



Post-Conflict State-Building and Social Policy

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This paper addresses social policy as part of the post-conflict state-building process. The primary assertion is that fulfilling social welfare responsibilities is a core role of the modern state, and is consequently an integral part of post-conflict state-building. This paper reviews the dependence on the idea and institutions of the state by a variety of actors in the post-conflict setting. Despite the possibilities of post-modern reconfigurations of local and global power and authority, the enterprise of post-conflict reconstruction remains focused on the modern state and its accompanying bureaucracies.

Introduction

This paper addresses social policy as part of the post-conflict state-building process. The primary assertion is that fulfilling social welfare responsibilities is a core role of the modern state, and is consequently an integral part of post-conflict state-building. Even in some of the most challenging environments for post-conflict reconstruction, the building of state institutions remains a priority, if only because the international system remains dependent on states as primary actors. The United Nations and its affiliated programs such as the UN Development Programme, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the World Food Programme, as well as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, continue to rely on state agencies as key partners. Bilateral donors by necessity look to a local state as their counterparts. Peace accords and agreements generally focus on integrating belligerents into newly reconstructed states. And finally, transitional authorities look for new state institutions to emerge, to which they can eventually hand over their political, social, economic and security responsibilities. Despite the possibilities of post-modern reconfigurations of local and global power and authority, the enterprise of post-conflict reconstruction remains focused on the modern state and its accompanying bureaucracies.

Although at its foundation, the state still rests on the traditional idea of the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, successful modern states also require a wide-range of institutions for managing political, social and economic issues. Social policy has come to mean the apparatus of the state designed for managing social issues and includes programs and institutions such as unemployment insurance, direct social assistance to the extremely poor, pension funds for the elderly, disability payments for those unable to work for physical or medical reasons, and health care insurance. Effective states possess the administrative, financial and political capacities to maintain public programs in social policy. Highly developed states,

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such as those Harold Wilensky (2002) refers to as “Rich Democracies,” feature extensive social welfare systems that deliver a wide range of benefits to their citizens.² At first glance the industrial states that make up Wilensky’s “Rich Democracies” may seem far removed from the experience of weak or failed states in crisis or post-conflict states under reconstruction, they hold important lessons, if only in the fact that they are clearly successful cases of state-building and consolidation over time. Underdeveloped and states emerging from violent conflict will not relive the political histories of the industrial world, but it is important to remember that much of those histories were in many ways as violent and tumultuous as those being currently experienced in the Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East and Southeast Europe. The modern states of Western Europe took their current form in a large part from the violence of a half century of war, mass violence, ethnic and religious confrontation, and genocide. While all state-building processes are specific to their individual cases, and cannot be expected to reproduce prior experience in vastly different geographic and historical circumstances, the correlation between strong, democratic states and effective social policy is too important to ignore. Incorporating this correlation to a commitment to state-building projects, either by the international community or as part of a single state’s foreign policy agenda, demands attention to the role of social policy.

Social Policy and State-Building

Social policy is particularly important for state-building in the post-conflict context. Collier and Hoeffler, grounding their argument in a statistical analysis of the effect of aid on economic growth in post-conflict societies, state flatly that assistance aimed toward reforming social policies offers the greatest opportunities in post-conflict reconstruction, outstripping the effects of aid geared toward macroeconomic, structural and governance reform (2004, 1138-1140). I argue that the benefits of effective social policy in post-conflict reconstruction can be found in the functional and normative aspects of the policy.

Functionally, social policy supports economic development by diffusing risk so as to lay the foundation for productive employment and entrepreneurial activity. The idea of social policy as contributing to economic growth as opposed to acting as a drag was under heavy attacks during the ascendancy and dominance of liberal and neo-liberal economic ideology from the 1980s through the late 1990s. In recent years there has been a rediscovery of the Keynesian idea of a positive state role in the economy. In this theory, the state has a responsibility to stabilize the national economy through monetary and fiscal policy (Akerlof 2007, 6). In application, growth in state spending on social programs falls into the category of expansive fiscal policy. Paying more attention to social rather than economic theory, social policy plays an important normative role promoting solidarity and political stability.

