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The worlds of welfare: illusory and gender blind?

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The nature of welfare state regimes has been an ongoing debate within the comparative social policy literature since the publication of Esping-Andersen's The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism *(1990). This paper engages with two aspects of this debate; the gender critique of Esping-Andersen's thesis, and Kasza's (2002) assertions about the 'illusory nature' of welfare state regimes. It presents a gender-focused defamilisation index and contrasts it with Esping-Andersen's decommodification index to illustrate that, whilst individual welfare states have been shown to exhibit internal variety across different policy areas, they are both consistent and coherent in terms of their policy variation by gender. It concludes, in contrast to both the gender critique of Esping-Andersen, and Kasza's rejection of the regimes concept, that the 'worlds of welfare' approach is therefore neither gender blind or illusory, and can, if limited to the analysis of specific areas such as labour market decommodification or defamilisation, be resurrected as a useful means of organising and classifying welfare states.*

Introduction

Esping-Andersen's 'three worlds of welfare' thesis has been the subject of an ongoing critical debate in the comparative social policy literature (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999; Lewis, 1992; Leibfreid, 1992; Castles and Mitchell, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Borchost, 1994; Daly, 1994; Kangas, 1994; Ragin, 1994; Ferrera, 1996; Shalev, 1996; Abrahamson, 1999; Goodin *et al*., 1999; Sainsbury, 1999; Pitruzzello, 1999; Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Kasza, 2002). The debate has included a variety of different critiques: the range (Leibfreid, 1992; Castles and Mitchell, 1993; Ferrera, 1996), the methodology (Kangas, 1994; Ragin, 1994; Shalev, 1996; Pitruzzello, 1999), the omission of gender (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Borchost, 1994; Daly, 1994; Sainsbury, 1999), and most recently, the central concept – welfare state regimes – itself (Kasza, 2002). This paper, through the presentation of a defamilisation index and a subsequent typology, critically engages with the latter two aspects of this debate; the critique that the 'worlds of welfare' typology is gender blind, and Kasza's assertions about the 'illusory nature' of welfare state regimes.

The Three worlds of welfare

In *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), Esping-Andersen argues that 'existing theoretical models of the welfare state are inadequate' (1990: 2) as their analysis relies too heavily upon the misleading comparison of aggregate welfare state expenditure. The focus on total expenditure figures conceals the variety of state approaches to welfare; as 'even if the lion's share of expenditure or personnel serve welfare aims, the kind

Table 1 The welfare state regimes

Liberal	Conservative	Social Democratic
Australia	Austria	Denmark
Canada	Belgium	Finland
Ireland	France	Norway
New Zealand	Germany	Sweden
UK	Italy	
USA	Japan	
	Netherlands	
	Switzerland	

Adapted from: Esping-Andersen, 1990: 52.

of welfare provided will be qualitatively different, as will its prioritisation relative to competing activities' (Ibid. 1). He asserts that it is therefore more beneficial to focus upon what a welfare state does, rather than how much money it is afforded. On this basis, Esping-Andersen presents a typology of capitalist welfare states based upon three principles: decommodification; levels of social stratification; and the relationship between the state, the market and the family's role in social provision. He concludes that through the application of these principles, welfare states can be divided into three broad regime types: Liberal, Conservative; and Social Democratic (Table 1).

The gender blind 'worlds of welfare'

Commentators (for example, Langan and Ostner, 1991; Lewis, 1992; Borchost, 1994; Bussemaker and Kersbergen, 1994; Daly, 1994; Hobson, 1994; Lewis and Ostner, 1995; Sainsbury, 1994, 1999) have argued that this 'three worlds of welfare' typology is deeply flawed because it marginalized women in its analysis. Aside from the overt absence of women in Esping-Andersen's analysis, the critique revolves around three other issues: the gender blind concept of decommodification (Daly, 1994; Hobson, 1994; Lewis, 1992), the unawareness of the role of women and the family in the provision of welfare (Borchost, 1994; Bussemaker and Kersbergen, 1994; Daly, 1994), and the lack of consideration given to gender as a form of social stratification (Bussemaker and Kersbergen, 1994). These criticisms have in turn led to both theoretical attempts to 'gender' Esping-Andersen's analysis (for example, Orloff, 1993; O'Connor, 1996), and the construction of alternative welfare state typologies in which gender has been a more overt and centralised part of the analysis (for example Lewis, 1992; Lewis and Ostner, 1995; Sainsbury, 1999). These rival typologies, although often flawed themselves (Esping-Andersen, 1999) through the use of only one factor (Sainsbury, 1999) or a limited number of countries (Lewis, 1992), have been used to undermine the 'worlds of welfare' thesis and to denigrate its validity, especially in respect to claims about women, welfare and the family.

