

The normative and institutional embeddedness of parental employment: its impact on gender egalitarianism in parenthood and employment.

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Introduction: a critique of the ‘continuum’

There can be little argument that, as Gornick and Meyers argue, a dual earner/dual carer society would be good for gender equality, good for children, and (probably) good for men. However, the model is ‘utopian’, and the problems and pitfalls in achieving this end are immense. Identifying these problems, however, is a necessary exercise if they are somehow to be tackled. In this chapter, therefore, we will begin by identifying some of the difficulties associated with the framework, and associated continuum, that Gornick and Meyers have drawn upon in making their arguments.

Figure 1: Beyond the ‘male breadwinner’ model (Crompton 1999)

Gender Relations

Traditional	←-----→		Less traditional
1	2	3	4
Male breadwinner/female carer	Dual earner/female part-time carer	Dual earner/state carer Or Dual earner/marketised carer	Dual earner/dual carer

Described as a ‘flexible framework’ rather than a ‘static taxonomy’, this continuum was originally developed in the concluding chapter of an edited book (Crompton 1999) that reported on the ‘Gender Relations’ project – a comparative cross-national study of changing gender relations that included data from Britain, France, Norway, the Czech Republic, and Russia.¹ The simple idea contained in the figure was that gendered divisions of care and market work would be associated with varying degrees of traditionalism in *gender relations*. This broad term recognises that ‘gender’ is structured by different institutions (generated by states, markets and families), and at different levels (legislation, organisations, households, in couple relationships). A move through from box 1 to box 4 was explicitly seen as a move towards more gender equality.

From the very first, however, and in the light of the interviews gathered within the gender relations project, there were problems with this suggested trajectory, largely in respect of box 3 (hence the caveats). In the 1990s, four of the countries studied (Norway, the Czech Republic, Russia and France) had (or had had in the very recent past) reasonably extensive state childcare provision (none of the countries in our comparison were characterised by a high level of marketised care in the 1990s).² However, the ‘outcomes’ of state provided childcare, in terms of equality in gender relations, (particularly in the domestic sphere), were rather different.

In Norway, as in other Scandinavian countries, state assistance with childcare is associated with more equality in gender relations overall – and indeed, these policies

were explicitly developed as part of the ‘state feminist’ equality agenda (Hernes 1987, Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006). In the Scandinavian countries, state provided childcare can be seen as part of a move in the direction of a dual earner/dual carer model. In some contrast, in Russia and the Czech Republic, state childcare was provided so that women could fulfil their public duty – employment. Although gender equality was an official state goal in state socialist countries, this was understood entirely in terms of access to paid employment – for example, Stalin described the ‘woman question’ as ‘solved’ when women achieved parity in employment with men (Einhorn 1993). However, the everyday reality of gender relations in the Eastern bloc was (and is) rather traditional. Within the Gender Relations Project, our qualitative work-life interviews in Eastern Europe described quite blatant instances of discrimination in employment, and it was clear that domestic work and childcare were seen as being almost entirely the responsibilities of women. Quantitative data (from the Czech Republic) revealed very traditional attitudes to gender roles (particularly amongst men), and a correspondingly traditional division of domestic work in the home – despite the fact that Czech women usually work full-time (Crompton and Harris 1999).³ In these circumstances, state provided substitute care had not been associated with greater equality in gender relations.

The case of France added further complexities. State childcare provision in France is relatively generous, and long established. As a consequence, French women have been enabled to work full-time, and (in comparison to the situation in Britain) had performed rather better in the labour market – for example, in reaching managerial positions (Hantrais 1990). Indeed, France has been described as a ‘modified male breadwinner’ welfare state (Lewis 1992). However, our interviews suggested that the domestic division of labour in France was rather traditional, as were gendered workplace relations.

