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GENDER EQUALITY POLICY AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

The objective of this research is to discuss the challenges of gender policy and ethnic minorities in the Nordic context by looking at the tensions between gender equality and respect for diversity. In spite of historical, political and religious differences, all the Nordic countries experience similar problems with accommodation of cultural and religious diversity. They face serious problems with marginalization of old minority groups, like Sami, Roma and people from Greenland, and with marginalization and discrimination of new immigrant groups on the labor market, in politics and civil society.

Using the CEDAW Convention as a starting point, a number of countries including Nordic countries are pursuing a range of issues aiming to draw attention to the lack of respect for women's rights although the Nordic welfare states are internationally recognized as pioneers of gender equality. The overall objective of Nordic countries' gender equality policy is that women and men should enjoy equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all significant areas of life. By the 1970s when gender equality once again was placed on the international agenda, the women's movement and the state authorities in the Nordic countries became promoters of gender equality, both nationally and internationally.

Even though the Nordic countries from the outside may appear homogenous, there are also considerable differences in the level of gender equality and in existing national arrangements. The right to gender equality (women have the right to be included in society and to be active citizens on equal terms with men) is a fundamental principle within the context of the Nordic welfare policy, as well as in the EU as a whole. This principle is not always taken into account instead in practices it is created a form of double discrimination for immigrant women (discriminating against a person because of gender and ethnicity).

Scandinavian countries according to their universal welfare state models, legal immigrants and refugees enjoy the same rights as national citizens, but these countries have adopted different approaches to gender equality policy. The Scandinavian welfare states have often been labeled woman-friendly but during later years, a recurrent issue has been, whether Scandinavian policies of gender equality have been designed for white middle class women, and whether diversity between women has been ignored¹.

A high-profiled ideal of gender equality has certainly been an important ingredient in the construction of a homogenous “Scandinavian-ness”. According to the Norwegian political scientist, Helga Hernes these countries possessed unique possibilities to transform into “women friendly societies,” “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”².

The goal of *equality* implies the continued efforts to give immigrants the same living standard as the rest of the population. It implies public initiatives are to be taken to assure members of ethnic and linguistic minorities domiciled in Scandinavian countries a genuine choice between retaining and developing their cultural identity and assuming a Scandinavian cultural identity. The goal of *partnership* implies that the different immigrant and minority groups on the one hand and the native population on the other both benefit from living together.

In the Nordic context the role of women in the development of culture and local urban communities is often essential in that they act as the main bearers of informal networks integrating local public life. Centered on the family, the household and local community life, such female networks may nurture boundary-crossing cultural dispositions and give birth to new forms of social organization. Though immigration and wage labor have given women new opportunities to achieve economic independence, their lingering subordination in an ethnically and gender divided labor market has perpetuated their dependence on the sense of unity and aid they give each other in female networks. These include women’s friends, relatives, neighbors and co-workers.

In the debates of political parties gender equality for the minority women was not mentioned at great length though these problems are to be considered as serious as any human right problems. In the most documents on gender equality produced by the government of the Nordic countries during the last decade focuses on the mainstreaming of a gender perspective. No any action plan was offered in the direction of gender equality policy for multicultural group by popular parties. How ethnic minorities are reflected and interpreted within

Scandinavian gender equality policies? It is necessary to take into account that the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) do not stand for a case of sameness.

Norway

Norway has high ambitions when it comes to gender equality. Norway is playing an active role internationally in fighting for the empowerment of women and girls. Women's rights and gender equality is therefore a central dimension in Norwegian foreign, security and development policy. The Gender Equality Act, which was passed in 1978, prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. It entered into force in 1979. The Norwegian Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud promote equality and combat discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability and age.

The Norwegian government has presented four major white papers on the lines and directions of Norwegian gender equality policies:

- 1) Action plan for gender equality, with an emphasis on the promotion of the situation of women in education and employment;
- 2) on measures and means in gender equality policies;
- 3) gender equality policies for the 1990s³.

The parallel situation of immigrant women to that of "Norwegian" women in an early face of gender equality involvement is stressed but in practice as above mentioned women of color suffer from a double handicap and is discriminated against on the basis of both their gender and their ethnicity.

According to the European Framework Convention, Norway has five main national minority groups: Romany (travelers in Norwegian *Tatere*), Roma, (gypsies), *Skogfinners* (Forest-Finns) — a population of Finnish origin, who settled in the Eastern part of Norway near the border to Sweden), Kvener (population in the North of Norway, also of Finnish origin)⁴.

