

Tomasz Inglot, Dorottya Szikra and Cristina Raț: *Mothers, Families, or Children? Family Policy in Poland, Hungary, and Romania, 1945–2020* University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022, pp. 454

Although historical institutionalists have provided important insights into the ‘hybrid’ nature of Central and Eastern European welfare states (Cerami, A., & Vanhuysse, P. (eds.). (2009). *Post-Communist Welfare Pathways: Theorizing Social Policy Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe*. Palgrave MacMillan; Inglot, T. (2008). *Welfare States in East-Central Europe 1919–2004*. Cambridge University Press), the ‘mixing’ of ‘continuity’ and ‘change’ remains undertheorised (pp. 4–11). Specifically, a static approach to agency and ideas has significantly hampered dissecting the ‘seemingly irreconcilable clash between simultaneous, and not mutually exclusive, continuity and change’ (p. 11). Picking up the gauntlet, Inglot, Szikra and Raț deploy a ‘longue duree’ analysis of family policy, seeking specifically new ways of theorising the co-constitutive relationship between agency, structure and contingency (pp. 8–11). Breaking down the umbrella terms of *family policy* and *critical junctures*, the authors use a comparative analysis of Poland, Hungary and Romania to show how governments’ ideational orientations have differential impacts on various policy areas throughout time.

A first crucial point is delineating the scope of the analysis. Specifically, the authors group four major categories of programmes—conventional social insurance cash transfers, family (child) allowances, parental and childcare leaves and benefits, and childcare services (p. 8)—into a *core* cluster, in which ideational layering most likely leads to path dependency, and a *contingent* cluster, which is more frequently subjected to path-departing change during critical junctures (p. 14). On the first level, old benefits, typically pertaining to the

pre-1945 period of welfare state formation, constitute the core cluster (p. 15). Because they embody the ‘historical orientation of welfare’ and benefit from the support of entrenched political actors, the ‘original’ policies are likely to coalesce into a path-dependent core of family policies (p. 16). On a more refined level, actors can proactively differentiate between policies, assigning lower priority to those with an ideational mismatch (pp. 14–16). This prioritisation opens up the contingent cluster to a plethora of path-departing options that range from changes in spending levels and eligibility conditions to more substantive reforms (pp. 16–17). While it is not always fully clear why the original policies appeared in the first place and how some of them matter more than do the others, even within the core cluster, the authors adequately highlight that explaining welfare state changes requires disentangling formal institutional creation from broad ideational debates (Kaufmann, F. X. (2012). *European Foundations of the Welfare-State*. Berghahn Books). This opens up space to analyse the highly distinct roles of both *standard* actors, such as parties and interest groups, and newer agents, such as the EU and emerging transnational networks.

A second major point of the book relates to timing. On a superficial level, the authors unearth new proof for the existing argument that CEE (Central and East European) family policy development follows, at least in broad strokes, the historical pattern found in Western Europe (pp. 31–33). On a deeper level, the authors propose a different understanding of sequencing. Whereas existing studies argue for three distinct critical junctures, Inglot, Szikra and Raț define a longer period of *modernisation*, in which topoi associated primarily with demographic concerns are debated as social questions, underpinning institutional change. Although with a significant lag given the specificities of communist industrialisation, CEE modernisa-

tion, beginning essentially with the Cold War *détente*, was linked to increased female participation in wage labour and subsequent disruptions in family life, just as in Western Europe (p. 32). Essentially, modernisation implies complete population coverage and institutional coordination into a coherent welfare net (p. 103). Concretely, if in Hungary and Poland, modernisation started in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively, ending in both cases around the 1980s, in Romania, it started in the 1970s but only ended in the 1990s. This fluid definition of a critical juncture opens up space to better dissect differential change across core and contingent policy areas, each with its own window of opportunity (such as Europeanisation) and an increasing range of potentially disruptive actors.