Considerable caution, therefore, was expressed in relation to box 3 as follows: ‘Women’s full-time work in combination with substitute care... is more likely to result in less traditional gender relations and greater gender equality – with the important proviso that this economic association is by no means automatic’ (Crompton 1999 206-7). In a similar vein, it was emphasised that ‘...gender cultures have to change, as well as the gender division of labour in employment’.⁴

What goes on in box 3, therefore, is absolutely crucial in influencing trajectories in the direction of a dual earner/dual carer society. Box 2 is associated with continuing, albeit modified, gender traditionalism – for example, studies of the domestic division of labour have demonstrated that women’s *part-time* employment has relatively little impact on the domestic division of labour in the home (Coltrane 2000, Crompton and Lyonette 2008). However, even when women are in full-time employment, if caring (and associated domestic work) is simply shifted elsewhere (usually to another woman), then gender relations in the home may remain very traditional. Box 3, therefore, represents a transitional state, from which gender relations might shift in *either* a ‘less’ traditional direction, or remain relatively traditional.⁵ If, therefore, we want to understand the difficulties associated with a move to box 4 (and therefore make suggestions as to how they might be overcome), then the more we can understand the particular circumstances of box 3 ‘cases’, the better.

In this chapter, therefore, we will first examine in more detail two box 3 ‘cases’, France and Portugal. We will draw on the findings of a further cross-national, quantitative, study (the ‘Employment and the Family’ project). This drew upon the 2002 Family and Gender Roles module of the International Social Survey (ISSP) programme. The countries studied included Britain, France, Finland, Norway, and Portugal.⁶ One of our major foci was the topic of work-life conflict – that is, the difficulties faced by dual earner couples given that it can no longer be assumed that women are available for unpaid domestic work.

The case of France

France is included as one of Gornick and Meyers’ ‘exemplar’ countries. However, it will be argued that in some important respects gender equality has advanced rather less in France than it might have done *despite* the long-term presence of working mother friendly policies.

As Gornick and Meyers demonstrate, France is characterised by extensive supports for mothers’ employment, having generous maternity and parental leaves, a statutory 35-hour working week, and universal publicly funded early years childcare and education facilities.⁷ Elements of these policies have been in place for many years. Historically, they were introduced in response to labour shortages, in combination with a sensitivity to the impact of maternal employment on birthrates, rather than in response to gender equality concerns (Jenson 1986, Lewis and Astrom 1992). Indeed, largely because of the French tradition of republican universalism, ‘equality’ for women *as such* has not been particularly prominent (and indeed has sometimes been resisted) in French policy development. Gender equality in the workplace, for example, has not progressed to the same extent as in Britain (Crompton and Le Feuvre 2000). Employment rates among French women are not particularly high. Despite ‘mother friendly’ policies, rates of employment amongst French women were around the EU (15 country) average at 57.6% in 2005, as compared to 70.4% in Sweden, 71.9% in Denmark, 71.7% in Norway, and 65.9% in the UK (Eurostat data). Moreover, the under-representation of French women in political life (French women only gained the vote in 1944) became something of a national scandal at the end of the twentieth century.⁸ As many commentators noted, within the EU, the political under-representation of French women was exceeded only in Greece.

Nevertheless, in the ‘Employment and the Family’ project, (Crompton 2006, Crompton and Lyonette 2006b), we anticipated that the relatively good dual-earner policies to be found in France would have a positive impact on work-life ‘balance’. A work-life conflict scale was constructed using four items from the ISSP survey:

I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which need to be done.

It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job.

I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done.

I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities.

Respondents were asked to indicate, for each item, whether this occurred several times a week, several times a month, once or twice, or never. Higher scores indicate higher work-life conflict.⁹ On the basis of a review of policies in respect of dual-earner families in these five countries, we expected Norway and Finland to demonstrate the lowest levels of work-life conflict and Britain and Portugal the highest, with France somewhere in the middle (this association might also have been predicted on the basis of the cross-country data summarised by Gornick and Meyers). What we found was that, as anticipated, Norway and Finland had measurably lower levels of work-life conflict than the other countries, even when a range of other factors were controlled for, thus a Scandinavian ‘societal effect’ (Gallie 2003) could be argued to be in operation. As far as work-life conflict was concerned, however, France was in the *same* country cluster as Britain and Portugal (Britain having the highest level of work-life conflict amongst full-time employees).