The illusion of welfare state regimes

Similarly, Kasza (2002) has also questioned the validity of the regimes concept. He argues that 'the concept of welfare regimes is not a workable basis for research' (2002: 283) as

it incorporates two flawed assumptions: firstly, that most of the key social policy areas, such as income maintenance, education, health or housing, within a welfare regime will reflect a similar, across the board approach to welfare provision, particularly in respect of the role of the state; and, secondly, that each regime type itself reflects 'a set of principles or values that establishes a coherence in each country's welfare package' (Kasza, 2002: 272). Kasza asserts that instead of an internal policy homogeneity or cohesion, welfare states and welfare regimes exhibit significant variation across different areas of social provision. He asserts that the regime concept therefore 'does not capture the complex motives that inform each country's welfare programmes' and, in pursuit of consistency, it ignores the fact that different areas of welfare state provision exhibit different cross-national variations. Kasza concludes that, in light of the internal policy diversity of welfare states, the best approach for future comparative research may be to abandon the regimes concept altogether – even for single policy comparisons (2002: 284).

The defamilisation index presented in this paper is used, in conjunction with Esping-Andersen's original typology, to examine two interrelated hypotheses: firstly, that the gender critique of the worlds of welfare thesis is not empirically robust, as the 'three worlds of welfare' typology is not altered in any significant way by the addition of a more overtly gendered approach; and, secondly, in so doing, to reiterate that, whilst welfare state regimes have been shown to exhibit internal inconsistency across different policies (Kasza, 2002; Kautto, 2002; Bambra (in press), the regimes concept can, if limited to the analysis of specific areas such as labour market decommodification or defamilisation, be resurrected as a useful means of organising and classifying welfare states (Arts and Gelissen, 2002). It concludes, in contrast to both the gender critique of Esping-Andersen, and Kasza's rejection of the regimes concept, that the 'worlds of welfare' approach is therefore neither gender blind or illusory.

This article proceeds with a critical overview of the concept of defamilisation, presents the alternative index, and discusses the resulting typology in relation to the two hypotheses drawn from the debate that has surrounded the 'three worlds of welfare'.

Defamilisation

The concept of defamilisation originates in the feminist literature on citizenship (Lister, 1988) and it has been appropriated by, and used intermittently within, the post-'worlds of welfare' debate (Taylor-Gooby, 1996; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Korpi, 2000). Indeed, there have been previous attempts at 'defamilisation' based typologies – most notably those of Esping-Andersen (1999) and Korpi (2000). However, the term 'defamilisation' has often been, inappropriately, defined by commentators as the extent to which welfare states support the family. For example, in their work both Esping-Andersen and Korpi utilise this conceptualisation of defamilisation and their typologies subsequently rely on factors which assess the extent to which welfare states support the family (Esping-Andersen, 1999) or different family models (Korpi, 2000), such as overall public family spending or overall public commitment to the subsidy of child families. There is an alternative definition of defamilisation that, whilst it has been far less apparent within the literature, seems more relevant to the gender critique of Esping-Andersen's typology (Borchost, 1994; Bussemaker and Kersbergen, 1994; Daly, 1994). In this definition, defamilisation refers to the extent to which the welfare state undermines women's dependency on the family and facilitates women's economic independence (Taylor-Gooby, 1996). The defamilisation

index presented in this paper reflects this second definition and therefore uses factors that are concerned with female freedom from the family, rather than the freedom of the family.

Defamilisation index

The defamilisation index is methodologically constructed in the same way as Esping-Andersen's decommodification index. Even though his methodology has certain drawbacks, such as the use of averaging, and has met with some criticism within the literature (Castles and Mitchell, 1993; Kangas, 1994; Ragin, 1994; Shalev, 1996; Pitruzello, 1999), it is important that the index replicates Esping-Andersen's method to ensure compatibility, comprehensiveness and sophistication.

Countries

The defamilisation index includes the same 18 OECD countries used by Esping-Andersen: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, and USA.