Norway for Norwegians! Eva Maagerø and Birte Simonaen argue that it is possible to find these graffiti on the walls in Norway. Although in official documents, there is a significant development towards a better understanding of multiculturalism but in reality it still seems to be difficult to put these good intentions into practice. The authors claim that it is important to build bridges, not barriers. As an example Sáámi people's story is given and they consider the forced assimilation of Sáámi people and other national minorities as 'a shadow' in the Norwegian history. Even in 1960s Sáámi children were allowed to use Norwegian as their school language and it was forbidden to present the Sáámi culture through songs, religious acts, fairytales and clothes⁵.

The gender equality action plan scarcity makes a few difficulties to study the interrelation of ethnic minority and gender equality policy. But the government preoccupied with ethnic minority women's and girls' forced marriage and genital mutilation problems. These types of violence have not been included into Norwegian action plans but the government carried out attempts to struggle against these forms of violence through special programs and did not give any further attention.

There is a tendency to isolate these problems in Norway and to tackle them through "specially formulated" strategies and similar measures. In this way, the types of violence that affect ethnic minority women are isolated from other kinds of domestic violence and are thereby defined outside of the field of gender equality.

Thus, the problems facing Norwegian ethnic minority women were omitted of the general gender equality policy. Simultaneously, it contributes to a strong isolation of some restricted issues, constructing forced marriages and genital mutilation as the only gendered "multicultural problems" worth public attention and governmental policy programs. Only one of eight themes discussed in the Norwegian gender equality action plan is "gender equality in our multicultural society". In this document it merely written that gender equality is aim and ideal relating to all minority groups and cultures. In this document it is said that immigrants also are to participate in work life and enjoy equal representation but none of this is made concrete additional focus.

Denmark

There are important differences between the Danish and the Norwegian government policies in the ways of gender. In the Danish account on gender equality the line is drawn relatively clearly between the issues that are treated in a unitary gender perspective and the issues that include differentiations according to ethnic background. In the latter cases, the perspective is primarily on the ethnic relations, i.e. focusing on the problems that particularly apply to men in ethnic minority groups (completion of higher education) and women in the same groups (participation in employment and the civil society).

Denmark is mostly inhabited by ethnic Danes. Very few Faeroese or Greenlanders have settled in mainland Denmark despite their status as Danish citizens. Small numbers of Germans, Jews, Roma, Poles and Hungarians, on the other hand, have been long established and are substantially assimilated. Minority groups include 55,600 Turks (1 %), 17,400 former Yugoslavs (0,3 %), Asians, Africans, Inuit and Faroese.

Gender equality among minorities in Denmark is an important aim in the government's integration and gender equality efforts. Gender equality is one of the democratic values of Danish society is built upon (GE Action Plan 2004). According to the action plan everyone has the right to equal opportunities concerning to choose type of education, work, as well as partner. It relates to ethnic minorities too (but unfortunately lack of the knowledge of gender equality policy among ethnic minorities deprives them to benefit this right).

The individuals in greatest need of protection and liberation are ethnic minority women, especially young girls and the biggest gender equality challenges facing ethnic minority women are in particular forced marriage and low employment rates compared to women of ethnic minority backgrounds⁶.

Denmark is the one where multiculturalism- here defined as "ethnic minorities" — is the most politicized in gender equality policy. During the years 2000s, either integration or ethnic minorities have had their own areas of focus in all action plans for gender equality. These come out every year and are discussed after a statement is given from the Minister of Gender Equality in the Danish Parliament. The focus on minorities comes straight from the mentality that there is less gender equality among the minorities.

Sweden

Gender equality as an economic and competitive advantage is among the main messages of The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion. It has the coordinating responsibility for gender equality policies. Implementing gender equality fully requires equal representation and participation of both men and women in the economy, decision-making, as well as in social, cultural and civil life. Key issues for today are particular focus on groups of women with low turnout and representation in politics such as the young and the immigrants. All in all, the Swedish GE Action Plan gives voice to a certain concern about the agency of young women and girls with ethnic minority backgrounds but cultural difference and ethnic minority status far less visible in these documents⁷.