When we explored further this example of ‘French exceptionalism’, we found that in the case of France in particular, traditionalism in the domestic division of labour was a factor significantly associated with a higher level of work-life conflict. A domestic division of labour (DDL) index was computed from five questions from the ISSP survey:

In your household, who usually does the:

Laundry

Cares for sick family members

Shops for groceries

Household cleaning

Prepares the meals

(always me, usually me, about equal, usually spouse/partner, always spouse/partner)

By convention, these would be considered ‘women’s’ tasks. Scores were allocated in accordance with this assumption. DDL scores could range from 5-25; and higher scores indicate more traditional DDL.¹⁰ A regression analysis on the French data (Crompton and Lyonette 2006b) demonstrated that the more traditional the domestic division of labour (DDL), the higher the level of work-life conflict reported.¹¹

We were also concerned to explore whether a disjunction between attitudes and behaviour had an impact – for example, an individual might be involved in a very traditional division of domestic labour, but if they think this is ‘the right thing to do’, this might not necessarily be a source of conflict. We therefore developed a variable that combined level of traditionalism in gender role attitudes (indicated by the question ‘a man’s job is to earn money, a woman’s job is to look after the home and family’) with level of traditionalism in the domestic division of labour.¹² This produced some very striking results in the French case. The level of work-life conflict for ‘congruent liberal’ French respondents (that is, liberal gender role attitudes in combination with lower levels of domestic traditionalism) was 6.7, whereas for ‘congruent traditionalists’ (less liberal gender role attitudes and a traditional division of domestic labour) the average score was 7.98 (Table 1). Moreover, those with ‘incongruent’ attitudes and behaviour had work-life conflict scores that were comparable to the ‘traditionalists’, rather than the ‘congruent liberals’.

Table 1: Means of work-life conflict for congruence categories, France (full-time employees only):

	More Liberal Divisions of Domestic Labour	More Traditional Divisions of Domestic Labour
Liberal Gender Role Attitudes	Mean= 6.71 SD=2.24 N=151	Mean= 7.69 SD=2.45 N=237
Traditional Gender Role Attitudes	Mean= 8.42 SD=(2.65) N=32	Mean= 7.98 SD=2.48 N=125

ANOVA $F = 11.365$; $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc tests showed that congruent liberals had significantly lower worklife conflict scores than both other groups.

In fact, levels of domestic traditionalism are relatively high in France as compared to Britain, Finland and Norway, as can be seen from Table 2.

Table 2: Mean scores of domestic division of labour (DDL) for each country (full-time respondents only)

<i>Country</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
Britain	514	18.61 (3.23)
Finland	452	18.23 (2.67)
France	575	19.23 (3.22)
Norway	545	18.19 (2.67)
Portugal	276	20.49 (3.18)
Total	2363	18.81 (3.08)

ANOVA $F = 35.066$; $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc tests showed that Portugal and France had significantly higher DDL scores than the other 3 countries.

A comparative analysis using our DDL measure revealed that the two Scandinavian countries had the least traditional DDL scores. As demonstrated in Table 2, in respect of the domestic division of labour, post hoc tests showed that France was closer to Portugal (which has the most traditional division of domestic labour) than to Britain, and that the difference between the DDL means of France and Portugal and the other three countries was statistically significant. In a similar vein, Windebank's qualitative comparative study of domestic labour and parenting in Britain and France found that French men contributed less than British men:

...in the French sample, there were numerous men who were available to look after children during the week when their partner was employed (e.g. teachers who did not work in the school holidays or on a Wednesday afternoon) but nevertheless, did not take responsibility for childcare even when they were free. This was not the case in any of the British sample where sequential

scheduling of jobs was used to minimise formal childcare provision...(Windebank 2001: 287).

Windebank suggests that the greater involvement of British men in childcare and domestic work is in fact a consequence of the greater flexibility in labour markets, and lack of support for childcare, in Britain as compared to France. She suggests that British men have been in a sense 'forced' into domesticity in order to enable their partners to work, which is becoming, increasingly, a financial necessity for British households. In contrast, French men have been enabled to 'fall back' on state childcare provision if their partners are in employment.

Policies to support employed mothers in France, therefore, do not seem to have had much of an impact on gendered divisions of labour in the home. Indeed, if Windebank's argument is valid, their impact might even have been counter-productive. In fact, it would be widely acknowledged in France that family (or work-life) policies are directed largely at labour market objectives, rather than being concerned with gender egalitarianism as such (Le Feuvre and Lemarchant 2007). For example, the introduction of the APE (*allocation parentale d'éducation* 1985, reformed 1994), a monthly benefit paid to a non-employed parent of more than two children, was seen as a measure to reduce rates of unemployment, rather than to promote gender equality. In fact, its introduction meant that between 1995-2001, and for the first time in 40 years, the activity rates of mothers with two children and a youngest child aged less than 3 years dropped from 69% to 53% (98% of APE recipients are women).¹³ Moreover, women who were unemployed before the birth of their second child, and/or having only a low level of education, are proportionately over-represented amongst APE recipients. The impact of this policy, therefore, will be to increase inequalities between women and households.

