Diversity and social welfare

To restrict or include?

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Diversity is, to a greater or lesser extent, a feature of all societies. Originating in the biological sciences, and used initially predominantly in relation to biodiversity – the degree of variation of life forms – the term is now used in many different fields. In the social sciences, diversity discourse emerged from the US minority rights movement in the 1960s, and while its use has been extended from race and ethnicity to include gender and disability it is still mainly associated with ethnicity and migration (Vertovec 2012), the focus of this chapter. Although in the biological sciences there is broad agreement that high levels of biodiversity signify a healthy ecosystem, there is much debate about the extent to which diversity is good for society. In recent times the debate about the relative positives and negatives of diversity has featured within the field of social policy. Both within social policy as a discipline that concerns itself with the study of social issues and their causes and resolutions, and the development of policies aimed at achieving social purposes, the nature, role and impact of diversity are receiving increasing attention. This has particularly been the case over the past 20 years as globalisation has amplified levels of integration in societies through communication, transportation and trade and the speed and scale of population movement has increased.

In particular, concerns about the impact of increasing population diversity have played out around access to social welfare: the arrangements made by states for ‘coping with collective risks and reducing inequality’ (Mau and Burkhardt 2009: 213). Welfare states and the regimes that underpin them are generally associated with the nation state and meeting the needs of those who are seen as both belonging and to be deserving of support. It is possible to trace a connection between fears about increased diversity, immigration control and denial of social rights over a century; for example, in the 1905 Aliens Act in the UK it was intended to deny entry to paupers or criminals – in reality at the time of high levels of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe – who were deemed both ethnically and religiously diverse (Humphries 2004). However, the majority of political attention to diversity, social policy and the welfare state has occurred since the 1950s as migration increasingly became a feature of life in Europe and Black Americans’ demands for equal rights began to attract attention.

Growing political attention to, and policy focus on, diversity and access to social welfare have not been matched in the discipline of social policy. Introducing critical social policy, Fiona Williams (1989) highlighted the neglect of both race and gender and the uncritical acceptance
of assumptions about the breadwinner role, whiteness and the responsibility of culture for unequal outcomes in both the design of social policies and academic analysis of their development, operation and impact. She and several others note the lack of attention paid to diversity in social policy as ‘the welfare state was assumed to be colour blind and so already an engine of equality’ (Fitzpatrick 2005: 299) and the study of ethnicity treated as a specialism (Vickers et al. 2012), neglected in comparative welfare research (Sainsbury 2006) or undertaken only at a local level (Bhopal 2012; Cochrane et al. 2001), thus failing to focus on structural underpinnings of inequality. Some commentators even consider that social policy analysts have compounded the development of racist and sexist social policy by failing to examine power differentials, reifying culture and problematising minorities as being responsible for their own exclusion. While efforts such as equalities legislation in the UK and Civil Rights laws in the USA compel researchers to ensure the use of diverse samples, overly simplistic ideas of ethnicity and biology and associated sampling techniques have over-emphasised biology, particularly in quantitative research, while failing to look at structural and social characteristics and their role in determining social outcomes (Epstein 2008).

Much effort has been made by social policy analysts to categorise social welfare regimes (see Esping-Anderson 1990). Welfare regimes tend to over-simplify the influences on policy development but do provide useful categories for comparing social welfare provision at a national level. While the theory around these regimes neglects diversity and provision for minority groups, the key fault lines around what determines provision, rights based upon need, citizenship or work, provide a basis with which to consider the relationship between diversity and social welfare. Liberal and Conservative regimes offer the lowest levels of provision, often relying on contributions made by those in employment. Such regimes are thought to be the least generous for migrants and minorities who make lower levels of contribution than the general population because of their vulnerability to unemployment or low paid employment (Avato et al. 2010). Social-democratic regimes are based upon the idea of universalism with generous state benefits available based upon citizenship which may not be available to all minorities or migrants despite length of residence. Mediterranean models rely heavily on the extended family for provision of social support, which may be problematic for those whose family live overseas.

