

Doing and becoming : women's movements and women's personhood in Iceland, 1870-1990 / Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir.

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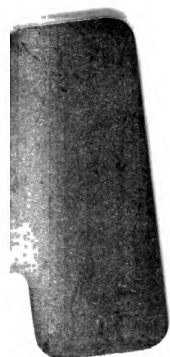
DOING & BECOMING

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND WOMEN'S
PERSONHOOD IN ICELAND 1870-1990



Social Science Research Institute

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Doing and Becoming

Women's Movements and Women's

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Doing and Becoming

Women's Movements and Women's
Personhood in Iceland 1870 - 1990

Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir



Doing and Becoming

Women's Movements and Women's
Personhood in Iceland 1870 - 1990

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PREFACE

This study of Icelandic women's movements was presented as a doctoral dissertation in social anthropology at the University of Rochester, New York, in 1990. It examines women's rights activities in Iceland from their emergence in 1870 until 1990 when the study was completed. Since then several events have taken place in Icelandic women's rights activities which I would like to note briefly and connect to the thesis put forward in this study.

The women's slaters, dealt with in the third and last part of the study, have continued their activities, placed slates in elections and had women elected to the Althing and municipal governments. Since 1990, however, they have suffered a downward swing in their votes. In the 1987 general elections the Women's Slates obtained 10.1% of the vote and six members elected to the Althing. In the 1991 general elections they obtained 8.3% of the vote and five members elected to the Althing, and in 1995 their vote was down to 4.9%, the lowest ever, and three elected members.

There are several reasons for this failure to appeal to the electorate. I shall name a few, but doubtless there are others. Changes in the political context, especially in the number and prominence of women politicians is one. In the 1995 general elections women lead a number of the election-slates put forward by political parties. Such leadership is generally considered conducive towards becoming a cabinet minister and is therefore a venue towards executive political power. In the same general elections a political party, a split-off from the Social Democrats, was for the first time led by a woman. Also in 1995, albeit after the general elections, another political party, the People's Alliance, elected a woman as chairman. Women were thus not only being elected to representative positions in much greater numbers than before the Slates' advent in 1983, they also seemed to be gaining real political power. That might have made the Women's Slates seem redundant to voters who perceived of the Slates as being first and foremost concerned with having women elected. Arguing that there were not yet enough women elected, or that those who were did not have feminist ideas, did not

seem to reach or have considerable impact on the electorate. Perhaps the slater's initial emphasis on women rather than on feminism as an ideology independent of the sex of the feminist was backfiring in the way that the general public primarily noticed the sex of those elected rather than their ideas on women's rights.

Disagreement within the movement with regard to policy can be another reason for the downward swing in votes, partly because in popular conception women who are concerned about other women are not supposed to disagree. The disagreement in 1992 about the movement's position towards the European Economic Area was a major one. It showed that sisterhood was not all powerful and that the movement was far from immune to strife and splits. Until then the movement had taken great pains to provide a public image of consensus. By disagreeing publicly the movement was presenting a different image of itself to the electorate. That image does not seem to have fetched new votes.

The image of the movement is not the only image in question. The image or idea of women as social persons promoted by the movement is of fundamental importance. As is argued in this study definitions or visions of women's social personhood, and validation of women as full social persons, is the core around which Icelandic women's movements revolve (see pp. 242-248). In 1990 my analysis of the Women's Slates Movement indicated that the movements idea of women's social personhood might need to be adjusted to a changed social context or even redefined in the near future (p. 232). Subsequent failure of the movement to appeal to the electorate and disagreement on policy within the movement suggest that such was the case.

What then was it in the slater's definition of women's personhood that needed to be adjusted to a changed social context? An ideological difference surfaced in 1991 when voices from both within and outside of the movement accused it of essentialist attitudes towards women's role. The questions asked referred directly to women's personhood. Did women for example need motherhood to become 'real' women or did they not? Were women essentially morally 'good' or were they not? Motherhood as the primary definition of women as social persons was a definition some women could not at the time abide. Although a number of women's slaters did not subscribe to that definition, the move-

ment was perceived to promote it. Women as free agents, as having the choice of remaining childless, as having even the choice of being “bad” or “unruly” according to accepted standards without forfeiting their claim to womanhood, seemed to be an adjustment to the definition of women as social persons called for in the 1990s.

Another adjustment had to do with power. Since the movement had never negotiated itself into government women slaters were by many presumed to be shy of power or even scorning power as something “male” and “polluting”. However far from reality this may have been it was an effective message in the political game serving to alienate women. It therefore became pressing to adjust the definition of women as social persons so that it emphasised that women were persons seeking and capable of wielding socially sanctioned power.

Awareness of this need may have facilitated what happened in 1994 when one of the Slates’ members of the Althing, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, agreed, in spite of opposition within the movement, to lead a coalition slate of left and centre parties in municipal elections in Reykjavík. The Women’s Slaters Movement came into existence in opposition to traditional political parties and by uniting in this manner with those selfsame parties an important tenet in the movement’s ideological grounds was destroyed. The drastic fall in the movements vote in 1995 general elections can in part be attributed to this event.

The issue is however more complicated. The coalition slate in the 1994 Reykjavík municipal elections was successful and the women’s slater who led the coalition has since been the mayor of Reykjavík. In view of the need for readjusting the definition of women’s personhood to include a non-motherhood and pro-power message, she may in the role of mayor be perceived to be effecting that adjustment. This is bound to confound the issue for those women’s slaters that support such a message where women’s personhood is concerned, but who are opposed to co-operating with other political parties in the way the mayor has done. Which way to turn and what to emphasise when redefining women as social persons is therefore the question of the day. Not surprisingly women’s slaters cannot agree on whether they should put forward a women’s slate in the 1999 general elections or whether they should emulate the Reykjavík municipal model and form a coali-

tion or even a new political party with leftist parties. Their eventual decision in this matter will be part of the redefinition of women as social persons now in process.

Apart from events in the Women's Slates Movement there are other indications that a redefinition of women as social persons is taking place. In 1994 women in the Independence Party, forming a group called Independent Women, put forward a feminist ideology which defined women primarily in terms of their rights and duties as individuals and not in terms of their biologically derived roles. This group was very vocal in the 1995 general elections and contributed to its outcome. Its view on women was contested by other women in the party who thought that women's participation in politics should be viewed in terms of the fact that they were of a different sex from men and that a political party needed as equal representation as possible of both sexes. At issue was whether women as politicians, and by extension women and men generally, should be defined in terms of their biological sex or in terms of ideas on their rights and duties as individuals. A recent move in the latter direction occurred last month when the general meeting of the Association of Women in the Progressive Party decided to admit men to their association. By this decision the association declared its view that feminism or women's rights activities were independent of biological sex and that being a feminist and working actively as such was a choice open to men as well as women. Women and men as comparable social beings and therefore equal, a view harking back to liberationist ideas, seems to be gaining strength again.

As this study demonstrates, women's movements form around new visions of women as social persons and the means by which that vision of personhood can be obtained. The events of the 1990s noted here indicate that a redefinition of women as social persons is taking place which in turn might herald a new phase in the history of women's rights activities in Iceland. Whether that will be an active phase or a quiet one, a phase when women's rights will be integrated into general politics or a phase characterised by a strong women's movement remains to be seen. What is important to keep in mind is that feminism in Iceland is becoming increasingly multivocal. Feminists or women's rights activists do have different views on basic ideas such as what sort of

social persons women are or should be. Feminists are also beginning to agree on disagreeing which suggests that one strong women's movement may not be likely in the near future. It should however be remembered that in any one of the women's movements discussed in this study there were at all times more than one view on such basic issues as the idea of women as social persons. The ideas I outline for each of the movements are the dominant ones each time and not the only ones found within a movement. The question now is whether this multivocalism has increased to such a degree that one major women's movement is no longer feasible or perceived as necessary.

I would like to thank my assistant Arndís Guðmundsdóttir for proof-reading the book and Lára Sturludóttir at The Social Science Institute for her computer wizardry. I would also like to thank the University of Iceland Art Collection for permission to reproduce Jóhanna Kristín Yngvadóttir's painting "Systur" or "Sisters" on the cover of the book.

September 1997

Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine and analyse the ideas and activities of Icelandic women's movements from their emergence before the turn of the century to the present day. It is based on two kinds of research, on one hand the examination of written sources and historical data, on the other on participant observation for a period of ten years.

The approach employed views the movement's ideas and activities in terms of their social and cultural context. Hence social processes and cultural perceptions, the social attributes of the women concerned, their ideas and activities, are placed in the foreground and analysed in terms of socio-structural and conceptual factors, especially those of social changes, particular to Icelandic society.

By contextualizing Icelandic women's movements in this manner the interplay between women's activists' ideas and activities on one hand and social processes and cultural conceptions on the other are demonstrated. It emerges that social change and conceptual-structural resilience are instrumental in bringing about Icelandic women's movements, in forming and shaping their ideas and activities.

This level of analysis leads to the analytical level of personhood which indicates that the core of Icelandic women's movements' ideas and activities is concern with women's personhood, that through their movement activities women consistently create and recreate themselves as persons. Finally, personhood generally is discussed in terms of the findings of the analysis.

The thesis can be said to fall within the following categories within anthropology: social-structural anthropology, the anthropology of gender and anthropology at home.

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Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family. To my parents and sisters for their unfailing support through the long years of fieldwork and writing; to my son Ragnar for being proud of rather than cross at his mother for her time-consuming activities; to Friðrik, for his patience, constant encouragement and a steady stream of single red roses. Finally to my supervisor and pater in anthropology, Professor Alfred Harris, who for more than half of my life in anthropology has ministered to its development, never interfering with the sometimes unpredicted directions it has taken, but always providing the thoughts and understanding, including that rarely communicated quality, spunk, which made my journey in anthropology into an adventure.

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I examine and analyse the ideas and activities of Icelandic women's movements from their emergence before the turn of the century to the present day. The approach I employ views the movements' ideas and activities in terms of their social and cultural context, treating the movements as a distinguishable but contextualized social and cultural phenomenon. Hence I place social processes and cultural perceptions, the social attributes of the women concerned, their ideas and activities, in the foreground, analysing the ideas and activities at issue in terms of socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society. Of specific importance in that respect are processes of social and cultural change and social and cultural resilience.

By contextualizing Icelandic women's movements in this manner I wish to demonstrate the interplay between women activists' ideas and activities on one hand and social processes and cultural conceptions on the other. Through a demonstration of that interplay I, finally, arrive at the analytical level of personhood and a discussion of what I see as constituting the core of Icelandic women's movements' ideas and activities, namely how women create and recreate themselves as social persons through their movement activities.

In terms of historical time the dissertation spans the period from 1870 to the present day. The point of departure in and around 1870 is chosen from two complementary points of view. First, it is a time when developments in Icelandic society which foreshadow fundamental social change become perceptible. At this point in history Icelandic society begins discernibly to move from the rural, medieval social order prevailing from the end of the commonwealth period, towards the new urban social order of modern Icelandic society. At this time Icelandic women also make their first moves towards concerted women's rights activities. That the two are connected will be demonstrated in the analysis. But in terms of our point of departure this is a time when structural changes involving among other things concerted women's rights activities are set in motion. Those changes

are still not completed, as is evidenced by present day women's activism in Iceland, but our point of departure is the point where they unequivocally surface.

The second point of view is in fact entailed in the first like the other side of a coin. It involves viewing the procession of past events from the vantage point of the present day, being able to evaluate with the benefit of hindsight, of knowing what subsequently occurred and what is occurring, where it would be expedient to begin the examination. In this manner 1870 becomes the departure point of detailed examination and description, although the historical whole of Icelandic society, which is an integral part of the world-view of an Icelander, is never totally absent.

This dissertation is about women, more particularly 'the silent women of Iceland'. Since it is about women activists it may seem paradoxical that it should be about 'silent' women, but so it is as shall emerge through the analysis of the data. And since it is about women, the ideas and activities of men are not particularly illuminated in the examination. But, as both men and women are the makers of society, men's ideas and activities and the male counterpart to women's gender-specific culture are ever present in the background, providing their intrinsic part of the social and cultural context within which women's rights ideas and activities are examined and analysed.

My examination is demarcated by those women's activities which aim at changing the socio-structural position and cultural conception of Icelandic women generally and which are based on ideas on women and society which in one or more aspects diverge from those conventional at the time. Hence the examination is directed at that women's activism which I term women's rights activism, found in different forms of women's movements which define themselves as women's movements. Although the activities of women in the labour movement, political parties, church societies, foundations of charity etc. are brought to bear on the examination and analysis where relevant, the examination does not focus on those activities. These activities provide an important part of the context of women's rights activities and sometimes the boundaries between the two become insubstantial, or one mirrors the other; but in order to avoid diffusing the

description and analysis with too much complementary material, women's rights activities are kept separate from other women's activities throughout.

The examination of the data is arranged chronologically. In Part I the ideas and activities of women's rights activists in the first fifty years of the period, those of the suffragists, are described and analysed. In Part II the second phase of Icelandic women's rights ideas and activities emerging around 1970, that of the liberationists, is dealt with, including an examination of the 'quiet years' preceding that phase. Finally, in Part III the phase immediately following that dealt with in Part II, the phase of the new women's slaters which extends to the present day, is examined and analysed. The two last phases, those dealt with in Part II and Part III, could be seen to form one continuous spell of women's rights activities, but because women's activists' ideas and methods of promoting their ideas changed radically around 1980, I have divided that spell of activities into two separate phases and deal with them in two consecutive parts.

Although the data are in this respect arranged chronologically and although part of the data refers to events long past I wish to state clearly that I am not writing history in the conventional sense. In my examination I use what historians have produced on the relevant subjects, and, when such historical work is not to be found which is often the case, I use the same sources historians would use to write history, although, not being a historian, I do not presume to have found all such possibly relevant sources. Also, often the data relevant to an anthropological analysis are not to be found in conventional historical sources. Sometimes they can be glimpsed in novels or letters, and sometimes there are simply gaps. Hence availability of anthropological data sources for events long past is problematic. Where Icelandic society is concerned that problem is, however, to some extent counterbalanced by the extreme smallness of the society which allows for a more accurate estimate of the extent of particular phenomena, similarities and differences, than would otherwise be the case.

The problem of availability of sources for events long past aside, I use what sources I have, including the work of historians, to describe and analyse the ideas and activities at issue from the comparative and

theoretical perspective of anthropology. Hence I use the chronological arrangement of the data as a means of ordering data into segments to facilitate its analysis in terms of both the vertical and lateral comparative perspectives of anthropology, social and cultural continuity and discontinuity, and in terms of analytical concepts belonging to anthropological theory.

Furthermore I have used the anthropological method of participant observation to gather data when possible and used the insights obtained from participant observation to order and illuminate data on events long past and, generally, on data gathered from written sources. Hence only part of the data is in one way or another derived from written sources. The more substantial part derives from participant observation in its broadest sense, which falls firmly within the methodological tradition of anthropology which emerged as a discipline from studies of societies which do not possess a written language. Hence the present study belongs to the field of anthropology, uniting with that of history where relevant to achieve that dimension of time through which social and cultural processes proceed as a sequence.

Secondly, in a feminist sense or rather in terms of a feminist pun, I am not writing his-story. I may be seen to be telling her-story, but in terms of paradigms and methodological and analytical procedures which belong to the discipline of anthropology as stated above. In that sense the present study belongs to the anthropology of women, or rather the anthropology of gender (cf. Rapp, 1990). And as shall be clear from the following Preamble on Theory the study is within the theoretical frame of social-structuralism in anthropology. Labelling of this kind can however be obscuring rather than illuminating as it narrows the study's scope by defining it in terms of what is known, rather than what is still to be discovered. Not wishing to preclude discoveries, I ask that such labelling be taken as hinting at rather than stating what is to follow in the description and analysis.

As is pointed out above the research on which this dissertation is based involved in one part an examination of written sources and, in another, participant observation. From the spring of 1981 onwards I took an active part in the activities of the emerging Women's Slate

Movement, serving as a member of the Althing for the movement and the constituency of Reykjavík from 1983 to 1987. A term in the Althing not only allowed me to observe women's rights activities from within the realm of authority as well as from the realm of the outside, i.e. from within the movement itself; it also allowed me to observe first hand the workings of the Icelandic political system in all its ramifications. The understanding and insights gained from this observation on the workings of the arrangement we call Icelandic society and on social movements as operating within that arrangement, informs how I deal with the data of all three women's rights phases. In that manner participant observation extends beyond the phase of the new women's slates.

Being born and brought up in Iceland, being an Icelander in other words, also informs my description and analysis. In terms of specific data dealt with in the dissertation observation extends through the second phase of women's rights activities, that of the liberationists, and into the 'quiet years' preceding that phase. Being brought up with two grandmothers and two great-grandmothers who would at times refer to the events observed by them taking place during the first phase of women's rights activities has brought those past events closer to me than would otherwise have been the case.

Being an Icelander and an Icelandic woman activist writing on Icelandic society and culture and Icelandic women's movements places this study squarely within the field of anthropology at home (Jackson, 1987, Hastrup, 1987). In fact I run a double risk of producing an "... ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch ..." (Geertz, 1983, p. 57), as I am not only dealing with my native society but also with a movement I took part in shaping. As Hastrup (1987) points out, Icelandic anthropologists working at home (and by inference all anthropologists working at home)

... have to leave the definitions of the 'inside' in order to perceive it as such. To identify 'the Icelanders' the anthropologist has to question both the name and the namer, and to perform a 'destructive analysis' of what they, as natives, think they know. (Handler 1985). (Hastrup, 1987, p. 20).

In my research for and writing of this dissertation I have found this to be very true and have used it as a directive both with regard to the Women's Slate Movement specifically and Icelandic society and culture generally. That this has not been an easy undertaking I freely admit, not least because

For the native anthropologist to explore the exotics of the 'inside culture' of Iceland, she has to step out of it and balance on the edge to the cultural void outside . . . She may, indeed, experience the remoteness of her island. (ibid, p. 23).

But going through this process of simultaneous nearness and remoteness, of balancing on the edge of a void, has been anthropologically rewarding. It has demonstrated clearly how important it is to know a culture from within and from beyond at the same time, which is essential to all anthropological enterprise, and how to go about it. It has made the contours and frontiers of a certain land form more clearly than ever in my mind. Although this applies to my native island as well, I am in this case referring to the land of anthropology, the land the anthropologist at home inhabits during her study of her native land. The dissertation that follows is an account of my island and the women who inhabit it, as sighted and explored from the land of anthropology.

A PREAMBLE ON THEORY

Any description and analysis in anthropology is informed by theory in one way or another. While the use of theory need not be obvious nor be theory in any grand sense, the process of selecting facts for description, arranging facts in a certain order etc. necessarily entails using a given set of ideas or perspectives. Otherwise order and sense are likely to depart from the text. Or as Fortes (1970 [1953]) phrased it:

Every way in which facts are grouped in description involves theories, implicit or explicit, about the connections between them that are significant ... (p. 129)

When it comes to interpretation or analysis of facts described the use of theory is by the nature of analysis implicit, demonstrated for example by the fact that only analysis can in turn generate theory.

In the preceeding Introduction I have given a short description of the subject matter dealt with in this dissertation and before proceeding with its description and analysis I wish to state briefly what theoretical concepts inform that description and analysis. I shall not discuss these concepts at any length here, they should in any case emerge most clearly through their use. To what extent the ideal isolates these concepts embody can be seen to form a coherent theoretical system, where each isolate is defined in relation to one another, will be discussed in Conclusions. Furthermore not all the concepts and theoretical perspectives used are to be found in this Preamble. Such a listing would be an impossible and propably a rather fruitless task, whereas a brief description of the main guiding concepts should clarify the grounds and direction of the following description and analysis, as well as help avoiding encumbering the text with explaining and defining concepts.

Above I mentioned ideal isolates, a term defined by Fortes (1970). Ideal isolates refer to theoretical constructions, varying in generality but meaningful both in terms of the descriptive reality of social life and in terms of theory. Such isolates, composed of abstracted distinguishable regularities in social action and social institutions, and in effect, linking observed social reality and its analysis, will be employed in the fol-

lowing description and analysis. My approach is therefore social structural in essence.

Another basic directive, derived from Fortes (1969), is his concepts of the politico-jural and domestic domains. These are analytical concepts referring, not to fields of action, but to sectors of social structural elements and processes which have certain distinguishable features in common not necessarily dependent on what field of action they are found in. Each domain comprises a range of social relations, customs, norms, statuses etc., the concept of domain thus being a classificatory construct but not merely so since

It is a matrix of social organization in the sense that its members derive their specificity from it. (Fortes, 1969, p. 98)

To the politico-jural domain pertain the social and cultural elements that define a person's jural status, the elements of right and duty defined by the rules that govern social relations, sanctioned by the political framework of society. These elements are distinguishable from other rights and capacities based on moral and emotive norms pertaining primarily to the domestic domain. Social relationships are usually made up of elements that pertain to both domains. A husband-wife relationship for example has both jural and moral/emotive elements which come into play differently in different social circumstances. The concept of domain therefore cuts across fields of action and allows for distinguishing the different components that make up social relationships so that they can be viewed and analysed according to their social structural significance.

In this respect it is important to note that the concepts of the politico-jural and domestic domains are not coterminous with the concepts of the public and private domains widely used in studies of women in various cultures (see e.g. Reiter, 1975, Rogers, 1980). As Afxendiou (1987) has pointed out the latter are primarily descriptive terms used "to present an area or situations where certain actions take place" (Afxendiou, 1987, p. 11). As such these concepts are useful to denote fields of action where among other things gender differences are acted out. To avoid terminological confusion I shall refer to the public and the private spheres rather than domains when concerned with fields of

action, reserving the term domain for the concepts of the politico-jural and domestic domains.

Another set of concepts to be used are the concepts of inside and outside as defined by Hastrup (1985,1987). These concepts are of specific relevance to the present study since their definition is generated by analysis of Icelandic society, past and present. Being concerned with the “structured perception of Icelandic culture” from the time of settlement until the present, Hastrup argues that

... the conceptual opposition between inside and outside has served as one of the strongest and most tenacious templates of Icelandic orientation in the physical as well as the social space. (Hastrup, 1987, p.2).

Originating in the heathen Icelandic perception of the world as divided horizontally into an inner and an outer space, defined in terms of concentric circles

... the cosmological model was a general model for conceiving of the opposition between the familiar and controlled social space on the one hand and the unknown and dangerous wild space on the other. (ibid, p.6.)

This model, Hastrup argues, can be discerned within a variety of semantic fields in Icelandic society, including gender relations where women have traditionally been perceived of in terms of the inside of Icelandic society and men in terms of both its inside and outside (Hastrup, 1985). In this context the opposition between inside and outside is seen to

... provide a dominant long term structure for interpreting events in Iceland from the settlements until this day. (Hastrup, 1987, p.8)

The concepts of inside and outside derive their meaning both from fields of action and factors structurally significant and identifiable independent of the field of action where they are found and refer primarily to conceptual categories which may be particular to Icelandic culture and society.

As conceptual categories inside and outside constitute a perceptual structure and as far as Icelandic society is concerned they constitute a dominant long-term perceptual structure (Hastrup, 1987). This leads directly to Ardener's (1975) argument that more than one perceptual structure can be found in any given society, and that such structures may be of different orders. Ardener uses the term model to denote such structures, which themselves are made up of two kinds of structures i.e. p-structures (paradigmatic structures) "... which are located in the programmatic aspects of the particular society ..." and s-structures (syntagmatic structures) located in "... the changing categories of society at the surface of events ...". To what extent these two structures fit within a model depends on the order of the model i.e. whether it is a dominant or a subordinate model. In a dominant model the structures are seen as linked by certain transformational rules but in a subordinate model those links are more problematic or tenuous because the different structures may be at considerable variance and hence a subordinate model is likely to be relatively muted in relation to a dominant model. Such muted models are to be found, he argues, in the way in which certain social groups e.g. women and ethnic minorities, perceive themselves and the world they live in and are contingent upon the group's social structural position (Ardener, 1975). I shall use the concept of model, dominant and muted, in order to analyze perceptual structures at work in Icelandic society and pertaining to women during the periods at issue. In this respect I shall distinguish between "model of women" i.e. how women are perceived by those that generate a model and "women's models" i.e. how women perceive themselves and their world. A women's model necessarily includes a model of women, whereas a model of women need not be a women's model.

Analysis of women's participation in events should be informed by concepts of the person, individuality, will and so forth to be read from the data and not into them. (Strathern, 1981, p. 683).

Since Mauss's 1938 seminal essay on the person and Fortes's later contribution to its study (Fortes, 1973), the attention of anthropologists has been increasingly drawn towards this until recently not much used concept (see e.g. Carrithers, Collins and Lukes, 1985). In my use of the

concept of the person I shall draw on Harris's (1989) discussion of the concept, which besides clarifying many of the inconsistencies which have pertained to its use, also encompasses much of what has been written on the concept. In 1973 Fortes wrote:

Person is perceived as the microcosm of the social order, incorporating its distinctive principles of structure and norms of value and implementing a pattern of life that finds satisfaction in its consonance with the constraints and realities ... of the social and material world. (Fortes, 1973, p. 317).

This definition of the concept of the person gives it a key position as an analytical tool in any social structural analysis, and, noting Strathern above, not least that pertaining to women. Harris's (1989) discussion of the concept broadens and develops its definition, pointing out the necessity of distinguishing between the often synonymously used concepts of individual, self and person which, when used without appropriate distinction, create a muddled biologicistic, psychologistic and sociologicistic explanatory device. Accordingly, she defines individual as a biological entity i.e. "... a human being considered as a single member of the human kind ..." (Harris, 1989, p.600), and self in terms of psychologistic factors i.e. "... to conceptualize the human being as a locus of experience, including experience of that human's own someone-ness." (ibid, p. 601). Neither individual nor self are coextensive with person, but a human person necessarily entails both individual and self, a culturally-shared concept of self being a necessary complement for such a concept of the person.

... a concept of person entails conceptualizing the human or other being as an agent, the author of action purposively directed toward a goal. By "human person" I mean a human being publicly considered an agent. In this sense to be a person means to have a certain standing (not "status") in a social order, as agent-in-society. (ibid, p. 602).

The person as agent-in-society, human or not, is thus defined in terms of social relationships and the moral values that pertain to them. In the person the different structural domains of the social order meet and are articulated, forming in Fortes's words "a microcosm of the social order". And as Harris demonstrates for the Taita, gender, being a

structural axis of the social order, is a determining dimension of the person (Harris, 1978). But person is not only a “microcosm of the social order” since, adds Harris, a person can also be seen “... as an embodiment of large-scale processes and quasi-history (i.e., of structural time).” (Harris, 1989, p. 604). This is arrived at by recognizing that personhood is conferred through a process in time i.e. during a life cycle. She points out that personhood may be contextualized according to the social position of the group in question, that different social kinds can be recognized in any given society, and by looking both at different social kinds reckoned to have different agentive capacities and social life-cycles showing how “... differing agentive capacities come to be imputed to, bestowed on, enunciated, or withdrawn from named humans as they enter and leave various social kinds.” (ibid p. 604), an account of personhood revealing the nature of agentive capacities, differentiating among people, can be arrived at. She distinguishes between three kinds of agentive capacities i.e. judgmental capacities, capacities of social entitlement, and mystical capacities which when “... imputed to people of particular social kinds, they mark those people as persons, agents-in-society” (ibid, p. 605) and importantly for the present study “... ultimately, we can see that the agentive capacities imputed to full, elaborated persons yield their power to recreate and perhaps to change the very action system that gives them their social being” (ibid, p. 606).

The nature of authority within society as well as the degree of institutionalisation of offices are important factors in shaping concepts of the person. When using the concept of authority, both in conjunction with the concept of the person and not, I distinguish between authority and power. I use the concept of authority as referring to socially sanctioned and accepted power i.e. that part of power which is seen as legitimate (Cohen, 1970). Hence the concept of power embraces that of authority, referring to the ability to influence and/or effect socially significant actions whether or not they are considered legitimate in a particular social context.

PART I

SUFFRAGISTS

CHAPTER 1

EVENTS

When considering both events and ideas attention is primarily directed towards those generated by women. Certainly men were also authors of events relevant to the legal and social position of women in Iceland and men influenced by various means the ideas Icelandic women held on the subject. But since the ideas and actions of women are our subject, those of men are viewed as complementary to those of women and only brought to bear on the subject where they illuminate the material in one way or another.

The period dealt with in Part I stretches from 1871 until 1926. The former date marks the first known claim raised by women on behalf of women generally, which occurred when a group of women in Reykjavík joined to petition the public to collect funds for a school for girls. The latter date marks the end of the first women's slates and thus the end of concerted action by women in the field of politics and women's rights for the time being.

Choosing 1871 as a starting point bypasses the founding of the first women's association in Iceland, which took place in Skagafjörður, northern Iceland, in 1869. This association as well as the next one to be established in 1874 in Svínavatnshreppur, northern Iceland, were primarily concerned with the material circumstances of the farmer's wives who founded them, one with improving the members' skills in housewifery especially by procuring labour saving appliances; the other by providing mutual aid to those who had lost a cow (Valdimarsdóttir, 1929). Those associations were therefore in effect local co-operatives confined to a specific area of co-operation and neither of them was concerned with women's rights or put forward any claims on behalf of women generally. The same applies to Reykjavík's first women's association, the Thorvaldsens' Association, founded in 1874. Its aim was charity and while it formalized for the first time in an association a traditional women's activity in Iceland i.e. materially assisting the poor, it

did not put forward any claims on behalf of women nor was it concerned with women's rights.

The claim raised in 1871 by 25 women in Reykjavík in an open letter to the papers is therefore the first concerted action of women on behalf of women in the country generally. However, this claim cannot be seen to have been entirely an initiative of women, as the idea of a school for girls seems to have been jointly generated and definitely jointly campaigned for by a couple, Þóra and Páll Melsted, who initiated the campaign for the school in 1870 in an article Páll Melsted wrote in *Norðanfari*, a paper published in Reykjavík. The campaign for the school involved men to no lesser degree than women, but it seems never to have been disputed that the school, when founded, should be headed by a woman. The campaign met with success eventually and the school was established in 1874, albeit on a more modest scale than originally intended. The school was located in Reykjavík, Þóra Melsted became its headmistress and Páll Melsted one of its instructors (Eiríksson, 1974). Even if the school cannot be seen to be entirely the initiative of women it remains that it was a school for girls and that it was the first issue campaigned for by women. It is worth noting that at the time no school at a comparable educational level existed for men, that women were by law excluded from higher levels of education i.e. grammar school and university, and that the educational emphasis of the school for girls was on needlework and housewifely skills rather than book-learning.

The first undisputed initiative taken by a woman on behalf of women is to be found in an article claiming enfranchisement and better education for women published anonymously in 1885 in the paper *Fjallkonan*, Reykjavík. The writer was the pioneer suffragist Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir who two years later "...caused a sensation in Reykjavík by being the first woman to give a public lecture. It was on the position and rights of women." (Valdimarsdóttir, 1929, 4-5). In 1888 Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir married the suffragist sympathizer and editor of *Fjallkonan*, Valdimar Ásmundsson, and apart from establishing, editing and to a great extent writing one of the two first women's papers in the country, *Kvennablaðið*, est. 1895, was not actively engaged in the campaign for women's rights until after her husband's death in 1902 (Héðinsdóttir, 1988).

Apart from Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir's efforts women do not appear to have been actively engaged in campaigning for women's rights in the 1870s and 1880s. However, the issue of enfranchisement for women as well as for men appeared as a politically debated issue in contemporary sources (*Alþingistíðindi* 1879-1889, Jónsson, 1977) and progress, from the point of view of women's rights, was made in the area of enfranchisement by the Althing i.e. by politically engaged and elected men.

In 1862 the Danish king, to whom Iceland was subject at the time, decreed that Akureyri, a town in northern Iceland, should be granted municipal rights. In the king's decree it was specified who had the right to vote in Akureyri's municipal elections and by what seems to have been a translation mistake from Danish into Icelandic, women obtained the right to vote with the same restrictions as men. The first and only woman known to have used this right did so in 1863 in Akureyri's municipal elections. She was Maddama Vilhelmína Lever, a well to do independent trader, who met the decree's requirement of being the head of her household and of sufficient means. In 1866 when the king issued a comparable decree for the town of Ísafjörður, western Iceland, it was translated from the Danish in the same way as the one for Akureyri, but no woman is known to have used the right to vote at the time in Ísafjörður's municipal elections. (Jónsson, 1977).

In 1882, after several years of debate, the Althing gave the vote for parish and town councils, district boards and vestries to all widows and unmarried women over 25 years of age who were heads of households. Women do not seem to have used this right widely to begin with nor are their voices to be heard, with a few exceptions, in the following years when the Althing and the papers debated extending women's rights, both civil rights and their rights to education. A notable exception is a petition to a political meeting in Þingvellir in 1888 signed by 70 women in Ísafjörður, western Iceland, and 27 women in Suður-Þingeyjasýsla, northern Iceland, claiming full political equality for women. The meeting agreed on the petition but had no authority to enforce it.

In respect to what appears as women's generally rather passive stance at the time towards women's suffrage it should be noted that women were excluded from the Althing by law, did not run any of the papers published, enjoyed less education than men and there was no

tradition of women either writing or speaking publicly. Men had the means to influence public opinion and affect legislation and in the field of women's rights did so at the time, although their opinions on the subject varied and resistance to extended women's rights was widespread among them. It is also important to note that at the time Iceland was engaged in trying to obtain its sovereignty from Denmark and that the debate on women's rights therefore took place in the midst of the debate on the country's right to independence.

In 1893 the Althing passed a bill granting women eligibility in municipal affairs but it failed to obtain the Danish king's assent. The grounds for the king's refusal were that women had not demanded these rights themselves and would therefore be imposed upon were they to be given them. This event seems to have jolted women out of what appears to have been their passive position on the subject and in 1894 a number of women in Reykjavík founded the Icelandic Women's Association, which was the first society concerned with women's rights in the country. The aim of the Association was to work for equality between the sexes and the participation of women in public matters with emphasis on obtaining for women the right of the vote and eligibility to serve on governing bodies. This right was seen by the women as basic to all other rights and they promptly sent a petition to the Althing with 3000 signatures demanding political equality and refuting the grounds for the king's refusal of the 1893 bill. The Association worked assiduously for a number of years in the cause of the enfranchisement for women as well as on the issues of education and alcoholic temperance, both seen as important and beneficial to women. When the Association shifted its emphasis away from women's suffrage the Women's Rights Association was established in 1907, at the instigation of Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, to carry on the work (Valdimarsdóttir, 1929, Sigurðardóttir, 1976, Jónsson, 1977).

In 1895, the year following the establishment of the Icelandic Women's Association, two women's papers were founded, *Kvennablaðið* and *Framsókn*, providing a platform for publicizing suffragist views although the former, edited by Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, concerned itself primarily with the education of women and matters concerning hearth and home. When *Framsókn* ceased publication in

1901, *Kvennablaðið* gradually devoted increased space to suffragist views on women's rights (Héðinsdóttir, 1988).

By now women were actively and visibly engaged in promoting women's suffrage and continued to be so engaged for the first quarter of the new century. Their views can be found in print, in their own and other papers, in the resolutions passed by their associations and later on in the reports of meetings of town councils and the Althing. As noted above their activities coincided with Iceland's struggle to gain independence from Denmark and with a call for general suffrage for men. And the following years saw the tide turn in favour of enfranchisement. In 1907 the Althing extended the municipal franchise to all women and men domiciled in the towns of Reykjavík and Hafnarfjörður who paid taxes, whether married or single. In 1909 this right was extended to all women in the country who paid taxes. A bill proposing parliamentary suffrage and eligibility to all women was first introduced in the Althing in 1911. In 1915 it obtained the king's sanction and women were granted restricted suffrage subject to an age limit which was gradually to be lowered. In 1918 Iceland received home rule from Denmark and in 1920 an amendment to this act granting women full political suffrage was passed by the Althing. Thereby Icelandic women obtained by law the same political rights and duties as men.

In 1908, a few months after the Althing had extended the municipal franchise to women in Reykjavík and Hafnarfjörður the first women's slate appeared in Reykjavík's municipal elections. The Women's Rights Association, led by Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, was instrumental in initiating the slate and devoted itself to its cause. The slate obtained 21.3% of the vote and got all of its four candidates, one of whom was Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, elected to Reykjavík town council. Women's slates were to appear in Reykjavík municipal elections until 1916, in Akureyri in 1910, 1911 and 1921 and in Seyðisfjörður in 1910 (see table 1.). The Women's Rights Association had established departments in both Akureyri and Seyðisfjörður and was also instrumental in initiating the slates there.

Table 1. Women's Slates in municipal elections.

	Year	% of vote	No. of representatives
Reykjavík:	1908	21.3	4 out of 15
	1910	20.8	1 " 5
	1912	21.5	1 " 5
	1914	11.7	1 " 5
	1916	10.1	0 " 5
Akureyri:	1910	8.0	0 " 3
	1911	16.7	1 " 3
	1921	29.3	1 " 3
Seyðisfjörður:	1910	36.3	1 " 2

When the parliamentary franchise had been given to women, women's slates also appeared in national elections, first in 1922 and again in 1926. In 1922 the slate got 22,4% of the vote and the first woman elected to the Althing in Iceland's history, Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason. In 1926, after Ingibjörg had joined a political party, to the chagrin of her supporters, a women's slate headed by Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, then in her seventies, only got 3.5% of the vote and no candidate was elected. The Women's Rights Association was the main instigator and supporter of the 1926 slate whereas in 1922 various women's associations, including the Women's Rights Association, had joined to support the slate (Styrkárssdóttir, 1982).

The women's slates did not put forward policy statements of any sort nor did they align themselves with the existing political parties. Their motivating factors were proving that women were worthy of the franchise, realizing what rights and duties it entailed, and that they had something specific to contribute to public decision making. The slates appeared during a period of shifts in the development of political ideas in Iceland and when Icelandic politics formed along the lines of class divisions in the twenties and the present political parties were established, the slates lost their momentum and were not to occur again in Iceland until 1982 (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1982, Kristmundsdóttir, 1982, 1989).

Iceland is the only country where women's slates are known to have succeeded at the time. In Denmark women's slates were put forward in

municipal election from 1908 until 1937, in Sweden in 1927 and 1928 and in Norway in 1918 but without success. Similarly a women's slate to the British Parliament in 1918 did not get its candidate elected (Styrkársdóttir, 1982). The fight for suffrage was also relatively peaceful in Iceland compared to the neighbouring countries. While women's suffrage in Iceland met considerable opposition both within the country and from its reigning sovereign in Denmark, the majority in the Althing could not resist granting women such basic rights while they were engaged in obtaining what they saw as the basic right of independence from Denmark for the Icelandic nation. Women's suffrage may have seemed trivial to the Althing compared to the independence of the nation. The Althing did not spend much time discussing the issue, and granting women the franchise was clearly contradictory to prevalent ideas at the time about who should hold authority. But conceptually two rights combined: the right of independence for Iceland, its right to hold authority by itself; and the rights of its women to be independent and thereby be holders of authority. One could not easily be denied without denying the other as well. In the words of Laufey Valdimarsdóttir, daughter of Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, the women's movement in Iceland "... grew side by side with the struggle for independence and almost at the same time Iceland and her daughters became free" (1929:11).

During the period a number of women's societies were established around the country. None of them concerned themselves with women's rights or were active in the field of political decision-making except the two associations mentioned above. The concerns of the various women's societies can be summed up in the following: nursing and charity, household-industry, education of housewives and the rearing of children. In 1914 the first women's labour union, Verkakvennafélagið Framsókn, was established in Reykjavík. It did not concern itself directly with women's rights but devoted its efforts towards the interests of women on the labour market (Styrkársdóttir, 1982).

To sum up: The initiative towards concerted action on behalf of women generally is initially not taken by women only. Men play an important part as supporters and wield the tools necessary to voice the concerns at issue. To what extent men are originators of ideas in this area cannot be determined since the voices of the women surrounding

them, their mothers, wives, daughters and friends, are not audible any longer as they are, for reasons explained above, not to be found in print or in records of the meetings of the Althing or other decision-making bodies. As the period winds on women become more visibly active, initiating various moves and presenting and forming new ideas on the subject. Emphasis is on legislation as the foundation of women's emancipation. All initiative and consequent action in this area takes place in urban centres rather than the rural countryside. The debate on women's rights is merged with the debate on and struggle for Iceland's independence from Denmark and takes place during a time of rapid social change in Iceland.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIETY AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

The last quarter of the 19th century and the first forty years of the 20th century is a period of intense social change in Iceland. During this period Icelandic society changed from a medieval peasant society, colonized for centuries by Denmark, into a modern industrial society and an independent republic.

Due to the country's geographical isolation in the Northern Atlantic, its literary and cultural heritage preserved in the sagas and its commonwealth law, and its unbroken tradition of literacy, Icelanders retained their language and sense of cultural identity through the centuries of colonial rule. In political terms this sense of cultural identity became, in the beginning of the 19th century, the cornerstone on which claims for the country's political and economic independence were raised. In 1874, when Iceland celebrated the millennium of its settlement, it obtained its own constitution from the Danish king, granting the Althing restricted legislative powers. This date is commonly used to mark the beginning of a new era in the history of Iceland, characterized by rapid social change, and it coincides with the emergence of concern for women's rights in the country (see chapter 1). In 1918 Iceland received home-rule from Denmark and in 1944 severed the remaining colonial ties with the then Nazi-occupied Denmark by declaring itself an independent and sovereign republic.

In cultural terms Icelandic society was a homogeneous one and socially egalitarian. The great majority of the population consisted of free farmers and the distinction between landowners and tenants was not crucial. In 1842 a contemporary describes Icelandic society as consisting of "... mainly two classes or groups, ... the common people and the learned men, but we mostly lack a middle class." (Sigurðsson, 1842, quoted in Tomasson, 1980, p. 49). Although education and wealth often went together education not wealth was the most important determinant of social status (Tomasson, 1980).

In economic terms the period is characterized by a shift from farming as a primary mode of production in a predominantly subsistence economy to the growing importance of fishing and industry and the development of a market economy with increasing emphasis on foreign trade. This shift was accompanied by a movement of the population from the rural countryside to coastal areas where fishing and industry thrived and towns grew rapidly (Þorleifsson, 1977). In 1901 80.2% of the population lived in rural areas and farming supported 68.1% of the population. In 1930 those figures were 45.4% and 31% respectively.

Thus during the period dealt with in Part I Icelandic society can be divided into roughly three categories in terms of economic and demographic factors. First, there was the farming society, where each farm was largely self-sufficient in terms of labour and food-products. A farm was geographically separate from other farms and was in effect a small, self-sufficient community based on the extended family. The farming society rested on age-old traditions but by 1870 had difficulty in supporting the bulk of the population, primarily because the primitive farming technology could not sustain the population growth since the turn of the century. As the period winds on the rural areas became increasingly less populated. Second, there were the growing small towns in coastal areas where fishing was the main subsistence activity requiring an ever increasing supply of paid labour. Third, there were three towns, also growing rapidly in terms of population, where trade and industry constituted a proportionately larger part of production activities than fishing and where paid labour became the rule. They are Reykjavík, Akureyri and Seyðisfjörður (Styrkársdóttir, 1982, Tomasson, 1980, Þorleifsson, 1977). It should be noted that these are also the three towns where women's slates in municipal elections appeared during the period.

Of these three towns Reykjavík grew most rapidly. In 1870 2.9% of the population lived in Reykjavík whereas by 1930 26% of the population did (Kjartansson, 1974). To begin with, or in the 1870s and 80s, Reykjavík had many of the characteristics of the farming society. People moving to Reykjavík in order to take up jobs in industry, trade or fishing usually continued to farm on a small scale within the confines of the town. Those who were relatively well off kept a cow for milk,

while others kept horses, sheep and poultry; and haying, shoveling manure, milking, slaughtering etc. were part of town life. Manual paid labour in Reykjavík was seasonal at the time and during summer, when work was scarce, labourers often returned to their farm of origin to help out during the haying season in exchange for board and lodging, or hired out their labour as farm hands. By 1910, however, only 5% of the population of Reykjavík drew the major part of their income from farming (Valdimarsdóttir, 1986). The shift from the traditional farming society to an urban industrial one was thus to begin with not an abrupt one and in the coastal towns where fishing was the main means of subsistence, farming as a subsidiary economic activity continued well into the 20th century.

Around the turn of the century Reykjavík took the lead in developing the fishing sector and from there ran the first trawlers, representing a revolution in fishing technique and the returns to be had from fishing. Industry and trade grew as well: in 1903 26.6% of all trade in the country was in Reykjavík and by 1922 that figure had risen to 33.4%. The country's two banks, established in 1885 and 1904 respectively, were situated in Reykjavík. Since the mid-19th century Reykjavík had been the centre for higher education in Iceland and in 1911, when the University of Iceland was established, it was located there. From the beginning of the period Reykjavík was where papers and periodicals were published and when the Althing was reinstated in 1874 it was housed in Reykjavík along with other governmental institutions, and Reykjavík became the centre of political activity in the country. By 1920 Reykjavík was the undisputed heart of national life in Iceland (Styrkárssdóttir, 1982, Þorleifsson, 1977). And Reykjavík was from the very beginning the centre of activities concerning women's rights (see chapter 1).

Social position of women

It seemed to me that there were only women in the family of the priest (in Þingvellir). Like all Icelandic women I have observed they do all the work there is to be done, look after the cows, make cheese, make hay, carry heavy loads and generally do all the hard work. Sometimes the men help but they prefer to ride

around on horses or idle at home. In Reykjavík the inhabitants are Danish seamen and fishermen and it is hardly fair to form an opinion on the grounds of the idleness and sloth that characterizes the people there. But it seems to me that the position of the woman is very similar to that in Germany. They do not rate high in human society (J.R. Brown, 1862, quoted in Ólafsdóttir, 1980, p. 79, my translation).

