SW&S | Social Work and Society
International Online Journal

Imagining and Practising Citizenship in Austere Times

John Clarke, The Open University

1 Introduction

Exploring the changing formations of welfare and states opens up a very large range of questions. Here I begin from the issue of citizenship because it marks the key relationship through which these issues can be productively engaged and provides a way of avoiding the tendency of welfare state studies towards formalism and programmatic comparison in which the practices of welfare often disappear along with the relationships in which they are enmeshed. It is clear that welfare state research has been too obsessed by cash transfer programmes. What was a convenient way of 'measuring' welfare spending was turned into the concept, as though states did nothing else by way of welfare (Clarke 2004). Citizenship provides a critical point of entry because it connects formations of nation, state and welfare. These formations provide the elements in particular assemblages of welfare-state-nation that take shape in different places (and at different times). As I will argue more extensively later both the elements and their articulation are subject to change and contestations. I treat citizenship both relationally (constituted through its connections to welfare, state and nation) and as an inhabited or lived relationship. It is constantly contested by diverse political forces and projects that seek to change its reach (who can be a citizen), its content (what rights and duties are involved) and its relationships (notably with the state and with other citizens/non-citizens). These arguments draw extensively on the analyses developed in Clarke (2004) and Clarke et al. (2014).

In the first part of this paper, I say a little more about changing articulations of welfare, state and nation, Each of the elements has been the recurrent focus of political projects seeking to reform, revise and reorder them. It is important to note that these are not necessarily the same politics: for example, anti-statism is not necessarily the same as, nor connected to, anti-welfarism, while both have differences from projects that seek to "re-nationalise" citizenship, even if sometimes all three dynamics do combine. To put it another way, we cannot – and should not – assume a symmetry of welfare reform, state reform and nation remaking.

I then consider how the politics and policies of Austerity after 2008 have influenced the formations of nation, state and welfare and give particular attention to the singular national case of the United Kingdom, where explicitly pro-Austerity governments were elected in 2010 and 2015. I explore how citizenship forms a critical point of condensation for these changes – and their tensions, contradictions and ambivalences. I conclude with some questions about the implications of this focus for the 'welfare service state'.

2 Not standing still: the remaking of welfare, state and nation

The so-called 'Golden Age' established familiar forms of welfare states (and their variation in different types or regimes, see Esping-Anderson and Huber and Stephens). The same period also underscored their (mostly taken for granted) national form. It is possibly necessary to underscore that even in the 'Golden Age', the forms of citizenship associated with welfare

states were recurrently contested, often through political forces that sought to expand the limited forms of 'universalism' (for example, women's movements seeking to overcome gendered conditionalities, disabled people's movements challenging exclusions and subordinations and anti-racist/anti-colonial movements contesting racialised hierarchies and exclusions). Nevertheless, in the global North's worlds of welfare, such challenges were a strange precursor to other political projects that have largely sought to reverse 'expansionary' conceptions of welfare, state and nation, seeking instead to retrench and reorder 'welfare states'. In the following, I will take each of the elements turn – welfare, state and nation – before looking at their contemporary articulations.

2.1 Remaking welfare

Beginning with welfare, I would suggest that, since the mid-1970s, four dominant tendencies can be identified, almost all of them underpinned by an argument that presents itself as a matter of *economic realism*: the claim that 'we can no longer afford welfare'. This claim about public spending was intimately tied to the neoliberal (and neoconservative) politics of taxation of the 1980s in which governments, notably in the USA and the UK, sought to drive down tax rates for corporations and individuals. Such tax politics turned 'we can no longer afford' into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The claim has persisted through the late twentieth century and was given new impetus by the demands for fiscal austerity following the global financial crisis of 2007-8.

