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A Nordic Nirvana? Gender, Citizenship, and Social Justice in the Nordic Welfare States*

Abstract

The Nordic model has emerged as some kind of exemplar in much center-left political debate. This overview article starts with a brief account of this political positioning and of the values underpinning the Nordic model. The main focus, however, is the extent to which the Nordic welfare states have been successful in promoting a women-friendly, gender-inclusive model of citizenship, taking account of the differences between the Nordic countries. It offers both a "half-full" and a "half-empty" analysis and ends with the challenge posed to the Nordic model by growing ethnic diversity.

Introduction

The Nordic welfare state has been characterized by some as "the best of all possible thinkable worlds" (Kangas and Palme 2005, 2). For members of liberal welfare regimes, it appears to offer a much stronger promise of social citizenship than their own more limited welfare states. In Europe, the Nordic model has been applauded for its "outstanding performance . . . on a very wide range of indicators" (Schubert and Martens 2005a, b, 6). In a development

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context, the Nordic experience has been held up by the Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development as containing "useful lessons for contemporary debates on democratization, development and inequality" (Mkandawire 2005, xvi).

The virtues of this Nordic Nirvana are often extolled by center-left commentators in the UK. The positioning of the Nordic welfare state in British political debate is the starting point for this article, which then reflects on the general values of social justice exemplified by the Nordic model and the role of the state within it. Pivotal among these values is gender egalitarianism. This is reflected in the generally positive appraisal of the Nordics in British feminist comparative analysis, summed up by Buchanan and Annesley: "In much of the comparative literature on democracy, welfare states and state feminism, the Nordic states are held up as role models for gender equality policies" (2007, 43; see also Daly and Rake 2003; Bryson 2007). Even the most nuanced accounts, such as that of Pascall and Lewis, suggest that only Scandinavian practices approach "gender equality across paid work, care work, income, time and voice" (2004, 379). From a Canadian perspective, Rianne Mahon identifies Denmark and Sweden (though not Finland) as guided by the kind of "egalitarian blueprint" she proposes for childcare policy. Such a vision, she argues, is not "an impossible utopia for postindustrial societies" (2002, 349). This equation of Nordic welfare states with a possible utopia is reinforced by Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers' (2006) influential contribution to the Real Utopias Project in the United States. Here, they identify four Nordic countries as among the six European welfare states whose work-family support systems come closest to their own gender-egalitarian Utopia.

The subsequent debate generated by their paper also illustrates how the Nordic model serves as a reference point for many North American scholars whether or not it represents their own version of Utopia. Kimberly J. Morgan, for example, refers to the Nordics as "the best case scenarios" for the kind of "dual-earner/dual-caregiver policies" promoted by Gornick and Meyers. Yet she also warns advocates to "be careful in what they ask for" in their own very different political contexts and in view of the pitfalls apparent in the implementation of such policies in the Nordics themselves (2006, 5, 2). More critically still, Ann Shola Orloff (2007) questions whether Gornick and Meyers' Nordic-inspired goal of gender symmetry represents a feminist utopia at all. Orloff's analysis builds on her previous critique of "the analytic predominance of the Social Democratic approach and the paradigmatic status of the Swedish case" in North American feminist comparative welfare state analysis:

this "Swedophilia" obscures as much as it illuminates, she suggests (2006, 250–1).

The purpose of this article is not to intervene in the debate as to what kind of utopia feminists should be pursuing, although it should be noted that the argumentation in my own work on gendering citizenship has been similar to that of Gornick and Meyers (Lister 1997/2003). Instead, this paper asks how far the Nordic welfare states have achieved nirvana *on their own terms* and how successful they have been in promoting a women-friendly, gender-inclusive model of citizenship. In doing so, it offers a more rounded analysis and evaluation of key facets of the Nordic welfare state, taking account of differences between the five Nordics, than is common in the literature. It is written from the perspective of an outsider, using existing evidence rather than original data, and that of a socialist-feminist based in a liberal welfare state.

"Proof That a Better World Is Possible"

As the Introduction indicates, the Nordic welfare model represents a dominant analytical paradigm in feminist scholarship. It is also quite notable how the Nordic model has emerged as some kind of exemplar in recent center-left *political* debate in the UK—both in general terms and more specifically in relation to childcare. This reflects both the current political climate in the UK and the wider interest in Nordic perspectives in the development of a European Social Model, which in turn represents a response to what is perceived as the success of the Nordic model in marrying economic competitiveness with social justice (Kangas and Palme 2005).

The Nordic model has been held up by both proponents and opponents of New Labour's third way. Anthony Giddens, its chief architect, has suggested that it offers "a policy framework of relevance to a diversity of societies" (2003, 32; see also 2004), even if, as he observes, it is not necessarily possible simply to duplicate what the Nordic countries have achieved. Needless to say, proponents and opponents of the third way tend to focus on different aspects of the Nordic model and current developments within it, although both tend to highlight childcare and social investment in the early years.

Robert Taylor, a vocal critic of New Labour and former *Financial Times* Sweden correspondent, published a pamphlet on Sweden and the Nordics through Compass, a democratic left pressure group. Taylor subtitled his pamphlet: "proof that a better world is possible." In it he argues that

> what Sweden and the other Nordics have achieved is of crucial importance in the much wider public policy debate of how the European left should respond to the complex challenges being imposed on modern societies by globalization.... The importance of the Swedish model is that it is perfectly possible to uphold and practise social democratic values of social cohesion, liberty and equality in the process of modernization and that those values remain of crucial importance to a country's ultimate economic success. (2005, 10–11)

The pamphlet generated considerable discussion in the media. One highly influential media commentator, who has regularly written glowingly about the Nordic model as offering an alternative vision, is Polly Toynbee of the liberal *Guardian* newspaper. In 2004, she observed that "at last Labour is looking north for inspiration. A steady stream of ministers and advisers is heading for Stockholm." She contrasted this enthusiasm with the previous tendency to treat the Nordic model as a "bizarre historical freak... impossibly Utopian" (Toynbee 2004). Toynbee invoked the Nordic model in particular with regard to childcare. The leading center-left think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research, also cites Scandinavia as a model for future childcare policy in its social justice strategy "for a Progressive Century" (Paxton, Pearce and Reed 2005, 358–9).

A somewhat different, sarcastic take on the center-left's lauding of the Nordic model came from the Blairite media commentator, John Rentoul: "I am writing from 'Sweden,' a mythical country of the liberal-left imagination, in which happy, smiling children are polite to each other as they grow up to be pacifist social democrats eager to pay more taxes" (2006).

Core Values and Institutions

One reason why Sweden and the other Nordic countries hold this place in the "liberal-left imagination" is because politics and policy are, more than elsewhere in Europe, framed by values that the liberal-left holds dear. Ed Miliband, an influential British Cabinet minister, has held up Scandinavian social democracy as a model because of its tradition of: "sustained incremental change which knits progressive values deep into the fabric of the country" (2007, 111). More than any other welfare state model, the Nordic or social democratic model is not just a label applied by welfare regime analysts but is worn with pride by Scandinavian governments and citizens. In the words of Robert Cox, "the core values of the

Scandinavian model are not only important to the scholars who observe the model, but they are widely shared by the citizens of Scandinavian countries and constitute an important component of national identity in those countries" (2004, 207). He suggests that it is the belief in the model at the level of an *ideal* which represents Scandinavian path-dependency, so that policy developments are interpreted so as to fit with the model.

