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BOOK REVIEW

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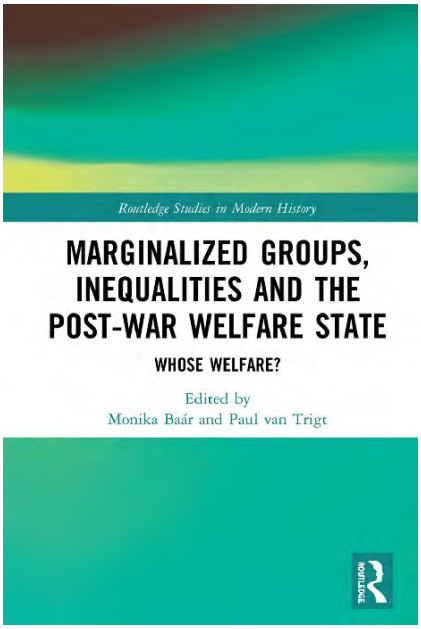
Inclusion, Exclusion, and the Post-War Welfare State[1]



Abstract: *This review analyses the book Marginalized Groups, Inequalities and the Post-War Welfare State (eds. Monika Baár & Paul van Trigt). This book is an important contribution to the study of the welfare state, as it examines welfare systems from the perspective of those excluded from them, such as ethnic, gender, racial, and sexual minorities, as well as people with disabilities. Based on this perspective and by studying several Western European countries as well as international organizations, the book provides an interesting view of the consequences of the welfare state – who it includes and who it excludes. Although the book focuses mainly on Western Europe and the United States, this approach to studying the welfare state from the perspective of marginalized groups is significant and can be used as a framework for analysing other regions and for comparative studies.*

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Keywords: *Welfare state; marginalized groups; social exclusion; post-war Europe.*

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Marginalized Groups, Inequalities and the Post-War Welfare State (eds. Monika Baár & Paul van Trigt) is a significant contribution to welfare state studies and to the scholarship on social care more broadly. The volume represents a shift in the way welfare state, social assistance, and social protection systems are approached.

Traditionally, two dominant tendencies have characterized the study of welfare states. First, analyses have tended to adopt a nation-state framework, focusing on the development of national welfare systems and, at times, comparing them across countries. This approach has frequently involved the use of typologies such as those of Esping-Andersen, which categorize welfare systems into liberal, conservative, and social-democratic regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Such an emphasis is understandable: from their origins – and especially in the post-World War II period, when social protection expanded significantly across Europe – welfare systems were indeed organized on a national basis, as the system was constructed to protect citizens in case of vulnerability (Introduction, pp. 1-3).

Second, welfare state research has long been centred on the citizen-worker nexus, examining the relationship between the contributing worker and the benefits they receive: what portion of their contributions is returned, and what kind of protection is provided in cases of unemployment, accidents, or old age. This contributor-centric approach has meant that scholarship has largely concentrated on the majority of citizens who actively paid into and benefited from these systems (Introduction, pp. 3-4).

This volume's primary focus is on migrants, disabled people, racial and sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups whose access to social protection in the post-war era was either excluded or very limited, even at the peak of welfare state expansion in Western Europe (Introduction, pp. 4-6; Ch. 2, pp. 29-48; Ch. 3, pp. 49-68; Ch. 9, pp. 155-

171). Through a series of chapters that examine both national case studies and the role of international organizations such as the UN, the ILO, and the European Communities (Ch. 1, pp. 9-28; Ch. 2, pp. 29-48; Ch. 4, pp. 69-80), the book reveals that while the post-war period indeed witnessed a significant expansion of welfare coverage – including industrial workers, artisans, small shopkeepers, and even agricultural producers – many groups remained outside these systems.

For example, in the chapter on Denmark, Heidi Vad Jønsson discusses how, in the immediate post-war period, migrant workers initially had the same labour rights as local workers. However, over time, these rights began to be restricted, conditioned on "the integration of workers into Danish society." For example, language exams and proof of social integration were required, and welfare benefits were no longer regarded as unconditional rights but rather as privileges granted only to those workers who demonstrated successful integration into the host society (Ch. 9, pp. 155-171).

Similarly, Karim Fertikh, in the second chapter, which focuses on the 1957 European Convention on the Social Security of Migrant Workers, shows that all efforts to advance a platform guaranteeing equal rights for all migrant workers across Europe were consistently obstructed by national governments. They were unwilling to extend to foreign workers the same rights available to local workers, who, after all, also had the right to vote (Ch. 2, pp. 29-48).

In his study of the Social Affairs Commission of the early European Communities, Brian Shaev notes that while measures were adopted to guarantee equal rights for steel and coal workers – primarily local male industrial workers – similar European-level measures for migrant workers and women were not mentioned (Ch. 1, pp. 9-28).

A similar transformation occurred regarding disabled workers. As Gildas Brégain demonstrates in his chapter on the ILO, in the immediate post-war period there was an inclusive approach aimed at rehabilitating all disabled citizens. Later, however, this approach shifted to become market-oriented, assisting only those individuals who could be integrated into the labour market while neglecting those without the potential for such reintegration (Ch. 3, pp. 49-68). The key reason, as the contributors demonstrate, is that the very criteria used by state institutions to determine eligibility – citizenship, formal labour market participation, and normative assumptions about productivity – also acted as

barriers of exclusion (Ch. 6, pp. 101-117; Ch. 9, pp. 155-171). This dynamic of inclusion and exclusion constitutes one of the central analytical axes of the book.

