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Gender, Care and Welfare: Can Caretakers Allowances or Basic Income Promote Gender Equality?

Zeynep Gülru Göker*
Sabancı University

Abstract

Gendered division of labour prescribing women's domestic and care work and men's labour market participation continues to be the cause of serious injustices affecting women and one of the determinants of women's social and economic inequality in the world. Certain social welfare policies such as caretakers' allowances can be interpreted as initiatives that aim to compensate the undervalued and non-income generating care work predominantly done by women. The article assesses such policies in the framework of feminist debates on gender, care and welfare and argues that as long as such policies assume that caring is women's natural job, they will fall short of serving gender equality. Re-visiting the feminist discussions on Basic Income, the regular payment of a monthly income to all citizens/residents of the state on an unconditional and universal basis, the article will discuss Basic Income as an alternative policy proposal that is more favourable in terms of its potential for advancing gender equality by providing women with economic security, engendering the re-valuation of care and challenging the gendered division of labour. Although Basic Income is not a panacea to the multiple problems women are faced with, the very discussion of this proposal from a gender perspective is valuable for emphasizing the role of care in human relationships and men's responsibility in equal role sharing.

Keywords*: basic income, care work, women, gender equality, social welfare policy.*

* Assist.Prof. Dr. Zeynep Gülru Göker, Sabancı University, Center of Excellence for Gender and Women's Studies, İstanbul-Turkey. E-mail: gulruu@gmail.com. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4324-7292

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Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Bakım Emeği ve Sosyal Refah Politikaları: Bakım Ödenekleri ya da Temel Gelir Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliğine Katkıda Bulunur mu?

Zeynep Gülru Göker
Sabancı Üniversitesi

Öz

Ev içi ve ev dışı emeğin toplumsal cinsiyete göre dengesiz dağılımı bugün kadınların karşı karşıya kaldığı birçok adaletsizliğe ve cinsiyete dayalı toplumsal ve ekonomik eşitsizliğe yol açmaktadır. Kadınlara bakım faaliyetlerini yürütebilmeleri için verilen ödenekler gibi bazı sosyal politika girişimleri kadınların gelir getirmeksizin üstlendiği bakım emeğinin maddi ve manevi olarak karşılanması açısından olumlu girişimler olarak yorumlanabilir. Bu makalede, bu gibi tasarılar toplumsal cinsiyet, bakım emeği ve sosyal refah konularını toplumsal cinsiyet açısından ele alan literatür bağlamında değerlendirilmekte, bakımın kadının doğal rolü olduğu düşünüldüğü sürece bu gibi tasarıların toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine katkılarının yetersiz olacağı vurgulanmaktadır. Makalede, devletlerin vatandaşlarına koşulsuz olarak vereceği aylık ödenek olarak tanımlanan Temel Gelir sosyal politika tasarısı üzerine yapılan akademik tartışmalar özetlenecek ve Temel Gelirin kadınların ekonomik güvenlik seviyesini arttırmak, bakım emeğinin değerli kılınmasını sağlamak ve toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı emek dağılımını kadınların lehine dönüştürmek gibi toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik faydaları ele alınacaktır. Her ne kadar Temel Gelir, kadınların toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği nedeniyle yaşadıkları sorunların hepsine deva olabilecek nitelikte olmasa da, bu konunun toplumsal cinsiyet ekseninden tartışılması gerek bakım emeğinin insan ilişkilerindeki önemini gerek de eşit rol dağılımının gerçekleşmesinde erkeklerin sorumluluğunu göstermesi açısından son derece önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *bakım emeği, kadın, sosyal refah politikaları, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, temel gelir.*

