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The Politics of Child Daycare: Some European Comparisons

This paper is concerned with possible explanations for the marked variations in levels of public childcare provision between different European countries. While factors such as patriarchal interests, women's paid employment and feminist mobilization are not discounted, the emphasis is on the nature of the state and its policy priorities. Specifically it is suggested that childcare provision has been most generous in the combined presence of an interventionist state tradition with policies aimed at offsetting social inequalities, a perceived labour shortage, a declining birth-rate or possibly, at least in the case of France, aimed at fostering a greater sense of shared national identity.

Ce papier traite des possibles explications des variations très marquées qui existent entre les différents pays européens en ce qui concerne le niveau de l'assistance publique à l'enfance. Tout en tenant compte des facteurs tels que les intérieurs patriarcaux, l'emploi rémunéré des femmes ou la mobilisation féministe, l'accent est mis sur le type d'Etat et ses priorités politiques. Plus particulièrement, il est suggéré que l'assistance publique à l'enfance est la plus généreuse si l'Etat a une tradition interventionniste et poursuit en même temps des politiques orientées vers la compensation des inégalités sociales, de l'insuffisance de l'offre sur le marché du travail et d'un déclin du taux de natalité ou, éventuellement, au moins dans le cas de la France, vers un renforcement du sens d'une identité nationale commune.

Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit möglichen Erklärungen der starken Variationen, die es in bezug auf das Niveau der öffentlichen Einrichtungen für Kleinkinder zwischen den europäischen Ländern gibt. Während Faktoren wie patriarchalische Interessen, die Beschäftigung der Frauen oder die feministische Mobilisierung nicht ausser Acht gelassen werden, liegt der Hauptakzent doch auf dem Typ des Staates und seiner politischen Prioritäten. Es wird insbesondere nahegelegt, dass die Einrichtungen für Kleinkinder dort am grosszügigsten sind, wo der Staat eine interventionistische Tradition hat und gleichzeitig soziale Ungleichheiten, Arbeitskräftemangel und sinkende Geburtenraten auszugleichen versucht, oder allenfalls auch dort, wo er, wie dies mindestens in Frankreich der Fall ist, die gemeinsame nationale Identität zu verstärken versucht.

This issues raised in this paper arise out of research underway into the making of child daycare policy in Great Britain. Specifically I have been seeking to explain the meagreness of public childcare provision in that country, especially in comparison with a number of European countries, notably Sweden, Denmark and France. But that question itself derives from a strong belief that childcare, is or should be, an issue of critical importance, for contemporary feminists.¹ Given the present status and organisation of paid employment, and associated with these men's general inability or unwillingness to share responsibility for childcare, the availability of adequate, affordable childcare is a vital aspect of women's equal opportunity and citizenship prospects.

One way of approaching this question is to identify those European countries where public provision has been more generous and then to look for the principal local factors that seem to have contributed. Accordingly this paper begins with a brief demonstration and discussion of the variation in the amounts and forms of provision. It then considers the chief salient features of child daycare as an issue and the ways in which these might be articulated in different national policy contexts. The implications of more specific policy priorities are looked at more closely and finally I examine the role of feminist mobilization. Although there is a large literature, spanning a wide range of social science disciplines, that touches on the issue of childcare, studies dealing directly with these particular political questions are remarkably few and the conclusions drawn in this paper should be regarded as a provisional first step, which, it is to be hoped, will encourage further debate.

I. Patterns of child day care provision in contemporary Europe

There is an approach in public policy which argues for a tendency for policy outputs, within given policy sectors, to converge across countries of broadly similar levels of industrialisation, over time² but childcare is one policy area that provides little support for such a contention. On the contrary, and confining ourselves for present purposes to the countries of the former Western Europe, what is striking is the divergences, and the continuing divergences between them. Table 1 provides some basic figures indicating something of the range.

Before elaborating on this point and explaining the figures more fully, it is necessary to say something about the central notion in this paper, «childcare». The provision of childcare is of course complex, both as a concept and in terms of the combination of arrangements in practice. A great many different agents or agencies can play a childcaring role, for instance relatives, friends, paid childminders

1 That being said, it is striking, that in Britain at least, the issue has failed to enthuse «second wave» feminists anything like as much as, for instance abortion or pornography. A national feminist-inspired campaign on the issue developed late and has had little real impact (see Lovenduski and Randall, 1993, chapter 8).

2 This approach is discussed, and contrasted with one that emphasises varying national policymaking styles, by Freeman (1985), referred to below.

