

---

## **Perspectives on gender studies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden**

*Edited by Rita Bencivenga<sup>1</sup>*

**Participants:** Pauline Stoltz, Christine M. Jacobsen, Lena Gemzöe and Margaretha Fahlgren<sup>2</sup>.

### **Introduction**

In this fourth round table, four researchers answer questions to assess the state of the art and future perspectives in gender studies related to three countries: Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The researchers have chosen to debate different perspectives that will raise readers' interest, no matter their status be it teacher or learner.

The distinctive feature of this round table is the interest the state has in gender studies and its support, as seen through the approaches in the three countries regarding institutionalisation. For those who live in countries that do not yet support gender studies, or in countries that have only recently begun a similar process, the answers

---

<sup>1</sup> LEGS - (Laboratoire d'études de genre et de sexualité) (CNRS/Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis et Université Paris Ouest

<sup>2</sup> **Pauline Stoltz:** FREIA, Center for Gender Research, Aalborg University, Denmark  
**Christine M. Jacobsen:** Centre for Women's and Gender Research (SKOK), Norway  
**Lena Gemzöe,** Gender Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden  
**Margaretha Fahlgren,** Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University, Sweden

given by the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish colleagues provide interesting insight. This may seem as a jump into a parallel universe, a universe in which areas such as childcare, education and politics have already been influenced for some time by a palpable presence of ideas put forward through gender studies.

In gender research, it is crucial to have access to a variety of role models; to be able to identify new and innovative research fields; to challenge societal norms and the distribution of power. The Nordic colleagues speak openly about their awareness of representing various role models for gender equality, through bottom-up approaches such as in Denmark, or a top-down support of the institutionalization of gender equality such as in Norway and in Sweden.

When one reads that the equality debate in Denmark “is more or less dead”; that Norway is implementing a strategy of gender mainstreaming that follows from academically established gender research; and, that in Sweden “the current government and five of the major political parties call themselves feminist”, we are confronted with experiences that are far from the state of things in many other countries.

The numerous references to previous round tables help in widening thought beyond the Scandinavian countries for anyone interested in widening their horizons on the topic.

## **1. What is the state of gender studies in your Country/Region - strengths and weaknesses?**

**Pauline Stoltz** (Denmark) - Denmark has produced internationally recognized gender researchers such as Birte Siim and Dorte Staunæs, Nina Lykke and Drude Dahlerup (the latter two presently based in Sweden), and Danish gender research has a clear voice in Nordic gender research. This despite the observation that, in comparison to those of its Nordic neighbors Sweden and Norway, Danish gender studies are less institutionalized. Danish gender research enjoys a strong tradition and a high standard of working within and across universities, in disciplinary and interdisciplinary research groups and networks. As in other countries, this research is mainly based within the social sciences and the humanities.

There are few universities in Denmark, notably the University of Copenhagen, Roskilde University, the University of Southern Denmark (main campus in Odense), Aarhus University and Aalborg University. As a result of the activism of gender scholars in the 1970s, since the 1980s Denmark has been in charge of the national *Coordination for Gender Research*, based at the University of Copenhagen. The Coordination for Gender Research hosts the editorial office of the scientific journal *Women, Gender & Research* (<http://koensforskning.soc.ku.dk/english/>). Other networks are affiliated with *The association for gender research in Denmark* <http://koensforskning.dk/> (in Danish only). Mention can also be made of the Copenhagen based *KVINFO - the Danish Centre for Gender, Equality and Diversity*, which has existed since 1987. KVINFO is a self-governing institution under the Danish Ministry of Culture; it has its own management board and hosts an online expert database and a library (<http://kvinfo.org/frontpage>).

Apart from these national initiatives, two centres for gender research located in Denmark can be pointed out as particularly advanced. The oldest is *FREIA*, Centre for Gender Research, which was founded in 1990 as an interdisciplinary research centre at Aalborg University. This centre is based on 15 years of work in the field of gender studies at Aalborg University (for more details, see for example *FREIA's Text series No. 2 / 1992 Feminist Research* and <http://www.freia.cgs.aau.dk> ). Related to *FREIA* since 2011 is *EDGE*, which is an interdisciplinary research and information centre at Aalborg University, whose purpose is to support and stimulate research within the areas of equality, diversity and gender. *EDGE* is in many ways 'the shop' of *FREIA* (<http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/research-groups/edge>). A second research centre is *CKMM*, the Centre for Gender, Power and Diversity at Roskilde University (<http://www.ruc.dk/en/research/search-research-centers/ckmm/>), which is organized as a highly active university-based network and has many collaborative research activities.

