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## Boekbespreking van: The 1996 Bosnia-Herzegovina Elections

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There are two points on which De Geus refuses to bend to anti-utopianism: he denies that utopia must be totalitarian and that it must seek to subject and exploit nature. To rebut the critics, he points to the democratic and ecology-friendly character of the seven utopias visited. I beg to differ with him there. As already argued, the idea that Utopians, the neighbours in Morris' *Nowhere* or the citizens of Skinner's *Walden Two* and Howard's garden cities follow a hands-off approach towards nature is questionable. What is more, a society may be totalitarian despite the (omni)presence of democratic institutions and procedures. A culturally and morally closed society, isolated from deviant ideas, constructed to mould people's attitudes in the right way from cradle to grave, permeated from top to bottom by one ideology only – a society like that is in effect totalitarian.

Two minor remarks *in margine*. First, De Geus seems to have neglected Karl Popper's critique of utopianism in *The Poverty Of Historicism*, which offers a much broader range of more formal arguments against utopianism than his *Open Society*. Second, one of the most forceful anti-utopian arguments states that utopianism uses people as means (to establish a perfect society), not as ends in themselves. By implication, utopianism violates other morally desirable phenomena like human autonomy, self-development, and self-realization. There is hardly a trace of this quite fundamental critique of utopianism in De Geus' book.

For the most part, De Geus agrees with the critics: utopias, however interesting, cannot be used as blueprints for the perfect society. Nevertheless, he argues, they can and should be used as sources of "meaningful questions, points of reference, ideas, perspectives and general criteria", as politico-navigational compasses (p. 199, translation MW). This is less vague than it sounds. The underlying idea is that utopia is not a destination but a direction: utopias can be used to develop policies and reform political discourse on a larger scale than piecemeal engineering. With this interpretation, utopian ideals can be compatible with pluralism and remain open to critique, correction and rejection. De Geus illustrates this point with an excellent analysis of the metaphors utopian authors use to describe nature, metaphors which are equally common in everyday political life: nature as a garden, as a wilderness, as a cycle, etc. His analysis indicates both why these metaphors are more or less convincing in utopias and why one may expect them to perform similarly in real life.

One should not expect the impossible. In the final analysis, De Geus does not prove that utopianism is a sufficient condition of "inspired" politics because he cannot. Utopias are illustrations of political theories rather than theories themselves, and they are destined to be imperfect, selective, incomplete, and superficial illustrations. Nor does he or can he prove that utopianism is a necessary requisite for bringing ideas back into politics. There are alternative means to re-inspire politics. One can talk about desirable practices and about the moral and political principles of radical reformers like utopian authors without an eschatological and perfectionist dimension. That way, politics can remain open to the contingencies of life and still be inspired by substantive ideals. Besides, it keeps politics honest – for if utopia is only a direction, then the description of it is a lie.

Nevertheless, Marius de Geus has made the far more modest and still controversial point he set out to make: even if one dislikes fiction, utopian fictions can inspire and they can be helpful in directing politics. He made his point, and he made it elegantly. The non-academic reader, for whom this book is meant in the first place, probably will not notice how well De Geus succeeds in translating philosophical subtleties into intelligible language. It is good PR for political philosophy and a good book to disagree with.

Marcel Wissenburg

Diane Sainsbury, *Gender, Equality and Welfare States*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996

Since Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* was published in 1990, a lively debate has developed on comparative welfare state regimes. An important topic in the international discussion is the gender dimension of welfare states or, to put it more accurately, the lack of attention given to gender in mainstream welfare state research. Feminist scholarship has contributed to the development of welfare state theory in several ways. It has shown how social programmes and social rights impact differently on men and women, and it has emphasized the role of unpaid care for welfare state variations. In addition, it has demonstrated that concepts such as social citizenship, de-commodification and stratification are strongly gender-dependent in the sense that they are rooted in the experiences of men and focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the public sphere. Moreover, it has shown that welfare state formation is not only determined through economic processes, but also through the development of the interrelationships between the family, the market and the state.

However, although feminist approaches have been very strong in their criticism of mainstream welfare state theories and in the development of alternative concepts (such as the concept of defamilisation to pare with de-commodification), as yet not much serious empirical work has been done on the international comparison of gender and welfare states. Diane Sainsbury's book certainly makes a contribution in furthering this research. She examines how gender variations have been developed in the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States since the 1960s and what its consequences are for stratification and redistribution of income.

