Gender and Citizenship: Problems of Exclusion and Inclusion in Europe

Introduction: Toward a Contextualized Theory of Citizenship

One of the main points is that there is no universal story about citizenship. In modern democracies, gender systems are dynamic concepts embedded in national histories, institutions and cultures. One of the objectives of the network “Gender and Citizenship: Social Exclusion and Social Exclusion in European Welfare States” (see appendix) has been to develop a gender perspective on the framework of citizenship confronting feminist rethinking of citizenship with the discourses and politics of women’s citizenship in different contexts. One main theme has been the interplay between political, social and civil rights, and the relations between social citizenship, political participation and power. In the paper I will use examples from my book to illustrate the different vocabularies and dynamics of gender and citizenship as well as the different processes of exclusion and inclusion of workers, mothers and citizens in different national contexts.

I ask first what does feminist approaches to citizenship have to offer to the framework of citizenship? Secondly, I ask what a gender sensitive model of citizenship looks like and discuss crucial questions concerning the interaction between discourses, institutions and agency using examples from a comparative study of France, Britain and Denmark (Siim, 2000). Thirdly, I give an overview of path dependencies and changes in women’s citizenship during the last 30 years and illustrate some of the shifts in the political meaning of gender with examples from France, Britain and Denmark. Finally, I discuss the new challenges to social and political inclusion of citizens posed by European integration, immigration and unemployment, as well as the promises connected with the new Social Democratic governments in France, Britain and Denmark.

1 The paper is inspired by debates and conclusions from the TSER project ‘Gender and Citizenship’ as well as by theoretical reflections and results of the comparative study of France, Britain and Denmark, in Siim (2000): Gender and Citizenship. Politics and Agency in France, Britain and Denmark, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The members of the network and the forthcoming book from the network is listed in appendix 1.

2 In the following the notion of citizenship refers both to a status, a practice and an identity. From an analytical perspective it is useful to differentiate between a vertical dimension designating the relation between the individual and the state, and a horizontal dimension designating the relations of citizens to each other.
1. Feminist Contributions to the Rethinking of Citizenship

Feminist scholarship has criticised liberal, republican and Social-democratic approaches to citizenship from a gender perspective. Liberalism is based upon the public/private divide, which is premised on individual freedom/right of citizens against the state and on private virtues. The feminist critique argues that one of the implications has been a tendency to exclude motherhood and care work from citizenship. Republicanism is also based upon a public/private divide, which in contrast to liberalism is premised on the political community, participation and public virtues. The feminist critique argues that one of the implications has been a tendency to exclude women and issues of everyday life from the public dialogue. Social Democracy is based upon social equality and on the universal citizen-worker model. The feminist critique argues that it has reproduced paternalism, because it is premised on a split between the citizen-worker and citizen-mother

What do the feminist theories and models of social and political inclusion have to offer? One influential model focuses on social inclusion of women citizens and family issues in social politics through “the politics of motherhood” (Pateman, 1988). Another more recent model has conceptualised “the right to be cared for and the right to care, e.g. for children and the elderly” as a way to re-integrate care work and family responsibilities in public life (Knijn and Kremer, 1997). There are two different models of political inclusion: One focuses on the inclusion of women and marginalised groups through “a politics of presence” in political institutions, e.g. gender quotas or parity (Phillips, 1995). The other model focuses on the inclusion of women and oppressed groups “from below” through a “politics of difference” e.g. voluntary associations in civil society (Young, 1990).

The feminist approaches to citizenship thus have different vocabularies of gender and citizenship, competing visions of the good citizen and strategies to include women in citizenship. The key concepts are contested, and the discussion is centred round three main issues: (a) equality and difference, (b) work and care, and (c) participation and power. I argue that the potential of the different feminist paradigms is the to establish the link between the political and social dimensions of citizenship and to place women’s concerns on the public agenda. The challenge is to avoid essentialism by including women’s agency in the deliberation about the common good without defining what are women’s substantive interests.

Carole Pateman’s analysis of women’s second-class citizenship based upon the public/private divide has been important for the feminist theory of democratic citizenship. The recent French debate about parity, i.e. perfect gender equality in representation, illustrates the ambivalence of Pateman’s vision of a ‘sexually differentiated’ citizenship that recognises biological sex as a basis for citizenship but ignores differences based on ethnicity and colour. From this
perspective, the critical question is whether a permanent institutionalisation of gender difference is possible without essentialist perspectives?

