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## **Nationalism, Gender and Welfare – The politics of gender equality in Scandinavia**

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## **Abstract**

*Feminist scholars have pointed out that constructions of gender and gender equality are embedded in national narratives and politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011; Siim & Mokre 2013). This paper aims to explore gendered approaches to nationalism and to discuss how nationalism in Scandinavia<sup>2</sup> is associated with 'social democratic' perceptions of welfare and gender equality. Brochmann and Hagelund (2010) have pointed towards a specific form of Scandinavian welfare nationalism which is challenged by globalization and increased migration. We add that gender equality is a key aspect of the Scandinavian politics of belonging and that this has implications for our understanding of the challenges which can be recognised in the contemporary politics of gender and welfare in Scandinavia. This point is illustrated by exploring the problematic ways in which contemporary nationalist parties in Sweden, Denmark and Norway have linked national belongings with support for the welfare state and gender equality politics. These observations in turn raise theoretical, normative and analytical questions about understandings and conceptualizations of the nationalism, welfare and gender.*

*The article aims to explore what the particular Nordic contexts can contribute to our analytical understandings of nationalism, welfare and gender equality and how this context can contribute to the evolution of the theoretical approaches to gender and nationalism. The first part gives a brief overview of two influential theoretical approaches to nationalism and gender: Nira Yuval Davis (2011; 1997) and Umut Özkirimli (2005; 2010) and discusses what questions need to be explored further from the particular Nordic contexts. The second part addresses the transformation of the Nordic political landscape and current reformulations of the countries welfare and gender equality policies. It first briefly presents key aspects of the Scandinavian perceptions of welfare and gender. Then it discusses how to conceptualize and understand the framings of welfare, gender equality and the family in three nationalist parties: the Norwegian Progress Party, the Sweden Democrats and the Danish Peoples' Party. The last section discusses the need for reframing (gender) equality and justice from a transnational intersectional perspective. Here we propose that one fruitful approach to address the political transformations linked to migration and globalization would be to transcend methodological nationalism and the exclusive notions of solidarity tied to the nation state and formulate more inclusive notions of solidarity and justice.*

### **1. Theoretical approaches to nation-building, nationalism and gender**

This section addresses relations between nation-building, national belonging and gender, which are dynamic and contextual influenced by time, space and place. The theoretical reflections about nationalism are inspired by Benedict Anderson's (1983) definition of the nation as 'an imagined community'. Following him nations are understood to be contingent, heterogeneous and subject to change. Gendering the understandings of nationalism should evolve further by historical and comparative case studies which situate nationalism by exploring the importance of space and place.

The following gives a brief overview of two influential theoretical approaches to nationalism that both urge the pursuit of a gendered analysis of nationalism: Nira Yuval-Davis

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<sup>2</sup> The paper focuses on examples from the three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, because there is still a lack comparative research of the five Nordic countries, which include Finland and Iceland.

(1997; 2011) and Umut özirimli (2005; 2010). Yuval-Davis defines nationalism as a national politics of belonging, which is concerned with the construction of boundaries of belonging, of a delineated collectivity that includes some people and excludes others (Yuval-Davis 2011; 86-94). Özirimli defines nationalism as a metanarrative, or discourse, that is a particular way of seeing and integrating the world, a frame of reference which helps to make sense of and structure the reality surrounding us (Özirimli 2005; 163). The two approaches supplement each other, since they are both concerned with borders and boundaries. The difference is that Yuval-Davis is concerned with the politics behind the construction of these borders and boundaries, while özirimli is more interested in how discourses operate. The nation refers to a form of discourse that structures the reality around us. In this vein, it is nationalism that defines the nations and not the other way round. Following these approaches we define nationalism as claims of community cohesion centered on 'the nation' as a common frame of reference. These claims can be made by diverse actors and on different levels – micro, meso and macro-levels. In the following the focus is on the claims made by nationalist political actors and political parties.

#### *Gender and the politics of belonging*

Nira Yuval-Davis' classical book *Gender and Nation* (1997) was one of the first approaches to address nationalism from a gender perspective, and her recent book *The Politics of Belonging - Intersectional contestations* (2011) elaborates further on this analysis. One of the crucial distinctions in this approach is between *belonging*, which refers to emotional attachment about 'feeling at home', and *the politics of belonging* which concerns both the construction of boundaries and the in/exclusion of particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries. In this context Yuval Davis has noticed that *women/mothers are often embodiments of the homeland, as well as of home*. Women are in the collective imagination often associated with children, since children represent the continuation and reproduction of the nation, with the collective, as well as with the familial future, i.e. Mother Russia or Mother India (In the Swedish context we can also think of the figure of Mother Svea). Yuval-Davis is interested in the symbols and imaginary of a population and emphasizes that it is not the figures of women/mother alone that symbolizes homelands, but rather the imaginary social relations and networks of belonging in which they are embedded (Yuval Davis 2011, pp. 94-95). Men have another role in this imaginary and these social relations in that the hegemonic discourse in many countries has been that men should show their care about their community and society by sacrificing their lives and killing others for the sake of the nation. This fighting has often been expected to be for the sake of what Cynthia Enloe called 'womenandchildren'. Men care not only for notions of home and homeland, but also for the other men in their unit (Yuval-Davis 2011, p 192)

