8 State feminism revisited as knowledge history

The case of Norway

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In 1987, Norwegian University Press published *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* (1987) by political scientist Helga Hernes. This book, which for the first time defined state feminism, offered a new and forward-looking understanding of Western democracies by turning the feminist notion of women's relationship to the state on its head. This was done by using Scandinavia as an example, where, Hernes wrote, "women [had] made significant advances in terms of political power", and the state itself was becoming increasingly woman-friendly due to the "interplay between agitation from below and integration policy from above".¹ State feminism was still practiced in relatively narrow spheres, according to the late political scientist Hege Skjeie, using her own experience from drafting the first parliamentary proposition on gender equality in 1980 as evidence.² From the basement of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Administration and Consumer Affairs, she worked on behalf of the publicly appointed Council of Gender Equality in a dialogue with the minister herself, Labour Party politician Sidsel Rønbeck. And together, "we fought the bureaucracy", Skjeie wrote in hindsight, "which always meant whining about money."³ But how did state feminism develop as political knowledge – and from where did it derive?

This chapter revisits state feminism by exploring its various origins and places of knowledge.⁴ In so doing, it shifts the perspective from what Hernes herself addressed (i.e., women's political power and integration in state institutions) to analytical focal points from the emerging field of knowledge history. It particularly draws upon Christian Jacob's *lieux de savoir* in its attempt to show how, but also why, state feminism by 1980 had become the new authority in Norwegian public policy-making in relation to the welfare state. Jacob sees knowledge as a process of building a common world, located in places and unfolding in temporal sequences, involving various agents and material objects, and specific operations ruled by social codes.⁵ But as no knowledge exists without circulation – and circulation requires reception or reaction of some kind – this chapter also leans on Philipp Sarasin's argument that "knowledge is evolving, changing, 'realizing' through *circulation between different social spheres*".⁶ In this process, academic institutions normally play a vital role, as this chapter also shows. However, various political institutions and impulses, in addition

to inter-Nordic cooperation and exchanges, assisted gender knowledge in the form of sex role research circulating and transforming into feminist interpretations of the welfare state. This dynamic, so to speak, created the epistemic foundation of state feminism as political knowledge in Norway.

Making sex role research “a kind of Norwegian specialty”

After World War II, publicly financed research was to become an important trope in the political discourse on the rebuilding of Western democracies, as the final years of the war had shown not only what science could do for humanity but also what generous state funding could do for science and scientists. In his seminal report *Science – The Endless Frontier* (1945), American war scientist Vannevar Bush argued for increased state support to basic research. Initially prepared for the American president, this report soon turned into a must-read. In Norway, university professors leaned heavily on Bush and his war-like rhetoric, as they, in the late 1940s, began preparing the ground for a national research council. In a speech to the Norwegian government in February 1949, Svein Rosseland, an internationally recognised astrophysicist at the University of Oslo and former colleague of Bush, moved the war from the trenches to the laboratories. He said:

During the winter months of 1939–1940, we talked about not having the resources to mobilise militarily, and as late as during the first week of April 1940, we talked about the same. In hindsight, we see how yonder this issue was. . . . The war is now conducted elsewhere and on different fronts than in 1940: We cannot anticipate whether it is in the military sector that we shall meet our next 9 April.⁷

The speech, playing on the Nazi occupation in 1940, was successful but only barely. Norwegian cabinet members, being predominantly working-class men, had no experience of the kind of large science projects the speaker had in mind. Thus, the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities (NAVF), formally launched in September 1949, was given a more applied mandate than what its advocate had initially argued for. Rosseland and his fellow academic entrepreneurs aimed for limited state involvement but ended up with a research council under state control, consisting of four units of basic research. In addition, a fifth unit was created for the new social sciences with funding for projects in education, psychology, and the so-called youth issues in line with political priorities.

Research on gender equality and women's relationship to men, or the state for that matter, was initially not included in these attempts to rebuild and modernise Norwegian society through scientific knowledge and education for all. The new institutions set up in the immediate postwar years by the state in order to facilitate and fund science work primarily served the economic sectors of industry, agriculture, and fishing, in addition to the university sector. In

this landscape of production and social mobility through economic growth and better schooling, women were first and foremost mothers and providers of the family and their dependents.⁸ Only later, within the confines of the Norwegian Institute of Social Research (ISF), did knowledge on the ways in which society thought of and practiced gender – termed “sex roles” – develop.

Created in 1950, the ISF was (and still is) an independent and non-profit research institution located at the outside of the university system and financed through various means.⁹ The American Rockefeller Foundation and the Norwegian industrialist Erik Rinde, in addition to the unit of social science research at the NAVF, were among its more stable sources of income at a time when the universities of Oslo and Bergen had no social science faculties of their own.¹⁰ Thus, in Norway, research on sex roles was initially carried out by the ISF and its full-time staff of social scientists.¹¹ Among them was Danish-born Harriet Holter, initially trained as an economist but much later, in 1973, appointed professor of social psychology at the University of Oslo. Yet, in her period as a researcher at ISF, Holter together with sociologist Erik Grønseth carried out various research projects on sex differentiation and social structures financed by the NAVF.¹² In fact, Holter received funding from the research council for a total of 17 years for studying sex roles at the intersection between sociology and psychology. By the early 1960s, Holter and Grønseth had become the leading figures in Nordic sex role research. Both belonged to the so-called “golden generation of Norwegian social science research”, in hindsight referred to as the founders of Norwegian family sociology, on the one hand, and Nordic gender studies, on the other. However, in the early years of gender studies, the common term was simply “sex role research”, an expression also used by the Swedish sociologist Edmund Dahlström in the introduction to the Swedish-Norwegian publication *Women's Lives and Work* (1962). Initiated by the Swedish Centre for Business and Policy Studies (SNS) a few years earlier, the book looked upon the issue of women in contemporary society “above all . . . sociologically and psychologically conditioned”.¹³ This approach, according to Dahlström, more than anything was the trademark of Holter, who had made sex role research into “a kind of Norwegian specialty”.¹⁴

In the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Harriet Holter organised her work on sex differentiation, with a special interest in “those which appear in occupations, education and political behavior”.¹⁵ In 1970, she submitted her doctoral dissertation *Sex Roles and Social Structure*, which was later translated and introduced to a Swedish audience under the title *Könsroller och samhällsstruktur* (1973). At the time of its release, the book presented a shift that had already taken place among social scientists.¹⁶ Framed as a critique of Talcott Parson, Holter looked upon sex roles as social and psychological constructs benefiting men, not as something needed for protecting a stable and monogamous marriage. Yet, in the 1960s, when Holter's work diffused into the wider Scandinavian public, her use of this label represented a new way of talking about the social roles of men and women in society.