Country	Year	Percentage of Children under 3	Percentage from 3 to School Age	Age Start School
Belgium	1988	20	95+	6 yrs
Denmark	1989	48	85	7 yrs
Finland	1990	31	58	7 yrs
France	1988	20	95+	6 yrs
Germany	1987	3	65-70	6-7 yrs
Greece	1988	4	65-70	5 1/2 yrs
Iceland	1990	24	60	7 yrs
Ireland	1988	2	55	6 yrs
Italy	1986	5	85	6 yrs
Luxemburg	1989	2	55-60	5 yrs
Netherlands	1989	2	50-55	5 yrs
Norway	1990	11	57	7 yrs
Portugal	1988	6	35	6 yrs
Spain	1988	?	65-70	6 yrs
Sweden	1990	29	64	7 yrs
U.K.	1988	2	35-40	5 yrs

Table 1 Publicly Funded Childcare(3)

either through an informal arrangement or under some system of official regulation, private nurseries run for profit, nurseries run by voluntary groups or the state, and nursery schools. Some forms of childcare may be part-time; others provide care all day. The role of the state within this network can also take different forms: on the «supply» side, direct provider, subsidising provision by the voluntary sector, monitoring and providing various kinds of support for childminding or the private sector, and on the «demand» side, providing childcare-related benefits or tax allowances.

In addition to this organisational complexity, we must recognize that not all these forms of childcare are necessarily seen as «care». In particular, nursery or pre-school education will tend to be seen primarily in terms of the education function. But this is related to a wider point, to be explored below, that childcare provision has often occurred within the context of policies and discourses that have very different direct concerns. One further important consideration, when it comes to *evaluating* patterns of childcare provision, is that it needs to be seen in combination with a range of other policies that have a bearing on how mothers, and indeed parents, can combine parental responsibilities with paid employment. To take one example, as a result of Sweden's generous Paid Parental Leave Act, «practically all Swedish children are at home with one of their parents until they are at least nine months old», with the result that «during the whole of the first year, relatively few children are placed in day care» (Broberg and Hwang 1991, p76).

While bearing in mind the context of overall childcare provision, and also the impact of other policies affecting the relationship between parenting and paid employment, the focus of this paper is on public or state child daycare provision, whether direct or through public funding or subsidy. To make the topic manageable, it has also been necessary to exclude detailed consideration of care for school-

age children, without in any way wishing to imply that it is a minor problem for working parents.

Table 1, then, shows public daycare provision for pre-school children in the twelve European Community countries, together with Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. The actual figures are for full-time places in publicly funded services as a percentage of the child population. It will be instantly apparent that there are problems of comparability between these national sets of figures. They are not all for the same year and the age at which primary schooling begins also varies: in Denmark, Norway and Sweden it is seven years. The data for Spain are incomplete, itself an indication perhaps that in the past it has not considered the issue of sufficient seriousness to monitor provision. Despite the problems with the available data, this table does make the point clearly enough that public daycare provision varies enormously cross-nationally. Provision for children aged three and above ranges from 35–40% in Portugal and the United Kingdom to near universal coverage in France and Belgium, and a respectable 85% in Italy and Denmark. Provision for the under-threes, everywhere much lower than for the higher age group, ranges from a mere 2% in Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Luxemburg to 48% in Denmark, 37% in Sweden, 31% in Finland and 20% in France and Belgium. How is this variation to be explained?

The approach adopted in this paper tends to assume that the answer is largely a political one. Before expanding upon this theme, however, we must consider the possibility that the variation is a function of demand. Although one might well argue that even home-based mothers need some respite from full-time caring, the usual reason mothers have given for needing assistance with child care is in order to be able to go out to work. So we might look for a relationship between the patterns of childcare provision and those of women's paid employment. There certainly is a strong correlation between high rates of public provision and high rates of employment for mothers of young children. In 1988 over 70% of mothers with children aged less than ten were employed in Denmark and Sweden and over 50% in France and also Belgium. Likewise low childcare provision and low employment rates often go together. In Britain the employment rate was 46%, and just over two-thirds of these were in part-time work, while in Ireland it was 23%. But first of all there is the obvious difficulty with such correlations of demonstrating which is the dependent variable (if indeed they are not both dependent on a third). One can easily argue that the relatively low work participation rate in Britain, and especially the high rates of part-time work, are a consequence of insufficient childcare provision. Second, there are many anomalies. For instance in Norway the rate of paid employment of mothers of young children in 1988 was comparable with that in Denmark and Sweden, but public childcare provision was much less. In Portugal, similarly, childcare provision was meagre but employment rates rather high at 62%, almost all of it full-time.³ Although the increasing number of mothers of young children in, or seeking paid employment is a crucial

3 I am grateful for assistance in compiling this table to Nichola Madge of the European Children's Centre, National Children's Bureau.

part of the background to the issue of childcare, it has not of itself determined childcare policy. We need to explore more directly political factors.