Equality, solidarity, and universalism are values that explicitly underpin the Nordic model's commitment to the principle of inclusionary and equal citizenship—even if that principle is not fully achieved and is under some strain in the face of growing immigration and also a growing preoccupation with choice in welfare (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006b). They are values that are mutually supportive, as underlined by Gøsta Esping-Andersen's description of universalist welfare: "the universalistic system promotes equality of status. All citizens are endowed with similar rights, irrespective of class or market position. In this sense, the system is meant to cultivate cross-class solidarity, a solidarity of the nation" (1990, 25).

Moreover, the commitment is not just to equality of status but to what some would call "equality of condition," an equitable distribution of material resources such as to promote well-being and to enable all citizens to flourish and pursue their own life projects (Levitas 2004). This "passion for equality," as it is often described, appears to avoid the false dichotomy between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome. Moreover, it integrates the issue of poverty into wider concerns about overall "levels of living" or quality of life rather than ghettoizing it (Lister 2004). In doing so, the Nordics are generally more successful than other welfare states in tackling poverty. For instance, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland (together with Belgium) had the lowest child poverty rates in the OECD in around 2000: the rates of between 2.1 and 3.3 percent compared with an OECD average of 10.3 percent and with 13.6 percent and 18.4 percent in the UK and the United States, respectively (OECD 2007).

The emphasis on solidarity translates into a model of citizenship, which places greater emphasis on the bonds *between* citizens and—to varying extents—*participatory* citizenship than do those models which focus on the relationship between individuals and the state. At the same time, it is premised on a much more positive construction of the state, and in particular the welfare state as integral to citizenship, than exists in liberal models of citizenship. Less distant from civil society and citizens than in many other countries, Kangas and Palme write that historically, "the state was not perceived as such a hostile and alien force to the individual" (2005, 19). This

may partly explain what appears to be a widespread acceptance of taxation as the necessary means to help make a reality of the values of equality, solidarity, and universalism, in contrast to the resentful grumbling about it as a "burden" in liberal welfare states with much lower levels of taxation.

With its commitment to universalistic tax-funded public services, the Nordic state could be described, in some ways, as the "social investment state" *avant la lettre*. Social investment is widely regarded as key to the new social policy agenda in the European Union and the OECD. In his scientific report, commissioned by the Belgian Presidency, Esping-Andersen, whose thinking is shaped by the Scandinavian tradition, articulates the general goal of "a child-centred social investment strategy" as the foundation stone for a "new European welfare architecture" (2002, 26ff, 5). A key aim is to weaken the impact of "social inheritance" on children's life chances (ibid., 27). He suggests that "perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Scandinavia is its quite successful investment in preventative measures" (ibid., 14). It is the Nordic welfare states that emerge time and again as having gone furthest with the kind of social investment strategy he advocates. A word of caution is however in order. The social investment strategy propounded by Esping-Andersen and by proponents of the third way tends to put greater emphasis on children as a profitable investment than on ensuring they enjoy a good childhood. As such, it is largely instrumentalist, treating children as citizen-workers of the future, with insufficient focus on children's well-being and citizenship in the here and now (Lister 2003, 2006; Williams 2004).

The Nordic model of child care and education, with its more holistic, pedagogically informed approach, has offered a better balance between future-oriented investment and a concern with the child *qua* child and good childhood. This is reflected in the Nordic countries' high scoring in the UNICEF child well-being league table (Adamson 2007).[1] Helmut Wintersberger (2005) suggests that the Nordic model is better equipped to accommodate the rights-oriented approach enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child than in Conservative welfare states, where citizenship is more closely tied to labor market status. It is important not to lose sight of the perspective of the child in the face of the promotion in Europe of the more instrumentalist social investment model.

Towards a Women-Friendly, Gender-Inclusive Citizenship?

Women have also been treated rather instrumentally in that model—with an emphasis on the needs of the labor market, in the

context of fertility and wider demographic trends, rather than on gender equality as such (Lewis 2006). In contrast, Melby, Ravn and Wetterberg identify gender equality as "one of the most prominent hallmarks of the Nordic model" (even if there are differences between the Nordic countries) (2008, 4). The Nordic Council of Ministers claims, in its Nordic Gender Equality Programme 2006–10, that "the Nordic democracies have distinguished themselves through their active work to promote gender equality" (2006, 7). The original class-based "passion for equality" was extended gradually to explicitly embrace gender so that, according to Anne Lise Ellingsæter and Arnlaug Leira, who summarize the view of the Nordic Council of Ministers, gender equality is now "integral to Scandinavian citizenship" (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006a, 7). This shapes the "gender culture" (Pfau-Effinger 1998) within which specific policies operate in the Nordic welfare states.

Concerns have been raised, though, that its very "taken for granted" status may now mean that gender equality is weakening as a central policy goal, particularly in the face of an increasingly prominent discourse of parental choice (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006b, 274; Westlund 2007), and as a motivating force among younger women (Melby, Ravn and Wetterberg 2008). Furthermore, there are real differences between the Nordic countries in the extent to which gender equality represents an explicit goal of their family policies (Melby, Ravn and Wetterberg 2008). In particular, Anette Borchorst (2006a) writes of "Danish exceptionalism" in terms of the narrowness of its gender equality project and "the relatively weak institutionalisation of gender equality" compared with the other Nordics (2006b, 118). Thus, for instance, child-care policies have been motivated by concerns for children rather than gender equality (Siim and Borchorst 2008).

Increasingly, the idea of a single Nordic model has to be nuanced to take account of such differences and of shifts in policy, particularly with the advent of right-of-center governments in Denmark and Sweden. Thus, although the Nordic welfare states tend broadly to be characterized as among those that have moved furthest towards a dual-breadwinner or adult-worker model, the policy mechanisms deployed to support those with care responsibilities differ in terms both of the specifics of policy and of the gendered citizenship models underlying them. More generally, Borchorst and Siim suggest that even though "scholars agree that it is possible to identify a Nordic gender model in terms of women's political representation and in relation to their participation in paid work," more detailed analysis reveals "important differences in the form of women's mobilization, their inclusion in political parties as well as

the extent of institutionalization of gender equality" (Borchorst and Siim 2002, 92).

Just as there are differences between policies for gendered citizenship between the Nordic countries, so there are differences among feminist scholars in their evaluation of the Nordic model. Such differences can reflect differing normative positions as to whether the goal is an ostensibly gender-neutral or an explicitly gender-differentiated model of citizenship or some combination of the two (Lister 1997/2003). Nordic policy discourses have generally been gender-neutral with the explicit aim of promoting equality between women and men. However, some policies, even though still couched in gender-neutral language, arguably are more consistent with gender-differentiated models of citizenship, in which women's particular responsibilities and needs are recognized. The prime example is the Finnish and Norwegian home child care allowance scheme (see what follows).

In contrast, in a classic article, Jane Lewis and Gertrude Aström argue that Sweden, although not necessarily transcending the dichotomy between equality and difference, "has constructed a distinctive equal opportunity strategy by grafting the right to make a claim on the basis of difference onto a policy based on equal treatment." More specifically, "since the early 1970s," they write, "Swedish women have first had to become workers to qualify for parental leave at a favourable benefit level, but paradoxically, having taken a job, they could then exert a claim as mothers and stay home for what has proved to be a steadily lengthening period" (Lewis and Aström 1992, 75).

