

NIKK

magasin 3.2010

Men against honour-
related oppression

Gender and power in
politics and business

No quota law in
Iceland without crisis

Family – a place of safety
or oppression?

NORDIC GENDER INSTITUTE

Focus:

Minority youth and the West Nordic region

Signs & practices

When “immigrant girls” become a political symbol





Intro

BOSSE PARBRING EDITOR OF NIKK MAGASIN

Ethnic minority youth and the West Nordic region



Gender equality among ethnic minority youth. Gender equality in the West Nordic region. Gender and power in politics and business. This issue of NIKK magasin contains articles on quite a

wide variety of themes, which reflect the areas in which NIKK has been involved during the past year.

Honour has become an important concept in gender equality politics and research in the Nordic region during the last decade. The debate started after several young women were murdered by members of their family in minority environments. Politics responded quickly by implementing action plans and political measures against 'honour-related violence' and arranged marriages. The debate and politics also resulted in research within the area.

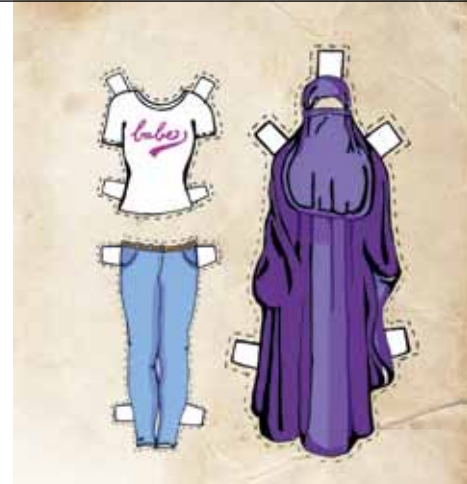
Critical research shows that the media debate, politics, social measures and research risk turning young women into victims who are to be saved by the gender equal countries in the Nordic region. Young women with a minority background are thereby turned into political symbols.

There are undoubtedly problems of gender equality in minority environments, but this is the case also in the majority society. Several researchers point to the danger of making too big difference between gender-related control and violence occurring in minority and in majority environments.

Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands make up the West Nordic region. Many women in the West Nordic remote rural areas acquire an education and move away, while the men – who have built their identities on being good hunters or fishermen – stay in the countryside. Both the financial crisis and climate change accelerate this developmental trend and create social problems which influence the equality between women and men.

This year NIKK completed an extensive research project on gender and power in politics and the corporate world. While politics have become relatively gender-balanced in the Nordic countries, business life is still lagging behind. This has led to a debate on gender quotas for corporate boards. Norway and Iceland have introduced quota laws, while the other Nordic countries have taken a more reserved stance on such measures.

– Bosse Parbring



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Arranged marriages, genital mutilation, honour-related murders – and hijab. In the public debate, these tend to be treated as part of the same package. Why does the debate not focus on turbans, capes, caps – and hijabs? Or slimming, shaved legs, bridal veils – and hijab?

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He was about to have his sister married off. Now Farman Sediq is involved in Sharaf hjältar (Sharaf heroes) and works to counter this culture of honour. “I’m proud to be a Kurd from Iraq, but I’m also proud to stand for human rights.”

16 “Immigrant girls” as a political symbol

The debate on honour-related violence over the last decade has engaged, mobilised and divided Swedish feminists within both the media and public gender equality politics. Two recent doctoral theses analyse the official Swedish policy on this issue and the consequences of the focus on the culture of honour.

20 No longer the best in the world

The socio-political debate, the attention paid to gender equality issues and pressure from the women’s movement are crucial to progress in gender equality. This is one of the key results from NIKK’s research project on gender and power in politics and business.

24 No quota law without crisis

When the law on joint stock companies was revised in the wake of the Icelandic financial collapse, the feminists of the Althing saw their chance. They seized the moment and added a paragraph on mandatory gender quotas for executive boards.

26 Nation-centric masculinity ideals

“To genes, money and the future!” The quote is ascribed to an Icelandic tycoon in 2006. At the same time, it is the title of a presentation on a gender-theoretical account of the reasons for the decline and fall of the Icelandic financial sector.

28 Family – a place of safety or oppression?

Women in the western part of the Nordic region depend heavily on family ties and romantic relationships as well as on the fact that the welfare system regards them as family members rather than individuals.

31 Column: A worthwhile investment

Gender equality is a worthwhile investment, as it is a vital factor in the success and wellbeing of a nation; perhaps even the precondition for it, writes Stefan Wallin, Minister of Gender Equality Affairs in Finland.

28 Hard to move in rural areas

Every other Icelandic woman has been beaten and nearly a quarter of women have experienced domestic violence, according to a major new study of Icelandic men’s violence against women.

Current

“As a curiosity I might mention that three out of five Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality today are men. That too, is a sign of the times!”

— STEFAN WALLIN, FINNISH MINISTER



FINLAND

Power explored

The extensive research programme Power and Society in Finland (2007-2010) was completed in September. Of the 20 projects, funded by a total of 6.5 million Euros by the Academy of Finland, five focussed on gender and power. The researchers studied differences in the use of public and private power between men and women: in politics, working life, industry and the family. Globalised politics and economics, and changes in welfare constituted central themes in the studies of state and institutionalised power. However, studies have also been conducted from a historical perspective, as well as exploring more everyday and informal power relationships. This is the first extensive study of power in Finland since the 1970s. The Scandinavian countries all conducted scientific power studies in the 1990s, which to a large extent enabled a comparison of the distribution of power between men and women in the various countries. However, this Finnish study of power is of a somewhat different character.

Time for minority quotas?

In most of the Nordic countries, there are political parties that have voluntarily introduced gender quotas. However, quotas for ethnic minorities is regarded as a more problematic issue.

Drude Dahlerup, Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University, has for several years studied gender quotas within politics. She has, for example, emphasized that the Nordic countries are no longer the best in the world when it comes to levels of female representation in politics, and that many countries have not wanted to take the long way to equality as the Nordic countries have done. Instead, they have introduced legally regulated quotas.



In the European research project FEMCIT, on the significance of women's movements for the citizenship of women, she has explored the relationship between gender quotas and ethnicity. The research project involves Sweden, Poland, Great Britain, Spain and Bosnia. Drude Dahlerup presented her research at a seminar in Oslo on 5 November, where several of the Nordic researchers in FEMCIT also participated.

“The quota debate concerns women, but in the minority debate women are often excluded”, Drude Dahlerup points out. Thus minority women are made invisible.

According to Drude Dahlerup, there are two different views when it comes to using quotas as a political strategy. The first is that gender equality will appear automatically, step by step, when women are sufficiently qualified. In that case, quotas are not considered an option. The second viewpoint is what she calls the fast track. In this view, under-representation is not regarded as something caused by the lack of qualifications, but by discriminating structures. Quotas are a remedy to that situation.

In the countries that the researchers have studied, it is more common that the political parties discuss minority quotas than quotas for

women. But organisations for women with a minority background are more interested in gender quotas than in minority quotas. They think that they do not necessarily need a woman with the same ethnicity to represent them.

Line Nyhagen-Predelli at Loughborough University in Great Britain studies minority women in and outside of the women's movement. Together with other researchers she has particularly analysed the situation in Norway, Spain and Great Britain.

She says that women with a minority background are still marked out by the women's movement. Representatives for the women's movement find that women with a minority background have their own interests, which separate them from 'Norwegian' women. A point of criticism is that the women prefer to organise themselves based on ethnicity rather than on gender.

However, there is potential in cooperating on certain strategic issues, such as men's violence against women.

“But majority women must reflect over their own whiteness and position”, Line Nyhagen-Predelli emphasizes.

BOSSE PARBRING

Global gender equality assessed

The World Economic Forum has measured the lack of gender balance in the world. Iceland got the best result. Yemen came last. But – so what?

“Do the individual countries actually care where they end up on such a list? That depends very much on whether gender equality is a prioritised political issue in that country. If gender equality is not on the political agenda, I think the ranking won’t make any major difference”, says Marie Thynell. She is Research Fellow in Peace and Development Research at the University of Gothenburg’s School of Global Studies.

For the fifth consecutive year, the World Economic Forum, an organisation based in Geneva, has composed the Global Gender Gap Index. It is a survey of the differences between the situations of men and women concerning economic opportunities, political participation, education and health. Each country is analysed according to its own conditions and resources, and the possible gender differences are weighted. In other words, it is not, for example, the level of education as such that is measured in the individual countries, but the difference between the educational level of men and women.

This year, as also last year, Iceland holds the first place, while Norway has taken over the second place from Finland, who this year must settle for being third. Sweden is found in position number four, while Denmark is number seven, after New Zealand and Ireland.

An increasing number of female ministers, a female prime minister and an approximate gender balance in parliament are the central reasons for Iceland’s winning position. There is also a good gender balance in education and employment. But when looking at the payslips of men and women respectively, it is obvious that Iceland, too, has work to do in order to reach full gender balance.

Norway now takes second place, thanks to a small increase in employment among women; an

increase large enough to push Finland down to third place, despite the Finns also scoring more points than before.

Sweden held the top position for the first two years after the index was compiled, but during the last three years, Iceland, Norway and Finland have scored more points and overtaken Sweden. Denmark, too, has fallen back since other countries have managed better in decreasing the gender differences in the various areas measured.

All in all, the Nordic countries, except for Denmark, succeed in filling over 80 per cent of the gender gap that the index is based upon.

Looking outside of the Nordic region, it might be surprising to find Lesotho in eighth place after Denmark. That small highland country is one of the world’s financially less developed countries, with very limited resources and it is strongly dependent on South Africa. But in Lesotho there is no difference between the education and health services of men and women. In addition, the country is number one as to gender similarity in salaries.

“It’s obvious that gender equality is taken seriously in Lesotho”, Marie Thynell notes. She finds the report primarily suited for assessing the attitudes to gender equality around the world.

“For politicians, researchers and NGOs, indexes like this one can be a method for measuring social change, and thereby be an indicator of the political climate in individual countries. The report simply provides a survey of which countries emphasize work on gender equality. If, for example, an NGO wants to work with projects on gender equality, they can look up such a report and find out places where there is already some support to be had from the authorities.”

SIRI LINDSTAD

SWEDEN

Support for local gender equality work

The Swedish government has decided to grant 80 million SEK (8.7 million Euros) to the Swedish municipalities and county councils to support and ensure the quality of their activities from a gender perspective. “Sweden is one of the world’s most gender equal countries. But there are alarming examples of how healthcare, education and social services are still far from equal. We need to develop approaches to schools, hospitals or homes for the elderly so as not to penalize citizens because of their gender”, says Gender Equality Minister Nyamko Sabuni.