The *maternalist-communitarian approach* has conceptualised women’s *caring work* in the family and the object of feminist communitarianist models is to include caring as a central political value. The models are premised upon a normative assumption about the value of women’s caring responsibilities in the family, and for democracy. The idea rests on a belief that women have substantive interests “as women” based on their obligation to care for dependants. I find that the emphasis on caring as the key notion is problematic as a universal strategy, because it is often linked to essentialist divisions of male and female interests and identities. I suggest that there is a need to deconstruct the family and to differentiate between different kinds of care work, for children, the elderly and the handicapped and mentally disabled. The critical question confronting feminists is how care should be organised, and whether women should have the monopoly as caregivers?

The *pluralist feminist approach* has conceptualised women’s active citizenship in politics through a ‘politics of presence’ based upon an equal representation in the political elite or through ‘a ‘politics of difference’ based upon the organisation of oppressed social groups in civil society. The pluralist approach emphasises the connection between the empowerment of women and that of marginalised and oppressed social groups. The vision is a ‘pluralist and differentiated citizenship’ that includes difference in democracy based upon gender, ethnicity and class.

The potentials and limits of the feminist pluralist approach can be illuminated by the Danish experiences. Here women and men already have a plurality of roles as citizens, and the division between the public and private spheres has lost some of its gendered effects. I find that the focus on women’s *agency* is important, but the political developments illustrate the need to combine agency with the notion of power. The Danish case further indicates that there is no guarantee that a feminisation of the political elite will transform politics and put feminist issues on the political agenda. The pluralist approach tends to exaggerate the role of women’s agency and to underestimate the structural and institutional barriers to equal citizenship. The Danish case indicates that there is an important differentiation in the group of women according to age, class and ethnicity as well as in women’s political identities. There are limits to the politics of everyday life if it is not connected to solidarity with marginalised social groups, and there is a need to create new forms of solidarity that includes responsibility for the others in their difference (Dean).

Each of the feminist approaches thus represents different perspectives that illuminate key aspects of women’s citizenship in modern societies. Pateman has conceptualised the notion of unequal power on a macro level, and there is no doubt that gender inequalities in political power are still partly determined by the gendered division of work and male domination in society. I suggest, however, that feminist
scholarship needs to develop a dynamic notion of power and empowerment that is both able to link empowerment in the daily lives with inclusion on the public arena but also to link the inclusion of women with the inclusion of marginalised social groups.

The maternalist-communitarian model has conceptualised the notion of care, and there is no doubt about the need to conceptualise care work in the framework of citizenship and in relation to welfare-state restructuring. The family and the mother-child relationship, however, are exclusive relationships that can be the site of both caring and of oppression. There is no universal model of how care work should be integrated within the welfare state. The comparative perspective illustrates that women’s agency has contributed to put issue of care for children and for elderly citizens on the political agenda, but it is contested what is in women’s and children’s best interests. Is it the Danish model of institutionalised care for children, a mixed model of institutionalised care combined with financial support to families, home based care, or new forms of mixes between public and private care?

The comparative approach indicates that there is a dynamic interconnection between the family, state and civil society that has constructed different gender logic and gender politics (Siim, 2000). It illustrates that there is no universal story of gender and citizenship and no universal vision of the common good or the good citizen. The asymmetry of power based upon the interrelation of gender, class and ethnicity is one of the crucial challenges for feminist theory that needs to be addressed on a structural, institutional and cultural level. Another is the formation of democratic identities and new forms of solidarity that recognises the responsibilities to strangers that are not like us.

The key concepts in the vocabulary of citizenship have normative implications. In the Republican discourse the citizen is connected to the public arena and the national political community. The feminist vision of parity is an argument for the inclusion of women citizens in republican political institutions. In the liberal discourse the citizen is connected with the private sphere, and the feminist vision to include care-work as the basis for social citizenship is an argument to include women based on their sexual difference. In the Social Democratic discourse the good citizen is an active citizen participating in voluntary organisations in civil society and women represent a bridge between the family and the state. The Danish political culture has included difference on the basis of gender (not ethnicity), and feminist visions of empowerment is based upon the notion of active citizenship.

2. Context Matters: Toward a Gender Sensitive Model of Citizenship

One inspiration behind the development of a gender sensitive model of citizenship has been Brian Turner’s framework that identifies different models of citizenship on
the basis of the interaction of agency and political institutions in different national contexts. The model indicates the key role that political history, institutions and discourses play, and it thus points toward both the dynamic formation of citizenship and the importance of the interplay between actors and political institutions. I have re-constructed the two dimensions from the perspective of gender.

