



**ESRC Research Group on  
Wellbeing in Developing Countries**

**WeD Working Paper 29**

**LABELS, WELFARE REGIMES AND INTERMEDIATION: CONTESTING  
FORMAL POWER**

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## **WeD - Wellbeing in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group**

WeD is a multidisciplinary research group funded by the ESRC, dedicated to the study of poverty, inequality and the quality of life in poor countries. The research group is based at the University of Bath and draws on the knowledge and expertise from three different departments (Economics and International Development, Social and Policy Sciences and Psychology) as well as an extensive network of overseas contacts and specific partnerships with institutes in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand. The purpose of the research programme is to develop conceptual and methodological tools for investigating and understanding the social and cultural construction of well-being in specific countries.

### **Correspondence**

The Secretary

Wellbeing in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group (WeD)

3 East 2.10

University of Bath

Bath BA2 7AY, UK

E-mail [wed@bath.ac.uk](mailto:wed@bath.ac.uk)

Tel +44 (0) 1225 384514

[www.welldev.org.uk](http://www.welldev.org.uk)

Fax +44 (0) 1225 384848

A large print size version of this paper is available on request.

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For enquiries concerning the submission of working papers please contact Ian Gough by email: [i.r.gough@bath.ac.uk](mailto:i.r.gough@bath.ac.uk) or by writing to the above address.

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## **SUMMARY**

This paper revisits Wood's 1985 paper on the 'politics of development policy labelling', focusing on processes of categorisation and forms of intermediation. It first reviews the context and summarises the original 'labelling as political manipulation' argument. Reviewing subsequent development and sociological discourses, it develops an autocritique of the hegemonic, statist assumptions of authoritative labelling. It then develops a revised argument which recognises the significance of plurality and contestation in the labelling process, as a way of understanding how formal power is either directly challenged or by-passed in more informal, less bureaucratically configured settings. It then deploys a comparative welfare regimes approach to capture more systematically the variations in intermediation, through which power is exercised and people pursue their livelihoods and wellbeing. The central feature of this welfare regimes framework is the relationship between rights, claims and correlative duties, and how these vary between different welfare regimes, and especially between formal bureaucratic practice and informal clientelism.

### **Keywords:**

Labels, intermediation, welfare regimes, authoritative labelling, clientelism

### **Key Readings:**

Wood G.D. (1985a) 'The Politics of Development Policy Labelling' in G.D.Wood (ed) *Labelling In Development Policy*. London, Sage (and Special Issue of *Development and Change* Vol 16: 347-373 July 1985)

Wood G.D. & Gough, I. (2006) 'A Comparative Welfare Regime Approach to Global Social Policy' *World Development*. October Vol 34, No.10 1696-1712

### **CORRESPONDENCE TO:**

Geof Wood

Professor of International Development

Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Bath

Bath BA2 7AY

E-mail: [G.D.Wood@bath.ac.uk](mailto:G.D.Wood@bath.ac.uk)

Tel: 01225 386736

## Introduction

In revisiting my earlier arguments about the 'politics of development policy labelling' (Wood 1985a), this paper focuses upon the general relationship between processes of categorisation and forms of intermediation. The argument starts with a review of the context for the original labelling thesis, and a summary of the 'labelling as political manipulation' argument which dominated that original paper. This leads into a brief overview of the relevant development and sociological discourses which followed those earlier arguments and thus an autocritique built around the limitations of the hegemonic, statist assumptions of authoritative labelling. This reflection sets up the basis for a revised argument which recognises the greater significance of plurality and contestation in the labelling process as a way of understanding how formal power is either directly challenged or by-passed in societies where the exercise of informal, less bureaucratically configured power prevails.

This is the basis of deploying a comparative welfare regimes approach (Gough, Wood et al 2004, Wood and Gough 2006) to capture more systematically the variation in forms of intermediation, as informed by labelling, through which power is exercised and through which people have to pursue their livelihoods and wellbeing. The central feature of this welfare regimes framework is the relationship between rights, claims and correlative duties, and how these vary between different welfare regimes. It observes that scarcity is managed in different ways in different regimes through variations in the process of intermediation between rights and claims on the one hand and correlative duties on the other. It also observes that the model of bureaucratic rationality characterised by authoritative labelling only applies successfully to societies where the state is sufficiently legitimate to perform both de-commodification and regulatory functions over the market, as well as community and household institutions. Within that notion of legitimacy is the widespread acceptance of the practices of bureaucratic rationality in classifying need and targeting resources to those needs.

However in societies where these principles of the welfare and developmental state do not exist then the relationship between rights, claims and correlative duties is not governed by bureaucratic and authoritative labelling. Thus we enter a range of situations which will be schematically outlined. A contrast is used between simple and dynamic reproduction in order to distinguish between situations of strong path dependency and thus simple reproduction through the domination of

uncontested state categories of rights, and situations of weaker path dependency, characterised by plurality and/or contestation, entailing prospects for dynamic reproduction – positively or negatively in terms of the wellbeing of the powerless. The plurality of authoritative labelling refers to what elsewhere is termed 'informal security regimes' where the domain of policy and state implementation is more obviously obliged to compromise with the hierarchy of intermediary actors who de facto but not de jure command the relationship between rights, claims and correlative duties through forms of patronage and other informal practices which nevertheless entail the management of scarcity through the informal prioritisation of needs. The 'contestation' end of that range is where the state is struggling but failing to establish the authoritativeness of its labelling over the rest of society—leading to various forms of contestation and subversion.

