Sexualization of Public Space
A certain Female Body

The vision of the Swedish IKEA low price furnishing empire now reigning in more than 30 countries worldwide is “to create a better everyday life for many people”. Presently this is done by portraying naked young women from behind in open fields on huge billboards advertising a sofa, which is hardly noticeable in the picture. This is just one example of a trend, which can be described as mainstreaming of pornography – or the so-called porn chic trend. This concept describes the current cultural process in which pornography slips into our everyday lives as an evermore universally accepted, often idealised, cultural element.

Two different trends seem to work together here: First, a clean-up, which finds expression in the increased interest by the mass media in pornography, is translated into television documentaries and articles on pornography in newspapers and magazines. Secondly, there is a tendency in advertising, the fashion industry and the music industry to use signs and symbols, not in themselves pornographic, but which refer to a pornographic universe.

This development is closely related to the drastic change of the cultural status of pornography over the last ten years as a result of developments within information and communication technology. The supply of pornography has increased; it has become more easily accessible to the individual consumer and consumption has become potentially anonymous by means of mobile phones and the Internet.

These representations seriously deviate from the norms and values that for the last thirty years have dominated the Nordic countries, with their concern for welfare and gender equality. We know very little about the way which this increased exposure of pornography affects children and young people, and their attitude to what they see, and about the way pornography relates to their perceptions of sexuality and gender and to their own sexual experiences.

The few Nordic researchers who have studied this problem disagree on whether exposure to hard-core pornography has any effect upon well-balanced children and young people and, if it does, what kind of effect we are dealing with.

This is the background for a major research project now launched in the Nordic countries which studies the way in which the spread of pornography affects young people’s perception of gender. The project, which is run by NIKK and comprising researchers from all Nordic countries, is presented in the lead article in this annual English issue of NIKK magazine.

Another article by one of the researchers in this project discusses some of the issues within, and analytical challenges for gender and media studies concerning questions of sexualization, femininity, masculinity and visual representation – or what is nowadays referred to as the sexualization of public space.

As the IKEA advertisement demonstrates so well, a certain female body is the most commonly spread eroticised symbol for desires such as consumption, and representation of sexuality in the public domain. But the question raised in this issue, is whether this form of sexualization just as much is a representation of ideas about masculinity.
YOUTH, GENDER AND PORNOGRAPHY
To what extent does the mainstreaming of pornography into mass culture affect young people’s perceptions of gender and sexuality? This is the main question raised in a new Nordic research project run by NIKK engaging researchers from all Nordic countries.

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MIRRORED MASCULINITY?
Gender and media researcher Anja Hirdman turns the perspective of sexualisation and representation around. She argues that the sexualizations of the female body in the public domain is also a representation of ideas about masculinity.

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MAKING VIOLENT FATHERS INVISIBLE
In her doctoral thesis in sociology – In the shadow of Daddy: family law and the handling of fathers’ violence – Maria Eriksson documents a number of problems in contemporary Sweden in protecting children and mothers/co-parents from post-separation violence from fathers.

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Looking at Men through Literature
Literary analyses show how the problematisation of masculinity is closely connected with the idealisation of women.

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The Long Waves of Women’s Movements
The internationality of women’s movements has played a crucial role for all forms of women’s activism since the 19th century.

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The Interview I
Finnish politician Elisabeth Rehn has an international career as relentless defender of women’s rights in crisis areas.

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Gender in Peacekeeping
Why mainstreaming gender into peacekeeping has become a part of the UN’s agenda on peace, war and security during the past decade.

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The Interview II
Professor Drude Dahlerup is known as a bridge-builder between the women’s movement and Women’s Studies in the Nordic countries.

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Crossing Borders
A new comprehensive anthology on international women’s movements.

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Youth, Gender and Pornography
A major research project has been launched in the Nordic countries which studies the way in which the spread of pornography is affecting the perception of gender by young people. The background for this project comprises changes in the cultural status of pornography that have followed in the wake of the development of new media.

From newspaper articles, anthologies and a handful of recent individual studies, in which young people are allowed to voice their own opinions, we know that teenagers of both sexes watch pornography, their motives being partly curious, partly sexual and partly connected with their need for information about sexuality (e.g., Mossige 2001, Håvold and Moen 2003, Søndergaard 2002). On the other hand, we have no concrete knowledge about the way that increasing exposure affects children and young people, about their attitudes to what they are watching, and the way that this relates to their perceptions of sexuality and gender and to their own sexual experiences. The few Nordic researchers who have studied this problem disagree about whether exposure to hard-core pornography has any effect upon well-balanced children and young people and, if it does, what kind of effect we are dealing with.

In many ways this research project is unique. It focuses on an area in constant development and in which the new media play an important role. The access that children and young people have to cable and satellite television and the internet as well as their consumption of products of mass culture have increased their chances of exposure to pornographic material – both regular pornography and fragmented references to the pornographic universe. Exposure is not always voluntary. As an element of aggressive promotion by producers of pornography, the internet has become an important medium for exposure through SPAM mails, banner advertising and pop-up windows.

This research project is also unique in the sense that it directly involves young people between the ages of fourteen and eighteen: in quantitative and qualitative surveys they will be asked about their attitudes to pornography. Teenagers of today may perceive pornography differently and have a less critical approach to pornography than their parents’ generation did.

Mainstreaming of pornography

The launching of this research project is to be seen in the light of the historical processes of change witnessed by the Nordic countries and by most of the Western world. The cultural status of pornography has changed drastically over the last ten years as a result of developments within information and communication technology. These developments have reduced the costs of producing pornographic material and have simplified distribution. As a result, the supply of pornography has increased; it has become more easily accessible to the individual consumer, and consumption has become potentially anonymous by means of mobile phones and the internet.

The change in cultural status, however, is also closely related to the mainstreaming of pornography – the so-called porn chic trend (McNair 2002). This concept describes the current cultural process in which pornography slips into our everyday lives as an ever-more universally accepted, often idealised, cultural element. Mainstreaming of pornography manifests itself particularly clearly within youth culture: from teenage television and lifestyle magazines to music videos and commercials targeted at the young.

This trend emphasises the need for a discussion of what defines pornography. Originally the word pornography meant ‘pictures of or writing about harlots’ (from ‘porne’ = harlot + ‘graphi’ = writing or picture). Today there are almost as many definitions of pornography as there are researchers within the field. However, it is possible to outline three basic definitions: (1) An explicit depiction of sexuality, which serves to arouse the spectator sexually and stimulate sexual fantasies, initiating or followed by masturbation. (2) Obscene or offensive descriptions. (3) Degrading and grossly exploitative presentations, usually of women and children (McNair 2002, 40, 211). Furthermore, it is open to debate whether depictions of genitals constitute pornography, or whether the depictions must include exposure of genital contact and/or penetration in order for us to define them in this way.

Power and gender

Power and gender are central elements in pornography. Regardless of the pornographic genre we are dealing with, power and gender serve as the driving forces behind the relations and sexual activities portrayed. Researchers disagree, however, about the way these
The research project

The research project ‘Youth, Gender and Pornography in the Nordic Countries’ is being funded by the respective Nordic ministries of gender equality, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and NIKK (the Nordic Institute for Women’s Studies and Gender Research). NIKK will carry out this project in collaboration with a group of researchers from Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The project began when the Danish Knowledge Centre on Gender Equality prepared the report Ej blot til lyst – pornografi i et ligestillingsperspektiv [Not just for fun – pornography in a gender equality perspective] (Cawood and Sørensen, 2002). The report established that very little research had been conducted within the field, and as a result the launching of the project was proposed by the Danish Gender Equality Minister at ‘ÅK-JÄM’, the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials on Gender Equality set up as part of the Nordic Council of Ministers. NIKK and the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality (the former Knowledge Centre) prepared a project proposal for the ÅK-JÄM. After several revisions of the proposal, the ÅK-JÄM decided to commission a research project that would throw light on ‘the way that the spread of pornography affects the perception of gender by young people of both sexes.’

The project comprises three subsidiary elements: a quantitative, internet-based inquiry using questionnaires, a qualitative study based on interviews and a media analysis. From the 22 applications, covering the different Nordic countries and the three subsidiary projects, NIKK’s team of researchers have chosen seven projects based on such criteria as professional background, interdisciplinary research, research experience, relevance, the quality of the project proposals, geographical representation, and gender representation, as well as the distribution of funds between single projects seen in relation to the total budget. The project will conclude with a number of publications in the summer of 2006. Throughout the period, information about the project will be published in Nordic languages on www.nikk.uio.no.

representations of power and gender in pornography are to be interpreted. A radical-feminist approach is to see pornography as being underpinned by a ‘phallic imperative’ (Stoltenberg 1991). Staging male dominance and female oppression, pornography is not simply to be seen as a symbol of male dominance but as a crucial element in the social oppression of women, according to Stoltenberg. In opposition to this view, Lynne Segal maintains that men, too, are victims of pornography. With its focus on the size of the penis, on technique and the capacity to perform endlessly, pornography contributes to performance anxiety which itself helps foster pornography by facing men with impossible demands. Instead of satisfying men, pornography, according to Lynne Segal, in fact exploits male sexual frustrations, and, by focusing on male sexuality, helps create for men a phallic reign of terror (Segal 1990).

Pornography versus sexuality

Regardless of the way we interpret the representations of power and gender in pornography, these representations seriously deviate from the norms and values that for the last thirty years have dominated the Nordic countries, with their concern for welfare and gender equality, and which have found expression in literature on sex guidance since the end of the 1950s. Central to these norms and values are aspects such as reciprocity, equality, willingness, emotions and – if not actually neutrality of power – at least power that ‘floats’ between the parties irrespective of gender.

This discrepancy between the fiction of pornography and contemporary social norms and values also applies on a more overall level to depictions showing the nature of sexuality. Though sexual preferences may vary according to the pornographic genre (homo, animal, S/M, violence, faeces, etc.), pornography mainly depicts sex between anonymous people, who are complete strangers. The identity of these people is deemed irrelevant; the fantasy depicts a brief, non-binding encounter between
two or more strangers, an encounter that does not subsequently result in a more permanent relationship.

Moreover, hard-core pornography is usually characterised by a very limited definition of sexuality. Its main function is to arouse the viewer sexually; this is achieved through a detailed depiction of the sexual act, limited to exposure of the genitals, genital contact and penetration: vaginal, anal and/or oral penetration. The culmination of the sexual act is usually defined by the ejaculation of the male actor/actors, also known as the ‘cumshot’. That there may be more to sexuality is a point not normally made in hard-core pornography. Thus the concepts of ‘foreplay’ and ‘post coital relaxation’, which within the culture of sexuality are considered norms of ‘good sex’, are toned down or non-existent in hard-core pornography.

The three approaches

The few Nordic researchers to have dealt with these problems disagree about whether exposure to hard-core pornography has any effect at all on well-balanced children and young people, and – if it has – what that effect might be: whether the effect is psychological or whether it affects their attitudes or their actions. It is for this reason that we have launched this research project in the Nordic countries. This research project comprises three subsidiary projects with opportunities for cross-referencing. All three subsidiary projects will concentrate on young people between the ages of fourteen and eighteen.