The active/passive dimension that raises questions of the formation of democratic citizenship ‘from above’ or ‘from below’, of the inter-connection between agency and political institutions and of the meaning of politics. One key question is who is excluded and who is included in active citizenship, and the implications for democracy of the exclusion of women based on their sexual difference from men. After gaining the vote, women were excluded from active citizenship in modern democracies, but we find different models of exclusion and different motivations for including women as mothers, workers and citizens in the three cases. The comparative perspective illustrates the importance of politics and the key role played by political agency, including women’s collective agency, in the development of women’s civil, political and social rights.

The public/private dimension raises questions about the meaning of the notions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in different policy contexts, the implications for political institutions and for political developments. The contrast between the liberal perception of the ‘public/private’ divide and the republican notion of public/private has profound implications for state regulation of market and families as well as for women’s struggle for civil, social and political rights. In the Republican French context the public notion of solidarism is combined with a positive perception of public regulation of families – familialism that places the family at the heart of social policy. In the Danish case, the figure is better understood as a ‘public/private mix’. The intermeshing of public and private can be illustrated by the interplay between social movements and voluntary organisations in the development of the welfare state. The family is not perceived as a ‘private’ arena outside state intervention, as in Britain, nor has the state been placed on a hierarchy ‘above’ the private family as in France. In Denmark there has been a public-private balance where the family is not perceived in opposition to the state, but rather as part of civil society which includes voluntary organisations. The comparative approach illuminates the need for feminist scholarship to transcend the vocabulary public/private and to re-conceptualise the family and the interrelation between market, state and civil society.

The notion of agency is about the role of the individual and collective activities of citizens, and it has been used as a bridge between social policy and political citizenship. It raises questions of the formation of women’s political identities, and one of the key issues is the role of women as collective actors in the political development and the conflicts and alliances between voluntary organisations, political parties and political and administrative institutions.
The cross national comparisons has raised questions about the notion of a universal male breadwinner model based upon women’s unpaid care work and their unequal social rights as wives and mothers. They indicate that we find different gender regimes embedded in the various models of citizenship. Lewis and Ostner introduced the notion of the male breadwinner model the key to women’s citizenship is the relation between women’s paid and unpaid work. This seems to be a good conceptualisation of the British case, but it does not fit neither the French nor the Danish case. In France, women were acknowledged to be working mothers and the gap between women’s lack of civil and political rights and their paid work can be seen as one key to women’s citizenship. In Denmark, women had double roles as producers and mothers, and one key to women’s citizenship seems to be the relation between women’s social and political rights. The comparative approach indicates that there are two relatively independent dimensions of citizenship: a social and a political dimension that influences women’s status, practice and identities as citizens.

I suggest that the French case can illuminate potentials and problems of Republican universalism. It tells a story about radical equality and the political inclusion of equal citizens premised upon the political exclusion of women from the public arena and of their unequal inclusion as mothers. The French case further illustrates the dilemma between the ideology of familialism in the private arena and solidarism in the public arena.

I suggest that the British case can illuminate potentials and problems of social liberalism and pluralism. It tells the story of women’s second class citizenship and their exclusion from equal social rights premised upon their primary roles as mothers and wives. The case further illustrates persisting inequalities among women according to class, ethnicity and colour, as well as the dilemmas between the private and public sector, between wage work and care work..

I suggest that the Danish case can illuminate potentials and problems of social democratic corporatism. It tells a story of universal social rights and of the interplay of social and political rights. The universal welfare state is based upon individualisation of social rights and a dual-breadwinner model, and during the last 30 years women’s inclusion in wage work and the expansion of childcare institutions has been followed by the democratic inclusion of women as citizens. The case illustrates the potential and limits of the dual breadwinner model, and the democratic dilemma between mobilisation ‘from below’ and integration ‘from above’, between political representation and new forms of governance.

Each of the three stories raises important methodological questions about continuity and shifts in discourses about and politics toward gender and citizenship from different policy contexts. They indicate that political institution, structures and cultures represent path-dependence, which contributes to reproduce gendered social and political rights. They also illustrate that political discourses contribute to both constructing, reproducing and changing women’s citizenship. Finally, they indicate
that woman’s agency in civil society and in relation to formal politics have in some cases been able to influence the discourse and politics of citizenship and improve women’s civil, social and political rights. In crucial periods of transformation of welfare states and democracies, alliances, networks or conflicts among women, and between women and major political forces, have been important factors influencing public policies toward women as workers, mothers and citizens.