The example of France, therefore, has been used to make the argument that as far as gender egalitarianism is concerned, the impact of state policies to support families and working parents is highly mediated by the gendered division of labour in the home, which is rather traditional in France. It is not being argued that this exception 'disproves the rule' that family leave provisions, the regulation of working time, and good ECEC policies are highly beneficial for working parents and their children. Family poverty is relatively low in France, and rates of mortality for French children are lower than in the US. Rather, the example is being used to support the more general argument that gender egalitarianism in parenthood and employment will require transformations in gendered divisions of labour in employment and at home, and that variations in these divisions can have an impact on policy outcomes in respect of gender equality.

Domestic work: national variations

The point does not have to be laboured that domestic sharing is key to gender equality. Fraser (1994) has argued that gender equality is not possible unless men become 'more like women' and combine market work, domestic work, and caring. In a similar vein, Lewis and Guillari (2005: 94) argue that women's responsibilities for care restrict their agency freedom and thus their 'choices', and: '...the key issue is not how to make women more self-interested...but rather how to promote conditions that foster responsibility for sharing care between men and women and that enhance

women's agency freedom by making men more accountable for their responsibility to care for others'.

Caring and domestic work is normatively assigned to women, and whether they work full-time, part-time, or not at all, women do more domestic work than men. As Coltrane (2000 1209) has summarised:

In general, women have felt obligated to perform housework, and men have assumed that domestic work is primarily the responsibility of mothers, wives, daughters and low-paid female housekeepers. In contrast, men's participation in housework has appeared optional, with most couples...characterising men's contributions as 'helping' their wives or partners.

These responsibilities mean that in practice, many women do not compete on equal terms with men in the labour market. Others, however, have argued that many (if not most) women 'choose' to retain the major responsibility for domesticity and are in fact happier when they do so (Hakim 2004, but see Crompton and Lyonette 2005). In fact, as women have entered the labour force, so men have increased their share of housework – although this seems to have reached a plateau in the 1990s. However, the major reason for the closing of the gendered domestic labour 'gap' since the 1960s is that, as women have entered employment, they have reduced their domestic work hours (Coltrane 2000, Bianchi et al 2000).

Comparative cross-national research on variations in levels of domestic traditionalism has produced some interesting findings. First, it has been demonstrated that the domestic division of labour in the Scandinavian countries, where governments have actively promoted gender equality in the home (Brandth and Kvande 2001, see also Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006), is not *significantly* less traditional than in neo-liberal countries, such as Britain and the US, where governments have not pursued such policies (Gershuny and Sullivan 2003, Geist 2005). Our results, summarised in Table 2, would confirm these arguments. Nevertheless, the finding that the domestic division of labour is generally more traditional in conservative or 'corporatist' regimes (Geist 2005, see also Korpi 2000), that *have* developed policies that reflect and give priority to women's domestic responsibilities, is generally supportive of the argument that state policies *do* have an impact on the gendered division of labour in the home.¹⁴

Moreover, it may be suggested that the finding of similar levels of domestic traditionalism in the Scandinavian and neo-liberal countries is a case of 'plural causation' (Pickvance 1995). That is, that different explanatory factors are in operation within the two different regime clusters. In the relatively unregulated labour markets of neo-liberal regimes, there are few barriers to the employment of women. Employers are free to develop 'non-standard' jobs (such as part-time employment, 'non-standard' hours work) that are attractive to women with domestic responsibilities. Downward pressures on wages in neo-liberal regimes mean that for many families, dual earning becomes increasingly necessary. As Gornick and Meyers have demonstrated, in their example of the US, there are few, if any state supports available for working mothers and dual earner families. Thus in aggregate, (as Windebank has argued in her Franco-British comparison) men find themselves constrained to give domestic assistance to their partners if their partners are to be enabled to generate much-needed income for the family. In contrast, in the Scandinavian countries, the level of mother's employment is high and good dual-

earner state family supports are available. These supports would facilitate mother's employment even if domestic assistance were not forthcoming from male partners. Nevertheless, men in the Scandinavian countries contribute as much by way of domestic support (in fact, slightly more) as do men in neo-liberal regimes, where dual-earner supports are not available. This argument suggests that state-sponsored efforts to persuade men in the Scandinavian countries to contribute to domestic work have, in fact, met with some degree of success.