Last term the government launched the biggest ever national initiative to promote the improvement of gender equality at local and regional levels.

The government’s decision means that the Swedish

Association of Local Authorities and Regions will allocate a further 80 million SEK for the years 2011-2013.



Photo: Pawel Flato

NORWAY

Most women satisfied with full-time work

In spite of extended parental leaves, tremendous improvement in day-care availability, and a cultural climate that is supportive of women’s full-time work, Norwegian women still have one of the highest female part-time rates in Europe. In the article “What makes full-time employed women satisfied with their working hours” Hege Kitterød and Marit Rønsen at Statistics Norway identify factors that may facilitate or impede working-hours satisfaction among female full-timers. Contrary to past research, they find that most women are satisfied with their full-time hours. Still, young children in the household are a strong deterrent of full-time contentment, as is long working hours for the spouse, if women are married. Full-time contentment also varies with occupation, but the main job-deterrent seems to be non-standard working hours such as shift and rota.

QUOTED:

“Such peculiar attitudes are something we must get rid of within the Defence Forces. This concerns both the use of death threats and what appears to be Viking behaviour.”

— HEAD OF THE OPERATIVE HEAD QUARTERS OF THE NORWEGIAN DEFENCE FORCE, LIEUTENANT-GENERAL FERDINAND BROVOLD, ABOUT NORWEGIAN OFFICERS HAVING USED VIKING HELMETS IN AFGHANISTAN.



FINLAND

Gender equality policy for the next decade

Finland has presented its first gender equality government report. The report gives guidelines for gender equality policy up to 2020. The Minister for Gender Equality, Stefan Wallin, emphasizes the opportunity to combine work and family, and that the report includes a parental leave model in three parts, where the parents receive one third of the leave each, while one third can be divided freely between them. “Shared responsibility for the family supports the partner relationship and prevents divorces. According to an English study, fathers who participate in family life are happier, and according to the WHO, they are also healthier”, Stefan Wallin says. “The report contains much material for future gender equality politics”, he notes. “It’s obvious that in the future we must better consider the position and needs of various minorities. We should also pay more attention to the gendered consequences of solutions within financial politics, since they affect us all.”

Conference on women’s movements

How have women’s movements contributed to transforming citizenship in contemporary multi-cultural Europe? The four year research project FEMCIT will conclude with a final conference at the University of Oslo, Norway, on 20 January 2011. Read more on www.femcit.org.

DENMARK

Companies want to recruit more women to top posts



Photo: Colourbox

Lego, Carlsberg and Bang & Olufsen promise to recruit more women to leading posts within their companies.

The three Danish companies have, together with several other leading Danish firms, signed the document ‘Recommendations for more women on corporate boards’. They thereby promise to increase the proportion of female candidates for board posts, to monitor the development in their annual reports, to be open about recruitment and selection criteria, to increase the proportion of female managers and to encourage others to also sign the recommendations.

“We have approached these problems in an entirely new way by gathering those agents who in practice decide who is to fill the board posts in several Danish companies, that is, the institutional owners, the capital funds, board chairs and head-hunter firms”, says Minister for Gender Equality Lykke Friis.

“Together we’ve formulated a set of rules that obliges those working at all links of the

recruitment chain to look much more intensively for qualified candidates when posts on the board are to be filled. This has resulted in a set of usable and very concrete recommendations, which I feel convinced, will lead to an increased diversity on the boards.”

In Norway a quota model has been introduced, according to which at least 40 per cent of the board members must be women. But Lykke Friis does not support the idea of quotas:

“We can’t handle this kind of challenge by sitting in parliament and deciding what the world should look like. Instead we have put together a set of recommendations, which are directly based on the corporate reality. Thus we get the best solutions going while the companies themselves also carry their responsibility. That is a far more efficient way forward”, says Minister for Gender Equality Lykke Friis.



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MINORITY YOUTH

Is there a danger of making too big difference between gender-related control and violence occurring in minority and in majority environments?

Arranged marriages, genital mutilation, honour-related murders – and hijab. In the public debate, these tend to be treated as part of the same package. Why does the debate not focus on turbans, capes, caps – and hijabs? Or slimming, shaved legs, bridal veils – and hijab?

BY JENNIE WESTLUND PHOTO: MARIA BERGREN

Hijab chique

In the Norwegian debate, the hijab has been represented as a symbol of female oppression, as expressing something we don't tolerate or perceive as compatible with Norwegian values. Therefore there has not been the same kind of commotion about, for example, male turbans," says Kristin Engh Førde, who has written her Master's thesis on the hijab and interviewed Muslim girls in an upper secondary school in Oslo.

Over the last – almost – ten years, the debate on the Muslim veil has regularly flared up in several of the Nordic countries. Many contentious issues in society have been boiled

down to the debate on this piece of cloth, which has come to form the battleground in the fight as to what it means to be civilised, Western, gender-equal and independent.

The debate easily turns into the question as to whether head-coverings should be allowed or forbidden, into attitudes for and against. Feminists who have participated in the hijab debate are found in both groups.

"The hijab becomes a platform on which the internal feminist battle is fought. This is in many ways a generational battle about who is to have the right to define what feminism should be today," says Danish Rikke Andreassen, lecturer at the Malmö Univer-

sity in Sweden. She was also one of the researchers participating in the EU project VEIL, which surveyed and analysed debates on Muslim veils in Europe.

When France banned the use of the hijab in 2003–2004, a large-scale debate on the veil arose in the Norwegian media.

Hijab ban hinders vocational life

Researcher Berit Gullikstad analysed the debate and was surprised to find that few of those who called themselves feminists raised the question of what consequences a hijab ban might have for the financial situation of Muslim women. If Muslim women are forced



Fashion, oppression or one of many ways of expressing femininity? *For some women the hijab is an useful instrument for building a bridge between the modern and the traditional.*

In the name of women's freedom all women must be able to show their hair. It's a strange thought that you can be a legitimate citizen in our countries only if you are bodily available. This is not a very feminist thought.

– RIKKE ANDREASSEN, RESEARCHER

to choose between their hijab and their job, many will leave work. The battle for the financial freedom of women has traditionally held a strong position within the women's movement, but it has not done so in the battle about the hijab. Is financial independence no longer a central issue for ethnically Norwegian feminists? In an interview on the Norwegian website Kilden, Berit Gullikstad provides a possible answer: the battle for gender equality today primarily focuses on sexuality.

And this creates many traps.

"In the name of women's freedom all women must be able to show their hair. It's a strange thought that you can be a legitimate citizen in our countries only if you are bodily available. This is not a very feminist thought", says Rikke Andreassen.

There are several current examples where body, sexuality and sufficient bodily availability have been the focus in the gender equality

battle. The prostitution issue is one such case. It, too, divides feminists. It is not hard to find similarities between these debates.

"The prostitution debate, too, is one where we talk about those involved, but not with them. Muslim women and women in prostitution are both archetypes of 'the other'. The debates are about embodiments of 'the other' and, at the same time, expressions of the notion that 'we will save them'", says Rikke Andreassen.

When the veil is drawn there is an absolute division between 'us' and 'them'; there is no opportunity for mutual understanding. Placing the hijab in relation to other garments and other gendered practices is perhaps a way of loosening attitudes and finding unifying themes. Kristin Engh Førde articulates the need for somebody who can talk about the relativisation of the hijab.

"Very little is said about this in the debate. I think it's necessary to relativise the hijab in order to at all be able to understand the complexity of the issue and show solidarity", she says.

One way of relativising and de-mystifying the hijab is not only to discuss what women wearing a hijab are, but also what they do with their veil. Such a perspective reveals many similarities between women's lives, regardless of religious or cultural contexts.

Slimming and the hijab

Kristin Engh Førde thinks that wearing the hijab can be seen as a sign of the will to a 'true' femininity among Muslim women.

"They wish to present an acceptable femininity, in the same way as women in Western cultures want to look good. Not wanting to 'tend to' one's feminine appearance in a Western culture – for example, not shaving one's legs – is also regarded as very suspicious", she points out.

Regardless of what kind of femininity one wants to ascribe oneself and show, it takes an effort.

"Wearing a hijab takes a great deal of self-discipline. Several of my informants described how, when they put on the hijab, it often turns out wrong and they take it off again and try anew, they lose their motivation. They fail to wear it correctly. This reminds me very much of, for example, slimming", says Kristin Engh Førde.

The similarities are there between various sorts of regulatory norms. Western women try to lose weight and shave their legs; Muslim women cover their hair and neck with a hijab. But do these parallels actually hold? The 'compulsion' to wear a hijab is based on religion, while the 'compulsion' to shave one's legs is not. Kristin Engh Førde thinks that the parallel is valid.

"There is a difference, yes, but I don't see it as relevant whether the driving force is religion or culture. In both cases, women internalise norms for femininity and this is an issue of gender and power.

The only women who wore a veil during the time of the prophet Mohammed were his wives. During that time, the expression 'she put on the hijab' was used about a woman who became his wife. In Western culture, too, young women dressed in a veil when they were married and after that wore a *koneskaut* (wife headdress) as it was called in Norway. Today, the veil has been eroticised and is a common part of the wedding dress.

Kristin Engh Førde does not think that the hijab practises can be changed by means of laws and bans.

"On the contrary. If one aspires to a situation where Muslim women are able to participate in public life, then focusing on the hijab is like shooting oneself in the foot", she says.

Focusing on the symbols of religious expression is obviously not the solution; there needs to be an analysis of the underlying structures. Gender equality problems are not solved by forbidding either the practice of slimming, or of wearing a hijab. Banning the

What is hijab?

- In daily language, the headgear worn by Muslim women to cover their hair and neck is called hijab in Norway, *tørklæde* (scarf) in Denmark and *slöja* (veil) in Sweden.
- The hijab was introduced by Arabs long before the prophet Mohammed and the spread of Islam.
- The hijab was a sign of social status in many societies and was used by Greeks, Romans, Jews and Assyrians.
- The verses in the Koran which concern the headgear of women are few and can be interpreted in various ways.