Yuval-Davis combines the politics of belonging with the intersectionality approach (2011; 6-8). She proposes to overcome the division which McCall (2005) has identified between *inter-categorical* and *intra-categorical* intersectionality. Whereas an *inter-categorical* approach focuses on the way in which the intersection of social categories, such as race, gender and generation (all of relevance in this study), affects e.g. the distribution of resources, *intra-categorical* studies problematize the significance and boundaries of the categories themselves. Instead of seeing these approaches as mutually exclusive, People may be born in the same

family at more or less the same time and live in the same social environment, she argues, but have different identifications and political views.

Another aspect of her thinking that is useful from a gender perspective is her observation that there is *a rise of 'autochthonic' or nativist politics of belonging*. This is important for understanding nationalist and extreme right politics in Europe and elsewhere. Claims to territories and states are here made according to logic of 'we were here first'. We here follow Yuval-Davis who contends that an intersectional analytical perspective is crucial for any concrete analysis of belonging/s and political projects of belonging. Her main point is that 'different political projects of belonging have different effects of different members of collectivities who are differently located and/or have different identifications and normative value systems (Yuval-Davis 2011; 25).

#### *Dimensions of nationalist discourse*

Umut Özkirimly has emphasized that the discourse of nationalism operates in ways that divide the world into 'us' and 'them', produces hierarchies among actors, naturalizes itself and reproduces itself through private and public institutions, especially family, school, workplace, media, church and the police (2005; 32-33). Özkirimly has a useful division of the nationalist discourse in different dimensions; a *spacial* dimension, which is associated with the territory – an actual or imagined homeland; a *temporal* dimension – the construction of national history; a *symbolic* dimension – aiming to provide a grammar for the collective consciousness through its metaphors, its heroes, its rituals and its narratives; and an *everyday dimension*, whereby national identity is produced, reproduced and contested in the details of social actions and routines of everyday life that are taken for granted (179-194). Like Yuval-Davis he emphasizes that the nationalist discourse has primarily emphasized women's roles as mothers at the symbolic level.

Following Özkirimli, nationalist claims provide a communication strategy that: (1) divides the world into homogeneous and fixed identity positions; (2) creates a temporal lineage from the past, through the present and by way of extrapolation into the future to demonstrate the diachronic presence of the nation; and finally (3) is based on a preoccupation with the national territory, imagined or real. In addition to this, we also follow Michael Freeden (1998), who argues that nationalist claims rest on a positive valorization assigned to one's own nation, granting it specific claims for social cohesion. In summary, nationalist claims can be interpreted as a particular communication strategy that seeks to reify and naturalize the nation as something natural and commonsensical (Hellström, Nilsson & Stoltz 2012; Özkirimli 2010).

#### *Summing up*

According to both Yuval Davis and Özkirimli, nationalist discourses tend to have a gender bias in which men and women are constructed differently. The two approaches emphasize how this has been done, especially by focusing on the reproductive and symbolic role of women as mothers and the idealization of motherhood and 'the home'. This is an important observation which has been further developed in masculinity research focusing on men as defenders of the home and the nation. Yuval-Davis' approach to intersectionality, which combines the inter-

categorical approach with intra- categorical studies is fruitful starting point for further theoretical and empirical studies.

The two approaches both emphasize that approaches to gender, nation-building and nationalism must be dynamic and contextual and have used historical and empirical illustrations to underscore their theoretical and methodological points. None of them have, however, been engaged in analysis of historical transformations or cross-national empirical analysis from different parts of the world. Arguably the theoretical approaches to gender, welfare and nationalism must evolve further by focusing on the present deep-going global transformations within and between the Global North and the Global South.

Recent gender research has pointed towards a number of changes in the ways gender and gender equality is constructed as part of national narratives and nationalist claims across Europe. Postcolonial research has emphasized the ways in which othering in nationalist discourses can become racist by means of stereotypical constructions of the gendered and racialist other (Kabeer 2008; de los Reyes et.al. 2002). One important change is that gender equality has today come to play a significant role in the constructions of both European values and of national identities although the discursive meanings attached to gender equality by political actors vary (Akkerman & Hagelund 2007; Andreassen & Lettinga 2012; Siim & Mokre ed. 2013). Research has noticed that in spite of diverse meanings and institutionalizations of gender equality across Europe, gender equality is often used by the Rightwing populist parties and organizations against 'the other' (Siim & Skjeie 2008; Meret & Siim 2013a).