The argument for the positive effects of social policy on economic growth may seem to run counter to much of the wisdom on development and state-building that was built up over the past twenty to twenty-five years. However, as the long dominance of economic policies emphasizing liberalization has begun to give way to a more nuanced approach, interest has renewed in the state’s potential role in managing market economies. The economic role of social policy rests on the Keynesian principle that the state could successfully intervene to promote employment and growth (Shaw 1988, 21-23). In short, the state can be effective in

2 Wilensky’s “Rich Democracies” are Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

managing capitalist economies through redistributive and regulatory social institutions. Applying this to state-building in post-conflict situation implies that social policy can function as a foundational aspect to promoting economic reconstruction. As will be discussed below, some international organizations have begun to pay greater attention to social policy issues in their assistance programs. Among donor-state agencies, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has gone the furthest towards incorporating social policy support into its economic development assistance. For example, in a draft policy paper from 2004, social protection and "pro-poor" economic growth were explicitly linked as part of a discussion on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Shepherd, Marcus and Barrientos 2004, 20-23). Attention paid by DFID to the social protection system in the reconstruction of Kosovo provides a second example (Stubbs and Haxhikadrija, 2008).

More broadly, the Global Financial Crisis that began in late 2008 pushed a variety of economic theorists and policy-makers to reconsider Keynesian approaches to state intervention in the economy (see for example: Leijonhufvud 2008; Buitter 2008; Bogle 2008, Berg, et al. 2009). Within the developed world, it appears likely that we have entered a period where more managed approaches to capitalism are increasingly acceptable in the policy arena. In the face of a global downturn, advanced capitalist economies have opted to increase the state role into their economies, even if it results in significant public deficits. For underdeveloped countries with weaker currencies, Keynesian deficit spending is more difficult and international financial assistance may be the only way out of the crisis. Although such assistance usually comes with strict conditionality, the newer aid packages should have a greater mix of policy options. The late October 2008 International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan packages for Hungary and the Ukraine seem to contain the traditional conditionalities of spending reductions and economic orthodoxy. Notably though, on 29 October 2008, the IMF also announced a new Short-Term Liquidity Facility to supply credit to economically healthy states that have been unable to meet their credit needs during the crisis. This new program does not come with the same conditionalities, and may signal some change in the IMF's approach.

A turn towards Keynesian economics and its social policy corollary holds particular potential for post-conflict state-building as one of its strengths is its attention to employment generation. Promoting growth in employment has become almost an article of faith in post-conflict reconstruction. As Woodward (2002, 201) points out, "The critical role of active employment in redirecting behavior and commitments toward peace is so obvious that no one disputes its importance." Social policy is a core part of a functioning labor market and successful efforts at employment generation. An excellent example of this is the experience of post-World War II Western Europe where effective social policies created the conditions for renewed productivity, employment and economic performance. Wilensky (2002, 435) demonstrates this relationship, arguing that countries that invested heavily in social security during the 1950-1974 period of reconstruction, had correspondingly high annual growth per capita, low inflation, and – most importantly in the post-conflict context – low unemployment. Five of his top nine economic performers – West Germany, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria – during this period spent generously on social security (Wilensky 2002, 433-434). This relationship becomes increasingly less pronounced after 1974, but "in no period and for no measure of economic performance is social-security spending a drag" (Wilensky 2002, 483).

Normatively, social policy highlights the relation between the state and citizen, defining the content of the emerging set of citizenship rights. By fulfilling an important aspect of citizenship rights, social policy functions as an integrative mechanism that furthers social solidarity, something which is particularly lacking in many post-conflict settings. As Wilensky

neatly sums up, "The essence of the welfare state is government-protected minimum standards of income, nutrition, health and safety, education and housing assured to every citizen as a social right and not as a charity" (2002, 211). Gøsta Esping-Anderson (1990, 21) links this "proposition that social citizenship constitutes the core idea of a welfare state" to T.H. Marshall (1964, 10), who characterized the development of citizenship as the progressive expansion of a basket of rights and obligations, each falling under the consecutive development of civil, political and social rights. Each set of rights and obligations is supported by its relevant public institutions. Marshall's analysis can be read as a rough parallel for the modern European state-building process. As the state consolidated, the rights of citizens become more concrete through public institutions.