Distinctive too among some Nordic welfare states has been the attempt, however tentative, to promote a more gender-inclusive model of citizenship in which men as well as women are able to play a part as citizen-earner/carers and carer/earners. This points towards what Nancy Fraser (1997) terms the universal care-giver model in which men become more like women, rather than the universal breadwinner model in which women are expected to become more like men. Fraser presents the model as "a vision," the essence of which was captured in a 1988 statement by the Swedish Ministry of Labor (cited in what follows) but which, she concedes, is unlikely to be realized in the near future (ibid., 62). It is therefore unsurprising that nowhere has the universal care-giver model been realized. Nevertheless, Gornick and Meyers use the Nordic welfare states as exemplars of policy packages that go some way towards the achievement of their similar vision of "a dual-earner, dual-carer society, a society in which men and women engage symmetrically in employment and care-giving and where gender equality, paid work, and caregiving are all valued" (2006, 3).

Assessing Progress

The relative success or not of such policies is important to overall empirically based judgments as to the extent to which the Nordic welfare states have achieved their goal of gender equality and their potential as "woman-friendly" welfare states, following Helga Hernes' much-used term. She defined a woman-friendly state as a state which "would not force harder choices on women than on men, or permit unjust treatment on the basis of sex" and in which women as well as men "can be both autonomous individuals and parents" (1987, 15, 29). However, as Borchorst and Siim (2002) point out, it is difficult to operationalize especially in cross-national analysis.

Again, the degree of progress is a source of dispute between feminist scholars. Crudely, given that few would dispute that *some* progress has been made, particularly when compared with other countries, it can be posed as a question as to whether the glass is "half-full" or "half-empty." It is also a question as to "which women?" Hernes expanded on her definition of a women-friendly state as one in which "injustice on the basis of gender is largely eliminated without an increase in other forms of inequality, such as among groups of women" (1987, 15). In the two decades since her intervention, there has been increased recognition of the diversity among women, to the extent that some feminist scholars have now rejected the term "women-friendly" as biased in its apparent failure to acknowledge this diversity, particularly racial/ethnic diversity. Gender-inclusive citizenship has to be inclusive of women in their diversity (Hobson 2003; Lister 1997/2003).

The rest of this article will deploy the half-full/half-empty distinction to evaluate the extent to which it is appropriate to characterize the Nordics as Nirvana from the perspective of gender-inclusive citizenship. The notion of "gender-inclusive citizenship" applied here is rooted in a synthesis of equality and difference gender models within a framework of diversity, and, like Fraser's universal caregiver model, it enables "citizen-the earner/carer and carer/earner to flourish" (Lister 1997/2003, 200). Four broad criteria are used in the analysis: the extent to which the gendered division of labor has shifted so that both women and men are able to combine earning and caring; gender equality in the labor market and the polis; and, less well developed, the extent to which the Nordic model of gender-inclusive citizenship addresses male violence and incorporates minority ethnic and migrant women. This to some extent reflects the Nordic Council of Ministers' own conceptualization of gender equality as meaning that

> power and influence are divided equally between women and men and that both women and men share the same rights, obligations and opportunities in all areas of life. It also translates into a society that is free of gender-related violence. (2006, 7)

Although, admittedly not scientific, the half-full/half-empty distinction is deployed to capture the extent to which judgment on the Nordics tends to reflect the analyst's stance as much as the evidence of policy outcomes. The article does not claim to provide a comprehensive evaluation of all relevant policies, and, in particular, in its focus on the gendered division of labor, pays rather less attention to the position of lone mothers and women's differential risk of poverty. It is also not possible with the available data to provide a systematic differentiated analysis of the impact of policies on different groups of women. This means that we cannot answer the question as to "which women" benefit from the "women-friendly" welfare state with any degree of precision.

The Half-Full Analysis

The Nordics hold the top four places in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index, with Denmark at seventh place. The UK is ranked thirteenth and the United States twenty-seventh. A commentary on the 2007 Index observes that the five Nordic countries "have all closed over 80% of the gender gap and thus serve as a useful benchmark for international comparisons" (World Economic Forum 2007). In the 2008 political empowerment subindex, Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden hold the top four spots in descending order, whereas Denmark stands at tenth place. This demonstrates how women have advanced as political citizens in the formal public sphere to a greater extent than elsewhere, with a regional average of 40 percent parliamentary representation—more than double the rest of Europe and the United States (www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm). In Finland, which has a female president, in April 2007, the (male) prime minister appointed a cabinet in which twelve of the twenty ministers are women, the highest level of female representation at the Cabinet level in the world (MacDonald 2007).

According to Karvonen and Selle (1995), the improvement in women's political representation has transformed the face of politics and represents the most important single change in post-war Scandinavia. It is important not just as a marker of women's political citizenship but also because of its potential implications for policy, particularly the policies that underpin social citizenship. There is some disagreement in the literature as to the difference that

women's political presence makes to policy. Female politicians do not necessarily promote "women-friendly" policies. However, many do and they are more likely to make a difference if women represent a critical mass in the political arena, which they do in the Nordic countries. Support for this view is provided by Priscilla A. Lambert's analysis of maternal employment policies, which found that "having more women in power is consistently associated with more generous childcare and parental leave policies" (2008, 317).

Hege Skjeie wrote of Norway over a decade ago that "within political life women now take an active part in creating those definitions of reality on which efforts to effect changes rest... Women's inclusion is perceived as having caused changes in party attitudes on a wide range of political issues" (Skjeie 1993, 258). What particularly distinguishes Nordic gender politics and policies is the interplay between state feminism and autonomous women's organizations (Bergman 2004). Thus, in differing mixes, they bear the mark of women's political agency from both below and within the formal political system (Huber and Stephens 2000; Hobson 2003; Christensen 2004; Leira 2006; Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen 2007).

"A Caring State"

This interplay has, in particular, helped to shape women's social citizenship. Key here to the half-full analysis is the highly developed social infrastructure of services and leave provisions, which have contributed to women's increased economic independence through paid employment and their relatively low levels of poverty (Daly and Rake 2003).[2] Although Esping-Andersen's original welfare regime analysis focused on cash transfers, other scholars have argued that it is the infrastructure of services, which is key to understanding the distinctive Nordic welfare model, particularly from a gendered perspective. Huber and Stephens' cross-national analysis concludes that "public delivery of a wide range of welfare state services is the most distinctive feature of the social democratic welfare state and that this feature is a product of the direct and interactive effects of social democracy and women's mobilization" (2000, 323). Whereas by 1985, between 15 and 20 percent of the working-age population of the social democratic welfare states of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden was employed in public services, in the comparator Christian Democratic and Liberal welfare states, the figures were between 2 and 8 percent (op.cit., 333).

