Daddy Leave and Gender Equality

the Danish Case in a Scandinavian Perspective

Borchorst, Anette

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
10.5278/freia.4691293

Publication date:
2006

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Anette Borchorst

Daddy Leave and Gender Equality – the Danish Case in a Scandinavian Perspective

FREIA

Paper
September 2006 **60**

Feminist Research Center in Aalborg
Institute for History, International and Social Studies
Aalborg University
Fibigerstraede 2
DK-9220 Aalborg Ø
Tel: + 45 96 35 83 10, Fax: + 45 98 15 32 98
Mail: cirka@ihis.aau.dk, www.ihis.aau.dk/freia/index.php

Anette Borchost

Daddy Leave and Gender Equality – the Danish Case in a Scandinavian Perspective

Anette Borchorst

Daddy Leave and Gender Equality – the Danish Case in a Scandinavian Perspective

Paper from
FREIA – Feminist Research Center in Aalborg
Institute for History, International and Social Studies
Aalborg University
Fibigerstraede 2
9220 Aalborg Ø
Tel.: 9635 8310

Print: Institute for History, International and Social Studies, Aalborg University
Layout & word processing: Cirkeline Kappel

ISSN: 0907-2179

FREIA's paper series contains working papers, papers for conferences and seminars, project descriptions, lecture manuscripts, chapters from books etc. The papers are made by researchers affiliated to FREIA or by researchers who have visited the centre. The paper series aims at spreading the knowledge of FREIA's activities, internally as well as externally. Editors of the series are Ann-Dorte Christensen and Ruth Emerek. The papers can be ordered at Aalborg University, Institute for History, International and Social Studies, phone: +45 9635 8310, or by e-mail: cirka@ihis.aau.dk.

Anette Borchorst
Daddy Leave and Gender Equality
– the Danish Case in a Scandinavian Perspective

Introduction

In 2002, the two weeks' daddy leave in the Danish parental leave was abolished after an intensive debate in the media from March to July 2001, and at the same time the parental leave was extended from 26 to 52 weeks. The decision was passed by parties from the right wing government, which had just taken office. The parental leave had not been placed high on the political agenda for many years, and the politication was triggered by the fact that the debate constituted a prelude to the electoral campaign preceding the parliamentary election in November 2001. Earmarking part of the leave for the fathers turned out to be a very controversial issue during the debate.

The daddy leave, which was not transferable to the mother, had been adopted four years prior by a Social Democratic-Social Liberal government together with the left, and it had the intended outcome. From 1998-2001, the take-up rate of fathers increased from 7 to 24%, contrary to the very modest take-up rate of fathers during the 10 week period which could be shared by the father and the mother in parental leave from 1984-2000. During this period, only 5% of the fathers opted for leave. Compared to this, the earmarking was a veritable success, and yet, it was not portrayed as such in the media. This has to do with the success of the right wing parties, and above all the Agrarian Liberals, which triggered the debate, to frame earmarking negatively as government interference in the private affairs of the family.

In this way, a public-private dichotomy that had played a modest role in Danish politics for many decades was rearticulated. The centre and left did not frame the daddy leave positively as entitlements of fathers, and they did not manage to activate a debate on the impact of the gendered construction of the leave. In this way, the gendered practices were reduced to being a matter of individual choices of fathers and mothers. The debate was not moved beyond arguments

about the choices of the individual mothers and fathers, whereby the significance of the structural aspects of the parental leave such as its gendered constructions and impact on for instance employers' attitudes on men opting for parental leave was not brought into the focus.

The failure of the Centre-Left to challenge the rhetoric of the Right may be explained by the fact that several of the parties, including the Social Democrats, were internally divided on the issue. On a more general level, the case reflects that the political game among other things is played out as a contest over meaning. In this particular case, it was reinforced by the fact that a call of election was expected. Surprisingly many politicians participated and much of the debate, which would normally take place in the parliament, took place in the media. The debate on parental leave also exposed a particular Danish policy paradox regarding gender equality as a policy logic. Gender equality is a strong informal norm, but a weak explicit policy norm. Denmark has for many decades been in the forefront in terms of expanding public childcare facilities, and it has had record high coverage with childcare facilities for pre school children, which has been very significant for facilitating women's paid work. On the other hand, policies of gender equality have been relatively weak and confined to a policy niche. They relate primarily to formal antidiscrimination in the labour market and have been kept separated from welfare- and childcare policies, which by and large have had a gender-neutral underpinning.

Strategies for achieving gender equality have above all been aimed at facilitating women's breadwinning, and this has been accomplished by expanding welfare policies. The role of Danish men as carers and fathers within marriage has not been politicised to the same extent as in Sweden and Norway, where the integration of fathers in caring responsibilities was placed high on the governmental agenda in the late 1980s and the1990s. Danish fathers' entitlement to parental leave was granted in 1984, which was 10 years later than in Sweden and 7 years later than in Norway. The daddy leave was also introduced later in Denmark, and at the time earmarking leave for fathers was abolished in Denmark, it was extended in the two other countries.

In this chapter, I focus on the background for the decision to abolish the Danish daddy quota in 2001. First, I approach problem definition, agenda setting, path dependence and social constructivism as approaches to public policy making. Next, I address the timing of different policies influencing changes in the position of women from the 1960s and onwards more generally, and subsequently I deal with childcare policies and policies of gender equality in particular. After this, I briefly provide a long historical perspective on parliamentary negotiations on maternity and paternity leave from 1901 till the late 1990s, after which I analyse the decisions to adopt a daddy leave in 1997 and abolish it 2001. Finally, I discuss Danish gender equality paradoxes.

