

Social Policies and Statehood in Argentina and Brazil

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Abstract:

Departing from Gramscian and institutionalist perspectives on Latin American welfare regimes, we will compare the development of social policies in Argentina and Brazil since the 1930s. The main focus of the article is on the liberal transformations occurring in the 1980s and 1990s and the recent changes since 2002. Special attention will be given to the social dynamics leading to newly emerging forms of welfare policies and their effect on the "strategic selectivities" of state institutions in the semi-periphery. Particular emphasis will be placed on both the universalism vs. targeting debate and on pacification of popular protest via "passive revolutions".

Introduction

In this paper we will reflect on ongoing changes concerning the role of the state in relation to economic and social policies in the semi-periphery, where the grade of autonomy for domestic political decision-making is higher than in the periphery. As a result, there is more room for manoeuvre for autonomous decisions. Brazil and Argentina are selected as case studies, as they represent the paradigmatic cases for semi-peripheral countries in Latin America. Both are marked by “structural heterogeneity” (Pinto 1970; Rodríguez 1998) – typical for peripheral countries, where a productive sector of the economy coexists with a much less productive sector where sub-employment prevails. This historical legacy continues to exist in both cases, as large parts of the rural population and urban informal workers form the marginalized “superfluous” sectors of society (Quijano 1974; Enriques 2007). The focus of this paper will not be semi-peripheral state-building and statehood in a general sense (on this issue: Evers 1977; Leftwich 1994; Schlichte 2005; Castillo 2006; Heigl 2007; Becker 2008) but on social policies within the context of the political economies of Argentina and Brazil.¹

In line with Institutionalist approaches towards the political economy of welfare regimes (Seekings/Nattrass 2005; Haggard/Kaufmann 2008), we will analyze the interplay of social and economic policies within the global political economy. Compared to other approaches for the analysis of social policies (Esping-Andersen 1990; Mesa-Lago/Bertranou 1998; Gough/Wood 2004), we will therefore cover a wider range of policies than the core domain of social security systems. As a result, social policies are treated as part of a range of redistributive measures including taxation, labour-related and employment-related institutions. These factors are associated with economic policies in the context of the global political economy, which decisively influences developments in semi-peripheral economies.

Nevertheless, we will go into further detail concerning discussions on social policies and welfare regimes, referring to the pronounced discussion on different styles of welfare policies in the OECD-countries since the publication of Esping-Andersen’s seminal work on “the three worlds of welfare capitalism” (Esping-Andersen 1990). With his ideal types of (1) liberal, (2) conservative and (3) social-democratic welfare state regimes he further refined the debate on universal vs. residual welfare regimes.² Nevertheless, the latter debate was at centre-stage during the recent phase of liberal reforms, where targeting was believed to lead towards more equitable results (Mkandawire 2005; Mesa-Lago 2008). The main argument in favour of targeting has been that, contrary to universalist systems, which redistribute wealth to the middle classes, the new emphasis should be on poverty reduction. Thus, social policies should only be directed towards the “deserving poor” who pass the criteria for government aid. Therefore, the argument to increase equity of welfare regimes has been based on the assumptions that (1) welfare regimes are of a rather conservative

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² Interesting works concerning the periphery have been produced by Huber (Huber 2002) and Wood and Gough (2006), who developed the notions of “informal security regimes” and “insecurity regimes”, which form different social security systems than the European-style welfare regimes.

character and (2) that public spending should be reduced or re-directed towards debt repayment. The last argument was especially viable for crisis-ridden peripheral countries from the 1980s onwards. Interestingly, the transformations of the welfare system tackled the (unachievable) separation of private and public realms in new ways, with liberal reforms leading to a conservative welfare state model (Allmendinger/Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2000). Similar to the classic liberal approach towards social policies between the 17th and the 19th centuries (Dean 1991), the “deserving poor” are separated from the “non-deserving delinquents” and social obligations are mainly fulfilled by private actors. Philanthropists should give pittance to the “deserving poor”, who should in return be grateful. These developments go against the tide of the 20th century, when “social citizenship” (Marshall 1950) and the notion of social rights were at centre-stage. This debate around citizenship has also been important in Latin America (Alvarez et al. 1998). As a result we will refer to the categories of social rights vs. philanthropy, assistencialism and clientelism. Concerning the gender dimension, we will place particular emphasis on the influence that the male-breadwinner family model (Eichler/Lewis 1999; Sainsbury 1999) has had on social policy.

The employed Institutional approach rests on the assumption of path dependency (i.e. political transformations have to occur within historically established paths) leading to specific configurations of institutionalized compromises (Thelen 1999; Ghezzi/Mingione 2007). While this approach assumes gradual and steady change, major changes and transformations do occur. In line with the strategic relational approach (SRA; see Jessop 2007) we treat these changes as highly dependent on societal forces and conjunctural moments. Therefore, social (class) relations underlying institutional developments form a vital feature (Korpi 1983; Mesa-Lago/Bertranou 1998) and will be grasped with conjunctural analysis (Fiori 1995; Soto/Lomelí 1995; Souza 2002). As a result, the historical development plays a central part in our analysis. Concerning analytical categories, we will refer to the Gramscian notion of “passive revolution” (Gramsci 1971: 106-114; 1988: 246-274; Buci-Glucksmann 1979; Sassoon 1982; Coutinho/Teixeira 2003; Morton 2003; Vianna 2007) for the understanding of the “strategic selectivities” (Jessop 1990; 2002; 2007) in social policies. According to Jessop (2002: 40),

[b]y strategic selectivity, [we] understand the ways in which the state, understood as a social ensemble, has a specific differential impact on the ability of the various political forces to pursue particular interests and strategies in specific spatio-temporal contexts through their access to and/or control over given state capacities – capacities that always depend for their effectiveness on links to forces and powers that exist and operate beyond the state’s formal boundaries.