In the Swedish-Norwegian 1962 co-publication *Women's Lives and Work*, Holter directly discussed the consequences of distributing work, wages, formal rights, social status, and prestige in society on the basis of people's sex. She reflected on contemporary issues regarding the roles of women in society and the consequences of reorganising the established sex order through the term "feminisation". Introduced by her Swedish college professor Dahlström, the statement did not represent an accurate description of the responsibilities and power of men and women in contemporary Sweden and Norway. However, Holter argued, it captured some of the tendencies and future dilemmas of modern society and the embeddedness of sex roles in social structures.¹⁷ "Neither the situation of women nor men is today the same as fifty years ago", she claimed, and continued:

Boys as well as girls are being raised and socialised quite differently today than [at the time of our grandparents]. These changes consist not only of women's access to the work, knowledge and attitudes previously reserved for men but also the opposite. Work, knowledge and attitudes formerly termed female are today more open to men. This humanistic welfare society is a more feminine society than the society of our grandparents; the role of men and the upbringing of boys is most truly feminised.¹⁸

The Swedish-Norwegian tome, which was immediately sold out from the publisher in Stockholm, had a much wider impact than Holter's own thesis.¹⁹ American sociologist Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, who in 1971 published *Women's Place: Option and Limits on Professional Careers* after receiving public funding to study the changing American family, in her review of Holter's doctoral work, wrote that it "demand[s] the reader's meticulous attention in almost a line by line reading and careful note taking. Many important ideas are also dismissed too abruptly".²⁰ And, according to Karin Widerberg, a former professor of sociology in Norway with a Swedish background, Holter's thesis "was so deep and we [as young students] did not have sufficient knowledge to see what was at stake in her often intricate and subtle sentences."²¹

The main work of the Norwegian sex role specialist was not a page turner, at least not compared to the large number of popular books on women's issues circulating at the same time. Since the mid-1950s, weekly magazines, female authors, and filmmakers were increasingly addressing the rising mismatch between social expectations for women and their individual wants and identities. The debate started off with a lengthy reportage in the American monthly *Life* in June 1947 titled "The American Woman's Dilemma", with the opening line: "She wants a husband and she wants children. Should she go on working? Full time? Part time? Will housework bore her? What will she do when her children are grown?"²² Nine years later, the same magazine followed up by proposing that the twentieth century would be the era of the feminist revolution.²³ Meanwhile, female specialists and intellectuals started producing intruding and

often publicly provocative answers to the female issue. In 1955, Norwegian feminist Margarete Bonnevie published a book titled *From Men's Society to a Human Society*.²⁴ A year later, together with British sociologist Viola Klein, Alva Myrdal argued for the need to combine women's housework and wage work in *Women's Two Roles: Work and Home* (1956). At the same time, Norwegian cinemas screened *The Woman's Place*, a modern piece of entertainment where "she" worked and earned the money and "he" did the cooking, cleaning, and "mothering".²⁵ In the words of historian Gro Hagemann, the movie not only highlighted the underlying norms and expectations with regard to women's lives by reversing them and making the established gender order visible but also lacked a clear moral, making the movie far more ambiguous than the reviewers appreciated.²⁶

The Scandinavian gender debate continued in the 1960s, but with more emphasis on women's liberation. Swedish Eva Moberg's "Woman's Provisory Liberation" in the edited volume *Young Liberals: Nine Contributions to the Debate of Ideas* from 1961 received a fair bit of attention. In the following year, Moberg published a book of her own, simply titled *Women and People* (1962), which once again illustrated the ideological source of modern feminism. Even Edmund Dahlström, a Swedish sociologist and colleague of Holter, placed himself and much of the work and research on sex roles in the liberal and non-socialist camp, although he acknowledged the ideological role of communism as well. However, the boundary between the public and scholarly debate on the female issue was never particularly strong. For instance, Dahlström introduced many of the public writers on the issue, including Moberg, as he set the scene in the introduction to *Women's Lives and Work* (1962) with the aid of Norwegian and Swedish sex role specialists.²⁷ This means that academics and experts such as Holter were never alone in producing knowledge on the ways in which society ascribed meaning and importance to sexual differences. However, through her role as an "expert" for the social democratic state, Holter helped sex role theory flow into the realms of party politics and state affairs.

Norwegian politics and state affaires

In 1961, the Norwegian Labour Party lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since the war, as many of its young voters shifted to the newly established radical left. In particular, young women turned their back on the party to the dissatisfaction of the Secretary General Håkon Lie, who in 1963 asked the leadership to update its activities directed towards women: "If this task remains unresolved, women will continue to leave . . . How can we win half of the voting people."²⁸ Obviously, the image and practical tasks of Norwegian housewives no longer appealed to female voters. Nor did the image of the female consumer, which in the 1950s had served as a successful aspect of the party's courtship to Norwegian women. In this happy moment of Scandinavian social democracy, consumer and family issues formed two sides of the same coin with a bearing on key knowledge institutions, such as the Norwegian Teachers'

College of Home Economics and the Public Institute of Consumer Research. In order to renew the political trust in the party among female voters, a new kind of expertise was needed that could transform the very idea that women were born to be mothers, caretakers, and housewives only – and that women had to earn less than men due to their sex.