Agenda setting and contest over meaning

Policy analysts have for many years engaged in discussions about what determines policy output. During the last two-three decades, new approaches have gained ground, challenging above all the idea that policy makers react to objective conditions, and that they do it in a rational way. Problems do not exist objectively; they are portrayals of people's experiences and interpretations (Stone, 1988). Issues may get to the political agenda for all sorts of reasons, and the politicians do not consider all alternative solutions. Many scholars have directed their attention to agenda setting and problem definition as decisive for decisions. Another important point is that policies are time bound and deeply shaped by context and varying economic, political and discursive opportunity structures. Timing is therefore important. At particular moments, policy windows may open, for instance due to political events and specific problems that surface and attracts public attention (Kingdon, 1984).

Historical institutionalists ascribe specific significance to the particular historical path of policies. Actors can play a key role at a certain time, but institutionalisation of organisational structures, policy logics and discourses may imply that policies follow the path that was initially chosen. The concept path dependence is an indication of this. It leads to the rather broad conclusion that 'history matters', and the intriguing question is what mechanisms create it, and

what causes path-breaking elements in politics (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992; Thelen, 1999).

Another somewhat different but compatible approach stems from the influx of social constructivism on policy analysis. Is has been labelled 'the argumentative turn' in policy analysis, and it focuses on how political problems are interpreted and how they are discussed (Fischer & Forester, 1993). This tradition also challenges the idea that political issues exist as objective phenomena. Policy making involves a constant discursive struggle over criteria and framing of issues, and the way they are framed attributes meaning to them. Some aspects are brought to public attention, others are downplayed, and competing problem interpretations often coexist. The terms of the political discourses have become a dimension of politics in itself, and political parties use arguments strategically to make some interpretations dominate and outcompete others.

Comparisons of political debates in different countries may expose considerable differences in, when and how political issues reach the political agenda, and the framing of political problems are often surprisingly different. Bacchi, who focuses on the problem definition regarding women's inequality in the US, Canada and Australia (1999), demonstrates that there are considerable differences in the way pay equity, abortion, childcare and four other areas have been constructed as political problems, and this has been significant for the different policies that have been adopted.

A central issue for determining specific policies of parenting and gender equality is what is framed as a public concern, and what is defined as private, which the state should not interfere in. The outcome of discursive battles on this distinction mirrors patterns of gendered power and dominance relations (Fraser, 1989: 166ff.).

In my empirical work on what has shaped public policies of particular influence for the gendered construction of parenting, I have applied all the abovementioned approaches, and I have kept the question of decisive mechanisms for policy outputs empirically open. The following sections are based on my findings.

Changes in family structures and women's position in the 1960s and 1970s

The golden age of the male breadwinner family model lasted only 15 years in Denmark. From the early 1960s it was undermined by a number of interrelated changes in family structures, which may be summarized as follows: The relative number of married women in paid work grew from ¼ to ½ during the 1960s, and fertility took a sharp downturn from 1966. Marriages decreased drastically from the mid-1960s, and divorces accelerated in the late 1960s and during the first half of the 1970s (Borchorst & Dahlerup, 2003: 199).

The timing of events may be explained by changes in the economic opportunity structures. The women's rights organisations had for several decades promoted education and integration in paid work as the optimal route to gender equality. They did not, however, gain much support for this strategy immediately after the war due to the cold war climate and the economic recession. Public committees recommended collectivization of housework and public policies to support a dual earner family model, but these ideas remained dormant throughout the 1950s. The economic opportunity structure changed with the boom in the Danish economy in the early 1960s, and the unmet demand for labour produced a shift in attitudes towards women's participation in gainful employment. Yet, it does not fully explain the *scope* of the changes, which stretched into a period of economic downturn in the first half of the 1970s.

Political and discursive opportunity structures were also subject to considerable changes. The expansion of welfare policies and the significance of the new feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s paved the way for a historical shift in gender perceptions and hegemonic norms (Dahlerup, 1998), and this was interlinked with the increasing secularization that characterized the country. Initially, competing discourses on the proper position of women triggered a heated debate, not least among women. A recurrent theme was who should care for pre-school children. In the 1950s and the early 1960s, women were framed as bad mothers if they engaged in paid work; 10 years later this position had lost ground, and working mothers had become the hegemonic norm (Biza et al, 1982).

The extension of the educational system generated irreversible changes from mothers to daughters, and tax policy reforms mitigated economic hindrances to gainful employment for married women. When the Danish economy was struck by the increasing oil prices in the early 1970s, and unemployment started to rise, inclusion of part-time workers in the unemployment insurance system represented another hindrance to sending women back to the family as housewives.

The integration of women into the labour force was facilitated by changes in reproductive policies. The pill was released in 1966, and this and other types of contraceptives enhanced women's bodily autonomy. Furthermore, abortion within 12 weeks of pregnancy became legalised in 1973, and it was offered as part of the public tax-financed health system. Of particular significance for breadwinning as a lifelong perspective for women was the strengthening of maternity leave entitlements and the expansion of public childcare facilities.

Before I focus on the debates on parental leave, I will deal with the timing, content and framing of childcare policies and policies of gender equality.

Universalist childcare provision

The competing images of ideal family structures were reflected in the political debates in the early 1960s. Childcare was subject to somewhat contradictory framing. Leading social democrats saw the family as a solution to consequences of rapid technological and economic changes, and initiatives were taken to adopt a coherent family policy founded on traditional family patterns. Policy recommendations suggested that mothers should take care for their own children, at least for the first three years. During the same period, it was widely debated whether childcare facilities were beneficial to children or not. Several attempts to ask experts to settle the matter generated ambiguous conclusions. Traditional family policy promoting a male breadwinner family model, however, never gained

ground in Denmark, which until 2004, only had a ministry of family affairs for 1½ years.