Whether rights to welfare are granted to migrants also depends on the immigration policy regime that is operating. Castles and Miller (2009) point to exclusionary, assimilationist and multicultural approaches each with its own set of expectations about the role of migrants in society and the extent to which social needs, sometimes seen as relating specifically to language and culture, should be met by welfare providers. Access to, and outcomes from, social welfare for minority ethnic groups and migrants are argued to be influenced by a combination of national welfare regime and immigration policy regime (Sainsbury 2006) and the moral justifications made by policymakers in introducing and seeking support for associated policies (Dean 2011). There is little work that has considered the interaction between welfare and immigration regimes (see Sainsbury 2006), largely resulting from the general neglect of diversity in welfare research (as already outlined) but also due to the complexity of creating categories and typologies by over-generalising characteristics that are themselves highly complex and variable at regional, national and supra-national levels.

Perhaps the main area of focus for social policy researchers in relation to diversity is that of deservingness. In the USA, Gilens (1996) shows there is a racial dimension to deservingness, with the majority population believing that black people are lazier and less responsible than white people and more likely to be welfare recipients. Meanwhile, with these beliefs being held, support for welfare provision is low and services are restricted for all. In the EU there has been much debate about whether increasing diversity will lead, or has led, to reduced social solidarity.
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The presence of solidarity – the willingness to contribute to welfare systems, providing a safety net for the general population – is said to be critical to the preservation of the welfare state and avoidance of a US type situation. Goodhart (2004) argues that people want to share with those who share their values, while Putnam (2007) argues that trust is critical to solidarity. Without the belief that people are sufficiently similar to ourselves, and equally deserving, it is argued that moral commitment to the welfare state will be undermined. In particular, research has focused on the role of immigration in relation to support for welfare provision. Analyses of the European Social Survey demonstrate that there is considerable evidence to suggest that immigrants are seen as the least deserving of all groups (Van Oorschot 2006). Certainly there are signs of widespread public anxiety about the impact of immigration on public services, with concerns about infectious disease, strain on services and housing and job shortages played out in the media and agitated by emerging new right political parties (Arai 2005). Attitudes to redistribution are mediated by public discourse and politicisation. Carmel and Cerami (2011) point to the emotive language used by both journalists and politicians in relation to policymaking around migration and welfare states, with a ‘siege mentality’ promoted by the media (Schierup et al. 2006: 22).

Yet other evidence shows that, rather than diversity undermining the welfare state, people want to see the emergence of a dual welfare system with immigrants demonstrating a commitment to their new country through gaining employment and seeking naturalisation (Miller 2006). There is no clear evidence that immigration reduces commitment to redistribution (Burgoon et al. 2012) or that perceived religious, ethnic or cultural differences lead to lack of solidarity. Instead it is clear that solidarity can emerge from economic integration and political citizenship (Myles and St-Arnaud 2006). Certainly, experience in Canada, which has enjoyed both increased immigration and an expanding welfare state, provides evidence that increased immigration and diversity do not necessarily undermine welfare states. Canada’s largely contributory welfare system, celebration of immigration and strong naturalisation programme may be explanatory factors (Soroka et al. 2006).

In the past decade, austerity and associated workfare regimes have emerged in many states as they seek to reduce welfare expenditure while a shift to social cohesion promotes a move from social citizenship to civic citizenship, wherein long term migrants have civic and political rights but not full nationality, and different categories of migrants have differential access to welfare (Banting 2000). With the general population prepared to include working migrants and workfare making benefits available to those in need, or to those who have made contributions, in theory it should be possible for migrants to access welfare on the same basis as the general population and for established minorities to have equal access to welfare. However, the increased use of welfare as a tool of restrictionalism has impacted upon access. Several authors have outlined the use of welfare as a tool of restrictionalist migration policy (Bloch 2000; Geddes 2000; Lewis 2003; Sales 2002). Restrictionalism, also labelled welfare chauvinism, emerged from political concern about the availability of benefits acting as an incentive and attracting migrants (Geddes 2000; Home Office, UK 2007) and also that the voting public viewed migrants as scroungers (Law 2009). It has subsequently proliferated in the form of

...internal differentiation of migration types [which] means that the relation of immigrants to the welfare state is internally highly differentiated dependent on their legal/residential status and labour market position.

