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In both Europe and North America, we are in the midst of what might be called a “farewell to maternalism,” a change in the gendered logics of our systems of social provision from supporting women as full-time caregivers, in households headed by breadwinning men or as single mothers, to requiring and supporting employment for all. Today, motherhood – unless coupled with employment -- is less and less a basis for making entitlement claims in welfare states, whatever its considerable remaining cultural and political-discursive power. Systems of social provision and regulation are being restructured to encourage “activation” and economic self-sufficiency. This is an epochal shift in social policy, politics and gender relations. In *Farewell to Maternalism? State Policies, Feminist Politics and Mothers’ Employment in the US and Europe* -- the larger project on which this paper is based -- I aim to describe and to explain this shift; to understand its implications for future policy possibilities; and to assess the gains and losses for feminism in maternalist policy and in the employment-based policies that have replaced it. Here, I want to take up the question of what kinds of policies and politics feminists should be aiming for in this post-maternalist world, with a focus on what is perhaps the most widely-accepted vision of feminists interested in the “social question” in its contemporary manifestations, and with social justice and social policy: a “universal caregiver” or “dual-earner/dual-carer” model -- a group I call *social feminists*.

Emerging from the fertile and ongoing mingling of feminism, socialism and social liberalism that has characterized social reform efforts directed at working-class women and employed mothers since the end of the 19th century, social feminists occupy a distinctive place in women’s emancipation movements and feminist scholarship. Social feminist activists have most often been allied with social democratic or labor parties and unions, as well as various social reformers; social feminist scholars have integrated studies of gender with class, “race,” and other forms of inequality and have been especially concerned with systems of social provision and regulation (sometimes, not always, “welfare states”). Since the second wave of the women’s movement, academic analysts of social policy in the social feminist tradition have been increasingly interested in policies that would encourage the erosion of the gender division of labor, at first in terms of getting women into the public sphere of employment and politics. Notably, in the last decade or so, they insist that this also requires greater efforts to get men to take up care and to resist androcentric political assumptions that denigrate caregiving.

To advance toward greater gender egalitarianism, social feminists argue persuasively that we should pursue a set of policies that will help to bring into being, and support greater gender symmetry in the allocation and performance of carework and paid employment (and, presumably, other kinds of participation in collective activities, such as politics). In their view, it is the gender division of labor – above all, men’s greater participation in the public spheres of paid work and politics and women’s greater responsibility for unpaid care work – that underpins gender inequality. Thus, ultimately, women’s emancipation demands the dissolution of that division of labor -- a utopian dream if ever there was one. But for most scholars, that utopia remains but a hazy image, and far greater attention is paid to policy institutions in several European countries, above all Sweden, which, if extended, could be expected to serve as the way stations on the path toward gender equality and women’s emancipation. These policies are individual entitlements to paid leaves and well-developed care services available as a right, alongside a restructuring of employment to reduce work time. They

argue that such policies put us on the road to gender equality by allowing and encouraging both men and women to work for pay and to participate in family caregiving in equal measures.

Certainly, there are many attractive features to this vision. Indeed, there is already a lot to like about the Scandinavian social-democratic model, even before its utopian extensions, including its explicit commitment to gender equality, excellent care services and very low poverty rates among children and solo mothers (see, e.g., Hernes 1987; Borchorst 1994; Borchorst and Siim 2002; Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006) – and this is especially so when we contrast the Nordic model to current US social provision, with its gaping gaps in coverage against the everyday risks of contemporary life, and the high levels of insecurity, poverty, illiteracy and crime which have flourished in their wake. But here I will not contrast – yet again – existing Nordic and US welfare and gender policy models (but see Orloff 2006; Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999).¹ Let us instead consider a gender-egalitarian vision and the policy institutions that might get us closer to it. Gender equality is usually portrayed as the opposite of the gender asymmetries that are implicated in women's oppression, but the ideal has not itself been subject to much probing. Instead, it is simply assumed that if asymmetry is associated with inequality, greater symmetry should be associated with equality – a problematic assumption, indeed, as I will try to demonstrate below.

In the following pages, I will do two things. First, I will assess the argument for policies that support a model of dual-earner/dual-carer households or a notion of “universal caregiver,” as have been put forward by a number of scholars, including Nancy Fraser (1994), Diane Sainsbury (1999), Evelyne Huber and John Stephens, Rosemary Crompton, and, most recently, Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers (2008). Because Gornick and Meyer are particularly explicit about the linkages between the gender division of labor, gender inequality and the potential for expanded social policies to remedy that inequality, I focus on their argument, in which they link gender egalitarianism and gender symmetry; I believe their recent essay brings to light many of the assumptions underlying the views of the broader group. I consider these proposals from the perspective of long-standing feminist debates about emancipatory projects based on “sameness” and “difference,” how we can get beyond the well-known limitations of both, and perhaps find ways to overcome this very dilemma. I attempt to unearth the assumptions about politics, culture and gender that support these contentions. And in answer to the question of whether feminists should pursue gender symmetry, I will say “not as a matter of universal principle.” Second, I will offer a different take on how feminists might approach political goals, which may be long- or short-term, utopian, radical or reformist, than has been typical for the social feminist perspective, which has been notably deterministic in its approach to politics (indeed, this has been true of most Marxist political analysis; see Adams, Clemens and Orloff 2005). While feminists in this tradition often take an essentially structural and deductive approach to understanding political interests, I offer a more inductive and historical approach. “Interests,” or, as I prefer, goals,² as well as utopian visions must be understood in specific political and historical contexts. I say this not in the sense that some utopias are conceivable and desirable, but unreachable in certain countries – as some Swedophilic political realists might conclude about the political feasibility in the US of Nordic-inspired utopias featuring generous parental leave and extensive, high-quality public care services. One could agree with the ultimate goal, or utopia, of gender symmetry, and think that there

¹ I have argued that these comparisons have been far too influenced by “Swedophilia,” and that we need a more comprehensive appreciation of the advantages as well as failures of existing US gender policy (as I offer with colleagues in O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999).

² Thanks to Julia Adams for illuminating conversations on this point; she convinced me that the concept of “interests” brings in its wake too much accreted semiotic baggage, especially from its Marxist past, thereby thwarting any attempt to set it free from understandings of politics as determined (in the last instance of course) by “material” forces.

might be policies other than those highlighted by the social feminists that could help deliver us there.³ This point is of course true, but hardly a startling proposition. I think we should also question the desirability of the goal itself, both in terms of its specific conceptualization of gender equality and with respect to how political goals emerge more generally.