The first of the four tendencies involves what has been called the shift *from welfare to workfare* (e.g., Peck 2001). Here a revival of the old Poor Law principle of less eligibility has driven the reform of welfare benefits and services towards 'activation'. Those without (waged) work have been encouraged, advised, directed and – in some cases – forced to take employment; while replacement ratios have been driven down in order to 'make work pay'. In these developments, 'work' has been celebrated as both an economic and social virtue: it makes those who work 'independent' (that is not dependent on the state); it makes them role models for their children and other young people; it defeats the vice of idleness; it brings social integration and inclusion; and it marks the willingness to be 'responsible'. In these terms, it is hardly surprising that the favourite figure in British political discourse has been the 'hardworking, responsible family' who are rhetorically rewarded for their virtuous state (although little material reward has come their way as work has degenerated and wages have stagnated). The activation principle has been directed at a range of target groups, starting with the unemployed (and with differentiating strategies aimed at the long terms unemployed and the unemployed young). Subsequently there has been governmental enthusiasm (most evidently, but not only in the UK) for encouraging other targeted groups into employment: disabled people; lone mothers and, in a brief flurry of over-excitement, the elderly. In 2012, David Halpern, then Director of the Cameron government's 'Nudge Unit' argued pensioners should be encouraged to return to work because of the benefits of social interaction for the elderly (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9073317/Elderly-told-go-back-to-work-and-downsize.html).

Workfare has been intimately linked to the second main tendency, that of *growing conditionality* in welfare. Conditionality seeks to make welfare benefits and services active, rather than passive, seeking to find ways of preventing people from obtaining 'something for nothing'. Conditionality (see, *inter alia*, Gould 2005) is fundamentally about installing the performative principle within welfare, such that passive recipients are turned into active, entrepreneurial and self-directing selves. The required performance may be active labour

market searches, educational enrolment, or family action (as in the conditions attached to cash transfers in many Latin American welfare systems during the last two decades: see Peck and Theodore 2015; Lavinas 2013).

The third key dynamic in welfare reform has been the commitment to *responsibilization*. This is visible in labour market activation programmes but has a wider reach across a range of welfare provision. For example, the drive to create expert patients in health care, or to make mental health service users independent and responsible agents form part of this tendency (see Brown and Baker 2012). As Brown and Baker suggest, the reverse side of the commitment to create active, responsible and independent subjects is a willingness to enforce such requirements, and to punish those who fail to be responsible.

Such activation and responsibilization processes have thus combined with *more disciplinary forms of welfare* provision that seek to enforce appropriate performance through the use of sanctions (notably the withdrawal of benefit). At the heart of these changes is an enlarged commitment to the surveillance of welfare subjects that links the performative conditionality noted above (surveillance is necessary to reassure ourselves that performance is being delivered) to an array of prompts, pressures and punishments for non-compliance.

2.2 Remaking states

States are, it seems, not what they used to be, provoking debates about the end, decline or transformation of the state. Here I will sidestep most of these debates to argue that state continue while shifting forms and changing core relationships. Although most studies of welfare state change have treated welfare reform and state reform as the same, I will note that it is important to see different lines of force in play and different political-cultural resources that have contributed to anti-statism, not least the anti-statism of the Eastern bloc (or what used to be the 'second world' when we had three worlds (Denning 2004). Reflecting the more complex dynamics of state reform, I will sketch five main tendencies in state reform.

In 1992, Ian Harden wrote of the '*contracting state'* in which he traced the (then) innovative dynamic of contracting out – in which public agencies purchased services from a range of suppliers in the voluntary and private sectors. This, he noted, produced a second meaning of 'contracting' – the shrinking of the state as services were outsourced through contracting. This has remained a central dynamic of state reform but also has a third meaning in relation to welfare. The idea of the 'contract' has been deployed in processes of activation and responsibilization as a way of signaling the (imagined) independence of the welfare subject. Contracts - and the appearance of free exchange – are the symbol of liberal society and the possessive individuals who populate them (Macpherson 1962), so their use in welfare reform bears the ideological mark of liberating these self-possessed subjects from the tyranny of state dependency. The capacity of such contracts to (barely) conceal the unequal power relations on which they rest (and which they reproduce) testifies to the thinness of the autonomy and agency at stake in welfare reform.