As a consequence of the general lack of institutionalization of gender studies, Denmark has *no full gender studies program* in the social sciences or in the humanities or, for that matter, within any other faculty at any academic level, neither in Danish nor in English. However, *elective* courses on gender issues can be found at most Danish universities. These are offered in both Danish and English. Since 2014 there has been

*one master's program with a specialization course in gender.* This is Global Gender Studies, which is a two-year specialization of the master's program in Development and International Relations at Aalborg University. It is taught and coordinated by researchers from the FREIA gender research centre (<http://www.en.aau.dk/education/master/development-international-relations/specialisations/global-gender-studies>).

The good news is that there is a growing interest among Danish and international students in working with gender issues in their MA- projects, especially at the universities of Aalborg and Roskilde. The bad news is that Danish students with an interest in gender issues tend to move abroad after their BA exams for their MA and PhD in gender studies. Such programs are found, for instance, at Lund University in Sweden, which offers a Master of Science program in Social Studies of Gender, or at Linköping University in the same country, which, in addition to a BA and an MA, also offers a PhD program in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies.

**Christine M. Jacobsen** (Norway) - In Norway as elsewhere in Europe the establishment of women's studies in the academia via the Social Sciences and the Humanities occurred in conjunction with the women's liberation movement of the 1970's (Griffin 2005b, Wærness 2013). During the 1970's and 80's, centres for women's research were established at the 4 Universities of Bergen (UiB), Oslo (UiO), Trondheim (NTNU) and Tromsø (UiT). In the 1990s there was a shift towards using the wording 'gender' rather than 'women', and the research centres changed their names into 'gender research', or, alternatively, 'women's and gender research'. This change occurred parallel to women's and gender studies being increasingly institutionalized within the universities as a field for research and teaching in its own right, and its meaning and consequences are still debated. In later years, other research and teaching institutions also developed infrastructures for gender research, including the Network for Gender Research at the University of Stavanger in 2009 and networks at several university colleges.

At the universities, the centres for women's and gender research developed as multidisciplinary sites of knowledge production, based mainly in the Social Sciences

and the Humanities. Gender research also developed as an integrated part of these disciplines within the traditional departments. Legal studies also gave an important contribution through the so-called Kvinneretten in Oslo (Wærness 2013). The natural sciences have so far been less present in women's and gender studies, but interesting attempts at including biology have been made among others in feminist reconceptualisations of the body and problematisation of the nature – nurture divide. Variation is great in terms of theoretical approaches and empirical focus in Norwegian gender research. A notable shift has been made from focusing on women and gender – which were in themselves heterogeneous and varied fields of study - towards including men and masculinities and the intersection of gender with other social categories, notably sexuality, class and ethnicity.

Gender studies are now taught at all levels at Norwegian Universities and University Colleges, but most institutions provide degrees only at some levels. The centres have tended to follow a double approach, attempting both to advance gender perspectives within the disciplines and establishing separate structures for interdisciplinary gender studies at the universities and at the national level. Initially, women's and gender studies courses were offered only within the frame of the disciplines, but gradually the centres for women's and gender studies have developed their own teaching programs. Questions as to the legitimacy of teaching interdisciplinary gender studies still arise occasionally, and the structure of the universities as well as the criteria for evaluation are challenging for interdisciplinary programs in general. The legitimacy of gender studies was strengthened when The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) established a National Council for Gender Research in 2002. In 1997 the centres at UiO, UiB, NTNU and UiT started to cooperate on organising Ph.D. courses, a cooperation that is being further developed in the current National Research School for Gender Research. In 2002 Norwegian gender researchers also established their own Association for Women's and Gender Research (FOKK, which recently changed its name to Association for Gender Research). The Association runs a biannual conference. There is also an institutionalized collaboration at the Nordic level. Since 1995 Oslo has hosted the NIKK (Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research, later the Nordic Gender Institute). The National Research School for Gender Research is affiliate with

Swedish *InterGender*, and the *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* (Nora) provides an important platform for circulating gender research in the Nordic countries and beyond.

In her comparison of the institutionalization of women's studies in 11 European countries, Griffin (2005 a: 4) concludes that the degree of institutionalization is related to the equal opportunities policies in that country. In Norway, state feminism has been an important dimension of the national political context for the development of gender studies. The concept of state feminism was introduced by Hernes (1987) to refer to how the Scandinavian welfare states have furthered feminism "from above" through women-friendly welfare and gender equality policies in conjunction with "feminization from below" and feminization of the welfare state professions (Holst 2005). State feminism has created a structure of possibilities for women's and gender studies to develop and be institutionalized in the academia, while gender research has importantly influenced state politics in areas such as childcare, education and politics.

In conjunction with state efforts to develop knowledge-based gender equality policies, The Research Council of Norway (RCN), which channels funding from state departments, was crucial to establishing gender as a research field, notably through funding a program in gender research. In 1998, a national information centre for gender research (KILDEN) was established with funding from the RCN. KILDEN owns the *Journal of Gender Research*, which also receives funding from the RCN. The Program for Gender Research was discontinued in 2012 and in its wake the RCN launched a program called "Gender Balance in Senior Positions and Research Management ". This new program is an "applied" program that has as its explicit goal to promote gender balance at the senior level in Norwegian research through new knowledge, learning and innovation.