Leira writes that "state sponsoring of social care services served to maintain the form of institutional welfare state developed in Scandinavia and facilitated women's gainful employment"—both through provision of care services to support mothers' employment

and as employers of female labor (2006, 31). Despite differences,[3] there are sufficient similarities among social care services in the Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) to allow the identification of what Leira terms "a 'caring' state" (2006, 30) and Anneli Anttonen and Jorma Sipilä (1996) a Nordic "social care regime." This caring state or regime has been characterized by extensive provision of public care services for both children and frail older people in line with the value of universalism, even if, as Anttonen (2002) points out, the universalist trademark does not always fulfill its promise. She suggests that "we might argue that caring has become an acknowledged part of social citizenship in the Nordic countries. From the feminist point of view, a radical extension of social citizenship has taken place, and citizens have won the right to certain social care services; for example, "a comprehensive and universal municipal day-care system" (Anttonen 2002, 76). Important here from the perspective of gendered social citizenship (and also the rights of children) is the characterization of child care as a citizenship right, most explicit in Finland but effectively realized in Denmark and Sweden also and aimed for in Norway, according to Leira (2002a, 2006; see also Lister et al. 2007). OECD statistics for the proportion of under-three-year-old children participating in childcare services in 2004 show Denmark leading the world with 61.7 percent; Norway, Iceland, Sweden follow with 58.7, 43.7, and 39.5 percent, respectively. Finland is seventh with 35 percent (marginally below the United States); the UK is twelfth with 25.8 percent, just above the OECD average of 22.0 percent (OECD 2007). Although they stand out less with regard to older pre-school children's participation, the Nordics are nevertheless among the member states "closest to meeting the European Union targets for childcare provision" (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006b, 265).

A strong social infrastructure has been of particular value to lone mothers who are treated as workers in the Nordic states. Anne Skevik comments that this "working mothers" approach has worked well for "the vast majority of lone mothers in the Nordic countries" and that the available evidence "indicates that they do better than women in the same situation in most other countries" (2006a, 260). A limited comparison of the incidence of poverty among lone mothers in ca. 2000 shows a rate of between 5 and 17 percent in the Nordics (Iceland excluded) in contrast to 39 percent in the UK and 40 percent in the Netherlands (Skevik 2006b, 225). 2005 EU statistics show that at-risk-of-poverty rates among children in lone parent families are lowest in the Nordic members at 20–23% compared with an EU average of 35 percent and a UK figure of 38 percent (Frazer and Marlier 2007).

Parental Leave and Fathers

As well as, for the most part, being in the vanguard of developing childcare provisions to support lone parent workers and an emergent dual-earner model, the Nordic welfare states have pioneered new parental leave arrangements to enable parents (not just mothers) to look after very young children at home. Interestingly, the Nordic countries have not all followed the same approach to leave provisions and increasingly they demonstrate shifting policy mixes. A recent typology of leave policy models classifies Sweden, Iceland, and Denmark as the main examples of a "one year leave gender-equality-orientated" model and Finland and Norway as examples of a "parental choice orientated" model, which also places (less explicit) emphasis on gender equality (Wall 2007).[4] Among the dimensions used in Wall's typology are the relationship between leave and public childcare provision and the extent and nature of the encouragement given to fathers' use of parental leave and involvement in childcare more generally.

This last issue is an element of the Nordic welfare model that is of particular significance for gendered citizenship (Lister 1997/2003). It represents recognition that men and women's access to citizenship rights and ability to act as citizens in the public sphere are differentially affected by their responsibilities in the private sphere. Women have been changing faster than men and their increased participation in the public sphere of the polis and the labor market has not been matched by men's increased participation in care work in the private, domestic sphere. In a number of feminist accounts, care work has been constructed as a citizenship responsibility in its own right equivalent to paid work. As far back as 1988, a Swedish Ministry of Labour sex equality document observed that "to make it possible for both men and women to combine parenthood and gainful employment, a new view of the male role and a radical challenge to the organization of working life are called for" (1988, 5). The Nordic Council of Ministers asserts that "the Nordic focus on men and gender equality is unique in an international context" (2006, 8).

Although the article will discuss the limitations from the half-empty perspective, it is important to acknowledge the significance of what has been attempted (see also Gornick and Meyers 2006). As Leira observes, "the schemes, and especially the father's quota, are remarkable as examples of state intervention not only in the general framework of employment, but also in the internal organization of the family. Everyday family life has been made into an arena for the promotion of gender equality" (2002b, 85). This has been backed

up by media campaigns in Sweden and Norway to encourage fathers to be more actively involved in care work (Hobson, Duvander and Halldén 2006; Hobson, Carson and Lawrence 2007; Hobson and Fahlén forthcoming).

Whether framed as "an entitlement for men to have more contact with children," as in Sweden (Hobson, Duvander and Halldén 2006, 280; Hobson, Carson and Lawrence 2007), or as an attempt to promote active fatherhood "by gentle force," as in Norway, the policy has been described as, "an innovative and potentially radical approach to updating the gender contract" (Leira 2006, 87). Particularly striking here is Iceland, which tends to be left out of many accounts of the Nordic welfare state (including that of Gornick and Meyers) but which has not just a daddy month or two but three months. This represents a third of the total leave, with another third restricted to the mother, and the remaining third available to either parent. The father's quota has been most successful in increasing fathers' use of the leave in Iceland and in Norway (up to 80 and 90 percent, respectively, from tiny proportions); Johanna Lammi-Taskulu (2006) suggests that this may be because it was added on to the existing parental leave period, whereas in other countries, it involved some loss of the leave previously available to mothers. Nevertheless, in Sweden also, men who do not use the leave to care for young children are now "the exception rather than the norm" (Hobson, Duvander and Halldén 2006, 269; Hobson, Carson and Lawrence 2007). Barbara Hobson argues that the policy has strengthened men's capabilities and agency to claim their entitlement to be active fathers (personal communication; Bergman and Hobson 2002; Hobson and Fahlén forthcoming).

There is research indicating that male use of parental leave has a positive effect on the gendered division of labor and fathers' subsequent involvement in child care (Haas and Hwang 1999). Overall, although Naomi Finch has found the persistence of a male breadwinner pattern in time use in all the European countries studied, there are signs that it "was weaker in the Nordic states at the beginning of the 1990s compared to the non-Nordic countries and has weakened over time, with greater gender equity in how working time is shared" (2006, 279). In particular, she identifies "a Nordic/non-Nordic divide," with Denmark the exception, in the extent to which fathers undertake childcare activities. Whereas generally fathers cross-nationally devote around 5 percent of their working time to childcare, the figures for Norwegian and Swedish fathers are 9 and 8 percent, respectively, but for Danish fathers, only 3 percent. A cross-European comparison of the amount of daily time spent by women and men aged 20–74 on domestic work more generally

shows the gender gap to be lowest in Sweden and Denmark at 49 percent, with Norway and Finland at 56 and 65 percent, respectively, compared with 96 percent in the UK (Aliaga 2006).[5]

Crompton and Lyonette discovered "reported levels of work-life conflict" to be lower and the domestic division of labor "less traditional" in Finland and Norway than in non-Nordic European countries (2006, 389). They identify working hours as "the most significant predictor of work-life conflict" (2006, 385). Similarly, an analysis of the Finnish government's contribution to "temporal well-being" by Goodin, Parpo and Kangas concludes that the Finnish welfare state is "temporally egalitarian," doing much "to equalise people's temporal autonomy and to neutralise the time-penalties that would otherwise come from parenthood (especially lone parenthood) and paid employment" (2004, 532, 544, 545). Such evidence is consistent with Gershuny and Sullivan's finding that "full-time employed hours of paid work in social democratic regimes *are* on average shorter than those in the liberal market economies" (2003, 215, emphasis in original). Although there are variations between Nordic countries, typically they are "characterised by working time regimes with few disincentives against gender equality" (Boje 2006, 196).[6]

In contrast, in the UK, there is a reluctance to intervene in both the market (through regulation of working time, witness the resistance to the European Working Time Directive) and the domestic private sphere. It is the willingness to cross the domestic public–private divide, which is the particularly striking aspect of Nordic welfare and gender equality policy. Although British politicians have now started to talk about active fatherhood and the government has indeed extended opportunities for paternity leave, they have been unwilling to intervene in the private, domestic sphere by actively promoting a more equal gendered division of care labor through measures such as the daddy month(s) of parental leave (Lister 2006).

