10 Social development and social welfare: implications for comparative social policy

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Previously regarded as a highly specialized and even exotic activity, comparative inquiry in the field of social policy has now become commonplace. Mirroring the accessibility of global information, and the ease with which people travel and communicate internationally, publications on international social welfare now appear regularly, international content is increasingly incorporated into local journals and textbooks and students are routinely exposed to developments in other countries. Several new journals dedicated to international social welfare have also been established. These developments reflect a rapidly expanding interest in international social welfare in many parts of the world and especially Europe and North America where comparative inquiry has been vigorously pursued.

However, comparative social policy inquiry still faces many challenges that have not been adequately recognized or addressed. One problem concerns the way the field has been defined and shaped by scholars in the Global North. This has resulted in what may be called a ‘mainstream’ approach that focuses almost exclusively on government welfare provision and uses a Western ‘welfare state’ perspective to conceptualize the field. Mainstream social policy writers have paid little attention to discourses emanating from other regions of the world that focus on indigenous welfare phenomena and define social welfare in ways that differ significantly from the mainstream welfare state approach. By ignoring these discourses, they have missed an opportunity to broaden and enrich the comparative perspective. In addition, the uncritical adoption of the welfare state approach by many scholars in the Global South has impeded the emergence of a multi-faceted perspective that recognizes hybridity, incorporates diverse insights and promotes a truly global understanding of social welfare.

Another problem is that mainstream comparative social policy inquiry has neglected normative concerns, preferring instead to pursue classificatory and explanatory activities. Normative references in mainstream welfare state studies are seldom made explicit and have accordingly failed to provide an adequate basis for social policy formulation. Similarly, because these implicit normative preferences reflect the dominance of
Western ideas, they are of limited use in assessing social welfare challenges in societies where different cultural and social traditions are valued. Nevertheless, they pervade the field and exert a subtle but decisive influence in determining what is desirable in terms of policy formulation and implementation. This is unfortunate in view of the urgent need for appropriate normative frameworks that can address the persistence of global poverty, deprivation and oppression.

These issues have been raised before but they deserve to be more extensively debated. Alternative discourses about social welfare emanating from non-Western societies should be recognized and accommodated. This requires a greater knowledge of indigenous social welfare perspectives, a receptivity to cognate fields such as anthropology, development studies and cultural (including post-colonial) scholarship, as well as a greater appreciation of the activities of the international development agencies that have exerted considerable influence on social policy thinking in the Global South. Comparative social policy inquiry can also be enhanced by being cognizant of policy innovations in other parts of the world.

One innovation of this kind is social development that emerged in the developing countries of the Global South in the years following World War II and has since been actively promoted by the United Nations and other international agencies. However, the social development discourse has been largely ignored by mainstream Western scholars. By focusing on the social development approach and considering how it addresses first, issues of indigenization, and second the need for a normative framework that can address global social needs, this chapter hopes to contribute to a broadened vision for comparative social policy. It also considers social development’s potential to contribute to the emergence of a one-world perspective that does not depend on the emulation of Western approaches.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND DEFICIENCIES OF COMPARATIVE SOCIAL POLICY

Writing in the mid-1980s, Catherine Jones (1985) identified a handful of books that were explicitly devoted to the subject of comparative social policy. They included pioneering descriptive accounts of statutory welfare provision in Western countries such as Britain, France, the United States and Sweden (Rogers et al., 1968; Jenkins, 1969). Since then a large number of books about social policies in other parts of the world have been published. In addition to Europe and North America, many non-Western countries have been included. These include nations as diverse as China and Hong Kong (MacPherson and Wong, 1995; Tang, 1998), Japan
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(Furukawa, 2008), Korea (Kwon, 1999; Hwang, 2006), Malaysia (Doling and Omar, 2000), Mexico (Dion, 2010), South Africa (Patel, 2005), Sri Lanka (Jayasuriya, 2000), Taiwan (Ku, 1995) and Zambia (Noyoo, 2010) to name but a few. In addition, the number of journal articles and book chapters on international social welfare has increased exponentially.

Building on country case studies and cross-national comparisons, comparative social policy scholarship has produced a number of typologies and conceptual approaches that have sought to comprehend different welfare systems and explain the causal determinants of state welfare engagement. The construction of welfare taxonomies has been a major preoccupation in mainstream comparative social policy. Abstracted from Wilensky’s and Lebeaux’s (1965) pioneering depiction of social welfare in the United States as evolving from a residual to institutional approach, many comparative social policy scholars, beginning with Titmuss (1974), have augmented or redefined the residual–institutional dichotomy. These include important typologies by Furniss and Tilton (1977), Mishra (1984) and Esping-Andersen (1990). Despite numerous criticisms of their inadequacies, taxonomies continue to feature prominently in mainstream comparative social policy scholarship; indeed, since the publication of Esping-Anderson’s typology, a significant amount of comparative scholarship has been devoted to typological activity.