3. Politics Matters: Path Dependency and Change

The political developments during the last thirty years illustrate the dramatic shifts as well as continuities in the discourse and politics of citizenship. In all European countries women’s agency in the form of women’s liberation movement became a social and political force from the 1970s that was followed by a new political meaning of gender as women have moved to the Left, but the movement had very different implications for gender equality.

The path dependency and change of politics can be illustrated by recent developments in France and Britain. In France Francois Mitterrand’s Presidency from 1981 represented a major change in public institutions and policies. Mitterand did introduce a new discourse and programme of gender equality with equality at the labour market as the key issue, although the policies were not successful. There has indeed been political consensus in the French political culture about universal family policies, and as a result French working mothers today have among the highest activity rates in Europe and the most extensive public provisions for child care for the over 3 year olds after Scandinavia. The integration of women in education and wage work contrasts with the exclusion of women from the political arena. Under Mitterand state feminism did attempt to integrate women in public administration, but women remained marginal in Parliament (their representation rise from 6 to 10% of the members of Parliament, June 1997). In this context the demand for parity between women and men in political institutions has been able to mobilise many women across the political spectrum as the road to political equality.

Universalism in the French political discourses and institutions has till recently been regarded as a major barrier to the integration of women in politics. Today universalism seems, however, to be open to change and the principle of parity, equal representation between women and men, has been included in the French constitution (1999) and adopted in French legislation (2000). The question is what will be the implication of parity for the inclusion of gender issues on the political agenda.

The comparative study indicates that there are crucial differences in the notion of politics, the character of political institutions as well as in the political culture that have implications for women’s democratic citizenship. This can be illustrated with differences between France and Denmark. In France, politics is
closely linked to the classical political institutions at the national level, like the Presidency, the government, Parliament, and high politics is connected with national politics and the ‘common good’ and divided from people’s daily lives. This contrasts with the Danish case, where political institutions have been decentralised, and politics has increasingly become related to locally organised social services and associated with problems in people’s daily lives. And political participation includes the participation of parents in social service institutions, for example in relation to childcare and schools. The perception of politics as ‘high politics’ removed from the problems of people’s daily lives can be seen as one of the causes of women’s exclusion from politics in France.

In Britain there was a major policy change from Labour to Neo-Conservatism with the victory of Margareth Thatcher in 1979, and this was followed by important policy changes in relation to class. There has, and still is, a consensus in the British political culture about non-intervention in private family matters that contrasts with political conflicts over nationalisation of industry between Labour and the Conservative Party. This has been a barrier for the expansion of childcare centres and the adoption of social policies helping working mothers to cope with work and care. The discourses of Social Liberalism as well as Thatcherism about the role of the state and the family were challenged by the Report from the Commission of Social Justice (in 1994) and by recent policy documents from New Labour. The Report’s reform programme has been an inspiration for Labour’s political debate about a renewal of the British welfare state. The vision is to develop an intelligent welfare state that can prevent poverty through public policies that enable citizens to combine life-long education with wage work and public care for the weakest social groups.

Feminist scholarship has, however, noticed that politics towards the family as well as strategies towards lone mothers represent a challenge for the discourse and policies of New Labour. One controversial issue is whether working mothers should be supported by universal policies or by targeted social policies toward the family. Another is under what conditions social politics should encourage lone mothers to take wage work.

In Denmark, the present centre-left government in power since 1993 has begun to restructure the welfare state through ‘activation policies’ to include all citizens on the labour market. Danish mothers have the highest activity rates in all the OECD countries, but there is a sexual segregated labour market with women employed mainly in the public and men in the private sector that has re-produced a gender-gap in values toward the welfare state. Women have been included in political organisations and there is a feminisation of the political elite, but there is a new gap between ‘everyday life politics’ and ‘elite politics.’ Corporatism is changing, and women have gained new positions in public committees and commissions and in the welfare state as professional workers and citizens, but there are inequalities of power connected with economic interest organisations on the labour market. Today,
corporatism is not only a barrier to gender equality it has also become one of the means to increase women's representation in political and administrative institutions.

The political consensus of the homogeneous Danish welfare state is challenged by new problems of ethnicity connected with immigration, and differences between women in terms of ethnicity are growing. The inclusion of women in politics has created new differences among women in terms of political power. The present demobilisation of social movements contrasts with the increase in citizens’ activities as ‘everyday-maker’, a new political identity and practice of citizens directly in relation to everyday life problems. The everyday-maker has both been interpreted positively as an expression of empowerment of citizens or negatively as an illustration of the growing indifference of (women) citizens toward big politics.