I argue for guiding political visions that emerge inductively, from an investigation of feminist political practices and theorizing, rather than assuming that we can deduce the features of a gender-egalitarian utopia and desirable political goals from analyses of gender “interests” read off social locations and structures that seem not to vary substantially across the developed world. Thus I question the goal of gender symmetry, from the angles of political and empirical as well as normative analysis. I contend that individuals and groups come to conceive, understand, and analyze their situations and themselves as political subjects with particular sorts of “needs” and goals, and develop strategies for stability or change through historically-specific cultural and political processes.⁴ It is, I think, impossible to understand how and when any goal – or utopia – emerges and might be brought into being without considering politics; the very desirability of goals (or utopias) depends on context.

My own analysis and normative probing has led me to advocate, in the contemporary US context, political goals that would expand choice, or decisional autonomy, based in interdependence, and inclusive citizenship, emerging from a consideration of diversity in modern societies and from an understanding of gender as constitutive of subjects. Further, as we fashion better policy and social arrangements, we must include mechanisms for democratic accountability and of respect for the multiplicity of gender arrangements among the diverse citizens and residents of modern states. While I am favorable to basing these entitlements on citizenship, I would also argue that this must be problematized; we need to find ways to take account of issues of immigration and integration, but I will not here pursue these fully. The policy institutions that might serve as “way stations” toward this utopian condition will vary, depending on context. While I feel most confident that this vision fits with US political conditions, the basic points about the challenges to universalistic policies from difference and diversity may have broader relevance. Finally, let me add that one might agree – as I do – that increasing support to care is desirable without supporting symmetry as an ultimate goal, or the specific menu of policies that social feminists have forwarded as universal solutions to the problem of gender inequality.

Analyzing Gender Symmetry: Gender Inequality, Gender Interests, and Gender Politics

Social feminists have proceeded from the conviction that gender difference in patterns of engaging in care work and employment is the key to gender inequality and that “gender symmetric” social arrangements would better suit women’s – and, interestingly, also men’s -- interests. Their policy proposals have been informed by second-wave feminist thinking and long-standing Marxist theorizing

³ I do believe that historically-specific institutional legacies make certain policy approaches likely, possible, or impossible – this is at least partly a matter of politics, as these legacies create, reinforce, or alter definitions of problems, understanding of patterns of coalitions and enmities, and sets of institutional capacities (Weir, Orloff and Skocpol 1988), while conditioning “actors’ struggles to name themselves and their protagonists by generating support for the formulation of their own preferred collective identity,” as Jenson and Mahon (1993) put it. In short, “policy creates politics” (Pierson 1994) – or, at least, helps to do so.

⁴ See Fraser (1990) for an influential statement of the contextualized and conflictual construction of what are understood to be “needs” or even, in some instances, “rights.” Haney (2002) explores the “invention” of certain sorts of needs and subjects (e.g., the “needy,” or “mothers”) in postsocialist Hungary and further specifies a theory of the political and cultural construction of needs, rights and identities.

about the significance of women's entry to employment in unsettling patriarchal arrangements and empowering women. According to Gornick and Meyers, prominent proponents of social feminism, the dual earner/dual carer arrangement:

is a society in which men and women engage symmetrically in employment and caregiving and all parents have realistic opportunities to combine waged work with the direct provision of care for their children. A dual-earner / dual-carer society is one that supports equal opportunities for men and women in employment, equal contributions from mothers and fathers at home, and high quality care for children provided both by parents and by well-qualified and well-compensated nonparental caregivers (Gornick and Meyers January 2007 mss, p.3).⁵

Reaching gender symmetry depends on several interrelated transformations: the dissolution of the remaining gendered division of labor in employment and in the home, a thorough transformation of workplace practices and the establishment of state policies that would encourage and support the model of a "dual earner/dual carer" household. But most of these authors eschew any deep analysis of how gender itself might be ended – for that is the implication of "dissolving" the gender division of labor; and while they indicate the need for controls on capitalists' prerogatives, particularly vis-à-vis reconciliation measures, they do not examine in any detail how capitalist and masculinist employment structures could be changed, and instead focus almost exclusively on state policies that would ease conflicts between paid work and family life.

Gornick and Meyers (2008) outline a package of work-family reconciliation policies that would support dual earner/dual carer arrangements: paid family leave provisions in which both mothers and fathers get equal, non-transferable shares of leave; working-time regulations; and early childhood education and care services.⁶ Like many other social feminists, Gornick and Meyers find the inspiration for these policies in Sweden, where social-democratic policies have supported mothers' employment with less time stress than in the US, provided better care services and resources for children than in most of Europe and North America, and encouraged fathers' caregiving. A great deal of feminist writing on social policy and gender has extolled the existing policies of Sweden (e.g., Crompton 1999; Sainsbury 1999), and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of other Nordic countries, and have assumed that such policies could conceivably be extended to promote more aggressively equal sharing of care work and paid work by women and men. And, indeed, while these policy proposals would dramatically change the landscape in the US, UK, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and continental Europe were they somehow to be enacted, these proposals are already quite familiar in the Nordic countries which are such an important source for this style of policy thinking. Given how close these ideal policy institutions are to already-existing practices in the Nordic countries, one might ask why these countries are not much closer to symmetry and women's emancipation than they are (see, e.g., Bergqvist 1999; Ahlberg, Roman and Duncan 2008). Although on some measures of women's relative well-being vis-à-vis men's, Swedes fare better than do Americans (e.g., gendered wage gaps, or poverty ratios), they are far from equal, and on some measures (e.g., gendered authority gaps), the US ranks higher (Wright, Baxter and Birkelund 1995; see also Estevez-Abe 2005). Perhaps other

⁵ It is not entirely clear – in any of this literature -- how one would measure progress toward gender symmetry, which is not particularly well-defined. Does it depend on 50/50 informal care and employment splits by all heterosexual couples? Most couples? What about singles or gay couples or other familial or household arrangements? The "dual" in these formulations strikes me as unapologetically heteronormative!

⁶ Although they mention "equal opportunities" in employment, they do not outline policies that would regulate equal treatment on hiring and wages and prevent hostile environments, sticking only with the regulation of working time. I return to this point below.

forces – not solely the gender division of labor – are implicated in sustaining gender hierarchy? Let's take a look, then, at how these scholars analyze gender inequality.

