

Concluding Remarks

Dahl, Hanne Marlene; Keränen, Marja; Kovalainen, Anne

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Hanne Marlene Dahl, Marja Keränen and Anne Kovalainen

Concluding remarks

This book has focused on varieties of care in present day diversified Europe. If at times care has been seen as something personal, intimate, familial and private, the articles of the book display the fact that the idea of care can no longer exclusively be understood as personal and intimate, nor within a nation-state container, but needs a trans-national perspective encompassing broad and complex processes of Europeanization and globalization.

Care relations have existed both informally and formally, the latter being regulated at different levels of state through the municipalities, regions and nation-states, the former existing as interwoven into the lives of families and women and informal dependency relations of various kinds. Care relations have always been changing in time and space, being organized differently in various places and related to different ideological understandings. In that existence care relations have been part of the normalized structure of social life. Therefore the questions related to the changing nature of care cannot be understood detached from the contextual understandings, and understandings of the past, present and future of care work, the role of the state, the voluntary or the private sectors and the changing positions of the family. As argued in the introduction and shown in details throughout the articles, there cannot be one single idea of care relations and their arrangement throughout the European Union member states. There may be strong political rhetoric and a general political wish for this aim, but it is not backed up by research and analysis of the current situations throughout the member states, nor through comparative studies on a larger scale, focusing on structures, mechanisms, time-use and other features carving out the different valuations and solutions related to care.

Yet, attempts to find a common solution for a unified model and idea of the European welfare strategy have been considerable. In 2001, a working group submitted a report to the Belgian presidency of the EU, titled "A New Welfare Architecture for Europe" (Esping-Andersen et al., 2001). The report set out to solve the Gordian knot of "How to sustain Europe's normative commitments to social justice while aspiring to be a truly competitive force in the evolving knowledge economy". The group admitted that the report only was "at best, a very partial installment in what must be an ongoing, lengthy, and far more comprehensive project of reforming the European social model(s)" (Esping-Andersen et al., 2001, 2). The basic principles of the welfare architecture designed by the group were to start from three cornerstones of people's lives, childhood, work life and old age. (Esping-Andersen et al. 2001, 3).

How well do these aims presently meet the general ambition for a globally competitive European Union are yet to be seen, as many of the member states are struggling now with high public sector deficit and expenditure related debts and slow economic recovery from the global downturn of 2008. For many countries, the maintenance of the level of public expenditure – coverage for the cornerstones' in people's lives - and further public sector investments are seen as an economic 'cure' that has helped to ameliorate the worst outcomes of the recession. However, the overall growth of the elderly population, trends of lowering the retirement ages among the working population, and general lack of work force in the future public sector services are major problems and might weaken the general recovery. The global economic downturn from 2008 onwards has put severe pressures also to slim down public expenditure throughout the European Union member states. Even if welfare services and care arrangements are not solely economic questions and cannot be solved with money alone, the economic aspects of care go hand in hand with the practical arrangements of the care throughout the states.

Indeed, the questions and issues originally raised in this book have turned out to be much more complex than we imagined when starting this project. Many of the previously adept categorizations and theoretical base for research seem inadequate and need to be readjusted and critically re-evaluated. The problems discussed in relation to care and care arrangements no longer necessarily fit into available categorizations of the research fields in question, or they only get a bleak explanation through traditional analysis. The contemporary issues of care cannot be adequately discussed in terms of migration flows in neat categories of migration regimes, welfare regimes, and the push and pull factors causing those flows. Neither can these

problems be discussed solely in terms of 'old' welfare regimes and welfare state models of a stable nature. Furthermore, issues raised in this book cannot be discussed relying on European integration as an economic integration project that would leave member states with autonomous capacities for social redistribution and regulation of their own kinds.

While the original aim of the European integration process was to establish a single market and ascertain the free movement of goods, services and capital, the consequential free movement of labor opens up far more complicated issues. The aim of the EU internal migration policy was to secure access to a transnational labor force – this leading to a need for regulating the rights of this labor force in all member states. The need for reconciliation of care and paid work has also put gender equality fairly high on the European political agenda. This is clearly visible in the articles of this volume as well.

Strengthening women's employment and labor force participation has earlier been a social policy safety measure that has enhanced any private family economy, brought along economic efficiency, and guaranteed better living standard for families and kept social exclusion at bay. This is no longer the case. Due to many overlapping processes, the women's labor market reserve no longer 'exists' in many countries, and as part of modernization, individualistic life patterns blur the picture even more. While gender equality is seen as central to achieving high economic activity and high birth rates, it is the overly 'policy' related aspect that ignores the current life styles and multitude of life patterns where balancing the different requirements at the same time may not always be easy.