Taking the range of social policies together, cross-national comparisons, such as Gornick and Meyers' (2003, 2006) study of policies to support employed parents, Lambert's (2008) analysis of maternal employment policy, and Daly and Rake's (2003) study of gender and the welfare state, tend to support the half-full analysis: the Nordic countries generally score well on most (though, as we shall see, not all) indicators of gender equality and gendered social citizenship (see also Korpi 2000). However, if one takes "gender equality" as the benchmark rather than comparison with other industrialized societies, as does, for instance, the Swedish Political Platform for a Feminist Initiative (www.feministisktinitiativ.se/downloads/platforms/; Hobson et al. 2007), then the glass starts to look half-empty.

The Half-Empty Analysis

Some evidence for this less favourable reading can be found in the same global indices on which the Nordics score so well. For example, despite their overall high ranking on the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index, cited earlier, only Sweden and Norway are ranked in the top ten of the Economic Participation and Opportunity Subindex, with Denmark, Finland, and Iceland at twenty-eighth, nineteenth, and twentieth below the United States at twelfth (World Economic Forum 2008). In particular, both the United States and UK score better than all the Nordics on the female-to-male ratio of legislators, senior officials, and workers. The Nordic Council of Ministers acknowledges that "the clear picture that emerges in most organisations, whether privately-owned businesses, political organisations, research institutions or public institutions is that the higher up the hierarchical ladder one climbs, the smaller the number of women" (2006, 14). The proportion of managers who are female in the Nordic member states is below the EU average and that in the UK (European Commission 2008). A major criticism made by feminists within the Nordic states is that, despite women's relatively favorable political representation, men still tend to dominate the important corporatist channels of political decision-making (Buchanan and Annesley, 2007). Norway is, though, trying to address this through the imposition of compulsory quotas of 40 percent of non-executive board directorships, with the result that it now has the highest proportion of women in this role in the world (Roberts 2008).

With regard to welfare state policies, Borchorst (2006a, b) observes that, for all the achievements in embedding gender equality in public policies, policy inconsistencies and gaps between objectives and outcomes can be found in all the Nordic countries. The half-empty analysis focuses primarily on how these "inconsistencies and gaps" are reflected in the persistence of a traditional gendered division of labor in both public and private spheres. The analysis also widens to include the response of the Nordic states to male violence and to the challenge of immigration and multiculturalism.

The Gendered Division of Labor in the Labor Market

The effects of the persistent gendered division of labor in both the economy and the domestic sphere interact to the detriment of Nordic women's economic opportunity. On the one side, gender divisions in the labor market affect decisions about who uses parental leave and home care allowances, and on the other side, policies to help parents reconcile paid work and family responsibilities are

seen by some as contributing to inequality in the labor market because it is still primarily mothers who make use of them (see, for instance, Datta Gupta, Smith and Verner 2006; Mandel and Semyonov 2006). In other words, it is a vicious circle in which policies and practices reinforce each other to undermine the very commitment to gender equality that frames those policies.

Despite women's educational achievements and increased labor market participation among mothers in both two- and lone-parent families, they enter a labor market, which remains highly segregated both horizontally and vertically by international standards. The female labor force participation rate in the Norden overall is 76.1 percent compared with 69.3 percent in the United States and 62.6 percent in the EU eurozone (Nordic Council of Ministers 2007). Yet, according to the Nordic Council of Ministers, the evidence shows:

> unequivocally that Nordic labour markets continue to be divided according to gender and characterised by stereotypical notions of 'women's jobs' and 'men's jobs'. A sharp gender divide in areas of specialisation, occupations and hiring practices are obstacles that prevent full equality between women and men in the workplace. (2006, 16–17)

Within the EU, the Nordics and, in particular, Finland score relatively poorly with regard to occupational gender segregation and worse than the UK (European Commission 2008). Women are more likely to work in the public sector (where leave arrangements are generally more generous) and men in the private (where pay is on average higher); they are more likely to work reduced hours when children are young, and, as noted already, are less likely to achieve top positions. Margarita Estévez-Abe critically reviews labor economist, cultural, and welfare state institutional theories, which attempt to explain "the puzzle" of the "counter-intuitive cross-national pattern of sex segregation" (2005, 183; 2006, 142). Her own theory "attributes cross-national variations in occupational segregation to differences in national skill profiles: those countries in which a large number of employers rely on firm-specific skills experience greater degrees of occupational segregation by gender" (2005, 180). The gender pay gap in terms of gross hourly earnings is also above the EU average in the Nordic member states (and in Finland is as wide as in the UK) (European Commission 2008). Studies of Sweden and Denmark show that the gap has actually been widening in the higher part of the wages distribution (Datta Gupta, Smith and Verner 2006). In the Swedish context, Hobson points to the "weak sex-discrimination law . . . and the unwillingness of the state to

implement wage equity for women employed in the highly segregated public service sector" (2003, 91). The Swedish Labor Court, which embodies corporatism, has resisted attempts to override collective bargaining agreements through the implementation of equal pay (Hellgren and Hobson 2009).

The degree of occupational segregation and unequal pay often comes as a surprise to outside observers who tend to assume that the commitment to gender equality will be reflected in greater labor market equality. That said, because these are relatively egalitarian societies overall with compressed wage structures, the gender pay inequalities that result from occupational segregation do not translate into such wide economic inequalities as segregated labor markets do elsewhere (Korpi 2000; Datta Gupta, Smith and Verner 2006). Thus, in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index, the Nordics are ranked between third and eleventh according to the female-to-male ratio in overall earned incomes despite their relatively poor ranking on wage equality for similar work (World Economic Forum 2008).

The Gendered Division of Labor in the Home

In the private, domestic sphere, two very different policy logics can be observed in relation to gendered responsibilities for child care (Leira 2006), although increasingly they are combined uneasily. On the one hand, there is the gender-explicit policy logic of the "daddy leave" (in Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Finland),[7] in which the stated aim is to shift the gendered division of labor by encouraging men's greater participation in the care of young children. [Denmark abandoned its short-lived "daddy leave" policy in 2002 following the election of a right-wing government. This policy reversal was despite the measure's success in increasing fathers' take-up of leave and represented, in Borchorst's view, "the public-private split rearticulated" (2006b, 101).] In addition, in recognition of the consensus around the sharing of care responsibilities, the center-right government in Sweden has introduced in 2008 a "gender equality bonus" to incentivize families to share the rest of the parental leave equally (Westlund 2007; Hobson and Fahlén forthcoming). On the other hand, there is the supposedly gender-neutral policy logic of child or home care allowances (again Finland and Norway), which are highly gendered in their effect. Home care allowances have also been introduced to a limited extent at the municipal level in Denmark (2003), Iceland (2006), and, most recently, Sweden (2008) (Westlund 2007).[8]

Unfortunately, the embedded resistance of the gendered domestic division of labor to significant change means that the gender-neutral

policies seem to have more of an impact in inadvertently reinforcing the gender division of labor than do the gender explicit policies in shifting it. As Elin Kvande observes in the Norwegian context, "even though cash for care is designed as a gender-neutral scheme, it is understood and practised as a gendered one, because it is situated in a gendered context" (2007, 23). It is overwhelmingly women who make use of home care allowances—over nine out of ten in Norway and Sweden (although it is too early to assess the long-term effects of their recent reintroduction in Sweden) (Westlund 2007).

