

Gøsta Esping-Andersen: *The Incomplete Revolution. Adapting to Women's New Roles*

Cambridge 2009: Polity Press, 214 pp.

As its title suggests, this book is concerned with women's changing roles in society (Chapter 1), the implications of the masculinisation of women's life courses for society at large and especially for patterns of stratification (Chapter 2), and the challenges this development provides for welfare state restructuring (Chapters 3–5 focusing on the design of family policy, early childhood education, and pension reform). The 'revolution' is deemed *incomplete* by Gøsta Esping-Andersen, not so much because in contrast to women's roles those of men have hardly changed. Instead, it is qualified as incomplete because it is mainly women from higher social strata whose roles and aspirations have fundamentally changed, while lower educated women who tend to be married to low income men have remained more traditional in their working and caring behaviour, with the consequence of polarisation dynamics between work-rich (dual career couples) and work-poor households (e.g. single breadwinner families, single parent households, jobless households). Another variant of describing its incompleteness refers to the stalling of the revolution between two ideal-typical equilibria: the traditional arrangement based on 'gender specialisation' (in the Beckerian sense, confining women to the roles of home-makers and carers) and the emerging arrangement based on 'gender equality' (referring in fact to the 'Nordic adult worker model', which is premised on strong involvement of the state and the de-familialisation of care, facilitating continuous lifetime employment of all adults and thus the equal participation of women and men in the labour market). The current situation in many countries is described as an 'unstable equilibrium' that lies in-between these two poles,

one that does not yet allow women to combine motherhood with full-time employment, and in consequence one that results in sub-optimal outcomes such as low fertility rates. Avoiding a pro-natalist stance, the author suggests that the main problem is that many people have fewer children than they desire, although he contends in Chapter 5 that too few babies are also a problem per se for old age dependency ratios.

Over and above the discussions of 'women's new roles' and their ramifications for social inequality, the book embeds the discussion in a broad life-course perspective that goes well beyond what its title suggests. Chapter 4 is chiefly concerned with equal opportunities policy. It first highlights how the growing polarisation between families resulting from increased educational homogamy of married couples hampers the realisation of equal life chances for children from lower social backgrounds. The main argument hinges on the gap in 'parental investment' between more and less highly educated parents, which is predicted to grow further (p. 130) unless we succeed in homogenising the learning milieu among families from different social classes. Advocating early intervention programmes ('what occurs in the pre-school ages is fundamental' p. 113), Esping-Andersen presents empirical evidence from prior research and his own investigation that suggests that early childcare can compensate for the unequal life chances of lower class kids that are due to the lower social capital of their parents (see p. 136). Early childcare, if it follows the Danish model of high-quality full-day care, is presented as a 'win-win policy' (p. 137) as it promotes female employment and earnings as well as better and more equal child outcomes (e.g. educational attainment, cognitive skills).

Chapter 5 then links the discussion of babies (fertility) and social investment (early childcare, efficient investment in the human capital of the future workforce) with

the issue of population ageing. The chapter is illuminating in its emphasis on social inequalities from a life course perspective. It discusses current pension reforms that raise the retirement age in order to reduce old age dependency ratios (counteracting effects of low fertility and greater life expectancy), and points out that such policies will also have the unintended consequence of increased social inequality, due to the fact that higher life expectancy is associated with higher social status (the rich live longer, they have higher pensions that they tend to consume for a greater number of years). A policy that succeeds in securing intergenerational equality (e.g. following the Musgrave rule that divides increasing burdens of pension costs fairly among the active population and the retired), may thus reinforce social inequalities *within* generations (p. 157). The policy remedy that is suggested by the author includes progressive taxation of citizens according to their life expectancy (p. 158) and the linking of the age of retirement to previous life time income (p. 164).

Overall then, the book is an informative and entertaining read. Its major strength is its life-course perspective, which provides the parenthesis that holds the different chapters together and links them in a coherent way. The thread links early childcare policy via the social investment perspective with future old age dependency ratios as well as with equality regarding old age security in the years to come ('pension reform starts with babies'). The issue of women's roles is linked into this debate from an instrumental perspective. Women's employment is deemed important as a means to increase parents' investment into the quality of children. Furthermore, women's involvement in the labour market and their taxes are needed to finance the welfare state (including the growing pension budget) that plays a very central and active role as a provider of childcare and female employment in the propagated Nordic

model. The key to achieving these goals is the public provision of high-quality early childcare, which is shown to foster women's employment and earnings, and at the same time is argued to tackle inequalities in opportunity for children from different social backgrounds that follows from a polarisation between low and high educated couples in terms of parental investment.

