Quotas and Controversies
Angels in the snow

When the first snow comes at this time of the year in the Nordic countries a favourite activity for children has always been to create angels by lying down in the snow while moving their arms and legs to make wings. The patterns left in the snow look very much alike; the snowangels bodies do not have female or male physical features. Leaving the childhood dream-world of snow and turning to society ‘the sign on the body’ reappears with its laded meanings. Whether you have female or male physical features is one key aspect of social organisation and categorisation into genders, into constituting men and women as two separate categories in a hierarchical order with ‘men’ traditionally as the dominant category. In Nordic societies politics to create gender equality have been going on for almost 30 years now. Various theories and strategies to overcome gender inequality have been developed and tried out with more success in some fields and less success in others. In this international edition of NIKK magasin one main focus is the very discourses on gender, the very manner in which we discuss gender in society.

Gender equality discourses linked to the use of gender quotas is one concern. For example, in Norway the use of quota systems has been an important measure aimed at creating gender equality in political parties, in law and regulations for public boards and commissions and also to some extent in regulations for recruitment to educational institutions. The use of quotas is usually justified by two main discourses as examined in the article “The Universe of Gender Quotas”. The discourse of rights is related to the principle of gender balance, of both democratic equality and of fair distribution of positions that give access to power and influence. The discourse of utility argues that positive action in favour of one sex is justified in the light of social consequences. The utilitarian discourse can also be understood in terms of the feminist discourse of difference. Positive action is justified with what society is missing out on when women are excluded.

Attempts to define the different gender-power discourses in the Scandinavian countries have recently generated debates among feminist scholars, and in this issue the Danish and the Swedish positions are discussed in relation to the neo-feminist wave of the last few years. NIKK’s new senior researcher, Susanne V. Knudsen, critically examines the gender discourses in relation to the barriers that women meet in their academic career, on the basis of her own research and other Nordic studies in this field.

One challenge to Nordic gender research will always be the opening up for gender theoretical thinking based in other social circumstances and living conditions. NIKK magasin offers this time an insight into the diversity of gender studies in Africa as a follow-up to the Women’s Worlds conference in Uganda this summer, which gathered 2,500 researchers and women activists from all over the world, an event also covered in this issue.

Lastly we at NIKK want to wish our readers a happy New Year – and where there is snow, be angels!
THE UNIVERSE OF GENDER QUOTAS

The manner in which gender equality and gender quotas are discussed in political debates can be sorted into two main stances; the discourse of rights and the discourse of utility. The PhD dissertation “Quotas and Controversies” analyses how the need for quotas is justified in debates in some European countries - with a special focus on Norway, where quota systems have been on the agenda for a long time.

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“WHERE HAVE ALL THE WOMEN GONE”

Out of 71 computer biographies only one was written by a female student. And only four of the male students mentioned girls and women at all in their biographies. The development from games to simple programming to expertise at a very young age is mentioned several times. Why is the IT world apparently more difficult for women than for men to gain access to?

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SEPTEMBER 11 AND MALE VIOLENCE

How could September 11 be interpreted from a gender perspective? Is there a connection between global violence and terrorism on the one hand and the violence of individual men towards women on the other? The tragic story of Fadime Sahindel can be a link to understanding these questions. The 26-year-old Kurdish woman was murdered in Sweden by her father in January this year.

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Social consequences of gender discourses

Attempts to define gender-power discourses in the Scandinavian countries has generated a debate. Here the Danish and Swedish positions are discussed. PAGE 9

Barriers and careers in academia

Women are free to apply for academic positions. The universities do not think, talk or write about gender. What, then, are the barriers to women’s academic careers? PAGE 12

The Interview: Solveig Bergman

She was the first co-ordinator of Nordic Women’s Studies from 1991-1994. This autumn she presented her doctoral dissertation on the women’s movement in Finland and West Germany from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s. PAGE 21

The diversity of gender studies in Africa

A central task for African gender researchers has been to deconstruct the white, Western production of knowledge and create new, alternative knowledge. PAGE 31

Creating a space for gender theoretical thinking

The Danish sociologist Signe Arnfred is co-ordinating the research programme Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa. One ambition is to create a space for gender theoretical thinking in Africa. PAGE 34

Information or surveillance?

Female employees in particular are connected to a monitor that registers their methods of working. PAGE 36

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The world met in Uganda

2,500 participants from 94 countries met in Uganda in July for the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress Women’s Worlds 2002 – for the first time organised in an African country. PAGE 29
The Universe of

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The manner in which gender and quotas is discussed in the political debate on gender equality can largely be sorted into two main stances; the discourse of rights, and the utilitarian discourse. This article discusses the Norwegian discourse in relation to the gender equality discourses in other European countries.
Gender Quotas

The principle of anti-discrimination – that everyone should be treated equally, regardless of gender, ethnic background, religion, class, etc. – is a classically liberal principle grounded in international conventions and in most countries’ national legislations. At the same time, the opinion that formal equality leads to a narrow and thereby problematic assessment of justice (Dahl 1985) has with time become widespread. A more complex view of the principle of equal treatment has led to positive action in a number of countries’ legislatures. The Norwegian Gender Equality Act (liketillingsloven) was one of the first of these, allowing for positive action as early as 1978.

Challenged by EU
In a number of the Nordic countries national legislation is challenged by EU-membership. Norway has legal commitments as a consequence of the EEA-agreement. Cases are brought before the EU-tribunal that touch on issues of the legality of positive action: the Kalandke case (C-450/93) in 1995, the Marshall case (C-409/97) and the Tham case (C-407/98), both in 2000. The first of these cases, the Kalandke case, raised the question as to whether or not positive action in employment programs was legal within the EU. Later cases dispelled these questions, however, confirming that positive action is legal. This legality has now been solidified in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997. The conditions under which positive action is legal within the EU can be summarized as follows: it must not lead to an automatic preference; the applicants’ qualifications must be evaluated objectively and individually; and the evaluation of the applicants must be based on multiple different criteria. This restricts what kind of initiatives can be taken with respect to the implementation of positive action.

Discourses on Gender Equality
In the discourse of rights quotas are justified through a combination of individual and group related rights. This position can be understood in terms of a discourse of discrimination. Nominally connected to a principle of equality of rights, where positive action should promote true equality by compensating for inequalities. Furthermore, the discourse of rights is related to a principle of gender balance – a principle of democratic equality. The principle of gender balance argues for a fair and equal distri-
bution of positions that give access to power and influence. Demands for gender balance use an expanded definition of justice, in which every form of socially determined distribution in principle demonstrates unjust distribution patterns. Imbalanced distribution between women and men becomes an indicator that selection principles do not work fairly; and gender balance thereby becomes a definition of fairness and justice.

The other main position is the discourse of utility: positive action is justified in light of societal consequences. Arguments for gender equality are primarily expressed as a simple resource argument: due to the fact that the talent potential in the population is equally distributed between women and men, male dominance will necessarily lead to a failure to capitalize on all available human resources. The utilitarian discourse can also be understood in terms of a feminist discourse of difference. Positive action is justified in terms of what society is missing out on when women’s life experiences, which are different from men’s, are not included and taken note of (Hernes 1982, 1987).

The idea that it is possible to identify what we can call main national discourses, relies on a dramatizing of national differences. Debates are defined by the various different modes of argumentation. Central players in debates often have a particular affection for certain arguments, or a strong belief that certain arguments can be especially effective in specific contexts. It is the core points in discourses on gender and quotas in various national political contexts that will be the main focus for the rest of this article.

**The Norwegian discourse on gender equality**

The Norwegian political debate on gender equality is characterized by the fact that gender equality initiatives are motivated directly by gender differences, such as “what gender means” and “how women are”. Claims about gender based inequalities, priorities, values and interests take the form of arguments in favor of the organizational and societal advantages of gender equality.

Rhetoric of difference, of the contribution of women, has long been central to Norwegian party politics’ understanding of how important it is to have female representation (Skjeie 1992).

Government documents on gender equality politics from the beginning of the 1980 to the present day demonstrates the turning of the discourse from rationales of right to a discourse of utility. It is women’s possibilities and position that were the focus of the ‘Plan of action for gender equality’ in the early 1980s (St. prp. nr. 122 [1980-81]). The main aim of using quotas is to improve women’s participation in areas in which they are underrepresented (1980-81:25).

In the parliament report on gender equality from the middle of the 1980 (St. meld. nr. 69 [1984-85]), women’s right to participate is still the main reason given for the continued use of quotas. In the gender equality report from the beginning of the 1990 (St. meld. nr. 70 [1991-92]) the argument for quotas gets turned around. The problematic aspects of using quotas for women are discussed in this report, whilst the establishment of quotas for men in occupations linked with the welfare state is encouraged. The reasons are now based on utility. Achieving gender equality will contribute to maintaining other interests that are central to society – men are to take jobs in occupations in the welfare state, such as looking after children, the young, and others in need of special care.

During the 1990s the debate over gender equality continued to shift from being a discourse of rights to a more utilitarian discourse. A comparison of the argumentation concerning the establishment of the Gender Equality Act’s § 21 in 1981, about regulating the gender composition of public boards and commissions, and the argumentation in 1999/2000 about the proposal to extend the regulation to include the boards of public and private corporate enterprises (Teigen 2002), show that both in the 1980s and today, rationales of utility and rights are evident. The difference is that twenty years ago the two arguments were on equal footing, whereas today utility based arguments dominate.

**The Swedish discourse**

The Swedish debate has been described as being more clearly polarized than the Norwegian (Borchorst, Christensen and Siim 2002). A strong discourse of oppression and discrimination exists in
Sweden alongside a more consensus and harmony-orientated discourse of difference.

In the Swedish official statement Varannan Damernas in 1987, which discussed female representation in public boards and commissions, both rights and utility are used as arguments in favor of gender balance. As Maud Eduards concludes in her analysis of the debate that took place over the subsequent decade (2002:51)

In her analysis of the rhetoric used in official Swedish and Norwegian gender equality politics, Malin Rönnblom (2002) shows that the duality of this discourse, balanced between stories of continuing oppression and stories of the Swedish evolution towards a country that is truly equal, is also present in the government’s documents on gender equality. The Swedish political debate on gender equality is largely motivated by an effort to avoid a system in which women are considered subordinate to men. At the same time Sweden is considered to be ahead of the field in their work on gender equality. As explicated by the Swedish government: In Sweden we have come far in terms of a system of gender equality. We are happy to share our experiences with others – we are happy to export our Swedish model for gender equality.

The Danish discourse

Denmark differs from the other Nordic countries in that quotas are considered as being more problematic. None of the political parties in Denmark make use of quotas in their internal structures. The two parties that have at one point made use of quota systems, the Socialist People’s Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti) and the Social Democrats (Socialdemokratene), both discontinued their systems during the 1990s (Christensen 1999).

In their analysis of the debate on quotas in Danish politics and academia, Borchorst and Christensen (2002) show how a marked change in the debate took place during the 1990s. In the 1970s and 80s, there was much support for quotas in the political arena. The main arguments in favor of quotas were both identity and discrimination based. The identity argument was born of the Danish women’s movement’s influential position and its sway over the political debate on gender equality. The discrimination argument claimed that quotas could be used to counteract the oppression of women, and could contribute to breaking the tradition that employment be gender determined.

Looking at the discourse of the 1990s, one can see that there was far less support for quotas than earlier. Indeed, the debate on quotas was, politically, virtually dead. Academics who supported positive action focused on arguments based on difference. These arguments, however, clearly do not carry the same support for quotas in the Danish arena as they do in the Norwegian – in Denmark the topic of quotas was taboo during the 1990s. It appears that supporters of the difference argument did all they could to avoid any association between the struggle for gender equality of genders on the one hand, and systems of quotas on the other (Borchorst and Christensen 2002).

The German discourse

Katherine Inhetween (1999) made a similar study of German and Norwegian parliamentary reasons for supporting quotas. The German parliament argued primarily for the use of quotas as a tool against the institutionalized discrimination of women. Secondly they argued that men and women are ultimately the same, and should therefore be represented equally, given that women make up half the population. The use of quotas is also seen as giving greater opportunities to each individual person. The grounds for the German parliament’s stance lie in arguments of rights, in an understanding of gender equality that is made up of two parts: the necessity of securing equal treatment of men and women through compensatory positive action; and the definition of equal as meaning that positions that give access to power and influence must be split evenly between the genders.