Underlying these social feminist accounts is the assumption that gender inequality is tied to gender differences in time spent on care and family versus employment and career; such assumptions also color less-explicitly-feminist accounts that are concerned with women's roles and the future of the welfare state. As Gornick and Meyers put it (2007, p.16):

Feminists concerned with the family have concluded that persistent gender inequality in the labor market is both cause and consequence of women's disproportionate assumption of unpaid work in the home. ...[M]en's stronger ties to the labor market carry social, political, and economic advantages that are denied to many women, especially those who spend substantial amounts of time caring for children.

Gornick and Meyers (2007, pp.8-9) define contemporary problems of gender inequality as resulting from "incomplete transformations," as we've moved from full to partial gender specialization; women have changed a great deal – taking up paid employment in addition to their work of caring (as we all know), but men have not changed enough, and still do much less care work than women. Moreover, labor market and policy institutions assume the traditional division of labor and fail to give adequate support to modern arrangements for caregiving. Sensibly, they do not want to focus solely on women, as did earlier efforts at achieving better "work-family reconciliation" (Stratigaki 2004). (Indeed, even mainstream analysts of welfare states, such as Gosta Esping-Andersen, have come around to the view that we've reached the limits of masculinizing women's lives and must focus some attention on changing men and work structures.) Yet, like most other social feminists, Gornick and Meyers do not put the blame for gender inequality on men (cf. Hochschild 1989). They claim that the interests of men, women, and children are not essentially in conflict. Rather, the "most pressing conflicts of interest arise not between women and men, nor between parents and children, but between the needs of contemporary families and current divisions of labor, workplace practices, and social policies." I agree with this analysis of the link between the gender division of labor and gender inequality, as far as it goes, but, as I will argue below, I think it is not fully adequate.

The gender division of labor is pivotal in shaping women's and men's gender interests, social feminists argue, and because they tend to assume a straightforward link between interests and goals, they are also key to the gender politics of social policies. Women are all disadvantaged by the existing gender division of labor, though to varying degrees – some have the resources needed to buy private services that can help them reconcile family and employment and can negotiate favorable bargains with their employers, while others must struggle with meager resources in unforgiving environments. Yet, in this view, all women are hurt by the gendering of care burdens, either directly, or indirectly, as, for example, when employers engage in statistical discrimination in the expectation that women will favor family over work commitments. Thus, without considering solutions that center on increasing direct support to women's (informal, or unpaid) care work, they assume women are in employment, and argue that all women would benefit if the current masculine model of the full-time and unencumbered worker were to be replaced by a model of an encumbered worker, who also puts in fewer hours than typical men do now. (Thus, "fulltime" work hours would be revised down; on the gender politics of work time and the gendered meanings of "full" and "part" time, see, e.g., Fagan 1996; Mutari and Figart 2001). Women should find attractive policies that would encourage, reward and support a more equal division of care work and paid work between men and women. Men, too, are often forced to work too hard by current social arrangements, and certainly cannot contribute more at home as long as they are held to its strictures, even if they want to. (How much they want to is another concern, but typically, this line of thinking is not pursued.) The social feminist view of gender

interests thus echoes Marxist and social-democratic, more than second-wave or contemporary feminist, accounts (e.g., MacKinnon 1983); men and women do not have opposed gender interests; rather, it is employers and “the state” that are problematic.

Social feminists advocate policy prescriptions drawing on what is commonly understood as the second-wave feminist contention that “women’s emancipation depends on reaching parity with men in the public spheres of employment and politics” (Gornick and Meyers, p.3) – although without as much of the critical edge vis-à-vis men. Their basic commitment to women’s employment is nourished as well from broadly Marxist and social-democratic sources, which have historically linked women’s emancipation to their engagement with paid work. Yet they also favor greater support for caregiving activities than was usual for either liberal feminists or orthodox Marxists. Perhaps this also reflects the familiarity with Scandinavian developments, which had a homegrown set of supports for caregiving linked to concerns about population, fertility, labor supply and working women’s rights to be mothers (Hobson and Bergmann 2002; Hobson 1993; Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006). This attention to care marks the social feminist approach as having gone beyond the assumptions of 1970s liberal feminism (“universal breadwinner” in the terminology of Nancy Fraser [1994]), denounced as “sameness” feminism, or “androgyny” by more radical feminists.⁷ Two decades of feminist work on social policy – some of it in the social feminist mold, some of it more influenced by “difference” feminism -- has been critical in raising the issue of care, as it has been centrally concerned with understanding the relationships among care, paid work, and welfare, the links between care and gender inequality, and many women’s strong normative commitment to the value of care.⁸

Gornick and Meyers’ social feminist proposal might be positioned in the space created in the aftermath of bitter feminist conflicts in the late 1980s and early 1990s over “sameness” and “difference” in politics and policy, in which protagonists argued about whether women’s interests (taking those as relatively unproblematic, at the time) would be best served by strategies assuming and promoting women’s similarity to men, or by those which assumed women’s difference from men (see, e.g., Bacchi 1991; Milkman 1995). The fight was staged in many policy arenas, for example, how best to craft policy on pregnancy and employment protection (Vogel 1993). (Is pregnancy a disability like any other meriting inclusion in existing general disability protections? Or is it a gender- or sex-specific condition warranting a gender-specific protection?) Questions of care and the body loomed large in these discussions. While feminists (especially though not only in the US) in the 1970s seemed to gravitate towards “sameness” strategies, the 1980s had brought greater attention to the importance of “difference,” especially that based on care. Since then, there have been several attempts to go beyond the problematic framing of the problem as “sameness versus difference” (see, e.g., Scott 1988; Williams 2000; Young 1990).

Among social feminist policy analysts, the work of Nancy Fraser has been extremely significant, in seemingly offering a way out of the dilemma. Unlike poststructuralist analysts of gender discourse and performativity in the Butlerian vein, to whom many social feminists find themselves allergic, Fraser works on the familiar terrain of paid work and care. I want briefly to examine Fraser’s argument because it provides insight into the analytic underpinnings of the dual earner/dual carer

⁷ Perhaps this also reflects the direct influence of “difference feminism” that has characterized feminism in the developed world since the 1980s; this certainly influenced Fraser (1994).

⁸ This literature is vast. Key works on care in political and legal theory include Tronto 1993; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Kittay 2002, Fineman 1995, 2004, Young 1990; germinal scholarship linking social provision, gender, care and employment includes Land 1978; Lewis 1992; Williams 2001; Jenson 1997; Koven and Michel 1990; Gordon 1990, 1994; Fraser and Gordon 1994; Hobson 1990; Knijn 1994; Cass 1994; Orloff 1993, 1996, 2005; O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999. Here, I must note that unlike other social feminists, Gornick and Meyer leave this work invisible in their text, mirroring the neglect of feminist analysis of care work that characterizes much mainstream work on social policy.

policy model that Gornick and Meyers, Crompton (1999), and other social feminists have championed.