Even if originally driven by economic interests, the European Union has, during its development, come to deepen its understanding of integration from economic issues to politico-institutional and even some social issues, making it possible to discuss a future European citizenship. While the content of that citizenship may, in Marshall's terms, concern civil rights or political rights, the issue of social rights being included in European citizenship has at best been a vague and ambivalent project, if it ever has been 'a project' of its own right for citizenship only. Presently, with the idea of 'flexible citizenship' (Ong 1999, Kwok-bun 2005), it is more difficult for nation-states to equate nationality and citizenship as membership rights as defined on the basis of human rights, and on the basis of residence, no longer on basis of community or birth (Eder & Giesen 2001). And while many of us would agree with social issues being better solved on the nation-state level, separating different policy fields may not be that simple: advancing economic integration and free movement of labor indeed also has social and

cultural consequences. Those consequences may be different for member states sending or receiving labor, and they might be global in a sense that the questions of 'otherness', 'minority', 'cultural coherence' all come into the open as part of the process. The indeterminate nature of globalization means that outcomes may be different for the individual citizen – the actual people – moving house and country in search of employment and income. And they may still vary depending on situational factors where sending and receiving – the basic categories of migration studies – are no longer to stable locations but to rapidly changing and fluctuating, contingent positions.

Throughout the book we have argued that gender has a key position in defining the care, relating to the variety of care arrangements and social and political articulations of it. The outlook of the European Union has in many respects been egalitarian, seeking just regulation of the rights of women, the disabled and minority ethnic or faith groups. There is increasing regulation of member state activities for protection against discrimination on the basis of gender or ethnicity. There are also various action programs for opening up opportunities for marginalized citizens. The union has been active in establishing policies for gender mainstreaming (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000), and gender equality and gender mainstreaming have indeed been fairly high on the EU agenda. Now it seems that attempts to advance the dual breadwinner model may have ended up undermining the rights of e.g. migrant care workers, whether at grey markets, at homes in private employment or in public employment. Promotion of the free movement of the labor force within the EU may in fact have ended up in leaving thousands of children in Eastern European new member countries without parents (Gheaus, 2008). As family care in one location of the EU gets promoted, families at the other end are dissolved due to this promotion. The EU aims at guaranteeing civil, political and even social rights to the new Europeans, but which jobs are available for them?

The gradually advancing process of European integration has been an effort to establish a single market with free movement of goods, capital and labor. This advancing process of deepening integration has been paralleled with the enlargement of the union, at the same time requiring new member states to adapt to "Western" criteria of economic and politico-institutional arrangements in the union, but also bringing in more variety and "difference" in the palette of member states, coming from many kinds of traditions and societal arrangements, histories and historical experiences. At the same time as the EU is pushing the new member states to become neoliberal economies, a 'care chain' is developed between member states. The effects of this are many: new inequalities on the cost of labor market, inequalities in the

receiving countries, overall commercialization of intimate relationships, but also freedom of movement, mobility of the labor force, and possibly, even slow unification of the union. What possibly started as a project of equal opportunities may have ended up in the birth of new frictions and problems. In the turns taken between political and economic integration, Eastern European countries have come to provide the cheap labor force required in Western Europe in care services, and for industrial production the transfers to Eastern European countries have provided a cheaper expense structure. While enlargement was intended to be a process of democratization and the countries entering the EU were put to tests of necessary levels of democratization, this process can also be seen as a case of Western neo-colonial rule, setting western norms to be filled by the entering countries (see Melegh 2006).

Is there, then, need for a European care strategy? Would there be any possibility for a joint view on care at the European Union level? We do not know and do not necessarily wish to propose a solution to this question. However, we suggest that there is a need for an academic and a political debate that takes into consideration the sometimes conflicting interests of children and the elderly, women and men in the East and the West, the ethnic or religious groups of the various member states, carers and the cared for, whether in families or public institutions. It seems that issues of care might act as a Litmus test of outcomes of many conflicting policies.

Original attempts to develop a European social dimension have failed and are not likely to succeed in the foreseeable future. While originally deemed as fairly successful in regulating equal opportunity matters and promoting women's participation in the labor force, the market led process of integration leaves social protection and issues of democracy to the nation-states, and the nation-states no longer can be regarded as autonomous actors isolated from a global context (Fraser, 2008). The parallel process of enlargement has brought in countries with varied societal gender orders, first the Nordic countries, sometimes deemed to have been the predecessors of equality policies (Hernes, 1987), and later Eastern European countries with strong traditions of women's participation in the labor market, but in some cases failing economies and societal infrastructure. While one could assume that the division of functions between nation-states and EU-institutions is clear, or that the functions of the market and political regulation can be separated, none of these "divisions of labor" seem to hold in real life. Instead, they co-act in complicated and conflicting ways.

All societies have developmental possibilities in the process of transformation that is presently taking place in Europe and beyond. In that, Europe has a very special tradition to carry forward

that is at the core of the idea of the 'caring state', which is the idea of gender specificity, formal recognition of care, and strong emphasis on citizenship, equality and welfare. By identifying in this book the emerging problematic fields at the nexus of European states, care arrangements and gender, we hope to have set new research agendas and captured issues that call for political solutions in the future Europe, for the benefit of its citizens.