

EUROPEAN GENDER REGIMES AND POLICIES

Comparative Perspectives

SEVIL SÜMER

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ASHGATE

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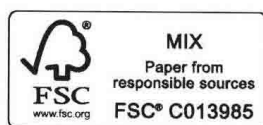
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EUROPEAN GENDER REGIMES AND POLICIES

For my daughter, Selma Sümer Mutlu

Preface

The writing process of this book has been a rewarding and exhausting episode. Even though many people supported me in this project, the actual production of the manuscript has necessarily been a lonely experience. This book coincided with two important changes in my life: My transition to motherhood and the decision of co-residing in Turkey and Norway by commuting between Bergen and Istanbul. These transformations and this book project have interacted and marked my life in the past three years.

Many thanks to the Department of Sociology at the University of Bergen for providing the institutional support for this project. My colleagues in Bergen have always been supportive and enthusiastic about this book. Thanks to Kari Wærness for her support throughout my whole academic life in Bergen and for her valuable comments on parts of this book. Many thanks to Liv Syltevik and Bente Nicolaysen for their care and encouragement. Thanks to the former Chair, Ole Johnny Olsen, for giving me responsibility for the course The Scandinavian Welfare Model and Gender Relations. My experience with that course since 2002 has been one of the major pillars of this book. Thanks to the current Chair, Olav Korsnes, for supporting this book project and offering me the flexibility I needed to teach and write in two countries.

Special thanks to Ann Nilsen for including me in the *Transitions* research team as a postdoctoral fellow. My experience in this EU funded research project has been another major building block of this book. I acknowledge the contribution of the whole *Transitions* team for the data and analysis presented in Chapter 5. Many thanks to Suzan Lewis, Janet Smithson, Julia Brannen and Maria das Dorres Guerreiro for their cooperation.

My family in Istanbul deserves a special thank you for bearing with my book obsession and providing me the back-up and care I needed in the whole process. A special thank you to my mother, Alev, and my aunt, Dilek, for taking such good care of my daughter. This book is dedicated to my little daughter Selma and I hope that she will not need to dwell on gender equality concerns, as much as I did, when she grows up. And finally, thank you Erkan for believing in the importance of this book and for reminding me as well when I occasionally drifted away.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The traditional gender contract is dissolving and is being replaced by a variety of new arrangements between women and men with respect to the gendered division of paid and unpaid work. This is taking place throughout Europe, although with varying form and pace. The last three decades witnessed significant changes in women's participation patterns in the public sphere, producing—and being produced by—transformations in European family practices. The male breadwinner/female housewife family model is becoming a minority practice, while the dual-earner family model is increasingly becoming the model family underpinning various national welfare state and European Union (EU) policies. The vision of social inclusion promoted by the EU involves, at least on paper, a democratic family and a more balanced division of working and caring among women and men.

A fairer distribution of paid and unpaid work is increasingly acknowledged as indispensable in achieving gender equality and social inclusion. Supporting parents in reconciling their work and family responsibilities is stated as a major goal on the European social agenda. Yet, the progress in this field is slow and marked by steps both forward and backwards.

Women's and men's behaviour and expectations related to their participation patterns in education, politics and the labour market have been changing rapidly. Fewer women are prepared for a life-long commitment to home making and more men are questioning the definition of their masculinity only as related to their breadwinning functions. However, structural patterns based on traditional gendered assumptions, allocating different rights and tasks to women and men continue to prevail. Contemporary women and men are facing both new challenges and traditional constraints throughout their life courses.

Despite important developments, comprehensive gender equality is a goal that remains on paper in many European countries. I conceptualize gender equality as a situation in which women have a fair deal concerning their life chances; a social condition in which women and men are not constrained by expectations and structures assuming a certain biological trait. Gender equality is a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon and there is not one straightforward formula that would work in all social contexts. In the framework of this book, the emphasis is on gender relations in the labour market and work–family reconciliation. Other important gender-equality issues, such as violence against women and trafficking, are necessarily bracketed out. The focus on working

parents is guided by the insight that inequalities become especially visible when mothers (re)enter the labour market. This is in no way meant as a privileging of heterosexual couples in relation to other forms of family practices and intimate relationships. The gendered division of work, both paid and unpaid, has been very slow to change and continues to disadvantage women. The labour markets and intimate relationships are organized by differing, and contrasting, principles and the demands of workplaces and families tend to clash. Reconciling work and family pose different problems for men and women and this is gradually acknowledged as a central issue with respect to social inclusion and gender-equality at the level of the EU policy.

