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Rethinking Welfare Regimes: Challenges from the South

Abstract

The literature on social policy – or, more broadly, welfare regimes – has long been fixated on the global North (especially Western Europe). Growing awareness of the importance of ‘emerging’, middle-income countries, global initiatives like the social protection floor and important policy innovations, such as Brazil and Mexico’s conditional cash transfers (CCTs), are beginning to draw attention to social policy in Asia, Latin America and Africa. The burgeoning literatures on Southern social policies make clear the need to rethink certain core concepts, such as decommodification and defamilialisation, while adding new concepts like declientelisation. They also raise questions about the methodological nationalism that is deeply embedded in the traditional welfare regime approach, which was designed for cross-national comparisons.

Introduction

The literature on social policy – or, more broadly, welfare regimes – has long been fixated on the global North, especially Western Europe. Growing awareness of the importance of ‘emerging’, middle-income countries, global initiatives like the social protection floor (Deacon, 2013) and important policy innovations, such as Brazil and Mexico’s conditional cash transfers (CCTs), are beginning to draw attention to social policy in Asia, Latin America and Africa. The burgeoning literatures on Southern social policies make clear the need to rethink certain core concepts, such as decommodification and defamilialisation, while adding new concepts like declientelisation (Wood and Gough, 2006). They also raise questions about the methodological nationalism that is deeply embedded in the traditional welfare regime approach, which was designed for cross-national comparisons (Yeates, 2008).

The first section of this paper begins with an overview of the Northern literature on welfare regimes, highlighting the three concepts at the core of Esping-Andersen’s (1990, 1999) classic theorisation – stratification, decommodification and defamilialisation – and the debates to which these have given rise, with particular

attention to feminist critiques. The second section looks at some of the literature growing out of reflection on developments in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The last section turns to rethinking the core concepts in light of the challenges posed by the growing volume of research – including the articles in this volume – on social policy regimes in the South.

Welfare State Regimes in the North: Core Concepts and Some Key Debates

Just as the modern welfare state originated in Europe, so too has the literature that attempts to understand its origins and varieties.¹ Earlier theorisations focused on the challenges posed by industrialisation (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1958) and/or modern capitalism (Polanyi, 1944, Marshall, 1963; Gough, 1979). The theoretical perspective that has dominated the literature for more than a quarter century, however, is that of Gösta Esping-Andersen, whose *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) established the concepts that remain central to debates about how to compare welfare states. The concept of welfare regime highlighted the distinct organisational logics connecting state, market and (later, 1999) family, leading to the identification of three social policy clusters: liberal, conservative/corporatist and social democratic. A liberal regime, typified by the US, relies on means-tested social assistance supplemented by modest contribution-based social insurance programs, leaving the rest to markets and/or families to provide. The conservative/corporatist regime, typified by Germany, is characterised by class and status segmented social insurance, oriented to the male breadwinner. In contrast, social democratic regimes, typified by the Nordic countries, is based on high quality, universal programs, which also ‘pre-emptively socialize the costs of familyhood’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 28).

Building on Titmuss’s (1974) distinction between residual, industrial achievement and institutional patterns, Esping-Andersen advanced the concepts of stratification and decommodification. The first is fairly straightforward. The liberal regime, with its recourse to stigmatizing social assistance, marks the poor out from the rest while conservative regimes offer class and status-differentiated social insurance. Social democratic regimes, with their emphasis on universality, encompass all citizens. Decommodification is more complex. Drawing on Polanyi’s argument that laissez-faire capitalism treated labour as a mere commodity, Esping-Andersen argued that social policies helped to re-embed labour. Decommodifying policies such as social

¹ For an overview see Béland and Mahon (2016. Chapters 1 and 2).

insurance programs that guarantee benefits equal to normal earnings mitigate the whip of market forces. Liberal regimes, with their emphasis on limited, means-tested benefits, are the least decommodifying. While corporatist regimes offer more generous benefits, these are contingent on work-related contributions. Thus, social policies work to decommodify labour when they make it possible to maintain one's livelihood without reliance on the market (1990: 22) but this does not mean that participation in the labour market is no longer necessary. In fact, social democratic regimes require high employment to finance generous social policies.

