Betwiste zelfstandigheid: individualisering, sekse en verzorgingsstaat
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Summary

Individualism and individualisation are common terms in political debates on the welfare state, especially during the past two decades. Because people rarely define these concepts precisely, these terms are subject to a wide variety of interpretations ranging from independence through egoism to equal rights and solitude. This study focuses on constantly recurring normative dimensions of the concept of individualism, particularly with respect to changing views on gender relations in the Dutch welfare state. It explores different meanings of individualism and reveals their relation to ideas about femininity and masculinity. These meanings and ideas are in turn linked to different types of social and political regulation to convey the values and structures of argumentation used to defend or criticise certain social facilities. This study focuses on tracing the connection between views of individualism versus community on the one hand, and masculinity and femininity on the other, in the Dutch welfare state from 1960 to 1990. Furthermore, the study investigates the link between changing perceptions of the relationship between individualism and community and changing views of femininity versus masculinity.

The approach centres on the scope of the fields of individualism and individualisation and on their restrictions in meaning. Does individualism mainly mean independence or egoism? Is femininity primarily associated with caring for others, or does it also signify individual autonomy? The associative link established between individualism and individualisation and social sectors (family, market and political sectors) may be seen as a struggle across fields of Dutch society. Is individualism restricted to commerce, or does it occur in private life as well? Should the government regulate relations between men and women in the private sector to ensure equality, or does this approach undermine the protection of family life and individual privacy?

Chapter 1, the Introduction, presents the problem in the context of the Dutch welfare state from 1960 to 1990. Both the Dutch phenomenon of pillarisation (social and political segmentation according to ideology and religious affiliation) and the conservative family structure consisting of a male breadwinner and a female care provider began to change in the
Although it would be incorrect to view the relationship between pillarisation and individualisation as the contrast between tradition and modernity, these trends continue to influence different forms of social and political regulation.

Chapter 2 deals with individualism as it appears in political theory. Starting with De Tocqueville, who, while not the first to use the concept, has substantially enhanced our understanding of individualism in modern, democratic society, this study analyzes different views on individualism. It reviews the beginning of individualist ideas in social-contract thinking, the Enlightenment and in response to the French and American revolutions and examines the ethnocentric and gendered nature of the concept. The analysis reveals that although individualism is not inherently gendered in the sense of excluding women, it has had a far greater significance for men than for women throughout history.

This chapter also addresses the contested nature of individualism and tries to distinguish different aspects, such as the relation between individualism and egoism, privacy, self-interest, citizenship, independence, morality, autonomy and self-development. To schematise different views on individualism, I describe two strong political vocabularies, one for utilitarian individualism and the other for expressive individualism. The first vocabulary is based on the principle of self-interest among individuals and their autonomy as part of self-possession and focuses on abstract rights. Expressive individualism, which arises from romanticism, stresses self-development, highlights feelings rather than abstract rights and views autonomy as a crucial objective.

Chapter 3 discusses the views of various Dutch political movements on individualism. The analysis covers the liberal, socialist, social-democratic and denominational parties, especially the Catholic and Calvinist ones. Feminism is also considered as a political movement. Dutch political tradition has not been very receptive to individualist ideas. Individualism often appears to be a term of disparagement for ideas from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Although this meaning applies more to denominational parties than secular ones, liberals, socialists and feminists are also wary of individualism. The opinions of liberals such as Van Houten, socialists such as De Kadt and Banning, and feminists such as Jacobs, clearly reflect the ambivalence of these movements to many ideas. While political movements have rejected many of these individualist ideas, Dutch political tradition reveals a widely shared organic view of society, along with a romantic approach to the authenticity of presumed natural identities. This tradition has major consequences for views on the relationship between individuals, families and the state. Most political movements consider a family the smallest and most natural unit in a society. According to the organic view of society, the family is an organism and part of a social whole in the same way that cells are part of the human body. While some political movements thought of individualism as a terrible threat to family life, others, including liberals and feminists, believed certain aspects (such as individual political and social rights) would enrich family life. Nevertheless, most Dutch political movements adhere to anti-individualist opinions on family, life and the corresponding distribution of tasks and duties between men and women. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, denominational movements have been the main supporters of these ideas. While these movements lost the fight against individual suffrage in 1919, they strengthened their arguments on morality, including the idea that women have a special duty to protect morality and to counteract individualism.

These ideas still appeared in the period following World War II, at the beginning of the Dutch welfare state. While most political movements showed great enthusiasm for modernisation and dynamics on economic issues, they preferred traditional values for morality and family life. The traditional ideal of family life valued welfare and economic policy. Many provisions of social policy justified and strengthened the nuclear family as a basic social virtue. Some political movements, especially Catholic ones, believed women's participation in the labour force conflicted with welfare policy. By the 1950s, the welfare state began to reflect friction in the relationship between the state, families, male or female individuals, as well as between individualism and community in different social sectors.