Hijab as wedding dress. *The only women who wore a veil during the time of the prophet Mohammed were his wives. During that time, the expression 'she put on the hijab' was used about a woman who became his wife. In Western culture, too, young women dressed in a veil when they were married and after that wore a koneskaut (wife headress) as it was called in Norway. Today, the veil has been eroticised and is a common part of the wedding dress. Photo: Istockphoto*

hijab could, in fact, have the consequence of confining Muslim women, rather than liberating them.

“For some of the informants, I see wearing the hijab as a way of building a bridge between the modern and the traditional, between the role of women in the society where they live and the more traditional femininity associated with their culture of origin. Wearing the hijab lessens the conflict between these two worlds. If one wears a hijab, it’s not so dangerous to go out into an ‘immoral’ society. The hijab becomes an useful instrument for some”, says Kristin Engh Førde.

“For some, there is compulsion involved, for others this is not the case. Regardless of this, I think we must take the women seriously. We can’t sit here and claim that the hijab is oppressive and that we don’t find its defenders credible”, Rikke Andreassen underlines.

Reason for suspicion

Perhaps the opponents do themselves a disservice by giving the hijab so much air time in the debate.

“I tend to say that if we want less of the hijab, we must talk less of it”, says Kristin Engh Førde.

Rikke Andreassen for her part emphasizes that there is reason for suspicion, when those who have never before shown any interest in gender equality issues, suddenly become interested in the hijab and oppression of Muslim women.

“The hijab becomes a platform for criticizing Islam and gender equality becomes the hostage in the debate”, she says.

Jennie Westlund is advisor at NIKK

Hijab ban in the Nordic region

- In 2004, the Danish People’s Party presented a proposal in parliament to ban the wearing of hijabs among all public employees. The proposal was voted down.
- In Norway, the Progress Party presented a similar suggestion in the same year.
- Denmark introduced a ban for judges to wear religious symbols in 2009. This is the only example of national legislation in the area.
- In Sweden, the National Police Board decided in 2006 to let police officers wear headgear when on duty.
- In 2009, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice suggested a similar amendment, but after much opposition, also internally within the government, the Minister of Justice withdraw the suggestion to allow the wearing of hijabs within the police force.
- In Finland, there are no public regulations on the headgear of Muslim women. The hijab has surfaced in the public debate every now and then, mainly as an issue of discrimination on the labour market.

He was about to have his sister married off. Now Farman Sediq is involved in Sharaf hjältar (Sharaf heroes) and works to counter this culture of honour. “I’m proud to be a Kurd from Iraq, but I’m also proud to stand for human rights.”

BY BOSSE PARBRING

Sharaf heroes

Young men

against honour-related oppression

Farman Sediq arrived in Sweden when he was 14 years old. He says that he early on sensed how he and his sisters were being treated differently in the family. His sisters were not supposed to engage in any physical activities, and Farman Sediq was to monitor that nothing bad happened to them or their family.

“When we moved to Sweden, this difference became more pronounced”, says Farman Sediq. “We lived in an area with Kurds. But there was something out there that was different. It wasn’t supposed to be like that. We were to continue living the way we’d always done. The strange phenomenon was the parents who allowed their daughters to party. They were bad parents.”

The surrounding society was perceived to be menacing. Native Swedes had no shame. The threatening aspect of the surrounding society reinforced the Kurds’ own identity and culture.

“I came to Bergsjön in Gothenburg. The only Swedes I met were cops, social workers

and outsider Swedes such as alcoholics and drug addicts. We read about murder and rape cases and saw drunk Swedish youth on the weekends. We didn’t want to end up like that.”

“One thinks that this is what Sweden is like and forgets that Swedish families, too, are worried about their children and want to look out for them.”

Unmasculine and a pimp

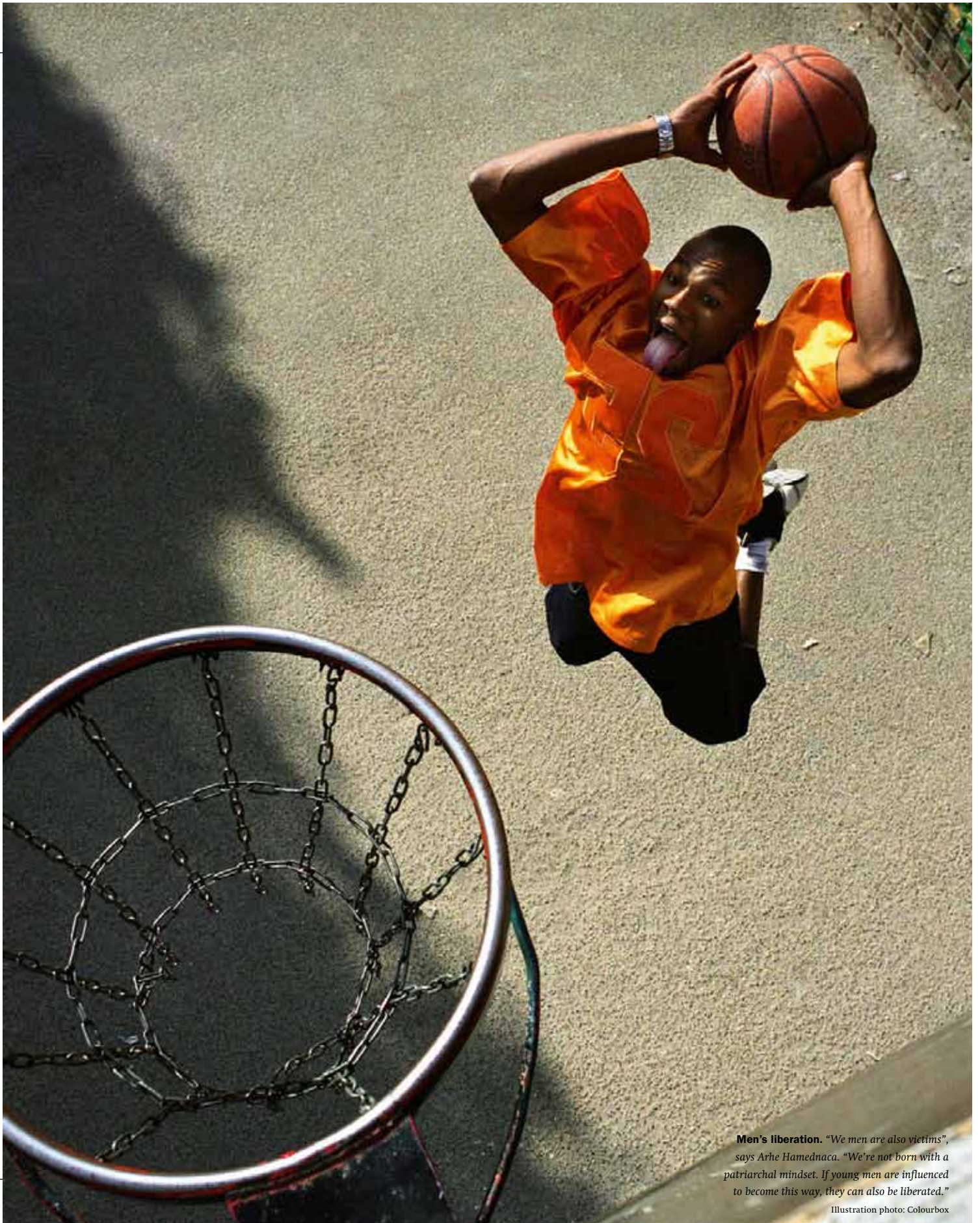
Surveillance of one’s sisters thus seemed a matter of course to Farman Sediq, and this was affirmed among his friends. They informed each other about their sisters’ behaviour and thought it peculiar if someone failed to react. Farman Sediq recounts an episode when someone had witnessed a friend’s sister hang out with a couple of guys who smoked. Upon being told, he did not react the way he was supposed to. He just said that he trusted his sister. This led to several months of bullying by 25-30 guys, among them Farman Sediq. After the young man had been locked up in the rest room and beaten, he moved to another school.

“He had sold out his honour and was called unmasculine and a pimp, says Farman Sediq. At the same time, his sister was labelled a loose woman.”

The fear of what his buddies might say had Farman Sediq almost marry off one of his sisters against her will. When one day he borrowed her mobile phone, he discovered that she had received a message from a guy. He confronted her, and she claimed that it was just a friend.

“In our family we had talked about it being OK to have male friends at school and in the work place, but not privately. We didn’t believe that he was just a friend. That kind of thing just wasn’t done in our homeland.”

Their parents got upset and were close to arranging a marriage for his sister in order to put an end to the alleged romance. But they finally decided to give their daughter a second chance. Later Farman Sediq fell in love with a girl, but was forced to break it off because her family considered him to be the wrong guy for her. In the course of these events he was introduced to Arhe Hamednaca



Men's liberation. *"We men are also victims", says Arhe Hamednaca. "We're not born with a patriarchal mindset. If young men are influenced to become this way, they can also be liberated."*

Illustration photo: Colourbox



Photo: Basse Farthing

I often say to young people who are afraid to become Swedish that they have nothing to fear. You can calibrate your culture.

– FARMAN SEDIQ

who had started Sharaf hjältar and who talked about democracy in the home, honour and sexuality.

“At this point, it didn’t occur to me that it was wrong”, Farman Sediq recounts. “The first time I met Arhe, I didn’t say a word. There were all these thoughts that were making my head spin. Who will I become? What will people say? But after a while I realized that it is up to the girls themselves to decide whether to drink or have sex. It’s their lives.”

Fadime’s murder

Farman Sediq joined Sharaf hjältar and now works as a project manager. Sharaf is Arabic and means honour. The idea is to turn the concept of honour, which is often perceived to be negative, around and provide it with a new meaning.

In 2002 Fadime Sahindal was murdered by her father who did not want her to live with a Swedish man. Arhe Hamednaca knew her because they were active in the same political party. He felt impelled to act. Even if supportive action is important to girls, it does not suffice. Men’s attitudes will also need to change.

“We men are also victims”, says Arhe Hamednaca. “We’re not born with a patriarchal mindset. Rather, we’re moulded into adopting one. We’re forced to control and oppress – and eventually even become killers. If young men are influenced to become this way, they can also be liberated. If we manage to affect young boys, i.e. the men of

the future; if they accept human rights and women’s rights, then the future is saved.”

Arhe Hamednaca made a few tentative attempts to get hold of guys who wanted to discuss with him. After he had won their trust he formed the group that was to provide the basis for Sharaf hjältar. At present, there are divisions of Sharaf hjältar in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö and even in other countries. In 2008 Sharaf hjältinnor was founded, educating girls in a similar fashion. Often the educated young women and men visit schools together, hence reaching a wider young audience.