Various suggestions have been made for alternative ways of classifying Northern welfare regimes (see Béland and Mahon, 2016:32), but the most fruitful criticism for our purposes has come from feminists who argue that Esping-Andersen underestimated the role of the family and the gendered nature of the unpaid social reproduction work performed largely by women.

Some sought to construct alternative systems for classifying welfare regimes in terms of the strength of their support for the (nuclear) male breadwinner family ((Lewis and Ostner, 1995; Sainsbury, 1996). Were women assumed to be primarily involved in unpaid care work in the home or were they treated as individuals? In male breadwinner regimes, women are left to gain what entitlements they can through their status as wives and mothers. Where citizenship is the basis of entitlement, women are treated as individuals. As Sainsbury argues, such regimes acknowledge that 'individuals have a variety of useful tasks in life not limited to paid work' (1996:42). Although countries like Sweden come close to this model, Sainsbury acknowledges that it remains aspirational – a way to critically assess the limitations of all other existing models.

Others like Orloff (1993) sought to rethink the three worlds along gendered lines. Orloff's critique (1993) in particular engaged directly with Esping-Andersen's framework. In addition to highlighting the ways that stratification is deeply gendered (1993: 315-317), Orloff tackled his conception of decommodification, noting that 'for many, women and others excluded from paid labor, commodification...is in fact potentially emancipatory...because it provides independence and enhanced leverage within marriage and the patriarchal family...' (1993: 318). For women, then, the right to be commodified, underpinned by policies to promote their access to paid work such as childcare, has to be included. Orloff, however, also sought to enrich the concept of decommodification by adding support for women's ability to form and maintain an autonomous household: 'If decommodification is important because it frees wage earners from the compulsion of participating in the market, a parallel dimension is needed to indicate the ability of those who do most of the domestic and

caring work....’ (Ibid.: 319). Here, as in Sainsbury’s individual-citizen model, unpaid work in the household has the potential to be valued.

We will return to these provisos later. Here it is simply important to note that feminists (Lister, 1994; McLaughlin and Glendinning, 1994) offered a new critical concept to get at this – defamilialisation, a sanitised version of which Esping-Andersen (1999) would later incorporate into his theoretical framework. For Esping-Andersen, defamilialisation involves policies that ‘lessen individuals’ reliance on the family; that maximize individuals’ command of economic resources independently of familial or conjugal reciprocities’ (1999: 45). The social democratic regime best achieves this as it provides services (child and elder care) and social insurance (parental leave) that encourage women’s full-time participation in the labour market. His definition, however, lacked the critical edge given by the feminist scholars who originally coined the term. For feminists, defamilialisation sought to capture the extent to which policies contribute to altering the balance of power between men and women and ‘hence the terms and conditions under which people engage in familial or caring arrangements’ (Lister, 1994: 29).

Defamilialisation can thus be seen as contributing to the commodification of women and to the monetisation of their former caring duties. While this is seen, as part of a broader process of individualisation, his intellectual mentor, Polanyi, views family as a constituted part of that network of reciprocal relationships that served to embed labour. Stripped of such networks, labour is reduced to a mere commodity. Similarly, defamilialisation can strip women of the kinds of protections they need to form autonomous households, while ‘familialising’ programs like pension credits for time spent caring for children or the elderly decommodify care work (Daly, 2011: 9). Thus, what Northern feminists were arguing for was ‘relational autonomy’ between the caregiver and the recipient of care. Leitner (2003: 359) therefore calls for ‘degendered familialism’, which involves policies ‘that do not refer to biological sex differences, validate family care, enable the financial independence of the carer, provide choices to move between family care and employment, and provide comparable benefits for different family arrangements.’ This concept can be seen as a development of the implications of Orloff’s second proviso regarding the capacity to form an autonomous household.

Feminist economists would go further using the ‘care economy’ to highlight the importance of care work and the power relations that currently underpin it. As Folbre argues, the care economy paradigm ‘calls attention to bargaining, property rights and inequalities based on gender and age, rather than taking families as “given” and treating households as undifferentiated units of analysis’ (2013: 129). In other

words, it is important to examine relationships within families and family forms, especially as we shift from North, where nuclear families are the norm, to the South, where multi-generational extended families often continue to play an important role.