Introduction

Today, an increasing number of individuals and families rely on social assistance as modern markets fail to provide every member of the society with the guarantee to live a dignified life. Basic Income is a policy proposal whose proponents agree on its potentials for securing income, alleviating poverty, and reversing, at least to some extent, the failures of market capitalism. As an idea having roots deep in history, the Basic Income proposals, today mostly popular in Europe, take on different names and forms, however, the common denominator of all Basic Income proposals is the regular payment of a monthly income to all citizens/residents of the state on an unconditional and universal basis (Van Parijs, 1992, 1995, 2002, 2004). It differs from other cash transfer policies in its universality, unconditionality and that it would be paid to individuals. Thus far, some of the most heated debates on Basic Income took place among feminist scholars who have taken up the idea in terms of its potential for promoting gender equality. While some believe that Basic Income could advance gender equality by increasing women's options for work, providing women with a sense of security that would make it less harder from them to opt out of oppressive and exploitative intimate and business relationships, engendering the re-valuation of traditionally undervalued care work predominantly done by women and eventually encouraging men for equal role-sharing in the domestic and public spheres (Christensen, 2002; Elgarte, 2008; McKay & VanEvery, 2000; McKay, 2001; Pateman, 2004; Stanley-Clarke, 1996). Others are sceptical, thinking that unless traditional gender norms change, Basic Income would only lead to the further strengthening of gendered division of labour and the re-privatization of care (Gheaus, 2008; Robeyns, 2001; O'Reilly, 2008).

I will first assess policies such as caretakers' allowances in the framework of feminist debates on gender, care and welfare. Although caretakers' allowances have been interpreted as initiatives that aim to compensate the undervalued and non-income generating care work predominantly done by women, I will argue that such policies fall short of promoting gender equality since they implicitly assume that caring is women's natural responsibility and duty, and also hold onto a strict gendered division of labour between private and public spheres, which reinforces women's secondary status as citizens. I will then move onto a discussion of Basic Income in terms of its potential for transcending some of the problems associated with caretakers' allowances. I will argue that contextually designed Basic Income proposals are favourable in terms of their potential for advancing gender equality in that Basic Income could provide women with economic security which would alleviate many problems women face in intimate and social relationships. Basic Income also has the potential to facilitate the re-valuation of care and the challenging of the gendered division of labour of care work and labour market employment. Nevertheless, it would be wrong and even dangerous to assume that Basic Income would be a panacea to all problems women face. Without a transformation in gender norms and the provision of good quality state-funded care services, we cannot assume Basic Income to be

the sole mechanism towards establishing gender equality. Finally, regardless of whether Basic Income would promote gender equality or not, the debate itself is extremely valuable for assessing the relationship between the gendered division of labour involving care and work and gender equality.

Feminist Perspectives on Caretakers' Allowances

Gendered division of labour prescribing women's reproductive and men's productive work and the accompanying gendered division of private and public spheres continues to be the cause of serious injustices affecting women and a determinant women's social and economic inequality in the world (Bubeck, 1995; Fraser, 1997; Elgarte, 2008; Okin, 1989). Even when women join the labour market in large numbers, they are faced with discrimination on many levels and have to work a "second shift" at home (Hochschild, 1989) as domestic and care work remains to be predominantly done by women in many parts of the world.

Social policies such as caretakers' allowances can be interpreted as initiatives that aim to compensate women's undervalued and non-income generating care work, such as looking after children, sick and the elderly. Precisely for that reason, they have often triggered a false dilemma for feminists (Tronto, 2001). On one hand, such schemes seem to award women's traditionally unseen and undermined domestic and care work, however they do not fundamentally challenge the traditional gendered division of labour that associates women as the "natural" care taker, an association that also impedes women's labour market participation. According to Tronto (2001) such welfare schemes entrap feminists to make a choice between the family and bureaucracy. In order to embrace and encourage initiatives for the sake of valuing and supporting domestic care, feminists have found themselves defending types of welfare programs they had criticized for decades (Tronto 2001: 65-66).