It was decisive that the first steps towards preparing changes in the legislation on childcare facilities were taken already in 1961 (Borchorst, 2002). In 1964, the universalist principle was instituted in the childcare legislation. The 1964 act marked a radical shift in state efforts dedicated to subsidizing childcare. Residual measures targeted at needy families were replaced by universal measures aimed at children from all social groups. The change involved a whole new set of values concerning care for infants. Whereas the staff had previously been preoccupied with hygiene and regularity, and the legislation had dealt with preventive child welfare, the cornerstone was now social pedagogic childcare offers, founded on the integration of care and education. The key objective of the facilities now focussed on play and social interaction. The diffusion of these ideas was nurtured by the introduction of a three-year education for childcare pedagogues in 1969.

Recommendations from progressive pedagogues, who had for many decades served as experts and advisors to public authorities, greatly influenced the content and framing of the decisions. The women's rights organizations were also active in promoting the issue on the political agenda. Among the political parties, the Social Democrats and the left in particular induced the policy change, but it is noteworthy that all political parties in parliament supported the act. Though satisfying the need for labour was an important incentive, especially for the right wing parties, the overall policy logic was child centred. The problem definition of the legislation was related to the needs of small children, not the lack of economic independence for women or the demand of labour.

The number of childcare facilities grew steadily from 1966, and coverage ratios increased and have remained among the highest in Western Europe, particularly for 0-3 year-olds (OECD, 2001). Childcare represents one of the few areas where Denmark was at the forefront of the Scandinavian development, and it is partly explained by the path dependence of the policies.

The state's commitment to support childcare was introduced in 1919, and this was earlier than most other governments started to subsidise childcare. It was generated by a unique coalition of progressive pedagogues and leading Social Democrats in Copenhagen. This responsiveness to forces in civil society characterized many welfare policies in Denmark. From early on, policies were founded on the integration of care and education, and private idealistic initiatives played a central role in the establishment of facilities. The public commitment, which was targeted at needy families, was gradually extended and strengthened. In 1949, an element of universalism was introduced when support for facilities accommodating children of all social backgrounds was allowed.

The 1964 act on childcare therefore exhibits continuity and a radical shift at the same time. The considerable public commitment was influenced by the legacy of the 1919 act, the institutionalisation of the child-centred policy logic and the cooperation between politicians and pedagogues. The timing of the new act was also of some importance. Preparations were started before the position of women was politicised, and childcare became a hot issue.

Gender equality policy: A political niche

In the middle of the 1970s, gender equality was established as a new policy area. The development was triggered by international initiatives, such as the UN call to establish women's policy machinery and UN's International Women's Year in 1975. The European Community also had an impact on the development in Denmark, which joined in 1973 as the only Scandinavian country at the time.

The fist step towards instituting gender equality was the establishment of a woman's commission in Denmark in 1965, inspired by similar Swedish and Norwegian initiatives. Whereas the other two countries established small powerful commissions, the Danish Social Democratic prime minister allowed representation by numerous organisations, according to the strong corporatist spirit that prevailed in policy making at the time. The fact that so many vested interests were involved hampered the commission's ability to agree on policy

recommendations, and this in turn curtailed its opportunities to influence the political agenda. Moreover, it took 9 years to complete its tasks, and by then opportunity structures had altered radically (Borchorst & Dahlerup: ch. 3).

The economic downturn and the so-called landslide election in 1973 transformed Danish politics. Denmark was hit hard by the oil crisis, and unemployment increased drastically. Furthermore, the election transformed Danish politics fundamentally. It eroded the stable party system based on the four old political parties, the Social Democrats, the Social Liberals, the Conservatives and the Agrarian Liberals, and this undermined the political consensus on which the welfare state had been founded and extended during the previous many decades. Two newly formed political parties challenged gender equality as a hegemonic political norm. The Progress Party, a tax denial party on the extreme right, obtained considerable representation, and it articulated open resistance and ridiculed almost all political decisions on gender equality. The much smaller Christian Democratic Party's pro-family rhetoric emphasized childcare within the family. The two parties did not gain major support on the actual policy making, but their presence prompted a shift in the discursive opportunity structure.

Hence, the timing and sequencing of events implied that Denmark was much more reluctant to establish gender equality policy machinery than Sweden and Norway. The support for political measures to enhance gender equality was modest, especially among the right wing parties. An exception was the Social Liberals, a small but very significant party in Danish politics, which has a long tradition for promoting gender equality. Outside parliament, the feminist movement, which had adopted a rather hostile attitude towards the state, had a considerable influence on the changing discourses. It put pressure on the political parties to address the subordination of women. The right turn in Danish politics did, however, undermine the extra-parliamentarian pressure to include gender issues on the political agenda (Christensen & Siim, 2001).

The political majority in parliament including the liberal government was against establishing a policy machinery for gender equality, but

Denmark got one anyhow, when a social democratic prime minister acted upon administrative order in 1975 and founded the Equal Status Council. As a consequence, its room of manoeuvre was curtailed. Until its legal confirmation in 1978 it primarily dealt with inquiries and complaints from individuals, and it only engaged in few considerations on strategies for achieving gender equality. The family was excluded from its general field of operation, due to the resistance of the Christian Democrats, and childcare and other welfare policies were kept separated from these policies, too. Hence, the dominant policy logic related to labour market issues and education only, even though the reconciliation of family and work constituted a significant problem for many women. Gender equality was very vaguely defined in the legislation, and the instruments were selected from a restricted repertoire. Affirmative action and special treatment was allowed, but the actual options were very restricted, since it required an exemption from the act on equal treatment in each case. In the 1980s, gender equality was strengthened as policy logic, but less than in Sweden and Norway which strengthened their policies of gender equality policies and the implementation of them (Borchorst, 1999a; b).