Inhetween finds extensive differences between the ideas that motivate the Norwegian and German representatives. The primary difference is that the use of quotas is not considered to be controversial by Norwegian politicians. Quotas are seen as a ‘natural’ way of
securing a more even gender distribution. Secondly, Norwegian representatives in the Storting argue that gender balance is important on the basis of the differences between the genders. These differences are important in the eyes of the Norwegian politicians because of three things: women and men have different backgrounds and experiences; their value systems and priorities are different; and the differences are complimentary to each other.

**The French discourse**

In most countries outside the Nordic region, male domination of the central political decision-making processes is commonplace. France has had the lowest ratio of female to male representation for an extended period of time. The male dominance of the French National Assembly became a much-discussed topic amongst researchers and activists in the 1990s. Action against this male dominance was organized through the Parité movement, with branches in the European Council, the EU, and a number of Southern European countries that had similarly poor records on female representation in political posts. Nordic solutions that used quotas were transformed into demands for fundamental parité (perfect gender equality). The Parité movement’s demand was for 50-50 representation, not more nor less. Women make up half of the population, not a percentage somewhere between 30 and 40% (Eduards 2002).

The Parité movement’s demand is that the principle of equal representation of men and women should be written into the constitution. In 1999 the French National Assembly voted in ten into the constitution. In 1999 the French National Assembly voted in favor of a legislature that would require equal gender distribution in popularly elected assemblies. The reasons for demanding equal representation lay in abstract concepts of fundamental rights. The ambition of parité focuses on de-abstract concepts of fundamental rights. The French discourse on gender equality’s two main stance: rights and utility, we can conclude: whilst other countries’ discourses revolve around different approximations within a discourse of rights, the Norwegian debate has a clearer base in a discourse of difference with clear concessions to arguments of utility.

The fact that the discourse of difference holds such a central place in the Norwegian debate can be approached in two ways. The first seeks explanations of perceptions of gender differences as being a particularly notable but little recognized trait of Norwegian society. At the same time it is worth remembering that the discourse of difference is not used as a tool to reinforce and maintain differences, but rather as an argument in favor of gender equality. Perhaps the ideology of gender equality is an appropriate focal point that can be used to understand the use of arguments based on difference.

A way to approach the discourse of difference’s central position involves focusing on the strategies used by those who promote gender equality. The public debate during the 1980s and 1990s stressing deregulation and privatization evoked opposition of gender equality policies and quota arrangements in particular. In this light the turn to utility in gender equality debates can be seen as an attempt to support quotas and gender equality politics adjusted to the language of new liberalism. This was an argument that barely touched on women’s rights, but rather focused on effective resource utilization. The lack of gender equality was presented primarily as a problem for the economy.

**Successful strategy**

The strong position the discourse of difference holds in the Norwegian debate on quotas is yet another chapter in the story of Norway – the land of consensus. The shift from a rights based to a difference based discourse is indicative of a shift: from gender equality in terms of ‘demanding ones rights’, ‘demanding half the power’, to that women are given as a gift to the economy. The discourse of difference has proved to be an especially successful and pragmatic strategy in the sense that it has effectively never met opposition. In this manner a debate in which disagreement is difficult to establish. As long as those that support the use of quotas stick strictly to the concept of the ‘utility’ of women, and consciously tone down other arguments, gender equality emerges as something there simply is a pleasure to agree with.

The article is based on Mari Teigen’s PhD-dissertation ”Quotas and Controversies” 2002.

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Social consequences of gender discourses

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Is it possible and desirable for Danish gender scholars to give their support to and work for an improvement in the present-day equal-opportunities situation? Is it possible within a Danish ‘power-mobilisation’ discourse to generate concrete political proposals? These are among the questions raised in this article with reference to a recent discussion between Swedish and Danish feminist scholars on the social consequences of the different gender discourses in the two Nordic countries. A comparative textual analysis of Danish and Swedish neo-feminist anthologies is linked up with this discussion.

The three Danish gender researchers Annette Borchorst, Ann-Dorthe Christensen and Birte Siim have with the article “Diskurser om køn, magt og politik i Skandinavien” [Discourses on gender, power and politics in Scandinavia] contributed to the publication Kønsmagt under forandring (2002) [Gender-power in process of change], which is part of an official survey and analysis of power in Denmark. The authors identify three gender-power discourses appertaining to Norway, Sweden and Denmark; respectively a discourse of difference, a discourse of oppression and a discourse of power mobilisation. In the following I will focus on the Swedish and Danish discourses. The Swedish model, characterised as a discourse of oppression, is exemplified by the Swedish gender scholar Yvonne Hirdman’s “Genuslov” [Gender law], an account of a pervasive structural societal dynamic by which women are systematically subordinated to men. This discourse is criticised by the three authors as essentialising. In their view, the discourse of oppression is too focussed on the continuity of women’s oppression, and it furthermore plays down the significance of women as collective actors since the discourse in its entirety focuses on the system and not on the individuals in the system.

Double view on gender power?
The three authors see that in contrast to the Swedish discourse there is what they call the Danish power-mobilisation discourse, which grew out of a closer relation between feminist research and the women’s movement. The Danish discourse focuses on the individual empowerment experienced by women participating in social movements. Through their collective activity they wield power from below. Thus in the Danish discourse there is a greater focus on women as individual actors and less on structural dynamics. According to these scholars, the Danish discourse contains a constructive double view of gender power, which comprises perspectives on both reproduction and change of the gender-power hierarchy. In other words, this discourse regards power as consisting of both 1) power as oppression and dominance, and 2) power as power mobilisation” (Borchorst et al 2002 p. 258); that is an actor-based discourse of change. But as they also write, there has been a development in Denmark one of whose consequences is that “discourses focussing unequivocably on women’s oppression and the reproduction of power relations between the genders are no longer legitimate” (ibid. p. 259). The authors do not consider to what extent discourses focussing unequivocably on changes in the gender-power relation are legitimate. However, if only one aspect of a so-called double view is illegitimate, can there really be said to be a double view? This reader is certainly left with the impression that the Danish discourse actually is a power-mobilisation discourse; that is, an actor-fixated discourse which unequivocally emphasises the change that women can bring about by virtue of their involvement in social movements.

Lack of scholarly responsibility
For me the three authors’ conclusions concerning the illegitimate focus on women’s structural oppression raise some problematic questions in relation to concrete observable structural problems for equal opportunities in Denmark. If it is illegitimate to focus solely on the reproduction of the gender-power relation, how are researchers to approach structural problems concerning equal opportunities involving the reproduction of the gender-power relation? For example, the negligible presence of women at the higher executive level of business, or other areas where the drive for equal opportunities is stagnant: how can such phenomena be dealt with at all if it is assumed that it is not legitimate for research to focus...
on reproduced gender-power structures?

Is it possible within a Danish power-mobilisation discourse to generate concrete political proposals for the improvement of the Danish equal-opportunities position? And is it possible and desirable for Danish researchers to give their support to and work for an improvement in the present-day equal-opportunities situation in other ways? And further: by overemphasising the potential for change from the angle of empowerment, is the Danish power-mobilisation discourse in danger of appearing in the slipstream of a global, strongly liberalistic discourse of free choice, in which gender is perceived as individualised, liberated from the limitations imposed by structures?

In her review of the survey publication *Kønsmagt under forandring* in the Danish web magazine www.forum.kvinfo.dk, the Swedish gender scholar Yvonne Hirdman pointedly criticised the article for, among other things, its fixation with an actor focus (Hirdman 2002). She refers to the three Danish authors apparent refusal to acknowledge the relative success which the Swedish subordination model has had for the equal opportunities situation in Sweden. According to Hirdman, the Danish empowerment discourse places too much focus on individual possibilities of change and in the process heroizes Danish women unnecessarily. Thus the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Danish and the Swedish discourse respectively is governed by an ideological discussion and not by the possibility of making concrete proposals for creating practical political strategies to promote equal opportunities. Yvonne Hirdman believes that the Danish trio of researchers miss the opportunity to show scholarly responsibility.

“Gender contract”

According to Hirdman, the Swedish gender-power discourse operates not with an oppression model but with a subordination model. She makes this point with the expressed purpose of shifting the focus from the actors over to the empirical fact substantiated by one survey after another: that women end up lower down in the power hierarchy than men. To enable a theoretical description of the process by which this takes place she has developed the term *gender contract*, which on the one hand makes clear the different rationality of action with which the genders operate and on the other describes the trading which takes place between the genders. Yvonne Hirdman believes that the three Danish writers have difficulty understanding this approach because of their adherence to actor-fixation.

Furthermore, Hirdman criticises Borchorst, Christensen and Siim for an erroneous evaluation of the impact of the discourses. Her impression is that the three authors order the discourses in such a way that the Danish discourse is evaluated as more progressive and thus better than the Swedish. But, she argues, the possibility of real change is greater with the Swedish discourse than with the Danish.

Scholars as collaborators

In the article *Fruityful kritik efterlyses* (Fruitful criticism wanted) in the same Danish web magazine the three authors give their response, maintaining that they have no wish to nominate a winning country. At the same time they emphasise that gender scholars are collaborators in social development and have a responsibility to indicate the direction that policies should pursue on the basis of their research. With such an understanding of the societal role of research it is rather problematic to refrain from evaluating which of the discourses has the best political consequences.

I would claim that the exaggerated focus on the actor for adherence criticized by Hirdmann is a fairly pervasive phenomenon linked to a widespread postmodern understanding of people as autonomous individuals who are free to choose the way they put together their identities, untrammelled by structures. I intend to demonstrate that such a conception might well undermine effective feminist social criticism, and to do so I will analyse the introductions to two Danish feminist anthologies which have appeared in recent years, *Nu er det nok. Så er det sagt* [That’s enough. Now it’s been said] (Goth et al 2000) and *De røde sko* [The red shoes] (Skov ed. 2002), and compare them with the introduction to the Swedish *Fittstim* (Skugge et al 1999). All three of these anthologies are written by relatively young feminists.

New feminism – a text-analytical intermezzo

The introduction to anthology *Nu er det nok* is in two parts, the first discussing women’s oppression and the other the construction of gender. The book gives a number of examples of the oppression of women drawn from the public sphere and statistics. At the same time the book has a constructivist project: to draw attention to the fact that gender is defined in terms of stereotyped roles which have a constricting effect on both sexes and are the result of a constant negotiation process, which makes it possible for us to change the stereotypes.

Curiously enough it is the latter part which gets to define what it means to be a feminist. As the editors put it: “The authors each have their definition of feminism … everyone can be a feminist, even men … Feminism isn’t about an opposition between the genders but about reacting to the unjust reality we all encounter … We have to negotiate our gender every day … Men must take part in this process as well as women. The definition of a ‘real’ man is just as limiting as the definition of a ‘real’ woman”.

Here a semantic slide takes place between the first section of the introduction in which tendencies oppressive to women throughout time are reeled off, with criticism directed at a stereotyped feminine image, and the second section, where gender roles are described as being equally restrictive for both sexes. It is an attempt to widen criticism of the inequality which afflicts women to comprise a criticism of the gender norms which afflict both sexes; and thus it is an attempt to mobilise men onto the feminist path.
Constructivism drowned out feminism
At the same time I would claim that what we see here is a kind of evasive action/legitimation strategy which says a lot about both the prevalent climate in which feminism and equal opportunities are discussed in Denmark and the theoretical discourses which are available. In the Danish context, the point of constructivism – that both genders are constructed and therefore negotiable – has a tendency to erase the feminist point that we live in a culture in which women do not have equality with men, and where the categories ‘men’ and ‘women’ are stubbornly maintained as separate entities in the hierarchical organisation. One may speculate whether the reason why constructivism has come to drown out feminism in a Danish context may be that its message feels modern. The message that gender is constructed goes hand in hand with an individualised culture where each person is able to choose his or her own distinctive personality, in contrast to the socially indignant, non-modern individualised culture where each

In the recently published _Den røde sko_, any mention of women’s oppression has been deleted from the introduction. Here the constructivist discourse reigns supreme. And again men are encouraged to join in as feminists. But the introduction concludes on an interesting note when the editor makes herself spokeswoman for an overall feminist “we”, even though she sees this “we” as opposed to constructivism’s constant deconstruction of self-sufficient and excluding “we’s”. She insists on this challenge anyway on the grounds that we still live in an unequal society. I read this somewhat contradictory message as an expression of frustration at not possessing sufficient analytical tools to draw attention to the subordinating mechanisms under which women as a group suffer.