II. Childcare as an issue

Arguably childcare as an issue has certain «objective» or inherent traits that can be identified and that will have a bearing on the politics that surround it. But it is also capable of being articulated in any number of different ways. As Joyce Outshoorn has shown, in her analysis of abortion politics in the Netherlands (1986), the way in which an issue is defined is also part of the process determining its outcome.

There are at least two noteworthy characteristics of childcare, or public childcare provision, as an issue. First, and to employ Theodore Lowi's terminology, it is «redistributory», that is it entails the redistribution of resources between major categories of people. Lowi (1964) had in mind primarily distribution from «haves» to «have-nots», or between the great producer classes, with as a consequence the principal actors being peak economic interests and political parties closely identified with them. But it is also possible in this case to think of redistribution of resources between households with children and those without, or indeed between men as the biggest earners and women as the biggest de facto beneficiaries of public childcare. Whatever the character of the redistribution, it will however therefore be perceived by governments as costly, in comparison with policies that simply require the regulation of private or voluntary sector activity.

The second and perhaps self-evident feature of childcare policy is that it concerns children, and thus by implication the «family». The family is everywhere highly valued, at least as far as rhetoric goes, as the founding unit, or «basic cell» of society. This is so despite the bewildering variety and changeability of its actual forms and despite some simultaneous recognition that a family is itself composed of individuals whose perceptions and interests can be in conflict. To an extent which varies between countries and cultures, and in some ways contradicting public pledges to «support» the family, it is also associated with a distinct «private» sphere, owed some amount of protection from public scrutiny and interference.

III. The policy context: patriarchy

While these features of childcare as an issue are significant, they do not determine of themselves, how childcare policy has been resolved. To understand this we also need to consider the context in which they have figured and the way this has affected how childcare as an issue is articulated and defined. One obvious initial observation about this context is that it is, or has been, «patriarchal». That is to say that the societies under consideration have been characterised by systematic male

⁴ Figures for this discussion are taken from *Childcare in the European Communities 1985–1990* (European Commission Childcare Network, 1990) and Arnlaug Leira (1993).

dominance. Although this is highly relevant to the question of childcare, it has two related drawbacks as an explanation of variations in childcare provision. In the first place, the concept of patriarchy is still seriously undertheorised. This may be because it is just too difficult to disentangle and appraise the key components of a process of subordination that operates on so many different levels, including in relationships of the greatest intimacy and even in our subconscious. In the second, in so far as patriarchy has been universal, it will not explain variation by itself. There have been attempts, especially by Scandinavian writers, to distinguish «public» from «private» patriarchy. The contention is that European societies, with Scandinavian countries in the van, have seen a shift from a situation where women are dependent on their own menfolk in the home to one where they are increasingly dependent upon a male-dominated state. While initially this shift was not necessarily seen as an improvement, many feminist writers are now more inclined to see public patriarchy as a step forward (for instance Siim 1991). In this context increased public childcare provision could be seen by the «pessimists» as a seeming concession to women which still actually institutionalises and ensures women's responsibility for childcare. They would emphasise how childcare workers are overwhelmingly women and the generally low pay and status that goes with such work. The «optimists», on the other hand, would see increased provision as a real gain that improved women's access to public power and thus their chance to bring about further woman-friendly policies. While this is probably the better way to look at it, what is being said here is really that public patriarchy is or can be less patriarchal than private patriarchy. The distinction tends to be more descriptive than analytic and we still need to identify the factors associated with the more benign forms of public patriarchy and generous public childcare.

Not only are there problems in using the universalistic notion of patriarchy to explain policy variations but it could be well argued that precisely because politics have been patriarchal, they have not generally been about women as such.⁵ The way they have affected women has been almost incidental, though not usually to the extent of jeopardising male interests. This point is not just a theoretical quibble. To anticipate the argument below, France is one of the European countries whose childcare policies have been relatively generous, especially for children aged three and over, yet it has had little in common with the enlightened «public patriarchies» referred to above. Other factors seem more relevant in France including an interventionist state tradition, the political importance of education policy, and the salience of pro-natalism and family policy.