Data and sources

Locating suitable data for the defamilisation index was a difficult task as there is very little international data which specifically relate to women. International data are seldom 'gender sensitive' as, for example, whilst wage rate comparisons between countries are often provided, statistical sources seldom compare male and female wage rates within and/or between countries, and there are no specific international databases relating to such issues as female employment, maternity leave or child care provision. Although there are a number of different national statistics that relate to the specialised contents of the defamilisation index, their availability is limited and furthermore, statistics from individual countries are often difficult to compare with one another, as they have been collected and presented using a variety of different methods, concepts and measurements. Therefore, the defamilisation index is based upon data from a number of different international statistical sources, such as the OECD and the UN, and international studies by commentators such as Gaulthier (1996). Unfortunately, the shortage of available data has also led to a slight time lag, as the most recent available and comparable data were from 1997.

Measures

In this paper, defamilisation is concerned directly with the relationship between women, the state and the family; the index is therefore based on the assessment of the following four factors (see Table 2 for data details):

(1) Relative female labour participation rate;
(2) Maternity leave compensation;
(3) Compensated maternity leave duration;
(4) Average female wage.

Each of these factors has been specifically selected to highlight a certain aspect of how the welfare state undermines female dependency on the family and facilitates their economic

Table 2 Defamilisation index data (1996/7)

	Relative female labour participation rate for persons aged 15–64 (percent)[i]	Maternity Leave Compensation for First 12 weeks (expressed as a percentage of normal pay)	Compensated Maternity Leave Duration (number of weeks)	Average Female Wage (expressed as a percentage of male average wage)[x]
Australia	19.5	0[ii]	0	85.1
Austria	18.6	100	16	65.6
Belgium	20.2	77[iii]	15	79.5
Canada	13.4	55	15	(76.5)
Denmark	11.7	100	18	83.3
Finland	5.2	80	28[vii]	79.3
France	14.2	100	16[viii]	79.1
Germany	18.0	100	14	74.3
Ireland	27	70	14	73.7
Italy	29	80	35	(76.5)
Japan	26.1	60	14	56.7
Netherlands	20.4	100	16	75.1
New Zealand	16.7	0	0	77.8
Norway	10.0	100	18	87.3
Sweden	4.6	75[iv]	65[ix]	90.0
Switzerland	17.5	100	8	68.7
UK	17.1	50[v]	18	72.5
USA	14.2	0	0	(76.5)
Mean	16.86	83.1[vi]	20.66[vi]	76.5

Notes: (i) Calculated as the difference between the female and male labour participation rate. For example, if the male participation rate was 78.9 per cent and the female participation rate was 76.4 per cent then the relative female labour participation rate would be (−) 2.5 per cent.
(ii) A replacement rate of 60 per cent is available to some women but this scheme only covers around 10 per cent of the female population and it has therefore not been included (see Sainsbury, 1999: 125).
(iii) 82 per cent for the first 4 weeks and 75 per cent for the remaining 11 weeks.
(iv) 1 year at 75 per cent, the remaining 3 months at the flat rate.
(v) 90 per cent for 6 weeks, flat rate for remaining 12 weeks.
(vi) Excluding those countries that have a value of 0.
(vii) 15 weeks maternity leave; the remaining 13 weeks are parental leave that can be taken by the mother or the father.
(viii) Maternity leave duration ranges between 16 and 26 weeks depending on the number of children. Since 1981, paid leave is 26 weeks for the third and subsequent children (Gaulthier, 1996: 175).
(ix) Paid parental leave which can be taken by either the mother or the father. Compulsory maternity leave (which is only available to the mother) constitutes 14 weeks of this period. The first 52 weeks are compensated at 75 per cent and the remaining 13 weeks are paid at the flat rate.
(x) Figures in brackets depict those countries for which separate male and female wage data was not available and which have therefore been weighted by the mean.
Adapted from: Gaulthier, 1996: Table 10.5, p. 179; Table 10.3, p. 180; Table 10.6, p. 181; OECD, 1998: pp. 82–83; UN, 1999: Table 33, pp. 303–310; UN, 2000: Chart 5.23, p. 132; Table 5c, pp. 142–143.