Social policies that are perceived as just and inclusive reinforce stability and foster solidarity because participants recognize themselves as beneficiaries of a just system of social regulation. Recognition of systemic justice within a social order acts as self-reinforcing foundation for stability (Rawls 1971, 490-491). This demands an inclusive state that incorporates all members of the polity as full citizens, regardless of ethnic, religious or other collective identity. Anything less implies exclusion of some group as second-class citizens or what Derek Heater refers to as "gradations of citizenship" (2004, 103). Attention to the dangers of segmented social citizenship is especially relevant for post-conflict state building where ethnic, religious or some other categorical exclusion often contributed to intense polarization and violence. Access to social rights can mark the boundaries of citizenship, and provide definition of inclusion and exclusion. Effective post-conflict state-building seeks to reconstruct more inclusive citizenship and overcome prior cleavages. Post-conflict social policy and public welfare programs should be structured to provide security across the lines of conflict.

The creation of social stabilization and solidarity through social policy, however, is not a guarantee. Configurations of different types of welfare programs result in different outcomes. Policies determine programs, and, in turn, programs largely determine outcomes. Scholars have identified specific policy configurations that have historically resulted in programs that encourage social solidarity. Although these configurations are not necessarily going to be recreated in post-conflict environments, they are important because they provide heuristic models that can be used to analyze the effects of sets of social policy. Esping-Anderson (1990, 27-28) argued that highly decommodifying and universalist social welfare institutions promote a broad sense of solidarity. For Esping-Anderson (1990, 22), decommodification is a core concept that indicates the provision of "a service as a matter of right," "when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market." Alternatively, welfare programs can create stigma, dependency and stratification if they are tightly targeted toward economic or social status (Esping-Anderson 1990, 55). Similarly, programs that differentiate beneficiaries according to collective identity such as an ethnic or religious community can intensify cleavages. Both Titmuss (1974, 30-31) and Esping-Anderson (1990, 26-27) disaggregated social policy systems into three models, and similarly argued that one held greater potential for social integration. Titmuss's models were "residual welfare," "industrial achievement-performance," and "institutional redistributive." Esping-Anderson's were "liberal," "corporatist," and "social-democratic." The residual welfare and the liberal welfare state are both minimalist constructions, where the welfare system is conceived of as a safety net. The industrial achievement-performance and the corporatist models present welfare institutions as part of the economic system, providing benefits based on class or status. Industrial redistributive and social-democratic models are universalist visions of social rights.

These typological models, though limited, can be useful for post-conflict policy makers in

providing a framework for designing and evaluating social programs. At the same time it is important to note that new configurations of social policies are increasingly challenging the old regime types. (See Lendvai and Stubbs 2009 for more radical interpretations of new social policy configurations). Increasingly welfare programs are being bundled differently from the classical categorizations. For states that are undergoing the consolidation process, social policy configurations may emerge that have not been seen in prior experience and a coherent policy regime may not be immediately apparent but will emerge over time. Highly decommodifying, but exclusionary programs may co-exist with those that are universalist, but only weakly decommodifying. For example, in the Kosovo case, the post-conflict pension system is composed of three different tiers, including a universalist basic pension, and two contributory schemes, one mandated and the other optional. Despite the universalism of the basic pension, it is only weakly decommodifying because of its very meager benefits. At the same time, the more generous contributory programs cover only limited numbers of beneficiaries. Despite the variations, it is likely that programs with more generous benefits and greater political support will crowd out poorer, less popular programs. This may not be a surprising development, but it is not less consequential in terms of the generation of popular support for a particular social policy. For practitioners in the field of post-conflict reconstruction, it is important to realize that programs that are universalist and decommodifying will need to be better funded and designed with eye toward building a political constituency in order to guarantee their long term survival.