Re-evaluating one’s view on women

To many, the training is a rather groundbreaking process, Farman Sediq relates. He recounts how he and his friends used to view girls before he joined Sharaf hjältar. They would hang out with Swedish girls, party and have sex. But the girls were only perceived of as casual affairs.

“Even if we liked the girls, we never imagined they could be wife material. The girls we marry must be nice girls, innocent and well-behaved.”

“I discovered at an early age that the guys looked at women in a way that cast Swedish girls as whores”, says Arhe Hamednaca. “You



Diploma of the Minister. Sharaf heroes get certificates of Minister for Integration and Gender Equality Nyamko Sabuni.

Photo: Bosse Parbring



If we manage to affect young boys, i.e. the men of the future; if they accept human rights and women's rights, then the future is saved.

– ARHE HAMEDNACA

can do whatever you want with them. They have no shame. I wanted to influence that attitude.”

“When coming into contact with Sharaf hjältar, one’s first encounter is devoted to understanding how I as a guy would feel if I were treated that way”, says Farman Sediq.

“To see things from the girl’s point of view. From there, we start working with values and the available knowledge in the field. We educate ourselves on democracy and human rights. To begin with, it seemed like rocket science to me. I come from a culture in which certain things are missing due to e.g. war. But I won’t become Swedish because of that.”

“I often say to young people who are afraid to become Swedish that they have nothing to fear, says Farman Sediq. You can calibrate your culture. The fact that we didn’t have human rights in our countries of origin is not our parents’ fault. I have the option to not raise my children in the same way, but still pass on the traditions of which I am part to them. This is a way to be proud of one’s culture.”

Death threats

At the same time, both the young people and the employees face resistance from where they come from. Many experience being threatened. Arhe Hamednaca received his first death threat in 2004.

“I sometimes wonder how old I’ll live to be. The people who threaten me believe that

I corrupt their children, and that their children will give up their culture. But seeing that we are so many now, it has become harder for the people who threaten us. The whole society is more aware now compared to a few years ago.”

“A certain political correctness used to dictate that we shouldn’t talk about this. Kurds and Muslims were being identified as the problem, and that was a mistake. All religions have this problematics.”

Furthermore, Arhe Hamednaca and Farman Sediq emphasise that even ethnically Swedish girls and boys are treated unequally when it comes to gender and sexuality.

During the spring of 2010 Swedish television ran a story on a small-town community in which rumours cast two rape victims as loose liars, while the perpetrator sentenced in court was hailed and seen as the one telling the truth.

“The woman always gets the worst part of the double standard”, says Farman Sediq.

Denmark inspired by Sharaf’s heroes

The Danish Ministry of Integration has taken the initiative to train a group of young men who will travel around the country to start a dialogue on honour-related conflicts, forced marriages and gender equality. The men all have other than a Danish ethnic background and are between 19 and 31 years of age.

“So far, we’ve recruited ten role models who have been given training”, says adviser Lion Rokx at the Ministry of Integration.

They will visit schools, clubs and associations. Using dialogue as a method they are to enter into discussions with other young people on the basis of various examples of honour-related conflicts.

“The aim is to create a debate on honour, gender and gender equality among young ‘new Danish’ men and thus remind them of their attitudes that make them stick to certain traditions and gender structures”, Lion Rokx explains.

The debate on honour-related violence over the last decade has engaged, mobilised and divided Swedish feminists within both the media and public gender equality politics. Two recent doctoral theses analyse the official Swedish policy on this issue and the consequences of the focus on the culture of honour.

BY TRINE LYNGGARD ILLUSTRATION: ANNE AAGAARD

“Immigrant girls” as a political symbol

The murder of Fadime Sahindal in 1992 triggered a polarised debate on honour, violence and the “culture” of immigrants in Sweden. A few weeks after the killing, the government presented its first programme for “vulnerable girls in patriarchal families”. A new political concept had been established. The young women’s plight had been made into a cultural symbol and a boundary marker – between what is Swedish and what is non-Swedish.

Since 2007, Sweden has had a coherent action plan for “male violence against women, honour-related violence and oppression, and violence in same-gender relations”. The plan says that “the honour rationale can take on various expressions, depending on cultural notions and religion, but it is not connected to a specific culture or religion. Honour rationale can also exist in non-religious contexts”. It is further noted that “as is all male violence against women, honour-

related violence and oppression is based on gender, power, sexuality and cultural notions of these” (p. 12-13).

According to this action plan, honour-related violence differs from other forms of violence in its *collective nature*; that is, that there can be several perpetrators of both genders, and that the victims can be both women and men, girls and boys. These formulations illustrate an ambivalence which has characterised, and still characterises, Swedish debate and research. Violence against immigrant girls: Is this an expression of the patriarchal violence which can strike women in general, or of a special, culturally based violence which strikes only “immigrant” girls – so called honour-related violence?

Conflicting values

The explanation of violence against “immigrant” girls as a “cultural” issue gradually started to become dominant in Swedish politics. At the same time, this special kind of



violence was described as the prime example of there being a conflict of values between what is “Swedish” and what is “non-Swedish”. This is shown by political scientist Maria Carbin in her recent doctoral thesis *Mellan tystnad och tal – flickor och hedersvåld i svensk offentlig politik* (Between Silence and Speaking: Girls and Honour Violence in Swedish Public Policy. 2010). She has studied the public discourse in Swedish politics in this area from the first so-called debate on honour-related killings in 1995 and up to 2008. Carbin analyses the negotiations that have been made on how this violence should be defined and explained, and she has a special focus on the portrayal of young immigrant women.

A policy of diversity was introduced in the 1990s in Sweden, emphasizing mutual change and tolerance across communities. At the same time, the murder of Fadime Sahindal resulted in a polarised debate on honour, violence and the “culture” of immigrants. Researchers played a prominent role in the debate. Carbin mentions, among others, the Norwegian scholar Unni Wilkan, who claimed that the murder of the young girl should be understood from a non-Western notion of honour and an ideology of honour. Others, such as Paulina de los Reyes (2003), strongly argued against using cultural explanations for violence. She said that this created a distinction of violence into “Swedish” and “non-Swedish”. Violence among immigrants was understood as specific to a culture, while violence among Swedes was dissociated from culture.

“Vulnerable girls”

These debates revealed how central a symbolic function the representation of the “immigrant” girl had in Swedish integration policies. “The actual integration policy is regarded as unsuccessful when it is discovered that society has failed to handle the situation of young women exposed to violence,” Carbin writes (2010:64).

In public documents cultural affiliation is ascribed a pivotal role and is linked to the

The problem with honour-related violence seems to be to find ways of making this type of violence visible without constructing it as separate from other forms of violence and thus stigmatising whole population groups.

oppression of women. One year after the murder of Fadime Sahindal, the Swedish government introduced measures against what they called “honour-related violence”. In parallel to this, fathers with a minority background were portrayed as bearers of patriarchal values and thus as those responsible for the violence. Gender equality is formulated as a Swedish value, which may be seen to be helping the integration of immigrants.

Structural discrimination

The new policy emphasized value-based differences between “immigrants” and “Swedes”, and it met with a lot of criticism. Those who criticised the programme underlined structural discrimination, where young girls were not primarily positioned as potential victims of violence, but rather as exposed to ethnic discrimination and prejudiced attitudes, Carbin summarises (2010:80). She also shows how the critics lost ground when the value-based policy was strengthened with the shift to a right-wing government in 2006.

However, the parallel discussion as to whether violence against minority women is different from violence against ethnically Swedish women continues: Can the reason for violence be found in culture and values, or is violence associated with gender, power and male dominance?

According to Carbin, what she calls the discourse of gendered power (Ibid:90), does not emphasize race/ethnicity, since it is an issue of a general power structure traversing

class and ethnicity and functioning “regardless of ethnicity”. The reason for violence is seen as being the same for all, and thus the situation of Other women does not need to be studied specifically. It is, so to say, a priori assumed that “immigrant” women are exposed to the same oppression as “Swedish” women.

Carbin notes that public policy has, during the right-wing government, shifted “from politics of similarity to politics of difference, from the relative lack of interest of the discourse of gendered power in the situation of girls to the great interest of the value discourse in particularly girls exposed to honour-related violence” (Ibid:114).

Immigrant boys – a double role

While young women are at the centre of Swedish policies and the survey of honour-related violence, “immigrant” boys have been ascribed a double role as both perpetrators and victims of the honour culture. Here, the government measures aim at a changing of attitudes; boys with a minority background should learn about gender equality and a correct way of behaviour in relation to their sisters and women in general.

Researcher Nils Hammarén has followed boys in so-called multi-cultural areas of Göteborg. In his doctoral thesis *Förorten i huvudet. Unga män om kön och sexualitet i det nya Sverige* (The suburb in one’s head. Young men on gender and sexuality in the new Sweden. 2008), Hammarén shows how the young men are influenced by the images presented in,



Schoolchildren in the National Day Parade in Oslo, Norway. Photo: Bosse Parbring

and played with these images in a construction of expressive and acting-out forms of masculinity.

Hammarén interprets this “suburban masculinity” as a compensatory revenge for the stigma they experience as having been ascribed to them. There were also manifestations of a contrasting behaviour of undercommunication of their “foreign” background, or solidarity with what they saw as the majority culture’s view of “immigrant” boys. According to Hammarén, forms of behaviour, expressions and style associated with the image of the “immigrant” boy, seemed to strengthen the feeling of many of the young boys of being in a less privileged position in Swedish society.

“The brother” – a repellent symbol

The issue of honour-related violence was raised in the interviews by the young men themselves, particularly in connection with the role of brothers in relation to their sisters. “The brother” then primarily appeared as a repellent symbol associated with the brother of a potential partner. Several of the young men protested against being placed in a category constructed in advance of “honour-related violent problem boys”.

Hammarén here points out that the problem with honour-related violence seems to be to find ways of making this type of violence visible without constructing it as separate from other forms of violence and thus stigmatising whole population groups. He thinks that the debate on honour-related violence runs a risk of contributing to the patriarchy being placed outside of the Swedish borders. The violence of “Swedes” against other “Swedes” is made invisible, while the control and violence of “immigrants” is culturalised.

Trine Lynggard is a writer and journalist with a Master’s degree in journalism. She was also the first editor of NIKK magasin.

among other places, the media of the “suburb” and of the young men living there. The problematisation of boys in these suburbs has increased with the political focus on cultures of honour, where these boys have been depicted as living in the shadow of their family’s and particularly their father’s patriarchal culture.