### **The context for earlier labelling thesis**

What was the point of departure for the original arguments?<sup>1</sup> They were several. **Empirically**, they were an instinctive counter-reaction to the practices of targeting, or even extreme targeting, which also required convincing other needy people outside the target that those so targeted were legitimately within it. Interestingly in the late 70s/early 80s (partly as a continuation of Basic Needs discourses) it was the 'progressive', poverty-oriented like-minded Scandinavian, Dutch and Canadian donors along with INGOs<sup>2</sup> and DNGOs who pursued targeting in mass poverty societies like Bangladesh. ODA/DfID was, at that time, out of the loop, still committed to non-targeted, programme aid. While targeting on the poorest appeared to be progressive (for example in rich, but unequal, Western societies), in the context of mass poverty it could be understood as regressive in the sense of actually excluding the needy. That problem remains located in the contemporary micro-classifications of poverty (chronic, extreme, hard-core etc.) for policy focus, as illustrated in UK-DfID's current poverty-focussed programmes in Bangladesh. **Ideologically and politically**, although Schaffer was my guru, we approached these issues via a tension between

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to acknowledge that these arguments had their origins in debates between myself and Bernard Schaffer. He died in May 1984 before I had drafted the central theoretical chapter of the earlier (1985a) publication. Bernard had supervised my original MPhil thesis on post-colonial administrative training in Zambia, and then I drifted off into Marxism, development anthropology and India/Bangladesh. But we remained very close. He was an intellectual colossus, continuously challenging my dialectical materialism. These labelling debates re-connected our projects - alas not for long enough.

<sup>2</sup> International NGO

Schaffer's critical Weberianism and my Marxism in the way the state should be analysed. However, both of us had written about 'access' (i.e. state-society relations at the interface of service provision and resource allocation) in the late 70s, from our respective positions (i.e. for Schaffer, the mechanics of bureaucratic rationing via queues, interface and encounters; and for Wood in terms of the exercise of inequality, rooted in political economy, together with the social incompatibility of bureaucratic and peasant rationalities). Meanwhile I had been reading Althusser, Foucault and post-structuralists, as well as remembering Gramsci, Dahl and Lukes. So the **theoretical convergence** between Schaffer and Wood focussed upon a frustration with the contemporary form of Marxian discourse about the state which was silent on the actual processes of power amid the formal assertions that the 'state acted' in either fully captured or relatively autonomous ways that were necessarily consistent with the interests of prevailing dominant classes. So we were interested in the unmasked questions about 'how' the state might serve the interests of some to the exclusion of others. Our entry point into this 'how' question was therefore the process of labelling, as a fundamental activity of exercising power. Althusser wrote about ideological apparatuses of the state. Foucault about hidden, unobserved power expressed through repeated, normalised, technique. The post-structuralists nevertheless remained gloomy about agency, seeing it as always over-ridden. So our work was intended to reveal these hidden, insidious dimensions of power, where authoritative, 'scientific' technique is used to de-politicise an essentially political process of resource allocation and management of scarcity through the realisation of conformity to labels which indicated the distribution of rights to entitlements. We settled upon this entry point as, in effect, the next step in our joint earlier interest in access. But in pursuit of this dimension of power, we thus entered a world of shadows, illusions and disguises. And arguably, all large organisations operate with these characteristics which reflect internal power configurations as well as organisational power over others.

### **Labelling as a fundamental social process**

The acts of classification and taxonomy are rather fundamental to human behaviour and interaction. If we consider the world around us as constructed by concentric circles of increasing moral distance, then we increasingly rely upon our skills and memories of classification as our relationships move from inner to outer circles – that is from intimate kin and friends to strangers, from multi-dimensional to single-dimensional

transactions, from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*. Of course, many things intrude into these processes of classification for personal survival: values, interests, preferences and learning from repeated interactions. Continuous adjustments to our taxonomies are made through symbolic processes of interaction. In this way, relationships can settle down to a pattern, and do not have to be derived from first principles each time, which would be too costly and insecure for functional interaction. To this social convenience of labelling as a proxy for unique and primary assessments must be added 'power'. It is of course everywhere, when two or more persons interact. For interactions towards the outer circles, power is more institutionalised rather than the idiosyncratic outcome of personalities in interaction. But of course, even within the immediate family, age and gender provide non-idiosyncratic accounts of power. From this we can understand that the interesting question is not whether we label and categorise. We all do that, as asserted above. Rather, the interesting questions are which and whose labels prevail, and under what contextual conditions? These 'which', 'whose' and 'what' questions become more significant as we move to the outer circles because these are the transactions more in the public than private domain. The public domain is one of institutionalised power within a wider framework of political economy, within which policies (through deliberation or default) are constructed to allocate resources and opportunities under conditions of overall scarcity. Such policies and their outcomes are an inextricable aspect of the power of labelling – the process of classifying needs and entitlements. And the interesting question here is whether that labelling is transparent and the result of open political competition, or whether it is hidden and arbitrarily imposed upon an unconvinced population. However, this is an extremely complex question to answer. The 'Labelling in Development Policy' volume in 1985 sought to answer this question both theoretically and ontologically as well as through case study application.