The problem with schemes that specifically target women is the taken-for-granted understanding that care is women's natural duty and inclination. Furthermore, such schemes leave unattended the power relationships intrinsic in the traditional gendered division of labour, thereby sustaining an understanding of citizenship based on contribution via income to the public sphere, which has historically favoured men at the expense of women (Knijin & Kremer, 1997; Tronto, 2001). Modern welfare states have often contributed to gender inequality by setting up the terms of citizenship based on what Pateman (1988) calls the sexual contract, ignoring the fundamental role care giving and receiving plays in humans' lives and allocating care to the family and to women (Knijin & Kremer, 1997: 330), while framing the public sphere as a sphere of independence, and the family as a sphere of dependence. Thus, they continue to favour the traditional male-breadwinner model, categorizing women as dependents on (male) income or welfare assistance, which reinforces

paternalistic and discriminatory attitudes of males and the welfare state towards women.

The traditional perception of women as dependents stems from an androcentric approach that only takes into account people's dependence on others' paid-income earned through labour market participation and ignores all other fundamental forms of human dependency (Kittay, 1999, 2001). When citizens' contribution to the state is strictly tied to their contribution to the labour market, the tendency is to ignore the fact that every single member of society gets some subsidy through the unpaid domestic labour, which is largely done by women (Fineman, 2001: 27). Caretakers spend time and energy for the well-being of others at the expense of their own labour market participation and job development while the silent equation of caretaking as women's natural responsibility undermines women's "contribution" and the dependencies created in marriage and other intimate relationships, which often work to the disadvantage of women.

While care has never been defined as a fundamental need or a basic social right, not even in the frameworks of social citizenship (Knijin & Kremer, 1997: 331), both men and women depend on each other as members of the society. To transcend the gendered division of labour and to recognize the value of care in human relationships, feminists have proposed more encompassing notions such as Fraser's (1997) universal caretaker model or Kittay's (2001) interdependency framework. Instead of dividing social roles as workers and caregivers, the universal caretaker model assumes that all citizens participate in both sets of activities, which necessitates the structuring of social institutions in consideration of the dual responsibility of all citizens regardless of gender identity (Fraser, 1997: 61). Similarly, to overcome the androcentric bias in welfare schemes, Kittay (2001) suggests thinking about interdependencies to address the collective responsibility in structuring the relations of giving and receiving care and to uncover the power relationships inherent in relationships of dependence among family members, citizens and between citizens and the state. In sum, as long as caretakers' allowances singlehandedly target women and the nuclear, heterosexual family, we cannot truly talk about transforming the undervaluation of women's unpaid domestic and caring labour. In other words, as long as caring remains exclusively women's domain and not a fundamental aspect of human life, caretakers' allowances cannot hold much promise for gender equality.

The realization of the inevitability and universality of interdependency among all members of the society makes it clear that relations of dependency require social response (Fineman, 2001: 28). If care is to be understood as a collective responsibility, then social policies have to address the need for providing accessible and reliable facilities for the care of children, sick and elderly. Given the positive effects of labour market participation on women's lives, the reconciliation of care work and labour market participation has been a primary concern for feminists (Gornick & Meyers, 2001, 2003). State-funded parental leaves and regulations for part-time work available to both men and women are necessary measures for reconciliation on the conditions that they are designed

and regulated so that they prevent employers' from cutting women off work or pushing women to low-paid, precarious, low-quality jobs. For instance, single-women and women who cannot afford to be unemployed are unfavourably disadvantaged in the absence of state-funded, quality care services (Michel & Mahon, 2002, p. 336). Although the availability of state-funded quality care services are extremely important, one also cannot ignore the private dimension of care and individuals' desire to take time off the labour market to attend their loved ones. That said, any policy that aims to reconcile the time men and women spend for care work and the labour market cannot serve gender equality on its own without an accompanying shift in gender norms so that men are also encouraged for equal role-sharing and employers are not discouraged from hiring or promoting women.

If caretakers' allowances do not do justice to gender equality, what does? Can any welfare scheme based on cash transfer be defended for its value for simultaneously de-gendering and re-valuing care to the advantage of women in all aspects of their lives? In what follows, I will visit the feminist discussions on Basic Income to evaluate its potential for an affirmative answer to the previous question.

