



STUDIES IN MIGRATION AND DIASPORA



Undoing Homogeneity in the Nordic Region

Migration, Difference, and the
Politics of Solidarity

Edited by SUVI KESKINEN,
UNNUR DÍS SKAPTADÓTTIR
AND MARI TOIVANEN

“Developing the idea famously set out by W. E. B. Du Bois, Stuart Hall suggested that living with difference would be the problem of the twenty-first century. Instances all across the world provide evidence of this and this insightful book, centred on the Nordic countries, adds powerfully to a body of critical scholarship on race and ethnicity that shows how entangled they are within repressed histories of internal and external colonisation and imagined nationhood. By considering the treatment of indigenous minorities alongside migrant communities, the editors and contributors impressively advance understandings of the ways in which difference is imagined and represented. Moreover the essays in this book skilfully analyse the peculiarity of claimed ethnic homogeneity. By linking the role of this myth to the influential model of the social democratic welfare state, they show that Hall’s ‘fateful triangle’ of ethnicity-race-nation requires a fourth pillar, namely the state. Here is a book that may seem to be mainly of relevance to Nordic scholars but will I hope be read well beyond there and by all those interested in ethnicity, migration and the state, for its critical, engaged and engaging, unmasking of assumed homogeneity as well as its search for the possibilities of solidarity across difference.”

—*Karim Murji, Co-editor of Current Sociology, University of West London, UK*

“This collection is a welcome addition to the ongoing discussion on politics of difference in Europe. Offering a Nordic perspective, it combines a historical deconstruction of national myths of homogeneity (questioning notions of exceptionality, denials of colonialism/racism and claims of innocence) with policy level analysis (securitization), individual narratives and group negotiation strategies. Particularly insightful is its inclusion of diverse exclusionary discourses in one volume. This strategy highlights the similarities between discourses concerning different disadvantaged groups that are often presented and discussed separately (Samis and Romas but also migrants and asylum seekers). Discussing the interconnected nature of these exclusionary structures through a historical perspective provides a strong foundation for joint struggles from below and for co-creating new politics of solidarity.”

—*Halleh Ghorashi, VU Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

“This wide-ranging and engaging collection underlines the historical and political labour involved in producing homogeneity as a state of innocence under perpetual threat. With its emphasis on histories and practices of nation-building, bordering and race-making, the chapters not only contest the political and affective investments in Nordic homogeneity that are so pronounced in the region, and transnationally, they also foreground the reality and potential of forms of solidarity forged against and beyond homogeneity’s coercive fictions.”

—*Gavan Titley, author of The Crises of Multiculturalism.
Maynooth University, Ireland*



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Undoing Homogeneity in the Nordic Region

This book critically engages with dominant ideas of cultural homogeneity in the Nordic countries and contests the notion of homogeneity as a crucial determinant of social cohesion and societal security. Showing how national identities in the Nordic region have developed historically around notions of cultural and racial homogeneity, it exposes the varied histories of migration and the longstanding presence of ethnic minorities and indigenous people in the region that are ignored in dominant narratives. With attention to the implications of notions of homogeneity for the everyday lives of migrants and racialised minorities in the region, as well as the increasing securitisation of those perceived not to be part of the homogenous nation, this volume provides detailed analyses of how welfare state policies, media, and authorities seek to manage and govern cultural, religious, and racial differences. With studies of national minorities, indigenous people and migrants in the analysis of homogeneity and difference, it sheds light on the agency of minorities and the intertwining of securitisation policies with notions of culture, race, and religion in the government of difference. As such it will appeal to scholars and students in social sciences and humanities with interests in race and ethnicity, migration, postcolonialism, Nordic studies, multiculturalism, citizenship, and belonging.

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Edited by

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Series editor's preface

In the first two decades of the 21st century, the countries which are the geographic focus of this book changed their policies towards immigrants from Welfare to Warfare, what has been called the 'crimmigration of migration'. This was particularly aimed at those from the non-Western world. For those for whom the politics of solidarity and securitisation in the Nordic Region are little known, this book provides a revelatory insight into the policies that Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden have adopted towards outsiders, particularly those whom they label as 'undeserving others'. Historically, not all the securitising policies have been directed towards non-nationals. In Sweden, indigenous misfits were perceived as a threat to the nation's societal homogeneity. Wishing to maintain its image of morality and harmony of behaviour and appearance, from 1906 until 1975 it operated a policy of sterilising 'misfits'; these were mostly women whose 'difference' ranged from apathy and promiscuity to dyslexia and cleft palates. These past policies help explain current strategies undertaken in order for the Nordic Region's nation-states to maintain their image as homogeneous societies.