One of the subsidiary projects will be an internet-based inquiry using questionnaires. It will be conducted in each Nordic country using websites frequently visited by young people. Such an inquiry has the advantage of allowing complete anonymity. The response rate is usually high and easy to utilise. In addition, this type of inquiry will enable us to compare the results country by country. The aim of the inquiry is to gain an insight into patterns of consumption, the situations in which this consumption takes place, as well as attitudes and sexual experiences.

Another more comprehensive subsidiary project consists of a series of qualitative studies of the way in which young people perceive, view and respond to ‘pornification’. The project is based on interviews with teenagers in focus groups and/or in-depth interviews. These interviews will be semi-structured and with predetermined themes. The interviews will be analysed as texts in which the researcher will look for processes employed in the accounts of each person interviewed – including both verbal and non-verbal statements – as well as noting shared matter and the unique aspects of individual accounts (Knudsen 2001). Furthermore, in the qualitative studies some of the researchers make use of the ‘memory-work’ method, employing a kind of ‘stream of consciousness’ or non-stop writing on a given topic.

In the third subsidiary project researchers will conduct different media analyses. One media analysis will focus on youth television in Finland as transmitted on the national channel, on local channels, and on Nordic and global channels. The study comprises a content analysis, interviews with heads of programmes within public television, and policy studies investigating the rules governing the media regarding material they are permitted to broadcast to children and young people. In Sweden and Norway researchers will analyse the sexualised self-portraits teenagers have uploaded onto frequently visited Nordic internet sites. The point of departure will be a picture analysis comparing the uploaded pictures of young men and women, focusing on the kind of sexual codes and references they use and the kind of sexual gender structures they produce. This visual self-presentation will be seen in the context of a week’s media supply of docuseries plus internet activity and reality television targeted at young people.

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This article seeks to discuss some of the issues within and analytical challenges for gender and media studies concerning questions of sexualization, femininity, masculinity and visual representation - or what is nowadays referred to as the sexualization of public space.

Sexualization is often discussed as an issue concerning women and femininity. I will argue that we need to shift this perspective and study the visual display of femininity, not just as symbolic constructions of the female, but also as representations of concepts of masculinity.

Gender representations do not primarily refer to individuals, so much as to a social relationship. Including mas-
culinity into an analysis of representations of femininity is also to underscore the process of gender construction as, and always as, a relation, even when only one party of this relation is depicted.

The notion of public space refers to, on the one hand, our actual surroundings - streets, walls, public transport (buses, underground stations, etc.) and the images that fill them. On the other hand, it includes the media outlet in various genres and formats such as tabloids, television, commercials, the internet and magazines.

**Hard and soft pornography**

When talking of sexuality and the media, the division between the genres of hard and soft pornography needs to be addressed, at least briefly. While hard porn usually shows two or more persons engaged in some sort of sexual activity with the overt purpose of sexually arousing its audience, soft porn images usually depict one person and are loaded with sexual connotation. These images have a more complex purpose of arousing all kinds of desires – consumption not the least. And while I find hard porn difficult to categorise as subordinating women as a genre, soft porn continues to reproduce some of the more traditional myths of feminine identity and sexuality.

Soft porn images are also characterized by their accepted social status. This mainstreaming process is a result of its aesthetic definition as “non-pornographic”, although the motif can be highly sexually motivated.

A common feature since the mid-eighties is that in both genres, women are the ones communicating sex to the audience. In hard porn this is due to conventions of the directed gaze and focus on their verbal and facial expressions, countered by the male performer’s diverted gaze, and non-facial expressions (Hirdman 2002). The core definition of soft porn is its communication of female accessibility and the alluring desire suggested by poses and gazes. Today this sexualized rhetoric is widely used in public and mediated visual representations of sexuality.

**Sexualization**

Sexualization refers to a process whereby a cultural and historic meaning interpreted as sexual, or that which symbolizes sexuality, be it by means of gesture, pose, clothes, gaze, or colour, is applied.
to somebody or something. This sexual fetishism is often symbolized by a certain gender, a certain body and a certain age, and connected to a certain purpose: consumption. Although the eroticised young male body does circulate in the public media today, it is by far outnumbered by the female figure. Sexualization is commercial both in its aesthetic and purpose, but the form - its visual expression - is also a sign for certain aspects of masculinity.

As much research has shown, women to a much greater extent than men, are portrayed as representatives for something outside themselves and in contexts not directly related to the individual (van Zoonen 1994, Warner 1996, Hirdman 2000). This is due to the symbolic status of femininity where meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women, presenting them as a means for communication of ideas and values, not always communicators themselves. This representational female form can have several meanings; partly femininity per se as form - woman-as-image - and partly as the form of/for something or somebody where the representation is symbolic in nature.

**Constructed sexual relation**

Representation can be seen to operate at two levels. At the first, representation is equated with speaking for someone, or for a certain group. What is emphasised at the second level is instead the rhetorical and ideological transformation, in which representation consists of the forming of the subject (Ganguly 1992).

If applying this argument to the function of femininity as figure and symbol for/of something or somebody outside herself, then the forming of the subject does not just have to concern the one represented (the female) but rather what or whom she is there to represent.

We know, and have known for a long time, that in the public image world women's bodies mean sex, while at the same time the sexual subject in our culture is male. And it is in this constructed sexual relation between femininity and masculinity and in its symbolic representation, that an important aspect of the sexualization of public space lies.

When studying ideas about sexuality and gender, three issues become evident. This is the area of male power. This power should not be seen as just a practical function but also as a process of defining oneself and others. In its public form, ideas about sexuality are so firmly connected to ideas of gender that they seem to blend together – gender becomes sexuality as sexuality becomes gender.

Throughout our modern history definitions of femininity have circulated in the public domain as a way to articulate its distinction from masculinity – that is, the production of meaning through difference. Therefore the way to define masculinity has always been related to definitions of femininity. Although masculinity is of course also discussed and defined in relation to other men, as in the case of hegemonic masculinity and homosociality, the notion of femininity still plays a crucial part - in the first case for the placing of men on a hegemonic or non-hegemonic scale, and in the second, male-bonding is founded on a distinctive position in relation to women.

**Femininity as representation of masculinity**

So, in the public domain a certain female body is the most commonly spread eroticised symbol for desires such as consumption, and representation of sexuality. But this form of sexualization is also, and maybe more significantly, a representation of ideas about masculinity.

To regard the visual display of femininity as a representation of masculinity does not imply a closed, determined system. It is rather an effort to move away from the focus on femininity and to divert our attention to the position of masculinity in our culture in general and to sexuality in particular.

One of the most striking characteristics of male (hetero) sexuality is its physical, visual absence, and at the same time, its constant presence as an idea. As Richard Dyer points out: “Male sexuality is a bit like air - you breathe it in all the time, but you aren't much aware of it” (1985:28).

The representation of male sexuality is thus not easy to grasp, since it tends to escape both its own categorization and symbolic form (even in hardcore pornography it hides behind the genital focus of the female). And the advantage of this (subject) position is that it does not have to show itself – it is rather aimed at. It takes the form of an imaginary beholder who is always there, but never to be seen.

**The problematic concept of “the male gaze”**

While this argument touches upon theories of “the male gaze” I think that there are some fundamental problems with this concept, or rather the use of it. One of these is an analytical tendency to divert the attention towards femininity and not masculinity.

Theories about the male gaze have been around since 1975, and have had an enormous impact on gender studies concerning popular culture and visual analyses. But now that almost thirty years have passed we can also conclude that they are still being used to study the subject in front of that gaze.

The psychoanalytic framework in which this theory was grounded did offer explanations to why and from where the gaze emerged (Mulvey 1975). Apart from my own disagreement with this formulaic explanation, it still did not analyse the constructed masculinity on which this gaze was formed (and since psychoanalysis was at stake, masculinity was not even considered as a construction).

What is said to constitute the male gaze is an active and more controlling spectator position, reflecting a male dominated culture which asserts that men have a right to look, that the representation of femininity is in the service of men's voyeurism and that men assert domination by the gaze. And while this is most certainly an issue, we need to broaden the relational analysis.
understand the visual display of femininity as notions of masculinity is to go beyond the definition of a male gaze as merely a “right to look”, and to deconstruct the gender relations expressed through representations at different historical times and contexts.

One of the reasons that the focus has been mainly on femininity is of course the problematic implications for female beings in a culture where woman is made an image, or, to paraphrase John Berger (1972), where she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision, a sight. But other aspects concerning these sexualized representations need to be addressed as well.

When making an analysis of other power relations with the help of (visual) representations, such as class or ethnicity, the point of departure has been to underline their function as reflecting and defining those in power, the ones not represented themselves. Here, this kind of mirrored image is first and foremost seen as a referent for a conceptualisation and self-perception of the one outside the frame (see for example Tagg 1988, Alloula 1987).

But the theory of the male gaze, thus far, has been used as a theory where the elaborated analyses concern femininity and not masculinity.

**Deconstructing masculinity**

To deconstruct masculinity through femininity is to position the image, the representation, in a political and historical context of relations where power, desire and mutual needs are at stake. The aim is also to stress the visual display of eroticized femininity as a strategy of representation for masculinity and gender relations.

For example, sexualized representations of femininity, of accessibility through illusory intimacy and subordination, do not just represent male power and desire. They can also be understood as an expression for some of the paradoxes and contradictions connected with masculinity. This would include the problematic connection in our culture today between the male body and heterosexual desire, and its implication for masculine identity.

From the perspective of deconstructing masculinity, how can we understand the tabooing of the depiction of semi-masturbatory men in public images - a convention which is widely accepted in representations of the female - while at the same time ideas about male sexuality as pleasure orientated and un-problematic is generally accepted? What does this tell us about the contradictory form on which masculinity is constructed? And how can we understand the complex combination of normative masculinity and individuality?

Since gender relations and their definitions are part of an ongoing process we should ask ourselves: what kind of process are we witnessing today, what kind of relational representations circulate at the moment, not least in the sexualized public space? Under what conditions are these representations accepted – and what do they tell us about the relative positions of femininity and masculinity?

How this perspective may be used and what kinds of results it might produce regarding the nature of gender relations today remains to be seen. So far I am just sketching out some thoughts. I am certain, however, that it is in finding new ways to integrate and problematise constructions of masculinity in gender theories that we have to start.

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1 They have also generated studies and arguments about a female gaze (see for example Gibson & Gibson 1993).

2 Not at least because of its ahistorical approach to the construction of gender and its genital explanation of sub-ordination.

PHOTO: Paul Sigve Amundsen/Samfoto
Looking at Men through Literature

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Literary analyses show how the problematisation of masculinity is closely connected with the idealisation of women in the works of important European modernists. There are no ideal models of masculinity in these texts. The definitions of manly and unmanly prove to be continuously floating and changing. The notion knapsu, meaning womanish, which the author Mikael Niemi ponders over in his book Popular Music, is the actual definition of the limit for male actions and behaviour.

There are continuous discussions within the field of literary analysis on the relation between aesthetics and ethics, between art and meaning. Is literature above all an aesthetic work, or a work producing meaning? Should the analysis of literature ever in his work Aesthetic Theory (1969). Adorno made it clear that hermeneutics, the practice of interpreting meaning, would always misunderstand a work of art. Interpretation would always end up as misinterpretation. This is simply because the hermeneutic reader will never totally understand the work, unless its aesthetic dimension is emphasized first and foremost.