Basic Income and Gender Equality

Basic Income is defined as "an income paid by a political community to all its members on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement" (Van Parijs, 2002: 3). Today, predominantly popular in Europe, the idea of a basic income is discussed under a variety of names and proposals such as state bonus, social credit, guaranteed income or citizen's wage. The idea of a regular payment of income to all citizens or residents of a state on an unconditional and universal basis dates as far back as the 16th century, while it has re-gained popularity in the late 20th and 21st century in the face of the shortcoming of market economy. Upon the demise of the socialist block, the idea of Basic Income has also been endorsed as a "capitalist road to communism" (Van Parijs, 1992: 7). With the exception of some pilot programs and partial implementations[1], to this date Basic Income has not been fully implemented anywhere in complete accordance to its three major differentiating principles: universality, unconditionality and payment to individuals rather than households (Van Parijs, 1992: 4).

If in place, Basic Income will be (a) paid in cash to all citizens or residents rather than households leaving the condition of its use to the recipients, (b) paid irrespective of any other income gained from another source, and (c) paid unconditionally, irrespective of past or present employment status or proof of active search for employment (Van Parijs, 2002: 3; see also Van Parijs, 2004). Even though most proponents agree that if Basic Income is in place, a substantive amount of existing schemes in most countries will have to be abolished, in many of the proposals, Basic Income is defended as a supplementary income, adding onto rather than replacing existing in-kind

transfers such as education and health insurance (Van Parijs, 2002: 3). Basic Income is proposed as a guaranteed source of income paid in regular intervals determined by the government and or any other responsible agency, so it also differs from once-and-for-all lump-sum cash transfers. While most proposals take the nation-state as the main financier, some proposals also consider supra-national organizations such as the European Union, common pool of state revenues just like other governmental expenditures, or specific taxes as source of funding (Van Parijs, 2002: 4). Questions such as, whether the payments will be made to citizens alone or whether it would also target residents or migrants remains to be a matter of discussion much like many other aspects of policy design.

While the three principles, universality, unconditionality and payment to individuals have been shown by its proponents to be the major strengths of the idea, others have also directed attention to its potential to overcome the pejorative treatment of dependents of welfare assistance as the "undeserving poor" (Offe, 1992), defended it for its simplicity and efficiency as a policy proposal (Goodin, 1992) and also celebrated it for its potential to contribute to freedom, understood as improving individuals' options in life for choosing the life they would like to lead (Van Parijs, 1995). On the other hand, critiques argue that it would engender a free riders problem, shorten labour-supply or that it is simply unfeasible, politically and practically (Alcock, 1989; Atkinson, 1995).

Some of the most heated debates on Basic Income have taken place among feminists, basically around the question: can an unconditional income paid in cash on regular intervals to every individual promote gender equality in a welfare state arrangement? Some scholars find Basic Income favourable from a feminist perspective because of its potential for challenging the androcentric bias in existing welfare schemes which rely on the provision of care by families, but are unable to recognize the main providers of care, namely women, as "full citizens with respect to benefit entitlement" (McKay & VanEvery, 2000: 270). In fact, in response to the criticisms that Basic Income would create a free riders problem, feminists have argued that there are more free riders at home than in the labour market (Pateman, 2004). The criticism that Basic Income would diminish work incentives rests on the traditional productivist model of society and associates anything outside the scope of labour market participation as non-work or idleness, hence significantly undermines and socially undervalues the kind of work mostly women do in society (McKay, 2001: 115). Moreover contribution-based policy schemes favour labour-market participation and thus, given women's historically limited access to the labour market and their lower earnings, disproportionally advantage men (McKay & VanEvery, 2000).