The typological preoccupation in Western comparative social policy has accompanied the subject’s extensive engagement with explanatory theory. Mainstream comparative social policy scholarship has for many years sought to analyse the complex factors that appear to be causally associated with the rise in public social expenditure and the expansion of government social programmes during the twentieth century. In addition to complex factor analyses that have sought to investigate the statistical correlates of welfare effort (Cutright, 1965; Aaron, 1967), a number of theoretical accounts of the reasons for the expansion of government welfare provision have been published. As numerous studies have shown, these include functionalist, Marxist, pluralist and other interpretations (Midgley, 1997; O’Brein and Penna, 1998; Kennett, 2001; Powell and Hewitt, 2002; Myles and Quadagno, 2002; Lavalette and Pratt, 2006). Although none provide a definitive explanation of the determinants of welfare effort, this scholarship reveals the impressive degree of analytical sophistication the subject has achieved.

Since the 1980s, comparative social policy inquiry has also been concerned with the way governments in various parts of the world have reduced social expenditures and retrenched welfare programmes. The nature of the trend has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny and while some scholars are persuaded that there is a ‘crisis’ in government welfare
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(Mishra, 1984; Munday, 1989; Pierson, 1994; Goldberg and Rosenthal, 2002), others are not (Alber, 1988; Castles, 2004). Nevertheless, a good deal of comparative social policy scholarship has focused on this issue, and many writers have pointed to the increasing influence of neo-liberal ideology that they believe has prompted many governments to reduce public expenditures, impose more demanding eligibility requirements and require recipients of income benefits to engage in paid employment (Huber and Stephens, 2001; Peck, 2001; Taylor-Gooby, 2001; Gilbert, 2002; Goldberg and Rosenthal, 2002; Timonen, 2003). The ambiguous concept of globalization has also been employed by several comparative social policy writers to examine this issue (Mishra, 1999; Yeates, 2001; George and Wilding, 2002; Swank, 2002). The recent global recession and the sizable debts incurred by a number of Western countries will no doubt generate many more studies on the future of government involvement in social welfare.

CHALLENGES FOR MAINSTREAM COMPARATIVE INQUIRY

As these examples reveal, mainstream comparative social policy has produced a substantial and significant corpus of knowledge. However, as has been argued already, the field faces numerous challenges. One challenge concerns the way the dominant discourse of mainstream scholarship is infused with a particularistic, Western perspective that reflects a long-standing preoccupation with government welfare and an implicit commitment to welfare state thinking. As was argued earlier, little attention has been paid to alternative discourses, such as those emanating from the Global South that utilize different cultural traditions, values and assumptions to respond to social welfare challenges. Similarly, the contributions of other fields of academic inquiry that address social welfare issues from other disciplinary or interdisciplinary perspectives have been largely ignored.

Neglectful of these alternative perspectives, mainstream comparative social policy scholarship continues to use Western theories and conceptual frameworks to categorize, analyse and explain social welfare institutions around the world even though it is unlikely that analytical inquiry into social welfare phenomena in culturally different societies can be effectively pursued by relying exclusively on Western constructs and theories. The use of these preconceptions to determine the subject matter of comparative inquiry fails to ask appropriate questions or to address the most pertinent realities of non-Western countries. Because of its failure to understand
indigenous welfare from the perspective of the ‘other’, mainstream comparative social policy often fails to properly comprehend welfare phenomena in the world’s many different cultures and societies.

The problem is revealed by the apparent lack of familiarity among mainstream comparative writers of social policy research in non-Western nations. Jones’s (1985) survey of the literature, which was mentioned earlier, revealed the extent to which comparative social policy scholarship at the time focused almost exclusively on the Western industrial nations. Although a number of important books on social policy in the Global South had by then been published, they were not cited. They include Livingstone’s (1969) formative account, which dealt with a number of critical social policy issues at the time, and an important study by MacPherson (1982), which used the insights of international structuralist theory in development studies to offer a critical assessment of social policy in what was then referred to as the Third World. Subsequent accounts focusing specifically on the Global South (Hardiman and Midgley, 1982; MacPherson and Midgley, 1987; H. Jones, 1990) also attracted little attention in mainstream comparative social policy circles. Although it is true that Western comparative scholars are today more aware of the publications of their colleagues in other parts of the world, relatively few references to this literature are made. Indeed, some mainstream scholars still believe that research into social policy in the South is limited and underdeveloped. A recent account of ‘welfare states’ in Latin America, East Asia and Eastern Europe (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008, p. 1) incorrectly asserts that the study of social policy in the developing world is of ‘recent vintage’.