The editors remind us that certain of the Nordic nations were themselves colonisers and that this has influenced those countries' reaction to the minority presence and multiculturalism. For example, the original inhabitants of the region, the Sámi, are now identified as indigenous peoples; they have had their histories silenced and now occupy a middle place in contemporary society.

Significantly, the studies in this book combine both historic and more recent—post 1960—responses to the presence of those who do not conform to the required cultural and social characteristics which reflect the national identity. The temporal range of essays thus enables the reader to compare and contrast Nordic nations' attitudes and policies towards difference. And whilst certain benevolent acts towards immigrants have taken place—in 2015 Sweden admitted 163,000 asylum seekers—a manifest oversight in anticipating the impact of the migrant presence has resulted in many incomers remaining on the margins and, as such, becoming a perceived threat to the security and identity of the nation, and accordingly victims of recent securitisation policies.

What becomes apparent when reading this insightful and highly informative volume is the way in which public and political attitudes have changed towards immigrants who do not readily conform to the Nordic icon. Whiteness and non-whiteness have come to play an increasing part in determining access to welfare and several chapters highlight the ways in which the provision of welfare has now become racialised and neighbourhoods virtually segregated. In response, some migrants and their children are now taking action to 'make their voices heard'. However, this does little to encourage and ensure cultural uniformity within nations that, as one contributor suggests, look upon homogeneity and whiteness as a binary.

As the editors point out in their introduction, this book is not intended as a hagiographical account of the policies that countries in the Nordic region are currently adopting in order to restore and ensure their nations' images of solidarity and cohesion through their cultural sameness. Rather, the chapters set out to deconstruct the securitisation strategies adopted as a means of re-imposing the stereotypical Nordic identity by exposing the use of the policing of those whose presence undermines the traditional image of Nordic homogeneity by means of their colour, race, ethnicity, or religion. There are five main Nordic nations and their policies of securitisation and provision of welfare to outsiders vary. What does not vary is the clear intent to maintain their nation's image of a homogenous cultural identity by means of restricting those who are other and endanger the icon.

Whilst this book is very specific in its spatial and national foci it sends a message to all those who readily accept national images and identities. It calls on those concerned about the treatments of those who are other, different, and misfits to deconstruct the public face, look beneath the social rubric and unearth the actual national composition and identity. For this reason and for the originality and scholarship of its contributions, it should be required reading for all those engaged in researching and understanding nations, nation building, and national responses to migration and difference within their society.

Anne J Kershen
Queen Mary University of London
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1 Narrations of homogeneity, waning welfare states, and the politics of solidarity

Suvi Keskinen, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Mari Toivanen

Cultural heterogeneity, and grounds for a politics of solidarity that would connect the “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006) of today’s nation-states, have become core questions in European politics. Across Europe and including the Nordic region, we have witnessed the rise of right-wing populism that builds its political agenda on ideals of cultural homogeneity, claims of diminished social cohesion, and security threats posed by migrants and racialised minorities. The emphasis on problems of difference and demands for stricter policies relating to immigration and integration, have by no means been restricted to the far right. Scholars have identified a “crisis of multiculturalism” discourse (Lentin and Titley 2011) or a “backlash against multiculturalism” (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), circulating among large sections of the political centre-right and parts of the left, as well as among many prominent journalists and intellectuals. The shift towards (demands of) cultural homogeneity, neo-assimilatory politics, and security measures would not have been possible without the active participation and rebranding of political rhetoric by the broader political field. As Lentin and Titley (2011) argue, public debates about multiculturalism and cultural differences are often ways to address questions of race, power, and privilege in a hidden way, in times when racism is treated as an outdated and awkward topic not to be explicitly engaged with. In this book, we investigate the historical and societal context within which the claims of the far-right parties become understandable—instead of viewing them as totally alien or exceptional phenomena, we see them as radicalised extensions of more accepted and normalised ways of thinking and acting. We also argue that new configurations of solidarity are needed in European politics, which would replace ideas around homogeneity/sameness and reformulate notions of social justice to include migrants and racialised minorities that are today increasingly portrayed as the “undeserving Others”. New politics of solidarity needs to acknowledge the histories and currents of colonialism and depart from an understanding of social justice that incorporates and seeks to repair the experiences of cultural and economic injustices.