The significance of this for gender equality and women's citizenship is disputed (Bergman 2004). Some point to the temporary nature of the break from the labor market, the value to those mothers who would otherwise be unemployed, and the strong support for the home care allowance among parents of young children (Ellingsæter 2006; Salmi 2006; Salmi and Lammi-Taskula 2007). Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen (2007) suggest that the impact on mothers' labor market participation has been very different in Finland and Norway, reflecting the much higher level of unemployment in the former and expanding labor market opportunities for women in the latter. This reflects the wider point that labor market opportunities and structures can be as influential as family policies in shaping women's choices (Salmi and Lammi-Taskula 2007).

Others, including the OECD (2005), contend that the home care allowances policy harms women's longer term labor market position. This is consistent with the more general argument made by some analysts that social democratic family-friendly policies, which fail to challenge the domestic division of labor, can reinforce occupational segregation—both vertical and horizontal (Mandel and Semyonov 2006). Some feminist scholars interpret home care allowances policy as a "new familialism" and a difference-based model of citizenship in which difference spells unequal (Mahon 2002). Kimberly J. Morgan and Kathrin Zippel conclude from a review of such schemes that "as currently structured [they] satisfy neither the advocates of difference or equality, in that they provide only a weak valuation of care while undermining women's place in employment" (2003, 77). They argue that superimposing such schemes "on highly gendered labour markets" simply reinforces "the current division of labor in the workforce and the home" (ibid.; see also Björnberg and Bradshaw 2006). This, according to the OECD, is particularly the case for "mothers with lower levels of education, who have worked in less skilled occupations [and who] are most likely to take these low-paid leaves, which may further marginalise them from the labour market" (OECD 2001, 33, cited in Mahon 2002, 352). In addition, in Norway, immigrant mothers are most likely to use the

allowance—78 percent of one- to two-year-old children in immigrant families are cared for at home compared with a national average of 62 percent (Westlund 2007). Thus, the policies can exacerbate class and ethnic as well as gender stratification.[9]

Highly gendered labor markets together with workplace cultures, which emphasize male indispensability, also blunt the impact of the daddy leave policies. Hobson et al., for example, point to "convincing evidence that workplace cultures have an effect on men's agency to take advantage of parental leave" (Hobson, Duvander and Halldén 2006, 285; Hobson, Carson and Lawrence 2007). Elsewhere, Hobson points to the significance of gendered earnings differentials "in accounting for the imbalance in parental leave" (2004, 80). In Sweden, fathers take 20 percent of the total parental leave days (Hobson and Fahlén forthcoming). In Finland, in 2003, they took only 5 percent of the leave days (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006a), and an increase in the number of fathers taking parental leave has coincided with a reduction in the average length of fathers' leave period from sixty-four working days in 2002 to twenty-nine in 2005 (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula and Takala 2007). Even in Norway and Iceland, where the daddy leave is most successful in terms of numbers of fathers taking the leave, mothers still take more parental leave overall. In Norway, fathers take only 8 percent of total leave days (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006a), and the use of the father's quota has not been matched by a similar increase in the number of fathers sharing the nonquota period of parental leave (Kvande 2007). According to Lammi-Taskula (2006), only in Iceland have the number of fathers taking parental leave and the length of leave taken by fathers been growing at the same time. Even here, fathers take less than a third (27.6 percent) of total leave days (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006a).

Moreover, although in general the traditional gender division of labor has weakened more in the Nordic countries than in the non-Nordic, data on child care and domestic work cited earlier reveal that "family obligations are [still] highly gendered with women doing the major part of caring and domestic work" (Boje 2006, 212; see also Finch 2006). Thus some conclude that the value of the policies introduced in the Nordic countries lies more in what they symbolize—a belief in the importance of a more equitable division of labor and the role of public policy in achieving that—than in their impact on the actual division of labor. Although, as Gornick and Meyers (2006) contend, such policies' symbolic function is important, the policies do not appear to have really achieved the institutionalization of change that they advocate in their essay.

Male Violence

Interestingly, although the Nordic governments (other than in Denmark) stand out in their willingness to treat the domestic division of labor as "a structural problem" (Andersson 2005, 176), they were generally slow to acknowledge issues of bodily integrity as matters of public citizenship requiring rights of protection—more so than in liberal welfare states like the UK (Hearn and Pringle 2006; Buchanan and Annesley 2007). As Keith Pringle observes, "patterns of comparative welfare responsiveness look very different when seen through the lens of gendered violence rather than through the lens of gendered labour activities. In particular, the Scandinavian countries looks far less successful in terms of welfare on the former measure as compared to the latter" (2008, 225). A focus on political and social rights, with the latter enabling women to exercise agency in order to leave violent partnerships (Hobson 1990), may have contributed to the lack of attention paid to embodied civil rights (Siim, personal communication). However, thanks to feminist movements, Nordic governments, notably Sweden, have become more responsive to gendered violence in recent years (Hobson 2003). In the Global Gender Gap Index, Sweden achieves the best score possible of 0.00 on a 0-to-1 scale measuring "existence of legislation punishing acts of violence against women";[10] Norway and Denmark score 0.25 and Finland and Iceland 0.50. The UK scores relatively well with 0.08; the United States scores 0.33 (World Economic Forum 2008).

Taking Sweden and Finland, as exemplars of the "best" and "worst," they are distinguished from each other in particular by the way in which they construct male violence. In Finland, domestic violence and laws on sexual violence are generally represented in gender-neutral terms (McKie and Hearn 2004; Hearn et al. 2006); in Sweden, there is greater willingness to situate male violence within an analysis of gendered power relations (Ahlberg et al. 2008; Roman 2008). Jeff Hearn observes that, in Finland, the positive construction of fatherhood is typically disconnected from men's violence even though the murder rate of women by male partners and ex-partners is high and the level of male violence towards known women is similar to that in the UK (2002; Hearn et al. 2005). A 2005 survey found that a fifth of women had experienced violence in a current partnership and just under half in a previous partnership (Piispa et al. 2006).

Swedish surveys indicate a lower but nevertheless high incidence of domestic violence: about one in ten women has experienced violence in a current partnership and a third in previous partnerships, often of a repeated and systematic nature (Ahlberg et al. 2008).

There has been a series of initiatives to combat male violence, including the introduction of a Gross Violation of a Woman's Integrity Act in 1998 and an advisory National Council on Violence, established in 2000. Amnesty International (2004) has applauded the Swedish legislation but criticized its implementation and the failure of municipalities to take action. In its final report, the National Council identified a continued tendency among Swedish authorities to deny male violence against women (Balkmar and Pringle 2005). Similarly, an evaluation of the major reform package adopted in the late 1990s identifies significant shortcomings in its implementation. Karen Leander of the Stockholm Centre for Public Health writes that the report and subsequent discussion have revealed "persistent resistance to the general 'institutionalization' of efforts against men's violence against women" and "structural obstacles to gender power-conscious work" (2006, 124).