In the language of Harriet Holter, wages represented a major example of sex differentiation embedded in and upheld by social structures. In Norway, as in other countries, women had earned less since they were socialised to be housewives and mothers, while men earned more due to their social roles as breadwinners for the family. This was changed with the ratification of the convention of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on equal pay for work of equal value in 1959, at least officially since all ratifying countries were obliged to start monitoring women's labour market participation and remuneration.²⁹ Women's occupational identities were still complex. Not least the debate running up to Norway's ratification in 1959 exemplified this ambiguity, as well as the requirements of the labour partners. But, even after Norway ratified the ILO convention, wages were to be set in a three-participant bargaining system consisting of the Labour Organisation (LO), the National Employers Organisation (NAF), and the state. However, in 1961, LO and NAF agreed that wages should be based on the character of the work, not gender, and two years later, a gender-neutral Collective Wage Agreement was made. In addition, a Council of Equal Pay was launched as part of the ratification of the ILO convention. Its task was to advise young women to educate themselves and prepare for work outside the home through public information, campaigns, and handouts.³⁰

After the speech by Secretary General Trygve Lie in 1963, the Norwegian Labour Party slowly began to modernise its official views on women, moving away from the housewife paradigm towards something new. The first step in this direction was taken in 1964, at the same time as Einar Gerhardsen had to cede his position as prime minister to Per Borten, who represented the non-socialists. One year later, a small green pamphlet titled *The Woman's Place Is – Where?* (1965) was issued, signed by Gerhardsen himself. By using sex role theory in terms of its vocabulary and perspectives on things, it discussed the changing roles of men and women in society, followed by solutions and initiatives, such as better childcare, part-time positions for women, and prolonged education. Many members of the examination panel responsible for its content, such as Harriet Holter, had a foot in both the political and the scientific arenas. Apart from being a specialist on sex roles, she was at the time a member of the Norwegian Labour Party as well as a deputy for male members of the advisory committee of the Norwegian research council NAVF. Likewise, Åsa Gruda Skard, another female advisor to the Labour Party, was originally a professor of psychology at the University of Oslo.

In hindsight, Åsa Gruda Skard is best known for her democratic and modern approach to child rearing, but in postwar Norway, she was also an eager public commentator on the female issue. In the book, *Women's Issue, Third Act* (1953),

Skard argued for the importance of men in solving what she saw as inflexible sex roles during a time of change. Interestingly, this line of reasoning, based on the notion that sex roles were socially and psychologically conditioned, also found its way into the green pamphlet of the Labour Party. Rather than thinking of men – and women – as essentialist beings, they were in the booklet perceived and presented as a changing element of modern society. It stated:

Many of the aspects earlier considered masculine have been discredited after being brought into full blossom during Fascism and Nazism. Temerity, fighting spirit and ability to subdue strong discipline are some of them. However, characteristics earlier seen as female, such as compassion, tenderness, sympathies, are gradually being accepted also for men.³¹

Holter and Skard did more than advise the political establishment on issues related to women. In the 1950s and 1960s, they served other trusted positions of the social democratic state, even though only Holter was elected member of the Central Committee of Norwegian Research (CNR), established in 1965. Since the early 1960s, overarching bodies of this kind had been actively promoted by the OECD, arguing for the importance of scientific knowledge to national growth. Sweden had introduced a similar committee a few years earlier, set up by social democratic Prime Minister Tage Erlander, with representatives from various ministers and research councils.³² However, the Norwegian CNR, which unlike the Swedish committee had no budgetary responsibility, never lived up to its own ambition. Initially lunched by the Labour government to coordinate and improve the organisation of Norway's research efforts to benefit national priorities, the CNR survived the political defeat of the Labour Party in 1964. In 1965, the committee was relaunched by the leader of the non-socialist government, Per Borten, who did not assign it any political significance.³³

Whereas the Norwegian Labour Party argued for a more extensive use of expertise in processes of societal planning, the non-socialists were more reluctant towards social engineering and technocracy. Divergent views on the role of scientific knowledge in policy-making processes also shaped the CNR, where Holter for a long time served as the only woman. The governmental body created by the Labour Party still had some influence over the overall organisation and funding of scientific research in Norway, particularly in its early years. During the late 1960s, Norway experienced a decline in public funding to scientific research. To solve this, the CNR suggested a new financial system that was accepted in the early 1970s. For the first time, each governmental department was itself responsible for commissioning and paying for research meeting their own policy needs and demands. The resources were then to be channelled via the research councils.³⁴

Governmental departments, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs later known as the Ministry of Children and Family (MCF), had since the mid- and late 1960s themselves increasingly commissioned research for in-house use. The call went either through

the research councils or directly to potential research milieus, making it even more difficult to coordinate the national scientific efforts. Even the Norwegian research council NAVF, predominantly academic in its orientation, began talking about policy relevance and applications with greater enthusiasm. In addition, it improved its assessment office with regard to serving public and private administration with figures on things such as annual investments in R&D or the distribution of boys and girls in education.

Sociologist Tove Thagaard Sem in the late 1960s carried out a lengthy study for the research council NAVF assessment office on sex differences in the recruitment to higher education institutions. The study, which was Sem's own master's thesis, was supervised by Harriet Holter together with Sigmund Vangsnes, the husband of the administrative leader of the Council of Equal Pay, Kari Vangsnes.³⁵ According to Sem, its conclusion proved the importance of sex roles in relation to sex differences in higher education. In her view, sex roles

motivate a man more than a woman to get higher education, since a good education will make a man better able to fulfil his – according to the sex roles – prescribed duty to support his family, while a woman will have no direct use for a higher education in her sex-role-prescribed duty as a wife and mother.³⁶

Nevertheless, few practical solutions were provided for helping mothers work outside the home. The Council of Equal Pay, or the Norwegian government for that sake, focused on collecting general data on men and women in society and on writing and circulating leaflets to inform young women about their opportunities in higher education and various professional careers.³⁷ In doing so, women were made responsible for breaking the prescribed gender order or established sex role regime. In one of the leaflets published by the council titled *Is the Education and Professional Careers of Young Women out of Step With Society?* (1966), the issue was even addressed as a question of doubt and distrust located in the young women themselves.