Another problem is the widespread use of Western taxonomies, and even the ‘welfare state’ construct, to classify government welfare programmes in the Global South. Although the notion of a ‘welfare state’ is of dubious validity when characterizing Western nations, it pervades mainstream comparative social policy discourse with unhelpful results. For example, comparative accounts of what are sometimes referred to as the East Asian ‘welfare states’ reveal the extent to which Western constructs fail to elucidate complex realities. Of course, it is questionable whether East Asian societies such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia can or should be classed as ‘welfare states’. Several of the region’s political leaders, most notably Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, have publicly denigrated Western welfarism (Lee, 2000) and at a more analytical level, Walker and Wong (2004) (see Chapter 6 of this volume) believe that the welfare state construct is not only of limited value when seeking to understand social policy in East Asian countries but that its ethnocentric bias impedes a proper assessment of the role of government welfare in the region.
Western welfare typologies have also been used to study social policy in the East Asian region but again, these typologies have not been particularly helpful. For example, the frequent use of the residual construct to characterize social policy in Hong Kong has been questioned by scholars such as Chow (1998) who points out that while state welfare in Hong Kong does have residual features, it also has institutional features. Midgley (1984) reached the same conclusion almost 15 years earlier in his discussion of the territory’s social security policies. Similar difficulties have been encountered by attempts to build on Esping-Anderson’s typology and to identify a unique East Asian welfare model. While some scholars have happily classified the East Asian societies into one or more of Esping-Anderson’s categories (Aspalter, 2001), a careful assessment by Goodman et al. (1998) concluded that there is, in fact, no distinctive East Asian welfare model. Although an attempt to expand Esping-Anderson’s typology by creating a fourth, East Asian ‘productivist’ welfare category has enjoyed some popularity in mainstream comparative circles (Holliday, 2000) it has not captured the complexities of social policy in East Asia. The result of these and other taxonomic exercises is a muddle that hardly enhances comparative knowledge of social welfare in this region of the world.

Another example of the problematic way mainstream ideas have been used in comparative social policy inquiry is the adoption of Western explanatory theories to account for the evolution of statutory welfare programmes in different parts of the world. While these theories may illuminate social policy development in Europe and other industrial nations, it is questionable that they provide plausible interpretations of the determinants of welfare effort in the Global South. Indeed, attempts to test the veracity of these theories have produced inconclusive results that also reveal the complexity of the field. For example, studies of the evolution of social security in Latin America, which have used these theories, have reached quite different conclusions. While Mesa-Lago (1978) believes that interest groups theory best explains social policy development in the region, Malloy (1979) is persuaded that a state-centred approach is more plausible. Similarly, Midgley’s (1986) account of the factors responsible for the growth of government welfare in the East Asian ‘tiger’ economies concluded that established Western theories offered few helpful explanatory insights. Another example is Tang’s (1998) account of the expansion of state welfare in Hong Kong, which found that no established theory provided a satisfactory explanation of the territory’s social policy development. However, these limitations have not prevented social policy scholars in the Global South from using these theories to explain indigenous realities. One example is Ku’s (1995) reliance on Marxism to provide a
paradigmatic basis for analysing government social welfare in Taiwan. Although the author’s use of theory is impressive, the role of culture and other indigenous factors are given little attention.

A major problem is that Western welfare state theories have failed to recognize the role of European imperialism in the evolution of social policy. This is a serious omission since it is difficult if not impossible to understand how and why social policy evolved in the Global South over the last century without referring to the colonial experience. Accounts of this legacy feature prominently in other social science analyses that have used the insights of international structuralism as well as post-colonialism to comprehend contemporary realities in many parts of the modern world. Mainstream social policy scholarship has been largely oblivious to this work and also to the contribution of social policy writers who have used these insights to explain social policy development. As noted earlier, one of the most significant was MacPherson’s (1982) application of international structuralist theory to analyse social policy in the developing countries. The pioneering work of Mair (1944) and the subsequent application of the insights of post-colonialism to the analysis of social welfare by Midgley (1998) have been largely ignored. Hopefully this omission will be addressed as the critical role that Western imperialism played in the development of social welfare in the Global South is more widely recognized (Midgley and Piachaud, 2011).

As was argued earlier, a related problem is the failure of mainstream comparative social policy to vigorously engage with normative concerns. Mainstream scholarship has been remarkably indifferent to normative and practical issues, preferring instead to pursue typological and explanatory interests. However, to be fair, it should be recognized that many comparative scholars have examined and regretted the shift from collectivist institutionalism to neo-liberal individualism, which has had a negative impact on social welfare in many countries. Nevertheless, while these accounts do evoke normative issues, these remain implicit, and offer few if any proposals that can effectively challenge neo-liberal hegemony.

The preference for European welfare statism has also established an implicit, international normative standard against which the welfare policies and programmes of non-Western countries are evaluated. Consequently, accounts of non-Western welfare systems by both local and international scholars are often critical or even apologetic if local approaches do not comply with this standard. It is not uncommon for social policy scholars in other societies to complain that the public welfare systems of their countries do not conform to the European ‘welfare state’ ideal. Even studies that do not seek explicitly to compare local welfare provision against the idealized Western ‘welfare state’ standard often
make implicit normative comparisons revealing the inadequacies of local welfare institutions (Ramesh, 2000).