Backed by feminists at the top
Drude Dahlérup, another Danish gender scholar (resident in Sweden), points out in another article in the power survey’s publication on gender power that Denmark cannot match the feminist debate prevailing in Sweden (Dahlérup 2002). In this respect, it looks as if Denmark, where political mobilisation is dependent on action from below, is particularly vulnerable as concerns political movement. In Sweden the popular gender debate is backed up by feminists holding central top posts, who by virtue of their societal status are able to enrich the debate from above. But in Denmark, where feminists are few and far between in top government jobs and other elite positions, the gender debate has wretched conditions. As an active feminist I have experienced that among the things one has to struggle against on a daily basis are a number of deeply hostile images such as that of the man-hating activist or the miserable prude. These images can often be propagated unchallenged by anti-feminist journalists and other opinion formers. Perhaps the pure grassroots movements are now a thing of the past, and the powerful influence of the media makes it necessary for us to consider some kind of top-down perspective?

I can perceive a tendency for Danish gender scholars to focus on change and renewal, but the theoretical tools are lacking to make sense of the static condition, the stubborn back-lag which hardly moves at all. It therefore seems clear to me that there is an interesting potential in Yvonne Hirdman’s criticism of the Danish gender-power discourse, which she sees as impeded actor-fixation.

The three Danish authors of “Diskurser om køn, magt og politik i Skandinavien” have a point when stating that the dominant theoretical discourses influence conceptions of reality and the interpretation of problems. These discourses form part of the base from which young feminists speak, and they can also create pro- or anti-feminist backcloths to the debates which feminists try to raise with the authority given to them by the title of scholar. Therefore gender scholars have a responsibility.

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Barriers and careers in academia

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The under-representation of women in academic positions is often explained in terms of external factors; but what about the internal processes at universities? New studies indicate the complexities of barriers and careers.
The proportion of women students at the Nordic universities is on the rise. In Denmark more than 50% of the students in some subjects are women, and the Danish media find the increase so pronounced that journalists raise the alarm and say that in a few years’ time women will have taken over the universities. But in fact the increase is largely restricted to students – to women studying particular subjects, such as medicine and the humanities. When we turn to the academic staff the general picture looks far less democratic. In 1997 female professors and female lecturers made up, respectively, 6.7% and 16.8% of the total at the five traditional universities in Denmark (Ståhle 1998). Male professors dominated with 93.3% and male lecturers with 83.2%.

The picture concerning academic staff looks slightly better in the other Nordic countries, though seen from an equal opportunities perspective there’s not much to boast about. At Norwegian universities in 1999 women’s share of professorships was 12% and of lecturer positions 38%. In Sweden in 1998 the figures were 11% of the professorships and 22% of the lectureships (NIFU 2000). In the case of Finland comparative statistics do not exist for lectureships, but in 1999 women held 33.4% of the engagement with (often) own research and 17.9% of the professorships (KOTA-DATABASEN 2001).

Barriers within women themselves?

One explanation for women’s failure to follow academic careers is that there is a historical lag: women have only been admitted to university in the Nordic countries for a little more than a century, with the large bulge of women students arriving in the 1960s, and this is why there are still so few women in university positions. This line of argument holds that the gender imbalance can be expected to right itself in the course of time, an optimism engendered by the fact that the proportion of female Ph.D. students has increased. But there are no grounds for applause. Further up in the academic hierarchy women’s success record takes a dive. This has been explained by pointing out that women do not apply for the jobs that are advertised.

The barriers to an academic career are thus said to be within the women themselves. They are not sufficiently set on getting appointments. They drop out of the race when they have children and instead go in for secondary school teaching or a job that can be combined with family commitments. Thus external explanations act as a scourge by attributing the problem to the women’s behaviour the university can maintain its pose of gender neutrality: discrimination against women does not exist in academic life. Women are free to apply for academic positions, which are advertised as open to all qualified applicants. The university does not think gender. The tenured staff – lecturers and professors – do not talk about gender, write about gender, or notice the presence of gender at the university. The university restricts itself to academic matters, which exclude gender perspectives.

Internal processes - in universities

Women also mention external factors when they explain why they have not chosen academic careers. And there has been no progress. Significant reports in Denmark from the start of the 1990s documenting the gender imbalance at the universities did not result in improvements (Borchorst et al. 1992; Recruiting of Researchers I & II, 1992-93; Ståhle 1993). Neither did the proposal to introduce gender quotas, which was countered by a number of objections concluding in the argument asserting the gender-neutral university. The Danish research programme Gender barriers and career processes. The programme was initiated in 1997 and reached its conclusion in the autumn of 2002. The central research system has supported it with 12 million DKK (1.5 US$). Twelve researchers have analysed structures, environments, pedagogic communication, academic approaches, and interpersonal and individual factors (The results of the investigations, 1997-2002).

One of the points highlighted in a report summarising the findings is that there are “subtle processes imperceptibly assigning men and women different routes in and out of the academic organisation” (Højgaard & Søndergaard eds. 2002). The smaller number of women than men who apply for and obtain Ph.D. stipends is accounted for by the fact that in some subjects, especially in the field of the humanities, there are very few stipends available. Scientific subjects dominated by men have a greater number of Ph.D. stipends. Since Ph.D. stipends are the entry ticket to a career in research in today’s Danish university system, the Ph.D. quotas work as both internal barriers and career processes.

How women are screened out

Advertisements for academic positions are another example of how women are screened out and men selected. They are often narrowly worded to suit a particular candidate who is already working in the department and who will most often be a man. In the medical faculty an advertisement for an appointment in surgery will give preference to male applicants. There will be more women applicants for appointments in chemistry than in physics, and if physics more women than men go in for the “softer” aspects of physics. Tradition determines that some subjects and subject areas are more prestigious than others and help put Danish research on the international map, and researchers stoutly maintain that these subjects are the most rewarding. But this tradition also contributes to keeping women out of the positions. Furthermore, there is the reiterated assurance from the academic world that the best qualified candidates are appointed. However, one of the studies finds that this is not the case.
in making appointments departments must also consider research plans for the university as a whole and for the subject in question, allocation of resources between subject areas, number of students, age etc. Such considerations may justify the appointment of less qualified applicants. And as it is a long way to the top and women occupy the lower rungs of the ladder, research planning and allocation is decided by men.

The good student is defined as one who is independent, selective, problem-oriented and competitive. The students and teachers interviewed in research projects associate these traits with male study habits (Knudsen [Looking at Gender] 1-4, 1999-2001). They are contrasted with female study habits, which among other things are seen as parallel to the “schoolification” of the mass university, with its combination of academic and social activities.

Educational theory has entered university teaching in the form of courses for teaching staff. It is not, however, felt to be of first importance. University study is first and foremost academic. However, observations in the classrooms of a humanistic department done in connection with my study indicate that teaching methods favour male students over female students (Knudsen 2000, Knudsen 2001a). The lecture form requires points to be made sharply and argumentatively. Students who want to be heard must use forms of communication which demonstrate their ability to compete. They must be able to oppose and confront the lecturer, as is possible for the good student with male behaviour patterns.

Oppositions produce gender
The division of the university into research and teaching contribute to maintaining the gender tradition of having more men than women on the academic staff. Such oppositions are productive of gender (Knudsen 2001b).

Paradoxically, significance is not attributed to gender in these oppositions, even though it is interwoven as a signifier in university internal processes. “Schoolification” is generally regarded as a problem for research at the university. Students are criticised for referring to their university studies as “school” and demanding homework with defined reading assignments and concrete exercises. This trend is linked with the increasing number of students admitted to university. Gender is never mentioned. But a glance at history shows that this increase coincides with the entry of a greater number of women students to higher education.

The debate on “schoolification” reveals that it is often associated with “feminine” behaviour, and in most cases is concretised in persons with female body features. But occasionally persons with male body features may also be associated with “schoolification” as “feminine” behaviour. Such persons rarely become university lecturers or professors.

Barriers: the case of Helle
The following two cases taken from my study could serve to illustrate some of these points. At the time of the interview I did with Helle she was writing her concluding thesis (Knudsen 1999). She starts off by describing a typical day in her life. Around 7.30 she gets her children up, then dresses them, gives them breakfast and takes them to kindergarten. From 9 to 3 she works on her thesis. Next in the interview she tells about a typical day in his life: a stable working day in which he works from 8 to 4, after which he engages in sport for three to four hours. He says that he spent less time with his thesis from a group that she attends while her husband, who works so far from home that he lives away during the week. She provides insight into various aspects of her life: how she copes when her children are ill, her work as chairman of the kindergarten management board, her membership of a housewives’ association, and about her relations with family and friends.

She must work on her thesis “full-time within a part-time framework”, as she puts it. She has allotted it half a year, and can’t afford to take longer.

She points out that as a student she cannot hope to live up to the theoretical demands of her subject. For example, in the first interview she says that she doesn’t intend to “research into what Lacan thinks in relation to Derrida”. In the second interview we hear that she has got a lot out of the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan, which she became acquainted with at a course she attended at another Nordic university, where his theories were applied to women’s literature and discussed in connection with theories of femininity. But at the university where she is writing her thesis she has experienced that encounters with theory make her lose academic self-confidence. She wishes that the subject she is studying could be presented and legitimised with more view to its application. She criticises the fact that the only response to her work that she has received has been a grade on a notice board, which gave her the impression that she was invisible at her department. She gains strength to carry through her thesis from a group that she attends with other thesis writers.

Helle has made up her mind not to aim at a career in research. She mentions three factors which present themselves as barriers for her. Firstly, she feels that she is unsuited to a life of research by reason of its scientific nature. Secondly, she finds the academic environment far too impersonal and closed: it flattens individuality, makes the individual invisible. Thirdly, she sees that it can be difficult to combine research with family life.

Helle’s family background is academic. Three-quarters of a year after the interview she obtained a teaching position at a college which trains nursery-school teachers.

Careers: the case of Mikael
At the time of the interview in my research Mikael has just handed in his thesis (Knudsen 1999). He too starts by telling about a typical day in his life: a stable working day in which he works on his thesis from 8 to 4, after which he engages in sport for three to four hours. He says that he spent less time with his wife whilst he was working on his thesis, and she accepted the necessity of this. They have put off having children for a while.

He was able to carry out his thesis as “overtime within a full-time framework”, and spent 2 1/2 years on it.
When Mikael talks about his studies he puts the focus on the thesis. In the interview he tells about the problem areas he encountered and about his experience with theoretical approaches. He theorises at a high philosophical level, explaining how he works intensively with a problem and stays with it until it resolves itself. Speaking about his time as a student, he says that he has had low examination grades; but adds that when that happened he got an oral response from his teachers encouraging him to continue because “you can do something different”. This led him to study intensively by himself in an attempt to discover what this otherwise could be. In his first year as a student he read “24 hours a day”. When he attended a lecture whose points he didn’t completely understand he studied the lecturer’s sources and theoretical ballast.

When he was writing his thesis Mikael preferred to work by himself. He has made up his mind to try for a carrier in research and has approached his supervisor to hear about the possibilities of getting a Ph.D. stipend. His supervisor has encouraged him to write an application.

Mikael’s mother has professional training and his father is a university graduate. Between the time of the first and the second interview Michael received the top grade for his thesis, and half a year later he was awarded a Ph.D. stipend at another university.

Research into gender in academia

The Danish research project which I participated in has provided some pieces in the larger picture, but far from enough to give a full understanding of the barriers to careers in academia. There have been smaller research projects in the other Nordic countries. The Finnish research project Køn og akademia (Research and the academy) has looked at structures, cultures, the gendering of researchers’ professional identity and the production of gender (NEWS from NIKK 1/2000, Husu 2001). The project consists of two individual but closely related qualitative studies, one investigating the experiences of Finnish academic women in response to subtle forms of discrimination, the other concentrating on the differences between men and women with regard to academic identity, feelings and gender. The Norwegian project Gender and power in academia is a part of the larger Norwegian project Power and Democracy (NEWS from NIKK 1/2000, Rogg 2001).

Further investigations will enable a closer approach to the labyrinths of the academic world. Using gender as a prism will open up a variety of different perspectives. Each projects in the Nordic countries show that investigating gender in academia reveals practices within many areas, such as job advertisements and educational problems. It will also be a good idea to conduct investigations on the factors that get women to go in for an academic career, and that can enable them to do so. The researchers on the Nordic projects have themselves achieved university careers, and most of them are in tenured positions. What has helped them and others to remain in the university world? What can get more women to apply for research positions? In the course of the last 30 years centres for gender and feminist research have grown up in the Nordic countries. Have they had any significant effect on gender in academia?