This book will focus on these issues with a comparative perspective. It has a European perspective but limits its in-depth analysis to the Scandinavian region and case studies from the UK and Portugal. It tries to present a general view of changing European Union policies on gender and how these operate in selected local settings. Three overarching questions guide the analysis and discussions in this book: What are the key “public issues” and “private troubles” (cf. Mills 1959) of our times with respect to changing gender relations, family practices and welfare state policies? How can we analyse the relationship between the gendered division of paid work and unpaid work with a comparative perspective? Why is there a growing interest in work–family reconciliation at the EU policy level?

A brief biographical account will help to place the production process and the themes of this book in context.

A Biographical Frame

This book stems from my experience as a researcher and lecturer who has been interested in comparative studies of gender relations, family patterns and welfare state policies with a European focus. My specialization in the field of sociology has been based on comparative studies of different scope. This comparative orientation is related to my personal experience of belonging to two countries, Turkey and Norway, and co-residing in two cities at the reverse margins of Europe, namely Bergen and Istanbul.

I completed my first Bachelors degree at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul and travelled to Norway in 1990 with a scholarship for a Masters degree in sociology. Since the day of my arrival, I have been engaged in observing and contemplating the institutional and cultural differences between Turkey and Norway. Despite the similarities in urban living arrangements and university environments, certain areas were strikingly different. For example, almost half of the members of the Norwegian Parliament were women, and gender issues ranked high on the political agenda. When I had to decide the subject of my Masters thesis in sociology, the

choice was easy: I would study women's societal positions in Norway and Turkey comparatively (Sümer 1996). My positioning in the two countries as concurrently an insider and an outsider was the essential factor that enabled me to mobilize the "sociological imagination" (Mills 1959) to compare the dynamics of these two societies.

A key finding of that first comparative study, which was based on qualitative interviews with women with higher education, was that Turkish and Norwegian women conceive gender differently (Sümer 1998). While Norwegian interviewees revealed an awareness of gender as a key social category, most Turkish interviewees did not think of gender as a major determinant in their lives and displayed weaker "gendered" identities, conceptualized as a significant sense of belonging to the category of "women" and an awareness of gender as a major social divide.¹ Yet, despite clear differences in terms of their gendered experiences, young Turkish and Norwegian women with a university education, expected to face similar problems related to the conflicting demands of motherhood and employment and to gendered division of domestic and care work. The available solutions for these problems, however, were fundamentally different in each country. The public support offered by the welfare state in Norway—especially the long parental leave; a focus on fathers' leave; and subsidized day care institutions—helped women in combining their earning and caring commitments. On the other hand, the traditional family relations and the availability of affordable household help enabled modern Turkish women to combine employment and motherhood without challenging the conventional role patterns within families (Sümer 1998: 124).

In light of these findings concerning young and educated women, I formulated the research questions for my doctoral project. I continued to investigate the complex relationships between gender, family practices, and state policies through comparative analyses of historical developments, statistical trends, official documents, and face-to-face interviews. Social practices of a specific group—dual-earner, professional couples—formed the basis of the comparative approach in that extended study (Sümer 2002).

My interest in the field of comparative welfare state and social policy analysis focussing on gender was initiated by empirical work. While I was intending to compare Turkey and Norway in light of different theories of late-modernity and individualization, in the course of empirical analysis, the theories of welfare regimes and gender regimes turned out to be more suitable and informative. Theoretically, I moved in to the field of comparative welfare state and gender policy

1 In that study, I underlined the importance of using the term "gendered identity" instead of the more familiar term "gender identity" to imply a recognition of plurality and the tension between the term "woman" as a theoretical construct and "the realities of 'women' who may or may not share a unified gender identity" (Marshall 1994: 112).

studies and conceptualized Turkey and Norway as representing different “gender policy regimes.” The comparative analysis showed that the prevailing ideology underlying the family policies in Turkey could be labelled “familialistic” since the assumption that childcare and eldercare can and should be met within the family (i.e. by women) led to low public provisions. Norway, on the other hand, could be characterized as an “individualistic” and “de-familializing” gender policy regime, since the state provision for childcare and eldercare was increasingly based on the assumption that both women and men will participate in paid employment (Sümer 2004: 363).