This contemporary description by a foreign traveler in Iceland gives a glimpse into the working situation of women at the time and an estimate of their social position, although it is not entirely accurate and conveys at least as much about how Icelandic society looked in the eyes of a foreigner as about how Icelandic society actually was.

Farms in rural Iceland were corporate groups and although sources indicate that women worked a great deal it is also clear that on the farm there was a marked sexual division of labour, allowing a certain latitude according to the economic standing of the farm. All housework, and milking and looking after the cows were, for example, women's work while sheeprearing and hunting were men's work (Sigurðardóttir, 1985). When the sexual division of labour was sidestepped it was more common that women took on men's work than men women's work. With rare exceptions farming households were headed by men who were responsible for the financial side of farming and the finances of the household. Women, as wives, had a defined area of management within the household, circumscribed by the sexual division of labour; and neither they nor daughters or relatives of the household's family were paid for their work. Women who sold their labour on farms were usually paid up to half of what male farm-labourers were paid (Erlendsdóttir, 1977).

Women moving to the growing coastal towns during the period sold their labour according to opportunities offered and the needs of their households. The census, which is the primary source in this area, gives incomplete information about the extent of women's paid work generally, paid work of married women outside the home not being counted unless married women were supporters of households i.e. widows or married to unemployed men. Also, agriculture and fishing are not listed as separate employment categories until the 1910 census, and before

that census employment categories of women are often altogether obscure. From earlier censuses it can, however, be gleaned that between 1880 and 1910 the majority of women engaging in paid work did so as unskilled labour, in the towns accepting any work offered such as carrying coals and water and all kinds of domestic work. Their work was seasonal and to begin with, it seems, only to be had when men were not available. This excludes the category of domestic help where women predominated, and in 1880 for example 23.3% of all women in Reykjavík are listed in that category (Ólafsdóttir, 1980). From 1910 onwards the census is more precise and table 2 shows the number of women employed in the listed employment categories according to the censuses of 1910, 1920 and 1930 (Styrkárðóttir, 1982).

Table 2. Women engaged in paid work in 1910, 1920 and 1930 in the country as a whole and in Reykjavík.

	1910		1920		1930	
	Cntr.	Rvk	Cntr.	Rvk.	Cntr.	Rvk.
Agriculture	988		512		467	
Fishing	1010	187	735	118	939	409
Cloth-manufacture	196	77	282	92	160	98
Sewing	452	203	674	424	489	381
Domestic help	5834	190	5155	1011	4887	1643
Trade	48	39	350	220	801	558
Total	8528	1696	7708	1865	7743	3089
Total population	85.183		94.690		108.861	
Women	44.078		48.518		55.319	

Several things can be read from this table. First, the number of women engaged in paid work is relatively small proportionately, even allowing for the fact that paid work of married women is only partly recorded in the census. The majority of women in the country are there-

fore engaged full-time as housewives although women on farms do a number of tasks normally not classified as housework. Second, between 1910 and 1930 the number of women in Reykjavík engaged in paid work almost doubles, while the number of women so engaged in other parts of the country diminishes. This points to the increasing importance of Reykjavík as a centre for women's paid employment. Third, apart from fishing, which is a growing industry at the time and which provides work on a seasonal and part-time basis, the majority of labouring women are to be found in 3 employment categories which are an extension of or a paid version of traditional housework, i.e. in domestic help, sewing and cloth-manufacturing. It can be argued that women's work in the fishing industry is also an extension of housework, since it involves preparing fish for consumption much as preparing any raw material for cooking in the kitchen. The same reasoning can be applied to the paid work of women in the diminishing category of agriculture, leaving the rapidly growing category of trade, which most often employed women as shop-assistants, as the only paid women's employment which is not in one way or another a paid version of some aspect of housework. Thus while women go out of their homes onto the labour market, they do not go far from their traditional area of work and the two spheres, the domestic and the public, are therefore closely connected in terms of the kind of work done.

However, work outside the home is done in a situation different from that done in the home and it has a different social meaning. At the time, work outside the home introduced the workplace as a new area of social life for women and it introduced a monetary meaning to their work. In the workplace women worked primarily with other women, the exception again being trade and to some extent fishing, where women sometimes worked alongside men. The monetary remuneration of their work was in itself new, as in the farming society the majority of women were not paid for their work. But the monetary value placed on their work was low compared to that of men, around a quarter to two thirds of what men were paid for comparable or the same work throughout the period. The labour market thus did not value the working capacity of women in the same terms as that of men, even though sometimes women and men did exactly the same work and accomplished the same

results. In this respect the labour market viewed men as workers and supporters of families and women primarily as helpers, both in terms of work done on the labour market and in terms of supporting their homes. The ethics of the labour market were thus very different from those of the corporate unit, the farm, where men and women were viewed as co-workers and responsible contributors to the survival of the unit, even if their contribution thereto lay in different areas of work.

Thus in terms of work the position of women changed considerably by their moving from rural to urban areas and their consequent entry onto the labour market. First, the monetary value placed on their work put them in a lower position compared to men, which was not the case with unpaid work in the farming society. Second, they were no longer working within a corporate unit, their home no longer being the unit of production on which survival depended; and since they fetched much lower wages on the labour market than their husbands or had no wages at all they became directly dependent on them financially (Erlendsdóttir, 1977). Third, their workplace became predominantly populated by women whereas on the farm their workplace, especially the kitchen, was at the centre of social life and did not exclude men. Fourth, their work-load increased rather than decreased since housework had to be done in addition to paid work. Some contemporary sources describe the working situation of labouring women as slavery (e.g. Ásmundsson, 1885). Fifth, most of the employment categories open to women were in one way or another extensions of traditional housework and their field of employment thus limited. The low monetary value placed on such work on the labour market as opposed to its being an integral part of production activities on the farm can be seen as devaluation of housework as such and therefore of women's contribution to subsistence. Trade, the only general employment category which cannot be seen to be an extension of housework was not generally open to women until after 1900.

Education, the means to train for a profession, was not available to women at the beginning of the period, midwifery being the exception but involving only rudimentary training. Girls as well as boys received elementary teaching such as learning to read and write but until 1874 when the first school for girls was established (cf. chapter 1) no oppor-

tunities for advanced education existed for women. The educational emphasis of that school, as well as of those that were to follow, was first and foremost to educate women to become good housewives, the role of mother and wife being the one envisioned for women. In 1886 when women were granted the right to sit exams at the country's only grammar school and enter the theological and medical schools it was specified that they did thereby not obtain the right to practice their education in any public capacity nor be recipients of stipends granted to students in these educational institutions. It was further specified that if they passed the theological exam they might not set foot in the pulpit. A woman did not sit the grammar school's final examinations, until 1897 and there is no record of a woman entering the theological and medical schools at the time. In 1904 women obtained the right to study at the grammar school as well as sit its examinations and in 1911 when the University of Iceland was established it was made open to women on the same conditions as men. At the same time the Althing passed legislation providing that women should not be excluded from any school in the country, should have the same right to stipends as men and be able to practice their education in the same public capacities as men (Sigurðardóttir, 1975).

But although sexual discrimination in the field of education was thus abolished by law, only a few women benefited from it during the period. Traditional and dominant ideas on the role of women and the financial situation of women, men in effect being preferred when it came to stipends and support from families, did not encourage or enable women to acquire formal education. The educational level of women continued to be lower than that of men throughout the period.

Several important changes were made during the period concerning the legal status of married women. In 1850 daughters acquired the same right as sons to inheritance, the equality of siblings in terms of inheritance thus being recognized by the law. Once married, however, women lost all rights to property or other material returns and valuables to their husbands, who alone held the right to dispose of the couple's property and income. In 1900, when the exodus from the rural countryside had lasted for a quarter of a century and 20% of the population earned their living in an economy very different from that of the tradi-

tional farming society, the law was changed so that a married woman could herself dispose of her own income and private property, such as that inherited from her parents. In 1923 a new law on the rights and duties of married couples stipulated that husband and wife had the same right to their common property and neither could dispose of any part of it without the consent of the other. In practice this meant more often than not that husbands continued to be the main book-keepers of the household's finances and the main decision-makers when property was to be disposed of. In matters of disposal the written consent of the wife was not required by the law and if it was not to be found it was assumed she agreed with the financial acts of her husband. In divorce, rare as it was, a rule of equal division of property was maintained throughout the period.

Thus the social position of married women in terms of rights to property changed during the period from their being by law subject to the jurisdiction of their husbands in the era of the farming society to their having, formally, the same jurisdiction as their husbands over the property of the couple although the husbands' jurisdiction continued in practice to be the effective one.

The same development can be observed where rights over children are concerned. Children, an important source of labour especially during the first half of the period and not least in the traditional farming society where from an early age they contributed their labour to the corporate unit the farm are until 1917 by law in custody of their father or mother's husband. Then the law was changed and both parents i.e. a married couple, became custodians of their children. A little later, in 1921, illegitimate children obtained the right of inheritance from their father and father's family and are thus recognized as legitimate heirs although born out of wedlock. Illegitimate children were with rare exceptions in the custody and the responsibility of their mothers (Sigurðardóttir, 1975).

This development relates to changes taking place in the size and composition of the family as a domestic unit during the period. In 1880, when over 90% of the population lived on farms in rural areas, a household consisted on the average of 7.4 persons, in 1910 of 6.0 persons and in 1930 5.3 persons, households in rural areas being at all times larger

than in urban ones. Between 1880 and 1930 the population increased considerably, i.e. by 39.7%, and the diminishing size of the household is therefore not due to population size but to social factors, especially the shift of the population from rural to urban or semi-urban areas and the consequent abolition in 1907 of the no longer enforceable legislation that did not allow people to marry unless they had secured land for farming. The age of marriage dropped: in 1871 30.3% of women married at age 20-24 and 3.8% before the age of 20 whereas in 1931 11.8% of women married before the age of 20 and 44.4% married at age of 20-24. Marriage frequency grew considerably but the rate of fertility dropped after 1890 from 4.073 children per woman in 1897-1906 to 3.368 in 1926-1935.

The composition of the household on farms at the beginning of the period was based on the extended family. Apart from a married couple and their children a household was in 30-50% of cases likely to include an unmarried brother or sister of one of the couple, a father or a mother of one of the couple and if the farm was of good economic standing other more distant relatives. Agricultural labourers, both men and women, slept and ate in the same room as the family and were an integral part of the household although technically not of the family. During the period the household became increasingly composed of the nuclear-family only, especially in the growing towns, and hired help became increasingly differentiated from the family e.g. sleeping and eating separately. Instead of being a unit of both production and consumption, the household became in urban areas a unit of consumption only, production activities taking place outside its confines (Gunnlaugsson, 1986).

Thus the position of women in the domestic sphere changed considerably during the period. When the household was a production unit their work was an integral part of production activities and they were situated at the very centre of social life. As wives women had a defined area of management in the household's activities and the authority to enforce their decisions in this area. When the household ceases to be a production unit women are removed to the periphery of social life, the household diminishes in size, production activities take place outside its confines and housework and looking after children, always the responsibility of women, are now separated from other

kinds of work and being without monetary value cease to be regarded as production activity. And the world of women becomes populated by children and other women to a proportionately higher degree than before. Women marry younger and contract marriages on the basis of romantic love rather than the mutual material benefit and compatibility of the partners as was previously most often the case (Gunnlaugsson, 1988). Mutual economic concerns and the authority that accrue with age are therefore less in evidence when women contract marriage, leaving women with the notoriously fickle element of romantic love as the basis of the domestic unit on which their survival depends. In spite of extended legal rights of married women during the period their actual position in the domestic sphere did not therefore improve; on the contrary their position changed from a central one to a peripheral one and was not secured by economic concerns to the same degree as before.

As pointed out earlier the majority of women in the country throughout the period were full time housewives so the above applies to the bulk of the female population. Those who sold their work on the labour market were not in a different position in this respect since, as argued earlier, the labour market viewed them primarily as helpers both in terms of work done on the labour market and in terms of supporting their homes. Women on the labour market were most often housewives as well and while their position in the domestic sphere may have been more prominent on account of their earnings, low as they were, their position there was fundamentally the same as that of full-time housewives.

Most writers writing on the position of women during the period emphasize the extended legal rights women obtained and from these changes draw the conclusion that the position of women in Icelandic society improved during the period. Erlendsdóttir (1977), for instance, argues that the values of the farming society oppressed women and maintained them in a social position lower than that of men, while extended rights in the fields of education, politics and formal financial independence, excepting women's situation on the labour market, did much to improve women's social position during the period. Tomasson (1980) arguing in part the opposite case states:

There was a high degree of traditional equality in the Icelandic rural society. Women always had a great deal of independence and were admired for the same mental qualities as men were (p. 109).

Yet a little earlier he writes:

Once we leave the world of the old Icelanders, we could speak of the silent women of Iceland ... The absence of women from written Icelandic history before the twentieth century is remarkable in its near totality; women apparently were only wives and mothers, concubines and mistresses, housekeepers and doers of all sorts of work. (p. 108).

I would agree with Tomasson that there was indeed a high degree of traditional equality in the farming society and would add that it was maintained by the institution of the corporate unit, the farm, which had to rely on all its members, both women and men, for its survival. Within that social system, however, women did not have much maneuvering space, their role and position were firmly fixed and they did not have any chance of entering the learned professions and creating a role for themselves different from that of the housewife, nor as such become visible as makers of history. Thus there were the “silent women of Iceland” since history generally concerns itself with the specific rather than the general and illuminates public decision-makers rather than domestic ones regardless of the importance of the domestic units for the society in question.

Insofar as women had little or no maneuvering space Erlendsdóttir is right in pointing out that the farming social system maintained women in a position lower than that of men, who had such social space, but it does not ipso facto follow that by obtaining extended legal rights women thereby obtained admission to the social spaces in question. True, in a state society such as Iceland a formal legal right is a prerequisite for being able to exercise the powers contained within a right, but legislation does not by itself ensure that rights are actually used and are thereby effective as agents of social change. Social and economic determinants and not least cultural ideas and values are the decisive factors in this respect, and if legislation does not tackle this aspect of its field of enforcement, e.g. supplying women with the

financial means to obtain formal education, it does not become immediately effective as is the case, for example with women and education in Iceland during the period. Legislation that ignores its economic and cultural context in this way, as legislation concerning women's rights during the period did, is more a statement of purpose than an immediately effective agent of change.

It does not therefore follow from the fact that women obtained extended legal rights during the period that their social position improved and became more equal to that of men. On the contrary it has been argued here that the social change taking place during the period had in some fundamental respects adverse effects on the position of women in Icelandic society. Legal reforms concerning the position of women during the period should therefore be viewed in part as attempts to deal with the changing and in certain respects deteriorating situation of women rather than being taken to signify that their situation improved. And if we accept the assumption that in order to voice a claim for an extended right, the lack of that right has somehow to be socially experienced, it should be noted that it was women in urban areas, especially Reykjavík, and not women still living in the rural farming society, who fought for extended women's rights during the period. Those were the women who were no longer anchored within the relatively egalitarian and stable social system of the farming society, but women who lived and worked in the rapidly growing urban areas and who most keenly experienced the social change taking place in Iceland at the time.

Women actively engaged with women's rights

It has been pointed out, e.g. by Friðriksson (1988), that women needed considerable courage to use their right to vote once it had been obtained. By using this right women were entering an exclusively male social area, further marked by the fact that voting took place in a public meeting, making those who voted and how they voted publicly visible. That in part explains why women were hesitant in using this right.

The first woman known to vote in Reykjavík municipal elections did so in 1888, six years after women in Reykjavík obtained the right to do so with the restrictions of being widows or unmarried women over 25 years of age and heads of their households. That women were not exactly encouraged to use their right to vote can be gleaned from the fact that in the first Reykjavík municipal elections after the passing of the 1882 law, the names of the women who held this right were not placed on the list of electors. In the 1888 elections the names of the women electors appeared after the alphabetical listing of the male electors, indicating that women were viewed as a separate category of electors rather than as a part of the general electorate.

The first woman to vote in Reykjavík municipal elections was Kristín Bjarnadóttir, then 75 years of age, a widow of good financial standing and well connected in Reykjavík society. She could have used her right to vote twice more before her death but did not do so. In the 1890 municipal elections in Reykjavík none of the 39 women who had the right to vote did so, but in the 1891 elections, two women did, both widows and members of the same family. They went to the election meeting together, apparently supporting each other in their venture. In the 1892 and 1894 municipal elections in Reykjavík no woman used her right to vote but in the 1897 elections one woman did, Kristín Jónsdóttir, who seems to have been unmarried and not of the educated part of Reykjavík society. Thus only four women used their right to vote in Reykjavík municipal election from 1882 to the turn of the century and none of them repeated their action.

After that women voted in every municipal elections in Reykjavík. In 1900 two women voted, both actively engaged with women's rights which the women who had voted before were not. In 1903 seven of the 53 women who had the right to vote voted, among them Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, who had become a widow the year before. When those elections had to be repeated later in the year 13 women voted, the six new women voters voting in exactly the same way as Bríet which suggests that she convinced them to use their right to vote. Electoral evidence from the 1906 municipal elections has disappeared but in the 1908 elections, when women had obtained extended rights to vote, women put forward the first women's slate and succeeded in having its

four candidates elected to Reykjavík town council (see chapter 1). Thus while women were very hesitant to use their right to vote to begin with, their boldness in doing so grows rapidly after 1900, culminating in the 1908 women's slate, which in view of the above must have been an act of considerable courage.

If women needed courage to use their right to vote they must also have needed courage to be actively and publicly engaged with women's rights. Many of the women so engaged belonged to the educated part of Icelandic society, and many had enjoyed more education than women commonly did, which accorded them a social position which helped them face their challenge. Many also enjoyed family connections with influential men. Out of 38 women listed in Styrkársdóttir (1982) as being actively engaged with women's rights in the eighteen years between 1908 and 1926, 19 or 50% were daughters of, married to or closely related to members of the Althing. Seventeen of the 38 women were daughters of farmers, and an additional ten were daughters of administrative men, among them members of the Althing, who were also farmers, and two were daughters of manual labourers. All who were married, except for one woman married to a labourer, were married to men having formal education and/or were in an administrative position in one field or another. Seven of the 38 women were unmarried and an unestimated number of the married ones, e.g. Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, were not actively engaged while being married.

Of special note here, not emphasized by Styrkársdóttir is that none of the women was a farmer's wife. The women all lived and worked in the growing towns around the country, most of them in Reykjavík, the others in Akureyri and Seyðisfjörður. As most of them were farmers' daughters they were women experiencing directly the shift in their position brought about by their removal from the traditional farming society to the newly created urban one.

A good third, or 13, of the women had more education than women commonly did at the time, 12 of those having studied abroad. Six of those thirteen women were married and the seven unmarried women all belonged to this group. The educational level of the women themselves was therefore comparatively high, self-educated women not being counted, and it is noteworthy that no unmarried woman participated in

women's rights activities unless she had achieved a degree of formal education. It is also apparent that most of the women engaged were also engaged in various other women's activities such as those listed in chapter 1, the general affairs of women being their concern and the time to engage in those at their disposal.

To demonstrate what motivated the women concerned Stykárssdóttir (1982) employs an analysis of worker's social consciousness expounded by Borg (1971). In terms of this class oriented analysis she comes to the conclusion that the women's involvement in suffragist activities and the ideas they put forward were generated by their upper class social status i.e. their position as wives and daughters of upper class men (Stykárssdóttir, 1982, pp 54-60). First, it is difficult to see why an analysis of workers' social consciousness is an apt analytical tool when Stykárssdóttir herself classifies the woman engaged as upper class and therefore in her terms far from belonging to or sharing the social consciousness of a class of workers. Second, explaining the women's activities in terms of their husbands' or fathers' social position completely bypasses the achievements of the women themselves who after all are the ones who are at issue. It also effectively contradicts the women's own ideas which claimed extended rights for women not as wives and daughters, i.e. not in terms of their relationship to men, but as independent individuals having the important roles of mother and housewife (cf. chapter 3). Third, Icelandic society was at the time singularly lacking in bourgeois tradition, having only a few decades earlier been a culturally homogeneous farming society, so a definition of class such as Borg's derived from an analysis of a society having a long-standing bourgeois tradition is hardly an appropriate analytical device when dealing with Icelandic society of the time.

As pointed out earlier the amount of formal education was what primarily differentiated people in Iceland, not their relationship to the means of production which is a governing factor in Borg's definition of class and is found in other authors as well. In terms of formal education a significant proportion of the women belonged to the educated part of society on account of their own educational qualifications. The fact that many of the women's husbands were educated men helps to explain, not that many of the women had education since many married only

after acquiring their education or their ideas on the subject of women's rights, but the important and necessary element of courage discussed above. When a woman lacked formal educational qualifications herself she could refer to those of her husband if need be and derive from those a certain social validation sometimes expedient in the doubtless often terrifying situation of being publicly visible as a suffragist. The fact that no unmarried woman ventured to become publicly engaged without herself having formal education further substantiates the point. Furthermore, an educated husband could perhaps be expected to find suffragist ideas more palatable or less threatening than an uneducated husband might and therefore be tolerant and/or supportive of his wife's suffragist activities, thus bolstering her courage.

But education is not only a means of the social validation which it is in an education oriented society such as Iceland; it is in itself a purveyor of knowledge and ideas and a means to express and develop knowledge and ideas. As such its force must not be underestimated as a generating factor in social movement activities. Therefore it is not surprising to find educated women in the lead of women's movements in different countries and at different periods regardless of their otherwise differing social circumstances (see e.g. Banks, 1981, Coote and Campell, 1982, Randall, 1987).

Education or access to education is very much in evidence in the group of women concerned and is an important explanatory factor in their involvement. It may be used to define the women as of a certain class but this would be misleading given the common definition of class. Class in the conventional sense defines women according to the social class of their fathers or husbands and since most of the women's husbands were educated or comparatively well-off men, the concept of class is only useful in that it indicates that the women concerned had easier access to education, direct or indirect, and sometimes more time to engage in social activities than women commonly did, although the amount of time available for women to spend on extra-domestic activities is no measure of their involvement in such activities.

The concept of class also obscures the importance of the social changes taking place in Iceland at the time which must be taken into account. As pointed out earlier 27 of the 38 women were daughters of

farmers while none was married to a farmer. They were women who had been removed from the traditional farming society where the rules of social interaction were familiar and who lived and worked in the rapidly growing urban areas where those rules were, at least initially, unfamiliar and often in the process of being formed. They therefore keenly experienced the shift in the position of women taking place in Iceland at the time. It is suggested here that it is more helpful to view the women's suffragist activities in terms of this change and in terms of their educational level rather than in terms of class, since this change affected their social circumstances more profoundly than their class position vis á vis other groups in the socially and culturally homogeneous but rapidly changing Icelandic society, and their education provided them with some of the means to deal with this change. Such an approach places the social processes of the time and the women themselves, their position within these processes, both socio-structural and conceptual, in the foreground rather than the position of the men surrounding them and does not promote a view of Icelandic society as a traditional and comparatively stable class society, which it was not.

This is not to say that the social relationships of the women to the men surrounding them are not important in viewing their involvement with women's rights activities. As pointed out earlier fathers and husbands could be instrumental in the important field of education - and, as far as husbands are concerned, in providing women with a legitimate social position, the role of mother and wife being the one socially acceptable for women. But while the educational level of their husbands may have helped the women face the challenge of becoming publicly engaged with women's rights it was no prerequisite for participating in such activities to be married. On the contrary, given the rising marriage rate in the country, the proportion of unmarried women in the suffragist group, 20%, is very high. If we add to that that a number of the married women did not become actively engaged until after they were widowed or ceased being active once they were married it becomes clear that a significant proportion of the women engaged were socially living "without a man". Given the accepted role of women as wives and mothers those women were in an anomalous social position. While this indicates further the futility of analysing the women's

involvement in terms of their husbands' social position, it also indicates that women socially "without a man" were not impeded by their single state in participating in women's rights activities. On the contrary, lacking the social characteristics of a domestically engaged wife and perhaps also having more education than women normally did, single women and widows, on account of their in between social-structural position, were ideally placed to mediate between the social worlds of men and women and therefore suitable candidates for bringing women's ideas into the predominantly male domain of public decision-making. Two of the leading suffragists of the period and the foremost candidates of the women's slates, Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir and Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason, shared this characteristic of being socially "without a man" during their active engagement with women's rights while otherwise leading quite different lives.

Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir (1856-1940) was born and brought up in Húnavatnssýsla, northern Iceland. Her father was a farmer of humble means and her youth and early adult years were characterized by poverty and its accompanying hardships, by no means uncommon in Iceland. She was the eldest of five siblings and, as was the rule on farms, contributed her labour to the farm from childhood onwards. When she was 14 her mother became seriously ill and Bríet took over her workload including the management of the household. Her strong desire to study was thwarted by her circumstances and lack of means and this frustration made her early on form the opinion that women were discriminated against.

The first injustice I came across was the oppression of women. Already when I was very young I realized that the circumstances of men and women were very different. I can remember how often I pined when my brother and I had both been working on the farm the whole day and at the end of the day he could sit down and read whereas I had to continue working - and I literally suffered because I have always much preferred books to manual labour. (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, quoted in Héðinsdóttir, 1988, p. 19, my translation).

When she was 24 years old Bríet, however, managed to attend for a year the women's school in Laugaland, established two years after the

first women's school in Reykjavík. By then her father was dead, the farm sold and the family scattered. Bríet supported herself by selling her labour on farms, sometimes teaching children as part of her duties, but failed in her subsequent attempts to obtain further formal education. During 1884 she was employed as domestic help in Reykjavík and the following year her article on the rights and education of women was published anonymously in the paper *Fjallkonan*, the first published article on the rights of women known to be written by a woman.

In 1887 Bríet took up permanent residence in Reykjavík, supported herself by teaching children and by the end of the year, on Dec. 30, became the first woman in the country to give a public lecture, its subject being the position and rights of women. The lecture, which created a stir, was well received although it also drew its share of criticism, chief among those being that it was too good to be written by a woman, therefore a man must have written it – which in its turn showed how intellectually inferior women were.

The following year Bríet married the suffragist sympathizer and editor of *Fjallkonan*, Valdimar Ásmundsson, a self-educated man of similar origins as herself and whom she credited with a great deal of her own education and her subsequent ability to speak out for women's rights (Héðinsdóttir, 1988, p. 57). In 1895 she established one of the two first women's papers in the country, *Kvennablaðið*, which she edited and to a great extent wrote for the 25 years of its publication, but was not actively engaged with women's rights until after her husband's death in 1902. Then a widow of insubstantial means and the mother of two young children she became actively involved with women's rights and in due course an apparently tireless advocate of these rights until her death in 1940.

Termed by one of her biographers "a major power in the history of Icelandic women", (Einarsdóttir, 1986) Bríet is to be found actively engaged wherever women's rights are at issue until the end of the period. After 1902 she turned *Kvennablaðið* into a platform for publicizing suffragist views, was instrumental in establishing the Women's Rights Association in 1907 and in setting up the women's slates of the period, she herself heading such slates a number of times and serving two terms on Reykjavík's municipal council as their representative. In 1905 she

initiated a connection with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, an organization committed to obtaining enfranchisement for women, and by doing so opened up a channel through which suffragist ideas from abroad were made accessible to Icelandic suffragists. She herself attended a number of the Alliance's international conferences. During her life her name became a household commodity in Iceland, firmly associated with suffragist ideas, and she is one of the few women who has found her way into present-day textbooks on Icelandic history (Héðinsdóttir, 1988, Einarsdóttir, 1986).

Another woman whose activities were instrumental in the field of women's rights during the period and whose name is also to be found in Icelandic history textbooks, is Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason (1868-1941). Born in Dýrafjörður, western Iceland, her father a trader and independent shipowner, Ingibjörg was brought up in circumstances of relative good means. In spite of her father's death when she was 8 years old, her mother managed to enable her and her four brothers to obtain a good degree of education. Being taught at home by an appointed teacher when a child, Ingibjörg entered the women's school in Reykjavík in 1881, then 13 years old, and graduated from there the following year. After having studied privately for two years she sailed for Copenhagen in 1884 to continue her studies, which she completed in 1893, having specialized as a teacher and gymnastics instructor, the latter then being unknown in Iceland as a subject for girls. On her return to Iceland at the completion of her studies Ingibjörg took up teaching posts in Reykjavík, but went abroad again in 1901 to study teaching in Germany and Switzerland. In 1906 when Þóra Melsted, the founder and headmistress of Reykjavík's women's school retired, Ingibjörg took over as the school's headmistress and occupied that position with renown until her death in 1941.

Upon her return to Iceland in 1893 Ingibjörg became engaged with women's issues, first in the fields of charity and home-industry, then in the field of women's rights. She was repeatedly chosen by women to head their organizations and to deliver speeches on solemn occasions such as expressing women's gratitude to the Althing on the occasion of the 1915 legislation which granted women full parliamentary franchise. In 1922 when the first women's slate was put forward in national elections Ingibjörg was chosen to head the slate and, the slate being suc-

cessful, became the first woman to be voted into the Althing. Soon after she was elected to the Althing, she joined the Conservative Party which was then being established, claiming that otherwise she had no chances of furthering legislation concerning women in the Althing, naming as chief among those the building of the national hospital in Reykjavík which women had fought for for a number of years. By joining a political party Ingibjörg greatly disappointed her suffragist followers and her “defection” was seen by them as a main reason for the failure of the 1926 women’s slate to get its candidate, Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, elected to the Althing and the subsequent disappearance of the women’s slates.

Ingibjörg was re-elected twice to the Althing where she represented the Conservative Party until 1930. In the Althing she continued to engage herself with women’s issues but was heavily criticised by the suffragists for failing in her duties to her original electors and in her commitment to suffragist ideas. A contemporary suffragist describes her rather ambiguously as being “... on the whole ... a woman with the courage of her opinions” (Valdimarsdóttir, 1929, p.8). Ingibjörg never married and remained childless throughout her life (Einarsdóttir, 1986, Thorsteinsson, 1974, Valdimarsdóttir, 1929, Pétursdóttir, 1928).

Comparing the lives of these two leading suffragists of the period it emerges, first, that since the social and economic circumstances of their parental families were very different, the social position of their fathers cannot explain their involvement with women’s rights activities. What they have in common where their origins are concerned is that both were brought up in the rural, farming society and both emigrated to Reykjavík and experienced the shift in the position of women occurring in the newly created urban society, which agrees with the earlier conclusion that the social changes taking place in Iceland were more important than the social status of the women’s fathers in explaining their women’s rights activities.

Second, while Ingibjörg had extended formal educational qualifications and was employed in education throughout her working-life, Bríet lacked such qualifications but was married for a number of years to an educated man and was able to rely on him both directly and indirectly for her education and educational validation, self-education being generally not less respected than formal education in Iceland. In addition

Bríet was successfully engaged in editing and writing a paper for 25 years, work commonly thought to require education. Education is therefore very much in evidence in both their lives which is in accordance with the importance of education in explaining women's involvement in women's rights activities pointed out earlier.

Third, while the economic circumstances of their adult lives were very different, pointing to the fact that these are not of crucial importance where involvement with women's rights activities is concerned, they shared the characteristic of living in a single state during their years of involvement, and when they were chosen by women to represent women in the traditionally male area of public decision making. It has been suggested that women's singleness, which meant that they were not domestically and otherwise engaged by being someone's wife and which meant that they were the heads of their households, placed them in social structural terms in an in between position with regard to the accepted structural positions of men and women respectively. The fact that the vote was first given to women who were widows or unmarried and heads of their household indicates the structural in-betweenness of such women. They had certain male social attributes which made them more eligible than other women to hold the right to vote in the eyes of men who alone had possessed the right. This in between position was further enhanced if the women concerned also possessed a degree of education, education having been an almost exclusive male prerogative and therefore in structural terms a defining element of men's and not women's social position. Educated women living in a single state were therefore structurally very well placed to negotiate between the social worlds of men and women respectively. And Bríet and Ingibjörg were both so placed, and not only in terms of possessing the male socio-structural attributes of being the heads of their households and being educated; they were also at the same time firmly grounded in the female social world, Bríet as a mother and a former wife and Ingibjörg as the instructor of girls. They therefore combined in their persons structural qualities of both social worlds, which, it is argued, contributed to their being chosen by other women to represent women in the male world of public decision making.

Such socio-structural attributes were important where candidacy was concerned but they were obviously not prerequisite for candidacy nor for becoming involved with women's rights activities. There was no pre-

requisite for becoming involved, but instead of attempting to explain women's involvement in such activities and their ideas on women's rights in terms of the social class of their fathers and husbands, it has been argued here that the social structural attributes of the women themselves, and the effects the social changes taking place in Iceland had on their social structural position, are the significant explanatory factors when analysing women's involvement in women's rights activities.

These explanatory factors point towards shifts in the definition of women's social personhood. First, the social changes taking place at the time brought about a major change in the context within which women's social personhood was defined. Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir and Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason both moved from rural areas to the new urban area of Reykjavík, and although the backgrounds of their paternal families were very different, they were with respect to that move structurally in the same position. Second, the change in women's socio-structural position resulting from the social change taking place meant that the traditional definition of women's personhood derived from their socio-structural position in the rural community, became inadequate as defining urban women's social personhood. Therefore a shift in the definition of women's social personhood began to manifest itself.

The socio-structural attributes of women chosen by other women as candidates to promote a new definition of women's social personhood provide a clear indication of what that new definition of women's social personhood was to be, since a candidate could not be expected to make her point in that respect without being able to demonstrate it to some degree in her own person. It is however important to distinguish between the socio-structural attributes that made specific women suitable candidates and those that represented a new definition of women's social personhood generally. Among the former is Bríet's and Ingibjörg's single status, the fact that they were living in a single state at the time of their candidacy and therefore in an in between socio-structural position with regard to the accepted structural position of men and women respectively. The same applies to their status as educated women.

There the similarity between the characteristics of singleness and education ends. The new definition of women's social personhood

generally did not entail singleness, quite the opposite, women were to continue being mothers and housewives. Therefore Bríet's and Ingibjörg's relation to those traditional roles, Bríet's as a mother and a one-time wife, Ingibjörg's as the instructor in womanly skills are an important part of their socio-structural characteristics as it situates them within the definition of women's social personhood generally. With respect to education on the other hand, the new definition of women's social personhood generally did entail, like that of women's political personhood, that women were to be educated and in addition that women were to hold the same jural rights as men, notably because they were mothers and housewives.

The social changes taking place in Iceland at the time and the new urban context within which women's social personhood came to be defined as a result therefore entailed a concept of the person for women which strove to include the traditional defining characteristics of men's social personhood derived from the politico-jural domain, notably the ones of education and formal jural rights, while retaining the traditional definition of women in terms of the domestic domain. Hence emerged a modified, new concept of the person for women in Icelandic society which is consistent with the significant explanatory factors for analysing women's involvement in women's rights activities at the time.

CHAPTER 3

IDEAS

As is to be expected during a period lasting 55 years and with many suffragists voicing ideas and opinions on women's rights, such ideas are many and varied and inevitably often idiosyncratic. No attempt is made here to chronicle all suffragist ideas on women's rights, the emphasis being on delineating salient and recurrent ones making explicit the ideological regularities and examining them in relation to social-structural factors.

Education of women is the issue that marks the beginning of the period and it is an issue that runs like a thread through available writings of the suffragists throughout the period and not least those of Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir who was by far their most prolific writer. Women's lack of education is seen as the basis of their subjugation, their noneducated state making women prey to various forms of oppression and women themselves unaware of this oppression and their duties as responsible citizens. Educating women is seen as the means to make women aware of their subjugation and of what their responsibilities should be, which in turn is the first step towards their being able to overcome their subjugation and become free and responsible citizens, the equals of men. Becoming the equals of men in this respect is seen as a necessary element in the progress of Icelandic society in its transition from the farming society of old to the new, modern one; and not only in terms of women's potential contribution in the public sphere but still more in terms of their contribution in the domestic sphere. Or as Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir puts it in that very first 1885 article:

Still everybody must admit that the education of women is the main prerequisite for all true prosperity in domestic life and therefore it is one of the issues on which the progress of society rests. (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, 1885, p. 42, my translation).

The issue of education of women is therefore on the one hand closely related to women's position in the domestic domain, reflected in the educational priorities of the new schools for women which emphasized in their curricula various housewifely skills rather than booklearning. On the other hand the education of women is closely related to the idea of progress which was prominent in the ideological climate of Icelandic society of the time. In Iceland the technological age was dawning. Knowledge, in particular scientific knowledge, seemed omnipotent. And, in a nation fighting for its independence from a colonial power and undergoing fundamental social change, knowledge was viewed as of primary importance in creating the new, modern and independent society which contemporaries saw as their task. And women, brought along by the enthusiasm which characterized this creative activity, did not want to be excluded but found they were seriously hampered in their participation by having few civil rights and no access to formal education. In the new urban society these were crucial conditions for participation, which they were not in the old farming society that did not rely on education for its maintenance and had long established traditions in the field of rights.

Women's desire to participate in the building of the new society, most keenly experienced by women residing in the developing areas of that society, i.e. the urban areas, is therefore instrumental in prompting them to voice their claims, but those claims are more often than not voiced in terms of women's ability to contribute in the domestic domain. This indicates, first, that the women view the domestic domain as their domain: in its sphere they contribute their work and from it they draw their social structural position. Secondly, they view the domestic domain as the fundamental one on which everything else is dependent (cf. Bjarnhéðinsdóttir above) and therefore their contribution in that area is not seen to be of small value. Women's significance in this respect is seen as a defining characteristic of women as social beings. Thirdly, this indicates that progress is needed in the domestic domain. Things are unsatisfactory there as they are, pointing toward changes taking place in the composition and role of the household and subsequent changes in the structural position of women discussed in chapter 2.

But obtaining extended rights for women both in the field of education and in the field of civil rights is in itself also seen by the suffragists as progress, a beneficial change from an unsatisfactory to a more satisfactory and up to date situation. And argued thus in a society absorbed in promoting progress the suffragists validated their claims in accordance with the accepted and dominant values of their times. On this level as well as others the social structural changes taking place in Iceland and their accompanying ideology inform the suffragists ideas and activities.

The same is true where the important idea of *independence* is concerned. According to the suffragists women were to be educated and accorded the same civil rights as men in order to enable them to become independent, i.e. free human beings able to take on the responsibility for their own lives with not only the rights but also the duties such responsibility entails. The idea of women's independence runs directly parallel with the then all pervasive idea of Iceland's independence from Denmark, preceived as Iceland's right to become a free country responsible unto itself in all issues, with the rights and duties such responsibility entails. While Iceland is perceived as oppressed but strong on account of its culture in relation to the colonial power, so the suffragists perceive women as oppressed but also strong on account of their gender-specific culture in relation to men.

The liberal nationalism which characterized Iceland's fight for independence was permeated with references to Icelandic *history*, especially that of the commonwealth period when Iceland was a free and independent country, partly validating Iceland's present claim to independence. The same is true of the suffragists' arguments for women's independence, which are loaded with references to the strong and independent women of the commonwealth period described in the sagas. Already in her 1885 article, Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir uses such references frequently and by the end of the article when she is calling for the mobilization of women in the cause of women's rights and education she clinches the argument by writing:

It is to be hoped that they [women] are willing to show that they are the true daughters of the free Icelanders of old, who do not suffer anyone to suppress their rights and freedom.
(Bjarnhéðinsdóttir 1885, p. 47, my translation).

And as late as 1929 when Laufey Valdimarsdóttir published her *A Brief History of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Iceland*, we find that two of the work's twelve pages are devoted entirely to a description of the commonwealth period and the position of commonwealth women, who are presented by the author as independent women, the possessors of will, strength and authority and thus "the forerunners of the women's movement in Iceland" (p.2.).

Hence the idea of women's independence did not only run parallel to the idea of the country's independence but the two were perceived in similar ways and argued for on comparable premises. And as with the idea of progress, the suffragists are using a dominant idea, transporting it to their field of interest to validate their claims, although in this case not making direct comparisons between the ideas in two different fields of application as is the case with the idea of progress. But as is pointed out in chapter 1 the conceptual combination of the two different rights to independence, Iceland's right to sovereignty and the right of its women to be independent and thereby holders of authority, meant that one could not easily be denied without denying the other which was instrumental in that women were eventually accorded the rights they sought in spite of widespread opposition to granting women such rights.

Extolling the independent state of Icelandic women of old also served to illuminate by way of contrast the present oppressed state of Icelandic women and how they were discriminated against. The idea of women's oppression or *sexual discrimination* is a recurrent one and is in suffragists' writings closely linked to the idea of *equality of siblings*. Why, they asked, did women not enjoy the same treatment as their brothers, why did they not have the same opportunities to study and work, why did they not hold the same civil rights, etc.? In 1850 the inheritance law had been changed so that it recognized the equality of siblings in terms of inheritance. The equality rule in sibling relationships was thus present in women's inheritance rights and could by extension be seen to be applicable to other rights. Furthermore daughters were expected to contribute their labour to the farm to no lesser degree than their brothers. The rule of the equality of siblings was therefore directly experienced in every-day farming life. But so was the

inequality between siblings in that sons were expected to “do and become” whereas daughters were expected to simply work, which once perceived as inequality enhanced the importance of the equality of siblings rule and women’s awareness of being discriminated against on account of their sex (cf. Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, ch. 2). The fact that women were born as it appears by accident of one sex rather than the other meant that they received less education, lower wages for their work and had fewer civil rights than their brothers which in terms of the equality of siblings (if nothing else) was perceived as patently unfair.

This close linking of the idea of sexual discrimination with the idea of the equality of siblings can in part be explained in terms of the social structural changes taking place in Iceland at the time. As pointed out above most of the women were brought up in farming households where their contribution from an early age to the corporate unit, the farm, was considered essential to its survival as the contribution of their brothers, in spite of the fact that their brothers were treated differently.

In their urban households this was no longer the case. Their contribution to the survival of the household had become secondary to that of husbands or brothers, who brought home the earnings on which the household lived. This devaluation of women’s work, along with their in other respects changing social structural position, made their lack of civil rights and work options more keenly experienced. The equality of siblings, even if imperfectly realized, experienced in their rural upbringing, therefore becomes the background which best illuminated the women’s present unequal position, there being no other area of sexual equality to refer to. And as with their references to women of the commonwealth period they are employing what is, if only partly, satisfactory in the past to illuminate what is unsatisfactory in the present in order to validate their claims for a more satisfactory state.

The suffragists perceived sexual discrimination in various areas of social life but the field of education and the field of *enfranchisement* were the ones that received the main burden of their attention and on which their claims were consistently focussed. Since what is socially experienced invariably informs social movement action it is of note that in spite of women’s situation on the labour market described in chapter 2, and although a suffragist like Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir was

instrumental in founding the first women's labour union in 1914, the suffragists did not put forward direct and consistent claims in this field although they frequently pointed out the injustices women suffered in this area. This is due to their belief that enfranchisement, the right to vote and the right of eligibility to public decision-making bodies, was the cornerstone on which all other rights rested. Invested in these rights was the fundamental *right to speak*, the right to voice ideas with the authority necessary for them to be influential in public decision-making and to turn women generally into signifying social beings. The suffragists believed that once women had obtained the right to speak, they were in a position to put all perceived wrongs right by voting and by becoming legitimate voices not least in municipal councils and the Althing. Therefore the issue of women's enfranchisement is the dominant issue throughout the period, the one that is seen as fundamental to all other issues.

Influence from abroad, i.e. from neighbouring countries where the emphasis in women's right activities at the time was on enfranchisement, is in evidence here. A number of the active suffragists had studied abroad and become acquainted with suffragist ideas. In 1905 direct contact with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance was established, and when the Women's Rights Association was established two years later it was modelled on the associations making up the Alliance, its sole aim being like that of the Alliance to obtain enfranchisement for women (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, 1947). The activities of Icelandic suffragists are thus by no means a geographically isolated phenomenon, but, while such influence from abroad helped Icelandic suffragists to formalize their aims, their aims and the ideas on which they were grounded were nonetheless informed by the changing social position of Icelandic women and ideas prevalent in and particular to Icelandic society. Without firm grounding in the social and cultural context of the society or a part of the society in question such claims and ideas would lack social authenticity and have diminished potential to affect the society at which they are directed (see e.g. Emery, 1986). Neither was the case with Icelandic suffragist ideas. Hence influence from abroad supplemented suffragist activities in Iceland, especially regarding the formal-

ization of aims and activities, but did not as such provide the social and ideological grounds on which those aims and activities were based.

The issue of education of women comes next in line to the issue of enfranchisement and its prominence compared to other issues is, it is argued, due not only to the rights or work opportunities education afforded women, but to the perceived instrumental nature of education in making women aware of their subjugation. This was seen as necessary if women were to overcome their subordinate position and become the responsible independent human beings envisioned by the suffragists. The suffragists, that is, see women as lacking in certain respects, hence women themselves need to be made aware of their position and what their rights and duties should be.

The suffragists did not, however, thereby perceive women as the ones fundamentally responsible for the sexual discrimination they were suffering. That in their view was due to the values society placed on women and men respectively, validating their unequal social positions. The word *patriarchy* is not to be found in their writings but the idea of it is there, expressed variously but consistently, the conventions and institutions of a male oriented society being seen as the basis on which women's subjugation rests. Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, for instance, devotes a third of her 1887 lecture on the rights and position of women to demonstrating historically and cross-culturally, starting with the Bible, the foundations of patriarchy and its effects on the contemporary position of women.