Sainsbury, an associate professor at the University of Stockholm, has done an excellent job in carefully examining differences in bases of entitlements, and differences in access to and levels of benefits for men and women in these countries. She avoids generalizations about the two sexes, by cautiously distinguishing between men's entitlements as breadwinners and beneficiaries of benefits and women's entitlements as wives, mothers, caregivers and workers. From this perspective Sainsbury shows

that it is not enough to look only at breadwinner arrangements and the extent to which social entitlements are modelled around the husband as the principal beneficiary. Although breadwinner arrangements are useful in analysing social provisions in the UK, the USA and the Netherlands, they are not useful in the case of Sweden where entitlements based on the principle of care and motherhood are much more developed and result in much more gender equality in social policies. The focus on entitlements which are based on care also reveals major contradictions in the other three countries between child care policies and maternity benefits. On the one hand, child care policies emphasize the concept of private responsibility and do not facilitate the combination of motherhood and employment. On the other hand, maternity benefits are solely available to working mothers, assuming a combination of both care and paid work.

Sainsbury does not restrict herself to just one or a few social security provisions, pension policies or any other case-study, but she examines the interrelation between all these arrangements, including unemployment benefits, disability and sickness benefits, family allowances, parental leave arrangements, social assistance, pensions and tax schemes. Her analysis shows how important it is to look at the interrelation of all these policies in order to explore variations among welfare states. While the UK, the USA and the Netherlands share a rather strong family and breadwinner's ideology, and rely heavily on dual welfare where men are claimants of insurance and women recipients of assistance, there are also important differences. Although in some respects breadwinner arrangements are tighter in the Netherlands than in both the UK and the USA, Dutch women, especially if they are dependent on social assistance or old age pensions, are better off than women in the UK and the USA, because of generous levels of social security and its interplay with tax policies and transfers. In general Dutch women's coverage and recipient rates were higher than in the other countries. Until recently, the position of single mothers, for example, could be described in terms of a high degree of de-commodification because they were less likely to be in the labour market. However, that was not true for defamilisation – social assistance was heavily dependent upon family relations.

Sweden distinguishes itself by running counter to the dual welfare thesis. With respect to single mothers, Swedish policies are not de-commodifying in the sense of providing market independence, but they are defamilizing in the sense that benefits are based on universal citizenship, and not on (former) family relations. On the whole, Swedish women more often receive insurance benefits, while men are more often recipients of assistance than in the other countries. The basis of entitlements differs from the other countries: entitlements based on universal citizenship and residence promote equal access to benefits and undermine the influence of marital or family status on social rights. However, the Swedish system also contains some contradictions. In analysing benefit inequalities and their effect on redistributive outcomes between men and women, Sainsbury arrives at a redistributive paradox: of the four countries the gender benefit gap is most pronounced in Sweden, yet Swedish policies have a stronger redistributive impact than the other countries, and the distributional outcomes

are less unequal. The explanation can be found in the equalizing effects of both transfers and taxes through which the difference between benefit income and disposable income is substantial. The Swedish "double decker structure" of flat-rate and earnings-related programmes decreases inequality. While it is generally assumed that means tested benefits have the largest redistributive effects, Sainsbury shows that a strategy combining flat-rate benefits, earnings-related benefits and taxing benefits might be more successful.

Sweden seems to distinguish itself from the other countries throughout the book. Sainsbury stresses again and again the exceptional position of Swedish social policy in relation to the other three countries. Although I think she is right in her description of the differences between Sweden on the one hand and the other countries on the other hand, her analysis of differences between the other three countries is weak. Sainsbury criticizes feminist scholars who focus predominantly on breadwinner arrangements and who do not distinguish clearly enough between countries such as the Netherlands and the UK. Though Sainsbury herself makes these distinctions in the description of policy arrangements, she does not do so in her analysis and conclusions. More often than not she groups the UK, the USA and the Netherlands together, although substantial differences exist between them. This is partly an effect of her analytical model. Inspired by Titmuss' typology of welfare states, Sainsbury contrasts a residual and institutional type of welfare provision, which she parallels to two contrasting ideal types of gender models: the male breadwinner model and the individual model. She distinguishes these models on the bases of variation in such dimensions as the familial ideology, basis of entitlement, unit of benefit, taxation and employment policies. Although Sainsbury emphasizes that she is interested in variation among welfare states, rather than in the existence of ideal types, it seems that she is a captive of her own analytical model. It is not that the variations themselves are inaccurate, but, rather, that the variations are continuously brought back to static ideal types. As a consequence, differences between, and paradoxes within policies are often simply taken for granted and not explained. This is particularly the case with respect to the Netherlands. She describes the Dutch welfare arrangements in full detail, but as a consequence the description has become somewhat arbitrary, as it lacks coherence and structure. The meaning of pillarization, for example, mentioned as an important reason to include the Netherlands, is not explored at all. Part of the problem might be due to language, as, in contrast to the other countries, no original Dutch publications are quoted. However, I think there is more to it than that, especially because the problem is not so much empirical as analytical. The strong dichotomy, between Sweden on the one hand and the other countries on the other hand, may result from Sainsbury's assumptions about the relation between gender and welfare states. The Scandinavian or Swedish model has often been seen as one of the most "women-friendly", meaning that these states give the best opportunities to combine paid work with family responsibilities. Sainsbury's analytical model reflects this way of thinking. The distinction between the male breadwinner and the individual model does not allow her to question other options, such as a more communitarianist one, which would stimulate care through the civil

