

## Introduction

*“Informal care in Portugal is expected to stay at the same level in the near future, and households rather than public organisations are likely to continue to be the mainstay. Informal care is not on the political agenda in Portugal because it is taken so much for granted, as is the domestic role of women.*  
(Giarchi, G., p.397)

### **1. The welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly: emergence and contours of a research problem**

This thesis addresses the topic of welfare support to elderly people in Portugal and contributes to an extensive body of research on welfare provision in old age, particularly the research carried out within Social Policy. It draws on different contributions to the analysis of social policy design and implementation, of welfare states and in particular of welfare arrangements in old age.

The broad research topic of welfare support in old age has been developing for quite some time, and with greater intensity since the nineties. This was very much prompted by the challenges of the ageing of the population in many European countries and by the challenges this represents for welfare states in modern societies. It is within the context of the challenges the ageing of the population brings about to the welfare state in all modern societies that we have been witnessing a rising interest in the study of models of welfare provision to elderly populations. This topic has been gaining increasing visibility both in the scientific and in the political agenda, and although not belonging to the historical core of the modern welfare state in what concerns provision of social care services, it has been progressively recognised as one of the main challenging domains of action (Flora, 1986; Daly and Lewis, 2000; Bahle, 2003).

In a context of multiple research efforts towards the understanding of the provision of welfare support in old age, it is possible to identify some mainstream approaches that have been more or less influent among researchers in different national contexts.

One of the mainstream areas of research on welfare arrangements in old age, very much aligned with economic theory, has been approaching the topic from the perspective of increasing the economic efficiency of public systems in delivering support to the elderly population (Karlsson, 2002). Some of the topics addressed include the analysis of payment models for long-term care (Glendinning, Schunk et al., 1997; Fine and Chalmers, 2000), the analysis of factors influencing utilization of services and choice of services (Browne, Roberts et al., 1995; Netten, Darton et al., 2001), or the analysis of boundaries between social care and health care (Challis, 1998). Some research has been focusing more on the outcomes of provision, and in some cases even trying to define a measure of social care outcomes (Netten and Smith, 1998). Overall, it is a current of empirical research that takes as reference the realities of developed/mature welfare states, namely in terms of expansion of formal provision of services of assistance to the elderly, and where the priorities of research align with the need to redesign and improve the formal support already provided.

Within this approach, but combining the economic reading with social policy analysis, some research has been focusing on the topic of informal care, namely care provided by families (Pacolet and Wilderom, 1991; Gordon and Donald, 1993; Pickard, Wittenberg et al., 2000). Despite the variation in research topics and outcomes, there is a common trait in the studies discussed in the literature: caring for the elderly tends to be analysed as a separate good and almost exclusively as an outcome of the social policy framework. Very rarely does one find approaches to caring for the elderly that articulate the provision of welfare support with broader social dynamics, namely with family dynamics and normative dynamics.

Some topics that have been gaining increasing visibility within this area of research are those focusing on carers' roles and carer's needs, on quality of care and on choice for care (Murphy, Schofield et al., 1997; OECD, 2000; Pickard, 2001).

One other mainstream area of research, more aligned with political theory, has been studying welfare arrangements in old age from the perspective of the processes of policy design and decision (Raak and Mur-Veeman, 1996). Researchers in this area often focus on the process of policy development in the domain of old age, most of the time from a cross-national comparative perspective (Munday and Ely, 1996; Bahle, 2003). This is an approach that tends to privilege the analysis of policy frameworks and how they impact/influence/explain variations in access to welfare support in old age.

A third current of research is the sociological approach. This approach to welfare arrangements in old age has gained some visibility more recently than the previous two, and has been bringing up topics of analysis such as the links between family helping behaviour and cultural values (Carrafa, Schultz et al., 1997), the impacts of changes in family life on intergenerational relations, caring and transfers of wealth (Bornat, Dimmock et al., 1999), among others.