The “passive revolution” refers to forms of “conservative modernization”, where emancipatory movements are co-opted by powerful groups with access to state power and a “revolution” is made from above. This is perhaps best expressed in Tancredi’s phrase in Lampedusa’s “Il Gattopardo” to his uncle, duke Don Fabrizio, when he legitimizes himself for participating in Garibaldi’s liberal revolution: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change”. Therefore, the “passive revolution” is useful when describing societal change, which especially occurs in critical junctures (Capoccia/Kelemen 2007), and during which institutional settings change more rapidly while social forces cease to accept the *status quo*.

These critical junctures that define periods are normally linked to crises with varying grades of impact. We derive the resulting periodization for Latin America from Dieter Boris (2001; 2007), differentiating between (1) colonization and export-orientation, (2) import substituting industrialization oriented towards domestic markets, (3) neoliberalism, and (4) current processes of re-orientation.

Argentina

Argentina's relative prosperity at the turn of the century

Due to the export of wool, wheat, and meat, Argentina was intensively involved in the world market early on. As a result, it had a notable number of wage labour earlier than other Latin American countries. With the exception of educational politics and some hygienic measures, there were nearly no social policies until 1930. This was due to the lack of collective social-political actors organized to fight for the interests of the working class and the poor. The only workers granted the benefit of retirement and pension funds were the essential state employees – military, teachers and administrative representatives - as their loyalty was considered very important (Soldano/Andrenacci 2006:55). In Argentina, some upper-class philanthropic organizations as well as the church built and administrated hospitals, sometimes financed by the state, but without any control or systematic resource management.

Prosperous and relatively wealthy – Buenos Aires had a better communication infrastructure than Paris or London in the end of the 1920s, (Halperín Donghi 1996:19) Argentina attracted 6.4 million immigrants between 1856 and 1932, mainly from Europe. In contrast to Brazil, the country experienced less structural heterogeneity and its social inequalities were less pronounced. With slavery-based work playing a smaller role in Argentina, the differing patterns of economic development in this early phase helped differentiate these two countries in terms of social structure.

Import substitution: the era of construction and containment of welfare

The world economic crisis of 1929/30 instigated a rapid decline in exports and a reduction of importation capacity. In turn, the state reacted by dramatically reducing its expenditures (Sommavilla 1996: 52ff.). Argentina fell into a deep recession, accompanied by unemployment and a significant rise in political power struggles. The military regimes of the 1930s not only promoted the export of agrarian products but also extended the internal market and nationalized many enterprises. For example, the oil company YPF and public transportation - most notably, the railway – were all nationalized. As industries, and therefore the wage-earning population, began growing rapidly in the years following the economic crisis, an important change in social structure started to occur. (Rapoport 2008: 271).

These changes in the social structure of Argentinan society made it possible for Peronism to emerge as a strong political force with reformist, populist and semi-fascist tendencies. Having its social basis in the working class and the urban poor, Peronism managed to “peronize” the labour movement by uniting and strengthening

the conformist unions. The important communist and anarchist unions were prohibited (Boris/Hiedl 1978). On the one hand the ruling class perceived Peronism as a threat because it was able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people and the peronist party had won every free election up until 1983. On the other hand it was the only actor able to channel the demands of the masses and to put a stop to the strikes and therefore Peronism was an important ally.

The Peronist state functioned as a mediator in the conflict between labour and capital, able to favour the interests of both. This was possible due to special circumstances related to intensification of Import Substitution Policies (Cardoso/Faletto 1976:160f). During the first peronist government, wages and social expenditure increased strongly, which was possible due to massive economic growth, the rise of export tariffs and measures such as the nationalization of the Central Bank. Probably the increase of real wages was the main redistributive form of the classical social policy, although other measures were developed in the field of social policy (Soldano/Andrenacci 2006: 62f.). Although the interests of industrial bourgeoisie and unionized formal workers had a privileged access to the Peronist state because of its specific strategical selectivity, the first Peronist government was able to include the less qualified workers as well as to reduce the wage differences. When Juan Domingo Péron came to office, first as the Ministry of Labour in 1943 and afterwards as President, measures of social policy and social security were introduced, that went beyond the achievements in many other Latin American countries: Minimum wages were established in outwork and food industries with the effect that the gap between male and female wages decreased in these sectors from 40% to 20% (45% of the industrial working force at this time were women). In the textile industry equal payment for women and men was introduced (Bauer 1990: 50). In 1944 working conditions of rural workers were improved at the expense of the landowning class (Rapoport 2008: 354).