The rhetoric dimensions

For a researcher in the field of literature (or of film or art, for that matter) who is also a gender researcher, this is a great dilemma. For a gender researcher, Adorno’s aesthetic theory is impossible to use as a theoretic point of departure, since one must behave as a hermeneutic reader in order to be able to understand what gender represents in a given literary work. At the same time, one’s interpretative mode is often so influenced by gender political concerns that one runs the risk of totally overlooking the fact that the literary work always has been and always will be an aesthetic piece of work. Without understanding the rhetoric dimensions of the text, one absolutely risks totally misinterpreting the work. Unfortunately, gender studies within comparative literature are full of examples of this. Somebody thinks they have found the truth about man or woman, without realising that it is precisely this truth that the work is attempting to deconstruct by the use of metaphors, images, metonymy, irony and paradoxes. One believes one has found the medicine, but it turns out to be the poison.

Literature is like nature. There are no absolutes, only sliding transitions and potential paradoxes. In his exploration of the Greek notion farmakon, Jacques Derrida has shown most radically how a concept can contain two totally opposing meanings. Farmakon can mean both “cure” and “poison”. The life-giving equals the deadly. In this way, language can always dupe us and evade meaning. Therefore literary analysis, like literature, is always an exploration of the relation between human beings, language and the world. Language will always mediate people and the world, and it is language that we as readers of literature have access to.

Similarly, nearly all research within the social sciences and humanities is research into the way language gives us access to an understanding of human nature and the world. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that literary research is part of the human sciences, that is, research into human beings. In combination with gender studies, it becomes research into gendered human beings, but gendered human beings as linguistic beings. With the dilemma in literary analysis on the relation between the aesthetic and the ethical in my back-pocket, and Derrida’s problematisation of linguistic concepts as potential bearers of their own opposite (medicine can be poison), I, as a gender researcher, may be able to make a contribution to the debate by saying something about the problems of interpretation within gender research.

Forms of masculinity

One way of doing this is to show that men and women not necessarily are contradictory signs. When, for example, a male artist writes about the feminine, he is perhaps telling us more about the masculine. Because of its close relation to gender politics, gender studies constantly runs the risk of generalising and simplifying scientific results. It is easy to regard a woman as a woman and man as a man without considering ways in which the borders between what is male and female are actually blurred, or how the relation between being powerful and powerless is seldom stable. In my work on central male Norwegian authors during the latter half of the 19th century, I find that a critique of patriarchal masculinity is an essential element of their literary texts. Writers such as Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Arne
Garborg, Alexander Kielland and Jonas Lie consistently offer a problematisation of the existing forms of masculinity in a way that makes it difficult to imagine how the history of female emancipation can be written without these authors being part of it. This problematisation is partly seen in the way traditionally male, rational linguistic and narrative structures start to crumble so that these can no longer be seen to deliver meaning, and partly by producing texts that at the level of signification tell stories about women who want to break free, whilst men stagnate and fall.

**Idealisation of the feminine**

Ibsen, Bjørnson, Garborg, Kielland and Lie are among the first modern European authors. The later, central modernists display this problematisation even more clearly, as in for example James Joyce, Marcel Proust and Samuel Beckett. In his excellent study of the relation between masculinity and modernism, Gerald Izenberg discusses three other important European modernists: Thomas Mann, Frank Wedekind and Wassily Kandinsky. In Modernism and Masculinity (2000), he tries to show how the problematisation of masculinity is closely connected with the idealisation of women in the works of these modernists. Or to put it another way, how the idealisation of women is linked to the problematisation of masculinity.

Let me use a bit of space on Gerald Izenberg’s reflections on how the relation between femininity and masculinity appeared in the works of such central modernists as Mann, Wedekind and Kandinsky. All three artists operated not only with idealised notions of the feminine as guidelines for their creative and artistic lives, but they also critiqued and deconstructed contemporary forms of masculinity through art and literature.

In Wedekind’s drama, we find a mix of sound female sexuality and femme fatale – the characteristic man-eating woman of the period. This double portrait illustrates women who are both sounder and truer than men, and women who possess a far greater power through their seductive sexuality than men’s hypocritical and morally ambiguous, lecherous lack of integrity. We find no ideal models of masculinity in Wedekind’s texts. All men are part of an authoritarian and rational bourgeois middle class, desperate emasculated men, melancholy artists or brutalised misogynists.

In his critique of the emerging, modern, market-oriented liberalism and male-governed world, Wedekind thus does not find any masculine ideals to which he could attach his creativity. And it is precisely in this absence that the feminine is idealised.

Thomas Mann and Wassily Kandinsky use completely different forms of an entirely different nature when positing the eternal feminine as the divine object of their desires. In the works of the self-denying Thomas Mann, this eternal feminine is hardly to be found in real women of flesh and blood, but rather in the creative power which he finds either in the female spirit or in the feminine passive longing and the female virtues that are enshrined in divine love.

This ambiguity is obvious also in Kandinsky, where creativity is identical with the feminine principle, which he, however, is able to fully encounter only in his abstract paintings, and not in living women.

Neither Mann nor Kandinsky attributes the bourgeois-realistic male culture with any potential for creating something new. It is the break from this culture that makes these artists turn to the idealised woman as the locus of opportunity in their revolutionary modernist art.

Gerald Izenberg’s arguments convincingly show how the idealisation of the feminine by these artists and their identification of the feminine as the source of creativity and the transcendent, is connected with the crisis in masculinity – both for them personally and in the culture at large. The idealisation of the feminine is thus fully comprehensible and is made visible not only as a temporary choice, but almost as an integral element in masculine self-denial, and ultimately as the only means of regaining a masculine self.
Differences between men

My point is that gender is not necessarily a decisive factor in somebody being a feminist or not. Besides, what is read as a male fantasy about femininity could also be seen as a story about the crisis of masculinity. The seeming medicine is carrier of the poison, and the poison can be the medicine. Thus literature tells us that each attempt to maintain clear borders between man and woman, between the feminine and the masculine must be a hermeneutic masterpiece. The interpretation will unavoidably turn into a misinterpretation.

It is, however, not only the boundary between what we call woman and what we call man that is difficult to maintain. The relation and conditions between the genders is one thing, the relation between the participants in each of the gender categories is another. Western women’s studies has taken somewhat too light an attitude to the conflicts and differences between women, a fact which has been criticised by non-Western feminists for a long time. Within men’s studies it was necessary to start by establishing the differences and conflicts between men, in order to dissolve the one-dimensional understanding of masculinity. Through close readings of male texts from the 18th and 19th centuries, the Nordic research project Menn og modernitet (Men and Modernity) has shown that this creation of difference between men has been essential in male hegemonic practices. The struggle has, to a large extent, been about the relation between the manly and the unmanly, a field in which definitions prove to be continuously floating and changing. You can never be absolutely certain whether you are sufficiently masculine, or are about to fall into the dangerous category of unmanliness.

The importance of not being unmanly

One of the latest Nordic best-sellers focuses precisely on this set of problems. Besides perfectly crazy drinking bouts and sauna evenings in the Finnish-speaking areas in the Tornevalen, a community in northern Sweden, Mikael Niemi’s fantastic novel Popular Music (Eng. 2003, orig. Populärmusik från Vittula 2000) also contains reflections on the narrow paths one must tread in order not to risk being unmanly. The notion knapsu, which Niemi ponders over in his book, is the actual definition of the limit for male actions and behaviour. In the local Finnish dialect, knapsu means womanish, and, as Niemi writes: “You could say that in Tornevalen the male role boils down to just one thing: not being knapsu.”

In the old days, it was relatively easy for men to avoid being knapsu. They felled trees, hunted elk, floated timber and took part in fights on dance floors, while women changed curtains, knitted, milked by hand, watered the houseplants and carried out similarly obvious feminine tasks. But when welfare and modernity arrived, things were no longer so simple. Engines were clearly masculine, but what about the sewing machine and the electric mixer? Is it possible for a man to vacuum-clean his car without being knapsu? Modern activities made it even more difficult: What about eating reduced-fat margarine or using hair gel or sticking plasters? Wearing goggles when swimming? Putting dog poo in a plastic bag? All this made it far more difficult to be a man in the Tornevalden community. Niemi can therefore divide the Tornevalden men into three categories. The first are the real macho men, silent ones who carry a knife in their belts. Their opposite, the unmanly men, useless in the forest, or when out hunting, often ended up as healers or naturopaths. And then there was the third group, the majority in the middle, where single acts might determine whether you suddenly end up being knapsu: for example wearing a red woollen cap. The boy who did that had to go on the rampage and fight for weeks afterwards in order to get rid of the knapsu label affixed to him. It was possible to free oneself from the unmanly stigma by behaving in a violent and macho-like manner.

A risky manoeuvre

The life values of men have been characterised by a strict code as to what a man should be like, and by the thought that each breach of this code of behaviour is a risky manoeuvre which might lead the man into an existence in the marshy territory of unmanliness. Behind the persistent assertion of “the real man”, there always lurks the tacitly acknowledged possibility of accusations of unmanliness: either by virtue of taking too much alcohol (or too little), having too much femininity, being too cowardly, or too fat, having too many feelings, or displaying other bodily or personal features that might marginalise men. The delineation of the border between the manly and the unmanly is unclear. Sometimes the struggle to assert what is masculine is persistent and diligent; sometimes whether you end up as manly or unmanly is determined merely by coincidence. Thus the concept of masculinity can be seen as a farmakon. It can be difficult to be sure whether you are good or bad, the cure or the poison. Chance or bad luck might decide whether you are one day characterised as a hero or knapsu.

Niemi allows us to watch the struggle around masculinity at a distance and laugh at it. Thus literature provides us with a language and a set of images that enable an understanding both of the fanaticism of gender relations and the complex phenomenology of gender.

Jørgen Lorentzen has recently published the book Maskulinitet. Blikk på menn gjennom litteratur og film (Masculinity. Looking at Men through Literature and Film.) Oslo: Spartacus forlag 2004. This article contains reflections on his book.

REFERENCES
The internationality of women’s movements has played a crucial role for all forms of women’s activism since the 19th century. Therefore it is surprising how late Western feminists have come to recognize changes at the international level and the significance of international women’s policies. Since the 1980s local and global women’s movements and women’s initiatives have emerged, together regarded as “Third Wave Feminisms”.

“The feminist movement is global in the sense that women in almost every country of the world are engaged in various struggles to change their lives.” This statement appears on the website of the network “Women living under Muslim laws”- WLUML. It continues: “This trend of globalization began in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the rise of feminist consciousness in Asian and African countries, both as a result of international dynamics of these societies and learning from the feminist movements of the West. Events like March 8th, The International Women’s Day, or decennial conferences held by the United Nations are aspects of internationalization. Today many states take at least symbolic action in order to show interest in improving the status of women. The formation of global systems of communication, ranging from satellite television to Internet, has further contributed to the globalization of the movement.”