There was, however, one attempt to merge welfare- and family policy with gender equality. The Council of Equal Status and the Child Commission, which was appointed in 1979, cooperated to strengthen a child-centred perspective together and incorporating gender equality as a policy logic. Together, they managed to influence political discourses for a while, but the cooperation did not materialise as significant policy changes.

During the 1990s, gender as a political category lost further momentum in public policies. Internal turbulence in the Equal Status Council and conflicts between feminist organizations and men's groups about the focus on men undermined gender equality as a political project. Policies with extremely gendered outcome such as the childcare leave scheme which granted parents a right to leave for one year to take care of their children were framed as gender-neutral family policies, and they were negotiated with very limited focus on gender (Borchorst, 1999c). Another factor that may explain this development is the disappearance of the feminist movement as a

strong extra-parliamentarian pressure that influenced discursive frames. It was also apparent that open resistance to gender equality measures in the majority population had stretched from the extreme right to the Agrarian Liberals and the Conservatives, which had previously supported many decisions on gender equality. To this should be added that gender equality plays a very restricted role in the political parties in Denmark (Borchorst, 2004).

In sum: The gender-neutral welfare policies adopted during the 1960s generated major reforms for women, but gender equality policies from the 1970s were weak, and the process towards establishing gender equality as a key policy area was punctuated by the fact that the economic crisis coincided with the land-slide election and the turn to the right. Attempts to coordinate the objectives of family policies and policies of gender equality capsized in the 1980s. Towards the end of the 1990s, they were still strictly separated, and policies concerning the adaptation to a dual earner family model were still predominantly directed towards women. Hence the weak and narrow policies of gender equality may be explained by path dependency and unfavourable opportunity structures.

Maternity and paternity leave on the political agenda 1901-1997[1]

Legislation on parental leave was first subject to regulation in Denmark in the factory law of 1901, which introduced two weeks' mandatory maternity leave for female factory workers after an intensive debate on special protection of female workers. A unique alliance between bourgeois women's organizations and female unions outside parliament succeeded in preventing a ban on women's night work, and they also managed to persuade the male politicians to open for social assistance to women during the maternity leave. In the interwar period, the assistance, which was meanstested, was gradually improved, and it was granted to more groups of women.

The following decades saw only modest changes in the legislation, but in the early 1960s, path-breaking changes were made. More groups of

[1] The section sums up my own empirical work in Borchorst, 2003, which is based on many different sources which are indicated in the references.

women employees gained access to benefits during the leave, and in 1966, statutory rights to parental leave were extended to almost all groups of women in the labour market, and the leave was extended to 14 weeks. The changes were adopted during a period when many welfare benefits were improved; universalist principles were strengthened and insurance based criteria were downplayed. The integration of women into the labour force was a central political objective, but the improvements of the maternity leave were not highly polticised.

Throughout the 1970s, leftist parties and the Social Liberals in particular made attempts to include fathers in parental leave entitlements. Outside parliament there was strong and persistent pressure from social movements and unions and above all the new feminist movement to prolong the leave and entitle fathers to leave. The issue was presented as a solution to women's double workload, but also as a benefit for fathers and children. The extra-parliamentarian pressure was not successful, however, above all because the economy was in bad shape.

The economic downturn implied that the politicians engaged in fierce conflicts on which issues should be given priority. Within the Social Democratic party there was a conflict between leading politicians in favour of a restoration of Kastrup Airport and female politicians, who pushed for the extension of the parental leave. The political strength of the female politicians was weakened by the fact that female trade unionists opposed statutory rights for fathers because they found that the leave for mothers was too short. They criticised that the four weeks' pregnancy leave was deducted from the leave after the birth, because this was disadvantageous to women with hard physical work. They also questioned whether the fathers would actually participate or just go fishing if they were granted leave.

Finally in 1984, after numerous unsuccessful proposals, the leave was extended from 14 to 24 weeks, and fathers became entitled to 14 days after the birth together with the mother. Furthermore, father and mother could share the last ten weeks. The entitlements of fathers were dependent on the status of the mother, and men who had children

with students or housewives were not entitled to leave. This was changed in 1991, when fathers gained statutory rights independently of their wives and partners.

The debates during the 1990s were characterized by reluctance to deal with gender equality objectives. The stipulation of parental leave entitlements had since 1989 been laid down in the equal treatment act. This was motivated by technical arguments, since EU directives required reversal of the burden of proof in connection with dismissal of pregnant women and people opting for parental leave. It did, however, not revoke further reflections on the gendered construction of the parental leave neither in 1989 nor in 2001.

By and large, the decisions from 1901-97 had been characterized by consensus between the political parties, with the centre and left as the most proactive agents for promoting and improving the parental leave.

Daddy leave 1997-2001 – from low to high politics[2]

In 1997, the parental leave was prolonged from 24 to 26 weeks, and the decision marked a radical shift in the construction of the leave, since the two weeks (25 and 26) were earmarked for fathers. The adoption of a daddy quota was inspired by the Norwegian *fedrekvote* from 1993 and the Swedish *pappamånad* from 1995, both for four weeks (Leira, 2002 and Leira this volume).

The act was passed as part of a centre-left agreement on the budget, which did not include the right wing parties. The right-left fight marked the shift from gender equality as a consensual political norm among the major political parties, except for the Progress Party at the extreme right, which had systematically opposed all decisions on gender equality. Given this left-right cleavage, it is remarkable that the right did not politicise the decision and profile their opposition to them in parliament nor in the media. The decision went largely unnoticed by the public. It was subject to a very short parliamentary debate and a very restricted debate in the media. It is not uncommon

[2] The section sums up my own empirical work in Borchorst, 2003. This work has been based on many different sources which are indicated in the references.

that issues that are included in budget agreements are not subject to longer debates in parliament, but it is noteworthy that several of the issues that triggered a heated debate four years later did not surface, when the leave was introduced.