The strength and importance of peronist politics is rooted in these improvements in everyday life as well as in its identity-moulding mobilization - especially for the poor - which was to characterize Argentina for decades. However these progressive moments of social improvement were carried out in a very paternalistic and benevolent way, because semi-autonomous foundations such as the Evita Foundation responsible for more than half of all social policy measures in the 1950s. Rooted in the philanthropist tradition, these institutions did not promote social rights but instead mainly served to strengthen peronist loyalties (Katz 2004:163). This period framed the demands of the Argentinan labour movement and its form of articulation for many years to come. It also set the frame for economic and social policies for years: state authoritarianism combined with expanding social programs. So one could conclude that although Peronism mobilized with the notion of social universal rights, assistentialism and philanthropy did not disappear but were common features in efforts to "help the poor". Moreover Peronism established in health one universalist system for "citizens" and promoted at the same time the extension of special health plans (*obras sociales*) considered as "workers rights" (Danani 2003: 228).

Social provision was organized according to occupation of the head of the household, which normally was considered to be male. Due to this characteristic Argentina could be seen as a conservative-corporatist welfare state within the classification of Esping-Anderson, despite the lack of an unemployment insurance system (Cortes/Kessler w.y.:3f) However one should not forget the role of structural heterogeneity, as due to the lack of formal work contracts approx. one third of the

population has never been included into the insurance systems - not even in the sometimes retrospectively glorified golden age of welfare states.

In the decade of instability (1955-66) following the overthrow of Peronism, wages were decreased and state spending for health, education and housing was reduced. As a result, social protest increased and the intensification of social conflicts and strikes prevented more wage cuts in the period of dictatorship of General Onganía (1966-70); even through it was a period of economic instability. In the search for social cohesion, health plans were institutionalized with management responsibilities given to the unions. However, through a combination of massive repression, which culminated in the disappearance of 30,000 persons and the collaboration of the unions, the last Argentinian military dictatorship (1976-1983) succeeded in implementing redistributive policy measures that were detrimental to the wage earning population and the poor. In 1976 real wages fell by 37 per cent and by 1983 the proportion of the wage earning population decreased to 27% until 1983 - in 1955 it has been 50% (Rapoport 2008: 676).

Argentina's defeat in the Malvinas War, economic stagnation, increasing strikes and the intensification of human rights movements, especially the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, caused the end of the military dictatorship. The candidate of the UCR Ricardo Alfonsín won the first democratic election. Economic problems increased as the military dictatorship had brought the country seriously into debt, which continued growing because of the rising interest rates after the breakdown of the Bretton-Woods-System, leading into the debt crisis. Inflation increased and finally reached nearly 5,000 per cent. Budget deficits, which became more critical as a result of the debt crisis in the 1980s, were used as the main argument to cut funding of social policy, which led to the decreasing quality of social services and the avoidance of many labour protection laws (Cortés 2007:5). But the complex dynamic of social forces and their interests during the transition time prevented any type of reforms with structural effects.

In summary: The extension of social policies was only implemented during a short phase of the first Peronist government, especially in the years from 1945 to 1950. The constant situation of economic crisis was always used as an argument for downsizing the social system – but depending on the societal forces this was not always possible. The various authoritarian governments tried to minimize the strength of the unions and the income of the lower classes but many forms of social policy, introduced by the first peronist government, had been consolidated in this time because the dictatorships did not have an alternative model of social policy (Soldano/Andrenacci 2006: 66f.).

Cuts in social services and precarization of labour relations in the 1990ies

After winning the elections in 1989 the government of the Peronist Carlos Menem (1989-99) turned to neoliberal policies – despite neglecting their main promises from the electoral campaign. This turn was only possible due to the massive social, political and economic crisis caused by inflation of up to 5.000%, leading to a critical juncture. As he managed to stop inflation in 1989, poverty rates fell (temporarily) and the economy started growing again. These policies led to a broad support from the business community, middle classes and poor people. However at the same time

subsidies were cut, interest rates for small and medium-scale business increased and domestic products could not compete with imported products, as tariffs fell and the Peso was overvalued. This caused over 24,000 factory closures, leading to 600,000 lost jobs (Magnani 2003: 37). Due to the privatization of public enterprises, another 600,000 jobs were lost. In the country-side land was concentrated in fewer hands: Between 1992 and 1999 the number of farms was reduced by 32 per cent. The prices of agricultural products fell, access to credit was restricted and a big agro-industry, mainly cultivating soya, emerged, dominated by five big enterprises (Svampa 2005:116).

Compared to other Latin American countries, dramatic cutbacks in labour rights and far reaching privatization were not flanked by compensatory social policy measures (as for example in Mexico or Bolivia). The percentage of social expenditure of the GDP was lower in 1991-1994 than in the 1980s and in 1996 it was reduced again. These cuts in social services were made possible by transferring costs, especially for health and education to provinces and municipalities. However decentralization was not accompanied by the transfer of the according financial resources and therefore Provinces and Municipalities began to face serious financial problems (Cortés 2007: 6ff). In 1995 tuition fees were allowed and public hospitals were asked to claim co-payments from all non-poor people.

