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States, Markets, Families: Gender, Liberalism and Social Policy in Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States
by Julia S. O'CONNOR, Ann SHOLA ORLOFF and Sheila SHAVER, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 281 pp., ISBN 0-521-63092-4 (hardcover) and ISBN 0-521-63881-X (pbk.).

Julia O'Connor, Ann Shola Orloff and Sheila Shaver have co-authored an important contribution to contemporary social policy debates. One of their main theoretical arguments — that social policy regimes are best understood in terms of the respective social policy roles played by states, markets *and* families — is now being conceded by several leading mainstream theorists, like Manuel Castells in *The Power of Identity* (1997) and Anthony Giddens in *The Third Way* (1999). In fact, in *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (1999), Gösta Esping-Andersen goes so far as to argue that "the household is the *alpha* and *omega* to any resolution of the main postindustrial dilemmas" (p. 6). Whereas Esping-Andersen, like neo-classical economists, is prepared to treat households as unitary decision-makers, the analytical framework O'Connor et al. provide is designed to illuminate the gender relations of power in families, markets and states. They also achieve another important objective — putting flesh on the often-stylized accounts of "liberal" policy regimes.

Building on the authors' earlier contributions, *States, Markets, Families* reworks the concepts of "decommodification" and "stratification" to provide a framework that encompasses class and gender (and potentially, race) relations. Thus a crucial question is the extent and quality of social citizenship rights as these establish "the capacity to autonomous household formation." They argue that just as social policies can strengthen the position of wage earners by lessening the "dull compulsion" of the market (decommodification), so too do social policies that enhance the capacity to form autonomous households support gender equality. For Esping-Andersen, the concept of "stratification" was used simply to distinguish between conservative regimes, with their segmented, categorical programs, and universal programs that contribute to solidarity. For O'Connor et al., stratification has two additional dimensions. The first is one upon which the feminist literature on welfare regimes has focused attention: do welfare regimes reinforce gender differences in paid and unpaid work by establishing different programs for labour market and family needs? The second gets at an issue highlighted by debates among feminists: do programs assume "gender difference" or "gender sameness" and, if the latter, do they do anything to address the factors that work systematically to counter the forces that often render that sameness simply a formality?

The utility of this framework is demonstrated through a detailed analysis of labour market, income transfer and reproductive policies in four countries. On the whole, the decision to include labour market and reproductive rights is a welcome one, and one consistent with their "autonomy" argument. Yet it is unfortunate that maternity and parental leave and child care policies are discussed in detail in the chapter on labour market policies (chapter 3), thereby largely reducing "reproductive rights" (chapter 5) to women's right to choose *not* to have children. Chapter 5 however concludes by bringing the two aspects together, noting that the liberal form of body rights is marked by the relative absence of comprehensive support in pregnancy and child care, typical of the Scandinavian social democracies.

Perhaps this book's major contribution is to put flesh on the underdeveloped conceptualization of liberal regimes through a systematic comparison of four "liberal" countries. As they

argue, "Liberalism is too often treated simply as a residual category... We attempt to give more substance to liberalism as a set of ideologies and institutional arrangements, built up over time, which shape current patterns of policies, and thereby contribute to understanding substantively the impact of policy liberalism on gender relations, a concern we have as scholars *and as participants in liberal polities*" (p. 38, emphasis added). They succeed admirably in showing how the liberal form of welfare regime admits of variation, across time (classical, social or "new" liberal as well as neo-liberal forms) and place.

Thus the social policy regimes in all four countries can be understood as "liberal" in their substantial reliance on the private sector. At the same time, there are significant differences in the way liberalism has come to be embodied in institutional design. Thus the U.S. represents the strongest blend of classical and neo-liberalism, but this means more than reliance on a combination of market and residual social programs. The American regime increasingly embodies a "gender sameness" model, backed by important civic rights especially in the area of labour market and reproductive policy. This is in marked contrast to Britain, where stronger social rights combine with a "gender difference" logic to shore up the male breadwinner family form. Since the early 1970s, Australia has moved from a regime committed to the male breadwinner to one where "women are treated as independent citizens, but caregiving is still the basis of claims" (p. 196).

The picture of Canada is more nuanced than one usually finds in the comparative policy literature. Thus, the authors argue that there are two institutional forms embedded in Canada's classic social programs (income supports and social services) — a social democratic one, best exemplified by health care, coexists with a predominant liberal form. Canada exhibits the same dualism when it comes to the gender dimension of labour market and social policies. These offer "gender sameness tempered, on the one hand, by an equal opportunity orientation and, on the other, by a commitment to social protection, each of which is circumscribed, to varying degrees, by a commitment to the primacy of the market" (p. 192). One example of the contradictions this produces is the recent decision to extend parental leave entitlement to a full year, in the name of "balancing family and work," while changes to unemployment legislation have rendered many women ineligible and reduced the income replacement rate further for those who do qualify. Over the last decades, moreover, Canadian policy has put increasing emphasis on civil over social rights. This emphasis is most clearly reflected in labour market policies like employment and pay equity. As in the U.S., these policies have been more effective in establishing equality at the elite level, than at the mass level. This is in direct contrast to Britain and Australia whose industrial relations systems have been more successful in reducing the gender wage gap.

The enrichment of the notion of "liberal" welfare regimes represents an important contribution to the comparative analysis of welfare systems. Its significance goes beyond the field of scholarly interest, moreover, as the authors clearly intended. In other words, the notion of "path dependency" is stressed in much of current scholarship. While insightful, a problem arises in that there is a tendency to move from the analysis of such dependencies to prescriptions that leave countries like Canada "trapped" in a liberal future. In demonstrating that liberalism encompasses more than maximizing the space for markets, as well as in bringing contradictions within liberal discourses, O'Connor et al. open up a way of thinking about the potential for change.

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