The Social Democratic government coalition framed daddy leave as a benefit to the father, the child and the mother and a means to increase gender equality. This win-win interpretation was not challenged by the right, which however questioned whether fathers would take up the leave. They suggested that the question should be settled by the social partners in collective agreements, in which case extending the leave would be financed by the partners themselves through collective agreements. They did not frame the daddy leave as an interference with the free choice of families, nor did they label it as a coercive measure. Indeed, both right and left argued that the proposal did not imply coercion.

The leave did not get a special name to distinguish it from the two weeks' leave to which fathers were entitled immediately after the birth together with the mother. Furthermore, the government did not launch comprehensive campaigns to encourage fathers to use this option as the Swedish and Norwegian governments had done.

In 2001, parental leave and the daddy quota reappeared on the public agenda on 8 March, the International Women's day. It happened by coincidence, and it became highly politicised, because it triggered a pre-election debate, during which the Agrarian Liberal party together with the Conservatives challenged the Social Democratic coalition, which had been in office since 1993. Hence, the upcoming election constituted the policy window that opened for politicising a new decision. It was a new phenomenon that gender equality occupied a central position in an election debate, since it had for decades been almost non-existent as an electoral issue.[3] The leading oppositional party, the Agrarian Liberals, saw the issue as a means to profile itself as an alternative to the Social Democrats, who headed the government. By supporting a central welfare policy, the Agrarian

[3] When the election was called in October, the issue disappeared, and refugees and immigrants became the leading theme of the campaign.

Liberal party sought to reinforce a pro-welfare profile. They also used the daddy leave as a tool to orchestrate a campaign framing the Social Democrats as old-fashioned and tutelary, and finally, the issue was chosen as a means to attract female voters who tended to prefer other parties.

The notion of coercion became a dominant discourse of the Right. The arguments also drew on the strong resentment which is evoked in the Danish public when something is labelled as quotas. Quotas and affirmative action is by far the most controversial gender equality instrument in Denmark. Initially, the coalition parties were caught on their heels, because extending the parental leave violated central objectives to increase the labour supply and prevent a rise in public expenditures. The Social Democrats were squeezed since they, who have been characterized as the primary architects of the Danish welfare state, opposed a welfare reform proposed by the right.

They and their coalition partner yielded some months later after an intensive media debate, when the remaining seven parties all supported the proposal. At this point, they engaged in a discussion of earmarking part of the leave for the fathers, as a way of distinguishing their proposal, but they were constrained by internal divisions.[4] The parliamentary group was deeply divided over the issue. The party's spokespersons for labour market and social policy affairs and several ordinary members opposed the daddy leave in the media and framed it as coercion. They labelled the Social Democratic minister of equal opportunities as a fundamentalist because she was in favour of the so called 3-3-3 model, which had been adopted in Iceland, reserving 3 months for the mothers, three for the fathers and three to be shared. The prime minister initially supported this model, but he retreated due to the opposition in the party. The conflict that was generated within the party was by and large of a gendered nature. The proponents were mainly women, and the opponents mainly men. Gender conflicts within political parties are rarely exposed in Denmark, because unlike the sister parties in Sweden, the Danish party does not organize women's caucuses within the party. In this particular situation it

[4] It was abandoned the same year, when a Social Democratic government took office.

became visible, since their disagreements were played out in the media.

The media controlled the timing, when the issue was put on the agenda, but during the ensuing phases, the politicians and the political parties kept the process going due to the impending election. An extraordinary number of politicians interfered on the issue as it overlapped three policy areas: social, labour market and equal opportunities policies and because the high politics status of the proposal brought out all the party leaders. The process was not visibly marked by other actors. The civil servants played a minor role, which is usual practice in the agenda setting phase, but in this case it was also due to the high politics nature of the issue and the upcoming election. The media were critical opponents of the parties' proposal to extend the parental leave, because it contradicted central political goals to reduce public expenditures and increase the supply of labour, but some journals systematically took over the coercive metaphoric as the dominant frame for the daddy leave. Feminist organizations warned against the combined effect of prolonging the leave and abandoning the daddy quota, but it is noteworthy that men's organizations did not voice support for the entitlements of fathers. These organizations have, however, mainly organized men on the issue of the rights of men at marital dissolution.

The Agrarian Liberal and the Conservative Parties had outlined a strategy profiling themselves as parties that supported central welfare issues. They presented themselves as a renewal, as a contrast to the old-fashioned policies of the government of the day. Freedom of choice and welfare constituted the key framework in the Agrarian Liberals' profiling, and they used the daddy quota to label the Social Democratic policy as coercion, guardianship and a limitation of the individual's freedom of choice. The Social Democrats did not in earnest profile themselves with an alterative interpretation of the coercive metaphoric, which should be viewed in light of the internal disagreement in the party.

It was noteworthy that neither during the media debate in 2001 nor in the parliamentary debate in 2002 was the daddy leave presented as a

success. The increase in the take-up rate of fathers that was stated in the introduction was never used as an argument for the earmarking. The figures were available at the national statistical office, but they were not included to inform the decision makers. The newly elected conservative minister of gender equality even defended the abolishment of the daddy leave by arguing that the fathers did not use it.
The focus on gender during the debate in 2001 points to a change since the 1990s when gender as noted above occupied a modest role in political debates. This shift may also be traced in the rearticulation of a public private split in relation to work and family issues.

The public-private split

The mobilization of women and their increased parliamentary presence in politics from the 1960s and 70s has all over the Western world challenged the public-private divide, and it has been demonstrated that this divide is neither fixed nor unchangeable. The new feminist movement which claimed that 'the personal is political' attempted to politicise the private sphere with a radical emancipatory project, and they managed to put issues like domestic violence on the political agenda in many countries.