Those young girls considering a future marriage, and most of them truly do, will see that the role of housewife limits the opportunity and efforts of women in working life. They can easily become doubtful regarding the value and return of educating themselves and planning for a professional career. There is reason to believe that these considerations result in a limited effort to undergo professional training.³⁸

Despite women's problems in the pursuit of a professional career on their own, due to the dominant notion of womanhood, the portion of working married women and mothers continued to rise, from 10 per cent in 1960 to 30 per cent in 1970.³⁹ At the same time, Norway had considerably fewer women in the workforce compared to Sweden. This was partly due to different attitudes and approaches to childcare in the two countries.

In 1970, 12,000 children were able to attend kindergarten in Norway, whereas Sweden at the same time had room for 100,000 children.⁴⁰ In addition to a rather negative view on childcare within the Norwegian labour organisation LO, this difference mirrored a stronger demand for female labour by the Swedish industrial sector. The Norwegian economy was more based on natural resources and industries linked to these, whereas the Swedish economy was more engaged in the consumer industry. This created more industrial jobs for women, making women's working rights and conditions a key priority of the Swedish Delegation on Gender Equality established in 1972.⁴¹ In Norway, as we have seen, educational supervision of the individual woman was a stronger priority, together with monitoring the social behaviour of men and women in education. In addition to research and gathering information, this would from an early stage make schooling and learning key for the Norwegian approach to gender equality. However, in the other Nordic countries, politicians and bureaucrats also started talking about the need to pay increasing attention to the "cradle of all sex differences in society" – schooling.⁴² As a result, sex role theory in 1969 entered the Nordic scene through a Swedish initiative at the Nordic ministerial meeting of education.

Nordic action for gender equality in circulation

Since the creation of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1952, Nordic cooperation had not only improved on the legislative level but practical solutions were also carved out in fields such as labour and education to coordinate and reconcile the needs of Nordic citizens. If a Finn chose to work in Sweden or a Norwegian wanted to enrol in a Danish higher education institution, he – or she – was to have the same rights and opportunities as at home. In the late 1960s, this made the Nordic meetings of ministers an important arena for coordination and policy-making but also for exchanging ideas and knowledge on how to modernise and plan the Nordic future. In 1969, the Nordic ministers of education met in Helsinki under the leadership of the social democrat Olof Palme. Palme, who at the time served as minister of education until he was elected prime minister in 1973, was already a controversial figure in Swedish politics. However, his appeal for more research and knowhow on issues related to sex roles in Nordic education met with no resistance. Several Nordic countries had already set up institutions or committees on the issue of gender equality or were about to do so. I have already mentioned the Norwegian Council of Equal Pay from 1959, which was renamed the Norwegian Council of Gender Equality in 1972. This, interestingly, was the same year as Sweden and Finland created their respective delegations on gender equality. Whereas the Swedish initiative, as we shall see shortly, was a result of Palme's Nordic request in 1969, the Finnish delegation derived from an initiative of the country's prime minister taken as early as in 1966. In addition, an all-Nordic committee was set up by the Nordic Cultural Commission after Palme's call in Helsinki on behalf of the Nordic Council. It included

representatives from all Nordic countries except Iceland and was led by the Swede Anna-Greta Leijon.

The mandate of the all-Nordic committee was to arrive at different approaches for achieving gender equality in education and schooling. The aim was to establish a common Nordic policy.⁴³ Choosing Leijon to lead this task was no coincidence. Already in 1964, she began studying women's access to paid labour for the local administration in Stockholm. However, compared to the Norwegian Holter, she was more of a politician than a researcher and scientist. In 1973, as she led the labour market board of the Swedish capital, Leijon signed up as a consultative minister in Palme's own government. Her main responsibility was to lead the new delegation on gender equality, a governmental body completely in line with the recommendations already presented by the all-Nordic committee she had led.

The Nordic report *Sex Roles and Education* (1972) was launched less than three years after the committee first met in Stockholm.⁴⁴ By spanning from the symbolic to the practical, it contained elements that were to become crucial for the Norwegian transformation of sex role research into feminist interpretations of the welfare state. This partly had to do with its various proposals and with the Norwegian reception of these. But what did they recommend and how was the Nordic advice received in Norway? Apart from urging "all Nordic ministers of education to draft a decree on gender equality to be passed by the individual states", it recommended the Nordic countries to take women's position into account in development aid programmes.⁴⁵ The committee stated that this was the only way to prevent the Western gender regime from being imposed on the beneficiaries and to make aid beneficial to women. Finally, the committee recommended that a Nordic research team should develop a method for decreasing sex differences in learning. Yet, to achieve this, a full overview of existing research and literature on gender inequalities in schools and tutoring had to be carried out, and a reference group had to be set up to monitor the questions at hand concerning sex roles in education and work. At the same time, the report suggested being open to affirmative action during admission processes to universities and scientific personnel being hired. This was imposed to make women and men more equal in all areas of society, as, it stated, "[the committee] sees a more equal distribution of the sexes in different arenas of society as a prerequisite for a more equal valuation of men and women and change of traditional sex role patterns".⁴⁶ The endorsement was explained further in the report's introduction, stating that "[f]or us in the Nordic countries, equality between the sexes is as much a question of equal opportunities as equal rights" as "all people should have the same possibilities to participate in society."⁴⁷ As sex roles, defined as the social expectations of the individual conditioned by his or her sex, were seen as the major obstacle for equality, the committee arrived at education, since "the educational system is the most efficient instrument for societal change."⁴⁸

As soon as the report *Sex Roles and Education* (1972) was published in Stockholm in the summer of 1972, it began circulating between and within the Nordic

states. In Norway, it first arrived at the desk of the minister of education, social democrat Bjartmar Gjerde, who a few years later, in 1975, claimed that his country had “the best education system in the world”.⁴⁹ However, in relation to the theme of the Nordic report, “sex roles and education”, there was no comparable understanding that being Norwegian was an advantage or an untapped good for the world. This did not imply that the diagnosis of the Nordic countries offered in the report was commonly shared. The notion of sex roles as socially and psychologically embedded was far from general knowledge – and most people had no idea that there was a problem in education that had to be solved. The report was still widely distributed by the Ministry of Education. Universities, university colleges, research councils, administrations, and school boards all received copies, although their readings and reactions differed. The Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (NHH), for instance, did nothing until it, in April 1974, received a letter from the Committee on Gender Equality at the University of Bergen, asking what the school had done “to improve the conditions for women at their school.”⁵⁰ But, even at the main Norwegian university in Oslo, few initiatives were taken apart from registering the tome on 18 January 1973 and filing it at the Office of Journals and Paper Affairs.⁵¹

