Introduction: the changing context of comparative social policy
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The field of comparative social enquiry has grown dramatically since the 1960s, in terms of the number of studies being undertaken, the range of approaches used and the countries analysed. The analytical emphasis on the notions of modernization and convergence, and social expenditure as a proportion of GNP as the measure of welfare effort, whilst still evident in contemporary cross-national research, ceased to dominate the comparative landscape from the 1980s. There is now much more interest in recognizing and explaining qualitative as well as quantitative differences in types of welfare systems, addressing the role of institutions and ideas; acknowledgement that formal social policies are only one element in the arrangement of welfare and that social policy is not just about ameliorating the impact of social inequality or altruism but itself contributes to social divisions in society. There has been a greater recognition of diversity and the importance of analysing context, processes, culture and the outcomes of social policies across countries and their impact on different groups.

The changing discourse around social policy and the welfare state can also be associated with the economic and political conditions of the 1980s, which were in marked contrast to what had gone before. In many OECD countries, post-1945 was an era in which the notion of Keynesian welfare capitalism, in its various institutional forms, incorporated a commitment to extended social citizenship and a certain minimum standard of life and security as a matter of right. National welfare regimes helped to underpin a global system of interacting national economies characterized by mass production and mass consumption. This model of institutionalized, bureaucratic provision and social rights was perceived as the inevitable outcome of a 'modern' or developed society. By the 1980s it was the political rhetoric of deregulation, privatization, the efficiency of the 'free market' and rolling back the frontiers of the state that had become the global economic discourse influencing both national and international policies. As Taylor-Gooby (2001) argues in a European context, 'Keynesianism (the view that state intervention is the best way to promote growth and employment) is quite simply dead, a result of the general acceptance that governmental capacity to manage investment within its borders is

limited' (p. 19). At the same time many of the fundamental assumptions associated with the national welfare state and the social rights of citizenship have been discredited and renegotiated, and the discourse about the role of the state in welfare has moved in a new direction (Kennett, 2001; Taylor-Gooby, 2001). According to Harris (2002) the 'new' welfare of the 1980s and 1990s centred on personal and community relationships (Etzioni, 1995; Driver and Martell, 1997), community governance and the notion of active membership, in contrast with the 'old' welfare of the post-war period which emphasized society, universal citizenship rights and statutory state provision (King and Wickham Jones, 1999; Rose, 1999). More recently, fundamental to the 'new' welfare is a re-balancing of the social contract between the state and the individual, between rights and responsibilities, work and welfare (Kvist, 2000; Barbier, 2001).

The current context then is one in which many of the old certainties of the past have been eroded and there has been a recognition of the emergence of 'new' social risks (Jenson and Saint Martin, 2002; Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2005). The predominantly inward-looking, domestic preoccupation of social policy has made way for a more integrated, international and outward approach to analysis (Kennett, 2001, 2010; Hantrais, 2009), and a recognition of the importance of scale (Brenner, 2001). Central to this endeavour is a reassessment of the place of the state in contemporary social policy analysis. The pre-eminence of the national scale, the national state and the national citizen has been weakened by internationalization, the growth of multi-tiered networks and partnerships and the re-emergence of the regional and the local within national states. There has been a proliferation of scales, channels, projects and social networks through which social interaction and active participation can be pursued. Thus, within the modern world system, the notion of unfettered state sovereignty has become problematic and contradictory (Clapham, 2002; Weiss, 2003; Kennett, 2008, 2010) and has presented new challenges for comparative analysis in the social sciences.