The most common notion of a boy with a minority background living in the suburbs is in terms synonymous with those of a person who is “dangerous” and “criminal” and defined as the masculine Other. The young men were familiar with these problematic images and in various ways had to take a stance on them, while they also made use of



No longer the best in the world

The socio-political debate, the attention paid to gender equality issues and pressure from the women's movement are crucial to progress in gender equality. This is one of the key results from NIKK's research project on gender and power in politics and business.

BY KIRSTI NISKANEN

NIKK was commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2008 to conduct a Nordic comparison of gender and power in politics and business. The project has identified and analyzed women's and men's representation in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and the autonomous territories of Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. What have we discovered?

A first observation is that it is no longer evident that the Nordic countries come out on top with regard to gender development in parliamentary representation. In a global perspective, a post-conflict country such as Rwanda, with a female majority in parliament (56 per cent), has overtaken all the Nordic countries (disregarding all other differences). Several countries in the Global South (South Africa, Argentina, Costa Rica), with over or just under 40 per cent female participation in parliaments, are approaching the Nordic countries (Dahlerup 2009). The previous Nordic comparison, *Likestillte demokratier?* ("Equal Democracies?") was published ten years ago. At that time, the representation of women in the Nordic parliaments was between 25 and 43 per cent, and the Nordic countries emerged as the region in the world with the greatest gender equality. Today, women constitute between 38 and 47 per cent of the MPs in the Nordic countries' parliaments, but it is no longer self-evident that the Nordic countries are best in class. Other countries are catching up and challenging the Nordic image as the world's most equal region.

Another observation in this project is that gender issues have not been resolved in the Nordic countries. The municipal sector is an example. Political representation in all the countries is less equal in local government than at the national level. The proportion of women local councillors varies between 32 per cent in Denmark and 42 per cent in Sweden. A look at management levels in local government gives a clear picture of how gender equality is lagging behind. There is a strong male dominance. In Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden between 70 and 80 per cent of the local councillors are men.

The crucial difference lies between positions that are highly visible and characterised by transparency, and the less visible positions where gender issues are not monitored as intensively, or not at all.

Diplomacy is a male dominated area, but there are some interesting changes underway. The proportion of female ambassadors (excl. ambassadors to international organizations) in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway has risen from very low levels (between 3 and 10 per cent in the mid-1990s) to around 15 per cent in Denmark and Iceland, and to almost 30 per cent in Finland and Norway. The Swedish figures also point in the same direction: the proportion of women heads of embassies and ambassadors in international agencies has increased from 10 to over 30 per cent since the mid-1990s. So the situation in the diplomatic service may be about to change. In Finland in the 2000s, women were over represented in the Foreign Ministry's training courses, and in Norway the gender balance among trainees been relatively steady in recent years.

The overall impression is, nevertheless, that the crucial difference lies between posi-

tions that are highly visible and characterised by transparency, such as parliamentary politics, and the less visible positions where gender issues are not monitored as intensively, or not at all.

Politics are helping business

Another important – but hardly surprising – result of the project is the continued male dominance in business. The project has focused on listed and state-owned companies and their management structures, but has not studied other Nordic businesses. As far as possible, the researchers also compared changes over time. While progress has been made, there are large differences between the countries.

Today there are between 7 and 36 per cent of women on the boards of listed companies, compared with 4-9 per cent in the late 1990s. The figures are higher in the public corporations, because they are generally influenced

Political representation

Share of **women**/men, in percentages

	Denmark	Iceland	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Government	47/53	40/60	60/40	50/50	46/54
Parliament	38/62	43/57	42/58	39/61	45/55
Municipalities	32/68	40/60	37/63	37/63	43/57

Quotas are a blunt instrument that should be carefully designed and safeguarded by rules that control its effects.

by the equality laws' provisions on gender parity of at least 40 per cent of each sex on the board and in senior management. There women now constitute between one quarter and just under half of the board members, against 20 to 30 per cent ten years ago. It is clear that politics contribute to more equality in business.

It is best in Norway where, helped by five years of quotas, the proportion of women on the boards of listed companies has risen to 36 per cent, from 9 per cent in 2004. Second best is Sweden, where the so-called code on corporate governance led to a rise in the proportion of women in the listed companies' boards to 19 per cent in 2008, from 4 per cent in the late 1990s.

But the picture is less bright, even in Norway and Sweden, if you look at the entire management structure in listed companies. There is a shortage of women in CEO positions and in management teams. The conclusion is that although the gender debate started in the business world and it has been a hot mass media issue at times, and although state-owned corporations led the way, there is still a long way to go before we really start seeing results in the private sector. Gender equality measures in business are often - with the exception of ASA, the Norwegian quota - aimed at increasing the number of female applicants for management positions. It remains to be seen when the business community will begin to demand women managers, in the same way as the political world does today (Göransson 2009).

So far - but no further!

Parliamentary politics in the Nordic region is a gender equality success story, based on the assumption that a proportion of 40-60 per cent from each gender constitutes balanced representation. The Nordic governments are also relatively gender-balanced, as is the proportion of women and men in parliamentary committees and most other parliamentary leadership positions. There are now female party leaders in every country - even in some of the major parties - and we have



WOMEN ON BOARDS

7-36%

of the members of the boards of listed companies are women.

GENDER BALANCE

40%

of each sex is the goal of a gender balanced representation. But shouldn't we be striving for a 50-50 representation of either sex, before we can consider there is gender balanced representation?

seen women ministers in the traditionally male-dominated posts such as defence, economic and business affairs, as well as foreign policy. State companies, and the Norwegian ASA companies, are the vanguard of increased gender equality in business.

The gender problem in these fields is about systematic, but more subtle, differences. There are women and men in different functions and positions. It is most common that men are over represented and women are under represented in policy areas such as defence, and economic and business affairs. The opposite applies to areas such as social affairs, culture, education and gender equality. An example can be taken from parliamentary committees. If you look at the gender composition of committees on the basis that women constitute 50 per cent or more of the committee members, we see that social functions such as culture and education are almost always women's issues. On the other hand prestigious areas such as economic and business affairs are dominated by men.

Horizontal gender division of labour in business is difficult to chart. However, our preliminary results suggest that the higher proportion of women in senior positions is primarily found in financial and service companies, and in the health services. Previous research also shows that men are over represented and women are under represented in middle management during recruitment for CEO positions (Göransson 2009).

It is important to draw attention to this kind of horizontal division of labour. Some researchers argue that women's over representation in political social functions can be seen as an expression of their wishes (Dahlerup 2009 Wägnerud 1999). Others argue that there is no indication that women are not willing to take their place in the most prestigious positions in committee hierarchy (Holli-Saari 2009:41). In a large European comparison of 27 countries no statistical difference between men's and women's preferences in the selection of the committee was found. The highest ranked primary elections

Could we imagine a situation where 70-80-90 per cent of women are in senior positions, as it has always been for men?

were the same for both sexes: international politics, economics and fiscal policy (Drew 2000:61). This area requires further research.

In any case, one has to ask whether there is gender balanced representation in areas where women are always closer to 40 per cent and men are closer to the 60 per cent limit. Shouldn't we be striving for at least a 50-50 representation of either sex, before we can consider there is gender balanced representation? And is half women half men the new limit? Could we imagine a situation where 70-80-90 per cent of women are in senior positions, as it has always been for men, without attracting attention?

What promotes equality?

One of the project's main findings is that the socio-political debate, coverage of gender issues and pressure from the women's movement is crucial to progress in gender equality. The project results show that the laws (in Sweden recommendations) which, since the late 1980s, proposed gender balanced representation on public boards, committees and boards have been effective. Similarly, pressure from women's organizations and feminist debaters since the 1970s and 1980s, more or less forced the political parties to review their internal party democracy and nomination practices.

The parties play a key role in the development of political representation – and this applies not only to women but also representation according to ethnic, LGBT, age issues etc. – since the parties nominate the candidates that voters can vote for and place them on elective or non-elective seats on their lists.

Business autonomy

Party quotas (quotas on parties' internal bodies) and candidate quotas have been introduced by the centre and leftwing parties in all countries, except Finland. (In Denmark the quotas were put into practice by two parties but abolished quickly.) Competition between the political parties and the gender debates resulting from these measures have, in their turn, forced the entire political spec-

trum to respond to and take an active position on representation issues.

Similar pressure from the women's movement has not taken place for election to the boards of private companies. Consideration for business autonomy and respect for personal independence has set the framework for the gender discussion (Teigen 2009).

In Sweden, the gender development we have seen in the private sector is the result of the performance codes presented in 2004, which stipulate that companies should aim for balanced representation on the boards. So far this has met with moderate success.

Are quotas the solution?

Quotas in various forms have proven to be an effective door opener for more even distribution of power. But is it a panacea? Research demonstrates quite clearly that this is not the case. Mari Teigen shows that the Norwegian ASA quotas were imposed by the then conservative government under special circumstances when the government's legitimacy in gender issues was somewhat eroded and when changes in business structure played an important role. When the problem of gender issues in business was under discussion and they were few good solutions, it was easy to lean up against the Norwegian quota tradition. Political science quota research also shows that the statutory quotas are a blunt instrument that should be carefully designed and safeguarded by rules that control its effects.

Is the Nordic region good at gender equality? The gender and power project shows that it is possible for women today to reach top positions in Nordic society, more so in parliamentary politics than in other areas. The project has not examined other aspects of social representation, such as ethnic background, age, disability, etc. An intersectional perspective would give rise to other types of power studies.

Kirsti Niskanen is Professor of History at Stockholm University and former Research Director at NIKK.

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Gender quotas for executive boards in Iceland

No quota law without crisis

When the law on joint stock companies was revised in the wake of the Icelandic financial collapse, the feminists of the Althing saw their chance. They seized the moment and added a paragraph on mandatory gender quotas for executive boards.

BY JENNIE WESTLUND

Homogeneity, friendships and close connections between trade executives became a decisive factor in the Icelandic financial breakdown. This is evident in several reports produced with a view to finding out what went wrong and preventing it from happening again (see article above). One of the recurrent demands has been increased transparency and variation within the upper strata of the business world. The demand for an increased share of women in private enterprise management became easier to voice.

Hildur Jónsdóttir is expert on gender equality at the prime minister's chancellery. She feels that an unmistakable gender perspective has been present within public discourse since the collapse.