4. New Challenges to Gender and Citizenship in Europe

Today there are new problems of citizenship associated with globalisation, immigration and transnational politics. The role of the European nation-states has changed and European integration has been contradictory in terms of democracy and social policies. The social dimension has strengthened the rights of workers, but at the same time the demands on financial and economic policy has contributed to cutting public spending and increasing unemployment. The political centralisation in EU institutions has created a democratic deficit that has weakened the role of citizen in the national democratic processes. From a gender perspective, social and economic integration has also been ambiguous. European equality politics has no doubt increased gender equality on the labour market, but in most European countries unemployment has adversely affected women relatively more so than men.

From a gender perspective we can identify tendencies towards convergence of European social policy. The restructuring of the European welfare states has during the 1990s been followed by political strategies to include married women on the labour market that has made the dilemma between paid work and social care visible. The caring deficit and the role of households in the economy has become visible, and new issues and discussions about politics of care for children and the elderly have become included on the political agenda.

Donald Sassoon has recently suggested that there is also a convergence of the programmes of Socialist parties in Northern and Southern Europe. He places the British and Nordic Social democracies in the same family of the Left in terms of the modernisation of capitalism. The gender perspective illustrates that in terms of family policies the Labour Party and Nordic Social Democratic parties did indeed belong to different Families of the Left. There are indeed signs of convergence, but there still seems to be major differences between New Labour and Nordic Social Democracy, especially in relation to the family and care work.
The New Left coalition government of Socialists, Communists and Greens in France also represents a shift in the political programmes and politics that brings it closer to the Nordic Social Democracies. The government led by the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, has recently adopted the principle of parity in legislation. This represents a major policy shift that challenges republican universalism embedded in political institutions and discourses, and it is a step toward an acceptance of the ethos of democratic pluralism of political representation and ideas, although politics in France remains connected to ‘high politics.’

The principles of the new Labour government towards a more active social state also represent a break with the past. The ambition to support married women’s employment, increase public childcare centres, as well as include women in politics, express a conscious break with the old masculine ethos of the labour movement. New Labour’s social programme is, however, ambiguous towards working mothers. Proposals about an active line in social policy that treat all women as workers have created problems, especially for lone mothers. New Labour has during the first period given priority to civil and political rights over social rights. There have been a growing number of women elected to Parliament through a quota system, but in spite of this Tony Blair has announced that he will not use quotas in the coming elections.

Danish democracy is based upon universal social rights and an active citizenship that has no doubt been a potential for the political inclusion of women citizens. It is, however, a serious problem that the Danish version of democracy have not been able to strengthen the political integration of immigrants and refugee groups, because they are not (yet) perceived to belong to ‘the people’.

What are the future implications for the inclusion of women as full and equal citizens? Key aspects of the Republican French discourse and institutions are today open to change since the Green-Red coalition government in 1997, and feminist demand for parity has been included in politics. The good republican female citizen once elected to Parliament must, however, still identify politics with the public sphere, and one key problem is that citizenship is still based upon a public/private split between high politics and everyday life problems.

The social liberal discourse and institutions are also changing with the new Blair government, and the feminist demand to include care work in the framework of citizenship has been put on the political agenda. There is, however, still a strong emphasis in the British political culture on the private responsibilities of women citizens to care for dependants. If motherhood were to become the primary image of a good female citizen, citizenship would still be based upon sexual difference.

The homogeneity of the Social Democratic discourse and institutions is challenged by demands for a pluralist and differentiated citizenship that includes differences based not only upon gender but ethnicity, race and religion have been put
on the political agenda. Immigrants must comply with the dual-breadwinner model of the universal welfare state, but it has proved to be difficult to integrate immigrant families on the labour market. There are also serious barriers to the political inclusion of immigrant and refugee groups in the Danish political culture, and it is a problem that the Danish version of active citizenship and democracy ‘as a way of life’ is still identified with ‘the Danish way of life’.

I have suggested that one of the major challenges to the theory of citizenship is to include women and marginalised social groups in democracy and to include gender issues on the political agenda. A major challenge for feminist thinking is to develop new forms of solidarity that are able to integrate differences in the language of citizenship - a reflective solidarity that expresses “support for the others in their difference”. There is a need for a new feminist vision of equality and solidarity and a need for strategies to include women in the democratic deliberation and responsibility not only for local and national politics but also for European and trans-national politics.
Appendix 1


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Books from the project:


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