Fraser, in her influential 1994 article “After the Family Wage,” performs a Hegelian maneuver to overcome the sameness/difference problem, which leads her to advocate a policy model analogous to the dual earner/dual carer – “universal caregiver.” Investigating feminist utopian visions for reforming the welfare state in gender-egalitarian directions, in a period of crisis and restructuring, she identifies two approaches -- dubbed “universal breadwinner” and “caregiver parity” – roughly corresponding to the preferences and practices of US versus European feminists. The former would allow and encourage women to act as men do in the economy, as breadwinners, earning a family-supporting wage, and ceding carework to others -- not the unpaid housewife of the “traditional” household, but the paid service workers of the state, thus commodifying everyone while commodifying care. While this model would lead to a number of improvements in the situation of most women, Fraser (1994, p.602) critiques this approach as problematic on several scores. For example, while the model depends on full employment, she doubts everyone can be employed; it also depends on care being removed from households, but she believes some care cannot be outsourced, while those who continue to perform care would be marginalized. She sums up by saying the model is androcentric and unworkable, and ultimately unhelpful to women’s interest in equality, because it expects women to become like men. The “caregiver parity” model does not neglect care, or women’s work as caregivers, but instead tries to compensate them for the disadvantages this work creates in a masculinist and capitalist society (“making difference costless,” in the words of Christine Littleton [1987, p. 1322]). So women and men continue to be different. Yet Fraser (1994, p.609) also finds this model limited because gender differences ultimately continue to create disadvantages for women that cannot be compensated – difference may “cost less,” but is far from “costless”; women end up marginalized from public activities even though better protected against poverty and other hardships. Fraser’s dissection of existing feminist policy approaches is extremely useful in showing the limitations of our thinking, and lays the groundwork for new perspectives – such as those championed by Gornick and Meyers, or Rosemary Crompton before them.

The way out of the sameness/difference dilemma, says Fraser, is the synthesis of the two earlier approaches, a political ideal she calls the “universal caregiver,” in which men are made the focus of efforts at change, rather than women – in other words, the problem is that most men are unlike what “most women are now,” caregivers who are also (paid) workers. This is an important analytic innovation (paralleling others working to decenter the masculine). In this way, care is valorized while not leaving it solely to women – we try to retain what’s good about women’s devotion to care while, by making it normative for men as well as women, avoiding the problems of women’s marginalization and the devaluation of care. To be sure, Fraser notes, this implies that the deconstruction of gender difference is a precondition for gender equity -- we must “end gender as we know it” (Fraser 1994, p.611)! This is a revolutionary demand indeed (Olson 2002). Perhaps in a more reformist vein, attempting to make men more like women – by finding ways to encourage their participation in care, such as the fully individual leave entitlements Gornick and Meyers propose – would still be a worthwhile goal. Yet it falls somewhat short of gender symmetry.

I want to probe more deeply into the analysis of gender – and of subjects and politics – that underlies the Gornick and Meyer proposal for gender symmetry and similar calls for promoting a combined earner-carer life pattern for men and women. To my mind, this takes too lightly the deep investments people have in gender (e.g., Fenstermaker and West 2002), and the ways in which knowledge, subjectivity and agency are both constrained *and enabled* by existing gendered categories (Butler 1990, 1997; Clemens 2005; Zerilli 2005). Taking account of these investments matters insofar as it clarifies men’s commitment to preserving the power that current social arrangements give them, but

also women's concerns to preserve their power in the domain of the private, care-giving realm. Identities are formed in relation to whether men and women see themselves as caregivers or not, or the gendered ways in which they conceive of their activities. This can certainly be taken up from a range of different theoretical angles, but many scholars would find it hard to imagine subjects – political actors – whose “needs” or “interests” can be said to preexist culturally constituted consciousness, including gendered (self-) understandings and knowledge.⁹ For example, R. W. Connell (1987) highlights political and psychic aspects of gender in an account of gender relations as shaped by three structures: labor, power, cathexis (see also Rubin 1975). Or take Joan Scott's (1986) germinal intervention, which defines gender first as a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes and expressed in symbols, norms, institutions and politics, and subjective identities, and second as a primary way of signifying power. One might also look to political and historical accounts that allow the “primary” causes of gender relations (or, less grandly, policy and political institutions) to vary over time and across place (e.g., Adams 2005; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999).

Scott's analysis is significant for any consideration of “sameness” and “difference” with respect to any sort of politics, utopian or pragmatic, for it points to the continuing productivity of gender. Even when we speak on behalf of gender symmetry, we speak “as women,” and must refer to difference. Moreover, while Scott points to the constitutively gendered character of subjects, she makes no assumption that gendered identities necessarily lead to a politics of gender difference. *Au contraire!* Women in the democratic age have been continually attracted to universalist visions. Similarly, Denise Riley (1988) or Judith Butler (1990, 2004) point to the variability and instability of gender categories for individuals, and for collectivities, and to the diverse ways gender can be mobilized politically.

Of particular concern for the prospects of greater gender symmetry that will depend on men's recruitment to caregiving, men's attachment to the powers and privileges of masculinity seem to be underplayed in social feminist accounts. I am thinking here of men's attempts to keep in place gendered divisions of labor by avoiding dirty work at home and in the workplace or by excluding women from favored positions in the paid labor force through sexual and other forms of harassment, or discrimination in hiring, pay, or occupational access. Will men be dissuaded from making these power plays simply by the offer of incentives to take up care? Women's disadvantages at work are indeed linked to the statistical discrimination practiced “rationally” by employers calculating the likely impact on employment of women's carework burdens (taking leaves, for instance). But there's plain old discrimination to deal with, too, and cultural beliefs in gender difference (see, e.g., Correll et al. 2007; Charles and Grusky 2004).¹⁰ Other feminists have identified a range of factors that – even if

⁹ As Adams and Padamsee (2001, p.13) describe a similar set of analyses, these works begin from the premise that

social position—analytically independent of and prior to consciousness—generates ideas and even identities. The latter are simply assumed to be aligned with actors' positional interests and preconceptual experiences. Further... [it is assumed that] these identities apply not just to an aggregate of people with the requisite demographic characteristics, but that these actors form a natural group and that their actions can be interpreted accordingly.