This positive assessment of women’s movements, particularly those of the West, at present may surprise, especially since it is uttered without resentment toward the internationality of women’s movements, organizations, means of
communication or practices dating from the turn of the twentieth century. Noteworthy as well is the line of tradition drawn to include present women's initiatives, especially the women's world conferences inaugurated by the United Nations in 1975, where many more than simply Western feminists had their say. In two ways, international initiatives and influences on women's issues in other countries have been playing a crucial role for all women's movements since the 19th century: On the one hand, awareness of identical problems and exchange about similar or the same experiences of injustice show that it is possible to change one's own situation by undertaking similar political actions; on the other hand, international women's organizations have been giving practical aid in organizing for women's interests at the national level. (…)

**Welfare and Equality Feminism**

Ilse Frapan titled her collection of essays *We women have no fatherland*, a book which, at the beginning of the 20th century, was often read and cited by the German women's movement because it obviously reflected that feeling of exclusion, of foreignness in a male state as well as the experience of discrimination in all areas of society. “We women have no fatherland because we’ve never had a state that serves us except in a pragmatic, goal-oriented way.” This statement was made by Ina Merkel at a rally of the Independent Women’s Organization [Unabhängigen Frauenverband] in February 1990 in Berlin, founded to represent East German women after the fall of the Wall. The association aimed to put the breaks on a too rapid union of the two German states. Does this distancing and scepticism vis-à-vis the state identify a seminal problem of feminism even in the twentieth century?

The acquisition of suffrage after the First World War was supposed to have regulated the women's movements' relationship to the state once and for all. It seemed logical that the multipartisan associations that composed the women's movement (…) would lead to awareness of women's power and enhance their presence in government organs. But it is precisely here that the problem begins: some held that having attained suffrage, the women's movement had become superfluous. Others, however, sensed an opposite danger, that of being co-opted by political institutions and parties, exhausted and made invisible. The International Alliance for Woman Suffrage (IAW) recognized the problem, resolved however in 1920 not to dissolve but instead – (…) – to broaden their mandate. In addition to suffrage, the entire palette of civil rights inalienable to equal participation was added: the struggle for civil rights in private law (for instance in opposition to patriarchal privilege in family law) as well as social rights of women, especially mothers and children. These aims were then expressed in a new title, the “International Alliance of Woman Suffrage and Equal Citizenship.”

In fact, women’s organizations in various European countries were confronted by diverse social and legal conditions so that their options for action were tied up with specific political constellations: among Europeans, active and passive suffrage on all political levels belonged before the war only to Finnish (1906), Norwegian (1913) and Icelandic women (with Women’s lists from 1908). In most countries where suffrage was later introduced, it happened as a consequence of war influenced by whether the nation had won or lost as a bid to refashion the map of Europe. (…)

Now, it seems as if it didn’t matter so much if women contributed to social reform as full citizens or instead, deprived of suffrage, as social workers operating behind the scenes, interwar feminism is known in the literature as “welfare feminism” or “feminist maternalism.” (…) This concentration of feminist activity on social questions in the 1920s that contributed greatly to the founding and profile of welfare politics was a pragmatic strategy with impressive success that proved it possible to take a maternalist approach to increase equality for women. Risks, however, were significant. On the one hand, this version of feminist politics privileged or included ‘only’ rights of mothers and children, thereby making maternalism an alternative pillar of the welfare state. But given real power relationships, the central contract between capital and labour, which built the basis for the modern welfare state in several European countries after World War I, was a compromise at the cost of women. In effect, the claim to equality was annulled by the many welfare provisions defining women’s difference: emphasis on their claims as mothers, widows and wives had been made the starting point for welfare provision, a position linked to demands for a family wage and conservative vision of marriage and family. On the international level, bitter disagreement reigned between those who emphasized gender difference and called themselves “new feminists” and so-called egalitarians or equality feminists where protective legislation for mothers was concerned. Although the women’s movement in continental Europe formed a rare alliance on this issue with social democrats and socialists, all of whom felt that protective legislation for mothers, maternal stipends and insurance constituted an important strand in social politics, representatives of the Anglo-American movements feared in particular that protective legislation would anchor gender specificity in law and inevitably lead to discrimination. On the international level, this split between opponents and proponents of protective legislation became evident at the world congress of the ICW in Berlin in 1929 with the founding of an Open Door Council. Difference feminists eventually won out over the egalitarians because, on the one hand, their vision supported a patriarchal model of the welfare state and, on the other, could be easily co-opted by conservative and fascist movements and political parties.

**Equality and/or difference**

These conflicts show that contemporary arguments over equality or difference are not new to the women’s movement. On the contrary, as Carole Pateman has shown, the paradox involved in urging equal rights while recognizing difference
can be found in documents written as early as Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792. Nonetheless, the thesis contends that the problem could only be clearly defined after the Second World War when in most Western democracies and real-socialist East European states' constitutions guaranteed women full and equal civil rights. Not unlike the years following the First World War, these triumphs after 1945 led in nearly all nations to “doldrums” of feminist activity if not to a complete shutdown.

The departure of a new women’s movement at the end of the sixties was nourished on this experience and disappointment, activists having learned that formal equality is far from sufficient. The new movement understood itself therefore not as a civil rights movement alone, but rather as a liberation movement with a strong legal component mobilized around abortion rights. Of highest importance were self-determination in questions concerning the body, interrogating so-called “sexual liberation” to women’s detriment, and condemning violence in private relationships.

The new “wave” of women’s movements that spread almost simultaneously in various European and American countries in the late 1960s was also significantly influenced by the outside world. From the very beginning, it also had an international orientation, yet it worked in a different manner than the “old” women’s movements. This new women’s movement was not organized in associations i.e. in a strict hierarchical structure of representatives, but was rather made up of an informal network of groups. Like the other new social movements, feminists opposed established organizations and parties with their policies, and instead searched for alternative and non-parliamentary strategies of interference, thus developing a new public sphere of civil society and putting topics like violence against women on their political agenda. However, the relationship between new feminist movements with their respective states and institutions were evidently different in individual countries – labelled either as patriarchal or women-friendly. Hence, progress and achievements were not only diverse but also non-simultaneous, according to the political, social and cultural context. Moreover, gains and losses were perceived in a variety of ways. This would explain why radical French feminists in the 1970s were already speaking of the end of the feminist movement, while West German feminists in the 1980s were still fighting over the first institutional achievements in equal opportunity politics, which some also called a betrayal of the autonomy principle or an “incorporation of autonomous politics.” At the same time, the equality-oriented welfare politics of Scandinavian countries prepared the ground for a so-called state feminism which partly took the edge off radical feminist ideologies (...). Despite these differences the new feminist movements have something in common: Because the role of the nation state has fundamentally changed with growing global economic interdependencies, international treaties, transnational organizations and new state communities like the European Union, these movements are generally more critical of and less oriented toward state policies. In this context, it is all the more surprising how late feminists in Western countries, while bemoaning the stagnation or backlash of women’s movements in their respective nations, have come to recognize changes at the international level and the significance of international women’s policies.

The “new feminism” is not to be described in a singular, but rather as a stream composed of various tributaries, aims and political interventions. (...) We can see, however, that controversy continues to revolve around the axis of equality and difference. (...) In contrasting equality and difference, many parties to this debate conclude, we are considering false alternatives having fallen into an “intellectual trap” and “impossible choice,” in Joan Scott’s words. Scott continues: „Feminists cannot give up, difference”; it has been our most creative tool. We cannot give up ‚equality’, at least not as long as we want to speak to the principles and values of a democratic political system.” This position derives from a pragmatic approach, as Nancy Fraser notes, one well anchored in American political theory. Nonetheless, if we want to answer questions of gender justice not only in terms of theory but also politics, offering practical legal solutions, we must place them in a socio-historical context. How significant these historical and political differences are, even if limited to Europe, emerges from the variety of welfare systems and cultures based on a gender order. Equality is not an absolute principle or irrevocable measure but a concept pregnant with historical struggle and controversial interpretation. A dynamic concept, it is bound up with “the historicity of gender difference”.

Equality as a principle of rights presupposes that the individuals are different from each other, but it demands that they are treated/looked upon as equals. That means, equality of rights can only involve equality in specific and relevant respects, but equality never targets at realizing identity or sameness but „Angleichung”. New women’s movements have mainly been concerned with debating these relevant aspects of equality, urging recognition of equality in the face of difference also among women, and thus created new standards of justice. Realizing these standards remains the task for continued feminist agitation and movements.

**Women’s Rights and Human Rights**

Given various contexts, Western feminists have been bemoaning the end of the new movement since the 1980s, but at the latest with the fall of the Iron Curtain, a backlash became evident as political priorities were re-set and a market neo-liberalism under the slogan of globalization won the day. At the same time, however, and independent of Western feminism, local and global women’s movements and women’s initiatives have emerged, together regarded as “Third Wave Feminisms”. Their starting point was the UN Decade for Women from 1975 to 1985. Of particular relevance to “Third World” Women have been the subsequent UN Women's
World Conferences, appropriate to international networking as well as to empowering women locally. Among global initiatives Women Living under Muslim Laws (launched 1997) was already mentioned (…) We can also list Women in Black and the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina as well as the Center for Women’s Global Leadership which organized a campaign under the motto “Women’s Rights as Human Rights.”

(...). Claiming human rights as women’s rights and thereby radicalizing the promise of freedom and equality for all humanity began with a reformulation of the Declaration of Human Rights of 1789 by Olympe de Gouges, who penned the 1791 Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizens. A human rights orientation accompanied the women’s movements of the 19th century through various strands and mobilizations around the world (...). A new international human rights discourse witnesses the continued persuasive power of this slogan but also suggests certain problems in its realization. Although in 1948 the U.N. gave the stamp of law to the “General Declaration of Human Rights,” implementation and effectiveness remain controversial and imperfect. The 1979 U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been ratified by a number of states only if granted significant reservations and has been unable to hinder daily human rights violations against women. Nonetheless, such legal instruments give voice to victims of injustice. They promise an ensemble of basic rights beyond those of national legislation, in the name of which individuals can formulate their experiences of injustice and translate them into the language of law. Since gender-specific experiences of injustice, injury to personal integrity and autonomy live on in nearly all cultures as self-evident components of the gender order and thus part of women’s role, as a result, the discourse needs a movement to continue placing women’s human rights on the public agenda. Whether or not this “third wave” will become a human- and women’s rights movement remains to be seen.

The question of rights, and that means, the basic political meaning of women’s rights as human rights and their recognition as a precondition for democratic relations and world peace, gestures toward the possibility of a common feminist platform in the opening years of the 21st century. Under the motto “for the power of rights against the right to violence,” the women’s rights and peace movement supported by Bertha von Suttner had already in 1899 called for intervention and gathered a million signatures on the occasion of the first Hague Peace Conference for Women of all Nations.

Today similar claims for women’s human rights have only increased in currency in other parts of the world because rights are neither given nor possessed but must be continually fought for, defended and measured against current standards of justice. That the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 went to the Iranian human rights attorney Shirin Ebadi could signal a new departure on the long and bumpy road to women’s equal citizenship composed of political, civil and social rights.

Translator: Tohe Levin

Extract from key note speech at the Nordic conference Women’s Movements - inspirations, intervention, irritation June 10-12. 2004 Reykjavik, Island.

For the complete text: http://www.nikk.uio.no/arrangementer/konferens/index_e.html

9 See SKOCPOL Theda, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers. The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States.
From Military Defence to the Defence of Women

ELISABETH REHN interviewed by ANNA-LENA LAURÉN
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Finnish politician Elisabeth Rehn was a middle-aged mother of four when she threw herself into politics. She was mocked both by her opponents and members of her own party as a bourgeois society lady. Twenty years on Elisabeth Rehn can look back at a meteoric rise in an international career as relentless defender of women’s rights in crisis areas. Her latest project is to defend human rights, especially the position of women, during the rebuilding of the Balkans.