Northern feminists have thus raised some important questions about the three concepts at the core of Esping-Andersen's theoretical framework. As we shall see, the growing literature on Southern welfare regimes raises new questions that help to deepen that critique.

Classifying Southern Welfare Regimes: Hybrids or Something More?

The literature on welfare regimes in the South – and Eastern Europe² – is clearly cognisant of the Northern debates. Some have worked with Esping-Andersen's typology by using the concept of hybridity to describe Japan (Esping-Andersen, 1997), South Africa (Button, Moore and Seekings, 2018), and Eastern Europe (Hacker, 2009). On the whole, however, even those who argue hybridity would agree that these models are very much the product of each country's history and politics. Others would go further, making the case for distinct regimes that reflect dominant patterns, at least at the regional scale.

Thus, the concepts of 'welfare developmentalism' (Goodman and White, 1998) and 'productivist' social policy (Holliday, 2000), have been used to describe the North-East Asian countries – Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea and Taiwan. Such a regime is characterised by the subordination of social policy to economic growth. As Holliday notes, "Everything else flows from this: minimal social rights with extensions linked to productive activities, reinforcement of the position of productive elements in society, and state-market-family relationships directed toward growth 2000: 708). Goodman and Peng (1996) highlight the Confucian celebration of (multi-generational) families and reliance upon the critical role the latter play. However, the regimes developed in these wealthier parts of the region differ from those in the poorer East Asian countries – the Philippines and Indonesia and the very low-income countries of Laos and Cambodia – which have social programs that cover a very small part of the population (Cook and Kwon, 2007:224).

² Although not part of the South, the Eastern European regimes, which were not included in Esping-Andersen's 'three worlds', have been subjected to often profound restructuring since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Remittances play an important role in those four countries, especially the Philippines.

These regimes are, however, by no means static or fixed. Indeed, a combination of democratisation, the Asian economic crisis and global social policy developments have helped spur a move toward universality. Peng and Wong (2008), Fleckenstein and Lee (2017), as well as Sumarto, (2017) all bring out the way these factors combined with the shift to post-industrialism to open the way to path-shifting reforms, including the development of national health insurance (South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia), unemployment insurance systems (at least for formal sector workers), and social assistance programs for those falling outside these. Moreover, the decline of the traditional family and falling fertility levels are leading to a process of defamilialisation, accompanied by a spurt in investment in social care and women-friendly workplaces (Peng and Wong, 2008; Estevez-Abe and Kim, 2014; Fleckenstein and Lee (2017). In India however, care arrangements remain:

an ad hoc summation of informal, stratified practices’ in which ‘at one end of the spectrum are those who have the possibility to retain familial carers at home and supplement them with paid and other institutional carers; at the other are those who are neither able to retain family members at home nor fill the care gap through formal institutions’ (Palriwala and Neetha, 2011:1049).

India’s main innovation for dealing with the rural poor, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, has achieved some positive benefits, but Swain and Ray (2013: 87-8) highlight its dualistic nature: the state, they argue, is ‘perceived by the rural poor...as a “hope generating machine” but also ‘characterized by “opacity and mistrust”...in its negotiations and dealings with the poor.’

While the concept of welfare regime might suggest closed systems, international organisations have clearly played a role in the region. Thus, the Asian financial crisis created an opening for the World Bank and the IMF to push the Indonesian government to move beyond social insurance systems catering to the formal sector to develop social safety nets targeted at the poor (Sumarto, 2017: 949). The concept of social policy as an investment, promoted by the OECD and the World Bank (Jenson, 2010; Mahon, 2010), has also had an impact on South Korean policy, as Peng (2011) argues.³ More recently, the move to ‘social policy for all’ in the form

³ See also Pellissery and Anand (2018) and Choi, Estevez Abe and León (2018).