IV. Types of welfare state

The notion of public patriarchy is of course closely linked to the development of the welfare state. There have recently been a number of attempts to relate cross-national variation in policies affecting women's ability to combine motherhood

⁵ I have developed this point in *Women and Politics* (1987), chapter four.

and paid employment to the prevalent form of welfare state. Different typologies of the welfare state have been invoked but especially that advanced by Esping-Anderson in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990). He distinguishes three main kinds of welfare regime. First is a liberal form which comes close to Richard Titmus' notion of a «residual» welfare state and provides modest and carefully delimited welfare entitlements. In some cases these may be «universal» but their modest scale still ensures that they are catering primarily for low-income groups. The second kind, labelled «conservative», retains from earlier times a corporatist flavour. Although entitlements have been enhanced in keeping with the needs of a «post-industrial» society, status differentials have been preserved, with contributions and benefits graded accordingly. Such regimes, amongst whom Esping-Anderson numbers Austria, France, Germany and Italy, are also likely, he suggests, and under the continuing influence of the church, to be strongly committed to preserving the traditional family. One consequence is that daycare services will be «conspicuously underdeveloped». There remains a third small cluster of welfare regimes he names «social democratic» in which welfare entitlements are not only universal but generous to cater for the needs of the middle- as well as the working-class. Such a welfare regime will preemptively socialize the costs of familyhood and take direct responsibility for the care of children.

Can these variations in welfare regime type help to explain differences in child daycare provision? One problem with the typology itself, as far as Britain is concerned, is that Britain doesn't fit very easily into one of the three existing slots. Although in the 1980s she moved closer to the first, liberal, model, as Esping-Anderson notes, the earlier Beveridge-inspired phase had more in common with the social democratic model. But setting that problem aside, even if this typology is illuminating in general terms, can it specifically explain childcare? Arnlaug Leira (1993), examining variations in childcare provision within Scandinavia, points out that public provision, particularly for under-threes, in Norway has been remarkably low, accounting for less than 10% of this age group. This leads her to question the validity of identifying a single «social democratic» or «Scandinavian» model of the welfare state, as such. It is also one of the considerations prompting Jane Lewis (1992) to argue for the need for an alternative, or supplementary, typology of welfare states whose central criterion would be how closely they approximated a «male-breadwinner» model. But not only does the predicted association between social democratic welfare regimes and public childcare not entirely hold, but Esping-Anderson's characterisation of the second, conservative, type of regime seems to be contradicted in the case of France. Far from being «conspicuously underdeveloped», we have seen that childcare services, especially for those aged three and over, are, relatively speaking, amongst the most generous.

V. National policymaking style or state traditions

If existing welfare state typologies cannot satisfactorily explain childcare variation, it is still possible that, in a broader sense, differing state traditions are relevant to our inquiry. Many political scientists, though not all, have found it helpful to relate differences in policy output between countries to what Gary Freeman labels different «national policymaking styles». Freeman argues that policy makers in different countries «develop characteristic and durable methods for dealing with public issues» (1985, p.467). Such institutionalised methods embody and help to preserve assumptions about how policy is made and what aspects of social life it should cover.

In this connection, Britain is frequently identified as having a «liberal» state tradition, in contrast to the more interventionist traditions of much of continental Europe. The argument, put forward for instance by David Marquand (1988), is that Britain's liberal tradition was to some extent absorbed and institutionalised during her industrial and imperial heyday and thus survived, however unacknowledged, the building of the welfare state. «Liberalism» has meant emphasising the boundary between public and private spheres, whether in terms of the economy or of the family and mistrusting state intervention in either. Although in practice the state has intervened in both spheres, inevitably and often, it is argued that this has tended to be on an adhoc, pragmatic basis, without a «philosophy of public intervention». This approach has been apparent in both labour market interventions and in family policy, two policy areas it is suggested below with considerable potential bearing on the organisation of child care.

While liberal assumptions presided for a time elsewhere in Europe, for instance in France, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, they were less unequivocally associated with national «success». They did not so effectively uproot older statist traditions and were abandoned or modified more readily when seen to run into difficulties. Thus Jane Jenson (1990) describes mounting concern about the «social question», the costs of economic liberalism, in France, especially in the wake of defeat by Germany in 1870. This helped to legitimise increasing state intervention, which in any case in some ways meant going back to a tradition well-founded in the ancient regime and its revolutionary aftermath. As the case of Germany indicates, an interventionist state tradition has not been a sufficient condition of public childcare but it may still have been a necessary one.