Another important contribution of the volume is its emphasis on the agency of marginalized groups. These populations were not passive, nor merely the objects of exclusionary policies; rather, they were active in trying to shape welfare systems. Migrants' associations, disability rights activists, queer movements, and human rights advocates all fought to gain a voice in the formation of social protection policies (Ch. 7, pp. 119-135; Ch. 8, pp. 137-153). This perspective shifts the narrative from one of "state benevolence" to one of contested social rights.

Thus, Monika Baár writes that in the 1980s, disability activists intensified their efforts to have their rights recognized and to gain greater independence in their daily lives. However, this effort – and their discourse – was co-opted by the Thatcher government to justify welfare cuts (Ch. 7, pp. 119-135). In Belgium, according to Anaïs van Ertvelde, activists for the rights of persons with disabilities, while strongly advocating for the protection of welfare provisions, simultaneously began efforts to develop grassroots movements emphasizing autonomy and community living. Yet even in Belgium, this type of discourse was occasionally used to restrict the benefits available to persons with disabilities, with such restrictions justified on the basis of individual autonomy (Ch. 8, pp. 137-153).

The book also proposes a periodization of welfare state development in the second half of the twentieth century. The post-war moment (1940s–1950s) saw a significant expansion of citizenship-based rights and access to welfare as a response to the humanitarian catastrophe of the war, for example Italy and France temporarily implemented universal benefits due to the severe difficulties in the aftermath of the war. (Ch. 6, pp. 101-117). The 1970s–1980s marked the neoliberal turn, which curtailed previously broad entitlements, reframing social protection as a conditional benefit rather than a right, and emphasizing individual responsibility (Ch. 7, pp. 119-135; Ch. 4, pp. 69-80). The late 1980s and 1990s introduced a paradox: while the discourse of exclusion and human rights became more prominent, it was often appropriated by policymakers and neoliberal think tanks to justify welfare cuts, reducing expenditures on pensions, healthcare, and social assistance even as the language of rights proliferated. These cuts were often justified as increasing the autonomy of individual – by giving them more space to

decide for themselves – and improving the efficiency of the system. (Ch. 4, pp. 69-80; Ch. 8, pp. 137-153).

From this perspective, the general conclusion of the book is that, although many aspects of social protection and welfare – such as access to adequate healthcare – constitute basic human rights and are guaranteed by the universal principles of human rights, they remain tied to possession of a passport from a specific country and to contributions. This arrangement disadvantages broad social categories that lack these characteristics (Conclusion, pp. 173-189). For this reason, the authors call for a reconsideration of welfare systems through a more transnational approach, placing equality, justice, and respect for human dignity at the centre of social policies (Conclusion, pp. 186-189).

As noted above, this volume constitutes a significant contribution to welfare state historiography, as it places at the centre of analysis those who were excluded from, or had only limited access to, systems of social protection. Employing an interdisciplinary approach and moving across scales – from the state level to international organizations such as the ILO and the European Communities – the book offers an inter-scalar study of how both national bureaucracies and international structures ultimately failed to provide a truly international framework for social protection, whether at the European or global level. By challenging Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare regimes, the volume leads to an important conclusion: welfare regimes themselves produce exclusions and inequalities among citizens.

While the book focuses primarily on groups excluded and marginalized by welfare systems – migrants, disabled people, and racial and sexual minorities – these groups are mostly examined as separate categories. The analysis does not pay sufficient attention to intersectionality: whether there were shared mechanisms of exclusion affecting individuals who embodied multiple marginalized identities, and how such intersectionality shaped their experiences within welfare systems. Furthermore, when examining activism to strengthen social protection, the book could have explored more deeply whether there was collaboration or conflict between different marginalized groups in their struggles for inclusion (Williams, 1995).

Another point that could have been researched more broadly is the book's geographical focus. While it analyses post-war welfare systems in Western Europe and includes one chapter on the United States, it largely omits Central and Eastern Europe – regions that also underwent crucial economic and political transformations after the Second

World War, transformations that profoundly affected their welfare regimes (Inglot, 2008). This omission is particularly striking given that many of these countries officially espoused socialist ideologies, placing the working class – at least rhetorically – at the center of public discourse. Consequently, their social protection systems prioritized the industrial working class, often to the detriment of other, more marginalized groups (Koleva, 2023). A comparative study of "Western capitalist welfare regimes" and "Eastern socialist welfare regimes" would have offered valuable insights into commonalities and divergences in the treatment of marginalized populations.

Similarly, the volume could have extended its scope to the Global South, where many countries emerged from colonial rule in the postwar decades and began developing their economies (Dey Biswas, Sambo, & Pellissery, 2024). Many of the migrant workers excluded from Western European welfare systems originated from these former colonies. It would have been illuminating to examine the extent to which colonial legal frameworks influenced post-colonial welfare regimes, and how this legacy shaped the position of migrants within European welfare systems. Moreover, given that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries sought to exert influence in the Global South – and were themselves regarded as development models by several post-colonial states – the competition between East and West over social policy models warrants attention, particularly in relation to the industrial corporations from former colonial powers that remained active in these regions.

Beyond these remarks, the book's core framework – studying welfare regimes not from the perspective of the contributing worker but from the vantage point of those excluded or only partially included – is of lasting scholarly significance. This approach has considerable potential for application beyond Western Europe, including in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as in the Global South. It also opens the way for comparative analyses of East and West, North and South, providing a broader and more nuanced understanding of how welfare regimes have historically shaped inclusion and exclusion. Thus, this edited volume is an important contribution to the study of welfare states and social protection, that lays a foundation for future research extending to other regions and dimensions.

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