In 1993, pension funds were partly privatized and the access criteria was tightened to 30 years of minimum contribution, which was especially unfavourable for women and those who were temporarily unemployed or informal sector workers (Sottoli 1999:139ff). In 1993 the *obras sociales* were pushed into competition, which led to an increasing gap between poorer and richer *obras sociales*, resulting in the poorer ones offering poorer services. The percentage of precarious workers grew from 14,9% (1980) to 23,9% (1980) up to 33,6% (1999) in Great Buenos Aires (Lindenboim 2004: 26ff). All types of work were precarized – even that of state employees, but the biggest increase took place in the highly qualified segment of the work force.

In the 1990s general tendencies concerning social policies can be described as (1) the privatization (or opening of security models in health and pensions to private and especially transnational capital) and (2) focalization of state-provided services (Grassi/Alayón 2005: 121). Many of small-scale targeting programs for young people, mothers with small children, handicapped persons, etc. emerged, but nearly without any coordination between them (Acuña et al. 2002: 22ff.). This marked a change in the conceptualization of social policies based on neoliberal thinking: While political work was professionalized, administration was decentralized and social measures focalized (Svampa 2005: 184). But the social programmes were not able to satisfy the growing necessities resulting from precarization, privatization and growing unemployment. More and more NGOs began working in poor areas, many of them financed by international organizations, especially the World Bank (Luna 1996: 178ff.). Accompanied by a discourse of empowerment and participation this focalized aid was mainly intended to strengthen opportunities within the (labour) market – but the labour market was in deep crisis. As a consequence of these programs clientelist relations, loyalty and dependency to local authorities rose, weakening mobilization power and causing political apathy – as long as the local authorities are conform (Wolff 2005: 64). The formerly precariously universal social services for all citizens became nearly a residual category – the public system started offering low quality services focalized to the poor (Danani 2003: 228).

Neoliberal Policy changed the structure of society in a decisive way. Inequality rose rapidly: The Gini-coefficient grew from 0.385 (1980) surpassing 0.451 (1991) to 0.492 (in 1997). In May 2002 it reached its peak value of 0.534 (Minujín et al. 2007:107). The number of unemployed persons grew by 900% between 1975 and 2002 and their percentage of the labour force went from 3,4 % to 21,5 %. The only dynamic sector with an absolute increase in jobs was the informal sector: About 20% of jobs belonged to the informal sector in 1975, by 2002 it was 32 per cent. Union affiliation fell in the same time from 37 per cent (1975) to 22 per cent (2004) (Palomino 2005: 5). Traditionally, social inequality has been relatively low in Argentina compared to other Latin American countries, which can be explained by the specific social structure (lack of peasantry, predominance of urban population, strong development of middle classes, presence of unions in the whole country) (Laclau 1979: 167f). In the 1990s, inequality rose dramatically, large parts of the middle classes came to be the new poor. The number of people in precarious living conditions in the growing slums of Buenos Aires and the surrounding area exploded and in the country-side poverty also grew.

“In conclusion: social policy is working more and more with assistencialist and philanthropic logic that have as a subject no one other than the unprotected worker, really or potentially poor. This corresponds with a maximal mercantilization of the working force after destroying the institutions that regulated its use and protected the workers” (Grassi/Alayón 2005: 125, own translation).

The declared aim of economic and job growth which was used to legitimate the flexibilization of labour relations and the drastic cut-offs in social standards was not reached at all. Economic growth achieved punctually high rates (12% in 1991/2 and 6% in 1993/4) but also fell to -2% in 1995. After recuperating in 1996/7 to 7% growth, Argentina slid into recession. Unstable working conditions, decreasing wages, growing inequality and the erosion of welfare were part of it. The continuation of the dollar parity led to the deepest Argentine crisis ever (Becker 2008). GDP fell by more than 20 per cent by 2002, so that at the end of 2001, the Peso-Dollar parity had to be given up, devaluating the Peso by two thirds. More than 55% of the population was poor in this moment and misery prevailed to an extent never before known in Argentina (Campione 2003: 90f.). The currency, financial and economic crisis caused a social and political crisis in which four presidents were forced to resign during the span of one month. Normal life was paralyzed – protests, gatherings, road blocks, looting of supermarkets and a wave of social solidarization characterized the turbulent phase from October 2001 to at least the middle of 2002 (Pereyra 2003).

Cooptation of the protest through economic growth, social plans and altered discourse

2001 and 2002 figure as a critical juncture in Argentina`s history when structural changes would have been possible. Some changes can be observed, but we will argue that the dominant tendency was the cooptation of protest in the form of a “passive revolution” that did not overcome but modified the paradigms of social and economic policies. Protest calmed down by the end of 2002, social solidarity decreased. The interim-president Eduardo Duhalde and from 2003 onwards Néstor Kirchner managed to gain surprisingly high popularity – after being a nearly unknown presidential candidate, Kirchner gained 60-70% of the public sympathy (Levitsky

2001: 152ff). This phenomenon can be explained, first because the government managed to rebuild (bourgeois) law and order, while the economy grew by 8% per year and therefore business circles became fans of Kirchner (Petras 2004), although he (re-) fixed prices for electricity, water and some basic food. These classical peronist measures were taboo in the 1990s – and still are in neoliberal thinking. Kirchner managed to integrate demands of social movements in the areas of human rights, poverty reduction and unemployment as well as not to obey the International Monetary Fund. These demands were translated partly to government orientations which invited the less radical social movements to participate in a dialogue for the first time. The counterpart of this cooptation of some social movements was the repression of the more radical movements (Boris/Tittor 2006: 58ff.).