The book has attracted ample attention in the research community and has received numerous reviews, most of which focus on its (non-)treatment of gender issues, however. Prominent feminist writers such as Jane Lewis (review in 2010: *International Social Policy*, 39 (3)) and Janet Gornick (review in 2010 *Contemporary Sociology* 39 (6)), comment on the author's open criticism of feminist work and on his neglect of gender as a central dimension of analysis, warning the reader that s/he should 'not expect insightful commentary on the position of women, gender divisions, or policies to further gender equality' (Lewis p. 483). Or as pointed out by Gornick (2010: 699): 'For a book about women's roles, women—and gender equality—are remarkably absent.' From a feminist perspective, the author's position that the 'changing role of men', i.e. a substantial increase in their participation in unpaid domestic work and care that may compensate for the masculinisation of female life courses, is simply an 'unrealistic scenario', is naturally a matter of concern. The book provides some evidence showing that in most countries men's contribution to home production has slightly increased, yet changing relative contributions in the direction of greater equality between the sexes have almost exclusively been driven by the changing behaviour on the part of women (i.e. overall less domestic work is carried out at the household level when the woman works). The book then proceeds on the premise that men's roles are, in essence, 'unchangeable', and thus the decreasing availability of women for home production

and care is (arguably) to be compensated by the state rather than men.

The general message of the book seems to be that the emulation of the 'Danish model' should be the goal for all advanced societies. There seems to be no viable alternative to the adoption of the adult worker model: the lifetime involvement in full-time employment for women and men helps to eradicate child poverty, to foster fertility, to increase fathers' time investment in (the quality of) children, to secure the sustainability of the welfare state, and to decrease the risk of poverty in old age. While there is little doubt regarding these beneficial effects of dual-earner arrangements (and also of the beneficial effect of employment for women's independence), a weakness of the book is its rather unbalanced discussion of the societal implications of the full adoption of the dual-career model, in particular its complete negation of the potentially negative implications of parental full-time employment, that has led to the highest incidence of time stress and work-family conflict among mothers in the Nordic countries, for instance. This is related to the fact that the degree to which gender equality is already achieved in the Nordic countries is overstated. Nordic women's roles have not yet changed 'in revolutionary proportions' either. They continue to do the bulk of caring work, both paid as (public sector) employees as well as unpaid in the home, leading to very high total working hours—a key predictor of time stress and a negative evaluation of work-life balance—and a continued separation between women's and men's work (stratified labour markets).

Moreover, like most feminist writing, the book draws on research only from Western countries. The strong link between women's employment and their gender attitudes that is assumed by the author (p. 50), for instance, is based on research that has focused on the comparison of the classic three worlds of welfare. This link is

much less obvious in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where female employment has traditionally been high, but where attitudes regarding desirable gender roles nevertheless have remained rather traditional. Consideration of the post-communist countries could serve as an interesting point of comparison that would require a more precise definition of the notion of 'degree of completeness of the revolution' that the author uses to compare the situation in different countries. While in Scandinavia the gender equalisation of labour market participation has to some degree coincided with an equalisation of home production, this is much less the case in the post-communist countries. Their evaluation thus strongly depends on the relative weight put on female employment rates as an indicator of gender equality. Moreover, it is an open question whether the interesting research findings presented in this book regarding, for instance, the growing importance of assortative mating, the spectacular increase in childcare time (only) among more highly educated men, the lower survival rate of marriages among low-income couples, the increasingly positive association between women's employment and fertility, to name but a few, also hold in a similar fashion for Central and Eastern Europe or other parts of the world.

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Marta Kahancova: *One Company, Diverse Workplaces: The Social Construction of Employment Practices in Western and Eastern Europe*

London 2010: Palgrave, 263 pp.

There is little doubt that multinational companies are among the most influential, interesting and complex organisations in today's economy and society, and a privileged