The processes of contracting point to what has often been called *marketization* as a significant dynamic of state reform. Marketization has three key aspects. First, it denotes the shift to contracting, driven by the wider ideological commitment to markets as the most efficient form of human coordination – markets are efficient, egalitarian, innovative and transformative. This post-Hayekian view of market coordination underpinned challenges to states in general and to states as welfare and public service providers in particular. Although it played a central role in political and policy circles, it also circulated much more widely in the form of what

Thomas Frank (2001) has called 'market populism'. Second, marketization also refers to the introduction of market-mimicking, or quasi-market, processes within public organisations – such as purchaser-provider splits in personal social services and other organizations. Such internal markets are intended to mimic the efficiency disciplines of open markets but are associated with high transaction costs and a range of perverse effects. Third, marketization can be seen as a set of processes of social and ccultural change in that they attempt to normalize a set of relationships, practices and dispositions for the range of agencies and agents that are invited (required) to behave in market-like ways.

Markets and market-mimicking devices require people to understand themselves as specific sorts of economic agents (motivated and powered by economic means). Anthropological work on markets, such as Elyachar's (2005), suggests that economic agents are not born, but have to be made. Our own study of citizen-consumers in England revealed people who were profoundly reluctant to identify themselves as 'consumers of public services', rejecting the impersonal and transactional model that such an identity implied (Clarke et al. 2007). Getting people to think economically, and to think of themselves as economic agents, is a process of construction that requires intensive political and discursive work (and may not always succeed).

The processes of marketization are linked to, but not the same as, processes of *privatization*, in which public resources have been transferred into private hands (usually corporate bodies). IAs David Harvey and others have argued many of the transformations of the state have involved the revitalization of processes of capital accumulation by novel means of 'accumulation by possession' (Harvey 2003). Here we encounter the invention of new forms of subsidy to capital, an angle of analysis that offers a different view of the welfare state as a mechanism of redistribution. Where debates about the welfare state have been dominated by complaints about the costs of welfare (a continuing theme of political discourse), some analysts have argued that the reform of welfare – particularly in Anglophone settings – has seen a move towards 'corporate welfare' (Farnsworth 2012), involving an 'income transfer' process to corporations who have become major 'welfare beneficiaries'. There are also other resource transfers to the corporate sector – subsidies for employing people, for example.

The next tendency is rather different, since it involves changing the internal architecture of the state, with a movement towards *devolution*. In many states, responsibilities for providing services and managing the social have been devolved to local states (regions, cities, wards, etc.). Particularly since 2009, such devolution has also involved the downward movement of fiscal responsibility and fiscal stress (see Peck on austerity urbanism, 2012) . Although I have named this tendency as devolution, it might be better grasped as a moving recalibration of centralizing and decentralizing dynamics within state formations, as political-governmental calculations are made about the best arrangement of the architecture of the state – a sort of intra-state scalar politics. Of course, states vary considerably in terms of their organizational and constitutional architectures.

The different tendencies discussed so far come together in the emergence of *new organizational forms* involved in the contracting, delivery and governance of public services. Partnerships, hybrid public-private organizations, voluntary organizations reshaped by the 'contract culture' and new forms such as 'social enterprises' have made for a complex organizational landscape at the edges of the state. Indeed, such innovations actively blur the edges of the state as other organizations are enrolled into the provision of services. Despite the changes, such organizational innovations tend to remain state-centric, as states fund,

direct, scrutinize and evaluate the array of organizations through which public action is performed. States, as Jessop (2000) suggests, remain in the business of 'meta-governance'.

Finally, state reform has involved an uneven but powerful move towards *authoritarianism*. The 'Golden Age' commitment to providing and promoting 'social security' (for some, at least) has given way to an obsession with security: dealing with the challenge of enemies within and beyond the boundaries of the nation. This punitive turn has certainly redirected resources and political discourse towards a more authoritarian state formation (Wacquant 2009; Garland 2001). Such developments have also shaped the 'welfarist' apparatuses of the state, intersecting with the disciplinary turn there.