By viewing male instituted ideas and values as the basis for women's oppression the suffragists removed the responsibility for the unsatisfactory position of women from individual, contemporary men who were seen as responsible agents of sexual discrimination only if they upheld patriarchal values. Plenty of such men were to be found but all men as a group were not seen as responsible for the discriminatory situation. This attitude had among other things the advantage of enabling individual suffragists to live in peace with their fathers, husbands or sons. It meant that they did not categorically have to declare war in the all important domestic sphere in order to be faithful to their suffragist ideas. And it meant that they could and did envision women as the companions and equals of men with whom they wished to work

in the building of the new society. Men as individual social beings were not necessarily reprehensible, nor were they to be dispensed with. Society without men being an impossibility, it was patriarchal ideas and values which permeated society that were reprehensible and which were to be dispensed with.

Linked to the idea of patriarchy is the idea that *women themselves* must join and work towards a new nondiscriminatory order of society. Whereas men as a group could not be held responsible for the subjugation of women, women as a group could be held responsible for allowing it to be maintained since it concerned all women equally. Women as a group were thus seen as the ones responsible for abolishing their subjugation to which the many calls to women to mobilize in the cause of women's rights found in suffragist writings bear witness. The idea that women themselves had to bear the brunt of this reformation is also consistent with the idea of independence. Suffragists wanted women to be considered independent, responsible human beings and therefore women must show themselves to be capable of such independence, relying on themselves and nobody else to make their aims materialize. They should not simply accept what men decided to hand out to them – much, it was argued, like a husband would hand out household money to his wife –but should instead claim what was rightfully theirs on the grounds that they were to be the rightful holders of the same rights and duties as men.

Consistent with the idea of patriarchy, of there being such a thing as male ideas and male values, and with the idea that women themselves must accomplish their aims, is the key idea of *women's gender-specific culture* or women's partial cultural separateness from men. The idea of matriarchy is not to be found in suffragist writings as either an existing or a desirable state of affairs. The idea of matriarchy as well as that of patriarchy presupposes that one sex has authority over the other and women were neither perceived as possessing such authority nor did they aim at possessing it, becoming the equals of men being their aim. But women were perceived to possess a cluster of values and ideas which were specific to their gender and as such comparable to men's gender specific ideas and values on which patriarchy rested. And if women's gender specific values and ideas were to be brought to bear on

the governing of society it was necessary that women themselves put them forward since who else could do that?

While women's gender specific values and ideas were seen to be excluded from or non-existent within the field of public decision-making, the suffragists believed that they were essential to that field, giving it a previously lacking but necessary dimension in dealing with the problems of social life and ensuring the well-being of society. On the idea of women's gender specific culture was based the suffragists' claim that women should be included in all public decision making and hence be given the necessary rights for it to be so. As usual Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir phrases it clearly:

Society needs everywhere the detailed and loving mother's care of women. In all its areas women should be included. Both as voters and legislators, everywhere where young and old, poor, destitute and sick are discussed, everywhere where culture and morality need spokesmen - there women should be. Men are probably more broad-minded when the bigger issues are at stake, perhaps they contribute a more suitable foundation for the government of countries. But they very often overlook details which women do not, with their qualities of practicality, greater consideration and finer sensibilities. All social life and all social organization would benefit if men and women were equal and worked together as equals and companions. Toward this aim we should direct all the strength we possess. (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, *Kvennablaðið*, Jan 23, 1907, my translation).

In this short passage the suffragists' vision of what women stand for and the aims of their struggle for their rights emerge clearly. The fundamental aim is that women and men are to be *equal*, and this equality is not seen to be beneficial to women alone, it is seen as beneficial to the whole of society and indeed necessary for its well-being. But to be equal does not mean that women and men are or are to become the same. On the contrary women and men are perceived to be culturally *different*, their different cultural attributes being seen to complement each other, forming a cultural whole on which the governing of society should be grounded. And not only are women perceived as culturally different from men but their cultural characteristics are seen as *positive*, as being useful and beneficial in all areas of social life and hence not to

be dispensed with. Thus women are to remain women culturally and as such be equal to men, "equal but different" encapsulating the issue.

It is clear that women are seen as culturally different from men because of their roles as mothers and housewives, their cultural separateness being derived directly from their close association with the domestic domain and from the fact that within its sphere they contribute the essential share of their work and act out the most important part of their social life. As became clear when considering the idea of progress, women in effect identify themselves as social beings in terms of the domestic domain or in Fortes' words "... derive their specificity from it." (1969, p. 98).

In the farming society the domestic and politico-jural domains were merged in the corporate unit, the farm, the farm being all at once a centre of production, as well as that of domestic and public social life, incorporating the defining elements of both domains. Hence the members of a farming household did not derive their specificity from one domain rather than the other, but were defined as social beings in terms of both domains. In the newly created urban society the spheres of the two domains have become separated, production activities, the defining element of paid work and thus of certain rights and duties, having become divorced from domestic work which, ceasing to be regarded as production activity, confers different rights and duties from work done outside the domestic sphere. Similarly domestic life has become divorced from other aspects of social life, creating two different spheres of action where social structural factors come into play differently.

This social change, the effective separation of the domestic and public spheres, underlies and informs the suffragists' claims. It is to be found in their claim that cultural attributes derived from the domestic domain are not to be found in public-decision making, the authority to effect such decisions being conferred by structural factors pertaining to the politico-jural domain. The underlying perception of this separation also emerges from the fact that they see themselves as deriving their specificity from only one of the domains i.e. the domestic one. They see themselves as being deprived of a great deal of the specificity derived from the politico-jural domain. They are outside its sphere of action and the structural factors pertaining to that sphere

do not apply to them directly, only to men who alone hold the rights necessary to have full rights and duties in both domains. And that they find unsatisfactory, the injustice of this state of affairs being brought about and enhanced by their urban social situation. The effects on their position of the social change taking place in this manner informs their ideas and motivates their claims. But by claiming membership in the public sphere and demanding to be defined in terms of social structural factors pertaining to the public part of the politico-jural domain they do not thereby relinquish their membership in the domestic sphere nor their specificity derived from the domestic domain. On the contrary they are demanding that a specifying dimension of the politico-jural domain be added to the dimension of the domestic domain in the definition of women as social beings, just as formerly they derived their specificity from both domains.

In the same manner as the suffragists did not question the values derived from their close association with the domestic domain they did not question the nature of that *authority* with which public decisions were made and which derived its legitimacy from the politico-jural domain. The oppression of women which could involve the misuse of authority they opposed; but the values of public decision-making authority, the way it was distributed and the grounds on which it rested they did not question.

Almost nothing is to be found directly on authority in the suffragists' writings. It was not an issue they dealt with on account of itself which in itself indicates that it was not an issue the suffragists thought had to be dealt with in one way or another. A hint appears, though, in Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir's 1887 lecture where, when considering the advent of early Christianity, she writes:

No, the apostles were obliged to shape their ideas in accordance with the manners of their age and the customs of the nations among whom they lived. They would hardly have advanced very far with their missionary activities if they had wanted to change the régime of the nations. (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, 1888, p. 13, my translation).

This indicates that Bríet at least did not consider that proclaiming changes in a nation's régime would be advantageous when promoting

new, unaccepted ideas. In other words, if one wanted to promote one's ideas and have them accepted as legitimate, one had to respect the authority structure of the society in question. And that is very much what the suffragists did, both when they themselves entered institutions wielding public authority such as municipal councils and the Althing, and when organizing their own movement. The by-laws, for instance, of the Women's Rights Association, passed in 1907 when the Association was established, decreed that the Association was to be governed by a board of five women, who were to be chairman, secretary, treasurer, vice-chairman and vice-secretary respectively. This is a traditional hierarchical authority structure such as that which made up the political framework of Icelandic society. Similarly the Association's meeting proceedings outlined in its by-laws, were the traditional ones. Issues were to be decided by taking a written vote, a simple majority then decided the issue, proposals to change the Association's by-laws were to be in writing and to be given to the chairman twelve days before an Association meeting etc. Evidence of hierarchical thinking within the movement can also be found, for instance, in that when the suffragists are describing how they went from house to house when electioneering they formed teams of women each made up of a head-woman and two subordinate ones, not three equally responsible women.

Thus the suffragists were compliant to their society's basic authority values on which its authority structure rested. There are, however, a few instances of disrespect towards established authority. Oral legend has it for example that once when during a meeting of Reykjavík's municipal council Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir did not like the way the debate was turning she intentionally took to yawning enormously. Yawning being infectious and it being late in the evening she soon had the whole council yawning so the meeting was adjourned and the issue under debate taken up at a later meeting where she succeeded in turning it the way she wanted. This episode does not indicate any questioning of established authority; it suggests rather that authority, being there, had to be dealt with even if unconventional means had sometimes to be employed.

There are also instances of suffragists accusing each other of monopolizing public authority once it was in their hands. Ragnhildur

Pétursdóttir, an active member of the Women's Rights Association, accuses Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason of doing just that, making no attempt to inform her voters or the general electorate of goings-on in the Althing, and hence effectively monopolizing the authority given her by her voters and by the women who chose her as their candidate (Pétursdóttir, 1928). Ingibjörg is clearly seen by the suffragists as someone sent into the Althing to voice their ideas, a representative of the women's world in that most male of all worlds, the Althing. These accusations reveal that the suffragists considered Ingibjörg as failing in that role in that she fails to deliberate with women, but they do not indicate that they found anything wrong with the kind of authority invested in the Althing as such, an accepted concomitant of that authority in any case being that members of the Althing inform the electorate of their activities.

The suffragists saw women as being outside the authority structure of their society and they wanted to obtain for women publicly sanctioned authority so that women could become part of that structure. The key to that was the franchise, which would give women the right to speak with authority both as voters and as members of public authority-wielding institutions. But they did not see anything inherently wrong with public authority, the way it was distributed, except that it was not distributed to women, or the grounds on which it rested. They were not in revolt against the authority structure of their society, they simply wanted to become part of it. The fact that many of the women had close family ties with men possessing public authority may have influenced this attitude, since what is familiar is less prone to be questioned than the unfamiliar; but it need not be so, as this unquestioning attitude is consistent with their unquestioning attitude towards women's gender specific culture. The values of society, whether they derived from the domestic or politico-jural domains, were not consistently questioned. The problem was that those derived from the domestic domain were under-represented and undervalued leaving women, who derived their specificity from the domestic domain, high and dry in terms of the politico-jural domain, discriminated against on account of their lack of rights and on account of the misuse of male gender-specific values in the form of patriarchy.

Not that the suffragists were not accused of being in revolt against the proper order of society; tirades in the papers, the minutes of the meetings of the Althing and contemporary novels bear witness to that. The novel *Kvenfreliskonur* (Suffragists), for instance, published in 1912, luridly describes what unsatisfactory wives educated women were, how ridiculous women were in traditional male jobs such as policemen and how impossible and unrewarding women found their work in such traditional male institutions as municipal councils. The heroines of that novel all opt for the proper role of mother and housewife in the end, after having suffered various hardships on account of their newfangled suffragist ideas. The suffragists' answer to this sort of argumentation, which certainly was not unusual at the time, was to point out that it was precisely because of the all important role of women as mothers and housewives that they should be given education and be included in all public decision-making. As mothers they were instrumental in the education of their children on whom the future of society depended and as housewives in the welfare of the domestic unit without which society would not survive. It was therefore imperative, they argued, that women be given the necessary rights to perform their socially important duties. Granting those rights would therefore not in any way hamper them in their proper, often termed "natural", roles as mothers and housewives. Quite the contrary.

By emphasising women's gender specific culture the suffragists are therefore once again using prevalent ideas, applying them in to their field of interest and formulating them accordingly in order to argue and validate their claims. They do so with the idea of progress, the idea of independence, using historical validation much in vogue at the time and seizing upon the principle of the equality of siblings to validate their claim to be equal to men. The social structural changes taking place in Iceland and its accompanying ideology thus inform the suffragists' ideas and activities, but at the same time the suffragists' ideas and activities are aimed at dealing with this social change, perceived, where women are concerned, in terms of sexual discrimination and patriarchy. They are not in revolt against society but society, as it has become, has to be reformed and so have its women. The relationship between suffragist aims and ideas and societal processes is thus direct but twofold

in that, on one hand, the prevalent ideology of change informs their ideas and, on the other, social change is itself in part responsible for the problems they aim at solving.

It now remains to be considered why the suffragists, after years of fighting their issues outside the established authority structure, chose the method of women's slates once they had been given the franchise. Why did they not use their newly obtained authority by simply using their right to vote, or become active by co-operating with men in the general politics of the time? After all they had had to co-operate with men to get their claim to the franchise through the Althing. In November 1907, two months before the first women's slate was put forward, Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir writes in *Kvennablaðið*:

For us women the most important thing in the impending elections is *to get women elected*. That is the beginning. If we don't seize the opportunity now it is a political sin which will avenge itself in all our issues later on. In the coming session of the Althing it would be seen as a reason against granting women political rights. ... Our honour is at stake that we refute the criticism that we are generally without interest in these matters. (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, *Kvennablaðið*, 1907, my translation).

The practical issue here is that women have to participate directly in the elections so that their non-participation could not be used against granting them that part of the franchise that still had to be won, which after all was the fundamental aim of the suffragists. There is also a practical side to the fact that the suffragists chose to participate by using women's slates; they did attempt to set up slates with men before the elections but failed because men were more interested in obtaining the votes of women than in getting women elected, and because some of the leading suffragists suspected that was the case and were from the start sceptical of such cooperation.

But method is not only determined by practical aspects, it is itself based on an idea or ideas, and the idea of a separate women's slate is consistent with the idea of women as a separate culture group and of women being discriminated against as a group. Women are seen as separate from men and therefore it is logical that women should participate separately on a separate women's slate in elections. A separate

women's slate is also consistent with the idea that women must themselves effect the changes they wish to see accomplished, and thus validate their claims to be allowed to participate with full rights in public decision-making. The franchise, although partial in 1908, had given women the right to speak. And the suffragists wanted and needed to demonstrate that women could indeed speak, that the franchise had been worth fighting for, and that women were worthy of the franchise and realized what rights and duties it entailed. Women had to validate their claims to participation, claims that were based on ideas of women as a separate social group, and that validation was both logically accomplished and effectively demonstrated by the method of separate women's slates. But participating was not in itself enough, women had to get elected to fully demonstrate their ability to speak and reap the fruits of authority for their cause. Co-operation with men in the male dominated politics of the period to achieve those goals proved to be practically impossible and ideologically diffused, hence the method of the women's slates.

Apart from proving that women could indeed speak, realized what rights and duties the franchise entailed and should therefore be given full enfranchisement, what did the suffragists want to use their voice of authority for? They never put forward policy statements for the slates, clarifying their position on various social and economic issues with which public decision-making of the time was concerned. Enfranchisement for women was throughout perceived as the cornerstone for all other rights for women and thus the key to improving women's unsatisfactory social position. The social issues they emphasized appear, however, in minutes of meetings of municipal councils and the *Althing* and from these sources it is clear that issues having to do with women and children had priority where suffragists were concerned.

In Reykjavík municipal council from 1908 until 1922 the following issues were initiated by the suffragists: instruction in swimming for girls, playgrounds for children, free meals for school-children, improved rules concerning how milk was sold, an employment office for women as well as men, rules on how long children could stay out evenings, a communal reading room for children, nursing for the poor,

a committee of two housewives and one man to fight high consumers' prices and a communal kitchen to save fuel costs. (Styrkársdóttir, 1985). In the Althing, Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason concerned herself among other things with the building of the national hospital, new legislation on marriage and various subsidies to women and issues of concern to women. (Valdimarsdóttir, 1929).

So the suffragists used their voice within public decision-making institutions in the interests of women and children and to a degree unprecedented in these institutions. Having entered the male domain of established authority they drew on their gender specific culture when choosing their priorities in dealing with the changing situation of women. The fact that issues concerning children are prominent among their issues indicates not only that the situation of children is closely tied to the situation of their mothers i.e. women, and that the situation of women and therefore also that of children had changed, making playgrounds, free school-meals, a communal reading room for children and a new marriage law appear as priorities. It means also that issues formerly pertaining to the domestic sphere were being brought into the public sphere and given a new politico-jural structural dimension. That is consistent with the analysis that the suffragists were demanding: that social activities and social beings defined in terms of the domestic domain should be given an added politico-jural dimension. Just as the suffragists' ideas are informed by ideas prevalent in their society so their claims and the issues they emphasize once they are in authority are informed by their changing social position, an important element of which was that certain socially determining factors derived from the politico-jural domain no longer applied to their specificity as social beings.

CHAPTER 4

THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

The approach employed in this study views Icelandic women's rights activities in terms of the society within which those activities took place. It places social processes, the social attributes of the women concerned and their ideas in the foreground, analysing the social activities at issue in terms of socio-structural and conceptual factors of Icelandic society. Instead of viewing women's rights activities as a separate social phenomenon as is habitually the case in societies where those activities take place, this study contextualizes those activities and aims at demonstrating the interplay between those activities and society at large.

The preceding examination has shown that both social structural and conceptual factors, not least those pertaining to social change, were formative and generating forces where women's rights activities during the period were concerned. The social and economic changes occurring during the period can be summarized briefly in that they involved a shift from a subsistence economy to a market economy, and a movement of the population from rural areas to developing urban ones where the economic and social unit was no longer the largely self-sufficient corporate farm based on the extended family but a household relying on wages for its support and to an increasing degree made up of the nuclear family only. It has been argued that these structural changes had adverse effects on the position of women. This is contrary to the contention of most writers dealing with the period. But it is in accordance with the findings of numerous development studies, which amply document for different societies how this kind of structural change has had negative results where women are concerned (See e.g. Rogers, 1980, Afshar, 1985 and Leacock and Safa, 1986).

In Iceland the structural changes occurring during the period involved among other things that the public and private spheres of activities which in the farming society were merged into one became

separated in the urban social context. Their production activities and public social life became divorced from the domestic activities, creating a separate domestic unit as a locus of consumption and private social life. This separation disadvantaged women in terms of their participation in the public sphere because of their socially sanctioned roles of mothers and housewives which tied them to the now separate domestic sphere.

To review a few of the salient features of how these structural changes affected the structural position of women, then, in 1862, when only a small percentage of the population lived in towns, J.R. Brown tells us that women do all the work there is to be done, and while his description may be read in part as a traveller's exaggeration it is clear that by the end of the period women's work in urban areas has all but disappeared from sight. That is especially true of that work which all women undertook, i.e. housework, which was by then conducted in the comparative privacy and seclusion of the urban household. Not only had housework become publicly invisible, women's work which formerly had been viewed as essential to the survival of the farming household had in the urban social context become secondary to that of men who had become the breadwinners, bringing home wages on which the household lived.

The secondary status of women's work did not apply only to housework. It also applied on the labour market where women, most often employed in work categories closely related to traditional housework, fetched much lower wages than men and too low to be expected to support a household. Women who sold their labour in the farming society had indeed also lower wages than male farm-hands, but in the farming society such women were integrated with the farming household and enjoyed the protection the corporate unit, the farm, could provide. In the urban social context labouring women enjoyed no such protection nor security in terms of satisfaction of basic needs; and in addition to their paid work had also to attend to unpaid housework in their urban homes. The situation of labouring women was therefore one of less security and increased workload, if not fundamentally different in terms of wages compared to those of men. Marriage, the social contract within which most women lived, came to be contracted when women were younger

and without the economic base of land for farming, increasing women's social and economic insecurity and making them more dependent on their husbands. In the household the structural position of the wife, which had on the farm been one of management within her gender defined area of work, began in the urban context to resemble more the one of servant, since, no longer being engaged in work regarded as part of production activities, her work became service to those who did engage in such activities.

In these respects the structural position of women thus changed from being a central, producing one along with that of men - and one of relative social security - to being a secondary one and prone to insecurity. This was true for full-time housewives no less than labouring women, since full-time housewives had to depend on their husbands' earnings not their own labour for their livelihood.

At the same time the household in urban areas became smaller than was the rule in the farming society, both in terms of number of family members and in terms of others such as hired help attached to the household, hired help concurrently becoming increasingly differentiated from members of the family. Instead of living and working at the centre of social life, constituted by the geographically separate farm where the public and private spheres of activity merged, women in the urban social context were thus removed to the margin of public social life, secluded as they were to an extent in small, private domestic units where they carried out their work. Extra-domestic activities available to women in urban areas were either the labour market where they worked primarily with other women and sometimes children or various women's associations such as those listed in chapter I consisting of women only. The world of urban women was becoming predominantly populated by other women and children only.

In effect this shift constituted a separation of urban social life into two very roughly demarcated gender based fields or gender based social worlds. These gender fields were not coterminous with the public and private spheres of action, but the women's field was predominantly that of the private sphere whereas men, being the prominent occupiers of the public sphere and at the same time living a part of their social life within the private sphere, in the domestic unit which depended on their

activities in the public sphere for its survival, were able in their gender field to move more freely than women could between the public and private spheres. In structural terms the separation of social life into public and private spheres and into gender fields imposed severe limitations on women's social structural space and served to marginalize them in terms of public social life.

While the social position of women deteriorated in structural terms it should be made clear that this does not mean that their situation necessarily deteriorated in terms of material conditions. During the period Icelandic society became gradually more affluent, the shift in the economy bringing higher economic returns than was previously the case, and the population as a whole enjoyed moderately rising living standards. Women generally were therefore not suffering a worsening of material conditions. What they can be said to have suffered in material terms was, as has been pointed out, increased economic insecurity in urban areas, and that they suffered in spite of increasing affluence because of their deteriorating social structural position which is at the heart of the matter.

In social structural terms that part of the politico-jural dimension that is derived from the public sphere was in part denied women in their urban social context. Instead women came to be defined more exclusively in terms of rights and capacities based on moral and emotive norms pertaining to the domestic domain. This created a certain lack, or an ambiguity, in the definition of women as jural persons: who they were in terms of the social and cultural elements pertaining to the politico-jural domain that define a person's jural status. It is therefore not surprising to find that the claims the suffragists put forward and the legislation made during the period concerning women pertain to the jural field, to women's right to vote and eligibility to governing bodies, their right to education and to hold office in that capacity and their jural rights within marriage. Both the claims and the eventual legislation aim at giving women a necessary but previously lacking jural dimension.

It is also not surprising to find some women, positioned in structural terms in between the domestic and politico-jural domains, being chosen either by women to advocate these claims or by men to hold the franchise. Such women could be defined in politico-jural terms as well

as domestic ones as social persons of a particular kind, and by sharing politico-jural dimensions with men were viewed by them as more right-ful holders of the franchise than other women, and by women for the very same reason as suitable candidates for advocating women's rights in a politico-jurally defined public sphere.

Nor is it in view of this surprising to find that it was not women still living in the traditional farming society but urban women who were active in women rights activities during the period. Those were women who experienced directly the shift in the structural position of women accompanying the social changes taking place and who therefore also experienced the lack in or ambiguity adhering to women's specificity as politico-jural social beings. Accordingly it was urban women who mobilized in the cause of claims directed at obtaining for women jural rights which were to destroy this ambiguity and give women as social persons a clear politico-jural dimension.

Moving from the social to the concomitant conceptual structure of Icelandic society and the concepts of inside and outside defined by Hastrup (1985,1987) a similar pattern emerges. According to Hastrup the general conceptual model of Icelandic culture originating in the traditional farming society perceives the world and thus society as divided horizontally into an inner and an outer space. Hastrup argues that in terms of this conceptual model Icelandic women were perceived as being inside, enclosed by the geographical and social boundary of the farmstead where social life and their work took place. Men, on the other hand, were perceived to belong both to this inner social space where they also worked and lived and to an outer space as well, the wild, where they fished, hunted and rounded up the sheep in autumn. This outer space was seen as dangerous to women, who were liable to be beset by various mishaps if they ventured outside the boundaries of the inside as demonstrated in numerous folkloric stories and legends. In the farming society women thus not only lived and worked at the centre of social life but were also conceptually defined in terms of it.

Fishing as an activity belonged to the wild, and towns being centres for fishing and being located outside the boundaries of farmsteads were thus part of the wild, the outside of Icelandic society. Women moving from farms to developing coastal towns were therefore moving from

the inside of society to the outside, the men's wild, where they traditionally had no position and were ambiguously if not dangerously placed. Also in terms of this analysis it is not surprising to find urban and not rural women mobilizing in women's rights activities, since they were dislocated in terms of conceptual categories and hence ambiguously placed conceptually. This created the need for a new, unambiguous definition of women in social terms. In fact Hastrup's analysis is substantiated by the fact that women's rights activities in Iceland are an urban and not a rural social phenomenon, and that most of the women concerned had themselves moved from the farming society to the developing urban one and had therefore directly experienced the change involved.

The conceptual model of Icelandic culture outlined by Hastrup is a dominant model in terms of Ardener's concepts of dominant and muted conceptual models. Since this model places both women and men on the inside of Icelandic society it is a model of a relatively egalitarian society where neither women nor men are socially muted but where men, having accepted access to the outside space of society, had less restricted social space than women. In the urban social context, as has already been pointed out, men continued to have access to greater social space than women. Women, however, not only continued to be restricted in terms of social space but once removed to the perceived male outside of society, and without being given the socio-structural characteristics of men, became socially muted. The suffragists' emphasis on enfranchisement, on women's right to speak, can be seen to be directly related to the social mutedness of urban women.

As evidenced by their claims the suffragists did see women as socially muted and since women are by no means muted according to the dominant conceptual model of women it suggests that a muted women's model can be found in suffragists' ideas on women and society. The suffragists did see women as being on the outside of society, outside its authority structure and culturally separate from men, and to the extent that they perceived of such an outside their model is in accordance with the dominant conceptual model. But insofar as they see women as socially muted as a result of social change, social change itself producing a more problematic linking of the paradigmatic and

syntagmatic conceptual structures of Icelandic society, their model is a different and a muted one compared to the dominant conceptual model. The mutedness of this women's model is also evident from the fact that women found it necessary to organize into a movement in order to voice their claims and obtain for women the right to speak.

Thus both social structural and conceptual factors are generative elements in women's rights activities in Iceland during the period. The change in the socio-structural and conceptual position of women brought about by their migration from rural areas to developing urban ones created a need for the redefinition of women as social beings both in socio-structural and conceptual terms. Viewing women's rights activities during the period as a process through time we see that this need did not translate into women's rights activities immediately. To begin with women were rather passive where women's rights were concerned and hesitated to use these rights once obtained. Apart from factors pointed out in chapters 1 and 2 this was due to the fact that to begin with urban society retained some of the basic elements of the farming society such as farming albeit as a subsidiary economic activity, relatively large households and a close connection with the farming society. But as the nineteenth century drew to an end these elements receded, the new urban social order came into its own and we find women mobilizing in the cause of women's rights. And we have found that suffragist ideas, the issues they emphasized and the claims they put forward are directly relevant to and explicable in terms of socio-structural and conceptual factors pertaining to their society as it was and as it had become.

Such factors also explain why suffragist activities eventually ceased. Their activities did cease once women's jural rights and especially their right to speak had been secured and women proven capable and worthy of holding those rights. By then women had in effect been redefined as jural persons, the ambiguity of their social structural position had been dissolved in so far as formal rights could do that and they had obtained access to the inside of the new urban society by having been given the right to speak in public social life. In fundamental respects the battle had thus been won. It should however be noted that the redefinition of women's social personhood was only completed in narrowly jural terms and not in terms of action on the part of both men and women.

It remains to be considered why the suffragists actually succeeded, if only partly, in their endeavours. In terms of the above outlined dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society women were traditionally not muted, which must have benefitted the suffragists in their socially muted urban situation. A tradition of women being audible was there even if the women concerned were, and perceived themselves as being, socially muted; and that tradition contributed to suffragist claims being audible if not necessarily acted upon.

With respect to the claims being acted upon, the social attributes of the women who voiced these claims were important, their education and other aspects of their social structural position lending their claims the aura and weight necessary for success. Circumstances such as increased affluence and the loosening of the traditional social structure in the wake of social change could also be conducive to success since it meant that at least some women had more time at their disposal to engage in non-subsistence activities and some poorly defined social spaces to manipulate.

But the crucial factor in the suffragists' success was that their claims and ideas were profoundly tied to ideas prevalent in their society. Not only were their ideas as well as those prevalent in Icelandic society informed by social change but the suffragists deliberately transported such ideas from different social fields to their field of interest and formulated them accordingly, if sometimes turning them upside down. By doing so they placed their concerns firmly within the general concerns of their society and gave their claims social validity and a socially acceptable argumentation conducive to success.

Finally, as Susan B. Anthony noted in connection with her trial for civil disobedience in 1873, "... the only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons?" (Anthony, 1902, p. 638). Anthony was here very much like Icelandic suffragists concerned with the jural dimension as a defining element of social personhood, the fact that as long as women did not have the same jural rights as men they did not have the same capacities of social entitlement and could therefore not be considered full persons as agents-in-society (cf. Harris, 1989). As has been repeatedly pointed out this is an issue which is at the heart of Icelandic suffragist activities; fundamentally they are concerned with the redefi-

inition of women as social persons. If "... person is perceived as the microcosm of the social order" (Fortes, 1973) then women in the new urban social order did not embody such personhood; they lacked an important jural dimension derived from the politico-jural domain, namely the right to speak in a public capacity, the right to speak invested in entitlement to office on the grounds of education and that invested in the franchise. All suffragists' activities were aimed at obtaining these rights for women so that women might become whole social beings, each in Fortes' words "a microcosm of society".

But while the suffragists fought to obtain for women the same agentive capacities of social entitlement as men possessed they did not claim that women had the same judgmental capacities as men. They claimed that women had different judgmental capacities on account of their gender specific culture. But these capacities were, according to them, not to be valued less than those of men; indeed they were to be valued as equally necessary to the survival of society. Thus while claiming full social personhood for women as agents-in-society the suffragists were not claiming in all respects the same kind of personhood for women as that which men possessed, women as social women not as social men should be fully valid as agents-in-society. As Harris (1989) points out, different social kinds can be recognized in any given society, and that is precisely what the suffragists pointed to in their vision of men and women as equal but to an extent different social persons.

And once women had obtained full agentive capacities the suffragists saw women if not changing then at least reforming the social order, or in Harris's words "... the very action system that gives them their social being" (ibid, p. 19). Therefore their activities not only aimed at redefining women as social persons but also society as such which in turn might require still another redefinition of women as agents-in-society. And half a century later, or by 1970, such a redefinition of women as social beings seemed indeed pertinent to Icelandic women.

PART II

WOMEN'S LIBERATION

CHAPTER 5

EVENTS

The next phase of concerted women's rights activities in Iceland began in 1970 with the establishment of the Icelandic Women's Liberation Movement, or the Redstockings as the movement was named by the women who founded it. Between then and 1926 when the last women's slate was put forward various women's organizations operated in the country, among them the long established Women's Rights Association. None of them, however, were either concerned with or had succeeded in promoting new or radical ideas on women's social situation and women's rights such as those successfully brought forward by the Redstockings who appeared at their emergence to have literally discovered the field of sexual inequality.

The establishment of the Redstockings Movement and its subsequent activities were characterized by an atmosphere of awakening and a new consciousness with regard to women's rights as well as a lack of concern with both the history of women's rights activities in the country and the activities of contemporary women's organizations. This lack of concern was partly due to the absence of available historical information on women's rights activities which were only perfunctorily dealt with in Icelandic history books and then only in terms of dates and a few names, not in terms of ideas and activities or their relation to other socio-historical processes. It was also due to the very real mutedness of contemporary women's organizations which operated without being much noticed by society at large and failed to draw the attention and interest of women generally. And, thirdly, since the ideas the Redstockings brought forward were new and radical to them if not to all women rights activists their need to pay regard to the past or the seemingly outmoded present was minimal.

After an intermission of almost half a century the Redstockings succeeded in making issues pertaining to women's social position and women's rights an integral and important part of social and political concerns in Iceland and they succeeded in making Icelandic women generally conscious of their position as women in Icelandic society. The movement operated vigorously in the early seventies but declined in the second half of the decade and was formally abolished in 1982 when its activities had diminished. The period dealt with in Part II covers the movement's lifespan, or roughly the decade between 1970 and 1980. The women's rights activities that followed in the next decade are variously linked to those of the Redstockings but they are treated as a separate phase in Part III because both the women's ideas and their methods of promoting them changed radically in the early nineteen eighties, constituting a shift which divides the second period of women rights activities in Iceland into two distinct phases.

Although the various activities of Icelandic women's societies, estimated in 1976 to number around 500 (Sigurðardóttir, 1976 b) is not our subject matter, they form to an extent the background against which the second period of intensive women's rights activities arose. The very quietness of organized women's activities from 1926 onwards was in itself a reason for searching for more audible ways of promoting issues pertaining to women's social position, a position which by 1970 appeared insufferable to a number of Icelandic women. Therefore and to link the phase of the suffragists to what followed I shall first examine briefly the years intervening between 1926 and 1970.

The Quiet Years

Banks (1981) explaining a similar period of intermission between 1920 and 1960 in women's rights activities in the United States and Britain contends that the illusory nature of suffragist unity, the fact that both British and American suffragists came from different social backgrounds and wanted the vote for different reasons served to divide them once the vote was won and women started voting, like men, along party

lines. Therefore women's rights activities in those countries lost their focus and subsided for a period, not to appear again as a concerted effort until the nineteen sixties. Randall (1987) is in agreement with Banks' theory claiming that the suffrage movement in Britain and the United States was in reality several women's movements, and dispersion hence inevitable once the battle for the vote that had united them had been won.

Although in Iceland there is roughly the same period of intermission in women's rights activities as in Britain and the United States the reasons for the intermission in Iceland are not quite the same as those given by Banks and Randall for Britain and the United States. Icelandic society was for reasons explained earlier much more homogeneous than both British and American society of the time and although Icelandic suffragists did have differences in their backgrounds those differences were probably less pronounced than those dividing British and American suffragists. The absence of bourgeois tradition and the rapid social change taking place in Iceland put all Icelandic urban women in much the same social position structurally, which served to unite them across other social boundaries. I have found no evidence that Icelandic suffragists wanted the vote for fundamentally different reasons or that their movement was internally divided into factions or different coexisting movements. That is supported by the fact that Icelandic suffragists were able to unite politically in women's slates to which they gave their votes for almost two decades after the vote had been won. It is only after the failure of the last women's slate in 1926, after which suffragists begin to vote like men along party lines, that they become dispersed, the failure of the slates, of direct feminist participation in politics, therefore being more of a reason for the intermission in Iceland than differences among the suffragists themselves.

It has been suggested previously that the disappearance of the women's slates was in part due to what the suffragists saw as Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason's defection from the cause when she joined a political party. Ingibjörg herself contended that she did so to further issues of interest to suffragists which she felt could not be promoted otherwise. But by joining a political party Ingibjörg entered a male network of relationships which, being an important part of the politi-

co-jural domain, allowed her to get things done but also controlled her actions more tightly than had she retained her independence. That, along with her (to the suffragists) apparent defection took the wind out of the sails of the women's slates. External social factors such as shifts in the political party system in Iceland and the effects of the Depression that began to be felt in Iceland by 1930 also contributed to dividing suffragists along political party lines, especially the effects of the Depression which made women's rights seem something of a luxury. Therefore external social factors complemented and contributed to events in the suffragist field and were instrumental in the disappearance of concerted women's rights activities in Iceland just as they were in their emergence.

But although women's rights activities thus lost the focus provided by the women's slates and in spite of otherwise changing social and political conditions, women continued to be active in the field of social and political issues. They dispersed into different fields of action, if not in different ideological directions, where the social position of women and women's rights were concerned. Some concentrated their efforts within women's labour unions, others entered political parties within which they formed women's societies that worked assiduously within party confines. During the period six more women were voted into the Althing from party slates, an apparent concession to women's votes if not to feminist ideas. The Women's Rights Association, backbone of the women's slates, continued to press for legal reform concerning women but was hampered in its activities by its unwillingness to be associated with one political position rather than another on any given issue. In the absence of women's slates the Association thus lost its cutting edge, since party politics eventually decided all public decision-making. In its internal construction the Association retained its original hierarchical structure but gradually modified its ideological orientation so that by 1968 human rights rather than women's rights were at the top of its agenda (*Lög Kvenréttindafélags Íslands*, 1968).

In 1930 women, among them several of the active suffragists, formed the Alliance of Icelandic Women's Societies, uniting the numerous women's societies around the country in an attempt to provide a joint platform for issues of concern to women, especially issues con-

cerning housekeeping with which most women in the country were involved full-time. The Alliance hoped to become an authoritative commentator on issues concerning women and children and although the Althing often asked for its comments on such issues it never obtained the status or influence of comparable interest groups such as that of the Agricultural Alliance which, run by men like all other interest groups of this kind, had a legitimate say in affairs of its concern. (Thorlacius, 1981, Ástgeirsdóttir, 1989).

Welfare activities, especially concerning the welfare of women and children, had from the very beginning of organized women's activities in the country been an integral and extensive part of women's activities and they continued to be so during the quiet years. Women formed ad hoc societies or devoted their societies to the cause of such issues as financial assistance to destitute mothers, the building of day-care centres for children, a pediatrics clinic, a tuberculosis sanatorium, a gynecological ward at the National Hospital once the hospital had been erected (also initially by their efforts), to name a few. They formed women's societies within church districts and often worked assiduously to promote the building and decorating of churches. When their undertakings became too extensive or expensive to be manageable they frequently petitioned the relevant authorities to take over the cause and often succeeded in this (Thorlacius, 1981, Ástgeirsdóttir, 1989). Through their welfare activities women therefore often had direct influence on issues traditionally reserved for public decision-making in the political arena. Women parliamentarians during the period also paid attention to these issues and often supported them if they came up for a vote in the Althing (*Alþingistiðindi*). Women were dispersed into different fields of action but their interests remained similar and continued to be consistently if quietly promoted.

Issues concerning women continued to appear on the agenda of the Althing during this period and several legal reforms were made, e.g. concerning the rights of unmarried mothers and their children, taxation of married women, widow's pensions, equal rights of all civil servants concerning pay, promotion and office, independent citizenship of married women, and eligibility of women to receive the order of the Falk, a token of honour awarded by the state; and some efforts were made

towards equal pay of women and men for the same or comparable work on the labour market (Sigurðardóttir, 1976).

Legislation of this kind which in some instances secured independent rights for women appears to be curiously at variance with the accepted view on women and their position in Icelandic society. Contemporary descriptions of urban Icelandic society evidence a society severely divided into two different gender social fields, where men were defined in terms of their work and the public audibility of their voice and women in terms of their roles as mothers and housewives and therefore in terms intrinsically relative to others i.e. wife or mother of someone or other. A perceptive description of the actual social situation is to be found in the writings of Amalia Línal, an American college woman who, having married an Icclander, came to live in Iceland from 1949-1971. Describing a mixed social gathering in Reykjavík she writes:

My first acquaintances in Iceland were women and I made my overtures to them by asking that unfortunate question, "What do you do?" At that time I was working as resident correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor*, and so this seemed a natural question to me. But the answer was, "I take care of my home and children."

"But what do you do, I mean, after the housework is over? Do you have a hobby? What do you like to read? What do you like to do?"

The answers were varied: "Oh, the housework is never done"; "I am embroidering a tablecloth or making clothes for the children"; "I like to read fashion and home magazines from Denmark etc."

What I couldn't understand was that a woman shouldn't also have vital interest in something totally apart from her life as a homemaker, something for herself as a person. Here again, I assumed that everyone was like me.

So I gravitated to the men who would occasionally switch from their discussions of local politics to such pet subjects of mine as religion or psychology or world political theory. As soon as I joined them, a silence would fall and the conversation would diminish to polite remarks or light banter or, if I was lucky, to resumé's of the discussion in one-syllable words which a woman could be expected to understand. Any opinions or questions I might offer on the prevailing topic would be listened to courteously (?) and answered in mono-syllables. Baldur [her husband] would be embarrassed for the men and sometimes angry at me. Finally, when further contact seemed impossible, I would accept defeat and move away, while the men closed ranks and continued from where they had been interrupted." (Línal, 1962, pp. 82-83).

This passage illuminates three salient features of the gender social situation. First, women predominantly identified themselves as mothers and housekeepers, which placed them in a gender demarcated social field separate from that of men who concerned themselves with public issues in their field of interaction. Second, both women and men generally respected the boundaries of their respective gender fields and did not attempt to cross them. Third, if women nevertheless attempted to cross over into the men's field they experienced themselves as socially muted, as not being the possessors of a valid voice on subjects of concern in the male gender field.

But while being muted in the male gender field, women were certainly not muted within their own gender field as their various social but gender defined activities described above attest. Of importance in this respect also are women's informal sewing-clubs which grew very popular during the latter half of the period. The sewing-clubs were not so much for the embroidering or knitting suggested by their name as for talking, comparing notes and socializing generally or simply to get away from home for an evening once in a while. During such gatherings, always held in women's homes and well supplied with food, symbolizing the proud housekeeper, the husband of the house would be asked to go see his friends or else keep his presence inconspicuous. The sewing clubs belonged strictly to women's separate gender field, they constituted an informal social network among women, and they were the main area of women's social activities apart from that of the various women's societies.

As noted earlier there appears to be a curious discrepancy between the legislation passed by the Althing during the period and the dominant relational definition of women as social beings. Apart from being concerned with the welfare of women and children, legislation was also in some instances concerned with securing women rights as independent individuals. As pointed out in chapter 2 legislation is more a statement of purpose than an effective agent of change as long as it is not effectively supported by dominant cultural values and ideas or ignores social and economic conditions necessary for its effectiveness. What is of importance here is what in Icelandic society informed the purpose of the legislation actually passed. Awareness of women's cultural and

social separateness, rather than ideas on women's independence, were of crucial importance in this respect. Indeed the legislation recognized the actual social situation by dealing specifically with issues of concern to women's specific cultural and social position. Seen as such the legislation is in line with suffragists' ideas about women's gender specific culture and their vision of women as independent social beings, and as such it echoed suffragist ideology which had by no means disappeared in spite of its comparative quietness.

Suffragist ideology is also evident in the extensive welfare activities of women, which constitute the main thrust of women's organizations during the period, and in the emphasis the Alliance of Icelandic Women's Societies placed on housekeeping. Women's gender-specific culture as the suffragists saw it was based on women's roles as mothers and housekeepers, roles they believed gave women certain cultural qualities that made them exceptionally perceptive to issues concerning "young and old, poor, destitute and sick" (Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, 1907).

Hence the overriding emphasis during the period on housekeeping and on welfare is quite in accordance with suffragist ideology. In these respects the thread of suffragist ideas did not break during the years of intermission which, being contrary to what happened in Britain and the United States according to Banks, is in accordance with the conclusion reached earlier that the Icelandic suffrage movement was socially and ideologically more homogeneous and therefore ideologically more enduring than those of Britain and the United States.

However an important part of Icelandic suffragist ideology had been the emphasis on women's independence, equality and formal rights to obtain them, and although that emphasis did not disappear during the quiet years it was only upheld to any degree by The Women's Rights Association. That ideological thread did not break either but it was much subdued compared to the emphasis placed on the roles of women as mothers and housekeepers and women as culturally separate from men.

It is precisely this emphasis on women as different social beings, on housekeeping as an occupation and sewing-clubs as centres of women's social activities etc. that the the Women's Liberation Movement denounced when it emerged in 1970. The first stirrings of that move-

ment were in fact to be found in 1968 among young women active in the Women's Rights Association, *Úur*, as they called themselves. The Association had alone preserved the emphasis on rights and equality and was therefore the only organization to provide room for an ideological alternative to the overriding emphasis on women's social and cultural separateness as mothers and housewives. That overriding emphasis provided the background against which the Women's Liberation Movement in Iceland arose, in the negative sense that to emerging liberationists it seemed insufficient or simply wrong as a feminist ideology.

But why would a long established feminist ideology suddenly seem insufficient or wrong to feminist minded women? By 1970 the outside world had become more accessible to Icelanders, ideas travelled faster and more freely to Iceland than before and new ideas on women and society originating in the neighbouring countries confronted the reality, social and ideological, in Iceland in a way that made new kinds of actions seem necessary to many feminist minded women. Ideas from abroad therefore contributed greatly to the emergence of the Icelandic Women's Liberation Movement. But, as will be demonstrated, social processes particular to Icelandic society were instrumental in this respect. Since the turn of the century Icelandic society had changed greatly and social processes taking place in the nineteen sixties had drastically altered the situation of urban Icelandic women. Once again a new definition of the personhood of women seemed pertinent and in order to obtain such a definition and have it recognized women's quietness, their social mutedness, had once more to be conquered. The emphasis on women as socially separate from men had, in the absence of women's slates to an extent furnished this quietness. It had helped shove women into a corner where they were not much noticed or listened to. Due to certain societal processes, discussed in the next chapter, this mutedness could no longer be tolerated and hence a new movement with an equal rights oriented ideology took over the stage of Icelandic feminism.

The Redstocking Movement

By the nineteen sixties the geographical isolation of Iceland no longer barred its access to the outside world to the degree it had done during the times of the suffragists. Telecommunications, television, new methods in global news transmission, more accessible ways to travel abroad, rising foreign language ability, increased import of foreign books and magazines etc. all contributed to bring Iceland closer to “útlönd”, literally outcountries i.e. the outside which for Icelanders constitutes the rest of the world. Information about events in the neighbouring countries thus travelled faster and by more diverse channels to Iceland than before, and with it seemingly new ideas on rights and duties, freedom and bondage and how these appeared in Western society. The Black Civil Rights Movement in the United States, The Vietnam war, the 1968 student uprisings in France and elsewhere, to name a few salient events of the sixties, all sent their message to once remote Iceland.