Between 2004 and 2007 there were many nominal high collective wage agreements with pay rises of about 20% in the formal sector – which mostly did not recover the losses of the 1990s. Numerous labour conflicts of non-unionist workers occurred and were responded to with harsh repression (Schulten 2006). Official poverty rates fell from 54,3% in October 2002 to 17,8% in the first half of 2008, official unemployment went down from 18,3% in October 2001 to 7,3% by the end of 2008 (<http://www.indec.mecon.ar/> 1.3.2009).

The *Piquetero*-Movement, a strong unemployment movement emerging in the late 1990s and reaching its peak in 2002, demanding jobs and social plans, succeeded to be responsible for the management of 10% of the *Planes Trabajar* (lit. Working plans). But the other 90% of the plans continued to be distributed by the local peronist leaders who ever since and especially during the 1990s had played an important role in the world of urban poor (Auyero 2001; Levitsky 2001). During the de la Rúa government many of the *piquetero* leaders mobilized against the government. But with the expansion of the plans – carried out by a peronist government – many of this assistentialist structures were reinforced. The working plans are a special form of Workfare-Programs (on the concept: Peck 2001), tying the income of 150 *Peso* to the obligation of carrying out community work. In 1993, the first program of this type, financed by the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank had 26,000 beneficiaries. By 2002, 1.4 Million people received money from *planes trabajar* (Giraudy 2007: 34).

The successor program *Jefes y Jefas de Hogar* (lit. head of the household) reached, 24.5% of the poor households (or nearly two million households) at its peak point in 2003. They received 150 *Pesos* from the program – which is less than half the minimum wage and hardly helped to alleviate poverty.

„The program introduced the notion of universal rights in the official transcripts, while the magnitude of its coverage was higher than other preceding targeted programs. But the announced rights` perspective was not necessarily present in the implementation of the plan; there were several exclusionary clauses (beneficiaries had to be heads of households with children under 18 in households without income); beneficiaries had to comply with different obligations (schooling and vaccination of children; minimum hours of work or training) to receive the benefits. In other words it defined the ‘deserving’ poor rather than awarding rights“ (Cortes/Kessler w.y.: 7)

In 2002 63% of the beneficiaries of the program were women; by 2006 up to 72% were female, as many men found new (normally low paid) jobs, while a lot of women returned to domestic work, although more than 60% of the women were looking for a

job. The program does not only „not help to remove the principal gender obstacles to female full employment, but it also consolidates the already existing inequities“ (Rodríguez Enriquez 2007: 15).

While *Planes Trabajar* and the program *Jefes y Jefas de Hogar* were reduced, subsidies for micro-credit-programs and small cooperatives were amplified. Many social movements had built up a total of more than 20.000 micro-enterprises in the form of cooperatives. Those persons employed there do not appear in the unemployed statistic and earn 150 Pesos per month. Margot Geiger (2006) sums up:

“The demand of the unemployed for social inclusion was a demand to the state, a demand to universalize social plans, but now the state gives subsidies to “participate” by building up self-organized competitive micro-enterprises. Flops are interpreted again as failures of individual persons” (own translation).

About 180 companies were occupied mainly between 2002 and 2004 by the workers to prevent unemployment and poverty at the time when the owner would otherwise have declared bankruptcy. But to work in these recovered companies gained through long and intense struggles and by the resistance of eviction attempts, often meant to continue in conditions of the working poor; as fewer people than before are employed, only 21% have pension funds, 49% an *obra social* (Rebón 2005: 39). Initiatives to expropriate the old owner or to guarantee the continuation of the projects, legalization or even subsidies were often delayed or negated, although there has been institutionalized financial help for cooperatives, mainly in the form of micro-credits. The expansion of the assistentialist policy in 2002 and 2003 made it possible to maintain the existing split inside of the heterogeneous *Piquetero*-Movement and the Movement of Recovered Firms and to deepen their differences. While many *Piquetero*-Representatives took local posts and administration jobs and gained funding for “their” movements, the movements that continued to mobilize and to criticize the government and the system did not get money from the state for their projects and suffered repression.

In summary, the social policy of Kirchner was based on cooptation and pacification of the protest movements. It was based on an assistentialist logic rather than on the principle of universalized social rights. Falling poverty and unemployment rates were mostly a product of economic growth. Trying to force the role of the state in creating employment and economic growth in a neo-developmental and neo-keynesian way some social reforms were launched. E.g. in November 2008 the government of Christina Fernandez de Kirchner (governing Argentina since December 2007) re-nationalized pension funds to evade losses due to the world financial and economic crisis. There are few steps to de-precarize state employees effectively. Some privatizations of the 1990s were rolled back, but in a lot of fields, e.g. the public railway system, there is still no public intent to recover the former size. These measures, as well as the stimulation of cooperatives and price fixings are small modifications in an economic and social policy that shows more continuation than change.