In 1975, however, the report reappeared, not as a document but as a point of reference in the internal discussion on the condition of women at the University of Oslo itself.⁵² What made the all-Nordic report recirculate within the University of Oslo was the distribution of another report published by the University of Bergen titled *Conclusion No. 1 From the Committee on Gender Equality (Appointed by the Academic Senate 18 May 1973)* (1974). This report soon turned into the Norwegian successor of the Nordic advice given by the Nordic Council and Cultural Committee by readjusting it, so to speak, to a homelier context at the University of Bergen.⁵³ In particular its new distinction between “radical” and “moderate” affirmative action was soon picked up by other public institutions, including higher education institutions, political parties, state departments, and legal scholars and milieus.⁵⁴ In its moderate form, affirmative action meant choosing a person from the underrepresented sex among equally qualified applicants. In its radical form, however, affirmative action meant relying more on the institution’s own need for gender balance.⁵⁵ In the university sphere, the idea was that the institutions themselves had to provide the resources, identify qualified women, coach them, and offer the practical solutions needed to hire them instead of “leaving it up to the individual woman to meet the requirements on her own under the current conditions.”⁵⁶

Unlike the University of Oslo, or the NHH for that matter, the University of Bergen had taken immediate action after receiving the Nordic report on “sex roles and education”. First, a committee was set up during the autumn months of 1972 on the initiative of the dean at the newly established Faculty of Social Science, sociology professor Ørjar Øyen.⁵⁷ Based on this, a formal recommendation was written, which, through a formal approval by the Academic Senate in May 1973, appointed another committee to develop concrete suggestions as to how to improve the situation for women at all levels within the university system. Subsequently, the University of Bergen was not only first to match,

organisationally speaking, the recommendation made by the Nordic council. Its first conclusion, which included a vast empirical mapping of the situation for women in Norwegian higher education, was also soon distributed to other universities via the Norwegian Chancellors Meeting. This led to the University of Oslo but also the University of Tromsø and other higher education institutions appointing their own gender equality committees. In doing so, the debate on female quotas entered the fields of higher education and research. Yet, the feminist worldview and knowledge that helped legitimise this organisational practice caused lively debates and harsh reactions.

At the University of Bergen, the committee on gender equality had justified the use of affirmative action by referring to patriarchal structures in society. In the view of the committee, “[t]here is positive discrimination [to the advantage of men] already, implicitly as well as explicitly.”⁵⁸ The reason was that the dominant understanding of the social role of men and women

in combination with a wide range of practical restrictions regarding women’s professional work, which is an implicit structure of positive discrimination to the advantage of men, leads to a system where most scientific and leading administrative positions are held by men.⁵⁹

In addition, the report concluded that affirmative action had already been used in Norway to secure a more gender-balanced corps of primary school teachers. In other words, men had been accepted to teachers’ colleges with lower grades than women with the aim of training more male teachers. Thus, the report asked rhetorically, the question was “whether gender quotas should *also* be used to the advantage of women?”⁶⁰

The group behind the Bergen report included seven university employees and two students: four men and five women. Three of them – Ida Blom, Karen Helle, and Helga Hernes – were self-declared feminists, all appointed by the Academic Senate and working within different scholarly fields. Two of them, historian Blom and political scientist Hernes, were born outside Norway but keen on developing more knowledge on women’s own lives and experiences – in the past as well as in the present. At the time, Norway had its own version of the women’s liberation movement. The speech presented by American feminist Jo Freeman in Oslo in the autumn of 1970 had lit the flame and different feminist groups emerged soon afterwards. In 1974, when the Bergen report was released, an organisation called the Woman’s Front dominated most places, at least until it was infiltrated by groups on the radical left. How to relate to the established political elite, represented by the Labour Party, was a crucial question for feminists, although it brought disruptive forces to the foreground.

Feminist critique: the new epistemology of the Norwegian welfare state

When the Labour Party in 1973 strategically announced a Gender Equality Act in the autumn of 1973, just ahead of the national election, expectations for

further reforms arose, especially among the growing number of young women affiliated to universities and sympathising with the feminist cause in particular. Since the local election of 1970, more women had entered local politics due to a so-called female coop organised across party lines. Nationally, things were also about to change. Still, the first version of the law on gender equality presented in 1975 lacked the power argued for by many of the young female academics affiliated with the feminist movements. Its third paragraph was at the centre of the debate. The reason was that the first version of the law, launched after the Labour Party returned to political power, only introduced affirmative action in its moderate form. As a result, a group of female students and lawyers at the Faculty of Law at the University of Oslo began campaigning for positive discrimination of women, as they saw women as the real victims of discrimination.⁶¹ Only women had for hundreds of years been structurally and culturally suppressed – not men. This argument, brought forward by students belonging to the legal milieu at Norway's oldest university, was not only based on a feminist conviction. Since 1973, the Faculty of Law had also hosted a women's legal group, in addition to a legal aid clinic for women, where legal principles were confronted with a gendered reality.

As the critical law movement spread to Oslo and Norway in the late 1960s, students set up legal services for ordinary people (i.e., people who did not have the necessary resources to consult a lawyer). The legal clinic for women at the University of Oslo, called JURK, was organised by young female students and scholars identifying with the feminist cause. Under the leadership of Tove Stang Dahl, a young legal scholar and later close friend of Helga Hernes, JURK was to develop into a kind of feminist laboratory. In fact, by providing legal aid to women in need, students received empirical knowledge, thus enabling them to challenge Norwegian law and legal scholarship. Based on this, Stang Dahl coined the term "housewife contract", pointing to the fact that legal principles were not neutral but based on the needs and norms of men. Hence, she argued, married women were in Norway legally inferior and vulnerable compared to men. And this was legal insight that to a large extent turned into the vehicle for transforming sex role theory into a feminist interpretation of the Norwegian welfare state, supported as it was by women's research in other disciplines.

