

# **The stratified emergentist Polanyian perspective: a relational approach for the study of the economy of the family**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation attempts to fill a gap in the theoretical field of the economics of the family through the proposal of a middle-range theory: the stratified emergentist Polanyian perspective. From this perspective, the economy of the family is an emergent, complex social phenomenon which both constitutes and is a result of the interplay of causal mechanisms from the structural, cultural and agential elements of the social system. The central question that this dissertation addresses is therefore a theoretical one: How should the economy of the family be studied? I argue that the existing literature in the field cannot explain the emergence of economic relations of the family because of an ontological limitation. The economy of the family has been researched from different approaches. Mainstream modern economics, based on an understanding of the family as an aggregation of rational individuals acting under the logic of utility maximisation, has been the dominant approach. Heterodox approaches have made contributions to the field, but they do not overcome the gap in their treatment of the human being and the structure-agency relation. This ontological limitation comes from not addressing relationality.

Proposing a middle-range theory based on Critical Realist metatheory provides a solution to this limitation and contributes to a wider shift in the field of the economics of the family. As part of my proposal, Karl Polanyi's 'human economy as an instituted process' provides an alternative conceptualisation of the economy where emergence is central to understanding and conceptualising social relations. Critical Realist metatheory allows Polanyi's relational perspective to be embedded in a stratified ontology. The proposal built in this dissertation also works from the complementarities of Critical Realism and three components from the Morphogenetic-Morphostasis (M/M) approach: (1) explaining social phenomena by unpacking their agential, structural and cultural elements; (2) analytical dualism for the treatment of these elements; and (3) the stratified model of people. These components are central to this proposal. They enable a non-conflationary treatment of the interplay between structural, cultural and agential elements in the social elaboration of the economy of the family. The stratified model of people connects their concerns and the emergence of emotions and explains the relation between personal and social identity. These relations contribute to an explanation of how and why the economy

of families emerges and evolves in a particular place. Using abduction as a mode of inference, I work with 80 illustrative cases of families from Bogotá, Colombia.

The stratified emergentist Polanyian perspective uses Polanyi's forms of integration to the economy: market exchange, reciprocity and redistribution. Through the process of discernment, deliberation and dedication, human beings decide the concerns to which they will dedicate their time and energy. 'Reciprocity', for example, can be their most favoured form of integration at one moment (or consistently), because they find pleasure in giving or receiving without future expectations of repayment, but with a commitment to give to another person in a similar situation or condition in the future. This can also happen with exchange and redistribution. The stratified emergentist understanding of the economy of the family and conceptualization of the 'human economy as an instituted process' are central to explaining how and why this is the case. In this dissertation, I argue that the family's economy emerges because of an interplay of causal mechanisms and their activation / mediation by human agency. This includes the process of emergence of personal identity in interplay with social identity, with the two being connected by relational reflexivity. In the concepts of personal identity and social identity, emotions and emotionality have a space and, importantly, are not reduced to preferences.

My overarching argument is that an innovative theoretical and methodological framework is required for the study of the economy of the family because the existing literature cannot explain the complexity of this social phenomenon. The stratified emergentist Polanyian perspective helps to explain how and why a market-led configuration of the economy has emerged and evolved in Bogotá, Colombia, and how reciprocity is subordinated to the binomial market/state in a complementary supportive relation. The dissertation's proposal illuminates the cases of 80 Bogotá families within their contrasting realities. An in-depth analysis of the interplay of mechanisms operating from structure, culture and agency is made using three cases of lower income families in particular. This analysis explains their integration to the economy through market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity. It also highlights that when the market/state binomial (Donati's term) is unable to meet the needs of the family, reciprocity from the extended family and friends are necessary and critical to cover this gap. At the same time, these acts of reciprocity generate relational goods -- bonds of mutuality and solidarity -- with their own emergent powers. It is by answering the theoretical question that this dissertation addresses that the stratified emergentist Polanyian perspective explains the importance of reciprocity for these families in Bogotá, Colombia, and also its importance for the stability of the market-led configuration of the economy.