Sweden raises the issue of the rights of women and girls in the development policy dialogue and in discussions with government representatives in multilateral contexts. The Swedish Government's gender equality policy has two principal aims:

- a) to combat and transform systems that preserves the gender-based distribution of power and resources in society;
- b) to ensure that women and men enjoy the same power and opportunities to shape their own lives.

The Swedish action plans for gender equality are produced during each government's electoral period of four years. The Swedish action plans begin by stating the overall objective of the Swedish gender equality policy which is "to ensure that women and men have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all significant areas of life," but in reality it takes a rather different turn.

On the whole the Swedish action plans give voice to a definite alarm about the agency of young women and girls with ethnic minority backgrounds, but cultural difference and ethnic minority status are far less noticeable in these papers. The gender equality problems are all discussed in a rather thorough way but none of them are considered in relation to ethnicity. All women are taken into account to the same extent and in the same manner. For instance the challenges pertaining to exclusion and discrimination related to simultaneous intersections of *gender and ethnicity/race* are not approached at all⁸.

The objective of Sweden's minority policy is to protect the national minorities, strengthen their power to influence and support the historical minority languages to keep alive. The five recognized national minorities in Sweden are Jews, Roma, Sami (also an indigenous people), Swedish Finns and Tornedalers. The long-established minority languages are Yiddish, Romany Chib (all varieties), Sami (all varieties), Finnish and Meänkieli (Tornedal Finnish).

The Swedish Government wants women from national minorities to gain a stronger position in society. In April 2008, it instructed the National Board for Youth Affairs to distribute grants to organizations to encourage their efforts to promote gender equality among national minorities. The assignment also includes developing forms for cooperation between the country's national minorities on gender equality related matters. A total of SEK 6.5 million has been allocated for the purpose up to and including 2010⁹.

The Nordic countries belong to the same welfare and gender regime but have moved in different directions in relation to ethnic minority with Sweden being the most multicultural country and Denmark the most restrictive country. In terms of access to citizenship Denmark has moved from one of the most liberal to one of the most restrictive models for naturalization in Europe.

Tensions between gender equality and cultural diversity

Okin has raised a significant issue on the role of culture and women's rights in the minority cultures. The author highlights the harmful role of religion and patriarchal oppression in minority culture which causes to treat minority women as passive victims of their culture. The author emphasizes civil and cultural

rights both to the right and respect for cultural diversity, including the right to practice your own language, religion, dress and behavior¹⁰.

Gender equality has already been achieved but patriarchal oppression is still a big problem for minority women. The issues of forced and arranged marriages, domestic violence and the right to wear a headscarf, to work have sparked highly gendered debates¹¹. Referring to A. Bredal the author claims that in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in the 1990s, forced marriages and ‘honor-related violence’ became subjects of public concern expressed through gender equality, women’s rights and the oppression of girls in patriarchal families.

The issue of forced and arranged marriages thus illustrates the tension between the dominant individualist political culture and the cultural diversity in family forms. It proves that the strong normative pressure towards cultural assimilation tends to exacerbate gendered conflicts between minority and majority groups about gendered rights¹².

Andreassen R. in the book of “The Mass Media’s Construction of Gender, Race, Sexuality and Nationality” (2005) writes that lack of adequate approach to migrant women’s integration denies migrant women’s autonomy and agency because they are perceived as potential victims of their own culture and religion. The tension exists between the patriarchal control of migrant women and the Nordic gender-equality model on the level of their everyday lives. The study shows that the existed conflicts about gender equality are generational and dynamic. The changes are contradictory because the young generations simultaneously live with the own traditional gender roles and share Nordic ideals about gender equality. These changes influences on the expectations of women’s and children’s freedom.

Mala Htun (2004) also raises problems related to the variables gender and ethnicity in the Nordic countries. She suggests that while gender tends to be “crosscutting”, ethnicity tends to be “coinciding”. While women and men belong to all political parties, members of ethnic groups often belong to one¹³.

What distinguishes Danish majority women with a similar background, as well as from majority of ethnic minority women, is their political activism and strong wish to make a difference in politics. This has arguably enabled them to successfully bridge the tensions in their daily lives and to negotiate actively between two cultures — an individualist majority culture and a more collectivist family-oriented minority culture. Their collectivist family norms and strong family attachment set them apart from similar majority women, but they constitute a close connection with many groups of minority women¹⁴.