VI. Policy priorities

But beyond a predisposition for state intervention, we need to identify the kinds of policy priorities, or of combinations of them, which have appeared most conducive to a (relatively) generous childcare policy. Three, or possibly four, broad policy concerns seem to have special relevance: the first is with reducing social, and essentially class, inequalities. This of course links with what has already been said about welfare states. There is no doubt that this has been a priority for govern-

ments in Scandinavian countries, where social democratic parties have played a major role. One consequence in the 1960s was the expansion of the activities and responsibilities of the welfare state, which in turn created new employment opportunities for women. But social egalitarianism also formed part of the rationale for expanded childcare provision itself. Thus in Denmark «educational or pedagogical motives like play and social interaction were given a very high priority» (Borchorst and Siim, 1987, p.139).

A second concern has been with remedying a perceived labour shortage. In both Sweden and Denmark in the 1960s, economic expansion brought with it a shortage literally of manpower. In the case of Sweden the initial recourse was to the importation of foreign labour but this proved unsatisfactory. According to Broberg and Hwang (1991) they looked for labour to Finland and southern Europe but not enough was forthcoming. According to Haas (1992) the problem with imported workers was rather one of assimilation. At any rate, the government turned its attention to potential women workers instead. In Denmark, according to Borchorst and Siim, «full» that is full male employment had been reached by the 1960s. «There have never been large numbers of foreign workers in the country and there was only a minor increase in workers coming from abroad in this period. The group of full-time housewives was seen as the solution to the scarcity of labour, and great efforts were made to get them into the labour market» (p.130).

The third concern has been with population growth, in turn linked to family policy. Pro-natalism has been of great significance both in Sweden and in France. A number of studies have stressed the impact of this long-standing concern in Sweden.⁶ In the 1930s she had the lowest fertility rates in Europe. The issue was addressed by two prominent Social Democrats, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, in *Crisis in the Population Question*, 1934, which recommended increasing subsidies to the family but also maintained in principle women's right to combine motherhood with paid employment, though this was primarily with the aspirations of middle-class women in mind. From that time on there developed a whole range of provisions for maternity leave, marriage loans, subsidized housing for families with three or more children, payment of costs associated with childbirth, child allowances and free school meals. As Haas writes, «This concern for children remained a driving force behind Swedish welfare and family policy» (Haas, 1992, p.23).

In France fears of a declining birth-rate went back still further, at least to the late nineteenth century and the shock of military defeat by Germany. As in Sweden they contributed to the emergence, especially after the second world war, of a coherent family policy, whose main thrust was to provide for considerable horizontal redistribution to families with children from families without (Rodgers, 1975; Lenoir, 1991). The redistribution of these benefits was the responsibility of a national Caisse des Allocations Familiales, working through a series of local CAFs. From the 1970s these caisses have been increasingly involved in funding child daycare (Leprince, 1991).

6 See Adams and Winston 1980, pp.182–85; Ruggie 1984; Haas 1992; Lewis and Astrom 1992.

The point here is not to suggest that any of these policy concerns have of themselves been sufficient to ensure increased public child daycare provision. Rather there has needed to be a combination. In the case of Sweden, all three seem to have played a part: social egalitarianism, pronatalism and the need for female labour. In the case of Denmark at least two, social egalitarianism and labour requirements were at work.

The case of France is more difficult to explain in this way. Clearly population concerns have been paramount. We cannot point to a moment of acute labour shortage that helped to precipitate an expansion in childcare provision. There are however two things that can be said about women's paid employment in France. The first is that employment rates have always been relatively high. Despite some decline in the early post-war years, by 1950 49.5% of French women were still in paid employment, against an OECD average of 38.2%.⁷ It might be said therefore that the French state was faced with a given: rates of female employment were already high. To encourage women to have more children, therefore, they needed to be given material incentives or assistance, as incorporated in French family policy. This raises a second point, or question. Why were women's employment rates traditionally high? A part of the answer would seem to be structural, especially the continuing importance of a fairly labour-intensive agriculture in the French economy. It is also argued (Jenson, 1990; Lewis, 1992) that these high employment rates reflected a long-standing acceptance in France that women, including mothers of young children, should be able to work if they so wished. In Jenson's words, the gender identity that emerged for women in France, by the turn of the century, while in no way directly challenging patriarchal expectations, «included the possibility – and indeed at times the assumption – of the validity and importance of women's paid work, both for single and married women» (1990, p.153). There is the problem here of sorting out how far these attitudes, if we accept that they existed, were a cause or an effect of women's high workforce participation rates. It must moreover be noted that other accounts do not discern such an attitude to women, and specifically mother's paid work. If women's paid employment was accepted, this was simply as a fact of life, rather than a positive entitlement. Lenoir (1991) depicts a shift occurring in the 1970s, following a new surge in women's employment in the 1960s and continuing fears about the birth rate which worsened from 1972: «Henceforth family policy recognized the rights of mothers to work» (p.71).