### **Labelling as political manipulation - arguments from the 80s**

While, as argued above, labelling, categorisation and classification is an intrinsic component of human agency, this is not the place to survey the entire breadth of labelling in all human interaction. Thus the interest here lies in a sub-set of the labelling process which pertains to prioritising claims to welfare. Sometimes these claims will be understood as rights and sometimes as effective demand. When understood as rights, the discourse of labelling will concern universal and moral concepts of need, deserving, targeting, inclusion/exclusion, prioritising and queuing for access. When

understood as effective demand, although an implicit list of similar qualifications may be deployed, there will also be the dimension of effectiveness of voice, meaningful threats of disloyalty, and realistic exit options which might harm resource controllers and service providers. There is, therefore, a tension between labelling as a hidden political process of technique, having recourse to 'science' for legitimacy and authoritativeness, and labelling as a negotiated, more obviously political process, reliant upon contingent settlement, always vulnerable to change. The central proposition is that the process of labelling is a relationship of power, in that the labels used by some sets of actors are more easily imposed upon a policy area, upon a situation, upon people as classification than those labels created and offered by others.

Labelling is a pervasive process, occurring at different levels and within different arenas of interaction. So, not just between the state and people in the society, but between people through constructions of social othering and identity creation. We are all labellers, and therefore we are all in turn labelled. Thus we abstract from the individual, the actuality, and then stereotype via the use of metaphor. All interaction requires labelling in the form of images, badges, stereotypes and metaphors which as signals guide perceptions and thus interactional behaviour. The power issue is expressed in terms of whether the individual controls the presentation of self image, or receives and lives within the images imposed by others.

The original paper concluded, therefore, that the issue is **not whether** we label, but **which** labels are created, and **whose** labels prevail to define a whole situation or policy area, under what conditions and with what effects? Applied to the analysis of the state, and more particularly for this chapter an analysis of welfare state regimes, we have to ask how specific sets of labels become universalised and legitimised instead of some other set. How does one set become authoritative at the expense of other options and choices? This is the crucial insight into political process. Accepted or authoritative labelling is the entry point into understanding the political settlement which underpins stable social policy. This is to be contrasted to unsettled political circumstances when labelling is far more contested. Thus authoritative labelling represents the conclusion or outcome of political settlement, when historic agreements have been reached between contending classes, ethnic and linguistic groups, genders and generations. While such agreements are not set in stone, their basic premises and assumptions are difficult to shift radically. **Simple** reproduction is more likely than **dynamic**, or **extended** reproduction. Thus the notion of political settlement reflects a situation of



induced consensus where each potentially contending party and advocate of change also calculates the odds of achieving any significant improvement as remote and likely to put present, albeit inadequate, entitlements at risk. Thus were revolutions always contained. This is how political settlements can reflect highly unequal social and economic conditions, as in the UK.

The process whereby acceptance is gained is assisted by 'politics appearing as technique'. This has been the contribution of Foucault. The authoritative labels of the state, and thus political settlements, are buttressed by the activities of science and the rationality assumed therein. Social sciences, especially in the forms of social policy and development studies, are essentially in the business of arranging people in different classifications and taxonomies for the purposes of data comparison to explain key variables in behaviour. Thus science, rationality and expertise appear as apolitical technique making the underlying assumptions about classification, arranging, grouping for the purposes of data comparison and policy justification unassailable in political debate. Grouping and classification is all about boundaries and thresholds, and where they are to be set for the purposes of attributing significance. While regression analysis offers more flexibility in terms of attributing significance to linear options, and thus more independence from the terms of the original question, it does not remove the arbitrariness of original category selection. A good example of politicised category selection has been SIDA<sup>3</sup> in Bangladesh when in the late 80s it attempted to target the extreme poor (a different concept and label from chronic) by using <0.5 acres as the divider between included and excluded families for targeted benefits in a village *para*<sup>4</sup>. However, such an arbitrary snapshot approach bore little or no relation to the experience of being poor in those *paras*.

This point sets up a key issue - the extent to which the authoritativeness of a label is undermined by lack of self evident fit to the condition of the labelled. If we take the SIDA case again. Let us assume that 30 families live in a *para* of a Bangladeshi village. As nuclear entities, these families are 'paribars'. However, these nuclear entities are frequently grouped into immediate, perhaps extended, kinship groups as 'baris' - perhaps with dwellings surrounding and facing into a common courtyard where some activities are done together. While all these *paribars* may share poverty, for

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<sup>3</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

<sup>4</sup> A 'para' is an identifiable geographical section of a village, where the families may trace common genealogical descent making some of them intimate to each other, and others more remote by blood but nevertheless acknowledging some bond and identity.

various reasons of multiple inheritance and debt circumstances they have variations in control over land at any one snapshot in time. However, they know that the poorest family today was better off yesterday, and those who are coping today could be in a rapid downward trajectory tomorrow. In other words they are all in a livelihoods process, improving, coping or declining at any one point in time but always highly vulnerable to crisis round the corner. Each family know this of each other. What sense then in trying to differentiate between them for targeting purposes on the basis of only one variable - land control? That control is so precarious for all. Can the label be imposed? Yes, but was it authoritative in the sense of being a self evident and valid discriminator locally? No.