These earlier comparative studies of Turkey and Norway formed one of the pillars of the intellectual base of this book. Another is related to my teaching experience at the University of Bergen. In 2003, I started teaching a course with the title *The Scandinavian Welfare Model and Gender Relations* at the University of Bergen. I planned to structure the theoretical framework of the course around the conceptual scheme of Gøsta Esping-Andersen and the feminist critique of his work. In the process of forming the course syllabus, I collected different articles and book chapters in this field and realized the lack of an update book bringing together both the recent feminist assessments and Esping-Andersen’s emerging response to this critique. From my class-room experience, I recognized that presenting this dialogue between Esping-Andersen’s original comparative framework and selected feminist critique has a pedagogical value and provides a good starting point for an in-depth study of the field of comparative gender analysis.

Another major building block in the production of this book is my experience as a postdoctoral researcher in a large international research project funded by the Fifth Framework Program of the European Union with the title *Transitions: Gender, Parenthood and the Changing European Workplace* (2003-2005). This project enabled me to extend the scope of my comparative approach and study the dynamics of gender relations with a specific focus on work–family reconciliation, in different European countries (Sümer et al. 2008). The major findings of this international project and an in-depth analysis of work–family experiences in Norway, the UK and Portugal is the theme of Chapter 5 in this book.

Upon completing my postdoctoral project, I started planning the possibilities of combining working and living in Turkey and Norway. After the 15 years I had spent in Norway, during which I kept my ties to my home country both professionally and personally, I was feeling attached to both the city of Bergen and Istanbul. In the spring of 2006, I started co-residing in the two cities, working part-time in both countries. I spent 3 months in a beautiful old house in Arnavutköy by Bosphorus in which the proposal for this book was produced.

A key factor that influenced the production process of this book is my own transition to motherhood. The writing inevitably came to a halt several months

following the birth of my daughter in January 2007. I took on the work with the manuscript in the summer of 2007 from my home office in Istanbul. I recognized that my perspective on the gender issues at hand was both widened and slightly altered based on my personal, first-hand experience with motherhood and work–family reconciliation. This, I believe, enabled me to analyse work–family policies and practices with a sharpened insider’s perspective.

Another particular feature of this book is its perspective on European Union policies. As a sociologist belonging to two countries that both have a unique relation to the EU, I sought to develop a standpoint that combined an insider and outsider view. Turkey and Norway are on the reverse margins of the EU both geographically and symbolically. Norway declined to become a member of the EU following a referendum in 1994 and a majority of women voted against membership, fearing the loss of the already established policies on gender equality. Yet, the relationship of Norway to the EU is characterized by close contact and cooperation through binding economic and social agreements. An important field of cooperation has been gender equality and the Norwegian government has officially declared that cooperation on gender research is a priority area (the Norwegian government’s European Policy Platform). Norway participates in various EU funded research projects and implements a range of EU policies internally. Turkey, on the other hand, is a distressing candidate country, facing a massive resistance within the EU and a rise in EU-scepticism internally. A more positive approach to the influence of EU on gender issues characterize the general opinion in Turkey. Major women’s organizations in particular see this as an important opportunity to bring gender equality concerns on to the political agenda. My research and personal experience in these two specific contexts influence my approach to the EU gender policies with a view from the margins, while my professional experience as a researcher in an EU funded project provides the necessary insight from within.

Before proceeding with a further contextualization of the theme of this book by providing some facts and figures from the wider Europe, I will first provide definitions for the key concepts at hand. This will also enable me to position the theoretical perspective applied in this book in the general field of sociology and social theory.