State policies, therefore, can have an impact on the domestic division of labour. However, these policies themselves are reflective of national 'path dependencies' that have significant impacts on gender cultures and gender regimes. In particular, all of the major religions incorporate an essentialist view of women that (amongst other things) argues that they are particularly suited to caring and domesticity.¹⁵ Very obviously, there are considerable differences in the impact of religious beliefs and organisations between nation states ('Corporatist' welfare regimes have been much affected by Catholic ideology, for example. See Korpi 2000). There will also be national cultural variations in culinary standards, and fashions in household décor, that will have an impact on the amount of domestic work required to be carried out. Although 'culture' is a notoriously slippery term, its impact and effects simply cannot be bracketed out, particularly as far as gender relations are concerned.¹⁶

Nevertheless, empirical research has demonstrated that a range of similar factors have an impact on variations in levels of domestic traditionalism in all countries. These include the presence or absence of children in the household, the extent and level of the woman's employment and her earnings, level of education (and the closely-related factor of occupational class), age, and attitudes to gender roles. However, even when these factors are controlled for, the extent of domestic traditionalism is still greater in some countries than in others (see Crompton 2006). As we have seen, amongst the countries we studied, Portugal had the highest level of domestic traditionalism. Moreover, Portuguese women reported many more hours of domestic work than women in the other countries studied. Average hours of household work (not including childcare) reported by women in Britain, Finland, France and Norway were just over thirteen hours a week, but Portuguese women reported twenty-six hours a week.

As has been argued above, some countries are more gender traditional than others, and much of this variation will be as a consequence of specific historical factors. In the particular case of Portugal, under the Salazar regime (that lasted until 1974), women were legally subject to their husbands (and legally responsible for housework) and formally barred from a wide range of occupations.¹⁷ There have been very substantial changes in legislation, and attitudes to women, post-Salazar but nevertheless, as Wall (2006) has argued, Portugal 'still has to deal with the legacy of authoritarian values which still permeate society and many institutional settings, as well as the problem of a civil society bogged down for forty years'. Thus, for example, in the ISSP surveys 34% of Portuguese respondents 'agreed' that 'a man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the home and family', as compared to only 10% of the Norwegian sample, and 18% of the British (Crompton 2006 145). In all countries, levels of gender traditionalism vary by age, but in Portugal, even amongst the 18-34 age group, in 2002 14% still 'agreed' that the 'man's job' was to earn money, as compared to only 5% in Norway, and 7% in

France, Finland, and Britain. In a similar vein, in a British/Portuguese comparison, whereas 56% of Portuguese men and women in full-time employment agreed that 'what women really want is a home and family', only 17% of full-time British men and women held to this view. Levels of employment amongst mothers of young children (under 3) in Portugal are high, at 69%. Nevertheless, in the ISSP surveys, 79% per cent of Portuguese women *in full-time employment* thought that a pre-school child suffered if his or her mother went out to work, as compared to 25% of similar British women (Lyonette et al 2007).

Variations in national occupational structures also contribute to national variations in both attitudes and behaviour in respect of gender roles. In general, as we have seen, both gender role attitudes, and levels of traditionalism in the domestic division of labour are associated with class and educational levels, in that professional and managerial groupings are more gender liberal than the 'lower' occupational groups. Occupational structures vary from country to country, and richer countries will have higher proportions of managers and professionals (as well as higher educational levels). Portugal was the poorest of our sample of five countries, and in aggregate, the most gender traditional in attitude.¹⁸ However, there were highly significant class differences in 'general' gender role attitudes in Portugal – for example, whereas 87% of managerial and professional women in Portugal *disagreed* with the statement that a 'man's job' was to earn money, only 57% of manual women did so (Lyonette et al 2007). Portugal has a proportionately smaller proportion of managerial and professional employees (21% as compared to 37% in the British ISSP sample), and on the 'gender roles' question, the higher level of aggregate gender 'traditionalism' might be to some extent be explained by this occupational imbalance. However, on a range of other attitudinal statements, including 'what women really want is a home and children', 'watching children grow up is life's greatest joy', and thinking that both family life, and pre-school children, will suffer if the woman is in employment, employed managerial and professional men and women in Portugal were significantly more traditional and family-oriented than similar respondents in Britain (Lyonette et al 2007 290-1).