Along with it came the information that while women had participated in such movements and events alongside men they had come to realize that their role was seen by the men to be mainly that of “making the coffee”. In spite of the prevailing ideology of equality that characterized the social movements of the sixties women found themselves being denied that equality within the movements themselves, being relegated to the traditional role of women as housekeepers, sexual partners and helpers generally. Consequently many women left the various social movements and established women’s movements in order to liberate women from their subservient social position. So began in the western world the new era of women’s liberation, with movements being rapidly established in most western countries along broadly similar ideological lines (Mitchell, 1977, Friedan, 1983). All of this reached Icelandic women and found fertile ground because of societal processes particular to Icelandic society to be examined in chapter 6.

The pebble that moved the avalanche where events in Iceland are concerned was a piece of news broadcast on the radio one morning in April 1970 relating how Dutch women from a women’s liberation movement in Holland named Donna Mina had invaded the meeting-premises of municipal councils and demanded day-care centres for chil-

dren. Later that day two women in Reykjavík met by chance on their way from work; both were employed as teachers and one had young children. They discussed this piece of news and the one who had children remarked, "If only we could do something like this" (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1981, p. 12). When the other one got home later that day she telephoned all the women she could think of who would be interested in doing something of the kind and on April 24th twenty eight women assembled to discuss what Icelandic women could do to draw attention to their distressing social circumstances.

The women agreed that some sort of an organization to liberate women from those circumstances should be founded, an organization that would with new methods press women to use their legal rights and participate fully in public social life. Since the international workers' day, May 1st, was only a week away the women decided that their first move would be to participate in the workers march traditional on that day and draw attention to the fact that "women were but an unpaid proletariat" (Rafnsdóttir, 1984, p. 33). On May 1st, to the dismay of the labour unions, women crowded the workers march, responding to the call of the original group of women to do so, shunned the unions' banners but marched instead beneath a huge statue of a woman on which were written the words "A human being, not a commodity". In order to signify that they were revolutionaries who stood on their own feet, i.e. revolutionary but independent, the women put on red stockings for the march. The red stockings later symbolized the women's liberation movement in Iceland and were adopted into its official name when it was formally established. (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1981, Rafnsdóttir, 1984).

The marching of the women on May 1st constituted the first publicly visible and organized mass action of Icelandic women in the cause of the new women's liberation. Previously young women in The Women's Rights Association, *Úr*, had voiced concerns to an extent similar, and in several sewing clubs in Reykjavík such concerns had been discussed and pondered (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1981).

The event of the march provided a focus for these concerns by making them eminently public or "loud" and subsequently many became active in the cause. During the summer women and men, who in Iceland unlike the neighbouring countries were not excluded, worked in groups

on the aims, methods and organization of the new movement. Women in The Women's Rights Association proposed to the women's liberationists that instead of forming a new movement they should join The Women's Rights Association and unite in the cause of equality. The Women's Rights Association women pointed out, quite rightly, that they had themselves been aware of the injustices at issue and had worked for years to obliterate them and complained that women liberationists had not let themselves be aroused from their sleep by the barking on their own doorstep but rather by noise emanating from abroad. In the words of Anna Sigurðardóttir "nothing new has happened except loudness and red stockings" (*Vísir*, Oct. 22, 1970). But no amount of pleading or scolding availed; to women liberationists it appeared that something new had to be done, and on Oct. 19., 1970 the new women's liberation movement was formally founded.

Even though the movement was from the beginning oriented towards revolutionary or basically leftist ideas expressed, for example, by stating that women were but an unpaid proletariat, women of otherwise different political convictions made up its initial membership and following, giving it a broader and more encompassing image. For its first few years the movement enjoyed considerable success in promoting its ideas, and its influence on social and political thinking in the country was substantial. It used new, unconventional methods such as attending a beauty contest tugging a cow in order to point out that such contests treated women like cows, and erecting an exhausted looking doll just before Christmas in the centre of Reykjavík to point out the slavery of housewives. Disseminating statistical and other information on sexual discrimination in different social fields was an integral part of the movement's activities, as were meetings and conferences on specific subjects, declarations in the media and from 1972 publishing a magazine, *Forvitin rauð*. In 1973 new abortion legislation came up for debate and although the women liberationists did not wholly succeed in having their view of women as autonomous decision-makers accepted where their body was concerned, their ideas greatly influenced the law eventually passed by the Althing in 1975. The same is true of the 1976 legislation on the equal rights of women and men which categorically stated that women and men should be equal in Icelandic society and

enjoy equal pay for the same or comparable work. (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1981, Rafnsdóttir, 1984).

By 1972 the ideological dissent between radical and conservative women in the movement, initially diffused by the early bout of enthusiasm, began to manifest itself. It was openly tackled at the movement's first general meeting in 1974 where the decision was reached that the struggle for sexual equality could not be divorced from the class struggle. Hence the movement turned overtly leftist and many women who could not subscribe to such an orientation left the movement, which began to lose its momentum.

In the wake of the events of 1975, especially the women's general strike on Oct. 24 (described in the following section), the movement experienced an influx of leftist minded women. Internal leftist factionalism began to characterize the movement and by 1976 many of the movement's remaining founders decamped. The movement, originally structured along non-hierarchical lines, became more hierarchical in its operation although it succeeded in preventing the adoption of a purely hierarchical structure proposed by some of its groups. The movement became isolated, its ideas no longer had the wide appeal they had had, with the departure of so many women valuable experience was lost, issues internal to the movement took up more time and energy than previously, and it ceased to provide women still active within it with the kind of support they needed. The movement continued its activities but it no longer provided the channel through which women generally could harness their new social consciousness which the movement had been instrumental in arousing (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1981, Rafnsdóttir, 1984).

Leftist factionalism finally resulted in most of those who promoted it leaving the movement and by 1979 apathy had set in. A handful of women, described by one of them as a group of orphans, kept the movement perfunctorily going but the wind was decidedly out of its sails. By 1981 new ideas on women and society and on methods to promote them began to be discussed among concerned women, ideas which the movement could not or would not accommodate. Once more it seemed expedient to women to form a new organization to promote their ideas and in 1982 the Redstockings Movement, having almost dwindled down to consisting of its central committee, was formally abolished.

Women on the move

During the decade of women's liberation in Iceland women pushed on in various areas where men prevailed. In 1970 a woman was first made cabinet minister not, however, to be repeated until 1983. Altogether seven women were either elected or re-elected from party slates during the decade into the sixty member Althing. The first Icelandic woman to become a priest was ordained in 1974, causing a good deal of debate in spite of the fact that women had possessed the legal right to be ordained since 1911. (Sigurðardóttir, 1976, *Konur á Alþingi*, 1987). Still more women sought higher education and many advanced into traditional male areas of employment, skilled and unskilled. Women writers, painters and musicians came to the fore to an increasing degree and women generally became more publicly visible in a variety of other fields. Concern with the history of Icelandic women was emerging and in 1975, The Icelandic Women's History Archive was established privately, which, apart from collecting documents concerning the history of Icelandic women, contributed to making women conscious of the fact that they were making history. But, apart from the advent of the Redstocking Movement, two events during the decade had farther reaching effects than others. Those were the women's day off on Oct. 24, 1975, and the election of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in 1980.

In 1972 the United Nations resolved that in order to further equality of men and women, participation of women in and their contribution to social and economic development and world peace, the year 1975 would be an international women's year devoted to these issues. Such a measure provided a focus for, and a means to publicize, issues of concern to women; and in Iceland several women's organization, among them the Redstockings, The Women's Rights Association and the Alliance of Icelandic Women's Societies, anticipated that and in 1974 formed a joint committee in order to prepare for the year. Later that year the government also set up an official committee to organize the year's activities, which included representatives of various women's organizations and labour unions. From the preparation phase onward the events of 1975 therefore required an extensive and often exhausting cooperation between various organizations, which did not always have much in

common in terms of ideas and working methods, but, since it succeeded, contributed greatly to the wide appeal of the events prepared.

Among these events were meetings and conferences, radio programmes and articles in papers and magazines devoted to the many issues pertaining to sexual equality. Thus these issues achieved a national prominence which they had not previously attained. Women's art shows were held, theatres put on plays by women and in four municipalities special sexual equality committees were established which promptly set about investigating the extent of sexual discrimination in various areas of social life. But of all the events of the year the women's general strike or women's day off on Oct. 24th was the one that drew the most attention and demonstrated most effectively the concerns at issue.

The idea of a women's general strike to draw attention to sexual discrimination on the labour market and in the home where women did most of the housework and looking after children, was first voiced by the Redstockings in 1970. Although the idea did not then command the support necessary for its implementation, it was revived from time to time and by the time the women's year dawned support for it had grown. It was finally adopted by a women's conference in June 1975, where it was formally proposed by eight women from political parties covering the range of the political spectrum. The extensive cooperation that characterized the events of 1975 carried the issue although the more conservative women could not accept calling the action a strike and instead suggested calling it a day-off which was accepted. Women around the country were alerted, preparations made, and on Oct. 24th, the United Nations day, Icelandic women brought Icelandic society virtually to a stand-still by not attending their work – neither in their homes nor on the labour market. It is estimated that 90% of Icelandic women participated in this action, which to all intents and purposes was a one day general strike. But it was also a day-off in the sense that women's meetings and various festivities took place all around the country where women congregated to demonstrate their awareness of sexual discrimination in work and their solidarity with the cause of sexual equality. In Reykjavík, the meeting held in Reykjavík's central square and attended mostly by women was the largest ever held in the

country. And feelings rose high. (*Skýrsla kvennaársnefndar*, 1977, Steinþórsdóttir, 1980, Guðnadóttir, 1985).

What happened on Oct. 24th was an effective demonstration both of the fact that without women society could not function, and of the strength women possessed if united in a single cause. As such it did much to strengthen women's awareness of both their social situation and their possibilities to change it. Moreover the event made world-news which contributed to women's sense of the importance of the event and to their sense of being makers of history, of their being, by themselves if united, able to change things which had hitherto seemed unchangeable. But there was no one channel through which this strength could be conveyed. The Redstockings provided an alternative to leftist minded women, The Women's Rights Association to some of the others, but there was no one ground on which women could meet and work towards the goals so brilliantly demonstrated by the event. Besides many of the active women were exhausted after the extensive cooperative efforts of the year and therefore not able to supply a new focus or a new organization to accommodate this newfound strength. But although nothing tangible seemed to follow the events of 1975 what had happened was not forgotten. After an interval of a few years it bore fruit in the events of the nineteen eighties and, to begin with, in the election of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in 1980.

That women possessed strength and abilities while also being discriminated against was part of the message conveyed by the events of 1975. This message obliquely motivated a lookout for a woman candidate when the 1980 presidential elections came up. A direct relationship to the events of 1975 or Redstocking ideas was not acknowledged at the time by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and her standing for election was not directly supported by any women's organization in the country. According to Vigdís Finnbogadóttir she was prompted to run for the presidency because she was requested to do so by "people of all classes and political parties, not my personal friends, but people who have observed how I handled my work and thought I did it decently" (*Þjóðin kýs*, No. 1, 1980, my translation). Among her supporters men were more prominent than women. Her campaign manager was a woman, but there was a higher proportion of men than women who publicly acknowledged

their support for her by writing in her campaign publications; and the first public petition to vote for her was signed by 53 men as opposed to only 31 women (*Þjóðin kýs*, Nos. 1-4, 1980).

Men on the whole were certainly more influential in Icelandic society than women, which could have led her campaigners to seek their signatures rather than those of women. But it is also significant that the Redstocking Movement, still the most visible women's movement in the country, was very much in the doldrums and not at all popular, having acquired a fractured argumentative image. In 1980 women's liberation or women's rights did not seem to be a winning or a willing horse and that may have contributed to the apparent ambivalence towards feminist ideas that characterized her campaign. But the strong message of 1975 was there and that message had been achieved by extensive collaboration of different organizations, a collaboration very much echoed on an individual, not organizational, level in Vigdís Finnbogadóttir's campaign.

Ideas, whether on women's liberation or other social or political issues did in fact not play an important role in her presidential campaign except in so far as avoiding expressing such ideas was concerned. While the office Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was running for is one of minimal political power, it is a representative office in the sense that the person holding it must be able to represent in an emblematic way the whole of the population regardless of its social and political differences. Avoiding becoming partisan or taking a stand on social and political issues was therefore part of her presidential campaign, especially because previously she had expressed such ideas on matters of concern to Icelanders generally. Accordingly Vigdís Finnbogadóttir stood for the election on the strength of her character and personal achievements, not ideas.

However, there is one fundamental idea in her standing for election, i.e. that a woman should be elected president. Not that it was an idea presented in her campaign as a fundamental reason for her standing; no such political ideas were. Her supporters were ambivalent on the issue, some claiming she should be voted for because among other things she was a woman and it was time women held high office in Icelandic society, while others claimed she should be voted for in spite of being

a woman, and still others skirted the issue of her gender as if it were irrelevant (*Þjóðin kýs*, nos. 1-4, 1980). But the central fact of the event was that she was a woman and she was standing for president of the Republic, the first woman ever to do so. That a woman should present herself as a candidate for that office was an act that was directly related to and supported by the ideological emphasis and women's rights activities of the seventies. The act asserted, as the liberationists had claimed, that women were no less qualified than men for any job, the presidency being the zenith of traditional male jobs, that women should use the rights they had to participate in public life and run for office, and, when she won the elections, the act echoed the message of 1975, i.e. that women had both the strength and ability to affect the course of their society.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir defeated her three male competitors for the presidency by a close margin, receiving 33.8% of the vote (*Tölfræðihandbókin*, 1984). Once she came into office, she supplied a new image in the Icelandic constellation of imagery: a successful public figure who was also unmistakably a woman. Her election and subsequent holding of office was an event that clinched the women's rights activities of the seventies and was to have a marked influence on women's rights activities in the nineteen eighties.

CHAPTER 6

SOCIETY AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

With a population of fewer than a quarter of a million people, Iceland is the smallest nation in the world with a full panoply of the institutions of modern nationhood: a national language, a distinctive history and literature, a strong national consciousness, governmental institutions, a full-fledged university, and diplomatic relations around the world. Only the military is missing. Iceland is a minination, much smaller even than the "small countries". Nonetheless, Iceland has institutions as legible and distinct as those of larger societies.

(Tomasson, 1980, p. 32).

By the second half of this century Icelandic society had become a modern industrial society in the tradition of the western world to which it belongs. It is exceptional in that its population is much smaller than that of other western societies and, secondly, in that it evolved extremely rapidly from a traditional farming society into its modern state, or within less than a century.

Cultural homogeneity still characterizes Icelandic society, a prevailing sense of unified cultural identity having if anything been strengthened by Iceland becoming a sovereign republic in 1944. The rapidity of social and economic change, especially after the second world war, created, however, a society in a state of flux and brought a certain frontier quality to social and economic relations, especially in the prospering urban areas. The exodus from the countryside continued, and by 1960 82.15% of the population lived in urban localities as opposed to 17.85% in rural areas. By 1980 those figures were 89.55% and 10.45% respectively. As before Reykjavík grew most rapidly of the urban areas and from 1960 onwards around 60% of the urban population lived in Reykjavík and its environs. Akureyri in the north was the second largest urban locality, roughly nine times smaller than Reykjavík (*Tölfræðihandbókin*, 1984).

The threefold division of Icelandic society in terms of economic and demographic factors emerging around the turn of the century prevailed. The farming society having become much smaller in size and increasingly incorporated within the general market economy, retained its cultural significance representing the essence of traditional Iceland (Hastrup, 1986, 1987). The small towns in coastal areas where fishing was the main economic activity continued to prosper as did Reykjavík and Akureyri which retained their centrality where trade and industry were concerned. Seyðisfjörður which with Reykjavík and Akureyri had constituted the third category at the beginning of the century evolved into the second one and became a coastal fishing town as the century progressed. Reykjavík, becoming much larger than Akureyri, continued to be the centre of national life and, as before, the centre for women's rights activities.

Around the turn of the century Icelandic politics had revolved around issues of independence and sovereignty. By the second half of the century internal social and economic issues occupied first place in political concerns, Icelandic politics covering the traditional spectrum of left to right characteristic of European democracies. However, issues of independence and sovereignty regained political importance after the occupation of Iceland during the Second World War by Britain and later the United States. In 1951, after prolonged negotiations with the United States and after Iceland had in 1949 joined NATO, the Althing allowed the U.S. military into the country on a long-term basis, revitalizing long established concern with sovereignty and independence.

The war lifted the effects of the Depression in Iceland, the foreign armies occupying the country needed supplies and services, Icelandic food-products sold well on foreign markets and the economy prospered. In the post-war period Iceland enjoyed a rapid rate of economic growth. The development of the fisheries initiated around the turn of the century continued and by 1970 fish products constituted 78.3% of the country's exports (*Hagtölur mánaðarins*, Oct., 1988,). Other industries grew more slowly and agriculture, once the mainstay of the population, had dwindled down to employing only 17.1% of the population by 1971 as opposed to 47.67% in 1910. Commerce, communications and services grew rapidly, employing 45.8% of the manpower by 1971 as opposed to

24.8% in 1910. The growth of the economy, led by the fisheries, thus involved a swift movement of the labour force out of primary and into secondary and tertiary economic sectors (*Iceland 1986, 1987*).

By 1970 Icelandic society was a typical Scandinavian welfare society, differentiated, however, by having reached its modern state extremely rapidly, by having a comparatively undiversified economy, by being extremely small and finally, by possessing its own particular history and culture. (Þorleifsson, 1977, Tomasson, 1980, *Iceland 1986, 1987*).

Social position of women

The affluence brought by the Second World War meant that as husbands and fathers were able to support their families on their wages alone, there was less perceived need for women to seek work on the labour market. Consequently the first post-war decade saw the majority of women working as full-time housewives within their homes. If thus socially isolated, women were conforming to the long established image in Iceland of women as mothers and housekeepers, an image of women also upheld in the neighbouring societies seeking to give the men returning from the war their jobs back, which women had held during their absence.

But with accelerating economic growth in Iceland the demand for manpower grew, especially in the early sixties with fishing and the marketing of fish products providing higher returns than ever. The tertiary economic sector grew rapidly, trade and services demanding an ever increasing input of manpower. By 1963, 36.6% of married women were employed on the labour market and by 1970 52.4% of married women were. (*Jafnrétti kynjanna, 1975,87*). Of special importance in this respect was a new housing policy initiated in the early sixties which, by making it more viable for people, especially young people, to own their homes, created a need for higher family income. This need was met by women, not least young married women, seeking paid work on the labour market. (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1981). The availability of new contraceptives by the early 60s offered married women greater latitude with

respect to timing their entry into and participation in the labour market and hence facilitated their move from the domestic sphere to the field of paid work in the public sphere. Once on the labour market women had extended opportunities of interaction and of comparisons both between themselves and to men which was instrumental in motivating women to form a women's movement when the time came.

The 1960 general census states that 32.6% of all women fifteen years of age and older were active on the labour market. Unfortunately no comparable statistics exist for the end of the decade, but judging from the statistics on paid work of married women and data for specific sectors such as commerce and trading, it is clear that during the sixties there occurs a radical change in women's employment as women enter into paid work to an unprecedented degree (*Jafnrétti kynjanna*, 1975).

In addition to such economic factors as those outlined above, education provided an incentive for women to seek work outside their homes. Since 1911 women had by law held the same rights as men where education and holding of office were concerned, but neither economic nor social conditions supported equal enjoyment of this right by men and women, and women continued to lag far behind men in this respect. The general economic prosperity of the post-war period, however enabled women to seek advanced education to an unprecedented degree, while social norms, viewing women primarily as mothers and housekeepers, still perceived women's education and professional training to be secondary to that of men. Consequently women generally undertook less advanced vocational training than men, although there is a significant increase during the post-war period in the percentage of women attending university, women being 20% of the total number of university students in 1951, 25% in 1961 and 30% in 1971. However the vocational training of women was mainly outside university and in the fields of housekeeping, child-care, teaching, nursing and commerce, with women, for instance, comprising 58% of the students of commercial colleges in 1971 and since 1966 more than 60% of the students of the Teachers Training College. On the other hand women did not frequent industrial and technical colleges, or agricultural and nautical schools, which continued to be attended primarily by men (*Jafnrétti kynjanna*, 1975). The rise in the educational level and professional

training of women during the post-war period contributed significantly to women's increased participation on the labour market, especially in the expanding tertiary economic sector where there was growing demand for trained personnel. Economic conditions and rising professional training of women therefore combined and complemented each other in bringing about the radical change in women's employment which occurred during the sixties.

But while women were converging on the labour market and becoming increasingly educated the sexual division of labour remained basically unchanged. Not only were women still responsible for housekeeping and the upbringing of children, their areas of paid employment and professional training continued for the most part to be closely connected to their socially sanctioned roles as mothers and housekeepers, reflecting the traditional sexual division of labour. In 1960 82% of women on the labour market were employed in the following work categories: domestic work, waitressing and cooking, washing, cleaning, assisting in shops, industrial food-production, unskilled labour in agri- and horticulture, office-work, sewing, nursing and health-care, teaching, telecommunications and postal-services. It is estimated that this remained the picture throughout the sixties, except for agricultural work which was a rapidly diminishing employment category. Women's choice of schools and professional training exhibits an emphasis on women's traditional roles and although there is a significant rise in women's attendance at university during the fifties and sixties women often left university without finishing their degrees, being in 1968 only 8.8% of university trained people. It is also significant that whereas there is little differentiation in men's employment according to age-groups, women's employment is characterized by age-group fluctuations, their active employment diminishing somewhat between the ages of 24 and 45 (*Jafnrétti kynjanna*, 1975). This indicates that women preferred being full-time housewives during their childbearing years or found it difficult to combine their duties as mothers and housekeepers with active employment on the labour market; or, considering their drop-out rate from university, with advanced studies. In spite of radical changes in women's paid employment and professional training, the role of

mother and housekeeper continued to be the dominant one, to be undertaken at the expense of education and/or paid work if need be.

Thus in the public sphere of work and education women were as closely connected to the domestic sphere as they were around the turn of century. As then, their work on the labour market was in most respects a continuation of the various aspects of their work as mothers and housewives, and the advanced educational level of women did not change the pattern since women trained predominantly for work of that kind. The monetary value placed on their work continued to be low compared to that of men; and paid work and education of women were perceived to be secondary to that of men and to women's roles as mothers and housewives. In spite of legislative attempts by the Althing to provide for pay equality women continued to receive less pay for same work as men, receiving e.g. in 1966 80.3% of the pay of men in factory work and in 1971 73.8% of the pay of men as shop assistants. For professionally trained women the same applied, as employers by various methods paid their professionally trained male employees more for the same or comparable work than women. In the general pay system the majority of working women were in the lower pay groups, whereas a majority of men was to be found in the higher ones (*Jafnrétti kynjanna*, 1975). While this may reflect that women's work-output was categorically perceived as less valuable than that of men, it also points to the prevalent notion of men as bread-winners and women's wages as supplementary to those of men. In terms of work area and pay women were thus in a situation structurally not much different from that of urban women at the beginning of the century.

Nor had women's position in the domestic sphere changed much. Notwithstanding their greatly increased involvement in the labour market and rising professional training, women were the ones responsible for childrearing and housekeeping. By 1960 most urban households were composed of the nuclear family only, the fertility rate, being in 1956-60 4.2 children per woman, declined and was 3.2 in 1966-70. Women married younger than before: in 1966 76% of all brides were younger than 25 years of age, and women most often gave birth to their first child around the age of 20 (*Tölfræðihandbókin*, 1987). Women thus undertook marital and parental duties when relatively young and

their participation on the labour market and efforts to obtain professional training were bound to clash with those duties, not least because day-care facilities for children were far from adequate (*Tíu ára áætlun um byggingu dagvistarheimila 1981-1990*). The workload of working mothers doubled, as housekeeping continued to be their responsibility in spite of their often working long hours outside their homes. Wishing to fulfill their culturally sanctioned roles as mothers and housekeepers while also needing or wanting to work outside their homes, women were faced with insolvable practical problems and mounting frustrations. It is significant in this respect that it was a working mother who in 1970 sighed to her friend “if only we could do something like this”, putting into motion the era of women’s liberation in Iceland.

With the rise in women’s paid employment and women’s attendance at various professional schools and evening classes communication across long established gender social boundaries increased, which among other things allowed women to compare themselves directly with men. During the sixties such comparisons became a matter of concern to many women e.g. with regard to pay and leadership, women generally being scarce where leadership was concerned. Icelandic society continued however to be rather severely divided into two separate gender social fields, women’s extra-domestic and extra-labour activities usually involving women only. To an extent women were therefore still socially secluded, and keeping in view the monetary value placed on their work and training and the nature of both, still defined primarily in terms of their roles as mothers and housekeepers.

This definition of women was bound to contrast sharply with their actual social situation. Economic and social change had brought about radical changes in women’s social situation but the conceptual cultural definition of women had not changed, creating a socially experienced discrepancy. By 1970 it is estimated that over half the female population was active on the labour market, professional training of some sort was becoming the rule not the exception, and in spite of both still being closely linked to women’s traditional roles, a definition of women in terms of those roles alone was no longer adequate. And not only was such a definition inadequate, it was also intolerable when perceived as the reason why women received less pay for their work, had become

confined to certain areas of work, were overworked and frustrated and to an extent socially secluded. Women did not lack formal rights, and they enjoyed generally the same civil rights as men, so the lack of jural rights could not be perceived as the source of sexual inequality as was true around the turn of the century. Ideas emanating from abroad claimed that women's subservient social position was to a large extent due to women's traditional roles as mothers and housewives, which among other things prevented women from using their rights. The "feminine mystique" in Betty Friedan's (1963) words was at the core of the matter. Due to the societal processes described above those ideas found a fertile ground in Iceland. Even if to an extent diffused, they illuminated women's social situation in such a way as to make it appear clear what was unsatisfactory about it. A combination of socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society, and ideas circulating in Western societies at the time, thus brought about the second period of concerted women's rights activities in Iceland.

Women actively engaged

The women who founded the Redstocking Movement were for the most part professionally trained working mothers; many were married and most were in their thirties.* A substantial number of younger women also participated in the movement, many of whom were single and students; but older women were relatively few as were full-time housewives. Women over 45 years of age actively engaged with women's rights were mostly to be found in the Women's Rights Association; and full-time housewives found it difficult to place their concerns with those of the Redstocking Movement because of its ideological emphasis (see chapter 7).

* The card-index listing members of the Redstocking Movement has disappeared and no written source as to its members exists. Information from informants and participant observation are therefore the main sources on women active in the movement.

The women actively engaged were therefore those who had most directly experienced the social change and its effects on the position of women taking place in the sixties. They were women who had experienced the difficulty of combining paid employment and professional training with housekeeping and motherhood. Their active engagement with the new women's liberation was therefore in the majority of cases a direct response to the disparity between the effects social and economic change had wrought on the social position and circumstances of women, and the dominant conceptual definition of women as mothers and housewives.

As around the turn of the century they were urban not rural women, most being second and third generation urban women, a few experiencing the shift from the rural farming society to the urban one themselves. Women still living in rural areas were mostly farmer's wives and had not experienced the effects of the social and economic changes on the position of women to anything like what urban women had experienced. Those effects were most pronounced in Reykjavík where the labour market was largest and most varied and where most educational institutions were located. As before, Reykjavík was the centre for women's rights activities.

In terms of the social class of their parental families, the women came from all classes, but as around the turn of the century they were often married to educated or professional men. The educational level of the women themselves was as before relatively high. Their first meeting in April 1970 was, for instance, attended by women who were teachers, nurses, journalists, artists or students (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1981, p. 12). A significant number of the active women had either studied abroad or accompanied their husbands during their studies abroad, often coming into direct contact with ideas on women's liberation promoted in the neighbouring countries during the sixties. Most of the women in the dominant age-group were married and had children, but an exceedingly high proportion of these became divorced during the seventies, increasing the proportion of single professional mothers within the movement. Contrary to suffragist ideology, women's liberation ideology (discussed in chapter 7) did not look favourably on women's roles as mothers and housewives, which undoubtedly placed extra strain on marriages. By

becoming single women were placing themselves in a structurally in-between position which, as discussed in chapter 2, made it in certain respects easier for them to negotiate between the social worlds of men and women respectively. By not being engaged or defined as someone's wife, by being the heads of their households, educated and professionally employed while still being mothers, women combined in their persons the structural qualities of both gender social worlds which made them better equipped to promote ideas on women's liberation in the male defined public sphere.

In 1974 and 1976, when the Redstocking Movement took a decidedly leftist turn in its ideology, many of the older women left the movement, not being content with their concerns for women's liberation being placed within the general concerns of Marxist socialism. Consequently the movements' membership became progressively younger, and with the years smaller, most of the women actively engaged being in their twenties, single and in the process of being professionally trained. Only a handful were still active in the movement when it was formally abolished in 1982.

Comparing the group of women actively engaged with women's liberation activities to the suffragist group a similar pattern of characteristics emerges. First, socio-structural factors, especially pertaining to social and economic change, and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society are decisive where the women involved are concerned, as both groups have directly experienced the effects of socio-structural change on women's social position. To those effects they respond with concerted activities. Second, the social and cultural attributes of the women themselves are more important in explaining their involvement than those of their parental families, class of origin holding no more significance in this respect during the women's liberation era than it did during that of the suffragists. Third, the social and cultural attributes of the two groups of women are to a large extent similar. In both cases they were urban women and in both groups the educational level of the women is relatively high, as is their indirect access to education through their husbands and exposure to different societies. While many of the women in both groups are married and with children, a relatively high degree of singleness is in evidence in both

groups, the important difference being that singleness was in no known case obtained through divorce in the suffragist group as it was in that of the women's liberationists', remaining unmarried or being widowed being the main reasons for singleness around the turn of the century.

Although leftist political parties sought to have active liberationists on their slates, the Redstocking Movement never participated directly in politics in the sense that it never put forward a slate itself nor presented specific women as candidates for office. Therefore no comprehensive analysis can be made of the socio-structural attributes considered important where candidacy was concerned. However, the women's liberation era does possess one apical candidate in the person of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, who, although not directly supported by any women's organization when running for the presidency, presented the image of the "new woman" proclaimed by the liberationists.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was born in Reykjavík in 1930 and brought up there. Her parents were both professionally employed, her mother a nurse and her father an engineer and a professor at the University. After graduating from Reykjavík Grammar School in 1949 Vigdís studied French, literature and theatre in Grenoble and Paris until 1953. In 1954 she married an Icelandic physician, but after a short, childless marriage they divorced. Vigdís continued her studies in Copenhagen and at the University of Iceland where she completed a B.A. degree in French in 1968. Between 1954 and 1957 and again between 1961 and 1964, she was employed as the press agent of the National Theatre in Reykjavík; from 1962 to 1972 she taught French at grammar schools in Reykjavík and at the University from 1972-1980. She was also active as a guide for tourists in Iceland and between 1971 and 1980 she was the director of the Reykjavík Theatre Company (*Þjóðin kýs*, no 1, 1980, Jónsson, 1984). In 1972 she became the mother of an adopted daughter but remained single.

Thus when Vigdís Finnbogadóttir stood for the presidency in 1980 she was an urban, professional, single mother and therefore shared the attributes of many of the older women liberationists. Like them she was educated, had like a number of them been exposed to different societies, was professionally employed, divorced and a mother. In terms of her life-history and social status she therefore fitted very well

with the original liberationist group, except she was older when she ran for the presidency than the liberationists usually were during their years of active involvement. The way in which her candidacy was related to liberationist ideas and activities discussed in the previous chapter and her personal social attributes, epitomizing as she did the “new woman” of the era, therefore made her the woman candidate of the liberationist period.

Now Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was not chosen by women to represent women, nor does it appear according to Gallup evidence that the majority of her voters were women, which indicates that the “new woman” image she presented did not go down well with the general women electorate. A decade of women’s liberationism had not sufficed to overthrow the traditional image of women as mothers and housekeepers, an image which was to surface again in the women’s rights activities of the nineteen eighties. But Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was a woman running for an office no woman had before attempted running for; she had the social attributes described above and she won the elections.

It is significant in this respect that in her presidential campaign primary emphasis was placed on her education and considerable professional achievements. Her being the mother of a young child or her having once been married were not brought forward even to the degree that in a long interview in her first campaign publication where she relates her life, neither is mentioned (*Þjóðin kys*, no. 1, 1980). The fact that she was single stood out a mile, if only because her three male competitors presented their wives as sort of co-runners for the office and were invariably photographed with them. Vigdís presented no such running mate and in her photographs she was alone. Public opinion in Reykjavík at the time had it that had she been married she would not have stood a chance because “nobody wanted a president with whom a spouse could meddle”. Her singleness was therefore as important as her competitors’ married state, wives being perceived to support and help their husbands in performing their public duties, a husband being perceived as somebody likely to exert undue influence on his wife in her performance of her public duties.

Due to her social attributes Vigdís was structurally in an in-between position, which as has been argued before made her eminently suitable

as a candidate for office. But she was not a women's candidate in the sense that she was not presented by women to promote women's rights ideas. Her campaign emphasized her male social attributes, not her female ones, her role as mother and one-time wife disappearing in the shadow of her educational and professional achievements, in her being the head of her household and the winner of her bread. Her being thus presented explains the ambivalence her supporters exhibited towards the fact she was a woman (discussed in the previous chapter), and it explains why more men than women seem to have supported her and voted for her, since being presented as socially male, as having the accepted social attributes of men rather than those of women, she could be safely voted for "like any man". While two thirds of the electorate were not convinced that this new kind of woman should be voted for Vigdís fulfilled the perceived politico-jural requirements for holding office and succeeded in winning the election.

By implicitly being presented in her campaign as socially male rather than female Vigdís Finnbogadóttir epitomized the dominant ideological emphasis of the liberationists and, by winning the election on those grounds she demonstrated the liberationist claim that by becoming socially male women could succeed in those social spheres where men prevailed such as that of public office.

CHAPTER 7

IDEAS

During the lifespan of the Redstocking Movement it was not uncommon to find its members voicing concern with the movement's lack of ideological coherence. Ideas on women's liberation and on methods to obtain it were at times found by its members to be too many and varied to provide the movement with the firm ideological basis perceived as necessary for its success. Up to a point that was a valid criticism. After the movement's foundation and initial resolution on aims and methods in 1970, a general meeting where ideological issues could be revised and decided on was not held until 1974. During the movement's first four and most productive years there was therefore no concerted attempt made to provide for or enforce strict ideological unification. The organization of the movement into independent groups which were alone responsible for their ideas and actions also contributed to ideological proliferation. And after 1975, during the movement's years of internal leftist factionalism, divergent opinions on ideas and methods were certainly in evidence, mostly however divergent leftist or Marxist ideas.

All the same certain of the movement's ideas were more salient and more resistant to change than others. When the movement's ideas and methods are viewed in relation to each other and as a whole a blueprint of recurrent ideas emerges, which by its basicness encompasses the ideological variations within the movement in such a manner that they become variations on a theme. It is this blueprint and its relation to socio-structural and conceptual factors which is at issue.

The "feminine mystique"

As has been pointed out in previous chapters ideas on women and society proclaimed in the neighbouring countries during the nineteen sixties

influenced to an extent the ideology of the Redstocking movement. According to Betty Friedan those ideas were generated by

the “problem that had no name” because it didn’t quite fit the image of the happy suburban housewife we were all living in those days - that image of woman completely fulfilled in her role as husband’s wife, children’s mother, server of physical needs of husband, children, home. That image which I called the “feminine mystique”, bombarded us from all sides in the fifteen or twenty years after World War II, denying the very existence in women of the need to be and move in society and be recognized as a person, an individual in her own right. (Friedan, 1983, p.30).

To deal with the problem of the “feminine mystique” women organized into women’s movements

to find themselves, fulfill themselves, their own personhood ... to free themselves from submission as servants of the family and take control of their own bodies, their own lives ... to find their own identity as separate from men, marriage and childrearing - and to demand equal opportunity with men, power of their own in corporate office, Senate chamber, spaceship, battlefield, at whatever price. ... We had to fight for our equal opportunity to participate in the larger work and decisions of society and the equality in the family that such participation entails and requires. This was the essence of the women’s movement - the first stage. (ibid, p. 30).

The ideas in the above spell out that women considered themselves oppressed and denied full social identity, that the reason for their oppression was to be found in their traditional roles as wives, mothers and homemakers and if that oppression was to be lifted and they were to be granted full social personhood, women had to escape from those traditional roles. They thus express a desire to escape from the confines of the domestic sphere into the perceived freedom of the public sphere, a desire to escape from the accepted cultural definition of women and to obtain a new definition which would allow women full social personhood by obtaining complete equality with men in all spheres of society.

By 1970 a great number of Icelandic women were already engaged in paid work in the public sphere but their social personhood was still

being defined in terms of their roles in the domestic sphere. The conceptual disparity entailed in this situation and the often seemingly unsolvable practical problems that faced women as a result meant that many Icelandic women readily welcomed ideas which proclaimed acceptance of women's participation in the public sphere and a new definition of women as social beings which fitted their public participation.

It is therefore not surprising that these ideas constitute the backbone of Redstocking ideology, variously modified and emphasized in the movement's different phases. They are particularly strong in the years before 1974, i.e. before Marxist ideology became a dominant ideological element. The movement's initial declaration of aims passed in 1970 states that the movement's purpose is:

1. To work towards complete equality of men and women in all spheres of society.
2. To work towards preventing an individual's sex impeding him or her in choosing employment in accordance with his or her aptitudes and interests.
3. To encourage women to use more extensively rights they already possess.
4. To uproot a centuries-old way of thinking about and various prejudices towards the sexual division of labour.
5. To encourage the movement's members to become familiar with social and political issues and be more active participants in society." (Rafnsdóttir, 1984, p. 34, my translation).

While the understanding underlying this declaration of aims is clearly the one expressed in the ideas outlined above, the declaration is more concerned with the practical or effective side of women's participation in the public sphere than with clarifying what oppresses women and why they should be able to participate in the public sphere. That is consistent with the actual state of affairs in Iceland at the time: women were already in the professional schools and on the labour market and had mounting practical problems. Therefore the practical or implementative

rather than the purely ideological side of the matter is uppermost in the movement's first declaration. The movement did not pass another declaration of aims and ideas until 1974 and until then the above five articles were the movement's charter on which all declarations on various issues and the movement's concerns and activities were based.

Equality and women's gender specific culture

The idea of *equality* of men and women is a central idea in the movement's ideology. Sexual equality is the ultimate goal of the movement, it occupies the place of honour in the first article of the movement's charter and the charter's remaining articles are all in one way or another concerned with how sexual equality can be obtained. The liberationist's idea of the equality of men and women was, that apart from irrelevant biological differences women were and should be regarded the same as men, treated in the same way, and given the same jobs and the same pay for the same work. Women should be able to live and work like men, to become, in effect, social men. The image of what men, not women, as social beings represented was the desirable one and once women presented that image themselves and were treated according to it, equality would be obtained.

This notion of equality manifested itself, for instance, in the liberationist claim that women could do any job like a man could, that women were no less suited than men for such traditional male jobs as trawler-fishing, driving trucks and bulldozers, electrical engineering, plumbing, directing a firm or an institution or being the head of state (cf. the election of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir). A picture on the cover of *Forvitin rauð* (May, 1976), the movement's magazine, of a young woman proudly operating a bulldozer, a balloon extended from her mouth saying "forward to battle", illuminates the point.

Another manifestation of the movement's idea of sexual equality is to be found in the movement's efforts towards the defeminization of job-designations which was adopted into the legislation on equal rights of men and women which the Althing passed in 1976, whereby it became illegal to advertise a job in such a manner that indicated that

either a man or a woman was wanted for the job. (*Lög um jafnrétti kvenna og karla*. 1976, 4. gr.). Traditionally not many job-designations indicated that the job in question was a woman's job, but some did, especially in women's traditional fields of employment. Those job-designations, not the ones that indicated that the job in question was a man's job, were the ones that were subjected to change. Hence among liberationists and in advertisement-parlance "kennslukona" (lit. teaching-woman) became "kennari", i.e. the masculine word for teacher, "skrifstofustúlka" (lit. office-girl) became "skrifstofumaður" (lit. office man), "hjúkrunarkona" (lit. nursing-woman) became "hjúkrunarfræðingur" (lit. nursologist) and unsuccessful attempts were made to turn "húsmóðir" (lit. housemother, i.e. housewife) into "eldhústæknir" (lit. kitchen-technician). Nouns in Icelandic have three genders, feminine, masculine and neutral, and in all cases job-designation nouns were not only changed so that woman or mother was substituted by man, -logist or technician, the gender of the nouns themselves became masculine. Hence, in order to keep correct grammar, women, when being referred to in terms of their jobs, had to be referred to as he not she. Thus language was enlisted to aid turning women into social men and, it should be noted, in the, to the liberationists, all important field of paid work.

This idea of equality is very much in keeping with the one expressed by Friedan in the quotation above. According to her women wanted "power of their own in corporate office, Senate chamber, spaceship, battlefield" - all traditional areas of male employment and male social identification. The same applies to the negative evaluation of *women's gender specific culture* that went with it. In order to obtain such "power of their own" women had to be released from their traditional roles as mothers and housewives, which were perceived to prevent women from living, working, thinking and behaving like men. What was traditionally "feminine" was what oppressed women. The liberation of women thus meant liberating women from being women, socially and culturally, leaving them free to become socially and culturally the same as men, free to participate in society on the same terms and in compliance with the same values as men.

The suffragists had claimed that women's gender specific culture, derived from women's roles as mothers and housewives, was something valuable and as such indispensable for the good of society. Therefore, women should be given equal rights to men and become the equals of men in all areas of society while retaining at the same time their valuable cultural difference from men. The Redstockings did not see women as possessing something cultural which was valuable to themselves or their society. Quite the opposite; women's gender specific culture, in Redstocking parlance women's traditional roles and women's social conditioning, was seen as oppressive in itself, something women had to be liberated from, something they should not preserve, if they wanted to become the equals of men. The fourth article of the movement's charter explicitly states that the obsolete and prejudiced sexual division of labour has to be "uprooted" if equality between men and women is to be obtained. Liberationist evaluation of what characterized women culturally as a gender group was therefore a negative one. Instead of being equal to but different from men as the suffragists saw it, women should, according to the liberationists, be equal to and the same as men.

Liberationists worked assiduously to break down the traditional image of women, claiming, for instance in a leaflet circulated just before Christmas 1974, that women who let themselves be deluded into preparing Christmas by "baking cakes, sewing curtains, cleaning and decorating the house", i.e. traditional activities of housewives at that time of year, were "dependent and stupid" women (Rafnsdóttir, 1984, p. 40). And they fought for social reforms such as day care for children, free abortion and paid maternity leave which would help release women from the oppression of their traditional roles, to better enable them to live and work like men. Not all liberationists could subscribe to the view that women's stupidity was to blame for their being oppressed by their roles as mothers and housewives. To many, especially after 1974, the culprit was capitalism which was seen to utilize women's traditional roles in the domestic sphere to oppress them. In spite of such variation and in spite of voices pointing out at various times that mothering and homemaking were important work, the basic idea was that marriage, motherhood and homemaking oppressed women, that women's

gender specific culture was negative for women and a hindrance on their road towards sexual equality.

This attitude towards women's gender specific cultural characteristics and the concomitant idea on sexual equality form the core of liberationist ideology. That core was in direct opposition to the accepted image of women in Iceland, and to the idea of sexual equality promoted by the suffragists which had prevailed through the "quiet years" immediately preceeding the liberationist period. The quietness and inattention to women's needs, the accepted image of women, and the dominant idea on sexual equality may be seen to have produced in the absence of women's slates, was in itself a reason for seeking new and different ideas on the subject, ideas which by being in opposition to the accepted ones might be expected to produce the opposite results i.e. attention to and concern with women's needs and contingencies. Such ideas were therefore readily proclaimed once the need for concerted action began to manifest itself.

The right to work

The need for concerted action arose with the social change that brought about the radical increase in women's employment and professional training during the sixties. Icelandic women did not only chafe under suburban housewivery as American women did according to Friedan (1963, 1983), they chafed under the double load of housewivery and paid work. Their problems, practical and otherwise, told Icelandic women that both could not be sustained and since they had become professionally trained and had both need and desire to use their education and their earnings, the unpaid and unskilled work of mothers and housewives was the one to be disclaimed. Furthermore, Icelandic women knew from their participation on the labour market that sexual discrimination in jobs and pay was rampant. Being in a position to compare themselves directly with men they asked why did they not get the same jobs and same pay as men? The answer seemed to be because they were defined in terms of their

unpaid and unskilled work as mothers and housewives, defined as women, and into the bargain, the practical difficulties presented by their double work-load were expected to be reflected in their paid work and render them less dependable as workers.

In other words, women were engaged in the public sphere of society through their work on the labour market and professional training but were all the same still defined structurally in terms of the domestic domain. Entering a new field of social action such as the public sphere apparently did not suffice to change women's structural definition in terms of domains, a definition basic to an individual's social personhood. A schism was therefore created between women's social activities and their structural definition as social beings. Their actions were no longer confined to or meaningful only in terms of the domestic sphere, but the structural definition of women as mothers and housewives, a definition which constituted a basic conceptual category in Icelandic culture, had not changed. In women's lives this schism was most profoundly experienced in the practical and doubtless often emotional problems with which women were faced in their attempt to reconcile their responsibilities in their different spheres of action. Women working outside their homes continued to be responsible for childrearing and homemaking, and not only the work that entailed. They were expected, in accordance with the accepted image of women, to be good mothers and good wives and homemakers as well. Many found that impossible and felt they could not live up to expectation on both fronts.