This book provides a critical approach to the narratives of cultural homogeneity and social cohesion that are usually taken for granted in the understandings of societal security in the Nordic region. The perception of the Nordic countries as exceptionally homogeneous in relation to culture and population is widespread in academic, administrative, and public discussions (Alghasi, Eriksen, and Ghorashi 2009; Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; *Ryymim* and *Schmidt* in this volume¹). Cultural homogeneity is often portrayed as one of the central reasons for the Nordic countries' high level of social cohesion² and—by extension—the high level of societal security in the region. Societal security in this sense refers to society's capability to preserve its essential characteristics in the face of actual or imagined threats. National and regional identities have become central to understandings of societal security, the maintenance of which is seen to depend on the preservation of experienced social cohesiveness and togetherness, that in turn legitimise the welfare state.

In this book, we trace the historical emergence of narratives of exceptional homogeneity and examine how governing of differences relates to the securitisation of migration in the Nordic region—a tendency interconnected with common trends in Europe (e.g. Guild 2009; d'Appolonia 2012), but with contextual specificities within the countries studied here. The contributors illuminate how normative understandings of cultural homogeneity neglect the histories of transnational migration and ethnic minorities within the region, as well as bypassing the colonial appropriation of land, and the assimilation policies towards the indigenous peoples in the Arctic. The book aims to answer the following questions:

- How are national identities in the Nordic countries developed around notions of cultural homogeneity, and what kinds of histories have created such understandings?
- What are the (ethnicised and racialised) presumptions of the idea that cultural homogeneity promotes societal security?
- How do welfare state policies and practices seek to manage and govern cultural/religious/racial differences?
- Which differences are seen as (cultural, economic, political) threats and become security problems, while others do not?
- How are migrants, minorities, and targeted local actors resisting securitisation processes, and creating alternative narratives from their viewpoints?

Compared to earlier studies on cultural homogeneity and migration in the Nordic region, this book elaborates three new perspectives. First, we not only investigate the historical trajectories of taken-for-granted notions of cultural homogeneity across the Nordic countries, but also detect how these are intertwined with ideas of race and racial homogeneity as part of nation-state

formation. Second, the book deconstructs ideas of cultural homogeneity by focusing on indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities with a long-term presence in the region, *together with* post-1960s migrants and their descendants. This contrasts with previous research that has discussed (the governing and perspectives of) these groups separately. Third, we understand the histories and current societal processes of the Nordic countries to be shaped by (post) colonial relations. In contrast to dominant discourses, the Nordic countries participated in colonial endeavours in many ways, outside Europe and within the region (Keskinen forthcoming; Kuokkanen 2007; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Körber and Volquardsen 2014). These ignored histories continue to affect relations between the indigenous populations and the Nordic nation-states, as well as the perceptions and exclusionary processes encountered by migrants from the non-‘Western’ world, and their children, in today’s Nordic societies.

Ideas of exceptional homogeneity, nation building, and race

Historical narratives of the post-1960s transnational migration that presuppose initial homogeneity as a central characteristic of the Nordic countries are prone to depicting growing migration as a potential threat. Embedded in such narratives—either implicitly or explicitly—is the idea that the national sovereignty and cultural identities of the Nordic states are being eroded by a greater level of cultural diversity, that is then seen to be undermining the countries’ level of social cohesion, and consequently their societal security. If (cultural) homogeneity is seen as a foundation for, or a precondition of, a well-functioning welfare system, then increased migration—by leading to greater cultural, ethnic, and racial heterogeneity—logically threatens that system, or at least is a problem that has to be dealt with.

However, all Nordic countries have been diverse in many ways, as documented in the growing body of historical research and literature on multiculturalism (e.g. Kivisto and Wahlbeck 2013; Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2009; Sandset 2019), as well as the chapters in this volume. The social, cultural, and ethnic heterogeneity of Nordic societies was readily acknowledged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century nation-building processes and policies. It was considered to be something that threatened the societal integrity of the nation-states, and thus was to be overcome through diverse assimilatory and/or integrative policies. This was not least evident in the building of the welfare systems, designed to overcome class and regional differences through equalisation.

