




FORUM

Boundaries of Belonging: The Welfare State in the Wake of Decolonisation

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Over the course of the 1970s, Europe reckoned with the after-effects of decolonisation – a transformative process in world history that not only led to the movement of millions of people from the former colonies, but also threw into question European economic and cultural hegemony. The three articles in this forum investigate different ways Europe remade itself in response to the unmaking of European imperialism. All three demonstrate that Europe radically redrew the boundaries of belonging over the course of the 1970s, either by limiting access to national welfare states for migrants and former colonial subjects, by crafting a new form of international welfare state that was less focused on the redistribution of wealth, or by ‘Europeanising’ fossil fuel production so as to insulate the continent from the economic power of the so-called Third World.

In ‘A Science of Reform and Retrenchment: Black Kinship Studies, Decolonisation and the Dutch Welfare State’, Chelsea Schields tracks the erosion of the Dutch welfare state from the 1970s through the mid-1990s. She shows that the migration of tens of thousands of individuals from the former Dutch colonies of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles played a key role in the whittling away of the Dutch welfare state. This was due to the involvement of social scientists, who were tasked by state and municipal officials to analyse immigrant family structures. Drawing on a corpus of scholarship developed decades earlier in the United States, France and elsewhere (from Melville Herskovits’s *The Myth of the Negro Past* of 1941 up through the ‘Moynihan Report’ of 1965), Dutch social scientists began to argue that what they defined as ‘Caribbean’ family practices were antithetical to ‘European’ ones, insofar as ‘Caribbean’ families supposedly favoured single-mother households and higher numbers of offspring. These family practices purportedly led to criminality and poverty, even as they challenged (eroding) norms in Western Europe that yoked sex to marriage. As Schields demonstrates, the pathologising of the Caribbean and Caribbean-heritage family would have far-reaching effects. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Dutch state reduced unemployment benefits in size and scope, slashing support for single mothers in particular. Funding was directed away from organisations assisting migrants and towards initiatives to enhance birth control and pregnancy prevention. Unsurprisingly, families of colour were adversely impacted by the reforms. In addition to contributing to important scholarly conversations about the circulation and use of racial knowledge across the Atlantic, Schields helps us see a particular European welfare state in a new light. As she shows, one response to decolonisation was to redraw the boundaries of belonging and to suggest that former colonial subjects must be better ‘assimilated’ to European society by excluding them from forms of state assistance. The irony here is that precisely as traditional family values were being called into question by Western European societies, Western European politicians were using the tool of welfare state reform to reward first- and second-generation immigrants whose lifestyles conformed with those values.

In ‘A Flanking European Welfare State: The European Community’s Social Dimension, from Brandt to Delors (1969–1993)’, Laurent Warlouzet explores another dimension of the redrawing of state welfare boundaries in the 1970s and 1980s. He investigates how, starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, left-wing European parties and trade unions attempted to craft a form of international welfarism via the European Economic Community (EEC), later superseded by the EC/EU. Their piecemeal requests amounted to demands for a range of different regulations on work, gender equality, environmental protection and regional redistributive policies. To have any chance of success, it was essential that all proposals should not clash with pre-existing national welfare state policies pertaining to healthcare, pensions and unemployment. In addition, the activism of these social actors was always subordinated to the main task at hand, namely setting up an integrated market. Warlouzet argues that, while the attempt to create a robust and far-reaching parallel welfare structure failed due to internal disagreements and outside pressures, the effort was not entirely for naught. Despite the neo-liberal onslaught of the 1980s, certain basic rights were protected in the EC/EU: social dialogue was inserted in the Single Act (article 22) and framework agreements enshrined basic worker rights, parental leave and gender equality. Pushing back against scholars who see EU institutions as inherently conducive to free-market policies, Warlouzet suggests that in the wake of decolonisation, neo-liberalism and international state welfarism co-existed (albeit uncomfortably) within the integrated European market. We might speculate that this was perhaps because a scaled-up European-level state welfarism was still compatible with national attempts (such as the Dutch one discussed in this forum by Schields) to limit the welfare benefits of first- and second-generation immigrants.

Decolonisation had a profound impact not only on the movement of people and welfare benefits, but also on energy policy in the 1970s, 1980s and beyond. It is to this issue that Giuliano Garavini turns in the final article in this forum, ‘Thatcher’s North Sea: The Return of Cheap Oil and the “Neo-Liberalisation” of European Energy’. Starting from 1973, when (most) OPEC members agreed to an oil embargo on Western nations supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War, European politicians pushed for the diversification of energy sources to make the West less dependent on the political and economic demands of the Global South. In the wake of decolonisation, demands for diminishing the role of Western Europe and the United States in global affairs were indeed making themselves felt not only through the oil embargo, but also through the insistent demands lodged by the Group of 77 at the United Nations for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) for the global redistribution of wealth. As Garavini shows, the discovery of petroleum in the North Sea gave Great Britain (and other European countries as well) the possibility to break with OPEC and sink the NIEO. Its discovery also weakened the Labour movement in Great Britain: the existence of North Sea hydrocarbons insulated Britain’s economy – and the Thatcher government – against the strikes of the National Union of Mineworks (NUM). Additionally, Garavini argues, North Sea oil enabled the Thatcher government to deliver on its promises to cut taxes – moves that otherwise would have generated serious budget deficits. Thus, through a stroke of good geological fortune, Thatcher was able to enact policies that effectively blunted the economic demands of an important portion of the decolonising world.

Scholars are increasingly turning to the 1970s as a key decade in the pre-history of our present.¹ Read together, these three articles show the crucial importance of this decade in setting the terms

¹ The literature investigating the 1970s as a crucial turning point in economic, intellectual, political and social history is vast; for an introduction, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York, NY: Verso, 2010); Fritz Bartel, *The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022); Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Human Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Philippe Chassaing, *Les années 1970: Fin d’un monde et origine de notre modernité* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012); Mario Di Donato, ‘Landslides, Shocks, and New Global Rules: The US and Western Europe in the New International History of the 1970s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 55, 1 (2020), 182–205; Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela and Daniel J. Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Ron Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political*

for the rise of neo-liberalism and the reform of the European welfare state. In the process, they suggest that the battle to redraw Europe's boundaries is far from complete; it is a battle that rages on as current debates around migration, the welfare state and energy supply chains make abundantly clear. Our hope is that this forum will contribute to a growing historiography on the 1970s and illuminate how this decade helped create the conditions for our historical present.

Styles among Western Publics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); and Dan Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Cite this article: Chamedes G, Sohm M (2024). Boundaries of Belonging: The Welfare State in the Wake of Decolonisation. *Contemporary European History* 33, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777323000176>