¹⁰ I wonder about several things. Are they refraining from proposing policies targeting masculine privilege out of a political calculation that this would be counterproductive, pushing away potential allies among men, particularly in the unions and social-democratic parties that have been such important players in expanding social policy in the Scandinavian – and indeed European – context? Do we see here, then, a bit of a concern about political and practical feasibility? Or are Gornick and Meyers simply assuming that we already have policies flowing from an understanding of masculine interests in opportunity hoarding (to use the rather bloodless term favored by some theorists of inequality) or worse? They would be partially right about the US (and to a lesser extent, other English-speaking countries); yet these sorts of policies are rather less developed in other countries (see also Zippel's contribution to this volume). Or do they think such policies are unnecessary?

one does not accept them as principal sources of unequal gender relations – surely contribute importantly to it: sexuality, reproduction and violence (see e.g., Brush 2002). Perhaps these factors are required to understand the continuing problem of women’s oppression even in “women-friendly welfare states” like those found in Norden? Adapting Catharine MacKinnon’s (1989) words, (at least sometimes) the problem for women is “domination not difference.”

On the flip side, the social feminist vision of gender symmetry and “gender-egalitarian caregiving” also seems to occlude both the body – and especially women’s bodies – and women’s attachment to caregiving, promoting another assumption of “sameness” with reference to men’s and women’s equivalence going into childrearing. How do the demands of pregnancy and lactation affect any shift to “gender symmetry”? (In Scandinavia, to date, complete equalization of leaves between men and women has been blocked, in part because of concerns about how these might affect breastfeeding practices [Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006]). Many feminists have stressed bodily aspects of gender -- assuming that this also implies an irreducible cultural element -- and would on these grounds alone dismiss policies or utopias based on androgyny, or symmetry (see, e.g., Moi 1999, Kruks 2001, and of course, de Beauvoir [1952], who wrote eloquently about the “body as a situation”).

Can we assume an unproblematic embrace of any social feminist symmetric version of “egalitarianism” among women? What are we to make, then, of the widespread, well-documented preferences of many women to pursue life courses that are not premised on 50/50 sharing of paid work and care work with male partners? “Traditional” women in “new orthodox” religious modes especially pose a challenge to interpretations of gender that assume that all women will find egalitarian arrangements in their interests, but even less extreme versions of women’s attachments to lives founded on caregiving pose problems for the symmetric scenario. The standard response to these challenges among “materialist” and structurally-determinist analysts makes allusion to false consciousness, or to short-term versus long-term interests. Thus, men and women may not know it now, but surely they will be better off under egalitarian conditions defined as gender symmetry. Understanding preferences that confirm the existing division of labor as merely “adaptive” to constraining conditions may be less analytically troublesome – though such an account would be improved if cultural processes were also invoked. But it will be difficult to apply such approaches directly to the formulation of policies if we also value democratic politics and accountability in policy-making.

The analytic challenge for social feminism of what I would call the “depth” of gender relations is matched in seriousness by a number of other challenges that might be grouped under the banner of “differences.” We have just discussed the wide range of variation in men’s and women’s preferences vis-à-vis the gender division of labor. A separate issue concerns the multiplicity of differences among women (and men). Some analysts embracing an “intersectional” analysis contend that advantaged white women may suffer from gendered caregiving arrangements, but that they are able to either mitigate or entirely offload their problems by using services provided by disadvantaged women of color, who suffer from more severe incompatibilities between employment and care – and who in fact may be deprived of opportunities to mother at all (see, e.g., Mink 1998, 1999; Roberts 2004; Glenn 1992). Michael Shalev (2008) raises the question of class differences among women in terms of orientations about mothering and paid work, assuming their social locations cause their interests not just to differ but to collide; Duncan and Edwards (1999) contend that such orientations (which they call “gendered moral rationalities”) vary not so much by class or its proxy, educational level, as by local gender cultures (see also Pfau-Effinger 2004). The difference between these scholars is important, but they both raise a similar problem for any assumptions of uniformity of women’s

interests in promoting a dual-earner/dual-carer model. While, as outlined above, I disagree with the social determinism of these analyses, it is clear that both the individual preferences and the political demands of different groups of women have been at odds. To take but one example, in the 1970s, National Welfare Rights Organization advocated a kind of maternalist policy of making AFDC more generous, enabling women's full-time caregiving (West 1981), while other feminist groups pursued equal employment opportunities and the extension of child care services. And "differences among women" are not simply an American concern, arising from the vexed and racially-divided history of US feminism and social justice movements. Instead, we see conflicts over gender arrangements, and disputes among feminists about how best to proceed politically, crossing the developed west, and indeed, the entire globe.

"Differences among women" (and men) also indexes a key concern that is absent from most social feminist considerations: *who* will be entitled to these new social protections and services? Unfortunately, few analysts in this tradition have paid attention to the question of exactly who would be included in these programs, although the usual assumption is that nation-states will be the entities running these policies, and thus entitlement would be based on citizenship -- but the boundaries set by states, and their immigration policies, are not in question. Historical accounts of the development of systems of social provision and regulation are increasingly highlighting the link between generous programs (such as those provided in Norden) and the existence of "we-feeling," or solidarity based in perceived ethnic, "racial" and/or religious homogeneity (Antonnen 2002; Ferrera 2006). This in turn has been linked to practices of social closure, until recently at the level of the nation-state. According to Maurizio Ferrera (2006), who has studied the intertwined development of welfare and citizenship boundaries in Europe, despite greater transnational movement of people, capital, and ideas "solidarity remains a national affair.... Social sharing builds on 'closure'. It presupposes the existence of a clearly demarcated and cohesive community, whose members feel they belong to the same whole and that they are linked by reciprocity ties vis-à-vis common risks and similar needs." Modern welfare states of the "golden age" -- the period in which Scandinavians initiated pro-gender equality leave policies and developed public services -- enjoyed an alignment of redistributive boundaries with national territorial boundaries. In countries with extensive social divisions such as the United States, not all citizens were in fact treated equally, although this was the formal premise and promise of post-WW2 national social benefits (see, e.g., Glenn 2002). Increasing immigration also tests the limits of the citizenship-based models of Europe (see, e.g., Soysal 1994; Williams 1995; Joppke 1998; Favell 1998; Siim 2008). But clearly there is a deep challenge to any nationally-based utopia once we think globally (see, e.g., Hassim 2008).