From the 1960s, political movements debated the welfare state, changes in gender relations and different aspects of individualism. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of these debates, as reflected in periodicals and other publications from scholarly departments of political parties since 1960. These publications may be considered platforms between daily politics and the movements' theoretical and political assumptions. The analysis is divided into three periods.

The first period, which runs from 1960 to 1972, focuses on the basis of the welfare state, especially on the connection between welfare as an economic category and wellbeing as a social and moral classification. The Catholic party (KVP) was especially interested in wellbeing, including self-expression and the political meaning of personal feelings, while it criticised the welfare state for its utilitarian nature. The Catholic party thus turned gender into a politically relevant category. Whereas femininity had been restricted to family life and motherhood, its significance was extended to public life as a condition for social wellbeing and happiness. Femininity changed from a women's issue to a human issue in a social context. Social movements, including the women's movement, also criticised the utilitarian character of the welfare state and consumer society.
Unlike the Catholic movements, however, the women's movement spoke out against the ideal of the nuclear family and not only defined gender as a political category, but also politicized the hierarchy between men and women. The expressive individualist vocabulary gained popularity during this period.

The second period, from 1972 to 1982, revealed an increase in the political influence of expressive individualist ideas. Simultaneously, the welfare state began to experience criticism because of the uncontrolled rise in welfare expenditures and their effect on the lives of individuals. Throughout this period there was open discussion on aspects of individualism and the fields associated with these ideas. The study describes how different political movements related these problems to changing gender relations.

The third period lasted from 1982 to 1990 and was marked by firmer political positions with respect to individualism, gender relations and the welfare state. While some political movements, in particular the Christian Democrats (the result of the merge of several different denominational parties), associated feminism with individualism in a disparaging manner (egoism), others, such as feminism and liberalism, focused on attributes of individualism such as independence and autonomy. Some people believed these features legitimized a limited welfare state. Social Democrats faced a dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to respect equal rights for men and women as individuals. On the other hand, they often identified these individual rights with egoism and perceived them as a threat to solidarity (interpreted as solidarity between rich and poor families). Careful analysis, however, reveals that this ambivalence, which is explicit among Social Democrats, appears in other political movements as well. This trend may be explained by the traditionally anti-individualist nature of Dutch politics, the ambiguity of the concept of individualism and the context in which it thrives. The rise in individualism resulted in changes in the relationships between men and women, as well as in a decrease in the belief that there are typically 'feminine' and 'masculine' natures and an increase in the interrelation between different social sectors. One effect of this combined situation is the disappearance of feminine virtues as a favourable counterbalance to the negative aspects of individualism, whereas individual interests have replaced general virtues in political debates.

To provide an insight into the precise nature of the link between aspects of individualism and different forms of social and political regulation, Chapter 5 discusses political debates on social assistance from 1960 to 1990. In 1965, the old Poor Law made way for a new law on social assistance that was heralded as the crowning glory of the welfare state. By 1990 this law had become a frequent topic of debates, political entanglement and public disagreement. This chapter focuses on the arguments used to defend or criticise social assistance. It analyzes the position of social assistance in the social security system, its relation to the old the Poor Law and its role in debates on themes such as rights and needs, personal and collective responsibility and solidarity and individualisation. These debates highlight problems arising from the confrontation between social regulation of the welfare state, changing views on gender relations and increasing distinctions between living arrangements.

While the family basis of the law on social assistance was understandable in 1965, it also created many problems, such as invasion of privacy. The original law on social assistance simultaneously upheld and undermined family life and marital status. The availability of social assistance enabled women to divorce without remaining dependent on an ex-husband. Thus, this benefit unintentionally stimulated independence and autonomy for women.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, however, policy makers responded to these coincidental developments by recognising new categories of living arrangements and tightening their grip on private life, while often refusing to assume public responsibility for the consequences of divorce for women. In 1965, freedom, dignity and self-development were the underlying principles for social assistance. By the end of the 1980s, these values had almost disappeared. New ideas, such as a financial dependency based on affective relations and shared housekeeping, had taken their place.

Although political debates tended to blame women's disproportionate share (approximately 80 percent) among those receiving social assistance on egocentric and calculating behaviour among individuals, another interpretation is possible. Perhaps fundamental concepts of social policy presuppose certain gender relations as well as a certain relationship between the state and private life (i.e. the family). Discussions on needs and rights as well as interpretations of egocentric and calculating behaviour are gender biased because they rarely perceive men and women as equal, independent individuals. The chapter concludes that in the interest of fairness to rich and poor families and to create equal social standing for men and women, the foundations of the law on social assistance require reconsideration. Although it might not be a panacea, a possible solution might be to initiate some sort of basic living allowance for every citizen.