The followings should be taken into account in tackling the tensions between gender equality and cultural diversity:

- Ethnically minoritised women suffer from a combination of gendered and ethnic forms of political exclusion, and special measures are needed to redress this problem.
- Women across the countries are quite similar in their views on representation. Many minority women want to be represented by a woman, preferably by another minority woman, but it does not have to be somebody of their own ethnic background.
- Gender quotas are accepted, but not ‘ethnic quotas’.
- Measures other than formal quotas might be relevant, and the measures needed might not be the same for old national minorities as for new immigrants¹⁵.

Intersections of Gender and Ethnicity (Muslim case)

Discrimination is a major obstacle in the way of integration of minorities. When immigrants are not treated as equals, it is difficult for them to feel at home in the Nordic countries. The other set of problems connected with culture is more difficult to tackle politically. There is no political party that proclaims that it is against equal treatment of immigrants and the rest of the population though the gap between theories to practice can be considerable.

The great differences in the levels of integration and social participation exist among immigrant women in the Scandinavian countries especially who come from non-urbanized areas (majority who have Muslim backgrounds) and many women and girls are unemployed and live isolated in their homes even if they are born in the Scandinavian countries. These immigrant women who remain non-integrated not only into mainstream society but also face discrimination in the minority group. Only the integration of gender perspective into Nordic legislation can help immigrant women equality and include them in the Nordic societies¹⁶.

Muslim women were often victims of multiple discrimination on grounds of gender and religion. Muslim women, however, are a flagrant example of a group that faces multiple discrimination, for instance on grounds such as legal status, ethnic origin, race, religion, religious clothing, and so on. “Muslim women are, for example, subject to prejudice not only because of their religion but also because of their gender and, quite often, their migration background. Many of their difficulties in finding employment or housing are linked to their choice to wear a headscarf. ECRI has noted that multiple discrimination is rarely monitored”¹⁷.

According to Harald Runblom the greatest cultural challenge to the Nordic countries concerns Islam and the immigration from Muslim countries. Referring to (Gustavsan Goran, 1981) Swedish report on various religious groups from the beginning of the 1960s the author claims that there was nothing to speak about Muslims because the immigration of Muslims is a new phenomenon but some single individuals came earlier. Later on North Africans, Palestinians, Libanese, Muslim Indians from Uganda, as well as smaller groups from other Asian and African countries have arrived. During the 1970s Iranian immigrants, escaping the regime of the Shah came Sweden and Denmark¹⁸.

Serious inequality accusations specifically directed towards Islam and Muslims. In the 2001 debate MP Egil Møller (DPP) implied that by letting “many Muslims” enter Denmark the conditions for gender equality are worsening. In addition, a parliamentary debate concerning sex discrimination and Muslim men was raised by four Danish People’s Party MPs in 2004, as they were worried that ethnic majority women, “Danish women,” are exposed to increasing levels of discrimination and harassment from Muslim boys and men¹⁹.

Their discrimination is based on their gender, their family, communities and society; victims of discrimination based on their religion, or due to Islamophobia; victims of gender-based violence, such as so-called “honor crimes”, forced marriages, marital rape, female genital mutilation; and as victims of oppressive traditions, such as the obligation to wear the headscarf or the integral veil.

Muslims are not active in the field of politics. Muslims and people from ethnic minorities are inadequately represented at governmental or parliamentary level in all the countries discussed here; and women from these groups are even more underrepresented. It is often the case that ethnic minority concerns are represented by men, feminism and gender concerns by white women, while women from minority communities are required to choose between their gender and their ethnic/religious identities, with few channels to empower them to speak for themselves and articulate a multi-dimensional or hyphenated identity. Muslims and people from ethnic minorities are inadequately represented at governmental or parliamentary level in all the countries discussed here; and women from these groups are even more underrepresented. It is often the case that ethnic minority concerns are represented by men, feminism and gender concerns by white women, while women from minority communities are required to choose between their gender and their ethnic/religious identities, with few channels to empower them to speak for themselves and articulate a multi-dimensional or hyphenated identity²⁰.

Many Muslim immigrants to Norway (around 70,000) have another mother tongue than Norwegian: There are also factors such as way of life, fundamental

values, habits and customs that separate a number of immigrant groups from most ethnic Norwegians. Many come from strongly male-dominated societies where men decide over women and fathers over children. These values, which dominate in many parts of the world, come into sharp conflict with the Norwegian ideal of equality. Many would say that Norway is obsessed with equality, which must make it even more confusing for immigrants to experience that they do not get the equal treatment they have a right to.