Differing from means-tested minimum income schemes, Basic Income can overcome the association of income solely with employment, thereby granting individuals increased freedom in choosing between being employed or not. For women, this could also mean not having to rely on male income for subsistence, as basic income could provide a sense of security which would show women a way out of oppressive intimate relationships and exploitative or low-paid, low-

quality jobs (McKay & VanEvery, 2000; McKay, 2001; Stanley-Clarke, 1996). So, Basic Income is embraced for its potential to protect women from social and economic risks posed by the gendered division of labour (Alstott, 2001; Elgarte, 2008). Furthermore, given the disadvantaged economic condition of single-mothers for instance (Briar, 1996); an independent, unconditional income source could increase women's pool of options when engaging in the labour market. Such that women do not feel trapped in low-paying, low-quality working conditions to earn a living for their children (Stanley-Clarke, 1996). Feminist arguments for basic income also refrain from undermining the importance of women's labour market participation, which is known to elevate women's traditional status in society and to contribute to their well-being in multiple ways. They advocate Basic Income because it can help remove the poverty traps faced by women in the labour market, i.e. by mothers who re-enter paid work. Moreover, the greater revenue required for basic income could be used for other valuable programs such as health and education that could additionally benefit women (Stanley-Clarke, 1996).

Given that Basic Income is paid on a level that could provide economic and social security for women, concerns about economic subsistence would be removed from the process of choosing to end violent, abusive and oppressive relationships or entering one in the first place (Pettit, 2007), thereby advancing women's freedoms (Pateman, 2004). The dissolution between the relationship between income and employment and the revaluation of care work are strong arguments in favour of basic income because they have major consequences in defining the terms of citizenship in order to make it more inclusive of women and women's social rights and freedom (McKay, 2001: 103). Scholars believe that an independent income has the potential to promote women's ability to make independent and autonomous decisions (McKay & VanEvery, 2000; McKay, 2001), thereby also serving the greater democratization of society (Pateman, 2004).

From a more sceptical view, the reconceptualization of the welfare-work nexus is inadequate on its own to overcome gender inequality which has complex sources that vary across societies (O'Reilly 2008: 5). So to argue that Basic Income would advance women's freedoms and promote gender equality requires clarity on what type of equality is being advocated. For O'Reilly (2008) who has a more sceptical view of Basic Income's feminist potential, the conceptual focus on choice is too atomistic (ibid). Without a doubt, economic insecurity cannot by itself explain the continuation of gender inequality, and it would be too simplistic to assume that women stay in oppressive relationships, intimate or otherwise, only due to economic reasons. However, aside from providing women with economic security, Basic Income's potential for challenging the gendered distribution of labour is very important, and for many feminists the dismantling of the gendered distribution of labour is one of the primary conditions of gender equality (Zelleke, 2008: 2). According to Baker, it would also give way to the organization of societies with an aim to meet members' needs for love, care and solidarity, in other words, their affective

needs as much as their economic, political and cultural ones (Baker, 2008: 2). In fact, the existing gendered division of labour not only disadvantages women but also denies men the positive aspects of caring. Hence, for Baker, equality of condition requires that care work is recognized, valued and supported, and equally shared between men and women (Baker, 2008: 3).

In sum, when considered in terms of its potential for simultaneously re-valuing women's domestic care work and reframing care as a collective responsibility and fundamental aspect of human relations, Basic Income favours much better than caretakers' allowances because it is proposed to be paid to all individuals and not just women. Unlike wages for housework schemes which could potentially entrap women to the domestic sphere (Stanley-Clarke, 1996), Basic Income is proposed as a citizenship entitlement, which means it could potentially affect men to consider caregiving as an option (Christensen, 2002). Basic Income's universality could potentially counter the gender bias in awards-for-housework or caretakers' allowances schemes, as it could lead to the tacit recognition of each citizen's right to time for giving and receiving care, and of the interdependency of all citizens. Since many problems associated with the gendered division of labour, such as women's lower status, double-burden, economic dependence on men and the related vulnerability to exploitative relationships also require role-sharing, then an independent source of income can protect women but also make role-sharing economically viable while keeping everyone safe from poverty and economic dependency (Elgarte, 2008: 4-5).