The close imbrication of Norwegian gender research with state feminism and policy making has spurred criticism and controversy within the field. Empirical debates about whether and to what extent the welfare state *is* women friendly attest to these internal tensions, as do the controversies spurred by the influence of post-structuralism and its critical appreciation of state power as disciplining and normalising (see Jegerstedt 2010). One criticism that has been reinforced with the discontinuation of the gender

research program in the RCN and the launch of BALANSE is that "likestilling"<sup>3</sup> has come to occupy a dominant and naturalized position. As Danielsen et al. (2013) have shown, the image of Norway as a pioneer of "likestilling" has become crucial to the country's self-representation both domestically and internationally. When coupled to the "methodological nationalism" that still characterises much of the humanities and social sciences, the focus on – and institutional support for research on – gender equality risks marginalizing other central questions in gender studies.

**Lena Gemzöe and Margaretha Fahlgren** (Sweden) - In Sweden gender research is conducted at all universities and university colleges. The state of gender studies in Sweden is probably unique in at least two aspects: the high level of organization of gender research, and the establishment and growth of gender studies as a discipline in its own right.

The history of gender studies in Sweden goes back to the end of the 1970's, when gender research associations, (Fora for women researchers and women's studies) , were formed at the largest universities. The Fora received state support and in 1980 Centres for women's studies, which later changed their name into Centres for Gender Research, were established. The Centres were important in stimulating cross-disciplinary research in the field, and often assumed the broader tasks to serve the whole university, offering courses to students from almost all disciplines. Besides the cross- disciplinary centres, strong disciplinary gender research developed in most universities within traditional departments, as integral part of the relevant fields.

By the end of the 1990s, the discipline *Genusvetenskap* (e.g. "Gender science") was established, and today undergraduate, master and PhD programs in *Genusvetenskap* are offered at almost all universities and colleges in the country. This means that the field of gender studies can develop without being dependent on research policies and resources within other disciplines.

The interest in, and support for, gender studies on the part of the state, has continued partly because it is seen as valuable in fostering gender equality in higher education as well as in society in general. In 1998, a *National Council for Gender Research*,

---

<sup>3</sup> Meaning "equality".

(*Nationella Sekretariatet för Genusforskning*), was established at the University of Gothenburg, also hosting an important national archive (Kvinnsam). The task of the Council is to promote and inform about Swedish gender research, and recently it has also been assigned the task to support state authorities working for gender equality. Finally, it has taken over the tasks of its Norwegian equivalent, NIKK.

Besides the Council, gender scholars today have an association of their own, the National Association of Gender Researchers, with individual membership. This association is important for strengthening cooperation between gender researchers and undertaking joint actions when needed.

The existence of gender studies both as a discipline in its own and as a multidisciplinary field is often referred to as the “two legs” of gender research. Since the end of the 90’s, different universities have taken different paths in organizing gender research with respect to the “two legs”. At some universities, the Centres hosting multidisciplinary research have continued to be important and developed into strong research environments (see below), whereas, for instance, Gothenburg University dissolved the Centre at an early stage, and at Stockholm University the dissolution of the Centre was required to permit the launching of PhD programs in *Genusvetenskap*. Lund University, which has the oldest gender research environment in Sweden, has also transformed the centre into a department of *Genusvetenskap*, which however collaborates with other departments in the area of master programs.

In recent years, the universities of Gothenburg and Stockholm have created new organizational frames for the coexistence of the “two legs”. GiG, Gender Research in Gothenburg, promotes collaboration in gender research between disciplines across the whole university. The Gender Academy at Stockholm University headed by *Genusvetenskap* is a collaborative network connecting twelve departments with strong gender research and a network of more than fifty PhD students. One of the aims of the Gender Academy has been to establish gender research as one of Stockholm University’s leading research areas, which was achieved in 2014.

It is of strategic importance to assert the quality of gender research and make it visible within universities. One reason is that the universities’ own research funding is gradually becoming more based on evaluations, a development that has come rather late

in Sweden compared to other countries. However, external funding continues to be vital to the development of gender research. The Swedish Research Council has played a crucial role in this respect, in particular through its expert group on gender research, dedicated to issues such as how to create fair evaluations and forms of funding that could benefit the field. An important initiative in this respect was the funding of gender research centres, called “Centres of Gender Excellence”, at the universities of Uppsala, Linköping and Umeå in 2006. The funding was given to centres with the potential to become international leaders in their field of research and the three internationally competitive research environments were awarded SEK 27 million each over a 5-year period starting in 2007. Research at the centres was evaluated twice during this period. The second evaluation, carried out in 2011, came to very positive conclusions. The grants had been crucial for developing the centres to a level of excellence. They had become both nationally and internationally renowned environments for gender research. The funds had enabled researchers to pursue work that was both of higher quality and of greater international impact than work that would have been carried out in a more individualized context.