“I don’t need to bow down to the authorities – I have reached an age when one can say almost anything. It is a fact that the international community is led by men, which means that there is often a deterioration of the position of women in crisis areas when bodies such as the UN or the EU intervene,” says Elisabeth Rehn.

We have agreed to meet in a café in central Helsinki and Elisabeth Rehn appears on time. It has snowed excessively in southern Finland during the last few days, which means that this one time parliamentary member, minister and international diplomat has had to rise early to shovel snow from her yard. She lives in the countryside and is used to being self-reliant – and not only when it comes to accessing the road through knee-high snowdrifts.

Against all odds
Her voice is friendly and pleasant but she has a look of steel. It is easy to understand why this woman has upset the male-dominated political establishment in Finland. The world’s first female Minister of Defence, UN Human Rights Rapporteur in the Balkans and Kofi Annan’s appointed Special Representative has an irritating capacity not to comply with the expectations which are imposed upon her by the political establishment.

A middle-aged woman who has been a housewife is not supposed to be Minister of Defence. She is not supposed to act with the same sort of self-confidence and authority as one would expect from a military general. She is not supposed to rebuke the establishment by almost being elected President of Finland in 1994, even if all the odds were against her – as not only a woman, but one belonging to the Swedish-speaking minority of the country. And she is not supposed to still, at the age of 69, be impertinently disrespectful of any form of institutional authority. This, despite the fact that Elisabeth Rehn, as Chairperson of the Stability Pact Working Table overseeing democratisation and human rights in South Eastern Europe, is part of the establishment. But she refuses to adopt a courteous tone towards the international community.

“I recently read an excellent report on women’s organisations in Kosovo, which notes that the situation of women has in fact deteriorated since the international community took charge. The political leaders in the Balkans are almost exclusively men, who now negotiate with a number of men from the EU and the UN. All decisions are made by men, over the heads of the women of the region. Those few women who have managed to reach governmental posts in the Balkans often take on a masculine role and do their utmost to be at least as hard and uncompromising as their male counterparts. I suppose they dare not do otherwise,” says Rehn.

Merciless against exploitative UN aid workers
She directs merciless criticism against UN aid workers who exploit prostitutes in the field. Such behaviour has, in fact, resulted in an increase of the trafficking of women and children. Since Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf from Liberia published their report Women, War and Peace, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has introduced a rule of zero tolerance of UN aid workers who buy sexual services.

“They get a one-way ticket home. But this should go much further and men who buy women and children should really be punished. During my travels I have met many 15–16-year-old girls who have been abused by international aid workers, among them peacekeepers. Abusing minors is a criminal act, and the perpetrators should be sued, either in the country where the crime has been committed or in their home country.”

The problem is that UN workers enjoy immunity in the areas where they work – an immunity which, says Rehn, they should be deprived of. She illustrates this point with the example of how top UN officer Sergio Vieiro de Mello (who later died tragically) acted when he was in charge of the UN peacekeeping mission in East Timor.

“When a UN policeman in East Timor was accused of having abused minors, de Mello decided to deprive him of his immunity. The policeman, who had committed this crime, was sentenced, which was the only right thing under the circumstances.”
Military lecture tours
Elisabeth Rehn gives lectures to the military in all Nordic countries on the importance of respecting the rights of women in the areas where they serve. Her latest visits have been to the Royal Danish Defence College in Copenhagen and the Finnish National Police School in Tampere.

“I explain how important it is to respect the local women and not abuse them. If the men really cannot restrain themselves until they return home, it is better that they do not embark on a peace-keeping career at all,” says Rehn.

Her personal involvement goes as far as helping individuals who are in trouble.

“The most recent case was a woman I helped who had got a child by a Finnish peace-keeper. He admitted that the child was his, but he did not want to pay any support. I have now persuaded him to do so.”

Rehn feels that it is her duty to act with consistency.

“Since I endeavour to maintain a principled stance, I cannot refrain from helping those who really need it. But of course I have my limits. No matter how much I want to, I do not have the capacity to do something for everybody.”

In several contexts Elisabeth Rehn has said that women’s bodies have become “the new battlefield”. It is nothing new that men in war rape the enemy’s women in order to humiliate him. What is new, is the perpetration of systematic rapes on a large scale, says Rehn.

“For example, in Rwanda the radio repeated day and night that all Hutu men should rape as many Tutsi women as possible. Particularly HIV positive men were encouraged to go out and rape. In the Balkans, there were prison camps for women where systematic rapes were carried out. In East Timor the Indonesian army methodically abused local women, in Congo I did not meet a single girl over 12 years of age who had not been sexually abused. In the cruel civil war in Sierra Leone girls are raped and mutilated.

“This is what is new – it is not a question of occasional violations by undisciplined soldiers, but of a systematic pattern of action. And since so many of the current conflicts are civil wars, the brutality has increased. Civil wars tend to be particularly cruel,” says Rehn.

Her experience as Minister of Defence has been very useful in her humanitarian work.

“My career as Finland’s Minister of Defence in 1991–1995 has been a great advantage. I’ve learnt how soldiers think – when they think.”

Laughter flashes in Rehn’s eyes.

“But since I received my international commissions, I have changed my opinion on certain issues. For example, I no longer accept Finland’s refusal to sign the Ottawa agreement on the ban of anti-personnel mines. Of course, the Finnish army does not place mines arbitrarily, but every single placed mine is one too many. Even if you know where the mines are, they must be removed, which is immensely time-consuming and dangerous work. Many accidents happen before it is done. There is no point in defending international conventions if one refuses to follow them oneself.”

Childhood experiences of war
How does a representative of a Nordic welfare state manage to encounter the horrors of war in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sierra Leone? Is the contrast between these cultures not simply too great?

“I have a background that many seem to be unaware of since so few remember how terribly old I am. I was born in 1935 and experienced war as a little girl. Together with my two sisters I was sent from our home in Finnish-speaking Mäntsälä to a Swedish-speaking boarding-school in Grankulla outside Helsinki. There we learnt to use our elbows. We were given food made of dusty flour and worm-eaten peas from old army storage. When we visited home, we were so hungry that we licked the plates like cats. I know what the horrors and poverty of war involve, since I have experienced them myself.”

Elisabeth Rehn grew up, married young, got four children and stayed home as housewife for seven years. After that, she worked in her husband’s company and as secondary-school teacher.

“My husband’s company was successful and for a while we were even somewhat wealthy. Then the company went bankrupt and we lost everything, even our home. As well as some ‘friends’ who suddenly disappeared.”

This experience taught Elisabeth Rehn to stand up for herself. She has a very practical attitude towards difficulties. They must simply be tackled, like everything else in life.

“I was elected into Parliament in 1979. In the 1987 elections I got about
11,000 votes. At that point the party (the Swedish People’s Party) had to choose me as Chair of the Parliamentary Group in order not to have to appoint me the Party’s Minister. I will never forget how nervous the boys were before our first press conference. They were convinced I would make a fool of the whole Parliamentary Group.”

Some men have, according to Rehn, an innate fear that women will make fools of themselves.

“I have encountered this attitude all my life. They have always regarded me as a dumb blonde, even if I have proven the opposite so many times. Personally, I have been more amused than hurt by this. Besides, it has given me fighting spirit. I’ve thought, Damn it, I’ll show them!”

She has never cared about the ‘don’t think you are somebody’ attitude. Her apparent self-confidence has not been looked upon with approval in Finland, even if the country likes to boast of being one of the most gender-equal countries in the world.

“As a female politician it’s not allowed to think of oneself as a ‘somebody’. But I have always had a strong sense of self-confidence. I believe in my own capacity. And I don’t care what they say about me. They may think what they like, I take my route, and usually things have turned out very well.” Rehn says this with her characteristic mixture of self-confident sarcasm and warm irony.

This pattern is repeated with Elisabeth Rehn’s international commissions. When the UN needed a human rights rapporteur to the Balkans in 1995 and enquired whether Finland would be interested, the Government responded that there was no suitable person available for the task.

“Then the German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel phoned me personally and asked whether I would be interested in taking on this assignment. Of course I said yes, and worked as Human Rights Rapporteur until 1997, when Kofi Annan appointed me his Special Representative in the region.”

**Gender issues are suppressed**

Even if Elisabeth Rehn received a lot of attention in the media when presenting her report on women in war, she finds that gender equality is still a second-rate issue in most international contexts.

“I chaired a working group during the Stockholm Conference on Genocide and followed the whole conference from beginning to end. When it was my turn to give my presentation, I declared that I had followed the conference for three days without hearing the words ‘women, conflicts and genocide’ being uttered once. I added: I don’t suppose this could be because this auditorium is full of men? The room went absolutely silent. If I had been an ordinary officer at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, I would probably have been fired. But at this age I no longer need to bow down to the authorities.”

Rehn has several examples of how the issue of gender equality is routinely suppressed in international contexts.

“Recently, I received an invitation to Tirana to give a lecture in April on the importance of women in politics. In their invitation, the organisers emphasized that they were not interested in any ‘gender history’. The title they gave me was: ‘The importance, if any, of women in politics’. Sometimes I really have to try very hard to restrain myself and not make myself impossibly difficult.”

Elisabeth Rehn has been very successful, but she has also encountered great difficulties. The latest is deeply personal – her husband fell seriously ill and was unconscious for three weeks.

“The doctors gave him a ten per cent chance of survival. I thought in that case Ove is included in that ten per cent! And he made it, despite the doctors’ fears. Now he will soon be able to leave the hospital.”

**The most devastating loss**

‘Never give up’ may be the basic principle of Elisabeth Rehn’s life. She has won a great deal, and sometimes lost. The most devastating loss is probably the
Since the Beijing conference in 1995, requests have been made for mainstreaming gender into all of the UN activities, and increasing the number of women in organisation’s peace support operations has been emphasised in a variety of UN documents. The Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000 states clearly that women have an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and it stresses the ‘importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution’ (S/RES/1325).

Gender mainstreaming of UN peace support operations is a step towards right direction as argued for example by Louise Olsson and Torunn Tryggestad (2001) in their Women and International Peacekeeping, yet this mainstreaming offers only a partial solution to the problem that is more complex than the organisation sees it to be. The problem is not so much the low number of women in peacekeeping mis-

United Nations peacekeeping – or peace support operations as peacekeeping is now called – has been used as an instrument for international intervention in armed conflicts for over fifty years, but the organisation did not issue specific requests for women peacekeepers until the 1990s.
sions as it is the entire culture of the organisation (Väyrynen, 2004). Integrating gender fully into UN peace operations requires thinking critically the rationale of the organisation and investigating the type of femininities and masculinities the organisation produces.