All three case studies provide rich historical narratives. Here, I zoom in on the four chapters detailing family policy trajectories in Poland and Hungary. Given that Poland and Hungary are topical cases in the literature, focusing on these respective chapters perfectly highlights the added value of Inglot, Szikra and Rat's arguments on timing and policy change. In the case of Poland, the key ideational trope that delineated the emerging core cluster was a mother orientation, with deep roots in the conservative-nationalistic ideals of the interwar (p. 48; further Inglot, 2008 – see above). This consistent ideational backing meant that the strong system of protection for working women from the 1920s to the 1930s could not be fully eroded, despite the fact that during the 1947–1950 communist consolidation and the ensuing de-Stalinisation, concerns over employment and wage management overshadowed 'developmental goals of family-related benefits' (p. 59). By the 1970s to 1980s, this specific mix of political-economic considerations, coupled with the resurgence of Catholic ideals (p. 82), created a highly specific ideational climate linking demographic concerns to mothers' employment protection.

Against this background, the maternity insurance created from the interwar pregnancy insurance, the unpaid childcare leave entitlement and the overwhelmingly urban kindergarten education of the 1960s coalesced into a core cluster with a clear political constituency (pp. 59–60). Steady political support entailed consistent reforms, comprising mostly programme expansion (pp. 59–60). Conversely, while the emerging 1960s family allowances, birth grants and childcare benefits were linked to wages, they were less tightly interwoven with broader issues of employment and, as such, became part of a contingent cluster in which policymakers faced fewer constraints to expand benefits in any way (p. 63).

The contrast between the path dependency of maternity protection and the path departure of family allowance expenditures became even sharper after 1989 (p. 78). While on the surface, family allowances were the second largest welfare expenditure after pensions, on a deeper level, maternity leave benefits appeared much more fiscally stable and less prone to the sweeping retrenchment of the 1990s (p. 76). Because family allowances were characterised more as wage supplements than decidedly pronatalist welfare interventions, they struggled to attract a stable political coalition, which in turn meant that the shock therapy of the 1990s rendered them politically untenable (pp. 77–78). By contrast, the economic slump of the late 1990s to the early 2000s generally rendered family policy a secondary objective (p. 224) but did not entail a full-on retrenchment of maternity benefits (pp. 80–82). With a highly stable electoral constituency already established since the 1980s, maternity insurance was supported by a political coalition that cut across the general retrenchment ethos (pp. 80–82). While Europeanisation significantly expanded the range of potential actors and their conceptual toolkits (pp. 220, 227), the emerging conservative-liberal duality essentially reinforced the core cluster,

at least until the mid-2010s (pp. 226–227). Given the EU’s jurisdictional limits, emerging new actors, such as transnational non-government organisations and women’s movements, approached the Union as a source of ideas and funding for experiments largely confined to the contingent cluster, in which they typically stood more chances of success (pp. 227–230).

Despite sharing interwar Poland’s family orientation (p. 101), Hungary’s comparatively earlier welfare state construction (Inglot, 2008) entailed a larger basket of policies that came to constitute the core cluster over a longer period of modernisation (p. 100). Against the background of population decline, a pro-family orientation promoting increased cash transfers (social insurance) and childcare services became the key narrative from 1945 to 1952 (p. 103). The sustained narrative on fertility rates and the adjacent focus on stay-at-home motherhood meant that pronatalism essentially implied a family orientation rather than a Polish-style mother orientation predicated primarily on female employment (p. 116). If, in the first stage of modernisation up to the 1960s, this ideational construction was interwoven with communist consolidation and forced industrialisation, in the 1970s, it underpinned a ‘full modernization’, in which the explicit focus on the ‘traditional family’ consolidated the core cluster (p. 111). Concretely, this can be seen in the across-the-board layering (Streeck, W. & Thelen, K. (eds.). (2005). *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*. Oxford University Press) of an array of benefits from family policy and extensive childcare leave to housing benefits and various services from 1973 to 1984 (p. 98). Conversely, rural nurseries, an inheritance of the urban–rural Bismarckian differentiation of the early 20th century, and the 1980s means-tested benefits and tax credits received far less funding and coordination, becoming a narrow contingent cluster (p. 142).