of national health insurance is in line with the approach advocated by the WHO, the World Bank and other IOs (Sumarto, 2017: 95), no doubt inspired by the ILO-led initiative for a global social protection floor.⁴

In Latin America, Barrientos (2009) classified the region's pre-Washington Consensus regimes as conservative-informal while Filgueira (2005) distinguished between the stratified-universalist regimes of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica; the dualist regimes of Brazil and Mexico; and the exclusionary regimes in the remaining countries of the region. Reworking Esping-Andersen's three core concepts in light of particular challenges posed by the region, Martinez-Franzoni (2008) identified three clusters – state-targeted (Chile and Argentina), state-stratified (Costa Rica, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay) and informal-familialist (the remainder). While the first and second clusters differ in terms of the extent to which they focus on the poor (the first) or the non-poor (the second, albeit through stratified social insurance programs), both 'have labor markets with a majority of formal salaried workers, low remittances, and a robust social policy' in contrast to countries in the third cluster, which 'have a majority of own account or migrant workers, high remittances and rather weak social policy' (Blofield and Martinez-Franzoni 2015: 42). The role played by migrants' remittances in the latter is reminiscent of the situation in the poorer Asian countries noted above.

Just as in the countries of the North (Razavi, 2011), changes in gender relations in the South are giving rise to challenges centred on the question of who provides care and under what conditions. The UNRISD project on the emergence of 'care' as a social policy issue in the South included important contributions on Argentina (Faur, 2011), Uruguay (Filgueira, Gutiérrez and Papadópulos, 2011) and Nicaragua (Martinez-Franzoni and Voorend, 2011). The first two showed that the fragmentation characteristic of their social insurance systems has carried over into care arrangements. As Filgueira et al put it, in Uruguay there were three worlds: one reliant 'on a weakened universal part of the social state, and on families and community'; a second representing the remnants of the old corporatist (formal sector) regime; and a third comprised of the upper and upper middle, highly educated classes, dependent on private solutions (2011: 1030). In Nicaragua, one of the poorer, more agrarian countries in the region, care needs are predominantly addressed by women's unpaid work in the household and community (Martinez-

⁴ Social protection floors 'are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees that should ensure, at a minimum, that over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level. <http://www.ilo.org/secsoc/areas-of-work/policy-development-and-applied-research/social-protection-floor/lang--en/index.htm>. Accessed 6 May 2018.

Franzoni and Voorend, 2011). Blofield and Martinez-Franzoni subsequently developed an approach for analysing the gender and social equity implications of various forms of work-family policies that ‘enables scholars to accurately assess the implications...in countries with large informal labor markets’ (2015:52-3) – in other words, for much of the global South.

Just as in Asia, so too are Latin American welfare regimes far from static. Of particular interest is the move toward ‘basic’ or ‘progressive’ universalism within several Latin American countries. The concept of basic universalism first appeared in a publication by the Inter-American Development Bank (Molina, 2006), where it was argued that ‘social policy be oriented toward providing basic income support and access to social services, particularly in health and education of high quality on a universalistic basis, as a social right guaranteed by the state’ (Huber and Stephens, 2012: 177). ‘Progressive universalism’, a concept coined by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) similarly views universality as part of a longer-term endeavour. It argues for social guarantees articulating ‘universal approaches with affirmative action and selective policies for those with the highest needs, gradually reaching the whole population’ (Rico 2014, 44 cited in Martinez-Franzoni and Sánchez Ancochea, forthcoming: 6). Examples of this move include Brazil’s social pensions, which cover over 86% of the population (Barrientos, 2013:887), Chile’s health care (Dannreuther and Gideon, 2008) and early childhood education reforms (Staab and Gerhard, 2011), and Uruguay’s child care policy, developed as part of its broader *Sistémica Nacional de Cuido* (Martinez-Franzoni and Sánchez-Ancochea, forthcoming). This is not to say that such reforms succeed in laying the foundations for universality (Ibid., on Costa Rica; Nagels, forthcoming, on Peru), much less address the gender implications (Gideon, 2012; Staab, 2017).