What has happened in this example? The agrarian economy has been understood too strongly in terms of land access and ownership as the prime determinant of livelihoods success. Thus landlessness becomes a key policy concept, as indeed it has been for three decades in the Bangladeshi discourse. From among the many roles, and thus including the many ways of earning a living, the land owning variable has been plucked as indicating everything else about a family's livelihoods prospects. Behavioural assumptions flow from this indicator. No account is taken of how a family may have entered or will exit from this condition. No attention to routes, in other words. Instead, the individual has been transformed into a client (i.e. the policy target) by being differentiated and disaggregated into components, and then identified with one component, with one principal label as the insight into the whole condition. The individual has thereby been transformed into an object, into a 'case' and de-linked from his/her own story. The greater the separation of the case from the story, the more the tendency away from self-evidence in terms of label applicability, and thus this separation is an index of power for the possessor of the case. Taking the SIDA example of targeting in Bangladesh, the political significance of de-linking lies in severing the target families from their social context, breaking identities to kin, clan and neighbourhood, and re-establishing identity on the basis of the family's relationship to or dependency upon an actual or potential category of state activity.

To those in power in unequal political economies, poverty is best conceptualised as behavioural rather than structural in order to separate the rich and powerful from responsibility for poverty through exploitative relations of production and exchange. This translates into behavioural rather than structural labels to designate the poverty problem and politically disorganise the poor through atomising the causes of their condition. Such

conceptualisation underpins policy and strategy, directing it towards activity which is weakly linked or de-linked by this ideological representation to historical systems of unequal exchange. Thus the poor become labelled through other self-incriminating badges: beggars, street urchins, itinerants, refugees, slum-dwellers, lazy, incompetent and so on. In this way, we see the de-linking of individuals from their hi/stories, enabling the de-linked explanations of poverty and deprivation to appear ideologically as the 'culture of poverty' in which the victims are blamed for their own condition. By de-linking explanations structurally from the non-poor, poverty is therefore easily explained as deriving from characteristics internal to the poor. People are labelled with badges independent of the capitalist relations of production through which their poverty, their vulnerability, their insecurity, their underemployment, their alienation is reproduced.

Within the terms of the global neo-liberal discourse, the main policy response to poverty alleviation from these de-linking labelling processes has been to increase the capacity of the poor to enter and operate successfully within the domain of markets. The central principle has been small scale entrepreneurialism and the spread of enterprise capacity. This has incorporated some strange bedfellows: capability thinkers; human development, rights and education advocates; even the most socially radical NGOs; the micro-finance industry; the small scale enterprise lobby; alongside international finance organisations. In welfare regime terms, the entrepreneurial panacea implies a weak political settlement, avoiding the harder structural questions about redistribution through, for example, wider and deeper taxes upon the rich.

Thus the original arguments about authoritative labelling in the poverty arena concluded, in effect, that social science, policy makers and the rich and powerful all conspired in the process of de-linking poor individuals from their stories, representing them through a series of degraded labels involving behavioural incompetences, pathologies and deviance. If the process fails to convince, it is difficult to maintain targeted, well-defined, case-oriented labels. In other words the problem is no longer successfully contained because the separation of case and story collapses. People re-assert their stories – in other words, they exercise voice, they struggle, they critically participate. The citizenship side of capabilities overrides the market entry side. This opposition sets up the main challenge to the idea of neo-liberal, welfare state regimes addressing mass poverty in poor countries – which is the general thrust of global development discourses, especially those emanating from richer countries. It is self-evidently very difficult to

label, de-link and therefore target the poor in conditions of widespread, mass poverty. This was SIDA's problem in Bangladesh in the 80s, and remains the problem for all those contemporary programmes focussing upon the chronic and/or extreme poor. It is difficult to positively discriminate in favour of the majority! They cannot all be blamed as incompetent and thus responsible for their own predicament.

### **Autocritique – hegemony, authoritativeness and simple reproduction**

Subsequent to publishing the original work, I was influenced by several intellectual contributions in the second half of the 80s which further moderated my earlier attempts at Marxian institutional ethnography via labelling. In 1985, Booth critiqued the over-reductionist, over-determinist dependency arguments as a failing paradigm within development sociology. I caught up with the Giddens (1984) reconciliation of structural determinism and free agency via his structuration thesis. For development anthropologists and later sociologists, the adaptation of dependency critiques and structuration as actor-oriented epistemology by Norman Long (1990), and his colleague in Wageningen, Van Der Ploeg (Long and V.D.Ploeg 1994), liberated the analysis of dynamic change in the interface between individuals/local communities and large scale bureaucratic agencies from its erstwhile hegemonic grip<sup>5</sup>. Latour's (1987) actor-network theory in the formation of knowledge stimulated the breakdown of expert-local dyads by Stephen Biggs and others (1997 and 1998), thus opening up the labelling approach to the idea of more negotiation and contestation.