The internationalization of Swedish Gender Research has also been promoted by funding networks for international research exchange (e.g. programs on gender and religion at Stockholm University and gender and medicine at Umeå University).

A very important collaborative project, financed by the Swedish Research Council, has been the research school *InterGender*, hosted by Linköping’s University. *InterGender* is a research school for interdisciplinary gender studies that establishes interconnections between Swedish PhD programs as well as four major European research schools. It involves all gender departments and centres in Sweden and serves to gather the country’s PhD students on a regular basis.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the gender studies departments have also been successful in receiving funding in general calls. A recent example is a large collaborative project at the gender studies department of Lund University taking a comparative and international perspective on women’s organizations and feminist activism.

It can be concluded that it is of the utmost importance that research councils and state authorities in Sweden have long term strategies for the development of gender research. However, in the latest research plan from the government, gender research is scarcely mentioned. This needs to be changed, especially since research policies from the EU demand that gender perspectives should be included in all research. Sweden, which in many ways is a role model for gender equality, should also be in the lead promoting gender research. As mentioned earlier, gender research has influenced and developed new knowledge in many research fields. To give some examples: the literary canon has changed since it has been scrutinized from a gender perspective. Gender research has also changed the way historical research is conducted and research in medicine and biology has benefitted from gender perspectives which have revealed gender bias in the understanding of research results. It is important that the inclusion of gender perspectives is developed in all disciplines, i.e. that gender research keeps its “two legs”. This means that the discipline itself needs to be strengthened, making cutting edge research, while, at the same time, disciplinary gender perspectives are developed.

## **2. In your opinion, what are the emergent challenges in your Country / Region?**

**Pauline Stoltz** (Denmark) - One of the most serious challenges to gender studies in Denmark concerns the observation that universities in general are experiencing serious funding cuts. These cuts affect both national and European funding. Achieving full financing for PhD students is particularly difficult.

Most Danish universities are financially dependent on the Ministry of Education. This Ministry governs in great detail, which was recently demonstrated when the current government chose to examine the size of all educational programs and enforced set student numbers for each program. As a consequence, an initiative by Aalborg University and Roskilde University to start a full joint MA gender program, or possibly a program organized only by Aalborg University, proved impossible because there were already too many master programs in other disciplines. This resulted in the strategy of

starting a *specialization course* in Global Gender Studies at Aalborg University, as mentioned above.

The funding of PhD students is traditionally acquired from research councils and faculties/departments. Due to general financial cuts at universities, the latter is increasingly rare, compared to previous periods in history, and the national research councils are increasingly inclined to either remove the possibility to apply for PhDs or focus solely on public-private partnerships. In this context, the focus on STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is markedly increasing, both in the councils and at the universities, to the detriment of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH).

Generally speaking, the traditional focus on SSH in gender studies makes it increasingly difficult to acquire external funding for a PhD in gender studies. The same applies to broader gender research projects. The dearth of council members with competence in and knowledge of gender issues in the national research councils is also a sensitive issue in this context, and a recurring point of criticism from the Danish gender studies community.

Having said this, I must admit that I personally took up a position in Denmark a few years ago after having worked in Sweden for twenty years. One of the reasons for my decision was that reliance upon external funding for research is not as prevalent in Denmark as it is in Sweden. As an associate professor I have up to 40-50 percent of research time, which I could compare to 20 percent in Sweden. Thus, the possibility to conduct research without financial constraints on the content is comparatively higher in Denmark. This also explains why Danish gender researchers in general are able to produce as much interesting and, above all, critical research as is the case; this seems increasingly important in these days and age.

Another challenge is related to the content of gender research. The ties between activism and academia were strong in the 1970s and 1980s, which was due, in part, to the comparatively strong feminist movements in Denmark, seen in a Scandinavian perspective. In a former comparative study of the relationship between gender, politics and democracy in the Nordic countries (Bergqvist et al. 1999), scholars found important national variations concerning models of feminist mobilization, and it was concluded

that there is one Nordic gender model with different gender profiles, the Danish being the most bottom-up, whereas the Swedish and Norwegian profiles are based upon a high degree of institutionalization of gender equality (Bergqvist et.al. 1999, 286-89).

Since the 1990s, these ties have become increasingly weaker as a result of the general weakening of feminist movements. Ten years ago, Hilde Rømer Christensen, longtime coordinator at the Coordination for Gender Research, claimed that Danish research was more theoretical (and interestingly also more apt to adopt queer research, for instance) and less focused on the immediate political use of gender research than was the case in Norway and Sweden, where the institutionalization of gender research was linked more closely to state feminism (Rømer Christensen 2003: 92).

