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FAMILISM

The term *familism* refers to a model of social organization, based on the prevalence of the family group and its well-being placed against the interests and necessities of each one of its members. It is part of a traditional view of society that highlights loyalty, trust, and cooperative attitudes within the family group. Although its origin is in the traditional family institution, it is also used as an analogy for characterizing different forms of organization and social relationships—those that are guided by group interest and well-being instead of the general interest and well-being.

From a psychological point of view, familism is a cluster of attitudes that emphasizes the relevance of the family for personal and social life, the development of a feeling of duty among the members of the family group, and the belief that to have children is a requirement for personal and social realization (Popenoe 1988; Gundelach and Riis 1994).

Familism is a concept that has evolved over time. Three main orientations can be distinguished: a classical social position; a sociopolitical formulation; and a psychological re-elaboration. The main

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antecedents of these orientations are, respectively, the disappearance of the Old Regime, the changes that have taken place around World War II, and the development of a culture of service characteristic of the postindustrial societies.

The Antecedents of Familism

The example of the familists. A Christian group who lived in small communities in sixteenth-century England could be considered to be one of the oldest antecedents for familism. They defended the spiritual unification of Christianity, giving up some of their more basic beliefs to accomplish this aim. The familists first appeared in 1540 in a small German town, where the political ideas of Johannes Althaus were widely accepted. In the book *Systematic Analysis of the Politics,* published in 1603, Althaus defends a new conception of the state as a federal entity composed of small basic units (family, economic associations, villages). A benevolent conception of an absolute monarchy was looked for in the intellectual atmosphere of this period. The *existence* of small communities, as those of the familists, helped with this renovated vision of the monarchy. The familists found great social acceptance in England. These communities spread between 1550 and 1650, but were accused of inspiring Puritanism. Their disappearance coincided with the restoration of English monarchy (1660).

The New Social Order of the Revolution

In political terms, familism can he associated with the new social order, inspired by the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century—which stressed the ability of human reason to understand the world and to solve social and ethical problems, and citizens' right to participate in the process of governance—and the French Revolution. The new order broke with the old hierarchical and stratified ways of social organization, facilitating a democratic social model. However, the private domain, and, therefore, the family institution, remained within the old hierarchical pattern of relationships.

Alexis de Tocqueville, in *De la démocratie en Amérique (Democracy in America,* 1835), did not use the term familism specifically, but analyzed a tendency of general well-being and interest, remaining hetween the limits of the family and reference group. He called this feeling individualism.

Familism, as a double moral behaviour (competition in the public domain and cooperation in the private domain), appears in Herbert Spencer's evolutionism. Spencer's concept of empathy could be seen as a tool for softening the competitive mechanism that governs social matters. In his theory, the family is the only social context where the behaviors of heip and protection are expected.

Colonial economics. The colonial economic pattern of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries is another antecedent of the current concept of familism. Colonialism, as a way of political and economic organization, developed an economy of subsistence and one that tended to export, and at the same time maintained a traditional cultural pattern, which guaranteed social stability. In the process of economic growth and decolonization, this traditional culture became an obstacle for the modernization of those societies.

Briefly, in the development of the democratic Western societies and the experience of the colonial economic pattern, familism could be seen in the family, clan, or village as a conservative element that impeded the economic and democratic growth of modem societies.

Familism After World War II

The political, economic, and psychologicai impacts of the family were criticized in the 1930s and especially after World War Il—for example, in the description of the authoritarian character by Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm, and Theodor W. Adorno. The principle of equality in modem societies did not modify the family. The internal structure of family stile maintained a framework, based on the principle of authority and acceptance of its norms. Democratic and industrialized societies, focusing on the individual and his or her social achievements, collided with the traditional and hierarchical structure of the family.

The criticism of the family as a closed and traditional structure appears in three different contexts: psychology, sociology, and politics. These three contexts are represented by the German criticisms of the family, Edward C. Banfield's concept of amoral familism, and Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba's concept of *civic culture.*

The German criticism of family. Fromm, Reich, and, later, Adorno (1950), in *The Authoritarian*

Personality, criticized the impact that the traditional family has on the social and political attitudes of individuals. They argued that the family stimulates the emergence of authoritarian adults, very susceptible to Fascist propaganda. On the other hand, in North America, Kurt Lewin (1948) developed group dynamics as a way to develop democratic attitudes in the family and in social groups to counteract the possible influences of the growing European authoritarianism.