However, according to Maria Eriksson, male violence among fathers is more readily officially acknowledged in the immigrant population. In other words, in the family context, male violence is racialized and, she argues, "gender equality and child-friendliness become ethnic and racialized markers" of Swedishness (2005, 28; see also Scuzzarello 2008). Nevertheless, an analysis of Nordic gender equality action plans by Trude Langvasbraten suggests that the racialization of male violence is least marked in Sweden. Here, the plan submitted by the previous government identifies male violence as a product of the gendered power structure, affecting women as an undifferentiated category, with no reference to "Sweden's status as a multicultural society" (Langvasbråten 2008, 40). In Norway, policies to address particular problems of violence associated with minority ethnic groups, notably forced marriages and female genital mutilation, are disconnected from broader state initiatives to combat "violence in close relationships" so that policies are marked by "segmentation" into "minority" and "majority" concerns (Siim and Skjeie 2008). The most recent action plan for combating violence in personal relations does not identify the particular problems facing minority ethnic women. Although this approach avoids the dangers of racializing male violence, it also isolates the concerns of minority ethnic women and narrows them down to the questions of forced marriage and genital mutilation (Langvasbråten 2008, 44).

The association of women's oppression with immigrant groups is most marked in Denmark. Here, the annual gender equality action plans identify gender equality as "a core value" of Danish society, which immigrant men and women must understand and comply with (Langvasbråten 2008, 41). The political Right, not previously

known for their commitment to gender equality, have adopted its rhetoric as a means of framing, particularly Muslim, minorities as the Other (Borchorst 2006a, b). This raises the wider issue of the challenges to the Nordic model in general and the women-friendly state in particular created by immigration and multiculturalism.

The Challenge of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Although the Nordic welfare states are said to belong to the same worlds of welfare and gender, as the examples just cited suggest, they are to some extent responding to the challenges of immigration and multiculturalism in different ways (Hellgren and Hobson 2008; Siim 2008). "Although they belong to the same categories of welfare and gender regime, they have recently moved in opposite directions in terms of migration due to different national histories, institutions and nationalisms" (Lister et al. 2007, 82). Sweden and Norway have moved to accept dual citizenship, and, in some accounts, immigration is presented as the answer to the demographic challenges facing the Nordic welfare states (see, for instance, Schubert and Martens 2005a, b); at the same time, in Denmark, the immigration regime has become much more restrictive, and the principle of universality of social rights has been breached for immigrants and refugees (Siim 2004, 2008). A cross-national study of immigrants' social rights identifies a sharp contrast between Sweden and Denmark (Morissens and Sainsbury 2005). However, despite the "Danish exceptionalism," Birte Siim notes that "studies of lived citizenship of ethnic minority women have identified common problems in the relation between the Nordic gender equality norm, women's rights and multiculturalism" (2006, 2008).

Siim is one of a number of Nordic feminists who, for some years, have been drawing attention to how not all women do equally well in women-friendly states. In the Danish context, she has pointed to new patterns of class polarization, linked to education and skills, and the need for new forms of gender solidarity able to embrace women of different ethnic and religious backgrounds (Siim 2000). Systematic data are not available to analyze how different groups of women fare but the evidence points to non-Western migrant women's inferior position on two key axes of citizenship: the labor market and the polis. The percentage gap between the employment rates of native women and those from non-Western backgrounds in 2002 was 29.9 percent in Denmark, 24.7 percent in Sweden, 18.2 in Norway, and 17.2 percent in the UK (Melby, Ravn and Wetterberg 2008). According to Siim and Borchorst (2008), the gap in Denmark is among the highest in Europe.

With regard to political representation, Siim and Skjeie identify a "gender equality paradox" in Denmark and Norway: "the simultaneous inclusion of women from ethnic majority backgrounds and exclusion of women from ethnic minority backgrounds in core political institutions such as parliament and government" (2008, 339). Siim has argued the need for mechanisms that enable immigrant women to be full participating citizens so that their voices are heard in their own right rather than lost in translation when mediated by others (2006; see also Hobson 2003; Hobson et al. 2007). In Sweden, this is beginning to happen: some immigrant women have been able to enter the political debate around honor-related violence (Hellgren and Hobson 2009).

Siim and Borchorst conclude that, despite the different multicultural policies adopted in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, "all three countries have problems with integration of immigrant women on the labour market, in politics and in society. None of the Scandinavian welfare states can therefore claim to live up to Hernes' vision of 'women-friendly societies'" (2008, 22). This, they argue, points to the "limits to the Scandinavian approach to welfare" and to the need to rethink the meaning of "'women-friendliness' in the context of diversity" (ibid., 22–3). They also identify the need for more comparative Scandinavian research on the question of gender equality, immigration, and cultural diversity.

Hobson interprets the nonrecognition of immigrant and minority ethnic women in Sweden as a product of "the Swedish universalistic frame [which] has meant less diversity in the types of claims that get recognized" (2003, 92). More generally, a number of commentators have been warning that diversity stands in tension with the values of solidarity and universalism that are so central to the Nordic model (see, in particular, Alesina and Glaeser 2004). This is a challenge that faces not just the Nordic welfare states but it is perhaps here that it stands in particularly sharp relief. Others, such as Peter Taylor-Gooby (2005) and Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (2006), have argued that empirical analysis does not support the thesis that we have to choose between diversity and solidaristic welfare states.

Indeed, in a globalizing world, it is possible to identify alternative, more inclusive and expansive conceptualizations of solidarity, which go beyond the cross-class solidarity identified by Esping-Andersen as underpinning universalist welfare: for instance, a "cosmopolitan solidarity," which, Ulrich Beck (2005, 140–1) argues, extends beyond the nation to embrace cultural Others, valuing diversity and "multiplicity" over "sameness and unity"; or "reflective solidarity," appeals to which rest on "our awareness of and regard for those multiple interconnections in which differences

emerge" (Dean 1996, 16; see also Clarke 2004, 156; Lister 2007). Thus, I would argue that one of the biggest challenges for the Nordic model is to develop new forms of gender-inclusive citizenship rooted in these cosmopolitan or reflective forms of solidarity. Although Nordic welfare state solidarity is generally represented as rooted in homogeneity, beyond the nation-state there is a tradition of "thin cosmopolitanism and the ideals of international citizenship," as expressed in international aid and development policies, which could be built upon (Kuisma 2008, 2).

Conclusion

Nirvanas usually prove to be chimeras, not least in the context of gender equality. Nordic feminist scholars are acutely aware of how far their homelands fall short of the ideal of the "women-friendly" welfare state. On none of the criteria deployed here, do the Nordics meet the Nordic Council of Ministers' definition of gender equality cited earlier: "power and influence" are not "divided equally between women and men"; whatever the theory, women and men do not, in practice, "share the same rights, obligations and opportunities in all areas of life," and the aspiration to gender equality does not "translate into a society that is free of gender-related violence" (Nordic Council of Ministers 2006, 7). In addition, minority ethnic and immigrant women have not yet been successfully incorporated into the Nordic model of gender-inclusive citizenship.

In particular, despite a high level of economic activity, women do not enjoy the same labor market opportunities as men, as they face, to a greater or lesser extent, occupational segregation, a glass ceiling, and a relatively high gender pay gap. Higher earning women are particularly badly affected (Datta Gupta, Smith and Verner 2006; Shalev 2007), whereas, according to Korpi and England (2007), working class women are better integrated into the labor market than elsewhere (although lower earning women are also more likely to be marginalized by home care allowances). As elsewhere, minority ethnic and immigrant women are marginalized both economically and politically. The Nordics were generally slow to address the issue of gender-related violence, focusing more on women's political and social than bodily civil rights, and, although more recent policies have been praised, their implementation has often lacked commitment.