The goal of this thesis is to develop a holistic analysis of welfare arrangements in old age in Portugal. By holistic, I designate a research approach that attempts to articulate the strategies developed by individuals with a systemic view that privileges the analysis of the institutional configuration and performance of the global system of welfare provision in its multiple dimensions.

The emergence of this research topic is grounded in three inter-related reasons:

- a) At a more personal level, the interest of the researcher in a topic that is just beginning to emerge as a research topic in a country where any public/political debate on welfare support in old age remains conspicuously absent.
- b) The identification of a gap in the body of empirical research on welfare in old age, that tends to take as a reference the realities of the more developed welfare states, leaving out countries where the welfare state project has never fully matured and where the problem of welfare support in old age needs to be analysed from a different angle.
- c) Related to the previous point, the underdevelopment of conceptual categories that centre the analysis on family dynamics in general and on intergenerational dynamics in particular.

In the following paragraphs I expand in more detail each of the three points raised.

### **1.1. Welfare support to old age in Portugal: research and policy agendas**

To start, it should be clarified that social policy is not established in Portugal as a research field where multidisciplinary approaches meet. Research on social policy is carried out mostly by sociologists. Also of significance is the fact that there are no research centres or institutions specialised in research on welfare provision, social care or as a matter of fact on any other specific topic of social policy. Researchers are integrated in research centres/university departments structured along disciplinary

lines. Among other consequences this means that there has been no continuous and systematic research on the topic of welfare support in old age per se that allows for the building up of some type of school or national orientation.

Adding to this, it should be acknowledged that only very recently, largely as a consequence of European integration, did the *Instituto Nacional de Estatística* (official centre producing national data, INE) start implementing surveys that relate specifically to family dynamics (e.g. the European Community Household Panel). Access to databases remains complicated and difficult to achieve, and only in some very few cases research projects have been able to draw on these data.

On the side of policy debate, it is significant to highlight that Portugal is one of the rare cases in Europe where the problem of welfare support in old age has not been clearly recognised as a political priority. This is very much related to what has been the general perspective on family policy in that country.

In Portugal, family policy has remained implicit, in the sense that public responsibility for the welfare of families has been embedded in national policies and not explicitly recognised as a separate domain of policy design. The welfare of the elderly in particular remains included in the larger area of family well-being and as such has not been clearly recognised as an autonomous field of policy design and an issue of individual social rights. In fact, the official discourse remains attached to pre-conceptions on the nature of the relation between state and other spheres of social regulation (family, market and third sector), namely to the principle of family privacy and autonomy and to the principle of subsidiarity, and resists to acknowledge the responsibility for the welfare of the elderly as a state's attribute.

In terms of policy design and public investment in social assistance, there has been an almost exclusive focus on expanding the network of childcare facilities (although under the same principles outlined above and promoting the balance between state, market and third sector in developing responses to support families). This emphasis on childcare is very much related to the need to sustain public responsiveness to the importance of women's work and the participation of women in the labour market. It has also meant the public recognition of the need to reconcile family life and work, but this has been confined to the issue of childcare.

From a global perspective, one could almost say there has been some alignment between the policy and the research agendas on the topic of welfare support in old age. On both sides of academics and policy makers there has been a more or less

consensual acceptance of the status of the elderly as recipients of welfare support in relation to their families, and only very recently the need to address the issue of care for the elderly as a domain of policy design became a topic for debate. Despite the efforts of some researchers to denounce the abusive use of some studies by public agents as instruments to legitimise social underinvestment (namely the use of studies on the nature of the Portuguese society as a case of resilient traits of pre-modern informal networks of solidarity), the truth is that the official discourse takes as a starting assumption the resilience and willingness of Portuguese families to be the primary providers of welfare support to the elderly.

It seemed important in the context outlined above to develop some systematic research effort that would address in some detail the topic of welfare arrangements in old age among the Portuguese elderly. It seemed particularly important to the researcher to dissect the dimensions and implications of the existing assumptions on the familialist character of the Portuguese global system of welfare provision in old age: a system that not only considers families as the primary locus for social aid but that also assumes families are willing and do not fail in performing that role.