There was, however, considerable difference between different countries. A public private dichotomy has permeated liberal societies and ideologies, and feminist scholars have analysed its liberal patriarchal legacy (Pateman, 1980). They have demonstrated how this divide has constituted a barrier to women's full citizenship (Lister, 1997).

In Scandinavian countries it lost some of its significance; a public-private mix emerged when the welfare states expanded their responsibility for reproductive tasks and thereby strengthened their woman-friendly potential (Hernes, 1987; Siim, 2000).

The process is, however, by no means a gradual or automatic process that works one way, and discursively political parties especially from the right have from time to time rearticulated gendered divisions of care and breadwinning. In 1974, the Danish prime minister Poul

Hartling, who was also the leader of the Agrarian Liberal Party, argued that strengthening girls' interests in vocational training, changing the distribution of household tasks between spouses, and strengthening women's interest and motivation for participating in organizational work were not a governmental concern, or was an aspect which could not be enhanced through legislative action (Folketingstidende, 25 October 1974). During the following years, the integration of women in vocational training and organization matters was indeed considered central to governmental policies, and as noted earlier public childcare facilities have been expanded drastically. On the other hand, the historical analysis has revealed that the caring role of fathers within marriage has been subject to a relatively weak politicization in Denmark, compared to the other Scandinavian and Nordic countries. During the 1980s and 1990s, the political disagreements about statutory rights of fathers were largely framed as disagreements on economic priorities, and it did not revoke major ideological battles about the public-private split.

In 2001, the abolishment of the daddy leave did, however, trigger a discursive battle on limits to public interference and a public private split was rearticulated as a means of profiling the right from the centre-left in Danish politics. Politicians from the centre-right parties voiced concurrently that it was not a task for the public sector to influence the division of labour by gender, and the daddy leave was interpreted as politicians invading people's privacy. The Social Democratic Party was inhibited due to internal disputes over gender equality as a parameter in the legislation and did not challenge the predominant opposition on this issue. The trade union movement was also divided with regard to the subject.

Yet, discourse and practice are not necessarily in accordance. The family has been subject to numerous regulations since this time, and the current government has gone considerably further by setting an age limit at 24 for marriage between Danish citizens and non-citizens. Furthermore, it has not been problematized that parental leave is premised on female responsibility for small children, since a relatively long period of the parental leave is earmarked for the mother. The first two weeks after the birth are mandatory for women, and after

this, twelve weeks are reserved for the mother. Historically, the arguments for this has been considerations for the recovery of the mother and the focus on promoting breastfeeding, but it is noteworthy that the Danish leave today has the most gendered construction in the Nordic countries, since it has the relatively longest period earmarked for the mother.
The rearticulation of the public-private split in relation to the daddy leave was chosen strategically to profile the right wing parties in relation to the Social Democratic party, and the upcoming election was the factor that opened the policy window and triggered the discursive battle. Another explanation for this development is the character of Danish policies of gender equality.

Gender equality policy paradoxes

The narrow Danish gender equality project may be explained by the disadvantageous opportunity structures that shaped policies of equal opportunities in the initial phase. These policies do not enjoy strong support, neither in the political parties, nor in the population at large. It is not likely that this development will be reversed, also because the feminist movement has disappeared.

Danish welfare policies still secure women's economic autonomy, and traditional family policies never gained a strong foothold in Denmark. The government appointed a new minister of family affairs in 2004, but it remains unclear whether this signals new policy measures or mainly governmental concern about the problems with reconciling work and family that especially women are concerned about. The norm of female breadwinning and dual income earner family structures has become a hegemonic and most likely also an irreversible norm. The care of small children will remain on the political agenda for the years to come, but it remains to be seen whether fathers will organize not only on the rights to care at marital dissolution, but also within marriage.

During later years, new challenges and cleavages have surfaced, and this has generated new gender equality paradoxes. For the first time in several decades, the right profiles itself on gender equality. This is

related to the fact that the situation of refugees and immigrants has been placed high on the political agenda. The parties in government argue together with the extreme right that especially Muslim groups do not comply with the Danish norms of gender equality. In this way these parties seek to profile themselves on a gender-political agenda that does not require significant policy initiatives. The centre-left has adopted a defensive strategy because it is internally divided on the question, and furthermore these parties do not know how to tackle the recognition of difference between ethnic groups and equality between the genders at the same time.

It is very likely that this paradox that the right wing parties, which have not profiled themselves on gender equality for many years, during the past five years have articulated a strong concern for gender equality among the ethnic minorities, will persist during the coming years. It remains to be seen whether the centre-left manages to promote a vision for gender equality, or whether the right has taken the lead in terms of framing gender equality discourses. It is, however, also clear that women have become a strategic electoral group, and this implies that all the political parties have to tackle issues like female representation and the gendered division of care and breadwinning.

The abolishment of the daddy quota reveals that fight over meaning has become an integral part of the political game and the competition for electoral support. If it is true that politics also is played out as a contest over meaning, it implies that things will not merely change if a new election brings a turn towards the left. A re-adoption of daddy leave hinges on the ability of the centre-left to produce an alternative frame to the free choice rhetoric that became hegemonic during the debate in 2001. Furthermore, unless the leave is extended further, which is not unlikely, it will be difficult to argue convincingly for earmarking a period for fathers, because it will be presented as curtailing women's access to leave.