While paying too little attention to differences *among* women (or among men), it is not the case that social feminists like Gornick and Meyers, or Fraser, are simply stuck in an old vision of "gender difference," emphasizing "women" and "men" as unitary and essentially different categories. Rather, they have embraced an approach that promises, by shifting the burden of change to men, to overcome the problems of understanding gender inequality in terms of a masculine standard. (It is the assumption of a masculine standard which forces the framing of gender problems in terms of women's "sameness" and "difference" from men.) But their solution actually recreates the demand of sameness in a new form: women and men will still be the same, but (allegedly) on women's terms, rather than men's. Men must "become like what women are now," as Fraser (1994) puts it -- meaning, they have to care more, while women are also working more (for pay, that is). One wonders, when women cannot become like men are now, according to many feminist critics of androcentric ideals, on account of their attachment to care (among other things), how it is that men can become like women

are now?¹¹ How will men develop an attachment to care?¹² (And let us recall that not all women are equally attached to or attracted to care work, or undertake it in similar ways.) The vision further presupposes that all are equally capable of caregiving (see also Weir 2005). Men might well be induced to care more – and I hope they are – but this is unlikely to lead to the “dissolution” of gender; rather, we are likely to see the reconfiguration of gender, perhaps in more desirable patterns. Finally, one might also fault this model for its singularity – it assumes, as Cynthia Willett (2001, p.91) has said, a “single norm of a socially useful person.” Is it possible that we can have greater involvement of men in care without producing anything like “symmetry” or the effacement of gender difference? Is it possible to value care more than is now the case, without assuming everyone will participate directly in giving care? As may be clear from my posing such questions, I will argue that the answer is “yes.”

A Contextual Understanding of Feminists’ Political Goals

Let me conclude by briefly discussing an alternative approach to feminist politics and the feminist projects (some utopian, some not) that emerge from such an analysis. While I certainly share many feminist values with Gornick and Meyers and am favorable to some of their policy proposals, we differ on how to develop political goals, be they feminist “utopias” or policy “way stations.” The shorthand for our analytic differences is deductive versus inductive, expert versus political, singular versus plural. I proceed inductively, from the historical experiences of various western feminist and women’s movements and theorists. At a very basic level, starting points for feminists in different countries vary – what kinds of social and political capacities are on hand, what women “need” versus what they already have, what kinds of conflicts characterize the polity, and so on – and these influence what political actors desire. Still, the culture and politics of liberal individualism of the western countries – particularly those with a Protestant religious-political legacy -- has shaped, in a foundational way, the diverse understandings of feminists and women’s movements. Feminists have, of course, usually embraced a revised individualism, one that rejects masculine standards and the assumption of a rational, unconstrained subject, one that takes account of relationality and interdependence, yet it is still recognizably liberal in its assumption of the importance of personhood and decisional autonomy (Reich 2002; O’Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999, chapter 2).¹³ But other values are combined in distinctive ways with feminist ones, and nationally-specific politics and cultures have produced a multiplicity of feminist projects and utopian visions.

Different utopias have flourished in different political contexts, and bear the marks of their parentage as well as of their adoptive context. This is not to say that specific policy legacies in any sense “dictate” corresponding utopias, or that there can be no transfer of utopian ideas – surely there is. Wollstonecraft, DeBeauvoir, Wittig and Butler, to name only a few feminist utopians, have been read and appropriated globally. It is simply to say, as in any case of translation, that the receiving context shapes the reception and understanding of the transferred object.

¹¹ I am grateful to Linda Zerilli for first raising this question in conversation, and continuing to discuss its implications with me.

¹² Indeed, some recent research on contemporary North American men who are primary caregivers (Doucet 2006) finds that these fathers do not see themselves as “mothering,” but fathering. Perhaps we should not worry about what they call it, as long as they are engaged in providing care. Yet it seems to me that politically the differences in terminology and in identification will matter.

¹³ Certainly feminism can – and has – emerged in non-western contexts, but as the protagonists themselves insist, it takes on context-specific forms; and it is still an open question about the extent to which any sort of feminism presupposes some kind of autonomy and individualism.

Let us take a closer look at the contrasting situations of feminists imagining utopian futures in Scandinavia, and in the US. The Nordic welfare model of excellent support to care and mothers' employment was built on notions of class equality in the "people's home," with gender equality as a secondary theme (and one which was not constructed in opposition to ideas of gender differences) (Jenson and Mahon 1993). These systems emerged – as did all the nascent welfare states of the modern era – from a context in which support to social reproduction was infused with eugenic thinking; generous social provision was based on sharing within the nation, not outside its boundaries (Hobson and Bergmann 2002; Koven and Michel 1993). Nordic feminists, especially but not only within and in alliance with social-democratic parties, have succeeded in extending an originally gender-differentiated scheme – a set of policies with maternalist roots, which focused on allowing working-class, employed women to be mothers – to encourage men's caregiving as well as allowing all women to "reconcile" motherhood and employment (Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006). Thus, the near-term political goals of those who would extend this project look a lot like the social feminists' preferred policy institutions of equally-shared parental leave, more extensive services, and workplace reforms.¹⁴ But feminists have also raised issues concerning men's greater power in politics, the economy and personal life – problems that they do not think can be solved simply through equalizing leave-taking (see, e.g., Bergqvist et al 1999; Borchorst and Siim 2002). Unquestionably, some Nordic feminists are most concerned with equalizing men's and women's time spent on care and paid work, but others have developed utopian visions that focus more centrally on empowering women across spheres of life, and especially in politics (see, e.g., Nyberg 2002.) And other feminists have opposed equally-divided parental leaves, responding to concerns raised by women who do not want to give up their own leave time – perhaps because they want to breastfeed for longer than six months, perhaps because they fear the fathers of their children will not take the leave (in which case total parental leave time would drop and children would have to go to day care before the age of one or one-and-a-half; see Morgan 2008).

Nordic feminists are increasingly attempting to revise their thinking about policies, politics and ultimate goals in the face of the challenge of diversity, dealing with the integration of ethnic minorities, especially non-European immigrants (see, e.g., Siim 2008; Lister et al 2007). They do not yet agree how their generous systems can change to accommodate newcomers, nor about how much such newcomers – often from non-western countries – should be asked to change, especially in terms of their gender and familial practices. Here we see Scandinavian versions of the difficult debates about the veil, sex-segregated schooling and the like that have roiled continental Europe and Britain, and are far from resolved (Scott 2007). Gender and family practices have been part of what defines the "we" of the west, especially in contrast with the Islamic, immigrant "Other" (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995), and yet feminists have commitments to developing a more inclusive feminist utopia, and policy institutions to support it. To say this poses political difficulties is to put it mildly.

