of caregiving? What new solidarities might emerge if care is reconceived as shared social responsibility rather than feminised obligation? And how might feminist scholarship in the Global South continue to challenge the epistemic hierarchies that render care invisible in development and policy discourse?

In reframing care as a site of both vulnerability and possibility, these chapters call for a renewed understanding of gendered agency not as autonomy from others but as the capacity to act meaningfully within webs of interdependence. The future of equitable care – and of justice itself – will depend on how societies recognise, redistribute and revalue the relational labour that sustains life.

The four chapters in Section 3 on *Changes and Challenges in Sexuality, Reproduction and Kinship Practices* trace the multifaceted transformations in how sexuality, reproduction and kinship are lived, regulated and imagined across the Global South. They reveal that the intimate sphere, once regarded as private and culturally stable, has become a site of profound negotiation, where global forces, local norms and gendered expectations converge. Each contribution illustrates that family and reproduction are not merely biological or moral institutions but key arenas through which aspirations, hierarchies and political ideologies are contested and redefined.

Taken together, these chapters illuminate the mutual overlapping of the intimate and the political. Whether through medicalised reproduction, adoptive kinship, state moralism or sexual autonomy, they reveal that the regulation and redefinition of family in the Global South are inseparable from broader struggles over modernity, gender justice and cultural authenticity. The family, in its many forms, remains a site of both constraint and creativity, where individuals and communities continually reimagine belonging amid shifting global and local conditions.

The enquiries raised by this section point to a set of interlinked future directions. How do global mobility, reproductive technologies and digital communication reshape the meanings of intimacy, parenthood and kinship across borders? In what ways do women's reproductive choices reflect aspirations for modernity while simultaneously reproducing class and gender hierarchies? How are concepts such as legitimacy, motherhood and citizenship redefined in contexts where family is both a moral ideal and a site of contestation? Further research is also needed to understand how state ideologies, like sacred familialism, appropriate discourses of family and morality to sustain authoritarianism and how individuals and movements resist these appropriations through everyday practices of care, sexuality and solidarity. Ultimately, future scholarship must interrogate how sexuality,

reproduction and kinship operate as crucial frontiers of both social control and transformation, shaping not only the intimate lives of individuals but the broader moral and political orders of the Global South.

The chapters in Section 4 on *Challenges in Heterosexual Systems* collectively challenge the presumed stability of heterosexual family systems, revealing instead that kinship, intimacy and care are dynamic arenas through which social hierarchies, moral orders and aspirations for belonging are continually negotiated. Across Latin America, Fiji and India, these studies illuminate how LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse communities confront and reconstitute dominant family forms, asserting new possibilities for recognition, resilience and relationality within the Global South.

Taken together, these chapters reveal that the 'heterosexual system' is not a monolith but a shifting terrain of contestation. The rise of queer and trans kinship formations, the partial recognition of LGBTQ+ families in law and the enduring presence of religious and cultural conservatism produce a complex moral economy in which family itself becomes a political project. The Global South emerges here not as a space of cultural lag but as a critical site of innovation – where diverse communities reimagine intimacy, parenthood and belonging under conditions of both vulnerability and possibility.

The analyses in this section open several important avenues for future inquiry. How do LGBTQ+ and trans families across the Global South navigate the disjuncture between legal recognition and social acceptance? In what ways do colonial and religious legacies continue to shape contemporary definitions of family, morality and belonging? How might digital media and transnational advocacy networks reshape the visibility, safety and solidarity of queer kinship communities?

Further research should also examine how intersectional inequalities of class, race, geography and faith mediate the everyday experiences of LGBTQ+ families. Comparative studies could illuminate how local forms of resistance rework global queer discourses, while longitudinal research could explore how children and youth raised within diverse family structures negotiate identity, belonging and generational change.

Ultimately, these questions compel scholars to rethink 'family' as a plural and evolving formation, one that transcends the heterosexual framework while remaining deeply embedded in cultural and political histories. To study these transformations is to trace how new moral worlds are being crafted at the intersection of care, intimacy and resistance, where love itself becomes an act of survival and a form of social imagination in the Global South.