These post publication insights have modified my earlier thesis, requiring autocritique. We assumed too much for the state, and were too universalist in our normative expectations of the state as the key authoritative entity in any society. Furthermore, where our empirical knowledge informed us of the problematic state (conceived in both Weberian and Marxian terms), we nevertheless operated within the assumption that the authoritativeness of the state was only a matter of time in societies where it had yet to be reached. These assumptions led us to concentrate, therefore, upon a quintessential 'western' problematic: the inner, hidden workings of the advanced state which purported to operate within a liberal-democratic, pluralist political system underpinning a neo-liberal, welfare state regime. We were overly preoccupied with the Foucauldian perspective (Foucault 1979) on the de-politicisation of legitimate political choice in resource

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<sup>5</sup> Schaffer would have hugely approved of these intellectual developments.

allocation via the activity of technique. Our focus was the penetrative capacity of the state to organise and reorganise the basic societal categories and accompanying ideologies through which ordinary people transacted among themselves in the outer circles of their moral universes.

Thus the arguments drew heavily upon Althusser and Poulantzas, as well as Habermas and Marcuse, who offered a precise critique of the simplistic Marxist proposition which associated the state solely with the interests of the dominant classes in any epoch, especially a capitalist one. That critique proposed, instead, the relative autonomy of the state as an actor within the mode of production, rather than simply a determined function of it. It was this epistemological breakthrough in Marxian thought, with due acknowledgement to Weber and more obviously, Gramsci, which enabled us to ask the 'how' question about the state's penetrative performance, rather than just the 'what' question. The 'relative autonomy' of the state also presumed that the state was not just a slave of market forces in capitalism, but in some way a moderator of such market forces. In other words, it had the power to introduce countervailing allocative rationalities to those of the market. This brings us, now, closer to Polanyi and the subsequent arguments of Esping-Andersen (1999). But, by acknowledging diversity in the performance of relative autonomy across different versions of capitalism in industrial and post-industrial societies, the way is opened up to examine a wider range of societal types which include the incomplete presence of capitalism in today's transforming or developing societies. This is the way in which the argument needs to move on from the limitations of the original labelling arguments on two fronts: first, the penetrative extent of the authority of the state under, secondly, conditions of highly imperfect markets (labour, product and financial).

## **Welfare Regimes as Rights, Claims and Correlative Duties**

Essentially the *power* of labelling and categorisation is a dialogue between those in authority (formal and perhaps informal) and those trying to activate rights or make claims on those with the power and authority to dispose of matching resources and services – i.e. the performance of correlative duties. In this dialogue, labelling is a rationing and allocation activity, and thus is essentially political. It is a mode of distribution and redistribution, either **simply** reproducing stratification outcomes or **dynamically** reproducing new forms of mobilisation and voice, which thus become new constituencies for changing the classification discourse. There is a

necessary circularity between rights and correlative duties. Rights are defined by those willing or obliged to provide the correlative duties via a process of authoritative labelling. However correlative duties can also be defined by those claiming rights when their mobilisation into powerful constituencies can make effective demands on those providing correlative duties by undermining the validity of the original 'rights' classification and compelling revised labelling. This is why we must retain an interactionist (Goffman 1971, 1972) dimension to the analysis of this process. By introducing claims as well as rights into this argument, attention is also drawn to a contrast between formal, statutory relationships, entailing rights and correlative duties, and the more informal processes by which claims are made upon potential service providers. This contrast effectively distinguishes between welfare state regimes and other non-state centred welfare regimes (informal security and in/security regimes), with 'rights' associated with the former and 'claims' more associated with the latter. Thus 'claims' are not statutory, correlative duties but a range of service responses within a more arbitrary, patron-clientelist structure: voluntarism; reciprocity; patronage; arbitrary discretion. From this, we can conclude that a 'rights' context features authoritative labelling, operated by bureaucratic rationality and a principle of universalism; whereas although a 'claims' context also entails processes of labelling, the authority of that labelling is exercised more coercively and more particularistically. This is an important adjustment to our original, sole focus upon authoritative labelling and bureaucratic rationality, since it acknowledges that outer circles, while outside of immediate moral intimacy, can nevertheless continue to be managed outside of moral **universals**, and therefore beyond the reach of the state.

## **A Comparative Intermediation Framework**

In this paper, the labelling process is being used as a variable to distinguish between different forms of intermediation between resource controllers and resource/service users. The concept of intermediation is almost a proxy for the notion of welfare regime since it represents the process by which rights or claims are met by correlative duties, or the extent to which they are not met but manipulated and avoided. Intermediation comprises many activities and practices: the creation of resources and their allocation to different purposes; the translation of resources into services; the analysis of need in respect of services; the elaboration of criteria to differentiate between types and degrees of entitlement to service; the creation and operation of appellate processes to handle disputes and challenges to the application of

such criteria to distinguish between the included and excluded; the actual disposal of resources via these services; the monitoring of the effectiveness and impact of such services; adjustments to practice in response to feedback from monitoring; and overall evaluation against wider objectives for generating and operationalising this aspect of social policy. Now, while this list of intermediation practices has been presented in rather formal terms, it is important for our overall analysis that we recognise a formal-informal continuum along each of these practice dimensions, and they have to be deconstructed accordingly.