The way mainstream comparative social policy scholarship has focused almost exclusively on state welfare institutions when seeking to assess welfare phenomena in other countries has resulted in the neglect of the many other institutional mechanisms that contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities and societies around the world. As feminist scholarship has shown, the preoccupation with state welfare provision in mainstream social policy studies has failed to explicate the contribution of women and familial forms of caring to social welfare (Dominelli, 1991; Sainsbury, 1996; Daly and Rake, 2003). Similarly, the contribution of non-formal, ‘traditional’ institutions that play a far more important role in meeting social needs than government social programmes in non-Western societies has also been ignored. It is unfortunate that a rich body of normative as well as analytical research into these welfare institutions, generated largely by anthropologists, remains beyond the scope of mainstream comparative social policy scholarship (Midgley, 1994; von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann, 1994; van Ginneken, 1999; Midgley and Hosaka, 2011).

Of course, this is not to suggest that comparative social policy inquiry should ignore government social welfare provision. The state is a major contributor to social welfare and its contribution obviously requires attention and analysis. But to focus exclusively on state welfare, as most mainstream comparative social policy scholars have done, is to offer a partial and inaccurate account of the many complex factors that contribute to human well-being in different cultures and societies. Since these institutions play a particularly significant role in non-Western societies, comparative scholarship should be cognizant of their role.

The widespread use of external normative standards originating in mainstream Western thinking to assess welfare outcomes in non-Western societies has impeded the development of normative theories that can facilitate the formulation of appropriate social policies based on their indigenous cultural and social realities. In fact, much mainstream comparative inquiry is detached from the type of advisory endeavour that practical social policy formulation requires if it is to generate humane responses to pressing global social needs. There is an urgent need for comparative social policy to contribute in practical ways to the formulation of policies and programmes that incorporate indigenous welfare approaches and accommodate social, cultural and economic differences. Because social policy is an applied field, it is not unreasonable to suggest that mainstream comparative inquiry should be more directly involved in practical matters. While analytical and explanatory activities need not be abandoned, the
persistent problems of global poverty, hunger, exploitation, conflict and oppression demand normative frameworks that can provide a basis for appropriate social policy-making.

SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Half a century ago, at the end of World War II, governments in many parts of the world broke with conventional laissez-faire beliefs and began more confidently to direct economic affairs and expand a range of social provisions designed to promote the well-being of their populations. In the industrial nations, enhanced state intervention was closely associated with post-war reconstruction while in the developing nations government engagement was closely linked to the struggle for independence from European imperialism. Nationalist movements, which had gathered strength before the war, now aggressively asserted the right to national self-determination. While this trend was resisted with bitter consequences by some of the imperial powers, it did not halt the inexorable struggle for freedom from foreign domination. In some regions of the world such as Latin America, which had secured independence from European rule many decades earlier, the struggle for self-determination found expression in greater efforts to assert national autonomy and modernize economic production.

It was in this context that the idea of development gained a new vibrancy. Drawing on nineteenth-century social evolutionary ideas as well as older beliefs about the possibility of progress and the ability of human agency to shape the future, the independence movements embraced economic planning and sought to address the pressing problems of mass poverty and deprivation that characterized their societies after what the imperial powers claimed was a period of progressive and ‘civilizing’ rule. For various motives, some of the metropolitan powers supported these efforts. Focusing chiefly on territories without sizeable settler colonies, they provided aid and technical assistance to support the development planning initiatives of the nationalist independence movements. Many of these movements were inspired by European socialism, believing that state direction of the economy, centralized planning, nationalization, public welfare provision and other forms of intervention would promote economic and social progress.

At the time, poverty and deprivation among the indigenous population was widespread. While European settlers and colonial officials enjoyed a high standard of living, local people suffered from debilitating commu-
nicable diseases, high rates of infant mortality, low life expectancy and widespread illiteracy. Although some colonial administrations had established education and welfare provisions in the years preceding the war, access to health, education and social services was limited. Missionaries were historically responsible for running hospitals and clinics, for managing schools, and for providing residential social welfare services to those with physical disabilities, the destitute elderly, orphans and others. However, the hospitals, clinics, schools and welfare facilities operated by the missionaries catered for only a small proportion of those in need (Macpherson, 1982).

With independence, many of the new nationalist governments implemented a statist approach to development, they introduced economic planning, established new nationalized industries, invested in infrastructure and expanded the limited social services previously introduced by the colonial administrations. Many of their leaders had been inspired by the rapid growth of the public social services in the industrial nations and were committed to extending the social service to cover many more people. However, it was clear that rapid economic development would be required to generate the funds needed to increase social provision on a significant scale. Accordingly, it was widely believed that economic development should be given the highest priority and that consumption should be deferred (Livingstone, 1969). Although economic planners argued that development should be an overriding goal, some political elites sought to balance economic and social objectives. In addition, the policy of deferring consumption was seldom realized largely because of grassroots political pressures for access to modern health and educational services.

