

## How The Feminist Movement Re-created Welfare States

Feminism in politics has been an important movement in the past few decades on which a lot of research was conducted. Additionally, the welfare state is present in most governments in the 21st century. It is defined as “a system of publicly (state) supported social services based on a combination of individual need and universal entitlement” (McCormack 2). Within the state of a global pandemic, welfare has proven to be vital to people’s lives in terms of access to healthcare services, unemployment insurance and other services provided by the welfare state.

Consequently, the feminist movement has been present for many decades and has made an impact on certain aspects of the social world, including the welfare state. It has been vital to the creating and re-creation of the welfare state in various countries.

Firstly, McCormack argues “women were critical in the formation of the welfare state” wherein women were pushing for welfare programs from child care to public health (31, 38). The author goes on to say that “no feminists” considered returning to the free market because without the help of the government gender equality could not be achieved (McCormack 44). Furthermore, women in Finland had a similar view of the welfare state, according to Markowitz. Two organizations in Finland worked on creating the welfare state, The Martha Group and the Women’s Union. The former was focusing on “practical education and homemaking skills may be seen as being rooted in this improvement of living standards strain of the nationalist movement” and the latter was involved with the suffrage movement and pushing women into opportunities outside the home (Markowitz 49). The Martha Group focused on “childcare, health, and nutrition, living conditions, physical fitness” as the prominent task of creating a welfare state was done through receiving “substantial state funding and the power of its large membership, which most likely supports political parties that address

these issues” (Markowitz 49). While the Women’s Union experienced a decline in activity after the suffrage movement, it began to target gender discrimination and trying to advocate for women’s rights in the work place (Markowitz 49). Thus, from both of these arguments presented by the paper, it can be seen that the “successes [of these organizations] are illustrative of the link between welfare state policies and feminism, in both its first and second waves” (Markowitz 49).

Alternatively, both authors presented counter-arguments, suggesting that the welfare state is also discriminatory and thus needs to be re-created. McCormack argues that “the contribution women made to the welfare state was less visible than men’s” (39). This illustrates that feminism has impacted the welfare state, however, it was not enough since the welfare system and society, in general, is built on patriarchal ideas. Even though welfare “contributes to equity...[it] does not empower women...certain types of welfare policies may reinforce the nuclear family justifying oppression” (McCormack 44). This argument is also present in Markowitz’s article where they discuss how “the second wave of feminism represents a rejection of certain aspects of the social welfare state, particularly the idea that the proper legislation will solve all problems”, which shows the welfare state is oppressive (49).

Additionally, in their book, Dale and Foster discuss how the welfare state is empowering women in Britain. “For women, the establishment of the [w]elfare [s]tate was the culmination of their struggle for equality and dignity. Women’s needs and interests were no longer ignored in the political system” (Dale and Foster 4). This suggests that the welfare state was beneficial and empowering since they received recognition in the public sphere (Dale and Foster 4). The book goes on to showcase empirical evidence as well as describe what feminism has achieved for women, such as helping them fight to become doctors, nurses and advancing in the educator

career which contrasts with the idea of women belonging at home. Further, “Feminists’ distinctive contribution has been to link the issue of hardship and bureaucratic insensitivity to the wider principle that women should be treated as independent individuals” through taxes suggesting that feminism contributed to creating the welfare state to empower women (Dale and Foster 4).

Similar to the articles mentioned above, this book also acknowledges how the welfare state is still discriminatory. Feminists still viewed the “existing welfare institutions...[as] unsatisfactory for women” and thought that “women’s normal ‘job’ is housework” (Dale and Foster 136, 109). However, Dale and Foster mention that the welfare institutions can be re-created and “be improved significantly even within existing society” (136). It claims that feminism tries to increase career opportunities for women to “reduce sexist nature of welfare institutions” (Dale and Foster 137). It further shows how “women...work out their strategies for coping with, resisting and ultimately perhaps fighting against sexist, oppressive policies and practices” suggesting that even though there is discrimination in welfare, women should fight against the system by challenging and re-creating it (Dale and Foster 137).

Williams, in their article “The Presence of Feminism in the Future of Welfare”, argued that the welfare state should be reformed to be more empowering. The article discussed that “feminism activism and its critiques provide an important moral and political case for a new welfare society” (Williams 502). The movement demanded “equal pay, equal work, equal educational opportunities, free abortion, and contraception or free-child care facilities” (Williams 502). However, a welfare state needed to be formed to abide by the principle of mutualism where the needs of others are respected more. “The challenge to current welfare thinking that this principle implies is the necessity to dismantle the dichotomy...[that] counterposes the

independence of paid work (morally good) against a so-called dependency culture, that is dependency upon welfare benefits (morally bad)” (Williams 507). Williams argued that this will make the welfare state more empowering because care will be emphasized in welfare politics so that the care work done by women will be more distributed in society, by adding more childcare and eldercare services as well as by creating a work-life balance for women.

The welfare state needs to be re-created because it can be seen as discriminatory. In their article “The Failure of Feminism in the Making of the British Welfare State”, Pedersen presents a counter-argument saying that feminists failed to reform the welfare state. The article first discusses how women’s income in Britain in the 1900s, or lack thereof, depended on their husbands (Pedersen 102). It argues that feminism has failed since “eligibility turned on the man’s insurance status and not the woman’s need” which is why women who are “separated wives, wives of uninsured casual laborers, and unmarried mothers” would be excluded (Pedersen 102). Thus the autonomy of income women were trying to achieve did not happen and “the welfare state, like the labor market, emerged as profoundly gendered, filtering women’s livelihood through the hands of men” (Pedersen 104).