These challenges have been captured in recent academic work relating to processes of globalization and transnationalism that have contributed to a de-centring of the state in social policy analysis. The burgeoning literature reflects the multi-faceted nature of global processes, and indeed the vagueness and inconsistencies in the use of the concept (Geschiere and Meyer, 1998; Giddens, 1999; Held and McGrew, 2000, 2002). General debates have been concerned with the economic, cultural, technological, social and political dimensions of globalization. In addition, the relationship between globalization, social policy and the welfare state has generated interest amongst commentators (for example, Deacon et al., 1997; Midgley, 1997; Mishra, 1999; Yeates, 2000; Scharf, 2000; Swank, 2002;

Kennett, 2010). This interest emerged in the context of the retrenchment and reorientation of welfare mentioned earlier and the changing role of the state as its dominant position has increasingly been challenged by stronger and more influential transnational and supranational institutions and the assertiveness of subnational governments. Global and transnational processes are said by some to have contributed to the erosion of the functions of nation-states and deprived national governments of their ability to establish and maintain an autonomous welfare model. Clearly there are differing opinions on the nature, extent and impact of global processes on social policy and welfare systems. What is more certain is that the current context of social policy is one that looks beyond the boundaries of the state in terms of incorporating transnational and subnational activities, and is sensitive to the nature of the mixed economy of welfare, the range of conduits through which policies are made and delivered and the changing relations of space and power within, across and between states and societies (Macrae, 2006; Kennett, 2008). As Geschiere and Meyer (1998) argue, 'The inspiring capacity of the notion of globalization is precisely that it forces social scientists to critically reflect upon how they construct their objects, and to seek for more appropriate fields of investigation which take account of people's actual entanglement in wider processes' (p. 603). So, in de-centring the state the researcher is encouraged to reconsider established structures of 'boundedness' and seek out alternative orientation points and identify reconstructed boundaries as individuals, communities and societies seek to make sense of a changing world.

It is in this context then that this *Handbook* brings together the work of key commentators in the field of comparative analysis in order to provide comprehensive, but by no means exhaustive, coverage of contemporary debates and issues in cross-national research. The collection explores the contextual, conceptual, analytical and processual aspects of undertaking comparative international social research. The collection is divided into five themes. The first part – 'The State and Social Policy in a Globalizing World' – is concerned with extending the epistemological framework through which comparative international analysis is explored by emphasizing the need to look beyond the boundaries of the state not only in relation to transnational activities, but also in terms of the mixed economy of welfare and cultural political economy (Sayer, 2001; Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008; Kennett, forthcoming) within different societies. The three contributors to this section explore the future of the nation-state and the nature of governance, debates that have been, according to Jessop (Chapter 1 this volume), reinforced with the recent global financial crisis and global climate change; and the implications for human security and social protection in different societies and for different groups of people.

Bob Jessop in Chapter 1 identifies the transfer of powers previously located at the national level to a more diverse, multi-level and multi-sector range of actors and institutions. In addition, he stresses the importance of conceptual distinctions and complexity in order to understand the future of national and/or nation-states. The differential impact of globalization on the states and societies of the North and the South is also a concern of Andrés Pérez-Baltodano in Chapter 2. He argues that global interconnectedness has generated new forms of human insecurity that require a range of social policy responses beyond national boundaries. He outlines the formation and development of the democratic Western European state and, drawing upon this 'universalist' model, considers the different levels of 'stateness' achieved by countries in the North and the South. He argues that an understanding of the varying capacities of states to respond to global pressures is vital in order to fully comprehend the varying conditions of human security across societies.

In the final chapter in Part I, Ramesh Mishra focuses on Australia, Japan and the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the former USSR as representative of societies with institutional patterns defined as 'social protection by other means'. He argues that these were developed during an era of relatively closed and insulated national economies and considers the extent to which they have been undermined by the opening up of national markets to international competition.

The reassessment of the role of the state in social policy analysis forms part of a fundamental reappraisal of the assumptions embedded in social science research that has been underway since the 1980s. The rationality, essentialism and universalism of policy discourse and practices through which the welfare state was established have been called into question. The emphasis on diversity, difference and contingency and the notion of spatial and temporal variation challenged many of the assumptions on which the theoretical and epistemological traditions of social policy have been built. The universalism of social policy discourse was, in reality, exemplifying the experience of the white, able-bodied, heterosexual worker and was unable to capture the 'particular' experiences and social needs of diverse ethnic, cultural, sexual and gender interests.