In the following the focus is on the recent changes in the framing of gender equality in nationalist discourses and politics of belonging in Scandinavia. We assume that the claims for welfare and gender equality in nationalist discourse can contribute to evolve the theoretical approaches to nationalism. Our guiding hypothesis is that nationalist articulations pertaining welfare and gender equality take different forms in Scandinavia because of the importance of the welfare and gender equality policies and strong cultural norms about social and gender equality. On this basis we have formulated the following research questions regarding nationalism and politics of belonging in Scandinavia, which will be discussed in part 2.

1. How have the key aspects of Scandinavian welfare, equality policies and gender equality norms been conceptualized and understood in Nordic welfare and gender research?
2. How can we conceptualize and understand the intersections of welfare, gender equality and the family in the three nationalist parties: the *Norwegian Progress Party*, the *Sweden Democrats* and the *Danish Peoples' Party* using nationalist discourse and politics of belonging?
3. What are the potential (feminist) responses to exclusive nationalist formulations of Scandinavian welfare and gender equality policies and what would the reframing of gender equality/justice look like from an intersectional transnational perspective.

## **2. Scandinavian Welfare Nationalism and Gender Equality Politics**

The first research question addresses the understanding of welfare, equality policies and gender equality norms in Scandinavia. Scholars have started to explore the particular version of nationalism tied to the Nordic (often labeled “social democratic”) welfare state and its politics of gender equality (Hellström, Nilsson & Stoltz 2012; Meret & Siim 2013b). As already mentioned, nationalism here refers to claims of community cohesion centered exclusively on the nation as a common reference point and as a form of discourse that structures reality around us (Özkırmli 2010). From this perspective nationalism has been interpreted as particular communication strategies that seek to reify and naturalize the nation. These communication strategies can be used by nationalist parties as well as by mainstream parties. Nordic welfare politics can be understood as part of these nationalist claims and struggles over politics of belonging, i.e. of who belongs to the nation and the people.

### *Nationalism and Nordic welfare and gender regimes*

In comparative research the Scandinavian countries are often considered to belong to the same welfare and gender model characterized by a large and generous public sector, a high level of universalism and many tax financed social benefits (Lister et al. 2007; Borchorst & Siim 2008; Melby et al. 2008). The three Scandinavian countries have developed flexible labour market models, which share important characteristics: a) well-organized labour markets; b) relatively strong and independent trade union movements; c) a close cooperation between employers union, trade unions and the state.

Comparative gender research often emphasises that the Scandinavian welfare states share basic characteristics which combine a large public sector with a dual breadwinner model. This includes; 1) a family and welfare model where both partners are expected to do wage work; 2) public welfare with extensive childcare services and generous maternity- and parental leave schemes, 3) a relative high number of women in the political elites, 4) gender equality as a strong norm in public discourse and politics as well as a value embedded in the private lives of citizens (see Bergqvist et al., 1999). On this basis feminist scholars have generally agreed that the countries in spite of their differences share basic characteristics that make it meaningful to include them as part of one common gender equality model with three exceptions (Borchorst & Siim 2002; Melby et al. 2008).

If a *temporal* dimension of nationalism concerns the construction of nation building and national history and if a *symbolic* dimension aims at providing a grammar for the collective consciousness through its narratives, then we suggest that the brief summary above can be considered as part of the national narratives of the Nordic countries by politicians, citizens and researchers alike. It is also a picture which is often idealized by actors from outside of the Nordic countries, including by researchers such as Sylvia Walby (2009).

### *Spatial dimensions of nationalism, migration and the politics of belonging*

Looking at the spatial dimensions migration and the politics of belonging of the Nordic countries, than arguably immigration represents a blind-spot in the Scandinavian welfare political strategy. That is, there have been migration regulations, but these were for long not the focus of any attention in the public sphere. Increased immigration by Third country nationals from countries outside the West has now raised concerns about the limits to welfare (Brochman & Hagelund 2010)

disclosed by the new forms of inequalities between the native born and third country nationals. This development has also made politicians question the gender model's ability to accommodate increasing diversities among women.

In spite of many similarities the Nordic countries have different experiences with multiculturalism and they have adopted different approaches and policies towards migration and integration (Bengtsson et al. 2010)<sup>3</sup>. Sweden has the longest history of work-related immigration since the early 1960s. Denmark's immigration was also a guest-worker model during the 1960s, and Norway experienced immigration from Third-country nationals from the end of the 1960s.

Comparative Scandinavian research has recently started to explore the different policy responses to migration and integration. One of the first Danish-Swedish comparison of public policies and discourses indicated that although the integration policies and discourses are divergent there may be an actual convergence in the practical effects of integration policies (Hedetoft et. al. 2006; 406). The studies also argue that the framing of the issues, i.e. whether diversity is labelled as a threat or an asset, whether ethnic minority groups are perceived as a problem or an asset, is a key factor in shaping public policies (Hedetoft et. al. 2006).