Definitions of Key Concepts

As a first step in clarifying the sociological concepts applied in this book, I visit a key dualism underpinning most classical theories, namely agency vs. structure. Following Anthony Giddens’ formulation in his now outdated, but still influential, structuration theory, I conceptualize individuals as “knowledgeable agents” who have the capacity of reflecting on their actions, though this knowledgeability is always bounded by the “unconscious” on the one hand, and by “unacknowledged

conditions” and “unintended consequences” of action, on the other (Giddens 1984: 282). This conception of agency informs the understanding of “structure” as not something external to individuals, but as “the *medium and outcome* of the reproduction of social practices which it recursively organizes” (Giddens 1984: 25, my emphasis). I believe this clarification is an important first step in any sociological analysis of the relationships between individuals and structures, helping one to avoid the traps of voluntarism and determinism.

In the context of late modernity and high capitalism, European social agents are divided by the still powerful social variables of class, gender, age and ethnicity. Keeping an eye on all these mechanisms, this book focuses on one of them, namely gender, to contribute with empirically driven theorizations.

Gender

Gender refers to socio-culturally constructed components attached to each sex and a basic insight of feminist theory is that these social definitions of biological sex have an important part in organizing social activity. Gender is a concept that is developed and brought to the centre of social theory by feminist thought. It is actually misleading to refer to feminist theory in singular since feminists do not form a homogeneous group. They are divided concerning the way they approach questions related to women, their natures, relations to men and reasons for their disadvantageous positions. There are many classifications within the feminist thought which makes talking about “feminisms” viable (Humm 1992, Hekman 1990). However a usage in singular is instrumental in the feminist political project in which finding common denominators to unite and mobilize women is a crucial task.

The most important advance in feminist theory is that the existence of gender relations has been problematized and that gender can no longer be treated as a simple, natural fact (Flax 1990). Feminist theory seeks ultimately to understand the gendered nature of virtually all social relations, institutions and processes. In feminist approaches, gender relations are not viewed as either natural or immutable. Rather, the gender-related status quo is viewed as the product of socio-cultural and historical forces which have been created, and are constantly re-created by social agents, and therefore can potentially be changed by human agency (Wallace 1989: 10). In this book, gender is conceptualized as a category of sociological analysis referring to manifold processes and relations that generate and sustain structured inequalities between women and men.

This book has a general feminist perspective in which the analysis of the institutional mechanisms by which women end up being less visible in the main decision making and economic bodies and consequently possessing less power (and capital) is specified as a major task. This analysis must be carried out with

a simultaneous attention given to divisions of labour both inside and outside the households. Another key task is dissolving the public/private dichotomy and revealing the hidden mechanisms that function to dismiss gender issues from the public agenda by treating them as private problems.

This standpoint endorses a feminist approach that is attentive to historical and cultural diversity, which does not “falsely universalize features of the theorist’s own era, society, culture, class, sexual orientation and ethnic or racial group” (Fraser and Nicholson 1990: 27). The focus is on the historical creation of the gendered division of labour and an articulation of everyday experience to historically situated socioeconomic and cultural formations (cf. Marshall 1994).

The social vision embraced by this theoretical stand conceives gender as a key social variable recognizing that “the lives of women and men are cross-cut by several other salient social divisions, including class, ‘race’—ethnicity, sexuality and age” (Fraser 2000). It is attentive to massive variation among groups of women and men. The vision for change demands that social life should not be organized “assuming” a certain type of gender difference and that the sex one is born in should not be a major force determining one’s life course and chances. It conceptualizes gender equality as a matter of justice, believing that change is possible through collective action. It has an interest in influencing policy making, believing that “the point is to change the world, not simply to redescribe ourselves or reinterpret the world yet again” (Marx, quoted in Hartsock 1990). In this perspective, the welfare state is seen as a major stakeholder and a possible partner in the struggle for this vision.

This note takes us to a clarification of the terms welfare state and the family as two major sites of the construction of gender and power relations. A detailed account of how these spheres interact will be further developed in Chapter 2.

Welfare States and Gender Regimes

The conceptualization of the welfare state in this book is a broad one, underlining the ways states intervene to reallocate life chances, “as a (re)distributor of money, time and opportunities as they play out across the life course” (Daly and Rake 2003: 41).

The concept of “social rights” as formulated by T. H. Marshall (1964) is useful in understanding the bases of the modern welfare state. Marshall had distinguished three types of rights associated with the growth of citizenship: Civil rights refer to the rights of the individual in law, like freedom of speech and religion, right to own property. Political rights refer to rights to participate in elections and to stand for public office. Social rights refer to the right of every individual to enjoy a certain minimum standard of economic welfare and security and include such rights as

sickness and unemployment benefits. In most societies social rights have been the last to develop based on the achievement of civil and political rights. The broadening of social rights is the foundation of what has come to be called the welfare state in Western European societies since the Second World War (Marshall 1964).