Brazil

Colonial heritage: slavery and patrimonialism as fundamentals of early statehood

To grasp the fundamental historical heritage of the Brazilian distributional regime, the post-colonial inheritances of slavery³ and patrimonialism have to be considered as well as its subaltern position in the international system (Furtado 1974). The growth path was oriented towards exportation of raw materials considered luxury goods in Europe (sugar cane, gold, coffee) which meant that the domestic market never developed and the main source of labour supply were African slaves. The state was weak concerning distributional measures which stemmed from high autonomy for the local landowners, who were local patriarchs and dependent upon the goodwill of the emperor at the same time, thus representing a classic example of a patrimonial state (Roett 1999; Faoro 2001; Thomas/Weber 2004). Apart from the fragmented structure of schools, there were virtually no government or social welfare benefits until the 1920s. Occasionally there were philanthropic welfare benefits from large landowners or the church (Pochmann 2007: 86f.). Thus, the few philanthropic and assistencialistic private social interventions during colonial regime fortified the patrimonial character of the state.

Import substitution, positivism, populism and military dictatorship

A new era began in 1930 with a military coup and the subsequent seizure of power by Getúlio Vargas. Due to the global economic crisis, exporting was nearly impossible and a domestic market had to be developed to cope with the crises which led to a critical juncture. The subsequent era of import substituting industrialization (ISI – 1930-1980s) was a positivist "modernization from above" where an industrial national bourgeoisie was promoted at the expense of large landowners. Heavy state investment was used to promote industrialization for the inward-oriented growth strategy. The thereby arising industrial proletariat had to be integrated into the regime which was accomplished by granting worker's rights and state social policy (D'Araujo 2003; Iamamoto/Carvalho 2008). This process can be interpreted as a "conservative modernization" (Becker 2008: 92ff.) or – in Gramscian terms (Gramsci 1971: 118ff.) – as a "passive revolution" (Coutinho 2007: 196ff.): The "dangerous groups", such as the Brazilian workers influenced by anarchist, socialist and communist European migrants, had to be passified by material concessions to prevent them from striking or even call the system into question. Therefore, there was a remarkable tendency towards nationalization and massification of social benefits in the 1930s, which also served the interests of industrialists who pressed for the socialization of reproduction costs. In the wake of these developments the tax base of the Brazilian government increased and government-defined minimum wages (1940 introduced) were

³ Brazil only abolished slavery in 1888 and thereafter, as access to land was denied for the former slaves, they were deprived of the opportunity for self-sufficiency. So they were forced to work - often to their former owners, and at prices below the level of subsistence (Novy 2001: 91). The exclusion of the formerly enslaved Afro-Brazilians was tightened by state migration policy, as they were not integrated into the emerging dynamic industries where the main labour supply was European and some Asian migrants.

increasingly important. These social rights covered only the formally employed - mostly male - urban industrial proletariat, while the informal and agricultural workers - the vast majority of the wage-dependent population - and the majority of women remained excluded (Pochmann 2007: 90ff.). The achievements thus only covered a minority of the population, leading to structural heterogeneity of the welfare state, which was far from universal, being a rather conservative regime in the Bismarckian tradition. In addition, there were also authoritarian traits for the included, as labour unions were state-controlled to avoid conflictive labor relations (D'Araujo 2003). With minor changes⁴ this system existed until the end of the military dictatorship in the 1980s, mainly sustained by economic success. Nevertheless, clientelism and patrimonialism in rural areas coexisted with selective state-corporatism in urban areas.

Democratization, social rights, liberal reforms and the emergence of “inclusive liberalism”

As economic growth slowed down during the 1970s and Brazil entered into a recession which was accompanied by hyper-inflation, the next critical juncture opened up space for the democratization movement when social movements united around the notion of "citizenship" (cf. Alvarez et al. 1998). Demands for democratic participation were linked to demands for social rights and social security (Dagnino 1994). The institutional outcome of this struggle was the participation of the movements in the Constituent Assembly in 1988, where social rights gained a prominent space in the Constitution (ANFIP 2008). One of the key social policy achievements of the Constitution of 1988 has been to establish minimum standards of "social security" (cf. IPEA 2007b: 27ff.). It was agreed that education, pension and health care benefits as well as social transfers should be available universally to all citizens in urban and rural areas. As an important part of this process, a minimum pension for the rural population was introduced as part of a process of universalizing social rights. For the first time, the rural population was included into the welfare system.⁵ Investment in basic education has also increased, especially during the government of Cardoso (1995-2002). As access to public schools improved, illiteracy fell from 18% in 1990 to 11.8% in 2002 and has continued to fall to 10% until 2007 (www.ipeadata.gov.br). During the 1990s Brazil was one of the few Latin American countries, where public social expenditure had increased instead of decreased (Filgueira/Filgueira 2002). Therefore, the constitutional reforms of 1988 represented a

⁴ In political terms, there were some major changes, as there was a brief spring for democracy in the 1950s and 1960s which culminated in a sort of progressive populism under João Goulart (1961-1964), where popular movements pressed for social reforms and the government promised “base reforms”, including agrarian reform. These reforms could never take place, as a coup d’état led to a military dictatorship which lasted until the 1980s.