It was in this context that limited welfare services were introduced by the governments of the newly independent states (Hardiman and Midgley, 1982; MacPherson, 1982). In some cases, existing colonial welfare provisions were augmented and generally this involved the creation of social insurance and provident funds for civil servants and workers in regular wage employment coupled with social assistance and residential care for the urban poor. The introduction of social welfare services for the urban poor was closely associated with professional social work (Midgley, 1995). Social work had achieved recognition as a ‘modern approach’ for dealing with social problems and although it had previously been introduced into India, South Africa and several Latin American countries, several metropolitan governments assisted in the creation of professional training opportunities, and in the development of governmental and voluntary agencies that would employ social work professionals.

Social work played an important role in the formulation of the social development approach. However, the realization that individualized
casework treatment could not address the problem of mass poverty and its associated ills of hunger, ill health, illiteracy and landlessness facilitated the introduction of community-based interventions that sought to mobilize local people to meet social needs and engage simultaneously in productive income-generating economic activities. Known as community development, these community-based activities fused with other social interventions to comprise an approach that the British Colonial Office in 1954 dubbed as social development (United Kingdom, 1954). The new term was used to connote the linking of social welfare with the overriding commitment to economic development that then characterized nation building in the Global South.

Social development was actively promoted in the British colonial territories but, with the waning of European imperialism, the United Nations assumed international leadership (Midgley, 1995). The organization actively promoted economic planning in the newly independent developing countries and provided technical assistance for this purpose. It also encouraged social policy development. In the early 1950s, United Nations officials subscribed to the widely held view that professional social work should be introduced to the developing countries to meet the need for modern social service provision. However, it also recognized that community development should form an integral part of the social services, particularly in the rural areas where the majority of the population resided. Accordingly, remedial social work services were emphasized for urban areas while community development was given greater priority in the rural areas.

In the 1960s, the United Nations reassessed this approach and it gradually began to place more emphasis on macro-development policies that integrated national economic policies with social welfare provisions. Governments were encouraged to transcend social work and community-based interventions, and refocus the activities of their central planning agencies to attain social objectives. In terms of this approach, which was known as ‘unified socioeconomic development’, development plans would seek to raise standards of living, improve health conditions, increase access to education and address the problems of inadequate shelter especially in the informal urban settlements. Economic growth achievements would no longer be measured exclusively in terms of per capita income growth or industrial investments or increases in exports but in terms of social outputs such as employment creation, improvements in nutrition, gains in health status and increases in literacy and school enrolments.

Together, the community-based and centralized planning approaches formed the core of the social development agenda. Although they coexisted uneasily, these twin perspectives provided a normative basis for
social policy in many countries of the Global South. The United Nations played a key leadership role in promoting the adoption of this broader approach to social development. In addition to the vigorous promotion of social development in the Economic and Social Council, and the adoption of numerous resolutions by the General Assembly, the organization convened international meetings and conferences and provided technical assistance to member states. These activities facilitated the adoption of social development in many countries. Many Western nations supported these efforts through their own aid programmes and, in addition, other multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank also promoted social development ideas.

By the 1960s, government-sponsored community-based projects concerned with social and economic improvements were commonplace throughout the developing nations of the Global South. The community development approach was also adopted in health care and became a primary mechanism for promoting health and nutritional improvements in many countries. At the same time, national planning agencies created social sectoral programmes concerned with health, education, housing and social welfare services. In addition, social planners skilled in promoting social development goals were recruited and trained. Social indicators were refined and widely adopted to measure the attainment of social development goals (Hall and Midgley, 2004).

While social development exerted a pervasive influence in the Global South, it was not universally adopted or always effectively implemented. In many developing countries, social development policy was incremental and haphazard and in others, serious economic difficulties, ethnic and political conflict as well as corruption impeded its implementation. In some countries, social development coexisted uneasily with other approaches. Indeed, the welfare state approach, which advocated the adoption of European-style social services, remained influential. In addition, international economic difficulties and increased developing country indebtedness weakened the ability of governments to expand social provision. These problems were exacerbated in the 1980s by the diffusion of neo-liberal ideas emanating from Britain, the United States and some other Western countries. As the International Monetary Fund and World Bank became increasingly committed to neo-liberal ideology, structural adjustment programmes were imposed, national planning agencies were dismantled or debilitated, social expenditures were curtailed and social programmes retrenched. These factors undermined the social development project.

As a result of these events, a new approach to social development
emerged. Instead of social development being directed by government planners and community development workers, the field was soon dominated by aid officials, international development experts and consultants. Funded by international donor agencies and Western governments, social development became the purview of local non-governmental organizations and community groups that now manage a variety of local development projects. Today, many social development projects supported by international donors are concerned with health, family planning and literacy, and many are directed at poor women. Indeed, gender issues now feature prominently in social development practice. Many non-government organizations also implement local income-generating projects especially through micro-enterprises. Social development personnel are also involved in large-scale economic development projects to ensure that the ‘human factor’, as it is called, is taken into account when large-scale transportation, hydroelectric and industrial projects are constructed. They are employed to assess the social impact of these projects, and to appraise and evaluate projects, and to undertake stakeholder and gender analyses.