## **1.2. The Portuguese case in the international research agenda**

Much of the research carried out by European researchers on the topic of welfare support in old age tends to take a comparative approach, this meaning they draw on the analysis of different national contexts, often classified in light of the established typologies of welfare state regimes. The underlying goal seems to be to understand how different welfare state configurations, (seen from the side of economic decisions and resources allocation, or seen from the side of the processes of policy design and implementation, or from the side of how existing policies impact on individual/collective behaviour), produce different outcomes in terms of the welfare arrangements of the elderly.

However, in the mainstream literature, there is an almost exclusive empirical focus on the well-established, mature welfare states of the most advanced countries. This is particularly so when it comes to including in cross-national comparisons the less developed South European social protection systems. In most research projects that have actually addressed the South European specificities in terms of logics of welfare support in old age, the countries taken as representatives of the cluster are usually

Italy and Spain (Carrafa, Schultz et al., 1997; Fargion, 2000; Aassve, Billari et al., 2001). These, however, are two countries that, within the South European cluster, show the highest degree of industrialisation and generally stronger economies.

The omission of countries such as Portugal (or Greece) from the mainstream research on welfare provision in old age from a comparative perspective has several consequences. I highlight the consequence of having conceptual and methodological developments in the topic aligning with the characteristics of the countries studied, meaning that there may be dimensions of analysis that are undervalued in mainstream frameworks given they are not particularly significant in the empirical contexts analysed.

This relates to the third reason for this research, addressed immediately below.

### **1.3. Established theoretical/conceptual categories and the analysis of familialist systems**

Largely as a consequence of the lack of empirical relevance of countries such as Portugal or other examples of less developed formal systems of welfare support in old age, there is a gap identified in mainstream literature on welfare arrangements in old age. Very incipient attention has been paid to family dynamics and in particular to intergenerational dynamics in welfare arrangements. The dominant approaches in the literature take for granted the role of families in countries such as Portugal (Giarchi, 1996). Although put in a over-simplified way, it seems to be considered that in national contexts where the level of welfare state development lags behind that of more developed countries, for a set of different reasons, families tend to step in and absorb the bulk of the responsibilities for welfare support in old age. There are no relevant studies on why this is the case, or if it is the case, looking at the side of family dynamics and trying to understand the true nature of the negotiations and strategies developed by individuals.

In the literature, the South European cluster is taken as representing social systems still marked by intense flows of exchange of support within the family network as a strategy to tackle old age related needs (Giarchi, 1996; Guillén and Álvarez, 2001). This assumption is then reflected in some more or less simplistic explanations, such as those that establish a straightforward association between multi-generations cohabitation and availability of family support in old age (Giarchi, 1996; Aassve,

Billari et al., 2002). There is no attention paid to the inner logics of living arrangements in these societies and to the effective relation they have with old age related needs.

This thesis was partially triggered by the need to contribute to the clarification of some conceptual categories within the specificities of social policy analysis in social systems marked by familialist logics and underdeveloped formal mechanisms of welfare support in old age.

## **2. Welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly: outlining a research strategy**

This thesis takes as a starting point the widespread belief in the tradition of familialism as a model of welfare provision in Portugal, seen explicitly or implicitly stated in much of the literature on comparative welfare state research and reproduced by official discourses of different social actors. Familialism is understood as a model of global welfare provision that assigns to families the primary responsibility for the welfare of its members and as a model that takes for granted that families do not fail when performing that role.

The initial question that triggered the research was:

“How resilient and operative is familialism as a logics of welfare provision for the Portuguese elderly?”

At the beginning of the research, it was identified a puzzling element that would later be assumed as a structural paradox in the current Portuguese welfare system: the generally accepted notion of familialism - as the willingness of families to provide care and assistance to their members - has been incorporated in social policy design and has been used as a tool for legitimising the absence of family support policies and social assistance services. Individuals themselves tend to reproduce this familialist orientation of public policies in the sense that it is part of a larger system of values characteristic of a society of late modernisation. Nevertheless, the changes that have been experienced in Portugal in the last twenty or thirty years have clearly eroded the ability of families to act as the efficient welfare providers that the official discourse of public actors often assumes they are. This situation can be seen as a potential creator of a mismatch between welfare provision assumptions and effective delivery of welfare support. In a context of limited possibilities for welfare state

expansion, this can be creating widening spaces of social exclusion, in particular when considering social groups that already accumulate other elements of social vulnerability such as the elderly.