⁵ However, not all people have been entitled to receive pensions, as informal workers have to contribute privately to the system. In 1995, the percentage of formally employed people was only 39% (♂: 40.6%; ♀: 37.3%), the unemployment rate was 5.8% (♂: 5%; ♀: 7%). Thus, in 1995 only 43.71%, 46.66% in 2002 and in 2005 still around 44.36% of the population were uninsured (IPEA 2007b: 48, 195, 197).

move against the international tide towards neoliberal reforms of “rolling back the state”.⁶

But concerning economic policies, the 1990s were also the decade of neoliberal reforms - beginning in 1990 under President Collor de Mello, and then accelerated by the introduction of the Plano Real by the former Finance Minister and then president Cardoso in 1994 (Saad-Filho/Mollo 2002). Liberal economists tend to stress the positive social effects in the implementation phase of this program of inflation-stabilization because the poor were not protected against inflation-related losses. The other side of the Plano Real, however, was the weakening of domestic capital, which led to increased unemployment rates. Furthermore, the high interest rate policy has had disastrous impact on fiscal policy (cf. Vernengo 2007), leading to increasing payments on debt service to the detriment of the other areas of public spending. The immediate effect of the combination of these policies with the universalization of social rights was decreasing quality of public services (Gimenez 2008). The most noticeable sign has been the exodus of the upper and middle classes from public social services to private services⁷ which was stimulated by state policies. Another interesting factor was the replacement of state subsidies by cash transfers to the poor, as happened to the former gas subsidies. In 2001, the attention on cash transfers increased, as conditional cash transfer programmes were implemented, which obliged the recipients to prove school attendance of their children (IPEA 2007b: 104). In addition, the philanthropic tradition of the Brazilian social security system continued to exist and was reinforced under Cardoso with his programme “*Comunidade Solidária*”, where voluntary private help for the poor was stipulated – partly as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs (Mauriel 2006).

Such developments are in line with the international discourse of targeting, of state support only for the “needy” poor, he maintained, while the rest of the population should no longer be privileged, but should instead pay for social services. Taking the previously very unequal access to public services into account, the “targeting paradigm” enjoyed a high legitimacy. The impact of these policies on the social structure were one the one hand the decrease of extreme poverty and the improvement of relevant indicators such as illiteracy, which is reflected in the positive development of the Human Development index. At the same time employment conditions eroded - the informal sector increased and unemployment rose. The functional income distribution has changed to the detriment of wage-earners. The personal income distribution stagnated at one of the highest levels in the world. The “Cardoso era” can therefore be regarded as a typical form of social liberalism or “inclusive liberalism” (Porter/Craig 2004): Liberal economic policies flanked by targeted social policies aiming at poverty reduction and implemented in cooperation with “socially responsible” companies and social rights are being undermined in favour of charity (Mkandawire 2005).

⁶ I am grateful to Eduardo Fagnani for this hint.

⁷ In 1990 86.9% of the children of the richest tenth of the population went to public schools, which dropped to only 18.49% in 1998. In health care the proportion the richest tenth of the population using public hospitals declined from 15.95% to 3.46% (Azpuru et al. 2007).

Social and developmental radicalization of “inclusive liberalism”

As Brazil suffered the second economic crises after 1998 in 2002, the Cardoso-administration could no longer stay in power and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won the presidential elections and governed in a sort of coalition government since 2003. Concerning the growth strategy, there were little changes, as neoliberal monetary policies continued. Due to the international conjuncture, exports of raw materials boomed in recent years and the financialization of the economy continued (Figueiras/Gonçalves 2007; Paulani 2008). There were changes concerning international relations, as Brazil emphasized south-south-cooperations (Schmalz 2008) and paid off its foreign debt, most notably its IMF-credit. Nevertheless, especially since Lula's re-election in 2006, the role model concerning economic policies was more and more the “developmental state”, i.e. state driven capitalist development, which was pursued mainly by infrastructural investments (Novy 2008).

When Lula took office he made clear that the main task of the government would be the extinction of hunger, clearly indicating an increased focus on poverty reduction. Initially the programme *Fome Zero* (zero hunger) was at centre-stage, focussing mainly on cooperation with private actors. Soon the focus shifted to the expansion and better coordination of the “inherited” conditional cash transfer programs within the programme *Bolsa Família* (family allowance, see Hall 2006). The programme has been coordinated by the newly created ministry of social development⁸ and was the cornerstone of Lula's first term (Hunter/Power 2007). It functions as income substitution or supplementation for poor families, earning less than 120 R\$⁹ with variable amounts depending on the number of children and income situation. Compared with the hitherto existing cash transfer programmes, the amount being paid has been raised from a max. of 45 R\$ to max. of 95 R\$, leading to an increase of the average amount from 24.75 R\$ in 2003 to 64.67 R\$ in 2006 (IPEA 2007b: 104ff.). This led to an increase of income transfers from an average of 1.9% of GDP per year from 1995 to 2002 (with FHC) to 2.58% of GDP from 2003 to 2005 (Mercadante 2006: 122). Compared with interest payments, amounting between 9.4% and 7.3% of GDP, these amounts appear to be relatively low (Antunes/Gimenez 2006), but they are still important for the recipients. Contrary to the dynamic development of cash transfers, investments in social service provision stagnate.