The idea of ethnic and cultural homogeneity is thus more a product of nation-building processes, than a description of actual existing conditions. As David Theo Goldberg (2002, p. 33) argues, “ethnoracial, cultural and national homogeneity is sustained throughout modernity, not because it is the natural condition”, but because it is the ideal kept alive and imposed on

heterogeneous groups of people “through repression, occlusion and erasure, restriction and denial, delimitation and domination”. For Goldberg, homogeneity is part of the ordering of the modern state, notably about the regulation of social, economic, and cultural relations, and the governing of populations defined in racial terms (*ibid.*, p. 110). Modern states have also, in varying ways, managed and sought to secure the conditions for economic production, expansion of capital, and reproduction of labour. The processes of homogenisation are thus as much about power over resources and distribution of wealth, as they are about cultural hegemony and normative understandings of the ‘people’ and ways of living.

Nation-state building in the Nordic region differs to some extent among the individual countries. While Sweden and Denmark have been the region’s dominant states for centuries, having ruled over what is today known as Norway, Finland, and Iceland, the latter three countries gained independence in the wake of the nationalist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, as the contributions in this book show, all Nordic countries have promoted ideas of being exceptionally homogeneous, ignoring and denying assimilatory and repressive state actions towards indigenous people and ethnoracially defined minorities.

The nation-states in the region have historically sought to manage and deal with existing differences in multiple ways. The appropriation of land, and subsequent erosion of livelihoods, have seriously affected the indigenous Sámi and Inuit people, while expulsion, restriction of movement, and interventions into family life have targeted the Roma and Traveller minorities (*Helakorpi*). Racial and ethnic categorisations—including racial biology—have been used to define and inferiorise indigenous people and several minorities. Compared to these, assimilation policies may seem less severe, but they have resulted in the silencing of identities and local histories, as well as cultural and linguistic erasure (*Siivikko, Ringrose, and Stubberud*). Since the 1970s, Norway, Sweden, and Finland have adopted multicultural policies in their efforts to respond to cultural heterogeneity that has become hard to ignore (*Ryymin*). Since the 1960s and 1970s, indigenous people and ethnic minorities have organised to struggle for their cultural and land rights, both in dialogue and in conflict with different state policies. The post-1960s migrants and their children have also mobilised in civil society to make their voices heard.

Notions of “exceptionalism” also refer to the perceived outsider position that the Nordic countries are often thought to have in relation to colonialism (Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Sawyer and Habel 2014). However, recent research has shown that Danish colonialism stretched from the Caribbean to West Africa, East Asia and the Arctic (Jensen 2015; Körber and Volquardsen 2014), while Sweden had minor colonies in North America, the Caribbean, and West Africa. The colonisation of Sápmi, the land of the Sámi people, crosses the national borders of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. While Iceland was not in possession of colonies, it has strongly identified with

European history and modernity (Loftsdóttir 2017). Compared to the British, French, or Dutch empires, the Nordic countries may have been “small time actors” (Naum and Nordin 2013) in overseas colonialism, but they actively participated in and benefited from the unequal economic, political, and cultural relations developed during European colonialism—a position that has been described as “colonial complicity” (Vuorela 2009; Keskinen et al. 2009). When these histories are combined with knowledge of Nordic colonialism in the Arctic, it becomes clear that the Nordic countries were in multiple ways involved in colonial endeavours, both as “accomplices”, but also as active colonial powers (Keskinen, forthcoming).

The chapter in this book by Teemu Ryymin uses social science texts to examine how and when the notion of Norway as a particularly homogeneous society was established. Ryymin detects the rise of a narrative that portrays a dramatic shift from an ethnically homogeneous country, to increasing diversity following labour migrations of the early 1970s, and refugee migrations since the 1980s. Ryymin shows how claims of exceptional homogeneity are at odds with the historical experiences of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and social diversity in Norway. The chapter analyses the silencing of the histories of Sámi people and several ethnic minorities, due to Norwegian assimilation policies, and the social democratic welfare state project that sought to equalise class differences from a universalist standpoint. Moreover, Ryymin discusses the impact of racialisation, when distinctions are made towards migrants from non-‘Western’ countries.