In this schism is the seed of the Redstocking Movement, it springs from the crucible of social change versus the endurance of basic conceptual categories. Because of this schism it became imperative for women not to be defined socially as women. If they were to get the same jobs and the same pay for the same work as men and if they were to be released from their double responsibility, they must be defined socially as men. Liberationists therefore denounced the traditional definition of women in terms of the domestic domain and fought for a new politico-jural definition of women. Social and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society are therefore crucial in the formation of liberationist ideas.

In light of the above it is not surprising to find that throughout its lifespan the Redstocking Movement was immensely concerned with work, with kinds of work women did, with the pay women got for their work, with women's work opportunities, with the idea of the breadwinner and so forth. This concern with work is to be found right at the movement's beginning, the initial battle cry of the movement was "women are but an unpaid proletariat", and its first action was to march in the workers' march on May first. Two of the movement's charter's five articles are directly concerned with work, and throughout liberationists wrote voluminously on the various aspects of work and held numerous conferences on the subject (*Forvitin rauð*, 1974-1982). Work is at the core of the activities on the 1975 women's day, and its method of demonstration, i.e. women not doing their work and thus bringing Icelandic society to a standstill, emphasized the importance of women's work. The 1976 sexual equality legislation, for which liberationists campaigned, is more concerned with equality in work than equality in anything else. Finally, the election of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in 1980, turned in an important respect around proving that women were no less qualified than men for any work, even the presidency, the pinnacle of traditional male jobs.

The right to work, work meaning paid employment, was as important to liberationists as the right to speak had been to suffragists. For liberationists the right to work equalled the right to speak; they had the formal right to speak but they were not being listened to. Through paid work, something which men were defined by, and men were listened to, they hoped to make themselves heard. Paid work which carried an important politico-jural dimension and was part of the public sphere of society, therefore became the criterion for the "new woman", the liberated woman who by engaging in paid work made herself heard and therefore turned herself into a fully signifying social being.

Validation of claims

As is discussed above liberationist ideas on equality and women's roles or women's gender specific cultural characteristics ran counter to the

accepted image of women in Icelandic society and therefore counter to one of society's basic conceptual categories. Liberationists were therefore not able, like the suffragists were, to align their ideas in this respect to dominant cultural categories and thus validate their claims in that manner. They suffered often ferocious attacks on their ideas in this respect, being told that they, as the embodiment of their ideas, were unfulfilled and ugly women, jealous of "proper" women because no man desired them; that they were women who preferred dabbling in unimportant work rather than undertaking the all-important task of looking after their children, were devoid of mother's love for their children, in fact against children, men and the family and a disgrace to their nation (Rafnsdóttir, pp. 44-45). Because of their ideas on equality and on women as social beings, liberationists were unable to counter such attacks as the suffragists had done by turning the argument on its head and claiming that it was precisely because of their important roles as mothers and housewives that they should be given equal rights to men, thus validating their claims in accordance with their society's basic conceptual category where women were concerned. Consequently, liberationists were never able to quell this sort of criticism. In view of the resilience of basic cultural conceptions, the fact that in this respect liberationist ideas ran counter to such conceptions, important as that was at the time to break the silence surrounding women in Icelandic society, may have contributed to how short-lived their movement was compared to that of the suffragists who developed their ideas in this respect in terms of their society's basic cultural categories.

Where work in itself was concerned liberationists had better chances in aligning and validating their ideas in terms of those accepted by their society. Work, who did it and what was paid for it, was after all a major concern of their society. Liberationists' concern with work could therefore be understood in terms of society's general concern with work. An example of that is a story published in *Forvitin rauð* about two Redstockings driving in a taxi. The taxi-driver, who was a man, listened in on the conversation in the back of the taxi and then turned around and said: "I can hear you are Redstockings, and I agree with a lot of what you say. But one thing I find unfair. My wife can do whatever she wants to but I have to work all the time." (*Forvitin rauð*, 1. May, 1974, p. 13).

The point in publishing this story in *Forvitin rauð* is to say that Redstockings quite agree with the point of view of the taxi-driver, that his position on the subject was also their position. A couple should both provide the home with an income so that both could have time off to enjoy their private life. In this manner liberationist's ideas on work did find resonance in their society. That they were able to link more aspects of their ideas on work to society's general concern with work is demonstrated by the passing of the 1976 sexual equality legislation which is above anything concerned with various aspects of work, and clearly recognizes that in terms of work women are to have the same rights and opportunities as men (*Lög um jafnrétti kvenna og karla*, 1976). An unequivocal result of the liberationist era was that by the time it came to an end not many challenged women's right to undertake paid work outside their homes.

In accordance with liberationists' emphasis on work they perceived of financial independence as a basis for women's general independence. Their idea of independence was therefore to an extent formed by their ideas on work and how women's ability to earn an income made possible their social independence. As is discussed in chapter three the idea of independence, the idea of a country's and by extension an individual's right to autonomy, constitutes a basic cultural conception of Icelandic society. Around the turn of the century Icelanders had been concerned with obtaining their independence from Denmark. Once formal independence was obtained Icelandic society became in a way an experiment in independence, its life from day to day was a test of independence. The idea of independence therefore continued to be dominant in society's discourse. It came sharply into focus in 1944 when Iceland obtained full sovereignty. And when the U.S. military was allowed into the country on a long term basis a few years later, concern with independence was revitalized, ensuring its continuing importance in society's discourse. By employing the idea of independence liberationists were able to align their ideas to one of their society's dominant conceptual categories and such alignment did spell success where claims were concerned.

Translating the idea of independence into their ideas on work therefore helped having their ideas on work accepted. Another manifesta-

tion of liberationist concern with independence and of claims linked to that idea being successful, is their involvement with the issue of abortion, which for liberationists was a major issue. Their position on the issue was that a woman should have an undisputed right to decide how many children she was having and therefore in case of an unwanted pregnancy to decide whether the pregnancy was to advance or not. While this concern is closely linked to the liberationists' idea that women's traditional roles, among which was motherhood, wanted or unwanted, was what oppressed women, their claims for women's right to choose in this respect were developed and phrased in terms of women's independence, their right to be autonomous decision-makers where their bodies and their lives were concerned. This linking of the issue of abortion, at all times a sensitive issue, to the idea of independence did succeed when in 1975 the Althing passed new legislation on abortion, where liberationist ideas on the issue were basically accepted, if not wholly implemented. (*Forvitin rauð*, Jan. 1974, *Lög um ráðgjöf og fræðslu varðandi kynlíf og barneignir og um fóstureyðingar og ófrjósemisaðgerðir*, 1975).

Women the proletariat

However, the area where liberationist ideas linked up most consistently with another body of ideas on society was within the ideological sphere of the political left. In spite of the fact that the very first battle-cry of the movement had been "women are but an unpaid proletariat" and in spite of the red stockings being put on for that first march on May first, 1970, to signify that liberationists were revolutionary, the linking of their ideas to the political left was initially only indirect. To begin with liberationists claimed that their movement was completely apolitical in the sense that it stood outside of the Icelandic political party system, and there was genuine concern within the movement that women's political opinions should not be allowed to hinder women in working together towards the aims of the movement (Rafnsdóttir, 1984, pp.35, 46, 49). In accordance with this initial position the movement did not align itself

with any specific political position during its first few years. Its ideas on sexual equality, on the negative effects of women's traditional roles on sexual equality, and its ideas on women's right to work and to independence constituted the movement's ideological focus.

Still from the outset there was a link, if indirect, to the political left. Many of the active women were also active in leftist organizations, liberationist ideas were to an extent part of a larger body of ideas, generated in the neighbouring societies during the sixties, which the political left adopted more readily than the political right, and, finally, the left's traditional idea of equality could be more easily translated into liberationist ideas on equality than could, for example, the right's ideas on individual enterprise. The ideological links were therefore there right from the beginning and after four years of intensive campaigning for women's liberation, "a significant majority of the Redstocking Movement considered it a pressing need that the movement form a political platform for itself" (Harðardóttir, *Þjóðviljinn*, June 13, 1974, p. 7).

At the movement's first general meeting on June 15.-17., 1974, that platform was framed and it was, not surprisingly, politically a leftist platform. The first paragraph of the meetings policy declaration reads:

Women's struggle for sexual equality cannot be divorced from the struggle of the oppressed classes for social equality, nor will there be victory for the workers without the active participation of women (*Forvitin rauð*, 1. May, 1975, p. 7, my translation).

After arguing that the structure of the Icelandic economy was responsible for turning women into an unpaid or at least a badly paid proletariat the declaration draws the conclusion that:

Therefore women's struggle for freedom and equality must be fought with the weapons of the class-struggle. (ibid, my translation).

At the movement's second general meeting in 1976 this ideological position was reiterated:

The struggle for sexual equality can not be separated from the class struggle which is fought for a new society where exploitation and all forms of oppression will be abolished and where

equality will reign (II þing Rauðsokka, *Forvitin rauð*, Dec. 1976, p. 3, my translation).

The terminology and ideological orientation of these quotations is decidedly Marxist: liberationists align themselves with the proletariat, their struggle with that of the workers and their vision of equality with that of socialism. The structure of the Icelandic economy, grounded on the basic principles of capitalism, surfaces as a major factor responsible for women's oppression, alongside the oppression generated by women's traditional roles. And that economic structure must be changed if women are to enjoy equality with men. The idea of equality is still a central idea, modified in terms of Marxist ideology, and the perceived oppressive effect of women's traditional roles and their right to work and to independence continued to be emphasized, but from 1974, and especially after 1976, various shades of Marxist ideas colour the movement's ideology (Rafnsdóttir, 1984, pp. 85-92).

Officially the movement continued to declare itself independent of all political parties, but the ideological links to the political left had become direct and obvious. Wishes to co-operate with leftist organizations were publicly expressed, some of the movement's members were active within various leftist groups or accepted candidacy on behalf of the *People's Alliance* (Alþýðubandalagið), the largest political party on the left in Icelandic politics; and the party's newspaper, *Þjóðviljinn*, devoted a page every week to Redstocking concerns. The movement could no longer, except by pretence, steer clear of Icelandic party politics and as was the case with the suffragist movement once their candidate, Ingibjörg H. Bjarnason, had joined a political party, it rapidly declined.

By turning overtly leftist, liberationists were able to link their ideas to ideas accepted by a part of their society, albeit a great minority. The *People's Alliance* obtained, for example, only 18.3% of the vote in the 1974 general elections and other more purely Marxist oriented parties less than 1% of the vote (*Tölfræðihandbókin*, 1984). Validation of liberationist ideas by such a small a part of their society did not help to have their ideas on sexual equality accepted generally; conversely it served to alienate that part of society which did not accept leftist ideas

and that part constituted the majority of the population. While the idea of independence constituted a basic conceptual category in Icelandic society, generally accepted in one form or another, Marxist ideology did not constitute such a category nor was it generally accepted. Validation of liberationist claims in terms of Marxism therefore did not succeed as validation of claims in terms of the idea of independence had done.

A matter of gender?

By placing capitalism centre-stage as a main obstacle towards sexual equality the Redstocking Movement diffused its focus as a women's movement. Sexual equality continued to be at the top of its agenda, but capitalism did not concern women only, it concerned society generally and attitudes towards it were not gender-determined. That did not bother liberationists, whose idea of sexual equality did not in any case recognize cultural gender-differences. A non-gender defined capitalism was therefore just as applicable as a non-gender defined marxism in the pros and cons of liberationist ideology. On the other hand feminism, which necessarily is gender-defined, was from time to time denounced by the movement as undemocratic and aggressive towards men, leaving feminism as such, however, undefined.

This is consistent with the fact that the idea of patriarchy was not a key idea in the movement's ideology. It was not patriarchy, the conventions and institutions of a male oriented society, which was seen to oppress women. What was socially and culturally male was the desired ideal and patriarchy could therefore not be held responsible for women's subjugation. The absence of the idea of patriarchy, of an abstraction that ascribed responsibility to men's gender specific culture, meant that what responsibility men were seen to have for women's oppression was transposed on to individual men. Individual men who upheld the values of what was perceived as sexual inequality became oppressors or "male chauvinist pigs" in the parlance of the day. Men were therefore held responsible for women's subjugation on idiosyncratic rather than abstract terms, which undoubtedly placed extra strain

on liberationist's marriages, resulting in the high divorce rate discussed in chapter six.

But to begin with, it was primarily women themselves who were seen to contribute to and maintain their oppression, not because they did not realize that they were suppressed by the values and institutions of patriarchy as the suffragists had indicated, but because they willingly and unwittingly let themselves be absorbed by their traditional roles as mothers and housewives and made few attempts to use the civil rights they did have. Hence liberationists placed great emphasis on "consciousness raising", on making women aware of how they connived with their own oppression. The inequality women were subject to in Icelandic society was traced to women's traditional roles and for the first few years liberationists did not pursue the issue further, i.e. towards the origins of women's traditional roles, which might have led uncomfortably close to the idea of patriarchy, uncomfortably because of the liberationists' positive view of things socially and culturally male. Once liberationists felt they needed to go beyond their first limited definition of the origins of sexual inequality, capitalism not patriarchy was named as the culprit.

In view of this it is not surprising to find that unlike in the neighbouring countries where women's liberation movements were closed to men, men were never unwelcome in the Icelandic Redstocking Movement. Redstockings did not, like the suffragists, think that women themselves had to do all the developing, promoting and struggling for their ideas on sexual equality. Why should they, since liberationists were not promoting anything specifically pertaining to women, culturally or socially, except the idea that it was unfair that women were made to suffer because of their traditional roles and did not enjoy the same kind of opportunities and social position men did? Why should not men, apparent natural holders of the ideal of the social person liberationists strove for, be even better suited than women to promote the ideal of the new woman, of woman turned social man? That is, men who recognized the unfairness of sexual inequality? After all men knew from first hand experience what being a man socially was all about, and, secondly, their voices undoubtedly carried more weight than most female voices, and would do so until women had gained the same social status as men.

This attitude towards men and their direct participation in promoting women's liberation is consistent with the liberationist idea of the social male as the ideal for the "new woman", with their negative evaluation of women's traditional roles wherefrom sprang what was specifically female culturally and socially, and with their idea of equality which meant that, except for irrelevant biological differences, women and men were and should be regarded the same. The attitude, found from time to time in liberationist writings, that as long as men recognized the unfairness of sexual equality they were even better suited than women to promote women's liberation (Rafnsdóttir, 1984, pp. 42-43), clearly manifests women's lack of confidence in themselves as promoters of their own liberation. Such lack of confidence is consistent with their negative evaluation of female cultural characteristics. This attitude is also consistent with and well demonstrates a certain cultural androgyny inherent in the liberationist idea on sexual equality. A man recognizing the unfairness of sexual inequality and willing to participate in its obliteration is, by his cognitive position and his social status as a man, the cultural equivalent of a liberated woman. Therefore he is quite suitable as promoter of women's liberation. Similarly, a woman who obtains the social position of a man becomes the equivalent of a social man. In this manner gender-determined cultural differences were obscured and replaced by a vision of a certain cultural and social androgyny where gender was concerned.

There was never a great number of men active in the Redstocking Movement; the majority of the movement's active members at all times were women. However, to some liberationists, it seems in retrospect that the presence of men within the movement was responsible for the movement's gradual decline and ineffectiveness. Sigurjónsdóttir, for example, contends that the presence of men within women's movements inhibits women in forming and voicing their ideas and prevents them from realizing the part played by patriarchy in women's oppression (Sigurjónsdóttir, 1988, pp. 32-38). Sigurjónsdóttir's observation is based on her active participation in the Redstocking Movement, but it bypasses the fact that the movement's ideology was nevertheless formed and developed throughout by women, that it was an ideology that fully justified men's active participation on behalf of women's lib-

eration and that without such a justification men would never have been able to be active within the movement. The presence of men in the movement is therefore only a consequence of the ideology promoted by the women who at different times made up the movement's membership and the movement's decline should therefore be traced to that ideology, part of which was ideas that ran counter to certain fundamental cultural conceptions and which allowed for the movement's later alignment to party politics, rather than to the influence of a few men active within the movement.

The vision of cultural androgyny contained in the movement's core idea on sexual equality, created a certain ambivalence in the movement's attitudes and activities. The Redstocking Movement was a women's movement, yet men were active members. As a women's movement it was necessarily in a fundamental respect a gender defined movement, yet it did not admit of gender as a desirable defining social element. It concerned itself with issues pertaining to women's social contingencies, roles and social statuses, yet it denounced gender-determined roles and social statuses for women. It was concerned with gender based inequalities, yet it did not admit of gender as necessarily instrumental in social and cultural formations, rather non-gender determined ideas such as those presented by capitalism or Marxism were seen as instrumental in this respect. Hence the movement unwittingly took a negative stance towards its own "raison d'être" which hampered it in its activities and created ideological and methodological conflicts, which further contributed to its decline.

Authority

This ambivalence was well demonstrated by the movement's ideas on authority and its implementation. In its internal organization the movement declined to adopt the traditional authority structure of chairman, secretary, treasurer etc. Instead it was organized into independent groups which were alone responsible for their activities. The groups reported their activities to a center, which operated as a linkage between

the different groups and as a provider of information when required. The center could not direct or evaluate the groups' activities provided the groups' activities were not in opposition to the declared aims of the movement. The movement as a whole was therefore not responsible for the activities of individual groups nor were individual groups authorized to speak on behalf of the whole movement. This non-hierarchical organization of the movement, described by Redstockings as a "free" organization, was adopted because a hierarchical organization was seen

to widen the gap between those who had authority - those on top - in society, and the common citizen. It also maintains the gap which at present exists between men and women, and which makes it easier for men to preserve their authority and employ it. (*Forvitin rauð*, Kynningarrit, p. 14, my translation).

During the second half of the movement's decade this untraditional and non-hierarchical authority structure was repeatedly attacked by its more militant Marxist members, who found this organizational structure ineffective and conducive to ideological confusion. The movement's structure prevailed, however, mostly intact throughout the movement's lifespan, although the groups became fewer and less independent and the center gained in authority after 1974 when the movement became decidedly leftist in orientation (Rafnsdóttir, 1984).

By declining to adopt a hierarchical authority structure within the movement on the grounds that such a structure contributes to social and especially sexual inequality, the movement was recognizing the part played by gender determined authority in the maintenance of sexual inequality. As such the idea of authority exemplified in its internal organization was a gender-determined idea, consistent with the fact that the movement was a women's movement based on the proposition that men and women were not equal in Icelandic society and that its aim was to overthrow that inequality. In the movement women should be able to work together as equals and as equals to men, and the authority structure of the larger society, being seen to contribute to inequality, was therefore not reproduced in the movement's internal organization.

This idea of authority stopped short of the movement's own doorstep. Where women and society were concerned liberationists were contemptuous of but did not otherwise question society's authority

structure. They opposed clearly the results of how authority was used in society, especially the unequal distribution of material rewards and the inferior job opportunities of women, but they did not question or attempt to deal directly with the ways in which authority was distributed, its grounds, or the way in which it was sanctioned. Women were being exhorted to use their civil rights, especially their right to work and their right to eligibility to municipal councils and the Althing, in fact to use the existing authority structure of Icelandic society to promote themselves to the same social status as men. Women were not to enjoy any “privileges”; they were to compete with men on the terms already existing in society at large - and many did exactly that, (cf. the 1980 election of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir). This unquestioning attitude towards society’s authority structure is clearly manifested in the movement’s repeatedly declared desire for involvement and co-operation with the labour movement and with leftist political parties, to which the latter responded by placing liberationists on their election slates. Both the labour movement and all existing political parties were organized according to a traditional hierarchical authority structure, very different from the movement’s own internal authority structure, but that did not seem to trouble liberationists.

Liberationist’s acceptance of or non-interference with their society’s ideas on authority where society itself was concerned is directly related to the idea of the social male as the desirable cultural model. Working towards enabling women to become social men necessarily meant acceptance of the basic elements of the society in which men held acknowledged authority, including the way in which that authority was distributed and sanctioned, even if liberationists did not approve of the use men made of their authority. The aim was to gain access to the male world, therefore the foundations of that world, and such as its authority structure, were not on its own level questioned and dealt with, only its results. Hence the gender element recognized in the movement’s internal organization was not recognized in its attitude towards authority external to the movement.

This ambivalent attitude towards authority is one more manifestation of the ambivalence inherent in the movement’s ideology discussed above. As such this attitude towards authority provided an additional

impetus for employing non-gender determined ideas to deal with perceived injustices in the world external to the movement. A non-gender determined attitude toward authority complements a non-gender determined ideology to deal with the effects of that authority. In that respect there is consistency in the movement's ideology, but that consistency rests upon the fundamental inconsistency embodied in an ideology that only erratically admits of the gender differences it strives to obliterate.

Method

In accordance with its core ideas on equality and evaluation of female cultural characteristics, the movement did not adopt the method of women's slates to promote women's liberation. Since women as a cultural group were not perceived to have something special and positive to contribute to their society, and since in an important respect women's liberation meant that women were to be socially and culturally assimilated to men, separate women's slates, which necessarily emphasize women as a specific social and cultural group and therefore women's social and cultural separateness from men, would have run counter to the movement's ideology. Awareness within the movement of the existence of such slates in the first quarter of the century was therefore not relevant to liberationist choice of method. Historical antecedents were generally not employed either to bolster the movement's arguments for women's liberation or to serve as models for the movement's methods. Concern with historical antecedents did surface by the time the movement was disintegrating, but to liberationists generally their ideas and their movement were something new. Their concern was with the present, not past situation of sexual inequality in Icelandic society, and on that present they gathered information avidly and promoted it with zest.

What characterized the movement's method in promoting women's liberation was this concern with the present, loudness and revolt. Dragging a cow to a beauty contest or erecting an exhausted looking doll in Reykjavík's main square at Christmas-time to symbolize the willingly exploited housewife was both unconventional and loud. The unconventionality of such methods is directly related to the move-

ment's revolt against conventional and generally accepted ideas on women and their role in society. By behaving unconventionally they demonstrated that women could be, wanted to be and were different from what they were supposed to be. And the loudness of their methods is directly related to the quietness which had surrounded issues pertaining to women and society for as long as anyone concerned could remember. To break that silence, noise was needed, and to that effect, and as an element useful in any revolt, loudness was employed.

Perceived by its members as a new social phenomenon, in revolt against conventional cultural conceptions and needing loudness to be heard, the movement saw itself at a distance from the society of which it was part and defined itself structurally as outside of society, not least society's authority structure which to a degree it held in contempt. Its members viewed it as a resistance movement, its difference from society in general exemplified by its unconventional ideas and methods and non-hierarchical internal authority structure. As a resistance movement its method of working towards its aims was to exert pressure from its self-defined outside on those who held authority i.e. those who were inside the authority structure, for instance on the Althing, to pass legislation consistent with the movement's aims. To that purpose the movement gathered relevant information and made enough noise for that information to be borne to the receiving end, i.e. those in authority and society at large. The method of pressure from its perceived outside on an inside, which in relation to the movement contained everything outside the movement, was therefore in essence the movement's working method.

As has been pointed out above this method is consistent with the movement's ideology but there is another side to the movement's method which in turn is consistent with the ambivalence inherent in its ideology. As the decade progressed liberationists repeatedly expressed a desire for involvement and co-operation with some of the institutions which embodied their society's authority structure, such as the labour movement and certain political parties. As a method that contrasts sharply with the movement's view of itself as outside society's authority structure and its directly related method of resistance and pressure, of non-participation according to conventional methods. But it is perfectly

consistent with the movement's acceptance on another level of society's authority structure and its aim of assimilating women into that structure so that women could become signifying social beings of the same order as men. Hence the ambivalence lying at the heart of the movement's ideology is borne through and reflected in the movement's methods.

If the movement's perception of itself in relation to society, reflected among other things in its methods of dealing with that society, is thus characterized by the same ambivalence that characterizes its ideology generally, it should, finally, be pointed out that whatever the movement's own view of itself in this respect was, it did nevertheless spring from the crucible of Icelandic society, the crucible of social change versus the endurance of basic conceptual categories. The blueprint of its ideas outlined above becomes meaningful only when viewed in terms of the social and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society. The movement, its ideas and activities, are therefore situated at the very heart of the ongoing process which is Icelandic society and from that point of view the movement can neither be viewed as peripheral to or outside of that selfsame society.

CHAPTER 8

THE RIGHT TO WORK

The preceding examination and analysis of liberationist ideas and activities and the social and conceptual context in which these occurred demonstrate, as was the case with the suffragists, that both socio-structural and conceptual factors were instrumental in bringing about and forming liberationist ideas and activities.

During the fifties and especially the sixties economic conditions in Icelandic society together with women's rising professional training and factors such as advances in the planning of parenthood, combined to bring about an unprecedented degree of women's active employment outside their homes. Social factors particular to Icelandic society, especially pertaining to social change, were therefore instrumental in changing radically women's social and economic activities and their general social situation.

At the same time conceptual factors regarding the accepted role and image of women, which had consolidated during the period of the quiet years, proved their resistance to change. The sexual division of labour remained basically unchanged. In spite of women's participation on the labour market, they were still the ones responsible for housekeeping and the upbringing of children, and their areas of paid employment and professional training continued to be closely tied to their socially sanctioned roles as mothers and housekeepers. The role of mother and housekeeper continued to be viewed by society at large as the dominant one for women, to be undertaken at the expense of education and/or paid work if need be. And women's work and professional training continued to fetch lower wages on the labour market than men's work and professional training, women's wages generally being considered supplementary to those of men.

Conceptually women therefore continued to be defined in terms of their activities in the domestic sphere and in terms of the structural factors pertaining to the domestic domain, creating an experienced dis-

crepancy between women's social activities on the one hand and their structural definition on the other. In this discrepancy and its adherent social problems lies the seed of liberationist ideas and activities. They spring from the crucible of social change versus the endurance of basic conceptual categories, aided by ideas on women and society circulating in neighbouring societies and by extended interaction and comparison among women and of women with men.

While economic and social change had brought about radical changes in women's field of activities their structural definition had not changed. By the end of the 60s women were basically in a similar socio-structural position as urban women were at the beginning of the century. As then women were not suffering the worsening of material conditions, quite the contrary. And as then, it was urban not rural women who mobilized in the cause of women's rights.

As is discussed in chapter 4, the structural change occurring with urbanization, the separation of the public and private spheres of activities and women's close association with and definition in terms of the private sphere, had adverse effects on the social position of women. In urban areas women's disadvantaged socio-structural position and not least their marginal presence in society's public sphere consolidated as the century progressed. The division of urban social life into roughly demarcated but separate gender fields persisted and continued to impose limitations on women's socio-structural space and marginalize them in terms of public social life. When, in the early 60's, women increasingly entered into professional training and onto the labour market they entered society's public sphere, but that did not suffice to change their socio-structural position in terms of domains and therefore not their socio-structural definition as persons. Having become engaged in the public sphere and having thus entered men's gender field highlighted for women their discrepant and disadvantageous socio-structural position, besides increasing the practical problems women were faced with. The need to change that socio-structural position therefore became the driving force behind the emergence of the Redstocking Movement.

In the urban social context the politico-jural dimension derived from the public sphere had been in part denied women. That this was still the

case by the end of the 60s is, for instance, demonstrated by liberationists' strong emphasis on making women participate fully in public social life. It indicates that women did not perceive themselves as full participants in society's public sphere and, therefore, as lacking some of the politico-jural dimensions derived from that sphere. As women had entered into that part of the public sphere which was demarcated by paid work and were there in a position to compare themselves directly with men, they phrased their claims for a change in their socio-structural position in terms of their right to work. Obtaining the lacking politico-jural dimension was imperative if the desired change in women's socio-structural position was to be brought about. By 1970 it was clear that formal jural rights, such as those claimed and obtained by the suffragists, would not suffice to bring about that change and therefore and because women were already engaged in the field of paid work, the right to paid work became the epitome of the necessary but lacking jural dimension. The right to work is directly comparable to the suffragists' right to speak. Paid work carried the politico-jural dimension through which liberationists hoped to make women's voices heard and hence turn women into fully signifying social beings.

That women considered and experienced themselves as socially muted emerges clearly from the examination and analysis of liberationist ideas and activities. In terms of Hastrup's concepts of 'inside' and 'outside', urban women continued to be ambiguously placed in terms of Icelandic society's enduring conceptual structure. Conceptually the rural areas retained their cultural insideness and women in towns therefore continued to be conceptually located in the outside of the men's world, where they traditionally had no position and were ambiguously if not dangerously placed.

Women's dislocation in terms of conceptual categories was instrumental in creating and maintaining their social mutedness. That mutedness is the prevailing characteristic of the quiet years in which both conceptual and socio-structural aspects of women's situation consolidated to such an extent that nothing less than revolt against society's basic conceptual categories of women seemed to suffice if women were to have a publicly audible voice. This mutedness is also demonstrated in the method employed by liberationists, the method of loudness con-

strued to break the silence surrounding women and their concerns. And it is demonstrated in the outside character of The Redstocking Movement, which defined itself as a resistance movement operating from an outside in order to influence an inside where authority to make far reaching decisions was perceived to reside.

As the dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society places both women and men in the inside of society, a perception of women and society which perceives women being located in society's outside is a perception at variance with the dominant conceptual model. In that perception, the perception that urban women were located in the outside of Icelandic society's conceptual structure where they had no accepted traditional position and therefore not an accepted voice, which in turn made for their social mutedness, we find a muted women's model of women and society. The mutedness of the model itself is also demonstrated by the fact that women deemed it necessary to undertake organized and loud activities in order to promote their points of view and claims to being listened to. As with the suffragists, women's muted model of women and society is the basis from which The Redstocking Movement proceeds to emerge. It informs liberationists' ideas and activities by way of contrast and by explaining how women's social position differs from that of men and how it is unsatisfactory.

Hence both socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society were instrumental in bringing about the revitalization of women's rights activities occurring by the end of the nineteen sixties. Social change had created a discrepancy between women's social activities and their socio-structural definition, women were as before dislocated in terms of their society's conceptual structure, experienced themselves as socially muted, and possessed as a gender group a muted model of themselves and their society. In socio-structural terms they were in part denied the politico-jural dimension derived from society's public sphere, in cultural conceptual terms their voices were socially muted which together meant that women were not fully signifying social beings, not persons "perceived as the microcosm of the social order" (Fortes, 1973).

Again women's social personhood is at the core of women's rights ideas and activities. Again these ideas and activities aim at redefining

women as social persons in terms fitting their social participation, the activities themselves being a means for women toward creating women as full social persons, as agents-in-society (cf. Harris, 1989). In the days of the liberationists women did not lack the formal jural rights pertaining to the politico-jural domain, such as those vested in the franchise, education or entitlement to office, which are all a prerequisite for full social personhood. The suffragists had succeeded in having that jural dimension of women's social personhood formally acknowledged. But that formal acknowledgement changed neither the conceptual-cultural nor the socio-structural blueprint of Icelandic society, the blueprint which informed everyday behavior. Women continued to lack a *de facto* jural dimension and an audible voice capable of holding by itself the note of authority.

In this respect the distinction between social spheres and structural domains made throughout the analysis is of key importance. By the nineteen sixties women were no longer confined to the private or domestic social sphere of activities, they were already active in society's public sphere. Yet, due to conceptual resilience, their personhood was still defined in terms of the structural domestic domain, in terms of their roles, rights and duties, as mothers and housewives. Without the distinction between social spheres and structural domains, the discrepancy experienced in women's social life would not become apparent, a discrepancy between social activities and structural definitions which was the generating element in the emergence of liberationist ideas and activities.

As is discussed in chapter 4 the suffragists recognized that different social kinds could coexist as agents-in-society, and on the basis of their positive evaluation of women's gender-specific culture they claimed full social personhood for women but of a different kind from that of men. During the quiet years this definition of women's social personhood consolidated, a definition which relied to a great extent on women's roles as mothers and housewives. As it was precisely the structural definition of women in terms of those roles which prevented women from enjoying the full jural dimension of their activities in the public sphere, liberationists disclaimed those roles as oppressive and took a negative stance towards women's gender-specific culture

derived from those roles. Accordingly the personhood they claimed for women was of the same kind as that of men, the right to work being perceived as a de facto jural right, a defining element of men's social personhood which women lacked. By obtaining that right for women and adding it to the formal jural rights women had held for decades, but which obviously did not by itself suffice to give women's personhood its lacking jural dimension, liberationists hoped to overcome women's social mutedness and turn them into fully signifying social beings.

With the liberationists there thus emerges a new shift in the definition of women's social personhood. Both suffragists and liberationists were concerned with claiming full social personhood for women, but the kinds of personhood for women they were claiming were different. It is of note in this respect that active liberationists were predominantly working mothers, women who directly experienced the collision of the public and private spheres in their everyday life. In their disadvantaged and dislocated structural position this was instrumental in motivating them to become active and disclaim one of the colliding elements. Of the same order of significance is the fact that while active liberationists and suffragists generally had similar social attributes, attributes which placed them structurally in an in between social position, the ones which pertain to the domestic domain were played down by liberationists. Motherhood, wifhood and housewifery were not illuminated aspects of their social attributes, (cf. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir's election campaign), and singleness *becomes* a social characteristic of the liberationist group but was far less prominent in the group when the movement emerged.

This concurs with the kind of personhood liberationists were claiming for women. They were claiming the same kind of personhood for women as that of men and therefore they emphasized women's male socio-structural defining attributes, such as those of education and paid work. Therefore they disclaimed women's female socio-structural defining attributes, such as those of motherhood and wifhood, which were not necessary to them as they had been to the suffragists, to validate a different kind of personhood for women, that of women as agents-in-society different from men as agents-in-society.

And since liberationists did not differentiate between men and women in terms of personhood, they did not differentiate between women's political personhood and women's general personhood, as suffragists had done. That distinction did not need to be made since women's gender-specific cultural characteristics were not to be structurally defining factors of women's social personhood. Their slogan "the personal is political" illuminates this point from another angle. To liberationists there was only one kind of personhood, applicable both in the public and private spheres of society and equally to women and men.

Although liberationists were not successful to the same degree as suffragists in validating their claims (cf. chapter 7), their ideas and activities had a profound effect on the conceptualization of women and not least women activities in Icelandic society and on women's social position generally (cf. chapter 10). The social changes taking place where women were concerned in the late fifties and sixties brought about a major change in the context within which women's social personhood was defined, and liberationists formulated a new concept of women's social personhood in accordance with those changes. If not for anything else their definition of the personhood claimed for women was bound to have profound effects. With the liberationists there therefore occurs a definite if short-lived shift in the definition of women as social persons, a shift which is consistent with the social changes taking place and the conceptual structural changes not taking place.

Social personhood entails agentive capacities which have the power to change the social order or "the very action system that gives [women] their social being" (Harris, 1989). A shift in the definition of women's social personhood can therefore entail yet another shift in the action system that defines that personhood, which in turn requires yet another shift in the definition of women's social personhood. Perhaps the most accurate measurement of the impact of liberationist ideas and activities is the fact that by the time the nineteen eighties dawned, such a redefinition of women as social beings seemed again pertinent to Icelandic women.

PART III

NEW WOMEN'S SLATE

CHAPTER 9

EVENTS

In many ways the phase of the new women's slates is a direct continuation of that of the Redstockings. The Redstockings had succeeded in breaking the silence surrounding women in Icelandic society. They had succeeded in making both women and men conscious of women's social position, they had been instrumental in bringing about the show of women's strength and solidarity on Oct. 24th 1975, and they had succeeded in effecting various changes in the position of women in Icelandic society.

The Redstockings had thus created a hearing space for and concern with issues of importance to women, had shown women they had strength if united and that women could, if they wanted, be different from what they were supposed to be. And effecting changes in women's social position, especially in the area of paid work, had both given women a new perspective on and an added impetus to tackle their problems, the negative side of which was that some of these changes created more problems than they solved. That in turn amplified women's need to find new solutions and new methods to bring about the changes they desired.

In these respects the phase of women's liberation is directly linked to that of the new women's slates which followed in the eighties. Also, certain aspects of liberationist ideas and methods continued to be employed in a modified form by the new women's slaters. In Reykjavík the idea of putting forward a women's slate in elections was generated with a group of women who had been active in the Redstocking Movement, but despaired of that movement's ability to tackle the problems with which women were faced by the beginning of the eighties. Some of these women left the Redstocking Movement and became active women's slaters and there is thus also continuity between the two phases in terms of individual active women.

However, there was a fundamental change in the early nineteen eighties in both the women's ideas and their methods of promoting them, which constitutes a shift dividing the second period of women's rights activities in Iceland into two distinct phases, that of the liberationists and that of the new women's slaters. Where ideas are concerned it seemed, to begin with, that once again influence from abroad was the dividing line between old and new, but as will be discussed in chapter eleven, a closer look reveals that in the ideas promoted by the new women's slaters, the traditional concept of women in Iceland surfaced and the newness was primarily to be found in the way that concept was formed and defined. The method of women's slates, which in many respects is radically different from the primary method of the liberationists, was a method consistent with these "new" ideas.

Like in the two phases discussed before, social and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society were instrumental in the emergence of the new women's slates. As will be discussed in chapter ten, certain aspects of the changes in women's social position during the seventies, some of which liberationists promoted, intensified the problems with which women were faced. That is especially true where women's right to work was concerned, a right that few challenged by the end of the liberationist era, but which quickly turned into a demand and an economic necessity for many women. By 1980 women were expected to work and provide, their influx onto the labour market had resulted in the devaluation of wages and for many women it had become a matter of economic necessity and not one of choice to engage in paid work.

At the same time women continued to be the ones primarily responsible for children and housekeeping and the society that had welcomed them onto the labour market and turned them into a source of cheap labour did not meet women's needs in this area. The 1976 sexual equality legislation had not produced the anticipated results and turned out to be ineffective as an instrument to solve the actual situation of sexual inequality. Again women's problems were mounting and since the old solutions and methods had not produced the desired results, it seemed to concerned women that once again new solutions and ideas and new methods were needed. Hence emerged the new Women's Slates Movement of the nineteen eighties.

The New Women's Slates Movement

According to the minutes of the meetings of the Women's Slates Movement in Reykjavík (*Fundargerðabók Kvennaframboðsins í Reykjavík*) women in Reykjavík first discussed the idea of separate women's slates in municipal elections in January 1981. Only a few women were parties to that discussion; they were friends, had been active in the Redstocking Movement and had lost faith in that movement's competence to deal with the problems they perceived women in Icelandic society were facing. These women were aware of the existence of women's slates in the first quarter of the century and discussed the possibility of adopting the method of slates. Also, only six months earlier, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir had succeeded on a one woman's slate in winning the presidential elections, providing an immediately relevant model for promoting women to positions of authority.

In June these Reykjavík women formed an informal discussion group to which various women, who were presumed to be interested in new methods to deal with the situation of women, were invited. No specific method was followed in deciding what women were invited to these discussions: general knowledge in a small society of who was who and who was interested in what, seemed to be the determining element in this respect. During the summer six or seven discussion meetings were held, attended by the original group of women: former and present members of the Redstocking Movement, some of whom were active in leftist groups, and women who were not and had not been active in the field of women's rights or politics. The membership of the group fluctuated somewhat, since not all the same women attended all the meetings.

The focus around which these informal meetings were constructed was whether a women's slate, as a method to activate women for their own concerns, would "reach all women on the grounds that there was more that united women than what divided them" (*Fundargerðabók Kvennaframboðsins í Reykjavík*, p.1). Right from the beginning it was clear that there were two opposed ideological positions within the group. On one hand there was the ideological position developed in the Redstocking Movement during its last few years which, in accordance

with Marxist ideology, looked upon women as divided into different classes which meant that all women as a group were not perceived to have the same concerns and interests. This ideological position was upheld mainly by women who were active both in the Redstocking Movement and in leftist groups. On the other hand there was a “new” ideological position which maintained that because women possessed to a large degree the same or similar social experience as women in Icelandic society, they as a group would to that same degree have the same concerns and interests: that “there was more that united women than what divided them”. Being thus perceived as a group to share gender defined social experiences, women were seen to possess a culture of their own defined by their gender and that culture was seen as something positive both for women and their society. These ideas were primarily promoted by three women who had all at one time been active in the Redstocking Movement, had left the movement and become acquainted with the ideas they proclaimed through their travels abroad and active interest in the then burgeoning field of women’s studies.

In the meetings discussion was heated, the two ideological positions could not be reconciled, and in September the discussion group broke up on a note of fundamental disagreement. Women who took part in these discussions and subsequently became active women’s slaters often refer to these meetings as having revolutionized their ideas on women and society by effectively reversing them. In October these women, along with the ones who originally promoted the “new” ideas and a few who had subscribed to these ideas all along, formed a new group consisting of twelve women in order to prepare a separate women’s slate for the 1982 municipal elections in Reykjavík.

The group of twelve decided to call an open meeting to introduce to the public the idea of a women’s slate in the coming municipal election and to find out whether women were interested in that method and its ideological grounds to promote their concerns. The meeting, held on Nov. 14, 1981, was attended by several hundred women and although some voices were raised against the idea of a separate women’s slate, the meeting voted unanimously in favor of the idea. As election day was only six months ahead there followed a period of frantic activity. At the meeting many women had enlisted in the cause of the new women’s

slate. After the meeting these women had to be contacted and brought together, and preparation activities had to be organized. The ideological grounds of the new slate had to be discussed, clarified and agreed upon as well as a policy statement regarding the affairs of Reykjavík municipality. The new movement of the women's slates had yet to be formally established, it needed housing for its activities and financial means to implement and publicize them.

Women organized into groups to undertake these various tasks and accomplished them within the next few months. The lease to a derelict hotel in the center of Reykjavík was obtained, the hotel was cleaned, painted and moved into, and cakes, hot drinks and various items prepared by the women were sold to obtain funding. Numerous large and small meetings were held. On Jan. 14, 1982, a general meeting of the women agreed upon a declaration of ideas for the new slate (*Hugmyndafræðigrundvöllur Kvennaframboðs*) and on January 31., at an open meeting again attended by several hundred women, the new Women's Slate Movement in Reykjavík (*Kvennaframboðið í Reykjavík*) was formally established.

Like when the Redstocking Movement was established, the activities of the women slaters were characterized by an atmosphere of awakening and newness, and so much so that when a veteran women's activist suggested that history was repeating itself and that women were once again starting anew to change their world, several women's slaters were openly affronted. To them it seemed that what they were doing was no repetition but something new and unprecedented. Awareness of historical antecedents was however by no means absent. In the following months at least two articles appeared by women's slaters comparing the new women's slates with the slates of the suffragists (Ástgeirsdóttir, 1982, Kristmundsdóttir, 1982). And when the graphic emblem of the new movement was decided upon the old national headdress of Icelandic women (*skotthúfa*) was adopted into the design, indicating awareness of historical continuity where women were concerned. Such awareness of historical antecedents and historical continuity did all the same not mean that women's slaters considered themselves at that time engaged in a repetition of history. Rather the past was used to strengthen their arguments, much as the suffragists had used the golden age of

the Icelandic commonwealth to strengthen their arguments. As such the past was perceived of as a building block in the construction of the new movement of the day.

By March the policy statement regarding the affairs of Reykjavík municipality (*Stefnuskrá Kvennaframboðsins í Reykjavík*) was completed and agreed upon and so was the actual slate i.e. the listing of candidates for the impending elections. To implement these and other tasks women worked in groups. Often a group of three to six women would be chosen at a general meeting to prepare a task, and such a group would then submit what it had prepared to another general meeting. Then, if the task was an extensive one like preparing a policy statement, the general meeting or a specific conference called on the subject would divide up into groups to discuss the matter before convening again to reach decision on the subject. By using this working method women's slaters attempted to reach decisions by consensus in an effort to ensure that the voices of all women taking part had their chance in forming the decisions made.

As election day, May 23rd, drew nearer activities intensified. The usual tasks of an election campaign in a democratic state had to be undertaken in addition to work internal to the new movement. Political meetings had to be attended and the media had to be tackled and employed. Reactions of the four established political parties that also put forward slates in the elections had to be dealt with, their response to the new slate ranging from silence, ridicule or anger, to attempts to write the slate off as a batch of either leftist or rightist frustrated women (see e.g. *Þjóðviljinn*, April and May, 1982). Women's slaters brought out two election publications (*Kvennaframboðið*, nos. 1-2, 1982), but otherwise employed rather unconventional campaigning methods. They included holding outdoor meetings in the different quarters of Reykjavík where among other things a women's choir dressed up in a modicum of the seldom used national dress of women performed, driving through the streets in a decorated pick-up truck dispensing their political message along with selling fruit-juice and cookies for funding and various carnival-like meetings. The largest of these meetings was held a few days before the elections, featured the various aspects of women's work as its main theme and was attended by a few thousand

people. On election day the Women's Slate harvested 10.9% of the vote and two seats in the twenty-one member municipal government of Reykjavík.

Women's slate activities were not confined to Reykjavík as had been the case with the Redstocking Movement, which had never succeeded in extending its activities outside of Reykjavík and its urban environs. In the second half of the seventies the Redstocking Movement had made unsuccessful attempts to establish a department in Akureyri, the second largest urban locality in Iceland, although roughly nine times smaller than the Reykjavík area. The Redstocking Movement had all the same managed to influence the whole of Icelandic society. The issues the movement emphasized and its ideas, especially its idea of equality, had become part of social discourse throughout the country. Also the events of the women's day in 1975 and the 1980 election of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir were national events and by no means confined to Reykjavík, although they originated in and in many ways centered on the capital.