Different strategies

Each individual country needs further investigations. But in a Nordic comparative perspective it will also be necessary to look at the different strategies which the individual countries have worked with. In Finland, and in recent years in Sweden, the initiative for appointing more women to academic positions has come from the higher political levels. Norway has worked towards achieving formal equalisation for many years, and today it is possible to talk about gender and equality without a blush or a joke. But not in Denmark. Danish researchers, including gender researchers, have wanted to work for gender equality from below, emphasising the universities’ autonomy and right to self-government, with the result that Denmark takes bottom place with respect to the proportion of female academics to male. The figures are not high for the other Nordic countries, but they show better results than Denmark.

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Only four of the 70 computer biographies written by male students at the North Karelia Polytechnic mentioned girls or women. Mothers and grandmothers are anonymous family members who have financed the boys’ first Commodores. Only one of the biographies was written by a female student.

"WHERE HAVE ALL THE..."
THE WOMEN GONE?"

– gender in the biographies of IT students

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These biographies, on the significance of information technology for the students in the first year of the IT course at the Polytechnic from the end of 1998 to the end of 1999, are freely written texts based on five given themes: me and IT, leisure and IT, work/school and IT, service, administration and IT, and the future and IT. Of all of them, only one is written by a woman.

Women are mentioned expressly in short passing statements about, for example, the writer having given a technically outdated computer to his sister when he bought a new and more powerful one for himself, or about a girlfriend using the writer’s computer more than he himself does for playing or doing homework. But women are never mentioned explicitly, except in one biography. Here the writer bought an expensive computer together with his mother, but after this mention she, too, disappears from his narrative. In another biography a woman plays an active role in acquiring a computer: one writer’s partner bought a computer, but this purchase had far-reaching consequences in the life of the man:

“Actually I got interested in IT only when my partner bought a computer. First, she couldn’t use the computer at all, so I had to install all the software. (...) I got really interested in computers as I was tinkering about with our own machine and finally I started studying IT where computers have a central role. In future, I hope to work with computers, which I really like” (Kimmo, b. 1976).

In fact, Kimmo is the only writer who mentions a female actor in his narrative more than once. The other incidence is from his childhood, when Kimmo and his sister wanted a Commodore 64 computer, since “everybody else” already had one. After these two mentions, his partner and his sister disappear from Kimmo’s story, too.

Apart from the five references described above, there are no women or girls in the young men’s computer biographies. The texts reflect IT as “world without women” (Vehviläinen 1996). Why is this the case? Where have all the women and girls gone?

Technology and masculinity
The absence of girls and women from the young men’s computer biographies would not be surprising or remarkable if the texts did not mention men or boys either. However, this is not the case. Fathers, older brothers, cousins, uncles and unidentified male persons, and, above all, the writers’ own friends appear frequently in the narratives:

“I remember that I first encountered computers about 11 years ago when I got to go with my older brother to his friend’s house to play; if I remember correctly, the classic game Operation Wolf on an Amiga 500 computer” (Veli-Matti, b. 1978).

Mellström (19-9: 50–52) writes about mediators - men, usually fathers, who introduce boys to the world of technology and at the same time pass on the idea of technology as something essentially connected with masculinity. Such mediators, through whom the writers got into contact with computers for the first time, are also mentioned in the biographies. In some cases this mediating person is a relative, but more often it is a friend. So the mediator does not need to be an older person or even a relative, the important thing is that he is already initiated in the world of technology.

The largest group who, according to the young men’s stories, have defined their interest in computers, is their circle of friends, consisting of boys. Together with these friends, they have played with computers, exploring, encountering and solving problems.

“During the C 64 period we played a lot but it was always a gang who gathered to play at somebody’s house. Not like today, when there is a PC and an internet connection in every home and the kids are totally cut off from the world” (Olli-Petteri, b. 1978).

Not one single girl is mentioned in the circles of friends. The interest in computers is thus very strongly concentrated in groups of boys precisely at the age when children create their gender identity by deviating from one group and being part of another. On the one hand, girls might consciously avoid the
computer hobby which feels strange, and on the other, boys are unwilling to let girls into their computer gangs (Oksman 1999: 183).

**Computer games attract boys**
The young men write that in the first phases of their IT interest, computers were used for playing – a lot – but sometimes they also got interested in the working principle of the computer and above all in programming. Computer games are a significant channel for getting to know and getting used to information technology and its functions. For girls, however, the games with their violence and action seem strange. Håpnes and Rasmussen (2000: 235) describe how girls define themselves in opposition to the nerd culture which they experience as strange. Girls do not want to be associated with game-addicted nerds who behave asocially, and therefore they do not play computer games. In addition, girls find typical boys’ games to be violent battle and war games that do not correspond to their values and therefore they are not interested in them.

In the young men’s computer biographies, the development from games to simple programming and so to the acquisition of expertise at a very young age, is repeated several times. This recurrent connection between games and expertise supports the idea that one reason for there being so few women in the field of IT might be that girls do not – even today, and even less so in the 1980’s – play computer games as frequently as boys do (Oksman 1999:179; 182; Velviltänen 1998: 280). By playing and fiddling with the computer out of pure curiosity, the boys get an understanding of the ‘soul’ of the computer and this understanding might develop into something that is perceived as intuitive knowledge – even as an adult.

“I ‘inherited’ both a Sega (a cool machine with rubber keys) and a C 64 from my uncle some time in the mid-80’s and I spent many interesting hours with them. Nowadays my computer use is ‘in my bones’ possibly thanks precisely to this long experience with my first computers” (Olli-Petteri, b. 1978).

Solitary play does not of course automatically lead on to a profession within the field of IT. Playing should rather be seen as a possible starting point for taking a deeper interest, more like an inducement to become familiar with computers. And games have so far attracted more boys than girls.

The young men think that self-studies based on trial and error is the most efficient way to learn IT. They do not value the IT teaching in school very highly. Many have commonly experienced situations where the pupils knew more than the teacher: it is difficult to appreciate the teaching if oneself already is more skilful than the teacher.

“The level of IT teaching totally depends on how interested the teacher is in his or her subject. Unfortunately one often encounters ancient IT teachers who got their training in granddad’s days and think they still master everything with the knowledge they got back then” (Topi, b. 1978).

Here, there is a clear difference compared with girls and women, who, according to studies, rather learn to use computers in school and at work under somebody else’s guidance than independently on their own. Usually women and girls use computers less experimentally than boys and men. They want to carry out specific tasks using the computer, while men and boys are often purely interested in the machine and its functions (Nurmela 1997: 31; Oksman 1999: 178, 181, 183). Thus, when reaching the age for choosing a field of education and vocation, many boys and young men have an information technological advantage over girls and young women, who have not to the same extent had the support of a technically oriented peer group and have not developed a feeling for computers by playing and independently working with them.

**Programming gives status**
A high level of skill in computer use is a central factor for getting acknowledgement and appreciation within a male peer group, both as boys and adults. Programming skills, for their part, are a kind of symbol or ultimate proof of the
knowledge that gives appreciation and status as a “guru”; in many of the young men’s narratives a recurrent wish is, above all, to learn to programme — perfectly.

I’d want to be able to make perfect software and at the same time learn how to repair computers and about what happens inside them (Heikki, b. 1978).

So not even excellent skills in normal computer use are enough to merit appreciation within a peer group. This is not surprising: if somebody has mastered the basics of programming as early as their (early) teens, the same level of knowledge will most likely not be enough in adulthood. Programming skills can thus be regarded as a kind of passport granting admittance to the group of “real” IT experts. This emphasis of extreme skills in and knowledge of programming acquired already at a young age as a prerequisite for real expertise within IT is also one of the characteristics of the IT world, which produces differences between the situation of men and women.

Håpnes and Rasmussen (2000: 239) as well as Oksman (1999: 181–182) note that girls are interested in word processing and the internet as tools for communicating with other people and not in the computers and their functions as such. Nonetheless, in order to reach “true” expertise, knowing how to use the computer for carrying out certain – even meaningful – tasks is not enough. One must be interested in computers in a more basic way to reach the extreme skills – “real” professionalism – where the understanding of the computer and their functions as such. Nonetheless, in order to reach “true” expertise, knowing how to use the computer for carrying out certain – even meaningful – tasks is not enough. One must be interested in computers in a more basic way to reach the extreme skills – “real” professionalism – where the understanding of the machine “is in the bones”. This deeper interest, to conquer the computer and make it do more than may be expected, seems to be typical expressly for boys and men.

Technology is tameable!

In these computer biographies many factors can be discerned that constitute differences between the relation of boys/men and girls/women to information technology – similar factors that have been observed by other studies. Firstly, the great significance of male mediators and groups of similarly minded boys for the initiation into the world of information technology is obvious. Secondly, the role of games as an incitement to learn to know computers and self-studies as the most efficient method of gaining IT competence emerge. Thirdly, extreme (programming) skills are emphasized as a prerequisite for true expertise in the field. These factors – together with several others – create an IT world where it is more difficult for women than for men to gain access to the innermost circles and act as full experts.

The only woman

Tiina was the only woman among the 71 students who wrote biographies. Tiina will be an excellent IT expert. However, her starting-point differs from that of most of the young men in her year. When writing her biography, Tiina had approximately one year’s experience of computers – while many of her male fellow-students had actively used computers for more than ten years. Tiina also seems to be interested in computers in a different way than many young men. She was not attracted at a young age into the world of computers by games. Her interest arose only as an adult and then explicitly as a result of the communication opportunities offered by the internet. Tiina wishes to study programming in order to find a solution to an existing, concrete problem, not as part of striving for perfect knowledge for the sake of knowledge only. Tiina is one of the women who will break down the male norms in the worlds of information technology.

"Taming strategy"

The different positions that women and men take within information technology are not unambiguous or easy to grasp. They are created through the processes mentioned above and do not consist of clear, separate elements. The fact that boys (so far) gain entrance into the world of computers more easily than girls is not the result of some conspiracy, and neither is it the fault of either boys or girls. In an article on Norwegian hackers, Håpnes and Sørensen (1995: 188–189) describe the relations between boys and young men and computers as a “taming strategy”, which includes, among other things, playing, peer groups and learning by trial and error. Girls and women generally do not yet have access to tools and methods for taming technology, therefore their situation in relation to IT is different to that of men and boys. However, Tiina’s narrative shows that technology can also be tamed by women — perhaps not using the same methods as men, but all the same in a way which enables development into an expert.

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The women’s movement was engulfed by the political establishment in the 1970s and 1980s. But radical feminism has not disappeared.
– At the end of the 1990s, new feminist grassroots movements emerged such, for example, as vegan feminism and girl power feminism, says sociologist Solveig Bergman.

Solveig Bergman is a researcher in the Department of Sociology at Åbo Akademi University in Turku, Finland. In August this year she presented her doctoral dissertation on the development of the women’s movement in West Germany and Finland from the end of the 1960’s to the end of the 1980s.
– It would now be an exciting project to investigate the new wave of feminism, she says.

The new feminism has been less visible in Finland than in the other Nordic countries, such as for example Sweden, where the book Fittstim (Cunt shoal) attracted great attention. But it does exist.
– The new young feminists are often connected to movements for animal rights, veganism and anti-pornography activism. In Turku, there are a number of women’s groups and many young women who study women’s studies are politically active.

Solveig Bergman herself belongs to a generation of women’s studies researchers who have tended to believe that feminist research should be separated from women’s politics. She finds it interesting that younger students do not experience any conflict between research and politics.
– They know the current feminist theories very well, but also work, for example, in crisis groups for battered women.

Bergman explains that a generational shift has occurred within the women’s movement. The daughters of radical women from the 70s have now themselves entered the arena. But this does not mean that their mothers will have settled back into a comfortable, material existence.
– I challenge the notion that people become more conservative as they get older. This is at least not the case with women, says Bergman.

The body and sexuality
New networks of active older women have emerged during the last few years. In Sweden, a group of well-known women – among them Alexandra Charles, Lill Lindfors and Barbro Svensson – recently published a book entitled Kvinnas mitt i livet (Woman in Mid-life) in which they seek to banish the myths surrounding the menopause. In Finland, female parliament members have created a network which crosses party lines.
– This might also be a reaction to the fact that younger women are more in the public eye. Young, beautiful female politicians get more attention in the media, together with middle-aged men.