**Real problems, partial solutions**

Why mainstreaming gender into peace-keeping has become a part of the UN's agenda on peace, war and security in particular during the past decade? The effectiveness of UN peace operations has been criticised after the end of the Cold War and the organisation itself has recognised the need to think anew about the operations. Post-Cold War conflicts are seldom wars where states fight against each other. Rather, they are complex emergencies where many actors engage in political violence over a variety of issues. Civilian populations are the main sufferers of this new warfare. Post-Cold War conflicts lead to massive population displacements, and many conflicts 80 percent of refugees are women and children. Moreover, the majority of civilian victims are women and children. UN peace operations face also more and more the use of sexual violence as a systemic strategy in the times of war. For example, during the war in Bosnia in the beginning of the 1990s tens of thousands (the estimate figure is between 20 000 and 60 000) of women were raped, among them teenage girls (see NUPI-report, no. 261; Olsson, 1999 and Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002).

The need to think anew about peace support operations has been felt so strongly that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan commissioned a report from an international panel lead by former Algerian foreign minister Lakdar Brahimi to recommend measures to improve UN’s capacity to plan and carry out international peace operations. Although the Brahimi Report (2000) did not intend to tackle the gender dimensions of peace operations directly, it suggested several actions to be taken to improve the effectiveness of the operations, including increasing women's participation in the operations. Furthermore, other UN documents – among them the Windhoek Declaration, the Millennium Declaration and the convening of the General Assembly’s twenty-third special session entitled ‘Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century’ (Beijing + 5) – deal with gender issues directly and notice that women have not had an equal access and participation in peacebuilding and peace support operations although civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict. These documents acknowledge that women have been denied their full role in multidimensional peace support operations both nationally and internationally, and the gender dimension in peace processes has not been adequately addressed.

It is also argued in these documents that women do have important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Therefore, according to UN’s new policy, gender equality should permeate the entire mission of peace support operations. The special need to protect women's security in conflict zones is also noted by the organisation. It calls all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

The UN has adopted the strategy of mainstreaming, ranging from specialised training to increased representation of women in managing and resolving conflicts, when encouraging gender equality. There is, for example, a request for training for all peacekeeping personnel on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations. The number of women in all decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes has to be increased, according to the UN documents. There should be 50 percent women in managerial and decision-making positions. Women are seen to be suitable for field-based operations too, and their contributions and roles should be expanded especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel. These measures are, however, bound to remain partial unless the UN engages itself in the reflection of its own origin and nature.

**The UN and modernity**

UN peace operations can be seen to represent modernity and its problem-solving attitude par excellence. The problem-solving attitude coincides with cognitive-instrumental rationality that has marked the self-understanding of modernity. This type of rationality aims at instrumental mastery of the world and its uncertainties. In this view, rationality is measured mainly by assessing whether goal-directed interventions to the world are successful. Philosopher Michael Oakeshott (1984) notes that the central agent for knowledge production in modernity is the modern ‘Rationalist’ whose reason is aimed at problem-solving and whose character is that of the engineer. The mind of the ‘Rationalist’ is controlled by the appropriate technique, and his or her attention is related to his or her specific intentions. According to Oakeshott, the view takes purpose as the distinctive mark of rational conduct: rational conduct is behaviour deliberately directed to and governed solely by the achievement of a formulated purpose. In consequence, the view reduces human mind to a neutral instrument, to a piece of apparatus in service of purposes (see also Väyrynen 2001).

An example of the UN’s modern problem-solving attitude can be found in its thinking about war. The UN considers war to be a recognised political and social problem to be solved, not one set or kind of problem among a vast majority of possibilities. It is one thing to ask what is the appropriate policy with which to respond to violent conflict and war, and another to show how contemporary modes of problematising conflict and war are peculiar when seen in a particular historical and political context, namely, in the contexts of liber-
General defines mainstreaming as a platform for action and politics that could be added to peace support operations as the UN thinking and policy on peace operations seems to suggest. There are, rather, certain femininities and masculinities that are bound to become the hegemonic forms of femininity and masculinity. However, there are always zones of ambiguity where neither of these prevails or where mixed variations of them come to the fore. Femininities and masculinities are not enacted only by individuals, but also by groups, institutions and cultural forms, such as the UN (see Connell, 2002). The problem the United Nations faces should be re-phrased. It is not how gender can be integrated in the UN activities concerned with conflict resolution in general and peace support operations in particular as the UN problematises the issue to be. The question is how the UN itself produces certain type of femininities and masculinities as hegemonic. By remaining within the confines of modernity, the UN produces neoliberal modes of masculinity and femininity where the problem-solving epistemology gives priority to the ‘Rationalist’ and manageralist masculinity and renders the variety of ambivalent and unsecured masculinities and femininities silent.

References
The sight of croissants on the table cheers Drude Dahlerup. She skipped breakfast in Stockholm so that she could catch the flight to Copenhagen, and then she came by bus to Nørrebro, where she is now ready for the interview.

The 59-year-old professor of political science at Stockholm University has been up all night editing an international anthology which focuses on quotas and women's representation in parliaments throughout the world, but no-one would notice that she has missed a night's sleep. Drude Dahlerup is alert and her commitment to the task in hand is very apparent.

Drude Dahlerup is indisputably one of the sharpest spearheads in the Nordic countries within the field of gender research and the development of the women's movement, with wide knowledge and an impressive scholarly production, not least her monumental two-volume work Rødstrømperne (The “Redstockings”: the Danish Feminists in the 1970s and 80s), on the development of the movement in Denmark. She is tailor-made for the position which she has now held for six years, one of the first Chairs in Gender Studies, established in 1998 at the Department of Political Science at Stockholm University.

“A professorship like this had never been advertised in Denmark, nor was there any prospect of one, so since my children had grown up and left home I said to myself, now it's time for something new – and I got it!”

Drude Dahlerup, who was born and
grew up in Denmark, packed up and moved to Stockholm. In her political work both as professional and feminist activist, Dahlerup’s focus was already largely on Scandinavia as a whole, and her husband is Swedish, so the move was no huge mental jump.

**Nationality: Nordic**

The wider Danish population connects Drude Dahlerup primarily with her political commitment to the Euro-sceptic organisation Junibevægelsen (The June Movement), which she inaugurated and was for many years spokes-woman for. On this topic she says, “Junibevægelsen has always just belonged to my spare time. I’ve resigned from being spokeswoman, but don’t feel too sure that I won’t suddenly appear on that front again”.

In the rest of the Nordic countries, however, Drude Dahlerup is regarded as first and foremost a bridge-builder between the women’s movement and feminist research. The Nordic countries have so much accepted Drude Dahlerup as their own that many people with whom NIKK have spoken in connection with this interview have described her as more Nordic than Danish. Does she feel this herself?

“Yes, absolutely. In the 1980s I worked on two large Nordic projects (Brytprojektet ([Breakthrough project]), an experiment in breaking down the deeply sex-segregated labour market; and the book We Have Waited Long Enough, which appeared in all five Nordic languages (ed.), and that gave me a wide knowledge of all the Nordic countries. I live and work in Stockholm, as you know, and travel a great deal around Scandinavia going to conferences and seminars, so I’m really not sure whether “home” still has any particular meaning for me. But in my soul I’m Danish, even though I think that both the politics and the landscape are more exciting in Sweden”, says Dahlerup, who doesn’t omit to add that she is also very fond of Norway, Finland and Iceland.

**Intellectuals were flat-chested**

Drude Dahlerup was one of the first “redstockings” to emerge in western Denmark in the 1970s. She was among the originators of the new Women’s Liberation Movement in Århus at the time when inspiration from the USA, UK and Holland blew in over Scandinavia. It isn’t so strange that the young Dahlerup was caught up by the new feminist trend.

“I’m one of three sisters who were brought up by a feminist mother, so my home provided me with good ballast. I studied at Aarhus University during the years it was impossible not to notice the total non-synchronicity between our presence as women students – young, smart, clever – and the inimical conception of women that prevailed. As Vita Andersen [Danish author, ed.] wrote, women should “shut up and look pretty”. The men we studied with dated high-school girls, perhaps, and were embarrassed if the girls opened their mouths to say anything. The norms were totally insupportable”, says Drude Dahlerup, with irresistible conviction. “I can remember the times when we trembled as we asked the first questions about women and gender in class, and later heard down the grapevine that the first women’s research library, which we established in the 1980s, was called “the menstruation room” by our male colleagues. If a woman was intellectual she was bound to be flat-chested. The debate concerning this grotesque view of intellectual women has suddenly and surprisingly emerged again in Sweden, with the offensive led by a well-known woman editor.

“It was impossible to shatter the barrier alone. It had to be a collective endeavour. Because we were many, the movement grew to be incredibly strong, as happened with the Redstockings. And perhaps we can learn from that today. Some people think that if the Redstockings had only dressed a little more nicely and used makeup we might not have been regarded with such disapproval. I think that’s quite mistaken”.

– Why?

“We broke with some very rigid structures and distanced ourselves from traditional ideals of beauty; with large numbers that was possible. We were the girls of the avant garde”.

**You don’t change anything by being nice and fitting in**

– What do you say to the criticisms of the neo-feminists who distance themselves from the Redstocking movement – that it was too bombastic in its expression, burning bras and throwing lipsticks away, for example?

“Many neo-feminists actually think that the work done by the Redstockings was necessary, important and good. The people behind a book like the Swedish Fittstim, for instance, have said so clearly. But still – you don’t change the world by being nice and fitting in, but by violating boundaries. We had to break through the wall of tradition, and anyone who thinks that can be done by being nice hasn’t understood how movements change the world. It requires new ways of thinking and new praxis. It can be done by provoking outrage, by exceeding boundaries, but not by being nice”.

– Many neo-feminists wear bras and use lipstick, and wouldn’t dream of giving them up!

“That’s OK. The new generation is coming in waves. We had a really good
period in the 1880s, then again in 1910-20 around the fight for the vote, and then with the new mobilisation of women in the 1970s and 80s. These were periods of mass organisation, ideological discussions and high visibility. And then it became quiet. I think the women’s movement can be compared to the ocean: it comes in waves but can never be stopped”.

The women’s movement learns no lessons

It is typical of the women’s movement that it has not been very good at learning from the previous wave, Drude Dahlerup thinks. The women’s movement is always starting anew, she says.

“I think that this is partly due to what the writer Susan Faludi calls backlash: after every wave new anti-feminism emerged, constructing negative images of feminists. It makes me sad when today, younger people say, for example, about the angry Redstockings, ‘Weren’t you really all just lesbian man-haters with mauve napkins round your heads?’ The same thing happened in the 1930s after the peak of the struggle, when women had gained the vote. Now they had to get back into the kitchen. Then people said, ‘Weren’t they just a load of spinster women so they couldn’t get a man?’ I see this as a general form of resistance which tries to hit women in the name of femininity, and young girls are hit very hard by it”.

— You say that the women’s movement is going through a slump at the moment, but there are still plenty of issues: the pornification of the public arena, the sale of g-strings for 9-year-old girls, silicone lips and breasts as confirmation presents, to name a few. Is the new generation of feminists simply too easy-going and slack?

“It’s correct that we now need a really strong women’s movement. However, there are many who address these issues in books and in the press etc. That’s great, and it takes courage, but to have any effect it will really be necessary to get into harness and break through the wall of powerful interests. This can only be done collectively, and so far we have only seen individual initiatives”, explains Drude Dahlerup; however, she sees new shoots springing up among young Swedish high-school girls, who are forming groups with feminist content.

“This might be the start of a new wave, because it always starts from the grassroots. Books like Fittstim, Femkamp etc. might also mark the beginning of a new wave”.

— Do you think this shows that things are moving in a positive direction?