The research set as main goal to disentangle the logics of familialism as a model of welfare support in old age in Portugal, in order to understand the roots of its resilience and the levels of its performance in a context of change of some of the traditional assumptions of that system. The period of time analysed in the thesis covers the last 15 years, although at times there are some incursions into a more distant past to ground the analysis of more recent trends.

By taking a holistic perspective, the research design has developed a global approach to welfare arrangements in old age as the meeting point of different social dimensions that are important to articulate and understand in both their specific and conjoint effects.

In that sense, and given the implications of the concept of familialism as a model of social welfare provision, welfare arrangements were considered as the outcome of:

1. The institutional configuration of the global system of welfare provision, namely in the way it reflects in the social policy instruments and ideologies.
2. Family dynamics, namely the logics of family arrangements considering all individuals/generations involved and all of their needs/resources (not only those of the elderly).
3. Normative propositions on family solidarity.

The research goal was to unravel the logics behind the welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly and to clarify the terms of the problem of welfare support in old age in familialist countries, in light of their recent socio-economic and demographic changes.

### **3. Outline of the thesis**

I introduce next the general structure of the thesis by outlining the main contents of each chapter and articulating them with the overall rationale of the research.

Chapter 1 sets to define in a systematic way the core theoretical pillars/options for the analysis of the welfare arrangements of the Portuguese elderly.

In line with a research strategy that takes a holistic synthesis of patterns of individual behaviour, aiming at unravelling the multisided logics behind familialism as a model



of welfare support among the elderly, the thesis tries to articulate contributions from three lines of reasoning:

- The institutional reading of welfare arrangements, namely those contributions shaped by new-institutionalism approaches that allow tackling the processes of institutional development and change and how social policy design and welfare support opportunities/preferences/choices are imbricated in different dimensions of the historical processes of institutional design.
- The readings of welfare arrangements from the side of family dynamics, emphasising the far-reaching implications of family dynamics and the complexities behind the exercise of family solidarity.
- The normative understanding of welfare arrangements, including in the overall theoretical model social norms and values and discussing the dimensions of influence of cultural/normative factors in the design of patterns of welfare provision.

Chapter 2 of the thesis introduces in detail the empirical case analysed along the thesis and focuses on the main elements of the historical process of welfare state development in Portugal, highlighting the path dependent character of some of its contemporary features. The analysis put forward in this chapter provides the overall context for the understanding of the familialist imprint of the global system of welfare provision in Portugal and sets the tone for the more detailed analysis of the institutional design behind the model of provision of welfare support in old age. This chapter also discusses the late emergence of the Portuguese welfare state and the impact of the heritage of a strong past of centralisation, authoritarian culture and bureaucracy. Furthermore, chapter 2 discusses how and why the Portuguese state has always counted on the civil society to fill in the gaps left by a weak state provision, be that by means of informal networks of solidarity or the expansion of a quasi-government non-profit sector.

Following the global analysis of the overall system of welfare provision in Portugal, in chapter 3 we find a relatively detailed analysis of the existing mechanisms/logics of formal provision of welfare support for the elderly within that same system. The analysis highlights two dimensions of provision: the existing framework of rights/benefits and the actual delivery and access to welfare support among the elderly. The conclusions drawn from this chapter consolidate a set of research questions that are raised in a more systematic way in chapter 4 and that are answered

and discussed along the remaining chapters of the thesis. Among those conclusions it should be highlighted that social security cash benefits and services available within the Portuguese social protection to old age are very low and sometimes so inefficient as to generate extreme poverty. The analysis in chapter 3 demonstrates that since the very beginning of the history of social policies in Portugal, a high level of familialisation of welfare provision has marked social policies tackling old age. Furthermore it is demonstrated that, in that country, there is no mobilisation around the issue of caring for the elderly as a social right and that official discourses remain highly assistencialist and persist in considering the family as the 'natural' and most desirable mechanism to address old age related needs.