Therefore, in spite of there not being a liberationist movement in Akureyri, concern with issues of importance to women was strong there. In 1980 there were several active women's groups in Akureyri, concerned with various issues of interest to women, and other groups in which women were active such as a group of parents concerned with finding new solutions to the pressing issue of children's day-care. The activities of these groups led to the establishment of the Akureyri Equality Movement (*Jafnréttishreyfingin á Akureyri*) on Feb. 8, 1981. The movement's aim was to promote all issues of concern to women, but because of a day-care nurses' strike on Feb. 20th, the issue of children's day-care was to begin with its main focus of concern and activities.

The idea that some sort of a new political slate was needed if the perceived inability of the municipal council to deal with problems such as those of children's day-care was to be overcome was voiced in 1980 in the parents' day-care group. Previously the idea of a women's slate had also been brought up in one of the women's groups. By spring 1981, after the solution of the nurses' strike, this idea was gaining general currency as a viable possibility. In May and June the Equality Movement

met to discuss whether such a slate should be a women's slate on the grounds that issues such as day-care, which were of specific concern to women, were paid inadequate attention by the municipal council because women were grossly underrepresented in the council and on its boards and committees. Opinions on the subject varied and a group was formed to prepare an open meeting to discuss the viability of a new slate. That meeting was held on July 8th, attended by over 100 people, and there it became clear that a women's slate in the coming municipal election in Akureyri had considerable support. Another meeting held on July 20th, attended by a group of 60, then took the formal decision that a women's slate would be put forward in the 1982 Akureyri municipal elections. Hence the Women's Slate Movement in Akureyri (Kvennaframboðið á Akureyri) was formally established and took over the stage from the only 6 months old Equality Movement. The latter thereby lost its focus and field of activities to the women's slate, although it continued to exist for some time.

The ensuing activities of the new movement followed much the same course and the same pattern as described for the Reykjavík movement above. Housing and funding had to be found, the activities of the new movement had to be organized, a policy statement regarding the affairs of Akureyri municipality written and so forth. During the election campaign the Akureyri women's slaters brought out four publications (*Kjósum konur*, nos. 1-4.) but otherwise employed rather unconventional campaigning methods similar to those of the Reykjavík women's slaters. On election day the Akureyri women's slate obtained 17.4% of the vote and two seats in the eleven member Akureyri municipal council. (Sæmundsson, 1982, *Kjósum konur*, nos. 1-4, 1981-1982).

When women in Reykjavík were having their ideological discussions during the summer of 1981, women in Akureyri were already forming their women's slate movement. Women in Reykjavík knew of the activities of the Akureyri women but there was not at that time any direct relation between the two groups, nor were there later, once both slates had been established, any organized attempts to assimilate the two slates' ideas and activities. The Akureyri and Reykjavík women's slates therefore came into being independently of each other and preserved their mutual independence in their ensuing activities. That the

two slates did thus emerge without any direct relation between the two, points towards the influence of the 1980 election of president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir on the emergence of the slates. Her one woman slate and successful election served as a model which inspired both women in Akureyri and women in Reykjavík and which both groups could refer to, independently of one another.

A difference between the emergence of the two slates is that the one in Akureyri was activated by dissatisfaction with the municipal council and its handling of certain issues, whereas the one in Reykjavík was activated by dissatisfaction with the existing women's movement and its inability to provide both ideological and practical solutions to the many problems women were perceived to be having. Consequently the Akureyri slate was to a substantial degree oriented towards municipal issues whereas in Reykjavík, with its tradition as a center for women's movements, ideological concerns and the building of a new women's movement were at least as important as concern with municipal affairs. Ideological debates comparable to the ones taking place in Reykjavík did not arise in Akureyri and the Akureyri slate never issued a declaration of ideas as did the one in Reykjavík. The liberationist idea of equality, discarded by the Reykjavík women, was promoted by the Akureyri slate side by side with the idea, originally promoted by the suffragists and then by the Reykjavík women's slaters, that women's gender specific social experience was something indispensable to but at present lacking in public decision making. Hence ideologically, the Akureyri municipal slate presented at its emergence an in-between or a mediating phase between the liberationist and the new women's slate eras, the Reykjavík slate on the other hand constituting a shift between the two.

The ideological variation between the two slates was not immediately obvious, especially since the Reykjavík slaters did from time to time employ the concept of sexual equality in spite of its having been consciously omitted from the slate's declaration of ideas and policy statement. The most clearly received message of both slates was that women were underrepresented in public decision making and therefore women should be elected into municipal councils. Consequently, in an attempt to preserve their votes, the political parties placed more

women at the top end of their slates and the combined result was that the percentage of women in municipal government rose in 1982 from 6.2% to 12.4%.

In Akureyri, where after the elections the women's slate held the balance of power, the slate entered into a majority coalition in the governing of the municipality. Besides supplying the president of Akureyri municipal council, the women's slate held 33 seats and 30 deputy seats in the municipalities' various boards and councils. In the Reykjavík elections the Independence Party, the largest party on the right, won a clear majority so there the women's slate became part of the minority in the municipal government. Seventeen seats and 15 deputy seats on the capital's boards and councils was the slate's lot in Reykjavík.

Within less than a year the women, who had formed, worked for and fought for the new women's slates in Reykjavík and Akureyri, found themselves shouldered with what were perceived as considerable duties and responsibilities towards the governing of their municipalities, towards the cause which had made them participate in the elections and towards those who had given their votes to that cause. In addition the Reykjavík slaters initiated the publication of a magazine, *Vera*, first published in Oct. 1982, in order to provide the movement with "a platform for discussion and the exchange of opinions" and to abet "the struggle of Icelandic women for better living conditions and increased influence of women" (*Vera*, 1/1982, Oct. p. 2). The magazine, which has been published regularly since, was, in spite of being published by the Reykjavík slate and in spite of carrying political news concerning the slate, intended to serve as a general women's magazine for the country, carrying material of interest to diverse groups of women. Bringing out such a magazine meant a great deal of work all of which had to be voluntary since the slate had meager finances and sales barely covered the unavoidable costs of publication. For women actively engaged with the slates the elections therefore did not signify a release from unpaid work for the benefit of a cause; instead new tasks and new duties and responsibilities emerged to make demands on their time and resources.

That this was the case was one of the reasons for why the Reykjavík women's slaters could not agree on whether or not the scope of the slate should be extended into the Althing by participating in parliamentary

elections. By autumn 1982 it had become clear that parliamentary elections would most likely be called in early 1983. Women's slaters first discussed the possibility of a women's slate in those elections at a conference held in Sept. 1982, and throughout the autumn a number of meetings were held on the subject. Those meetings were stormy, women who had previously worked and fought together found themselves opposing each other which served to intensify the conflict. When, on Feb. 5, 1983 a vote was finally taken on the issue in a general meeting, twenty six voted against a women's parliamentary slate, twenty four voted for such a slate.

those who voted against a slate the new duties they had shouldered in the governing of Reykjavík municipality weighed heavily. They felt the movement did not have the resources necessary to undertake a parliamentary campaign and the duties entailed in a subsequent representation in the Althing, in addition to those already undertaken in Reykjavík municipality. Indicative of this attitude is the relatively minor issue of "strætó", i.e. a certain problem to be dealt with in Reykjavík's public transport system, which keeps cropping up in minutes of the meetings as such a pressing issue that it did not allow time for contemplating something like a parliamentary campaign. Focusing on the immediate rather than the more far reaching issues involved in the question, a lack of confidence in the movement's ability to shoulder additional responsibilities and a desire to do well what had already been undertaken, was therefore instrumental in deciding women against a parliamentary slate.

But those were not the only reasons. Another major reason was that many of the women felt that where policy in national affairs was concerned the movement was too heterogeneous in terms of traditional politics for it to reach common ground, especially in certain politically sensitive issues such as the presence of the NATO base in Iceland. Being able to unite on how to govern one municipality was for some of the women something quite different from being united in terms of national politics. Concerns such as whether the movement would turn into a political party if it participated in parliamentary elections, whether legislation made by the Althing made any difference for women (cf. the 1976 equality legislation), and others of a

similar genre, were also voiced and contributed to the vote against a parliamentary slate.

None of the above appeared valid arguments to those women slaters who promoted and voted in favor of a parliamentary slate. For them the difference between a women's slate in municipal elections and a women's slate in parliamentary ones was one of degree only. They reasoned that since a women's slate and a feminist representation had been found necessary where municipal affairs were concerned, such a slate and such a representation were equally if not more necessary in national affairs where larger issues were at stake which concerned the whole of society, including all women. Since women had been able to reach common ground in municipal affairs on the basis of a defined ideology, that same ideology, they contended, would allow them to reach common ground in national affairs; that if sensitive political issues like that of the NATO base had so far divided the nation, such issues should not be allowed to divide women and thus prevent them from uniting in the cause of women. They argued that since the women's slate had been successful in the municipal elections, now was a unique and a not-to-be-retrieved opportunity to extend the scope of the slate into national affairs, that such an extended scope would only strengthen the movement and make it more able to fulfill its municipal responsibilities, not the contrary, that the municipal slate had raised the hopes of many women for a new political force that would succeed in improving the lot of women, and that those hopes must not be shattered by not putting forward a slate, that a slate was the best way to get women's voices listened to - and so forth. The 1983 parliamentary slate conflict constituted the worst crisis in the event-saga of the women's slates and in it there crystallized some of the basic ideas of the movement as did its nature, to be discussed in chapter 12.

Although the movement had on Feb. 5, 1983, voted against putting forward a women's slate in the impending parliamentary elections, the women's slaters who were in favor of such a slate decided that they would not abide by that majority decision and would all the same put forward a slate in the elections. That decision effectively divided the group of women which constituted the Reykjavík movement into two halves. The ones who were against the slate had no choice but to step

back, but declared they would not in any way impede the success of the parliamentary slate; the others started working without respite towards the new slate.

Again there followed a period of frantic activity similar to the one preceeding the 1982 municipal elections. On the basis of the 1982 slate's declaration of ideas, which was adopted unchanged, a policy statement on national affairs was prepared. An open meeting held on Feb. 26, where the idea of a women's slate in parliamentary elections and a draft of the slate's policy statement were presented, was attended by several hundred women and demonstrated wide support for the slate. Contacts were made with women in the constituency of Reykjanes, which surrounds that of Reykjavík, and women there decided to join in and put forward a slate as well. So did women in Akureyri who had also thoroughly discussed the issue and conferred with the Reykjavík women all along. So of the eight constituencies, three carried a women's slate in the 1983 parliamentary elections. On March 13, in Reykjavík women's slaters of these three constituencies formally established a national women's slate movement, The Women's Alliance (Samtök um Kvinnalista), agreed on a policy statement on national affairs for the new movement (*Stefnuskrá Kvinnalistans*, 1983) and on its law i.e. its internal organization (*Lög Samtaka um Kvinnalista*)*. Shortly thereafter the three slates and the policy statement were published and the election campaign was under way.

Although a new national movement had thus been formally established, it was to a large extent made up of the same women who in 1982 had established the municipality defined or local women's slates movements (i.e. *Kvennaframboðið í Reykjavík* and *Kvennaframboðið á Akureyri*) and who continued to be active in their local movements. Also the new national movement was grounded on the same basic ideas on which the local ones, especially the one in Reykjavík, had been grounded. So although by spring 1983 there existed organizationally

* The word "kvennaframboð", used in the name of the 1982 municipality orientated slate movements, and the word "kvinnalisti" used in the name of the national slate movement, are semantically interchangeable and both translate into English as "women's slate".

three separate movements, these movements did not differ significantly in terms of ideas, nor to any extent in terms of women active within them, and are therefore seen to constitute together one movement, that of the new Women's Slates.

The 1983 election campaign was in most respects similar to the 1982 election campaigns, except that this time the women slaters had less preparation time, election day being April 23rd, and therefore could not organize as large scale events as they had been able to in 1982. Also since election day was in April the weather did not permit of many outdoors activities which had proved effective in 1982. One significant campaign action which, however, took place out of doors was the women's slaters "silent march" on April 22nd, the day before election day. That evening the final election debate of the political leaders was to be broadcast on national television, but the women's slate had been denied participation in the debate by the national television and radio board on the technical grounds that it had slates in only three of the eight constituencies. The women's slate representative would have been the only woman participating in the debate and the first to do so since previously no woman had obtained the status of a political leader. To draw attention to and protest against this perceived discriminatory exclusion from the debate, the women's slaters marched in silence through the center of Reykjavík to the television station where they stood for half an hour in the biting cold without uttering a word in spite of being entreated by arriving reporters to give statements concerning the affair. The message of this action was that in spite of having the technical right to speak, the right of the vote and of eligibility, women were still being prevented from speaking where hearing conditions were optimal, such as in this debate which the majority of the electorate was expected to watch.

Yet, in spite of this event, media attention being traditionally more intense in parliamentary elections than in municipal ones, the women's slaters had plenty of microphones and television cameras through which to convey their message. Having succeeded in marshalling a sizable portion of the vote in the municipal elections the previous year, the women's slate was perceived as an effective threat to the interests of the political parties and was treated accordingly. On

election day the women's slates received 5.5% of the vote and had three women elected into the Althing, two from the Reykjavík slate and one from the Reykjanes slate. In the predominantly agricultural North-East constituency the women's slate did not succeed in having its candidate elected. Until this date only twelve women had held seats in the millennium-old Althing, now altogether nine women were elected into the Althing and the percentage of women members rose from 5 to 15 percent.

After the elections the women's slate participated in negotiations towards forming a coalition government but did not press for government participation. Being new to the Althing, wielding only three out of sixty votes there, and the realization that there was still much work to be done in expanding the slate's ideas and in organizing the less than two months old Women's Alliance, were the main reasons for not pressing for government participation. By the end of May when a coalition government was finally formed, the women's slate became part of the opposition in the Althing. When the Althing convened in Oct. 1983 the members for the women's slate found that while the other members would neither necessarily agree with their point of view nor, they felt, even understand it, they were given specific respect for having - unaided by men, but like men, - fought for their parliamentary seats and won them.

In the Akureyri and Reykjavík municipal councils and in the Althing the women's slaters worked within the traditional organization and system of procedure of these institutions. They attempted to cross traditional boundaries of political organization by instigating the co-operation of women members of the Althing and of women municipal councillors regardless of political affiliations but these attempts foundered. In organizing their movement, into which considerable effort was directed during the next few years, the women's slaters attempted to avoid traditional organizational features as will be discussed in chapter 11. Like the Redstocking Movement in the previous decade, women's slaters used non-traditional methods in promoting their ideas like, for instance, attending a Reykjavík municipal council meeting dressed as beauty queens to protest against the major of Reykjavík's views on beauty contests, and, in order to demonstrate and protest against

women's low pay on the labour market, went shopping for food in a super-market and refused to pay more for their purchases than the same percentage as the average percentage of women's wages compared to that of men.

Apart from activities directly related to the slate's representation in the Althing and in the municipal councils, women's slates prepared and held a number of meetings and conferences on specific subjects, participated in the formation of various women's interest groups which proliferated during this time, and continued publishing *Vera*. Considerable effort was directed into encouraging women all over the country to participate in the cause of the slates, including an extensive bus-tour around the country in 1984. By 1987, when there were again parliamentary elections, women's slates were put forward in all of the eight constituencies.

As discussed above the Women's Slate Movement was by 1983 divided into three separate organizations i.e. the local organizations in Reykjavík and Akureyri (Kvennaframboð) and the national organization (Kvennalisti, Women's Alliance). The foundation of the Women's Alliance had constituted a crisis in the Reykjavík movement which, to begin with, created a rift between the women who were left in the local movement and those who had founded the national movement. Consistent attempts were made by both groups to close ranks but the rift had left scars that did not heal overnight. By 1984, however, the national movement joined the Reykjavík local movement in the publication of *Vera*, and in turning the old hotel which housed both organizations into an open women's house accommodating various women's-group activities.

But with the advent of the parliamentary slates and the national movement, the local one had lost some of its steam. A number of its formerly active members now devoted their energy to parliamentary activities which in turn commanded more media attention generally than did municipal activities. Spending most of the local movement's energies in the municipal council and its committees without directly visible results, without having been able to adapt the municipal procedure system to suit women's participation in it, and without having commanded a massive participation of women in activities internal to the move-

ment, was for some of the Reykjavík women's slaters a reason not to repeat the Reykjavík municipal women's slate in the 1986 municipal elections.

For other slaters the action of placing a slate was just as valid in 1986 as it had been in 1982, the slate was considered to have made considerable difference both politically and in terms of how women were perceived in Icelandic society and how women perceived themselves, and it was thought that to not repeat the slate would be a defeat that would cut short the positive changes resulting from the slates so far. A number of the women who advocated repeating the municipal slate were women who were also active in the national movement i.e. the Women's Alliance. The local Reykjavík movement debated the issue of repeating the municipal slate throughout the year 1985 and although the minutes of the meetings of the movement indicate that a majority of the women active there were against repeating the slate, the movement failed to make an affirmative decision on the subject, perhaps remembering that such a decision in 1983 regarding the parliamentary slates had not prevented those who wanted to place such slates in doing so.

When it became clear in early 1986 that, failing a slate from the local movement, the Women's Alliance was prepared to and would put forward a municipal slate in its own name, the Reykjavík municipal women's slate movement finally decided it would not participate in the coming municipal election by placing a women's slate. A number of that movement's active women who had not already joined the Women's Alliance now did so in order to prepare for the municipal slate. In terms of activities the two movements thus finally merged. Formally the local movement still exists but has not held a recorded meeting since Oct. 1986 and is to all ends and purposes defunct as an organization.

In the Akureyri local slate movement, there was similarly minimal interest in repeating the slate. Having been in a minority position within the municipal council's majority made the negative side of the municipal experience, such as that recorded for Reykjavík, count still more. Besides the Akureyri women had not got their candidate elected into the Althing in the 1983 parliamentary elections, which contributed still further to a disillusioned state and affairs and a need for time to

evaluate the method of slates. In the end therefore no women's slate was put forward in the 1986 Akureyri municipal elections.

On the other hand women's slates in the name of the Women's Alliance appeared in two municipalities where such slates had not been placed before, in Selfoss in the Southern constituency and in Hafnarfjörður in the constituency of Reykjanes. In a number of the smaller localities members of the Women's Alliance did not venture forth with separate slates but joined forces with others forming independent slates from which a number of Women's Alliance members were elected. The Reykjavík women's slate received 8.1% of the vote in 1986 municipal elections, or 2.8% less than in 1982, and since the municipal council had been diminished from 21 to 15 members, one member elected. In Hafnarfjörður the women's slate received 4.5% of the vote and no member elected, but the Selfoss slate received 10.9% of the vote and one member elected and was the only women's slate to form a municipal council's majority after the elections. In the 1986 municipal elections the number of women elected into municipal government rose from 17% after the 1982 elections to 26.2%.

The municipal elections were hardly over when women's slaters started preparing for the 1987 parliamentary elections. Within the movement it was only perfunctorily discussed whether the parliamentary slates should be repeated or not, since while women's slaters did not think women's slates should be put forward automatically, i.e. without discussion, there was never any doubt within the movement that this time around they should be repeated. Now women's slates were put forward in all of the eight constituencies and in the 1987 parliamentary elections the women's slates received 11.1% of the vote, or double that of 1983, and six members elected into the then 63 member Althing. Three members were elected from the Reykjavík slate, one from the Reykjanes slate, one from the Western constituency slate and, this time, one from the North-East constituency slate.

In four constituencies, the ones of the Western fjords, the North-West, the East and the South, the women's slates did not succeed in having their candidates elected into the Althing. All of these constituencies, except the South, are sparsely populated and all of them are predominantly agricultural or fishing-sustained as opposed to urban. Conversely,

Reykjavík, where the women's slate got 3 members elected, is a completely urban constituency, the constituencies of Reykjanes and the Western country, which got one candidate elected each, are adjacent to that of Reykjavík and more urban than the rest of the country. And although the North-East constituency which got its candidate elected now is predominantly agricultural, it contains Akureyri, the most important urban center outside of Reykjavík and its environs.

After the elections the women's slate again took part in negotiations towards forming a coalition government, this time with four years of parliamentary experience to their benefit, an organized movement behind the members in the Althing and, because no two political parties had obtained a majority in the elections, a strategically favorable political position. Yet the members in the Althing were only six out of 63 and since the women's slate therefore could not rely on the strength of their votes in the Althing to carry their priorities they thought it expedient that those priorities be unequivocally accepted and clearly stated in the covenant of a government of which they were a part. When that proved unacceptable to the political parties in question the women's slate stepped out of the negotiations and became, when a government finally was formed, a part of the opposition in the Althing. Fourteen months later, or in Sept. 1988, the same process was repeated along similar lines when the government resigned and a new one was formed, and the women's slate continued to be in parliamentary opposition.

Since 1982 altogether 20 slates have been put forward by the new Women's Slate Movement. Women's slates were placed in Reykjavík, Akureyri, Ísafjörður and Kópavogur in the 1990 municipal elections, but only the Reykjavík slate managed to have a candidate elected into municipal government, receiving 6% of the vote or 2.1% less than in 1986. Comparing the first term of the women's slates to the second one in terms of character of activities, then, progressively more energy has been devoted to work within state and municipal institutions, boards, councils and temporary committees of various kinds. Unconventional actions such as discussed above have on the other hand become fewer. The 1987 parliamentary elections brought a heightened foreign media attention to the Icelandic women's slates and since then considerable work has been devoted to responding to such attention and to attending

the requests of various women's groups in Europe and North-America for women's slates speakers, information, advice and the like. Icelandic society therefore no longer constitutes the perimeter of the women's slates field of activities, but it continues to supply the slates' grounds and therefore the most significant aspect of their scope.

An opening of floodgates

During the nineteen eighties there occurred an unprecedented proliferation in women's group activities. The liberationist era and its emphasis on and formulation of the key concept of sexual equality had made groups composed of women only seem egregious. Accordingly, when in 1981 the women's slates, which were very obviously a women only phenomenon, were being formed they were greeted with accusations of practicing sexual apartheid, of being an anachronism and of effectively jeopardizing sexual equality.

Foremost among these critics were the political parties, not least politically active women, who had in one way or another assimilated the liberationist ideology and felt that both their status as women in the male world of politics and their party interests were threatened by this development. The Redstocking Movement, or what by 1981 was left of it, adopted the same point of view. The long established Women's Rights Association, backbone of the old women's slates, reacted similarly but in a more subdued manner, as if, after having suffered the Redstocking Movement, new women's movements were thought to come and go and need not be bothered about too much. Once the Women's Slates Movement was established, the Women's Rights Association, however, promptly invited it to elect a representative to the Women's Rights Association board where the political parties had their representatives.

With the advent of the new Women's Slate Movement it was as if floodgates of womenonly activities opened, as if suddenly it was again acceptable to women to form women-only groups around diverse topics of interest to women. The Women's Slate Movement need not be

seen as the cause of this flood of activities; it can equally be seen as part of an initial wave resulting from a general dissatisfaction with the consequences for women of social development in the seventies and with liberationist ideology and method. The Slates Movement was, however, the first organized activity of this kind to occur, was the most eminently and persistently visible women-only activity, and its initial and repeated success supplied a continuing justification for such activities. A number of women active within the Women's Slate Movement were at one time or another also active in such groups, either as individuals or as women's slaters.

The first women's interest group to be formally established in this bout of women's social activities was the Society for Sheltering Battered Women, Samtök um Kvænnaathvarf. The target group in question, i.e. women who had been raped or had suffered other forms of violence, was obviously a women-only group which may have facilitated the establishment of a womenonly society to deal with the issue. After a preparation period of several months, the society was formally established in June, 1982, organized intensive fund-raising activities, and in Dec., 1982, opened the Reykjavík shelter for battered women. During its first year of operation 151 women with 108 children made use of the shelter, the average attendance per year since being 148 women and 117 children. A comparable shelter opened in Akureyri in 1984 but operated for less than a year. In 1989 20% of the women and children resorting to the Reykjavík shelter came from outside the Reykjavík area as did a considerably larger proportion of the 861 telephone calls asking for advice the shelter received during 1989. From 1983 onwards the Althing has appropriated a specific amount to the shelter but it continues to be run by the original women's society, which besides managing the shelter, supplies what voluntary work it can muster.

During the 1983 parliamentary campaign women's slaters had emphasized the gender situation on the labour market, especially the uniformly low pay of women, as an immediate political issue. When the government formed after the elections began its management of economic affairs by devaluing all wages regardless of their relative value, the issue of women's wages received still more leverage as it became impossible for many women to support themselves on the wages they

received for full time work. During the fall of 1983 two different women's groups on the issue of women's wages were formally established, *Samtök kvenna á vinnumarkaðnum*, and *Framkvæmdanefnd um launamál kvenna*. The former was an organization open to all women interested in tackling the situation of women on the labour market, the latter was a committee of women representatives from the political parties, women's movements and women's labour unions which directed its efforts into gathering, processing and forwarding information on the labour market's gender situation. In the following year the Icelandic Women's Peace Movement, *Friðarhreyfing íslenskra kvenna*, was founded, the issue of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, being at the top of its agenda. That movement made contacts with similar movements in Europe and North America and sent delegates to international meetings and peace marches, besides organizing activities in Iceland. The movement and other women's peace groups which were subsequently formed, e.g. the Group for Peace Education, the Group for Nuclear-free Iceland and the Grandmothers for Peace, in all of which women's slaters were instrumental, radically changed social and political discourse on the issues involved.

As is mentioned in the previous section, in 1984 the women's slaters turned the old down-town hotel which housed their organizations into an open Women's House. A house-committee was established to manage the activities of the house including preparing regular cultural programmes, and allocating various meetings taking place in the house. Rooms were hired out cheaply to various women's groups, solving some of such groups' housing problems. The house was run until spring 1988 when the lease on it expired and the groups in the house had to find new accommodation.

In 1984 the Women's Counselling Service, *Kvennaráðgjöfin*, was established and housed in the Women's House. Run on a voluntary basis by women lawyers and social workers, the counselling service supplied legal and social advice to women free of charge and was widely used. The few lesbian women who were members of the Gay Society left that society to form the Icelandic Lesbian Society, *Íslensk-lesbíska*, on the grounds that sexual discrimination was just as prominent in the gay group as elsewhere and overrode lesbian interests. And, in 1984,

the first women's press, *Bókrún*, was established by a group of women to publish works by women only. The press has specialized in publishing women's poetry and women's biography, thriving in a previously rather empty space of the publishing market.

The year 1985 was the final year of the United Nations' Decade for Women and in connection with that various women's groups and organizations cooperated in preparing a number of events. Conspicuous among these were a repetition of the 1975 women's day on Oct. 24, and an extensive exhibition of women's work, *Kvennasmiðjan*, or the Women's Workshop, from Oct. 24 to 31st. In those events the major emphasis was, like in 1975, on work. On Oct. 24, 1985, women generally went on a one day strike like in 1975 and as then held meetings all over the country, the one in Reykjavík being somewhat smaller than the one in 1975, but like then devoted to the issue of women's work. President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir contributed to the day's action by delaying her signature to legislation to stop the very real strike of Icelandair's air hostesses which had effectively grounded the company's planes. The president's grounds for delaying her signature were that "after due deliberation I considered it the only way to make it known to the people that for me, like so many others, this day [i.e. Oct. 24] is very important." (Finnbogadóttir in *Morgunblaðið*, Oct. 15, 1985, my translation, cf. also chapters 5 and 6). That same day the Women's Workshop opened, portraying and relaying information on the different kinds of work women did, paid and unpaid, on women's working conditions, wages and the products of their work. The workshop documented its activities by publishing a paper, *Kvennasmiðjan*, in an edition for each of the seven days of the workshop.

Comparing the 1985 women's day to the 1975 one, the element of repetition emerges as a significant one. The euphoria which had characterized the 1975 day, its spirit of pleasant surprise and unknown possibilities, was not in evidence in 1985. In 1985 a feeling of "will we be able to repeat it?" permeated the atmosphere, along with a sense of things slowly but surely accomplished and yet more that still had to be accomplished.

In addition to those two events the co-operative committee, formed to manage the events of the year, prepared a meeting on June 19, in

Pingvellir, the ancient meeting place of the Althing, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of women's right to vote. It organized tree-planting activities around the country, collected signatures to the Icelandic Women's Declaration of Peace which was submitted to the U.N. conference on women in Nairobi in July, and published a book, *Konur hvað nú?*, where the results of the 1976-1985 decade for women were described and evaluated.

The '85 committee was also instrumental in bringing about the Women's Art Festival which was held in Reykjavík in Sept. and Oct. 1985. The idea of a women only art festival was first voiced in 1982 by the Reykjavík women's slaters but, as with the events of 1975, extensive co-operation of various women's groups and organizations accomplished the venture. The festival was comprehensive and featured women's art in the fields of painting, sculpture, textiles, photography, music, theater, architecture, book-making, literature and the cinema (*Listahátíð kvenna*, 1985). Besides giving an extensive overview of women's artistic activities, the festival presented the concept of women's art as something distinct from that of men, that art could to some extent be gender defined.

That that was also the case with the academic disciplines, the sciences and the humanities, was the scope of the first women's studies conference held at the University of Iceland, Aug. 29 - Sept. 1., 1985. The conference was organized by a group of academic women in co-operation with the university and was as such not part of the organized '85 activities. Altogether 22 papers on Icelandic women's studies were given by as many women at the conference in the disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, political science, criminology, psychology, theology, geography, biology, law, linguistics, art history and literature. The proceedings of the conference were published in book form, *Íslenskar kvennarannsóknir*, 1985, which promptly sold out, and the conference as all other events described for 1985, enjoyed high attendance by the general women public.

Shortly after the conference the Icelandic Women's Studies and Research Group, Áhugahópur um íslenskar kvennarannsóknir, was established providing a meeting ground for women academicians engaged with women's studies and a forum for women's studies sem-

inars. In 1986 women's slaters in the Althing succeeded in having the Althing appropriate a specific amount in the state's budget to women's studies research and the group added the administration of research grants to its activities. Finally, in 1989, the University Council decided that a Women's Studies Research Institute would be founded at the University.

The year 1985 also saw the foundation of the Women's Cultural Centre, Hlaðvarpinn, in Reykjavík. When in 1985 three old houses with a courtyard between them in the centre of Reykjavík came up for sale an informally formed group of women decided to found a women's limited - liability company to buy the houses and turn them into a cultural centre for women. The venture succeeded, the shares, which could be held by women only, sold well enough to cover a down payment on the houses and in June, 1985, Hlaðvarpinn was formally opened. The houses, run by a board of five women elected annually at the company's general meeting, accommodate various women's activities. Visual art shows and out-of-the-mainstream theatrical productions have featured prominently among the activities in the houses. Rooms are rented out for meetings, courses and festivities, and, in compliance with the principle of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf, 1929), to individual women artists and academicians needing a room to work in. The offices of the Society for Sheltering Battered Women and that of a co-operational group against incest and sexual violence towards children are housed in the centre, as is the Women's Counselling Service which moved there from the Women's House. For a while, when the Women's House was being evacuated, the editorial offices of *Vera* were situated on the premises. Various women business ventures are accommodated in the houses, among them a women's architectural firm, a woman herb medicinist, a woman goldsmith and two shops selling clothes and antiques. There is also a market selling women's handicrafts and a coffee-shop where women's literature is on loan and sale. This small gender defined world is run from an office on the center's premises and has thrived since its founding, in spite of persistent financial difficulties related to the purchase of the houses.

All of the groups, societies and establishments described above have since continued their activities, with the exception of the Women's

House which expired along with its lease. It should also be emphasized that these activities all took place in or centered on Reykjavík. Besides the group activities already described various informal women's groups prospered during this period, among them the, by 1980, outmoded sewing-clubs. That old bastion of women only social life became once more a popular and legitimate informal meeting ground for women, if even less for sewing this time than for socializing generally. A proliferation of women only social activities and with it a gender determined outlook towards most issues social and cultural is the chief characteristic of the decade of the new Women's Slate Movement, a decade when the actors in question, i.e. women, presented themselves in a variety of ways as women, as persons socially and culturally different from their gender counterpart, men.

CHAPTER 10

SOCIETY AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

As no social or economic metamorphosis occurred where Icelandic society was concerned in the decade between 1970 and 1980, the descriptive outline of modern Icelandic society given in chapter 6 applies equally to the period dealt with in Part III. Social processes generally continued along the lines already set in the nineteen sixties. The economy continued to prosper, not least because cod-wars with Britain were won, the fishing resources secured and fish products continued to sell well on European and North-American markets.

The continuing prosperity of the economy, and the accompanying rise in living standards, made possible certain changes in the social position of women. Therefore, although the structural characteristics of women's social position were in many respects the same in the period preceding the Women's Slate Movement as they had been in the period preceding the Redstocking Movement described in chapter 6, a closer look at the social position of women around the year 1980 is warranted.

Social position of women

During the nineteen seventies, the liberationist era, women's active participation on the labour market continued to rise. In 1960 32.6% of all women fifteen years of age and older had been active on the labour market. Comparable statistics on women's employment do not exist until the year 1979, when 77.5% of all women were active on the labour market. By 1982 that percentage had risen to 79.6%. In 1970 52.4% of married women had been on the labour market; by 1979 that figure had risen to 77.1%, and by 1982 to 80.2% of married women. The figures for single women's participation on the labour market are 78.1% for

1979 and 78.9% for 1982, which displays an insignificant difference between married and single women in terms of rate of employment (*Staðreyndir um stöðu kvenna á vinnumarkaðnum*, 1985).

The rise in women's employment during the seventies and early eighties is in accordance with liberationist emphasis on women's right to work as a means to obtain sexual equality. The fact that marriage does not make a significant difference in terms of women's employment rate further illustrates the connection with liberationist ideology which contended that motherhood and housekeeping were instrumental in preventing women from obtaining sexual equality, which, in turn, would make it even more expedient for married women than for single ones to exercise their right to paid work to obtain that equality.

However, ideology does not by itself suffice to bring about changes in employment rates; economic conditions have to allow for such changes. The continuing growth of the Icelandic economy during the seventies with its increased demand for manpower was conducive to a rise in women's employment. In that respect liberationist ideology went hand in hand with the needs of the economy. But there the correspondence ended.

Contrary to liberationist ideology the labour market continued to view women's wages as supplementary to those of men, and, in spite of all legislation to the contrary, women's wages continued to lag behind. In 1982 women's average wage per capita per year was 65.8% of that of men. Married women enjoyed on the average 60.4% of the wages of married men and unmarried women 78.3% of the wages of unmarried men. Unmarried women 25-44 years of age was the women's category with the highest wages per capita per year. Their wages corresponded to those of 15-19 year-old men, 65-69 year-old unmarried men and 70-74 year-old married men, (*Staðreyndir um stöðu kvenna á vinnumarkaðnum*, 1985). In other words, the peak in women's wages corresponded to the low in men's wages, so in these terms the highest monetary value placed on women's work corresponded to the lowest monetary value placed on men's work.

Furthermore, the influx of women onto the labour market resulted in a general devaluation of wages (*Iceland* 1986, 1987) which meant that for many women, especially married women whose families could not

manage on the husband's earnings alone, it was not a matter of choice but one of economic necessity to engage in paid work. Liberationist ideology on women and work, validated by the needs of the economy, also diminished the element of choice for women in seeking paid work. Conceptually women were, by the end of the seventies, expected to work and provide or else run the risk of being considered unliberated, of being a "just a housewife".

At the same time the sexual division of labour remained basically unchanged. Within the home women continued to carry the responsibility for housekeeping and the upbringing of children, although men, especially younger men, participated more in these tasks than they did before the advent of the liberationists. A survey made in 1980 by the Equality Committee of Reykjavík indicates that married women spent on the average 33 hours a week on housework while their husbands spent on the average 6 hours a week on work of that kind. The time husbands spent on housework did not change radically in relation to their wives' paid work, being 5 hours a week if the wife was a full time housewife, 6 hours a week if the wife had a part-time paid job and 7 hours a week if the wife had a full-time job outside the home (*Staðreyndir um stöðu kvenna á vinnumarkaðnum*, 1985). This indicates clearly that housework continued to be women's responsibility regardless of their participation on the labour market.

On the labour market the sexual division of labour also remained basically unchanged as women continued to a considerable degree to engage in paid work closely related to that of housework. In 1980 the majority of women employed were employed in the areas of health-care, teaching and day-care, cleaning, various services, office work and as unskilled workers (*Staðreyndir um stöðu kvenna á vinnumarkaðnum*, 1985). Women's vocational training followed the same pattern as it had in the sixties and continued to reflect and maintain the labour market's sexual division of labour. The fact that by 1982 42.3% of students at the university were women does not change the picture; women's vocational choices remained relatively unchanging (Guðbjörnsdóttir, N.D., 1988). Nor did a university education make a significant difference where the relative wages of men and women were concerned. In 1981, 20,8% of the university educated manpower were women, 90,3% of

them received wages determined by the lower half of the wage scale of the Union of University Educated People (Bandalag háskólamanna), 9.7% had managed to enter the brackets of the upper half of the scale. The comparable figures for men are 53.5% for the lower half of the scale, 46.5% for its upper half (*Staðreyndir um stöðu kvenna á vinnu-markaðnum*, 1985). Hence, in spite of possessing a university education women still lagged behind men in wages, either because their traditional vocations were poorly paid or because they had fewer promotion chances within the traditionally male vocations.

Similarly women lagged far behind men where the decision making process of their society was concerned. By the end of the seventies women were, for instance, 5% of the members of the Althing and 6% of municipal councilors with similar figures for other governing boards and councils. Two women had a seat on the 15 member board of the labour unions, none on the board of the employers union, and in management generally women were scarce. The holding of authority did not characterize women's social position.

Although around 80% of Icelandic women were by the early eighties on the labour market, women did not stop having children. The average fertility rate of women for 1980 is 2.48 children per woman (*Mannfjöldi, mannaflí og tekjur*, 1984). Yet the state and the municipalities or the labour market which had welcomed women's participation did not provide adequate day-care for children. In 1983 there was room for only 8.9% of pre-school children in full-day day-care and for 34.6% in half-day day-care, leaving over half of the children between the ages of 6 months to 5 years and their parents without the possibility of professional day-care. For the age-group between 6 and 11 years of age, school-related day-care could be provided for only 1.5% (*Frumvarp til laga um átak í dagvistarmálum barna*, 1984).

Hence by the beginning of the eighties women's social position was characterized by an exceedingly high employment rate, wages generally considerably lower than those of men, a diminished element of choice both economically and conceptually where work was concerned, an unchanging sexual division of labour in both the private and the public spheres, a rising educational level without a corresponding rise in terms of monetary remuneration and/or the holding

of authority, and, finally, social contingencies related to unprovided-for family needs.

The right to work had therefore not brought women the sexual equality they desired any more than had the right to speak in its time. On the contrary, the right to work having turned into an obligation to work, appeared to have intensified sexual inequality besides making it more obvious and less easily overlooked as more and more women were in a position to compare themselves directly to men in terms of work and education. The schism between women's social activities and their structural definition as social beings which had contained the seed of the Redstocking Movement was not only still there, it seemed to be growing wider and more obvious with every year. Having willingly taken on the role of the breadwinner, in the belief that that role would afford them the sexual equality they desired, women found that the duty of providing an income was appended to their duties as mothers and homemakers. Women's participation in the public sphere had neither taken away their role in the domestic sphere, nor changed their primary structural definition as social beings in terms of that role: cf. the unchanging sexual division of labour in both the public and private spheres and the comparative wages of women and men.

In women's lives this schism was, as before, most profoundly experienced in the variety of practical problems with which women were faced in their attempt to reconcile their responsibilities in their different spheres of action, and their unchanging social position and social definition with the pervasive liberationist ideology. The right to work began to seem increasingly less tenable as the road towards sexual equality, women attempting the role of social men seemed to obtain only the duties and not the seemingly elusive rights entailed in men's social personhood.

In this realization, the social change that shaped women's social position during the seventies, or the lack of the desired change because of the continuing endurance of basic conceptual categories where women were concerned, lies the seed of the Women's Slate Movement of the eighties. Once more something new and different seemed to be needed if women were not to chafe under their double load of responsibilities and the conceptual disparity entailed in their social position.

Liberationist ideology had apparently failed to supply the road towards sexual equality, the Redstocking Movement was defunct, the 1976 equality legislation had not produced the anticipated results, but the events of the seventies had demonstrated to women that united they possessed strength and that there could still be unthought of possibilities for women. Women's rising educational level was not only conducive a rise in women's employment rate, it was no less important as a means towards new ideas and a renewed understanding of women in society, and as a source of confidence to women in a traditionally education oriented society. From their participation on the labour market women had by the early eighties had ample opportunity to test their abilities in the field of paid work, as well as their inability to change the labour markets and their home gender situation, the inequality of which was becoming obvious to more and more women as women's employment rate continued to rise.

Women were therefore in a position to make claims grounded on experience, supported by education as well as legislation and the knowledge that unity spelled strength. Since the nineteen-seventies had not brought with them the social and conceptual change in women's social position women desired, but the opposite, the ground was ripe for yet another ideological turnabout and a concerted action in the field of women's rights. Thus, once more, a combination of socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society brought about a new phase in women's rights activities in Iceland.

Women actively engaged

The women who founded the Women's Slate Movement were for the most part married, with children, educated and professionally employed and the dominant age-group was that of those 30-40 years of age, although the women who founded the national movement were generally somewhat older than the ones who founded the local movements.

Examining first the group of twelve, who in Nov. 1981 called the first open meeting in Reykjavík, they were between 27 and 45 years of

age, four were in their late twenties, five in their thirties and three in their early forties. Eight of the women were university educated, three had advanced professional qualifications and one was an industrial worker. All were either engaged on the labour market or still attending university. At least eight of the women had spent some time abroad, either while being educated, accompanying their husbands or both. Four of the women were unmarried, four were divorced and four were married. None was a widow. Seven of the women had children. The professional and economic status of their families of origin was diverse, exhibiting no discernible pattern.

These are social characteristics which generally distinguished women's slaters with the exception of marital status. In the group of twelve there were proportionally more single women, divorced women and women without children than in the then still to emerge group of women's slaters. In these respects the group of twelve resembled more the group of women making up the Redstocking Movement where at least eight of the twelve women had been active at one time or another. Once women's slate ideology, not least ideas on women's roles as mothers and housekeepers, was clearly formulated and publicized, the number of active women married and/or with children rose significantly.

The slates themselves, i.e. the listing of women candidates on slates put up for election, demonstrate the composition of the group that constituted the Women's Slate Movement. A principle of a wide representation in terms of social categories was to an extent employed in the composition of the slates and thus they attest to the relative density of social categories within the group of active women. The information given about each woman varies between the slates, name is of course a constant factor and so is profession, sometimes age, marital status and/or number of children are also indicated.

Examining first employment the slates generally reflect the sexual division of labour, paid and unpaid, in Icelandic society of the eighties. Full-time housewives are very few, the great majority of women's slaters are women engaged in work outside their homes. Still there are full-time housewives on the slates, indicating the shift in ideology between the Redstocking and Women's Slates Movements. In the area of education, however, the slates do not reflect the general picture as

the level of education among women's slaters' is considerably higher than among women generally. At least 23 of the 42 women on the 1982 Reykjavík municipal slate, or over 50%, were university educated and an additional 15 had other professional qualifications. Only two women on the slate were unskilled workers and 3 were full-time housewives. When the slate was repeated in 1986 university educated women on the slate were somewhat fewer, or 13 out of 30, 10 had other professional qualifications, one was an unskilled worker, but 6 were full-time housewives which is a significant rise in that category. The Reykjavík constituency parliamentary slates also exhibit a high degree of education: in 1983 fourteen out of the 24 women on the slate were university educated, 6 had other professional qualifications, 2 were unskilled workers and 2 were full-time housewives. On the 1987 Reykjavík parliamentary slate, which was composed of 36 women, 21 were university educated, 12 had other professional qualifications and 3 were full-time housewives. None was an unskilled worker.

With one exception, that of the 1987 Reykjanes parliamentary slate where 10 out of 22 women were university educated, women's slates in constituencies and municipalities other than Reykjavík exhibit a degree of education which is more closely corresponding to that of women generally.

On the 1983 North-East constituency parliamentary slate, for instance, one woman out of 12 was university educated and five had other professional qualification. Similarly, in 1987, the women's parliamentary slates in the rural constituencies were generally composed of 1 or 2 university educated women, 3 to 5 women with other professional qualification and 4 to 6 unskilled workers and full-time housewives. Considering that there are generally many fewer professional opportunities for educated women in rural areas than there are in the urban center of Reykjavík, as is reflected in the level of women's education on the Reykjavík slates, the rural slates still exhibit a relatively high degree of education of women. In all, a salient social characteristic of the women's slate group is therefore a notably high degree of education, which corresponds to the high degree of education found in both the liberationist and suffragist groups.

Examining the age of women actively engaged, then, a strikingly high proportion of the local Reykjavík slaters were in their thirties, or 20 out of the 42 women on the 1982 municipality slate. Women in their twenties were as many as 10, seven were in their forties, two in their fifties and three in their sixties. Eleven of the 21 women on the Akureyri slate were in their thirties, 4 in their twenties, 3 in their forties and 4 women were over 50 years of age. The age distribution of the original Reykjavík and Akureyri slates groups is therefore similar to that of the original Redstocking group, except that women older than 45 years of age were generally not to be found in the Redstocking group as was the case with both the slaters groups and that of the suffragists.