This process of intermediation is central to any understanding of sustained livelihoods involving people negotiating resources within the society's institutional responsibility landscape or matrix (IRM). This concept of the IRM has been elaborated elsewhere (Wood and Gough 2006, and Wood and Newton 2005), but a summary is required to advance our argument here. The comparative analysis of welfare regimes extends beyond Esping-Andersen's (1999) contrast between 3 different welfare **state** regimes for rich, advanced countries: social-democratic, conservative and liberal. Each of these variants reflected differences in the way the state intervenes formally in the society to reduce the impact of unregulated markets on people's livelihoods, through the principle of decommodification. In adapting this approach into a broader comparative understanding of welfare regimes globally (see also Gough, Wood et al 2004), both the state and market arenas are more problematised, requiring people to rely more upon community and informal clientelism, as well as kinship and households. These arenas comprise the institutional responsibility matrix (IRM). As we know, once we move outside the long established, richer democracies, the state is less respected and legitimate, and therefore less authoritative for ideological purposes and labelling functions. And markets are highly imperfect and socially embedded in arbitrary behaviour rather than commodified: thus fragmented, segmented, preferential, unstable and insecure. They are less amenable, therefore, to regulation. Under these conditions, a rights based intermediation process involving consensus about labels triggering social protection and other services is much weaker. Instead a more informal, discretionary claims based, clientelist intermediation prevails, where the labelling game is less secure for the supplicant players.

This critical perspective about the state in terms of comparative welfare regimes, in which distinctions are made between welfare state regimes, informal security regimes and in/security regimes (Wood and Gough 2006)

thus modifies the assumptions about authoritative labelling in the original labelling arguments. In other words, the intermediation between resource controllers and users has to be understood across the institutional responsibility landscape in the contrasting domains of formality/informality, rights/claims and security/insecurity. Labelling, as a precondition of resource allocation, becomes less authoritative and more contested on the right hand side of these dyads. The state is less penetrative ideologically, resulting either in more substitute coercion or less control. And political settlements around the key principles of social policy (e.g. tax funded universal protection with tax claw backs, or lower tax participation and highly targeted protection) harder to reach and less stable, with rights consequently more fragile. Under these conditions, labelling itself changes from the disguising functions of Foucauldian technique into more politically obvious but less universal classification.

## **Labelling and Social Reproduction**

The translation of resources into services is a fundamental act of societal construction. How is the basic social contract to be broken down into its constituent elements in a manner that will reproduce what is valued overall in the society? Like the writing of history, what is valued primarily reflects the interests of powerholders, and secondarily the compromises they have to make to remain in power. Basic choices exist between forms of social investment in human capital to generate greater resources for the future (education, health, communications infrastructure and so on) and forms of social protection to offset the present destabilising threats of inequality, poverty and exclusion (social insurance, pensions, employment protection and so on). Even informal security regimes (quasi democratic, dictatorial and hybrids of state and clientelism) have to have some sense of a social contract, but are likely to be more exposed to the pressures of preferred constituencies in applying particularistic rather than universal criteria and to be far more constrained in terms of a universal tax base. Such national state weakness opens up the political space for other processes to occur, either in the form of NGOs and other forms of voluntarism, or in the forms of local patronage.<sup>6</sup> At the local level, under such conditions, the blurring of boundaries between a universal service and its particularistic mode of delivery is prevalent. Consider the way access is managed via 'mafia' type

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<sup>6</sup> And the connection between voluntarism and patronage should not be under-estimated.



intermediation<sup>7</sup> in poor country urban slums to essential public goods like sanitation, electricity, clean water, secure pathways, as well as to educational or employment opportunities.

In formal, open democratic systems, the public creation of resources for designated purposes is the essence of the policy process – a transparent manifestation of a stable, path dependent political settlement and simple reproduction of the political economy. Resources are generated through various forms of taxation, and thus reflect an element of consent. Purposes are defined through processes of political debate in which some consensus is reached on how much to tax, and who has what entitlements. The labelling of both tax payers and entitlement recipients is indispensable to these regime functions of market decommodification. However under other institutional conditions (problematic state, imperfect markets and clientelist political cultures), resources are gathered up more privately and arbitrarily through rents and tributes as well as indirect taxation, and redistributed to meet political objectives, including the reproduction of patron-client forms of power and control. Because of the informality of these processes, they may occur at very local levels of resource generation and redistribution as well as at more regional and national, widespread levels. In a strong and unchallenged clientelist system, the inequalities of livelihoods and power are also simply reproduced.

The analysis of need is another element in the social construction of society and in a welfare state regime comprises a merging of ideology and technique. But in other informal security (or clientelist) welfare regimes, the identification of need and correlative responses to it is more preferential and partial. Any analysis of need (formal or informal) evolves seamlessly into the next stage: elaboration of corresponding qualifying criteria for entitlements and services, either as rights or less securely as claims. Any analysis of need is a rationing activity and thus constitutes also the management of scarcity, whether bureaucratic or clientelist. So the concept of 'need' is rarely an untainted, objective view of necessary well-being items for would-be recipients. There is an iterative process between a sense of recipients' potential needs and what is actually available for distribution.