– But there will be counter-reaction, as those born in the 1940s get older. As the old men die smart healthy women born in the 1940s will make demands and get involved in politics, says Bergman.

Despite the new women’s groups, she thinks that the campaign for equality at work should be made more attractive.

– When the talk turns to wages and working life, the young women yawn. Wages and work related issues are still important, but the agenda must be broadened. Questions on the body and sexuality must be highlighted.

The body, sexuality and co-existence are subjects that today’s young women feel to be important, and they were also the focus for the women’s movement that spread throughout the Western world in the 1970s and 1980s after the student revolt of the 1960s.

– In the aftermath of sixties’ radicalism, other new movements emerged, such as the environmental and peace movements. But the women’s movement is one of the most influential social movements in the post-war period, explains Bergman.

– It has affected politics, culture and human relations far beyond the core of the movement itself.

**Social protest**

The feminism in the 1970’s and 1980’s was called ‘the new feminism’. Bergman notes that it both was and was not a new social movement.

– It was part of a general social protest, but also a part of the historical continuity of the women’s movement. This goes back to women’s political mobilisation during the 19th century, she says.

– The common feature for the women’s movement is the women’s interest in acting collectively to change society and counteract a patriarchal order.

In her doctoral thesis, Solveig Bergman studied ways in which women’s collective action has been formed in autonomous feminist movements. She related the women’s movements of the 1970s and 1980s in Finland and West Germany to their historical, social and political context. Theoretically, she defined the movements as a combination of collective action and discursive construction.

Solveig Bergman studied in Frankfurt am Main for two years. She chose Finland and West Germany as case studies partly for pragmatic reasons, partly in order to be able to compare the differences between two countries where the position of women, the political culture and the formation of the welfare state vary.

On an empirical level, Bergman examined the various development phases of the women’s movement. So far, the political agency, that is, women’s ways of acting together for political objectives, within the feminism of the 1970s and 1980s has not been studied to any great extent.

– I suppose women who participated in the action then need some distance in time before they can take stock. But a doctoral thesis is being written in Lund in Sweden and Drude Dahlerup, who today is professor in Stockholm has made an extensive study of the Danish Rödstrumpe (redstockings) movement.

**A Finland-Swedish phenomenon**

As a young student, Solveig Bergman herself got to participate in the aftermath of the student revolt. In the 1970s she was active in student politics. She got seriously interested in feminism through her engagement with women’s studies in the 1980s.

– In my research I have not explored the women’s organisations in political parties or female activism within trade unions, but rather autonomous feminist movements in the so-called civil society.

Autonomous women’s groups and activists were more prominent in West Germany than in Finland. It has even been claimed that independent grass-roots movements did not exist in Finland.

This is not the case. In Turku, for example, there was a group who called itself Kvinnoligan (the Women’s League). In Helsinki there were the Feminists and the Women’s Union.

– The Union dates back to the 1800s. But younger feminists in Helsinki carried out a coup in the 1970s and changed the character of the Union, Bergman explains.

She has scrutinised the journals of the Feminists and the Union, as well as journals of German women’s groups. Her empirical material includes a secondary analysis of existing research in West Germany and Finland, and a series of interviews with Finnish feminist activists.

Solveig Bergman is the first researcher in Finland to show that the new women’s movement in Finland was linguistically slanted. Throughout the 1970’s, feminist groups were dominated by Finland-Swedes.

– Finland-Swedes introduced the feminist debate into Finland. One explanation to this is the Nordic influence; another is that the youth and student movement tied to party politics – particularly Soviet-Marxism – was less dogmatic in Finnish-Swedish circles during the 1970’s.

Many student-political movements in the 1970’s were generally patriarchal. It was felt that the “big social questions” had to be solved before turning to the power relations between the sexes.

– Issues relating to phenomena such as the body, sexuality and co-existence were sneered at, explains Bergman.

**The state - the enemy**

The women’s movement crossed the language border and gained a stronger foothold in Finland only at the end of the 1970s – ten years later than in most other Western countries. Solveig Bergman explains this in terms of the general political culture, particularly the strong influence of party politics in the student movement.

– Young women were the front-runners in the women’s movement in
Finland. But they found it difficult to make their voices heard within the political left. As the role of party politics weakened, environmental movements and the women's movement emerged, says Bergman.

The women's movement developed differently in Finland than in West Germany. The German movement followed a clearer autonomous strategy and had a more confrontational relation to the state authorities.

– German feminists regarded the state as enemy number one. The state also expelled political protest movements, Bergman explains.

Thus, the German women's movement was separatist: it distanced itself from the public system and formed an extra-parliamentary opposition. In Finland the complete opposite was the case.

– Political culture in Finland is based on an ideology of consensus and it has, to a larger extent than in the other Nordic countries, incorporated political protest. The young radicals from the student movement were integrated into the political establishment. In this way, the protest movement was neutralised.

Many feminists in Finland followed the same path. They found posts as civil servants and as decision-makers throughout the party political structure. The ideas of the women's movement were incorporated into state welfare politics. In the Nordic countries, the state carried out political reforms to a totally different extent than in Germany.

Childcare, explains Solveig Bergman in her thesis, became a civil right in Finland, while it continued to be a private responsibility in Germany. In the 1980's, the so-called mothers' movement was strong in Germany. Mothers demanded economic compensation for taking care of their children as well as space for mothers within the political apparatus.

– On the whole, the view of women's emancipation has not been as strongly tied to paid labour in Germany as in Finland and the other Nordic countries, Solveig Bergman says.

The conflict is masked
In the 1980's, however, a change occurred in the West German women's movement's relation to the state. Feminists joined political organisations, they became gender researchers, and their projects – for example women's help centres – were institutionalised and professionalised. The political parties and the state also modified their view of the women's movement.

– A similar institutionalisation as that in Finland took place. Look at the new Green movement: Joschka Fischer was a green fighter on the barricades. Now he is foreign minister, explains Bergman.

Researchers have discussed whether women can influence the system better from the outside or from within. Solveig Bergman thinks that grassroots groups outside the system can be as effective in their work for change as feminists within the system.

In her work she points out that Finnish women made demands on the state when they needed childcare, while that issue was not as important for the German women. But Bergman problematises the simplified view of the German women's situation as subordinate and Finland as a country where equality has been realised.

– In Finland, women's demands for equality were transformed into programmes for family policy and social welfare. This has obscured the power conflict between the sexes to a gender-neutral way of approaching social problems, Bergman writes in her thesis.

She thinks that the established Nordic view of equality must be challenged.

– It is true that there is more awareness of the power structures of society in Sweden, for example, than in Finland. But I'm afraid that the Nordic discourse has been neutralised.

Strategic women
At the same time, Solveig Bergman, who was the first co-ordinator of Nordic Women Studies in 1991–1994 and a consultant for the establishment of NIKK in 1995, is pleased about the growing Nordic co-operation in women's studies and gender research. She is particularly happy about NIKK's plans for organising a Nordic conference on women's movements in a few years' time.

Bergman notes that the new feminism is not based only on white, heterosexual middle-class women.

– Today, there is a transnational feminism and the internet provides new opportunities for ideas to spread across national borders. Global questions about women's rights are dealt with by the UN, and women activists from the third world are seen and heard. This becomes necessary as fundamentalist ideas gain ground.

Solveig Bergman also emphasises the women's networks that work at a European level against, for example, trafficking in women and prostitution.

– It will be interesting to see how the debate on trafficking in women is affected when former Eastern European countries join the EU, she says.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the women's movement was characterised by optimism. Women believed that it was possible to influence opinions and change society.

– Now a rather more pessimistic attitude prevails: a constant fear of catastrophes, such as global environmental pollution, says Solveig Bergman.

Still, she herself is optimistic.

Movements such as Attac give hope and she believes the women's movement tends to go forward, "even if two steps forward are sometimes followed by one step backwards".

– Women continue to organise themselves and strive for collective action. The movement has become less uniform in its organisation, but various kinds of co-ordinating actions, coalitions and networks are common.

– In certain situations, women activists think it is wiser to stay outside the system, in others, that it is wise to enter it. Women are very strategic, says Solveig Bergman.
The world faces a new global battlefield upon which terrorist deeds are met with a war against terrorism, unregulated violence with regulated violence. It is said that the world will never be the same after September 11. But what has changed - and for whom? How could September 11 be interpreted from a gender perspective? And is there a connection between global violence and terrorism on the one hand and the violence of individual men towards women on the other?

War is a story about men, virility and violence. War creates solidarity among men, for values that are defined by men. But war is also stories about gender relations, sexualised symbols, and access to women.

The most obvious aspect is that the terrorists are men. It was men, prepared to die, who steered the planes against the twin towers in New York. Al-Qaida and similar terrorist networks are dominated by men. And the attacks were directed against men. Usama bin Laden has stated in an interview that women and children were not targeted. “The Holy Prophet was against killing women and children”, he said.

It is men, headed by president George W. Bush, who have reacted with force and who have initiated the war against terrorism. It is men who have passed the crucial resolutions, who make authoritative statements, and who dominate the media debate. With few exceptions, terrorism and the war against terrorism is a performance of men, for men, against other men.

Men are also less critical than women about attacks of retaliation. Two weeks after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, an opinion poll in Sweden showed that 48 per cent of the men interviewed and 72 per cent of the women were against attacks which involve a risk that innocent people would be killed (SvD 2001-09-27).

Women are unreliable allies for those who are in favour of war. If, as Bush points out, there is only one way between civilisation and (global) terrorism, for us or against us, then it becomes evident that women’s hesitation to use of violence marginalizes them even more. To speak of alternative solutions and non-violence is dubious in the polarized global order that is outlined, both in the West and within fundamentalist groups.

The association of men with war remains. Nowhere in public life are men’s and women’s tasks more separated than in war and international crisis management: men as soldiers vs. women as civilians and outsiders, and at the same time symbols of the specifically national, the bearers of culture, those who should be protected.

It is not only that men are those fighting, both with and against terrorist methods. The message that is spread is, above all, that when the security of a country or other basic values are threatened, men are most suited to take on the political responsibility, as a group. But the physical exclusion of women is only part of a broader paradigm, which
is built on gendered concepts such as nation, security and war.

**Metaphors of sexuality**

In a cartoon circulated on the net, bin Laden has assaulted the American president. She, America, has lost her innocence, peace researcher Johan Galtung writes (2002). He also wonders whether this could be interpreted in terms of three buildings being raped by jets, rammed into their wombs.

The fatherland is a woman who must be protected from assault (by men). But America was molested, humiliated, on her own soil. It has been regarded as a shame in the US that the attacks of September 11 could not be stopped. The military and economic superpower showed for a moment a sign of weakness. The man had not been capable of protecting his woman.

The metaphors are based in an idealised masculinity, where the security of the nation is built with strength, autonomy and demarcation against others. The citizen as soldier-patriot-man is glorified. Women symbolize weakness, even a threat against the national order.

"Nowhere in the public realm are (these) stereotypical gender images more apparent than in the realm of international politics, where the characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity are projected onto the behaviour of states whose success as international actors is measured in terms of their power capabilities and capacity for self-help and autonomy", states Ann Tickner (1992, p 6-7).

In international relations (theory) "security has been understood largely in terms of the protection of national communities from the violence – actual or potential – of excluded ‘others’", according to Jill Steans. War "has been constructed out of hostility towards the female ‘other’" (Steans 1998, p 99).

We stand in front of a series of simple and devastating dichotomies such as strength vs. weakness, autonomy vs. dependence, us (good) vs. them (evil). Goals are set up against means. Peace is regarded as based on a balance of power and deterrence, above all through the maximizing of military strength.

The question has to be raised: Could violence and terror be used in order to build a safe world without violence and terror? Feminist critique maintains that the separation of goals and means is one of the most devastating ideas in humanity, that, rather, security must be seen as the absence of war and violence, and that the security of one state cannot be built on the insecurity of others. The question has to be answered: security for whom – and for which values?

**Threatened masculinity**

Usama bin Laden is frightened by gender relations in the West. In an interview in 1998 he maintained that “the rulers of that region (the Gulf States) have been deprived of their manhood. And they think the people are women. By God, Muslim women refuse to be defeated by these American and Jewish prostitutes”. The West, in bin Laden's account, is determined “to deprive us of our manhood. We believe we are men”.