In Norway as well as in the rest of the world, alternative epistemologies emerged in the wake of the social forces spurred by identity politics and women's liberation. History, psychology, sociology, literature, and political science were the disciplines wherein the feminist turn had the greatest impact. In these knowledge fields, female students, individually and in groups, started collecting data and analysing society from the perspective that women were suppressed structurally and individually and that mainstream university knowledge helped maintain this suppression. Even theology students stressed the need for new and feminist guidelines. In 1975, a female student at the University of Oslo said that a feminist conviction was seldom the reason why students like her decided to study theology. Simultaneously, she said, there "was no reason that it [i.e., the study of theology] cannot transform into feminism over time."⁶²

Throughout the 1970s, the mobilisation for feminist knowledge influenced the overall field of Norwegian research, including the national research priorities expressed by the authorities. The research councils, more than the Central Committee of Norwegian Research (CNR), had already in the winter of 1973 for the first time addressed the issue of gender after receiving the Nordic report on sex roles and education. Whereas the CNR lost much of its influence already around 1970, the research council NAVF increased its ability to play a more independent political role. By reorganising and dividing the council into four independent units for the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and medicine, it became more accountable for its own operations according to both its own and political priorities. Besides, the organisation grew rapidly. In order to handle this, new administrative resources were made available to the increasing numbers of applications meeting the annual deadlines of the council each year – and for handling those who had already received their funding to develop new insights and knowledge in their respective fields. For each of the four individual councils of the NAVF, female administrative secretaries worked full time to support the councils' work led by men.

During the 1970s, the composition of the boards of the Norwegian research councils changed more to the advantage of female scientists. The councils in the social sciences and humanities, in particular, underwent a demographic change. And unsurprisingly, it was here that the first adjustment to the feminist demand for new knowledge had the strongest impact, again based on the Nordic report on sex roles. Distributed equally to all councils, only two of them – the councils for the social sciences and humanities – took the time to discuss its content, which in the longer run helped transform sex role theory into feminist interpretations of the welfare state. The first and far most important decision was taken by the council of social science in February 1973, as it agreed to initiate a public inquiry on Nordic possibilities and needs for research on education and sex roles. The second important decision was the determination of the council in the humanities to support the decision taken by the council in the social sciences. However, the public inquiry never materialised in the way the two councils initially envisioned with eyes for Nordic needs. Instead, the administrative secretaries of the two councils invited young women to an evening meeting at NAVF's main office in Oslo. The invitation addressed "all women interested in the women's cause", and during the evening discussion, the audience arrived at the conclusion that "new knowledge is needed to untangle the mechanism of woman's suppression."⁶³ In the form of a short note, written after the evening meeting was over, the appeal to intensify feminist research was communicated back to the leaders of the two research councils, suggesting that they should organise a cross-disciplinary seminar for researchers and students on women's role in society in 1974.

The short note circulated after the secret feminist meeting at the NAVF resulted in a common agreement on a cross-disciplinary women's conference. Albeit members of the two councils at first insisted on keeping a Nordic profile on things, everything changed when the secretary general of the

Norwegian research council NAVF in 1974 received a letter from the Norwegian Council of Gender Equality with Labour politician Reiulf Steen as head of the board. Due to the letter, the council of social science research decided to expedite the public inquiry they had already agreed upon. Moreover, in the winter months of 1975, which introduced the international women's year, a group of young female scientists accompanied by two older members began examining the possibilities and needs for social science research on women. Led by a young psychology graduate, Hanne Haavind, the working group concentrated on the Norwegian situation. Consequently, the Nordic perspective was left behind, and in its final report, simply called *Research on Women* (1976), a whole range of new initiatives were launched to develop new knowledge on women's situation in Norway.⁶⁴ The most innovative of these was the suggestion to create a secretary for feminist research.⁶⁵ The intention was not only to inspire researchers to start documenting and explaining why and how women's inferiority and lack of power was being reproduced in Norwegian society.⁶⁶ By offering new analytical categories and perspectives in relation to the study of human society, the social sciences were also to be renewed from within.

Concluding remarks

At first, the idea of having a secretariat for feminist research within the NAVF met criticism, but it was nevertheless introduced in 1977 for a trial period of five years. An administrative secretary was hired full time to coordinate the work and edit the monthly newsletter of the secretariat, called *News on Women's Research*.⁶⁷ In addition, Helga Hernes, still working at the University of Bergen, was elected head of the board of the secretariat. At that time, Hernes had moved up in the academic world and was, from 1976, a member of the council for social research in NAVF. Finally, Harriet Holter, serving as professor of social psychology at the University of Oslo, was hired part time to supervise graduates in women's studies. All activities were organised from the facilities of the secretariat, in the old "milk shop" across the headquarters of the NAVF.

In 1980, it was decided that the Secretariat for Feminist Research was to be extended for another five years, financed by the Department of Administration and Consumer Affairs under the leadership of social democrat Sissle Rønbeck. The argument behind this extension was the central role of the secretariat in renewing the Norwegian welfare state. The Equal Status Act passed by the Norwegian parliament in 1978 served as the decisive element for this choice, as it made the state itself accountable for changing society to benefit women more. In the final version of the act, paragraph three had legalised positive discrimination against women with the aim of creating a more woman-friendly society. Or, as the law text stated, "different treatment of men and women that furthers gender equality is not in conflict with the law."⁶⁸ For the research council NAVF, this decision changed the organisational status and mandate of the secretariat.