Garbi Schmidt analyses the ‘myth’ of ethnic homogeneity from a local perspective, focusing on two neighbourhoods in Copenhagen. She investigates the history of Danish national symbols, and the stories that hold together the notion of a “homogeneous” nation. Contrasting the narrative of homogeneity with the actual diversity in these two neighbourhoods at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Schmidt argues that Denmark and its citizens were engaged in networks of communication that exceeded the space of the nation-state. Ethnic and cultural homogeneity cannot be evaluated by investigating only the number of immigrants; instead, a broader view that addresses the transnational social, political, financial, and cultural connections of the country is needed. The chapter further examines perceptions of homogeneity and heterogeneity in the two neighbourhoods today, showing that such understandings are deeply racialised, and that homogeneity is conflated with whiteness.

In her chapter, Niina Siivikko examines Sámi representations in the Finnish media during the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter focuses on a period called the “Sámi Renaissance”, referring to the revival of Sámi culture after harsh assimilation policies that nearly led to the extinction of Sámi culture in Finland. It is not coincidental that the Sámi defended their cultural and land rights during a time when many other indigenous peoples and racialised minorities were involved in similar struggles around the world. Siivikko examines mainstream Finnish newspapers, arguing that the role of the Sámi

within the nation was ambiguous. At times, the Sámi people were treated as part of the Finnish nation, while they were otherwise thought to be in the process of becoming part of the nation. Sometimes, they were even considered to not want to become Finnish. The “Sámi Renaissance” meant the voice of Sámi cultural activists became stronger, and a new identity politics was developed that built on a spirit of solidarity to provide greater visibility to Sámi demands.

Priscilla Ringrose and Elisabeth Stubberud analyse how two documentary films about old and new minority groups in Norway position themselves in relation to the Norwegian “national fantasy”. The documentaries explore issues of national identity and belonging in relation to the Kven and the Norwegian-Pakistani communities. Both films reflect on the assimilationist policies of the Norwegian nation-state towards ethnic and racial minorities, but adopt different ways of positioning themselves to majoritarian and minoritarian perspectives. The documentaries revolve around family stories, bringing to the fore questions of gender, generation, and Norwegian state interventions in the arena of family life. Ringrose and Stubberud interpret the two films as being in dialogue with each other, suggesting that the Kven documentary contains both a symbolic warning and a promise to its Norwegian-Pakistani counterpart.

Nordic welfare model and social cohesion

The link between social cohesion and cultural/ethnic homogeneity in different societies, and the long-term consequences of migration, have been widely explored in recent research literature. Putnam’s 2007 article ‘E Pluribus Unum’ created a controversy when it suggested that there are negative effects within ethnic diversity resulting from migration to “Western” societies (Putnam 2007; Morales 2013). The last decade has witnessed a heated debate among scholars, and a growing body of research has evaluated the “threat” hypothesis put forward by Putnam. Indeed, one of the central questions in this literature has been whether the increased ethnic and cultural heterogeneity resulting from migration to a given society leads to the erosion of social cohesion in that society. Scholars have examined, for instance, the relationship between increased ethnic/cultural diversity and its potentially weakening effect on reciprocity, participation in volunteering, social capital, social trust, and solidarity in different societies (Koopmans, Lancee, and Schaeffer 2015; van der Meer and Tolsma 2014 for a summary of these studies). Whereas some have confirmed (to a certain extent) Putnam’s hypothesis, others have shown that racial inequalities, segregation, and economic and social precariousness are more consequential for social cohesion and trust, than ethnic diversity (see *ibid*; Uslander 2012).

The debates in Nordic research have been similar to those in the United States and continental Europe, in that they have also included contrasting views on whether the link between social cohesion and increased diversity

resulting from migration is negative or positive (Delhey and Newton 2005; Larsen 2013; van der Meer and Tolsma 2014; Goldschmidt 2017). The studies have also examined, for instance, the attitudes of the white majority towards government-funded welfare to migrants living in the Nordic welfare states, known for their universalistic approach to social policies. The majority population's willingness to accept migrant and minority groups as legitimate members of the welfare community has been considered to be central to the social cohesion of that society (Goldschmidt 2017). Whereas the Nordic countries may share some elements of their welfare models, they have had quite different approaches concerning immigration and integration policies. These have ranged from more restrictive models of inclusion in Denmark, to more liberal approaches in Sweden (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012), and somewhere in-between for Norway, Finland, and Iceland. However, in recent years, the policies have converged towards stricter measures in all countries. Furthermore, the Nordic countries have in the past decade witnessed increasing political and public debate about who is deserving of social welfare benefits, and who is not. Keskinen, Norocel, and Jørgensen (2016) discuss how welfare chauvinistic claims—that is, how the white majority population is seen to deserve welfare benefits, more so than migrants and racialised minorities—have become policy matters, influencing welfare practices in the aftermath of the 2008 global recession.