Unfortunately much less has been written about social policies in sub-Saharan Africa,⁵ with the notable exception of South Africa. The latter can be seen as a hybrid of all three of Esping-Andersen’s welfare regimes, but one whose characteristics have been powerfully shaped by the legacy of apartheid (Button, Moore and Seekings, 2018). As Seekings and Moore argue, South Africa’s welfare regime reflects ‘its particular colonial and post-colonial history. Extensive defamilialisation among the minority white population coexisted with persistent dependence on family and kin among the majority African population....Democratization brought the deracialization of public policies resulting in a pro-poor welfare state...’

⁵ However, see Hailu (2017) on the role of NGOs in delivering social assistance for children in Ethiopia. For a somewhat dated but broader overview, see Adésinà (2007).

(Seekings and Moore, 2014: 426). The (racist) foundations were British (liberal) in design, but with democratisation, a series of means-tested programs – for the elderly, disabled and children – discussed in this volume, have been extended such that they now directly and indirectly support roughly two thirds of the population. As these articles make clear, while such programs have attenuated extreme poverty, they have done little to promote class or racial equality. Moreover, they have served to reinforce (gendered) patterns of care within extended African families, especially in rural areas. At the same time, ‘many children in better-off households will be cared for by paid domestic workers, of whom there are about one million in South Africa (the vast majority of whom are African women’ (Budlender and Lund, 2011: 938).

Southern Exposure: Welfare Regimes Reconsidered

The most ambitious attempt to conceptualise welfare regimes in the South comes from Wood and Gough (2006), who developed two new regime types based on what they see as core differences between regimes in the North and the majority in the South. They also added a new concept – declientelisation – to supplement stratification, decommodification and defamilialisation.

Wood and Gough argue that welfare *state* regimes are largely absent in the South, where one of the main welfare forms can be described as an ‘informal security regime’

an institutional arrangement where people rely heavily upon community and family relationships to meet their security needs, to greatly varying degrees. These relationships are usually hierarchical and asymmetrical. This results in problematic inclusion or adverse incorporation, whereby poorer people trade some short term security in return for longer-term vulnerability and dependence’ (Ibid.: 1699).

The second is an insecurity regime – ‘institutional arrangements which generate gross insecurity and block the emergence of stable informal mechanisms to mitigate, let alone to rectify, these...where powerful external players interact with weak internal actors to generate conflict and insecurity’ (Ibid, 1699). Applying these to actual regimes, they distinguish 1) welfare state regimes (including potential ones) found in Central Europe, the Southern cone of Latin America, Kenya, Algeria, Tunisia and Thailand; 2) (more efficient) informal security regimes (SE Asia, Sri Lanka, the remaining Latin American countries and parts of the Middle East; 3) (less efficient)

informal security regimes (East Asia excluding Sri Lanka, and certain sub-Saharan African countries; 4) externally dependent insecurity regimes which include the bulk of sub-Saharan Africa (Ibid.: 1703-4).

Their classification is certainly an ambitious and contested one.⁶ What is of particular interest here are the questions they pose about key features welfare regimes in the global South.⁷ These include stratification systems arising out of the fragmented and exclusionary social insurance programs, which reproduce the formal/informal and urban/rural divide – divisions that often intersect with racial, linguistic and gender hierarchies. Wood and Gough would also turn the state-market-family triangle into a diamond by adding ‘community’, which ‘represents a wider range of institutional practices between the state and the household involving hierarchy as well as reciprocity, thus inequality and power. It also represents a continuum from immediately local and ascriptive relations...to wider and more organized and purposive ones...’ (Ibid.: 1702). The idea of a ‘welfare diamond’ is of course not new nor confined to the South (Evers et al, 1994). However, Wood and Gough’s version brings out the importance of culturally-embedded bonds of reciprocity such as *ubuntu* in South Africa (Moore and Seekings, this issue) and *gotonroyong* in Indonesia (Sumarto, 2017: 946) as well as the revival of Confucianism in China. For Wood and Gough, in the absence of state-guaranteed social rights, such relationships foster clientelistic relations. They therefore argue for declientelisation – ‘the process of de-linking client dependents from their personalized, arbitrary and discretionary entrapment to persons with intimate power over them’ (Ibid., 1708).