“To cut a long story short: the view that a male norm – entailing the exaggerated risk taking, nepotism and even sexism that fostered the kind of behaviour leading to the collapse – has been widely supported. One way of repairing and regenerating trust after



The position of women within the private sector has been very weak.

– HILDUR JÓNSDÓTTIR,
GENDER EXPERT

the crash has been to increase the share of women in the private sector.”

Road paved for gender quotas

“The position of women within the private sector has been very weak. Compared to e.g. politics and the public sector, this is the area where Icelandic gender equality has enjoyed the least progress”, says Hildur Jónsdóttir. She recalls that already 7–8 years ago, the then responsible minister declared that an act on gender quotas would have to be passed if things failed to improve.

But despite all the discussions and pushing for change, no act on gender quotas was passed. Then came the crisis.

In the summer of 2009, i.e. in the wake of the collapse, independent Minister of Economic Affairs Gylfi Magnússon proposed to revise the law on joint stock companies. The purpose was to increase corporate transparency by e.g. demanding full accounts of ownership and suffrage and emphasising the importance of their role to executive chairmen.



Gender quotas did not figure on the minister's agenda. However, it did on that of others. Seeing that the current law was to be revised anyway, it was time to strike while the iron was hot.

Seizing the moment

"When the proposal first came up in the Althing, we were debating whether to take the opportunity to include gender quotas, but time was scarce", says MP of the reigning Left-Green Movement Lilja Mósésdóttir.

The proposal was discussed a second time in October 2009. In the meantime, Lilja Mósésdóttir had been elected spokesperson of the Althing Commerce Committee which was to consider the proposal.

"I was well-acquainted with the discussion and Norwegian legislation on the matter and decided to find a solution as to how to go about this and ultimately pass the proposal. I received a lot of support from others, within the committee as well as among other MPs, including men", she says.

In March 2010, the Althing passed the new law on joint stock companies with a paragraph on gender quotas within executive boards, making it more comprehensive than the Norwegian model. It does not apply to companies listed on the stock exchange only, but to all companies with more than 50 employees. In total, this means approximately 350 companies.

"In light of the Norwegian experiences, it was deemed necessary that the act also apply to minor private enterprises, the so-called limited companies. The Norwegian act does not, and it is estimated that this type of business has become more prevalent because of gender quotas", says Lilja Mósésdóttir.

No law without crisis

The act saw the light of day only two years after legislation on gender quotas in state-driven companies was passed. It was a rapid development. The question remains, however, whether there would have been an act on gender quotas if it had not been for the crisis.

Resigned after the financial collapse. Iceland's former Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde, is now facing impeachment. Photo: Johannes Jansson/norden.org

"No, I doubt that there would have", Hildur Jónsdóttir muses. But as she points out, the collapse also led to a political shift.

Crisis and turbulence do not automatically entail any opportunities for new actors and women to get on board and take over. According to Hildur Jónsdóttir, the Icelandic collapse led to a fierce power struggle behind the scenes where the involved parties defended their positions and tried to rescue themselves in various ways. According to 2009 statistics, the share of women on executive boards decreased. Despite expectations of the opposite, the number of women on the boards of newly established businesses dropped after the bank collapse.

The political shift, then, turned out to be as important as the crisis itself.

To Lilja Mósesdóttir, the act is an example of how far one can get once one is in power.

“Thanks to the many feminists within the Althing, we managed to include the regulation on gender quotas. They’re not only present in the Commerce Committee.”

Critical entrepreneurs

FKA, the Icelandic association of female entrepreneurs, however, were critical. They resisted gender quotas. Approximately a year before the act was hammered home, FKA, the Icelandic employers’ association SA and the Chamber of Commerce as well as representatives from all political parties in the Althing signed an agreement that by 2013 at the latest, each gender must be represented by a minimum of 40 percent on executive boards.

“FKA referred to the agreement we signed and believed that quotas would go against it. Statistics, however, showed something else.



Inspired by Norway. “I decided to find a solution as to how to go about this and ultimately pass the proposal”, says Lilja Mósesdóttir. Photo: Bosse Parbring

The share of women on executive boards decreased in 2009. Hence, we decided to legislate on the matter”, says Lilja Mósesdóttir.

“But within the committee, we tried to compromise with the FKA arguments. For this reason the act won’t take effect until 2013, which is also when the agreement will expire. It’s longer than e.g. the Norwegian companies had available to achieve gender-equal boards.”

The current wording of the act does not prescribe sanctions against businesses failing to meet the quota requirements. Lilja Mósesdóttir blames lack of time to include that in the statutory text this time round.

“However, I read that one of the recommendations in the research report recently presented (see article below) is to introduce sanctions. So we’ll start working on that now”, Lilja Mósesdóttir concludes.

Jennie Westlund is adviser at NIKK

Nation-centric masculinity ideals and the Icelandic bank collapse

“To genes, money and the future!” The quote is ascribed to an Icelandic tycoon in 2006. At the same time, it is the title of a presentation on a gender-theoretical account of the reasons for the decline and fall of the Icelandic financial sector.

BY ERLA SIGURDARDÓTTIR

In the report, gender scholars Dr. Þorgerður Einarsdóttir and Dr. Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir give an account of the ways in which hegemonic masculinity and nation-centric masculinity ideals influenced the ideology

behind the events leading to the Icelandic financial sector’s breakdown in 2008.

It is no secret that the ideology spawning the financial bubble was characterised by masculine values. As the Icelandic bank sector collapsed in the autumn of 2008, many people called for “feminine values” supposedly capable of salvaging the country from utter ruin. Women were more or less absent in the financial leapfrog, but in the midst of the chaos it remained unclear what exactly those coveted “feminine values” were.

A new chapter

On April 12, 2010, the Althing’s special commission of inquiry, led by Supreme Court Judge Páll Hreinsson, presented a comprehensive report on the background and reasons for the Icelandic financial collapse. Subse-

quently, a commission of MPs – assigned to draft proposals based on the conclusions of the report – ordered a gender-theoretical summary.

“The gender-theoretical elucidation marks a new chapter in the Icelandic gender equality debates”, says commission chair Atli Gíslason (Left-Green Movement) and adds that the gender-theoretical summary of the report was crucial to an improved understanding of how things could go so wrong.

Hegemonic masculinity

According to the authors, the economic politics leading to the collapse had an indirect gender perspective. Heavy industry, tax politics and housing politics favoured men at the expense of the female population. Moreover, the financial sector was governed by a



Photo: Colourbox

Greenlandic quota debate

Gender quotas within executive boards are also a topic in Greenland. Minister for Equal Opportunities Maliina Abelsen has participated actively in the debate and would like to see measures ensuring that also the competences of women are utilised within Greenlandic business management. A member of the left-wing party Inuit Ataqatigiit – in power since 2009 – has presented a proposal in the Landsting which suggests gender quotas within governing

boards. The proposal comprises the boards of the large self-governing institutions rather than the private enterprises.

“In a Greenlandic context, it seems natural to focus on the entirely or partly publicly owned companies, seeing that they’re by far the largest and most important in Greenland”, says Torben Weyhe, official within the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The debate is still fairly new, and so far no work is being done on any concrete law text.

small homogenous group of men rewarding each other on the grounds of subjective evaluations.

Icelandic men’s superiority

When banks were privatised in 1998–2002, the party leaders of the government in power shared the booty between their favourites. Non-transparent skill requirements seemed custom-made for the desired candidates. The scholars account for the ways in which the laissez-faire ideology and mindset of privatisation were characterised by cultural notions of a masculinity that came to play the starring role in the continued development.

“Nation-centric masculinity ideals about Icelandic men’s superiority helped justify the ever-escalating development”, Þorgerður Einarsdóttir explains. She points out that not only bankers, but also rulers supported this ideology. Ministers, and even the president, talked of tycoon intuition and brilliance in line with hegemonic masculinity.

The actors’ mutual competition concomitant with their looking out for each other’s

interests played a major role on the banking sector outgrowing every reasonable proportion.

“Important consultations and decisions were made in informal networks between ministers and bankers who were often each other’s neighbours or former classmates”, Þorgerður Einarsdóttir continues. “Democratic rules of the game, such as formal meetings and minutes, were either insufficient or non-existent.”

Risk of ruin or foolhardiness

The self-created myth of the Icelandic bankers’ competence and superiority, grounded in a pristine Viking spirit of yore, helped justify their astronomical wages. In other countries, people were questioning the Icelandic foolhardiness which had to do with lack of knowledge and experience. Hence, they did not compete with the Icelandic highest bidders expanding their territory abroad.

At the same time, bankers looked out for one another’s interests by granting themselves and each other unfathomable loans to allow the pyramid game to continue. Men

were starring in this game, while relatively few women were supporting actresses, most often as trophy wives.

Active use of legislation

The gender-theoretical summary of the report of investigation will result in 11 concrete proposals concerning how legislation and gender mainstreaming may facilitate moving forward and avoid past mistakes where men look out for each other’s best interests via informal and non-transparent networks.

Among other things, the scholars suggest that authorities make sure that enterprises abide by the laws regarding gender representation on boards of joint-stock companies – and consider sanctions if rules are not observed. Gender mainstreaming in public administration would ensure that both genders have equal access to information and decision-making processes.

Erla Sigurdardóttir is freelance journalist

Women in the western part of the Nordic region depend heavily on family ties and romantic relationships as well as on the fact that the welfare system regards them as family members rather than individuals.

BY GUÐBJÓRG LINDA RAFNSDÓTTIR

Women and welfare in the West Nordic region

Family

A place of safety or oppression?

Despite the fact that the West Nordic countries are regrettably rarely included in comparative studies on Nordic welfare, and that it is difficult to achieve funding for West Nordic research exclusively, it is a well-known issue that the welfare system in the West Nordic region in many ways differs from that of the rest of the Nordic region.

For instance there is a difference in the way that the question of gender equality and social security has been handled in the West Nordic region as opposed to the other Nordic countries. In certain contexts the West Nordic countries are intimately linked when it comes to welfare and living conditions. In other contexts, however, the countries have faced different challenges, and they have applied different solutions to the welfare issue.

In the northern peripheral regions, women have gone away more so than men. This is true not only for the West Nordic countries, but also for the peripheries of e.g. Norway, Sweden and Finland. Various sources have pointed out that especially young women

who leave the peripheral areas often find it difficult to move back. The labour market is characterised as masculine, the educational opportunities are limited, the debate on gender equality is insufficiently developed, and the welfare offers accommodating the needs of women and families are scarce. As a consequence, the share of women in the West Nordic countries is lower than the share of men, whereas it is the other way around in the other Nordic countries. This is true especially for Greenland and the Faroe Islands as well as for some parts of Iceland.