Drude Dahlerup recently pointed out, in a comparative study of the Danish and Swedish equality debates, how the equality debate in Denmark is more or less dead, whereas great progress is being made in Sweden, where the current government and five of the major political parties call themselves feminist. According to Dahlerup, this stands in stark contrast to the situation in Denmark, where 'feminism' is a taboo word. Today, feminist engagement in Denmark is more likely to be found within the labour movement than in the women's movement (Dahlerup 2015).

However, this rather outspoken opinion about Danish feminism could be nuanced by considering more carefully the arena in focus (parliament, the labor movement, civil society, social media or everyday life and the actor in focus (age, migration, ethnicity/'race', class). The theme of discussion may also play a role (women as board members; embodiment); it might be claimed, for instance, that young activists typically use social media to discuss body matters. A debate about the future of feminism, which was organized in Copenhagen in March 2015<sup>4</sup>, gathered a large number of activists of all ages (Arbetaren, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015).

**Christine M. Jacobsen** (Norway) - One of the main areas of contention in Norwegian gender research in the last few years has been the question of mainstreaming. As

---

<sup>4</sup> Arbetaren 25 March 2015 'Feminister samler og styrker sig'. <http://www.arbejderen.dk/indland/feminister-samler-og-styrker-sig> (Accessed: 26 March 2015).

mentioned, the RCN program in gender research was discontinued in 2012, at a time when academics came under increased pressure to apply for external research funding. The RCN, instead, moved towards mainstreaming gender in all research programs where it is considered relevant, making it a compulsory criterion in the evaluation of funding applications. All programs and prioritized research areas are now expected to consider how the gender dimension matters to their area of knowledge. The mainstreaming strategy is based on the assumption that gender research has now been successfully established as an academic field in Norway. Although this is true, this premise does not take into account that the centres for women's and gender research are still small and vulnerable to ongoing neo-liberal restructurings of Norwegian universities. Furthermore, the mainstreaming strategy seems to underestimate the amount of work needed to develop the level of awareness and competence among researchers and within the research council for the strategy to succeed across the research areas.

The move towards gender mainstreaming has been controversial, and gender researchers have stressed several potential adverse consequences. One concern is that mainstreaming will bring about a move from gender research towards gender perspectives in research, and that a more superficial focus on gender as a "dimension" of various fields of knowledge will supplant foundational questions in gender studies. A related concern is that mainstreaming will reduce gender to a question of similarities and differences between women and men, a reductionism that, besides reproducing a binary and heteronormative gender model, loses out on the creative and critical potential of gender as an analytical category, which is after all what has been exciting about gender studies and made it a crucial contribution in various disciplines.

Within teaching institutions, a closely related controversy regards what Clare Hemmings (2006) names the autonomy/integration debate, that is: whether feminist enquiry should seek to influence the academia from within particular disciplines or establish itself as a separate discipline. Both autonomy and integration perspectives have been rigorously criticized (Hemmings 2006). In Norway, what Hemmings calls a combination approach has dominated and been seen as the most desirable. Current developments in the university system work both to enable and to disable the

combination approach. On the one hand, there is a growing demand for interdisciplinarity – which might be an advantage to interdisciplinary academic fields like gender studies. On the other hand, the use of so-called result-based indicators in the financing model puts gender studies centres in potential competition with the discipline-based departments they seek to contribute to.

A further challenge relates to the status of gender research within both academia and society more broadly. Gender research has been a target for criticism, partly by other disciplines and partly in public discussions where it has been claimed that it is strongly politicised, and that it is (therefore) less scientific than other disciplines. A critical event in the public criticism of gender research was the TV-series Hjernevask (Brainwashing) in 2010, which gave rise to a heated debate. The allegation put forth was that gender researchers deny biological underpinnings of gender difference for ideological reasons and that they promote ideological views that are poorly based on "facts" and "scientific methodologies" (cf. Lie 2011). An additional dimension to consider is how criticism towards state feminism may also have consequences for the political support for gender studies. While state feminist policy and ideology has enjoyed remarkable support among leading segments of the population (Gulbrandsen, Engelstad, Klausen, Skjeie and Teigen 2002, Holst 2005), some also claim that it has “gone too far” and that Norway has become a "vaginal state" (Langeland 2003) that polices a politically correct view of gender and privileges women over men. With the instauration of a new conservative and right wing government in 2013, there is reason to fear that political support for gender studies, especially in its more critical version, will weaken in the years to come.

**Lena Gemzöe and Margaretha Fahlgren** (Sweden) - The challenge for the development of gender research in Sweden is to continue enhancing the presence of Swedish gender research at an international level – important steps in this direction have been taken as shown above – while at the same time continuing the project of building gender as a discipline in its own right, with a strong presence in Swedish society. For this aim to be fulfilled, long term strategies and adequate funding are needed. It is often difficult for research Councils to evaluate new collaborations in gender studies between

researchers from diverse fields, since they are organized according to disciplines. This has to change in order for new and groundbreaking research initiatives to have better chances to receive funding.