Chapter 6 is about political debates and discussions on childcare facilities. In 1960 there were very few centres for childcare. The few that did exist were considered inconvenient but necessary institutions. By 1990, even though childcare was still a topic of debate, such institutions met with less public disapproval. Views on childcare facilities vary according to ideas of the good life and economic necessity, as well as between different social sectors, including the market, the state and the family.
This chapter analyzes the opinions of politicians and leaders of public opinion on childcare from three perspectives.

The first perspective stresses morality and responsibility: some reject childcare facilities in favour of good family life and a modern welfare state, while others view childcare as an alternative to an oppressive and unhappy family life. The main problem with this perspective is its failure to allow for dissenting opinions, because morality tends to be interpreted in a paternalistic and compelling way. Consequently, pleas for public childcare are often seen as complete rejection of personal responsibility and vice versa.

Another perspective on childcare is based on the principle of need. Are such facilities necessary, and, if so, for whom? Should they be the state's responsibility? Opinions of needs vary, depending on whether the needs of children or parents (the mothers in this case) are considered. In political circles, arguments concerning the needs of children are more cogent than arguments concerning the needs of mothers. The major pitfall of this perspective is that it does not distinguish clearly between necessary and desirable facilities. Another problem is the association of public responsibility with public funding. If the availability of childcare is an important prerequisite for many women's autonomy, it could be argued that the state should be responsible for funding. On the other hand, it might be more important to focus on changed labour relations that would make it possible to combine labour market participation and caring for children.

The third perspective relates to economic efficiency. While this perspective was of limited importance in the Netherlands until recently, its influence is on the rise. Many politicians, including some in the national government, believe childcare is required for women's participation in the labour market, which is necessary to perpetuate the welfare state. But while childcare is seen as a necessity, financing is left to parents and businesses. The main problem with the efficiency perspective is that it overlooks the social desirability of childcare. Some say that childcare then turns into an economic tool and neglects the interests of children.

None of these perspectives in itself suffices to make an effective case for or against childcare facilities. Each approach focuses on specific aspects of individualism (the moral perspective, for example, often focuses on egoism, whereas the efficiency perspective stresses economic independence and calculating behaviour). The chapter concludes with the argument that political debate on childcare should strike a balance between private options for good life and public values of justice and solidarity and should avoid posing the question in terms of private or public responsibility. A social, flexible reorganisation of labour market relations along with the provision of care without paternalism should figure in the debate. Apart from the family, the market and the state, civil society might initiate shared responsibility.

In Chapter 7, the main question is how to evaluate the context of individualism in the Dutch welfare state. The chapter provides comparisons of political arguments on social assistance and childcare and concludes that, while both have furthered the rise in individualism, the gender aspects of this trend have often been subject to misinterpretation.

In particular, the correlation between labour market participation and childcare responsibilities has been a problem. As far as childcare is concerned, women are often viewed as mothers with an obligation to care for their children full time. The social assistance services, on the other hand, consider women independent citizens who must support themselves. In private life, the problematic consequences of growing individualism give rise to a paradox: growing labour participation among women will increase rather than decrease public responsibility for social facilities. Government attempts at social regulation result in a second paradox: to limit the burden on social facilities, the authorities intervene more in personal life, thereby decreasing (rather than increasing) the independence of individuals. To understand the problem, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between different social sectors, the prevailing forms of logic and how they relate to gender.

This step would involve acknowledging ambiguities between individualism and community. Individualism and community should be considered concurrent rather than mutually exclusive concepts. Individualism is only possible in a community with common values, whereas a community may arise if members respect individual preferences and abilities.

To take this idea seriously, we must reject strong vocabularies on individualism, such as the expressive and the utilitarian ones. As an alternative, I advocate a moderate but democratic approximation of individualism. This approach respects individualist values while trying to keep them in perspective without neglecting the role of community. Fundamental values of moderate, democratic individualism might include human dignity, autonomy, privacy and self-development. None of these values is considered an isolated attribute. Rather, each presupposes the existence of the others. This approach places restrictions on the state's power but still allows it to show compassion. It also relies on citizens' willingness to contribute to the common good as well as their desire to exercise their freedom to contribute to the dignity, autonomy, privacy and self-development of others. This democratic individualism might benefit from the opportunities of modern life and avoid some of the disadvantages.

This chapter describes the consequences of this approach to individualism for the Dutch welfare state. Social facilities are necessary to make...
democratic individualist values available to more than a few fortunate individuals, while trying to avoid excessive regulation and paternalism. Ideals for community life merit consideration in a community of independent citizens, in contrast to the emphasis on small-scale community life often propagated by Christian Democrats. Some consensus on the basic characteristics of a welfare state is essential for a modern, diverse and democratic-individualist society. It is also essential to justify the welfare state as a political goal based on the willingness of citizens to devote their own happiness to the wellbeing of others. Without this prerequisite, even a moderate, democratic approach to individualism can turn into a strong, hedonistic and totalitarian perspective resulting in a society pervaded by detachment and a morality based on economic calculation.