2.3 Remaking nations

I will be briefer in this third section, but it is important to begin by noting four different registers in which we can think about the remaking of nations. The first concerns the (often contested) organization of the geopolitical space of the nation, including both its boundaries and its internal organization. We have seen extensive – and continuing changes in such formations, as new nations are created and/or revived (as in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and Germany), and as internal relations of nations are recomposed through often antagonistic forms of separatism and devolution (from Scotland to Catalonia). Nations and their hyphenated states have been unsettled phenomena.

Second, the nation has been subjected to the stresses of operating within an increasingly volatile and demanding inter-national environment. Most evidently this is associated with the dynamics of globalization, from the dissolution of national barriers to the movement of capital to the still contested movement of people – or at least some sorts of people – across national boundaries in response to the environment, economic and military dislocations of recent decades. These forces have exposed the limitations of nation-states as the managers of social, economic and political contradictions emerging from 'globalization'. In particular, there are contradictions here between the desire of increasingly insecure nations to be protected against the pressures and effects of globalization and the reduced capacity or willingness of states to provide such protection. In popular terms, there remain persistent desires – or what Jansen (2016) calls 'yearnings' – for a state that will do state-like things.

Thirdly, we must attend to the less visible connection between welfare, states and nations in which welfare is actively engaged in the processes of nation-making: that is, producing the sort of population imagined by dominant political projects. Not only emergent nations, but established ones are susceptible to this desire to improve the population to make them 'fit for purpose' in the face of current demands on the nation. I borrow here from Tania Li's conception of governing as shaped by the 'will to improve' (2007). Most recently, we have seen the dream of making the 'entrepreneurial; nation', peopled by energetic, responsible and nard working individuals and families – productive workers and avid consumers.

Finally, there is the return or revival of nationalism in its many varieties. These developments are currently dominated by nostalgic and restorationist fantasies about the recovery of national sovereignty (e.g., in the UK exit from the European Union). They often include a nostalgic, if not melancholic, conception of the people, imagined as purer and more coherent than the current composition of the nation, tainted by those who do not really 'belong'. National identity is reclaimed for the 'true' people and fantastic schemes are elaborated to both keep out the Others (walls, fences, border control) and to purify the nation by removing

or ejecting its others (from the UK's 'hostile environment for unwanted migrants to Muslims in an imagined Hindu nation or the pursuit of a Rohingya-free Myanmar).

2.4 Reassembling welfare, state and nation: citizenship at stake

These different tendencies come together – are reassembled - in specific formations, such that the articulation of welfare, state and nation is not the same in Hungary as in Germany. But pressures, forces and tendencies exist in common, even though they play out differently. What emerge are complex and contradictory assemblages in which forms of welfare, state and nation are put together into new formations. These elements do not necessarily live together either coherently or comfortably. More often, their combinations resemble what Louis Althusser, the French Marxist, wonderfully called 'teeth-gritting harmony' (1971, p. 150). To return to my starting point, citizenship is at the centre of these remaking processes, and is often the focal point of the strains, disjunctures and tensions between the different lines of reform. Citizenship is redefined in the course of welfare reform as rights are exchanged for responsibilities; as conditions are attached and as performances are demanded (of eligibility, of desire, and of commitment). Citizenship is in play during state reform projects as the resources and relationships that previously sustained citizenship as a juridical position are undermined or redirected. Some citizens also find it harder to find the state when they look for it to provide security, support or protection, while other citizens (usually the subordinated or excluded) usually find the state – especially in its disciplinary and securitizing forms – all too present in their lives (for example, various forms of 'stop and search' practices of police forces which operate on more or less explicit racially structured 'profiles'). Finally, citizenship is once again at issue in the revival of nationalist politics and policies, as those deemed out of place become the subject of civil and state suspicion, hostility and violence. In all these aspects, and often in interlocking ways, citizenship is at stake in the transformation of the older assemblages of welfare, state and nation.