Starting in 1981, the Secretariat for Feminist Research was to become a more integrated part of Norway's national research efforts by not only supporting and organising women's research but also helping women qualify for scientific work. Helga Hernes again assumed a central role, now as head of research. Over the next seven years, she was to serve as chief editor of 17 volumes in the book series "Women's Lifecycles and Living Conditions," presenting empirical evidence on the modern Norwegian welfare state from a feminist perspective.⁶⁹ Her own book, *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* (1987), which I referred to in the introduction of this chapter, was not formally part of the series. However, the book complemented the work edited by Hernes on behalf of the Secretariat for Feminist Research by offering a meta-analysis of the current state of Nordic women. It did so by showing how women had mobilised over time and were finally able to enter the headquarters of the welfare state (i.e., parliaments, corporate channels, and state bureaucracies). What the book did not mention was the importance and crucial role of female scholars like herself by producing evidence for a particular Scandinavian version of state feminism, characterised by an "interplay between [feminist] agitation from below and [state] integration policy from above."⁷⁰ In this picture, the Secretariat for Feminist Research was the ultimate *lieu de savoir* of state feminism in its role as a bridge between feminist scholars and the Norwegian state. The Nordic context was still decisive for what has been argued in this chapter: that over the period 1960–1980 sex role research and theory changed into feminist interpretations of the Norwegian and Scandinavian welfare state by circulating between different social spheres and adjusting to the university sector at a time when many of its young women sympathised with the feminist cause.

Notes

- 1 Helga Maria Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press/Scandinavian Library, 1987), 9, 11.
- 2 Hege Skjeie, "Hva er statsfeminisme?" in *Krysningspunkter: Likestillingspolitikk i et flerkulturelt Norge*, eds. Cecilie Thun and Beret Bråten (Oslo: Akademika Forlag, 2013), 35.
- 3 Ibid., 34.
- 4 The research upon which the chapter is based is related to a larger project on the history of the Norwegian research councils. For additional information, see Thomas Brandt, Mats Ingulstad, Eirinn Larsen, Marte Mangset, and Vera Schwach, *Avhengig av forskning: Historien til de norske forskningsrådene, 1946–2016* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2019).
- 5 Christian Jacob, "Lieux de Savoir: Places and Spaces in the History of Knowledge", *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (2017): 86, 88.
- 6 Philipp Sarasin, "Was ist Wissensgeschichte?" *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 36 (2011): 166 (emphasis added).
- 7 Quoted from Øystein Elgarøy, "'Tippelunchen' på Continental – hvordan forskningsråd blir til", *Forskningspolitikk* 2 (1995): 12 (author's translation).
- 8 Eirinn Larsen, "Rådsetablering til grunnforskningens nytte", in *Avhengig av forskning: De norske forskningsrådenes historie 1946–2016*, eds. Thomas Brandt et al. (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2019), 96; Kjølvi Egeland, "Forskning – kulturgode eller produksjonsfaktor? En studie av de politiske partienes syn på forskning etter 1945" (MA diss., University of Oslo, 1973), 43; Stig Kvaal, *Forskning og industripolitikk: Om gjennombruddet for forskning*

- i industripolitikken, STS-Arbeidsnotat 10/93 (Trondheim: University of Trondheim, 1993), 18.
- 9 Fredrik Engelstad, "Kunnskap og refleksjon. Institutt for samfunnsforskning 1950–2000", in *Kunnskap og refleksjon: 50 år samfunnsforskning*, ed. Fredrik Engelstad (Oslo: ISF Rapport 2, 2000), 5–6.
 - 10 The University of Oslo received a social science faculty in 1963, while the University of Bergen launched its faculty ten years later.
 - 11 Edmund Dahlström, Harriet Holter, Sverre Brun-Gulbrandsen, Per Olav Tiller, and Gösta Dahlström, *Kvinnors liv och arbete* (Stockholm: Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle [SNS], 1962), 14.
 - 12 In the 1960s, psychologists Per Olav Tiller and Sverre Brun-Gulbrandsen were also at the ISF, working on issues similar to those discussed by Holter and Grønseth.
 - 13 Dahlström et al., "Innledning", in *Kvinnors liv och arbete*, eds. Dahlström et al. (Stockholm: Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle [SNS], 1962), 14.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Cyntia Fuchs Epstein, "Book Reviews [*Sex Roles and Social Structures*. By Harriet Holter, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970]", *Acta Sociologica* 14, no. 1/2 (1971): 130.
 - 16 Harriet Holter, *Sex Roles and Social Structure* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970).
 - 17 Dahlström, "Introduction", in *Kvinnors liv och arbete*, eds. Dahlström et al. (Stockholm: Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle [SNS], 1962), 15.
 - 18 Harriet Holter, "Kjønnsroller og sosial struktur", in *Kvinnors liv och arbete*, eds. Dahlström et al. (Stockholm: Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle [SNS], 1962), 107.
 - 19 In 1974, Harriet Holter republished her contribution to the Swedish-Norwegian book on women's lives and work. The reason given was that the original book was sold out, and despite being replaced in an English version and later a Swedish version, it was difficult to get a hold of it in Norway. See Harriet Holter, *Kvinnors liv og arbeid* (Oslo, Bergen, and Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), 5.
 - 20 Epstein, "Book Reviews [*Sex Roles and Social Structures*]", 130.
 - 21 Karin Widerberg, "Harriet Holter: A Pioneer in Gender Studies and Sociology", *Acta Sociologica* 43, no. 4 (2000): 415.
 - 22 "The American Woman's Dilemma", *Life*, 16 June 1947, 101.
 - 23 K.A. Cuordilone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 140.
 - 24 Margrete Bonnevie, *Fra mannssamfunn til menneskesamfunn* (Oslo: J. W. Cappelens Forlag, 1955).
 - 25 Gro Hagemann, "Tøffelheter og karrierekvinner: Etterkrigstidens kjønns(u)orden", in *Feminisme og historieskriving: Inntrykk fra en reise* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2004), 146–147.
 - 26 Ibid., 168–169.
 - 27 Eva Moberg, "Kvinnans villkorlige frigivning", in *Unga Liberaler: Nio inlägg i idédebatten*, ed. Hans Hederberg (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1961); Eva Moberg, *Kvinnor och människor* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1962).
 - 28 Quoted in Hagemann, "Tøffelheter og karrierekvinner", 150.
 - 29 Iceland was in 1958 the first Nordic country to ratify the ILO convention on equal pay, whereas Denmark ratified the convention in 1960, Sweden in 1962, and Finland in 1963. The International Labour Organization, Ratification of C100 – Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), Date of entry into force 23 May 1953, see accessed 3 April 2019, www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO::P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312245.
 - 30 Mari Haugland, *Tvetydig likelønn. Norges ratifisering av ILO-konvensjon nr. 100 i 1959* (Master thesis: University of Oslo, 2018).
 - 31 Author unknown, *Kvinnens plass er – hvor?* (Oslo: Det norske arbeiderpartiet, 1965), 113; Doris H. Linder, *Aase Lionæs: En politisk biografi* (Oslo: Det norske arbeiderpartiet, 1999), 172–173.