In the article “National Projects and Feminism” by Ardoy and Mesa on feminism and the Spanish welfare state, presented the inequality that continues to exist in the welfare state. This paper suggests that the “male dominant patriarchal perspective” affected the formation of the welfare state (Ardoy and Mesa 1). Further, they argue that historically women do not belong to the nation and are not allowed to make decisions but “it is women’s bodies on which the mythology of nationhood is built, as they narrate the origin of the country” (Ardoy and Mesa 4). This paradox highlights how women were not allowed to build society and are stuck with male-centered concepts of nationalism and the welfare state, which is why the welfare state

needed re-creating. Due to the family structure reinforced by society “where providing is the responsibility of men, and domestic care is the responsibility of women,” making the welfare state gendered contributes to gender inequality and discrimination (Arday and Mesa 5). This article concluded that the conservative parties in Spain framed welfare as being gendered based on the idea that “women should continue to be responsible for care” while also using discriminatory words towards women and the feminist movement (Arday and Mesa 13). The main argument presented in this paper about the welfare state is that it is decentralized due to neoliberalism making it privatized which will make gender equality practically impossible (Arday and Mesa 16). Thus, the welfare state ensures the “persistence of inequality between sexes” (Arday and Mesa 17).

In “The New Literature on Gender and the Welfare State” Kornbluh argues that the welfare state in the United States is discriminatory by saying that “welfare is demanding, sexist, racist, heterosexist, and stingy” (171). The author continues to argue that the welfare state is “public patriarchy, social control, and sexual regulation” while also presenting a contradicting argument stating that a reduction in welfare policies is “antifeminist” (Kornbluh 172). They also highlight how the decentralized structure of the US government negatively impacts the formation of the welfare state (Kornbluh 176). Kornbluh highlights how the welfare state is discriminatory and needs to be re-created since it “denied benefits [such as pensions] to most Black women, divorcées, unmarried women, and many deserted women” (182).

In contrast, Pierson’s article “Three Worlds of Welfare State Research” highlights how gender relations impacted the welfare state. The article showcases the discriminatory nature of the welfare state by saying it “excluded women from view, because they were neither citizens nor (for the most part), paid laborers” (Pierson 801). This article discusses how a reassessment

of the structure of the welfare state is needed to be less discriminatory, thus urging society to re-create it. The author references Sweden, who, besides their efforts to “enhance employment opportunities and efforts to balance work and child-rearing, it [still]... produces extremely high levels of gender segregation within the labor market” (Pierson 802). In addition, the role of women in the labor market, as well as reproductive rights were “politically contested” in society (Pierson 802). Pierson also discusses a counter-argument to consider welfare in France where due to the weakness of feminism, income was distributed to families and everyone had the right to use it. Also, “France produced more women-friendly policies” thus suggesting that the weakness of feminism contributed to a more beneficial welfare state for women in France (Pierson 802).

Additionally, Gheaus, in their article “Gender Justice and the Welfare State in Post-Communism”, argues that in post-communist Romania, welfare politics are discriminatory towards women. Contrary to how communism connotes equality, looking through the welfare lens, this was not the case in Romania. “The central claim is that the Romanian welfare state in its current form mostly provides well-paid state jobs and social security nets for men, with money collected from taxes that are mainly paid by women,” making it discriminatory (Gheaus 185). Gheaus, just like Williams, also argues that care is relevant to bring justice to welfare since historically, care work has been done by women in the private sphere. “The argument in favor of redistributing care is that justice requires a fair sharing of all burdens of social cooperation; conceptualized as a form of work, caregiving is a central, indispensable type of social burden” (Gheaus 185). Thus, redistributing care could make the welfare state less discriminatory and give women more choices to stay at home or work. Further, the communist social structure provided the backbone for the welfare state, nevertheless, it was not efficient since hunger was faced and

corruption continues to persist (Gheaus 189). Hypothetically, due to the communist regime, feminists “do not need to fight the same battles as their colleagues in the West in order to dislocate a market-oriented, feminist unfriendly understanding of justice” (Gheaus 189). Nonetheless, gender divisions still prevailed even after communism.

Finally, Nandasen’s article “Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights” also highlights how the welfare state is discriminatory. “The lack of protest suggests that welfare, although it is the main nomic support for women in need in the United States, is still not considered by most feminists a women's issue” (Nandasen 271). Stereotypes have made welfare “a difficult and unlikely issue around which progressives can organize” (Nandasen 271). The author also argues how “the man, the welfare system, controls your money” suggesting that welfare was built along with the \ patriarchal idea of welfare which was entangled in sexism that women experienced in the home as well as in the welfare state (Nandasen 272). Nandasen also discussed how the welfare state regulates “the sexualities and lives of women” (272). This article introduced the intersectional identities of poor Black women which described the various degrees of oppression that were not experienced by other women (Nandasen 294). Women with intersectional identities then developed their own “multicultural feminism” movement that argued for intersectional identities of women and their liberation from the discrimination of the welfare state (Nandasen 294).

In conclusion, the arguments presented on whether the feminist movement influenced the welfare state suggests that it has done so by creating welfare to empower women but it ended up being a tool of discrimination instead. This issue is relevant since the feminism movement has been present for a long period of time but some of the welfare state policies are still

discriminatory against women, which is why it is important for it to be re-created. The arguments presented on the side of discrimination were stronger, nevertheless, the welfare state is a necessary tool for the government to provide their citizens with a better quality of life. Thus, the welfare state should be re-evaluated to construct a non-discriminatory and inclusive system.



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