Criticisms of the role of social policy have also focused on its economic and normative roles. In contrast to theories that social policy is a foundation for a growing economy, traditional economic liberals have argued that social spending reduces productivity and growth. Similarly, contrasting the idea of a social policy as a mechanism for integration and solidarity is the contention that it builds dependence and impedes on human freedoms. Focusing on these critiques, conservative political actors have undertaken sustained efforts to roll back and limit social policy. Despite this, social welfare institutions in the developed world have remained politically popular and, for the most part, intact (Pierson 1994, 2, 164; Wilensky 2002, 223-224). Some types of policies and programs have remained more popular than others over time. Those that bring broad benefits to coherent and large collective actors generate constituencies of political support. Assistance programs targeted towards segments of the population that are difficult to mobilize politically, such as the extremely poor or chronically unemployed, are less likely to retain their political popularity. Social security and public pensions, for example, have maintained strong support, while support for direct assistance to the poor is often much weaker (Hacker 2004, 247; Wilensky 2002, 222). The differing levels of support for different types of social welfare programs relates directly to the issue of post-conflict state-building. If the long-run goal is to establish policies and programs that will endure over time and become core features of the local political economy, then those that generate strong, mobilized constituencies should be appealing policy options. Conversely, policy-makers may instead design programs that will be less likely to generate political support and will be short-lived, or easily transformed through relatively minor administrative adjustments. In the post-conflict situation much of the infrastructure of the state is open for negotiation, including the determination of the type of social welfare regime and the programs that will compose it. The outcome in terms of the social content of citizenship is determined in both the design and details of the implementation of the social policy and programs.

The politics of social policy development

Perhaps the most challenging aspect for social policy development in the post-conflict setting is

its inherent political nature. As already indicated, social policy is a highly variable set of state programs. This points to a difficult aspect of the relationship between state-building and social policy – the policies generally emerge as part of the process of state-formation, or in the post-conflict setting, the process of state re-formation. Ultimately social policy represents bargaining and accommodation between competing political actors, often both internal and external, as they try to define the social rights of citizenship. Historically, the roots of early social policy innovations are deeply embedded in highly contentious political dynamics. In the western European context, political struggles between conservative and progressive political parties, augmented by organized segments of the working and middle classes, and religious or ethnic communities, laid the foundations for later social policies (see Luebbert 1991 for the inter-war period; Mazower 1999 for the war-time period; Judt 2007 for the Post-War period; Esping-Anderson 1990 and Wilensky 2002 for broad historical overviews). As political actors sought to make, remake, capture and transform their states, social rights and social policy were at the core of the confrontations. Political parties, trade unions and other collective actors formed to represent various class, ethnic and religious communities in political struggles to define the distributive social welfare mechanisms of the consolidating states. This process of contention did not always degenerate into political violence, but neither was it always contained within electoral processes. Instead, political contention instead often occurred through popular participation in protests, strikes, and other forms of collective action. On the surface these actions may be seen as destabilizing the state-building process. If democratically managed, however, they can help new states sort through differing political demands and counter-demands, and build a state structure that reflects local preferences.

Again, although the historical experience may seem very far removed from the contemporary problems of post-conflict state-building, it holds important lessons. At the fore is the reality that social policy disputes are classically political in that they involve the distribution of public resources. Most established social welfare institutions are reflective of preferences of local actors that emerge through political contestation. Social policy, like almost all state policy, involves political confrontation. These confrontations are often extremely intense because they involve direct access to the resources necessary for survival. To make matters worse, there is no guarantee that the social policy that emerges will be especially effective on the economic level or will contribute to the restoration of peace. In fact, it is very likely that earlier contention over social policy had been a significant part of the initial conflict. Regardless, social policy decisions that are imposed from the outside have only a limited chance of finding the strong popular support necessary for institutionalization. Institutions and policies formulated through local politics benefit from greater legitimacy and are more sustainable. Given the immediate history of conflict, external mediation is a necessary and potentially challenging component to such policy-making, but the difficulty of the process does not reduce its potential value. In a post-conflict state-building context, it is an uncomfortable realization that one of the most important policy areas may be best dealt with through highly contentious political bargaining by the representative domestic groups. International relief and development organizations have been reluctant to become directly associated with such an obviously politicized dynamic. Despite the risks, the process offers an opportunity in that effective social policy formulated by local political actors can provide a powerful demonstration of the workability of the new post-conflict state.

Global Social Policy (?)