- 32 Eirinn Larsen, "Internasjonal forskningspolitikk i norsk støpning", in *Avhengig av forskning. De norske forskningsrådenes historie*. In Thomas Brandt, Mats Ingulstad, Eirinn Larsen, Marte Mangset og Vera Schwach (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2019), 166.
- 33 Eirinn Larsen, "Fra styringsoptimisme til sektorisering". In Thomas Brandt et al. 172.
- 34 At the time, Norway had four national research councils: NAVF (1949), the National Research Council for Technology and Science (1946), the National Research Council for Agricultural Science (1949), and the National Research Council for Fishery Science (1972). A fifth research council was created in the 1980s for applied social sciences. In 1993, all councils merged into one – the Norwegian Research Council.
- 35 Tove Thagaard Sem, *Kjønnsroller og studiemotivering: En studiet av kjønnsforskjeller i rekruttering til høyere utdanning* (Oslo: Norges allmennvitenskapelige forskningsråd Utredningssavdeling, 1967).
- 36 Ibid., 131.
- 37 In the 1970s, 30 per cent of married women were registered as wage earners in the national statistics, whereas it had been 10 per cent ten years earlier. Hilde Danielsen, "Det lange 70-tallet", in *Norsk likestillingshistorie 1814–2013*, eds. Hilde Danielsen, Eirinn Larsen, and Ingeborg W. Ovesen (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2015), 159.
- 38 Author unknown, *Er pikenes utdanning i utakt med samfunnsutviklingen?* (Oslo: Likelønnsrådet, 1966), 10 (author's translation).
- 39 Danielsen, "Det lange 70-tallet", 159.
- 40 Ibid., 161.
- 41 "Arbejdet med ligestillingsproblemer i de nordiske lande", attachment 1 in *Betænkning vedrørende Kvindernes stilling i samfundet. Slutrapport afgivet af den af statsministeren nedsatte kommission vedrørende kvindernes stilling i samfundet*, Betænkning No. 715 (Copenhagen, 1974), 105–109, accessed 2 July 19, www.kvinfo.dk/kilde.php?kilde=636.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 108–109; Nordiska rådet, Nordiska kultursekretariatet, *Könsroller och utbildning*, Nordisk utredningsserie nr. 6/72 (Stockholm: Nordiska rådet, Nordiska kultursekretariatet, 1972), 9.
- 44 Nordiska rådet, Nordiska kultursekretariatet, *Könsroller och utbildning*, 9.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid., 15 (author's translation).
- 47 Ibid., 10 (author's translation).
- 48 Ibid., 11 (author's translation).
- 49 Kim Helsvig, *Reform og rutine: Kunnskapsdepartementets historie 1945–2017* (Oslo: Pax, 2017), 70.
- 50 The central archive of NHH: Letter from the principal of NHH, Olav Harlad Svendsen, to the Committee on Gender Equality, University of Bergen, dated 16 April 1974. This was an answer to the letter from the Committee on Gender Equality, University of Bergen, by Assistant Professor Ida Blom, dated 26 March 1974.
- 51 Eirinn Larsen, "Jubileumshistorie nedenfra–UiO og nye studentgrupper", in *Universitetet i Oslo: Samtidshistoriske perspektiver*, eds. Peder Anker, Magnus Gulbrandsen, Eirinn Larsen, Johannes W. Lovhaug, and Bent Sofus Tranøy (Oslo: Unipub, 2011), 66–67. My copy of the report, borrowed from the university library, to a large extent verifies this by its fading stamp on the cover sheet, in combination with partly unspoiled and unbroken pages.
- 52 The central archive of the University of Oslo: 0008.8–011, Notat Arbeidet med likestilling mellom kvinner og menn, dated 8 March 1976. The Gender Equality Committee at the University of Oslo was approved by the Academic Senate on 8 March 1976.
- 53 *Innstilling nr. 1 fra Likestillingskomiteen (oppnevnt av Det akademiske kollegium 18. Mai 1973)*, University of Bergen, June 1974.
- 54 *Aftenposten*, 9 May 1980.
- 55 *Innstilling nr. 1*, 47.

- 56 Ibid. (author's translation).
- 57 Ibid., 1 (author's translation). Interview with Helga Hernes 23 January 2017.
- 58 *Innstilling nr. 1*, 49 (author's translation).
- 59 Ibid. (author's translation).
- 60 Ibid., 50 (author's translation, italics in original).
- 61 Tove Stang Dahl, *Juss og juks: En arbeidsbok i likestilling* (Oslo: Pax, 1975).
- 62 *Kvinner og klær*, 18 September 1975. Referred to in Larsen, "Jubileumshistorie nedenfra–UiO og nye studentgrupper", 62.
- 63 Eirinn Larsen, "Sekretariat for norsk statsfeminisme", in *Er pikenes utdanning i utakt med samfunnsutviklingen?* (Oslo: Likelønnsrådet, 1966), 271.
- 64 Norges almenvitenskapelige forskning, *Forskning om kvinner. En utredning om muligheter og behov for samfunnsvitenskapelige forskning om kvinners livsforhold og stilling i samfunnet*, Utarbeidet av et utvalg nedsatt av Rådet for samfunnsvitenskapelig forskning i NAVF (Oslo, Bergen, and Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1976).
- 65 Ibid., 273–274.
- 66 Beatrice Halsaa, "Feministisk forskning – feministisk politikk", *Kvinneforskning* 27, no. 1 (2003): 2.
- 67 The Norwegian title was *Nytt om kvinneforskning*.
- 68 Lov om likestilling mellom kjønnene, approved 9 June 1978, enacted on 15 March 1979, § 3 (author's translation).
- 69 Helga Hernes, ed., *Kvinnens levekår og livsløp* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1981–1987).
- 70 Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power*, 11, 15.