Although Portuguese men in the managerial and professional groupings are highly supportive of 'general' gender role liberalism, the ISSP data suggests they contribute very little to domestic work (Lyonette et al 2007). However, the same data suggests that about a third of professional and managerial women in Portugal have help with domestic cleaning, washing and ironing. If a 'bought in' household employee replaces an employed woman's domestic input, there will be little need or incentive for men to share in domestic tasks, particularly in rather traditional countries such as Portugal, and gender relations in the home will remain traditional.

There are significant regional variations in the hiring of domestic workers. In Scandinavia, paid domestic help is relatively uncommon (a very small occupational category, and ISSP data suggests that very few respondents used paid help for domestic chores). Paid domestic help becomes more common as one moves south through Europe, and in Portugal, ILO data reveals that it is the largest single category of female employment. The relative national availability of low-cost domestic help, therefore, will be another factor having an impact on the nature of trajectories out of box 3.

The purpose of our discussion of these cross-national differences has not simply been to draw attention to country-specific problems in achieving a dual-earner/dual carer society – in any case, this has been extensively demonstrated in another contribution to this volume (Morgan). Nor has it been only to make the (important but obvious) point that shifts in the gendered domestic division of labour are essential in order to make a successful transition to box 4. Rather, our purpose has been to explore, however briefly, the roots of gender traditionalism. In the case of both France and Portugal, these may be, at least in part, explained by historic circumstances in which particular national traditions relating to gender, and gender equality, have been important.

A rather simple explanation of gender traditionalism is available – the persistence of patriarchy (eg Walby 1990). It cannot be denied that globally, women are still dominated by men, and have been throughout recorded history. However, ‘patriarchy’ can be a dangerous concept as far as feminists are concerned. Put simply, if male domination is viewed as being somehow inevitable, then the essentialist trap – that men are inherently oppressive – is all too easy to fall into. Patterns of gender equality have been decisively shaped by two major sets of gender essentialist normative assumptions. The first is masculine supremacy. Men have for millennia been regarded as superior to women and accordingly as better suited for positions of authority and domination. This ideology of masculine supremacy has been buttressed by the second set of assumptions - normative ideas about the ‘proper’ roles of men and women, and what they should and should not do (Charles 2005). In the second part of the twentieth century, in western societies the ideology of masculine supremacy has been successfully challenged, and women have been formally recognized as the equals of men. What has proved to be much more enduring, however, are deep-seated norms, and cultural beliefs, about what men and women are good at and how they should behave. As we have seen, these essentialist gender norms, and, more importantly, associated behaviours, have been more persistent in France and Portugal than in the other three countries studied in the ‘Employment and the Family’ project. As far as gender equality is concerned, changing these norms and associated behaviour is as important a task as developing the institutions that support gender egalitarianism.

Conclusions

As our discussions of France and Portugal have suggested, the model described in Figure 1 may be defended as a useful heuristic device, but is by no means an accurate description of trends in gender relations. Indeed, one of its major uses might be in stimulating discussion and debate as to how and why ‘positive’ transitions out of box 3 might *not* be achieved. In addition, as in Gornick and Meyers’ elaboration of the model, it is useful in thinking through the varying ideological emphases on employment, caregiving and gender relations that are assumed by the different ‘stages’ (boxes 1-4) within it. Nevertheless, as was cautioned when it was originally formulated, on its own Figure 1 is excessively ‘economically determinist’ and it is vital that its ‘embeddedness’ in both particular normative contexts, and particular state welfare and labour market institutions, should continually be emphasised.