Believing that social development efforts had been weakened by neo-liberalism and become increasingly fragmented and ineffective, the United Nations sought to reinvigorate the social development approach. In 1990, it published the first of a series of reports on what was now called ‘human’ rather than social development (United Nations Development Programme, 1990). The publication of these reports was accompanied by political efforts to again promote social development ideals on an international scale. These steps were a prelude to the convening of the World Social Summit on Social Development at which, the organization hoped, member states would reaffirm their commitment to social development.

The World Summit was held in Copenhagen in March 1995 and was attended by 186 government delegations including 117 heads of state, with the noticeable exceptions of President Clinton of the United States and Prime Minister John Major of Britain. It resulted in the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration, which committed the world’s governments to achieve eight major goals. These included, among others, the eradication of poverty; the promotion of full employment and sustainable livelihoods; and the achievement of gender equity. The Declaration also emphasized the role of governments in promoting universal access to education and health and mitigating the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes that had been adopted in many developing countries as a condition for international aid (United Nations, 1996).

Although the Copenhagen Declaration was accompanied by a Plan of Action designed to ensure that policies and programmes to achieve these
goals were implemented, progress was slow and in 2000, when the United Nations General Assembly met in New York at what was dubbed the Millennium Summit to review the implementation of the Declaration, the results were uneven. Many countries had failed to adopt poverty eradication strategies and economic adversity had slowed employment generation in many countries. As a result of budget cuts, access to the social services had been curtailed and in some parts of the world such as Sub-Saharan Africa, economic and social conditions had deteriorated. In many countries, the challenge of gender discrimination had not been adequately addressed. In addition, several countries, noticeably in East Asia and Latin America, were seriously affected by economic crises associated with international speculative finance capitalism. Indeed, meetings of the World Trade Organization attracted more media attention than the Summit meeting.

On the other hand, the Copenhagen Declaration created an agenda for social policy at the global level. In 2000, at the Millennium Summit, the Declaration was reformulated as the Millennium Development Goals. The Summit set specific targets that would, it was hoped, be met by 2015. They include halving the incidence of absolute poverty, achieving universal primary school enrolment, promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, reducing child mortality and the incidence of AIDS and other communicable diseases and improving maternal health. While the attainment of these goals is ultimately the responsibility of individual governments, they are pursued within an international framework of collaborative policy formulation and implementation that ultimately transcends national activities. At a United Nations meeting in 2010 to assess progress in achieving these goals, it was agreed that while much progress had been made, the record was still decidedly mixed and that much more needed to be done if these goals were to be reached by 2015 (United Nations, 2010). Although the poverty rate had fallen significantly in East Asia, and especially China, poverty in many parts of Africa and South Asia remained widespread. Considerable progress had been made in achieving primary school enrolments, but maternal and child health still posed a significant challenge. This was true of other areas such as gender equality and the reduction of communicable diseases as well. Nevertheless, despite economic upheavals in many parts of the world, the devastating effects of the recent global recession, and violence and political oppression in some countries and regions, the trend towards improved social conditions that has taken place globally since the middle years of the last century has continued. Much of this has been achieved through the implementation of social development policies and programmes.

Efforts to ensure social development’s vitality have also continued
at the academic level. Its essentially pragmatic prescriptions have been augmented by attempts at theory building and various conceptual formulations of social development ideas have appeared. The populist, community-based approach that provided the foundations on which social development thinking emerged in the 1950s, was subsequently enhanced by the incorporation of radical community action. More recently, social capital theory has been incorporated into social development theory. These ideas have since been formalized, giving social development an intellectual identity and coherence. The statist version of social development that emerged in the late 1960s was variously conceptualized as the unified socioeconomic planning approach and the Basic Needs approach (Miah and Tracy, 2001). A more recent development is a pervasive interest in local entrepreneurship and the promotion of micro-credit and micro-enterprises by which poor people can engage in economic activities (Remenyi and Quinones, 2000; Rainford, 2001; Werhane et al., 2010). Although this approach reflects the influence of neo-liberal thinking, it has fused with the populist, community development tradition to promote cooperative, community-based enterprises that involve larger numbers of people.