This reassembling of welfare, state and nation – and the accompanying remakings of citizenship – cannot be understood as a simple transition from one coherent 'welfarist' model to a neoliberal one. Not only do the processes of dis-assembling and reassembling reveal multiple and contradictory dynamics, the processes themselves have been uneven and remain unfinished: they are uneven because some elements from assemblages have proved to be 'sticky' or intractable, resisting change, while new social and political forces have brought other citizenship demands or pressures into being that interrupt the processes of neoliberalization. At the same time, they are unfinished in the sense that it seems unlikely that the capacity for constant reinvention that has characterized neoliberalism is yet exhausted. Such dynamics have been visible – and much discussed in the UK and elsewhere, where 'Austerity' has intensified these changes as the post-2008 politics and policies have come to focus on public debt and public spending (Forkert, 2016; Evans and McBride 2017).

3   The ambivalences of citizenship and the welfare service state

I think there are four important issues to underline in reflecting on citizenship as a focal point for these dynamics. Centrally, there are continuing contestations over citizenship and these can be traced at large scales: the national and supra-national questions of who counts as a citizen (and in official terms who can be counted as a citizen).As we have seen in the UK, attempts to clamp down on 'illegal migrants' have produced political controversies about who is counted as a citizen, and who comes to be recognized as such: the unfolding scandal of the governmental mistreatment of the "Windrush generation" (British subjects from the Caribbean) testifies to the slipperiness of nationalizing pressures on citizenship. But

citizenship is contested in more everyday forms, as 'little Bakhtinians' engage in reflection, argument and contestation over conceptions of citizenship and their consequences (see Clarke and Newman, forthcoming and Kirwan, McDermont and Clarke 2017).

These conflicts are particularly pertinent for the 'emerging welfare service state' because they raise the question of who gets to be served by such a state. This is particularly significant in the context of rising nationalisms and their impacts on welfare provision in the form of growing 'welfare chauvinism' (Keskinen, Norocel and Jorgensen 2016).

The future of citizenship is also at stake in reworkings of the relationship between welfare and state in other ways, not least in the ambivalences that emerge as states try to enforce 'independence' on welfare subjects, making them responsible for their own well-being. In times of social and economic stress (variably distributed both within and between countries), large sections of the public continue to look to states to provide protection and support rather than being required to be independent. This remains a site of some tension, not least at the front line of welfare services.

As states change their form and engage in devolution, privatization, outsourcing and subcontracting, those seeking its support may find it harder to actually find the state (much less the 'welfare state'). As the institutional forms become unevenly localized and dispersed across different organisations, how do people know where to find the state? It is true that this disappearing state has its reverse side, a state that for those deemed dangerous, irresponsible or untrustworthy, the state may be all too present, but rarely in its welfarist forms. These form some of the contemporary ambivalences around citizenship and its shifting articulations with forms of welfare, state and nation – giving rise to significant questions around the 'welfare service state', including the following.

There is a problem about whether we know what services count as 'welfare' (or why some do not). The list of possibilities might include social work, education, health/community health, various psy therapies, public space and recreation management and development, housing management and case work (and/or work with the homeless), prison education, probation work (sometimes known as 'offender management' in the UK), midwives, police (as social workers and as police), youth work, drug/addiction/substance abuse work, employment case workers, law advice, and many more. In many of these, similar debates about care/control, paternalism and empowerment, surveillance and development and more have gone on within the occupation (and among its educators/trainers). How we understand 'welfare service' is thus a critical empirical and analytical issue because all of these might be named as welfare services, social services or public services. But they certainly are active in the management of the 'social question' - while their diversity indicates how fragmented/divided the social question has become.