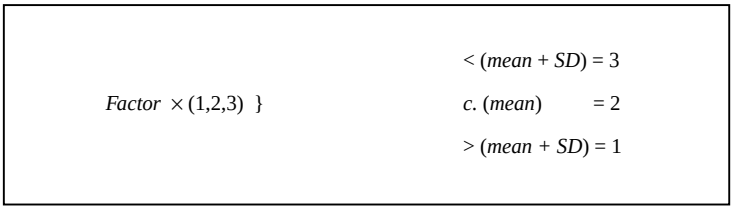

Figure 1. Decommodification scoring formula.
Adapted from: Esping-Andersen, 1990: 54.

independence. The first factor, relative female labour participation rate has been chosen because it indicates the extent to which the economy of the welfare state facilitates female employment. It is 'relative' because it is measured in relation to male employment levels, thus reducing the influence of different national unemployment rates. This factor provides a measure of one way in which women gain economic independence from the family, enter the public realm; and gain access to certain social rights (Meyer, 1994: 67–68).

Factors 2 and 3, maternity leave compensation and compensated maternity leave duration, are intended to show whether the welfare state provides economic support when women decide to have children or if it encourages reliance on the family. Factor 2, maternity leave compensation, shows the level of replacement income which women receive when they are absent from work due to pregnancy. Factor 3, compensated maternity leave duration, indicates the length of time for which women can take paid maternity leave.

Factor 4, average female wage, has been selected to weight the other factors because it indicates the ease with which women can independently maintain a decent standard of living and, as it is expressed as a percentage of the average male wage (Table 2), it also shows the extent of gender pay inequality. Furthermore, the level of a woman's independent income is an important factor in providing women with a choice between family/state dependency and paid employment. This factor has been chosen as a weight in preference to the other factors because if the paid employment in which women participate provides only a small average income then it is not a real alternative to reliance upon the family or the state.

Method

The process of scoring for the defamilisation index replicates that used by Esping-Andersen (1990: 50–54) and is by way of the numerical description of the relationship of an individual country's score to the mean (and standard deviation) for three (1–3) of the four factors that make up the index (Figure 1). On the basis of the values on each of these three indicators for the 18 nations, a score of 1 for low defamilisation; 2 for medium; and 3 for high defamilisation was given. Following Esping-Andersen, the classification into three scores has been done on the basis of one standard deviation from the mean with adjustment where necessary for extreme outliers (1990: 54). These individual factor scores have then been combined and the total has been weighted by factor four – average female wage.

Table 3 The degree of defamilisation

Australia	17.0
Austria	45.9
Belgium	47.7
Canada	38.3
Denmark	66.6
Finland	63.4
France	55.4
Germany	52.0
Ireland	36.9
Italy	45.9
Japan	22.7
Netherlands	52.6
New Zealand	15.6
Norway	69.8
Sweden	72.0
Switzerland	41.2
UK	36.3
USA	15.3
Mean	44.1

Results

The assessment and combination of these factors produces an indicative defamilisation index (Table 3). This index shows a wide range of defamilisation scores, from the USA's score of 15.3 to the highest score of 72.0 awarded to Sweden. The majority of countries fall in a smaller range of between 36.3 (UK) and 55.4 (France). None of the scores are surprisingly high or surprisingly low and those allotted to each country, and the range of scores, are very similar to those under Esping-Andersen's index (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 54). This suggests that the addition of a more gender sensitive analysis does not greatly alter the relative relationships of the index countries. In order to make a more informed comparison between the results of the defamilisation index and Esping-Andersen's typology the, mean plus/minus SD method (figure 1) used to construct the index can be continued in order to place the countries into one of three groups. This process produces a comparable typology (Table 4).

There are striking similarities between the arrangements of countries in Esping-Andersen's decommodification regimes and the defamilisation groups. The vast majority of countries are placed in similar groupings as in Esping-Andersen's index. For example, Australia (17.0), New Zealand (15.6), and the USA (15.3) are in the lowest defamilisation group; Austria (45.9), Belgium (47.7), France (55.4), Germany (52.0), Italy (45.9), the Netherlands (52.6) and Switzerland (41.2) are in the medium level defamilisation group; and Denmark (66.6), Finland (63.4), Norway (69.8) and Sweden (72.0) are by far the highest scoring countries and remain as a distinctive high-scoring group, separate from the other index countries by a large difference in both their decommodification (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 52) and defamilisation scores. There are however some slight differences in group composition, most notably there has been a reduction in the size of the lowest scoring group of countries: Canada (38.3), Ireland (36.9) and the UK (36.3) are in the

