

Workshop 2: Gender equality, nationalism and welfare:
Intersectional contestations and the politics of belonging

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Nordic Nationalism, Gender Equality and the Politics of Belonging

Abstract

The Nordic countries are often believed to belong to the same welfare and gender regimes with a strong tradition for universal social rights and gender equality. This is the basis of the positive evaluations of the potentials for social equality, welfare and gender regimes by influential scholars like Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) and Sylvia Walby (2009). Globalization, increased mobility and migration represent major challenges to universal welfare states and the Nordic version of Social Democracy, which have played a major role in these welfare regimes. Nordic research suggests that there are indeed limits to welfare, and that in spite of the differences in immigration/integration discourse and policies these countries face similar challenges to include immigrant minorities as equal citizens on the labour market, in democracy and society (Brochman & Hagelund 2010). From this perspective one key question is whether the Nordic welfare states still represents an alternative to the liberal and Conservative welfare and gender regimes as once suggested by Gøsta Esping-Andersen.

The Nordic countries are in international rankings still included as some of the most gender equal societies in the world (see EIGE's Gender Equality Index). In spite of this potential, feminist scholars suggest that immigration and multiculturalism present major normative and conceptual challenges to address multiple inequalities in power and resources according not only to class and gender but also to processes of immigration and related categories of ethnicity and race (Melby et.al. 2008; Siim & Skjeie 2008). The paper aims to analyse the challenge from multiple inequalities to the Nordic welfare and gender regimes and discuss the potentials and limits of the Nordic approach to equality. Generally the question is to what extent Nordic welfare and (gender) equality politics are characterized by a problematic form of nationalism characterized by exclusive solidarity biased towards the native populations. The paper first explores the recent feminist critique of Nordic gender equality policies for its 'class and ethnicity' bias (i.e. NOU 2011:18 and NOU 2012:15). Then it discusses recent expressions of resistance to gender equality policies, including the mainstreaming of gender (cf. Nora, vol. 21, No. 4 2013). The conclusion reflects on the present potentials and limits to redesign inclusive equality policies based on multiple inequalities.