Some feminists take a more reserved position towards Basic Income, fearing that rather than promoting equal role sharing, it would reinforce the traditional gendered division of labour (Gheaus, 2008; Robeyns, 2001). According to Gheaus (2008) in order to judge to what extent a policy promotes gender justice, we should assess whether the costs of engaging in a lifestyle characterized by gender symmetry would be smaller than or equal to the costs of engaging in a gender asymmetrical lifestyle. It is safe to assume that a significant number of men might not immediately want to seize the opportunity to participate in the work at home, however I agree with Elgarte that the undesired effect would not be a deficiency of basic income but a deficiency elsewhere (Elgarte, 2008: 5). None of the proponents of Basic Income would reject the sceptics' concern that existing gender-based inequalities and injustices should be attended to in order to challenge the gendered division of labour. In fact, basic income is not proposed as a panacea to women's problems, and we should not forget that it will be paid unconditionally, in other words, it is not aimed as a caretakers' income; individuals are free to use it for whatever reason they choose.

I agree with O'Reilly (2008) though that these simple polar distinctions give the impression of an either/or choice: either stay at home and care or go to work and pay someone else to do it for you. In reality, caregivers, whatever combinations of choices they arrive at, always depend on a network of various formal and informal (paid and unpaid) care arrangements resulting in the commodification of care (Ungerson, 1997). So, Gheaus' (2008) critique that Basic Income could contribute to the further privatization of care is well founded.

She argues that Basic Income would lead to serious shortage of labour supply in caring professions and thus care might become increasingly re-privatized. For that reason she advocates socialized child-care instead (Gheaus, 2008: 5). This discussion raises another relevant and important point. A feminist endorsement of Basic Income would have to attend to the existing inequalities among women that cut across class and ethnicity. A significant number of women do not opt out of work to care but outsource care to other women (Vollenweider, 2013: 20). So on one hand, feminists have to decide whether outsourcing care is ignoring the struggle for gender equality. Some women, mostly minorities, lower classes or documented or undocumented migrants, have to have the double burden of being a part-time housewife in another's house and also attending to their home while they work in precarious conditions, open to exploration and uncovered by labour laws (Vollenweider, 2013). The valuation of care could also benefit these women in terms of opening up channels for positively transforming their working conditions. If more and more men and women really do use the Basic Income to opt out of work, it could also mean that domestic care workers would lose their jobs, which said the question of whether Basic Income will be paid to citizens or migrants becomes very important.

Basic income is attractive to feminists also because it is paid to individuals rather than families, thereby better addressing contemporary demands for defamilialization[2], unlike wages for housework or caretakers' allowances schemes that are paid to households. Moving the locus of welfare away from the family to the individual means that policies would address personal autonomy and recognize the possibility of alternative family arrangements (McKay & VanEvery, 2000: 277). As Tronto (2001) suggests, it is possible to think about "what we value in family care and what makes it so desirable" instead of lamenting the loss of traditional family, and then construct policies that reflect that value without imposing the responsibility on the family, and on women's shoulders alone (76). Unlike other schemes, Basic Income's two principles, universality and payment to individuals, does not reinforce the moral elevation of the nuclear, heterosexual family and thus has the potential to promote a truly universal understanding of citizenship in not only widening the terms of citizenship to include women but also in capturing the demands of an increasingly post-familial society to allow for a variety of familial arrangements (McKay & VanEvery, 2000: 281-82). In fact, Basic Income is proposed as a payment made to individuals regardless of the configuration of the household or demographic factors; such that every recipient will get the same income without regard to anything other than being a member of the society (Van Parijs, 2002: 6). So it would tacitly help recognize alternative family structures advanced by sexual minorities (Perez, 2004).