Table 4 Worlds of welfare and defamilisation

Liberal	**Low Defamilisation**
Australia	Australia
Canada	Japan
Ireland	New Zealand
New Zealand	USA
UK	
USA	
Conservative	**Medium Defamilisation**
Austria	Austria
Belgium	Belgium
France	Canada
Germany	France
Italy	Germany
Japan	Ireland
Netherlands	Italy
Switzerland	Netherlands
	Norway
	Switzerland
	UK
Social Democratic	**High Defamilisation**
Denmark	Denmark
Finland	Finland
Norway	Norway
Sweden	Sweden

medium defamilisation group 2, whereas in the decommodification typology they were in the low scoring Liberal regime. Another difference between the two typologies is the alteration of Japan's (22.7) group position from the Conservative regime (medium decommodification) to the lowest defamilisation group. However, overall the differences between the two typologies are very slight – only four countries have changed position – and the emphasis is therefore on similarity rather than change in respect of the relative scores and relationships of the countries.

Discussion

Earlier in the paper, two interrelated hypotheses were outlined: first, that the gender critique of the worlds of welfare thesis is not empirically robust, as the 'three worlds of welfare' typology is not altered in any significant way by the addition of a more overtly gendered approach; and, secondly, that the regimes concept can, if limited to the analysis of specific areas such as labour market decommodification or defamilisation, be resurrected as a useful means of organising and classifying welfare states. It is useful to briefly return to these hypotheses in the context of the comparison of the two typologies.

The gender critique of Esping-Andersen's 'three worlds of welfare' is centred upon the claim that the typology is gender blind and does not therefore reflect women's experiences of the welfare state. The defamilisation index presented in this paper has focused itself upon gender and the role of the welfare state in facilitating women's economic

independence from the family. The resulting typology has shown stark similarities with the 'three worlds of welfare' typology and it therefore undermines the gender critique as it suggests that, whilst Esping-Andersen had gender in the corner rather than the fore front of his eye when constructing the decommodification index, it nonetheless has fairly accurately captured the extent to which women's experiences of the welfare state differ by country and regime type. The 'three worlds' typology is therefore not gender blind as has been claimed, as it has reflected women's relationship with the welfare state, albeit in an implicit rather than an overt way.

The second hypothesis focused on Kasza's critique of the regimes concept itself. The comparison of the defamilisation and decommodification indexes partially undermines Kasza's claim that welfare state regimes are illusory. This paper, whilst acknowledging one aspect of Kasza's critique – that it is inappropriate to use the regime concept, and Esping-Andersen's 'three worlds' thesis, to generalise about all different aspects of a country's welfare provision – has nonetheless suggested, through the addition of the defamilisation index to Esping-Andersen's original, that it is unnecessary to wholeheartedly reject the entire regimes concept as Kasza has implied (2002: 284). The similarities identified between the two typologies suggest that the regimes concept maintains its value as a means of identifying commonalities within, and between, the principles and provisions of diverse welfare states. Regimes, ideal types or 'worlds', remain a useful way of describing, organising and classifying (Arts and Gelissen, 2002) across what can be quite broad areas of policy, such as labour market decommodification or defamilisation. However, the concept is still analytically restricted and it should therefore not be overused: the generalised claims that result from regime typologies are only valid when they are limited to the actual original areas of analysis; otherwise the concept may well become illusory and unrelated to empirical reality.

Conclusions

The comparison of the defamilisation index groups with Esping-Andersen's 'worlds of welfare' typology has revealed remarkable similarities in the composition of the three groups and the relative relationships of the 18 countries. These results are not isolated, as other 'defamilisation' typologies have also noted a lack of significant difference (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Korpi, 2000). The two hypotheses under examination in this paper have thereby both been upheld: the gender critique of the worlds of welfare thesis is not empirically robust, as the 'three worlds of welfare' typology is not altered in any significant way by the addition of a more overtly gendered approach; and the regimes concept can, if limited to the analysis of specific areas such as labour market decommodification or defamilisation, be resurrected as a useful means of organising and classifying welfare states. In contrast to both the gender critique of Esping-Andersen, and Kasza's rejection of the regimes concept, the joint examination of defamilisation and decommodification has revealed that the 'worlds of welfare' approach is neither gender blind or illusory.

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