Despite the fact that we live in an era of globalisation, country differences still count as far as gender egalitarianism is concerned. Amongst the factors we have discussed in this chapter are specific historical features (including legacies such as fascism, or the dominance of particular religious creeds) that have affected state policies in

relation to women and the family. There are persisting national differences in the extent to which childcare and domestic work is normatively assigned to women, even in countries in which women have achieved formal equality with men. There are also persisting national differences in the structuring of labour markets, giving rise to variations in the availability of ‘good’ (and ‘bad’) jobs, and opportunities for flexible working (Soskice 2005). National policies also affect the extent to which low-cost labour – particularly migrant labour – may be used to replace women’s unpaid domestic labour as they enter employment (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).

Part-time work in Britain may be used as a ‘worked example’ to illustrate this general argument. One major reason why part-time work (for women) emerged as a ‘British solution’ to the problems of employment/family articulation from the 1960s onwards was that as the British labour market was relatively unregulated, employers were at liberty (indeed encouraged) to introduce short hours working that could be fitted in around conventional family arrangements. An example would be the ‘twilight shift’, in which women are employed from early to late evenings, when their partners are available to look after the children. Part-time workers are cheap to employ, which is just one of their advantages from an employers’ point of view (Purcell et al 1999).¹⁹ However, in more regulated labour markets in Europe (such as France), job protections made it much more problematic to develop part-time employment, and indeed, in France part-time employment is still seen by many as a dangerous innovation given that it may lead to excessive flexibilisation and a lowering of labour market protections (Morgan, this volume).

Policies designed to ‘normalise’ part-time work – that is, to give it similar rights, and protections, as full-time employment – have been widely introduced in Europe, particularly as a consequence of EU policy directives. Nevertheless, the hourly rates of part-time workers remain substantially less than those in full-time employment, and part-time work has a very negative impact on career development at all levels of employment. Putting it bluntly, getting promoted means working full-time (Crompton et al 2003). Part-time work is overwhelmingly ‘women’s’ employment, and is an important factor that contributes to gender inequality in employment (O’Reilly and Fagan 1998). Thus even when part-time work is instituted ostensibly for the ‘right’ reasons – as in the Netherlands, where the right to part-time work was introduced for men and women in order to facilitate a combination of employment and family life – it is overwhelmingly women who choose this option, and bear the subsequent negative consequences (Morgan this volume).

Does the fact of the embeddedness of couples’ earning arrangements in particular normative and institutional patterns lead us to suggest any major changes in the policies recommended by Gornick and Meyers? I would suggest the answer to this question is negative. However, embeddedness does mean that careful thinking has to take place about strategies for the implementation of these policies. Work-family policies intersect with both existing beliefs about gender roles and the care of children (Pfau-Effinger 1999), as well as established national institutional frameworks. Thus in France (and the countries of the Soviet bloc), where policies to facilitate mother’s employment (rather than ‘work-family’) were introduced in the earlier part of the twentieth century (ie, before the impact of ‘second-wave’ feminism), they had little impact as far as prevailing domestic gender norms were concerned.²⁰ In contrast, work-family policies introduced and developed with gender equality as a specific

goal, as in the Scandinavian countries, are much more likely to effect a successful transition from box 3 to box 4.

Finally, in thinking about these issues, I am often reminded of Folbre's (1994) observation to the effect that although the 'male breadwinner' model of the division of labour between men and women was not 'fair' at least it underwrote human reproduction. One of the arguments that underpins Gornick and Meyers' recommendations is that with the erosion of the breadwinner model, human reproduction is *not* best left to individualised, marketised care arrangements, and hence their emphasis on the role that state ('collective') provisions have to play in their policy prescriptions. However, given that we are in an era in which neoliberal political and economic thinking is in the ascendance, the re-direction of resources toward collective provision is going to be a difficult task to achieve. On the other hand, women's employment is on the increase in all 'western' countries, and issues of gender equality, and work-life 'balance', have moved towards the upper reaches of policy agendas (eg Esping-Andersen 2002). It is vital, however, that an explicit goal of gender equality remains central to the debates relating to policies facilitating adaptations to the increase in women's employment. Policies emphasising the importance of parental 'choice' are presented as if they are gender neutral. However, even Esping-Andersen (2002 91), who is formally committed to gender equality, endorses Hakim's arguments relating to maternal 'choice' and makes the essentialist assumption that women's choices will 'naturally' differ from those of men. Gender equity in parenthood and employment does not necessarily mean that men and women will behave in exactly the same way, but it does mean that women should be enabled to make choices independently of the gendered normative constraints that have for so long been attached to parenting and domestic work.