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<sup>7</sup> In Bangladesh, the 'mastaan' are a broker class of intermediaries who operate in the zone between desperate people and their essential livelihoods resources, dominating access to employment, municipal services and so on. They 'run' these slums. Indeed, it is common now to refer to a mastaani system or culture, as being more pervasive across the society, as the dominant form of clientelism.

In a welfare state regime characterised by open democracy, that iteration has to be ideologically justified in order to be palatable to both the generators of revenue as well as the recipients of it. If science and technique can support such rationing decisions, then other bases for rationing can be disguised, such as prejudice, ignorance, self-interest, political discrimination and exclusion, gender and ethnic blindness, ageism, and so on. Effective disguises increase the universal validity of qualification criteria, and thus reduce the effort required to secure compliance. Appeals, challenges and contestation are reduced, and thus the transaction costs of rationing. Thus in such systems, science and technique is more available to assist a process of matching qualification criteria to political assumptions and objectives, embedded within basic and usually dominant cultural stances. Most open democratic systems struggle with the boundary between worthy and unworthy, deserving and undeserving. While the rationing rationale may be to sweep as many potential recipients into the unworthy and undeserving categories as possible, this cannot simply be the product or outcome of the prejudices of dominant groups. The Tories under Thatcher tried this with culture of poverty arguments about laziness and circles of deprivation, induced in their minds by over-generous benefits from the state. They, and others on the 'right' of politics, also tried similar formulations with immigrants in different epochs. Such prejudicial behaviour is of course quite generic in different societies and cultures, with constructions of the other being part of self-identity creation. However, for the most part, the Tories could not make the negative labels stick because they could not assemble sufficient supporting science and technique for validation, and attempts to impose such categorisation met with increasing contestation and loss of popular political support.

In other political systems, where the authoritativeness and legitimacy of the state is contested, the prospects for science to disguise prejudice are weaker. Almost a tautology. The analysis of need is thus an even more complicated business. Criteria are less explicit and contestation more likely to be met with force and repression either from the beleaguered state or from powerholders outside it. Clearly constituencies of clients need to be serviced if they are to remain loyal, without being equal in terms of wealth and status, to their patrons who have also captured the state and other organisations in the so-called civil society. Of course, in insecure societies, need is Hegelian as well as Polanyian. It is about secure and orderly conditions for the pursuit of livelihoods and wellbeing as well as needing protection and/or compensation from the discriminatory practices of imperfect markets. The principle of universalism is more likely to apply to

the Hegelian agenda under these circumstances than to the Polanyian one, where the public goods dimension is less evident while the particularistic, individual dependencies are more prominent. This is the basis for favouritism and preferentialism. A sort of mafia model of social policy. Thus the understanding of need does not occur through formal processes of analysis but through far more personalised and iterative forms of communicating the relation between dependency and largesse. These societal forms of dependent security, operating through informal relationships outside the state, imitate the welfare state regime in one crucial respect. They are also path dependent and simply reproducing the political economy, thus earning 'regime' status. Contestation with the state has not translated into contestation with powerholders in clientelist structures.

### **Contestation and Dynamic Reproduction**

Are there more optimistic scenarios in which the authoritative labelling by the state or other powerholders outside the state is contested and challenged, or at least deployed in new forms, thus representing new forms of empowerment, heralding prospects for improving the governing conditions for the institutional responsibility landscape? What would indicate such dynamic contestation? Certainly we have to get behind the rhetoric of civil society and trade union or NGO movements which would have us believe in their independence from the state with a corresponding empowerment agenda. There are too many examples across the world where the empowerment claims belie a corporatist or syndicalist process of incorporation of trade union and NGO leaders into elite positions in the society, conspiring in the labelling processes which keep their followers in subservience. At the same time, there is a potential generic contradiction in which the political disorganisation of labelling actually produces new forms of organisation and solidarities under precisely those imposed labels. This was the purpose of my 'Targets Strike Back' chapter in the original volume of labelling papers (Wood 1985b). If the landless were to be organised via that label into rural works labour during the lean agricultural periods of the year in Bangladesh, could they then embrace that label as a vehicle for organising the promotion and defence of their labour rights to an extent not intended in the original policy instrument which had been about reproducing dependency via state hand-outs – sweat for wheat? Supported as it happens by a combination of SIDA and local NGOs, some empowerment progress was made under the new label (Wood 1994 as well as 1985b).

Lest one think this is an old, insignificant example, consider the expansion of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in India as a response to the problem of jobless growth (Luce 2006, Wood 2006). This is a major programme of herding disparate, poor rural labour across different parts of India into a single relationship to the state. Can one really imagine that they will stay dispersed and disorganised in such a process? Rather this has the potential to produce serious levels of contestation and rights claiming (at least until this chapter is read by the nervous in the Indian Planning Commission!). Of course, this potentially mobilised labour solidarity will have to deal with the local level intermediation processes involving local contractors and preferentialism in recruitment to schemes, alongside the cheating and corruption in the measuring of work and payments therefrom. But the optimistic lesson comes from the proletarianisation of labour under the conditions of early industrial capitalism in the West in which the newly formed labour forces eventually organised to resist the exploitative cheating of pre-commodification capitalist employers freshly weaned from slavery in the colonies. It was only much later that they became incorporated.

