

Högre seminarium

onsdag 11 maj 2022

kl 15.15-17 (i Comenius, Key-huset)

Higher Seminar

Wednesday 11 May 2022

3.15 - 5 pm (in Comenius, Key Building)

Gender equality in the name of the state: State feminism or femonationalism in civic orientation for newly arrived migrants in Sweden?

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In a widely cited article, Joppke (2007) has underscored how the shared focus on rights, women's rights in particular, in integration policies is indicative of a post-national turn characterized by a decrease in national and cultural distinctiveness and a convergence around universal liberal values. In his view, these policies 'are not born of sources extrinsic to liberalism, such as nationalism and racism, but are inherent in liberalism itself.' (2007, p. 14). A diametrically opposite interpretation has been provided by Farris (2017), who contends that 'the concrete national articulation of the themes of gender equality and women's rights within the civic orientation national programs is precisely what attests to the persistence and even strengthening, rather than a disappearance, of a nationalist (and racist) trope, which I conceive as intrinsic and not extrinsic to liberalism' (2017, p. 81). And she goes on to propose that 'civic integration policies are arguably the most concrete and insidious form of femonationalism' (ibid.). Here, femonationalism refers to 'both to the exploitation of feminist themes by nationalists and neoliberals in anti-Islam (but, as I will show, also anti-immigration) campaigns and to the participation of certain feminists and femocrats in the stigmatization of Muslim men under the banner of gender equality' (Farris, 2017, p. 4).

Taking an intersectional perspective, this presentation seeks to contribute to these ongoing discussions by analysing how gender equality is presented, discussed, and negotiated in civic orientation contexts in Sweden. For this purpose, we employ a bifocal lens that combines (1) a quantitative investigation of representations of civic orientation programs in Swedish policy documents and mainstream media, and (2) a qualitative analysis of ethnographic data collected in 6 civic orientation courses – 3 in English and 3 in Arabic – in three large municipalities in Sweden over a period of four months in 2020. We believe that such a two-pronged approach that connects policy and media discourses with interactions in civic orientation classes not only offers a granular picture of the complex and often ambivalent intersections of ethnicity and gender in relation to migration Sweden.

Viewed from an intersectional perspective, discourses and practices of civic orientation in Sweden remind us that marrying the state can be tricky business which brings within it the risk of warping feminism into a trait of national/ethnic distinctiveness. Ultimately, our argument is that femonationalism is not the prerogative of far-right parties alone but is already becoming institutionalized, informing both mainstream media and educational practices in a feminist state like Sweden.

References

- Farris, S. R. (2017). *In the name of women's rights: The rise of femonationalism*. Duke University Press Books.
- Joppke, C. (2007). Beyond national models. *Western European Politics*, 30(1): 1-22.