Many of those who were born of immigrant parents and grew up in Norway are now young adults. Several of them have made positive contributions to society, as politicians, debaters, writers, program leaders in television, etc. Among immigrants themselves opinions are divided on which integration policy is best. There are both modernists who advocate equality for women and traditionalists who insist on continued adherence to the age-old values.

Studies indicate that many of this generation, not unexpectedly, want to get the best of both worlds: personal freedom and treatment as equals in Norwegian society but also security through the cultural heritage of their parents and their country of origin. Many continue to be practicing Muslims. A balance must be struck between the right to equal treatment and the right to be different if integration is to work. The law stipulates that all those living in Norway are to have an equal right to work and education and few in Norway openly defend differential treatment.

Stemming from Denmark's touting of its gender equality narrative and efforts, it tends to be the common view that ethnic minority women, specifically those of Islamic faith, are suppressed and victimized. This view point does a few things. First, it propels the view that Danish and inunigrant cultures are irreconcilably different due to differing gender equality norms. It also criminalizes minorities as culturally violent. Finally, this view sets up ethnic minority woman as a vulnerable demographic with specific needs for outreach.

What makes the group of political activists different from other migrant women is their political activism and leadership of voluntary organizations as well as their ambitions to influence political institutions. In Denmark migrants gained the right to vote in local elections in 1983 and while they are relatively well represented in local municipalities. Research indicates that especially migrant women are under-represented in voluntary organizations, public debates and political institutions. Many activists experience a feeling of powerlessness, because they do not have a voice in the public debate. They encounter the multiple difficulties when they enter the public sphere both as individual women in relation to minority cultures and as minority women in relation to the major

culture. The difficulties are not only connected to the oppressive political system and negative political discourse, but also rooted in the norms and practice of minority cultures. Turkish women have difficulties to enter politics, especially because of the media's role in politics because if you enter politics you should be independent, educated, strong. They need to be able to stand up for themselves towards the critical Danes but also to defend themselves vis-à-vis their own culture. This is difficult balance and it frightens many Turkish women from entering politics²¹.

As result, Denmark has a number of different domestic violence programs that emphasize statistics showing that ethnic minority women are the greatest victims of domestic violence in Denmark²².

Sååmi (Såpmi) case

Starting in the 1980s, Norway undertook a dramatic change in its policy, acknowledging that the Norwegian state is founded on the territory of two peoples, Norwegian and Sååmi, and that the latter have a special right to cultural protection. A Sååmi Parliament was established in 1989 and Article 110a of the Norwegian Constitution states: "It is possible the responsibility of the authorities of the State to create conditions enabling the Sååmi people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life"²³.

The two largest groups in the Sámi Parliament, the National Alliance of Norwegian Sámi (NSR) and the Norwegian Labor Party, took female representation very seriously in the nomination process. In many constituencies, women were nominated as first or second candidates on the ballots. In some places there were actually women in both first and second places.

Tove Skotvedt writes in the article "*Sami: The indigenous Peoples of Norway*" that with population of approximately 40.000, the Sååmi people represent a minority with a unique status. Oslo, 2.000 kilometers away from the Sååmi homeland, represents the largest "Sååmi community" with approximately 5.000 Sååmi. They never see the authentic Sååmi peoples' traditional costumes and hear their speaking language. According to the author Norwegianization policy of Sååmi people is a black spot in the history of Norway although this country is known as a country with long humanitarian and democratic traditions, fostering people like Fridtjof Nansen, known worldwide as a great explorer and helper of refugees. How could this racist behavior from Norwegian authorities be explained²⁴.

Unlike women in many other indigenous or traditional societies in the world, Sååmi women historically were regarded as equal to men, dynamic characterized

by a symmetrical complementarity of domestic roles, and tasks. As a result, Sáámi women were independent and possessed power and control over certain domains. Often these spheres were domestic and private, but in some cases they were also economic. Traditionally, reindeer-herding women in particular were often in charge of their family economies²⁵. Moreover, it was customary practice for women and men to own separate properties. Skolt Sáámi women, for example, traditionally owned everything that they prepared and made, including clothing for their husbands. Women and men also managed their own loans.