Brochmann and Hagelund (2010) have led a large comparative study of the welfare-political consequences of immigration to the Scandinavian welfare states titled 'limits to welfare'. In the summary they interpret the three Scandinavian countries<sup>4</sup> as one welfare model with three exceptions. The 'multicultural' Swedish model is presented as the 'good' model with a relative accommodating response towards diversity, the restrictive Danish model as 'bad' model; with the pragmatic Norwegian response positioned 'in between' (356-357). This interdisciplinary study focuses on both differences and similarities in the interactions between the welfare state and immigration in the three countries. The emphasis is on the policy shifts towards immigrants since the second WW till 2010 and on intended and unintended effects of the interactions between the policy changes in the three countries. They argue that the founding and evolution of the Nordic welfare states' can be interpreted as an exclusive 'welfare nationalism' based upon integration with three central elements: democracy, citizenship and modernization.

According to Brochmann and Hagelund the three countries face similar problems with discrimination and failed integration of immigrants on the labour market and in society (Brochmann & Hagelund 2010). The studies conclude that in spite of the differences in governments' policies and discourses towards immigration, the three countries face similar problems with discrimination and failed integration of immigrants on the labour market and in society.

Scandinavian research has thus started to discuss crucial questions about the implications of the political and ideological differences for the in/exclusion of immigrant minorities on the labour market, in politics and society. The studies emphasise that traditional welfare state

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<sup>3</sup> In 2005 Sweden's foreign population ratio was 12.4. Denmark and Norway were in between with a medium-size foreign born population ratio of 6.5 and 7.8 respectively. The largest immigrant groups in Denmark, Norway and Sweden come from Turkey, Pakistan and Ex-Yugoslavia (Brochmann & Hagelund 2005).

<sup>4</sup> The interdisciplinary comparative study has participation of researchers in history, sociology and political science from Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

policies have failed to integrate immigrants on the labour market and in developing equality based policies towards new immigrant groups (Brochmann & Hagelund 2010; 367; Bengtsson et. al.2010). And that even the more accommodative Swedish policies face similar problems with failed integration of immigrants. One of the main conclusions is that the three countries have become de facto multi-ethnic countries, which are presently forced to re-define the national welfare projects faced with global mobility and growing demands for labour power.

We find that Brochmann and Hagelund's comprehensive study has identified the major challenges from migration to Scandinavian welfare policies. We add, however, that gender equality politics is an integrated part of Scandinavian perception of welfare and national politics of belonging. The relations between migration, accommodation of cultural and religious diversity and gender equality have become crucial theoretical, normative and analytical issues.

### *Gender and the politics of belonging*

The marginalization of non-western immigrant groups on the labour market and in society, including immigrant women, has thus become a controversial political problem in Scandinavia during the last 20 years. Research has demonstrated that in Denmark and Norway gender equality has come to play a key role in the discourse about integration, where the perceived gender equality in 'ethnic majority families' is contrasted with the supposed patriarchal oppression of women in 'immigrant families' (Siim & Skjeie 2008). The Danish and Norwegian cases illustrate how Governments and nationalist anti-immigration forces have used/misused gender equality against ethnic minority women who are perceived to be oppressed by their culture (Meret & Siim 2013).

Feminist scholars in turn have started to criticise Scandinavian welfare and 'women-friendly' social policies 'from within', because they have focused on gender issues for the native majority and has tended to neglect diversities of interests among women (Siim & Skjeie 2008; Mulinari et.al. 2009). Research has recently compared the effects of various Scandinavian migration/integration and gender equality policies from the perspective of immigrant and refugee women (Langvasbråten 2008; Siim & Skjeie 2008; Borchorst & Teigen 2010). One central concern is the perceived conflicts between the official gender equality norms and the cultural norms and practices in immigrant families, which have been politicized by Right wing anti-immigration forces (Bredal, 2006, Meret & Siim 2013). Another concern is the absence of ethnic minority women from decision-making (Skjeie & Siim 2008), which influences the power to define what gender equality and feminism is and should be (Pristed & Thun 2010), and has made alternative perspectives on gender and family relations invisible and illegitimate (Langvasbråten, 2008).

On the basis of these studies we propose that one of the main challenges for the Scandinavian countries today is how to reformulate welfare and gender equality in the face of increasing ethno-cultural and ethno-religious diversity. Research has demonstrated that the countries have during the last 150 years been characterized by a relative cultural, religious and linguistic homogeneity. Up until the 1960s immigrants came primarily from other Nordic or European countries. As the countries became increasingly diverse, inequalities become visible between more "culturally distant" migrants from the Middle East, Africa and Asia and the rest of the population.

Culturalist explanations to inequalities feature in the public discourses about work, family, sexuality and personal life. Gender equality has become a key marker in these contexts, delineating the boundary between Nordic and “other” cultures by means of the portrayal of immigrant men as more patriarchal than Nordic men and immigrant women portrayed as being more oppressed than Nordic women. From this perspective the characteristic “passion for equality” seems to be premised on an underlying “antipathy to difference” (Kabeer 2008). Such representations serve to ignore the observation that cultures are negotiated and transformed through interactions with others and shift attention away from wider issues of discrimination and racism that are likely to permeate these interactions (Kabeer 2008; 266-268; see also de los Reyes 2000).