The question remains whether the relatively weak institutionalisation of gender equality will lag behind as a social practice in Denmark. This may be the case in terms of political representation and women's

top position and gendered practices in care of the newborn, but there are also indications that point in the direction of less pessimism. First of all comparisons on welfare and family policy models rank Denmark relatively high in terms of achievements in gender equality (Korpi, 2002). Furthermore, comparative data on the attitudes of parents from the mid-1990s suggest that the support for egalitarian gender norms are stronger among Danish parents than Swedish and Norwegian, and they are also more optimistic in their evaluation of prevailing gender equality patterns (Ellingsæter, 1998). This may of course relate to the hegemonic discourses of gender equality as an accomplishment, but seen together these findings may be interpreted as a sign of gender equality as a strong informal norm, especially among women. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the gender gap in party choice has been persistent. Since the early 1980s, women vote more to the left than men, and the gender differences in political attitudes are even more pronounced. During the 1990s, the gap between women's support for economic redistribution and welfare benefits and men's preference for tax reduction has become considerable, and it is today higher than ever. The gender gaps are larger than in Sweden and Norway (Andersen & Goul Andersen, 2003; Mandag Morgen, 2004).

References

Andersen, J. and J. Goul Andersen (2003): 'Køn, alder og uddannelse: Fe unge mænds sejr', in J. Goul Andersen and O. Borre (eds.): *Politisk Forandring: Værdiforandring og Nye Skillelinjer ved Folketingsvalget 2001*, Århus: Systime.

Bacchi, C. (1999): *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems*, London: Sage Publications.

Biza, L. C., B. Krebs Lange and E. K. Lous, (1982): *Ude og hjemme*, Speciale, Historisk Institut, Aarhus Universitet.

Borchorst, A. (1999a): 'Equal Status Institutions', in C. Bergqvist et al (eds.): *Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, Nordic Council of Ministers, pp. 167-89.

Borchorst, A. (1999b): 'Gender Equality Law', in C. Bergqvist et al (eds.): *Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, Nordic Council of Ministers, pp. 190-207.

Borchorst, A. (1999c): 'Den Kønnede Virkelighed – Den Kønsløse Debat', in J. Goul Andersen et al (eds.): *Den Demokratiske Udfordring*, København: Hans Reitzels Forlag, pp. 113-32.

Borchorst, A. (2002): 'Danish Child Care Policy: Continuity Rather Than Radical Change', in S. Michel & R. Mahon (eds.): *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads: Gender and Welfare State Restructuring*, New York: Routledge, pp. 267-85.

Borchorst, A. (2003): *Køn, Magt og Beslutninger. Politiske Forhandlinger om Barselsorlov 1901-2002*, Århus: Magtudredningen.

Borchorst, A. (2004): 'Skandinavisk ligestillingspolitik tur-retur, på dansk billet', *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, no. 3-4, pp. 264-74.

Borchorst, A. and Dahlerup, D. (2003): *Ligestillingspolitik som Diskurs og Praksis*, København: Samfundslitteratur.

Christensen, A.–D. and B. Siim (2001): *Køn, demokrati og modernitet. Mod nye politiske identiteter*, København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Dahlerup, D. (1998): *Rødstrømperne. Den danske Rødstrømpe-bevægelses udvikling, nytænkning og gennemslag, 1970-1985*, København: Gyldendal.

Edelman, M. (1988): *Constructing the Political Spectacle*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ellingsæter, A. L. (1998): 'Dual Breadwinner Societies: Provider Models in the Scandinavian Welfare States', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 41, no 1, pp. 59-73.

Fischer, F.and Forrester, J. (1993): *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Folketingstidende (1974).

Fraser, N. (1989): *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hernes, H. M. (1987): *Welfare State and Women Power. Essays in State Feminism*, Oslo: Norwegian University Press.

Kingdon, J. D. (1984): *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, New York Harper Collins College Publishers.

Korpi, W. (2002): *Velfærdsstat og Socialt Medborgerskab*, Århus: Magtudredningen.

Leira, A. (2002): *Working Parents and the Welfare State. Family Change and Policy Reform in Scandinavia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mandag Morgen (2004): 'Regeringen har tabt kvinderne og 1968-generationens børn', 24 August.

Leira, A. (2002): *Working Parents and the Welfare State. Family Change and Policy Reform in Scandinavia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lister, R. (1997): *Citizenship. Feminist Perspectives*, Macmillan Press ltd.

OECD (2001): *Employment Outlook*, Paris: OECD.

Pateman, C. (1989): *The Disorder of Women*, London: Polity Press.

Siim, B. (2000): *Gender and Citizenship. Politics and Agency in France, Britain and Denmark*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stone, D. (1988): *Policy Paradox and Political Reason*, Harpers Collins.

Thelen, K. (1999): 'Historical institutionalism in comparative politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, no 2, pp. 369-404.

Publications in FREIA's paper series:

1. Karin Widerberg: Udfordringer til kvinneforskningen i 1990'erne - föredrag på Center for Kvinneforskning i Aalborg 10.5.90, 1992

2. Feminist Research. Aalborg University. Report 1976-1991, 1992

3. Ann-Dorte Christensen: Kvinder i den nye fredsbevægelse i Danmark - mellem køkkenruller, resolutioner og teltpæle, 1992

4. Ulla Koch: Uformel økonomi og social arbejdsdeling - en fortælling om tværfaglighed og det umuliges kunst, 1992

5. Marianne Rostgaard: Kvindearbejde og kønsarbejdsdeling i tekstilindustrien i Danmark ca. 1830 - 1915, 1992

6. Inger Agger: Køn og krænkelse - om politisk vold mod kvinder, 1992

7. Margrethe Holm Andersen: Heks, hore eller heltinde? - et case-studie om tanzanianske kvinders politiske deltagelse og kønsideologier i forandring, 1993