There are other examples from India. The constitution is replete with labelling, with some progressive intent by the avuncular authors of it. We have seen over the intervening decades how the labels of backward classes, castes and tribes have enabled those belonging to these categories to use the labels imposed upon them as rallying cries to enhance programmes of positive discrimination and affirmative action by the state. The Mandal Commission, reporting in 1990, was a famous example of newly formed solidarities under the inspiration of state labels translating into successful demands for preferential recruitment into the civil service and educational opportunities via reserved places. The 'Backward' caste Yadavs or Goalas in Bihar have successfully deployed their degraded caste label into the basis for entry into public service opportunities across the state, much to the disgust of the 'Forward' castes who have had to surrender their monopoly rents over these positions. Their caste colleague, Laloo Prasad Yadav, has run the state, albeit bizarrely and corruptly, for the last 2 decades! The 'outcaste' Dalits have shaken off the Harijan label awarded them paternalistically by the high caste Gandhi, moving from an imposed to a self-asserted label as a vehicle for political mobilisation to the point where they cannot be electorally ignored in some Indian states. They can no longer be left out of public social policy, and they are no longer completely trapped into local clientelist domination, although given the continuance of atrocities against them, and especially women, by upper caste landlords and moneylenders, there is some way to go.

And of course, there are so many further examples of such processes from other parts of the world. Some are highly ironic. Consider the relation between the US government and the Taliban in Afghanistan. A clear association based on much labelling. Afghan refugees in and around Peshawar, labelled in ways which kept them apart from mainstream entitlements in Pakistan during the 80s<sup>8</sup>, were constructed into 'freedom fighters' as Mujahuddin embarked upon Jihad and financed to turn them from farmers, traders and teachers into a guerrilla force to fight the US proxy war against Brehznev. Not surprising that their identities and solidarities were consolidated over a decade of intense struggle against the Soviet occupation. And given that 90% of US financial support during that decade went to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, it is also not surprising<sup>9</sup> that that should translate into the overwhelming Pashtun liberating force which became the Taliban identity - with the accompanying irony of 'Talib' meaning student, but of Madrassas since mainstream education had been denied them.

In addition to these processes of contestation, where imposed labels are 'turned' against the labellers, we also need to consider the rejection of imposed labels and the assertion of counter labels. Perhaps the most obvious generic example of this has been the feminist movement world-wide. For many societies behavioural expectations associated with the category 'women' arising from patriarchal labelling have been successfully challenged and translated into different forms of policy and rights. Of course, most feminists would argue that there is a long way to go, even in those societies that have moved the farthest from the patriarchal image of women. But there can be little doubt of successful counter-labelling to centuries of patriarchal assumptions. The whole policy arena of 'equalities and diversities' in the public sector in the UK, together with anti-discriminatory legislation for compliance by the private sector, is effectively the outcome of extending counter-labelling beyond gender to ethnic minorities, the disabled and sexual orientation. The literature of colonialism and post-colonialism is full of counter-labelling. Today's protest movements over mining, oil extraction, pollution, US domination of IPR, unfair trading practices under the WTO are all examples of misplaced assumptions about ignorant, illiterate, disorganised, acquiescent peasants who were not expected to mobilise against unfair prices, wages and conditions at work.

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<sup>8</sup> In the original labelling volume, Zetter wrote interestingly about the labelled conditions of the Greek Cypriot refugees who had had to move from the Turkish held North.

<sup>9</sup> Though clearly a surprise to the US military attaché in Pakistan with whom I had an Islamabad dinner in 2002!

Such processes of counter-labelling become the true test of participation. I revert to a conundrum, which I have used in teaching for many years: the good participant is the bad participant; the bad participant is the good participant. The analysis of labelling provides the answer. Thus the measure of true participation is when successful counter-labelling has occurred, so that the less powerful have demonstrated an ability to negotiate the institutional responsibility landscape (state, market, community and household at domestic and global levels) from their own preferred identities and agendas rather than entrapped within the frameworks set by others. Such mobilisation thus leads to dynamic rather than simple reproduction of political economy and political culture, since the terms of exchange in the realm of images, ideas and frames of meaning have been changed. Optimistically this leads to circumstances where formal rights replace informal claims, and thus more security is enjoyed by the vulnerable and poor. But remember, under such conditions, labelling itself has not disappeared. What has been re-arranged is the 'which' and 'whose' labels prevail in the intermediation between resource controllers and resource users. And under conditions where the state is less legitimate and authoritative and where political settlements around the basic principles of social policy are less stable and secure (non welfare state regimes in other words) we can expect less authoritative labelling and greater contestation. The large question that remains is whether such processes of label contestation will eventually lead to stable political settlements about welfare and entitlements in the longer term. Clearly this has happened strongly in South East Asia and parts of Latin America, though the possibilities of breakdown are always near. Some way to go in South Asia, where much labelling remains outside the state in terms of widespread discriminatory practices and degraded rights. And a long way to go in much of sub-Saharan Africa, where the evidence of state capture by groups and elites is not evidence of stable political settlements for welfare oriented intermediation (Bevan 2004, Lockwood 2006).

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