Amoral familism. Banfield employs the concept of amoral familism in his book, *The Moral Basis to Backward Society* (1958), to describe a cultural pattern characterized by the absence of moral obligations to anyone who does not belong to the family group, together with a strong distrust toward social and political institutions. Banfield detected this phenomenon in a little community in southern Italy, as a contrary phenomenon to events in northern Italy. Amoral familism takes place when at least two elements combine: scarce economic development and ongoing foreign dominance. This situation reinforces social bonds and cooperation bonds exclusively among relatives. In *The Unheavenly City* (1970), Banfield applied his thesis of poverty's cultural bases to North American industrialized cities, where excluded and impoverished subcultures exist. From this point of view, the idea that economic development is rooted in cultural factors emerges again, emphasizing mainly the negative presence of basic groups in the social bonds of the society. This concept of the amoral familism was used later by Rafael López-Pintor and José Ignacio Qrtega (1982) in the studies they carried out between 1968 and 1980 with the Spanish population.

The civic culture. The civic culture represents a postwar concern to study the conditions that favor the stability of democratic systems. The important decline of political participation—for example, in voting behavior—accompanied by high levels of distrust and political inefficiency justifies this concern. Almond and Verba in *The Civic Culture* (1963) assumed that interpersonal trust is a basic condition, although not the only one, for the development of secondary associations required for political participation. Interpersonal trust eliminates the barriers of the primary group, establishing bonds and duties with those who are different from one's own group. Interpersonal trust is the opposite of familism, which only establishes bonds

of loyalty and cooperation inside the family group. Verba in *The Cívic Culture Revisited* (1980) highlights the importance of family's democratization for the development of social and political attitudes that are necessary for a democratic culture.

The New Familism

The new familism has emerged in postindustrial and services societies, which tend basically to satisfy the needs of personal realization. Many authors have labelled this new culture as hedonistic and narcissistic; some authors consider it a radical individualism (Seoane 1993).

The development in the 1970s of new forms of marriage, different from the traditional civil and religious forms, the rise of the divorce rates, and the decline in birth rates are clear examples of this new culture. Paternal authority, strict family morality, obligations to family members, and the sexual division of the domestic work were replaced by the principle of equality, the relaxation of traditional moral values, and the family opening to the outside world.

At the beginning of the 1980s, a turn to family values is evident (Inglehart 1998). However, this new familism is full of ambiguities. On the one hand, it means the resurgence of the family as an important force. At the same time, it supports an individualistic and narcissistic conception of the family relationships. The current importance given to the family is related to a defense of its affective and emotional functions and its help for personal development, From this new familism, the family group is used as a resource to satisfy the psychological needs of its members (Demo et al. 2000).

The new familism moves away from the political and social context from which it originated. It can be considered as a psychologized familism, because it answers the concrete needs of personal and individual realization. This familism moves away from the traditional cultural pattern, in which the family was more important than the goals and aspirations of its members, and from the traditional definition of familism.

From the point of view of psychological needs, the ambiguity of the new familism allows very different family politics. Although some approaches defend alternative ways of families, other writers turn to the new familism to stop the advance of a radical individualism, or even to compensate the

setback of the state of families' well-being (Popenoe 1988; Garzón 1998, 2000).

Conclusion

The future of the term familism is uncertain. Is religious, political, and economic roots, and elements of postindustrial societies, are implicit in its current meaning. However, it is used in an ongoing way to characterize a psychological syndrome caused by a combination of attitudes, beliefs, and values that evolved along with changes in our societies. Thereafter, familism is a term in transition, aside from its classic assumptions and well-established definitions. It illustrates the difficulties of ambiguity, but at the same time has ah the advantages of being open to the changes of society of the twenty-first century.

See also: FAMTLY LOYALTY; GRANDPARENTHOOD; 1MMIGRATION; ISRAEL; LATIN AMERICA; PHILIPPINES, THE

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