It must further be remembered that there are really two elements in French childcare provision. The expansion of child daycare, especially for children under three, was primarily a development of the 1970s. But this built on the earlier foundation of the network of *ecoles maternelles*, for children aged three up to school age, which comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, and whose formal beginnings go back at least to the 1880s. Jenson (1990) associates the emergence of the *maternelles* with a public concern for ways of combining women's paid work with childcare. But it seems possible to invoke here a fourth kind of

⁷ Figures taken from Jenson (1988) and Bakker (1988).

policy concern that could be conducive to public childcare provision, to link the *maternelles* with the particular emphasis under the Third Republic on expanding and consolidating education provision in France as one important means, not so much of reducing social inequalities as of fostering a sense of shared national identity. Eugen Weber (1976) has argued that French national unity and identity by the early twentieth century were not the products of tradition but centrally imposed. He quotes Alexandre Sanguinetti: «France is a deliberate political construction for whose creation the central power has never ceased to fight» (p.113). In this mission education has played a crucial role. It is hard to believe that the readiness to retain and integrate the preceding «salles d'asile» into a more comprehensive system of *maternelles* was not influenced by a recognition of the value of reaching children as young as possible, especially when their homes were not only illiterate but non-French speaking. And arguably the *maternelles* have continued to act as bearers of the national culture.

I have argued so far that certain policy priorities may help to explain the greater readiness of governments to fund public childcare. But, it must be stressed that these policy concerns need to be combined with a more active or interventionist state tradition. In Britain, for instance, there were concerns about the birth-rate in the 1930s, and again briefly after the war, though these subsided with evidence of a new «baby boom». There was also a labour shortage in the 1950s though this was solved by turning to the former colonies. An ethos of greater social egalitarianism was certainly part of the inspiration and implication of the postwar welfare state. But surviving «liberal» reticence about meddling with the «private» sphere of family and market inhibited the kind of response seen in France, Sweden or Denmark.

VII. Feminist Mobilization

Jane Lewis, in her general discussion of the gender implications of different welfare regimes, finds it «noteworthy that in both France and Sweden women played little part in securing such advantages as accrued to them from the respective welfare regimes» (1992, p.170). While variations in patterns of childcare provision certainly cannot simply be explained by reference to feminist mobilization, we should not leap to the opposite conclusion that it has been irrelevant. It is striking that the growth of public childcare in Denmark and Sweden and the expansion of daycare outside the existing provision of *maternelles* in France coincided in time with the new wave of feminist mobilization from the late 1960s. Of course, we have seen that it also coincided with rising rates of female employment and both the expansion of childcare and the resurgence of feminism could be seen as dependent on the latter. But we should not discount the independent effect of feminist pressure, especially through social-democratic or socialist parties and through trade unions. In both Sweden and Denmark the distinction between old and new waves of feminism has in any case been more difficult to maintain. «Older» feminists were

already well entrenched in these parties by the 1960s. In France, feminist arguments were acknowledged by governments in the 1970s, though they were most influential in the socialist governments of the early 1980s which retained their commitment to childcare even when faced with severe economic constraints.

VIII. Conclusion

The main conclusion from a discussion such as this must be that the number of factors influencing patterns of childcare provision in different European countries is considerable and their interrelationship complex. Some of these, notably patriarchy, are relevant but universal. Feminism, in so far as it has modified patriarchal assumptions, is likewise relevant. But the main force of my argument has been that, precisely because patriarchy subordinates the interests of women, we should not expect these to be driving childcare policy. Instead we have to look to other policy concerns. I have indicated three – social egalitarianism, population levels and labour shortages – with a possible fourth suggested by the case of France. But at the same time I have stressed that these policy concerns have to be resolved in the context of an interventionist state tradition. While all these suggestions can only be regarded as working hypotheses at best, they may be useful in focusing argument and in shaping the collection and investigation of further data from a wider range of countries.

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