Both chapters 2 and 3 were organised on the basis of literature reviews and documental analysis.

Chapter 4 is structured as a discussion on the methodology of research employed and on the methods of analysis developed. It is in this chapter that the rationale of the research design is brought together and that the initial research hypothesis is operationalised into subordinate/applied research enquiries. In face of the discussion developed in the previous chapters, there was a fundamental paradox that needed to be investigated: in contemporary Portugal we seem to have a formal system of social protection in old age that shows all the traits of a familialist system in a society that seems to be moving away from the socio-demographic structures typical of familialism, or at least, that allow familialism to operate effectively. This prompted the research question already introduced and that leads to the analysis of two other dimensions of welfare arrangements complementing the analysis put forward in chapters 2 and 3: the analysis of family dynamics and the analysis of normative dispositions. In chapter 4, we find a relatively detailed discussion on how the two dimensions are operationalised in the research and how they are articulated with the empirical data.

The thesis has used for the empirical analysis data from three different sources: the European Community Household Panel, especially the database for 1998; the Family Budget Survey released by the Portuguese National Statistics Office (INE), in particular the database for 2000; the Eurobarometer Survey Series, especially the databases for years 1992, 1995 and 1998. In chapter 4, we find a summary of each data source and the reasons for its use in the thesis.

The empirical part of the research has involved a great deal of descriptive analysis in line with a study design that aims at providing a holistic synthesis that can explain the trends observed in data. Hypotheses' testing was not at the core of the research framework and this was reflected in the ways the data were analysed. The statistical procedures used for analysing data are those adequate for descriptive purposes. The analysis followed a general scheme of simple description at the univariate and bivariate levels leading to multivariate syntheses that articulate the full scope of factors considered in the explanation of the trends/patterns observed in the data. In chapter 4, we find a set of considerations on the technical details involved in the analysis of data.

Although the thesis focuses on a case study, it resorts to some comparative analysis, namely to highlight the meanings of the trends found for the Portuguese case. The chapters that deal with the presentation and discussion of the results of the empirical analysis are structured to articulate those two levels of analysis: a detailed and more specific analysis of the Portuguese case with a cross-national comparative analysis.

Chapter 5 is structured in a way that allows for the systematic listing of the key elements in the lives of the Portuguese elderly, often defined from a comparative perspective, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The content of the discussions put forward in chapter 5 address three main issues: i) identifying with whom are the elderly living and the main socio-demographic trends that appear associated with the different living arrangements in old age; ii) describing the general level of well-being of the elderly population by analysing financial conditions in old age; iii) looking at familialism from the side of those engaging in care for the elderly, describing levels and ways of engagement in caring activities among the families.

Chapter 6 moves on to a relatively detailed discussion, for the Portuguese case, on familialism seen from the side of household dynamics. This involves analysing income dynamics within the household as well as in kind exchanges of support. The chapter provides evidence on the inner logics of familialism in the lives of the Portuguese elderly seen from the side of family dynamics and consolidates the argument that welfare arrangements in old age are part of a broader system of intergenerational exchanges of support that do not necessarily prioritise the needs of the elderly.

The last of the three chapters that introduce the results of the empirical analysis carried out in the thesis is chapter 7 and provides a discussion on familialism in the lives of the elderly seen from the normative side of welfare arrangements. In familialist settings, the debate is still very much linked to the belief that there remains a system of values and social norms that are resilient and that pressure towards family responsibility, which largely legitimises, if not *de facto* at least at the discursive level, the under-development of the formal provision of support to the older people. Chapter 7 discusses the expressions and the multisided meanings behind that system of norms and values.

The last chapter of the thesis, chapter 8, summarises the main conclusions of the study and attempts to discuss the main implications of the findings put forward along the thesis.

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