Diversity also has another face in Norden – that of the demand for greater citizen "choice" with respect to services and care arrangements, which has been forwarded across the developed welfare states by "third way" and "recalibrative" projects, and connects in complicated ways with the increasing social diversity of these societies (Pierson 2001; Ferrera, Hemerijck, and Rhodes 2000). In combination with demands for fiscal cutbacks, these demands for wider options have helped to shift policy across Norden – even in Sweden -- towards "cash for care," in which citizens can "cash out" the cost of public services (Borchorst and Siim 2002; Berven 2005; Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006; Duvander, Ferrarini, and Thalberg 2008). It is usually mothers rather than fathers who have opted to take the cash and stay at home, and this reflects a class gradient. As is the pattern across most western

¹⁴ Iceland has recently introduced a new parental leave policy that comes close to the social feminists' vision: each parent receives a three-month leave entitlement and a further three months is available for couples to allocate as they wish (Eydal 2008).

countries, well-educated women pursue life patterns that converge most with those of men of their own class (tales of “opt-out revolutions” notwithstanding), while less-educated women tend to make greater accommodation to care and diverge more from men with similar educational levels. Feminists are divided on how to respond: keep pushing for greater involvement of fathers in care, even if it means less time for mothers who may want it? Or support women’s and men’s options to decide, but attempt to make the choices about at-home care versus employment more “real” by insisting that cash for care policies be accompanied by guaranteed rights to spots in child care centers?¹⁵ Clearly, contrasting utopian visions animate these different positions – symmetry versus choice and “difference,” to put it too simply. And in either case, there is a challenge to maintain and broaden solidarity while accommodating diversity in all its guises.

What about the US? First, it is important to stress that the US is not an exemplar of limited government intervention as is so often claimed, but that the modes of “intervention” have differed importantly from the European model, with an emphasis on regulation rather than social provision (Orloff 2006; Weir, Orloff and Skocpol 1988; Prasad 2006). We do not confront a blank slate, or simple lack of gender policy, in the US versus well-developed “women-friendly” policies in Scandinavia, but a distinctive alternative gender regime (O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999). US versions of feminism, pathbreaking across many areas, have been influential in building this gender regime. The considerable influence of US feminisms, in both policy and the broader culture, are all too often forgotten when we focus on the obvious failures – like getting paid parental leave or publicly-supported child care services. One thinks of developments in the practice of queer politics, the development of “body rights,” or the development and diffusion of theories of sexuality and gender, among other things (e.g., Butler 1990; Shaver 1993; Halley 2006). And the US is a leader, not a laggard, in removing discriminatory occupational barriers -- getting women into many masculine blue-collar occupations and the top tiers of management and the professions (including academia) (Cobble 2004; Charles and Grusky 2005), in developing public remedies for sexual harassment (Zippel 2006), and, in the Family and Medical Leave Act, developing an understanding of caregiving needs that extends beyond mothers and children. The leave is not paid, and this is clearly a huge problem. Yet we should not ignore that the leave is available to men and women for a very broad range of caregiving needs, and not limited by a maternalist or “reproductionist” logic (see Franke 2001, Case 2001).

What is inescapable from any analytic engagement with actual feminist politics and theorizing in the US, as across the developed world, is that political actors favoring gender equality or the abolition of “patriarchy” do not agree (and have not agreed) on questions of gender difference and “sameness” (or “symmetry”), and that they have enunciated a rather wide variety of political goals. Thus, for example, in the early twentieth century, many feminists in the US as in Europe imagined a maternalist utopia – one in which, based on motherhood, women might be resourced and recognized by the state with allowances and services that would empower them within still-patriarchal households and allow them, sometimes, the capacity to live independently of male relatives (Koven and Michel 1993; Bock and Thane 1991; Skocpol 1992; Ladd-Taylor 1994; Pedersen 1993). In other words, these political actors proceeded from an assumption of gender difference, and did not aspire to symmetry in men’s and women’s participation in care and paid work. Rather, they sought “equality in difference.” And it is important to note that some maternalist, gender-differentiated visions accepted mothers’ employment, while others did not (Pedersen 1993; Jenson 1986). Maternalist visions have remained surprisingly resilient in the contemporary period, even as they have often been revised in a degendering direction, from supporting motherhood to supporting care (cf. Fineman 1995, 2004). In other words, the goal becomes sustaining caregivers generally and not mothers specifically, although

¹⁵ Arnlaug Leira (personal communication) has suggested that Finland comes close to assuring this choice.

there is often an assumption that most caregivers are and will continue to be women, and most women will be caregivers. (And, again, this may or may not be combined with support to the employment of caregivers.)

Something like “gender symmetry,” premised on women’s and men’s similarities, and the goal of “halving it all” has been a perennial favorite among some feminists, to be sure. In the US, and perhaps increasingly in the law-bound EU, it has affinities with the broader demand for gender neutrality encouraged by the legal-political framework. Gender neutrality has been a wedge against entrenched privilege in many occupations and educational institutions. In the US in the judicial arena, far-reaching anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action programs, and hefty jury verdicts against employers convicted of sexual harassment have broken (or at least begun to crack) glass ceilings. American women occupy professional and managerial positions in much greater numbers than their Swedish (or other European) counterparts. But the shortcomings of this essentially liberal vision are well known. It is difficult to find ways to incentivize men’s care through negative liberties, and it has been more common for feminist political actors to stress the opening of women’s vocational opportunities, which can be accomplished through legal regulation and the removal of state-sanctioned barriers.¹⁶ Moreover, as social liberals and social democrats have long pointed out, one may have formal rights but lack the resources with which to enjoy them. While formal “rights to choose” are well-established in the US, the resources to enable people to make choices among viable alternatives are often lacking, particularly for poor women and women of color – thus, we have rights to abortion but not to the material resources either for the medical procedure itself or for bearing and raising children (O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999). Contemporary feminists who recall the maternalist visions of early twentieth century women’s movements have pushed in the direction of offering greater material support to disadvantaged women; for example, Dorothy Roberts (2004) calls for policies that will support “economic freedom” for such women (see also Orloff 2002; and the essays in Mink 1999, which deal with these concerns in the context of the US, post-welfare reform). This is especially important given that anti-natalist purposes have often motivated social policies targeted on poor women (Roberts 1997). The inequalities with which they are most concerned are those of race and class, which deny some women the option to be domestic, or to perform their own caregiving as they see fit. The proponents of this kind of feminist utopia seems relatively unconcerned with gender symmetry.