“Shall I answer honestly?”

—Yes please.

“When I was asked the same thing ten years ago I thought that now something would happen, but I’m in doubt whether that is an expression of professional optimism or whether it’s realistic. So I’m in doubt. We’re up against powerful commercial adversaries.

“I’m a limited optimist. A spark is needed. Different factors have to ignite together for a movement to start. If I had a precise recipe I could start a large grassroots movement tomorrow, but it’s not as easy as that. But good God! There’s plenty to fight against.

Quotas – Nordic countries no longer a model

Drude Dahlerup believes that when it comes the next wave will be global and developments are much more likely to be sudden and rapid.

“The world is in a chaotic state, and it will be interesting to see whether women are able to make use of these new departures to take a leap forward. It will be necessary to seize the moment when it appears”, says Drude Dahlerup, who believes that this ability will make itself felt in many other areas of the world.

“The Nordic countries have driven in the slow track and practical gradualism – one step at a time – but from now on things will move in leaps”. Here Professor Dahlerup is thinking not least of how many years it has taken for women in Scandinavia to achieve democratic political representation. For the last two years Dahlerup has led the project “Quotas – a key to equality?”, which is considering the new trend in the world to increase women’s representation by introducing various forms of gender quotas at elections. Dahlerup is the architect behind this project, which is funded by the Swedish Science Council and carried out in collaboration with IDEA, the international organisation for democracy.

The purpose of the Quotas project is to follow the development in countries which introduce a gender-quota system in their parliaments. The work consists, among other things, of creating a debate by means of conferences and seminars, of promoting research in the individual countries, and of follow-up studies in areas where there is the risk that representation will be merely symbolic, with women functioning as puppets for powerful men. There are examples of this, and the Quotas project therefore follows the implementation of the rules scrupulously, but up to now Dahlerup has mainly positive stories to tell.

“Twelve Latin American countries have passed legislation for a quota system designed to get more women into their parliaments. The same has taken place in Southern Asia and Africa: we’re talking about countries like Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, even Morocco. It’s absolutely wild. You wouldn’t have thought it possible just 10 years ago – it’s simply extremely exciting. My point is that the Nordic countries are no longer a model in the field of equal opportunities and women’s representation. We who always used to be number one in the world league tables now have to keep up with Costa Rica, South Africa and Mozambique!”

“When I’m asked, out in the world, how long it took us in the Nordic countries before, for instance, 30% of our parliament members were women, and I answer ‘about 70-80 years’, I’m told, ‘We’re not going to wait that long’. They won’t wait, as we in the Nordic countries have done, for women to develop resources in civil society, to progress in the sphere of education and employment, gradually grow stronger, and then are able to gain a greater degree of representation. So now we see countries, including some that are not
democratic, which are taking enormously interesting historical leaps forward in terms of women’s numerical representation.

Drude Dahlerup has learnt that a quota system for women cannot be realised without the support of an active women’s movement. “It’s always the women’s movements which push to make it succeed. They give support, they criticise, they see that women’s issues get on the agenda, etc. And in fact there are now centres for research into women’s issues all over the world. I can’t guarantee for North Korea; but one thing’s for sure: it’s not in Scandinavia that the women’s movement is making the greatest advances these days. It’s in the Third World. We may be overtaken some day by Costa Rica and South Africa, and I find this incredibly exciting. Denmark, in fact, has come to a complete halt.”

“I’ve changed”

– What gives Third World countries the energy and strength to get these things moving?

“Everyone I meet in the Third World countries says that the UN’s women’s Conferences, especially the one held in Beijing in 1995, have played an incredibly large role for the women’s movements. Drude Dahlerup stops for a moment, and continues: “And I have to admit that I have actually changed. When the first UN Women’s Conference was held in 1975, which was Women’s Year, many of us in the Danish Redstocking movement said ‘yuck’. We just didn’t believe in it. Women’s Year for one year, and all the other years were Men’s Years. We laughed ourselves silly. All those ladies in smart costumes holding conferences, and so what? And when the Foreign Office sent delegates to a meeting on feminism we just thought it was far out. So I was among the grassroots who said, ‘Now you really have to stop. What good is all this to women?’. But I have to admit that for the Third World especially, the UN Women’s Conferences have been of enormous importance. An international network of feminists has been established, and despite the great differences between them they are able to make use of each other. It’s a support and gives legitimacy when women’s movements nationally can refer to international resolutions, after having translated these demands into the national discourse. “I can also see that in many countries equal opportunities are regarded as a sign of being modern. It’s part of the country’s image, and such images are being very important in the international community today. This is especially true of Latin America, and in fact also in this country. I don’t believe that the Chairman of the EU Commission wants more posts filled by women because he’s a feminist but because he’s thinking of his image. In Sweden all political parties except for two now call themselves feminists, and so does the Prime Minister.

Mainstreaming in the desk drawers

– But the Scandinavian countries are very different in the importance they give to equal opportunities. Denmark, for instance, has closed down the Equal Opportunities Council, and the functions of the previous Equal Opportunities Minister are now carried out under the aegis of the Social Minister. Suddenly it’s no longer acceptable to talk about equal opportunities in Denmark, but the opposite seems to be the case in Sweden and the rest of the Nordic countries.

“I quite agree. Recently I made an analysis for the Danish Power Investigation (Magtudredningen) comparing Denmark and Sweden. There is no doubt that Denmark has ground to a halt and is even hit by a backlash. This can be blamed not only on the present Liberal-Conservative government but also on the previous Social Democrat administration. According to contemporary Danish discourse equality is more or less obtained, while in Sweden there is still long to go! For example, I compared the opening speeches in the Danish and Swedish Parliaments. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the previous Danish Prime Minister, mentioned the term equal opportunities for the first and only time in his opening speech in 1993, whilst Swedish prime ministers, no matter what their party affiliation, speak about equal opportunities, feminism, violence against women, the education of immigrant women, etc, in every single opening speech or government formation. It’s very strange, because Denmark was so famous for its strong mobilisation of women back in the 1970s, when women from all the Nordic countries flocked to the feminist summer camp at Femø. Denmark is lagging behind in relation to Norway, Iceland and Finland, and this trend started back in the 1990s.

– Why do you think this is so?

“Denmark is such a laissez faire nation. In Sweden and Norway they know there’s still a lot to fight for. In Denmark we think we’ve achieved equal opportunities, and we’ve brought in mainstreaming strategy, which hasn’t had any effect, however. The idea that equal opportunities should permeate all institutions is fundamentally good, but the chances of a flop are great. How can mainstreaming be implemented in the Ministry of Transportation, for example, where no one has any competence in equality policies? There are plenty of equal opportunity plans in desk drawers everywhere, but the implementation is lousy”.

– What went wrong, apart from the laissez faire mentality which you say prevails in Denmark?

“That’s a difficult question. As I said, the women’s movement has always proceeded in waves. There’s very little organisation in Denmark: some professional people are doing a fine job, but the grassroots level has completely disappeared. The official equal opportunities policy, state feminism, needs a strong, critical women’s movement at the grassroots level. But the Nordic countries as a whole are not at the crest of the wave”, says Drude Dahlerup, who hopes, professional optimism aside, that the wave will come with an international burst of foam which will go down in history.
More recently the contrary way that policy and practice tends to operate, concerning men's violence against women on the one hand and child custody and contact on the other, has become of increasing concern to feminist scholars and activists in the Nordic countries and elsewhere. In my doctoral thesis in sociology – In the shadow of Daddy: family law and the handling of fathers’ violence (Eriksson 2003) – I document a number of problems in contemporary Sweden in protecting children and mothers/co-parents from post-separation violence from fathers. Some of these problems concern the practices of the courts and their interpretations of fathers who are violent to women. Other problems concern the practices of the professionals providing the courts with information about the child’s situation. Using Sweden and my own empirical material as the case in point, I argue that well established notions of heterosexuality, of motherhood and fatherhood, as well as of childhood create specific obstacles in the work to combat men’s violence.

Can the category of ”normal father” include violence?
In the thesis I draw upon three sets of qualitative empirical material, and one of the sets consists of interviews with a group of social workers specialised in family law. In legal conflicts concerning contact, custody or residence they investigate and write reports about the child’s situation to the court. Normally, joint conversations and/or mediation are regarded as best practice, and joint custody and contact are regarded as the best solution post-separation. A closer analysis of the interviews with these eight women and two men from eight workplaces in Sweden shows that on the one hand, cases where the father has been violent to the mother are perceived as cases needing to be dealt with in a special way. On the other hand, it is clear that some cases with violence are regarded as “normal” cases. There seems to be space for negotiating the meaning of violence in the particular case among these professionals. In some of the interviews, this space for negotiation is quite extensive.

Consequently, some fathers seems to be able to use a certain amount of vio-
ence against women/their partner and co-parent without qualifying as violent in the eyes of the professionals. This is the case if, for example, there is no criminal law verdict regarding violence, if his violence has not been physically very serious or frequent, if it started in conjunction with the separation, if his victim - the mother - has not been physically injured or does not seem to be very scared, and if the fathers stands out as "normal" in other respects. Here, it should be added that in these interviews normal implicitly means white: "Swedish". If a father can be defined as a normal father joint custody and unsupervised contact is the self-evident alternative – in spite of a history of violence - and the question of risks for the child slips out of focus. The professionals' understanding of violence in heterosexual intimate relations, more specifically, their tolerance for fathers' dominance and violence in intimate relations and norms prescribing male dominance and female subordination, undermine other attempts to protect both women and children.

Splitting fathers' violence to women from violence to children
There is more than one reason for the question of risks for children slipping out of focus. The connection between men's violence to adult women and the victimisation of children documented through research is not very well known by the interviewed professionals. Instead, they present fathers' violence against mothers and against children as more or less unconnected phenomena. This split especially concerns sexual abuse of children. While physical child abuse is constructed as sometimes occurring, although not very often, mothers' narratives about child sexual abuse are interpreted against a mistrusting backdrop. The professionals argue that mothers suspect sexual abuse because of their own childhood victimisation, and that mothers can use "allegations" of abuse to win the case. Furthermore, they talk about a "wave" of incest allegations in Sweden in the late 1980s and early 90s, and this "wave" is presented as exaggerated and not based upon real cases of abuse. This raises the question what chance there is for a sexually abused child to get protection if there is a legal conflict regarding contact, custody or residence.

Here I want to add that the kind of child victimisation the professionals are quite concerned about is children's witnessing of violence. However, it should also be noted that the emotional abuse of children is closely associated with the mother's presence: it is implicitly assumed that when the father and mother do not see each other any more, the child is not emotionally abused. The question of what the violence to the partner might mean for the father's views regarding, and behaviours to, children becomes a non-question. Father's who are violent to women are in other words presumed to be not just physically and sexually, but also emotionally peaceful to children.