The increasing transnational integration of economic, financial and trade activity over the past

decades has added a new aspect to social policy and the question of emerging states. Since the mid-1990s some theorists have begun to argue that there are the beginnings of a global social policy developing across borders. In particular, Bob Deacon, working with a number of collaborators, including Paul Stubbs and Noémi Lendvai among others, has pushed these concepts the furthest (Deacon 2006, Deacon 2007, Deacon and Stubbs 2007; Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs 1997; Stubbs and Lendvai 2009). The main idea of global social policy is that as the interconnected processes of globalization such as growing international trade and markets, cross-border migration, and environmental transformations continue apace, pressure grows to address the social effects of these phenomena on an international level. Deacon argues, “Global social policy is, by extension, the mechanisms, policies and procedures used by intergovernmental and international organizations, working with other actors to do two things: first influence and guide national social policy and second provide for a supranational or global social policy” (2006, 145). In this sense, global social policy encompasses the efforts by transnational actors to influence policy decisions about social issues within states, as well as those to create social policy institutions that transcend state borders. In practice this would include programs such as the World Bank-IMF Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper approach, as well as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS. The former seeks to influence states through the reform of their economic policy in order to more fully integrate into the global economy, while the latter represents a specific transnational redistribution mechanism.

To a degree, global social policy has existed as a reality since at least the immediate post-World War II period and the founding of the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions. The international system that these agencies form has remained fairly weak in terms of the enforcement of social rights, but it has had a significant effect on both international approaches to social issues, as well as the formation of domestic social policy. This has been true especially for weak and developing states. This influence has grown since the early 1980s when the international financial institutions, through their responses to the debt crisis of the developing world, assumed a greater role in the policy making processes of countries that sought external assistance (Deacon 2007, 27). For the most part, what can be understood as the social policy of the dominant international financial institutions has been firmly within the liberal type of social welfare regimes described above. When there were variations in the international approach, they tended toward more rather than less liberalism. By the 1980s, neo-liberalism was the dominant policy paradigm. By the 1990s even this was surpassed by extreme market-oriented liberal globalization. Assistance from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund were often associated with proscriptions for economic reforms that constrained social policy to a safety net approach, and limited the state’s welfare role.

Paralleling the turn toward Keynesianism, in the past few years has there been a turn toward what could be thought of as a more universalistic social policy at the level that Deacon refers to as supranational. Following from the development of his own work, Deacon argues that at the time of his initial publication on global social policy in 1997 there was little chance for more than a “safety net” approach. In his more recent work however, “[international] prescriptions for national social policy involving safety nets contend with a renewed emphasis on universalism” (2007, 172). For Deacon, the World Bank is too deeply associated with the approaches of the 1980s and 1990s to be accepted as a legitimate promoter of broader, inclusive social policy regimes. He instead identifies trends in other international organizations, including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and surprisingly even the IMF, that indicate efforts to promote social policy that moves beyond safety nets (Deacon 2007, 169-171).

Just as national social policy is deeply embedded within the national political process; global social policy is embedded within the transnational political process. International organizations are only one type of actor in this process. Other types of actors include NGOs, multinational and transnational corporations, collective publics, and states themselves. States play a crucial role, both as the primary sources of the resources for the formulation of the dominant discourses on global social policy, as well as the subjects on which this dominance is played out. Strong, wealthy donor states occupy the former position, while weaker states, including those undergoing state-building occupy the latter. States in the process of reconstruction are particularly sensitive to the development of a global social policy. Dependent on external assistance for financial as well as capacity building assistance, these states have little choice but to respond to the preferences of more powerful donor states and the international institutions that they control. Because of this, the global social policy regime is felt most acutely in weak states under reconstruction that is being guided by international actors. (see Orenstein 2008; Orenstein and Haas 2002, and Deacon and Stubbs 2007 for cases from the east-central European, and southeastern European contexts.)

Conclusion

Social policy is a surprisingly overlooked area of the state-building process. For modern states, providing a guarantee of a minimum of social welfare is a primary role. Successfully rebuilding states after political collapse, civil war or other extreme disruptions means reconstructing the administrative, institutional and professional capacity to deliver social rights to much of the population. It is a vital component to re-building the legitimacy of the government, establishing the necessary conditions for economic activity and ensuring social and political stability. Despite its importance for building strong states that are well connected to their citizens, social policy is often either regulated to a limited focus on particular projects, or left out of the discussion altogether. Where social policy is addressed in a more comprehensive fashion, it is often done by external actors who consciously or unconsciously seek to quarantine the subject from the domestic political process. This resistance by external actors to allowing social policy to become a political issue in the state-building process is founded in the fear that contention will return to violence. Although this may be a well-founded fear, it is imperative for strong social policy to come from local politics. International actors assisting states in their reconstruction process have to take this into account and be prepared to manage a potentially difficult and dangerous political dynamic.

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