Gender studies in Sweden have an important role to play in research which takes on societal challenges, such as health, ageing, violence and discrimination, to mention a few. The cross-disciplinary approach in gender studies creates new forms of research cooperation and research renewal. This should be acknowledged more by universities, which should give priority to gender research.

In the academia today gender research is an established field. However, one cannot ignore that gender perspectives still evoke resistance. This is, of course, due to the fact that gender research challenges societal norms and the distribution of power. Looking back, women's studies could be tolerated as long as it seemed to only concern women, but gender research claims to be part of all disciplinary research, and so it is far more threatening. In Sweden the official discourse promotes gender equality and gender research but there still exists a more or less hidden resistance against the field as such. This can be seen when gender research is described as an ideological rather than a scholarly field. It is important to take this resistance into account when developing new gender research, since the results will imply the need for societal changes.

In Sweden gender equality is promoted by the government, and gender research has received state support in varying degrees in the last decades. However, gender research has not been prioritized in the latest governmental research proposition. The development of gender equality in Sweden has benefitted greatly from gender research in the social sciences. If less research is carried out this will affect the progress of work on gender equality; it is therefore necessary to continue emphasizing the link between gender equality and research.

Gender research has broadened its scope and today includes research in medicine, technology and natural sciences. An emergent challenge is to develop research in these fields and develop new knowledge which could have great impact on future research.

### **3. Looking ahead, can you try to identify some trends and perspectives for gender studies in Europe?**

**Pauline Stoltz** (Denmark)- Given the above comments about external funding, there is a strong tradition of receiving funding from the European Union, especially for large and often comparative gender research projects. As at the national Danish level, the ambition of H2020 is that gender should be integrated in the application and research processes. The previously mentioned Danish policy on how this should be understood can be claimed to follow the European trend closely.

As was indicated earlier, in this series of roundtables there are challenges concerning the implementation of a gender perspective in H2020 in order to move beyond the present level of ambition. This is not least due to the lack of support of the SSH. Recently, the European Sociological Association wrote a petition addressed to the European Commission in which they pointed out that H2020:

*“...has very little to propose in terms of “Fairness” and “Democratic Change”, or of a new approach to “Jobs and Growth” in these times of crisis. The research programme for Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) has disappeared and its budget been dramatically reduced compared to the previous European Framework Programme. There is no longer even a specific Directorate in charge of SSH research at the European Commission.”*

In the EU, and Denmark is following suit in this regard, the trend is to see the role of SSH, and consequently of much gender research, as a perspective upon research in science and technology, focused upon innovation and growth.

This trend is obviously fortunate for gender researchers in science and technology, but problematic due to the need of gender research in areas that are typically SSH. Danish gender research has followed the general European move from women's to gender studies, and today research focuses broadly on the meanings of gender in relation to key areas of society, including migration, masculinity, postcolonial and queer research and intersectionality understood as an analytical approach. Transnational and global perspectives have been added as a methodological starting point and research field to the earlier focus on historical and comparative studies. These perspectives are

especially important in relation to contemporary issues concerning gendered aspects of the nationalist movements, welfare state transformations and the global financial crisis.

Earlier in these roundtables it was mentioned that, due to different reasons, the production and circulation of knowledge in gender studies in Europe have mainly been dominated by British and American feminisms, and that English language feminism is hegemonic in gender studies in Europe. Given the way in which the above mentioned contemporary issues affect European societies in different manners, due to diverse historical and other trajectories, it does indeed become important to revisit these contentions and to look for opportunities to consider the meaning of a transnational gender studies approach in Europe today.

One successful source of knowledge production and circulation is *Nora – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, which recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary. The journal is published by Taylor & Francis and reaches an audience far beyond the Nordic countries. The current editorial team is based in Denmark. At the time of writing, it seems that in future the system of rotating the editorial teams amongst countries will be replaced by one editorial team consisting of editors from all Nordic countries.

Another measure to advance transnational cooperation is the recent initiative to create *RINGS - The International Research Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies*, located at the Institute of Thematic Gender Studies, Karlstad, Linköping and Örebro Universities. During the initiating meeting in 2014, a discussion took place about the implications of using notions of either excellence or advanced gender studies to promote transnational cooperation. This is especially important and interesting, due to the different stages of institutionalization or integration of gender studies found in the Nordic countries, in Europe and globally. The final choice made at the meeting was for the notion of ‘advanced’.