Responsibility for household

Women's workforce participation in the West Nordic region is more frequent than in the other Nordic countries. At the same time, however, the gender-based unequal pay seems to be more pronounced. Women in the western part of the Nordic region have more children, but generally public welfare has had less to offer parents than in the eastern region. Besides working more and having more children, West Nordic women also

assume the daily responsibility for household and family more often than their East Nordic counterparts. This is also the case for Icelandic women despite the 9 months parental leave in Iceland, of which three are reserved for fathers, and Iceland ranking highest on the "Gender Gap Index" 2009.

This became evident in e.g. the book *Velfærd, arbejde og helse i Vestnorden* (Welfare, work and health in the West Nordic region). Appearing in 2007, it features West Nordic researchers' writing on welfare from different perspectives.

However, more concrete facts about the West Nordic region are necessary, such as figures on gender ratio, and we also need more thorough analyses of e.g. the distribution of power and how women and men in the West Nordic region define their quality of life, their life context.

Taking the above as its point of departure, the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Gender Equality launched the project *Kvinder og velfærd i Vestnorden* (Women and welfare in the West Nordic region). The project analyses



official information and features focus group interviews with five differently compiled groups of women in each country. Each group contains five women on average. All in all we have interviewed 75 women.

The five focus groups have been compiled based on the following criteria:

- Married/co-habiting women with children aged less than 12 years
- Women with no children – other marital status
- Single women with children
- Women educated abroad
- Women with no vocational training

The interviews involved interview forms with questions regarding the following issues:

- Why do women move away – or why do they fail to move back?
- What does a good life look like to contemporary young women in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland? What do the women interviewed identify as necessary in order to achieve a good life in these countries? How do they define the concept of quality of life?

We asked questions about the public sector – the welfare system. How can the public sector support younger women and families in making a good life for themselves in the respective countries? What public rights/services most aptly support the balancing between work life and family life? What public rights are the most important ones to achieve gender equality? What do the women interviewed identify as prerequisites for the promotion of gender equality and equal pay in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland? And the interviewed women defined gender equality.

Reliance on the extended family

The interviews with the 75 West Nordic women show both differences and similarities. They are characterised by a reliance on the extended family until now prevalent in the West Nordic countries when it comes to various welfare solutions and political questions pertaining to family issues. Intimate relations to family and friends turn out to be a leitmotif in the interviews, and important-

Family Paradox. *Close relationships with family and friends are a common thread in the interviews. But the women feel that this so-called familism also suppresses many women because it makes them stuck in old gender roles.* Photo: Scanpix

ly, the women point to these relations as capable of establishing a comfortable and desired feeling of safety.

But the interviews also reveal a paradox: the women feel that the so-called familism also oppresses a lot of women because it ties them to old gender roles. They carry the main responsibility for the family – household, children, extended family, in-laws etc.

The interviews display an interesting paradox between the women's entitlement to independence and security, between women's liberation and wanting to support the extended family, between wanting to live in the country where one has one's roots; in a country that one loves – but on the other hand desiring to live in a country allowing more anonymity and opportunity to be "oneself"

in a different way than at home. We see certain paradoxes suggesting that the best aspects of living in the West Nordic region are also what the women find most oppressive.

As a consequence, unfortunately a great deal of the gender equality struggle does not take place in public, but predominantly within the extended family, between four walls and not least perhaps only within the women themselves.

Many formal systems are weak in the West Nordic region, and public institutions do not always meet the women's demands and interests as far as political questions pertaining to the family are concerned.

This means that women as individuals depend heavily on family ties and romantic relationships as well as on the fact that the welfare system regards them as family members rather than individuals. This problematic is most conspicuous for single mothers in the Faroe Islands and Greenland. In brief, they have to rely on financial and social support from the family.

Control over one's own time

Women in all of the West Nordic countries express the opinion that women move in order to improve their educational opportunities, get internships and jobs – and also to stand on their own two feet. All the West Nordic women believe that the right to parental leave of absence when a child is sick should be extended. They also agreed that an extended parental leave for men and women is the most important factor to achieve gender equality.

Lack of power over one's own time was a very dominant discourse among all the West Nordic groups of women. The explanations were structural as well as subjective. Among the structural reasons long hours, low pay and high birth rate were mentioned. Among the subjective reasons they mentioned inequality between the sexes in work life as well as in the home and the hyping of paid labour.

The West Nordic women's descriptions of a more efficient and sustained welfare sys-



Photo: Rosse Parbring

A great deal of the gender equality struggle does not take place in public, but predominantly within the extended family, between four walls and not least perhaps only within the women themselves.

tem turned out to be quite identical. They emphasised that the welfare system ought to even out men and women's job opportunities as well as provide equal opportunity on a more general level. The women pointed out that gender-based unequal pay created a general inequality, determined the division of labour in the home and perpetuated traditional gender stereotypes.

The discussion on social control caused by small populations and compromised anonymity was also a dominant discourse. This social control makes it difficult to break free from e.g. traditional gender roles. But it is an interesting paradox in this discourse because the women also find safety in living in the West Nordic region precisely because of the small populations – people in the West Nordic countries stick up for each other in a way that they would not in places with millions of inhabitants.

Next step interviewing men

I hope that the book *Kvinder og velfærd i Vestnorden* (Women and welfare in the West

Nordic region), published in all the West Nordic languages and Danish, will become an important contribution to a better understanding of welfare and gender equality in the West Nordic region as well as potential beneficial solutions. The project should be seen as a mapping out of welfare and gender equality in the contemporary West Nordic countries and the challenges they face. But not least, it should also be seen as an important contribution to the development of future welfare and gender equality and a platform of continued research and action within the field of welfare and gender. The scope of this small project did not allow us to interview men. The next step will thus be to interview men on welfare and gender equality in the same way that we did women.

Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir is Professor of Sociology at the University of Iceland and editor of the report *Kvinder og velfærd i Vestnorden* (Women and welfare in the West Nordic region). The report is available for download at www.norden.org.

STEFAN WALLIN Minister of Gender Equality Affairs

Stefan Wallin is Minister of Gender Equality Affairs in Finland. 2011 Finland is chairing the Nordic Council of Ministers.



A worthwhile investment

Controlling climate change and developing sustainable solutions have been selected as the themes for the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers next year.

Gender differences may be found in behaviour and choices in areas such as traffic, consumption, diet and waste handling. If we know, for example, that women form the majority of users of public transport, we can focus on men in our efforts to promote the use of public transport. If we know that men are better at recycling waste, we can seek to train women to do so, too.

The gender equality sector seeks to identify and improve gender-sensitive solutions as part of the curbing of and adaptation to climate change. In this, we need further information on correlations between gender and sustainable development and climate change. This information will help us discover better and more lasting solutions to the problems we face.

In the area of gender equality, this Presidency will introduce a new Nordic cooperation programme for gender equality for the next four years. This will help diversify cooperation on gender equality between the Nordic countries. The four principal themes of the programme are the labour market, training, ethnic minorities and gender-based violence. Mainstreaming the gender viewpoint and considering the male perspective in gender equality policy are the overarching themes of the programme.

The labour market and training are traditional gender equality themes: in these areas, we find attitudes and other obstacles hindering the career progress of women and their full participation in working life. As the population is ageing and the number of taxpayers decreasing in the Nordic countries, it will be interesting to see how the gender equality viewpoint will be featured in the public debate on extending working careers.

Ethnic minorities and gender-based violence represent a more modern brand of gender equality policy, even though the problems addressed here are by no means new. Ethnic minorities are also subject to multiple discrimination, which sometimes makes it difficult to process matters in our occasionally somewhat one-track government administration. Violence, on the other hand, must always be condemned in any shape or form.

The cooperation programme also highlights the male theme, which is highly topical in Finland and in the Nordic countries in general. The gender equality problems faced by women have not been fully solved – far from it, if we consider the situation globally. However, we remain convinced that it is also necessary to strengthen the male viewpoint in gender policy and to encourage men to take up gender equality aspects in their own matters as well as in matters concerning women. Gender equality policy is about genuine attempts of women and men to establish equality together.

Nordic gender equality policy is of worldwide interest. We consistently rank at the top of various equality surveys, and we are consulted on how to build an effective gender equality policy. Although solutions implemented in one country rarely work in others without modification, we are more than happy to help if others wish to draw on our experiences and adapt our tools for their use.

Of course, we still have a lot to do ourselves, and we have a lot to learn from other countries, too. However, the Nordic countries present a clear message: gender equality is a worthwhile investment, as it is a vital factor in the success and wellbeing of a nation; perhaps even the precondition for it.



Arnat amerlanerit
persuttartillutik toqusarput
kræfteqarnerminngaanniit

Flere kvinder
dør af vold end af
kræft

Photo: Kistaraq E. Jensen

Campaign picture from the 8th March Group in Greenland. Design: Kistaraq E. Jensen

Men's violence against women in the West Nordic region

Hard to move in rural areas

Every other Icelandic woman has been beaten and nearly a quarter of women have experienced domestic violence, according to a major new study of Icelandic men's violence against women.

BY BOSSE PARBRING

A new Icelandic study of male violence against women was presented by Kristín Ástgeirsdóttir, Director of the Icelandic Centre for Gender Equality, Jafnréttisstofa, at a West Nordic conference on 2 September in Ilulissat in Greenland.

2500 Icelandic women were interviewed in a quantitative part, while social workers, doctors, nurses, midwives, heads of schools, family lawyers, the police and NGOs were interviewed on how they meet women who have been victims of violence. The survey was conducted by the Research Centre for Child and Family Protection at the University of Iceland.

According to the study, 42 per cent of all women in Iceland have experienced some sort of violence after the age of 16. Four per cent of them have experienced violence in the past year.

22 percent have experienced domestic violence at some time in their lives. 1.6 per cent have suffered from violence in the past year. This represents 1800 women in Iceland, which is significantly more than the 1100 women who said the same thing in a study in 1996.

26 per cent of the women who had experienced domestic violence said that they were in danger of their lives, and 41 per cent of them were physically injured. Only 13 per cent contacted the police.

Five per cent were pregnant and in 24 per cent of the cases there were children present.