(Ryner 2000: 67)

A whole range of different measures, including no recourse to public funds for those joining families, the detention of asylum seekers or their accommodation in camps, exclusion of...
unsuccessful asylum seekers from some secondary health care, preventing asylum seekers from accessing employment and exclusion of economic migrants from some benefits, serve as but a few examples of restrictionalism. Law (2009) points to the re-racialisation of welfare, as welfare benefits increasingly have conditions attached to them stating the ineligibility of persons subject to immigration control. In addition, the complexity of regulations and eligibility has put service providers under great pressure and led, it is argued, to those unable to prove their status being excluded from services (Maffia 2008; Mir 2007). Restrictionalism is said to have culminated in poor welfare outcomes for migrants and immigrants experiencing high levels of unemployment, poor housing conditions, low levels of educational attainment and poor health outcomes as exclusion has become tinged by ethnification (Schierup et al. 2006). The FRA (2011) points to differential access to healthcare, particularly for undocumented migrants and failed asylum seekers, contradicting WHO guidance and European Human Rights legislation and the desires of welfare professionals. Such approaches are argued to reduce cost-effectiveness of health services and potentially damage public health, and are evident even in countries such as Sweden with its generous social-democratic welfare regime and multicultural immigration regime.

With civic citizenship all important to belonging and acquiring full access to social welfare and, as we have seen, to acceptance by the general population, naturalisation might be argued to be critical to ensuring that migrants can settle in countries of migration. Yet accessing citizenship has become increasingly difficult as countries raise the bar for those who wish to naturalise. In the last decade eligibility criteria for naturalisation have toughened in many countries (MIPEX 2013) and look set to become increasingly dependent on language ability and income.

While migrants have limited access to social welfare services, which depend upon their immigration and employment status, established minorities who have gained access to citizenship or were born in their country of residence have full access to labour markets and the welfare state, yet poor outcomes are observed in many social policy areas with what Atkin and Chattoo (2007: 378) describe as ‘depressing familiarity’. Analysis of survey data such as the European Social Survey and the US General Social Survey have evidenced poor outcomes in education, health and housing (Craig 2007), higher unemployment, residential segregation and discrimination in access to finance (Ahmad and Craig 2003). Little research has explored how minority groups use services (Arai 2005) and why inequalities exist. It is widely acknowledged that in the early days of migration to Europe social welfare services were colour blind. There is evidence of a lack of recognition of the needs of minority groups in policy and of widespread use of myths about biological characteristics that make some ethnic groups either more or less likely to experience problems or provide social support to each other, thereby sidelinining the state (Chahal 2004). The tendency to blame the victim for poor outcomes – either their culture or perceived biological characteristics – while failing to recognise or question racism, is commonplace (Atkin and Chattoo 2007; Craig 2007).

In countries such as the UK and Sweden multicultural social policies have, at least until recent austerity cuts and the backlash against multiculturalism, been relatively widespread in urban areas. Such approaches, wherein culturally specific services such as interpretation and translation were offered and ethnic minority staff employed (Chahal 2004), were made available on the basis that special services, outside of the mainstream, could help meet the specific needs of minority groups. However services were not universally available. They could only practically be provided where a critical mass of people from one ethnic background was present. Furthermore they did nothing to address the wider structural problems and institutionalised racism that shape access to, and experiences of, key social policy resources: employment, housing, education and health services. Thus, ethnic minority and migrant groups continue to be among the core poverty groups in Europe (Van Oorschot 2006), while Black and Hispanic Americans are three times
more likely to be impoverished than white Americans (NPC 2013). Although many countries have introduced anti-discrimination and race-relations legislation, this tends to operate at local or community levels, and the taken for granted assumptions that lead to discriminatory outcomes combined with the uncritical application of social policy and procedures mean that many problems endure despite repeated initiatives (Vickers et al. 2012).