**Christine M. Jacobsen** (Norway) A critical task for gender studies in the years to come is how to position itself with regard to challenge-based approaches adopted by the EU in Horizon 2020. The mainstreaming of gender in Horizon 2020 raises some of the same challenges that I addressed in regard to the mainstreaming of gender in the Research

Council of Norway. It risks reducing gender to a pre-defined dimension, rather than stimulating analytical gender and queer perspectives, and demands a high level of gender competence among researchers and evaluators across the fields. Furthermore, gender studies should aim not only at taking part in interdisciplinary efforts to produce knowledge about what is defined by funding bodies as "societal challenges", but also to contribute to defining what gets defined as such, how the "challenge" is framed, and the epistemologies underpinning the knowledge produced. One way of doing this is to continue the work in feminist and gender studies to provincialize Europe and to develop transnational, transversal, post-colonial and global perspectives as vantage points from where to engage critically with politics of exclusion, precarisation, and racialization.

I further believe that a number of crucial issues are coming up in regard to how Europe is currently investing in legislating and governing sexuality and gender, as a number of European countries are revising their laws, for instance, on prostitution, abortion, surrogacy, same-sex marriage, rape, and adoption. We need to ask how knowledge produced by gender studies is sometimes co-opted by (neoliberal and other) projects of state governments that are potentially harmful to precarised and racialised populations. We also need to engage the affects that surround the legislation and governing of sexuality and gender. In Norway, abortion was back on the public agenda last year and stirred up a lot of sentiment, as did the question of "marriage pour tous" in France. Investments in legislating and governing sexuality and gender, and the affective engagements they spur, need to be thought alongside the growth of populist criticism against feminism and "gender theory" that we now see emerging across Europe. Issues of sexuality and gender also energise concerns over threats against "European values" in various ways, and are used to draw boundaries and patrol borders between Europe and its "alien others" (Gressgård and Jacobsen 2008; 2014). These anxieties seem to be importantly precipitated by the reconfiguring of national sovereignty and political economies, largely driven by neo-liberal capitalism.

Gender studies should aim to develop critical perspectives on these processes in both teaching and research, and to address how neo-liberalism is currently also reshaping the conditions of possibility for gender studies. This of course depends partly on specific local histories and state regimes. While Norway has long been viewed as a slow and

cautions reformer, the imposition of a neo-liberal agenda is also making an imprint in the Nordic countries. What impact do current shifts in funding for universities and research organizations and in research and teaching assessment have on, for instance, curricula and research questions in gender studies? What are the consequences for gender studies of the move towards assessing teaching in terms of study points and student (now increasingly perceived as customer) satisfaction? How can we keep proposing and further developing the critical perspectives of gender studies, as we compete for research funding that is increasingly geared towards innovation, impact and solutions to pre-defined social problems? Another set of questions that needs to be dealt with relates to the gendered forms that precariousness and casualization take in an increasingly neo-liberal political economy of higher education. These questions will be in focus during an upcoming conference on Gender in/and the neoliberal university organized by RINGS (a new global association of leading centres of advanced gender studies connecting leading research institutes and centres from Africa, Australia, Europe, and North and Central America). Marina Warner (2015), this year's winner of the Norwegian Holberg Price, recently warned against the "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) that binds academics more tightly into a neoliberal regime. Despite warnings against cruel optimism, however, gender studies should follow Warner in "hold[ing] fast to the life of the mind – its beauty, its necessity" – and continue struggling to remember that we could have been otherwise, and might yet be (Haraway/Goodeve 2000:171).

**Lena Gemzöe and Margaretha Fahlgren** (Sweden) – Horizon 2020 focuses on the need for research which will solve the challenges facing contemporary society. In order to meet these challenges researchers from different fields must cooperate and this includes researchers in gender studies. It is of the utmost importance that gender researchers engage in these broad research programs thus putting gender research even more at the centre of European research policies. There is a general recognition of the need to include gender research to solve societal problems and this means new possibilities and new cooperation for gender researchers.

There is excellent gender research carried out in Sweden and the field has become more internationally oriented. This international approach needs to be strengthened

through closer cooperation between researchers in Europe. Sweden, which for long has been seen as a role model for gender equality, is an important contributor in an extended research cooperation.

The broadening of the field will continue and gender researchers will cooperate across disciplinary boundaries. However, it is equally important to develop new theories, focusing on the core of the discipline. The link between researchers who are more theoretically oriented and those who work more empirically needs to be strengthened so that new theories are used in gender practice.

The discipline *Genusvetenskap* is growing rapidly in Sweden – for instance, at the beginning of 2015, Stockholm University received one thousand applicants to the undergraduate level. That funding of PhD-programs in *genusvetenskap* should continue is vital to secure a new generation of gender scholars, who can form a stable future core group in the field.

The presence of gender research in public debate and political life in Sweden is unique in a European context. This makes Sweden an interesting case to learn from. Besides, the experiences of enhancing the quality and strengthening the organizational frames of gender research in Sweden could be valuable to the ongoing work of our European colleagues –as we could learn from them. Therefore, we hope this Round Table will be followed by other initiatives to share experiences across national borders.

## **Final remarks**

In closing remarks, it is as always important to emphasise positive facets.