Historically, Sáámi society was organized locally by the extended family system called the *siida*. Each *siida* had its own tribunal to look after such matters as hunting and fishing disputes and disputes over territory between two *siidas*. The *siida* system was the early model for Sáámi self-determination, a freedom that was, however, ignored and gradually erased by the colonizing states.

Patriarchal ways of thinking and laws have changed traditional gender roles in indigenous societies in many ways. This can be seen, for example, in current structural inequality within traditional economies, particularly reindeer herding. Sáámi women have been pushed to the margins of reindeer herding for several decades. Particularly since 1945, government policies have made Sáámi women invisible in the livelihood in which they had always played a prominent role. In many cases, these policies have erased women's traditionally held right of reindeer ownership. In official records, reindeer-owning Sáámi women have been registered, since 1978, under their husbands' names, thereby losing their membership in the organizational unit for reindeer herding. This act has had ramifications ranging from who receives subsidies and grants to the status and recognition of women within a livelihood that is often considered one of the central markers of Sááminess and Sáámi identity²⁶.

According to Sáámi customary law, women and men inherited on an equal basis; it was also common for a Sáámi widow to move back to her own family and community, taking her property with her (Balto 1997). Further, Erik Solem ([1933] 1970) proposes that Sáámi naming customs and terminology indicate a relatively strong matrilineal and matrilocal tradition. This does not mean, however, that patrilineal practices did or do not exist in Sáámi society, nor can Solem's findings be considered proof of the equal status of Sáámi women in contemporary society²⁷.

Referring to Asta Balto (1997) Eva Maagerø and Birte Simonaen point out that there were significant differences between boys and girls in the upbringing situation. They were both offered the same freedom and close contact with

parents' work. But they were normally trained in different skills. Girls were kept near the house or the *lavvo* as participants in cooking and handicrafts, while boys were hunting, marking tools and taking care of the reindeer. The women had a strong position, because their activities were as necessary as the men's for the survival of the family²⁸.

In the case of Sáámi women, it has resulted in the loss of both their status and visibility in their livelihood and in policies regulating it. This has led to changes in reindeer-herding activities, which in turn has radically reshaped communal work practices and introduced a new, gendered division of labor.

Today, Sáámi enjoy both redistribution and recognition, unlike the fate of many aboriginal peoples elsewhere. It is worth to say that this is redistributive justice. But most significantly, the two forms of justice did not take place before the policy of cultural assimilation had born fruit. As is the case with women, successful assimilation can therefore be posited as the preliminary for redistribution and recognition²⁹.

Developing strategies to support gender equality policy for ethnic minority

Although, ethnic minority associations in the Nordic countries are very critical of the under-representation of minority groups in Scandinavian decision-making bodies, they do not see quotas or other legal mechanisms as the right way to go. Rather political parties should be targeted as being responsible for ethnically just gender balanced lists. Gender is also given priority at the expense of ethnicity.

The adoption of quotas or reserved seats in political decision-making bodies will better reflect the diversity of the population. These rights are seen as temporary 'political affirmative action' measures to redress the oppression or systematic disadvantages that these groups experience and to provide them with access to full inclusion in political assemblies.

First, it is a democratic challenge for the political system to give minority women equal citizenship rights, recognition and influence in their daily life and in politics. Second, it is a gender-political challenge to respect the equal values and cultural norms of minority women and their search for their own ways to emancipation and to support them in developing strategies able to bridge between majority norms and the values of minorities concerning family norms and gender equality³⁰. Finally, feminist scholarship needs to rethink the Nordic gender equality agenda of state feminism and women-friendliness. The analytical potentials of state feminism and women-friendly policies are challenged by

increased diversity among women and among men, not only according to gender and class but also an increasingly according to race/ethnicity, religion and nationality in relation to forms of activism and political priorities. This requires negotiations and reformulations of some of the key policies, strategies and normative foundations. The Scandinavian societies have emphasized social and gender equality as key normative principles, and there is a strong democratic norm about political representation according to class and gender. They are still important, but from a perspective of intersectionality, they must be balanced with the equally important principle to represent immigrants and minorities and to recognize cultural diversity, including diversity among women in terms of gender equality norms and family forms. January, 2008.

Two new challenges have appeared in the past thirty years; responding to the needs of women seeking to combine careers with families and integrating non-European immigrants into the social and economic mainstream. Much progress has been made on gender issues, but the immigration/integration issues remain highly controversial. Finally the fundamental economic issue- can the Nordic countries afford their generous welfare states — remains open.

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