Minorities and migrants continue to experience poor social policy outcomes, yet they are the main providers of social welfare at both an institutional and a domestic level (Kofman et al. 2000). Much of the labour movement to Europe between the 1950s and the 1970s commenced in response to labour shortages in emerging welfare states, and this migration continues today, with established minority groups continuing to play important roles in the provision of social welfare (Lewis 2003). A clear racialised and gendered division of labour is in evidence, with low paid work almost exclusively undertaken by minorities (Cochrane et al. 2001) and migrants imported as units of labour rather than people with needs of their own (Clarke et al. 2001). Women’s entrance to the labour market in the developed world has seen the shift of domestic caring responsibilities from the home to informally or privately provided child or elder care, much of which is dependent upon female migrant labour working at, or below, minimum wage level (Kofman et al. 2000).

With the gradual realisation that ethnic diversity is a permanent feature of societies in the developed world, a new field of social policy has emerged focusing upon migrant settlement and acculturation and inter-ethnic relations. There has been much academic debate about the nature of integration and the extent to which it is a means of assimilation or encourages social cohesion, the key features (Ager and Strang 2004) or measurements of integration (Phillimore and Goodson 2008), whether it is a process (Bhatia and Ram 2009) and what migrants should integrate into (Hall 1990). In policy terms there appears to be a consensus that both new and old migrants and their descendants should become integrated through being economically active, adopting the mother tongue of their country of migration, adapting to behave in culturally appropriate ways and socially mixing with the mainstream population.

As integration continues to dominate national debates around migration and ethnic diversity, little consideration is given to the incremental approach to integration that occurs when migrants and minorities have different rights according to status and length of residence (Schierup et al. 2006) and minorities fail to achieve their potential. The role of the state or the general population is a much neglected dimension in the debate around integration (Phillimore 2012), where ever more emphasis is placed upon migrants to integrate or build social cohesion with majority communities. Furthermore, as attitudes to migrants and minorities harden amongst the public and politicians, greater emphasis has been placed on welfare professionals to act as gatekeepers. Social workers, doctors and others are increasingly expected to adopt an authoritarian stance and shift from being care-givers to de facto immigration officials obliged to ascertain individuals’ migration status before offering services and to contact the immigration authorities to report identified ‘offenders’ (Duvell and Jordan 2002; Humphries 2004).

In the face of such regimes, minorities and migrants are increasingly turning to the voluntary sector for help, setting up their own voluntary organisations and acting as mediators in their own welfare by establishing services to help themselves and others (FRA 2011; Kofman et al. 2000). Thus, migrant, refugee and community groups have taken a key role in the provision of, or brokering of access to, welfare, providing services with low levels of funding accessed from local, national or supra-national resources (FRA 2011). These organisations have tended to be viewed by welfare professionals as repositories of knowledge about minority communities, and much pressure has been placed on over-stretched small, voluntary or community organisations to meet the needs of growing numbers of migrants and minorities. While there is some evidence that
they are able to meet needs more effectively than core services, they are marginal to policy
development (Chahal 2004), lacking the time, resources and influence to bring their specialist
knowledge to help reshape mainstream social policies based around taken for granted assumptions
that lead to discriminatory outcomes (Phillimore and Goodson 2010; Vickers et al. 2012).

Despite 50 years of migration in Europe, the Black rights movement in the USA, the accep-
tance and celebration of ethnic diversity in Australia and Canada and the recognition of, and in
some cases attempt to meet the needs of, diversity in social policies across the developed world,
extensive ethnic or racial inequalities endure. Although there is no doubt that the politics of
recognition have led to the acknowledgement, and perhaps the simultaneous essentialisation,
of specialist needs (Atkin and Chattoo 2007; Taylor 1994), and there have been improvements
in outcomes for some ethnic groups, it is clear that social policy has failed ethnic, racial and
migrant minorities. As we enter an era of superdiversity, the unresolved problems of the last half
a century are likely to be amplified. The remainder of this chapter will explore some of the
challenges and opportunities that superdiversity has brought for social policy and how they
might be addressed.

Vertovec (2004) coined the term ‘superdiversity’ to describe the emergence of diversity that
supersedes anything experienced before. The key features of superdiversity – its scale, spread,
speed of change, complexity, fragmentation and multi-layering – all represent challenges and
opportunities for social policy provision. Much of the developed, and many developing, coun-
tries are seeing far greater numbers of arrivals, from many more countries than ever before.
Furthermore these new arrivals often come in small groups, do not live in ethnic or country of
origin communities (as has often been the case in earlier migrations), often move around their
country of migration or supra-national region and have different immigration statuses and asso-
ciated rights and entitlements to social welfare. Emergent superdiverse communities are thus not
fixed, less likely than longer-established groups to establish organisations to meet their needs, or
seek to influence policy, and have languages, cultures and social problems that are both novel and
complex (see Phillimore, forthcoming).