Both the size of the core cluster and its specific ideational backing meant that the 1989 regime change did not, in fact, constitute a path-departing critical juncture (p. 142), which represents a strong addition to the existing scholarly consensus (Inglot, 2008 – see above). In fact, successive Hungarian governments embraced mothers’ temporary withdrawal from the labour force during the early 1990s as a specific form of unemployment mitigation (pp. 124–125). Given this specific historical–economic contingency and the pre-existing ideational and institutional background, even strong players, such as top-level politicians, or large associations, such as the National Association of Large Families, could, even with international backing, only impact policy in the contingent cluster (pp. 135–137). The growing divide in the late 1990s to the early 2000s between the conservative Right and the liberal Left did not fully erode the overarching pro-middle-class ethos but rather revamped it, similar to Poland’s case, towards a bias for working families (pp. 257–258). While this ideational reconsideration barely impacted the core policy—as seen in the upgrading of GYES (Child care leave payment originating in the 1970s) and GYED (Child-care leave payment originating in the 1980s) across the Gyurcsany and Orban governments (pp. 266–267)—it had a much larger scope in the child protection programmes of the contingent cluster, which were diverted away from Roma and non-working families. Even after 2010, EU pressures only helped successive Orban governments expand the core cluster under the aegis of protecting the traditional family (Vanhuysse, P. & Perek-Bialas, J. (2021). *The Political Demography of Missed Opportunity: Population Policies in a Younger but Faster-Aging East Central Europe, 1990–2040*. In A. Goerres & P. Vanhuysse (eds.), *Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change* (pp. 373–399). Palgrave Macmillan). Overall, Inglot, Szikra

and Rat offer an in-depth historical account that adds an important layer to existing path-dependence studies; that is, agency can have a differential impact on policy change over time. By adding a layer of sociological enquiry to historical institutionalism, the authors successfully highlight how actors ascribe varying degrees of political salience to benefits within a given welfare area. This hierarchy creates a core cluster that is prone to inertia or gradual change and a contingent cluster that is more susceptible to radical change. However, the causal mechanisms are not always fully clear. Some ideas cut across the core and contingent clusters in an unsystematic way, and the balance of power between actors is sometimes ambiguous. However, the book does send out a strong message that critical junctures require further dissecting to analyse welfare state change.

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Nancy Folbre: *The Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Systems: An Intersectional Political Economy*
Verso, 2021, 320 pp.

This book aims to explain the origin and development of patriarchal systems by using perspectives and tools from Marxism, feminist theory, institutional economics, game theory and bargaining models. The special focus is the interaction between patriarchy and capitalism, but the book also draws on other collective conflicts and hierarchies along the lines of age or race/ethnicity. In the first half of the book, Folbre introduces the theoretical tools to conceptualise and apply her model of an intersectional political economy. In the second half, she uses such tools to challenge some of the narratives around patriarchal institutions, capitalism, care and the welfare state, and final-

ly points to possible strategies of coordination for a 'feminism of the 99%' (p. 226).

After offering broad insight into her theoretical foundations and the aims of the book in the first chapter, in the second chapter, Folbre zooms in on the definitions of patriarchy and how they can be understood. Folbre argues that explaining patriarchy needs to go beyond biology or a simple theme of male dominance. Rather, she draws on feminist literature to outline three areas of patriarchal political institutions: 'property rights over women and children' (p. 25), 'restrictions on the individual rights of women, children, and sexually non-conforming individuals' (p. 25) and 'rules of remuneration for time, effort, and resources devoted to the care of others, especially dependents' (p. 25). These explanations form the historical context for understanding patriarchal structures and the undervaluation of care work.

The third chapter deals with gender inequality and questions of agency and structure. Marxist approaches argue that gender inequalities in care work benefit capitalists, who aim to keep wages low. Collective interests and pre-capitalist patriarchal structures are largely ignored. The neoclassical argument relies on differences in preferences and on market efficiency. Discrimination is deemed inefficient, leading the free market to drive out those companies that act discriminatorily, for example, in their hiring decisions. Folbre argues that neither approach can deliver a convincing account, as it overlooks the institutional factors influencing bargaining power, earning possibilities in the market and people's ability to enact change. Folbre introduces the concept of collective agency and argues that multiple identities can complicate collective agency.

The fourth chapter traces shortcomings in more classical economic approaches to undervalued or unpriced goods and services. Incomplete property rights regimes over natural capital lead to an under- or un-