Families also clearly play an important role in the welfare diamonds of much of the South. Just as communities can be complex, so too are families. In a manner reminiscent of Folbre’s earlier comment, Wood notes that ‘Families have alliances and implicit contracts within them; sometimes gender-based between generations of women and girls; sometimes between siblings...; sometimes age cohorts in opposition to other age cohorts’ (2015: 140). Nor should it be assumed that the

⁶ See also Seekings (2005; 2013) whose original typology distinguished between agrarian, inegalitarian-corporatist and redistributive regimes. The later version identifies 5 clusters based on their distributional implications: minimalist, weak and strong workerist and weak and strong pauperist.

⁷ It should be noted however that Ferrera’s (2006: 29-30). Southern European welfare regime has much in common with some of the more elaborated regimes of the South: a highly fragmented social insurance system and a low degree of state provision of welfare, leaving an important role for non-state actors, and the persistence of clientelism. Their economies also include a significant informal sector.

nuclear family is the norm. Across the global South – and in parts of the North – multi-generational extended families play an important role. Migration and the politics of remittances complicate these relationships. The essays in this volume cast light on the tensions that can arise in the intersection of tax-financed social assistance programs with conflicting ideas of such implicit contracts. As Button et al note ‘public programmes focus for the most part on individuals, whilst family norms involve these same individuals in networks of kin (and, less often, community) with norms as to what it means to be a “good” daughter, son, mother, father or grandmother’ (2018: 608).

If defamilialisation is likely to be a particularly complex and contested process in many countries of the South, decommodification raises even more difficult questions, in countries where many have yet to be ‘commodified’, un- and under-employment are widespread, and the informal sector frequently dwarfs the formal. The main response of ‘development’ policies has long been to commodify labour. Organisations like the ILO advocate for the spread of ‘decent work’ while the ECLAC’s neo-structuralist policies (Mahon, 2015) aim to transform informal into formal jobs. Others like Li (2016) argue that, as the surplus population swells in both South and North, it is impossible to secure jobs for all, much less good ones. The solution, for Standing (2017) among others (Shulz, 2017; Lacey, 2017) comes in the form of a universal basic income – a prospect even the World Bank (2018: 92) seems prepared to contemplate. Experiments have been or are being tried in various parts of the Globe, from Namibia to Finland. They are, however, by no means uncontested among those concerned to preserve welfare regimes in the North (Jackson, 2017).

Finally, for much of the South, the institutional mix includes the international, which cuts across all four (state, market, family and community) dimensions. This came out in the discussion above, which brought out the role of remittances as a way of providing social protection. Several critics also noted the role international organisations have played in disseminating social policy ideas, from CCTs to ‘basic universalism’. Of course the international dimension is not only important in the South. As Williams (1995) argued, migration plays an important role in the provision of social programs in the North. More broadly, Deacon (2007) and Yeates (2008) have challenged the methodological nationalism that underlies the Northern welfare regime approach. In the South, however, the impact of transnational actors can have a particularly pernicious effect. As Wood (2015) argues, international non-governmental organisations, faith-based communities, aid donors and even transnational corporations (especially in the mining and oil sectors), contribute to the fragmentation of social provision.

Reflecting on welfare regimes from the South thus offers an important opportunity to rethink some not only the classic welfare regime typology but also the core concepts underpinning it. A welfare diamond replaces the original state-market-family, thus shedding light on the important role played by community, and not only in the South. Stratification results from the intersection of welfare architectures with rural/urban and informal/formal divides, as well class, gender, race-ethnicity and language hierarchies. Can initiatives like the move to 'basic universalism' provide a Southern path to overcoming these? Refamilialisation occurs alongside processes of defamilialisation, as the essays in this volume illustrate, and with this new tensions between generations and within households take place. Decommodification means something different in contexts where commodification has yet to become the norm. Is the answer 'decent work for all' or something like a universal basic income? Finally, it is time to abandon the methodological nationalism that has characterised much social policy research. International forces do not determine what happens locally but the local cannot be understood in isolation from the wider contexts in which it is embedded.

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