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¹ The project began in the late 80s. In each country, fifteen qualitative work-life interviews were carried out with female medical doctors, and banking and finance sector managers. We also had access to ISSP data (see footnote 5 below) for Britain, Norway, Russia and the Czech Republic. See Crompton ed 1999. Russia was 'under-represented' in our final discussions, largely because of problems with the

quantitative materials available (which in the event were not used), together with difficulties in maintaining contact with Russian colleagues in what were fast-changing times (to put it mildly).

² The level of state childcare provision in Norway was lower than in the other Scandinavian countries (Leira 1992), although it was increasing rapidly. Parents in Norway have a strong preference for state childcare, and although provision is generous, shortages are still perceived (Ellingsaeter 2006). Universal state childcare was a feature of 'state socialist' economies, and although it was being cut back in the early 1990s, was still generous. The level of provision in Czechoslovakia was somewhat lower than that of other 'eastern bloc' countries (Heitlinger 1979), although still good by 'western' standards.

³ This analysis has been updated using 2002 data, see Crompton Brockmann and Lyonette 2005. Czech men remain highly traditional, although the attitudes of Czech women have changed considerably.

⁴ Indeed, it was argued that as gender systems and arrangements are multidimensional, the 'continuum' was not in fact such, 'although its heuristic value may still be defended' (Crompton 1999 207).

⁵ Men *do*, in aggregate, carry out more domestic work when their partners work full-time.

⁶ Acknowledgements and thanks to the ESRC for two grants: R000239727: 'Employment and the Family', and R000220106: 'Families, Employment and Work-Life Integration'. For a description of the ISSP programme, see Davis and Jowell (1989). In 2002, interviews were carried out with a stratified random sample of 2312 in Britain, 1353 in Finland, 1903 in France, 1475 in Norway, and in 1092 in Portugal. Questions on work-life conflict were only asked of those in employment, and numbers will vary.

⁷ There are, however, considerable regional variations in childcare provision in France. Indeed, it has been argued that one of the intentions of the APE (see below) was to 'encourage' mothers of young children to withdraw from the labour market in regions with below-average childcare provision. See Le Feuvre and Lemarchant 2007.

⁸ Following the 1997 legislative elections, women were 10.9% of deputies, but only 5.9% of senators. In 1999, the French Constitution was amended so as to actively promote the political participation of women.

⁹ Cronbach's alpha .73; factor analysis showed one factor with an Eigen value of 2.2, explaining 56% of variance.

¹⁰ Factor analysis showed 1 factor, Eigen value 2.699, explaining over 54% of the variance. Cronbach's alpha for all 5 items =0.7860.

¹¹ A similar association was also found in the other countries, but the difference was statistically significant only in France.

¹² The DDL scale was dichotomised and cross-tabulated with a dichotomised version of the gender role question, generating four categories.

¹³ The level of the APE is approximately 50% of the national minimum wage.

¹⁴ Using the definition very loosely, both France and Portugal might be described as 'corporatist'.

¹⁵ For example, the 'Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the church and in the world' (Offices of the Congregation for the doctrine of the Faith, May 31, 2004, written by the present Pope) asserts that women, 'in her deepest and original being, exists 'for the other'', linked to their 'physical capacity to give life'. Furthermore, women live the 'dispositions of listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting' with 'particular intensity and naturalness'.

¹⁶ Indeed, and following the 'cultural turn' within the social sciences, 'gender' is frequently discussed as a largely 'cultural' phenomenon. For an interesting discussion see Fraser 2000.

¹⁷ Official explanations of French women's exclusion from political life similarly draw on historical factors, including Salic law, which excluded women from succession to the throne, and the French Revolution, which excluded them from citizenship. See www.diplomatie.gouv.fr

¹⁸ Figures for 2001 show that, compared with an EU-15 gross earnings average of 31910 euros for full-time employees in enterprises with 10+ employees, Portugal was much lower with an average of 13338 euros.

¹⁹ Short hours working was also encouraged by the fact that until recently, short hours part-time work in Britain was not liable for National Insurance contributions.

²⁰ It is of interest that in France, women's 'right to employment' is widely accepted, although domestic gender norms, and ideas about 'suitable' work for women, remain rather conventional. See Crompton and Le Feuvre 2002.