The mechanisms employed previously if, and when, social policy providers have sought to
meet the needs of diverse communities – specialist services based around perceived cultural
needs of minorities – are no longer feasible in places like Birmingham, UK (arrivals from 187
countries), Toronto (over 200 ethnic groups) and Sao Paulo (over 100 countries of origin). The
absence of a critical mass of migrants or minorities sharing at least a language and some knowl-
edge of the workings of welfare states means that newcomers lack a source of information about
institutional cultures. With movement and increased transnationality becoming increasingly
common, change rather than stability has become the norm. In the absence of fixedness, welfare
professionals are increasingly expected to police access to the welfare state by understanding and
implementing rights of access to services that are dependent on migration status, while they are
struggling to understand and provide for need (Phillimore 2011). While such transiency and
complexity is particularly an issue in urban escalator areas (Travers et al. 2007) where it is demon-
strated that administrative costs associated with movement are onerous; superdiversity and
change are becoming part of life in smaller urban, and rural, areas.

Governments have attempted to use immigration policy to reduce pressures on social welfare
by toughening entry requirements or increasing welfare restrictionism, but have failed spec-
tacularly and have perhaps even compounded problems around complexity. The ways that we
have traditionally sought to plan welfare services at the local and regional level have depended
upon knowing who resided in those areas, using knowledge based upon previous trends to make
predictions about likely need, seeking to consult service users and designing services accordingly
about their needs. We lack much of this information. It might be argued that previous research
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undertaken by social policy analysts has done little to resolve unequal outcomes perpetuating the problematising of minorities and reinforcing stereotypes (Atkin and Chattoo 2007). In addition, emphasis in social policy on exploring the impacts of migration or ethnicity on social welfare provision or the health outcomes of diverse groups has depended upon over-generalised categories consisting of a handful of ethnic groups, with migrants defined as those born overseas, and a growing category of ‘other’ ethnicity that now makes up 25 per cent of ethnic minorities in some UK cities. These approaches cannot and do not capture the complexity associated with superdiversity and mean that social problems experienced by individuals outside key ethnic groups or along other dimensions are not identified, let alone addressed.

We cannot prevent at national level global forces of movement and change. So we need to plan for change and complexity and to introduce new approaches to understanding the nature of need and creating social policies appropriate for a superdiverse society. The answers to these challenges are not currently available, which offers huge scope for the development of a research agenda bringing together social policy analysts and race, ethnicity and migration researchers. A key starting point is changing ethnic monitoring systems, which were designed before the emergence of superdiversity, to include data about key variables such as country of origin, immigration status and language. Collecting data will help us to understand which combinations of variables are important in influencing outcomes and will allow us to target limited resources. Qualitative research examining why outcomes are poor is also necessary. This will need to concentrate on variables associated with poor outcomes and will require a shift from approaches focusing on ethnicity to perhaps those examining experiences of locations, newness, transiency or status, or combinations of those or other variables. A clear priority is to understand what works in achieving equitable social welfare outcomes. There is a need for comparative research looking at the governance of immigration, diversity and social policy in countries with more/less favourable outcomes, possibly using welfare and migration regimes to develop a conceptual framework. Also important is research that focuses on the micro level to examine the processes through which migrants and minorities as agents secure access to welfare across the sectoral boundaries (public/private/third) within, but not between, which social policy analysis is generally undertaken, and to look at the ways individuals use cross-sector hybrids in conjunction with informal, transnational and virtual provision. Much could be learned from exploring the strategies adopted by migrants and minorities to help shape provision to meet their needs and those of the general population better. Given that inequality in access to social welfare is experienced across the globe and has sustained for decades, perhaps the time has come to re-imagine completely social policy and models of welfare delivery so we can better meet the needs of all in an era of mobility and change.

References


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