Any attempt at explaining the failure of the Nordics to achieve their own goal of gender equality is bedevilled by a number of problems.[11] First, despite their shared label of social democratic welfare regime, we are talking about five different countries, each with their

own institutions, political histories and cultures, and gendered patterns of agency and citizenship engagement. This has implications for the second difficulty: the level of explanation. The more general the level of explanation, the less useful it is for understanding the specific weaknesses in specific sites within each of the Nordic welfare states and for formulating policy solutions suitable for those sites. Yet, the more specific the level of explanation, the harder it is to generalize across different institutions, cultures, and patterns of women and men's agency in the five Nordics (Hobson and Fahlén forthcoming).

One way of trying to make sense of the half-empty verdict is to use Hobson's distinction between "gender participatory" and "gender equity" models: the former promotes "participatory parity in paid work" and policy measures "that enable parents to combine employment with caring responsibilities"; for the latter, "gender equal participation in paid and unpaid work is the goal" (2004, 76). In the Swedish context, she concludes that "the gender participatory model did not lead to the gender equity model – the equal participation of men and women in paid and unpaid work," even though that had been the expectation in earlier debates about gender equality (op.cit. 81).

For some analysts, this conclusion will reinforce their view that "gender equity" represents the wrong goal. Indeed, this takes us back to Orloff's (2007) debate with Gornick and Meyers (2006) around their feminist utopia of gender symmetry, referred to in the Introduction. But for those of us who still believe that the more or less equal participation of men and women in paid and unpaid work is a key to gender-inclusive citizenship, the challenge is to identify the roadblocks which have prevented the shift from the gender participatory to the gender equity model.

Mixing metaphors, these roadblocks are created and reinforced by the persistent power of the vicious circle through which inequities in public and private spheres continue to reinforce each other. The half-empty analysis reminds us that this vicious circle continues to operate even in the Nordics, where more progress has been made than elsewhere in triggering a "'virtuous circle,' through which gains in one area interact with gains in another, to produce a general picture of cumulative progress" (Bryson 1999, 111). Thus, to some extent, women's weak labor market position reflects both the failure of parental leave policies to shift to a significant extent the gendered division of domestic labor and the increasingly conflicting policy logics embedded in policies for childcare. At the same time, so long as women's labor market position is weaker than men's and workplace cultures reflect this, gender-neutral policies for childcare will

have gendered effects, and the impact of parental leave policies designed to increase men's care-taking labor in the home will be circumscribed. Structures and cultures continue to shape gendered agency in ways that undermine gender equality in both private and public spheres (Olson 2002).

Despite the pessimistic conclusions reached on the basis of the half-empty analysis, on its own it does a disservice to what the Nordic welfare states *have* achieved. Thus, for example, in their contribution to the Real Utopias project, Gornick and Meyers use the example of four Nordic countries "to demonstrate that our Real Utopia is in the realm of possibility" (2006, 26). They write from the perspective of the United States, where the public social infrastructure is particularly weak among industrialized societies. From the standpoint of a British socialist-feminist too, there are many aspects of the Nordic model's values and of its policy operationalization in individual welfare states that are enviable. These are societies with an egalitarian ethos in both gender and class terms, where lower income women are generally less vulnerable to poverty than elsewhere. Majority ethnic women have gained an effective political presence which has been world-leading. Childcare provision is among the best and at least governments (other than in Denmark) see it as part of their role to try to shift the domestic division of labor through highly symbolic parental leave policies, with some, although limited, success. In a recent feminist analysis of the politics of time, Valerie Bryson concludes that "the Nordic welfare states are much closer to the feminist uchronia" ("non-existent ways of understanding and using time") "than anywhere else in the world" (2007, 102, 183).

How one weighs up the half-empty and half-full analysis depends in part on the weight attached to different dimensions of women's citizenship; and some women are closer to a women-friendly Nordic Nirvana than others. The weaknesses revealed by the half-empty analysis serve as a corrective to more starry-eyed accounts of the Nordics as having achieved "women-friendly" welfare states. The analysis points to the need to intervene more decisively in both the public sphere of the labor market and the private sphere of the family in order to break the vicious circle, which continues to reinforce gender inequalities across the public–private divide. Moreover, a more fundamental policy shift is required with regard to addressing the economic and political marginalization of minority ethnic women. Nevertheless, for this outsider, the strengths identified by the half-full analysis mean that many aspects of the Nordic model will continue to provide a source of inspiration in the search for a more equal and gender-inclusive model of citizenship.

NOTES

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1. All of the four Nordic countries included in the survey are placed in the top third of the overall ranking for child well-being, with Sweden, Denmark, and Finland in second, third, and fourth places and Norway seventh. They are in the top four places on the material well-being dimension.

2. Daly and Rake (2003) calculate a poverty rate of 11 percent for Swedish women compared with an 18 percent EU average and 20 percent in the UK in 1997.

3. A recent analysis has, for instance, questioned whether it is still valid to identify the Scandinavian countries as forming a distinctive group "when it comes to social service universalism and care defamilialization" (Rauch 2007, 264). It points in particular to the transformation of Sweden's "formerly universalistic elderlycare service system into a highly selective and partially familialistic one" (ibid.).

4. Key elements of the "one year leave, gender-equality-oriented" model are: some months of paid parental leave following a relatively short period of maternity leave; the explicit promotion of gender equality in the use of leave (particularly in Sweden and Iceland with the father's quota; less so in Denmark but its inclusion is justified with reference to two weeks' paternity leave with full earnings compensation and an emphasis on flexible sharing of the leave); and strong support for dual earner parents through child care provision after the parental leave period. The "parental choice orientated" model is characterized primarily by financial support for the option of either a longer period out of the labor market or the use of child care services. Since Wall wrote, the new center-right Swedish government has introduced a home care allowance at the municipal level in the name of parental choice.

5. The Danish survey methods were slightly different so the figure for Denmark is indicative rather than strictly comparable.

6. A more recent analysis by Hobson and Fahlén (forthcoming) of the 2004 European Social Survey paints a more ambiguous picture. Although it confirms that lower proportions of fathers were working more than 40 h a week in Finland, Denmark, and Sweden than comparator Western European countries (other than the Netherlands), the number of average

hours worked was similar in Sweden, Finland, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands, with Denmark the lowest and the UK the highest.

7. The term "father month" was introduced into the Finnish legislation in 2007 to describe what was previously called bonus leave. It comprises the last two weeks of parental leave plus twelve bonus days, which are contingent on having taken the last two weeks of parental leave (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula and Takala 2007).

8. In the Swedish case, the home care allowance has been heavily contested and research suggests that take-up is likely to be low (Hobson, personal communication).

9. At the same time, though, according to Ulla Björnberg and Jonathan Bradshaw (2006), the allowances are aimed at couples and are too low to enable lone mothers to take advantage of them. This is an example of how "the dual breadwinner/dual carer model carries its own dangers," if it fails to provide adequate support for those women (and men) raising children on their own (Skevik 2006b, 233). Skevik points out that "even in the countries where lone parents are doing best in terms of employment and poverty rates, lone parents face higher poverty risks and also a higher risk of unemployment' (2006b, 233). Another factor with regard to class and ethnic stratification is the extent to which home care allowances are used to buy other (often immigrant) women's labor (Hobson, personal communication).

10. Hobson, however, argues that Sweden scores very poorly with regard to its treatment of rape (personal communication).

11. This conclusion has benefited from input from Anette Borchorst, Barbara Hobson, Arnlaug Leira, and Birte Siim.

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