The four chapters in Section 5, *Domestic Worlds, Political Struggles: Gender at the Nexus of Family and State*, illuminate how domestic worlds in the Global South are deeply entangled with political structures, ideological regimes and global transformations. Across Jordan, Nigeria, the Arabian Gulf and El Salvador, the family emerges not as a private retreat from power but as its microcosm, a space where gendered hierarchies are produced, contested and remade. These studies collectively show that the household is a crucial arena through which broader struggles over citizenship, justice and rights are negotiated, and

where political change is often prefigured in the intimate negotiations of everyday life.

Taken together, the chapters in this section foreground the family as both a site and a symbol of political struggle, where questions of gender, power and justice converge. Whether through youth defiance, women's resilience, theological reinterpretation or intergenerational reconciliation, these studies reveal that domestic life is neither apolitical nor peripheral. It is the ground on which political orders are sustained and subverted, the sphere through which subjects learn to negotiate authority, and the terrain where hopes for equality, belonging and peace are continually reimagined.

From these insights emerge critical questions for scholars and policymakers alike. How do families mediate political repression, resistance and reform across authoritarian and post-conflict contexts? In what ways do young people's negotiations of gender norms within households prefigure broader sociopolitical transformations in the Middle East and North Africa? How can feminist and decolonial frameworks better capture the relational, affective and moral dimensions of agency that unfold within domestic spaces?

Further research should explore the intersections of family and state as dynamic systems of governance and resistance – asking how intimate life both reflects and reshapes political structures. Comparative work across regions could illuminate how religious authority, women's increasing entrance into labour markets and public spheres and economic precarity intersect to redefine moral citizenship. Moreover, expanding the focus on intergenerational justice, as in the Salvadoran case, could deepen our understanding of how memory, trauma and reconciliation unfold within families over time.

Finally, future scholarship must attend to the everyday ethics of resistance: the subtle acts through which women, youth and marginalised communities challenge patriarchal, religious and state power from within the domestic sphere. Recognising these practices as political – rather than private – compels a rethinking of both gender and governance in the Global South. It invites us to see family not as a relic of tradition, but as a living, contested and creative frontier where the boundaries between the personal and the political are continuously redrawn.

Across the chapters of this volume, the family in the Global South emerges not as a static institution but as a dynamic, contested and creative site of change. Far from being merely private, families are shown to be deeply political spaces where gender, power and care are constantly negotiated. They reflect broader processes of social transformation shaped by globalisation, migration, religion, conflict and state policy – yet they also serve as laboratories of resistance and reimagination.

Throughout this book, we see how families both reproduce and disrupt patriarchal orders. From Botswanan rural women's preferences of village settlement because of their obligations towards their extended kin and rural Nigerian women confronting everyday violence to young urban Jordanians questioning and redefining gender roles and Gulf feminists reinterpreting faith to Salvadoran daughters reclaiming post-war reconciliation; Indian middle-class parents'

redefining adoptive family practices and Chinese middle class parents' aspirations for reproductive autonomy as well as Turkish middle-class women's aspirations for sexual autonomy and equity in their marriages, each context illustrates how intimate life mirrors and reshapes local, national and global struggles. Family becomes not just the site of inequality but also the ground from which agency, care and hope emerge.

A gendered perspective reveals that transformations in family life are inseparable from transformations in political and moral orders. Acts of caregiving, resistance and reinterpretation – often enacted by women and youth – are key to how societies in the Global South negotiate change. The family thus stands at the intersection of the personal and the political: a space where the meanings of justice, belonging and modernity are redefined.

Looking ahead, scholarship must continue to examine how shifting economies, digital life and environmental precarity reshape kinship, intimacy and care. Comparative, decolonial and intersectional approaches remain vital for understanding how families adapt and imagine alternative futures.

In the end, this volume affirms that the family, despite its contradictions, remains a frontier of hope. Within its everyday negotiations lie the seeds of social renewal, reminding us that the pursuit of equality and dignity often begins at home.