Arguably this focus on gender inequalities in terms of categorical differences between men and women, as these cut across the class-based categories of capital and labour has led to “epistemological blind spots”, which makes it difficult to incorporate inequalities of race/ethnicity and more particularly the intersections between gender, class and race/ethnicity.

Scandinavian gender research has also for many years tended to take the perspective of Nordic women and has not addressed intra-categorical differences *between* women or *between* men from different social categories. While migration research has mainly focused on immigrant men, and immigrants are often represented as passive, victimized and trapped in their cultures. This situation has gradually changed, and today there is a growing literature where feminist scholars are questioning basic assumptions of Nordic gender equality politics (Kabeer 2008; 268-269; Siim & Skjeie 2008; Borchorst & Siim 2008; Långvasbåten 2008; de los Reyes 2003; de los Reyes, Molina & Mulinari eds, 2002; Stoltz 2000).

### *Conclusion*

The three Scandinavian countries have historically had a strong engagement in equality policies and discourses and have until recently been perceived as relatively homogeneous from a comparative perspective. Path-dependent developments in welfare states policies in relation to class and gender still form key elements of Scandinavian politics of belonging. Immigration has increased inequalities among the native and foreign born population from non-western countries - and women. This development has challenged the countries self-understanding as normative models for (gender) equality and social justice. Research has pointed out that new inequalities among groups of women exist on the labour market, in the family and in politics.

This development has challenged the famous Norwegian feminist Helga Hernes’ grand vision of a ‘women-friendly’ society ‘where injustice on the basis of gender would be largely eliminated without an increase in other forms of inequality, such as among groups of women’ (1987: 15). Siim and Skjeie (2008) have proposed that the new forms of inequalities among women can be interpreted as a Scandinavian gender equality paradox between the relative inclusion of the native majority women in society and the relative marginalization of women of diverse ethnic minorities on the labour market, in politics and society.

The evolution towards de facto multi-ethnic countries has transformed the political landscape in Scandinavia and challenged Scandinavian gender theory and research. The political transformations can contribute to explain current challenges to reformulate (gender) equality policies, but also the interest in (gender) equality issues on the part of populist and nationalist parties in Scandinavia. We conclude that welfare nationalism includes normative ideals about

gender equality, which have been relatively uncontroversial and has largely been accepted by major political actors on the Left and Right of the political spectrum. It can be perceived as a form of banal nationalism, or following Özkirimli (2005; 2010) as a part of everyday dimension of nationalism. Arguably neo-nationalist parties have adopted and rearticulated the close links between nationalism, welfare and gender in ways that have provoked mainstream politicians and feminist researchers alike. Let us therefore now turn to these versions.

### **3. Case studies of nationalist discourses and claims by nationalist parties in Scandinavia**

This brings us to the research question, which addresses the framings of welfare, gender equality and the family in Scandinavian political parties in relation to discourses and claims by Right wing populist parties. The following briefly identifies and discusses the articulations between welfare, gender equality and the family in the discourse of three nationalist parties: the Norwegian Progress Party [*Fremskridtspartiet*, FrP], Sweden Democrats [*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD] and the Danish Peoples' Party [*Dansk Folkeparti*, DFP].

European gender research has noticed that Rightwing populist parties have found new and creative ways to use/misuse gender equality as a key value which separates the modern majority from the oppressive, patriarchal immigrant Muslim minorities (Rosenberger & Sauer eds. 2012). Scholars have also noticed that in the Scandinavian contexts right wing political parties have generally supported the welfare state and defended liberal values, including gender equality in the family and women's rights in society (Meret & Siim 2013a).

#### *The changed political landscape*

In the last decades, the Scandinavian countries have witnessed profound changes in the political landscape. The 'Social Democratic' understanding of welfare for the working classes, and equality policies [lighed- og likestillingspolitik], focusing on class and gender that dominated larger parts of the last century, have come under pressure from increased globalization and immigration processes in the Scandinavian countries. As a result the countries have witnessed a growth of neo-liberalism and new forms of political conservatism. Since the 1980s each country has for longer or shorter periods of time had Conservative, Liberal or Center governments, including coalition governments.

There are important historical and institutional differences between the political landscapes in the three countries. One is the role of Social Democracy, which has historically been weaker in Denmark than in Norway and Sweden. Liberal-Conservative-centre governments have thus played a larger role in Denmark that since 1980 has had long periods with liberal conservative-center governments. The first was headed by the Conservative Poul Schlüter (1982-1993); the latest by the liberal leaders Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2001-2009) and Lars Løkke Rasmussen (2001-2011). The right-wing populist Danish People's Party [Dansk Folkeparti, DF] was the parliamentary support for this government. When it comes to the Danish party political landscape, research highlights that the party has succeeded in moving from a maverick party to become a legitimate support party for the previous Government (Meret 2010). In the election in 2007 the party gained 25 out of 179 seats in Parliament and in the latest national election in November 2011 it gained 22 seats. The Party gained popularity on two major political issues; the opposition to immigration and criticism of the EU. DF has

managed to influence the political landscape, the political culture and immigration/integration policies as a loyal support party for the Conservative-Centre Government.