Among the various professional groups that meet women who have been victims of violence, there are considerable gaps of knowledge, according to Kristín Ástgeirsdóttir.

"Groups at risk do not get the attention they require," she says.

This applies to pregnant women, elderly women, disabled women and women from a non-Nordic ethnic background.

"Children are also exposed to considerable risk, both as victims and as witnesses to violence in their homes," says Kristín Ástgeirsdóttir.

The study calls for training for all professionals involved and action plans for men's violence against women in all levels of society. Only the work of NGOs is totally accep-



Inge Olsvig Brandt and Kathrine Bødker (to the left) and Jonna Ketwa (to the right). Photo: Bosse Parbring



ted. These organisations also take the greatest responsibility for women and children affected by violence.

Break the taboo on violence

In Greenland the 8th March Group held several high-profile demonstrations against men's violence against women. Through various campaigns, they have managed to draw attention to an issue that has previously been unspoken.

"Violence has been taboo," says Kathrine Bødker of the 8th March Group. But now there are more and more women coming forward and talking about the violence they have suffered.

A major demonstration this past winter following the death of a woman was attended by several older women who showed physical signs that they had also been beaten by men.

"They walk with us in demonstrations and we are also approached by men who use violence," said Inge Olsvig Brandt, who works for the Council of Gender Equality in Greenland.

The number of cases reported has risen sharply in recent years, but the housing shortage in Greenland is still a major problem. Women who have been beaten by men they live with are stuck in relationships because it can take up to 20 years to get a new home.

"In Nuuk many people live in staff housing which is tied to the man's workplace," says Kathrine Bødker. These women have nowhere to go. Women think of their children first. If they cannot find a new home the children will have problems.

"There is no freedom of movement for women," says Inge Olsvig Brandt. The housing shortage helps to keep women as victims.

The small isolated communities of Greenland are also a problem. It is difficult to seek support and help when everybody knows

everybody. Moving to another village to escape the violence is not easy either.

"A woman cannot just move to another town. It takes a lot of resources," says Inge Olsvig Brandt.

The 8th March Group would like to see greater support on many different levels for women who have been victims of violence. Psychologist Jonna Ketwa, who also took part in the conference, has met many women and children who have been victims of violence and sexual assault in her work. She also deals with convicted offenders. She can see a common trait among the men.

"Many have been victims of violence and have seen violence," says Jonna Ketwa. It has become the norm for them. They distance themselves from their own violence, but what they have been exposed to before overshadows their actions.

Men believe that they have trouble controlling their women. They use violence when they experience jealousy and powerlessness. Alcohol is sometimes involved, but not always.

"It's a myth that alcohol always needs to be involved," says Jonna Ketwa.

Change of attitude

When men undergo therapy they process partly their own trauma and partly go through a change of attitude in which they learn to resolve conflicts in ways other than through violence.

"Many Greenlanders say that it takes two to fight. Women are said to exert psychological terror and the men respond with violence."

"However, society must stress that violence is not acceptable and that violence has consequences," says Jonna Ketwa.

Research news

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NORWAY

Inspiration for promoting gender balance within the research sector

"Talent at stake. Changing the culture of research – gender-sensitive leadership" is designed to inspire everyone who wants to do something to increase diversity and promote greater gender balance within the research sector.

"We must do everything in our power to address the challenges of gender balance today in order to shape the gender-equal society of tomorrow," says Minister of Research and Higher Education Tora Aasland in the preface of "Talent at stake". The booklet has been published by the Committee for Gender Balance in Research, appointed by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. In "Talent at stake" you will find interviews with leaders at various institutions and in a variety of research communities who have confronted the gender equality challenge and made a difference. Letters from university rectors who present their experience with successful gender equality measures are also included. Professor Øystein Gullvåg Holter has contributed with an article on gender equality and the modernisation of academic organisations. "Talent at stake" also presents measures for solving specific problems, facts, statistics and more. The editors are Linda M. Rustad and Anne Winsnes Rødland. More information: <http://eng.kifinfo.no>.



NORWAY

An all-out effort for women



Photo: Göteborg University

The Research Council of Norway is planning a large-scale initiative to increase the recruitment of women to high-level positions and research management.

"Following the EU ruling in 2003 that prohibited the earmarking of positions for women, we have been rather cautious about developing new measures to improve the gender balance in Norwegian research. Now we want Norway to move forward on this issue," says Lise Christensen, Senior Adviser at the Research Council of Norway.

"We would like to see an initiative that runs for a seven-year period – from 2012 to 2018 – and has a start-up budget of NOK 25 million in the first year," says Lise Christensen.

The Research Council is currently considering a three-part approach to the challenge of recruiting more women.

1) A grant scheme to assist female researchers with obtaining qualifications beyond the post-doctoral level. This scheme could also help to stimulate mobility between academia and the business sector, both nationally and internationally.

2) Activities to increase the proportion of women in research management and to strengthen research directors' expertise in gender-equality leadership.

3) An effort to learn more about the mechanisms that influence women's decision to drop out of the research sector rather than pursue upper-level positions. Research projects, seminars and network-building will be employed to gain more knowledge about this area.

The focus on recruiting women should serve as a source of inspiration as well as a stimulus to ensure that the other funding instruments and programmes under the Research Council incorporate a gender perspective.

"We award just under NOK 7 billion each year, so it is crucial that the gender perspective is visible when we design programmes and activities. To achieve this better than we do today, I think we need a powerful catalyst and we will get such a catalyst with the new initiative."

ANNE WINSNES RØDLAND

Gender Balance in Research
<http://eng.kifinfo.no>



SOLVEIG BERGMAN

D.Soc.Sc. and Director of NIKK

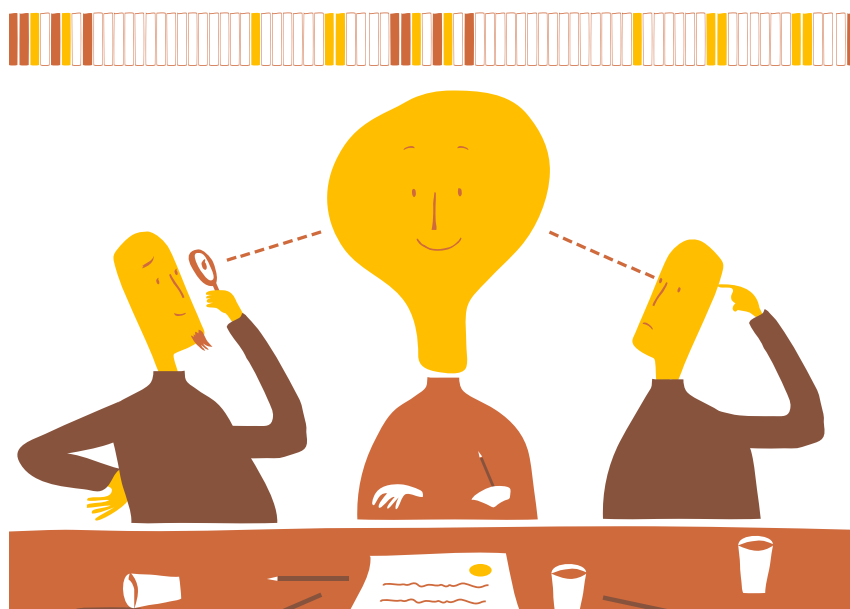
Strong research needed for social change

The knowledge basis of Nordic gender equality policies lies in research work carried out in the universities and scientific institutions as well as in statistics.

When the new debate on gender and equality started in the 1960s, it was itself stimulated primarily by novel research results and theoretical thinking concerning the social and cultural nature of gender and thus also its mutability. During the recent decades, feminist research has equipped political decision-making with important research findings and has been essential in the development and renewal of gender equality policies in the Nordic countries.

Strong and critical gender research is needed for social change. Practically every research project containing a gender perspective – from teenagers' media consumption to studies of globalisation – generates knowledge that can be seen as relevant for achieving equality between women and men. Some projects may have a more immediate societal relevance, such as research on violence against women or men's health. Yet, in a more indirect sense also research on, for example, the construction of masculinities or discourses of the family can have high societal and cultural relevance. In all Nordic countries we find examples of how gender research has influenced policy-making and social innovations, from fathers' quotas in parental leave legislation to campaigns for female leadership or policies combatting the wage gap between women and men. Recent government reports, for example, about men and equality in Norway and gender equality in Finland, were largely influenced by gender research.

The connection between feminist scho-



larship and political interests favouring gender equality is sometimes problematic. Gender research is not necessarily gender equality work, and should not be regarded as a simple tool for a certain kind of politics. All too often these two fields are confused with one another. The theoretical development of the field might have distanced some of its traditional allies. Several activists, politicians and femocrats say that they are losing interest in gender research. They claim that feminist theory has become much too esoteric, much too difficult to comprehend and much too disconnected from practice and everyday life. On the other hand, some feminist researchers express scepticism and cautiousness about political gender equality work and do not wish to tie their research to pre-structured

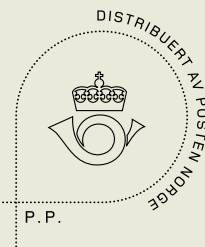
frames, utilitarian benefit-thinking and political pragmatism.

In order to bridge this widening gap, gender research and equality work need to gain mutual benefit from each others' experiences. Dialogue between academics and practitioners as well as moves to create common platforms is important at both national, Nordic and European level. For example, the recently founded European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the new European professional association for gender researchers (AtGender) could usefully establish cooperation and plan common initiatives in order to strengthen both gender equality policies and gender research across the continent. In the Nordic region, we have several examples of "good practices" that we can refer to in this respect.

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20.01

**Remaking Citizenship: Women's Movements,
Gender, Diversity**
Oslo, Norway
www.femcit.org

01.02

**Gender, Climate Change and Sustainable
Development**
Side event at the Nordic conference Solutions.
Turku, Finland
www.solutions2011.fi

11-13.02

Gender in the Nordic Countries
Nordic Summer University
Copenhagen, Denmark
www.nsuweb.net

08.03

**6th European Symposium on Gender & ICT:
Feminist Interventions in Theories and Practices**
Umeå, Sweden
<http://gict2011.informatik.umu.se>

09-10.3

**Nordic Challenges, Future Possibilities:
Gender Awareness in Schools and
Teacher Education**
Jyväskylä, Finland
www.hotelzon.com/fi/confedent/nera2011

03-07.07

Women's Worlds 2011
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Ottawa-Gatineau, Canada
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