This interview was presented in the article “Occidentalism” in New York Review of Books and the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter. The authors’ comment is that “to all those who see military discipline, self-sacrifice, austerity, and worship of the Leader as the highest social ideal, the power of female sexuality will be seen as a dire threat” (Margalit & Buruma 2001).

What bin Laden says is that men who permit women to exploit their sexuality and pursue their emancipation as far as they do in the US are not real men. Hence, Western dominance in the world is a threat to the heroic masculinity, which holds death in contempt. Or in Anne Sisson Runyan's words: “both the terrorist and the state terrorist are preoccupied with transcendence and (sexual) purification through death” (2002).

The standpoint of president Bush, in an address to the American people, is that the Afghan people have been brutalized, i.e. since women have not been allowed to attend school. The oppression of women is used as an argument against the enemy and its culture. The worry about Afghan women "is not really motivated by concern for these women. Rather it is a device for ranking the ‘other’ men as inferior or as ‘uncivilised’", writes Nira Yuval-Davis (2002).

Real, civilized men do not treat women that way. The US government's intention is to say that the Taliban are not only terrorists, but also sexists. The severe conditions of women in Afghanistan have been used to legitimise the bombings.

It is worth noting, though, that neither the US, nor any other country, have earlier been prepared to take to violence against the Taliban regime in Kabul to liberate women (on the contrary, they sought to co-operate with the Taliban).

"In the masculinist legalese of 'national sovereignty' men in power can do what they like to their women, safe in knowledge that no other men will intervene. Only when men attack each other do they react", according to Annabelle Sreberny (2002).

Wendy Brown maintains that "the state guarantees each man exclusive rights to his woman" and "agrees not to interfere in a man's family (de facto woman's life) as long as he is presiding over it (de facto, her)" (1995, p 189). Politics between men are "the politics of exchanging, violating, protecting, and regulating women" (ibid, p 188).

Women must be controlled. The Taliban are not afraid of death, as the French journalist Catherine David formulates the problem (David 2001). They are afraid of women. David characterises the extreme fanaticism as a masculine neurosis, a phallocentric tragedy. The contempt for women is apparent. Mohammed Atta, probably the best known of the hijackers, wrote in his final message that he did not want pregnant women to say good-bye to him, nor any woman to go to his funeral, or later to his grave.

Do we face a new expression of threatened masculinity? With September 11, men's frustrations and need to control are not restricted to so called
honour killings or violence against women in the home. It was rather an attack on a gender order that is not tolerated. As Michael Kimmel writes: “Terrorism is fuelled by a fatal brew of anti-globalization politics, convoluted Islamic theology, and virulent misogyny” (2002).

But these statements about the disdain for women within fundamentalist groups do not exonerate the US from responsibility in terms of gender. Global terrorism and the war against terrorism remain conflicts between men - conflicts pertaining to construction of masculinity and women’s freedom of action, to what degree and how women should exist for men. It is to a large extent a hidden agenda. Under the social contract there is a sexual contract which, in the words of Carole Pateman (1988) is based on the law of male sex-right, men’s right of access to women’s bodies.

Gender is a vital but rarely discussed dimension of global and national security. One could talk about a hegemonic masculinity, made up of a symbiosis of a) an overwhelming presence of men, b) references to masculine values and symbols that restrict the political space for conflict resolutions to violence, war and terrorism, and 3) a substantial dispute about women’s agency, what women should and should not do.

Global - local

The next step, or question, in the discussion of gender and violence concerns the connection between public, global violence and so called private violence. My point of departure is that violence runs across all levels of analysis.

There are strange parallels between public and private terror, according to Kathleen Jones (2002). She states that the mantra of the domestic violence community is to "break the cycle". “Why can’t there also be a prayer for peace, not revenge at times of public violence?” she asks. I certainly agree with her, but I would like to go a step further, not only see parallels but relationships between public and private.

As Jill Steans states: “The links between domestic violence and war go beyond soldiers, brutalized by their experiences, beating their wives. Rather, there is an intricate relationship between the construction of masculinity and patriotism and violence. War and domestic violence are, in a symbolic but still meaningful sense, linked” (1998, p 101).

It is easy to see women’s conditions in Afghanistan as a question of culture, collectivity and gender – as a power structure. The US government is constructing the Other (culture) as patriarchal, “evil” and “uncivilised”. But when an American man put bombs in skyscrapers in Oklahoma City in 1995, there was no talk of culture or collective responsibility. No retaliation. Oklahoma was not bombed. The event was explained in individual terms, as a mad person who ran out of social control.

In the same way, when a Swedish woman and her child(ren) are killed by a Swedish man it is not regarded as a sign of patriarchal culture or collective responsibility. It is seen as a single – and sad – action executed by a frustrated individual, (who happens to be a man). But how are the terrorist attacks of September 11 linked to a Swedish man’s killing of “his” woman?

Fadime

I will use the story of Fadime as a link in our understanding. Fadime Sahindel was a 26 year-old Kurdish woman who was murdered in Uppsala by her father on the 21st of January 2002. She had
been threatened for years by her brother and father and had finally received a hidden identity. Still, she was found and shot dead. Reactions to this so-called "honour killing" have been very strong in Sweden. People have mobilised against this crime, 5,000 people attended the funeral in Uppsala.

Why the case of Fadime? I want to point out that single events of murder could be constructed as patriarchal culture and group responsibility. When a Kurdish man kills his daughter it tends to be viewed, from a Swedish perspective, as a common, Kurdish, male cultural problem. Why is it the responsibility of a whole culture, when a Kurd kills his daughter because she wants to live an emancipated life, but not when a Swedish man kills his woman and child?

Why will woman-killing in Sweden turn into Kurdish macho culture when a Kurd kills his daughter, but not turn into Swedish macho culture when a native-born Swede is the perpetrator?

I will indicate some answers/objections:

a) The Kurdish case could be seen as worse since it was a father killing his daughter (in Swedish public rhetoric men could be regarded as bad, but fathers are always good, as Maria Eriksson's research (2001) on the good-enough father shows).

b) There was a strong pressure on the father to restore the honour of the family, that is, to kill the daughter/whore. Hence, it is a problem of culture, of explicit male bonding.

c) There are more killings in a patriarchal culture such as the Kurdish than in the Swedish – it is a question of numbers. More macho if more women are killed.

Swedish reactions are based on the presumption that there is a difference in kind between Kurdish so-called "honour killings" and the killing of Swedish women. The broadly sanctioned ideal is maintained: Sweden is a land of equality, and thus, Swedish men are better men (with some exceptions).

If we say difference in degree, the Kurds will come too close, it will be difficult to uphold the construction of the Other as patriarchal, our own culture may have to be discussed and deconstructed as masculine, too.

It is interesting to note how members of Fadime's family construct the event. They maintain the view that the killing of Fadime was done by a lonely, odd and lost individual. Just the way men's violence is officially defined in a Swedish context.

**Male violence**

There is universalism and there is the position of us against them. There is difference in degree and there is difference in kind. If we regard hegemonic masculinity as a matter of degree we cannot construct the Other in the same easy way. This does not mean, though, that there are no differences.

I will pinpoint that there are great differences in how hegemonic masculinity is expressed.

However, threatened masculinity, men's right to have access to women and the questioning and denial of women's freedom of action, is in my opinion what links between global terrorism and an individual man's killing of "his" woman.

The demand for chastity which lies behind honour killings is a severe threat to women's integrity and agency, accepted by some and a horrible crime for others, legitimated by explicit ideology and religious beliefs. But women who are killed all over the world, by their partners, without explicit reference to cultural and religious values, are still victims of men's believed demands and rights. Codified and regulated male violence is worse than disguised violence, but it is still violence.

What is universal is the "culture" of male violence; that factors such as men's frustrations, the need to control and that threatened masculinity are "permitted" to express themselves in violence on all levels: on personal, collective (explicit or implicit), national and global levels. This hegemonic masculinity is an underestimated global problem, with repercussions for women's conditions, democracy and peace in the world.

REFERENCES


The world met in Uganda

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“Every practice is inspired by theory, every new theory generates practice”. These are words spoken by the gender researcher Amina Mama, in her opening address to the 8th International Interdisciplinary Women’s Worlds 2002. This year, the conference was for the first time organised in an African country – Uganda.

Referring to the overall theme of the conference – Gains and Challenges – Amina Mama, who is Director of the African Gender Institute at Cape Town University, spoke of the challenge to develop strategies of change based on both theory and practice in order to “create a world where we can live as equals”. And in line with the organisers, she also emphasised the opportunity of the conference to highlight perspectives from the South within the global women’s movement, and particularly African perspectives: “Uganda is an excellent observation post for investigating the dominant paradigms and centres of power that form our daily lives,” she said.

The 2,500 participants from 94 different countries consisted not only of researchers, but also to the same – if not larger – extent of representatives of NGOs and of policy-makers. All were present to exchange experiences and views on health, the economy, development, culture and identity construction from a gender perspective.

The presiding organisation was the Department of Women and Gender Studies, which is one of the larger departments of the Makerere University with 1,000 registered students. During the conference week, the department – which was established in response to pressure from the women’s movement – celebrated its 10th anniversary. At the same time, the new departmental building was inaugurated. The building, which was finished in time for the conference, has been financed by the Norwegian aid organisation NORAD.

The conference was organised at the university’s main campus, situated on one of Kampala’s seven hills, Makerere. On a huge lawn called Freedom Square, a gigantic tent had been erected. During the week, a number of dignitaries
arrived to participate in the opening and closing ceremonies, including even the President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta-Museveni, who arrived with pomp, circumstance and tanks. During the conference itself, the tent turned into an exhibition hall teeming with conference participants and students – not least male ones – who explored and bought local handicraft and books on gender research, and collected free material from several bookstalls. Many visited the stall for Nordic gender research, where representatives from NIKK (Nordic Institute for Women’s Studies and Gender Research), the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research and the Co-ordination of Gender Studies in Denmark noted a wide interest for Nordic gender research and equality policy. The tent was at the heart of a political and cultural event of a kind never seen in Uganda before.

**Africa’s new women’s movement**

For me – and perhaps for many others – before this conference, Uganda was above all associated with the dictator Idi Amin and HIV/AIDS. I was completely unaware of the fact that under president Museveni’s regime one of Africa’s strongest women’s movements has arisen, that Uganda is one of the African countries with the largest representation of women in the parliament (25 per cent) and that women constitute one third of the voting strength amongst the local decision-making authorities. Furthermore, one of the vice-presidents is female and there is a female minister for gender issues, which is remarkable not only in an African context, but also globally. And, what is more, the vice-president has publicly announced that she has been beaten by her husband!

Therefore, the experiences of Uganda were in focus as a ‘success story’ when the North American political scientist Aiili Tripp talked about Africa’s new women’s movement. She described the growth of a new women’s movement in Africa and in Uganda over the last 10–15 years and dated its starting point as being at the latter end of the 1980s and particularly the beginning of the 1990s, following the UN conferences in Nairobi and Beijing. What characterises this new women’s movement is its heterogeneity (it includes many different kinds of grouping), its width (it works across national, ethnic and religious borders) and, not least, its autonomy in relation to the state, which makes it different from, for example, the large, national women’s organisations that were connected to the governing party.

In contrast to the “old” women’s movement, which was based on religious groups or cultural clubs and concentrated on alphabetization, childcare and the upkeep of female handicrafts, the new women’s movement is very political and challenges governments with demands for the rights to own land and to take part in political decision making. It also raises issues that have previously been taboo, such as men’s violence against women, circumcision and sexual harassment. Because the women’s organisations challenge governments, they are also subject to harassment, restrictions and pure persecution. This is also the case in Uganda. As Aiili Tripp put it:

“Women’s political space is constantly threatened. We cannot know for how long it will remain open.” One of the most pressing issues that several participants raised was that of the movement’s dependency on foreign financial support and how this forces compromise in agenda setting. As a Ugandan woman asked: “If the Ugandan women’s movement turned more radical and feminist – would we still receive funding?”

**Gender perspective on HIV/AIDS**

One of the most clearly dominant themes of the conference was women and health, and several of the sessions of course dealt with HIV/AIDS. Of the 40 million people who live with HIV/AIDS in the whole world, more than 25 million are Africans and of these, 55 per cent are women. The reasons for these horrifying figures – and for the even more horrifying reality behind the figures – are manifold. There are structural aspects: poverty that weakens the immune system, the inequality in access to medicine between the South and the North, and the financial misery that forces women into prostitution in order to survive.