Social Democracy has been stronger in Norway, but since 1990 the country has had two Conservative-centre governments (1997-2000 and 2001-2005). The Norwegian Progress Party [Fremskridtspartiet, FrP] has also been highly successful in electoral politics. In the local election in 1987 Progress Party gained around 12 per cent of the votes nationally and the success was large due to the party's focus on restrictive immigration policies. In 2009 the Progress Party became the second strongest political organization in Norway, second only to the Labour Party, but it has never managed to gain a direct influence on politics, since the other political parties have been unwilling to cooperate on the national level (Sicakkan 2011). In the most recent parliamentary elections in 2013 the party lost seats and became the third largest party in the country. Despite this loss the party entered a coalition government together with the Conservative Party, thereby for the first time in its history gaining direct influence on politics. Up to this moment in time the other political parties had always been unwilling to cooperate on the national level (see also Sicakkan 2011 for this last point).

Sweden has had Social Democratic governments from the 1930s until 1976, from 1982 until 1991 and from 1994 until 2006, when the centre-right coalition of Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt took over, which is in power still today. It was only in the general elections of 2010, that the nationalist political party, *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats, SD), had its electoral breakthrough. With 5.7 per cent of the total votes the party crossed the threshold of representation in the national parliament (which has a 4 per cent threshold). Four years earlier, after the 2006 elections, the party had emerged from the shadows of the far right. The SD received 2.93 per cent of the votes – not enough to secure a position in parliament, but enough to gain representation in almost half the country's municipalities. Before the 2006 elections the SD was hardly noticed in the media; afterwards, it became a high-profile party in the public debate (Hellström, Nilsson & Stoltz 2012). In November Statistics Sweden has a political party preference survey, which showed that the SD would have received 9.3 % of the votes, which is a statistically significant increase compared to the last national elections in 2010. This would mean that SD would become the third largest party in Sweden ([http://www.scb.se/en/\\_/Finding-statistics/Statistics-by-subject-area/Democracy/Political-party-preferences/Party-Preference-Survey-PSU-/Aktuell-Pong/12443/Behallare-for-Press/367927/](http://www.scb.se/en/_/Finding-statistics/Statistics-by-subject-area/Democracy/Political-party-preferences/Party-Preference-Survey-PSU-/Aktuell-Pong/12443/Behallare-for-Press/367927/)).

This brief overview indicates that there are profound differences in the history, politics and impact of right-wing populism on the political agenda in the three countries. Since the 1990s the Norwegian Progress Party and the Danish People's Party (DF) have both attracted a large part of the population. DF has directly influenced legislation as a parliamentary support for the Liberal-Conservative governments and has recently had a breakthrough in many municipalities in the last local elections (Nov. 2013). The Norwegian FP is today in an ideal position to influence Norwegian policies as part of the new coalition government. The growth of the Sweden Democrats is a more recent phenomenon and it is still an open question what will be the party strategy and how much influence the party can expect.

### *Nationalist parties, welfare and Social Democracy*

One key issue is the intersections between neo-nationalism and welfare politics and the Right wing parties' relations to Social Democracy. In the Swedish context Hellström, Nilsson and Stoltz (2012) point out that Sweden has ceased to be an exception within the Nordic and European context. Instead it has started to develop similar patterns in relation to the role of the two other populist right parties in Denmark and Norway imitating their organization and adopting some of their positions and policies. Despite its limited political weight, the SD has gained a strategic parliamentary position between the winning centre-right coalition and the Left–Green opposition (with a weak and internally divided Social Democracy). The extremist origins of this party and its past associations with national-socialism still constitute one of the major differences with the other Nordic cases (Hellstrom, Nilsson & Stoltz 2012; Lööw 2011).

As early as during the 2006 general election campaign SD blamed the Social Democrats for refusing to see the connection between migration and the implosion of the universal welfare system. They urged for a return to a more homogeneous Sweden with much less immigration. The party referred to the metaphor of the so called 'People's Home'. In Sweden, the evolution of a strong welfare state was linked to the consolidation of the democratic state. Popular use of the phrase 'people's home' by leading Social Democrats from the late 1920s and onwards demonstrates the relevance of nationalist claims to mobilize support for a class-transgressing welfare regime for all Swedish people. The people's home alluded to a trinity of democracy, the people and the nation that contributed to establish the founding myth of the modern Swedish national community. Marginalization strategies by mainstream politics and media against the SD did not deter skilled and unskilled workers, unemployed and the retired (cf. Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008).