8. Ulla Koch: A Feminist Political Economics of Integration in the European Community - an outline, 1993

9. Susanne Thorbek: Urbanization, Slum Culture, Gender Struggle and Women's Identity, 1993

10. Susanne Thorbek: Køn og Urbanisering, 1994

11. Poul Knopp Damkjær: Kvinder & rektorstillinger - et indlæg i ligestillings-debatten, 1994

12. Birte Siim: Det kønnede demokrati - kvinders medborgerskab i de skandinaviske velfærdsstater, 1994

13. Anna-Birte Ravn: Kønsarbejdsdeling - diskurs og magt, 1994.

14. Bente Rosenbeck: Med kønnet tilbage til den politiske historie, 1994

15. Jytte Bang og Susanne Stubgaard: Piger og fysik i gymnasiet, 1994

16. Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen og Monica Rudberg: Jenter og gutter i forandring, 1994

17. Jane Lewis: Gender, Family and the Study of Welfare 'Regimes', 1995

18. Iris Rittenhofer: A Roll in the Hay with the Director: The Manager in a Genderhistorical Perspective, 1995

19. Ruth Emerek: On the Subject of Measuring Women's (and Men's) Participation in the Labour Market, 1995

20. Maren Bak: Family Research and Theory in Denmark: A Literature Review, 1995

21. Ann-Dorte Christensen & Birte Siim: Gender, Citizenship and Political Mobilization, 1995

22. Hanne Marlene Dahl: Contemporary Theories of Patriarchy - Like a Bird without Wings? Power, Signification and Gender in the Reproduction of Patriarchy, 1995

23. Lene Klitrose: Moving far beyond the Separated Fields of Patriarchal Scholarship: the Qualitative Leap of Philosophical Daring, 1995

24. Ulla Koch: Omsorgsbegrebet i lyset af international økonomisk integration - begrebs- og metodediskussion, 1995

25. Karen Sjørup: Patriarkatet og det kvindelige subjekt, 1995.

26. Susanne Thorbek: Women's Participation in Slum Organizations - Does it Make a Difference? 1995

27. Mette Groes: Kvinder laver daghøjskoler for kvinder, 1995

28. Signe Arnfred: Conceptualizing Gender, 1995

29. Durre Ahmed: Essence and Diversity in Gender Research, 1995

30. Ann Schlyter: Women's Responses to Political Changes in Southern Africa - Common Grounds and differences, 1995

31. Diana Mulinari: Thinking about Feminism, 1995

32. Susanne Thorbek: Global Context - Local Concepts, 1995

33. Sylvia Walby: Key Concepts in Feminist Theory, 1996

34. Yvonne Hirdman: Key Concepts in Feminist Theory – Analysing Gender and Welfare, 1996

35. Anna Alten: The Incompatability of Entrepreneurship and Femininity: A Dilemma for Women, 1996

36. Jane Lewis: Equality, Difference and Gender in Twentieth Century Welfare States, 1996

37. Eileen Drew: Key Concepts Employed to Understand Gender in Relation to the Labour Market, 1996

38. Ilona Ostner: Individualization, Breadwinner Norms, and Family Obligations. Gender Sensitive Concepts in Comparative Welfare, 1996

39. Feminist Research. Aalborg University. Report 1996-1999, 1997

40. Ruth Lister: Engendering Citizenship, Work and Care, 1997

41. Ruth Lister: Citizen or Stakeholder. Policies to combat social exclusion and promote social justice in the UK, 1997

42. Anne Showstack Sassoon: Beyond Pessimism of the Intelligence: Agendas for Social Justice and Change, 1997

43. Lilja Mósesdóttir: Breaking the Boundaries: Women's Encounter with the State in Sweden, Germany and the United States, 1997 Labour Market, 1996

44. Ruth Emerek, Jeanette E. Dahl og Vibeke Jakobsen: Migrant Women on the Danish Labour Market, 2000

45. Birte Siim: Dilemmas of Citizenship in Denmark – Lone Mothers between Work and Care, 1999

46. Iris Rittenhofer: Historicizing the "Glass Ceiling". The engendering of difference in German and Danish media presentations of leadershipdebates 1960 – 1989, 2000

47. Chiara Bertone: Familiens rolle i og kvinders krav til de sydeuropæiske velfærdsstater: et studie om Italien, 1999

48. Margareta Bäck-Wiklund: Senmodernt familjeliv och föräldraskap – om tratitionella roller och nya identiteter, 2001

49. Pernille Tanggaard Andersen: Retten til at vælge fællesskab – Yngre ufaglærte kvinders opfattelse af og praksis om fællesskab og solidaritet, 2002

50. Birte Siim: Feministiske bidrag til politisk teori, 2003

51. Anna-Birte Ravn: Economic Citizenship: Debates on Gender and Tax Legislation in Denmark, 1903-83, 2004

52. Christina Fiig: En feministisk offentlighed – Ph. D-forelæsning, Aalborg Universitet den 23. september 2004

53. Ann-Dorte Christensen: The Danish Gender Model and New Political Identities among Young Women, 2004

54. Hege Skjeie: Trosfrihet og Diskrimineringsvern, 2005

55. Kathleen B. Jones: Reflections on Violence and Gender in an Era of Globalization: A Philosophical Journey with Hannah Arendt, 2005

56. Gunhild Agger: Køn i *Matador* og *Krøniken*, 2005

57. Tina Kjær Bach: Kvinder i kommunanpolitik – rapport udarbejdet for Lige-stillingafdelingen, 2005

58. Birte Siim: Køn, magt og medborgerskab I en globaliseret verden, 2005

59. Kirsten Sværke: Nyfeminisme og nye kønsidentiteter, 2005

60. Anette Borchorst: Daddy Leave and Gender Equality – the Danish Case in a Scandinavian Perspective, 2006

FREIA - the Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg is an interdisciplinary organization of feminist researchers at Aalborg University. Focus of the centre lies within the social sciences, especially the fields of anthropology, history, sociology/social science and political science. The present research programme “Gender and Social Change” forms the framework of a number of individual and collective projects. FREIA is part of the Institute for History, International and Social Studies at Aalborg University.