In contrast, wage-setting policies changed, with a new emphasis on raising the minimum wage, which increased by 32% in real terms between 2002 and 2006 (IPEA 2007a: 12), whereas middle class wages decreased until 2004 (Quadros 2006). After this, the international economic scenario was favourable to Brazil, facilitating high growth rates and resulting in rising employment, increasing formalization of the labour market along with rising salaries. From then onwards, the middle class began to increase, while the poor continued to be better off (Quadros 2008). This led to a continuous decline of the Gini coefficient of 0.596 in 2000 to 0.556 in 2007. These latter changes of the economic situation and their impact on employment and wages

⁸ According to Celia Vieira (personal interview, 2008), the communication assistant of the executive office of the Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social, the ministry's key task is poverty alleviation. Therefore it could also be called a “ministry of poverty alleviation”.

⁹ Currently, 120 R\$ are approx. 40 €. The Brazilian minimum salary is currently 415 R\$ and the medium salary in urban areas 1273.60 R\$ (www.ipeadata.gov.br).

are viewed as major drivers against economic inequalities, whereas the cash transfers' influence on the reduction of inequality is estimated at 20% (Hoffmann 2005).

Reflections on social and economic policies in the Latin-American semi-periphery

Argentina and Brazil are often considered as “pioneer countries” of the welfare state in Latin America besides Chile and Uruguay (Mesa-Lago 1991). While many authors agree in characterizing Argentina as a “universal welfare state” (Filgueira/Filgueira 2002: 135ff.; Huber 2005: 76) that is (better was) able to provide social security to more than 60 per cent of its population, the classification of Brazil is more difficult, because social and spatial inequalities were stronger which has been reflected in social policy. Therefore Filgueira and Filgueira (2002:138f.) describe Brazil as a “dual regime”, that only is available for a part of the population. Social concessions, particularly made in the 1940ies, were more developed in Argentina's Peronism than in Brazil's *Estado Novo*. Even though Argentina's welfare state was relatively universal in a regional comparison, this classification should not be misunderstood in that way that it was able to reach all segments of population – and even less to all in the same way. Being work-centered, women were highly dependent on their husbands to get access to *obras sociales*. In Argentina as in Brazil one can find elements of “passive revolutions”, but Argentina's Peronism was able to include more social groups in its political project than Brazilian populism.

In both cases redistributive struggles, that began to sprout during the populist projects, were suppressed before they really began to grow by the repressive military dictatorships. Both dictatorships have been brought down in the 1980s – but in different settings: While in Argentina protest movements fought particularly for human rights (in a liberal sense), in Brazil demands for political rights have been vinctulated to demands of social rights (*cidadania*). These struggles led to the drafting of a constitution in which „social security“ was considered a fundamental right and therefore universal access to social services – health and education – and to a certain extent also to pensions has been granted.

In both countries the democratic transformations took place in the context of the debt crisis in the 1980s, but the consequences for social policy have been different. In Argentina one can see a fast dismantling of social policy, nearly without flanking assistentialist compensations. The regime has mainly been legitimized by economic stability. In contrast, in Brazil, basic infrastructure and social services were amplified in the 1990s. In the course of focalization to the poorest there were constant quality losses, so that the upper and middle classes increasingly joint private services. Both countries spent a considerable amount of money on interest payments, so that social policy funds have been relatively low.

Since the turn of the millennium one can observe a gentle break with neoliberal policy concepts. In the area of social policy there are some changes: In Brazil particularly the increase of the minimum wage and the introduction of a basic income should be mentioned, which could perhaps lead to a new form of “focalized universalization” of social policy, which does not completely break with assistentialist forms. In Argentina the universalistic component is less developed. Social programs are only guaranteed on a short term and have been massively introduced to weaken the protest of the

Piquetero-Movement, being carried out in a more clientelist form. In Argentina one can see elements of the passive revolution, as Kirchner was able to coopt the majority of the most active protest movements by anti-neoliberal rhetoric and an expansion of social programs.

In contrast, the Brazilian situation is marked by social movements losing strength compared to the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, but with a contrasting partly extension of social policies. Nevertheless, this is legitimizing the continuity in economic policy based on high interest rate policy and priority of debt service. The latest passive revolution in Brazil can be placed in the 1990s, when Cardoso legitimized neoliberal reforms by targeted poverty reduction. Currently, remarkable social-policy innovations can be observed, as the social rights that were achieved in the democratic constitution of 1988 are combined with the fight against poverty.

In both cases, the structural heterogeneity of the societies has been reflected in the development of social policies. Social struggles led to social achievements, but they only improved the situation of the social groups that were able to articulate their interests – which were compared to Europe relatively small groups – while big parts of society stayed excluded. Actual tendencies towards “social targeting” partly attack this problem, but lead to new problems as they undermine the precarious forms of universalism in the semi-periphery. The specific forms of policy interventions in the socio-economic have always been contested, as the case studies show.

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