Not talking to children about their experiences
The patterns described above are also made possible by the fact that the "standard" method for conducting investigations in these cases is not suitable for documenting children's experiences of violence. The professionals state that they see almost all children concerned. However, the main aim with the conversations they have with children is to fulfil the requirements of the law that is that the report documents the child's "wish". Some of the professionals say that they do not talk to children about violence since they do not have appropriate methods, and others argue that investigation is not treatment or counselling and that it would be irresponsible and unprofessional to start something with (dependent and possibly victimised) children that they cannot follow up. It is clear that although it is possible for the respondents to ask for help from additional expertise, for example, within the child- and youth psychiatry, or to involve the child protection agencies this is not done systematically in cases with violence from fathers.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the assessment of whether, for example, contact is safe enough for the child is not grounded in the particular child's experiences of, and views on, violence. This is at least partly due to constructions of adequate adult and professional approaches to children in these legal processes. Thus, the assessment must be based upon something else. The questions are: on what? Here, notions of children's needs, as well as gendered constructions of parenthood become of central importance.

Constructions of the Child and interpretations of children
The professionals presume that (biological) heterosexual parenthood is the natural and normal form of parenthood and that children need a two-sex/gendered environment when growing up. Therefore, and in line with the Swedish family law, children are presumed to need a close contact with both parents post-separation. This is presumed to be true also for children who have experienced violence.

Notions of the needs of a general "Child" are of great importance for the interpretation of concrete children. This becomes very clear, for example, when the respondents talk about children's wishes as regards contact. When the interview conversations concern children who say that they want to see their fathers these children's accounts are presented as genuine expressions of the child's wishes. However, when the interviews concern children who say that they do not want to see their father – and the children's accounts are in conflict what the general Child is presumed to need – these children are presented as dependent upon, and influenced by, their mothers. The thought that a child's wish not to see the father might be part of the child's strategy for protection against violence is not very close at hand.

Some of the professionals argue that especially children who have experienced violence need safe and good contact with the father, to help them to see
that he is not just "bad". Children are presumed to be able to work through their previous experiences through contact. In this way, contact is presented as therapeutic for the victimised Child. However, whether a particular child is actually experiencing contact as safe or not is hard to know when this child’s perspective on violence is not explored and documented in the investigation. Furthermore, it is not clear who is responsible for evaluating how contact is actually working for the particular child.

"A bad parent but a good dad"

In the interviews, all of the professionals were asked how they perceive "abused women as mothers" and "violent men as fathers". While it was relatively easy to get an answer to the first question, it was more difficult to get answers about fathers. The respondents had a lot to say about the parenthood of abused mothers and they were all relating to the notion of "the inadequate abused mum" in some way. However, when the interviews concerned the parenthood of violent fathers it was sometimes not possible to get an answer at all. In other interviews the respondents started to talk about what the mothers in question, or the children, were thinking about the fathers. Thus, established ideas as regards fathers comparable with the notion of the inadequate mother can not be found in this interview material. The "inadequate violent dad" does not exist.

A closer analysis of the respondents’ speech about mothers and fathers makes this silence understandable. The professionals tend to use a gender complementary construction of parenthood as their point of departure. Motherhood means main responsibility and fatherhood means being complementary to the mother-as-main-carer: a father is the other parent doing things with the kids, making sure that they have a space for action for violent fathers when they encounter these professionals. While "bad parent but good mam" is unintelligible, the notion of "bad parent but good dad" seems to culturally intelligible.

**Fathers’ violence on the policy and research agendas?**

The patterns described above are clearly not unique to this group of professionals. For example, research on fatherhood and the practices of fathers have typically focused on "normal" fathers or "new" fathers but not on violence, and there has been a lack of focus on men as fathers in the literature on men’s violence against women (see Eriksson 2002; Hautanen 2005; Peled 2000). Furthermore, in spite of the fact that men’s violence against women has increasingly become present on the policy agenda in, for example, Sweden in recent years, the issue of violence from fathers is still marginal to the public debate on gendered violence.

In my thesis I review governmental printed material in Sweden in the 1990s that concerns either violence in close relationships; parenthood separation and divorce; or children at risk. The conclusion that can be drawn from this review is that in contemporary Sweden we have "violent men" or "fathers" (presumed to be peaceful). The only example that can be found in this material where violence is associated with the father-position or notions of fatherhood is the issue of the victimisation of girls/young women in "patriarchal family structures", that is, the discussion that explicitly concerns ethnic minorities, and so called immigrants. “Swedish” violent fathers do not seem to exist.

According to the sociologist Sylvia Walby (2002) inadequate interventions can be regarded as part of the cause of violence. The lack of political and professional recognition and intervention can in other words be defined as part of the cause of fathers’ violence against children and mothers/co-parents in contemporary Sweden. Furthermore, the lack of research on this topic is also part of the problem. Here lies a substantial challenge for researchers – in Sweden and elsewhere.

**REFERENCES**


The purpose of this review is to analyse the extent to which the anthology manages to fulfil its dual promise of both “mapping a broad range of issues” and offering “re-narrations and re-locations of one of the major social movements of the 20th century and […] fresh analysis of its latest trends”. With twenty contributions from various scholars, the anthology is very diverse, and I have chosen to structure the review along the five parts of the book.

**Construction and Deconstruction of Feminism**

The first part of Crossing Borders reflects on how one should or should not go about to study women’s movements. Solveig Bergman offers a refreshing perspective on how to analyse and compare women’s movements in different countries. The focus is on “autonomous, grassroots oriented feminism and not on formal-hierarchical women’s organisations” (p. 32). As a reader, I am curious to know more about how Bergman achieved the necessary data for her analysis. In this contribution, however, which is both well-written and a pleasure to read, Bergman places more emphasis on methodological and theoretical reflections.

Elisabeth Lønnå has given this anthology one of its more original contributions. Her conclusion that “there can be no wave theory” certainly goes against the grain of many feminist analyses that have applied the concept of “waves” and found it useful in identifying historical periods of intense feminist activism. The gist of her argument is that, looking only at historical periods where feminists have been particularly active and identifying these periods as “waves”, we risk missing out on all the feminist activities that are ongoing on a more continual basis. Lønnå receives general support for her thesis from Leena Laine, who in part two of the book argues that the identification of particular historical periods as “first” or “second” wave feminism does not do justice to periods of higher than usual activities in the women’s sports movements in Norway, Finland and Sweden.

On the other hand, Drude Dahlerup, objects to Lønnå’s rejection of the wave concept by saying that the fact that one can identify periods of feminist activities between different waves does not imply a falsification of “the thesis that the feminist movement has had its ups and downs in terms of activity, mobilization, visibility and impact” (p. 68).

**Sources of Activism**

Unfortunately, there is much less engagement with the wave concept throughout the remainder of Crossing Borders. In her well-researched analysis of academic feminism in Norway from 1880 until 1980, Beatrice Halsaa is more concerned with naming and constituting academic feminists as “a social movement, a women’s studies movement” (p. 83). She does, however, like Bergman and Dahlerup in their contributions, use social movement perspectives such as “political opportunities, mobilizing structures and cultural framing” (p. 83) to aid her analysis of women’s access to higher educational institutions. In the next chapter, Hilda Romer Christensen turns to religion as a source of activism, and offers an analysis of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in an effort to show how organisations that are not so readily identified with feminism may actually have contributed by offering “a reservoir for consciousness building and for the maintaining of practical community based projects”.

Part two also includes an excellent contribution from Irina Yukina, who offers a valuable insight into nineteenth century feminism in Russia. Finally, Malin Rönblom discusses local women’s groups in modern day rural Sweden.
International Fora and Transnational Networks

Part 3 of Crossing Borders is concerned with international and trans-national forms of feminism, and the previously dominant Nordic perspective (with the exception of Yukina) loses its ground. Naihua Zhang presents an empirical analysis of the unintended consequences of hosting the 1995 United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The article suggests that “the Conference became the seminal event that marked China’s integration into the international women’s movement” (p. 172), having a significant impact on both the women's movement itself, in terms of the appearance of a new type of organisations acting independently of the state, and on the socio-political context in which the women's movement is situated, in the form of new government policy documents.

On her part, Alena Heitlinger is concerned with Czech women’s groups, and in particular how such groups have developed and maintained cross-border links with international organisations and with national organisations in other countries. Heitlinger argues that “transnational networking and foreign funding have given Czech women greater political voice, and empowered them in their struggle for equality, social justice, and the building of a democratic civil society” (p. 199). Part three ends with an article by Mona Lena Krook, who looks at the role of international organisations and networks in the quest for gender-balanced representation, and an interview with Airi Markkanen (by Beatrice Halsaa) on the lives of Finnish romanes.

Violence and Care

Part four includes contributions from Russia, the Barents Region, China, Italy and Denmark. Natalia Khodyreva’s article is written more from an activist’s viewpoint than from a scholar’s, and offers viewpoints on the trafficking in women. Cecilia Milwertz looks at two specific attempts by women in China to establish organisations dealing with domestic violence against women. Mostly empirical in her focus, Milwertz also makes the interesting observation that “Euro-North American women’s movements” have been influenced by various aspects of women’s experiences in communist China. Aino Saarinen reflects on attempts by a network of scholars and activists to create and sustain dialogue between Nordic and Russian feminists on the topic of crisis centres in the Barents region. Saarinen shows how the concept of transversalism and the techniques of rooting and shifting, developed by Nira Yuval-Davis, have been useful in order to sustain the network. Chiara Bertone’s focus, on the other hand, is on comparing the policies of Denmark and Italy on fathers’ leave in connection with caring for small children. While the articles in part four are interesting in their own right, it is hard to tell what unites them.

Multiculturalism – globalisation

With the editors announcing that globalisation and multiculturalism constitute the main framework for the anthology’s texts, it is surprising to find this theme relegated to part five, which has only two articles, both of them more theoretical in nature than the previous empirically oriented articles. Pauline Stoltz draws on prominent feminist theorists in a highly recommended discussion of the ways in which feminist academics contribute to patterns of inclusion and exclusion in their analyses of the feminist movement. She is particularly concerned with the invisibility of black, immigrant and refugee women’s political activism among white scholars, especially in Nordic and European contexts. Sigridur Duna Kristmundsdottir suggests that processes of globalisation in the first instance lead to an increased preoccupation with diversity and difference, while they in the second instance “can lead to renewed emphasis on women’s traditional roles, especially their roles as mothers and housewives” (p. 326).

The last section of the book, Reflections, offers two short pieces commenting on the anthology itself, with Ute Gerhard emphasising its contributions to international dialogue and Sasha Roseneil its “contribution to feminist understandings of women’s political agency” (p. 349).

Conclusion

In terms of fulfilling its promise of “mapping a broad range of issues”, this anthology is right on target. It is very diverse, and examines a variety of expressions of feminist movements and activities in different parts of the world. I am confident that scholars will find articles that are worthy of reading, depending on their own research interests. In terms of the promise to offer “re-narrations and re-locations of one of the major social movements of the 20th century and [...] fresh analysis of its latest trends”, however, the anthology is more mixed. While some of the authors manage to engage the reader and offer fresh insight and perspectives, other authors remain too close to their empirical issue and do not lift their analysis from the descriptive level. There are several underpinning tensions in the book, such as that between an explicitly stated Nordic focus on women’s movements (p. 9) versus an equally explicit global and international focus. While the book sometimes succeeds in linking Nordic and inter- and trans-national women’s movements, in my opinion it does not present a sufficiently broad geographical analysis to claim a global perspective. Another tension is that between analysis of contemporary movements and events, versus historical accounts of earlier women’s movements. Although disagreements on the usefulness of the term “wave” are prominent in the first part of the book, other contributors could have engaged more actively in this debate and thereby made the anthology both more cohesive and interesting.

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