What seems to be characteristic of debates (and research) on social cohesion, both in the Nordic countries and elsewhere, is the conflation between heterogeneity and migration: the heterogeneity of a given society is framed in terms of an increased number of racialised migrant groups, without reference to indigenous people or existing national minorities. This can lead to the often-implicit assumption that national societies before 1970s migrations were more or less culturally homogeneous. This can also come with a certain level of normativity, when social cohesion that is associated with an alleged lack of ethnic diversity is considered to be a desirable state of affairs. Increasing heterogeneity through migration has been approached as a potential problem and threat for the societal and political order, to be resolved through the integration of the migrant 'Others'. Indeed, Hickman, Mai, and Crowley (2012) suggest that the phenomenon of social cohesion should not be approached through the normative and functionalist models of social cohesion that contain an essentialist understanding of what constitutes a "good society". Instead, the authors show that "local hierarchies of social entitlement and mobility, the acknowledgement of transnational affiliations, belongings and histories of diversity and/or homogeneity are all constitutive of social cohesion" (p. 10).

Another underlying premise in social cohesion literature seems to be that only the nation-state is the basis of social cohesion and the provider of resources (see Delanty 2000). In other words, cultural homogeneity, social cohesion, and the "problem of integration" have been approached through the nation-state frame, both in policymaking and research (see Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2003). Migrants, although coming from outside the national

space, could not be excluded from the emerging welfare systems in Europe in the post-Second World War period, since the emergence of the welfare systems was closely linked to the labour market the migrants became part of (ibid, p. 310). Post-war immigration studies, especially in Europe, focused upon the consequences of immigration to national welfare systems, and how this related to the question of integration. Indeed, Bommers and Thränhardt (2010) suggest that the way migration is conceptualised and the “problem of migration and integration” is rearticulated, is rooted in the different histories of nation building. They argue that “paradigms of migration research” are “rather scientific re-articulations of nation-state specific ways to constitute international migration-related problem constellations” (ibid, p. 29).

Therefore, it is important to question the normative understandings of cultural homogeneity and social cohesion—and to problematise the implicit assumption of the nation-state as their frame of reference. Similarly, in debates that conflate cultural homogeneity with social cohesion, difference/heterogeneity needs to be approached in a way that does not overlook the histories of transnational mobility, indigenous people, and ethnic minorities. And finally, there is a need to critically examine the implicit link between social cohesion and cultural homogeneity, particularly in Nordic societies where cultural/ethnic/racial homogeneity has been part of the historical and present-day narratives of national identity.

The development of the welfare state in the Nordic region was tightly connected to the nation-state and notions of homogeneity. From the 1930s, Sweden led the way in developing what became known as the Nordic or the social democratic welfare model (Esping-Andersen 1990), combining redistribution policies, comprehensive welfare benefits, and social services, in order to enhance class and regional equality. The Swedish social democrats made the notion of *folkhemmet*—literally, the people’s home—the basis of their political ideology. *Folkhemmet*, originally a social-conservative nationalist idea, presented the Swedish people as a unified and homogenous entity under the shared familial roof (Norocel 2013, p. 139). From the beginning, kinship ties and common origins were thus part of the welfare state ideology, the aim of which was to create social cohesion and reduce class differences understood as the root of conflict.

The “golden era” of the Nordic welfare states gave way to neoliberal policies from the 1980s onwards. The economic recession of the following decade provided grounds for politicians who argued for welfare cuts and privatisation in the name of competitiveness, efficiency, and reducing welfare costs (Pyrhönen 2015, pp. 24–25; Keskinen, Norocel, and Jørgensen 2016). With the shrinking welfare state came the reduction of available political means, and the will, to decrease social divisions and govern economic fractures. The economic crisis of 2008 led to austerity politics, especially in Iceland and Finland. The welfare state that developed as a national project to reduce economic differences and promote class solidarity now seems to be a threatened project—this is due to neoliberal policies, but also waning class solidarity when the economic redistribution element no longer benefits lower