A basic distinction can be made between marginal and institutional welfare states (Esping-Andersen and Korpi 1987: 40). While the marginal model is premised on a commitment to market sovereignty, the institutional model sees the welfare of the individual as the responsibility of the social collective. The future of the welfare state in Europe has been a contested terrain. As the developments in the social policy agenda of the European Union demonstrate the European welfare state developed as a distinctive solution to the problem of securing social integration within competitive capitalism (Taylor-Gooby 2001).² The recent decades witnessed many arguments claiming that the welfare states in Europe would converge in a “race to bottom” (Greve 2007). Several studies show a type of convergence, but not in terms of less social spending. On the contrary, most of the traditionally weak welfare states of the Mediterranean region had to level up their social transfers as a result of EU legislation. Despite worries and predictions, comparative analyses continue to show that welfare states in Europe are not contracting (Taylor-Gooby 2001).

This book is concerned with analysing the major policies influencing gender relations in European welfare states. The state is conceptualized as the central institutionalization of gendered power and each state is seen as having a definable “gender regime” that is linked to the wider “gender order” of the society (Connell 1990). A gender regime is defined as a complex of rules and norms that create established expectations about gender relations, allocating different tasks and rights to women and men (Sainsbury 1999: 5). Gender-sensitive welfare state analysis is built on the recognition of the interaction of gender and class and is linked to a more general critique of the dominant conception of citizenship that ignores gendered processes (O’Connor 1996).

Welfare state’s activities in relation to gender is wide reaching, including family, employment, population and housing policies; organization of mass education and regulation of sexual behaviour. The state is therefore a focus for the mobilization of interests that is central to gender politics (Connell 1990, 2002). It is also vital to underline that the state is constantly changing, gender relations are historically dynamic and consequently the state’s position in gender politics is not fixed.

Family policy is a field in which the welfare state’s ability to intervene into gender relations becomes unusually visible and the public/private dichotomy comes to the fore.

2 These developments will be reviewed and discussed in Chapter 4.

Family Practices

Transformations in families and gender relations moved to the centre of social theory from early 1990s onwards. As powerfully put by a key figure in the field: “Among all the changes going on in the world, none is more important than those happening in our personal lives—in sexuality, relationships, marriage and family” (Giddens 1999: 51).

In this book the plurality in the form of families is recognized and family relations are conceptualized as “sets of practices which deal...with ideas of parenthood, kinship, and marriage and the expectations and obligations which are associated with these practices” (Morgan 1996: 11). The term “family practices” conveys a focus on both everyday activities and regularities and it stresses the active rather than the passive or static (Smart and Neale 1999). Family practices include various activities, such as endless negotiations between men and women centred on the housework, decisions concerning if and when to have children and how to arrange their care (Sümer 2002). As David Morgan stresses, “the Janus-faced character of everyday life—looking to both self and society at the same time—is seen or constructed in its clearest form in the case of family practices” (Morgan 1996: 193). This conceptualization enables one to stress that paid work constitutes part of family practices, since it influences the organization of care responsibilities, and provides a fruitful nexus for studying the interactions between the private and public spheres.

In this book, the changes in families are seen as resulting from a basic incongruity in the design of modernity that prescribes the public-private dualism and a traditional gendered division of labour. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) have convincingly argued, the prescribed gender roles are the basis of industrial society, and not some traditional relic which can easily be dispensed with:

Without a distinction between male and female roles there would be no nuclear family, and without nuclear family there would be no bourgeois society with its typical pattern of life and work...On the one hand a wage-earner presupposes a house-worker and production for the market presumes the existence of the nuclear family. In that respect industrial society is dependent on the unequal roles of men and women. On the other hand these inequalities contradict modern thinking and give rise to more and more controversy as time goes on (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 24).

Transcending the Public/Private Dichotomy

A key task for a critical feminist perspective is to question and transcend the public/private duality. As Barbara Marshall (1994) argues a basic undertaking for