Attempts have also been made to synthesize these different perspectives into a unified ‘institutional’ approach that recognizes the role of governments, communities and markets in the promotion of well-being in the context of economic development efforts. Rather than treating these different normative positions as antagonistic, some admittedly optimistic proponents of social development such as Midgley (1995) contend that it is possible to integrate their respective approaches so that all contribute to a comprehensive and sustainable process of development in which social and economic interventions are purposefully linked and harmonized. However, the need for economic development remains paramount. For the proponents of social development, economic growth is a vital dynamic in the production of social welfare. But many social development experts recognize that a distinctive type of economic growth that maximizes employment, spreads benefits widely and invests in human capabilities is needed. This requires state intervention, participation and redistribution. Of course, this approach is antithetical to the neo-liberal perspective that requires a reduction in government social spending and a reconstructed role for government that creates opportunities for entrepreneurs to pursue profits without hindrance, and a faith in a trickle down effect, which, it is claimed, will of its own accord bring prosperity to all.

An important element in the conceptualization of social development is an emphasis on ‘welfare productivism’. Since social development ideas were first implemented in community-based interventions in the Global
South more than 50 years ago, the need to link social welfare interventions with economic development activities has been emphasized. Although direct transfers to those facing particular needs were not discounted, it was widely believed that local social needs could best be met through engaging in local economic activities. However, it was also believed that social interventions should not only be compatible with economic activities, but productivist in their own right. The notion of social investments that enhance individual, family and community capabilities has since been stressed by many scholars (Sherraden, 1991; Midgley and Tang, 2001). Of course, these ideas are not new. Many years ago, Schultz (1981) showed that anti-malaria campaigns in India and Sri Lanka in the 1950s not only reduced mortality and morbidity but increased agricultural production.

As will be recognized, the ideas attending social development have been controversial and have been contested both within the development community and by proponents of alternative normative perspectives, particularly neo-liberalism and post-modernism. Neo-liberals view social development’s statism as antithetical to economic progress while post-modernists regard social development’s commitment to social change and progress as just another failed meta-narrative arising from Enlightenment thought. For the anti- or post-development school, which has drawn extensively on postmodernist thinking, the very idea of progress is anathema (Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Munck and O’Hearn, 1999). However, it is precisely because social development comprises one of many alternative discourses in comparative social policy that its approach needs to be recognized and comprehended and its potential application examined.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: INDIGENIZATION AND NORMATIVE RELEVANCE

The preceding discussion of social development and its relation to comparative social policy is intended to serve an illustrative rather than informative purpose. It shows that social development comprises an alternative discourse about social welfare at the international level that, together with other discourses, deserves to be recognized and understood in mainstream inquiry. The fact that the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit and the 2000 Millennium Summit were attended by the heads of state of the vast majority of the member nations of the United Nations suggests that social development is not a peripheral activity but that it represents many voices that should be heard and embraced by Western social policy scholars. In addition, the comparative study of social welfare can be enriched by recognizing and accommodating the social development approach.
However, social development is only one of many discourses about social welfare that are relevant to comparative social policy. It has been noted already that feminist scholarship has generated a discourse that, in the form of a critique of mainstream thinking, has revealed the need for a broadened vision of social welfare based on social care and familial institutions. Similarly, post-colonial studies provide insights that can inform a long-standing concern with issues of immigration, cultural identity and racism in social policy scholarship in the industrial nations. The field of development studies also has much to offer comparative social policy inquiry. Although attempts have been made to bridge the gap between social policy and development studies (Hall and Midgley, 2004), the two fields remain quite distinct even though they share a common commitment to poverty eradication, the expansion of social provisions and a recently renewed commitment to social protection. By paying attention to these and other discourses, the challenges facing comparative social policy inquiry can be addressed. As has been argued already, the lack of both indigenization and appropriate normative frameworks that can inform efforts to respond to pressing social needs are major limitations of mainstream comparative inquiry. Social development is concerned with both issues. Its roots are indigenous to the Global South and it gives expression to a body of normative theory that seeks to address the serious social problems facing hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Social development has been cognizant of indigenous influences and, despite its modernist roots, may be regarded as a distinctly ‘Third Worldist’ approach to social welfare. Although the initial impetus for social development came from expatriate colonial officials involved in establishing social welfare programmes, they recognized that urban-based remedial interventions that relied on professional expertise and bureaucratic social service provision were of limited relevance to the problems facing the majority of the population located in the rural areas. Their alternative community-based approach revealed an understanding of the importance of agrarian life in the Global South as well as the importance of community networks and cultural commitments, both of which are often based on indigenous family institutions. The participatory emphasis in community development drew on culturally institutionalized patterns of mutual aid and created an intervention that made limited use of professional and bureaucratic provisions. The emphasis on self-determination and cooperation, which formed an integral element of community development, was also highly compatible with indigenous culture. In some countries such as India, community development was directly influenced by Gandhi and Tagore’s indigenous approaches. The state interventionism that subsequently became prominent in social development think-
ing also had an indigenous aspect, harmonizing social policy with the nationalist populism that characterized the ideology of the anti-colonial, independence movements.