Some have argued that a partial Basic Income or a participation income would be more feasible alternatives to basic income. Partial or participation income is proposed as alternatives that suggest payments to be made only to those who participate in economic or socially useful activities, including care work (Robeyns 2001). A participation income is defended for having more clear

and positive effects towards the revaluation and recognition of care work, because Basic Income "would also be paid to people who do not make any social or economic contribution" (Robeyns, 2001: 85). However, although participation income differs from means-tested-benefits in that it would not stigmatize recipients, it would however stigmatize non-recipients many of whom may engage in forms of care work that are too invisible or unusual to be reflected in bureaucratic rules (Baker, 2008: 3). Moreover, a participation income would pose the very dangers the critiques of basic income are concerned about, and that is the reinforcement of the idea that care is the woman's job. The very task of determining who qualifies for receiving the income would lead to further inequalities stemming from paternalistic and traditional understandings of the family and gender roles. Basic Income's major strength is its universality. Categorizing citizens in terms of their social contribution, and opening the door to the determination of the valued caregiver to bureaucracy, are at odds with these principles and could reinforce traditional gender roles and the gendered division of labour.

Without a doubt, whether Basic Income can effectively promote gender equality depends on context and the details of policy design. In oppressive relationships, men might have full control over women's resources including her Basic Income. So it would be too naïve to assume that Basic Income would by itself promote gender equality or advance women's freedom. I agree with Wollenweider (2013) that "BI, like any other measure that seeks to diminish gender inequities, would not bring about radical changes, at least in the short term, in a whole cultural and ideological spectrum of deep-rooted gender stereotypes in all the spheres of social life" (34). No feminist would disagree that advancing gender equality is a long-term struggle on multiple realms. Labour market arrangements, improvement of working conditions, public arrangements of childcare, health and education and the transformation of gender norms are necessary components of a greater policy package that could also include the universal Basic Income (McKay & VanEvery, 2000; McKay, 2001; Stanley-Clarke, 1996).

Finally, the very discussion of Basic Income from a gender perspective is valuable because, whether it would promote gender equality or not, the discussion puts to the centre the role gendered assumptions about care play in the construction of welfare policies and the continuation of gender inequality. As Baker (2008) argues, it is the broader ideological climate and the belief that care is women's role that maintains the gendered division of labour and the institutions that sustain it, so within the broader goals of the women's movement, a shift in norms towards gender equality is the more important issue. If basic income and even discussing it from a gender perspective contributes to that shift, then the idea is valuable.

Conclusion

Having enumerated the basic components of Basic Income and situated its discussion in the larger context of gender and care, it is shown that as a social policy, Basic Income is potentially more favourable then caretakers' allowances that target women, because it could individualize benefits, challenge the association of income with work, emphasize the revaluation of care and thus point towards a more inclusive understanding of citizenship. However it cannot contribute to gender equality by itself, and not without an assessment of contextual differences, societal gender norms and structural inequalities among women. Context is important. Thus far, the feminist arguments for Basic Income are raised within a specific geographical context of the welfare state. Any defence of Basic Income will have to attend to contextual specificities, structural inequalities and gender relations existing in the context in which it will be defended; hence comparative research and situated gender analyses are needed. Another, related issue concerns the implementation of Basic Income. In order to realize its potential for advancing women's status in society, economic or otherwise, women's full access to the income must be guaranteed. If Basic Income is proposed as a viable solution to women's economic and social problems in terms of welfare state arrangements, it must be addressed through rigorous gender analysis that takes into consideration those specific structures that constrain women's economic and social prospects and maintain existing inequalities among women. Even as an unrealized policy, the very discussion of Basic Income from a gender perspective is valuable for emphasizing the central role of care in human relationships and men's responsibility in equal role sharing.

Notes

[1] Finland is the first country in Europe to pay an unconditional income to its citizens. The 2-year pilot programme, which started in January 2017, guarantees the monthly payment of 560 Euros to unemployed citizens aged 25 to 58. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/03/finland-trials-basic-income-for-unemployed

[2] Developed by Ruth Lister, the concept of defamilalization refers to "the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through the social security system" (Lister, 1994: 37).

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