society, or an alternative feminist one, which would emphasize the autonomy of care and time, rather than economic independence. I do not want to claim that these options are more accurate: my problem with Sainsbury's analysis is that she cannot see them because her model presupposes that the individual model is the most emancipated. In this sense there is a parallel with Esping-Andersen's typology: his analyses of typology of welfare states is rooted in the tradition of the power resources approach and reflects the assumption that social democracy and welfare go together; Sainsbury's research is biased through the assumption that social democratic states rectify gender inequality better than other ones.

Another problem is that Sainsbury did not include another continental country. A comparison with, for example, France would be interesting because France pairs a "conservative welfare state regime" with generous childcare and parental facilities. The whole idea of conservative welfare states has withered away in Sainsbury's book. That is a pity because it could have shown more about the meaning of gender for the interrelations between state, market and family, and therefore about ways to integrate gender in mainstream theory in welfare regimes.

Sainsbury's analysis of welfare states and gender strongly focuses on outcomes, rather than intentions and political discourses. More generally, the political dimension is missing throughout the book, despite the chapters on gender equality reform and welfare state retrenchment, which do show some important changes in welfare policy dating from the early eighties. I use the political dimension here in a rather broad sense: I refer to the meaning of the representation of political parties in government (this may be important particularly in discussion about retrenchment politics); political ideologies (especially in relation to familial ideology); the political meaning of similar concepts in different countries ("solidarity" for example, focuses in Sweden on individuals, whereas in the Netherlands it is understood to be solidarity between rich and poor families); as well as the influence of social movements, including the women's movement. I would like to have read more about the meaning of politics for the variation in welfare states.

Sainsbury has done a tremendous job in bringing so much material together and comparing so many aspects of social policy in various countries. The strength of the book lies in its detailed analysis of social policy; its weakness lies in the theoretical synthesis of data and in the feedback to the analytical models. This becomes most apparent at the end of the book. The last page is suddenly there – the moment one expects a feedback and an overall conclusion, Sainsbury stops and leaves it to the reader to draw his or her own conclusion. For me, as a reader, this conclusion raises a lot of questions. Nevertheless, these arise from a well-written book which makes an important contribution to welfare state analysis.

*Jet Bussemaker*

John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media*. Polity Press, Oxford, 1995, ISBN 0745610056, £12.95

As a student of mass communication and political science I was pleasantly surprised to find a book on the development of modern societies in which the mass media command a central role. Such books are few, as in many sociological and political studies on the modernization of Western societies the mass media have been given only cursory attention. In the book reviewed here John Thompson tries to redress the neglect of communication media within the literature of social theory. In his latest book he puts forward a new social theory about the ways in which mass media have shaped and influenced social interaction, culture, and politics in modernizing societies.

Drawing on his familiar mixture of critical social theory, hermeneutics, and media theorists like Innis and McLuhan, Thompson's central claim is: "if we wish to understand the nature of modernity – that is, of the institutional characteristics of modern societies and the life conditions created by them – then we must give a central role to the development of communication media and their impact" (p.3). The reason being that the development of networks of (mass) communication has profoundly changed the relations of individuals to others, as mass mediated communication fundamentally differs from face-to-face interaction. As a result, the use of the communication media has transformed the spatial and temporal organization of social life, and has created new forms of action and interaction, and new modes of exercising power, which are no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale (p. 4) In eight chapters this claim is elaborated on with respect to the changing nature of social interaction, the influence of media on culture, and the nature of the public sphere.

In the first chapter of the book the nature of communication media is analysed. Both the distinctive characteristics of mass communication and the social contexts in which individuals produce and receive mediated symbolic forms are discussed. In the hermeneutic tradition, Thompson stresses the view that the meaning of media messages is not fixed and transparent, but rather the ever-shifting outcome of a process of interpretation, determined by the social-historical context of the recipient of the message.

The following chapters deal with such varied subjects as the development of modern societies and media institutions; the globalization of communication; the rise of mediated interaction; the nature of the self and the process of self-formation in a mediated world; and the transformation of tradition. Although much of the content of these chapters can be regarded as received knowledge, the author shows himself to be an acute observer, who can link a wide variety of concerns seemingly effortlessly. Thus, an analysis of the behaviour of (pop star) fans, which in its extreme versions may be regarded as the negative outcome of the process of self-formation enabled by the media, is as self-evident as an analysis of the media as a creative force in the (re)-invention of tradition, exemplified by the growing popularity of the Scottish tartan kilt in recent times.