By being cognizant of the way indigenization can inform the comprehension of welfare institutions in other societies, mainstream comparative social policy scholarship can become more sensitive to cultural realities and transcend its current preoccupation with typological categorization and speculation about the origins and functions of state welfare. Fortunately, there are indications that mainstream scholarship is moving in this direction. For example, recent accounts of the evolution of social welfare in Ireland and Sweden have utilized insights of this kind, placing far more emphasis on the role of culture than before (Gould, 2001; Peillon, 2001). Similarly, although criticized, Jones’s (C. Jones, 1990, 1993) exploration of the role of indigenous culture in East Asian welfare transcends conventional approaches and fosters a more incisive account of cultural dynamics. More recent studies that explicitly address the role of culture in shaping welfare institutions are especially helpful (Chamberlayne et al., 1999; van Oorschot et al., 2008).

Social development is also overtly normative. It is more concerned with articulating value assumptions and formulating responses to social problems than with categorization and explanation. While the normative engagement of social development writing may be viewed by some social policy scholars as a second-order activity that should follow analytical endeavour, social development proponents believe that pressing global problems demand solutions based on appropriate and workable normative theories. Unlike much mainstream comparative social policy scholarship, social development has energetically sought to explicate normative assumptions and policy prescriptions. The willingness of social development proponents to declare normative preferences should inspire those engaged in mainstream comparative scholarship to explicate their own implicit preference for Western welfare statism. The tendency to assume the moral superiority of welfare statist position has resulted in a failure to affirm normative commitments and to articulate a defensible normative position. This has impeded efforts to confront the continuing diffusion of neo-liberalism. It has also impeded the formulation of a reconstructed neo-institutional position that can meet the neo-liberal challenge. By ignoring the normative implications of other approaches, mainstream scholarship has not exploited its potential to contribute to an effective reformulated normative conceptualization of state welfare engagement that may challenge neo-liberalism.

The productivist commitment in social development offers a potentially viable response of this kind and counters neo-liberal claims that social
expenditures impede economic development. As noted earlier, there is a wealth of evidence to show that social expenditures that invest in human capabilities promote economic growth (Midgley and Tang, 2001, 2008). They also have positive redistributive implications (Midgley, 1999). Investments in human capital are today regarded as essential components of economic development and social capital generated by community interventions has the same effect. By utilizing this evidence to demonstrate that social expenditures can promote economic growth and promote social prosperity, social policy scholars could provide a normative alternative that progressive policy-makers could use to repackage conventional welfarist ideals.

Wider challenges arising from civil conflict, oppression, ethnic hatreds and gender and other forms of contemporary discrimination also require an effective response. Mainstream comparative social policy has not addressed these endemic problems, preferring instead to focus on conventional state welfare provision. However, conventional social service programmes have little relevance to those whose daily lives are characterized by violence, brutal oppression and perpetual suffering. They are irrelevant to African villagers who do not know whether they will be slaughtered by marauding gangs of militia funded by political leaders from different ethnic groups, or to slum dwellers on the outskirts of Latin American cities who scavenge in landfills for their subsistence, or to Palestinian families who cower in terror as Israeli tanks demolish their neighbourhoods, or to impoverished Asian families who live in oppressive feudal conditions and are compelled to sell their children into debt bondage. The current situation in Syria dramatically illustrates this argument. While it is obviously desirable that comparative scholars should be concerned with typological and explanatory activities, these pressing problems also demand attention.

Finally, a familiarity with the social development perspective can promote the goal of formulating a one-world approach to social policy. Although the literature on this issue is still underdeveloped, debates on internationalism are still framed in terms of mainstream welfare state criteria except that the role of international organizations rather than national governments is now more frequently emphasized (Deacon et al., 1997; Mishra, 1999). While these debates touch on issues that are relevant to social development to a greater extent than before, they nevertheless perpetuate conventional welfare state preoccupations and fail to recognize the heterogeneity of welfare institutions and the diverse ways in which these institutions have been conceptualized and analysed by scholars working outside the mainstream.

A truly global perspective on social policy must accommodate diverse discourses. It has been argued already that social development is only one
of many discourses that provide insights into the complex and diverse realities of social welfare around the world. The construction of a truly one world perspective cannot legitimately proceed by seeking to impose one approach to conceptualize global social policy. Nor can it use only one interpretive mode to understand the complex reality of social welfare in the world’s many diverse societies. Similarly, attempts to subsume this reality within a unitary normative perspective such as Western welfare statism (or neo-liberalism) are meaningless. Instead, efforts to promote the emergence of a one world social welfare perspective should begin by recognizing the claims of many discourses, assessing them in a discursive dialogue and ultimately promote hybridity based on relative rather than absolute criteria. This does not deny the need for absolute standards relating to the alleviation of suffering, oppression, the eradication of poverty and the assertion of freedoms but it should recognize that these goals may be achieved through different institutional mechanisms in different social, economic and cultural contexts. In this way, a much more flexible conceptual framework that promotes a fusion of diverse positions and fosters the adoption of a truly one world approach may emerge. By recognizing social development’s contribution to comparative social policy, this goal may be furthered.

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