First of all it is evident that the willingness of the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish participants to interact, not only among themselves but to also reflect on contributions made in previous round tables, is promising. This confirms that awareness of the importance of joining forces and energy in order to strengthen gender studies is whole. This is a historic moment of utmost importance, recognised as a particularly critical turning point in all round tables.

Moreover, the Scandinavian colleagues reaffirm their wish to follow up with other transnational initiatives. Their wish “to consider the meaning of a transnational gender

studies approach in Europe today” is challenging and purposeful. It will not remain vain.

Finally, the presence of gender research in public debate and political life, a marked feature of this round table, provides for thought about the positive, and perhaps sometimes less positive, consequences that may help predict risks and problems that could easily arise in other countries. This might be useful for a comparison between the experiences expressed by the Scandinavian colleagues with those cited by Diane Lamoureux (see round table n.2) in her description of the situation in Quebec and through her reflections on the political responsibility of intellectuals in the public sphere.

This issue concludes a first cycle of a series of round tables in which we attempted to deepen our understanding of the status of gender studies in several European countries and some other ones too. Starting with the next issue of *About Gender*, we will tackle new topics with other social scientists, with a continuing aspiration to stimulate a debate and to learn about new approaches to keep gender studies vivacious, always evolving and connected to the societies in which we live.

## References

- Berlant, L. (2011), *Cruel optimism*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- Bergqvist, C. (editor in chief) et al. (1999), *Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries*, Oslo, Scandinavian University Press.
- Dahlerup, D. (2015), *Kan en dansk statsminister kalde sig feminist? A4 Ugebrevet*, 6. March 2015 - [http://www.ugebreveta4.dk/drude-dahlerup-kan-en-dansk-statsministerkaldesig\\_20008.aspx?redir=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=guest\\_GammelA4\\_Ikkevalideret&utm\\_medium=nl\\_topB&utm\\_source=newsletter\\_Morning&nid=NDI5&aid=20008](http://www.ugebreveta4.dk/drude-dahlerup-kan-en-dansk-statsministerkaldesig_20008.aspx?redir=newsletter&utm_campaign=guest_GammelA4_Ikkevalideret&utm_medium=nl_topB&utm_source=newsletter_Morning&nid=NDI5&aid=20008) (Accessed: 12 March 2015).
- Danielsen, H, Larsen, E. and Owesen, I. W. (2013), *Norsk likestillingshistorie 1814 – 2013*, Oslo, Fagbokforlaget.

- Gressgård, R., Jacobsen, C.M. (2008), *Krevende toleranse. Islam og homoseksualitet*, *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning*, vol. 32, n. 2, pp. 22-40.
- Gressgård, R., Jacobsen, C.M. (2014), *Citoyen intolerable: tolerance, Islam et homosexualite*, *Nordiques*, 28, pp. 41-49.
- Griffin, G. (2005a), "Introduction", in Griffin, G. (ed. by), *Doing Women's Studies. Employment Opportunities, Personal Impacts and Social Consequences*, London, Zed Books.
- Griffin, G. (2005b), "The Institutionalization of Women's Studies in Europe", in Griffin, G. (ed. by), *Doing Women's Studies. Employment Opportunities, Personal Impacts and Social Consequences*, London, Zed Books.
- Gulbrandsen, Trygve, Fredrik Engelstad, Trond Beldo Klausen, Hege Skjeie, Mari Teigen og Øyvind Østerud (2002), *Norske makteliter*, Oslo, Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Haraway, D., Goodeve, T. N. (2000), *How like a leaf: an interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve*, New York, Routledge.
- Hemmings, C. (2006), "The life and times of academic feminism", in Davis, K., Evans, M. and Lorber, J. (eds. by), *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies*, London, Sage, pp. 13-34.
- Hernes, H.M. (1987), *Welfare State and Women Power: Essays in State Feminism*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget.
- Holst, C. (2005), *Feminism, Epistemology & Morality*, Bergen, University of Bergen.
- Jegerstedt, K. (2010), *Hva var poststrukturalismen – og har den utspilt sin rolle?* *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning*, vol. 3, n. 4, pp. 406-411.
- Langeland, N. R. (2003), *Kveldseta. Historiske essay*, Oslo, Damm.
- Lie, M. (2011), "Brainwashing: Taking another turn with biology", in «NORA. Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research», vol. 19, n. 1, pp. 53-58.
- Rømer Christensen, H. (2003), *Et par pointer om skæve læsninger i historien og i Norden*, *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*, 2003/1.
- Warner, M. (2015), *Learning My Lesson*, *London Review of Books*, vol. 37, n. 6, pp. 8-14.

Wærness, K. (2013), *Noen refleksjoner over utviklingen av norsk kvinneforskning, likestillingsforskning og kjønnsforskning fra 1970 og til i dag*, Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning, vol. 37, n. 2, pp. 173-185.