Given the rapid changes in the world economy, the SD portrays itself as the defender of the people's home and to Per-Albin Hansson (prime minister of Sweden from 1932 to 1946, who applied the people's home label to the Social Democratic reformist agenda) as a key inspiration for its politics, although it also pledges allegiance to the late nineteenth-century conservative nationalist movement in Sweden. The SD claimed during this election campaign to be the rightful heir of a long Social Democratic tradition of safeguarding the interests of the common people. The populist appeals to the people presuppose the commitments to 'the heartland' – an idealized past society, populated by a culturally homogeneous 'people'. In the case of the SD, these appeals are centred on a particular symbiosis of the universal welfare state and cultural conformism; hence, the people's home concept suits the party well (Hellström, Nilsson & Stoltz 2012). Today the party is struggling with an infected struggle between so called 'nationalist' and 'social conservative' wings amongst its members. In 2011 the party changed its party designation from 'nationalist' to 'social conservative'. Discussions about ideological deviations and party discipline have since then led to the exclusion of members with amongst others Nazi and extreme right wing sentiments. This is still internally controversial (see e.g. *Dagens Nyheter*, 18 March 2013, 'Hotande utslutning splittrar SD').

Siim and Meret (2013b) have analysed multiculturalism, Right wing populism and the crisis of Social Democracy. They notice that the Scandinavian populist right-wing party with the strongest working class profile is the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*, DF); and show how this profile have affected the party's position on welfare issues. Remarkably, the party has

succeeded in the role of 'welfare guarantor' within the Liberal and Conservative project. At the 2011 elections the DF vote slightly declined from 13.9 to 12.5 per cent, but the party remains the third strongest political force in the country. More than half of the DF votes come from skilled and unskilled manual workers, principally men and people with low levels of education (Meret 2010). Working class support has clearly been achieved at the expense of the traditional left-wing, especially Social Democrats, which in the past decade have lost a considerable share of working class support.

The pro-welfare orientation of the party became carefully and gradually part of the DF programme. Today the party leadership promotes the DF as the only genuine carrier of the classic Social Democratic welfare tradition. In 2006, the DF leader Pia Kjærsgaard declared that 'a real Social Democrat votes for the Danish People's Party' (Dansk Folkeblad 2006/5), where welfare is considered to belong to the deserving, who –according to the DF – are native Danes, who have paid for it through generations. To strengthen this point the DF 2007 campaign posters significantly captured: 'Tight immigration policy and real welfare', formalising the party politics around two central issues: anti-immigration and the welfare state and at the same time maintaining a strong Eurosceptic position.

The Norwegian Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*, FrP) has roots in the neo-liberal and tax protest wave of the 1970s (Goul Andersen & Bjørklund 2000). Compared to its equivalent in Denmark, the FrP survived the new times, re-thinking some of its positions on economic issues, but particularly developing anti-immigration and cultural protectionist standpoints, strongly critical of the multiculturalist politics pursued by the Norwegian governments. In 2009 the FrP became the second strongest party in Norway with 22.9 per cent of votes, a significant share coming from less-educated, less-skilled workers (cf. Bjørklund 2011: 285). Already in 2005 the FrP had gained votes among unskilled manual workers in Norway and was the second party among manual workers, right behind the Labour Party (Bjørklund 2009). These levels of working class support are remarkable, particularly as the FrP continues to support economic liberalism at the core of party ideology (cf. Prinsipp- og handlingsprogram 2005-2009; see also Mudde 2007). From the 1990s the party leadership acknowledged its role as 'new working class party', introducing *ad hoc* pro-welfare measures that appealed to this electorate. For instance, the party asked to 'use oil reserves to benefit the common people' and to employ the revenues to finance public infrastructures and improve social, health and schooling systems.

In the case of all three Scandinavian countries we find that especially the temporal and symbolic dimensions of nationalism are used in the argumentation of the parties.

#### *Nationalism, gender equality and the family*

Another key issue is relations between nationalist parties, gender equality and the family. Meret & Siim (2013a) has analyzed the framing of gender equality, women's rights and family values in the party programs and manifestos of the Danish Peoples' Party and the Norwegian Progress Party. The study illustrates that the two parties' exclusionary neo-nationalist positions and nativist discourses, are combined with a growing emphasis on the importance of liberal democratic values, including gender equality, women's rights and to some extent homosexual

rights. One explanation for this would be that gender equality discourses and policies have become an important part of the national narratives and political projects of belongings.

According to both the DF and the FrP, the implications of the modernization of gender roles and the achievements in gender equality, reached so far in both Denmark and Norway, are something to be acclaimed, whereas further advancement of gender equality can only be reached by the labour market's self-regulatory mechanisms<sup>5</sup>. Within this frame of 'world leading [countries] on issues of gender equality' (FrP Prinsip-og handlingsprogram 2005-2006), women's current struggles for rights can almost be perceived as a selfish project, or to put it in the words of the FrP leader Siv Jensen '[...] it makes me sick to see that Norwegian feminists demonstrate to get more women into management positions, while immigrant women still lack access to the most basic rights' (cited from Meret & Siim, 2013b).