In the diversity of radical and reformist (as well as “traditional”) visions that have inspired US feminists, we see the reflection of the broader culture. American society is distinctive among the developed countries for its heterogeneity and its high levels of inequality. Meanwhile, the US social policy regime is notable for the prominent role for private provision of services, and the importance of private sources of income to citizens’ and residents’ well-being. These features of political life reinforce the multiplicity of life situations, not simply inequality. Understandings of the good life in the US vary widely, including with respect to ideals about family and gender relations. This is partly the result of great ethnic and religious diversity, with people from every corner of the earth among in the current US population – a fact only intensified with the most recent waves of immigration. It also reflects long-standing religious, political, and ideological divisions, and the liberal pluralist institutional compromises fashioned to accommodate them.

If there is merit to be found in the liberalism of American policy and politics -- and I think there is – it is in respect for the different visions of the good held by members of the polity, that is, in pluralism. This is not to argue, as many “political liberals” do, that policy can ever be fully neutral with respect to people’s choices about how they live their lives. It cannot. Indeed, Rob Reich (2002) argues that

¹⁶ This has not stopped women from fantasizing about getting men to do more housework, however.

citizens' participation in liberal and pluralist societies requires a certain level of autonomy – meaning capacities to make decisions about one's life -- that undermines the authority and cohesion of groups that depend on obedience and hierarchy; he further contends that this should be understood and supported more explicitly than is typical among US political liberals. But certainly there can be greater and lesser levels of respect for all kinds of differences, and for notions of citizenship that embrace cultural multiplicity. As compared with its European counterparts, the US features greater levels of support for diversity, without having yet reached pluralist goals of toleration and respect.¹⁷ Given the variety of religious, social, and cultural norms we expect to exist in our societies, we cannot expect a single ideal or policy model to appeal to them all. This is not an argument for relativism, but for respectful and democratic engagement among citizens with differing views of the good.

Where, then, are feminists left with respect to envisioning alternative futures that can animate democratic and gender-egalitarian politics? As I have been arguing, the sheer facts of diversity, of all kinds, speak against a gender-egalitarian utopia founded on gender symmetry. Gender symmetry expects and presupposes too much similarity across politically and socially significant groups in their gendered life goals and the political demands that might respond to these. It is a utopian vision deduced from an abstract analysis of gender in the rich democracies; the associated imaginings of gender interests for particular institutional way stations are comparably deracinated. Let me underline that while I am not inspired by the utopian vision of gender symmetry, I am very much in sympathy with finding policy solutions to the dilemmas of combining care and paid work in ways that contribute to gender equality.

In this essay I have emphasized questions of “difference,” but not because I think we should articulate a utopia based on valorizing, resourcing and reinforcing gender and cultural differences. Rather, I believe that feminist political projects should begin from our policy and political history; in the specific case of the contemporary US, this means that feminists must reckon with popular beliefs in, and investments in, gender differences of various kinds, and the multiplicity of their expression across cultural divides based on geographic location, “race,” ethnicity, religion, and all the rest. We need to find ways to articulate egalitarian visions that can appeal to many different kinds of people, not all of whom embrace the standard social feminist version of the good put forward by Gornick and Meyers, Nancy Fraser, and so many others.

The radical vision of opening opportunities for women – all kinds of women, and others denied access to advantaged positions in employment and elsewhere – has characterized large swathes of organized and popular feminism. It is sometimes accompanied by demands to open familial and care “opportunities” to men, to move towards something like gender symmetry – but at other times, the logic of expanding choice in the face of diverse situations and demands has prevailed, while the goal of making men's and women's lives more alike has been sidelined.¹⁸ Given the character of gender relations, in which the category of “woman” (and gender) has varying levels of salience at both individual and collective levels (Riley 1988), we will wait in vain for a final resolution to “sameness or difference” questions, and must be prepared to wrestle with gender forever. Thus, I suggest that our motto be “open possibilities for men and women, remove policies and practices that impede choices,” continuing the best aspects of past feminist practice in the US: removing obstacles to women's (and men's) freedom, and providing resources for a democratically-selected range of options.

¹⁷ Whether respect for diversity and generous systems of social provision can coexist has not yet been demonstrated, either in the diverse but non-solidaristic US, or in solidaristic but not yet diversity-accommodating European countries.

¹⁸ Gender neutrality is a homegrown American concept, and does not mandate similarity, only that neither men nor women be given options (by the state, or regulated entities) that are not available to the other; yet “gender neutrality” seems unlikely to stir much passionate political attachment.

I hope it is clear that such a vision could inspire feminist political action around issues of care. Indeed, if I were not something of a political pragmatist, this orientation would lead me to advocate a citizen's wage, or participation income, which could cover the exigencies of care, as well as allowing people to fulfill other needs and aspirations. But (unlike many advocates of basic income, citizen's wages and the like) I would insist that such payments be coupled with strengthening efforts to develop and open "non-traditional" training and employment opportunities for women, to upgrade the conditions and pay of care workers in the US and elsewhere, to encourage men's caregiving, and to develop better public and private care services. This ensemble of policies would facilitate a variety of arrangements vis-à-vis employment, care and other important activities. Yet I believe that in the contemporary US, gender-egalitarian policy reform starting from the premise of adult employment is far more likely to succeed – thus, I can see political promise in all the policies I've enumerated, save a citizen's wage itself!

Democracy is critical to our politics, both as means and end. The designers of policies that support social reproduction, care and employment, and that regulate these spheres, must be accountable to democratic constituencies. This is not to say that "anything goes" as long as people "freely choose" it: we must decide collectively what will be supported through public means, given legal protections to minority rights. There is no political obligation on feminists to support every possibility. Calculations of economic and political feasibility, as well as normative desirability, enter here. Within the multiplicity of political and policy possibilities, feminists can and should argue for those that empower women, that give them more freedom to define their lives and to engage in the political decisions that define and support collective ends. But we must expect agonistic political debate among ourselves and others over how this will be understood – this cannot be fixed in advance or settled for all time (Mouffe 2000). The continuing, constitutive paradox of feminist politics – that we must both accept and refuse difference, as Joan Scott famously put it – precludes any ultimate decision in favor of "symmetry" or of diversity. Our present-day goals and our utopias will be created politically, and anew, as long as there are feminists and democracy.

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