There are cultural norms and values: notions of male sexuality as being by nature polygamous, the idea of women as naturally subordinate to men and thus lacking the right to control their own sexuality and body, cultural traditions such as circumcision and polygamy. Focussing on male sexual behaviour, the following kinds of question were posed: How can we stop men from spreading HIV by buying sex? How can we get the men to protect themselves? How can we involve men in...
the battle against HIV/AIDS?

It is obvious that the main problem in the spread of the disease is not lack of information. In Uganda, the information has been successful, not least through the work of NGOs, but as one woman asked: “Here in Uganda over 90 per cent of the women are informed about HIV/AIDS and 100 per cent of the men. So, why do they still catch it?”

“If men are the main perpetrators, then men must also be the main opponents to violence against women.”

This was the claim of the Ugandan researcher Joseph Tumushabe, who in a workshop on women’s experience of war talked about how the civil war in northern Uganda affects the situation of women.

African voices

The aim of organising the 8th Women’s Worlds conference in Uganda was to let African voices be heard and make African perspectives visible. And, looking at the distribution of the speakers, this aim was fulfilled. Over half of the presentations were given by African, and particularly Ugandan, participants. Of the approximately 1,100 presentations, 315 were from Uganda, 260 from other African countries, 240 from USA/Canada, 160 from Europe (of which about 50 from Norway and Sweden), 70 from Asia and 25 from Latin America.

While it was liberating and informative for us who were there that the African women’s voices dominated, one can wonder why so few European researchers chose to attend and why so many Americans were not present? Did the conference have a low status because the emphasis was on activism and practical experience? Or because it was organised in Africa? And what does this say about attitudes within gender research in the North?

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Book of Abstracts and Conference Papers presented: http://www.makerere.ac.ug/womenstudies

The 2005 International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women will be held in Seoul, Korea under the theme

*Globalization from Women’s Perspectives: http://www.kaws.or.kr

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The diversity of gender studies in Africa

By ANNA JOHANSSON

Are Western feminist concepts applicable on African realities? What is the view of African gender researchers? As a follow-up to the Women’s Worlds conference in Uganda, this article discusses the history of gender research in Africa, its conditions and contents.

In October, the opening issue of the first feminist web journal that covers all Africa, Feminist Africa, was published by AGI – African Gender Institute at Cape Town University in South Africa. The theme of the issue is feminist perspectives on African higher education. It contains analyses of the gender inequality which is still seen as characterizing higher education in Africa, and also seeks to put African reality into a global context.

In her article, Jane Bennet, who together with Amina Mama heads AGI, notes that the focus today has been directed onto the overwhelming dominance of male students and researchers within academia in Africa. She also points out that since questions concerning gender and higher education were begun to be articulated at the end of the 1970’s, activism and theory of development has, in fact, focused on other things. Issues at stake have included the intellectual challenge to make visible and establish gender as a key category within research, to receive acknowledgement for the double burden (academic and reproductive work) of female academicians, and to observe, explore and counteract the widespread occurrence of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women on campus.

In 1997, an anthology entitled Engendering African Social Sciences was published which contained a number of contributions on the androcentricity of the research in social sciences in Africa. The book was the result of a pioneering conference with the same name in 1991 in Dakar, organised by CODESRIA.
Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa. Amina Mama, one of the editors, writes that the publication of this book indicates that neither male nor female researchers in Africa can deny the significance of gender in social theory.

**UN feminism**

In her survey of the history of African gender research, Amina Mama emphasizes the ambivalence of the role that the development industry has played in its emergence. A bureaucratised version of feminism established itself in African countries, a feminism formulated and financed by the UN. Through aid projects primarily targeted at women in rural areas, the African women were to be integrated into “the development”. This also created a need and prerequisites for research on women. Amina Mama thinks it significant for the African gender research that the first regional organisation which conducted research on African women was actually established under the supervision of the UN Economic Commission for Africa in 1975, not by the African women’s movement.

And while this organisation certainly worked towards promoting applied research and education according to the objectives set by the UN, it did very little for challenging the male dominance within African research in the social sciences, or about the dominance of white people within the study of African women. Instead, this became the task for AAWORD (Association of African Women for Research and Development), an organisation founded two years later by African researchers. Another organisation that has been important for the promotion of a gender perspective in African research is Women in Nigeria (WIN). Nigeria can be described as a leader when it comes to African gender research, with a number of centres for women’s studies and gender research, some with a history dating back to the early 1980’s.

**African Womanism**

In order to understand gender research in Africa, one has to take on some of the criticism directed against western feminism. Many African researchers, both in Africa and in the diaspora, have claimed that feminism is an imperialistic movement and yet another expression of white dominance. In an attempt to find their own ways of making visible and problematising the situation of women, they have used concepts such as womanism, a term coined by the African-American author Alice Walker, which, among other things, refers to the specific experience of a black woman being oppressed both by racism and by sexism. The debate on the applicability of Western feminism in African contexts entails many different positions. One of the harshest critics of feminism is Cleonora Hudson-Weems (1995) who does not want to be associated with either white or so-called Black Feminism, but claims that feminism has a racist past in the white suffragette movement in the USA, and has existed and still exists primarily for white, middle-class women. Prioritising gender is obvious for women who have never experienced the powerlessness based on ethnic oppression, she writes, and instead talks about the importance for African women to define themselves from their specific position. According to Hudson-Weems, Africana Womanism, for its part, has an agenda which is unique and separate from both white and black feminism, based on African culture and with a historical past that includes, among other things, slavery and African women’s economic independence.
A totally different position is taken by Amina Mama, who in an interview in the South African journal Agenda on the theme of African feminism, says that she happily and proudly defines herself as a feminist. It is a positive term originating in a political movement. Among her favourite feminists, she mentions the Egyptian feminist Huda Sharawi, who in the 1920s organised an occupation of the Egyptian Parliament, the Suffragettes in England and the African-American Sojourner Truth:

— I choose to hold on to the original word and insist that my own reality forms my way of using it.

Changing terminology does not solve the main problem which, according to Amina Mama, is the white domination of global politics and the relative power of definition that feminists from the North retain.

**Against radical feminism**

In the anthology *Sisterhood, Feminisms & Power. From Africa to the Diaspora* (1998) Obioma Nnaemeka, researcher in comparative literature working at Indiana University in the USA, discerns a number of areas that the opposition against white feminism is organised around. First and foremost, opposition has been directed against radical feminism – African feminism is not radical feminism. Secondly, opposition is directed against the negative view held by radical feminism towards motherhood. Thirdly, the language used by feminist activity in Africa – that of cooperation, negotiation, compromise – stands in opposition to the language of Western feminism which is characterised by challenge, deconstruction, disruption. African feminism challenges through negotiation and compromise. Fourthly, Nnaemeka argues that there is an opposition to the emphasis on sexuality in Western feminism. Fifthly, there is a disagreement about priorities: African women focus on what they see and experience in their own lives and immediate surroundings, for example, the shortage of water and soil. Sixthly, African feminists oppose the exclusion of men from the address of women's issues. Finally, there is an opposition against universalisation of Western theories and concepts.

**Create new knowledge**

A central task for African gender researchers has been, and still is, to deconstruct the white, Western production of knowledge, colonial as well as feminist discourses, and to create new, alternative knowledge based on African realities. The sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi writes in the latest issue of Jenda, a web journal on culture and African women’s studies, that the main challenge for African gender studies is precisely that of the difficulty encountered in using Western, feminist concepts to express and analyse African realities. Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) directs strong criticism against white feminist theory in that it is based on dualistic perceptions of gender: male/female, man/woman, where masculinity and men are thought of as superior and the female/women subordinate. According to Oyewumi, such categorisations are unfamiliar to many African cultures. In the Yoruba society of Nigeria, which she herself has studied, the basic organising principle is not gender but relative age, a category which, distinct from gender, is shifting and flexible.

**Motherism**

Another important researcher in this context is the social anthropologist Ifi Amadiume. In her thesis from 1974 she explores gender relations in the Igbo society in Nigeria, where her own roots are, and finds that daughters can take on the role of a son, and that women can take on the role of a “husband” and marry other women. In her later work (Amadi-ume1987) she shows how Eurocentric concepts based on a patriarchal ideology have formed the study of African contexts. Ifi Amadiume claims that European researchers have systematically made invisible and ignored the matricentric structure, focussing on the mother, that exists in many of the stateless societies in Africa – a structure that exists in parallel with the patriarchal one.

Both Oyewumi and Amadiume emphasize the structural status of motherhood in African societies. The significance of motherhood is also discussed by Niara Sudarkasa (1996) and Obioma Nnaemeka (1997). The Nigerian researcher in Comparative Literature, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu (1995), goes as far as putting forward the African alternative to Western feminism as motherism.

**Race, gender and subjectivity**

In opposition to the group that Acholonu represents, where the aim is to define one female “African” basic identity, in this case, motherhood, there is another group which studies African gender identities as multiple, contextual and created in continuous social processes. This relatively new direction in African gender research investigates how various femininities and masculinities are constructed in today’s post-colonial Africa – and how this happens in relation to race and class. South African gender researchers are the forerunners in this group, and the tone is set not least by Amina Mama in her book *Beyond the Masks. Race, Gender and Subjectivity*, published in 1995. The title of the book alludes to the post-colonial critic Franz Fanon’s notion of black identity as a “white mask” and is an attempt to go beyond this view, developing a theory of black, gendered subjectivity on the basis of feminist and post-structuralist theory.

Amina Mama begins by deconstructing the colonial and psychological constructions of “the Negro” and “the African”, and then presents her own case study of how black women construct their subjectivity. The study emerged during the 1980s and 1990s in Mama’s own then current context, the black feminist movement in Britain. On the basis of black women’s personal narratives, Mama reflects on, among other things, the emotional consequences of being defined by colonial and racist discourses, and how women are driven to redefine themselves on the basis of new positions in feminist and radical discourses. South African gender researchers do not only focus on new forms of femininity, but also on masculinity. The pioneer within South
African men’s studies, Robert Morrell (2001), has written several articles on masculinity and violence.

In April 2002, CODESRIA’s follow-up to the first conference on gender research, a symposium called “African Gender Research in the New Millennium: Perspectives, Directions and Challenges” was organised in Cairo. In her report from the symposium, Desiree Lewis from AGI notes that rather than discussing its theme, the conference came to focus to a large extent on the conflict in the Middle East and the Palestinian struggle, and the new aid programmes for Africa. This clearly illustrates, according to Lewis, how the discussion on gender in an African context inevitably must be connected to political questions pertaining to the developing countries’ position in global power networks. Placed in the South, on the periphery, African gender researchers have at least one common condition; they must unavoidably take a stance on issues of global justice, racism, human rights and power. This makes them different from white gender researchers working in the North, in the centre, whose privileged position give them the option not to do so.

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The Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala runs a research programme entitled Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa, which started in the year 2000. The co-ordinator for the programme is Signe Arnfred, a veteran within Nordic gender research on Africa.

Signe Arnfred, a Danish cultural sociologist and lecturer in International Development Studies at Roskilde University, has for many years carried out research with a gender perspective in Mozambique. Based on her research she has discussed post-colonial feminist theory and discourses on gender and development. Since 2000, she is co-ordinator for the research programme Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala.

Signe Arnfred explains that the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa in recent years has resulted in the emergence of a great deal of research into the disease – research to a great degree dominated by the discipline of medical science. One of the ideas of the research programme is to break this dominance and to stimulate and promote research on sexuality in Africa from the perspective of social science and specifically gender theory.

– There is an increased understanding of the fact that AIDS is not least a question of unequal power relations between the genders. As researchers and activists in South Africa put it: AIDS is a feminist issue, says Signe Arnfred.

An important task of the research programme is to make a survey of ongoing research both in Africa and the Nordic countries within the field of gender and sexuality in Africa, and to establish contacts and create networks between Nordic and African researchers working in this field:

– I have two main ambitions for this programme. One is to create a space for gender theoretical thinking in Africa, based on the continent’s own prerequisites. My other main ambition is about contributing to the globalisation of gender research in our part of the world, in this case, the Nordic countries. Globalisation should not be understood as an imperialist dissemination of dominant viewpoints, but as an opening towards forms of thinking that are based in other social circumstances and living conditions, she underlines.