Parts II and III of this volume – 'Concepts and Definitions' and 'Comparing and Categorizing Social Policy Provision and Redistribution' – focus on the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for analysing social policy cross-nationally. In Chapter 4 Jochen Clasen begins by exploring the distinctive features of and the meanings applied to comparative social policy over recent years. For comparativists the unit of analysis has traditionally been different national contexts. However, as the boundaries of state and society are becoming increasingly blurred the concerns for

Graham Crow in Chapter 5 are 'What do social scientists compare? Are the concepts of state and society still relevant in cross-national analysis?'

Chapters 6 and 7 question the dominance of the Western social research paradigm in comparative analysis. Alan Walker and Chack-kie Wong in Chapter 6 critically assess the way in which the concept of the 'welfare state' has been utilized in cross-national analysis. They conclude that the Western ethnocentric construction of the concept has resulted in the exclusion of large sections of the globe from comparative research. Noemi Lendvai and David Bainton in Chapter 7 draw on the concept of 'translation' to capture the 'mobility of the policy process' and frame a more 'equitable dialogue between divergent cultural and epistemic communities' (p. 116 this volume).

Attempts to categorize and typologize different aspects of welfare systems across countries have been an extremely popular feature of comparative social research (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Bonoli, 1997; Holliday, 2000, 2005). The four chapters in Part III are concerned with extending and broadening the analytical, conceptual and substantive aspects of categorizing and typologizing welfare states. In Chapter 8 Julia O'Connor links the contested concepts of gender, citizenship and welfare regimes to explain the variations in the range and quality of social rights. She urges that gender, race and class and their interaction must be integral parts of comparative analysis. This is echoed by Norman Ginsburg in Chapter 9 who adopts a 'critical structured diversity' approach to explore cross-national developments in social policy. For Ginsburg this approach enables the research to retain the specificity of each national context, whilst also incorporating elements 'beyond the state' within the analysis. It also incorporates consideration of the relationship between the welfare state and the social divisions of race, class and gender.

The final two chapters in this part are concerned with the relevance of classificatory and explanatory models for analysing social welfare in the South. James Midgley in Chapter 10 points to the urgent need for 'appropriate normative frameworks that can address the persistence of global poverty, deprivation and oppression' (p. 183 this volume). He suggests that the social development perspective offers one alternative discourse on social welfare with the potential to enrich the study of comparative social policy. In Chapter 11 Ian Gough has sought to 'radically recast' the welfare regime paradigm. He provides a variegated, middle-range model that can facilitate fruitful and integrated analysis across the North and South of the globe.

In Part IV – 'The Research Process' – the focus is, as the title suggests, on the processual and practical day-to-day realities of carrying out cross-national social policy analysis. It is concerned with recognizing and

exploring the issues that emerge from carrying out research in more than one country. In Chapter 12 Linda Hantrais discusses the relevance and implications of recognizing and understanding different research cultures and disciplinary traditions when carrying out comparative research. In Chapter 13 Steen Mangen undertakes the task of defining 'the qualitative' and explores a range of significant innovations in qualitative methods. He discusses the opportunities and challenges created by the growing availability of web-based and electronic sources. In Chapter 14 Jaak Billiet's focus is on quantitative approaches and research design, focusing particularly on cross-country survey data. As well as considering conceptual, theoretical and epistemological issues associated with this research strategy, he also considers the challenges presented by the equivalence of samples, response rates, measurement scales and the translation of questions.

The contributions in the final part of this collection – 'Themes and Debates', by Jonathan Bradshaw, Ray Forrest, Huck-ju Kwon and David Nelken – highlight specific areas of comparative social policy including child poverty and well-being, patterns of housing provision and housing inequalities, social protection in East Asia following the global economic crisis in 2008–09, and finally crime and criminology in a global context. These chapters are intended to highlight continuing and emerging themes and issues that are of particular relevance to understanding and responding to the needs of the contemporary social world.

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