Examining the welfare service state demands that we think about not just what services exist or are rising and falling in significance, but how we understand 'service' as an idea, a mission and a set of practices and organisations. How have services changed? What services have declined? What new services have appeared And then there are three more systematic questions:

1. How are different services accessed? Do people self-select? Or are they recruited (with more or less compulsion)? Can people 'exit'? What is the place of 'voice'?

2. What ethos governs the work of service? How is paternalism tempered, contained, refused? Is there a professional ethos? What are the forms that liberalism can take in such settings?

3. Who are the service workers? How are they recruited and trained? Are there distinctive social, political and professional formations? What is the stake and significance of voluntary workers? (see Kirwan 2016; and also Muehlebach 2012)

This leads to a final question: in what sense do we talk about these practices, people and organisations as a 'state'? Are they state provided? State funded? State directed? State licensed or regulated? There is something here about the shifting forms and formations of 'the state', and its reach in the personal, familial, communal - to 'make better people' and to 'make people better' (see Tania Li (2007) on 'the will to improve').

References

Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books.

Brown, B.J., & Baker, S. (2012). *Responsible Citizens: Individuals, Health and Policy under Neoliberalism*. London, New York: Anthem Press.

Clarke, J. (2004). *Changing Welfare, Changing States: New Directions in Social Policy*.

London: Sage.

Clarke, J., Newman, J., Smith, N., Vidler, E., & Westmarland, L. (2007). *Creating Citizen-Consumers. Changing Publics and Changing Public Services*. London: Sage.

Clarke, J., Coll, K., Dagnino, E., & Neveu, C. (2014). *Disputing Citizenship.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Denning, M. (2004). *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*. London: Verso.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. London: Sage.

Evans, B., & McBride, S. (Eds.) (2017). *Austerity: The Lived Experience*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Elyachar, J. (2005). *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Farnsworth, K. (2012). *Social versus Corporate Welfare: Competing Needs and Interests within the Welfare State*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Forkert, K. (2017). *Austerity as Public Mood: Social Anxieties and Social Struggles*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Frank, T. (2001). *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy*. New York: Anchor Books.

Garland, D. (2001). *The Culture of Control*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Gould, J. (Ed.) (2005). *The New Conditionality: The Politics of Poverty Reduction Strategies*. London: Zed Books.

Harden, I. (1992). *The contracting state*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Huber, R., & Stephens, J. D. (2001). *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State: Parties and Policies in Global Markets*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Isin, E. (2012). *Citizens Without Frontiers*. London, New York: Bloomsbury.

Jansen, S. (2015). *Yearnings in the Meantime: 'Normal Lives' and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn.

Jessop, B. (2000). *'Governance failure', in G. Stoker (ed.), The New Politics of British Local Governance*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Keskinen, S., Norocel, O., & Jorgenson, M. (2016). The politics and policies of welfare chauvinism under the economic crisis. *Critical Social Policy*, 36(3), 321-329.

Kirwan, S. (Ed.) (2016). *Advising in Austerity: Reflections on challenging times for advice agencies*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Kirwan, S., McDermont, M., & Clarke, J. (2017). Reassembling Citizenship in Austere Times. In W. Larner & V. Higgins (Eds.), *Reassembling Neoliberalism: Expertise, Practices, Subjects* (pp. 109-130). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lavinas, L. (2013). 21st Century Welfare. *New Left Review*, 84, 5-40.

Li, T. (2007). *The Will to Improve*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Macpherson, C. B. (1962). *The political theory of possessive individualism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Muehlebach, A. (2012). *The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Peck, J. (2001). *Workfare States*. New York: Guilford Press.

Peck, J. (2012). Austerity urbanism. *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 16(6), 626-655.

Peck, J., & Theodore, N. (2015). *Fast Policy: Experimental Statecraft at the Thresholds of Neoliberalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the Poor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Author's Address:
John Clarke, Prof. PhD.
The Open University, United Kingdom
Central European University in Budapest, Hungary
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences; Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
john.clarke@open.ac.uk