Walk the fine line

In her paper presented at the Women’s Worlds conference, Signe Arnfred writes about the central dilemma of the African gender researcher: to be, on the one hand, an academic and researcher, and on the other, since the salaries of university scholars are too low to live on – dependent on an income as consultant in international development aid projects. She highlights the fears held by African gender researchers that they may lose their intellectual independence and cites, among others, a statement from AGI – African Gender Research Institute: “Those concerned with gender studies must walk the fine line between retaining links to political practice without being reduced to the mindless servicing of donors and governments”;

– The tendency of gender research being reduced to “mindless servicing of donors and governments” is a constant threat, and I want to contribute to the continuation of a more critical and conceptual kind of research.

As a part of this work, Signe Arnfred together with Akosua Adomako Ampofo from the University of Ghana, is currently gathering contributions for a forthcoming anthology with the working title Research, Activism, Consultancies: Dilemmas and Challenges. The aim of this pioneering anthology is both to make visible feminists’ (individual as well as group) experiences of navigating between the various contexts formed by aid organisations, academic institutions and NGOs, and to develop theoretical arguments pertaining to these problems. The question on her view of her own role as being an “outsider”, a gender researcher from the Nordic countries whose aid organisations SIDA/SAREC, NORAD and DANIDA are so active in Africa, Signe Arnfred answers as follows:

– Aid money is of great importance in Africa, for good and for bad. Aid resources that I think are used for a good purpose, are such that are used for creating space for independent research, for example, SIDA’s support to CODESRIA. I see the research programmes at the Nordic Institute in the same light: as Nordic aid money for promoting research in Africa. The justification of my own role as co-ordinator is not least about the two-way connections I would like make between African and Nordic research.

„Ethnocentric self-sufficiency”

One of Signe Arnfred’s hopes is that the activities of the programme will contribute to challenging the “ethnocentric self-sufficiency” in some Western feminist theory. In her article “Simone de Beauvoir in Africa: Woman = the Second Sex? Issues of African Feminist Thought” (published in the conference report from the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research ”Svensk genusforskning i världen” (Swedish gender research in the world) and in the journal JENDA, www.jendajournal.com), Signe Arnfred discusses the concepts and theoretical arguments developed by the Nigerian researchers Ifi Amadiume and Oyèrônke Oyewùmì, and which oppose Simone de Beauvoir’s thesis of woman as “the second sex”. Her conclusion is that concepts developed for Africa are fruitful not only in an African context, but also as sources of inspiration for feminists in the West for developing new concepts and opening up alternative ways of thinking about gender in Western contexts as well.

– I think we have a lot to learn from listening to feminists with a non-Western post-colonial background. Since I work within Africa, I transmit the thoughts of African feminists, but this of course does not mean that there would not be a lot of inspiration to be had from, for example, Latin America and India, says Signe Arnfred.
Information or surveillance?

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The use of modern technology in rationalisation of workplaces can result in individual control and surveillance of productivity and the employees. It can also lead to changes in the organisation of work, increased psychosocial stress and less individual freedom, especially for women with no vocational training.
This is a fact which is often overlooked when information technology (IT) in the working environment is discussed, the focus being solely on the new and exciting things that it seems to offer many employees. But it is a many faceted question.

There are a number of studies which show that information technology has contributed to a polarisation of the labour market. The amount of so-called good jobs has increased. They provide opportunities for development, creativity and increased freedom. At the same time, changes in the organisation of the working environment have also lead to increased risks, as many of the components which can be assumed to correlate to stress and ill-health have increased.

Such risks are associated, for example, with the fact that the technology creates a tendency towards a fast working pace, few natural breaks and a low level of control over one's own work as well as few opportunities to partake in decision-making (Gravesgård 1997, Aronsson 1996, Bradley 1998). The "need" for increased surveillance and registration of the staff results in an organisation of the work which is characterised by one-sidedness and short work processes.

**The electronic eye**

Foucault’s discussion of Jeremy Bentham’s architectural structure from the 1800’s, which is called a panopticon, comes to mind when looking at the development that has taken place in the information society in the name of, for example, rationality, discipline and globalisation. While Bentham regarded the panopticon as primarily an architectural phenomenon, Foucault has pointed out that it is rather a reflection of an ideology that characterised social development during the latter half of the 20th century, where registration and various other kinds of surveillance have become the means by which individuals within modern society are controlled.

Bentham's panopticon is a "control centre", a prison which is constructed in such a way as enables the prison guard to observe the people/prisoners without them being able to see the guard. The building is circular, there is a tower at the centre and there are large windows in this building, which faces the inner prison yard. A person occupying the tower is thus constantly able to view what happens in the surrounding prison. Prisoners are no longer confined in darkness, as in the old style prison dungeon, but in this new structure they are imprisoned in light. Visibility becomes the prisoner's punishment and the means by which he or she is controlled. The ingenuity and efficiency of this form of control lies in the fact that the prisoner cannot know whether the guard is in the tower or not, since the guard can see the prisoner, but not vice versa. The prisoners are never able to enjoy solitude, since they are constantly aware of the fact that they may be being surveyed. The prisoner is forced to exercise his or her own control, his or her own discipline, in order to avoid trouble (Foucault 1987).

Nowadays, the guard is not a human being, but an "electronic eye". Those subject to surveillance, or the electronic eye, are not only prisoners, but "ordinary" people, not least women in workplaces who have no vocational training. The aim of the electronic eye is to make sure that people behave according to the current rules, to rationalise work practices and increase productivity.

When Foucault theorised the panopticon as an ideology, he sees it as an opportunity for a few to control many (Foucault 1987). Power becomes invisible, but at the same time, all-embracing and public. Power is superior, dominant and so self-evident that it does not even need to be enacted by those in positions of authority. The panopticon principle has thus become the way by which modern managers control the workplace, although it is the employees who have actually integrated its constraints into their own behaviour.

**Monotonous women's work**

In the Nordic countries, legislation regarding the working environment stipulates that it must be appropriate to the nature of the work carried out there and consistent with the social and technical developments in society. Research on working environments done during the last few years show that such legal requirements are rarely met in the cases involving large groups of women, because of, amongst other things, changes in the organisation of work in connection with the introduction of new technology (Aronsson 1996). One aspect typical for the new organisation of work is the increased use of the panopticon or individual surveillance in order to increase productivity, improve services and/or socialize employees. Electronic performance monitoring (EPM) has made it possible to register easily how many products an individual woman makes by, for example, count-
ing the number of hits on each keyboard, or measuring for how long a person working in telephone services is connected to a client. In some cases, the employees are paid on the basis of this monitoring. This has resulted in the emergence, particularly in the USA and Canada, of a new research field which studies the surveillance of employees from ethical, legal and ergonomic perspectives (Wright 1993, Levy 1994, Johnson 1995, Rogerson & Fairweather 1998). Research also focuses on problems connected to health and stress (Smith et al 1992, Aiello & Kolb 1995).

There are also studies that reveal a correlation between the levels of skill and gender. The more monotonous and one-sided the tasks are, the larger is the proportion of female employees. To intervene and change these kinds of job is of course a health issue, but it is also a women’s issue. Contributions to the field can upgrade work within a large female sector on the labour market (Aronsson 1996, Webster 1997).

Big Brother

Various research results show that when people work under constant pressure of time, having to concentrate on boring tasks and with no personal space to move around in, the risks associated with psychosocial stress increase. (Lovallo 1997, Aronsson 1996, Karasek & Theorell 1990).

Rafnsdóttir (2000) shows that while the working environment has partly improved in companies that have invested extensively in technology, large areas of the working environment have deteriorated in psycho-social terms, particularly for women lacking vocational training. This result is primarily based on a three-year research project on the technological development that was carried out in a call centre (i.e. decentralised telephone service for a company) and in 24 fish processing plants in Iceland at the end of the 20th Century. Rafnsdóttir has analysed the effect of the development on the organisation of work and on the situations of the employees. The aim of the investment in advanced technology has been to increase the management’s opportunities to rationalise working methods - for example, by means of time studies and increased surveillance. Characteristic for the technological development in these workplaces is, among other things, the introduction of electronic devices that ensure that the staff, and particularly the female employees, are directly connected to a monitor that very carefully registers their methods of working. During the day, the management can follow every individual’s work production and “non-production” (e.g. pauses and lunch breaks) and make internal comparisons among the employees. In some companies, the employees are paid according to this registration.

Within the framework of this project, Rafnsdóttir visited 24 plants, handed out questionnaires and interviewed 15 persons, particularly female employees and managers (see Skaptadóttir & Rafnsdóttir 2000). A similar study was made in a large department at a call centre which had recently invested in new advanced technology similar to the one introduced in the fish plants – the work of the staff was very carefully measured and registered. The results were compared to those of a department at the call centre where such investments had not been made. After the analyses, the research results were presented to the staff of the call centre during a “course”, where they could discuss the issues, the responses and the interpretations of the material. The results from the fish plants and the call centre were very similar to each other.

The interviews with the staff and managers revealed that the rotation opportunities for the staff, particularly for the women, have decreased, both in the high tech factories and at the call centre where advanced technology had been introduced. And the more advanced the technology, the more persons thought that their work was “mentally” difficult.

It also appeared that women employees with no vocational training at the advanced technology workplaces thought that the feeling of community and pleasure in their work had decreased. A woman working in the one of the fish plants says:

“It was much more fun before... Now everything is forbidden. There is more discipline and less space... But we still try to joke a bit.”

“Nothing to hide”

We expected the staff at the high technology companies to express a more negative attitude towards the new technology and the changes that had taken place in the organisation of work when it was introduced. However, this was not the case. Rather, they articulated a more positive attitude towards these investments than other staff, even if the women were more negative than the men.

The interviews with the staff show, as do the quantitative data we have collected, that the organisational working environment is in many respects more difficult for women with no vocational training at the advanced technology workplaces than at those with less advanced technology. In spite of this, they are so proud of the company’s investments in new technology that in many respects they are prepared to ignore the increased stress this has meant for themselves. “We have nothing to hide”, is a typical answer by women to the question as to why they do not protest against the constant electronic surveillance – particularly after they have described how stressful and unfair it is. “We would never accept that kind of surveillance”, is, on the other
hand, a typical response by men who were not at all monitored in the same way as the women, since, among other things, their jobs are not as monotonous as those of the women, and thus also more difficult to measure and register. Men who are not directly connected to a surveillance monitor state that they would never accept that kind of surveillance, while the women, who think they have no choice, seek to find something positive in the situation. Thus, they instead contribute to their own oppression by “accepting” the surveillance.

Women silent and controlled

Increased rationalisation has resulted in somewhat higher salaries for both women and men in the company. In addition, certain parts of the working environment have improved. Thus it is possible to “choose” to see the positive changes that have taken place. Women are particularly keen not to complain about their miserable situation. The view that “things are not improved by nagging about them” can be seen as the key to the survival of these women, but paradoxically, also to their subordination.

The interview with one of the managers in the fish factory revealed that after the introduction of the careful registration of the employees’ work, those who surveyed it were surprised by the great variation in the productivity of the individual women from one day to another:

“We guys have discussed whether this depends on where the women are in their menstrual cycle, or if it perhaps depends on how their men have been the night before. [laughs]”

Even if interpreting women’s productivity on the basis of their sexuality is not anything new, the increased electronic surveillance gives the managers better opportunities than ever before to speculate how and why women differ from robots or machines. However, it remains to be seen how they will use the information so gathered. Another open question is how close to the employees and their privacy they are permitted to go. This is an ethical question concerning the limits for the protection of people’s privacy, their freedom and security.

Gender and class in IT

The fact of an increase in opportunities to register and measure work is the incentive for our new research project, where the aim is to analyse the effects of increased surveillance in workplaces from the perspective of questions on gender, class, ethics and health. Even if surveillance as such is not a new phenomenon (Attewell 1987), there is a strong current tendency to focus primarily on individuals, and not on the work (Regan 1996). Many regard this as a self-evident, if not necessary, result of the information society, without reflecting on the importance of privacy or the consequences of decreased personal freedom. This is perhaps the case because those being surveyed are mostly women with a low level of education who feel they have no “choice” in the face of the technocrats who glorify the opportunities provided by new technology. Information technology constantly gives the management better possibilities for an advanced registration of work processes and individuals, and to store the information gathered. The opportunity to link the individual registration with information in other databases increases. These possibilities bring to the fore several ethical and legal questions.

There are studies which show that for many women the global economy has resulted in increased social and mental stress in their work. The idea that information technology would mean increased equality between women and men is partly proven wrong (Doyal 1995, Castells 1996). Our research also shows that issues of gender and class still require special attention at workplaces. This is true not least when analysing the applications of information technology.

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