The women who established the national slates movement and put forward the parliamentary slates were on the average somewhat older than the ones who were active in the local movements. Thus on the 1983 Reykjavík parliamentary slate, only one woman out of the 24 women on the slate was in her twenties. Thirteen, or over 50%, were in their thirties, six in their forties, three in their fifties and one in her sixties. Similarly, on the 1983 Reykjanes and North-East constituency slates, the dominant age-group is that of women in their thirties, the balance being made up of women over 40 years of age, with only one and two women respectively in their twenties. When those slates were repeated in 1987 the average age was still higher, in part because a number of the same women made up the slates and they were four years older than they had been in 1983. Conversely, the 1986 Reykjavík municipality slate kept a similar age distribution as the 1982 one as a significant number of women new on the 1986 slate belonged to the younger age groups.

Considering this age distribution it appears that women in their thirties are the dominant age-group. These women would have been in their twenties during the liberationist era when they would have made their educational and professional choices. Being the age-group with the highest professional rate and educational level, their social attributes reflect liberationist ideas on “the new woman”. But, having reached their thirties, they had also had a chance to experience directly that in spite of their education and professional engagement, they were still in a social position not very different from that of their mothers with

respect to women's traditional roles. Liberationist ideology had not changed that aspect of their world. Having been in their teens or early twenties at the emergence of the Redstocking Movement, they were also not women who had created that movement and its ideas, and fought for both in the beginning. They were therefore less tied to the Redstocking Movement and its world-view than were many older women. Therefore this age group was in a key position to create a new movement with a new view on women and society. It had the social experience, ideological liberty and educational means to undertake such a venture.

Consequently this is the age-group, reaching into early forties and late twenties, which forms the core of the first women's slaters' groups. The group that originally formed the Redstocking Movement was perhaps slightly younger but still essentially similar. But there the age similarity between these two movements ends. While the median age of active liberationists became with the years progressively lower, the opposite was the case with the Women's Slate Movement, where the median age rose with the years. In that the women's slaters group is similar to that of the suffragists. As appears to have been the case with the suffragist group, young women did not in any numbers join the women's slaters' group once it became settled. Therefore both the suffragist and women's slaters' groups became older with the years as they continued to a large extent to be made up of the same women. On the other hand, women in their twenties joined the Redstocking Movement in great numbers after 1975, while the older women who had founded the movement left it as the years went by. It is significant in this respect that both the suffragists and the women's slaters were engaged in direct political participation by means of slates, whereas the Redstocking Movement was not, and that the women's slaters parliamentary group was somewhat older than the municipal one. This indicates that the more direct the method used to tackle authority is, and the higher or more extensive the level of authority tackled, the older the women engaged tend to be.

The 1982 Akureyri municipal slate and the 1983 parliamentary slates were the only slates where women's marital status was indicated. The 1983 parliamentary slates were also the only ones where each

woman who had a child was titled housewife besides carrying a professional or an employment title. Out of the 24 women on the Reykjavík slate 20 were married, one was divorced and three were unmarried. Out of 10 women on the Reykjanes slate 7 were married and three were unmarried. And of the 12 women on the North-East constituency slate, 8 women were married, one was unmarried and three were widows. On the 1982 Akureyri municipal slate 17 of the slate's 21 women were married, 2 were unmarried, one was a widow and one was divorced.

On these slates, as well as the 1986 Reykjavík municipality one, the number of children each woman had was also indicated. On the 1983 Reykjavík parliamentary slate there were 21 women with in all 65 children, or just over 3 children per woman on the average. Three women did not have children. On the Reykjanes slate 8 out of the slate's 10 women had between them 21 children, or around 2,6 children per woman on the average which is the same average as that of the 1982 Akureyri municipal slate. On the North-East constituency slate 11 of the slate's 12 women had between them 29 children or 2,75 children per woman on the average. And on the 1986 Reykjavík municipality slate 27 of the slates 30 women had 82 children between them, or just over 3 children per woman on the average. The number of children each woman actually had varied between one and eight, but the median average can compare with women's average fertility rate. In 1982 the average fertility rate was 2,26 children per woman. Therefore the women's slaters' group had a relatively high fertility rate, or about equal that of the 1970 average rate which was 2.81 children per woman (*Mannfjöldi, mannaflí og tekjur*, 1984).

Hence, motherhood is very much in evidence in the women's slaters' group. And so is marriage. The degree of singleness is low compared to the suffragist group and to the Redstocking group, as that group developed. The great majority of women's slaters were women who had undertaken the traditional women's roles of motherhood and marriage. That in conjunction with the groups' age-distribution, educational level and rate of employment, distinguishes the signifying social characteristics of the women's slaters' core group. They were mostly thirtyish, married, educated and working mothers. They were thus

women who had directly experienced the trials and tribulations of trying to conform both to the traditional role of women and to the prevalent liberationist ideology of the seventies on work and education. They were women who had themselves experienced the effects of both social change and conceptual resilience on women's social position during the seventies, which was instrumental in making them seek new solutions and methods in the field of women's rights.

Returning to the social element of marital status, singleness was not only not a signifying characteristic of the women's slaters' group in the manner that it was of the suffragist and the liberationist groups. By publishing the marital status and the number of children each woman had, women slaters were literally flaunting the fact that they were married, mothers and on the 1983 parliamentary slates, housekeepers. While within the slaters' group it was very often not known or cared about whom a woman was married to, the fact that she was married was important enough to be used as a social signifier on a number of the slates.

That this is contrary to the inattention to or even silence about liberationists marital status (cf. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir's election campaign) and the growing rate of singleness within the liberationist group, is directly indicative of the opposite views liberationists and women's slaters took on marriage and motherhood. For liberationists marriage and motherhood were seen to restrict women in their quest for equality and these social attributes were therefore not employed to signify the new liberated woman liberationists campaigned for, even though most of them to begin with were both married and mothers. For women's slaters marriage and motherhood neither could nor should be escaped, therefore these attributes must be turned into a social asset, something positive which was employed to signify the new liberated woman they campaigned for.

Now the new liberated woman women slaters campaigned for was not much different from the free and responsible woman suffragists had campaigned for. Yet, the degree of singleness characterizing the suffragist group where candidacy was concerned, their foremost candidates living in a single state at the time of their candidacy, is not in evidence with women's slaters. It has been argued that the characteristic of singleness, along with the characteristics of education, employment and

a direct relation to the world of motherhood and housekeeping, placed suffragists in a socio-structural in-between position which made them exceptionally well suited to mediate between the separate conceptual and socio-structural spheres of women and men. With the exception of singleness women's slaters candidates for office generally share those characteristics.

To explain why singleness is absent as a signifying social attribute where women's slaters candidacy is concerned and not where suffragist candidacy is concerned, different views on marriage and motherhood do not apply, as they do where liberationists are concerned, since suffragists and women's slaters did not hold radically different views in this respect. To arrive at an explanation it is necessary to consider on one hand the changing social connotations of marriage during the period in question and, on the other, differences in the ideological contexts in which the slates emerged.

In the days of the suffragists, marriage as a social contract connoted a definite division of responsibilities between husband and wife. Husbands were responsible for providing the means on which their family lived and the social status by which the family, i.e. they themselves, their wife and their children, were defined. Wives were responsible for bearing and rearing children, administering to the basic needs of the family and homemaking generally. Mutually exclusive sexual rights were included in the marriage contract but applied with more force to wives than to husbands. To be married signified a distinctive social status for both men and women, and married women were categorically addressed as mrs., i.e. in terms of their marital status.

By 1980 this mode of addressing married women was disappearing and hardly ever used in addressing married women in their twenties and thirties. Women's activities in the public sphere, their jobs and/or education, had become decisive signifiers of women's social status. Marriage had by no means become irrelevant in defining women's social status, but its connotations had changed. Marriage no longer spelled an automatic financial dependence of wives on husbands, nor that husbands need shoulder alone the responsibility of providing for the family. As wives had undertaken the responsibility of supplying an income along with their husbands, the economic connotations of mar-

riage changed. The sexual connotations of marriage had also changed. With changing sexual mores in Western society and generally available and safer contraceptive devices, wives were more likely than before to transgress their side of the mutually exclusive sexual rights contract. Hence the social connotations of marriage did not define women in the same manner as they had around the turn of the century. The division of responsibilities between husband and wife had changed and a previously non-existent relation of mutuality or equality in terms of perceived sexual and economic rights and duties within marriage meant that the social connotations of marriage had by 1980 with one exception grown relatively similar for men and women. That exception was the responsibilities of the wife in ministering to the basic needs of her family which will be referred to later.

As marriage lost some of its gender defining significance so its general social significance seemed to wane. During the sixties it had become increasingly common for young couples to cohabit for a period of time and have a child or two before exchanging the marriage vows (Björnsson, 1971). During the seventies this temporary social formation, the engagement couple, began to develop into a more permanent one, cohabitation becoming increasingly more common as the social equivalent of marriage. Although the majority of couples still went through the rite of marriage, by 1980 it was considered a private matter rather than a social one whether young couples actually married. By then the distinction between marriage and cohabitation, especially for people in their twenties and thirties, had diminished to the degree that the two need not be socially differentiated, as they are not when the marital status of women's slaters is indicated.

Thus the social significance and social connotations of marriage were not quite the same in the days of the suffragists as in those of the women's slaters. Nor, therefore, those of singleness, of being not married. As marriage lost some of its significance as a distinction of social status, and, especially, as a signifier of a relationship in which women were dependent, so did singleness lose its significance in distinguishing women's social independence. Hence singleness was by the nineteen eighties not as important a signifier of women's in-between socio-structural position as it had been in the times of the suffragists. Marriage

could therefore be used as a signifier of women's slaters' social attributes with a diminished risk in compromising their social independence and in-between socio-structural position, which as before continued to be an important defining characteristic of women's candidacy.

The question remains why marital status, i.e. marriage, should be employed at all as a signifier of women's slaters' social attributes. In this respect differences in the ideological contexts in which the suffragist and women's slates movements emerged, are significant. The Women's Slates Movement emerged in the wake of the liberationist era when women's traditional roles as mothers, wives and homemakers had been consistently and forcefully disclaimed by women activists. Having adopted an opposite view in this respect and grounded their ideology on it, it was important for women's slaters to signal that they were women activists who did not disclaim women's traditional roles. The social connotation of marriage which had not changed during the period in question was the one of wives' responsibilities in ministering to the basic needs of their family, a cultural activity which women's slaters perceived of as one of the foundations of women's gender-specific culture on which they in a positive sense built their movement's ideology. Marriage was therefore the social attribute which most unequivocally signaled women's slaters' ideological position in this respect at a time when that position needed to be clearly specified. Accordingly, marriage was employed as a signifying social attribute of women's slaters.

The suffragist and the liberationist movements, on the other hand, emerged in times when the positiveness of women's traditional roles was not only generally not questioned, but was the only available role model for women. Hence marriage, which epitomized those roles and placed women firmly within a gender defined sphere the confines of which both movements for their different reasons sought to break, was not a social attribute employed to characterize women candidates. Singleness, which placed women in an in-between structural position with regard to society's gender-defined structural spheres, and which negated to an extent the one accepted role model for women, was therefore employed by both suffragists and liberationists as a signifying social attribute of their candidates.

Examining, finally, the social attributes of the women who came to represent the Women's Slate Movement in the Althing and in municipal councils, the social characteristics of candidacy are very much the same as those described for women's slaters generally. As the group of municipal councillors is in all fundamental respects similar to that of members of the Althing description will be limited to the latter.

The first three women's slaters who were elected into the Althing in 1983 were all married with one, three and four children respectively. Two had advanced university education and one was a qualified teacher and an experienced journalist. They were 30, 41 and 43 years of age respectively at the time of their candidacy. Two had spent several years abroad during their studies while the third had travelled widely and been engaged in writing travelling guides for Icelandic tourists.

In the 1987 parliamentary elections four other women's slaters were elected into the Althing. Of these four, two were married with two and five children respectively, one was a widow and a mother of seven children, and one was unmarried and without a child. Two had university education, one was an established play director and the one who was a widow had worked in catering after her husband's death. She did not have advanced formal education but was self-educated to the point of having become a renowned winner of national quiz-competitions. They were 33, 38, 42 and 60 years of age respectively at the time of their candidacy and three had spent periods of time abroad.

While singleness is by no means absent in this group of candidates, marriage is the predominant marital status. Motherhood is very much in evidence as is education, exposure to different societies and professional employment. All except one, who was temporarily a full-time housewife, were engaged on the labour market at the time of their candidacy. The candidates tended to be somewhat older than women's slaters generally were; none was in her twenties, three were in their thirties, three in their forties and one had just turned sixty. The five who were married at the time of their candidacy were all married to educated professional men. All were urban women, two having themselves experienced the transition from a rural to an urban social environment. Five had been young, married, professional mothers during the seventies and had directly experienced the social exigencies the liberationist

era presented to women who attempted to conform to that era's ideal for the "new woman" without renouncing marriage and motherhood.

With the exception of marital status explained above, women's slaters candidates thus generally exhibit the same social characteristics as did suffragist candidates and the apical candidate of the liberationist era before them. As in the two preceding women's rights phases those characteristics place women actively engaged in an in-between socio-structural position with regard to the traditional socio-structural spheres of women and men. The social attributes of education and professional employment signify social maleness while the attributes of motherhood and homemaking signify social femaleness. This combination of social attributes afforded women representing women in the male world of political office simultaneous validity in both the male and the female socio-structural worlds. That, for the women's slaters as for the suffragists before them, was important as a means toward being heard as women in a traditionally male defined social sphere. Like before, the socio-structural attributes of the active women themselves in conjunction with the social processes of their times explain their involvement with and candidacy on behalf of the Women's Slate Movement. And as before, women actively engaged were women who had themselves directly experienced the effects of social change and social and conceptual resilience on women's social position. To those effects they responded with concerted activities and a set of ideas geared to effect certain changes in women's social position and yet another definition of women's social personhood.

CHAPTER 11

IDEAS

Compared to the suffragists, who never issued a declaration of ideas or a policy statement for their slates, and to the liberationists, whose policy declarations were neither many nor extensive, the new women's slaters demonstrate a propensity towards proliferation in this respect. To an extent that is due to the method employed, as direct political participation required, by 1980, an extensive publication of political ideas and issues. In municipal and national politics written declarations passed by a legitimized group of people are important political instruments and, accordingly, numerous such declarations were issued by women's slaters.

The most basic of all such declarations issued by women's slaters is the 1982 Declaration of Ideas (*Hugmyndafræðilegur grundvöllur Kvennaframboðs*). The policy statements of both the local Reykjavík movement and the national movement were subsequently based on this declaration. The 1982 Akureyri slaters' municipal policy statement was the only policy statement not based on this declaration. As the 1982 Declaration of Ideas was basic to all other women's slates policy statements, the articulation of women's slaters ideas in other municipal councils and in the Althing can be traced back to the Declaration.

In addition to the Declaration of Ideas and the policy statements on national and municipal affairs, women's slaters regularly published statements on various issues and, once every year, a general political statement issued by the movement's annual general meeting. Speeches given in the Althing are printed in *Alþingistíðindi*, published by the Althing, as are bills and proposals placed before the Althing. Since 1984 *Vera* has published the movement's policy making in national and municipal affairs in every issue, and records are kept of most meetings held within the movement.

Therefore, documentation on ideas is abundant where women's slaters are concerned. At the same time women's slaters ideology seems to be comparatively homogeneous, perhaps because women's slaters attempted to work by consensus which necessarily means constant assimilation of ideas. And during consensus processes women habitually referred to the ideas originally formed and published in the 1982 Declaration of Ideas or subsequent policy statements which contributed towards ideological continuity and homogeneity. Therefore, even though women's slaters sometimes declared that every woman's voice which drew on a woman's gender specific experience was valid as voicing women's slaters policy regardless of documented policy, women's slaters ideology has remained relatively coherent, if not without certain changes, since the emergence of the new women's slates.

Equality and women's gender specific culture

Since liberationist ideology had not brought women the sexual equality they desired, but rather widened the schism between women's social activities and women's socio-structural definition, creating both new contingencies for women and a heightened sense of women's capabilities, by 1980 the ground was ripe for women activists for a thorough evaluation of women's social position and activist ideology (cf. chapter 10).

The ideological turnabout or break with current ideas on women and society which characterized the emergence of the Redstocking Movement occurred again in the early 80s, ideologically in reverse. Campaigning towards the sexual equality envisioned by the liberationists now seemed insufficient or wrong to women activists. Something new seemed to be needed to break the vicious circle of sexual discrimination; new ideas and new methods were called for. And new ideas and methods constructed to break the perceived vicious circle emerged just as liberationists had emerged in 1970 with new ideas and methods constructed to break the silence surrounding women and their concerns. A rupture in terms of activists' ideas on

women and society therefore characterizes the emergence of both the liberationist and new women's slaters phases in Icelandic women's rights activities.

But were the ideas and methods formulated and proclaimed by the new women's slaters new? To women's slaters they seemed both new and revolutionary (cf. chapter 9), but from a comparative analytical perspective those ideas and methods echo those of the suffragists and hark back to the resilient traditional concept of women in Icelandic society. The 1982 Declaration of Ideas reasons:

Since time immemorial it has been women's concern to protect and perpetuate life. It is women who bear and rear the children. Their workplace has been in the home or its vicinity and there women have developed their own ways in cooking, making clothes, obstetrics, raising and educating children, washing and cleaning, nursing and caring for the disabled. In spite of different circumstances in life women have this experience and knowledge in common; it is their heritage transmitted from one generation to the next and it has shaped their world-view, self-identity and culture. ... Instead of taking their bearings by the role and position of men, women are now beginning to realize what is positive in their life and experience and that it needs to be preserved and developed, not only for their own sakes but for the sake of society generally. The aim of the New Women's Slates is that the unused knowledge of women be put to use, that their world of experience be made visible and valued in parallel with men's point of view as a directing force in society. Women and men can not co-operate until men have acknowledged and subscribed to women's world of experience in the same way as women can subscribe to what is best and most viable in the attitudes of men.

(*Hugmyndafræðilegur grundvöllur Kvennaframboðs*, 1982, my translation).

Like the suffragists before them, women's slaters see women as possessing a gender specific culture of their own grounded in the traditions and social experiences which are particular to women as women. That gender specific culture they value positively as something at present undervalued but necessary for the well-being of society. And because this cultural heritage is undervalued and unrepresented but essential to public decision making women must be given the chance to bring this heritage into the realm of public authority. Therefore, argued suffragists, women should be given the vote and

therefore, argued women's slaters, women should be voted into municipal councils and the Althing.

The idea of women's gender specific culture forms the core of women's slaters ideology and the pivot around which it turns. It perceives women as sharing certain gender specific social experiences and traditions which are different from men's gender specific social experiences and traditions. To the degree women possess the same or similar social experiences they are perceived to have the same concerns and interests which allows them to unite for their concerns across all social boundaries. Because women's gender specific culture is different from men's gender specific culture women have to the extent of that difference different views on things social and cultural and different values. These views and values are perceived as being undervalued and unrepresented in public decision making which creates and maintains sexual discrimination. That in turn makes it necessary for women to unite in proclaiming these values so that they will become audible and instrumental in the realm of public authority. Once women's gender specific values have reached that instrumentality, discrimination on the basis of sex can begin to be abolished.

Women's gender specific culture is perceived by suffragists and women's slaters alike to be derived from women's traditional roles as mothers and housewives. To women's slaters, however, the field of derivation was originally broader than that bounded by women's traditional roles, as it was seen to encompass all gender specific experiences of women from childhood to old age. Yet the roles of mother and housewife are the paramount field of the women's slaters' idea, repeatedly used to supply validation for women's slaters' claims and as indicators of women's slaters' social status and ideology.

In this process of derivation the traditional concept of women as mothers and housewives surfaces again as the basic definition of women as social beings. In spite of its emphasis on liberating women from the perceived confines of these traditional roles, the liberationist decade had not been able to basically alter women's particularly close association with the domestic domain. When the eighties dawned women were still the ones responsible for the activities taking place within the domestic sphere, the social connotation of marriage which

had not changed was that of a wife's responsibilities in administering to the needs of her family, and in spite of being engaged in paid work on the labour market women still undertook those responsibilities. Ten years of liberationist activism had not changed Icelandic society's basic cultural conception of the role of women.

In adopting that basic cultural conception women's slaters both acknowledged this situation as the reality of women's social position and attempted to turn that reality into the means towards yet another reality for women. The reality women's slaters envisaged for women was one in which women were both free and responsible social beings, responsible in terms of both the domestic and politico-jural domains and having not only the duties but also the rights, including the right to choose, entailed in these responsibilities. In that envisaged reality women's slaters saw women as the social equals of men, but as in part culturally different from men. Also in that there is correspondence between women's slaters and suffragist ideas. In fact there is not much new in women's slaters ideas in these respects except that they were shaped to an extent by the fact that they emerged out of the context of liberationist ideology. Because they emerged out of liberationist ideology, and not out of an unquestioning attitude towards women's traditional roles as did suffragist ideas, women's slaters were compelled to formulate their ideology more extensively than suffragists had needed to, and to refer to liberationist ideas in that formulation.

Hence the liberationist concept of sexual equality was directly disclaimed in the 1982 Declaration of Ideas and in the 1983 National Policy Statement which opens on the following:

The Women's Alliance aims for a society where respect for life and shared responsibility are of primary importance. We give priority to women's freedom of choice which contains the right of women to be evaluated on their own grounds as equal to men. We put aside ideas about equality which imply the right of women to be the same as men. Women are moulded by their role of bearing and raising children, we do different kinds of work and consequently we have different experiences in life from men. Women's experiences lead to a different set of values, other than those dominant in the male world. Accordingly women have a different outlook on the world.

(*Stefnuskrá Kvennalistans*, p.1, 1983, my translation).

The liberationist idea of equality is “put aside”; women no longer aim at becoming equal to men by becoming social men. Instead women’s freedom of choice, a freedom based on women’s right to be equal to men as women, as whatever is contained in the socially and culturally constructed entity “woman”, is the goal. Again the suffragists “equal but different” encapsulates the issue.

To begin with women’s slaters did not always indicate clearly when using the word ‘equality’ what sort of equality they were referring to. The liberationist heritage was strong and the society which received the women’s slaters message, for which hearing conditions had been created by liberationists, did not immediately comprehend the difference between “equal and same” and “equal and different”. To many, women’s slaters were just another bunch of liberationists. And in Akureyri, where ideological debates comparable to the ones taking place in Reykjavík in 1981 had not occurred, women’s slaters did not disclaim the liberationist idea of equality. The Akureyri slaters used the idea of sexual equality as the focus around which they constructed their municipal policy statement, and then introduced alongside it the idea of women’s gender specific culture as something positive but undervalued and lacking in public decision making (*Stefnuskrá Kvænnaframboðsins á Akureyri*, 1982). Therefore the Akureyri municipal women’s slate presented at its emergence an ideological orientation which was an in-between or a mediating phase between the liberationist and women’s slate eras.

Although confusion regarding the idea of sexual equality persisted where the general public was concerned, no such confusion surrounded the traditional concept of women’s social roles. To understand that women were housewives and mothers was not difficult; and with time those traditional women’s roles were used by women’s slaters, at the expense of other social and cultural factors making up women’s gender specific culture, to explain and validate their ideas and claims. By 1989 the emphasis on those roles had reached the point where women’s slaters celebrated the 74th anniversary of women’s suffrage in Iceland by awarding two women special honours for having performed these roles with excellence. One was an 89 year old woman who had borne and brought up 17 children and

kept a large and busy rural household (*Morgunblaðið*, June 20, 1989). The other was 79 years old, mother of seven, housekeeper in an urban household and children's schoolteacher for many years (*Morgunblaðið*, July 4, 1989).

By awarding public honours for laudable performance of specific roles women's slaters effectively validated those roles as *the* roles of women society ought to honour and revere. By doing so they placed second the value of other roles women could have and thus negated to an extent their own premise of women's right to choose on their own grounds, regardless of how society valued these grounds. Awarding public honours was originally seen by women's slaters as a typically male gender-specific cultural activity and one of the instruments of male dominance. Women's freedom of choice was seen to run counter to such public declarations of how people, in this case women, ought or ought not to be. The element of women's right to choose had thus by 1989 become secondary to the element of the importance of women's traditional roles. The latter was an integral and non-ambivalent part of Icelandic cultural constructions while the former was not. Resorting to what was generally accepted and understood therefore characterized the development of women's slaters idea of women's gender specific culture.

Freedom and oppression

An important aspect of women's slater's idea of women's gender specific culture is the positive evaluation of that culture. The opening of the floodgates of women-only social activities in the wake of that ideological turnabout, (cf. chapter 9), indicates that a large number of women caught on to the "new" idea and accepted it as a basis on which to ground an expression of their social personhood.

The aspect of positiveness entailed that women considered themselves good at certain things and that, due to their gender specific culture, they had certain things to contribute that were good. But did that mean that women themselves were good human beings i.e. morally

good? Being good at something and having something good to contribute are easily confused with moral goodness, and after a few years women's slaters could be found supporting and validating their arguments with the assertion that women were good human beings and should therefore be given a voice in public decisions.

Again we find a contradiction to women's slaters' fundamental premise of women's right to choose. First, because the image of the morally good woman as a role model effectively negates women's right to choose other role models, notably that of the "bad woman". Secondly, assigning women moral goodness was originally perceived by women's slaters as one of the instruments of male dominance, an instrument that kept women in check and thwarted their right to choose, because if not obedient women could be chastised for being not good.

To explain the development of the aspect of positiveness we must consider the social context in which it developed. To begin with women's slaters were lumped with liberationists by a public that did not see much difference between one kind of women activists and another. And, as is discussed in chapter 7, liberationists generally suffered ferocious attacks on their ideas and attitudes and were by many considered "bad women". By direct political participation in the form of slates, women slaters were, during both the 1982 and 1983 election campaigns, repeatedly accused of being bad because they were taking votes which the political parties considered belonged to them. Being accused of theft was bad enough even though women slaters knew that nobody owned votes; but being accused as they were of being bad mothers and wives and against men was worse for women who considered their roles as mothers and housewives valuable. Women's slaters' emphasis after 1983 on women's goodness can therefore be seen as a reaction against the label of badness stuck on them, an attempt to obtain approval and validation as women activists in their social environment.

Hence the image of the cultural and social entity "woman" presented by women's slaters was not only that of a woman who should be free to choose and be responsible in both the public and domestic domains but also that of a morally good woman. This image had a pervasiveness

derived from the key idea of women's gender-specific culture which added to its force. Because women were seen to share their gender-specific culture, women were at times perceived as being the same, i.e. not as idiosyncratic individuals with differing cultural and social attributes, but as cultural beings of the same order. This element of sameness reinforced the image of women presented by women's slaters as all women, not only some, were seen to fit into that image.

Prominent among the reasons given by women for leaving the Women's Slate Movement is that they did not feel they fitted within the group of women constituting the movement. That indicates that the movement's accepted image of women and the element of sameness, which encouraged conforming to that image, oppressed some women. A demand for conformity, be it in terms of being morally good or of dressing in a specific way as an expression of social personhood, is obviously contradictory to the element of women's free choice contained within the same image. Women joining the movement in order to work towards women's free choice are therefore likely to feel oppressed by being themselves denied that choice within the movement.

Since the element of cultural sameness is derived directly from the key concept of women's gender specific culture the question arises whether that culture as defined and employed by women's slaters could serve to oppress women. That in fact was the liberationists' position on women's gender specific culture and their main argument at the emergence of the women's slates against basing women's activism upon a cultural heritage they perceived as oppressive. Women's slaters' position on that issue is that while they see women as an oppressed group, women are not seen as being oppressed by their own culture, which is positively evaluated, but by the dominant culture of men. To what extent women's gender specific culture is the culture of the oppressed and in itself capable of breeding oppression is still left open.

What emerges clearly is that the element of women's free choice on the one hand, and the element of sameness or conformity reinforcing an image of women which contains a moral and therefore judgemental element on the other, constitutes a contradiction at the core of women's

slaters ideology. That contradiction could prove as destructive for the success of the movement as the contradiction inherent in liberationist ideology was for the Redstocking Movement.

A matter of gender

Because of the traditional sexual division of labour women and men have different sets of values. Society has been shaped by men's values and the experience of women has hardly any say in the governing of societies.

(*Hugmyndafræðilegur grundvöllur Kvennaframboðs*, 1982, my translation).

Contained within the idea of women's gender specific culture is the idea of gender-specific values. Because women and men are seen to have to an extent different social experiences they are seen to that same extent to have a different set of values. Men's gender-specific values are seen to be the dominant values of Icelandic society and culture and therefore the ones society is governed by. Accordingly women's oppression, the fact that women and men are unequal in Icelandic society, is seen to be due to the long standing and systematic employment of these dominant values, or in other words to patriarchy. Consequently, women's slaters claimed that society would neither be changed towards allowing women the freedom of real choice nor towards being a more just and better society, the two being seen to go hand in hand, unless there occurred a fundamental change in the values by which society was governed. In other words, what was needed was a revolution of values and of modes of thinking.

Women's slaters' positive evaluation of women's gender specific culture enabled them, like the suffragists, to blame the conventions and institutions of a male orientated society for women's oppression. Being able to place the blame on the abstraction 'patriarchy' rather than on individual men or 'male chauvinist pigs' as liberationists had had to resort to, helped women's slaters to prevent their feminist ideology from interfering with their relations with individual men, notably their husbands on whom their signifying marital status depended.

Like the suffragists, women's slaters envisioned women and men as socially equal but in part culturally different. Until the revolution of values which would even the balance between women and men had been achieved, women must themselves and by themselves work towards that aim since only women could bring forth, explain, and formulate policy on the grounds of their own gender specific culture and values. Accordingly, even though the Women's Slates Movement was theoretically not closed to men, women's slaters agreed that only women could form the movement's policy, make its decisions and represent it in public decision making. When the movement was established a few men joined it, mostly husbands of active women's slaters, but finding themselves relegated to tasks such as painting the movement's accommodations or entertaining women slaters at their social gatherings, they soon made themselves scarce. Many however continued to place their various skills at the disposal of the movement, but as husbands, brothers or friends of women's slaters not as members of the movement.

The movement's ideology in this manner did not admit of men's full participation in the movement and its tasks. Once the balance between women and men had been put right and the ultimate aim of the movement achieved, women's slaters like suffragists saw women and men working together as companions and equals. Co-operation with men in whatever field is thus viewed as feasible by women's slaters once men have acknowledged women's gender-specific cultural differences and evaluate women's gender-specific cultural attributes as highly as they evaluate those of men. Co-operation between equals is one of the basic premises of women's slaters view on authority and its distribution, a premise which, like all other basic premises of women's slaters's ideology, is derived directly from the central idea of women's gender-specific culture.

Authority

Because women share their gender-specific culture equally they are in women's slaters' ideology perceived as being equal to each other.

Achieving the goal of a movement must be based on a number of individuals working together and therefore, in accordance with women's gender-specific culture, women must co-operate as equals. And since such a view on co-operation is intrinsic to women's gender-specific culture and since the movement is concerned with promoting the values and views of that culture, it follows that co-operation between equals is women's slaters model for all working together of individuals and, therefore, basic to women's slaters' ideas on authority.

The basic notion of equality in authority was by women's slaters seen as contrary to hierarchical authority structures, which they saw as derived from men's gender-specific culture. Women's authority values they claimed were those of horizontal distribution of authority where each participant had equal authority, men's authority values on the other hand being those of a vertical distribution of authority where those at the upper end of the line had authority over those below them on the line. Furthermore, argued women's slaters, the existing system of distributing authority, i.e. society's hierarchical authority structure, both contributed to and maintained women's oppression. Therefore changing society's authority structure towards one based on the co-operation of equals was a means of obtaining women's slaters' ultimate goal. Consequently, women's slaters placed great emphasis on organizing their movement in accordance with these basic ideas on authority and on promoting them in their policy making.

Women's slaters saw appointed leadership as one of the fundamental characteristics of the male hierarchical authority structure and therefore purposefully declined to have a leader themselves. Instead leadership was to be in the hands of the whole movement or groups within it which had by consensus been given decision making authority in certain fields or on certain issues. Ultimate authority within the movement resided with the movement's general meeting, required by the movement's by-laws to be called annually. That meeting, as were all meetings and groups within the movement, was open to all women's slaters. Between general meetings of the movement, authority rested with general meetings of the movement's eight departments, each department being coextensive with a constituency. These departmental general meetings then distributed authority to women's slaters groups of vari-

ous kinds and chose candidates to represent the movement and the constituency in the Althing and municipal councils.

The decision-making process within the movement was thus evenly distributed among separate groups, and the working method employed in the decision-making process was at all stages the one of consensus. That working method was perceived as the only one congruent with the basic premise of women sharing their gender specific culture. It was seen to allow women to reach decisions on the grounds of what united them instead of having to choose, by resolving an issue into a for and against position, with taking a vote, thus underlining what divided women.

Now, society was not structured according to the authority values embodied in the structure of the movement. Since women's slaters had with the slates adopted a method of direct participation in society's decision-making process, considerable effort was devoted to preventing authority from accruing in the manner of hierarchy to specific women both within the movement and in its outward presentation. Women's slaters viewed their representatives in municipal councils, the Althing and various boards and committees as messengers sent by the movement from the outside, i.e. from the world of women, into the realm of authority, that of public decision making. Once on the inside women's slaters representatives were seen by women's slaters not as individuals, but as spokespersons for the movement and its ideas, as speaking not only with their own voices but with the voices of all the women outside the "walls" of authority.

Of women's slaters representatives the members of the Althing were the ones most prominently visible to the public eye and therefore in danger of being regarded in person as the embodiment of the movement. Therefore women's slaters adopted a policy of frequent exchanges in the Althing, the elected members stepping aside every now and then leaving the limelight to women further down on the slates who thereby made their voices heard in the general assembly. In addition women's slaters decided that no woman could sit for more than 6 to 8 years at a time as an elected member for the women's slates in either municipal councils or the Althing. This policy of regulated exchange or rotation was practiced in all activities of the movement. No woman could, for instance, sit

as an elected member of any group within the movement for more than 6 to 12 months at a time. Similarly, in election campaigns the movement presented as many women as possible as spokeswomen and generally tried to present itself as consisting of many women who all held equal authority as spokeswomen for the slates.

In order to change their society's authority structure women's slaters introduced their ideas on authority wherever possible. The 1983 Policy Statement reasons:

We consider it pertinent to radically decrease the centralization of authority in Icelandic society. Ever increasing centralization places authority and responsibility in still fewer hands. ... In structures like that the voice of women is weak and their concerns overlooked. (*Stefnuskrá Kvennalistas*, 1983, pp. 3-4, my translation).

Introducing their ideas on authority within the realm of public authority was therefore an important part of achieving the goal of the movement. A case in point is the radio bill the new women's slaters introduced in the Althing in 1984. There they proposed decentralizing the state radio's administrative structure, organizing its activities into relatively independent work groups where no one could hold a position of authority for more than a specific length of time. In the Althing the bill was greeted with a mixture of incomprehension and ridicule and was not passed.

Practicing an ideal

Women's slaters were adamant in considering their organization as a movement and not as a political party although the organization had all the functions of a political party. In the 1983 crisis about whether to place a parliamentary slate or not, the argument was repeatedly voiced that if such a slate was placed the movement would turn into a party institution. In 1985 when the question arose in the Reykjavík local movement as to whether the municipal slate should be repeated or not these considerations reappeared. In a confidential paper not intended

for the eyes of the media two alternative interpretations of the nature of the slates were given to help women decide on the issue. Either the slates were

a temporary action intended to bring attention to and concern with the position, ideas and interests of women

or

a women's political party aiming at getting women and their interests into the domain of authority (Gísladóttir, 1985, my translation).

The conclusion was drawn that women who think the slates were a temporary action would be against repeating the municipal slate and consider that it was time for the movement to focus itself on more traditional women's movement activities. Women of the second opinion were on the other hand considered likely to want to repeat the slate on the grounds that the temporary action was not finished and that it was the nature of political parties to place slates as long as their aims were not achieved.

The latter was what in fact happened, (cf. chapter 9), but the two choices demonstrate women's slaters fundamental concern with authority, with keeping their movement different from their society's authority structure, and thereby retaining its purity in terms of women's gender-specific culture and its place in the world of women. Women's slaters did not want to become social men and did not want to turn their movement into a political party, a fragment of patriarchy. And although slates continued to be placed, this concern about and consistent avoidance of being contaminated by men's authority values continued to figure prominently among women's slaters' concerns. Views on authority are therefore basic to women's slaters' perception of themselves as women, as a gender-defined social and cultural entity, and of their movement which in this respect is seen to reflect women's slaters social personhood.

The actual dividing line between the women who in 1983 did and those who did not want to place a parliamentary slate and in 1986 repeat the Reykjavík municipal slate was their relative degree of confidence in the movement's ideology as the grounds for political poli-

cy making. For women who thought that the ideology was both sound and comprehensive enough to provide such a basis there was no doubt that slates should continue to be placed. A non-ambivalent attitude towards the fundamental premise of that ideology, that of women's gender specific culture, went hand in hand with a non-ambivalent attitude towards authority. Men's authority system was there to be tackled and changed, and not to be drawn away from by not placing slates.

But was it in practice possible to work within men's authority system without being contaminated by it? Certainly it quickly became clear that to continue working in ideological opposition to that basic system, e.g. in the Althing, was much more difficult than assimilating to it. Certain elements like the procedure of the authority system, for instance, had to be followed by women's slates' representatives who, moreover, had become insiders in the realm of public authority by the simple fact of being legitimate members of the Althing. As the years passed the distinction between "outside" and "inside" of authority became blurred, if not for any other reason than familiarity with the inside. That is, for instance, reflected in recent policy making decisions which go against the slates' basic premise of distribution of authority and methods used to make them.

Similarly the ideal organization of the movement has proved difficult to sustain. Randall (1987) discussing the "structurelessness" of women's movements writes:

Yet this ideal is not always realised. Freeman reminds us that structurelessness does not necessarily prevent tyranny. Elites, based less on conspiracy than on friendship cliques, are endemic. When there are no formal procedures, they can devise and manipulate tacit rules to ensure their *de facto* control, and to exclude fringe members. (Randall, 1987, p.255).

These as well as other characteristics of organizational "structurelessness", or rather non-hierarchical movement structures since the structurelessness of women's movements does have a structure of its own, also characterizes The Women's Slates Movement. In 1988 the following could be found in *Vera*:

Women in The Women's Slate Movement do not have an equal amount of authority. The members in the Althing sometimes make decisions they say more women should take part in making... Women who have long been members of the movement have a certain kind of authority because they have more knowl-

edge than others about the movement and can evaluate decisions in relation to what has been done before ... Also the flow of information between women of long standing with the movement is greater than to new women, because the veteran members know each other better and interact more.

(*Vera*, 3/1988, vol. 7, pp. 15-16, my translation).

The list goes on and has not been challenged in print by any other women's slater. Similarly, except perhaps for the adjective "bitter" the following also holds true for the movement.

Then, in the absence of formal leadership the media can pick on individual women, the "stars", as representing the true voice of women's liberation, leading not only to misrepresentation but to bitter recrimination within the movement itself. (Randall, 1987, p. 256).

Lately the consensus method itself in reaching decisions in a meeting has suffered some manipulation in the form of certain women declaring either in a meeting or a day or two afterwards that so many in the meeting were for a certain position and that so many were against it and therefore the position of the movement on the issue in question was clear i.e. that it was what more women were said to be in favour of. By this the consensus making process is effectively destroyed and turned into a voting procedure without women ever having declared their position in the unequivocal manner of actually taking a vote.

These symptoms of deviation from the ideal could mean that in terms of authority the movement is becoming assimilated to its society's dominant ideas on authority, and/or, that an organization of "structurelessness" can not exist for any length of time within the context of a different and dominating organizational structure without becoming assimilated in some ways. Or, it could mean that "structurelessness" has such inbuilt weaknesses, such as those discussed above, that it cannot withstand erosion on the strength of its own premises. But in spite of these deviations in the practice of an ideal, that ideal and its fundamental idea of authority nevertheless remain an important part of the ideological grounds of the movement, which the movement in various ways attempts continuously if not successfully to reinforce.

The right to be heard

What characterizes women's world of experience is that it is almost invisible and little valued. Women's lack of authority and influence in Icelandic society is glaring. In the Althing there are only three women and 57 men ... In state government there is no woman ... In municipal councils there are 71 women and 1076 men ... In spite of women's extended formal rights and advanced education their authority and influence in society have not increased.

(*Hugmyndafræðilegur grundvöllur Kvennaframboðs*, 1982,
my translation).

This excerpt from the 1982 Declaration of Ideas singles out public invisibility and society's low evaluation as chief characteristics of women's gender-specific culture. These characteristics are seen as instrumental in creating and maintaining women's situation of deprivation in terms of authority and influence. Therefore, in order to bring women authority their "world of experience" must be made visible. Holders of an underrated and invisible culture perceived as such by its holders are bound to find themselves socially muted in terms of that culture. To be seen equals to be heard in this respect, since if a social person is not socially visible that person cannot be socially heard. The incident of the women's slaters' silent march in the 1983 election campaign, (cf. chapter 9), illustrates the point. The message of that march was: Women are not being listened to and if they try to speak where hearing conditions are optimal they are prevented from doing so.

The right to be heard was as important to women's slaters' as the right to speak was to suffragists and the right to work to liberationists. Through obtaining these different rights women activists each time hoped to acquire their ultimate goal of becoming socially the equals of men. The suffragists' right to speak and the slaters' right to be heard match each other in that both entail women's right to be listened to as women and because they are women. The liberationists' right to work on the other hand entails women's right to be listened to as social men and in spite of their being women. Liberationists believed that the formal right to speak, the right of the franchise, would make women listened to. To liberationists and women's slaters' it was clear that such formal rights

would not do the trick, that acquiring hearing conditions was a more complex matter. Therefore they put forward claims for rights which were not formal, legal ones, but social and cultural in nature.

To make women heard women's slaters' headed for that area of Icelandic society where most of the media's and the public's attention was concentrated, that of politics. The method itself, that of appearing in front of television cameras, speaking on the radio, at meetings, writing articles in the papers etc., illustrates concretely their basic concern with getting women heard. And not only the women who actually went in front of the cameras and the microphones, but all women. As was discussed in the previous section women's slaters' ideas on authority entailed that all women should have an equal amount of authority. Therefore all women should have an equal right to be heard, every woman's voice should be able in itself to hold the note of authority. Within the realm of authority women's slaters' representatives were not seen as speaking as individual, idiosyncratic women, but as if they had the voice of all the women they represented. To overcome women's social mutedness and make their world of experience publicly visible and justly valued as equal to that of men, all women, and not only a few elected ones, must be given the right to be heard.

To women's slaters' women generally and very obviously did not enjoy that right. In the 1982 Declaration of Ideas the right to be heard equals that of having authority, of being in a position to make people listen to you. And, as is apparent from the latter half of the quotation above, women are not seen to possess public authority, they are seen as outside the sphere of public authority. In spite of formal rights, in spite of education and, it might be added, in spite of the right to work, in spite of all these characteristics of the politico-jural domain and of men's social personhood, women were still not qualified actors in society's public sphere where men acted out an important part of their social personhood. Standing mutedly outside of the works of authority was thus women's lot in spite of all their qualifications.

Being in this respect outsiders in the society in which they are living places women in a position comparable to that of the stranger (Simmel, 1950). In spite of women's proximity, their presence in society, they are at the same time remote, outside of one of society's spheres of action,

that of authority, derived from the politico-jural domain. As Simmel points out, strangers have freedoms others do not have. A potent fictional description of the kind of freedom entailed in not having public authority is French's description of the American suburban housewife of the fifties, who could go to the supermarket with curlers in her hair, mismatched shoes and a loony grin on her face without anybody minding much (French, 1977). That kind of freedom is the freedom of someone who does not meet the requirements of full social personhood and therefore does not have to be taken seriously as a person.

That kind of freedom is not the freedom women's slaters' aimed at for women. It is precisely the opposite. The freedom women were to have was that of full social personhood, and full social personhood entailed the holding of responsibility and authority in terms of both the domestic and politico-jural domains. Yet women's slaters' were not claiming men's social personhood for women. They were claiming full social personhood for women as women, as culturally different from men. Only when that was achieved would women be listened to and only then would they have something which could be termed women's freedom of choice which was the Women's Slates Movement ultimate goal.

Method

As has been discussed in chapters 3 and 7, the method of separate women's slates is consistent with viewing women as a separate cultural group. It is consistent with women's slaters' core idea of women's gender-specific culture, its positive evaluation and the derivative premise that women must themselves bring forth and employ the views and values embodied in their gender-specific culture. Furthermore direct political participation on a women's platform of some sort is an active expression of and realization of women's right to be heard, the process of participating in politics supplying an immediate analogy to the right to be heard.

Reviewing the sequence of events discussed in chapter 9 it appears that the idea of placing a slate comes before the idea of women's gender-

specific culture. The 1981 summer debate revolved around the question of what ideas a slate should be based on if it were placed. Had liberationist ideas survived that debate would a women's slate have been placed at all? Since liberationist ideas did not survive the summer of 1981 the question is rhetorical, but from the analysis of liberationist ideas in chapter 7 it can be surmised that if a liberationist slate had been placed it would not have been a women-only slate and therefore not a women's slate but a slate more comparable to the slates of the political parties.

It may be asked whether the initial idea of a women's slate which directly and concretely connected with concerned women's perception of being socially muted and thus having to claim the right to be heard, paved the way for the surfacing of the traditional concept of women in Icelandic society? That without the idea of a women's slate the idea of women's gender-specific culture would not have become the core idea of women's activists' ideology in the eighties? Certainly that core idea and the method of separate women's slates fit so closely that it may be surmised that the method itself played an important part in the formation of women's slaters' ideological grounds.