In this sense the populist right wing parties tend to use gender issues mainly in relation to the vulnerable position of immigrant women (eg. Akkerman and Hagelund 2007: xx). However, by referring to concrete and pragmatic issues (genital mutilation; enforced marriages; honor killings; question of the veil/headscarf) these parties have sometimes contributed to highlight some of the existing shortcomings of gender equality policies. At the same time they have reduced the question of gender equality into an issue dealing primarily with ethnic minority issues, i.e. cultural incompatibility, the role of Islam in the West and the condition of Muslim women.

#### *To sum up: The particularities of Scandinavian nationalism*

Our preliminary findings are that the ideology of Right wing populism in Scandinavia is strongly influenced by the particular national histories, political institutions and cultures, including the values, norms and policies about welfare and gender equality (Meret & Siim, 2013; 93). All three parties refer to the history of the working class and perceive themselves as heirs of Social Democracy and that the Norwegian Progress party and The Danish Peoples Party have become de facto working class parties (Meret & Siim, 2013b). Comparative research from European studies indicates the strong support for the welfare state and gender equality on the labour market and within the family is a particularity of Nordic nationalism, which resonates with Scandinavian society (Hadj-Abdu, Rosenberger, Saharso & Siim 2012; Meret & Siim 2013a).

Following Özkirimli we find that the three nationalist parties by means of this reference to history have succeeded in creating a positive lineage from the past, through the present and by way of extrapolation into the future to demonstrate the diachronic presence of the nation. They also divide the world into homogeneous and fixed identity positions, notably as this concerns women from ethnic minorities, especially those from the religious minority of Muslims on the one side and a positive valorisation of the own nation and identity on the other side. Here Yuval Davis' point about women/mothers being used as embodiments of the homeland seems to be reframed into a struggle between modernity and tradition. In the

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<sup>5</sup> The FrP and the DF are presently particularly attentive to gender equality, although there are still inherent tensions in this commitment. The two parties consider that gender equality has already been achieved in Norway and Denmark and are thus negative towards further gender equality policies, like 'gender mainstreaming' policies, gender-based quotas, or even 'positive actions'.

Scandinavian case modernity is symbolized by the positive valorization of native born women who embody the dominant values of gender equality, and tradition is symbolized by a negative valorization of Muslim migrant women who embody the patriarchal values of their culture.

### **Reflections and future research questions**

The above arguments have inspired reflections and posed new research questions concerning the links which *are* made and those which *could be* made between welfare and gender equality policies and the role of diverse national politics of belonging in the formulation of these links; between theoretical, analytical points and normative points.

The main argument is that the theoretical approaches to gender and nationalism need to evolve further with contributions from specific times and places. This article has started to analyse the particular articulations and claims about welfare and gender equality in nationalist discourses and politics of belonging from the Nordic contexts. The illustration of these claims in the discourses of the three Right wing populist parties indicates that the intersections of welfare, gender equality and the family have taken particular forms in Scandinavia. This challenge the understandings of gender and nationalism by Yuval-Davis and Özkirimli focusing primarily on women's reproductive and symbolic role as mothers and the idealization of motherhood and 'the home'.

Theoretically the research field of gender and nationalism is and should be broader than a focus on gender equality policies, a focus on women as mothers and the idealization of 'the home', on men as defenders of this home and the 'womenandchildren' in it. One example is the innovative work of Jasbir Puar who in her work on homonationalism combines transnational feminist and queer theory, Foucauldian biopolitics, Deleuzian philosophy, and technoscience criticism (Puar 2007).

From a Nordic gender perspective the tensions between what has been identified as an *exclusive* form of welfare and solidarity for native born citizens only, as expressed by the nationalist parties, and *transnational and global versions* of (gender) equality and justice beyond the borders of the national territory need to be explored. A related issue is therefore the need to reframe feminist approaches to welfare, gender equality and justice in the Scandinavian context and beyond from transnational and global perspectives. This could be done by reformulating the notion of solidarity and justice as less exclusionary than the formulations of the welfare and gender politics by both mainstream and nationalist and populist parties in Scandinavia today.

Normatively speaking migrant men and women, wherever they came from, should not only be the *objects* of discussions about Scandinavian gender and welfare policies on citizenship and migration, but also were *subjects* and people with their own ideas about policies that concern themselves. Arguably their possibilities of representing themselves have implications for the reframing who belongs to the nation as well as for defining the content of welfare and gender equality politics. The question 'who has the power to define the meaning of gender equality?' is therefore still crucial. Arguably there is a dual challenge for gender equality and welfare politics

to transcend exclusive welfare and equality within the nation state and develop inclusive forms of welfare and equality beyond the nation state. Nira Yuval Davis' intersectional approach and the concept of transversal politics could potentially be a useful starting point to transform democratic politics within and beyond the nation state.

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