But it did not play the only part; the need for an ideological turn-about, for something new which could bring new results, was also instrumental. And, thirdly, although budding women's slaters considered the idea of women's gender-specific culture new, it was not, and because it was not new and was directly understandable in terms of the traditional concept of women's roles in Icelandic society, it was the more readily apprehended and adopted. This surfacing of one of Icelandic society's basic cultural perceptions where women were concerned in a new disguise as it were, lent women's slaters' ideology once it was comprehended an air of being nearby self-evident while the disguise made it seem new.

The method of the slates was not the only method employed by women's slaters. For the first few years the method of unconventionality and loudness employed by liberationists was also employed by women's slaters side by side with the method of slates. In that, the liberationist heritage is apparent in women's slaters' activities. But loudness and unconventionality also had a direct relation to women's

slaters' perception of women as socially muted and their basic concern with obtaining the right to be heard for women. As with liberationists before them, women's slaters found they had to break the silence surrounding women, the silence of women's social mutedness, if women were to be heard at all. And loudness was as before eminently suited to break a silence, loudness meaning doing things unconventionally so that they are noticed. An unconventional, socially jarring action has the effect of a sound and a message breaking through other sounds and messages of which the "silence" was made up.

Actions such as dressing up as beauty queens to attend a municipal council meeting and the like were quite frequent to begin with. By employing this method women's slaters were supplementing the method of the slates, making noise being perceived to help avoiding having the slates themselves become shrouded in silence once they had entered the realm of authority. Also, while only a few elected women could act as representatives of women's activism within the walls of authority, actions like the above were open to all women activists allowing them to express their ideas in action. In this respect as well actions of this kind were important. They were a means to activate women, to keep them active and to supply them with a channel of expression, all of which was instrumental in keeping the Women's Slate Movement itself, the backbone of the slates, alive and growing.

As the years passed actions of this kind, the employment of loudness and unconventionality, became less frequent. By the 1987 national elections it was clear that the women's slates had become a socially respected political phenomenon, accepted by the authority system they sought to change. Society's acceptance of the slates as a political phenomenon which had come to stay and therefore was not to be denied, effectively placed the slates within society's authority structure, depriving them of their important and ideologically generating outside characteristic which had made the employment of noise both effective and feasible. By accepting the slates society, and especially society's authority system, despoiled some of women's slaters' reasons for speaking and therefore diffused the original scope of the slates.

Women's slaters mostly saw this acceptance as a success and were therefore perhaps not on guard against the dangers involved. A covert

assimilation to the authority system such as this undoubtedly dampened women's slaters' enthusiasm for "loud actions". It may also have been instrumental in diffusing the employment of the slates' authority values, which were radically different from the ones on which society's authority system was grounded. The plight of being different, of being a stranger in the land of authority, therefore, from the point of view of women's slaters' ideas and ideals, had its reactionary elements as well as revolutionary ones.

Validation of claims

Women's slaters were not immune from attacks on their ideas and activities any more than the suffragists and the liberationists had been before them. Women's slaters were among other things accused publicly and privately of practicing sexual apartheid, of turning women's activism into a social anachronism and, classically by then, of being bad mothers and housewives suffering from a winter of discontent. Because the slates threatened the interests of the political parties many of the attacks women's slaters suffered were political in nature. Even if that did not make aggression towards them seem any more reasonable in content to women's slaters, they could still retaliate if they wished within the political context itself, which provided them with a frame within which to legitimize their actions and points of view.

Women's slaters' ideas on women's gender-specific culture did not run counter to the accepted image of women in Icelandic society and therefore not counter to one of society's basic conceptual categories as had liberationists' ideas on sexual equality. Women's slaters were therefore in this respect, like the suffragists before them, able to align their ideas to dominant cultural categories and thus validate their claims in that manner. Being accused of avoiding their socially legitimate roles of mothers and housewives with their activism, women's slaters could, again like the suffragists, turn the argument on its head and claim that

because of their important roles as mothers and housewives women's activism was necessary.

Women's slaters claim for women's freedom of choice was not as readily understandable, even the word they used to connote that freedom, 'kvenfrelsi', being uncommon to Icelandic ears in the nineteen-eighties. Had women's slaters used the concept of independence instead, which can connote the same as freedom of choice, they might have had more success in this respect as is indicated by the analysis of suffragist and liberationist validation of claims. As it was the concept of women's freedom of choice fell into the shadow of the more easily understandable and therefore more readily employable concept of the positiveness of women's roles as mothers and housewives as is discussed in a previous section.

In accordance with claiming full social personhood for women, women's slaters perceived all issues as women's issues; nothing in municipal or national decision making was not of women's concern. When asked how they were going to tackle one issue or another, i.e. asked about their politics, women's slaters habitually replied that they would tackle the issue in question in terms of the interests of women and children. That refrain, because a refrain it did become, was easily understood, since after all women were traditionally concerned with children, and could therefore easily be seen to think in terms of what was good for children, women and by extension the home and the family, the traditional domain of women.

Another example of this kind of validation of claims employed by women's slaters is their use of the concept of the thrifty housewife. When asked about their policy on economic management, often with a snicker because municipal and national economics were not considered a women's area, women's slaters replied with the thrifty housewife. National economic management, they argued, followed the same rules as the economic management of homes, and therefore thrifty housewives, such as they themselves, were in their own right experts in the field. And not only that, referring to the poor state of the national economy, they claimed that national economic management was in dire need of the economic management values of the thrifty housewife. Men's values in the field had obviously, they claimed, made a mess of things.

The thrifty housewife was easily understandable by all, she was a common figure in the Icelandic constellation of cultural perceptions.

That women should be given authority because they were morally good was also not difficult to understand in a society with a reformist tradition of its own in which women had always been prominent (cf. e.g. Thorlacius, 1981). Reformism is however not needed to explain a basic cultural understanding of women's moral goodness, the traditional concept of motherhood, of the loving, caring and self-sacrificing mother, suffices as a foundation for women's socially validated and gender-determined moral goodness.

An effective way to thwart the validation of claims of new political slates is to assert that they are only a repetition of what was already there, and what was already there in politics in Iceland was the Left and the Right. On the basis of having different values from men, determined by their gender-specific culture, women's slaters claimed that their policy and politics in general were neither leftist nor rightist in orientation. The Left and the Right they claimed were creations of men's gender-specific culture, based on their gender-specific values which gave priority to economic factors in policy making, while women's gender-specific values gave priority to the human factor. The Left and the Right, they argued, differed only in that they approached the economic factor differently, women's politics on the other hand had altogether different priorities and were therefore a new third dimension in the Icelandic political spectrum. To be politically different is at all times an important political instrument, and women's slaters' validation of their claims to political specialness derived, as did all their validation of claims, from the core concept of women's gender-specific culture. And that core concept spelled success where the validation of claims was concerned.

Success in validating claims can be measured in votes, and considering women's slaters percentage of the vote, and especially their doubling of votes received between the 1983 and 1987 parliamentary elections, there is no doubt that women's slaters' validation of claims was successful. Since late 1988, however, the polls have shown a downward swing for the slates, and although polls are unreliable and the reasons for vote fluctuations complicated, this might indicate that

the validation of claims employed by women's slaters up until now do not suffice any longer. But success has served to bring the women's slates to the attention of the media around the world and hence to the attention of women in different countries (cf. chapter 9). The publicity entailed by such international attention has, finally, served as one more validation for women's slaters' claims, the interest and, by extension, the approval of the wider world having a legitimizing force of its own.

CHAPTER 12

THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD

As was the case with the examination and analysis of suffragists' and liberationists' ideas and activities, the preceding examination and analysis of women's slaters' ideas and activities demonstrate a correspondingly close connection between those ideas and activities on one hand and socio-structural and conceptual factors on the other. In all three cases socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society were instrumental in bringing about and forming women's rights ideas and activities.

During the seventies, the decade of the liberationists, the social change processes set in motion in the pre-liberationist era intensified where women were concerned. Liberationists had formed their concept of women's social personhood with reference to the social changes that had occurred and as a result the influence of those changes on women's social situation were augmented. Women's employment rate continued to rise, as did their level of education and professional training. A notable change with regard to women and paid work during the seventies was that women's right to work developed into a requirement to work and to supply an income, reducing the choice involved for women in whether or not to engage in paid work.

Apart from that, women's socio-structural situation was by the beginning of the eighties essentially similar to what it had been at the beginning of the seventies. In spite of liberationist ideas and activities the sexual division of labour had remained basically unchanged through the seventies both in terms of work done in the domestic sphere and that undertaken in the public sphere. Women's wages continued to be generally and considerably lower than those of men, their wages were still being considered supplementary to those of men, and women continued to be scarce as holders of public authority. Women were still being denied a part of the politico-jural dimension derived from the public sphere, in spite of their escalating public sphere participation both in

terms of work and education, their structural definition was still subject to conceptual resilience.

The discrepancy between women's social activities and women's structural definition, which had carried the seed of the women's rights activities of the 70s, thus persisted and was intensified by the element of diminished choice where paid work was concerned. Similarly the social problems women had to deal with resulting from this discrepancy became worse. Liberationist emphasis on women's right to work as a defining element of women as social persons had turned paid work into a requirement for women, the duties of which were appended to their duties as mothers and housewives. The right to work had not brought women the desired politico-jural dimension: paradoxically its effects seemed to be adverse as most women were chafing under a seemingly inescapable double load of responsibilities. At the same time the events of the seventies in the field of women's rights and women's growing experience of the labour market and their rising educational level, had given women a sense of strength and the means to unite in the cause of women's rights.

The persistently growing discrepancy between women's social activities and their structural definition, the discrepancy between social change and conceptual-structural resilience, gave rise to women's slaters' ideas and activities. Those ideas and activities were informed and fuelled by the growing social problems resulting from this discrepancy, by continuously extended interaction and comparison among women and of women with men, by women's heightened sense of strength and capabilities, and by the realization that the right to work had not brought women what they desired. As in the two previous phases of women's rights activities women were not suffering the worsening of material conditions, and, as previously, it was urban not rural women who mobilized in the cause of women's rights.

The structural change occurring with urbanization, discussed in chapters 4 and 8, thus continued to exert its influence on the social position of women. Of specific importance in that respect was women's continuing close association with and definition in terms of roles pertaining to the domestic sphere which with urbanization had become separated from society's public sphere. Women's extended participation

in society's public sphere of activities and liberationist ideas and activities had not sufficed to change women's socio-structural position in that respect. Women were still the ones responsible for the activities taking place within the domestic sphere, the social connotation of marriage which had not changed was that of a wife's responsibilities towards her family, and in spite of being engaged in paid work on the labour market or in obtaining an advanced education women still undertook those responsibilities. Women's participation in the public sphere had thus not taken away women's socially sanctioned roles in the domestic sphere and therefore not changed their socio-structural definition as social persons in terms of those roles. A politico-jural dimension derived from the public sphere was still in part denied women, the right to work had brought women some of the duties of the public sphere, but not the rights which complemented the duties. Women's slaters' concern with authority, with women's right to exercise the rights entailed in a politico-jural dimension derived from the public sphere, illustrates the point.

Since the right to work had not brought women what they desired and since attempting the role of social men had not given women the lacking politico-jural dimension, women's activists of the 80s phrased their claims for the desired change in women's socio-structural position in terms of yet another right and in terms of yet another definition of women's social personhood. Women were already doing much the same things as men in society's public sphere so a right of women *to do* what men were doing, to vote or to work, did not seem to bring about the changes women wanted.

What seemed to be needed was an understanding of what women were doing, an understanding and acceptance or validation of the social and cultural significance of all women's social activities. The right to be heard is a right to receive a hearing. Entailed in the right to be heard are the rights to do women already had, the right to speak and the right to work. The rights to do were a necessary prerequisite for the right to receive, in order to receive; women had to do. The right to receive a validation of their social activities which would give women's social personhood a full jural dimension therefore constituted the essence of women's slaters' claims. A right to the rights and not only the duties

entailed in participation in society's public sphere, and an acknowledgement of the rights entailed in active engagement in society's domestic sphere, constituted therefore the fundamental claim of women's slaters.

Although the right to speak and the right to work differ from the right to be heard with respect to doing and receiving, those three rights are directly comparable in that through claiming those rights for women, women activists each time hoped to obtain the lacking jural dimension for women and turn them into fully signifying social beings.

Like the discrepancy between women's socio-structural definition and their social activities, women's perception of themselves as socially muted intensified during the liberationist decade. The right to be heard presupposes social mutedness and at almost every turn in women's slaters' ideas and activities there emerges a strong perception of that mutedness. Women's slaters claimed that women's traditional work within the home was socially invisible, that the values derived from women's gender-specific culture were socially muted, that as far as society was concerned women seemed to be "the hidden people", a phrase often used by women's slaters. Women's slaters' silent march the day before the 1983 national elections well demonstrates women's perception of their social mutedness, as do the methods of loudness employed by women's slaters and their choosing to place slates so as to get in front of loudspeakers and television cameras with their views which would otherwise not be "heard". It is also demonstrated by women's slaters' perception of women being outside their society's authority structure and by their concern with getting every woman's voice heard, in accordance with which they structured their movement into a structure of 'structurelessness', employed the method of consensus in decision-making and promoted in their policies views on authority different from those on which society's authority structure was based.

As is pointed out in chapter 8, women's dislocation in terms of the dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society was instrumental in creating and maintaining women's social mutedness. The forceful display of women's perception of themselves as socially muted during the 80s clearly demonstrates women's experienced conceptual dislocation and its continuing significance for women's socio-structural definition.

And since conceptual dislocation was instrumental in maintaining women's social mutedness, and since conceptual resilience has been demonstrated over and over again in this examination, it is not surprising that a decade of liberationism did not suffice to change Icelandic society's basic conceptual models.

Not only had the dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society withstood the assault of liberationism, women themselves continued to possess a gender determined muted model of their own of women and society, a model which as before perceived women being in the outside of society and was therefore at variance with the dominant conceptual model. Since the right to work had not brought the change in women's socio-structural position which they desired, and since mutedness had more clearly than ever to be combatted, a new right, new ideas and new methods were called for to break the silence through which the vicious circle of sexual discrimination was maintained. In the ideological and methodological reversal of the 1980's, there is a fundamental concern with providing this newness, the failure of the right to work and women's social mutedness informing women's slaters' ideas and activities.

Hence, as was the case with both the suffragists and the liberationists socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society were instrumental in bringing about the new phase in women's rights activities which emerged with the 80s. In addition, in the case of both the liberationists and the women's slaters, preceding women's rights activities influenced specifically the formation of subsequent women's rights activities. During the 70s the discrepancy between women's social activities and their socio-structural definition had intensified and become less easily overlooked. Women were as before dislocated in terms of their society's dominant conceptual model, perceived themselves as socially muted and possessed as a gender group a muted model of themselves and their society. In socio-structural terms they were still denied a part of society's politico-jural dimension, in cultural conceptual terms their voices were muted. Women were thus still not fully signifying social beings, not persons "perceived as the microcosm of the social order" (Fortes, 1973).

As before women's social personhood is at the core of activists ideas and activities. Again activists aim at redefining women as social per-

sons in terms fitting their social activities. Liberationists had advocated a definition of women's social personhood which disclaimed the structurally defining elements of women's traditional roles within the domestic sphere, defining elements they perceived as preventing women from enjoying the full jural dimension of their activities in the public sphere. This definition of women as social persons had served to consolidate the double burden of responsibilities women were carrying, diminishing women's choice with regard to paid work. To ease that burden, bring women back a choice with regard to paid work and give women a full de facto jural dimension women's slaters promoted a definition of women's social personhood different from the one promoted by liberationists.

In spite of liberationist ideas and activities women had continued to be engaged in society's domestic sphere as well as in society's public sphere, a definition of women as social beings which fitted their social activities had therefore to be in terms of both the domestic and politico-jural structural domains. Hence women's slaters reclaimed women's traditional roles, pronounced them, like the suffragists before them, socially important and took a positive stance towards women's gender-specific culture.

Like the suffragists, women's slaters recognized that different social kinds could coexist as agents-in-society. They claimed full social personhood for women, one which entailed the holding of responsibility and authority in terms of both the domestic and politico-jural domains, but one that was different from men's social personhood. By having women recognized as socially and jurally equal but culturally different from men, women's slaters hoped to make women socially audible as women and because they were women, and thereby turn women into fully signifying social beings.

With the women's slaters there therefore emerges yet another shift in the definition of women's social personhood. The inescapability of women's roles in society's domestic sphere and the consolidation of women's participation in society's public sphere during the liberationist decade led the working mothers who established the Women's Slates Movement to form a concept of women's social personhood which attempted to encompass all women's activities.

It is of note in this respect that the dominant women's slaters' age-group is that of women in their thirties. The predominant characteristics of this age-group were education and professional employment, motherhood and wife-hood. This age group was composed of women who would have made their educational, professional and personal life choices during the liberationist decade. They were too young to have been able to initially form and promote liberationist ideas and were therefore less emotionally tied to them than older activists, but old enough to have learned from experience that education and paid work did not change their situation in society's domestic sphere. They were therefore in a position to realize that the liberationist formulation of women's social personhood did not suffice to bring women the lacking de facto jural dimension, that motherhood and wife-hood did continue to define women structurally and that if the lacking de facto jural dimension was to be obtained it must also encompass motherhood and wife-hood. Otherwise motherhood and wife-hood could continue to be used as structural disqualifiers for obtaining the lacking de facto jural dimension. If women were to be whole social persons the whole range of their socially important activities had to be recognized. Women's slaters' heavy emphasis on their status as mothers, housewives and wives, cf. e.g. how women were presented on the slates, demonstrates the point.

Women's slaters differentiated between women's political personhood and women's general personhood like suffragists had done. The signifying characteristics of women's slaters' candidates for office were that they were married, mothers, housewives, educated and professionally employed. As with the suffragists women's political personhood was characterized by a structurally in between position in terms of men's and women's structurally defining and gender-determined social attributes, marriage having taken on a different social significance by the 1980's from what it formerly had (cf. chapter 10).

But while women's slaters indicated that motherhood and housewifery were part of women's general personhood, they implied that education and employment outside women's homes need not characterize women generally. Hence women's slaters' and suffragists' concepts of women's general personhood were not quite the same, as neither specific-jural rights nor education were emphasized by women's slaters as

signifying elements of women's general personhood as they were by suffragists. In the days of the women's slaters women had possessed and exercised the same jural rights as men for decades and these rights may therefore have seemed included in women's general social personhood although they clearly did not suffice to bring women a full de facto jural dimension. Motherhood and housewifery, on the one hand, had been disclaimed by liberationists in the previous decade as part of women's general social personhood, and were therefore brought forward by women's slaters as "new" signifiers of women's general social personhood.

It therefore emerges, first, that when women activists distinguish between women and men in terms of personhood, which they do on the basis of their evaluation of women's gender-specific culture, they differentiate between women's political and women's general personhood. And, second, that women's general personhood is each time defined by activists in accordance with social changes and preceding activist ideas on women's social personhood. The shift occurring with the women's slaters in the definition of women's social personhood is therefore, as are their ideas and activities generally, consistent with and dependent upon what social changes had taken place and what conceptual-structural changes had not occurred, and reflect a reaction to preceding ideas on women's social personhood, ideas which in turn had influenced what changes occurred and what changes had not occurred.

As is discussed in chapter 11 women's slaters were comparatively successful in validating their claims but have since 1988 suffered a downward swing in their votes. As social personhood entails agentic capacities which, as has been demonstrated, have the power to change the social order or "the very action system that gives [women] their social being" (Harris, 1989), the downward swing in women's slaters' votes might indicate that women's slaters' definition of women's social personhood does not suffice any longer for their purposes. Once again a readjustment of the concept of women's social personhood to a changed social context or even yet another redefinition of women's social personhood might seem pertinent to Icelandic women in the near future.

CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding examination and analysis of concerted women's rights activities in Iceland from 1870 to the present day I have examined women's rights ideas and activities in terms of the socio-structural and conceptual context in which they occurred and are occurring. When individuals organize themselves into a movement for a specific social purpose their activities are informed by a view or a vision of their society that is in one or more respects different from what it is generally perceived to be. Accordingly I have throughout my analysis differentiated between the general social and conceptual context within which women's rights activities took place and the way this context was perceived by the actors, i.e. the women who undertook those activities.

This method of analysis, which is informed by the material to be analysed, has allowed me to bring out the interconnections between women's activists' ideas and activities on one hand and the social and cultural context of these activities on the other. It has also allowed me to examine the continuities and discontinuities involved both in terms of society as a whole and in terms of women's ideas of themselves and their society. What has emerged has then been examined at another level of analysis in terms of theoretical concepts which permit non-lateral analytical comparisons of the emerging socio-structural and conceptual regularities. These regularities have in turn generated yet another analytical level, that of conclusions. The conclusions which have emerged will be articulated in the following sections.

Women's movements in Iceland

A central conclusive point emerging from the preceding examination and analysis is that women's rights ideas and activities are at all times brought about and formed by socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society. The interplay between social change and

conceptual structural resilience is the spark which ignites the periodic flames of Icelandic women's rights activities.

It has emerged equally clearly that women's rights ideas and activities have themselves influenced the social context, the context of social interaction, within which subsequent women's rights ideas were formed and activated, cf. the emergence of the Redstocking Movement and the Women's Slate Movement. To what degree new women's rights ideas and activities are brought about by previous women's rights ideas and activities on one hand and to what degree by social changes and conceptual structural resilience on the other cannot be determined. What is clear is the connection between socio-structural and conceptual factors on one hand and women's rights ideas and activities on the other and that the latter in turn influences the context of social interaction and thus also subsequent women's rights ideas and activities. Icelandic women's movements thus spring from a mesh of a social processes, socio-structural relationships and conceptual structures which combine to produce the social phenomena of the movements.

Hence it emerges, first, that in terms of Icelandic society women's movements are centre-movements, they spring from the crucible of social change and conceptual structural resilience which lies at the heart of Icelandic society. In spite of society's view of such movements as peripheral and in spite of women's activists' perception of their movements as different from and existing in the "outside" of their society, Icelandic women's movements have through my examination and analysis emerged as being far from peripheral. On the contrary in socio-structural terms they are situated right at the centre of the ongoing social process which is Icelandic society.

Second, contrary to prevalent points of view (e.g. Styrkársdóttir, 1982, Rafnsdóttir, 1984, Sigurjónsdóttir, 1988) Icelandic Women's Movements are not primarily formed by ideas emanating from abroad. Women's rights ideas and activities in the neighbouring societies provided a larger context to which Icelandic activists could refer their ideas and activities, but the formation of Icelandic women's rights ideas and activities is, as has been demonstrated, primarily dependent upon social and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society.

Third, concerted women's movements' activities are discontinuous in the sense that they subside and rise at irregular intervals. As has been demonstrated and repeatedly pointed out factors pertaining to social change are instrumental in shaping the irregular waves of movement-activities, but so are factors of social assimilation and continuity. We have seen how society absorbs at any given time ideas promoted by women activists, assimilates them and diffuses the arguments activists use to validate their ideas but does not change in basic social and conceptual structural terms. Hence both social change, social assimilation and cultural continuity are instrumental in bringing about concerted women's rights activities. Therefore also women activists are through the 120 years examined engaged with changing the same fundamental social and conceptual structures, which remain basically intact throughout the period.

Fourth, as has emerged Icelandic women's movements are an urban social phenomenon. The structures women activists are attempting to change throughout are the structures emerging with urbanization. Urbanization separated the domestic and public spheres of activities, thereby depriving urban women, who came to be identified primarily in terms of the domestic sphere, of some of the politico-jural dimensions derived from society's public sphere. Urbanization also dislocated urban women in terms of the dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society and it is those urban social and conceptual structures women activists have at different times attempted to change.

In my examination and analysis I have divided Icelandic women's movement activities into three phases on grounds of shifts in activists' ideas and methods to promote them. From the perspective of waves of activities Icelandic women's movements activities can also be seen to constitute two wave-phases, i.e. the wave-phase at the turn of the century and the wave-phase emerging at the end of the 60s. From that point of view it emerges that both wave-phases are preceded by a period of quiet years, incalculably long before the first wave-phase, almost half a century in duration before the second wave-phase. Furthermore, the two wave-phases are similar in that each can be seen to consist of two identical stages. The first stage is that of women activists exerting pressure from an outside position on those in possession of public authori-

ty, a stage often characterized as 'traditional' women's rights activities. That stage is in both instances followed by a period of separate women's slates, i.e. a stage where pressure is exerted by the method of slates to obtain an inside position of public authority. It therefore emerges that intensive 'traditional' women's activities periods are followed by periods of women's slates. Although a comparison consisting of two instances is too limited to establish a general rule, it appears that in spite of the apparent irregularity in the rise and decline of women's movement activities in Iceland, there is a certain regularity to their pattern which has a procedural structure of its own, regardless of what ideas on women and society are being promoted.

In order not to obscure the interrelations of the women's rights ideas and activities examined and the socio-structural and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society, I have not used the labelling conventionally used to classify kinds of feminism such as 'liberal feminism', 'radical feminism', 'socialist feminism' etc. (see e.g. Jaggar, 1983). That method entails using extrinsically derived notions about kinds of feminism as those labels ultimately derive their meaning and theoretical validity from political ideologies other than feminism i.e. from liberalism, socialism, Marxism etc. Viewing feminism in terms of other political ideologies thus both obscures its content and tends as a method to place second the effects of contextual social and cultural factors on the formation of feminist ideas.

By not using such labelling I place feminism itself centre stage in my examination and analysis and examine the ideas and activities dealt with, not in terms of other political ideas and activities, but in terms of the ideas and activities themselves and their social and cultural context. By so doing I describe and analyze Icelandic feminism in terms of the texture of everyday life from which feminism at all times flows and without coloring the description and analysis with the shades of other political isms. An attempt at descriptive and analytical directness of this kind echoes the fundamental content of feminism i.e. that feminism and its advocates, women, be taken for what they are rather than a reflection of something else. In that sense the preceding description and analysis is a feminist description and analysis as well as a socio-structural description and analysis.

This approach has revealed that Icelandic women's movements are at all times fundamentally concerned with the rights of women, variously defined. In all three phases examined ideas and activities converge in one fundamental right, first the right to speak, then the right to work and finally the right to be heard. Viewed laterally each right follows another in a linear process of formulation directed at changing the social structures emerging with urbanization. The different rights are diametrically defined in relation to women's gender-specific culture. The right to speak and the right to be heard are claimed for women because they are women, i.e. because of their gender-specific culture; the right to work is claimed for women in spite of their being women, i.e. in spite of women's gender-specific culture. It therefore emerges that regardless of women's activists' evaluation of women's gender-specific culture, the notion that women were culturally different and to an extent separate from men as a gender group underlies both types of rights definition. The notion of women's gender-specific culture is therefore fundamental to the ideas and activities at issue in all three phases.

The notion of rights also leads directly to the basic aim of the ideas and activities examined, i.e. activists' fundamental concern with women's social personhood which is necessarily defined in terms of rights (cf. Harris, 1989). The perspective of rights therefore reveals how women are continually engaged in creating and recreating themselves as social persons though their ideas on women and society and the concerted activities which they base on those ideas, and how society itself is instrumental in shaping that creative process. In a paraphrase of Fortes' words on person "perceived as the microcosm of the social order" (Fortes, 1973), so the analytical level of personhood can be perceived as the microcosm of the analytical processes which, by illuminating the fundamental concern of the ideas and activities at issue, brought us to that analytical level. Before articulating the conclusions arrived at at the level of personhood and the social continuities and discontinuities involved, a closer look at the ideal isolates which brought us to the analytical level of personhood is warranted.

Dimensions of space and social processes

A number of the key ideal isolates, i.e. the theoretical constructions that link observed social reality and its analysis employed in the preceding analysis, have to do with different dimensions of the organization of space. The concepts of the politico-jural and domestic *domains* refer to clusters of socio-structural elements existing in an abstract or conceptual ordering of social space, informing people's behavior but not dependent upon where that behavior takes place. The concepts of the public and private/domestic *spheres* on the other hand refer to an on the ground ordering of space, to areas of social activities where structural differences are acted out.

By distinguishing between domains and spheres as different kind concepts for the ordering of space, it has been possible to encompass social processes as a continuity through time, i.e. as lateral processes within the vertical ordering of the dimensions of social and physical space. Without this distinction the discrepancy which has been demonstrated between women's social activities, and women's structural definition, which was the generating element in the emergence of Icelandic women's movements, would not have become apparent (cf. chapters 4, 8 and 12). Therefore this distinction is crucial in demonstrating the instrumentality of socio-structural and conceptual factors in bringing about and forming women's rights ideas and activities.

With respect to the acting out of structural gender differences the concept of gender fields, generated in the analysis, links the ordering of space contained in the concept of domains on one hand and that contained in the concept of spheres on the other. Gender fields refer both to areas where gender differences are acted out, i.e. physical space, and the structural elements pertaining to gender which inform social actions, i.e. to socio-structural space. The division of Icelandic society into separate gender fields, appearing with the emergence of this isolate from the data, allowed us to demonstrate in the analysis that stepping across sphere boundaries did not entail changing structural definitions, that men and women continued to be defined in terms of structural gender elements regardless of their social activities (cf. e.g. L  ndal, 1962). To link the different kind isolates of domains and spheres in order to

encompass social processes within the vertical ordering of space the isolate of gender field thus presented a bridge.

The isolate of gender fields has multiple functions in terms of explaining particular discrepancies between structural definitions and social action. One such discrepancy which has been indicated time and again throughout the analysis is the one between the legislation concerning women passed at times by the Althing and the social and cultural context in which the legislation is to take effect. Legislation concerning women often appears to assimilate women's activists ideas and be 'advanced' in terms of general ideas of the day on the social position and role of women and men. The legislation then turns out to be ineffectual because the social and cultural context necessary for its implementation is neither there nor is an attempt made to provide the elements of such a context with supplementary legislation.

Legislation generally is concerned with defining rights and duties and is therefore based upon structural elements pertaining to domains. It is acted out in gender fields which may encompass different parts of society's spheres. If the structural elements pertaining to gender which inform people's behavior in their gender field are at variance with those on which the legislation is based, the legislation will not be effective except as a possible directive for future gender behaviour. In that sense the passing of legislation concerning women which, because it concerns women specifically must be acted out in terms of gender fields, is often only the setting of the stage for further legislation.

Why such 'advanced' legislation is passed at all may be due to the Althing responding to and assimilating women's demands for change in their socio-structural position, women being half of the electorate, an assimilation which we have repeatedly seen taking place without effecting the change aimed at. But in terms of isolates it is of importance here that the isolate of gender fields bridges the different ordering of space entailed in spheres and domains both ways. We have previously seen how stepping across sphere boundaries does not change structural definitions in the gender field, and the above example demonstrates how structural definitions do not change actual behavior in the gender field. In both cases the isolate of gender field links the isolates of domains and spheres by referring both to areas where gender differences are acted

out and to the structural elements pertaining to gender which inform social actions.

Another set of key isolates employed which also refer to dimensions of space are the concepts of inside and outside. These isolates are different order isolates from the ones of domains and spheres, as they contain an organization of space in both "the physical and the social" (Hastrup, 1987, p. 2). Hence inside and outside are isolates of an order directly comparable to that of gender field, enabling the isolate of gender field to be meaningful in terms of both orders of isolates. The concept of gender field thus stretches between different levels of analysis and links its key isolates into a coherent theoretical system.

By employing the isolates of inside and outside and linking them to the other key isolates in the manner described above, it has been possible to add a new dimension to the analysis without obscuring that part of it which is in terms of socio-structural space and social processes generated by the employment of the isolates of domains and spheres. That added analytical dimension has brought forward the importance of urban women's dislocation in terms of the dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society, a model which continued to entail the physical and social space ordering predating that of urbanization. Because urban women were dislocated in terms of the dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society, they were rendered socially muted, perceived themselves as such and as in the outside of their society. As a gender group they thus possessed a muted model of themselves and their society which was at variance with the dominant conceptual model. All of this was instrumental in bringing about and forming the ideas of Icelandic women's movements (cf. chapters 4, 8 and 12). Hence the analytical dimension obtained by employing the concepts of inside and outside complements and enriches that obtained by employing the concepts of domains and spheres.

Linked to this combination of analytical dimensions is a cluster of isolates of yet another order from those discussed above. These are isolates such as gender-specific culture, social mutedness, public authority and social rights which, in spite of their abstraction, are closer than the other orders of isolates to the descriptive reality dealt with. They are closer to that reality because they take form directly out of the data in

much the same way as the method of analysis is informed by the material to be analyzed. These lower order isolates, i.e. lower order in terms of a lower level of remoteness from descriptive reality, link the higher order isolates, often termed concepts in the text, to the descriptive reality dealt with. As with the isolate of gender fields the linkage is both ways: those isolates are meaningful both in terms of descriptive reality and in terms of higher order isolates. The isolate of right, for instance, is meaningful both in terms of actual women's movement activities whether or not the movements themselves used it to denote their claims, and in terms of the higher order isolate of domain where rights are regulated at an abstract level of society.

Finally, the combination of analytical dimensions employed has brought out a defined distinction between society and culture in terms of the material dealt with. Because of this combination of analytical dimensions the conclusion emerged (cf. chapters 4, 8 and 12) that in socio-structural terms, i.e. in terms of society, women were in part denied the politico-jural dimension derived from society's public sphere, while in cultural conceptual terms, i.e. in terms of culture, their voices were socially muted. Hence both the social and the cultural side of that arrangement we call society are brought to bear on the analysis of Icelandic women's movements in order to explain why women in Iceland organized as they did into these movements.

Being both dispossessed in terms of the full structural definition of social personhood and socially muted women were not fully signifying social beings. They had difficulty in being heard as social beings because of their cultural dislocation and because they did not possess the full de facto politico-jural right to speak which in turn created social contingencies which made it imperative for women to be heard. Women were thus not persons "perceived as the microcosm of the social order" (Fortes, 1973) which they must be if they are to be heard. The combination of analytical dimensions described above involving the employment of different order isolates which together form a coherent theoretical system has thus led us to the core of Icelandic women's movements' activities, that of women's social personhood.

Women's personhood

As Susan B. Anthony phrased it in 1873, at about the same time as women in Iceland were stirring toward concerted women's rights activities; "... the only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons?" (Anthony, 1902). In that question and its implications resides the pulsating heart of Icelandic women's movements from their emergence to the present day.

In general, social movements such as women's movements which are formed around a specific view on the social order within which they exist have in the same manner also a specific view of the social person. This view on social movements and personhood derives directly from the formulation of the concept of the person employed i.e. person seen as "... the microcosm of the social order" (Fortes, 1973) and "... an embodiment of large-scale processes and quasi-history" (Harris, 1989) "... intrinsic to the arrangements we call societies" (ibid). As social movements, such as women's movements, are necessarily grounded to an extent on experienced dissatisfaction with some aspects of the social order, because otherwise there would be no reason to form such movements, they are bound to have a vision of the desirable social order as in some respects different from what it is perceived to be, and thus embody a concept of the person different from that which is the rule. And since such movements are concerned with changing and reforming the existing social order, they must also be concerned with changing or reforming the concept of the person and therefore be in their activities intrinsically concerned with the construction of social personhood.

As is noted above this is a view on social movements and personhood derived from the formulation of the concept of the person employed. As such it has served as a directive for examining the data on Icelandic women's movements but is not in itself capable of producing the conclusion that the driving force behind Icelandic women's movements is concern with women's personhood. That conclusion is generated by the data themselves, read from them and not into them.

An outstanding characteristic of Icelandic women's rights ideas and activities emerging from the data is an overriding concern with rights,

with women's rights to speak, to work and to be heard. This concern with rights points directly to concern with personhood, first because they are rights, second because of what rights they are. Harris (1989) distinguishes three sorts of agentive capacities which mark people as persons, or agents-in-society. One of those, the capacities of social entitlement, is directly concerned with "rights, duties, freedoms, and constraints of specific social roles" (ibid p. 605). So concern with rights is concern with personhood as is concern with duties, freedoms and constraints which together with rights adequately embody, as has been demonstrated in the examination of the data, a succinct description of Icelandic women's activists' concerns at all times. The rights to speak, to work and to be heard are rights of social entitlement marking personhood, but they are also, because of what rights they are, directed directly at validation, at giving women a valid, audible voice in all spheres of society, and therefore touch the core of personhood, that of social validation.

Icelandic women's movements' fundamental concern with women's personhood surfaces through more openings in the data than that of rights. Women's activists' concern with authority is one, because as La Fontaine has pointed out: "In particular [concepts of the person] relate to the degree of institutionalization of offices and the nature of authority" (La Fontaine, 1985, p. 138). The 'nature of authority' is at all times a fundamental concern of Icelandic women's activists, taking on a growing importance as the years pass and one activist phase succeeds another. This concern in itself also points directly to concern with personhood. The fact that direct concern with authority seems to grow in time could also indicate that as a process Icelandic women's rights activities proceed closer to their core concern with each successive phase.

As for the other agentive capacities Harris (1989) distinguishes as marking persons i.e. judgmental capacities and mystical capacities, we find concern with judgmental capacities in women's activists' use of the notion of women as to an extent culturally separate from men. A fundamental basis of both suffragists' and women's slaters' claims was that because women were culturally different from men, they had different judgmental capacities and should therefore be given a voice in public

affairs. Liberationists' fundamental claim in this respect on the other hand was that women had the same judgmental capacities as men and should therefore be given an equal voice in public affairs. Suffragists and women's slaters thus recognize the existence of different social kinds while liberationists do not, but all are concerned with defining women's judgmental capacities in relation to women's gender-specific culture which, again, points towards a fundamental concern with women's personhood.

Evidence of concern with mystical capacities is not to be found in the data, except in so far as a shred of that can perhaps be detected in women's slaters' emphasis on women's moral goodness, which they derived from a rather mystical and hidden source of woman-ness. However, the supernatural is hardly represented in that nor in Icelandic women's rights ideas and activities generally and is therefore of limited concern to this analysis.

In this manner Icelandic women's movements' fundamental concern is read from the data, revealing by means of analysis that through women's rights activities women at different times are consistently concerned with creating and recreating women as social persons, with doing in order to become. Having established this fundamental premise I shall articulate what the analysis has brought forward on how women activists have proceeded through time with formulating their fundamental concern and how it relates to social and conceptual factors particular to Iceland society, especially social change.

As Harris (1989) points out social and cultural changes produce new formulations of the concept of the person and that that is case with Icelandic women's activists' formulation of the concept of the person for women has emerged clearly from the data. As we have seen concerted women's rights activities in Iceland emerge with urbanization. The radical social change entailed in urbanization produced a new formulation of women's personhood by the women who experienced that social change. They were women who moved from rural areas to growing urban ones, became dislocated in terms of the dominant conceptual model of Icelandic society and hence socially muted which they had not been in terms of the rural social order. Claiming full social personhood for women as they did therefore represents social and cultural continu-

ity in the sense that women wanted to *continue* to be full social persons. But because the new urban social order was not the same as the rural social order they formulated a new concept of women's personhood in terms of the new order, claiming jural dimensions, the right to speak, which would do away with their new social mutedness. Hence social changes are instrumental in bringing about new formulations of women's personhood. And, therefore, there is discontinuity in how women's personhood is defined by women's activists, a discontinuity deriving from social change but based on another level on social and cultural continuity from the rural to the urban social order, namely that women should continue to be full social persons. This interplay of discontinuity in activists' formulation of women's personhood with social and cultural continuity characterizes women's activists' ideas and activities throughout.

It is also clear from the analysis of the data that the activists' ideas and activities influenced to some extent the direction of social changes. Activists' ideas became assimilated into social change processes without changing the fundamental structures emerging with urbanization - but to an extent informing the behavior of both women and men contributing to social and cultural continuity. Hence during the quiet years following the suffragist phase, suffragist ideas consolidated into social continuity without changing the basic structures they were aimed at changing. Social change during the 60s which brought women face to face with that fact then led women activists, the liberationists, to form yet another and a diametrically opposed formulation of women's social personhood, which when that had been assimilated and consolidated into social continuity, led to yet another and again diametrically opposed formulation of women's personhood, that promoted by the women's slaters. Diametrically opposed formulations were in each case designed to break the social continuity which maintained urban women's social mutedness, discontinuity thus being employed as the means to effect change in social and cultural continuity.

But if different formulations of women's activists' concept of the person for women were thus employed in order to obtain full social personhood for women, they also reflect each time the shifts in social context taking place. Hence suffragists, experiencing the first effects of

urbanization in a society absorbed with obtaining its independence from a colonial power, formulated their concept of the person with primary reference to women's traditional roles which were the reason, they claimed, why women should be given an independent voice. Much as Iceland was perceived to have a right to sovereignty because of what it was and had always been, so women were to have their sovereignty because of what they were and had always been. But because of the change occurring with urbanization women needed more than what they had always had to be full social persons. In order to overcome their urban social mutedness they needed the same jural rights as men, notably the ones of education and the vote. Hence emerged a new modified formulation of the concept of the person for women which reflects the shifts in the social context taking place.

Similarly, the changes occurring in the 50s and especially the 60s with regard to women's participation in society's public sphere without there occurring simultaneous changes in terms of structural domains and hence in women's structural definition, led women activists to formulate another concept of women's social personhood. This time the discrepancy between women's social activities and their structural definition resulting from shifts in the social context taking place was at issue. Instead of attempting to solve that discrepancy by assimilating into a whole women's different activities as women's slaters were to do a decade later, liberationist disclaimed a part of women's activities and structural definition, that which had to do with women's activities in society's private sphere and their definition in terms of the domestic domain, so that women would obtain full social personhood on the same grounds as men.

When women's right to work had consolidated into a requirement to work and it was clear that women neither would nor could escape their responsibilities in society's private sphere, women's slaters formulated yet another version of women's social personhood, one that encompassed women's social activities, rights and duties, in terms of both spheres of activities and in terms of both structural domains. Hence shifts in social context, the social and conceptual factors particular to Icelandic society, inform and shape women activists' formulations of

women's personhood each time, resulting in as many formulations as there are phases of activities.

Comparing among themselves the kinds of formulations of women's social personhood made by women's activists, we have seen that both suffragists and women's slaters claim full personhood for women because they are women and as women, while liberationists claim full personhood for women in spite of women being women and as social men. Hence while suffragists and women's slaters distinguish between different social kinds, liberationists do not do. Similarly suffragists and women's slaters distinguish between women's general personhood and women's political personhood which liberationists do not. Although none of the three formulations of women's social personhood is the same, they are of two kinds, that of the suffragists and women's slaters on one hand and that of the liberationists on the other. The former kind involves distinctions not made in the latter. This difference derives from different evaluations of women's gender-specific culture. When that cultural heritage is positively evaluated by women's activists, formulations of the first kind result; when it is negatively evaluated formulations of the second kind result. This indicates that besides being dependent upon social and cultural changes and social and cultural continuity or non-change, women's perceptions of themselves as persons is dependent upon how they evaluate their gender-specific cultural characteristics. How the element of gender enters into women's perceptions of themselves as social persons is therefore a determining aspect of the formulation of women's social personhood arrived at each time.

It should also be noted that the women who each time are engaged in formulating women's personhood are women who have themselves experienced the social changes and continuities they are attempting to deal with by their women's movement activities. What the suffragists had in common was their experience of moving from rural to urban areas, the liberationists had their engagement on the labour market in common, and the women's slaters the experience that engagement in society's public sphere did not change women's relation to the domestic sphere or their definition in terms of the domestic domain. Direct experience of the relevant changes and social and cultural continuities therefore characterizes all Icelandic women's activists. What also char-

acterizes them is their in-between socio-structural position with regard to women's and men's separate gender-fields which enables them to visualize and attempt to bridge the two, having themselves some degree of social validity in both fields. In that respect education is a constant characteristic of Icelandic women's activists at all times as it is of women activists in the neighbouring societies (see e.g. Banks, 1981). As has been pointed out in the analysis education serves both as a means to validate claims placed by activists and as a source of understanding and new ideas, demonstrating the continuing importance of education for women's rights activities.

Finally, doing and becoming by means of creating and recreating women's social personhood does not concern women alone. It affects and thus concerns the whole of society. In the description and analysis it has emerged over and again how "... the agentive capacities imputed to full, elaborated persons yield their power to recreate and perhaps to change the very action system that gives them their social being." (Harris, 1989, p. 606). The 'perhaps' does not apply in this case as it is clear from the analysis that activists' formulations of women's full social personhood have brought about changes in the action system that gives women their social being so that new formulation fitting the changes taking place have had to be made.

What appears equally clearly is that it is activists' formulations of women's social personhood and the promoting of those formulations that change the action system, rather than women's enjoyment of the "the agentive capacities imputed to full, elaborated persons" (ibid). That in itself indicates the measure of impact and influence women's movements' ideas and activities can have on the societies that engender them, how creating and recreating women as social persons means creating and recreating society itself, that when women do to become, society does and becomes.

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Doing and Becoming: Women's Movements and Women's Personhood in Iceland 1870-1990 is the first comprehensive analysis of Icelandic women's movements from their emergence in the last decades of the 19th century. In the book three consecutive periods in women's rights activities in Iceland are identified and discussed. Events in the history of Icelandic women's rights, the social attributes of the women concerned, their ideas and activities, are described and analysed in terms of the contradictory pull of social change and cultural conservatism. The importance of social personhood, and a demonstration of how women create and recreate themselves as social persons through their movement activities, is a key element in the analysis, shedding new light on the dynamism of social movements.

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